



## Alexandria

*Story by Mariam Hamdy*

The second largest city in Egypt after Cairo, Alexandria has an atmosphere that is decidedly more Mediterranean than Middle Eastern. The setting for the stormy relationship between Cleopatra and Mark Antony, Alexandria was also the centre of learning in the ancient world, but ancient Alexandria declined, and when Napoleon landed he found a sparsely populated fishing village.

Today, this mixture of old-world charm and modern streetwise wit makes up the city's attitude- a more temperamental yet friendlier ambience than the urban Cairo. It's that atmosphere that makes Alexandria a city to explore at random: It's as important to enjoy simply walking through the city as it is to see the sights.

In fact, walking through the city is a blast from the past: every street, particularly the corniche and the roads leading off it, retain faded architecture from the city's glorious cosmopolitan history. It's impossible not to feel nostalgic for these good old days, even if you've never part of them. Alexandria is a city for daydreamers and lovers- as well as those who'd appreciate a perfect seafood meal and a good laugh.

## The Alexandria library

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina was inaugurated in 2003 near the site of the Royal Library of Alexandria, once the largest library in the world and whose destruction remains a lively source of debate. The architecture of the entire structure is made of granite from Aswan, the walls of the library's exterior are carved with large letters, each from a total of 120 different scripts. The library houses four art galleries and a conference centre, making it an excellent cultural centre and meeting place as well as a library.

## El Montaza

Having been one of the palaces of the former Egyptian Royal family (the descendants of Muhammed Ali, El Montaza retains a sense of old world charm. Built in 1892 by Abbas Hilmi Pasha, the last Khedive of Egypt, El Montaza is a huge compound of gardens, pathways and gorgeous sceneries peppered with two main palaces and smaller complexes. The word "montaza" quite literally means 'promenade' but also refers to a walk, stroll, recreation ground and park, all of which fit perfectly to this scene.

## El Mursi abul-Abbas

El-Mursi Abul-Abbas Mosque is a famous mosque in Alexandria, dedicated to the Alexandrine Sufi saint el-Mursi Abul-Abbas. A beautiful structure located in the Anfoushi neighborhood near the Citadel of Qaitbey, the saint's name has quickly worked its way into the local's language as the most important figure to swear by (as you would on your mother's soul in most Middle Eastern dialects). Abul-Abbas became a Muslim teacher and was hailed Saint upon his death in 1286.

## Stanley Bridge

A very important highlight in Alexandria cityscape today, the Stanley bridge provides a much more sociable path between the various sections of Alexandria. The bridge itself is beautiful, sparking nostalgia as it shares aesthetic and architectural similarities to the Royal palaces in El Montaza. The construction of it is vast, being the first bridge in the country to be built into the sea, allowing for an excellent view of the Mediterranean. The walk across the bridge has become a favourite pastime for the locals and a must for tourists.

## Ba7ary restaurants

It'd be a shame to go to Alexandria and not eat seafood. The locals will always have a better restaurant than the one you've just suggested but there are a few that have been famous for their exquisite old school recipes and have become tourist attractions. Their locations are in the middle of narrow alleyways not far from the view of the sea. You'll be sat on wooden tables and chairs covered in plastic and drinking out of paper cups.

## The language

The Alexandrian locals are some of the most colourful people you'll meet in Egypt, and their language is no less so. Loud, funny and full of energy, the city's dialect is decidedly different and more forward than it's Cairene counterpart. Predominantly using the plural term even when talking about oneself, the joy of listening to Alexandrian dialect is one of hearing a really witty joke: forward, unapologetic and full of charm. Sometimes, as with all the Egyptian dialects, the language can be borderline brash.