



reading

E G Y P T

BOOKS ABOUT EGYPT

Reading books is a great way of warming up for your adventure in Egypt. With 5,000 years of history and a vibrant modern culture, there's no shortage of contenders. Our recommendations range from a best-selling novel that shocked many to two marvelous memoirs from Jews who left the country in the turbulent 1950s and 1960s but who never lost their sense of the country's beauty and charm.

Fiction

EAlaa-Al-Aswany. *The Yacoubian Building* (2002)

A best-selling, taboo-breaking novel about the people who live and work in a formerly grand, now-declining, Cairo apartment building. The cast of characters includes a wheeler-dealer politician, a gay newspaper editor, a doorman drawn to militant Islam, and a woman facing sexual harassment from her boss.

Lawrence Durrell. *Justine* (1957)

The first of Durrell's Alexandria Quartet, four celebrated novels about sexual and political intrigue in multi-ethnic Alexandria before and during World War II. Durrell's lush, nuanced depiction of the city is considered a great feat of twentieth-century literature.

Yusuf Idris. *The Essential Yusuf Idris* (2009)

An introduction to Egypt's master of the short story. Idris was renowned for his realistic portraits of everyday life in Egypt's cities and villages and for his leftist political views.

Naguib Mahfouz. *Palace Walk* (1959)

This kicks off The Cairo Trilogy, a multigenerational saga of one family and their city from the 1919 uprising against British rule until Colonel Nasser seizes power in 1952. The trilogy is acclaimed as Mahfouz's masterwork and helped him win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Ahdaf Soueif. *A Map of Love* (1999)

An epic novel about love and friendship across cultural boundaries. Nominated for the Booker Prize, it links the love affair of an upper-class Englishwoman and an Egyptian nationalist in 1900 with the contemporary relationship of her American great-granddaughter and an Egyptian musician.



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Non-Fiction

André Aciman. *Out of Egypt* (1994)

The *Los Angeles Times* called Aciman's account of life in Alexandria as part of a polyglot, eccentric Jewish family "beautifully remembered and even more beautifully written."

Lucette Lagnado. *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit* (2007)

Another wonderful, prize-winning memoir about Jewish life in 20th-century Egypt and of the sudden exiling of this seemingly secure and thriving community. The snappily dressed man in question was the author's father, who spoke seven languages and spent his mornings in synagogue and his nights gallivanting in cosmopolitan Cairo.

Tarek Osman. *Egypt on the Brink* (2011)

Published just before the Arab Spring, Osman provides a "lively and authoritative" account of Egypt's transformation in modern times. It criticizes mismanagement by the country's military leaders, looks at the views of militant Islamicists, Coptic Christians and liberal capitalists, and stresses the rising frustrations of the young (75% of Egyptians are under the age of 35) and underemployed.

Robert L. Tignor. *Egypt: A Short History* (2011)

Tignor, a distinguished professor of history at Princeton, achieves the daunting task of providing a concise, accessible, and expert overview of 5,000 years of Egyptian life. He explains the great events and leaders but also explores the experiences of everyday people and how their lives are shaped by two key characteristics of Egypt across the ages: authoritarian rule and religious sentiment.

Barbara Watterson. *Women in Ancient Egypt* (1991)

Watterson argues in this readable, expert account full of surprising details, that Egyptian women enjoyed a higher status and better lives than many of their counterparts in the ancient world. Shereen El Feki's less academic, more journalistic *Sex and the Citadel* (2013) looks at modern issues facing Egyptian women and especially the country's often-repressive attitudes toward women's sexuality.

Toby Wilkinson. *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* (2010)

The *Los Angeles Times* called this a "magnificent, illuminating and refreshingly readable" account of ancient Egypt from the great pyramids to Cleopatra and much in-between.