

Alexandria:

Bride of the Mediterranean



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قلعة قايتباي مكان الفنار القديم.

Qayitbay castle on the place of ancient lighthouse.

"Tourism is neither luxury nor illusion; it is industry and a source of livelihood". So believed the people of ancient Alexandria, second city of the modern Arab Republic of Egypt, and the largest and most important port throughout of all North Africa. The city houses many cultural landmarks that date back into deep antiquity and it seems that God must have bestowed on it much of His Grace vis-à-vis its rare natural beauty and moderate climate throughout the seasons, making this one of the greatest tourist destinations not only in the Arab world but in Africa.

Spanning more than five thousand years, Alexandria today abounds with ancient as well as modern attractions. It contains many of the world's most

renowned religious, academic and cultural monuments, ranging from ancient neighbourhoods, home to mosques, churches and castles, museums, traditional houses, Pharaonic, Greek and Islamic archaeological sites, ancient marketplaces, magnificent palaces and lush gardens, to the New Library at Alexandria, the captivating beaches on the Mediterranean coast, dazzling new tourist facilities, including spas and charming cultural resorts.

Alexandria is also a place to experience the two types of water available here: fresh waters from the great Nile River via the Mahmudiyyah Aqueduct; and saline water from the Mediterranean Sea. ➔

City Tourism



متحف الجواهرات من الداخل.
The Royal Jewellery Museum from inside.

The City's Distinctive Location

Alexandria is located above the western corner of the Egyptian Delta in northern Egypt. It is perhaps best known to outsiders as the city that Alexander the Great chose to be his capital after he conquered Egypt in 333BC and which has been romantically referred to by European travellers as *Bride of the Mediterranean*. Indeed, the city has a distinctively European feel to it, perhaps because of a resemblance between the fortified Phoenician city of Tyre and the

location of the coastal port of Rakotis, or Raqudah, that attracted the attention of Alexander during his campaign of Egypt, and which inspired him to name this very spot so eponymously, although he famously spent only a few weeks here before his onward conquests.

Building and Planning the City

It is a well-known fact, therefore, that Alexander, the Macedonian prince, was the one who "built" the city of Alexandria. In

actual fact, he merely transited through the area on his way to the Oasis at Siwa via the province of al-Buayrah. Indeed, his excursion lasted no longer than a few weeks, during which he approved the project for the restoration of the city.

Alexander assigned the task of planning the city to the engineer Dinocrates (C.390 B.C.), who unfortunately died without ever seeing it. The task of continuing its construction was then given to Ptolemus I, also known as Sotir, or Saviour. He generously facilitated the beautifying of the city and its completion according to the notion of reviving the classical Greek city state, bringing together the entire heritage of Greek civilization. He thus also incorporated within its construction the *Mosin* (pl. *Mosay*), or temples of the goddesses of the arts, with a central altar dedicated to these goddesses surrounded by sanctified features. The *Mosin* was also a centre for scientists, people of letters and intellectuals to reside communally on a permanent basis. Such people were paid high salaries and had access to all the latest scientific research. It was in this *Mosin* that the famous Library of Alexandria was to be built, and it was thanks to this that city experienced a golden age of scientific, literary and linguistic studies characteristic of in the ancient world, from the time of the Pharaonic era through to the Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine periods, right up to and including the Islamic conquest.

Egypt had known the importance of perpendicular thoroughfares in the planning of cities from the beginning. Even the written symbol adopted in ancient Egypt to denote the word "city" was a circle dissected by two perpendicular streets. Then came the Greek notion of city planning, which was more sophisticated. One of the clearest examples of this is the city of Alexandria under Dinocrates' planning rules, who based his ideas and theories on those publicized earlier by Hippodamus during the Fifth Century. This is characteristically net-like, consisting of straight streets that pass through the city from north to south, and from east to west, in perpendicular lines that divide the area into squares, rendering it similar to a chessboard. At the centre of these intersecting streets are two thoroughfares: Kanub Street, running from the north-east to the Western Gate in the south-east, and Sima Street, which used to run from the Sun Gate at the Maryut Lake in the south-east to close to the beginning of the bridge connecting the beach to Pharos Island.

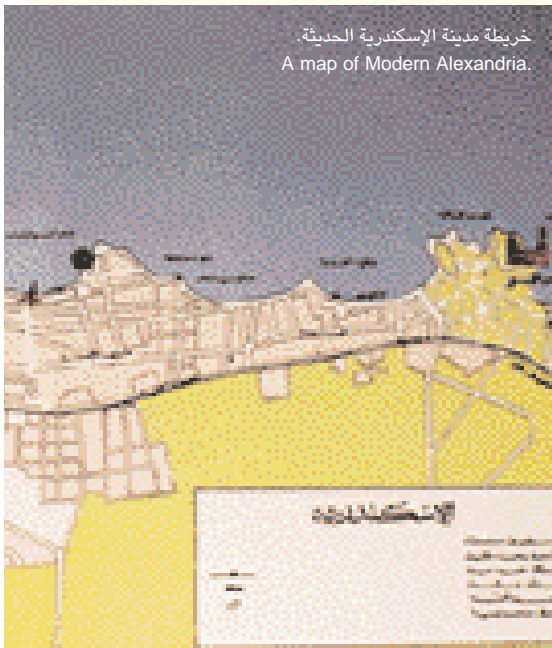
Inside the walls that encircled the city at ➤

City Tourism



تمثال العلم والحياة بميدان زويل.
The Statue of Science & Life at Zuel Square.

خريطة مدينة الإسكندرية الحديثة.
A map of Modern Alexandria.



that time, Alexandria was 30 stadiuns long (1 stadiun = 186 metres) and 7 or 8 stadiuns in width (or approximately 1,400 metres). It was divided into only five neighbourhoods, named in Greek. The most important of these was the royal neighbourhood (bordered by Sima Street) to the west, the Jewish neighbourhood to the east, Kanub Street to the south and the eastern port, and the Lukias Cape (the al-Silsila district today) to the north. Egyptian archaeologist Mahmud Pasha al-Falaki exerted tremendous efforts to delimit the topography of the city. He recorded important findings about ancient Alexandria and drew up maps for it, which were of great importance in illustrating many of its landmarks. He also found during his excavations parts of the streets cobbled with black stones.

The city's planning in the Greek era remained fundamentally unchanged throughout the Roman era, despite the addition of new neighbourhoods to the east of the city. Following their conquest of Alexandria, the Arabs also did not modify planning. The city, therefore, kept its straight streets that intersect at right angles, and both its thoroughfares remained the same. The area of the intersection of the two thoroughfares now came to be known as the city centre.

Ancient Mosques in Alexandria

Ever since the Arabs conquered Alexandria under the leadership of 'Amr bin al-'Aas in 642, the city has become home to many imams, saints and scholars, not least because of its distinct geographical location. As the mosque, alongside the halls of learning, is a central gathering point for Islamic architectural elements and arts within an Islamic city, and since the mosque always represents a main focal point in city planning, its numerous functions required that it be located in the centre of the city, in order to be near the masses, as well as to

facilitate the holding of Friday and other prayers. Accordingly, the *Jami'* mosque became the first element in the planning of an Islamic city. It was around the mosque that the city was planned and it was towards the mosque that the streets lead.

As such, the centrality of the mosque to the Islamic city came to resemble the centrality of the *acropolis* in the Greek city and the *capitol* in the Roman city - albeit for different reasons. The *acropolis* was built atop the highest point in the city centre. This phenomenon was repeated with the Romans who also chose a high place for their capitol. Muslims established more than one mosque in the ancient cities they conquered, although the *Jami'* remained the mosque where Friday Prayers were held up until the beginning of the Mamluk era. Consequently, the companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad set up five mosques in Alexandria, which was a large enough city for this purpose.

Ibn al-Hakam, author of the oldest historical text to have reached us regarding the mosques of Alexandria, tells us that these five mosques are: The Mosque of Prophet Moses at the Lighthouse; The Mosque of Solomon; The "Mosque of Dhil Qarnayn, or al-Khidr, located near the acacia trees in the Qaysariyyah district (a neighbourhood in the ancient city centre); The Second Mosque of al-Khidr at the Eastern Gate of the city; and The Grand Mosque of 'Amr bin al-'Aas.

Present Mosques in Alexandria

Some of the most important features of Islamic civilization in Alexandria include schools and religious institutes belonging to al-Azhar University (Cairo), which teach Shari'a and fiqh (jurisprudence), the associations dedicated to memorizing the Holy Qur'an, and hundreds of mosques, the most important of these perhaps being those that are concentrated in the Jumruk neighbourhood, considered to be the city's religious centre of gravity.

The total number of the mosques here stands at around eighty. One of the most important is The Mosque of Sidi Abi al-'Allas al-Mursi, characterized by its high-rise minaret and four domes. Another is The Mosque of Imam Busiri, who was a disciple of Abu al-'Abbas al-Mursi, and was famous for his Sufi poetry that extolled the love of God and praised the Holy Prophet. One of his poems is *Nahj al-Burdah* (Trans. *The Path of the Garment*). Other important mosques include The Mosque of Sidi Yaqut al-'Arsh and The Mosque of Sidi Jabir al-Ansari. ➔



هنا وقف الإسكندر ليختار مدينته.
Here stood Alexander to plan his city.

It is perhaps best known to outsiders as the city that Alexander the Great chose to be his capital after he conquered Egypt in 333BC and which has been romantically referred to by European travellers as Bride of the Mediterranean.

All of these mosques are located in Masjid Square in the al-Anfushi neighbourhood, which overlooks the Mediterranean. The Mosque of Ibrahim the Commander, which is in the locality of al-Raml Station, was built in 1240, and is to Alexandria what al-Azhar is to Cairo. The al-Attarin Mosque, which was destroyed during the Mamluk period, was rebuilt in 1901 and is renowned for its Mamluk minaret, which has a high architectural value. The Sidi al-Qabbari Mosque in al-Basal Harbour, The al-Burdayni Mosque in the al-Labban neighbourhood, The al-Fatah Mosque in Bakus vary in their architectural styles, both in terms of their exterior as well as interiors. Most - if not all - fit perfectly the meaning of the word Jami' (lit. all-inclusive) as they contain facilities for the youth, education, treatment of the sick, zakat (almsgiving) houses, and other Islamic social activities, in addition to being places dedicated to worship and the teaching of divine laws.

Educational and Cultural Facilities

The city of Alexandria boasts many educational and cultural facilities at all levels, up to and including higher or university education through the colleges of

Alexandria University. The latter was established in 1940, starting with the establishment of only two faculties: literature and medicine. This expanded to include comprehensive colleges in all scientific, artistic and literary branches of knowledge. Subsequently, many private universities and institutes of learning were added, as well as the Senghor International Francophone University to teach Africans and foreigners, as well as other specialized national institutes. Recently, Mubarak University City was established in the newly-added areas to the west of Alexandria.

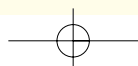
Libraries and Art Museums

Alexandria has always prided itself on being the first city in the world to have housed the largest world-class library in antiquity. Perhaps one might recall the ancient Library of Alexandria, which was destroyed. Among the city's libraries are The Municipal Library, which is one of the oldest libraries possessing rare manuscripts and books on the Islamic conquests and ancient times. This is located in Menashsha Street in the Makram Beg neighbourhood. Next to it is the Fine Arts Museum and sidewalk bookstands

which exhibit and sell all variety of books and magazines, in Prophet Daniel Street in the city centre.

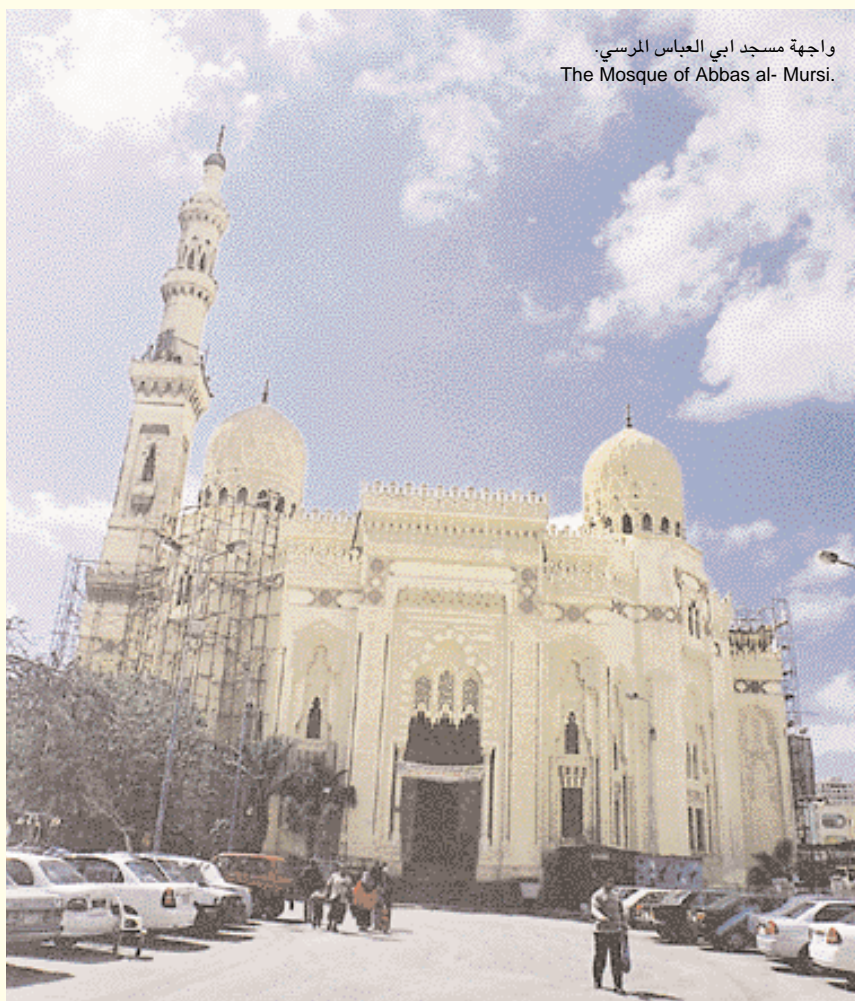
Public libraries are widespread throughout the palaces and cultural centres that are run by the Ministry of Culture and the Cultural Development Fund. The New Library of Alexandria, which is an alternative to the ancient library that had been destroyed, is probably the latest in a long line of library centres throughout the city. This is housed opposite the al-Shatibi District, or "Lisan al-Silsilah, on the Mediterranean coast in the ancient royal neighbourhood, home to the many civilizations that have prospered here, including Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Islamic.

A glimpse of this new library from the outside illustrates its stature. It is shaped like an incomplete cylinder whose surface is tilted towards the horizon of the Mediterranean Sea, indicating that the light of the civilization of ancient Egypt shines over all human civilizations. Covering its walls is a twenty centimetre-thick layer of Aswan granite, on which various symbols and alphabetical letters representing the languages of various world civilizations, indicates the library's position as a bridge linking Egypt's ➤





City Tourism



واجهة مسجد ابي العباس المرسي.
The Mosque of Abbas al- Mursi.

heritage human heritage generally - a lighthouse beaming across the world.

The seven floors of the library, each one dedicated to the civilizations within a certain historical epoch, progress gradually from bottom to top capturing the attention of observers. The first floor introduces us to the most ancient of these historical epochs, progressing gradually upwards to the seventh floor which expresses the most recent epoch, a reference to the light and radiance of thought. It could symbolize other things as well. Each floor contains material on various types of art, science and literature belonging to more than one civilization, progressing successively from ancient times to medieval and modern, until it reaches the civilization of the Twenty-first Century on the seventh floor, with all the latest intellectual achievements that the human mind has attained so far.

The impressions that the visitor to this great cultural edifice returns with shows that the

Arabs and Muslims were nothing like the way they have been painted historically. Indeed, a visit will show how Islam encourages learning, honouring the wise and educated, preserving the tools of learning, establishing libraries and centres of learning, and promoting of the drive publication and translation of texts and documents.

Palaces and Archaeological Museums

Alexandria houses many magnificent palaces, the most famous and important of which is the al-Muntazah Palace on the Mediterranean Sea. It lies at the centre of 350 acres of fertile agricultural land amid lush gardens containing varieties of tree and flora. Besides this palace there is the al-Salamlak Palace which was devoted to the male courtiers of the former king, and a third palace called the al-Haramlak Palace, devoted to the womenfolk of the courtiers. All of these were built in an Islamic style.

Another is the Antoniadis Palace, in al-Nuzhah Gardens, which once again lies amid exquisite gardens, dotted with statues carved by some of the world's greatest artists. In addition are the al-Safa Palace in Zizinya neighbourhood, al-'Urubah Palace, Ra's al-Tin Palace in Ra'as al-Tin, or Bahri, quarter, and Emir Kamal Palace in the Istanly quarter, among others.

Alexandria is perhaps one of the few international cities to house a large number of living museums of ancient archaeology. These include Serabium Museum, or 'Amud al-Sawari (lit. Mast Post), which is 25 metres tall and was built among the ruins of the Sirabium, in 397, in memory of Emperor Decledianus. There is also the Koum al-Shaqafah Cemetery in Karmuz neighbourhood, the largest Roman cemetery in Alexandria, consisting of three floors carved in rock formations at the depth of a hundred feet. This dates back to the Second Century CE and has a distinctive mix of Pharaonic and Roman art. There is also Ra'as al-Sawda' Museum, Qabbara Cemetery, and Mustafa Kamel Cemetery in the Rushdi neighbourhood. The latter graveyard, in particular, stands out with its inscriptions and vivid colours which recount the daily life of those lying therein and their religious beliefs. The cemetery contains four sections, all of which are carved in underground rock formations.

Another historical landmark is the Roman amphitheatre located in the Koum al-Dikka quarter. This is considered to be a unique archaeological site in Egypt and includes ten marble rows of rising seats in the shape of a semi-circle, and is in remarkably good condition. There are numerous other museums at the bottom of the sea, of course. Work is currently underway to prepare them for the pleasure of sightseers and visitors.

As for the those archaeological museums that have been especially established, the most important is the Greco-Roman Museum in the al-Mesallah quarter which houses rare Greek and Roman archaeological collections - about forty thousand pieces in total - dating back to the period between the beginning of the Third Century BC and the Seventh Century CE. Prominent among these pieces are the statues of Tanagra. They also include a rare collection of ancient coins.

The Qaytbay Castle Museum, in the al-Anfushi neighbourhood; the Maritime Museum; and the Royal Jewellery Museum, in al-Zahra' Palace in Zizinyah are also notable. The latter is a rare and magnificent archaeological masterpiece. Its halls hold many rare paintings, arabesque designs and statues, as well as a collection of rare ➤





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The city itself also has varieties of restaurants, attractions, public and private parks, and orchards on the edges of the city. The streets are decorated with statues and huge marble columns.

and precious jewellery belonging to the dynasty of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha.

The Rare Coins Museum is a unique museum that holds more than two thousand coins of various values. These include Alexandrian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic coins, as well as golden ducats, some of which are from civilizations dating back more than 33 centuries.

Alexandria has many other museums too, including science museums, such as the Museum of Marine Biology, in al-Anfushi, the Animal Museum in al-Nuzhah, the Anthropology Museum at the College of Literatures, and the Health Museum at the Institute of Medical Research.

In the domain of arts, there are similarly many museums, including the Museum of Fine Arts, which holds works of art by

some of the greatest Egyptian as well as international artists. This is located in Menashsha Street in the Muharram Beg quarter. The Mahmud Sa'id Museum of Fine Arts is in the Janaklis quarter; the Sayyid Darwish Theatre and Museum is currently undergoing preparations to transform it into an Egyptian opera house; and the Museum of the College of Fine Arts is in the Mazlum neighbourhood.

Qayitbay Castle

The Qayitbay Castle, which was built by the Muslim commander Sultan al-Nasser bin Qalawoun to defend the city, was built on Pharos Island in the al-Anfushi neighbourhood. This is one of the most renowned castles in the world by dint of its buildings fortified in an intelligent, geometric design. It lies in the northern edge of the entrance to the eastern port in the same location as the great Lighthouse of Alexandria. The castle was built in the Fifteenth Century and consists of three floors in the manner of medieval castles. Inside, the Maritime Museum was set up to revive the ancient maritime heritage of Alexandria. Ruins of the ancient lighthouse, one of the "seven wonders of the world", were found in the vicinity of the castle in 1961. Historical documents indicate that an island called Pharos, which means "lighthouse", was located in the same place that the city of Alexandria now stands. Its exact location was where Qayitbay Castle now stands. The castle contains a massive, 120-metre-long building. Work on building the lighthouse started during the reign of Ptolemy I in 333BC and continued for 700 days. Then a series of earthquakes affected the crust of the earth in the area causing the lighthouse to fall into the sea. The castle was built on the base of the lighthouse in 1477 by Sultan Ashraf Qayitbay, one of the Circassian Mamluks. There is also a colossal amount of archaeological finds under the water in this area, including huge statues of red granite, each up to 25 tons in weight and 7 metres in length. From among these, the statue of Isis was picked out of the water in the 'Amud al-Sawari, or Serabium Temple area. The emblem of the lighthouse is a square-shaped piece of granite that weighs

nearly four tons and has a hole which points to "a glowing fire" inside. Remnants of Introdus Island, which used to house a Greek royal palace, were also found, in addition to many other archaeological discoveries. Divers have also succeeded in capturing the entire submerged lighthouse in the vicinity of Qayitbay Castle on film.

Churches and Religious Temples

Alexandria has a plethora of churches and cathedrals as well as synagogues, including among them al-Karrazah al-Murqusiyyah Cathedral in the al-Raml Station neighbourhood, which was built by Saint Mark, one of the disciples of Jesus according to the Bible. The church is basilican and has a hall leading to the graves of the Coptic patriarchs who lived here until the Eleventh Century. Other churches include the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Middle East and Africa in the Minor al-Mashiyyah Square, St Mark's Church, the Roman Catholic Cathedral, the Evangelical Church in the al-'Attarin neighbourhood, Dibbanah Church in al-Raml Station, the Armenian Catholic Church, and the Monastery of Saint Mina the Miraculous in the al-'Aameriyyah neighbourhood.

Among the well-known temples is the Synagogue at Prophet Daniel Street in al-Raml Station neighbourhood.

All these religious places of worship are architectural masterpieces in their own right, both on the inside and outside. Religious activities are exercised in complete freedom and, moreover, these churches and temples are considered as attractions that appeal to tourists from all over the world.

The City's Markets

Alexandria became famous during the various Islamic eras for its industries and the quality of their products. The most important of these industries was textiles, pottery, glass, soap and shipbuilding. The city was perhaps most famous for its textiles, however, and the Arabs used Alexandrian textiles for the beautifully-woven, black cloth that is draped over the Holy Ka'aba (*Kiswah*). ➔



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Among the most famous markets of this ancient city, which captivates the visitor's mind, are those that are located in the centre of the city, such as the al-'Attarin Market, which specialized originally in perfumery, groceries, seeds and grains. Today, it also sells clothes, appliances, shoes, and so on.

There are also ancient markets that have maintained their unique character throughout the ages, such as al-Khayt Market, which sells all kinds of yarn, buttons, zippers, and all manner of embroidery and knitting needs. Zanqat al-Sittat Market specializes in womens' needs. The Jewellers' Market speaks for itself, with an emphasis on gold.

The markets include fabulous buildings constructed in architectural styles that are decorated with beautiful drawings, and high and wide apertures and rising rows of stores. There are, in addition, modern malls that have proliferated throughout the residential neighbourhoods, both poor and affluent. Finally, Alexandria has many antique stores that can be found mainly in the vicinity of the harbour.

Tourist and Entertainment Facilities

Alexandria occupies a coastal strip of up to 70 kilometres of seashore. It is full of many tourist and entertainment facilities, such as cinemas, theme parks, clubs, theatres and the like. The city's coastal thoroughfare has been decorated and was expanded to double its original size. Many entertainment and tourist sites have been built close to the thoroughfare, in a manner that does not block natural visibility of the beauty of the sea and its shores which extend from Abu Qir to the end of the northern coast close to Cairo, where tourist villages, designed along the lines of the world's state-of-the-art tourist styles, stretch along the entire coast.

In Alexandria, there are tens of thousands of furnished apartments spread throughout the city's neighbourhoods, in addition to scores of hotels. There are first-class hotels, such as the Sheraton in the al-Muntazah neighbourhood, Helnan Palestine and Ramada Renaissance in the Sidi Bishr neighbourhood, The Plaza in the Zizinyah neighbourhood, as well as Saint Giovanni and Regency. Lower ranking hotels can also be found along the coast as well as within the city's environs.

The city itself also has varieties of restaurants, attractions, public and private parks, and orchards on the edges of the city. The streets are decorated with statues and huge marble columns.



The Mosque of Ibrahim the Commander

جامع القائد ابراهيم بمحطة الرمل.

City of Consecutive Civilizations

Alexandria is truly a city of civilizations. The diversity of archaeological and religious attractions, which number over twenty from different epochs and represent different religions, are testament to this. The city is now gently shaking off the sands of time and is gradually revealing to us its mysteries and

secrets. Facing the Mediterranean, Alexandria has been Bride of the Sea since antiquity, allowing civilizations to plunge in its waters and excavate past glories to assume a prominent place among the centres of cultural and intellectual radiance. The sea has always been a kind companion to this history, for it was always faithful, preserving the city and embracing its archaeological finds. ■