

Working at the British School of Alexandria and living in Alexandria

Whether you are considering teaching overseas for the first time, or you are an experienced international teacher, you will have many questions about what it is like to teach at the BSA and live in Alexandria. The following information will hopefully give you a feel for our school and, along with the FAQ section, what it is like to live and work in Egypt.

The British School of Alexandria

The British School of Alexandria (BSA) aims to offer a British style education, based on the National Curriculum of England, of the highest quality to both the expatriate and the local community. The BSA is a registered British Charity and is self-financing and non-profit making. The school currently has 260+ students from 26 different countries. It was established in 1984, in the grounds of the British Consulate, providing a British Education to a relatively small number of expatriate children from 2 to 11 years of age. In 1998 the school began an expansion programme, opening a Secondary department and welcoming English-speaking Egyptian students.

Students at the BSA take the Key Stage (KS) tasks and tests at the end of KS 1 and 2 and IGCSE/GCSE examinations in Years 10 and 11. Where there is demand AS and A' level courses are offered, although numbers are small at present they are growing year on year and we expect more than 50% of the current Year 11 to continue with us in Year 12. The school is one form entry with class sizes between the high teens and the low twenties. It is our aim to limit class sizes to 20 whenever possible.

The school occupies two sites (three buildings) all within close proximity. Key Stage 2 is located in a refurbished consulate building (opened September 2005) on the original BSA site in the Consulate grounds – this is known as the Main Site. Approximately 400m away (walking distance) is the Foundation and Key Stage 1 site which is known as the Mina Villa and adjoining this is the Secondary building which was completed in the spring of 2004.

All of the full-time teaching staff are expatriates (21) and there are a number of locally recruited part-time teachers. The teaching staff are supported by teaching assistants, administrative staff and ancillary staff.

The teaching year generally runs from early September until late June with additional INSET and administrative days at the beginning of each term and at the end of the school year. Holidays are taken at Christmas and Easter along with shorter half term breaks. The teaching day begins at 8.40am and ends at 12.30pm for Foundation Stage 1, 3.00pm for Foundation Stage 2 and KS 1 and 3.20pm for KS 2, 3 and 4. Staff are expected to be in school by 8.15am each day. In addition to their teaching timetable, all staff are expected to contribute to at least one extra curricular activity per week. The school operates on a Muslim week with Friday and Saturday being taken as the weekend.

The students at BSA are usually polite, motivated and hardworking. Serious discipline problems are very rare and the general atmosphere of the school is very welcoming. Academic standards need to be high as Egyptian students going on to university have to sit all of their IGCSE/GCSE examinations at extended/higher level. The majority of our SAT's results are at the expected level or above. Having said this we do have a number of students who require learning support and the fact that a large percentage of our students are operating in their second and sometimes third language needs to be taken into account.

The resources available in the school are constantly improving and orders are placed with both local and UK suppliers. Each phase of the school has its own library and all sites have their own IT suites. Land in Alexandria is at a premium and although outdoor space is limited we do have playground and sports areas available to each phase of the school and a local sports club's facilities are used for PE activities that cannot take place in our gym or on the school's hard-court.



Expatriate Teachers' Package

- Contracts are normally 2 years and can be extended by mutual agreement.
- Tax-free salaries are quoted in sterling based on teaching experience. 25% of this salary is paid in local currency calculated at the exchange rate on the appropriate date.
- Currently the top of our 6 point salary scale is £24000 net
- Head of Primary/Deputy Head's salary will be within the range £30,000 to £35,000 net.
- Rent free accommodation – in apartments within walking distance of the school.
- Accommodation is furnished and usually includes AC, TV, washing machine, etc.
- Flights: London Heathrow – Alexandria at the beginning of contract and Alexandria – London Heathrow at the end of contract.
- For 2 year contracts, a mid contract flight allowance is given.
- Medical cover from a UK based International Health Scheme.
- Baggage allowance of £500 at the beginning and end of employment.

In addition to the contracted package working at the BSA offers an opportunity to make a real impact on a rapidly developing school where your ideas, enthusiasm and experience will be valued. BSA is a small school which wants to do everything that a big school would do and we are fortunate that we have a staff team that always gives 110%. BSA is not the place for a teacher who only wishes to teach their subject and go home!

Living in Alexandria

Alexandria is a large city (population over 4 million) with a little city feel. The number of expatriates is relatively small and you will soon be known by the local shop keepers and taxi drivers. The city has a long history much of which is unfortunately buried under new apartment blocks, but there are still some remarkable places to be found and a number of very interesting historical sites and museums.

Alexandria has undergone a large amount of refurbishment in recent years with new roads, bridges and buildings. The building programme continues and almost weekly a new building opens somewhere in the city.

Climate

The climate in Alexandria is one of its great advantages. It has long summers with the temperature ranging from the high 20's to the high 30's. For virtually 2 terms of the year the sun shines every day! The 'winter' does feel cold, (*it really does feel cold!*) as many of the buildings are designed to keep heat out rather than heat in, but the daytime temperature, even on the coldest day, does not drop much below 15C. All classrooms and apartments have air-conditioning/heating and this enables us to live and work very comfortably.

Local Culture

Egypt is not a place for people in a hurry. Things do happen here, but they happen at their own pace. The more relaxed approach is one of Egypt's charms but it can also be one of its main frustrations.

Egypt is a predominantly Muslim country with a small, but significant, Coptic Christian community. It is important to respect the culture and therefore dress and behaviour should be conservative when in public. It is advisable for women to keep shoulders and knees covered and to

wear loose fitting clothes. Although foreigners are made very welcome and feel safe in Egypt there will be occasions when women attract unwanted attention and dressing appropriately will keep these incidents to a minimum.

Shopping and Cost of Living

There are not many things that you cannot buy in Alexandria and the range of goods is increasing all the time. However, you may not be able to get the exact brand that you want and although a product may have been on the shelves of the supermarket one week there is no guarantee that it will be there the next. The number of supermarkets is growing with Carrefour and Metro being the ones most used by staff. Debenhams will be opening a branch in Alexandria in the next couple of months! Local food is relatively cheap, particularly meat, fish, fruit and vegetables. A full shopping trolley costs considerably less here than the equivalent in the UK. However, imported goods can be expensive. Beer and local wines (of mixed quality) are available but one has to try a little harder if you wish to purchase spirits.

Most households in Alexandria employ a maid. Some staff employ a maid on a full-time basis, others on a part-time basis and some do not employ one at all. Maids charge approximately £5.00 per visit and they will clean, iron and some will cook. If you do not have a maid who will iron there are lots of ironing men who will collect your ironing and return it when it is done at a very reasonable cost.

There is an assortment of restaurants in Alexandria ranging from fast food outlets like McDonalds, KFC and Pizza Hut to local food such as Kofta and Shwarma to more western style restaurants. Eating out can be very cheap to medium/high priced in hotels; all are cheaper than their UK equivalent. If you do not wish to eat out the majority of restaurants will deliver.

Household bills for electricity, gas and telephone arrive monthly. Electricity can cost between £15 and £25 depending on the usage of AC units, gas is very cheap and telephones depend on how many international calls you make (local, non-mobile calls are cheap). Dial-up internet is very cheap and a DSL connection (which is better for Skype etc.) can be obtained approx. £40 per month. Most staff find that their household and food bills account for only a small percentage of their salary and it is not unusual for staff to be able to save more than half of their monthly salary.

Transport

There is little discipline on the roads and although the average driver will indulge in acts that visitors from the west watch with amazement and horror, serious accidents are surprisingly rare. Taxis are easily available and by UK standards are very cheap. Most taxi journeys within Alexandria would cost no more than a £1 or £2! There is a very cheap tram system that runs the length of Alexandria and although seats might be in short supply the fare of 3p makes it a very good value for money. For journeys outside Alexandria there is a good rail link with Cairo, with the fastest trains taking just 2½ hours and costing £6.00. Trains to Luxor and Aswan cost about £17 for a 1st class seat and £60 for a sleeping berth. Cars and minibuses (with drivers) are relatively cheap to hire and can be an economic option for small groups.

The Rest of Egypt

One only has to watch the Discovery Channel to find the historic wonders to be found in Egypt. However, Egypt has much more to offer for those willing to look for it. Diving in the Red Sea, walking in the Sinai, trips to a desert oasis, the Mediterranean coast etc. etc. Flights are available

from Alexandria early on a Friday morning with the return on a Saturday evening so a weekend in Sharm is easily doable. There is plenty to keep even the most enthusiastic traveller busy.

Most of our expatriate staff find that once they have moved to Egypt they become the centre of many of their friends' and families' holiday plans!

There is a lot more I could write but I hope that this has given you a flavour of what life would be like at the BSA and living in Alexandria.

Some useful websites:

www.googleearth.com

www.alexandriatour.com

www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Africa/Egypt/Muhafazat_al_Iskandariyah/Alexandria-2009064/TravelGuide-Alexandria.html

For IGCSE/GCSE and GCE information:

www.cie.org.uk

www.edexcel-international.org/

www.edexcel.org