

Fayoum – a tranquil world just one hour from chaotic Cairo

Ecotourism activities in and around Fayoum Oasis Hiking in Wadi Rayan Protected Area



HIKING IN WADI RAYAN PROTECTED AREA

The Fayoum, a rural area only 90 km from Cairo, has a rich and varied cultural heritage. Beyond its history, the Fayoum has long been distinguished by its natural beauty, which is rare to the settled lands of the Nile Valley and Delta. With its lakes, palm trees, pristine desert areas, fossil remains, bird sanctuaries, and rural quietude, the area has much to offer to visitors.

Visitors to the Fayoum invariably list the spectacular desert of Fayoum as one of the main reasons to come to the area. The combination of stunning landscape and the proximity to Cairo make the Fayoum an attractive destination. All typical desert features of the Western desert can be found around Fayoum including the rocky desert, the sandy desert, and the gravel desert. Two large areas in the Fayoum consisting of lakes, adjacent wetlands and desert – Lake Qarun and Wadi Rayan – have been declared protected due to their geological and paleontological importance and unique biodiversity.

Hiking tours allow visitors to experience nature in an unobtrusive, quiet manner and take participants far away from beaten tourist tracks to a parts of Wadi Rayan Protected Area that are rarely visited, yet unique in their scenic and naturalistic value.

The Fayoum Ecotourism project has developed a number of hikes in Wadi Rayan Protected Area as well as a network of local hiking guides. All hikes have been planned with the Protected Area Management Unit to ensure a minimal impact on the environment and are guided by a community guard of the Protected Area. Some of the hikes are close to the lake and offer the possibility to swim. Others include a visit to local monasteries and a land reclamation area. A visit to the Waterfall Area, the Park Visitor Center and to local handicraft producers can also be arranged upon request.

Sample Itinerary A

1 day hike in Wadi Rayan Protected Area. Desert, Lakes, Wetlands and Land Reclamation

This is a medium rated walk that provides visitors with an insight into the flora and fauna of the Protected Area, while at the same time introducing them to a land reclamation area where visitors can learn how barren desert land is transformed into lush farmland.

Departure from Cairo is at 6 am. Arrival in Wadi Rayan at 8 am. The hike starts at the Mudaware Mountain of Wadi Rayan, one of the most popular viewpoints of the park and will lead over a scenic escarpment that offers a unique view on the Wady Rayan lakes to a small hidden bay, where a clean and sandy beach invites people to swim and rest. After a short walk along dunes the land reclamation area of Saydna Khidr is reached and participants walk along drainage and irrigation canals and fields before reaching the small cafeteria of the village. The cafeteria stocks soft drinks. At around 1.30 pm drive to the Water Fall area of Wadi Rayan. Visit of the Waterfall Area and guided tour through the Park Visitor Center. Departure to Cairo at around 4 pm.

Sample Itinerary B

1 day hike in Wadi Rayan Protected Area. Desert, Spring Area, Desert Monasteries and Protected Area Management

One of the most important natural habitats of Wadi Rayan is represented by the spring area of Wadi Rayan that is nestled between limestone ridges and dune fields of Wadi Rayan, off the main road west of the Lower Lake. It is an excellent example of an uninhabited Saharan oasis that contains four springs supporting the highest diversity of desert plant and animal life in the Protected Area. In the 1970s, Monks from Wadi Natrun came to Wadi Rayan to retake possession of an abandoned monastery located in a rocky hill above the spring area. Today,

about twenty monks are living in the monastery. They have adapted to the harsh environment, built rooms and churches in the rocks.

The tour will start from Cairo at 6 am. You will drive to Wadi Rayan Protected Area and arrive at the Protected Area Outpost at 8.30 am. After a short introduction of the hiking guides, you will start heading over dunes into the spring area. The walk will lead towards the first and second spring, include a visit of the monastery and a climb of the monastery mountain. End of the hike and departure towards Cairo at around 3 pm.

Duration of the walk is 5 – 6 hours (excluding rests). Requires basic fitness and suitable walking shoes. We recommend that you spend the night prior to the walk in one of the hotels of Fayoum.

Sample Itinerary C – 1 day hiking from Wadi Rayan Protected Area to the Amba Samuel Monastery in Minya

This is a spectacular walk for experienced and trained hikers that takes participants from the green fiords of the Wadi Rayan lakes through a unique desert scenery consisting of white sand dunes, rocky escarpments with embedded fossils to a remote monastery 35 km south of Wadi Rayan. The hike covers one entire day including transport from/to Cairo. The walk is technically not difficult, but rather long and participants must be ready to walk for 6 to 7 hours. To be able to start early in the morning and avoid a long transfer time, we recommend that you spend the night prior to the walk in one of the hotels of Fayoum.

Departure from Cairo at 5.30 am. Arrival in the Spring Outpost of Wadi Rayan Protected area at 8 am. Coffee/Tea break. Briefing on the walk and introduction of the walking guides. The hike will start at 8.30. Arrival at the Monastery of Anba Samuel at around 4 pm. Transfer back to Cairo is through the Assiut-Cairo highway. Arrival back in Cairo at 7 pm.

How can you book a tour?

The Fayoum Ecotourism project has trained a number of guides that belong to the Community Center of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels in Fayoum. We recommend you contact the Center or its guides to arrange for guidance and assistance.

If you would like to use your own tour guide, contact one of the desert guides listed below. They are familiar with the desert around Fayoum and can help you in arranging your trip safely.

If you would like to have a specialized naturalist for an in-depth explanation of flora and fauna of the Protected Area, please contact the Headquarters of Wadi Rayan Protected Area. All contacts are listed in the *Hiking Service Facts* table.

The long desert hike and spring area hike need to be lead by experienced desert guides. Be advised that, under no circumstances, should you attempt these walks unaccompanied.

Remember:

Ecotourism means local community benefit so please remember all guides and local service providers are developing their skills through guiding and purchase local goods and services as much as possible.

The hikes take place inside a Protected Area. Please take special care of the environment and wildlife during your stay by observing the environmental code of the Park.

Hiking Service Facts

<i>Contact of local desert guides</i>	Muhamed Saleh Shalaan Village, Fayoum Tel: 084 685 334 Omar Muhamed Ahmed Shalaan Village, Fayoum Tel: 084 685 318
<i>Do you need professional and qualified guiding services / Want the help of an operator to arrange the tour?</i>	Community Service Center of the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Cairo University, Fayoum Branch. Tel: 084 33 776 Osama Abdel Naby Mobile: 012 790 2448 Email: semsemamon@hotmail.com Ibrahim Abdel Baset Mobile: 010 542 7679 Email: hemoamon@hotmail.com Abdel Karim Barasy, Tour Operator Mobile: 010 602 3742 Email: kimotaba@hotmail.com
<i>Fees of the hiking guides</i>	LE 50 to LE 70 per day for the local desert guides LE 100 to 150 for the trained ecotour guides.
<i>Services available during the trip</i>	Simple but clean sanitation facilities in the cafeteria in the land reclamation village Sayedna Khidr. The cafeteria also provides tea, soft drinks and upon request very simple meals. Lunch or dinner is available at the Moon Valley Cafeteria in Wadi Rayan at the Waterfall area. Clean sanitation facilities in the Auberge du Lac, Panorama Shakhouk Hotel and the Cafeteria in Wadi Rayan.
<i>Permits needed to organize this tours</i>	No permits are needed. A police escort is mandatory. Procedures at the Police checkpoint at the entrance of Fayoum can be speeded up by informing the Fayoum Tourism Police and/or the Fayoum Tourism Authority at least one day prior to the trip. The Police needs to know the itinerary, number and nationality of the participants. Entrance tickets to Wadi Rayan Protected Area can be purchased at the entrance of the park.

<i>Useful contads</i>	Fayoum Tourism Authority Mahmoud Mustafa, Manager Fayoum Governorate Tel: 084 343 213 Fax: 084 337 304 Wadi Rayan Protected Area Headquarter Shakshouk Village Tel: 084 572001/2 Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency Nature Conservation Sector Tel: 02 5248 792
<i>Hotels in Fayoum</i>	Auberge du Lac Hotel, Fayoum Tel: 084 572 001/2 Panorama Shakhouk Hotel, Shakshouk, Fayoum Tel: 084 830 757
<i>Suggested readings</i>	<i>The Fayoum: History and Guide.</i> Neil Hewison. AUC Press, 2001. The most comprehensive introduction to the cultural, historical, geographical and social background of today's Fayoum. <i>Egypt's Pocket Guide: The Fayoum and Wadi el Rayan.</i> Alberto Siliotti. AUC Press, 2003. A brandnew pocket guide for visitors that contains on 48 pages a lot of useful information, maps, drawings and photographs. <i>Atlas of Wadi Rayan. Egyptian Italian Environment Program/IUCN.</i> 2002. Atlas containing pictures, texts and maps about Wadi Rayan Protected Area. The atlas can currently not be purchased but is available through the Nature Conservation Sector of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (02 5248792). http://www.wadielrayan.org/index.htm Official website of the Wadi Rayan Protected Area with plenty of information , maps and photos on the area visited.

This information sheet has been prepared by the Fayoum Ecotourism Project
Email: ecotourismfayoum@nsce-inter.com
Tel: 02 735 1045 / 737 0673