

Egypt uncovers lost Byzantine-era city in the western desert A well-preserved Byzantine-era residential city in the western desert is one of two major archaeological finds announced by Egypt on Saturday. The recent discoveries at Dakhla Oasis and at the Marina el-Alamein archaeological site, near Alexandria, are the latest findings which the Egyptian government hopes will boost the country's vital tourism sector, partially driven by antiquities sightseeing. Along with the strategic Suez Canal, tourism is a major source of foreign currency in the cash-strapped country. The Tourism and Antiquities Ministry said that the first discovery reveals details of daily life, urban development and economic activities in the Dakhla Oasis in the fourth century, when Egypt was part of the Byzantine empire. The unearthed quarters included north-south thoroughfares intersected by east-west streets, forming open squares and public spaces, said Hisham el-Leithy, secretary general of the supreme council of antiquities. A basilica church, dating back to the mid-fourth century, stands at the settlement's head, overlooking its main streets, along with remains of two watchtowers to safeguard the outskirts, said Mahmoud Massoud, who chairs the archaeological mission. The oasis, located in Egypt's western province of New Valley in the western desert, is on UNESCO's Tentative List, a step away from being added to the agency's World Heritage List. A heavily fortified structure with thick defensive walls, and many houses consisting of reception halls and vaulted roofs were found in the area, Massoud said. Among them were the house of Tisous, identified as a church deacon and dating to the second half of the fourth century, which archaeologists believe served as a house church before the construction of the city's basilica. Archaeologists also uncovered bread ovens, kitchens and stone grinding tools that had been apparently used to produce food. Also found were well-preserved bronze coins bearing portraits of Byzantine emperors, Latin inscriptions and Christian symbols, alongside a group of gold coins dating to the reign of Roman emperor Constantius II, who ruled between 337 and 361, the ministry statement said. Diaa Zahran, head of the Islamic, Coptic and Jewish Antiquities department, said they found a collection of about 200 pottery fragments which would have been used as writing material. The fragments, known as ostraca, have inscriptions detailing commercial transactions, correspondence and other details of daily life, Zahran said. Separately, archaeologists have found 18 ancient tombs in the Marina el-Alamein archaeological site, which is around 100 kilometers (62 miles) west of the Mediterranean city of Alexandria. The findings included 11 rock-cut tombs, with an average depth of 8 meters, and seven surface limestone-built tombs, the ministry said. That has brought the total tombs found in the site to 48, ministry said. In the site, archaeologists found pottery vessels, amphorae, lamps, plates, altars and limestone basins, it said. Mission chief Eman Abdel-Khaliq said they found a 2.5-meter-long granite sarcophagus, with skeleton remains that were currently being studied. Close to the sarcophagus, they found the remains of a plaster sphinx statue, she said Abdel-Khaliq said they also found 4 gold pieces placed inside the mouths of some of the deceased – known as “the golden tongue,” which had been a practice associated with funerary beliefs of that era. Marina el-Alamein is an archaeological site close to the city of Alamein in Egypt's Northern Coast. Unearthed in 1986, archaeologists believe that the site was the ancient Greco-Roman port city of Leukaspis on the Mediterranean, which was built in the second century and thrived until the fourth century, the ministry said. Egypt's tourism has started to recover after years of years of political turmoil and violence, as well as the coronavirus pandemic. A

record 19 million tourists visited Egypt last year, a 21 percent increase from 2024, according to official figures. The first four months of 2026 saw 6.1 million tourists, compared with 5.7 million during the same period in 2025, the figures showed.