

# Nile Valley: Luxor



Royal Thebes, Egyptian treasure-house of countless wealth, Who boasts her hundred gates, through each of which, With horse and car, two hundred warriors march.

*Homer, The Iliad, Book IX*

The city's governor claims that Luxor is the world's greatest open-air museum, but that doesn't come close to describing this amazing place. There's nothing like the grandeur of ancient Thebes. Florence Nightingale called it 'the deathbed of the world' and likened it to the writings of Shakespeare. It's one of the few places in the world that deserves to be called unforgettable.

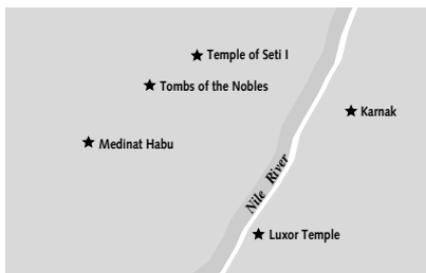
Although the modern East Bank city has grown rapidly in recent years, the setting is still breathtakingly beautiful, the Nile flowing between the modern town and the West Bank necropolis, backed by the enigmatic Theban escarpment. Scattered across the landscape is an embarrassment of riches, from the temples of Karnak and Luxor on its East Bank to the temples of Deir al-Bahri and Medinat Habu, the Colossi of Memnon and the Valley of the Kings.

Thebes's wealth and power was legendary in antiquity, its god Amun feared across the Mediterranean and Asia. By the late 18th century, its legend lured travellers from Europe. Since then, fuelled by tales of treasure and pharaoh's curses, huge numbers have made pilgrimages here

Today's visitor risks being surrounded by coachloads of tourists as they are herded through tombs and temples at a furious pace, and lost amid a sea of jostling groups. But with a little planning and flexibility the biggest crowds can be avoided and the magic of the Theban landscape and its unparalleled archaeological heritage can be enjoyed in relative peace.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Imagine yourself in an exotic garden with gigantic papyrus-shaped stone columns in the **great hypostyle hall** (p247) at Karnak
- Glimpse the good life of an ancient Egyptian aristocrat, so good he wanted it represented on his tomb walls, in the **Tombs of the Nobles**, (p269) hoping it would continue after his death
- Marvel at the wonderful architecture of the **Luxor Temple** (p249) and return later at night for a detailed view of the beautifully lit carvings on the walls
- Wander through the best-preserved Theban temple, **Medinat Habu** (p274), in the soft, late-afternoon light
- Sense the spirituality in an uncrowded ancient temple, at the beautifully restored and rarely visited **Temple of Seti I** (p257)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 095

■ POPULATION: 451,318

## HISTORY

Palaeolithic tools found in the Theban hills indicate that there have been human settlements in the area for at least half a million years, but Thebes (ancient Waset) only became important in the Middle Kingdom period (2055–1650 BC). During the chaos of the First Intermediate Period (2160–2025 BC), the small village of Thebes eventually grew strong enough to overpower the northern capital Heracleopolis. The 11th-dynasty Theban prince Montuhotep II (2055–2004 BC) reunited the country, moved his capital to Thebes and increased Karnak's importance as a cult centre to the local god Amun with a temple dedicated to him. Montuhotep's funerary temple at Deir al-Bahri served as an inspiration for Queen Hatshepsut's temple 500 years later. The 12th-dynasty pharaohs (1985–1795 BC) moved their administrative capital back north to al-Lisht, situated about 30km south of Memphis, but much of their immense wealth from expanded foreign trade and agriculture, and tribute from military expeditions made into Nubia and Asia, went to the priesthood of Amun and Thebes, which remained the religious capital. This 200-year period was one of the richest times throughout Egyptian history, which witnessed a great flourishing of architecture and the arts, and major advances in science.

After the Second Intermediate Period (1650–1550 BC), when much of Egypt was ruled by Asiatic tribes known as the Hyksos, it was the Thebans again, under Ahmose I, who drove out the foreigners and unified Egypt. Because of his military victories and as the founder of the 18th dynasty, Ahmose was deified and worshipped at Thebes for hundreds of years. This was the beginning of the glorious New Kingdom period (1550–1069 BC), when Thebes reached its apogee. It was home to tens of thousands of people, who helped construct many of its great monuments.

Amenhotep III (1390–1352 BC) was probably the greatest contributor of all to Thebes. He continued to accumulate wealth from foreign expeditions and spent vast sums on building, including substantial additions to the temple complex at Karnak, his great palace, Malqata, on the West Bank, with a large harbour for religious festivals and the largest memorial temple ever built. Very little of the

latter is left beyond the so-called Colossi of Memnon, the largest monolithic statue ever carved. His son Amenhotep IV (1352–1336 BC), who later renamed himself Akhenaten, moved the capital from Thebes to his new city of Akhetaten (Tell al-Amarna), worshipped one god only (Aten the solar god), and brought about dramatic changes in art and architecture. The temples in Thebes were closed until his death, but the powerful priesthood was soon after reinstated under Akhenaten's successor, Tutankhamun, who built very little but became the best-known pharaoh ever when his tomb was discovered full of treasure in 1922. Ramses II (1279–1213 BC) may have exaggerated his military victories, but he too was a great builder and added the magnificent hypostyle hall to Karnak, other halls to Luxor Temple, and built the Ramesseum and two magnificent tombs in the Valley of the Kings for him and his many sons.

The decline of Pharaonic rule was mirrored by Thebes' gradual slide into insignificance: when the Persians sacked Thebes, it was clear the end was nigh. Mud-brick settlements clung to the once mighty Theban temples, and people hid within the stone walls against marauding desert tribes. Early Christians built churches in the temples, carved crosses on the walls and scratched out reliefs of the pagan gods. The area fell into obscurity in the 7th century AD after the Arab invasion, and the only reminder of its glorious past was the name given to it by its Arab rulers: Al-Uqsar (The Fortifications), giving modern Luxor its name. By the time European travellers arrived here in the 18th century, Luxor was little more than a large Upper Egyptian village, known more for its 12th-century saint, Abu al-Haggag, buried above the mound of Luxor Temple, than for its half-buried ruins.

The growth of Egyptomania changed that. Napoleon arrived in 1798 wanting to revive Egypt's greatness but, with the publication of the *Description de l'Égypte*, did manage to revive interest in Egypt. European exhibitions of mummies, jewellery and other spectacular funerary artefacts from Theban tombs (often found by plundering adventurers rather than enquiring scholars) made Luxor an increasingly popular destination. By 1869, when Thomas Cook brought his first group of tourists to Egypt, Luxor was

one of the highlights. Mass tourism had arrived and Luxor regained its place on the world map.

## ORIENTATION

Luxor today divides into three separate areas for visitors: the town of Luxor itself, the temple complex at Karnak, a couple of kilometres to the northeast, and the monuments and necropolis of ancient Thebes on the west bank of the Nile.

In Luxor town (Map pp244–5) there are five main thoroughfares: Sharia as-Souq, Sharia al-Mahatta, Sharia al-Karnak, Corniche an-Nil, and Sharia Televizyon, a bustling area around which many of the town's budget hotels are clustered.

On the West Bank (Map p255) the village of Al-Gezira, close to the ferry landing, is becoming a hub of shops, midrange hotels and restaurants. Most monuments are further west, with tombs and temples strung out at the edge of the desert.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

Luxor has two excellent English-language bookshops. Opposite Aboudi and the New Winter Palace, on the Corniche, is a kiosk selling a good selection of foreign press.

**AA Gaddis Bookshop** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 7042; Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-10pm Sun) Between Old and New Winter Palace Hotels; extensive selection of books on Egypt, postcards and souvenirs.

**Aboudi Bookshop** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 3390; Tourist Bazaar, Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 8am-10pm) Has an excellent selection of guidebooks, maps, postcards and fiction.

## Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 123)

**Police** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 1500, 237 3845; cnr Sharias Karnak & al-Matafy)

**Tourist police** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 6620; Corniche an-Nil) Next to the tourist office.

## Internet Access

You can find internet access everywhere in Luxor, including in many hotels. Prices range from E£5 to E£10 per hour.

## EAST BANK

**Aboudi Bookshop** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 3390; Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 9am-10pm)

**Gamil Centre** (Map pp244-5; lower level, Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 24hr) In front of the Old Winter Palace Hotel.

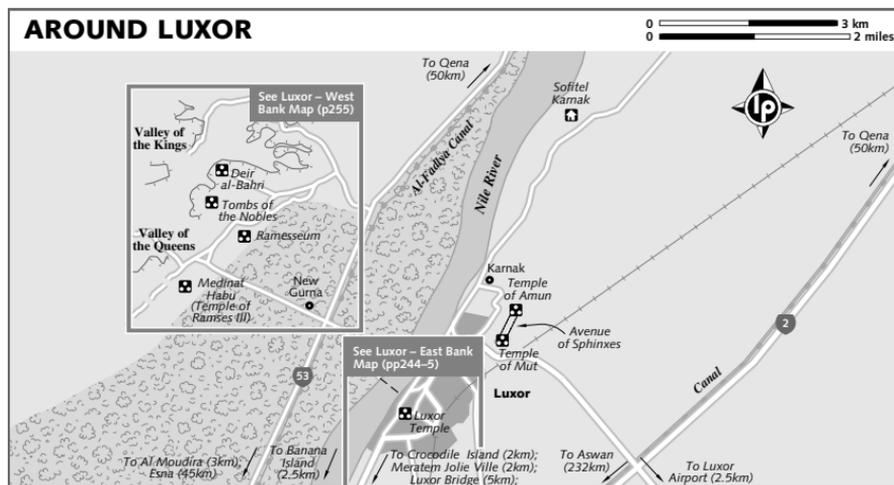
**GBC Internet** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 236 5519; lower level, Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 9.30am-6pm) In front of the New Winter Palace Hotel.

**Heroes Internet** (Map pp244-5; Sharia Televizyon; ☎ 24hr)

**Salem Net** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 236 4652; ☎ 24hr) Good connection and air-conditioned room next to the train station, opposite the Anglo Hotel.

## WEST BANK

**Europa Internet** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 012 866 5558; main street, Gezira; ☎ 8am-2am) Very fast connection.



**Nile Centre** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 3482; Gezira; ☎ 9am-midnight)

## Medical Services

**General Hospital** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2025, ☎ 382 698; Corniche an-Nil) As a last resort.

**International Hospital** (☎ 238 7192/3/4; Sharia Televizyon) The best place in town.

## Money

Most major Egyptian banks have branches in Luxor. Unless otherwise noted, usual opening hours are 8.30am to 2pm and 5pm to 6pm, Sunday to Thursday. ATMs can be found all over town, including at most banks and five-star hotels.

**American Express** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 8333; Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) Beside entrance to Old Winter Palace Hotel.

**Bank of Alexandria** (Map pp244-5; Corniche an-Nil) Near Hotel Mercure.

**Banque du Caire** (Map pp244-5; Corniche an-Nil)

**Banque Misr** (Map pp244-5; Sharia Labib Habashi) Around the corner from the Mercure. There is another branch on Sharia Televizyon.

**National Bank of Egypt** (Map pp244-5; Corniche an-Nil)

**Thomas Cook** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2196; Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 8am-8pm) Below entrance to Old Winter Palace Hotel.

## Post

**Main post office** (Map pp244-5; Sharia al-Mahatta; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Sat-Thu)

**Tourist Bazaar post office** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 6620; Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Sat-Thu) Next to the tourist office.

## Telephone

There are cardphones scattered throughout the town. Cards are available from kiosks and shops. There are several mobile phone shops on Sharia al-Mahatta and Sharia Televizyon that sell tourist SIM cards.

**Central telephone office** (Map pp244-5; Sharia al-Karnak; ☎ 24hr)

**Telephone office** (Map pp244-5; Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 8am-8pm) Below entrance to Old Winter Palace Hotel.

## Tourist Information

**Airport office** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2306; 8am-9pm)

**Tourist office** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2215; fax 237 3294; Tourist Bazaar, Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 8am-9pm)

**Train station office** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 0259; ☎ 8am-9pm)

## Visa Extensions

**Passport office** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0885; Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; ☎ 8am-8pm Sat-Thu, 2-8pm for information only)

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Until recently Luxor was considered the hassle capital of Egypt but the new governor is cleaning up the town in every possible way. Some scams remain, including asking for extra baksheesh at the monuments, overcharging for a *calèche* (horse-drawn carriage) or felucca, and touts in the souq or station still target new arrivals. The tourist office will need a written report from you if anything happens, and will try to take action.

If you are looking for student cards in Luxor, make sure you get to the correct office; one office issues ISE (International Student & Youth Exchange) cards, which do not provide as many discounts as the International Student Identity Card (ISIC). For more details, see p507.

## SIGHTS – EAST BANK

Luxor's East Bank is still a busy provincial city, despite the presence of increasing numbers of tourists. But the new governor seems more interested in the needs of visitors than citizens and, at the time of writing, was courting much controversy with his efforts to clean up the centre of town. Sharia al-Mahatta now has a slight Parisian air, the souq is clean and partly covered, and buildings are being cleared from around the temples of Luxor and Karnak. His next project is to clear the 3km-long alley of the sphinxes between the two temples, pulling down a number of historic, though not ancient buildings on the way, including the French House next to Karnak Temple.

The city centre, where the hotels, bars and restaurants are concentrated, is easily walkable when the heat is not intense. At its heart is Luxor Temple, an elegant architectural masterpiece, its courtyards and sanctuaries dedicated to the Theban triad. Rather than start here, it makes sense to visit the awe-inspiring temple complex of Karnak early in the morning. Here, for more than 1500 years, pharaohs vied for the gods' attention by outdoing each other's architectural feats. Luxor Temple can be visited later.

Complementing the monuments are two excellent museums. Luxor Museum has a fascinating collection of artefacts discovered in this antiquities-rich area, while the Mummification Museum displays animal and human mummies and explains in detail how the ancient Egyptians perfected the embalming process.

### Temples of Karnak

More than a temple, **Karnak** (Map p241; Sharia al-Karnak; adult/student ££50/25; ☎ 6am–5.30pm Oct–Apr, to 6pm May–Sep) is an extraordinary complex of sanctuaries, kiosks, pylons and obelisks dedicated to the Theban gods and the greater glory of pharaohs. Everything is on a gigantic scale: the site covers over 2 sq km, large enough to contain about 10 cathedrals, while its main structure, the Temple of Amun, is the largest religious building ever built. This was where the god lived on earth, surrounded by the houses of his wife Mut, and their son Khonsu, two other huge temple complexes on this site. Built, added to, dismantled, restored, enlarged and decorated over nearly 1500 years, Karnak was the most important place of worship in Egypt during the New Kingdom. It was called Ipet-Sut, meaning ‘The Most Esteemed of Places’; Karnak is its Arabic name meaning ‘fortified settlement’. New Kingdom records show that the priests of the Temple of Amun had 81,000 people working in or for the temple, owned 421,000 head of cattle, 65 cities, 83 ships and 691,000 acres of agricultural land, giving us an idea of its economic, as well as spiritual, significance.

With so many additions, the site can be very confusing; trying to understand this immense monument has vexed travellers for centuries. As Amelia Edwards, the 19th-century writer and artist who journeyed up the Nile, succinctly put it:

It is a place that has been much written about and often painted; but of which no writing and no art can convey more than a dwarfed and pallid impression ... The scale is too vast; the effect too tremendous; the sense of one's own dumbness, and littleness, and incapacity, too complete and crushing.

The most important place of worship was the massive **Amun Temple Enclosure** (Precinct

of Amun; Map pp246–7), dominated by the great Temple of Amun-Ra, which contains the famous hypostyle hall, a spectacular forest of giant papyrus-shaped columns. On its southern side is the Mut Temple Enclosure, once linked to the main temple by an avenue of ram-headed sphinxes. To the north is the Montu Temple Enclosure, which honoured the local Theban war god. The 3km-long paved avenue of human-headed sphinxes that once linked the great Temple of Amun at Karnak with Luxor Temple, is now again being cleared.

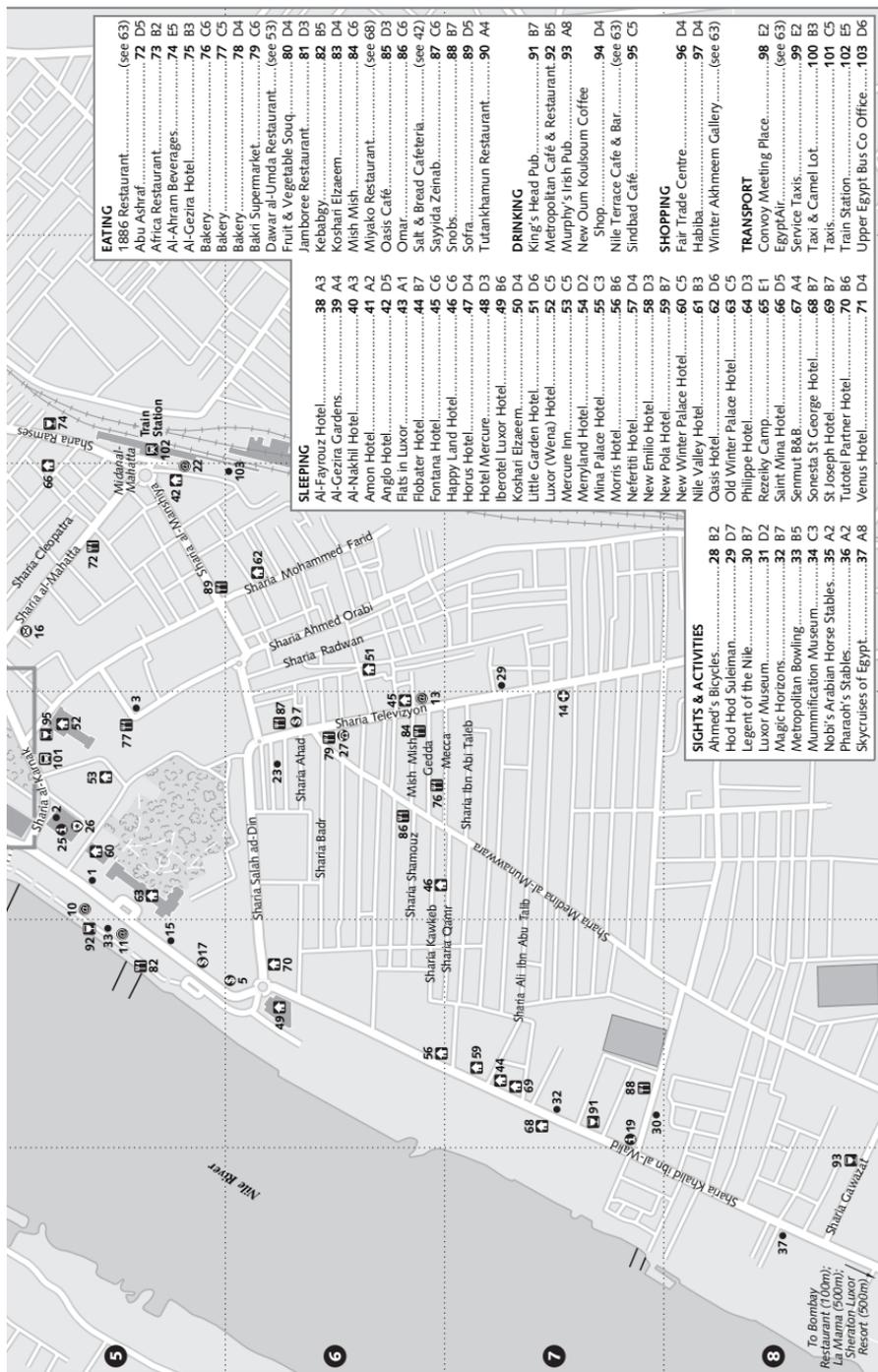
The earliest structures at Karnak go back to the Middle Kingdom period: the White Chapel of Sesostris I (1965–1920 BC), reconstructed in the open-air museum, and the 12th-dynasty foundations of what was the most sacred part of the Temple of Amun, the sacred barque sanctuary and the Middle Kingdom Court (behind the sixth pylon). However most of what you can see was built by the powerful pharaohs of the 18th to 20th dynasties (1570 and 1090 BC), who spent fortunes on making their mark in this most sacred of places. Later pharaohs extended and rebuilt the complex, as did the Ptolemies and the early Christians. Basically the further into the complex you venture, the older the structures.

Wandering through this gigantic complex is one of the highlights of any visit to Egypt. The light is most beautiful in the early morning. It is also worth bearing in mind that the convoy from Hurghada arrives around 10.30am and as many as 150 coaches unload their cargo for an hour or two. It pays to visit more than once, to be able to make sense of the overwhelming jumble of ancient remains. As almost every pharaoh left his or her mark here, it can feel like a crash course in the evolution of ancient Egyptian artistic and architectural styles.

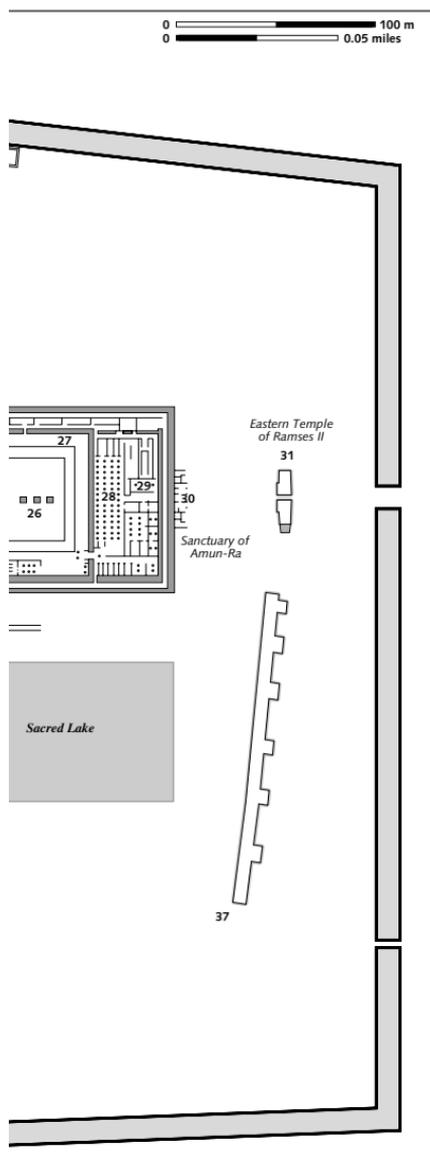
### AMUN TEMPLE ENCLOSURE – MAIN AXIS

The **Quay of Amun** was the dock where the large boats carrying the statues of the gods moored during the festivals. From tomb paintings such as those in the Tomb of Nakht (see p269) we know that there were palaces to the north of the quay surrounded by lush gardens. On the east side is a ramp sloping down to the processional **avenue of ram-headed sphinxes** which leads to the massive unfinished **first pylon**, built by Nectanebo I of the 30th dynasty. On the inside is a massive mud-brick construction ramp, onto which the blocks of stone for the pylon









hypostyle hall with eight columns and three barque chapels for Amun, Mut and Khonsu. At the centre of the court are two rows of five columns. Only one still stands 21m tall with a papyrus-shaped capital, and a small alabaster altar at the middle: all that remains of the **Kiosk of Taharka**, the 25th-dynasty Nubian pharaoh.

The **second pylon** was begun by Horemheb, the last 18th-dynasty pharaoh, and continued by Ramses I and Ramses II, who also raised three colossal red-granite **statues** of himself on either side of the entrance; one is now destroyed.

### Great Hypostyle Hall

Beyond the second pylon is the awesome **Great Hypostyle Hall** (Map pp246–7), one of the greatest religious monuments ever built. Covering 5500 sq metres – enough space to contain both Rome’s St Peter’s and London’s St Paul’s Cathedral – the hall is an unforgettable forest of 134 towering papyrus-shaped stone pillars. It symbolised a papyrus swamp, of which there were so many along the Nile. Ancient Egyptians believed that these plants surrounded the primeval mound on which life was first created. Each summer when the Nile began to flood, this hall and its columns were under several feet of water. Originally, it would have been brightly painted – some colours remain – and roofed, making it pretty dark away from the lit main axis. The size and grandeur of the pillars and the endless decorations are overwhelming: take your time, sit for a while and stare at the dizzying spectacle.

The hall was planned by Ramses I and built by Seti I and Ramses II. Note the difference in quality between the delicate raised relief in the northern part, by Seti I, and the much cruder sunken relief work, added by Ramses II in the southern part of the hall. The cryptic scenes on the inner walls were intended for the priesthood and the royalty who understood the religious context, but the outer walls are easier to comprehend, showing the king’s military prowess and strength, his ability to bring order to chaos.

On the back of the **third pylon**, built by Amenhotep III, to the right the pharaoh is shown sailing the sacred barque during the Opet festival (see the boxed text, p250). Tuthmosis I (1504–1492 BC) created a narrow court between the third and fourth pylons, where four obelisks stood, two each for Tuthmosis I and Tuthmosis III (1479–1425 BC). Only the bases remain except for one, 22m high, raised for Tuthmosis I.

### Inner Temple

Beyond the **fourth pylon** is the Hypostyle Hall of Tuthmosis III built by Tuthmosis I in precious wood, and altered by Tuthmosis III with 14

columns and a stone roof. In this court stands one of the two magnificent 30m-high obelisks erected by Queen Hatshepsut (1473–1458 BC) to the glory of her ‘father’ Amun. The other is broken but the upper shaft lies near the sacred lake (right). The **Obelisk of Hatshepsut** is the tallest in Egypt, its tip originally covered in electrum (a commonly used alloy of gold and silver). After Hatshepsut’s death, her stepson Tuthmosis III eradicated all signs of her reign (see the boxed text, p270) and had them walked into a sandstone structure.

The ruined **fifth pylon**, constructed by Tuthmosis I, lead to another colonnade now badly ruined, followed by the small **sixth pylon**, raised by Tuthmosis III, who also built the pair of red-granite columns in the vestibule beyond, carved with the lotus and the papyrus, the symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt. Nearby are two huge statues of Amun and the goddess Amunet, carved in the reign of Tutankhamun.

The original **sacred barque sanctuary** of Tuthmosis III, the very core of the temple where the god Amun resided, was replaced by a granite one, that was built and decorated with well-preserved painted reliefs by Alexander the Great’s successor and half-brother: the fragile, dim-witted Philip Arrhidaios (323–317 BC).

East of the shrine of Philip Arrhidaios, is the oldest known part of the temple, the **Middle Kingdom Court**, where Sesostri I built a shrine, of which the foundation walls were found. On the northern wall of the court is the **Wall of Records**, a running tally of the organised tribute the pharaoh exacted in honour of Amun from his subjugated lands.

### Great Festival Hall of Tuthmosis III

At the back of the Middle Kingdom Court is the Festival Hall of Tuthmosis III, the Akh-Menou, Brilliant of Monuments. It is an unusual structure with uniquely carved stone columns imitating tent poles, perhaps a reference to the pharaoh’s life under canvas on his frequent military expeditions abroad. The columned vestibule that lies beyond, generally referred to as the **Botanical Gardens**, has wonderful, detailed relief scenes of the flora and fauna that the king had encountered during his campaigns in Syria and Palestine, and had brought back to Egypt.

For the many people not allowed inside the temple’s sacred enclosure, Tuthmosis

III built a small **chapel** onto the back of the temple wall behind his festival hall, at either side of which can be seen the enormous bases for two of Hatshepsut’s obelisks that once stood here. Beyond this, further to the southeast, Ramses II built a similar chapel, the **Temple of the Hearing Ear**, again with a base for a single obelisk standing 32.2m tall and which Ramses usurped from Tuthmosis III. Removed from Karnak on the orders of the Emperor Constantine (AD 306–337) and bound for Constantinople, the obelisk was redirected to Rome to stand in the Circus Maximus. It was re-erected in 1588 on the orders of Pope Sixtus V where it now stands, in front of the church of St John (Giovanni) Lateran.

Against the northern enclosure wall of the Amun Temple Enclosure is the well-preserved cult **Temple of Ptah**, started by Tuthmosis III and finished by the Ptolemies and Romans. Access to the inner chambers is through a series of five doorways, which lead to two of the temple’s original statues. The headless figure of Ptah, the creator god of Memphis, is in the middle chapel behind a locked door – the custodian will often unlock it for some baksheesh. To his left is the eerily beautiful black granite statue of his goddess-wife Sekhmet (the spreader of terror), bare-breasted and lioness-headed.

### AMUN TEMPLE ENCLOSURE – SOUTHERN AXIS

The secondary axis of the Amun Temple Enclosure, running south from the third and fourth pylons, is a walled processional way from the seventh to the 10th pylon, leading to the Mut Temple Enclosure. The courtyard between the Hypostyle Hall and the **seventh pylon**, built by Tuthmosis III, is known as the **cachette court**, as thousands of stone and bronze statues were discovered here in 1903. The priests had the old statues and temple furniture they no longer needed buried around 300 BC. Most statues were sent to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, but some remain, standing in front of the seventh pylon, including four of Tuthmosis III on the left.

The well-preserved **eighth pylon**, built by Queen Hatshepsut, is the oldest part of the north–south axis of the temple, and one of the earliest pylons in Karnak. Carved on it is a text she falsely attributed to Tuthmosis I, justifying her taking the throne of Egypt.

The **ninth and 10th pylons** were built by Horemheb, who used some of the stones of a demolished temple that had been built to the east by Akhenaten (before he decamped to Tell al-Amarna), some of which can be seen on display in the wonderful Luxor Museum (p252).

East of the seventh and eighth pylons is the **sacred lake** (Map pp246–7), where, according to Herodotus, the priests of Amun bathed twice daily and nightly for ritual purity. On the northwestern side of the lake is part of the **Fallen Obelisk of Hatshepsut** showing her coronation, and a **Giant Scarab** in stone dedicated by Amenhotep III to Khepri, a form of the sun god.

In the southwestern corner of the enclosure is the **Temple of Khonsu**, god of the moon, and son of Amun and Mut. It can be reached from a door in the southern wall of the Hypostyle Hall of the Temple of Amun, via a path through various blocks of stone. The temple, mostly the work of Ramses III and enlarged by later Rameside rulers, lies north of Euergetes' Gate and the avenue of sphinxes leading to Luxor Temple. The temple pylon leads via a peristyle court to a hypostyle hall with eight columns carved with figures of Ramses XI and Herihor. The next chamber housed the sacred barque of Khonsu.

### MUT TEMPLE ENCLOSURE

From the 10th pylon an avenue of sphinxes leads to the partly excavated southern enclosure – the Precinct of Mut. The badly ruined Temple of Mut was built by Amenhotep III and consists of a sanctuary, a hypostyle hall and two courts. Amenhotep also set up more than 700 black granite statues of the lioness goddess Sekhmet, Mut's northern counterpart, believed to form a calendar, with two statues for every day of the year, receiving offerings each morning and evening.

### MONTU TEMPLE ENCLOSURE

A gate, usually locked, on the wall near the Temple of Ptah (in the Amun Temple Enclosure) leads to the Montu Temple Enclosure. Montu, the falcon-headed warrior god, was one of the original deities of Thebes. The main temple was built by Amenhotep III and modified by others. The complex is very dilapidated.

### OPEN-AIR MUSEUM

Off to the left of the first court of the Amun Temple Enclosure is Karnak's **open-air museum** (Map pp246–7; tickets at main ticket office; adult/student ££25/15; ☎ 6am–5.30pm summer, 6am–4.30pm winter), missed by most visitors, but definitely worth a visit. The well-preserved chapels include the **White Chapel of Sesostris I**, one of the oldest and most beautiful monuments in Karnak, which has wonderful Middle Kingdom reliefs; the **Red Chapel of Hatshepsut**, its red quartzite blocks reassembled in 2000; and the **Alabaster Chapel of Amenhotep I**. The museum also contains a collection of statuary found throughout the temple complex.

### SOUND-&LIGHT SHOW

Karnak's highly kitsch **sound-and-light show** (Map pp246–7; ☎ 237 2241; www.sound-light.egypt.com; adult/student ££60/45; ☎ 6.30pm, 7.45pm & 9pm winter, 8pm, 9.15pm & 10.30pm summer) is a 1½-hour Hollywood-style extravaganza that recounts the history of Thebes and the lives of the many pharaohs who built here in honour of Amun. It's worth a visit particularly for the walk through the beautifully lit temple at night.

This was the schedule at the time of writing but check before heading there.

Day	Show 1	Show 2	Show 3
Monday	English	French	Spanish
Tuesday	Japanese	English	German
Wednesday	German	English	French
Thursday	English	French	Arabic
Friday	English	French	Russian
Saturday	French	English	
Sunday	German	English	Italian

### Luxor Temple

Largely built by the pharaohs Amenhotep III (1380–1352 BC) and Ramses II (1279–1213 BC), this **temple** (Map p251; Corniche an-Nil; adult/student ££40/20; ☎ 6am–9pm Oct–Apr, to 10pm May–Sep) is a strikingly graceful monument in the heart of the modern town. Visit during the day, perhaps later afternoon, but make sure to return at night when the temple is lit up, creating an eerie spectacle as shadow and light play off the reliefs and colonnades.

The temple, also known as the Southern Sanctuary, was once the dwelling place of Amenemopet, the ithyphallic Amun of the Opet, and was largely built for the Opet celebrations, when the statues of Amun, Mut and Khonsu were annually reunited during

### THE BEAUTIFUL FESTIVAL OF THE OPET

The most important annual religious festival in Thebes and Egypt was the Opet festival, when the barque shrines of the Theban triad, Amun, Mut and Khonsu were taken in a procession from Karnak temple to their home at Luxor Temple. The festival lasted two to four weeks during the summer, the second month of the Nile flood, and was particularly important during the New Kingdom. The cult images were carried on the shoulders of the priests along the avenue of sphinxes, stopping for ceremonies and to rest at six barque shrines on the way, or taken by boat up the Nile, as seen on the reliefs in Amenhotep III's Colonnade in Luxor Temple and the outer wall of the Temple of Ramses III in the Great Court in Karnak. The statue of Amun was reunited with his ithyphallic form Amunemopet, symbolising fertility and rejuvenation. The ceremony reaffirmed the pharaoh's authority and his close ties with the 'King of Gods' Amun. The pharaoh, after all, was the living embodiment of the god Horus on earth. These days, during the *moulid* (a saint's festival) of Abu al-Haggag (see the boxed text, p252), one of the highlights of this three-day-long festival is a felucca pulled in procession through town and circulating the temple, a modern survival of the ancient Opet festival.

the inundation season with that of Amun of Opet (see the boxed text, above). Amenhotep III greatly enlarged an older shrine built by Hatshepsut, and rededicated the massive temple as Amun's southern *ipet* (harem), the private quarters of the god. The structure was further added to over the centuries by Tutankhamun, Ramses II, Alexander the Great and various Romans. The Romans constructed a military fort around the temple that the Arabs later called Al-Uqsar (The Fortifications), giving modern Luxor its name.

In ancient times the temple would have been surrounded by a warren of mud-brick houses, shops and workshops which now lie under the modern town, but after the decline of the city people moved into the – by then – partly covered temple complex and built their city within it. In the 14th century, a mosque was built in one of the interior courts for the local sheikh (holy man) Abu al-Haggag. Excavation works, begun in 1885, have cleared away the village and debris of centuries to clear what can be seen of the temple today, but the mosque remains. The new governor is determined to clear the avenue of sphinxes from here to Karnak.

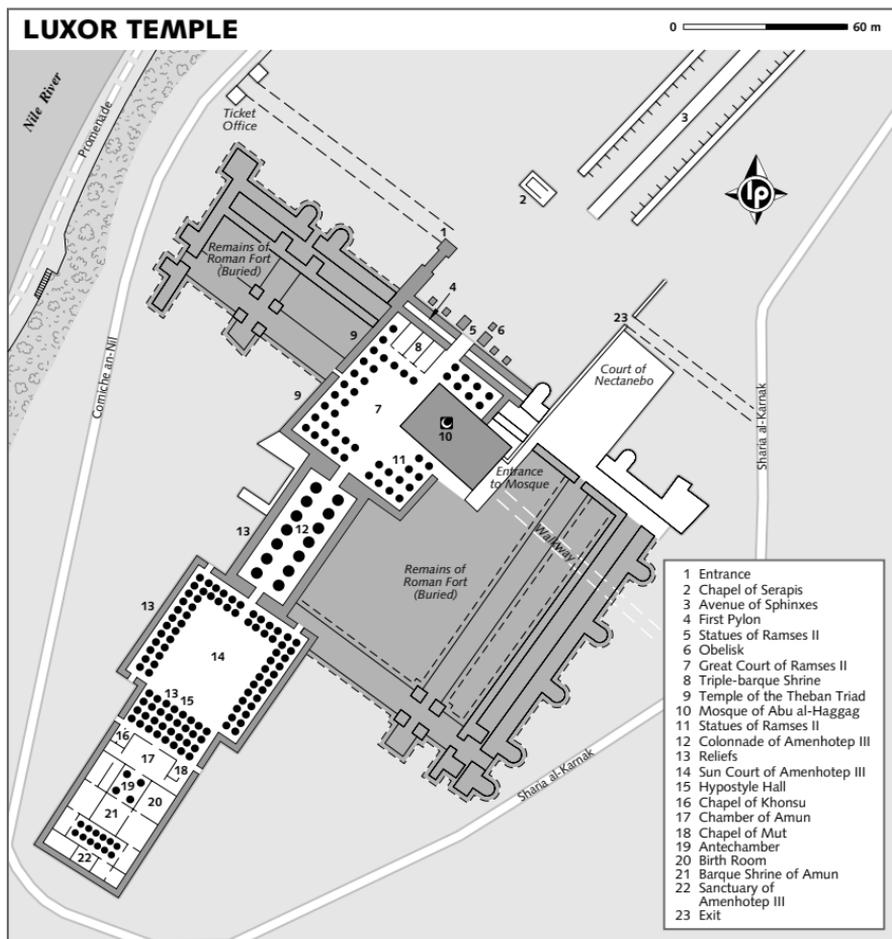
### WALKING TOUR

The ticket office was on the Corniche at the time of writing, but the entire area around the temple is being cleared and the entrance will be from the square at the other side of the temple, near the mosque of Abu al-Haggag. The temple is less complex than Karnak, but here again we walk back in time the deeper

we go into it. In front of the temple is the beginning of the **avenue of sphinxes** that ran all the way to the temples at Karnak 3km to the north.

The massive 24m-high **first pylon** was raised by Ramses II and decorated with reliefs of his military exploits, including the Battle of Kadesh. The pylon was originally fronted by six colossal **statues of Ramses II**, four seated and two standing, but only two of the seated figures and one standing one remain, and a pair pink granite **obelisks**, of which one remains and the other stands in the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Beyond lies the **Great Court of Ramses II**, surrounded by a double row of columns with lotus-bud capitals, the walls of which are decorated with scenes of the pharaoh making offerings to the gods. On the south (rear) wall is a procession of 17 sons of Ramses II with their names and titles, and in front of them a beautiful relief, the first pylon of the temple with statues, obelisks and flags, reliefs of his military successes. In the north-western corner of the court is the earlier **triple-barque shrine** built by Hatshepsut and usurped by her stepson Tuthmosis III for Amun, Mut and Khonsu. Over the south-eastern side hangs the 14th-century **Mosque of Abu al-Haggag**, dedicated to a local sheikh, entered from Sharia al-Karnak, outside the temple precinct.

Beyond the court is the older splendid **Colonnade of Amenhotep III**, built as the grand entrance to the Temple of Amun of the Opet. The walls behind the elegant open papyrus columns were decorated during the reign of



the young pharaoh Tutankhamun and celebrate the return to Theban orthodoxy following the wayward reign of the previous pharaoh, Akhenaten. The Opet Festival is depicted in lively detail, with the pharaoh, nobility and common people joining the triumphal procession. Look out for the drummers and acrobats doing back bends.

South of the Colonnade is the **Sun Court of Amenhotep III**, once enclosed on three sides by double rows of towering papyrus-bundle columns, the best preserved of which, with their architraves extant, are those on the eastern and western sides. In 1989 workmen found here a cache of 26 statues, buried by priests in Roman times, now moved to the Luxor Museum (see p252).

Beyond lies the **Hypostyle Hall**, the first room of the original Opet temple, with four rows of eight columns each, leading to the temple's main rooms. The central **chamber** on the axis south of the Hypostyle Hall, was the cult sanctuary of Amun, stuccoed over by the Romans in the 3rd century AD and painted with scenes of Roman officials. Through this chamber, either side of which are **chapels** dedicated to Mut and Khonsu, is the four-columned **Antechamber**, where offerings were made to Amun, and immediately behind it the **Barque Shrine of Amun**, rebuilt by Alexander the Great, with reliefs portraying him as an Egyptian pharaoh.

To the east a doorway leads into two rooms. The first is Amenhotep III's **birth room** with

## MOULIDS AROUND LUXOR

At a *moulid* (saint's festival) you can see Sufis of different orders endlessly repeating the name of Allah in order to go into a trance, hear real Saidi music and see *tahtib* (male dance performed with wooden staves). The largest one is the Moulid of Abu al-Haggag (see the boxed text, p250), who is believed to have brought Islam to Luxor eight centuries ago. This three-day carnival draws thousands of visitors over several days and the streets around the temple are lined with stalls selling sweets and toys.

There are several smaller *moulids* around Luxor, mostly during the month of Sha'aban, immediately before Ramadan. **Abu'l Gumsan**, named after a religious man who died in 1984, is a small *moulid* that takes place on 27 Sha'aban near the West Bank village of Taref, just south of the road to the Valley of the Kings. **Sheikh Musa** and **Abu al-Jud** both take place in the sprawling village of Karnak. Other local *moulids* include **Sheikh Hamid** on 1 Sha'aban and **Sheikh Hussein** a couple of days later.

The week-long Christian *moulid* of **Mar Girgis** (St George) takes place at the monastery of the same name at the village of Razagat, culminating on 11 November. This area is officially forbidden to foreigners, but the service taxis ferrying the hundreds of people to the *moulid* often avoid the checkpoint by taking a desert track.

Women attending *moulids* should dress very conservatively and preferably be accompanied by a man, as groping and harassment do occur in the party spirit.

Ask at the tourist office (p242) for exact dates.

scenes of his divine birth. You can see the moment of his conception, when the fingers of the god touch those of the queen and 'his dew filled her body', according to the accompanying hieroglyphic caption. The **sanctuary of Amenhotep III** is the last chamber; it still has the remains of the stone base on which Amun's statue stood, and although it was once the most sacred part of the temple, the busy street that now runs directly behind it makes it less atmospheric.

## Luxor Museum

This wonderful **museum** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0269; Corniche an-Nil; adult/student EE70/35; 🕒 9am-9pm Oct-Apr, 9am-1pm & 5-10pm May-Sep) has a beautifully displayed collection, from the end of the Old Kingdom right through to the Mamluk period, mostly gathered from the Theban temples and necropolis.

The ground-floor gallery has several masterpieces including a well-preserved limestone **relief of Tuthmosis III** (No 140), an exquisitely carved **statue of Tuthmosis III** in greywacke from the Temple of Karnak (No 2), an alabaster **figure of Amenhotep III** protected by the great crocodile god Sobek (No 155) and, one of the few examples of Old Kingdom art found at Thebes, a **relief of Unas-ankh** (No 183), found in his tomb on the West Bank.

A new wing was opened in 2004, dedicated to the glory of Thebes during the New

Kingdom period. The highlight and the main reason for the new construction are the two **royal mummies**, Ahmose I (founder of the 18th dynasty), and the mummy some believe to be Ramses I (founder of the 19th dynasty and father of Seti I), beautifully displayed in dark rooms without their wrappings. Other well-labelled displays illustrate the military might of Thebes during the New Kingdom, the age of Egypt's empire-building, including chariots and weapons. On the upper floor the military theme is diluted with scenes from daily life showing the technology used in the New Kingdom. **Multimedia displays** show workers harvesting papyrus and processing it into sheets to be used for writing. Young boys are shown learning to read and write hieroglyphs beside a display of a scribe's implements and an architect's tools.

Back in the old building, moving up via the ramp to the 1st floor, you come to face a seated **granite figure** of the legendary scribe Amenhotep (No 4), son of Hapu, the great official eventually deified in Ptolemaic times and who, as overseer of all the pharaoh's works under Amenhotep III (1390-1352 BC), was responsible for many of Thebes' greatest buildings. One of the most interesting exhibits is the **Wall of Akhenaten**, a series of small sandstone blocks named *talatat* or 'threes' by workmen – probably because their height and length was about three hand lengths – that came from

Amenhotep IV's contribution at Karnak before he changed his name to Akhenaten and left Thebes for Tell al-Amarna. His building was demolished and about 40,000 blocks used to fill in Karnak's ninth pylon were found in the late 1960s and partially reassembled here. The scenes showing Akhenaten, his wife Nefertiti and temple life are a rare example of decoration from a Temple of Aten. Further highlights are treasures from Tutankhamun's tomb, including *shabti* (servant) figures, model boats, sandals, arrows and a series of gilded bronze rosettes from his funeral pall.

A ramp back down to the ground floor leaves you close to the exit and beside a black-and-gold wooden head of the cow deity Mehit-Weret, an aspect of the goddess Hathor, which was also found in Tutankhamun's tomb.

On the left just before the exit is a small hall containing 16 of 22 statues that were uncovered in Luxor Temple in 1989. All are magnificent examples of ancient Egyptian sculpture but pride of place at the end of the hall is given to an almost pristine 2.45m-tall quartzite statue of a muscular Amenhotep III, wearing a pleated kilt.

### Mummification Museum

Housed in the former visitors centre on Luxor's Corniche, opposite the Mina Palace Hotel, the small **Mummification Museum** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 1501; Corniche an-Nil; adult/student ££40/20; 🕒 9am-1pm & 4-9pm Oct-Apr, 9am-1pm & 5-10pm May-Sep) has well-presented exhibits explaining the art of mummification. On display are the well-preserved mummy of a 21st-dynasty high

#### MAKING MUMMIES *Dr Joann Fletcher*

Although the practice of preserving dead bodies can be found in cultures across the world, the Egyptians were the ultimate practitioners of this highly complex procedure that they refined over a period of almost 4000 years. Their preservation of the dead can be traced back to the very earliest times, when bodies were simply buried in the desert away from the limited areas of cultivation. In direct contact with the sand that covered them, the hot, dry conditions allowed the body fluids to drain away while preserving the skin, hair and nails intact. Accidentally uncovering such bodies must have had a profound effect upon those who were able to recognise people who had died sometimes years before.

As burial practices for the elite became more sophisticated, people who would once have been buried in a hole in the ground demanded purpose-built tombs befitting their status; however, this meant that instead of drying out in the sand, bodies rapidly decomposed. An artificial means of preserving the body was therefore required, and so began the long process of experimentation. It wasn't until around 2600 BC that they finally cracked it, and began to remove the internal organs when putrefaction actually begins.

As the process became increasingly elaborate, all the organs were removed except the kidneys, which were hard to reach, and the heart. The heart was considered the source of intelligence rather than the brain, which was generally removed by inserting a metal probe up the nose and whisking to reduce it to a liquid that could be easily drained away. All the rest – lungs, liver, stomach, intestines – were removed through an opening cut in the left flank. Then the body and its separate organs were covered with piles of natron salt and left to dry out for 40 days, after which they were washed, purified and anointed with a range of oils, spices and resins. All were then wrapped in layers of linen, with the appropriate amulets set in place over the various parts of the body as priests recited the incantations needed to activate the protective functions of the amulets.

With each internal organ placed inside its own burial container (one of four Canopic jars), the wrapped body complete with its funerary mask was placed inside its coffin. It was then ready for the funeral procession to the tomb, where the vital Opening of the Mouth ceremony reanimated the soul and restored its senses; offerings were given, while wishing the dead 'a thousand of every good and pure thing for your soul and all kinds of offerings on which the gods live'.

The ancient Egyptians also used mummification to preserve animals, both as a means of preserving the bodies of much-loved pets and the far more widespread practice of mummifying animals to present as votive offerings to the gods with which they were associated. The Egyptians mummified everything from huge bulls to tiny shrews, with cats, hawks and ibis mummified in their millions by Graeco-Roman times; recent research reveals that such creatures were killed for that purpose.

priest of Amun, Maserharti, and a host of mummified animals. Vitrines show the tools and materials used in the mummification process – check out the small spoon and metal spatula used for scraping the brain out of the skull. Several artefacts that were crucial to the mummy's journey to the afterlife have also been included, as well as some picturesque painted coffins. Presiding over the entrance is a beautiful little statue of the jackal god, Anubis, the god of embalming who helped Isis turn her brother-husband Osiris into the first mummy.

## SIGHTS – WEST BANK

The West Bank is a world away from the noise and bustle of Luxor town on the east bank. Taking a taxi across the bridge, 6km south of the centre, or crossing on the old ferry, you are immediately in the lush Egyptian countryside, with bright green sugarcane fields along irrigation canals and clusters of colour-

ful houses, all against the background of the desert and the Theban hills. Coming towards the end of the cultivated land you start to notice huge sandstone blocks lying in the middle of fields, gaping black holes in the rocks and giant sandstone forms on the edge of the cultivation below. Magnificent memorial temples were built on the flood plains here, where the illusion of the pharaoh's immortality could be perpetuated by the devotions of his priests and subjects, while his body and worldly wealth, and the bodies of his wives and children, were laid in splendidly decorated hidden tombs excavated in the hills.

From the New Kingdom onwards, the necropolis also supported a large living population of artisans, labourers, temple priests and guards, who devoted their lives to the construction and maintenance of this city of the dead, and who protected the tombs full of treasure from eager robbers. The artisans perfected the techniques of tomb building, decoration and concealment, and passed the secrets down through their families. They all built their tombs here.

Until a generation ago, villagers used tombs to shelter from the extremes of the desert climate, and until recently many lived in houses built over the tombs, some even derived their livelihood from trafficking the ancient artefacts that they found in their 'basement'. For at least 100 years the Antiquities Department has tried to relocate the inhabitants of al-Gurna, whose beautifully painted houses were built over the Tombs of the Nobles, a picturesque sight to anyone visiting the West Bank. A new village was built for them by Hassan Fathy at New Gurna (see p275), but all those years they refused to move as their livelihood was just there: trading in trinkets, alabaster work and tour-guiding.

In spring 2007 their houses were bulldozed one by one, and the families moved to a huge new village of small breeze-block houses a few kilometres north of the Valley of the Kings. Some families are happy, particularly the young ones who can now live in their own house rather than their parents' one as tradition had it, but most miss their cooler large mud-brick houses, the community spirit they had and being close to the job – public transport is only slowly becoming available to and from the new villages. This is all part of the governor's master plan to make Luxor the largest open-air museum in the world.

### BEST OF THE WEST

Our pick of the top West Bank sights that are currently open:

#### BEST TOMBS

##### Valley of the Kings

- Tuthmosis III (p264)
- Amenhotep II (p263)
- Horemheb (p263)

##### Valley of the Queens

- Amunherkhepshef (p273)

##### Tombs of the Nobles

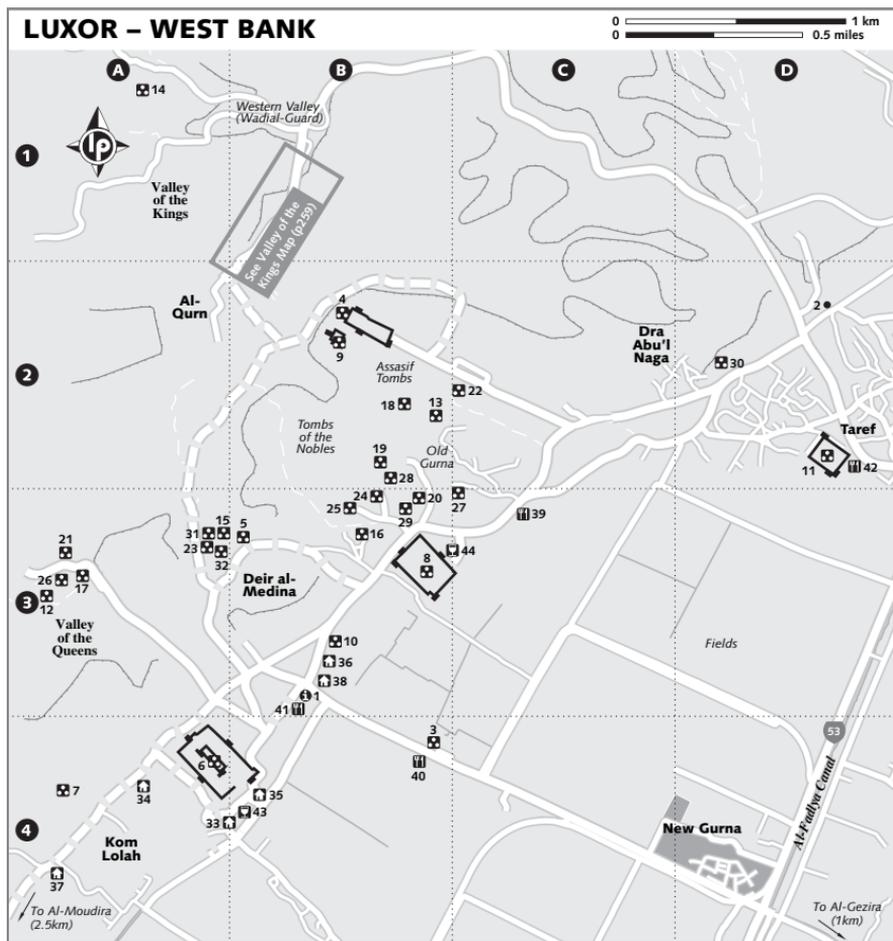
- Nakht (p269)
- Senofer (p270)
- Ramose (p269)

##### Deir al-Medina

- Sennedjem (p273)

#### BEST MEMORIAL TEMPLES

- Deir al-Bahri (Hatshepsut; p267)
- Medinat Habu (Ramses III; p274)
- Ramesseum (Ramses II; p271)
- Seti I (p257)

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## TACKLING THE WEST BANK

Little shade can be found at the archaeological remains on the West Bank and the midday heat is intense from April to October. Early-morning visits are therefore ideal, but that is unfortunately also when most tour groups visit the Temple of Deir al-Bahri or the Valley of the Kings. In winter you can visit the two sites without the crowds during the afternoon, but they get very hot. This is our advice for getting the most out of your time on the West Bank:

- Don't try to see it all in a day: if your time is limited, don't cram in too much or at the end of the day, you will be unable to distinguish a sarcophagus from a scarab. Choose a few tombs, perhaps in the Valley of the Nobles instead of the Kings to avoid the crowds, and a temple.
- Keep tomb-viewing time to a minimum: visiting deep-cut tombs is exhausting and the air in some is far from fresh. Twenty minutes is ample time for most, bearing in mind that the humidity created by the breath of so many visitors creates a fungus that destroys the ancient pigments.
- Take breaks: sipping a cold drink with view of a temple can be as sublime an experience as seeing your first tomb.

With all this in mind, here are some itineraries for those with limited time. The one- and two-day plans need a brisk pace and assume you have some sort of a vehicle.

- One day: go via the Colossi of Memnon on the way to the Valley of the Kings. See some tombs, then spend an hour at Deir al-Bahri. Have lunch near the Tombs of the Nobles, after which you can visit a few tombs in that area for an hour. Late afternoon spend an hour at Medinat Habu.
- Two days: the above at a slower pace, seeing more tombs, taking longer breaks and adding the Ramesseum.
- Three days: spread out the previous offerings, walking along the mountain path from the Valley of the Kings to Deir al-Bahri; adding the Temple of Merneptah and its fascinating museum and the Temple of Seti I; horse riding through the fields from Gezira to the desert at sunset.
- Four days or more: take things at a leisurely pace; add the tombs at Deir al-Medina, and some other Tombs of the Nobles; revisit the Valley of the Kings. Definitely take a sunset horse or camel ride. Drink tea and chat with villagers.

## What to Bring

Above all bring plenty of water, though it is available at many of the sites, and a sun hat. Small change for baksheesh is much needed too, as guardians rely on tips to augment their pathetic salaries – a few Egyptian pounds should be enough for them to either leave you in peace, or to open a door or reflect light on a particularly beautiful painting. A torch (flashlight) can come in handy.

## Tickets

Part of the new plan is that every site will have its own ticket office, but at the time of writing the **Antiquities Inspectorate ticket office** (Map p255; main road, 3km inland from ferry landing; ☎ 6am–4pm, to 5pm Jun–Sep) near Medinat Habu, still provided all tickets except for the Temple at Deir al-Bahri, the Assasif tombs, the Valley of the Kings and

the Valley of the Queens. Check here first to see which tickets are available, and which tombs are open. All sites are officially open from 7am to 5pm October to May and from 6am to 7pm June to September. Photography is not permitted in any tombs and guards may confiscate film or memory cards.

Tickets are valid only for the day of purchase and no refunds are given. Prices (adult/student):

**Assasif Tombs** (Kheruef & Ankhor) E£25/15

**Assasif Tombs** (Pabasa) E£25/15

**Dra Abu'l Naga** (Roy & Shuroy) E£25/15

**Deir al-Medina Temple & Tombs** (except Peshedu) E£25/15

**Medinat Habu** (Temple of Ramses III) E£25/15

**Ramesseum** E£25/15

**Temple of Merneptah** E£25/15

**Temple of Seti I** E£25/15

**Tomb of Ay** (Western Valley) E£20/10

**Tomb of Pshedu** (Deir al-Medina) E£10/5

**Tombs of the Nobles** E£10/5 to E£25/15 per group of tombs

## Colossi of Memnon

The two faceless Colossi of Memnon (Map p255) that rise majestically about 18m from the plain are the first monuments tourists see when they visit the West Bank. The enthroned figures have kept a lonely vigil on the changing landscape, and few visitors have any idea that these giants were only a tiny element of the largest temple ever built in Egypt, Amenhotep III's memorial temple, believed to have covered an area larger than Karnak.

The pharaoh's memorial temple has now all but disappeared. It was built largely of mud brick on the flood plain of the Nile, where it was flooded every year. The walls simply dissolved after it was abandoned and no longer maintained, and later pharaohs used the stones for their monuments. Some tiny parts of the temple remain and more is being uncovered by excavation; the colossi are the only large-scale elements to have survived.

The magnificent colossi, each cut from a single block of stone and weighing 1000 tons, were already a great tourist attraction during Graeco-Roman times, when the statues were attributed to Memnon, the legendary African king who was slain by Achilles during the Trojan War. The Greeks and Romans considered it good luck to hear the whistling sound emitted by the northern statue at sunrise, which they believed to be the cry of Memnon greeting his mother Eos, the goddess of dawn. She in turn would weep tears of dew for his untimely death. All this was probably due to a crack in the colossus' upper body, which appeared after the 27 BC earthquake. As the heat of the morning sun baked the dew-soaked stone, sand particles would break off and resonate inside the cracks in the structure. After Septimus Severus (193–211 AD) repaired the statue in the 3rd century AD, Memnon's plaintive greeting was heard no more.

The temple was filled with thousands of statues (including the huge dyad of Amenhotep III and Tiy that now dominates the central court of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo), most of which were later dragged off by other pharaohs. A stele, also now in the Egyptian Museum, describes the temple as

being built from 'white sandstone, with gold throughout, a floor covered with silver, and doors covered with electrum'. Other statues and fragments of wall reliefs can be seen at the nearby Temple of Merneptah.

The colossi are just off the road, before you reach the Antiquities Inspectorate ticket office, and are usually being snapped and filmed by an army of tourists. A new archaeological project is salvaging what remains of the temple.

## Temple of Merneptah

Almost directly behind Amenhotep's temple, lie the remains of the **Temple of Merneptah** (Map p255; adult/student E£25/15), who succeeded his father Ramses II in 1213 BC and ruled for 10 years. In the 19th century, the 'Israel Stele', now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, was found here, which was the only Egyptian text to mention 'Israel' (which Merneptah claimed to have defeated).

The Swiss Institute in Egypt has done considerable work here, uncovering the temple's original plan and a large number of statues and reliefs. At the small **museum** near the entrance, the history of the temple is illustrated with text, plans and finds from excavations, a great help to understand the little that remains of the building. In a covered storage area east of the sacred lake are the statues found on the site, including 12 jackal-headed sphinxes, some of which retain their original colours. Merneptah pilfered these, and many other statues and large stone blocks, from Amenhotep III's Temple nearby, often scratching out the latter's cartouche and replacing it with his own. Two display rooms in the centre of the temple house the reliefs of Merneptah with various gods that once stood atop the temple pylons (ask the caretaker to unlock them).

## Temple of Seti I

At the northern end of the Theban necropolis lies the **Temple of Seti I** (Map p255). Seti I, who also built the superbly decorated temple at Abydos (see p233) and Karnak's magnificent hypostyle hall, died before this memorial temple was finished, so it was completed by his son Ramses II. The temple sees few visitors, despite its picturesque location near a palm grove and recent restoration, after it was severely damaged by torrential rain and floods in 1994.

The entrance is through a small door in the northeast corner of the reconstructed fortresslike enclosure wall. The first and second pylons and the court are in ruins, but recent excavations have revealed the foundations of the pharaoh's palace, just south of the court. The earliest found example of a palace within a memorial temple, its plan is similar to the better-preserved palace at the memorial temple of Ramses III at Medinat Habu. The walls of the columned portico at the west façade of the temple, and those of the hypostyle court beyond it, contain some superbly executed reliefs. Off the hypostyle are six shrines and to the south is a small chapel dedicated to Seti's father, Ramses I, who died before he could build his own mortuary temple.

### Carter's House

Surrounded by a lush garden on what is otherwise a barren hill, where the road from Deir al-Bahri to the Valley of the Kings meets the road from Seti I's temple, stands the domed house where Howard Carter lived during his search for Tutankhamun's tomb. There are discussions about turning it into a West Bank conservation centre. In the meantime it languishes.

### Valley of the Kings

Once called the Great Necropolis of Millions of Years of Pharaoh, or the Place of Truth, the **Valley of the Kings** (Wadi Biban al-Muluk; Map p259; adult/student for 3 tombs excluding Ay & Tutankhamun ££70/35) has 63 magnificent royal tombs from the New Kingdom period (1550–1069 BC), all very different from each other. The West Bank had been the site of royal burials from the First Intermediate Period (2181–2055 BC) onwards. At least three 11th-dynasty rulers built their tombs near the modern village of Taref, northeast of the Valley of the Kings. The 18th-dynasty pharaohs, however, chose the isolated valley dominated by the pyramid-shaped mountain peak of al-Qurn (The Horn). The secluded site enclosed by steep cliffs was easy to guard and, when seen from the Theban plain, appears to be the site of the setting sun, associated with the afterlife by ancient Egyptians.

The tombs have suffered great damage from treasure hunters, floods and, in recent years, from mass tourism: carbon dioxide, friction and humidity produced by the average of 2.8g of sweat left by each visitor have affected the

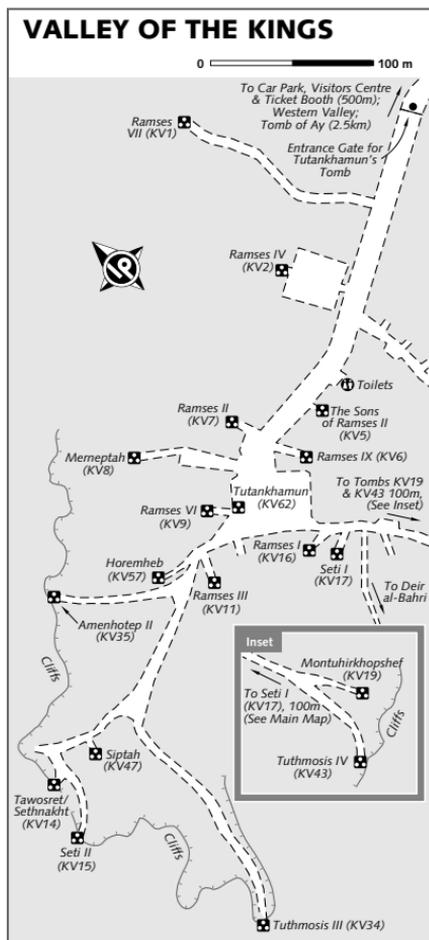
reliefs and the pigments of the wall paintings. The Department of Antiquities has since installed dehumidifiers and glass screens in the worst affected tombs, and introduced a rotation system for opening some tombs to the public while restoring others. Each tomb has a number that represents the order in which it was discovered. KV (short for Kings Valley) 1 belongs to Ramses VII; it has been open since Greek and Roman times, and was mentioned in the *Description de l'Égypte*, dating from the late 18th century. KV 62 – Tutankhamun's famous tomb, which was discovered by Howard Carter in 1922 – was until recently the last one to be discovered, but in 2006 KV 63 was discovered, with a few empty sarcophagus, so it is not clear if this was a royal tomb or a chamber for the mummification process.

The large car park leads to a new **visitors centre** (Map p259; ☎ 6am–4pm winter, 6am–5pm summer) where guides explain the history of the site and show a silicon model of the Valley to their groups in an air-conditioned room, and where individual visitors can get information on a set of computers. A movie about Carter's discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun is also shown. Newly erected signs and maps make navigating the site far easier than before. Tomb plans and histories have also been upgraded to help visitors better understand what they're seeing. This is all part of the site-management plan Dr Kent Weeks and his Theban Mapping Project are developing to improve the experience of visitors and ensure protection of the tombs. It's worth having a torch to illuminate badly lit areas.

The road into the Valley of the Kings is a gradual, dry, hot climb, so be prepared if you are riding a bicycle. A rest house is being built near the visitors centre, but mineral water, soft drinks, ice creams and snacks are available from the stalls at the tourist bazaar near the entrance. A *tuf-tuf* – a little electrical train – ferries visitors between the visitors centre and the tombs (it can be hot during summer). The ride costs ££4.

Most of the tombs described here are usually open to visitors and are listed in the order that they are found when entering the site. If you want to avoid the inevitable crowds that tour buses bring to the tombs, head for those outside the entrance area.

The Tomb of Tutankhamun (KV 62), somehow the least impressive of all the royal tombs but famous for its treasury now mostly in



Cairo Museum, has been deemed worth a ticket on its own (adult/student E£80/40) and this can be bought at a second ticket office where the *tuf-tuf* arrives. The tomb of Ay (KV 23) also has its own ticket (E£20/10), available from the main ticket office.

### TOMB OF RAMSES VII (KV 1)

Up a small wadi near the main entrance is the small, unfinished tomb of Ramses VII (1136–1129 BC; Map p259). Only 44.3m long, short for a royal tomb because of Ramses' sudden death, it consists of a corridor, a burial chamber and an unfinished third chamber. His architects hastily widened what was to have been the tomb's second corridor, making it a burial chamber, and the pharaoh was laid to rest in a

pit covered with a sarcophagus lid. Niches for Canopic jars are carved into the pit's sides, a feature unique to this tomb. Walls on the corridor leading to the chamber are decorated with fairly well preserved excerpts from the Book of the Caverns and the Opening of the Mouth ritual, while the burial chamber is decorated with passages from the Book of the Earth. Although it has only recently reopened to the public, the Greek, demotic, Coptic and 19th-century graffiti show that it has been open since antiquity – at one stage it was even inhabited by Coptic hermits.

### TOMB OF RAMSES IV (KV 2)

This is the second tomb (Map p259) on the right as you enter the Valley of the Kings. Its whereabouts were already known by Ptolemaic times, as is evident from the graffiti on the walls dating back to 278 BC. Ramses IV (1153–1147 BC) died before the tomb was completed and its pillared hall had to be hastily turned into a burial chamber. The paintings in the burial chamber have deteriorated, but there is a wonderful image of the goddess Nut, stretched across the blue ceiling, and it is the only tomb in the valley to contain the text of the Book of Nut, with a description of the daily path taken by the sun every day. The red granite sarcophagus, though empty, is one of the largest in the valley. The discovery of an ancient plan of the tomb on papyrus (now in the Turin Museum) shows the sarcophagus was originally enclosed by four large shrines similar to those in Tutankhamun's tomb (p261). Following the robbery of the tomb in antiquity, the mummy of Ramses IV was one of those reburied in the Tomb of Amenhotep II (KV 35), and is now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

### TOMB OF RAMSES IX (KV 6)

Opposite Ramses II is the most visited tomb in the valley, the Tomb of Ramses IX (1126–1108 BC; Map p259), with a wide entrance, a long sloping corridor, a large antechamber decorated with the animals, serpents and demons from the Book of the Dead – then a pillared hall and short hallway before the burial chamber. Here as well graffiti indicates that the tomb has been open since antiquity. In the chamber just before the staircase to the burial chamber are the cartouche symbols of Ramses IX. On either side of the gate on the rear wall are two figures of Iunmutef priests,

**TOMB BUILDING** *Dr Joann Fletcher*

Tombs were initially created to differentiate the burials of the elite from the majority of people whose bodies continued to be placed directly into the desert. By about 3100 BC the mound of sand heaped over these elite graves was replaced by a more permanent structure of mud brick, whose characteristic bench shape is known as a 'mastaba' after the Arabic word for bench.

As stone replaced mud-brick, the addition of further levels to increase height gave birth to the pyramid, whose first incarnation at Saqqara is also the world's oldest monumental structure. Its stepped sides soon evolved into the more familiar smooth-sided structure, of which the Pyramids of Giza are the most famous examples.

It was only when the power of the monarchy broke down at the end of the Old Kingdom that the afterlife became increasingly accessible to those outside the royal family, and as officials became increasingly independent they began to opt for burial in their home towns. Yet the narrow stretches of fertile land that make up much of the Nile Valley generally left little room for grand superstructures, so an alternative type of tomb developed, cut tunnel-fashion into the cliffs that border the valley and which also proved more resilient against robbery. Most were built on the west side of the river, the traditional place of burial where the sun was seen to sink down into the underworld each evening.

These simple rock-cut tombs consisting of a single chamber gradually developed into more elaborate structures complete with an open courtyard, offering chapel and entrance façade carved out of the rock with a shaft leading down into an undecorated burial chamber. The most impressive rock-cut tombs were those built for the pharaohs of the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC), who relocated the royal burial ground south to the remote valley now known as the Valley of the Kings. New evidence suggests that the first tomb in the valley may have been built for Amenhotep I (1525–1504 BC; KV 39). The tomb intended for his successor, Tutmosis I (KV 20), demonstrated a radical departure from tradition: the offering chapel that was once part of the tomb's layout was built as a separate structure some distance away in an attempt to preserve the tomb's secret location. The tombs themselves were designed to resemble the underworld, with a long, inclined rock-hewn corridor descending into either an antechamber or a series of sometimes pillared halls, and ending in the burial chamber.

The tomb builders lived in their own village of Deir al-Medina and worked in relays. The duration of the ancient week was 10 days (eight days on, two days off) and the men tended to spend the nights of their working week at a small camp located on the pass leading from Deir al-Medina to the eastern part of the Valley of the Kings. Then they spent their two days off at home with their families.

Once the tomb walls were created, decoration could then be added; this dealt almost exclusively with the afterlife and the pharaoh's existence in it. Many of the colourful paintings and reliefs were extracts taken from ancient theological compositions, now known as 'books', and were incorporated in the tomb to assist the deceased into the next life. Texts were taken from the Book of the Dead, the collective modern name for a range of works, all of which deal with the sun god's nightly journey through the darkness of the underworld, the realm of Osiris and home of the dead.

The Egyptians believed that the underworld was traversed each night by Ra, and it was the aim of the dead to secure passage on his sacred barque to travel with him for eternity. Since knowledge was power in the Egyptian afterlife, the texts give 'Knowledge of the power of those in the underworld and knowledge of their actions, knowing the sacred rituals of Ra, knowing the hours and the gods and the gates and paths where the great god passes'.

both dressed in priestly panther-skin robes and sporting a ceremonial side lock. The walls of the burial chamber feature the Book of Amduat, the Book of Caverns and the Book of the Earth; the Book of the Heavens is represented on the ceiling. Although unfinished it

was the last tomb in the valley to have so much of its decoration completed, and the paintings are relatively well preserved. A number of wooden statues of the pharaoh and the gods were salvaged and taken to the British Museum in the 19th century, although the

pharaoh's mummy had already been removed in antiquity and reburied as part of the Deir al-Bahri cache.

### **TOMB OF RAMSES II (KV 7)**

As befits the burial place of one of Egypt's longest-reigning pharaohs (67 years, from 1279 to 1213 BC), KV 7 (Map p259) is one of the biggest tombs in the valley. However, the location of its entrance at a low point in the valley left it vulnerable to flash floods – archaeologists estimate that it has flooded at least seven times since it was built. This has destroyed much of what must have been spectacular decoration, and left the rooms full of debris, so it is unlikely to open anytime soon. Based on the decorative scheme in his father Seti I's superb tomb, the walls of Ramses II's tomb would once have been just as brightly coloured, the wall scenes featuring the Litany of Ra, Book of Gates, the Book of the Dead and other sacred texts. In one of the side chambers off the burial chamber is a statue of Osiris similar to one found by Dr Kent Weeks in KV 5 (see the boxed text, p263), giving him yet more evidence for his theory that KV5 belongs to the many sons of Ramses.

Excavations have shown that Ramses II, following his father Seti I, had his sarcophagus made from alabaster, although his mummy was eventually buried in a wooden coffin in the Deir al-Bahri tomb cache; it's now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

### **TOMB OF MERNEPTAH (KV 8)**

Ramses II lived for so long that 12 of his sons died before he did, so it was finally his 13th son Merneptah (1213–1203 BC) who succeeded him in his 60s. The second-largest tomb in the valley, Merneptah's tomb (Map p259) has been open since antiquity and has its share of Greek and Coptic graffiti. Floods have damaged the lower part of the walls of the long tunnel-like tomb, but the upper parts have well-preserved reliefs. As you enter the first long corridor, on the left is a striking relief of Merneptah with the god Ra-Horakhty followed by the Litany of Ra. Further down, the corridors are decorated with the Book of the Dead, the Book of Gates and the Book of Amduat. Beyond a shaft is a false burial chamber with two pillars decorated with the Book of Gates. Although much of the decoration in the burial chamber has

faded, it remains an impressive room, with a sunken floor and brick niches on the front and rear walls.

The pharaoh was originally buried inside four stone sarcophagi, three of granite (the lid of the second still *in situ*, with an effigy of Merneptah on top) and the fourth, innermost, sarcophagus of alabaster. In a rare mistake by ancient Egyptian engineers, the outer sarcophagus did not fit through the tomb entrance and its gates had to be hacked away. Merneptah's mummy was removed in antiquity and was found in Amenhotep II's tomb (KV 35); it's now displayed in the Egyptian Museum.

### **TOMB OF TUTANKHAMUN (KV 62)**

The story of the celebrated discovery of the famous tomb and all the fabulous treasures it contained far outshines its actual appearance. Tutankhamun's tomb (Map p259) is small and bears all the signs of a rather hasty completion and inglorious burial. The son of Akhenaten by a minor wife, he ruled briefly (1336–1327 BC) and died young, with no great battles or buildings to his credit, so there was little time to build a tomb.

The Egyptologist Howard Carter slaved away for six seasons in the valley, excavating thousands of tonnes of sand and rubble from possible sites, believing that he would find the tomb of Tutankhamun intact with all its treasures. Even his benefactor Lord Carnarvon lost hope, and with his funding about to be cut off Carter made one last attempt at the only unexplored area that was left, which was covered by workers' huts just under the already excavated Tomb of Ramses VI.

The first step was found on 4 November 1922, and on 5 November the rest of the steps and a sealed doorway came to light. Carter wired Lord Carnarvon to join him in Egypt immediately for the opening of what he believed was the completely intact Tomb of Tutankhamun.

The tomb's priceless cache of treasures, although it had been partially robbed twice in antiquity, vindicated Carter's dream beyond even his wildest imaginings. Four chambers were found crammed with jewellery, furniture, statues, chariots, musical instruments, weapons, boxes, jars and food – even the later discovery that many had been stuffed haphazardly into the wrong boxes by necropolis officials 'tidying up' after the ancient robberies does

not detract from their dazzling wealth. Most are now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (a few items remain in Luxor Museum).

Seeing all the treasure contained in this small tomb, people wonder how rich the larger tombs must have been, but some archaeologists believe that Tutankhamun was perhaps buried with all the regalia of the unpopular Amarna royal line, as some of it is inscribed with the names of his father Akhenaten and the mysterious Smenkhkare (1388–1336 BC), who some Egyptologists believe was Nefertiti ruling as pharaoh.

Most of the treasure is in the Cairo Museum, but what is special here is that Tutankhamun's mummy still lies inside its gilded wooden coffin, the outermost of the three wooden coffins, which in turn rests within a carved, red quartzite sarcophagus. The burial chamber walls are decorated by chubby figures of Tutankhamun before the gods, painted against a yellow-gold background. The wall at the foot end of the sarcophagus shows scenes of the pharaoh's funeral; the 12 squatting apes from the Book of Amduat, representing the 12 hours of the night, are featured on the opposite wall.

### TOMB OF RAMSES VI (KV 9)

The intactness of Tutankhamun's tomb is largely thanks to the existence of the tomb of Ramses VI (Map p259). Tons of rock chippings thrown outside during its construction completely covered the tomb of Tutankhamun. The tomb was actually begun for the ephemeral Ramses V (1147–1143 BC) and continued by Ramses VI (1143–1136 BC), with both pharaohs apparently buried here; the names and titles of Ramses V still appear in the first half of the tomb. Following the tomb's ransacking a mere 20 years after burial, the mummies of both Ramses V and Ramses VI were moved to Amenhotep II's tomb where they were found in 1898 and taken to Cairo.

Although the tomb's plastering was not finished, its fine decoration is well preserved, with an emphasis on astronomical scenes and texts. Extracts from the Book of Gates and the Book of Caverns cover the entrance corridor. These continue into the midsection of the tomb and well room, with the addition of the Book of the Heavens. Nearer the burial chamber the walls are decorated with extracts from the Book of Amduat. The burial chamber is beautifully decorated, with a superb double

image of Nut framing the books of the day and of the night on the ceiling. This nocturnal landscape in black and gold shows the sky goddess swallowing the sun each evening to give birth to it each morning in an endless cycle of new life designed to revive the souls of the dead pharaohs. The walls of the chamber are filled with fine images of Ramses VI with various deities, as well as scenes from the Book of the Earth, with scenes that show the sun god's progress through the night, the gods who help him and the forces of darkness trying to stop him reaching the dawn; look out for the decapitated, kneeling figures of the sun god's enemies around the base of the chamber walls and the black-coloured executioners who turn the decapitated bodies upside down to render them as helpless as possible. On the beautifully decorated right wall of the burial chamber also try to pick out the ithyphallic figure (the one with a noticeable erection); the lines and symbols surrounding him represent a water clock. Plenty of Greek graffiti, from around AD 150, can be seen on the upper portions of the chamber.

### TOMB OF RAMSES III (KV 11)

Ramses III (1184–1153 BC), the last of Egypt's warrior pharaohs, built one of the longest tombs in the Valley of the Kings. The tomb (Map p259) started but abandoned by Sethnakht (1186–1184 BC), is 125m long, much of it still beautifully decorated with colourful painted sunken reliefs featuring the traditional ritual texts (Litany of Ra, Book of Gates etc) and Ramses before the gods. Unusually here are the secular scenes, in the small side rooms of the entrance corridor, showing foreign tribute such as highly detailed pottery imported from the Aegean, the royal armoury, boats and, in the last of these side chambers, the blind harpists that gave the tomb one of its alternative names: 'Tomb of the Harpers'.

In the chamber beyond is an aborted tunnel where ancient builders ran into the neighbouring tomb. They shifted the axis of the tomb to the west and built a corridor leading to a pillared hall, with walls decorated with scenes from the Book of Gates. There is also ancient graffiti on the rear right pillar describing the reburial of the pharaoh during the 21st dynasty (1069–945 BC). The remainder of the tomb is only partially excavated and structurally weak.

## THE GREATEST FIND SINCE TUTANKHAMUN

In May 1995, American archaeologist Dr Kent Weeks announced to the world his discovery of the largest tomb ever to be unearthed in Egypt, believed to be the burial place of the many sons of Ramses II. It was immediately hailed as the greatest find since that of Tutankhamun, or, as one London newspaper put it: 'The Mummy of all Tombs'.

In 1987 Weeks decided to excavate a hill where Howard Carter had uncovered an entrance to a tomb and partly cleared it in his search for Tutankhamun's tomb. Robbed in antiquity then filled with debris from flash floods, the tomb, KV5, appeared to have been destroyed and Carter soon dismissed it and filled it back in. Weeks located the entrance and his team then set about clearing the entrance chambers, finding pottery, fragments of sarcophagi and, more importantly, wall decorations which led him to believe it was the Tomb of the Sons of Ramses II.

However, it wasn't until 1995 that Weeks unearthed a doorway leading to an incredible 121 chambers and corridors, making the tomb many times larger and more complex than any other found in Egypt. Clearing the debris from this unique and enormous tomb is a painstaking and dangerous task. Not only does every bucketful have to be sifted for fragments of pottery, bones and reliefs, but major engineering work has to be done to shore up the tomb's structure. Despite the slow progress, Weeks has found the remains of six males that he contends are the sons of Ramses II. So far representations of 20 others have been found in the fragmentary reliefs, indicating that they too are likely to have been buried here.

Much of the tomb still lies tantalisingly off limits to investigation thanks to the tonnes of debris jammed inside its rooms and corridors. Weeks speculates that it has as many as 150 chambers: so far he has found 125 but exploration remains painfully slow. It might take another decade to study the tomb, during which it remains closed, but you can follow the progress on the excellent website at [www.thebanmappingproject.com](http://www.thebanmappingproject.com), or read Weeks' fascinating account in his book *The Lost Tomb*.

Ramses III's sarcophagus is in the Louvre in Paris, its detailed lid is in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and his mummy – found in the Deir al-Bahri cache – was the model for Boris Karloff's character in the 1930s film *The Mummy*. The mummy is now in Cairo's Egyptian Museum.

### TOMB OF HOREMHEB (KV 57)

This tomb (Map p259) was discovered filled with ransacked pieces of the royal funerary equipment, including a number of wooden figurines that were taken to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Horemheb (1323–1295 BC), a general and military strongman under Tutankhamun, brought stability after the turmoil of Akhenaten's reign. He had already built a lavish tomb in Saqqara, but abandoned it for this tomb. The various stages of decoration in the burial chamber give a fascinating glimpse into the process of tomb decoration.

From the entrance, a steep flight of steps and an equally steep passage leads to a well shaft decorated with superb figures of Horemheb before the gods. Notice Hathor's blue-and-black striped wig and the lotus

crown of the young god Nefertum, all executed against a grey-blue background. This leads to an undecorated pillared hall, and an antechamber. The six-pillared burial chamber decorated with part of the Book of Gates remains partially unfinished, showing how the decoration was applied by following a grid system in red ink over which the figures were drawn in black prior to their carving and painting. The pharaoh's empty red granite sarcophagus carved with protective figures of goddesses with outstretched wings remains in the tomb; his mummy is missing.

### TOMB OF AMENHOTEP II (KV 35)

One of the deepest structures in the valley, this tomb (Map p259) has more than 90 steps down to a modern gangway, built over a deep pit designed to protect the inner, lower chambers from both thieves (which it failed to do) and the water from flash floods.

Stars cover the entire ceiling in the huge burial chamber and the walls feature, as if on a giant painted scroll, text from the Book of Amduat. While most figures are of the same sticklike proportions as in the tomb of Amenhotep's father and predecessor

Tuthmosis III, this is the first royal tomb in the valley to also show figures of more rounded proportions, as on the pillars in the burial chamber showing the pharaoh before Osiris, Hathor and Anubis. The burial chamber is also unique for its double level; the top level was filled with pillars, the bottom contained the sarcophagus.

Although thieves breached the tomb in antiquity, Amenhotep's (1427–1400 BC) mummy was restored by the priests, put back in his sarcophagus with a garland of flowers around his neck, and buried with 13 other royal mummies in the two side rooms, including Tuthmosis IV (1400–1390 BC), Amenhotep III, Merneptah, Ramses IV, V and VI and Seti II (1200–1194 BC), most of which are now at the Egyptian Museum.

#### **TOMB OF TUTHMOSIS III (KV 34)**

Hidden in the hills between high limestone cliffs and reached only via a steep staircase that crosses an even steeper ravine, this tomb (Map p259) demonstrates the lengths to which the ancient pharaohs went to thwart the cunning of the ancient thieves.

Tuthmosis III (1479–1425 BC), an innovator in many fields whose military exploits and stature has earned him the name 'the Napoleon of ancient Egypt', was one of the first to build his tomb in the Valley of the Kings. As secrecy was his utmost concern, he chose the most inaccessible spot and designed his burial place with a series of passages at haphazard angles and fake doors to mislead or catch potential robbers.

The shaft, now traversed by a narrow gangway, leads to an antechamber supported by two pillars, the walls of which are adorned with a list of more than 700 gods and demigods. As the earliest tomb in the valley to be painted, the walls appear to be simply giant versions of funerary papyri, with scenes populated by stick men. The burial chamber has curved walls and is oval in shape; it contains the pharaoh's quartzite sarcophagus that is carved in the shape of a cartouche.

Tuthmosis III's mummy, which shows he was a short man of around 1.5m, was one of those found in the Deir al-Bahri cache and is now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

#### **TOMB OF SIPTAH (KV 47)**

Discovered in 1905, Siptah's (1194–1188 BC) tomb (Map p259) was never completed but

the upper corridors are nonetheless covered in fine paintings. Like the builders of Ramses III's tomb, workmen struck an adjacent tomb when digging out the rock, but fortunately they were already in the burial chamber, and blocked up their mistake with stone blocks.

The tomb's entrance is decorated with the sun disc, and figures of Maat, the goddess of truth, kneel on each side of the doorway. The corridor beyond features colourful scenes from the Litany of Ra with an elaborately dressed Siptah before various gods, including Ra-Horakhty (an aspect of the sun god Ra combined with Horakhty, a form of Horus the sky god). There are further scenes from the Book of Amduat, and figures of Anubis, after which the tomb remains undecorated. The tomb was reused in the Third Intermediate Period. But Siptah's mummy was moved for safety to the well-hidden tomb of Amenhotep II by 10th-century priests. There he lay with many other royal mummies, Seti II, Amenhotep III and Ramses IV, V and VI among them.

#### **TOMB OF TAWOSRET/SETHNAKHT (KV 14)**

Tawosret was wife of Seti II and after his successor Siptah died she took power herself (1188–1186 BC). Egyptologists think she began the tomb (Map p259) for herself and Seti II but their burials were removed by her successor, the equally short-lived Sethnakht, who completed the tomb by adding, unusually for the Valley of the Kings, a second burial-chamber where he himself was buried. The change of ownership can be seen in the tomb's decoration; the upper corridors show the queen, accompanied by her stepson Siptah, in the presence of the gods. Siptah's cartouche was later replaced by Seti II's. However, in the lower corridors and burial chambers images of Tawosret have been plastered over by images or cartouches of Sethnakht.

The tomb has been open since antiquity and although the decoration has worn off in some parts, the colour and state of the burial chambers remains good, with astronomical ceiling decorations and images of Tawosret and Sethnakht with the gods. The final scene from the Book of Caverns adorning Tawosret's burial chamber is particularly impressive, showing the sun god as a ram-headed figure stretching out his wings to emerge from the darkness of the underworld. The two anonymous mummies found in the

Amenhotep II cache may belong to Tawosret and Sethnakht.

#### **TOMB OF SETI II (KV 15)**

Adjacent to Tawosret's/Sethnakht's tomb is a smaller tomb (Map p259) where it seems Sethnakht buried Seti II (1200–1194 BC) after turfing him out of KV 14. Open since ancient times judging by the many examples of classical graffiti, the tomb's entrance area has some finely carved relief scenes, although the rest was quickly finished off in paint alone. The walls have extracts from the Litany of Ra, the Book of Gates and the Book of Amduat and, unusually, on the walls of the well room, images of the type of funerary objects used in pharaohs' tombs, such as golden statuettes of the pharaoh within a shrine (just like the actual examples found in Tutankhamun's tomb, which are now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo). The sky goddess Nut stretches out across the ceiling of the burial chamber. Seti II's mummy was found in the Amenhotep II tomb cache. During the 1920s, Seti II's tomb was used by Carter and his team as a conservation laboratory and photographic studio during their clearance of Tutankhamun's tomb.

#### **TOMB OF RAMSES I (KV 16)**

Ramses I (1295–1294 BC) only ruled for a year, so his tomb (Map p259) is a very simple affair. Originally called Paramessu, he was a military officer and vizier under Horemheb, later chosen as Horemheb's successor. His tomb has the shortest entrance corridor leading to a single, almost square, burial chamber, containing the pharaoh's open pink granite sarcophagus. Only the chamber is superbly decorated, very similar to Horemheb's tomb (KV 57), with extracts from the Book of Gates, as well as scenes of the pharaoh in the presence of the gods, eg the pharaoh kneeling between the jackal-headed 'Soul of Nekhen' and the falcon-headed 'Soul of Pe', symbolising Upper and Lower Egypt. For information on the long journey of the mummy some think is Ramses I from here to North America and back again, see the boxed text, p266.

#### **TOMB OF SETI I (KV 17)**

As befits such an important pharaoh, Seti I (1294–1279 BC), son and heir of Ramses I, has one of the longest (137m) and most beautiful tombs (Map p259) in the valley. Its

discovery by Giovanni Belzoni in 1817 generated almost the same interest as the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb a century later. As the first royal tomb to be decorated throughout, its raised, painted relief scenes are similar to those found in the pharaoh's beautifully decorated temple at Abydos (p233) and the quality of the work is superb. Two of its painted reliefs showing Seti with Hathor are now in the Louvre in Paris and Florence's Archaeological Museum, while Seti's alabaster sarcophagus was bought by Sir John Soane, and it can still be seen in the basement of his London house-turned-museum. Seti's mummy was found in the Deir al-Bahri mummy cache, and is now in the Egyptian Museum.

The first part of the pharaoh's burial chamber is decorated with texts from the Litany of Ra, and the Book of Amduat, with the Book of Gates featured in the first pillared hall. The walls of the burial chamber are adorned with the Book of Gates, the Book of Amduat and the Book of the Divine Cow, while the ceiling depicts vivid astronomical scenes featuring the various constellations.

The tomb is indefinitely closed for restoration (ongoing since 1991).

#### **TOMB OF MONTUHIRKOPSHEF (KV 19)**

The tomb (Map p259) of Ramses IX's son (c 1000 BC), whose name translates as 'The Arm of Montu is Strong', is located high up in the valley's eastern wall and seems to have been constructed for an earlier prince. It is small and unfinished but has fine paintings and few visitors. Its entrance corridor is adorned with life-size reliefs of various gods, including Osiris, Ptah, Thoth and Khonsu, receiving offerings from the young prince, who is shown in all his finery, wearing exquisitely pleated fine linen robes and a blue-and-gold 'sidelock of youth' attached to his black wig – not to mention his gorgeous make-up (as worn by both men and women in ancient Egypt).

#### **TOMB OF TUTHMOSIS IV (KV 43)**

The tomb (Map p259) of Tuthmosis IV (1400–1390 BC) is one of the largest and deepest tombs constructed during the 18th dynasty. It is also the first in which paint was applied over a yellow background, beginning a tradition that was continued in many tombs. Discovered in 1903 by Howard

Carter (who less than 20 years later would find the tomb of Tuthmosis IV's great-grandson Tutankhamun), it is accessed by two long flights of steps lead down and around to the burial chamber where there's an enormous sarcophagus covered in hieroglyphs. The walls of the well shaft and antechamber are decorated with painted scenes of Tuthmosis before the gods, and the figures of the goddess Hathor are particularly fetching in a range of beautiful dresses decorated with beaded designs.

On the left (south) wall of the antechamber there is a patch of ancient Egyptian graffiti dating back to 1315 BC, written by government official Maya and his assistant Djehutymose and referring to their inspection and restoration of Tuthmosis IV's burial on the orders of Horemheb following the first wave of robbery in the eighth year of Horemheb's reign, some 67 years after Tuthmosis IV died.

After the tomb was ransacked a second time it was decided it would be safer to re-bury Tuthmosis' mummy in the tomb of his father Amenhotep II (KV 35). Tuthmosis' mummy with pierced ears, is now displayed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

### TOMB OF AY (KV 23)

Although he succeeded Tutankhamun, Ay's brief reign from 1327 to 1323 BC tends to be associated with the earlier Amarna period and Akhenaten (some Egyptologists have suggested he could have been the father of Akhenaten's wife Nefertiti). Ay abandoned a grandiose tomb in Amarna (see p227) and took over another in the West Valley here. The West Valley played an important part in the Amarna story, as it was chosen as a new burial ground by Amenhotep III for his own enormous tomb (KV 22, part way up the valley), and his son and successor Akhenaten also began a tomb here, before he relocated the capital at Amarna, where he was eventually buried. It seems Tutankhamun too planned to be buried in the West Valley, until his early death saw his successor Ay 'switch' tombs. Tutankhamun was buried in a tomb (KV 62) in the traditional section of the Valley of the Kings, while Ay himself took over the tomb Tutankhamun had begun at the head of the West Valley. The tomb (Map p255) is accessed by a dirt road leading off from the car park at the Valley of the Kings that winds for almost 2km up a desolate valley past sheer rock cliffs. Recapturing the atmosphere (and silence)

### THE RETURN OF THE MUMMY

In 1881 the Egypt's antiquities authority made the greatest mummy find in history: the mummies of 40 pharaohs, queens and nobles, just south of Deir al-Bahri in tomb No 320. It seems that 21st-dynasty priests had them moved as a protection against tomb robbers to this communal grave, after 934 BC. The mummies included those of Amenhotep I, Tuthmosis I, II and III, Seti I and Ramses II and III, many of which are now on display at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Their removal from the tomb and procession down to the Nile, from where they were taken by barge to Cairo, was accompanied by the eerie sound of black-clad village women ululating to give a royal send-off to the remains. The episode makes for one of the most stunning scenes in Shadi Abdel Salam's 1975 epic *The Mummy (Al-Mumia)*, one of the most beautiful films made in Egypt.

However the cache had already been found a decade earlier by the Abdel Rassoul family from Gurna, who were making a tidy sum by selling contents from it. Mummies, coffins, sumptuous jewellery and other artefacts made their way to Europe and North America, and many ended up in museums. One of the mummies ended up in a small museum in Niagara Falls, Canada until the late 1990s, when the crossed arms and excellent state of the body were recognised by an Egyptologist as signs of possible royalty. When the museum closed in 1999, the mummy was acquired by the Michael Carlos Museum in Atlanta. CT scans, X-rays, radiocarbon dating and computer imaging attempted to identify the mummy, and although they could only suggest that it was from later than the Ramesside period, an uncanny resemblance to the mummified faces of Seti I and Ramses II was seized upon by some Egyptologists as proof that this was the missing mummy of Ramses I.

As a gesture of goodwill, the museum returned the mummy to Egypt in 2003, where he was welcomed home, at the Egyptian Museum, with songs and ceremonies. Later he was taken to Luxor where, as befitting a pharaoh in his afterlife, he made the final stage of his journey under sail.

## TOMB PLANNING

Each of the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings is unique, but most follow a basic plan that developed over time. In the 18th dynasty (1550–1295 BC) the typical tomb had four passages, each symbolising a stage on the journey to the afterlife. The passages led into a small chamber with a well or pit, called the ‘Hall of Waiting’, which led into a pillared hall called the ‘Chariot Hall’. From here another passage, at right angles to the first four, led into the oval burial chamber. This change in axis may have had a symbolic meaning, possibly reflecting winding waterways in the afterlife, or may have been simply a function of the topography.

During the 19th dynasty (1295–1186 BC) the bent axis eventually switched to an east–west orientation with the sarcophagus set at right angles. The descent of the passages became less steep and as time passed an antechamber, which may have been a false burial chamber, was added to the first pillared hall. Wooden doors were added to close off passages and rooms (previously mortar had been used to seal off sections of tombs).

By the 20th dynasty (1186–1069 BC) the tomb axis had straightened and the tombs became shorter, but were higher and wider. The sarcophagus was on the same east–west axis as the tomb, so that the pharaoh could eternally face the rising sun.

The tombs were decorated with texts from the Book of the Dead and with colourful scenes to help guide the pharaoh on his or her journey through the afterlife. In the 18th dynasty only the burial chamber was decorated but by the 19th dynasty the entire tomb became a riot of colour.

once found in the neighbouring Valley of the Kings makes it worth the visit.

Although only the burial chamber is decorated, it is noted for its scenes of Ay hippopotamus hunting and fishing in the marshes (scenes usually found in the tombs of nobles not royalty) and for a wall featuring 12 baboons, representing the 12 hours of the night, after which the West Valley or Wadi al-Gurud (Valley of the Monkeys) is named. This is so similar to the decoration in Tutankhamun’s tomb that archaeologists suspect that the same artists worked on both tombs. Although Ay’s mummy has never been identified, his smashed up sarcophagus has been restored for tourists.

## Walk to Deir al-Bahri

The steep walk out of the Valley of the Kings and over the surrounding mountains down to Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple at Deir al-Bahri, guarantees great views over the ancient sites, fertile green fields, the Nile and across to the town of Luxor. The path starts beside KV 17, the tomb of Seti I, where the path is marked. The first few hundred metres are very steep, but then the path levels out. Ascending the path, souvenir hawkers and would-be guides will offer their services, but the route is pretty obvious. Walk along the ridge, taking a left where the path forks. After passing the police post on the left, you can

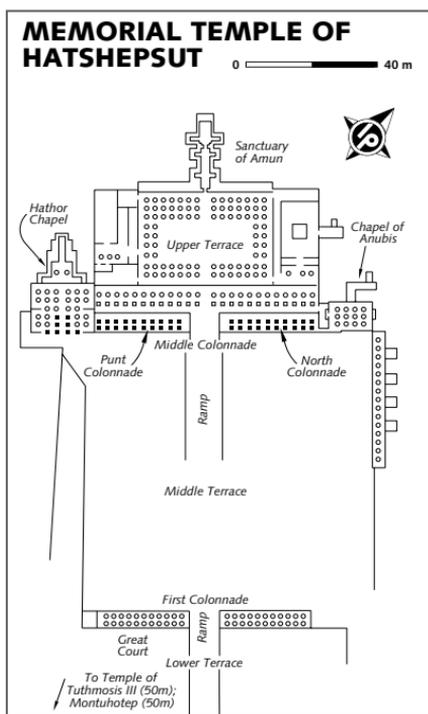
see Deir al-Bahri down the sheer cliff to your right. Stick to the path that follows the ridge, ignoring the steep trail that plunges down the cliff face. Once you’ve almost completed a full circle you will find yourself at the ticket office to the temple.

The walk takes about 50 minutes, allowing time to enjoy the views and the amazing lunarlike landscape. Ideally the walk should be done in winter. In summer start very early as it gets incredibly hot up there. At all times take a hat, sun cream, lots of water and some decent walking shoes. If you tire on the ascent there are sometimes donkeys available to carry you to the top.

## Deir al-Bahri

The eyes first focus on the dramatic rugged limestone cliffs that rise nearly 300m above the desert plain, a monument made by Nature, only to realize that at the foot of all this immense beauty, lies a man-made monument even more extraordinary, the dazzling **Temple of Hatshepsut** (Map p268; adult/student £25/15; ☺ 6am–4.30pm Oct–Apr, to 5pm May–Sep). The almost-modern-looking temple blends in beautifully with the cliffs from which it is partly cut, it is a marriage made in heaven.

Continuous excavation and restoration since 1891 have revealed one of ancient Egypt’s finest monuments, but it must have been even more stunning in the days of



Hatshepsut (1473–1458 BC), when it was approached by a grand sphinx-lined causeway instead of today's noisy tourist bazaar, and when the court was a garden planted with a variety of exotic trees and perfumed plants – the ancient Egyptians called it *Djeser-djeseru*, 'Most Holy of Holies'. If the design seems unusual, it featured in fact all the things a memorial temple usually had, including the rising central axis and a three-part plan, but had to be adapted to the chosen site almost exactly on the same line with the Temple of Amun at Karnak, and near an older shrine to the goddess Hathor.

The temple was vandalised over the centuries: Tuthmosis III removed his stepmother's name whenever he could (see the boxed text, p270), Akhenaten removed all references to Amun, and the early Christians turned it into a monastery, Deir al-Bahri ('Monastery of the North'), and defaced the pagan reliefs.

Deir al-Bahari has been appointed as one of the hottest places on earth, so an early morning visit is advisable, also because the reliefs are best seen in the low sunlight. The complex is entered via the **great court**, where

original ancient tree roots are still visible. The colonnades on the **lower terrace** were closed for restoration at the time of writing. The delicate relief work on the south colonnade, left of the ramp, has reliefs of the transportation of a pair of obelisks commissioned by Hatshepsut from the Aswan quarries to Thebes, and the north one features scenes of birds being caught.

A large ramp leads to the two upper terraces. The best-preserved reliefs are on the **middle terrace**. The reliefs in the northern colonnade record Hatshepsut's divine birth and at the end of it is the **Chapel of Anubis**, with well-preserved colourful reliefs of a disfigured Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III in the presence of Anubis, Ra-Horakhty and Hathor. The wonderfully detailed reliefs in the **Punt Colonnade** to the left of the entrance, tell the story of the expedition to the Land of Punt to collect myrrh trees needed for the incense used in temple ceremonies. There are depictions of the strange animals and exotic plants they saw there, the foreign architecture and strange landscapes as well as the different-looking people. At the end of this colonnade is the **Hathor Chapel**, with two chambers both with Hathor-headed columns. Reliefs on the west wall show, if you have a torch, Hathor as a cow licking Hatshepsut's hand, and the queen drinking from Hathor's udder. On the north wall is a faded relief of Hatshepsut's soldiers in naval dress in the goddess' honour. Beyond the pillared halls is a three-roomed chapel cut into the rock, now closed to the public, with reliefs of the queen in front of the deities, and with a small figure behind the door of Senenmut, the temple's architect and some believe Hatshepsut's lover.

The **upper terrace**, restored by a Polish-Egyptian team over the last 25 years, had 24 colossal Osirid statues, some of which are left. The central pink granite doorway leading into the Sanctuary of Amun, which is hewn out of the cliff.

On the south side of Hatshepsut's temple lie the remains of the **Temple of Montuhotep**, built for the founder of the 11th dynasty and one of the oldest temples so far discovered in Thebes, and the **Temple of Tuthmosis III**, Hatshepsut's successor. Both are in ruins.

### Assasif Tombs

This group of tombs, located near Deir al-Bahri, belong to 18th-dynasty nobles, and 25th and 26th-dynasty nobles under the

Nubian pharaohs. The area is under excavation by archaeologists, but of the many tombs here, only some may be open to the public including the **Tombs of Kheruef** and of **Pabasa** (Map p255; adult/student ££12/8; ☞ 6am–4.30pm Oct–Apr, to 5pm May–Sep); tickets are available at the Antiquities Inspectorate ticket office near the Memnon Colossi. The tomb of Kheruef is the largest 18th-dynasty noble's tomb here in Thebes, and it has some of the finest examples of New Kingdom relief, but unfortunately the tomb is in poor condition. The tomb of Pabasa, a 26th-dynasty priest, has scenes of agriculture, hunting and fishing.

### Dra Abu'l Naga

Hidden in the desert cliffs north of Deir al-Bahri lies yet another necropolis, **Dra Abu'l Naga** (Map p255), with 114 tombs of rulers and officials, most dating from the 17th dynasty to the late period (about 1550–500 BC). The area has been extensively plundered but two tombs escaped with their paintings more or less intact.

The **Tomb of Roy** (No 234; Map p255), a royal scribe and steward of Horemheb, is small with scenes of funerary offerings and agriculture, and a beautifully painted ceiling. A few metres away, the T-shaped **Tomb of Shuroy** (No 13; Map p255) contains some finely executed, but in places heavily damaged, paintings of Shuroy and his wife making offerings to the gods and a funeral procession led by a child mourner.

### Tombs of the Nobles

The **tombs** (Map p255; adult/student ££25/15 per group of tombs; ☞ 6am–4.30pm Oct–Apr, to 5pm May–Sep) in this area are some of the best, but least visited, attractions on the West Bank. Nestled in the foothills opposite the Ramesseum, there are more than 400 tombs, belonging to nobles from the 6th dynasty to the Graeco-Roman period. Where the pharaohs decorated their tombs with cryptic passages from the Book of the Dead to guide them through the after-life, the nobles, intent on letting the good life continue after their death, decorated their tombs with wonderfully detailed scenes of their daily lives.

Only 15 or so tombs are open to the public – they are divided into five groups and each requires a separate ticket from the Antiquities Inspectorate ticket office near Memnon Colossi.

### TOMBS OF KHONSU, USERHET & BENIA (NOS 31, 51 & 343)

Khonsu was First Prophet in the memorial temple of Tuthmosis III (1479–1425 BC). Inside the first chamber of **Khonsu's tomb** (Map p255) are scenes of the Montu festival at Armant, about 20km south of Luxor, the festival of the god of war over which he presided. The sacred barque with the shrine of Montu is towed by two smaller boats. The gods Osiris and Anubis are also honoured, and in many scenes Khonsu is seen making offerings to them. The ceiling is adorned with images of ducks flying around and nests with eggs.

The **Tomb of Benia**, just behind that of Khonsu, is even more colourful. Benia was boarder in the Royal Nursery and chief treasurer also during the reign of Tuthmosis III. There are many scenes of offering tables piled high with food and drinks overlooked by Benia, and sometimes by his parents. In a niche cut out at the end of the tomb is a statue of Benia flanked by his parents, all three with destroyed faces.

The **Tomb of Userhet** (not to be confused with Userhet No 56) was closed at the time of writing.

### TOMBS OF MENNA & NAKHT (NOS 52 & 69)

The beautiful and highly colourful wall paintings in the **Tomb of Menna** and the **Tomb of Nakht** (Map p255) emphasise rural life in 18th-dynasty Egypt. Menna was an estate inspector and Nakht was an astronomer of Amun. Their finely detailed tombs show scenes of farming, hunting, fishing and feasting. The Tomb of Nakht has a small museum area in its first chamber. Although this tomb is so small that only a handful of visitors can squeeze in at a time, the walls have some of the best-known examples of Egyptian tomb paintings, including some familiar scenes such as that of the three musicians, which shows up on a million souvenir T-shirts, posters, postcards and papyrus paintings.

### TOMBS OF RAMOSE, USERHET & KHAEMHET (NOS 55, 56 & 57)

The **Tomb of Ramose** (Map p255), a governor of Thebes under Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, is fascinating because it one of the few monuments dating from that time, a period of transition between two different forms of

## FEMALE PHARAOHS

Pharaoh was an exclusively male title and in early Egyptian history there was no word for a Queen regent, but records show there actually were a few female pharaohs. From early Dynastic times it seemed common practice that on the death of the pharaoh, if his heir was too young to rule or there was no heir, his wife, often also his stepsister or sister, would be appointed regent. It's not clear if this role was limited to a regency, or if they were created pharaoh, but what is sure is that they were often buried with all the honours reserved for a pharaoh.

The first queen to have ruled independently is thought to have been Merneith, who was the wife of the 1st-dynasty Pharaoh Djer (c 3000 BC), and mother of Den who ruled after her. Her name was recently found on a clay seal impression with all the names of the early kings. She was buried with full royal honours at Abydos. Almost every dynasty had a woman who ruled for a short while under the title of 'King's Mother'. The 12th-dynasty Sobeknofru, daughter of Amenemhat III and wife and half-sister of Amenhotep IV, is thought to have ruled Egypt from 1785 to 1782 BC after the early death of her husband. Her titles included Female Horus, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, and Daughter of Ra. The 12th dynasty ended with her rule, as she had no son.

Hatshepsut is the most famous of Egypt's female pharaohs. She was married to her half-brother Tuthmosis II, whose son by a minor wife was to be his successor. When Tuthmosis II died in 1479 BC, Hatshepsut became regent and ruled together with the child Tuthmosis III. Then, with the political support of the Amun priesthood, she declared herself pharaoh. Her 15-year rule (1473–1458 BC) marked a period of peace and internal growth for Egypt. She is sometimes shown in the regalia of the male pharaoh, including the false beard, while in other scenes she is clearly female. When Tuthmosis III finally took control in 1458 BC, he ordered all reference to her be wiped from Egyptian history. Hatshepsut's mummy has never been found, and her name and images were almost all erased.

Other female rulers include Nefertiti, wife of the rebel pharaoh Akhenaten who was clearly involved in her husband's policies and is often depicted wearing kingly regalia. Some believe that she was in fact the mysterious Smenkhare, known to have ruled for a few years after Akhenaten's death in 1336 BC. Tawosret, the wife of Seti II, was buried in the Valley of the Kings (see p264). After her husband died, she became co-regent with her stepson Siptah, and after his death she proclaimed herself pharaoh from 1188 to 1186 BC).

About a thousand years later Cleopatra came to the throne at the age of 17, in 51 BC. It's thought that she first ruled jointly with her father Ptolemy XII and, after his death, with her younger brother Ptolemy XIII. To keep Egypt independent, she allied herself with the Roman Julius Caesar, whom she married and whose son she bore. After Caesar's death, she famously married another powerful Roman, Marc Anthony, and fell with him to the might of Augustus Caesar.

religious worship. The exquisite paintings and low reliefs show scenes in two different styles from the reigns of both pharaohs, depicting Ramose's funeral and his relationship with Akhenaten. The tomb was never actually finished, perhaps because Ramose died prematurely.

Next door is the **Tomb of Userhet** (Map p255), one of Amenhotep II's royal scribes, with fine wall paintings depicting daily life. Userhet is shown presenting gifts to Amenhotep II; there's a barber cutting hair on another wall; other scenes include men making wine and people hunting gazelles from a chariot.

The **Tomb of Khaemhet** (Map p255), Amenhotep III's royal inspector of the gra-

naries and court scribe, has scenes on the walls showing Khaemhet making offerings; the pharaoh depicted as a sphinx; the funeral ritual of Osiris; and images of daily country life as well as official business.

## TOMBS OF SENNOFER & REKHMIRE (NOS 96 & 100)

The most interesting parts of the **Tomb of Sennofer** (Map p255), overseer of the Garden of Amun under Amenhotep II, are deep underground in the main chamber. The ceiling there is covered with clear paintings of grapes and vines, while most of the vivid scenes on the surrounding walls and columns depict Sennofer and the different women in his

## OLD GURNA

Until early 2007 the entrances to the Tombs of the Nobles were hidden among the mud-brick houses of the village of Sheikh Abd al-Gurna. The houses often had painted façades, and were a picturesque sight against the backdrop of the Theban Hills. Now almost all residents have been relocated to a new village a few kilometres north of the Valley of the Kings, and their houses have been demolished.

The UK-based Friends of Qurna Discovery, with the agreement of the Supreme Council for Antiquities, have launched a project to preserve and restore four properties. These will be devoted to explaining the history of life on this hillside in the last millennia. A *zawia* (tomb complex of a saint) will house a permanent exhibition of drawings of Qurna by early-19th-century British artist Robert Hay. His finely detailed works depict ancient mud-brick structures that are now lost and, of course, the famous tomb houses, all showing a life that has all but disappeared in the past 50 years. The adjoining Daramalli house will be used to exhibit household objects and agricultural implements to show how Gurnawi families lived and worked. The *bab al-haggar* (tomb house), with its amazing collection of mud structures, and the ruined house of Giovanni D'Athenasi, the early-19th-century dragoman, will both be restored. Donations are welcome to restore these four houses and to provide for the guardians. More details from [www.qurna.org](http://www.qurna.org).

life he was close to, including his wife and daughters and his wet nurse. The guard usually has a kerosene lamp, but bring a torch just in case.

The **Tomb of Rekhmire**, governor under Tuthmosis III and Amenhotep II, is one of the best preserved in the area. In the first chamber, to the extreme left, are scenes of Rekhmire receiving gifts from foreign lands. The panther and giraffe are gifts from Nubia; the elephant, horses and chariot from Syria; and the expensive vases from Crete and the Aegean Islands. Beyond this is the unusual chapel. The west wall shows Rekhmire inspecting the production of metals, bricks, jewellery, leather, furniture and statuary, while the east wall shows banquet scenes, complete with lyrics (the female harpist sings 'Put perfume on the hair of the goddess Maat').

### TOMBS OF NEFERRONPET, DHUTMOSI & NEFERSEKHERU (NOS 178, 295 & 296)

Discovered in 1915, the highlight of the brightly painted **Tomb of Neferronpet** (also known as Kenro; Map p255), the scribe of the treasury under Ramses II, is the scene showing Kenro overseeing the weighing of gold at the treasury. Next door, the **Tomb of Nefersekeru**, an officer of the treasury during the same period, is similar in style and content to his neighbours. The ceiling is decorated with a huge variety of elaborate geometric patterns. From this long tomb, a small passage leads into the **Tomb of Dhutmosi**, which is in poor condition.

## The Ramesseum

Ramses II called his massive **memorial temple** (Map p272; adult/student ££25/15; ☎ 6am-4.30pm Oct-Apr, to 5pm May-Sep) 'the Temple of Millions of Years of User-Maat-Ra'; classical visitors called it the Tomb of Ozymandias; and Jean-François Champollion, who deciphered hieroglyphics, called it the Ramesseum. Like other memorial temples it was part of Ramses II's funerary complex. His tomb was built deep in the hills, but his memorial temple was on the edge of the cultivation on a canal that connected with the Nile and with other memorial temples.

Unlike the well-preserved structures that Ramses II built at Karnak and Abu Simbel, his memorial temple has not survived the times very well. It is mostly in ruins, despite extensive restoration – a fact that would no doubt disappoint Ramses II. The Ramesseum is famous for the scattered remains of fallen statue that inspired the English poet Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias', using the undeniable fact of Ramses' mortality to ridicule his aspirations to immortality.

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs  
of stone  
Stand in the desert...Near them, on  
the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies,  
whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold  
command,

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read

Which yet survive, stamped on these life-less things,

The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:

And on the pedestal these words appear:

'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare

The lone and level sands stretch far away.

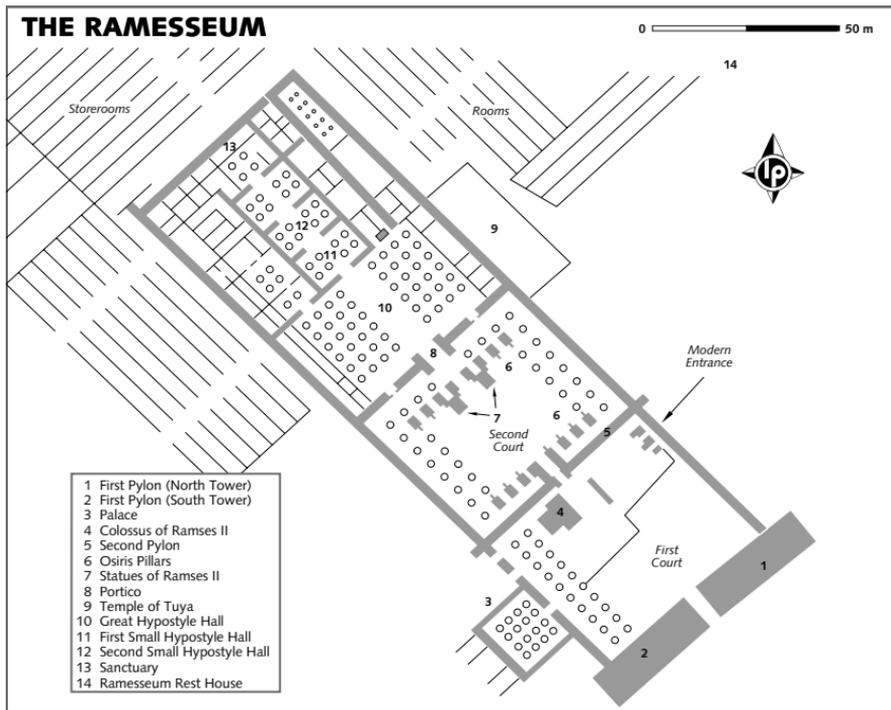
Although it is more elaborate than other temples, the fairly orthodox layout of the Ramesseum, consisting of two courts, hypostyle hall, sanctuary, accompanying chambers and storerooms, is uncommon in that the usual rectangular floor plan was altered to incorporate an older, smaller temple – that

of Ramses II's mother, Tuya – off to one side.

The entrance is through a doorway in the northeast corner of the enclosure wall which leads into the second court, where one should turn left to the **first pylon**. The **first and second pylons** measure more than 60m across and feature reliefs of Ramses' military exploits, particularly his battles against the Hittites. Through the first pylon are the ruins of the huge **first court**, including the double colonnade that fronted the royal **palace**.

Near the western stairs is part of the **Colossus of Ramses II**, the Ozymandias of Shelley's poem, lying somewhat forlornly on the ground, where it once stood 17.5m tall. The head of another granite **statue of Ramses II**, one of a pair, lies in the **second court**. Twenty-nine of the original 48 columns of the **great hypostyle hall** are still standing. In the smaller hall behind it, the roof, which features astronomical hieroglyphs, is still in place.

There is a rest house–restaurant next to the temple that is called, not surprisingly, **Ramesseum Rest House**. It is a great place to relax and have a cool drink or something to



eat. You can leave your bike here while exploring the surroundings.

### Deir al-Medina

About 1km off the road to the Valley of the Queens and up a short, steep paved road is **Deir al-Medina** (Monastery of the Town; Map p255; adult/student ££25/15; ☎ 6am–4.30pm Oct–Apr, to 5pm May–Sep), named after a temple that was occupied by early Christian monks. Near the temple is the ruined settlement, the Workmen's Village. Many of the workers and artists who created the royal tombs lived and were buried here. Some of the small tombs here have exquisite reliefs, making it worth a visit.

### TEMPLE

The small Ptolemaic-era temple of Deir al-Medina is set just north of the Workmen's Village, along a rocky track. Measuring only 10m x 15m, it was built between 221 and 116 BC, the last of a series of earlier temples built on the same site. It was dedicated to Hathor, the goddess of pleasure and love, and to Maat, the goddess of truth and personification of cosmic order.

### WORKMEN'S VILLAGE

Archaeologists have uncovered more than 70 houses in this village and many tombs, the most beautiful of which are now open to the public.

The beautifully adorned **Tomb of Inherka** (No 359) belonged to a 19th-dynasty servant who worked in the Place of Truth, the Valley of the Kings. The one-room tomb has magnificent wall paintings, including the famous scene of a cat (representing the sun god Ra) killing a snake (representing the evil serpent Apophis) under a sacred tree, on the left wall. There are also beautiful domestic scenes of Inherka with his wife and children. Right next to it is the **Tomb of Sennedjem** (No 1), a stunningly decorated 19th-dynasty tomb that contains two small chambers and some equally exquisite paintings. Sennedjem was an artist who lived during the reigns of Seti I and Ramses II and it seems he ensured his own tomb was as finely decorated as those of his masters. Due to the popularity and small size of both these tombs, only 10 people at a time are allowed inside; it's likely you'll find yourself in a queue.

While you wait, take a look at the 19th-dynasty **Tomb of Pashedu** (No 3) just up the slope from the other two tombs. Pashedu was another servant in the Place of Truth and can

be seen in the burial chamber praying under a palm tree beside a lake. Close by is the **Tomb of Ipy** (No 217), a sculptor during the reign of Ramses II. Here scenes of everyday life eclipse the usual emphasis on ritual, with scenes of farming and hunting, and a depiction of Ipy's house in its flower- and fruit-filled garden (see the boxed text, p253).

### Valley of the Queens

There are at least 75 tombs in the **Valley of the Queens** (Biban al-Harim; Map p255; adult/student ££30/15). They belonged to queens of the 19th and 20th dynasties and other members of the royal families, including princesses and the Ramesside princes. Only two were open at the time of writing, as the Tomb of Nefertari was again closed.

### TOMB OF NEFERTARI (NO 66)

Hailed as the finest tomb in the Theban necropolis – and in all of Egypt for that matter – the **Tomb of Nefertari** (Map p255; ☎ closed at the time of writing) was completely restored and reopened in 1995, but it was solidly booked and closed again until further notice in 2003.

Nefertari was one of the five wives of Ramses II, the New Kingdom pharaoh known for his colossal monuments, but the tomb he built for his favourite queen is a shrine to her beauty and, without doubt, an exquisite labour of love. Every centimetre of the walls in the tomb's three chambers and connecting corridors is adorned with colourful scenes of Nefertari in the company of the gods and with associated text from the Book of the Dead nearby. Invariably, the 'Most Beautiful of Them', as Nefertari was known, is depicted wearing a divinely transparent white gown and a golden headdress featuring two long feathers extending from the back of a vulture. The ceiling of the tomb is festooned with golden stars.

Like most of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings, this one had been plundered by the time it was discovered by archaeologists. Only a few fragments of the queen's pink granite sarcophagus remained. Of her mummified body, only traces of her knees were left.

### TOMB OF AMUNHERKHEPSHEF (NO 55)

Until the reopening of Nefertari's tomb, the **Tomb of Amunherkhepshef** (Map p255) is the valley's showpiece, with beautiful, well-preserved reliefs. Amunherkhepshef, the son of Ramses

III was still in his teens when he died. On the walls of the tomb's vestibule, Ramses holds his son's hand to introduce him to the gods that will help him on his journey to the afterlife. Amunherkhepshef can be seen wearing a kilt and sandals, with the sidelock of hair typical of young boys.

The mummified five-month-old foetus on display in a glass case in the tomb is the subject of many an inventive story, among them the suggestion that the foetus was aborted by Amunherkhepshef's mother when she heard of his death. It was actually found by Italian excavators in a valley to the south of the Valley of the Queens.

### TOMB OF KHAEMWASET (NO 44)

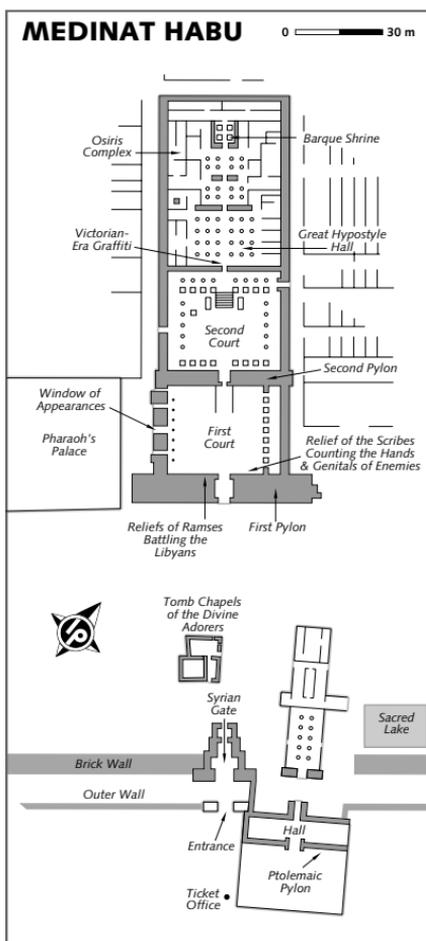
Another of Ramses III's sons, Khaemwaset died young, although Egyptologists have little information about his age or cause of death. His tomb (Map p255) is filled with well-preserved, brightly coloured reliefs. Like that of his brother Amunherkhepshef, Khaemwaset's tomb follows a linear plan, and is decorated with scenes of the pharaoh introducing this deceased son to the various gods and scenes from the Book of the Dead. The vestibule has an astronomical ceiling, showing Ramses III in full ceremonial dress, followed by his son wearing a tunic and the sidelock of hair signifying his youth.

### TOMB OF TITI (NO 52)

Egyptologists are not sure which Ramesside pharaoh Titi was married to, however, in her tomb, she is referred to as the royal wife, royal mother and royal daughter. Some archaeologists believe she was the wife of Ramses III, and her tomb is in many ways similar to Khaemwaset and Amunherkhepshef's, who were perhaps her sons. The **tomb** (Map p255) consists of a corridor leading to a square chapel, off which is the burial chamber and two other small rooms. The paintings are faded but you can still make out a winged Maat kneeling on the left-hand side of the corridor, and the queen before Toth, Ptah and the four sons of Horus opposite. Inside the burial chamber are a series of animal guardians: a jackal and lion, two monkeys and a monkey with a bow.

### MEDINAT HABU

Ramses III's magnificent memorial temple of **Medinat Habu** (Map p274) is perhaps one of



the most underrated sites on the West Bank. With the Theban mountains as a backdrop and the sleepy village of Kom Lolah in front, it is a wonderful place to spend a few hours late afternoon.

The site was one of the first places in Thebes to be closely associated with the local god Amun. Although the complex is most famous for the funerary temple built by Ramses III, Hatshepsut and Tutmosis III also constructed buildings here. They were later added to and altered by a succession of rulers through to the Ptolemies. At Medinat Habu's height there were temples, storage rooms, workshops, administrative buildings and accommodation for priests and officials. It was the centre of the economic life of Thebes for

centuries and was still inhabited as late as the 9th century AD, when a plague was thought to have decimated the town. You can still see the mud-brick remains of the medieval town that gave the site its name (medina means ‘town’ or ‘city’) on top of the enclosure walls.

The original **Temple of Amun**, which was built by Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III, was later completely overshadowed by the enormous **Funerary Temple of Ramses III**, the dominant feature of Medinat Habu.

Ramses III was inspired in the construction of his shrine by the Ramesseum of his illustrious forebear, Ramses II. His own temple and the smaller one dedicated to Amun are both enclosed within the massive outer walls of the complex.

Also just inside, to the left of the gate, are the **Tomb Chapels of the Divine Adorers**, which were built for the principal priestesses of Amun. Outside the eastern gate, one of only two entrances, was a landing quay for a canal that once connected Medinat Habu with the Nile.

You enter the site through the unique **Syrian Gate**, a large two-storey building modelled after an Asiatic fortress. If you follow the wall to the left you will find a staircase leading to the upper floors. There is not much to see in the rooms but you’ll get some great views out across the village in front of the temple and over the fields to the south.

The well-preserved **first pylon** marks the front of the temple proper. Ramses III is portrayed in its reliefs as the victor in several wars. Most famous are the fine **reliefs** of his victory over the Libyans (who you can recognise by their long robes, sidelocks and beards). There is also a gruesome scene of scribes tallying the number of enemies killed by counting severed hands and genitals.

To the left of the **first court** are the remains of the **Pharaoh’s Palace**; the three rooms at the rear were for the royal harem. There is a window between the first court and the Pharaoh’s Palace known as the **Window of Appearances**, which allowed the pharaoh to show himself to his subjects.

The reliefs of the **second pylon** feature Ramses III presenting prisoners of war to Amun and his vulture-goddess wife, Mut. Colonnades and reliefs surround the **second court**, depicting various religious ceremonies.

If you have time to wander about the extensive ruins around the funerary temple you

will see the remains of an **early Christian basilica** as well as a small **sacred lake**.

## New Gurna

Hassan Fathy’s mud-brick village of **New Gurna** lies just past the railway track on the main road from the ferry to the ticket office. It was built to rehouse the inhabitants of Old Gurna (see boxed text, p271), who lived on and around the Tombs of the Nobles, and whom the authorities have been trying to remove from their hillside since the 1930s. Hardly any Gurnawis moved in, and Fathy himself admitted that his vision was a failure as a social engineering experiment. He blamed the authorities’ disdain for the Gurnawis rather than any flaw in his own vision.

The buildings were stunning, with his signature domes and vaults, thick mud-brick walls and natural ventilation, but Hassan Fathy would probably cry if he went back today. The houses are now lived in by people who came from villages outside Luxor, many of the domed mud-brick houses have been replaced with crude concrete boxes which need less maintenance and can easily be extended. However, the beautiful mud-brick mosque and theatre still survive, as well as the architect’s own house.

## Getting There & Around

Most tourists cross to the West Bank by bus or taxi via the bridge, about 7km south of town. But the river remains the quickest way to go. The *baladi* (municipal) ferry costs £1 for foreigners (10pt for locals) and leaves from a dock in front of Luxor Temple. Alternatively, small motor launches (locally called *lunches*) leave from wherever they can find customers and will take you across for £5 to £10 for a small group.

On the West Bank, the taxi lot is up the hill from the ferry landing. Voices call out the destinations of pick-up truck taxis (*kabout*). If you listen out for Qurna you’ll be on the right road to the ticket office (25pt). Pick-ups run back and forth between the villages, so you can always flag one down and find your way to one of the sites, although you might have to walk from the main road to the entrance. If you want to have an entire pick-up for yourself, it’ll cost £5. The driver will likely stick to his normal route.

To hire a private taxi for the day, expect to pay between £150 and £200 per day,

depending on the season, the state of tourism and your bargaining skills.

Past the taxi lot are bicycles for rent for ££15 per day. One of the best selections is at Ahmed's, just up the hill from the taxi park at the first track forking left off the main road.

Donkeys and camels with guides can also be rented; see right.

To give you an idea of the distances involved, from the local ferry landing it is 3km straight ahead to the ticket office, past the Colossi of Memnon; 4km to the Valley of the Queens; and 8km to the Valley of the Kings.

## ACTIVITIES

### Felucca Rides

As elsewhere in Egypt, the nicest place to be late afternoon, is on the Nile. Take a felucca from either bank, and sail for a few hours, catching the soft afternoon light and the sunset, cooling in the afternoon breeze and calming down after sightseeing. Felucca prices range from ££30 to ££50 per boat per hour, depending on your bargaining skills.

A popular felucca trip is upriver to Banana Island, a tiny isle dotted with palms about 5km from Luxor. The trip takes two to three hours. Plan it in such a way that you're on your way back in time to watch a brilliant Nile sunset from the boat. Some travellers have complained that the felucca captain has added money for 'admission' to the island; make sure you are clear about what is included in the price you agree.

### Ballooning

**Hod Hod Suleiman** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 0116; Sharia Televizyon), **Sky Cruise of Egypt** (Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; ☎ 237 6515) and **Magic Horizons** (Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; ☎ 012 226 1697; www.magic-horizon.com) offer early morning balloon flights over Luxor's West Bank. When the air is clear, the view over the monuments and the mountains is truly amazing. Changing winds mean that the trips are subject to cancellation at the last minute. The prices are not fixed, varying from US\$70 to US\$120 per person, and it definitely pays to bargain, particularly out of season.

### Bowling

For something entirely different, a bowling alley has just opened in the shopping arcade below the Corniche opposite the Winter Palace. **Metropolitan Bowling** (Map pp244-5; Corniche an-Nil; 20 shots per person ££50; ☎ 9am-noon) has two bowling

lanes and rents out shoes. Food is available, as are drinks, including cool beers (££15).

### Donkey, Horse & Camel Rides

Almost all the smaller hotels organise donkey treks around the West Bank. These trips, which start at around 7am (sometimes 5am) and finish near lunchtime, cost a minimum of about ££35 per person.

If you want to see the Nile from the back of a camel, the boys at the local ferry dock on the West Bank ask ££30 to ££40 for an hour. Some hotels offer camel trips, which include visits to nearby villages for a cup of tea.

Riding a horse through the fields and seeing the sunset behind the Theban hills is a wonderful thing to do. The best horses, and the only stable that provides riding hats, English saddles and insurance is **Nobi's Arabian Horse Stables** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 0024, 010 504 8558; ££25 per hour; ☎ 7am-sunset). Nobi also has 25 camels at the same price. Call ahead to book, and he can arrange a hassle-free transfer to make sure you arrive at the right place, as often taxi drivers will try and take you to a friend's stable instead. Another stable is **Pharaoh's Stables** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 0015; ☎ 7am-sunset) who have horses, camels (both ££25 per hour) and donkeys (££15 per hour).

### Seaplane

**Legend of the Nile** (Sharia al-Marwa; ☎ 238 6646, 010 070 7429; www.lont-travel.com) have just started doing tours by seaplane, flying over the temples in Luxor & Upper Egypt (from US\$85 for a 25 min tour over Luxor).

### Swimming

After a hot morning of tombs and temples, a dip in a pool can seem like heaven. Most of the bigger hotels and some of the budget places have swimming pools. The St Joseph, Karnak, Windsor, New Emilio and Arabesque Hotels have small rooftop pools that you can use for ££20. The pool of the Mercure Inn can be used for ££30. Rezeiky Camp's slightly larger pool is ££10. The Sheraton pool sits on a secluded Nile-side spot and charges ££80 for day use.

### TOURS

The ever-increasing travel restrictions for foreigners and the constant bargaining and hassle involved in even a simple transaction can make independent travel challenging, so

you may want to visit sites on a day tour. American Express and Thomas Cook (see p242) offer an array of tours. Prices range from around US\$30 to US\$60 per person for a half-day.

**Al-Nada Travel Service** (NTS; Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 2163; www.alnadaegypttravel.com; Petra Travel Agency Bldg, Sharia Ahmed Oraby; 🕒 8am-11pm) Near the Luxor Temple. Deals with lots of young travellers and is where you go to organise ISIC student cards. It's more geared to long-range travel than day trips around Luxor.

**Jolleys Travel & Tours** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2262; www.jolleys.com; 🕒 9am-10pm) This reputable company, located next to the Old Winter Palace, also runs day trips to the main sites.

**Nawas Tourist Company** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 0701; magednawas@yahoo.com; 🕒 10am-2pm & 5-9pm) Located behind the tourist office, this company also has a good reputation. As well as organising day trips, it sells ferry tickets from Hurghada to Sharm el-Sheikh and day cruises to Dendara.

**QEA Travel Agency** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 1667; www.questfortheegyptianadventure.com; Al-Gezira) British-run agency that runs tailor-made tours in and around Luxor, as well as further afield on the Red Sea or in the Western Desert. A percentage of its profits go towards charitable projects in Egypt.

**Sherif Tours** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 010-280 9988; Sharia at-Taeib, off Sharia Televizyon; www.elsheriftours.com) Has a good reputation for organising tours in Luxor, Nile cruises and trips into the desert.

Most of the small budget hotels aggressively promote their own tours. Some of these are better than others and there have been complaints by a number of travellers that they ended up seeing little more than papyrus shops and alabaster factories from a sweaty car with no air-con. If you do decide to take one of these tours, expect to pay about £E50 to £E75 per person.

The Iberotel Luxor Hotel (right) organises day cruises on the *Lotus Boat* to Dendara for £E350 per adult and £E150 per child, including lunch, guide and admission fees. Trips to Abydos are less frequent but go for about £E400 per person. The **Nefertiti Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 010 601 6132; www.nefertitihotel.com/tours; Sharia Sahbi) also organises day cruises to Dendara.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The town's biggest traditional festival is the **Moulid of Abu al-Haggag**. One of Egypt's largest *mouilids* (saints' festivals), it is held in honour of Luxor's patron sheikh, Youssef Abu al-Haggag, a 12th-century Iraqi who settled

in Luxor. The *moulid* takes place around the Mosque of Abu al-Haggag, the town's oldest mosque, which is built on top of the north-eastern corner of Luxor Temple. It's a raucous five-day carnival that takes place in the third week before Ramadan. See the boxed text, p252, for details of other *mouilids*.

In February each year a **marathon** (☎ 02-260 6930, 012 214 8839; www.egyptianmarathon.com) is held on the West Bank. It begins at Deir al-Bahri and loops around the main antiquities sites before ending back where it began.

## SLEEPING

Luxor has a wide range of hotels for all budgets. Most of the package-tour hotels are on the East Bank, and so are the shops, restaurants and the hectic town life. The West Bank is coming on fast, and is no longer as rural as it once was, but it is still a tranquil place, where the pace is much slower and where the evenings are more often than not blissfully quiet.

## Budget

Luxor has a good selection of budget places. Many boast both roof gardens and washing machines. The budget hotels on the West Bank are particularly good value, much quieter and often offering a more authentic meeting with locals.

Avoid the hotel touts who pounce on you as you get off the train or bus – they get a 25% to 40% commission for bringing you in, which is added to your bill.

## EAST BANK

**Oasis Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 496 1848 , 010 380 5882; www.luxoroasis.com; Sharia Mohammed Farid; dm £E12; s/d without bathroom £E15/25, d/tr/q £E35/50/65; 📺) Delightful budget hotel all painted in shades of bright blue, with clean rooms, most with air-con and very clean private bathroom, and all with fans. Internet and afternoon tea is included in the price. The blue rooftop terrace is a lovely spot to hang out or to have breakfast. The owner Hassan often picks up clients from the train station, and the staff is incredibly helpful and friendly. There are many reports that touts working for the much lesser-quality Nubian Oasis Hotel in the same street, claim that the Oasis is now the Nubian Oasis, but beware: this isn't true. They are two different hotels.

**Fontana Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0663; off Sharia Televizyon; s/d without bathroom £E20/30, s/d £E30/45; 📺)

An old stalwart of the budget hotel scene, this 25-room hotel has clean rooms, a washing machine for guest use, a rooftop terrace and a kitchen. All bathrooms are large and really clean, and toilet paper and towels are provided. The owner Magdi Soliman is always ready to help, and readers have written in to tell us how friendly and helpful his staff was.

**Anglo Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 1679; fax 238 1679; Midan al-Mahatta; s/d/tr ££40/50/75; ☺) Right next to the train station, so a bit noisy at times, but the spacious rooms are excellent value, very clean and well maintained, with air-con, satellite TV, private bathroom and telephone. The bar in the basement is popular with locals.

**Venus Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2625, 012 171 3599; Sharia Yousef Hassan; s/d with fan ££25/4, with air-con ££35/50; ☑) The 25 rooms at the Venus are quite noisy and shabby, but there is a fun atmosphere in the hotel, that is still popular with budget tours. All rooms have clean private bathrooms, and most have air-con. There is a great rooftop terrace and a lively bar (Stella beer ££10).

**St Mina Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 5409; fax 237 6568; off Sharia Ramses; s/d without bathroom ££30/35, s/d ££35/50; ☺) A friendly, family-run hotel, the St Mina doesn't have the aura of hustle that plagues so many of Luxor's budget hotels. Its 20 rooms are clean, with air-con or fans. Prices drop considerably in summer.

**Horus Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2165; fax 238 0965; Sharia al-Karnak; s/d/tr ££40/60/80; ☺) A recently refurbished old-timer, the Horus has clean and spacious rooms, simple but comfortable, with clean private bathrooms. All rooms have views over Luxor Temple as the hotel is situated right behind there. Good central location.

**Happy Land Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 1828; www.luxorhappyland.com; Sharia Qamr; s/d without bathroom ££30/45, s/d/tr with bathroom, fridge & air-con ££55/70/90; ☺ ☑) The Happy Land, another backpackers' favourite, offers clean rooms and spotless bathrooms, as well as very friendly service, a copious breakfast with fruit and corn flakes and a rooftop terrace. Competition among Luxor's budget hotels is fierce, and the Happy Land comes out on top almost every time, it doesn't need to send touts to the station! Bikes can be rented for ££12 per day and laundry facilities are free. Mr Ibrahim tries his utmost to make everyone appreciate his town. It sells ISIC cards.

**Nefertiti Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2386; www.nefertitihotel.com; Sharia as-Sahbi, btwn Sharia al-Karnak & Sharia as-Souq; s/d/tr US\$9/13/16; ☺ ☑) The energetic Aladin as-Sahbi runs the hotel, which has been in his family for a few generations, and the attached Aladin Tours travel agency, to perfection, offering midrange facilities at budget prices. No wonder this hotel is popular with our readers: the rooms are simple but cosy, the small private bathrooms are spotless, the breakfast is good and the staff is super friendly. You can sunbathe on the rooftop and take a shower, or have a drink with views of the West Bank and Luxor Temple. The top-floor lounge has satellite TV, a pool table and a small gym.

**Merryland Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 1746; s/d ££50/80; ☺ ☑) Large but quiet three-star hotel near the Luxor Museum, off Sharia Labib Habashi, which offers good-value rooms – albeit quite dark and small – all with satellite TV, private bathrooms and small balconies. The roof terrace has a bar, breakfast area and great views over to the West Bank.

**Mina Palace Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2074; Corniche an-Nil; s/d ££80/100; ☺) Right on the Corniche in front of the Mummification Museum the Mina Palace offers five-star views at bargain-basement prices. The two corner rooms have unparalleled views of both the West Bank and the avenue of sphinxes at Luxor Temple. All rooms could use a coat of paint but have lots of atmosphere, satellite TV, comfortable beds and very clean bathrooms. There is a roof terrace where you can kick back and enjoy a cold beer while watching the sun setting over the Nile.

**Rezeiky Camp** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 1334; www.rezeikycamp.com; Sharia al-Karnak; camp site per person ££20, vehicle ££15, s/d with fan ££11/14, s/d with air-con ££12/16; ☺ ☑ ☑) Rezeiky Camp is the only place to pitch a tent in town, but it is pleasant enough with a pool on your doorstep. There is a large garden with a restaurant and bar, and internet access. The motel-style rooms are not nice enough to make up for the inconvenient location, but the place is popular with overland groups, so call ahead to make sure there is space.

## WEST BANK

**Habu Hotel** (Map p255; ☎ 237 2477; Kom Lolah; s/d ££25/40) If you like character in a hotel, the Habu is for you. It's a mud-brick warren of small, vaulted rooms and has stunning views

over the entrance to Medinat Habu temple complex and the mountains beyond. Go for one of the three domed 1st-floor terrace rooms, which are practically in the forecourt of Medinat Habu and have a large terrace with palm-reed furniture. The downstairs restaurant has dusty ceiling fans and great old tourist posters. The downside? The less welcome saggy beds, mosquitos, somnolent staff and waterlogged bathrooms.

**Al-Gezira Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 0034; [www.al-gezira.com](http://www.al-gezira.com); Gezira al-Bayrat; s/d ££70/100; 🏠) Different in style, as it is in a modern building overlooking the lush and fertile agricultural land in the village of Gezira al-Bayrat, this hotel is very much a home away from home. It is actually home to quite a few archaeologists during the winter season, and the charming owners really make everyone feel welcome, so much so that the hotel is often full. The 11 cosy and homey rooms are pristine, all with private bathrooms, overlooking the lake or a branch of the Nile. Management and staff are friendly and efficient, and the upstairs rooftop restaurant, where breakfast is served, has great Nile views as well as cold beer (££10) and good traditional Egyptian food.

**Senmut Bed & Breakfast** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 3077/012 736 9159; [www.senmut-luxor.com](http://www.senmut-luxor.com); Ar-Ramlah, south of the ferry-landing; s/d without bathroom ££60/90, s/d ££70/110) In the home of a Dutch-Egyptian couple are nine comfortable double rooms, six with a clean private bathroom, all with fan and some with air-con, and a communal kitchen where guests can cook or order dinner in advance, a shaded garden and a roof terrace with great views on the Nile and Luxor Temple. The owners are very happy to have a cup of tea and help you organise your stay on the West Bank. The whole 1st floor can be rented as a large apartment for a family, with five double bedrooms.

**Marsam Hotel** (Map p255; ☎ 237 2403, 231 1603; [www.luxor-westbank.com/marsam\\_e\\_az.htm](http://www.luxor-westbank.com/marsam_e_az.htm); Gurna; s/d without bathroom ££40/80, s/d ££60/120) Built for American archaeologists in the 1920s, the Marsam, formerly the Sheikh Ali Hotel, is the oldest on the West Bank. The hotel is charming with 30 simple rooms set around a lovely courtyard, with ceiling fans and traditional palm-reed beds. A delicious breakfast with home-baked bread is served in the garden. Atmospheric and quiet, and close to almost all the West Bank sights, it is still popular with archaeologists, so you need to book ahead, particularly

during the dig season, roughly from October to March. The hotel has a good restaurant too (see p284).

## Midrange

Luxor has an ever-growing selection of mid-range hotels on both banks. If you are looking for a hotel with character, then check out the small mud-brick, traditional-style hotels around Medinat Habu on the West Bank. Many new hotels on the West Bank cater to families and often offer flats with two double rooms and a kitchen and living area. The hotels in Luxor are often slick and modern places, popular with budget and adventure tour groups. There are also some excellent bargains in this category, with good facilities at rock-bottom rates.

## EAST BANK

**Little Garden Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 227 4936; [www.littlegardenhotel.com](http://www.littlegardenhotel.com); Sharia Radwan; s/d US\$18/24; 🏠) Don't let the location put you off, there is a free transfer from the airport and the train station! This small hotel is very well managed, with friendly but very efficient staff, 24-hour room service, good cotton mattresses, air-con, satellite TV and sparkingly clean private bathrooms. There is also a small garden courtyard and a rooftop restaurant serving Asian foods and *sheesha* (water pipe) but no alcohol. Students can get a 10% discount.

**New Pola Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 236 5081; [www.polahotel.com](http://www.polahotel.com); Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; s/d/tr US\$18/25/45; 🏠 📺 🚿) Great views and a small rooftop pool make the recently opened New Pola an excellent bargain. The décor is kitsch but the 81 air-con rooms are spotless and come with minibars, satellite TV and private bathrooms. Half also have Nile views. Very good value for money.

**Philippe Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0050; Sharia Labib Habashi; s/d US\$18/25; 🏠 📺 🚿) Near the Corniche, the Philippe is immensely popular with budget tours, offering comfortable and clean rooms with satellite TV, private bathrooms and air-con. The style is rather impersonal, but it is good value, there is also a roof terrace which has a small pool. Front rooms are the best: most have small balconies and get plenty of light.

**St Joseph Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 1707; [sjhiey2002@hotmail.com](mailto:sjhiey2002@hotmail.com); Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; s/d US\$25/30; 🏠 📺 🚿) This popular and well-run three-star hotel has been a favourite with small

groups for years thanks to its comfortable rooms with satellite TV, air-con and private bathrooms. There is also a (heated) rooftop pool and basement bar. Ask for a Nile view.

**Luxor (Wena) Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0018; Sharia al-Karnak; s/d/tr US\$25/30/45; 🏠 📺 🚿) This very faded grand old hotel, recently used as the set for a BBC film about Howard Carter, boasts a great location near Luxor Temple, in a 2-hectare garden. The Arabesque-Moorish lobby is wonderful, but the rooms are quite shabby and the staff is beyond sleepy.

**Flobater Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 4223; fax 370 618; off Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; s/d US\$25/35; 🏠 📺) Next to the St Joseph, this modern family-run hotel has 40 comfortable rooms with fridges, satellite TV, air-con and private bathrooms. There is also a pleasant roof terrace with a pool. Try to get a room with a balcony.

**Tutotel Partner Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 7990; tutotel@partner-hotels.com; Sharia Salah ad-Din; s/d US\$34/42; 🏠 📺 🚿) A three-star hotel with four-star facilities conveniently located between the Corniche and Sharia Televizyon. The 79 rooms, most with Nile views, have comfy beds, satellite TV, air-con and minibars. There is also a rooftop pool with a Jacuzzi, three restaurants and one of Luxor's few discos.

**New Emilio Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 3570; emilio\_hotel@hotmail.com; Sharia Yousef Hassan; s/d US\$25/47; 🏠 📺 🚿) A good midrange hotel, the New Emilio has 101 spacious rooms, all fully equipped with minifridge, satellite TV, private bathroom, air-con and 24-hour room service. Other extras include an AstroTurfed roof terrace with plenty of shade and a large pool, a sauna and a business centre.

**Morris Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 235 9832; www.hotelmorrisluxor.com; Sharia al-Hurriya, off Sharia ibn al-Walid; s/d/tr US\$50/80/105; 🏠 📺 🚿) New four-star hotel that came recommended by some of our readers for its spacious rooms with classical décor with fridge, satellite TV and safe. The views over the Nile and the West Bank from the West Bank terrace, where breakfast is served upon request, are delightful. The hotel has several international restaurants, a swimming pool and a piano bar, and a discotheque is planned. Lunch buffet costs US\$12, dinner buffet is US\$18.

**Mercure Inn** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0721; www.accor-hotels.com; off Sharia al-Karnak; s/d/tr US\$65/85/95; 🏠 📺 🚿) The Mercure Inn has very comfortable rooms with a fridge and satellite TV, and offers four-star amenities, which include

room service, baby-sitting, three restaurants, a bar and a decent-sized swimming pool in large grounds, for less than most of the other top-end hotels.

**Sheraton Luxor Resort** (☎ 237 4544; www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton; Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; s/d from US\$70/90; 🏠 📺 🚿) The long-standing Sheraton is a secluded three-storey building set amid lush gardens at the far southern end of Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid – close enough to walk to some restaurants but far enough away to avoid any street noise. Rooms are well appointed and those overlooking the Nile have great views. The rooms in the main building are far nicer than the garden bungalows, which should be avoided. The hotel has a shopping arcade and Italian restaurant (see p283). Prices do not include breakfast and rates are considerably lower if booked through the internet.

## WEST BANK

**Al-Fayrouz Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 2709, 012 277 0565; www.elfayrouz.com; Al-Gezira; s/ E£80-120, d E£120-150, tr E£140-170, q E£160; 🏠 📺) This tranquil hotel with 17 brightly painted rooms, overlooking fields of sugarcane and clover, is a great base for exploring the monuments of the West Bank. Under Egyptian-German management, the simple, nicely decorated rooms are spotless and have private bathrooms; some also come with air-conditioning and a balcony with a view. The more expensive rooms are larger with a sitting area, and have more atmosphere. Meals can be had on the comfortable roof terrace or in the popular garden restaurant.

**Amenophis Hotel** (Map p255; ☎ /fax 231 1228; www.luxor-westbank.com/amephis\_e.htm; Kom Lolah; s/d E£75/130, s&d half board E£100-170, flat E£250; 🏠 📺) This quiet hotel, in a large building near the Medinat Habu temple complex, is a good midrange choice, with spotless, comfortable rooms, all with air-con, satellite TV and private bathrooms, as well as flats with two double rooms, a kitchen and living area. The rooftop restaurant has stunning views over the temple, the mountains beyond and the fields.

**Nour al-Gurna** (Map p255; ☎ 231 1430, 010 129 5812; Gurna; s/ E£100, d E£150-200, ste E£250) A unique little hotel in a mud-brick house nestled in a palm grove opposite the Antiquities Inspectorate ticket office, Nour al-Gurna has large rooms, each slightly different, with fans, small stereos, locally made furniture and tiled bathrooms.

All beds have mosquito nets, which are both practical and decorative. The only complaint is that the traditional cotton mattresses are quite hard. Romantic and original, with friendly management and a convenient location, this is a lovely centrally located hotel for visiting West Bank sites.

**Amon Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 0912; fax 231 1353; Al-Gezira; s/d/tr ££120/160/230; 🏠) Utterly charming, family-run hotel in a modern building with spotless rooms, a lush exotic garden where it's pleasant to have breakfast or have a drink, extremely helpful staff and delicious home-cooked meals. In the new wing the rooms are large with private bathrooms, ceiling fans, air-con and balconies overlooking the courtyard. In the old wing, some of the small rooms have private bathrooms, and all are air-conditioned. On the top floor are three triple rooms with an adjoining terrace and stunning views over the Theban Hills and the East Bank. This hotel is also popular with archaeologists so book ahead if you can.

**Nile Valley Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 1477, 012 796 4473; [www.nilevalley.nl](http://www.nilevalley.nl); Al-Gezira; s/d without bathroom £15/24, s/d £18/27; 🏠) Pleasant Dutch-Egyptian-run hotel in a modern block right near the ferry landing. The immaculate and comfortable rooms almost all have ultra clean private bathrooms and air-con – the rooms that don't share one bathroom between two rooms intended for one family. Some rooms have Nile views but those overlooking the rear garden are quieter and slightly bigger. Upstairs is a good rooftop bar-restaurant with fantastic views of the Nile and Luxor Temple, and there is a pool and children's pool in the garden. This hotel is particularly family friendly, and has families staying here for a week or more. They organise good-value donkey tours (££35 per person from 7.30am to 2pm) and other trips upon request, and have bike rental (££12 a day).

**Nour al-Balad** (Map p255; ☎ 242 6111; Ezbet Bisily; s/d/ste ££150/200/250; 🏠) Equally beautiful but even quieter sister hotel to Nour al-Gurna, Nour al-Balad takes the same traditional-with-a-twist style to the edge of the desert. Upper rooms in the large mud-brick house range from two large suites with a stunning view over the desert and the fields, to simple singles with woven mats, brass beds and arabesque tiles in bathrooms. Downstairs rooms are small and dark but cosy in winter. All have ceiling fans and are highly recommended. To

get there, follow the track behind Medinat Habu for 500m.

**Al-Nakhil Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 3922, 012 382 1007; [www.el-nakhil.com](http://www.el-nakhil.com); Al-Gezira; s/d US\$25/35; 🏠) A more recent arrival on the hotel scene, the Nakhil or 'Palm Tree' is nestled in a palm grove at the edge of Al-Gezira. The resort-style hotel has spotless, well-finished domed rooms, all with private bathrooms and air-con, or flats (US\$55) with two double bedrooms, a kitchen, living room and a terrace. Like so many of these new hotels on the West Bank, it is very family-friendly, with cots available for babies. It also has a room that can cater for disabled guests. With views over the fields and a small restaurant, this hotel is an excellent addition to the hotel scene, and it offers really good value.

**Al-Gezira Gardens** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 2505; [www.el-gezira.com](http://www.el-gezira.com); al-Gezira; s/d US\$25/35, s/d half board US\$30/45 2-bed apt incl breakfast \$55; 🏠) A large resort-style complex with 14 double rooms and eight flats with two double rooms, a kitchen and a living room, popular with Germans. All rooms have a balcony – some overlook the garden, and others have great views over the Nile and the surrounding fields. The décor is not entirely tasteful but the beds are comfortable and everything is spotless. The hotel boasts a bar, restaurant and a great rooftop terrace, a good-size swimming pool in the garden, and a little super market. A free hourly shuttle boat takes residents back and forth to Luxor and the East Bank.

**our pick Beit Sabée** (Map p255; ☎ 010 632 4926; [info@nourelnil.com](mailto:info@nourelnil.com); Kom Lolah; d ££250-400; 🏠) This latest addition to Luxor's mushrooming West Bank hotel scene was having the finishing touches put to it at the time of writing, but it already looked very attractive. Set in a traditional-style two-storey mud-brick house, across the fields from Medinet Habu temple, the eight bedrooms, all painted in different warm colours with private bathroom, are effortlessly stylish, decorated with local furniture and textiles. This small hotel, very much like a real Egyptian home, is definitely set to become one of the nicest hotels in the area, a good place to spend awhile.

## Top End EAST BANK

Luxor has many four- and five-star hotels, all, with one notable exception, run by international hotel chains.

**Iberotel Luxor Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0925; www.iberotel-eg.com/luxor; Corniche an-Nil; s/d with Nile view US\$90/110, with city view US\$80/105; ☒ ☑ ☎) Formerly the Novotel (and still called that locally), this squat high-rise at the southern tip of the Corniche has an indoor atrium, great Nile views and a floating swimming pool. Rooms are comfortable, if smallish, and the building interior has the look of a cheap package-holiday hotel, but its location on the Nile just a short distance from Luxor Temple, is unbeatable.

**Sofitel Karnak** (Map p241; ☎ 237 8020; www.sofitel.com; Sharia az-Zinia Gebly; r US\$110-250; ☒ ☑ ☎) Quiet and secluded, the enormous Sofitel Karnak, with 351 rooms, is nestled in lush gardens beside the Nile 3km north of the Temples of Karnak. Its Nubian-influenced architecture works well with the palms and bougainvilleas, and it is a tranquil haven after the din of the town. As well as comfortable bungalow-style rooms there is a very pleasant (heated) Nile-side pool, tennis and squash courts and a fitness centre, sauna, and Jacuzzi. It is also near an 18-hole golf course. Buses are on hand to shuttle guests into the centre of town.

**Our pick Old Winter Palace Hotel and New Winter**

**Palace Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0422; h1661@accor-hotels.com; Corniche an-Nil; old wing r €200-350, ste €445-890; new wing s/d €75-106; pavillion r €108-120, ste €325; ☒ ☑ ☎) These hotels stand side by side on the Corniche. Ignore the modernist new section (rumour has it that the governor wants the building removed as it is an eyesore so close to Luxor Temple) and head to the old. The Old Winter Palace was built to attract the aristocracy of Europe and is one of Egypt's most famous historic hotels. A wonderfully atmospheric Victorian pile, it has high ceilings, lots of gorgeous textiles, fabulous views over the Nile, an enormous garden with exotic trees and shrubs, a huge great swimming pool, table-tennis tables and a tennis court. The rooms vary in size and decor, but are very comfortable. After many years of incredibly sleepy service and mediocre food, we are pleased to see that the service and food are finally back up to standard with the beautiful surroundings. A buffet breakfast costs ££95 in the old wing, ££81 in the pavillion. The Winter Palace is a great place to spend a week in Luxor. At the back of the New Wing is a low-rise, more classical building of the Pavillion Wing, which shares the garden and the pool, as does the New Wing.

**Mövenpick Jolie Ville** (☎ 237 4855; www.moevenpick-hotels.com; Crocodile Island; s US\$110-130, d US\$160-170, ste US\$300-400; ☒ ☑ ☎) Set amid lush gardens on Crocodile Island, 4km south of town, this is a great family hotel with a minizoo and playground in addition to the swimming pool, tennis courts and feluccas. There are 320 comfortable, if architecturally unremarkable, bungalow-style rooms, and a hotel motorboat shuttles guests to and from the centre of town. At the end of 2008 the name of the hotel will change to Meretem Jolie Ville, but at the time of writing there was not yet a new website.

**Sonesta St George Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 2575; www.sonesta.com/egypt\_luxor; Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; s/d with Nile view US\$120/180, with city view US\$108/195; ☒ ☑ ☎) This 224-room marble-filled hotel has a kitsch value that should not be overlooked, with lots of marble, faux Pharaonic columns and a flamelike fence around the roof, but it is a good lively place to stay. The hotel is well managed, has friendly staff, recently refurbished and comfortable rooms with great views, a heated swimming pool, a business centre and a good selection of restaurants.

**WEST BANK**

**Al-Moudira** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 012 325 1307; moudira hotel@yahoo.com; Daba'iyya; r €170, cte €220-290; ☒ ☑ ☎) Al-Moudira is a true luxury hotel, with an individuality that is missing from so many other hotels in Luxor. A Moorish fantasy of soaring vaults, pointed arches and enormous domes, surrounded by lush green and birdsong, the hotel has 54 rooms grouped together around small courtyards. Each room is different in shape, size (all are very large though) and colour, each with its own hand-painted trompe l'oeil theme and with antiques found throughout Egypt. Cushioned benches and comfortable antique chairs invite pashalike lounging and the enormous vaulted bathrooms have the feel of a private *hammam* (bathhouse). The public spaces are even more spectacular with traditional *mashrabiyya* (wooden lattice) work combined with work by contemporary 'orientalists'. Set on the edge of the cultivated land and the desert, the hotel is truly spectacular, the only let downs are the sometimes surly staff, and it's a long way from anywhere.

**Flat Rental**

Families or those planning a prolonged stay in Luxor might consider a self-catering option. Flat rental is mushrooming on the West

Bank, particularly as so many foreigners are getting involved in the business. The street along the Nile south of the ferry landing on the West Bank, is locally called 'European Street', because so many Europeans have built houses and flats here. The downside of the self-catering is apparently sex tourism, as there is no control as to who you take to your room. Several companies can arrange flat rental, including **Flats in Luxor** (Map p255; ☎ 010 356 4540; www.flatsinluxor.com; per week from £150; 🍷 🍷 🍷) run by a British-Egyptian couple who started renting out their own flats but now also manage others. The website www.luxor-westbank.com also has a wide selection of flats available, as does www.egyptwithmara.com/flats\_in\_luxor.htm.

## EATING

Most people come to Luxor for monuments and not for its fine cuisine – a good thing as most restos are pretty mediocre. However there is good news as a few newcomers are upping the standards by doing what Egyptians do best: cook honest traditional Egyptian food. Outside the hotels few serve alcohol or accept credit-card payment; exceptions are noted in the reviews. Unless otherwise noted, restaurants tend to open from about 10am until midnight.

## Restaurants

### EAST BANK

**Mish Mish** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 1756; Sharia Televizyon; meals £7-18) A long-standing budget-traveller haunt, Mish Mish is showing its age these days but still popular. Its prices have jumped too. It's a basic café-restaurant with reasonably priced pizza (££10 to ££18), salads (££3 to ££5) and piping hot *tagens* (££15). There is also fresh fruit juice for ££8.

**Kings Head Pub** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 1249; Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; dishes ££10-30; 🍷 10am-2am; 🍷) The king here is Akhenaten in a Tudor hat, and the temperature inside is closer to the cool of an English summer day. This increasingly popular pub provides everything a homesick Brit could possibly need: a teakwood counter, darts, pool table, Sky sports, curries (about ££20), chips, and on Sunday you can even get roast beef and Yorkshire pud (££30). Beer is reasonably priced (££12 for a Stella) and there's an array of cocktails and spirits.

**our pick** **Sofra** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 235 9752; www.sofra.co.eg; 90 Sharia Mohamed Farid, off Sharia al-Manshiya; mains

££12-35; 🍷 11am-midnight) Sofra is the restaurant Luxor has been waiting for. Located in an old 1930s house, away from all the tourist tat, it is as Egyptian as can be, both in menu and décor –and even in price. The ground floor has three private dining rooms, as if you were in someone's home and a salon, and there is a wonderful terrace on the rooftop, which is also a café, where you can come for a drink. The house is filled with antique oriental furniture, chandeliers and traditional decorations, all simple but cosy and very tasteful. The menu is large, featuring all the traditional Egyptian dishes, such as stuffed pigeon and excellent duck, as well as a large selection of salads, dips (££4) and mezze. Alcohol is not available, but there are delicious fresh juices on offer, and *sheesha* afterwards. A real treat, with very friendly staff, which was also recommended by many readers.

**Oasis Café** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 012 336 7121; Sharia Dr Labib Habashi; mains ££15-60; 🍷 10am-10pm; 🍷) Set in a renovated 1930s building right in the centre of town, the Oasis is a good place to recover from the bustle of Luxor town, from the heat or from sightseeing. The dining rooms are cool with fans, high ceilings and old tiled floors, painted in soft colours with local artwork on the walls, and furnished with traditional-style furniture. With jazz softly playing, smoking and nonsmoking rooms, the *New Yorker* to read and friendly staff, this is the perfect place for lunch, to linger over a good morning latte or to spend the afternoon reading. The place is very Western, but in a nice way, like your favourite café back home, not like some of the brash tourist restaurants elsewhere in town. The food is good too, with an extensive brunch menu and a regular menu of international dishes, including pastas (££15 to ££25), grilled meats (££40 to ££60), filling sandwiches (££12 to ££18) and a wide selection of pastries.

**La Mama** (off Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 4544; Sheraton Luxor Resort, Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; dishes ££18-60; 🍷 10.30am-11pm) The Italian restaurant on the terrace overlooking a little pond with wading birds, at the entrance to the Sheraton, is a good bet, particularly if you've got kids in tow. This is an Italian restaurant in 1970s style with red-and-white napkins, live Neapolitan music and a good selection of pizzas, pastas and mains, all served in clean five-star surroundings.

**Dawar al-Umda Restaurant** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 3321; Sharia al-Karnak; mains ££20-40; 🍷 7-11pm) Set in the garden of the Mercure Inn, this pleasant, cheap and cheerful outdoor restaurant serves

Egyptian specialities, with a good selection of mezze (E£2 to E£6), in addition to the usual kebab and *kofta* (mincemeat and spices grilled on a skewer). The Egyptian experience is completed by an Oriental buffet, that comes with a belly dancer, on Thursday evenings (6.30pm to 10.30pm; E£65), call for reservations.

**Kebabgy** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 6521; Nile Shopping Centre, Corniche an-Nil, opposite Old Winter Palace Hotel; dishes E£20-45; 🕒 9am-1am; 🍷) Good solid Egyptian fare including kebab, *kofta* and *tagens* and the usual selection of salads and dips, served on a delightful terrace right on the Nile, with simple wooden tables and a mist machine to cool down on a hot day.

**Snobs** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 236 0356; off Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid, just past the Sonesta Hotel; dishes E£20-50; 🕒 10am-12am; 🍷) Popular and well-managed Western-style restaurant that has gained an excellent reputation for its great salads, pastas, pizzas and steaks, cooked by a young and talented chef. There is no alcohol but you are welcome to bring your own discreetly.

**Bombay Restaurant** (off Map pp244-5; ☎ 010 665 9505; Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; dishes E£24-45; 🕒 noon-11.30pm; 🍷) Good Indian restaurant, always filled with Brits, outside the Sheraton Hotel. At E£80, the lunchtime set menu for two is good value, offering a good choice of basic curry dishes, along with side dishes such as dhal and samosas. Good selection for vegetarians.

**Jamboree Restaurant** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 235 5827, 012 781 3149; Sharia al-Montazah; dishes E£35-80; 🕒 10.30am-11pm; 🍷) A small British-run restaurant, Jamboree serves international fare in its rather undistinct dining room or much better, upstairs on a pleasant roof terrace. Lunchtime dishes are limited to good homemade sandwiches and snacks. The menu includes filled jacket potatoes, pastas and the traditional, perhaps not so authentic, Egyptian dishes.

**1886 Restaurant** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0422; Old Winter Palace Hotel, Corniche an-Nil; starters E£35-122, mains E£60-190; 🍷 dinner only; 🍷) The 1886 is once again the gourmet restaurant in town serving inventive Mediterranean-French food, and a few Egyptian dishes with a twist, in a grand old-style dining room with very formal waiters. Guests are expected to dress up for the occasion – men wear a tie and/or jacket – and are eyed up by the waiters just a tad too much, but the food is superb and light. Delicacies include risotto of crayfish, truffle and chanterelles, sea scallops in artichoke broth and potato and celery ravioli. A grand evening out!

**Miyako Restaurant** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 2575; Sonesta St George Hotel, Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; teppanyaki menu E£125-180, sushi E£25-40, sashimi E£40-100; 🍷) Luxor's only Japanese restaurant serves rather mediocre Japanese food, but it is still a welcome change from kebabs and stews. You can either sit in the cool and peaceful *tatami* (straw matting) room or watch the chef's stunts, including the throwing of knives, while preparing the *teppanyaki* at your table.

## WEST BANK

**Restaurant Mohammed** (Map p255; ☎ 231 1014; Gurna; dishes E£12-30) With an outdoor terrace and laid-back atmosphere, Mohammed's is the perfect place to recharge batteries in the middle of a day exploring temples and tombs, or to linger in the evening. This is a family affair, the restaurant is attached to the owner's mud-brick house; the charming Mohammed Abdel Lahi serves with his son, while his wife and mother cook together. The menu is small but includes meat grills, delicious chicken and duck as well as stuffed pigeon, served with fries and excellent simple salads. Stella beer is available (E£10).

**Al-Gezira Hotel** (Map p255; ☎ 231 0034; Al-Gezira; dishes E£15-45) This comfortable rooftop restaurant serves Egyptian specialities such as the infamous *molokhiyya* (stewed leaf soup) and *mahshi kurumb* (stuffed cabbage leaves), but food needs to be ordered in advance. The menu of the day costs E£25. There are great views over the Nile and the bright lights of Luxor beyond. Beer and wine are available.

**Nour el-Gurna** (Map p255; ☎ 231 1430; Gurna; meals E£15-50) Stuffed pigeon, duck and other hearty local dishes are served under a palm-reed shade on long benches in the garden or in a cool room, depending on the season. Near the Antiquities Inspectorate ticket office, this is a friendly and pleasant place to eat. Alcohol is not available, but there excellent fresh juices.

**Memnon** (Map p255; ☎ 012 327 8747; opposite Colossi of Memnon; dishes E£19-30; 🕒 6.30-10.30pm, later in summer) Excellent, laid-back restaurant with simple but very well prepared Egyptian fare, and if you want a change from that, there are some equally good Indian & Chinese dishes on the menu. Afterwards hang out and stare eternity in the face looking at the Colossi, while smoking a *sheesha*. Leave some space for the homemade mango sorbet, it's worth it.

**Africa Restaurant** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 012 365 8722; Al-Gezira; meals E£25) On the right just up the hill from the ferry landing, the popular Africa

Restaurant, with a large outdoor terrace, serves simple but good Egyptian food – grilled meat, poultry or fish, accompanied by rice, vegetables and salad. A Stella can usually be conjured up for ££10.

**Nile Valley Hotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 1477; Al-Gezira; meals ££25-45) A popular rooftop restaurant with a bird's-eye view of the action along the West Bank's waterfront, the Nile Valley has a wide-ranging menu of Egyptian and international specialties, but is also a good place to relax with a cold drink and a *sheesha*. On Sunday nights a buffet (££55) is accompanied by Sufi dancing and local music.

**Tutankhamun Restaurant** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 231 0918, 010 566 8614; Al-Gezira; mains ££30-40) This top-floor restaurant was the first one here on the riverside just south of the local ferry dock and it's still going strong. Amm Mahmoud (Uncle Mahmoud), a former cook at one of the French archaeological missions in Luxor, is still cooking his excellent *tagens, duck à l'orange*, chicken with rosemary and other good dishes. The food is served on the great rooftop terrace with wonderful views of the Nile.

**Al-Moudira** (Map p255; ☎ 012 325 1307; Daba'iyya; dishes ££35-180) In keeping with its décor, Al-Moudira has the most sophisticated food, and the most expensive, on the West Bank, with great salads and grills at lunchtime and a more elaborate menu for dinner with Mediterranean-Lebanese cuisine. Call ahead for reservations.

## Quick Eats

### EAST BANK

**Abu Ashraf** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 5936 209; Sharia al-Mahatta; dishes ££2-9) This large, popular restaurant and takeaway is just down from the train station. It serves roasted chicken (££12), pizzas (££12 to ££20), good *kushari* (££4 to ££10) and kebabs (££15).

**Sayyida Zeinab** (Map pp244-5; Sharia Televizyon; dishes ££2.50-5.50) This tiny but spotless place is one of Luxor's best *kushari* joints. Takeaway only.

**Koshari Elzaeem** (Map pp244-5; Midan Hussein; dishes ££4-11; ☎ 24hr) Popular *kushari* restaurant that also serves an Egyptian version of spaghetti (££8 to ££15). There are a few tables but they fill up fast.

**Salt & Bread Cafeteria** (Map pp244-5; Midan al-Mahatta; dishes ££6-20) Quick, cheap meals, including kebab, chicken and omelettes are served here, on a terrace and restaurant opposite the train station.

## Self-Catering

Luxor has a number of good bakeries. Try the ones on Sharia Ahmed Orabi, at the beginning of Sharia al-Karnak and on Sharia Gedda (all Map pp244-5). On the West Bank try the food and fruit shops on the main street in Al-Gezira, or head for the wonderful weekly market Souq at-Talaat on Tuesday mornings opposite the Temple of Seti I.

**Fruit & Vegetable Souq** (Map pp244-5; Sharia as-Souq) This is the best place for fruit and veg, although the good stuff sells out early in the morning. On either side of the main street are little shops selling produce and groceries throughout the day.

**Bakri Supermarket** (Map pp244-5; cnr Sharias Medina & Televizyon) A bustling, well-stocked, Western-style store with a good selection of imported products as well as yogurts and cheeses kept in clean, functioning fridges.

**Omar** (Map pp244-5; Sharia Medina al-Manawwara) A large Western-style minimarket, which has a range of imported goodies.

**Al-Ahram Beverages** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2445; Sharia Ramses) Al-Ahram Beverages is the Luxor outlet for Egypt's monopoly beer and wine producer.

## DRINKING

### East Bank

**Metropolitan Café & Restaurant** (Map pp244-5; lower level, Corniche an-Nil) A pleasant, popular outdoor café, right on the Nile, in front of the Winter Palace Hotel. Beers (Stella ££10) and a wide selection of cocktails are available, served on a terrace with rattan furniture with jungle-print fabric and mist machines. Salads (££13 to ££17) are available as well as snacks and sandwiches (££10 to ££35), ice cream and *sheesha*. The perfect place to enjoy a sundowner.

**New Oum Koulosoum Coffee Shop** (Map pp244-5; Sharia as-Souq; ☎ 24hr) New and very pleasant *ahwa* (coffeehouse) right at the heart of the souq, on a large terrace with welcome mist machines, where you can recover from shopping and haggling in the souq and watch the crowds without any hassle. On the menu are fresh juices (££10), hot and cold drinks and a good *sheesha* (££5) as well as 'professional Nespresso' coffee (££10).

**Kings Head Pub** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 1249; Sharia Khaled ibn al-Walid; ☎) A relaxed and perennially popular place to have a drink and shoot pool, the Kings Head tries to capture the atmosphere of an English pub without being twee. The

laid-back atmosphere also means that women can come here without being harassed.

**Nile Terrace Café & Bar** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0422; Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 9am-7pm) The terrace in front of the Old Winter Palace Hotel is the most elegant place in Luxor to watch the sun slowly set over the Theban hills. Starched collars and gin and tonics are the rule here, but there is also ice-cold beer (££23); or you can order afternoon tea if you prefer.

**Sindbad Café** (Map pp244-5; off Sharia Al-Karnak; ☎ 7.30am-1am) A large pleasant terrace in the grounds of the Wena Hotel, overlooking the back of Luxor Temple, with old rattan chairs. This is a laid-back friendly place serving some of the cheapest cold Stella beer (££8) in town, tea and *sheesha* and simple Egyptian fare including grills and salads (main dishes cost ££12 to ££22, salads ££6).

**Murphy's Irish Pub** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 8101; Sharia al-Gawazat; ☎) With polished wood and a family atmosphere, this pub is a nice place to escape to for a quick, cooling Stella beer or a long evening with friends.

## West Bank

There are no real bars on the West Bank; drinking is done at restaurants or not at all.

**Maratonga Cafeteria** (Map p255; Kom Lolah; ☎ 6am-11pm) This friendly outdoor café, in front of Medinat Habu, is the best place to sip a cold drink under a big tree after wandering through Ramesseum III's magnificent temple. The view is superlative and the atmosphere is relaxing.

**Ramesseum Rest House** (Map p255; beside the Ramesseum, Gurna) A friendly, laid-back place to relax after temple-viewing. In addition to the usual mineral water and soft drinks, Stella is sometimes available.

## ENTERTAINMENT

### East Bank

With tourism booming in Luxor, the town is busy at night. The Temple of Luxor is open until 10pm and worth seeing at night, the souq is open late as well and more lively at night than in the day, and in summer lots of locals stroll along the Corniche. This is not the place to go clubbing though, even if you're into dancing to outmoded disco music, but there are some bars with a decent atmosphere. Most of the larger hotels put on a folkloric show several times each week, depending on the season and number of tour groups around.

**Dawar al-Umda** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 3321; Mercure Inn, Sharia al-Karnak) This venue has a popular folkloric show that includes a belly dancer, *rababa* music (named after the instrument that resembles a single-stringed violin) and occasionally a snake charmer. The show is usually on Thursday night and comes with an Oriental buffet (££65).

If you'd rather move about on the dance floor yourself, the disco at **Tutotel** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 7990) is one of the more popular options, while at **Hotel Mercure** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0944; nonquest minimum £40) the extra charge covers you for watching the belly-dancing show at 11.30pm too.

## West Bank

If you want to avoid the bright lights of the town, the West Bank is the place to be. Pharaoh's or Nobi's Arabian Horse Stables (p276) and QEA (p276) arrange evening desert barbecues for groups of 10 or more and sometimes put on a horse-dancing show.

On Sunday (and occasionally on other days according to demand) you can watch and dance to local musicians on the rooftop terrace of the **Nile Valley Hotel** (Map p255; ☎ 231 1477; Al-Gezira).

## SHOPPING

The whole range of Egyptian souvenirs is available in Luxor town, but for alabaster it is best to head for the West Bank. The alabaster is mined about 80km northwest of the Valley of the Kings, and although the alabaster factories near the Ramesseum and Deir al-Bahri sell cheap handmade cups, vases and lights in the shape of Nefertiti's head, it is possible to find higher-quality bowls and vases, often unpolished, which are great buys. Take care when buying, sometimes what passes for stone is actually wax with stone chips.

The *tagen* (clay pots) that are used in local cooking make a more unusual buy. Very practical, they can be used to cook on top of the stove or in the oven and they look good on the table too. Prices start at ££5 for a very small pot and go up to about ££30. They're on sale on the street just beside the police station in Luxor.

**Habiba** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 010 124 2026; www.habiba.gallery.com; Sharia Sidi Mahmoud, off Sharia as-Souq; ☎ 10am-10pm) Newly opened and run by an Australian woman who loves to travel in Egypt and who wants to promote the best of Egyptian crafts, this tiny shop sells an ever expanding selection of Bedouin embroidery, jewellery, leather work, wonderful Siwan scarves, the

best Egyptian cotton towels usually only for export, mirrors and brass lights all at fair-trade fixed prices. A world away from what is available in the nearby souq. Recommended.

**Fair Trade Centre Luxor Outlet** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 236 0870, 012 356 3445; www.egyptfairtrade.org; Sharia al-Karnak; ☎ 9am-10.30pm) A nonprofit shop that markets handicrafts from NGO projects throughout Egypt, with a good selection of well-priced hand-carved wood and pottery from the nearby villages of Hejaza and Garagos, aromatic oils from Quz, bead work from Sinai and hand-blown glass, recycled glass and recycled paper from Cairo.

**Winter Akhmeem Gallery** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0422; Corniche an-Nil) A small shop, beside the staircase to the Old Winter Palace, stuffed with beautiful hand-woven cotton, linen and silk from Akhmim. Prices are steep, averaging £120 to £180 per metre, but this is still cheaper than you'd pay for something comparable in most other countries. *Galabiyyas* (men's full length robes) and shirts can be made to measure.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

**EgyptAir** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 238 0581; Corniche an-Nil; ☎ 8am-8pm) operates several daily flights between Cairo, Luxor and Aswan. A one-way ticket to Cairo costs £198 to £574. Tickets to Aswan cost £127 one-way. There are three flights per week to Sharm el-Sheikh (£328 one-way). Flights to Abu Simbel only operate in high season but have such long waits in Aswan that you're better off arranging a trip from there.

### Bus

The bus station is out of town, located approximately 1km from the airport, but tickets for the

**Upper Egypt Bus Co** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 232 2218; ticket office, Midan al-Mahatta) buses can be bought at their office in town, south of the train station. Minibuses (£5) go from town to the bus station, and a taxi will cost around £25 to £30.

Buses heading to Cairo leave at 7am (£91, 10 to 11 hours), but booking ahead is essential as the bus fills up quickly. Six daily buses head to Hurghada (£25 to £32, five hours) from 6.30am to 8pm. All stop in Qena (£5, one to two hours) and Safaga (£20 to £27, 3½ to four hours) and go on to Suez (£60, 10 hours). For Quseir and Marsa Alam, change at Safaga. A bus to Sharm el-Sheikh (£110, 12 hours) and Dahab (£120, 14 to 16 hours) leaves at 5pm. It is often full so try to reserve in advance. There are frequent buses to Qena (£3 to £5) between 6.30am and 8pm, and a daily bus to Port Said at 8pm (£70, 12 hours) via Ismailiya (£65). There are buses to Al-Kharga (£50, four hours).

To go to the Western Desert oases take a bus or train to Asyut from where there are daily buses. At the time of writing there were no buses between Luxor and Aswan.

### Cruise Ship or Dahabiyya

For information on the many cruise boats and increasing number of *dahabiyyas* (houseboats) that ply the Nile between Luxor and Aswan see p89 and p87.

### Felucca

You can't take a felucca from Luxor to Aswan, most feluccas leave from Esna because of the Esna Lock, but unless you have a strong wind, it can take days to go more than a few kilometres in this direction. For more information, see p85.

## POLICE CONVOYS

Getting out of Luxor by road usually involves going in police convoy (see p314). Current convoy times to Hurghada are 8am, 2pm and 6pm. Day trips to Dendara and Abydos leave with the 8am convoy and branch off at Qena with their own escort. There is also a 2pm trip to Dendara. Both return at around 5.30pm.

To Aswan the convoys leave at 7am (stopping at Esna, Kom Ombo and Edfu), 11am (direct) and 3pm (direct). Check these times with the tourist office before travelling.

Vehicles congregate on Sharia Serb (see Map pp244-5) about 30 minutes before the convoy time.

If you are heading further afield by car, you will not fit into the convoy schedule but will still be given a police escort. There are police checkpoints at most municipal boundaries so chances of eluding them are slim. Irritatingly, at each checkpoint your police escort will probably change, involving a delay of a few minutes each time. If possible take the train.

## Service Taxi

Foreigners are forbidden from taking service taxis at present. Instead you have to rent the entire vehicle and go in a convoy. The drivers are always ready to bargain for special trips up the Nile to Aswan, stopping at the sights on the way; expect to pay about £250 to £300. To Hurghada, the going rate is about £400. Make sure you are at the taxi stand 30 minutes before the convoy leaves.

Travellers planning a trip from Luxor to Al-Kharga have to push the police hard if they don't want to go on a long detour to Asyut. Taxis are reluctant to undertake the trip and their current asking price is £900 for the car (maximum seven people).

## Train

**Luxor Station** (Map pp244-5; ☎ 237 2018; Midan al-Mahatta) has left-luggage facilities, plenty of cellphones and a post office.

The **Abela Egypt Sleeping Train** (☎ 237 2015; www.sleepingtrains.com) goes daily to Cairo at 8.30pm and 9.30pm (single/double including dinner and breakfast US\$80/120, child four to 10 years US\$45, nine hours). No student discounts; tickets must be paid for in US dollars or euros.

Other trains to Cairo permitted for foreigners are the 981 at 9.15am (adult 1st/2nd class ££73/35, student 1st/2nd class ££40/27, 10 hours), which stops in Balyana (££19/14, three hours) for those who wish to visit Abydos; the 1903 at 9.15pm (adult 1st/2nd class ££78/40, student 1st/2nd class ££45/32, 10 hours); and the 980 at 11.10pm (adult 1st/2nd class ££78/40, nine hours). All trains stop in the Nile Valley towns of Qena (1st/2nd class ££18/13), Sohag (££26/16), Asyut (££36/22), Minya (££54/35) and Beni Suef (££62/40). Student discounts are available on all trains.

To Aswan (three hours) there are three trains: the 996 at 7am (1st/2nd class ££35/21); the 1902 at 9.30am (1st/2nd class ££30/21); and the 980 at 5pm (1st/2nd class ££26/18). All stop at Esna (1st/2nd class ££14/12), Edfu (££19/15) and Kom Ombo (££25/18). Student discounts are available.

There is also a train to Al-Kharga every Thursday at 6am or 7am, depending on the time of year (adult/student ££11/6 in 3rd class only; eight to 10 hours).

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Luxor airport is 7km east of town. A taxi costs at least ££30 to ££40 from the centre of town. To get to or from the West Bank costs about ££70 to ££100. There is no bus between the airport and the town.

## Bicycle

A compact town, Luxor lends itself to cycling, and distances on the generally flat West Bank are just far enough to give some exercise but not far enough to exhaust (except when the weather is too hot). Cycling at night is inadvisable given the local habit of leaving headlights off.

Many hotels rent out bikes. Expect to pay from ££10 to ££15 per day and choose carefully – there's nothing worse than getting stuck with a broken chain halfway to the Valley of the Kings. You can take bikes across to the West Bank on the *baladi* ferry (see p275). If you're based on the West Bank, see p276.

## Felucca

There is a multitude of feluccas to take you on short trips around Luxor, leaving from various points all along the river. How much you pay depends on your bargaining skills, but you're looking at about ££20 for an hour of sailing.

## Hantour

Also called a *calèche*, horse and carriages cost about ££20 to ££50 per hour depending on your haggling skills (this is where you really need them). Expect to pay about ££15 to ££20 to get to Karnak.

## Pick-up Taxis

*Kabout* and minibuses are often the quickest and easiest way to get about. To get to the Temples of Karnak, take a minibuses from Luxor station or from behind Luxor Temple for 50pt. Other routes run inside the town. For information about West Bank pick-ups, see p275.

## Taxi

There are plenty of taxis in Luxor but passengers still have to bargain hard for trips. A short trip around town is likely to cost at least ££10. Taxis can also be hired for day trips around the West Bank; expect to pay ££100 to ££200, depending on the length of the excursion and your bargaining skills.

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