

“There are deserts and there are deserts. But the Western (Libyan) Desert, a vast expanse that starts at the western banks of the Nile and continues well into Libya, is the desert of deserts.”

The Western Desert of Egypt: the Libyan Desert is part of the Sahara that lies in Egypt. It covers almost two thirds of Egypt.

Wonders in the Western Desert

There are wonders in the Western Desert that have finally gained the spotlight in **eco tourism**; there are the White and Black deserts, the Great Sand Sea, Gelf Kebeir, Jebel Uwaynat and the Valley of the Whales among many. At the frontier of Egypt.

Al-Fayoum

Location:

Located about 81 miles (130km) south west of Cairo, its name is deprived from Coptic *Payoum*, meaning the Sea or the Lake, which in turn comes from late Egyptian *pA y-m* of the same meaning, a reference to the nearby Lake Moeris, also known as Lake Qaroun.

Unfortunately, because of its site that was far from Cairo and Giza, the city of Fayoum is not really an urban centre or rural centre. It has several sites and it serves as a starting point for deep desert safari exploration.

Al fayoum at paranoiac period:

Al-Fayoum has been linked to the Nile Valley since antiquity; it was important site during the reign of **King Senusert I**, second king of the XII Dynasty, who saw in Fayoum as something more than hunting grounds. After the XII Dynasty, Al Fayoum declined not to be exploited until the Ptolemies period.

Lahun Pyramid, Hawara Pyramid, and the Fayoum Portraits;

The **Lahun** and **Hawara** pyramids, were built by King **Senusert II** .The **Hawara** pyramid was built by **Amnemhat III**, his mortuary temple may have been known to Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Pliny, and Strabo as the “**Labyrinth**”, the building was said to have over 3000 chambers from a single rock according to Herodotus; Strabo praised it as a wonder of the world. The pyramid itself contained some of the most complex security features of any found in Egypt and is perhaps the only one to come close to the sort of tricks Hollywood associates with such structures.



Fayoum Mummy Portraits

The Fayoum Mummy Portraits

Refer to the style of art than the geographical location of the portraits, although the majority of them were discovered in Fayoum. They are famed with their brilliant naturalistic style. They date back to the Roman times. it is indicated that there are about 900 mummy portraits are shown at museums around the world.

The Seven Waterwheels, the Obelisk of Senusert I, and 'Ain Al-Siliyn

The **Seven Waterwheels** date back to the *Ptolemies*, they are found about 3 km to the north of the city of Fayoum along the right bank of *Bahr Sinnuris*. Entering or leaving the town you pass the 13 meter high **Obelisk of Senusert I**, it is the only obelisk in Egypt that has a rounded tip.

'**Ain Al-Siliyn** is a natural spring halfway between Fayoum city and Lake of Qaroun with traces of titanium that is supposed to be good for the blood pressure.

Kom Oshim, Qasr Al-Sagha, Dimeh Al-Siba', and Widan Al-Faras

30km from Fayoum city to the north, coming in from Cairo, the first thing you see is the remains of the ancient Greco-Roman settlement of **Kom Oshim/Karanis**. In ancient times it was on the banks of *Lake Moeris*. The ruins are surrounded by nothing but desert as far to see by the eye. Karanis was the cult centre for the crocodile deity Sobek, and among the ruins of the city, there are two temples that are better preserved, the first one dedicated to the local crocodile deities and the second one to Sobek, Jupiter, Zeus, Amun, and Serapis.



Massive stone sinks, and the remains of one of the temple walls at Karanis

To the north of the Lake, there are several near sites like: **Qasr Al-Sagha, Dimeh Al-Siba'**, and **Widan Al-Faras**. These sites are best visited

accompanied by a guide, as the tracks leading to them are not always very clear.

Qasr Al-Sagha (*Palace of the Jewelers*) is a small Middle Kingdom temple with seven shrines and fantastic views of Jebel Qatrani.

Dimeh Al-Siba' (*Dimeh of the Lions*) is around 8km to the south of Qasr Al-Sagha; it was the site of a Ptolemaic town known as *Soknopaiou Nesos*. Its Greek name means 'Island of the Crocodile-god'. The ruins and the city wall are visible from a distance at 10m high and 5m thick in places. It once sat on the banks of the lake Qaroun, as the lake receded; however, the town was no longer sustainable. The lake now lies 11km away.



Parts of remains of the ancient town of Crocodilopolis at Karanis, L: men's bath, R: an enclosed sunken women's bath.

Qasr Qaroun, city of Madi, and Tunis

Sitting within the ruins of the ancient Ptolemaic frontier town of *Dionysias* are the two temples that make up **Qasr Qarun**. The town was founded in the 3rd century BC, only to be abandoned in the 4th century CE. To the west of the temples there are the remains of the mud brick fortress built by the **Emperor Diocletian** to protect the town against Bedouin tribes invading from the west.



The unique architecture and greenery at Tunis Village.

En route to Madinet Madi to the south of Qasr Qaroun you will find the village of **Tunis**.

Further south, is **city of Madi** – City of the Past? The temple, one of the most isolated and romantic sites of the Fayoum, was started during the reign of **Amnemhat III** and completed by his son **Amenemhat IV** of the XII Dynasty. In Graeco-Roman times it was known as ‘Narmouthis’. Excavators have discovered two separate towns at this site, but today the main monument at city of Madi is the small temple dedicated to Sobek, Horus and the serpent-goddess Renenutet.

Lake Qaroun, Wadi Al-Rayan and Wadi Al-Hitan:

Lake Qaroun, Wadi Al-Rayan, and Wadi Al-Hitan have been declared **protectorates** in 1989. Wadi Al-Hitan is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Lake Qaroun is remain of the ancient **Lake Moeris**. People say the name “**Qaroun**” for a while, especially when story about immense

treasures that might be buried deep beneath the lake. The reason for that is the name itself, it is named after a Jew and of Moses (عليه السلام) during his time in Egypt, who, according to the Quran.



A lone fishing boat on one of Wadi Al-Rayan lakes.

In ancient times, the lake was a freshwater lake and covered large area about 1155 square km, but by the end of the 19th century it has become too salty for the freshwater fish living in it.

The ***Auberge du Lac-Fayoum*** was once the hunting lodge of King Farouk, it was also where Allied and Arab leaders met to carve up the Middle East after WWII.

Wadi Al-Rayan consists of an upper lake and a lower lake with waterfalls in between. The area is home to 15 species of desert plants, 15 types of wild mammals, including the world's few remaining populations of the horned gazelle, 16 species of reptiles, and over 100 species of resident and migrating birds.



Fossilized Crocodile, Valley of the Whales.

Wadi Al-Hitan, *Valley of the Whales*, is part of the Wadi Al-Rayan. it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2005 for its hundreds of the earliest forms of whale. No other place in the world has the number, concentration and quality of such remains, as their accessibility and setting in an attractive and protected landscape..

Wadi Al-Hitan is a natural environment for animals threatened with extinction like the white deer, Egyptian deer, sand fox, wolf and rare migrating birds like the shahin falcon, deer falcon, and free falcon among others.

Al-Wadi Al-Jaded (New Valley)

West of the Nile, there are several pockets of life and vegetation in the middle of this wasteland. The area was named so by **Jamal Abdul Nasser** in 1958 when he approved a project to cultivate the Western Desert and have people move there to reduce the pressure on the Nile valley. This governorate considers the least populated.

In ancient times, the Western place of wildlife like; giraffes, lions, and elephants.

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