

MENA HOUSE HOTEL

Since 1869

Pyramids road, P.O. box 12556, Giza, Cairo, Egypt | Telephone: +202 33 77 3222

Historical Background

The origin of the Mena House was that of a royal lodge for the Khedive Ismail, then ruler of Egypt.

In 1869 with the opening of the Suez Canal, specifically for the visit of the Empress Eugenie a road was laid between Cairo and the Pyramids, and a pair of lodges were built, One was on the rocky plateau next to the Great Pyramid, The other on lower ground.

1880s: Egypt was becoming a fashionable and chic winter resort for European travellers. The climate near the Great Pyramid in Giza, outside Cairo, was obviously better than in town. This peaceful environment was the right place for a young couple to settle in front of the Great Pyramid.

1883: Frederick and Jessie Head, a couple on their honeymoon, acquired a former Khedival hunting lodge near the Great Pyramid. They enlarged the house and added a second floor. Finding the air beneficial, he began to erect a small sanatorium, hoping that invalids like himself might resort there, and gain a longer lease of life. Seeking a name for their estate, Professor A . H. Saya made the suggestion that it should be called Mena House, after the first king referenced in the Tablet of Abydos.

A few years later, Frederick died suddenly during one of his trips to England and Mena House was sold to another wealthy couple, Hugh and Ethel Locke-King, who while wintering in Egypt for their health, had discovered the salubrious properties of the air at the Pyramids. One of the reasons the Locke-Kings had bought Mena House was because they could not find a hotel with the standard of comfort that Ethel required for an anchorage for six month at a time.

Once the couple had settled into their desert house, Ethel decided to create a hotel. Mrs. Locke-King hired a Cairo-based English architect, Henri Favarger, to create their hotel, which was plotted out in the desert beside the lodge, this the Locke-Kings retained as their own private residence.

Favarger was an architect of some talent. For the hotel he draws inspiration from the vernacular and religious architecture of old Cairo.

The main facade of the hotel was formed of irregular sections of different heights, some recessed, and some set forward, each with terraces and proof parapets. Capitalizing on the view was a large front terrace with wooden framing in an Arabesque style, a part of which was glazed for protection against sand whipped up by the wind.

The Mena House “Family Hotel” with 80 guest rooms was opened in 1887.

Room were spacious with 10foot high ceiling, fire place and furnished with English furniture. The hotel was appointed with a billiard room, a darkroom for the use of amateur photographers, a studio for artists, a modish dining room, a library, the services of a French chef in the fashionable restaurant as well as of the Italian photographer Fasani, who had his studio at the hotel

The first travel agent to start booking hotel rooms for travelers coming to Egypt, was

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Thomas Cook, who advertized in their magazine The Excursionist the availability of Mena House Accommodation Coupons.

For the convenience of the hotel guests, arrangements were made with Thomas Cook and they provided a single four horse coach service to the city which was known as Mena RA.

Four years after the opening, a swimming bath was added to the hotel, the first of its kind in Egypt. The Egyptian Gazette described it as a revolutionary pool, with 85 feet long and 25 feet wide, with water supplied from the same spring which the hotel drew its drinking water. The same year, it was the first hotel to announce that it would stay open all year long and no longer close during the hot summer season.

Despite all the wealthy visitors who came to Cairo, Mena House was run at a loss because the Locke-Kings were very extravagant Finally Mrs. Locke-Kings decided to appoint their Polish friend, Baron Ernest de Rodakowsky as hotel manager, and she continued to have the controlling interest in Mena House during the seven years that Baron Rodakowsky was there. It was Rodakowsky, with the architect Henri Favarger, who built the stables, the stand for gymkhana And later in 1999, the Golf Course.

1889, 4 November: the leading society figure of all European spas and resorts, from the springs of Baden to the roulette tables of Monte Carlo, visited Mena House. His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales (top) had been welcomed by His Highness the Khedive, who showed him the Pyramids. Lunch was served at the old 'kiosque' of Empress Eugenie. After lunch, The Egyptian Gazette reported, they 'went over to the Mena Hotel and took coffee there.'

1895–1896: After Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes book and his wife Louise (Touie) spent the winter of 1895-96 at the Mena House Hotel.

1896: later the hotel was leased to Schick and Weckel who managed the hotel until 1904 when the Locke Kings sold the hotel to George Nungovich Egyptian Hotels company for the sum of £ 65,000

1898: Cairo received electricity (gas since 1870). Ernst Rodakowski sold his shares in the Mena House for £45,000.

December **1899** the Golf Course was opened as a sandy Golf Course. And it was turned into grass in **1917** by Roy Wilson.

1900: Four tramways were traversing Cairo and a fifth was being built to run from Giza to the pyramids. Trains ran from Helouan and Tura. English department stores and shopping districts were set up. At the Mena House, a lift had been built in the main building and for the first time electric light illuminated each floor, and all public rooms. The 1900 spring season at the Mena House offered a croquet lawn, lawn tennis, shooting, gymkhanas and the swimming bath. A daily coach service was in operation. The whole city was buzzing with word of the new tram scheduled for autumn completion In November, the new electric tram

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was proudly mentioned in every advert. Of course, this new means of convenience was great for business. Leaving the Pont des Anglais downtown every 40 minutes, it increased the traffic to the Pyramids, from seven in the morning until nine in the evening, when the last train chugged back. There was one first-class carriage, built in America with a sitting-room for 24 passengers, 36 passengers were travelling third class. With the new golf course in place, the hotel now held its famous gymkhanas on the fairway of the 9th and 18th holes. The grand stand was at the foot of the Great Pyramid. The idea was to leave Cairo with the 12.20 train for lunch at the Mena House, and take the 5.40 to return to the city.

The **1913-1914** tourism season was great in Egypt, but the First World War came to Egypt amongst martial law. A camp was erected behind Mena House to house the Australian troops, and was known as Mena Camp, But later **during the First World War**, the Mena House became one of the hospitals, and remained so for the rest of the war.

The 5th December 1924 The Prime Minister Saad Zaghloul decided to retreat at Mena House, after the resignation of his government.

In 1925, Charles Behelr's Egyptian Hotels Ltd. Acquired the Mena House in a wholesale takeover, of former George Nungovich properties.

Fred Herrling was appointed as General Manager and Milo Niederhauser as assistant Manager.

Charlie Chaplin arrived for a few weeks with his companion, He was busy writing a script for his next film but took time off to give a tea party at the terrace, among his guests was The Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie and King Alfonso of Italy.

The Kataab family has run the antiques shop at the hotel since the hotel opened? Grandfather Ibrahim was a well known Egyptologist himself, and the generations to follow inherited his love for antiques. King Gustav of Sweden was a true archaeologist and while at the Mena House viewed the Kataab collection

The Aga Khan loved Mena House. He and his beautiful Begum often stayed at the hotel. 1936 visit happened to coincide with the Aga Khan's jubilee and the begum had all her jewels with her. Milo, the hotel manager, saw that guards surrounded Mena House and the hotel safe was stuffed like Tutankhamoun's tomb.

NOVEMBER 1943, the Mena House saw one of its most exciting years. Plans for Overlord, the invasion of Europe, had to be discussed by Churchill and Roosevelt and operations in Southeast Asia needed consultation with General Chiang Kai-Shek. It was decided that the Big Three conference should take place at the Mena House Hotel, where they announced the independence of the Korean Peninsula.

In Winston Churchill's book V on the second World War he writes:

"The Staffs congregated rapidly. The Headquarters of the conference and the venue of all the British and American chiefs of staff was at the Mena House Hotel, opposite the Pyramids.

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The Whole place bristled with troops and anti-craft guns, and the strictest cordons guarded all approaches. Everyone set to work at their various levels upon the immense mass of business which had to be decided or adjusted”

At Mena House there had been great activities. Fred Herrling, the hotel manager, was only given three days notice to clear the hotel of guests and prepare for the event. Some bedrooms had to be emptied and turned into offices. Overnight the hotel and its spacious grounds became a miniature armed camp surrounded with barbed wire. The hotel staff had to be finger-printed and photographed. Each was given a pass without which they could not go in or out.

Sir Peter Ustinov, actor and author, enjoyed the story of King Zog and Queen Geraldine of Albania, who had spent seven months at Mena House in 1946.

Mena House was nationalised in 1954.

Cecil B. DeMille and Charlton Heston and the crew of the movies The Ten Commandments stayed at Mena House for 3 months during shooting of the film, back in 1954.

In 1972 The hotel was meticulously renovated and expansions incorporated. A new wing with 300 rooms was built at the hotel garden, a new swimming pool. and a new lobby was founded in place of the old tennis court.

1974: US president Richard Nixon lunched at the Mena House.

December 1977: Mena House, was the venue for MENA HOUSE CONFERENCE, the pre-Camp David peace talks between Egypt and Israel.

The hotel was fully closed for the public and open only to delegates. Every visitor, including children, needed a pass-badge.

In 1979, Frank Sinatra, while residing at Mena House, gave two fund raising events for the City of Faith and Hope founded by Mrs Sadat.

The first event was a fashion show, by Pierre Bellman, at the Poolside of Mena House, and the following day a concert at the Pyramids, where, Sinatra sang (Strangers on the Nile).

Celebrities check-in:

Sir Winston Churchill

Field Marshall Montgomery

Late King Mohamed of Morocco

Late Agha Khan

Cicile B. DeMille

Charlie Chaplin

Robert Taylor

Omar Sherif

Agatha Christie

Henry Kissinger

President Richard Nixon

President Jimmy Carter

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Gen. Moche Dayan	
John Travlotta	
Frank Sinatra	
Helmut Schmit	
Maurice Bejart	
Gianni Versace	
Christopher Lee	
Jane Fonda	1995
King Gustav of Sweden	1997
King & Queen of Spain	1998
Brian Adams	1999
Ralph Lauren	1999
Brook Shields	1999
Roger Moore	1999
Mrs. Barabra Bush	2000
Sylvie Vartan	2000
Jean Paul bolmondo	2000
President of Portugal	2001
Queen Sophia of Spain	2002
resident of Portugal	2002
President of the World Bank	2003
Mrs. Laura Bush	2005
Brian Adam	2005
Bill Gates	2006
Zain Zidan	2007
Julia Armond	2008
Susan Sarandon	2008
Salma Hayek	2009
Julio Iglesias	2010
Kylie Minoge	2010
Prince Albert of Monaco	2010
Pele	2014
Lionel Messi	2017
Will Smith	2017
Roberto Carlos	2017
Gloria Gaynor	2017
Ronaldinho	2017
Luis Fonsi	2017

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Awards and Accolades

Award	Awarded by
<i>Award of excellence 2017</i>	Trip Advisor
<i>Award of excellence 2016</i>	Trip Advisor
<i>Top 10 Hotels in Africa & Middle East</i>	Travel + Leisure Magazine World's Best Awards 2015.
<i>Award of excellence 2015</i>	Trip Advisor
<i>Award of excellence 2014.</i>	Booking.com
<i>Award of excellence 2014</i>	Trip Advisor
World's top 500 hotels	<i>Travel & Leisure Magazine, January 2014.</i>
Amongst the top three Best Hotel for location in Africa. Middle East and the Indian Ocean	<i>Condé Nast Traveller, UK, The Gold List 2012</i>
Best Leisure Hotels in the Indian Ocean (Ranked 12th)	<i>Condé Nast Traveller, UK, Readers' Travel Awards 2011</i>
Top 15 City Hotels in Africa and the Middle East (Ranked 8 th)	<i>Travel + Leisure, World's Best Awards, Readers' Poll 2011</i>
Top 20 Hotels in Africa (Ranked 11 th)	<i>Condé Nast Traveler, USA, Readers' Choice Awards 2010</i>