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Getting Started



You can buy, download and print individual chapters from this guidebook. Get Africa chapters

There are no hard and fast rules for travelling in Africa. Climate, behaviour and customs all vary from the top to the bottom of the continent. A T-shirt and sandals in January in Cape Town? Perfect. A T-shirt and sandals in January in Tripoli? You're looking at verbal abuse and a nasty cold. The following section is only intended to give you general information that might be useful before you set off. For more specific tibits, flip to the Africa Directory on p1098. No matter how prepared you are, however, nothing will quite prepare you for the overwhelming sensory and cultural experience that is a first visit to Africa. But isn't that why you're going?

WHEN TO GO

The equator cuts Africa in half, which not only means that water goes in opposite directions down the plughole in the north and the south, but the continent experiences huge climatic variation. Watch out for the wet or rainy seasons, which can turn dirt roads into rivers and curtail travel to remote regions. Just as uncomfortable can be the searing hot season in some countries, which can make moving around during the day nigh on impossible. For climate information about each country, see the relevant country chapters. General climate information is given on p1102.

Late October to February is a great time to visit the Sahara and arid Central Africa (although be prepared for cold nights) and you can also enjoy the warm summer days of southern Africa or beachcomb along the West African coast.

By around January or February, East African wildlife is concentrated around diminishing water sources and is therefore easier to spot. In contrast, the usually arid lands of North Africa spring into life between March and May.

COSTS & MONEY

Africa can be as cheap or expensive as you want it to be. Travelling around like a maniac is going to cost much more than taking time to explore a small region slowly and in depth.

WHAT TO TAKE?

We guess you know to take things like a bag, toothbrush and spare underwear. Here are a few more items to consider:

- Cash you can't go wrong with a wad of US dollars or euros in your pocket (or, better, strapped about your person). Travellers cheques and ATM cards are good too, but not always viable.
- Medicine general first-aid gear and all sorts of pills and potions (such as antimalarials) are available without prescription, but it's a good idea to have some with you. Mosquito repellent and sunscreen are absolutely essential.
- Memory cards if you've got a digital camera, bring along a couple of spare memory cards. You'll take more pictures than you think, and it's useful to have a backup in case one gets damaged.
- Photocopies of important documents photocopy your passport data pages (and those with relevant visas), tickets and travellers cheques, and pack them separately from the originals.
- Water purifier bottled water is available everywhere, but the plastic bottles are an environmental nightmare.

The actual cost of living (food, transport etc) varies around the continent, and travellers commonly blow big chunks of their budget on car hire (US\$30 to US\$150 per day), internal flights, balloon rides, adrenaline sports, organised safaris or treks (at least \$100 a day in East/southern Africa), and diving or language courses.

Africa is thought of as expensive among some budget travellers, but you can still scrape by for under US\$20 per day. If you'd like a few more comforts (such as an in-room shower), reckon on US\$30, plus a slush fund of, say, \$100 a month for unexpected expenses. Beyond that, the scope for spending money is limited only by your bank account or your credit limit...

For more on money issues, see p1107. The Fast Facts boxes in the country chapters provide more specific country budgets.

TOP AFRICAN READS

Country-specific books are mentioned under Arts in each of the country chapters, but the following selection should give you a starting point for literature that covers a broader geographical spectrum.

The *Heinemann Book of African Poetry in English*, ed Adewale Maja-Pearce, features poems written by authors continentwide over the last 30 years.

The *Traveller's Literary Companion to Africa*, ed Oona Strathern, is a handy volume of extracts from African works of fiction and biographies of their authors.

Shadow of the Sun by Ryszard Kapuscinski and The Zanzibar Chest by Aidan Hartley are both searing memoirs of their authors' decades spent as foreign correspondents in Africa. More contemporary issues are dealt with in John Reader's excellent Africa: A Biography of the Continent.

The Tree Where Man Was Born by Peter Matthiessen, although written in the early '60s, remains for many the definitive African travelogue.

For a more visual experience, get hold of *African Ark* by Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher, also a few years old but still one of the most beautiful photographic works on Africa.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Every savvy traveller knows that the best information comes from fellow travellers, and the World Wide Web is now full of sites where those on the road can upload their own travel experiences for the benefit of others. Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree forum (http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start, and the following sites are also great for meeting fellow Africa enthusiasts online:

Bootsnall (www.bootsnall.com) IgoUgo (www.igougo.com) Travellers' Point (www.travellerspoint.com) Trip Advisor (www.tripadvisor.com)

Virtual Tourist (www.virtualtourist.com)

Some commercial sites also provide reams of good travel information. Have a look at www.go2africa.com or www.siyabona.com, both tour operators' sites that have some excellent travel articles, or www.travelafricamag.com, a British travel magazine that provides a wealth of information (some of it only available to subscribers). The National Geographic site has an Africa Archive section (www.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/africaarchive) with enough articles and photos on it to keep you lost for hours.

Two very useful academic sites that provide links to Africa-related websites are **Penn University** (www.africa.upenn.edu) and **Stanford** (www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg /africa/quide.html).

CONDUCT

It's hard to generalise about appropriate behaviour for travel in Africa. Certainly, traditional values remain strong and vibrant across the continent, even when they're masked with a veneer of Westernisation: in East Africa, a Maasai *moran* (warrior) may carry a briefcase in town and then pick up a spear once he's home.

By and large Africans are easy-going and polite. Your social gaffes are usually forgiven and are more likely to cause confusion and amusement than offence. At the same time, good manners are respected and many people will think you most rude if you don't say hello and inquire after their health before asking them when the next bus is going to leave. That's why it's useful to learn a few local greetings, although in some African societies these initial exchanges can go on for minutes and you'll inevitably have to switch back to English or French.

Shaking hands is a big deal in most African countries. Men who know each other well will often clasp each others' hands for many minutes, with much enthusiasm. There are more than a few styles of shake: in some places shakers link thumbs in the clasp, others touch their right elbow with the left hand during the shake or touch their hearts with the right hand after releasing the clasp. You'll soon pick it up. Local women don't usually have their hands shaken, but foreign women are sometimes treated as honorary blokes; see p1114 for more general information about female travellers.

Africans operate with a smaller area of personal space than most Westerners, which can feel odd at first. There are few queues in Africa – just scrums – and people showing you the way somewhere will often grab your hand as they go along.

Hospitality towards travellers is common, and only in a few overtouristed areas does it come with a catch, where travellers are occasionally exploited for income or hustled for money by the people they believed to be their friends.

DO

- Learn to use the local language a little goes a long way
- Interact with local folks; don't hide in tourist ghettos
- Share your food and drink with local people on long journeys
- Respect local customs and superstitions
- Show photos of family and friends back home to break the ice
- Get off the beaten track; people can be more warm and welcoming
- Tread lightly; leave little lasting evidence of your visit

DON'T

- Undermine the authority of elders and officials; treat them politely and with respect
- Insult touts and hustlers, no matter what the provocation
- Show too much flesh
- Stumble around drunk
- Camp on or wander across private land; ask permission first
- Use your left hand for eating or passing anything on
- Partake in public displays of affection

If you can't get enough of African literature, check out the website of literary magazine The African Review of Books (www African reviewofbooks .com), which has a top

100 list as well as reams

of news, reviews and

book gossip.

TOP TEN...

Films

The comedy and tragedy of African life has always attracted filmmakers, with recent years producing an outstanding crop of features and documentaries. For further reviews see each country chapter.

- Out of Africa (1985) Evergreen adaptation of a classic novel
- Lumumba (2000) Biopic of the doomed Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba
- U-Carmen eKhayelitsha (2005) Bizet's opera Carmen set in a South African township
- Xala (1975) The story of a corrupt politician in newly independent Senegal
- The Constant Gardener (2005) Thriller set in Kenya starring Ralph Fiennes and Rachel Weisz
- Adanggaman (2001) Seventeenth-century slave trading among West African tribes
- Nowhere in Africa (2001) Oscar-winning German account of a Jewish family's life in Kenya
- Yesterday (2004) Tragic story of a South African AIDS victim
- Tsotsi (2005) Tale of violence and hope in Johannesburg
- The Lost Boys of Sudan (2003) Two Sudanese refugees journey to America

Novels

Africa's rich literary scene has yielded some fiction classics, not all of which get the publicity they deserve in the rest of the world.

- The Famished Road (Ben Okri) Extraordinary magic realism epic from Nigeria
- The Book of Secrets (MJ Vassanji) Interwoven tales in past and present Tanzania
- Disgrace (JM Coetzee) Confronting tale of post-apartheid South Africa
- Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe) Classic tragedy by the Nigerian master
- So Long a Letter (Mariama Ba) The marital drama of a Senegalese Muslim woman
- Purple Hibiscus (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie) A young Nigerian girl comes of age
- The Cairo Trilogy (Naguib Mahfouz) Sweeping family drama set in 1940s Egypt
- The Heart of Redness (Zakes Mda) Tradition and modernity collide in South Africa's Transkei
- Nervous Conditions (Tsitsi Dangarembga) Two girls experience different lives in Zimbabwe
- Buseboy (Ferdinand Oyono) Darkly humorous tale of colonialism and sin in Guinea

Festivals

If your travel times are flexible, why not plan your trip around one (or more) of Africa's many festivals and cultural events. There's no better way to party with the locals...

- Panafest (www.panafest.org) Biennial festival of theatre and culture in Ghana
- **ZIFF** (www.ziff.or.tz) Film and music festival held every July in Zanzibar
- Festival in the Desert (www.festival-au-desert.org) Tuareg culture meets rock music in Mali
- Lake of Stars (www.lakeofstars.com) Superstar DJs come to Lake Malawi each September
- Durbar Festival Spectacular traditional parade of horsemen, annually in Kano, Nigeria
- Dakar Rally (www.dakar.com) Iconic car rally across the Sahara
- Fespaco (www.fespaco.bf) Africa's biggest film festival, held every two years in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
- **Timkat Ethiopian Epiphany celebration** Colourful and ceremonial; every January
- Imilchil Moroccan 'Festival of brides'; every September
- Sauti za Busara (www.busaramusic.com) Swahili and world music festival, every February in Zanzibar

Dress

Urban hipsters in Dakar or Nairobi may like their hip-hop gear, but African society is generally conservative in outlook. It's inappropriate to wear immodest and revealing clothes. Being meeting-granny neat will help your cause when applying for visas, crossing borders or otherwise dealing with authorities. On the road, T-shirts and shorts are just about OK in major tourist areas, but revealing tops or bottoms are unacceptable almost everywhere except on tourist-only beaches. Extra care is needed in rural areas and Muslim countries, where women should keep shoulders (and sometimes hair) covered and wear long skirts or loose trousers.

Giving Gifts

Be very careful when distributing gifts to locals. Visitors handing out freebies to locals (especially children) can have a detrimental effect on social networks and create communities of people likely to greet travellers with their hands outstretched. You should expect a few requests from locals for you to give them your flashier travel items, clothing or other gifts, but a polite knock-back isn't considered rude. If you want to help the people you meet, donate to a charity or go via community leaders, schools and hospitals. If you're offered a gift, don't feel guilty about accepting it – to refuse may bring shame on the giver.

Taking Photographs

Always, always ask permission before taking photos. Many Muslim women feel very strongly about having their photographs taken by strangers. Likewise, some tribal peoples get really hacked off with being constantly photographed. If you're asked for money, negotiate a reasonable fee when asking permission. Don't offer to send photos back unless you're really prepared to do it.

Itineraries CLASSIC ROUTES

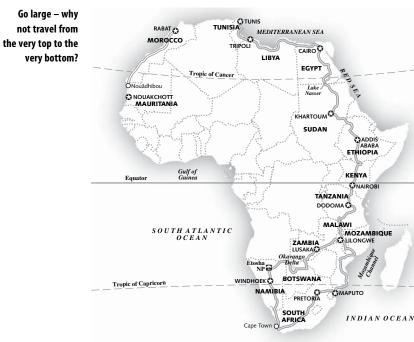
ТОР ТО ВОТТОМ

One Year

Begin in **Tunisia** (p213), then head east past **Libya** (p126) to **Egypt** (p82). Hope for smooth sailing across **Lake Nasser** (p119) to **Sudan** (p197), then head into the Ethiopian highlands. From **Ethiopia** (p651) journey down to **Nairobi** (p684).

An alternative for hitchers or self-drivers is to go via the west coast, through **Morocco** (p142) and south to **Nouâdhibou** (p426), Mauritania. There's no official public transport for this desert crossing, but there are some hitching opportunities. Reports from overland travellers who've taken the once-impossible west-coast overland route are now coming in. The latest suggest that it's possible to take a 'desert taxi' between Dahkla, Morocco and Nouâdhibou.

If you're less of a purist, you can avoid the long haul from Cairo and concentrate instead on the classic jaunt from Nairobi to Cape Town – passing through the wildlife-sprinkled plains of **Kenya** (p677) and **Tanzania** (p745) and onto the warm and welcoming villages of **Malawi** (p908) and **Zambia** (p1051). From here, it's back into wildlife territory with Botswana's **Okavango Delta** (p848) and Namibia's **Etosha National Park** (p972), before finishing up right at the bottom in the stunning city of **Cape Town** (p993), South Africa. It pays to factor stunning **Mozambique** (p934) into this round trip.



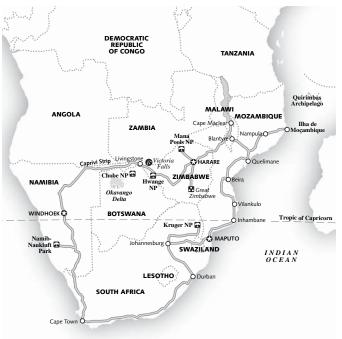
SOUTHERN AFRICA SMORGASBORD

Three Months

Start in South Africa's mother city, vibrant **Cape Town** (p993) then head north to take in the endless sand dunes of Namibia in **Namib-Naukluft Park** (p968). Continue north and east along the Caprivi strip to Kasane, the gateway to Botswana's **Chobe National Park** (p856) and its amazing concentration of elephants, then fly to Maun for a few days poling through the swampy maze of the **Okavango Delta** (p848). Back in Kasane, it's a short hop into Zambia's **Livingstone** (p1064), Africa's adrenaline capital and the place to see the spectacular **Victoria Falls** (p1064).

Continue on from Livingstone to Zimbabwe's **Harare** (p1079) for trips to **Mana Pools National Park** (p1086), **Hwange National Park** (p1090) and the ruins of **Great Zimbabwe** (p1087).

From Harare, make your way towards Mozambique's Nampula (p947), the jumping-off point for trips to the unforgettable **Ilha de Moçambique** (p947), via Malawi's **Blantyre** (p921) and the white beaches of **Cape Maclear** (p927). Take a trip to the lost-in-time **Quirimbas Archipelago** (p949) then head south via the sleepy towns of **Quelimane** (p947), **Beira** (p946), **Vilankulo** (p945) and **Inhambane** (p944). Next stop is **Maputo** (p939), the only Latin city in Africa, for a fiesta of seafood and caipirinhas, then it's on to **Johannesburg** (p1015), South Africa's hustling, bustling commercial capital. From here you can head to the **Kruger National Park** (p1026) or set off back towards Cape Town via **Durban** (p1007).



This itinerary takes in the best southern Africa has to offer – most places are easily accessible, English is widely spoken and the countries are well set up for overseas visitors.

EAST AFRICAN EXTRAVANGANZA

Two to Three Months

Fly into Kenya's **Nairobi** (p684) and explore the Central Highlands around **Mount Kenya** (p694) then head east via **Mombasa** (p700) to the palm-fringed beaches, sleepy atmosphere and coral reefs of **Lamu** (p705).

Head south into Tanzania to **Arusha** (p765), the safari capital of the country, from where you can arrange all sorts of activities including 4WD safaris to the **Ngorongoro crater** (p771) or **Serengeti National Park** (p770) and trekking trips up **Mount Kilimanjaro** (p774). Head south to **Dar es Salaam** (p751) and hop offshore to drink in the Swahili history and culture of **Zanzibar** (p757) and neighbouring **Pemba** (p765). From Dar es Salaam head west towards remote, stunning **Lake Tanganyika** (p780) to watch chimpanzees, then make your way across to **Mwanza** (p772) and western **Lake Victoria** (p789). From here you can move up through Rwanda, which is still recovering, but is a great place to see mountain gorillas, or head directly into western Uganda. The **Sese Islands** (p812) are a good place to chill out, there's fantastic white-water rafting at **Jinja** (p813) and **Murchison Falls National Park** (p817) is a gem.

From Uganda cut back east to explore western and northwest Kenya, perhaps starting with a trip north to remote **Lake Turkana** (p698). Adventurous jaunts to Ethiopia, Eritrea or northern Mozambique are also possible – or head to Lake Malawi for some laid-back beach time.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

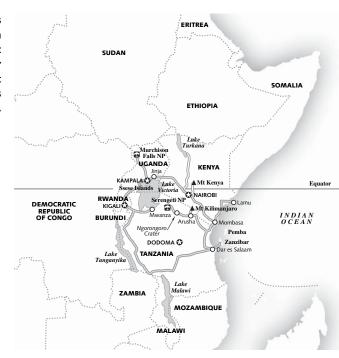
FRENCH FOOTSTEPS

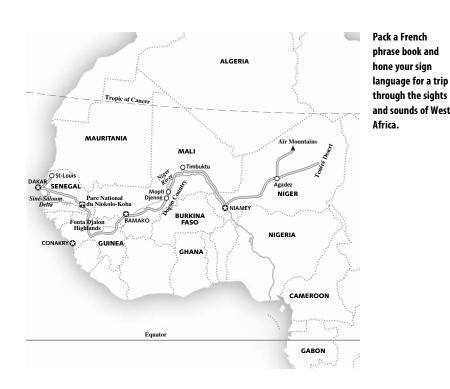
Flights into Senegal's **Dakar** (p477) are cheap and its vibrant nightlife, the beautiful colonial architecture in **St-Louis** (p484), the wildlife-watching opportunities of **Parc National du Niokolo-Koba** (p488) and the spectacular birdlife of the **Siné-Saloum Delta** (p488) all make it a good place to start. Most people then head southeast to Guinea.

After checking out some fine beaches, Guinea's pumping music scene and the beauty of walking in the **Fouta Djalon highlands** (p375), it's easy to cut up into Mali by shared taxi. The vast, ornate mud mosque in **Djenné** (p402), the vibrant port at **Mopti** (p403), trekking in the fascinating **Dogon country** (p410) and the legendary desert outpost of **Timbuktu** (p406) are among the highlights to be discovered along the Niger River. Camels and Tuareg nomads are found in **Agadez** (p445), Niger's premier ancient city, while the desert scenery of the **Air Mountains** (p448) and **Ténéré Desert** (p448) leaves powerful memories.

From Niger you have a couple of options: head south through Nigeria to Cameroon or southwest to Burkina Faso and on to Ghana. Ghana's national parks are excellent, but the beaches and colonial coastal forts on the Gulf of Guinea draw the most travellers.

Many travellers choose to focus on East Africa, but few spend all their time hanging out on safari with lions and zebras.





SWAHILI GHOSTS

Begin in Mozambique's capital, **Maputo** (p939). Head north via **Inhambane** (p944) and **Vilankulo** (p945) to **Beira** (p946), where the ruins of the legendary gold-trading port of Sofala lie. Continue north to **Nampula** (p947), then cross to **Ilha do Moçambique** (p947), an important port in the Swahili heyday, with its Arab-influenced stone houses and carved wooden doors. North from here you'll start to hear the lilt of the Swahili language with its mixture of African, Arabic and Portuguese words and sounds.

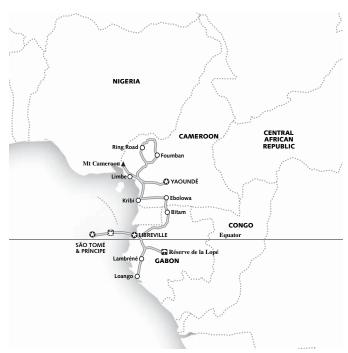
North again to **Pemba** (p949) and the **Quirimbas Archipelago** (p949) for a multiday sailing safari in a traditional Swahili *dhow* (a wooden boat with a huge triangular sail) around these stunning islands. If the wind's in the right direction and the captain's in the right mood, you might even be able to pick up a *dhow* from **Moçimboa da Praia** (p949), in Mozambique's far north, all the way to **Mtwara** (p780) in southern Tanzania. From Mtwara it's a rough bus trip (there are interesting Swahili ruins on the way), or an overnight boat journey to **Dar es Salaam** (p751) and thence to **Zanzibar** (p757). Here the Swahili legacy is most strongly felt in the ancient mosques that sit among the palm trees, the stone bridges that cross the town's narrow streets and the Persian festivals that are still celebrated with music and dancing. If you've got a bit more time, you can carry on right up the East African coast to **Mombasa** (p700) in Kenya, once an Arab stronghold, and on to **Lamu** (p705), a Swahili island so peaceful it seems to be lost in time.

SURFING HIPPOS & NESTING TURTLES

Fly into Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé (p280), then head east via lazy beaches around Limbe (p288) to explore Mount Cameroon (p288) and the Ring Road (p291), a circular route through rolling hills and mountains, lakes and waterfalls in the heart of Cameroon's northwestern highlands. Put in some time in Islamic Foumban (p292) then head south via the white sandy beaches of Kribi (p293) to Ebolowa (p294) and onwards across the Gabon border to Bitam (p590). Northern Gabon is uncharted territory and ripe for exploring offoff-off the beaten path. Some remaining Pygmy tribes are even rumoured to live in the northern forests. After exploring to your heart's content continue south to uncover the mind-boggling highlights of Gabon's many newly created national parks, which include watching surfing hippos on the beaches at Loango (p591) or tracking the vibrant mandrill troupes of Réserve de la Lopé (p592). Most of these unique ecotourism opportunities are only accessible by plane from Libreville (p584), Gabon's capital, so you may have to base yourself here and shuttle back and forth - it's not cheap, but for the chance to see some of Africa's most pristine natural areas before mass tourism takes hold, it's worth it. Accessible by road is Lambréné (p591), the site of Albert Schweizer's famous hospital, which nestles in the heart of an impressive lake network. Finish the trip with a jaunt to one of Africa's smallest countries, São Tomé & Príncipe (p598), a land of nesting turtles, perfect tropical beaches and ghostly old plantation houses.

This rarely done trip follows the land and sea routes of the 10th-century Swahili sultans, slavers and merchants who once ruled the East African coast.





Throw yourself into some of West Africa's most unexplored natural regions with this way-offthe-beaten-track itinerary. Throw in several tribal kingdoms and sultanates, and it's an ecotraveller's paradise. lonelyplanet.com

TAILORED TRIPS

BRIGHT LIGHTS, CRAZY CITIES

Sure, many of Africa's cities are dirty, daunting and best rushed through, but if you've got the time and the energy, others are living, pulsing testaments to the continent's cultural diversity. In Senegal's **Dakar** (p477) a feverishly energetic scene boasts some of the best nightclubs, live-music venues and



of the best inglictuos, hve-finusit vertices and arts festivals in Africa. Ghana's **Accra** (p335) is the birthplace of some of the region's most popular music – jump into your glad rags, hit the club scene and make partying an adventure sport. If you like things a bit more laid back, head to **Maputo** (p939) in Mozambique to drink caipirinhas with the beautiful people, dance the salsa in late-night jazz clubs, feast on gigantic prawns and sip espressos in elegant pavement cafés.

For sheer beauty, it's hard to beat South Africa's **Cape Town** (p993) with an iconic mountain slap-bang in its centre and a necklace of beautiful beaches around its rim. Its multi-ethnic people have come together to create one of Africa's richest cultural scenes. Another must-see

is **Marrakesh** (p178) in Morocco where musicians, merchants, storytellers and the odd lunatic wander through the bewitching hubbub of mind-scrambling medinas and fragrant *souqs*. In Ethiopia's **Addis Ababa** (p656) past and present meet on the city's wide boulevards as priests in medieval-looking robes shuffle past style-queens with mobile phones and the odd herd of goats.

THE WILDEST SHOWS ON EARTH

If you're the type who spent their childhood glued to the TV watching BBC nature documentaries, it's time to make your wildest dreams come true. In



Tanzania the **Śerengeti National Park** (p770) is the venue for the great wildebeest migration, to the delight of the giant crocs that wait for them. If you can make it down to Uganda and have the cash for a trekking permit, you can pay a visit to **Bwindi Impenetrable Forest** (p804) and pick up the trail of the giant, gentle gorillas. Drop down to Botswana and take a sunset river cruise in the **Chobe National Park** (p856) to see hundreds of elephants drinking and romping in the water within metres of your boat.

Cut across to **Madagascar** (p878) and get up early to hear the eerie shriek of the indri (which looks like a giant teddy bear) or watch creamy white sifakas leap sideways across the ground like competitors in a sack race. If you prefer a scuba tank

to a pair of binoculars try **Ras Mohammed** (p102) near Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, where you can dive with thresher sharks and scalloped hammerheads.

TREKKING TALES

If you like trekking, Africa provides enough trails to wear out many, many pairs of hiking boots. But why use your own feet when you can ride a camel through the Sahara's burning sands towards the blue rocks of the **Aïr Mountains** (p448) in Niger? Or perhaps you'd prefer ice to fire, undertaking the arduous

but rewarding climb to the snowy peak of Tanzania's **Mount Kilimanjaro** (p774) to be rewarded with an unforgettable view of the Serengeti at sunrise? For gentler pleasures wander through the magical milkwood forests of South Africa's **Otter Trail** (p1003), a track that fords rushing rivers on the way to wild and windy beaches.

Some of West Africa's best trekking opportunities are found in Mali's **Dogon Country** (p410), which combines stunning landscapes with the complex and elaborate culture, art forms and unique houses of the friendly Dogon people. In Morocco's **Atlas Mountains** (p185) you can climb steep paths past flat-roofed, earthen Berber villages and irrigated, terraced gardens and walnut groves. Ethiopia's challenging **Simien Mountains**



(p666) are simply breathtaking – and not just because of the punishing gradients and high altitude. And finally, if you like your wildlife up close and personal, many of Africa's game reserves and national parks, including South Africa's **Kruger** (p1026), offer walking safaris, where you can find yourself eye-to-eye with a lion or an elephant.

PUT YOUR FEET UP

Treks, wildlife and urban parties are the stuff that African travels are made of, but they can also be a bit, well...tiring. At some point on your travels

you're going to need to hit a hammock, close your eyes and drift away to the sounds of lapping water.

Most East African travellers choose to do their R'n'R in Tanzania's **Zanzibar** (p757), a spicy heaven of perfume plantations, endless white beaches and whispering palm trees. But if you fancy somewhere even quieter, head to Kenya's **Lamu** (p705), where donkeys replace cars and the hardest decision you'll make all day is when to take the next nap. Southern Africa's best-loved beach hangout is the shore of turquoise **Lake Malawi** (p927) with its fresh waters, laid-back locals and reggae bars. Further south, the **Bazaruto** (p945) and **Quirimbas** (p949) islands of Mozambique offer the chance to float for days on a lazy wooden sailing boat. At the



other end of the continent the Red Sea resorts of Egypt's **Sinai** (p98) region are a haven for snorkellers and swimmers as well as sunbathers. Out west the little-known country of **São Tomé & Príncipe** (p598) has miles and miles of perfect white sand and blue waters frequented by sea turtles and unknown to tourists. Alternatively, try the grilled seafood and chilled vibe of Cameroon's **Kribi** (p293).

Snapshot

'Africa always brings something new.'

Pliny the Elder

Long consigned to the 'boring but important' section of newspapers and TV programmes, it seems that African issues have enjoyed something of a renaissance in the world media in recent years. Whatever you think about rock stars getting involved in world politics, there's no doubt that 2005's Live 8 concerts around the world in support of the Make Poverty History campaign (www.makepovertyhistory.org) brought issues such as AIDS, trade deficits and child poverty into the spotlight. The attentions of the various celebrities who've championed the cause of the continent brought the faces and voices of ordinary Africans into the living rooms of the West.

FAST FACTS

Population: 910,571,130 Elephant population: 500,000 (approx) GDP: US\$2,092,300,800,000 Unemployment: 10.5% Inflation rate: 8.4% Economic growth: 4.6% Internet users: 32,765,700 Population over 15 years old who can't read: 40% Despite this, trade with the EU and USA remains skewed against Africa, thanks largely to massive agricultural subsidies in Europe and the USA and the power of global multinationals. Many nations pay the equivalent of their annual health budgets to banks, governments, the IMF and other lenders each year. Lurking in the shadows of lofty ideals about an 'African renaissance' is the sad fact that inept governance and the outright theft of land, resources and money by corrupt regimes continues apace across the continent.

Pointless wars remain 'popular'; as one country manages to raise its game, so another becomes seemingly intent on flushing its immediate future down the toilet. Many more people have died in the recent conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo than during the whole of WWII, but you'll struggle to get any details about this in the Western media. Natural resources (the cause of many protracted civil wars) continue to be exploited to the detriment of locals and the enrichment of foreign interests and African elites. Western governments and multinational companies may have buckets of blood on their hands, but Africa's people have also been repeatedly let down by their leaders.

It's hardly surprising that immigration is on the minds of many, with thousands committing their lives each year to people-traffickers for the promise of a new life in Europe. Some are 'lucky' enough to score a low-paid job in Paris or Madrid; others wash up dead on the beaches of southern Europe, the victims of unseaworthy vessels and unscrupulous immigration 'agents'.

There *is* such a thing as good news from Africa. The continent is home to five out of the 10 fastest-growing economies in the world. There are more female members of parliament in both Rwanda and Tanzania than in the UK. The governments of Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Botswana and South Africa are potential role models for democratic rule. The G8 summit of 2005 pledged to double aid to the world's poorest countries by 2010, treat all AIDS patients, halve malaria deaths and get every child into school. As long as citizens of non-African countries continue to pressure their governments for real action on these issues there's no reason the good news stories shouldn't keep coming.

'YOU TELL GEORGE BUSH '

Since September 11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, many travellers in Africa have noticed an increase in local resentment towards US and European governments. These governments are widely perceived as self-serving hypocrites, and this is not just in the Muslim countries where you can still buy Osama bin Laden T-shirts at the market. There's probably no need to feel personally threatened, though – you're unlikely to receive anything but courtesy from most individual Africans you meet.

The Authors



GEMMA PITCHER

DAVID ANDREW

Coordinating Author

Lesotho, Swaziland

Gemma Pitcher spent her childhood in Buckinghamshire with her nose buried in books with titles like *Safari Adventure* and *Across the Dark Continent*. These prompted her to disappear to Africa at 17, travelling from Nairobi through six countries to Harare. She returned to the UK for university, then moved back to East Africa to write books about luxury safari camps (it was hard, but someone's gotta do it). She has written for several Lonely Planet titles, including *One People, Madagascar & Comoros* and *South Africa, Lesotho & Swaziland*. These days she lives in Sydney, but still dreams of falling asleep to the sound of lions roaring in the distance...



Kenya, Madagascar, Tanzania, Wildlife

David has been hooked on Africa since his first visit at age 10. Since then he has travelled extensively on the continent while researching Lonely Planet's *Watching Wildlife* series. His passion for wildlife has led him to study and write about the subject in all corners of the globe. As a biologist he has studied Giant Pandas in southwest China and seabirds in Antarctica, and as an author he has written or co-written all five of Lonely Planet's *Watching Wildlife* series. He was the founding editor of Birds Australia's *Wingspan* magazine and a former editor of *Wildlife Australia*, and has written about wildlife and ecotourism in places as diverse as Madagascar, the Galápagos Islands, Borneo and New Guinea.



KATE ARMSTRONG

Kate was bitten by the African bug when she lived and worked in Mozambique, and on her subsequent travels around East Africa. She jumped at the chance to explore new territory for this Lonely Planet edition. While she successfully avoided malarial mosquitoes, she was less able to escape an obsession with Zulu culture, giraffes and the overwhelming hospitality of the local people (not to mention several flat tyres along the way). When Kate's not eating, hiking and dancing her way around parts of Africa, Europe and South America, her itchy feet are grounded in Sydney where she works as a freelancer, writing travel articles and children's educational books.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.

Botswana, Namibia



JAMES BAINBRIDGE

Benin, Togo

West Africa is James' patch. On the three visits he's paid to the region since he was 13, he's dug the dunes, dance floors and dysfunctional minibuses in countries from Morocco to Ghana. Hailing from Shropshire in England, a county where inbreds and eccentrics roam the hedgerows, he's always had a keen eye for the memorable characters Africa throws up. When Lonely Planet dispatched him to Togo and Benin, he was pleased to find the usual stream of fishermen, farmers, hustlers, nomads, kamikaze *taxi-moto* drivers, and a ginslugging hotelier who instructed him in the art of making a voodoo bomb. His other Lonely Planet credits include *West Africa* and *The Africa Book*.



TIM BEWER Cha

Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Sudan

While growing up, Tim didn't travel much except for the obligatory pilgrimage to Disney World and an annual summer week at the lake. He's spent most of his adult life making up for this, and has since visited over 50 countries. After university he worked briefly as a legislative assistant before quitting Capitol life in 1994 to backpack around West Africa. It was during this trip that the idea of becoming a freelance travel writer and photographer was hatched, and he's been at it ever since, returning to Africa several times. He lives in Minneapolis.



MATTHEW D FIRESTONE

MARY FITZPATRICK Criginally from Washington, DC, Mary set off after graduate studies for several years in Europe. Her fascination with languages and cultures soon led her further south to sub-Saharan Africa, where she has spent much of the past decade living, working and travelling, including almost four years in Mozambique and two years in Liberia and a few of its neighbours. Mary has authored and coauthored numerous other guidebooks covering Mozambique, Liberia and many other destinations on the continent. She calls Cairo home at the moment and travels to points south (preferably those with beaches) whenever she gets the chance.

Matt is a trained biological anthropologist and epidemiologist who is

particularly interested in the health and nutrition of indigenous populations.

His first visit to Botswana and Namibia in 2001 brought him deep into the

Kalahari, where he performed a field study on the traditional diet of the

San. Unfortunately, Matt's promising academic career was postponed due

to a severe case of wanderlust, though he has relentlessly travelled to over

50 different countries in search of a cure. Matt is hoping that this book will

help ease the pain of other individuals bitten by the travel bug, though he

fears that there is a growing epidemic on the horizon.



JEAN-BERNARD CARILLET Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, Mauritania

Say 'Africa' to Jean-Bernard and he will instantly have itchy feet. An Africa aficionado for more than 20 years, he has visited 15 nations in western, eastern and southern Africa. For this edition, he was all too happy to travel the breadth and length of eastern Africa, from agreeable Asmara to underrated Djibouti and to mysterious Somaliland, where he experienced the smug feeling of having the whole country for himself. He also swallowed his fair share of sand in the Mauritanian Sahara. He is currently based in Paris, where he works as a freelance journalist and photographer. He has coauthored Lonely Planet's *Ethiopia & Eritrea* and *West Africa*.



PAUL CLAMMER

Cameroon, Nigeria

Once a molecular biologist, Paul has long since traded his test tubes for a rucksack, and the vicarious life of a travel writer. Overlanding in Africa was his first significant travel experience, and he has returned to the continent many times since. He is fascinated by the interface between Muslim and black Africa (he's also written a book about Sudan), and so particularly relished the chance to explore Nigeria, that most maligned of West African countries.



MICHAEL GROSBERG

Ghana, South Africa

After a childhood spent stateside in the Washington, DC area and a valuable philosophy degree in hand, Michael took a job doing something with developing a resort on an island in the Pacific, after which he left for a long overland trip through Asia. He later found his way to South Africa where he did journalism and NGO work and found time to travel all over southern Africa. He returned to New York for graduate school in comparative literature and he has taught literature and writing in several NYC colleges in addition to Lonely Planet assignments that have taken him around the world.



ANTHONY HAM

Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Morocco

Anthony's first trip for Lonely Planet was to Africa, where he ate rat, was held up at knifepoint and fell irretrievably in love with the region. In the six years since, he has returned often to the region (collecting a formidable array of illnesses en route) to indulge his passions for West African music, Libyan days of Saharan solitude and long, slow trips up the Niger, not to mention visiting old friends. When he's not in North or West Africa, Anthony lives in Madrid from where he writes and photographs for numerous newspapers around the world. For Lonely Planet, he has also written the 1st edition of *Libya* and coordinated the most recent editions of *West Africa* and *Morocco*.



KATHARINA KANE

Senegal, The Gambia

When Katharina heard the haunting sound of a Fula flute during a London concert, her fate was sealed. She headed straight to Guinea in West Africa, where she ended up studying the instrument for a year before writing a PhD on its origins. She then decamped to Senegal, a country that she'd fallen in love with during one of her many travels to West Africa in her role as a music journalist. Katharina has worked on other Lonely Planet titles, writes for various world music magazines and produces radio features on world music for stations including the BBC and WDR. She currently lives in Dakar, or on a plane to yet another new place.



ROBERT LANDON

Guinea-Bissau

Robert has degrees in literature from two different California universities, but his best education continues to be travel, especially year-long stints in Italy, Paris and Rio de Janeiro. His time in Brazil introduced him to the far-flung Portuguese-speaking world and was his gateway to West Africa's Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau – two of the most extraordinary places he's visited.



MATT PHILLIPS

Ethiopia, Niger

Matt's shared campfires with hungry hyenas in Zimbabwe, crossed the Sahara in a couple of directions, dodged Mauritanian land mines in Mr Harry ('82 Land Rover), slept in more forms of transport than he can remember and wept in joy when an Ethiopian highlander gave birth in his 4WD. No, Matt's African experiences, which cover over 20 nations, never seem to be ordinary or boring. Perhaps that's why he was so enthused about taking on Ethiopia and Niger for this title! Matt's also co-authored Lonely Planet's *Ethiopia & Eritrea*, *West Africa* and *Kenya* guidebooks, as well as coordinated Lonely Planet's behemoth colourful bible on the continent, *The Africa Book*.

NICK RAY

Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda

A Londoner of sorts, Nick comes from Watford, the sort of town that makes you want to travel. Nick has travelled through many countries in Africa over the years, including the southern stunner that is Mozambique and the northern mystique of Morocco, but it is Uganda and Rwanda that he finds to be small but perfectly formed. He relished the chance to return for another round of towering volcanoes, plentiful primates and blessed beers from Kampala to Kigali. He also managed a hit and run on Burundi, a fascinating country emerging from its tortured past. Nick currently lives in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and has worked on more than 20 titles for Lonely Planet.



NANA LUCKHAM

Born in Tanzania to a Ghanaian mother and an English father, Nana started life crisscrossing Africa by planes and bouncing along the roughest of roads. A rather less glamorous childhood on the south coast of England followed, albeit punctuated with periods living in Ghana and a then-thriving Zimbabwe. After a degree in history and French and a Masters in international relations she headed off, with an impressively small backpack, to explore southern and eastern Africa and beyond, supplementing her travels with periods of gainful employment at UN headquarters in New York. She now lives in the exotic wilds of southwest London but still spends most of her time on the road.



VESNA MARIC

Algeria, Tunisia

Malawi, Zambia

Vesna's love for North Africa was awoken in the Algerian Sahara years ago, when she celebrated New Year's Eve at a Touareg music festival. Researching Algeria and Tunisia for this book was a fantastic experience, and Vesna particularly enjoyed going back into the desert, visiting *Star Wars* sites, eating lovely Algerian and Tunisian food (and trying to make her own *briq*, a deep-fried, thin pastry pocket), and dipping her feet into the Mediterranean sea. Vesna writes articles and short stories, produces radio features and has worked on short films.





Brendan is an expat Brit and one-time travel guide who woke up one morning to find himself living in Vancouver married to one of his former clients. He first discovered Africa in the 1990s, when he embarked upon a crosscontinental hitchhiking odyssey that began in Cape Town and ended in Dar es Salaam. Inspired by tales of derring-do on Africa's last frontier, he returned to the 'dark continent' in 2001 to work at a teacher's training college in rural Angola. Extracurricular tasks included building latrines, refurbishing a library ransacked by Unita guerrillas, and staging a Portuguese version of Shakespeare's 'Comedy of Errors' in the middle of the bush.



JENNY WALKER

Egypt

Jenny Walker's first involvement with Egypt was as a teenager trying to fend off the advances of balcony-climbing locals. Certain there must be more to Egypt than testosterone, she studied the country (and wider region) in a dissertation on Doughty and Lawrence (BA, University of Stirling) and in a thesis entitled *The Perception of the Arabic Orient*, *1780–1820* (MPhil, University of Oxford). She has written extensively on the Middle East for Lonely Planet and, with her husband, coauthored Off-Road in the Sultanate of Oman, where she lives. Although deeply attached to the Arab world, she has travelled extensively in 86 countries from Morocco to Tanzania, and from Panama to Mongolia, engaged in diverse assignments.



TONY WHEELER

Central African Republic

Tony and Maureen Wheeler's Asia overland trip in 1972 led to Across Asia on the Cheap, the very first Lonely Planet guidebook. Their Africa travels have ranged from camping safaris in East Africa with their young children to a recent aerial trek up the western side of the continent that included a visit to the Central African Republic. Their latest African adventure was the Plymouth–Banjul Challenge, where they nursed an old car from England to Gambia.



VANESSA WRUBLE Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, São Tomé & Príncipe Currently pursuing an advanced degree in psychology, for most of her adult life Vanessa has been a freelance writer, humanitarian aid worker, TV correspondent/producer, documentary filmmaker, interactive artist, renegade street event organiser, and, of course, a traveller. She is currently at work on a book based on her blog from Sierra Leone (www .vanessawithoutborders.com), tentatively entitled *A Hipster's Guide to Freetown*. If she ever finishes, Vanessa intends to embark on an album, write and direct a movie, and learn the 30 languages she's been dying to become fluent in, but only after traveling to every country in the universe.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Harriet Martin wrote the Zimbabwe chapter. Born in Tanzania to Australian parents, Harriet lived in southern Africa until she was 12. She then studied in Sydney, but the travel bug was never far from the surface. She backpacked and worked in South and Central America, the Middle East, India and West Africa, before returning 'home' to sub-Saharan Africa.

Jane Cornwell is an Australian-born, UK-based journalist, author and broadcaster, who wrote the Music in West Africa chapter. After graduating with a Masters degree in anthropology, she left for London where she worked, variously, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts and for Peter Gabriel's Real World company. She currently writes about arts, books and music – most notably world music – for a range of UK and antipodean publications, including the *Times, Evening Standard* and *Telegraph* newspapers, *Songlines* magazine and the *Australian* newspaper. She travels about the planet regularly, interviewing world musicians.

Dr Caroline Evans wrote the Health chapter. Caroline studied medicine at the University of London, and completed General Practice training in Cambridge. She is the medical adviser to Nomad Travel Clinic, a private travel health clinic in London, and is also a GP specialising in travel medicine. She has been an expedition doctor for Raleigh International and Coral Cay expeditions.



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History

African history is a massive and intricate subject. What follows is only intended as a general overview. It's just to give you a taste of the world-shaking events that have shaped the continent's history, from the early men and women who left their footsteps in volcanic ash to the liberation of Nelson Mandela, and a whole lot of wars, conquests, civilisations and revolutions in between. You'll find more detailed histories in each of the individual country chapters.

HUMAN ORIGINS & MIGRATIONS

You've probably heard the claim that Africa is 'the birthplace of humanity'. But before there were humans, or even apes, or even ape ancestors, there was... rock. Africa is the oldest and most enduring landmass in the world. When you stand on African soil, 97% of what's under your feet has been in place for more than 300 million years. During that time, Africa has seen pretty much everything – from proto-bacteria to dinosaurs and finally, around five to 10 million years ago, a special kind of ape called *Australopithecines*, that branched off (or rather let go of the branch), and walked on two legs down a separate evolutionary track.

This radical move led to the development of various hairy, dim-witted hominids (early men) – *Homo habilis* around 2.4 million years ago, *Homo erectus* some 1.8 million years ago and finally *Homo sapiens* (modern humans) around 200,000 years ago. Around 50,000 years later, somewhere in Tanzania or Ethiopia, a woman was born who has become known as 'mitochondrial Eve'. We don't know what she looked like, or how she lived her life, but we do know that every single human being alive today (yup, that's EVERYONE) is descended from her. So at a deep genetic level, we're all still Africans.

The break from Africa into the wider world occurred around 100,000 years ago, when a group numbering perhaps as few as 50 people migrated out of North Africa, along the shores of the Mediterranean and into the Middle East. From this inauspicious start came a population that would one day cover almost every landmass on the globe.

Around the time that people were first venturing outside the continent, hunting and gathering was still the lifestyle of choice; humans lived in communities that rarely exceeded a couple of hundred individuals, and social bonds were formed to enable these small bands of people to share food resources and hunt co-operatively. With the evolution of language, these bonds blossomed into the beginnings of society and culture as we know it today.

The first moves away from the nomadic hunter–gatherer way of life came between 14,000 BC and 9500 BC, a time when rainfall was high and the Sahara and North Africa became verdant. It was in these green and pleasant lands that the first farmers were born, and mankind learned to cultivate crops rather than following prey animals from place to place.

By 2500 BC the rains began to fail and the sandy barrier between North and West Africa became the Sahara we know today. People began to move southwest into the rainforests of Central Africa. By this time a group of people speaking the same kind of languages had come to dominate the landscape in Africa south of the Sahara. Known as the Bantu, their populations grew as they discovered iron-smelting technology and developed new agricultural techniques. By 100 BC, Bantu peoples had reached East Africa; by AD 300 they were living in southern Africa, and the age of the African empires had begun.

'The break from Africa into the wider world occurred when a group numbering as few as 50 people migrated along the shores of the Mediterranean and into the Middle East

AFRICAN EMPIRES

Victorian missionaries liked to think they were bringing the beacon of 'civilisation' to the 'savages' of Africa, but the truth is that Africans were developing commercial empires and complex urban societies while Europeans were still running after wildlife with clubs. Many of these civilisations were small and short-lived, but others were truly great, with influence that reached far beyond Africa and into Asia and Europe.

Mozambique loses more than \$130 million a year – the equivalent of its entire national budget for agriculture and rural development – due to restrictions on importing into Europe and the dumping of cheap sugar exports at its door.

Pyramids of Power

Arguably the greatest of the African empires was the first: Ancient Egypt. Formed through an amalgamation of already organised states in the Nile Delta around 3100 BC, it achieved an amazing degree of cultural and social sophistication. Sophisticated food-production techniques from the Sahara combined with influences from the Middle East to form a society in which the Pharaohs, a race of kings imbued with the power of gods, sat at the top of a highly stratified social hierarchy. The annual flooding of the Nile kept the lands of the Pharaohs fertile and fed their legions of slaves and artisans, who in turn worked to produce some of the most amazing public buildings ever constructed. Many of these, like the Pyramids of Giza, are still standing today. During the good times, which lasted nearly 3000 years, Egyptians discovered the principals of mathematics and astronomy, invented a written language and mined gold. Ancient Egypt was eventually overrun by the Nubian Empire, then by the Assyrians, Persians, Alexander the Great and finally the Romans. The Nubians retained control of a great swathe of the Lower Nile Valley, despite getting a spanking from the Ethiopian empire of Aksum around AD 500.

Hannibal's Homeland

Established in Tunisia by a mysterious race of seafaring people called the Phoenicians (little is known about their origins, but they probably hailed from Tyre in modern-day Lebanon), the city-state of Carthage filled the power gap left by the fading empire of Ancient Egypt. By the 6th century BC, Carthage controlled much of the local sea trade, their ships sailing to and from the Mediterranean ports laden with cargos of dye, cedar wood and precious metals. Back on land, scholars were busy inventing the Phoenician alphabet, from which Greek, Hebrew and Latin letters are all thought to derive. All this came to an abrupt end with the arrival of the Romans, who razed Carthage to the ground (despite the best efforts of the mighty warrior Hannibal, Carthage's most celebrated son) and enslaved its population in 146 BC. A host of foreign armies swept across North Africa in the succeeding centuries, but it was the Arabs who had a lasting impact, introducing Islam around AD 670.

The Kingdom of Sheba

Aksum was the first truly African indigenous state – no conquerors from elsewhere arrived to start this legendary kingdom, which controlled much of Sudan and southern Arabia at the height of its powers. Aksum's heart was the hilly, fertile landscape of northern Ethiopia, a cool, green place that contrasts sharply with the hot, dry shores of the Red Sea just a few hundred kilometres away. The Aksumites traded with Egypt, the eastern Mediterranean and Arabia, developed a written language, produced gold coins and built imposing stone buildings. In the third century AD, the Aksumite king converted to Christianity, founding the Ethiopian Orthodox church. Legend has it that Ethiopia was the home of the fabled Queen of Sheba and the last resting place of the mysterious Ark of the Covenant. Aksum also captured the imagination of medieval Europeans, who told tales of a legendary Christian king named 'Prester John' who ruled over a race of white people deep in darkest Africa.

Golden Kingdoms

The area around present-day Mali was the home of a hugely wealthy series of West African empires that flourished over the course of more than 800 years. The Ghana Empire lasted from AD 700 to 1000, and was followed by the Mali Empire (around AD 1250 to 1500), which once stretched all the way from the coast of Senegal to Niger. The Songhai Empire (AD 1000–1591) was the last of these little-known, trade-based empires, which at times covered areas larger than Western Europe, and whose wealth was founded on the mining of gold and salt from Saharan mines. Camels carried these natural resources across the desert to cities in North Africa and the Middle East, returning laden with manufactured goods and producing a huge surplus of wealth. One Malian emperor was said to possess a nugget of gold so large you could tether a horse to it! Organised systems of government and Islamic centres of scholarship – the most famous of which was Timbuktu – flourished in the kingdoms of West Africa, but conversely, it was Islam that led to their downfall when the forces of Morocco invaded in 1591.

Swahili Sultans

While the West African kings were trading their way to fame and fortune, a similar process was occurring on Africa's east coast. As early as the 7th century AD, the coastal areas of modern-day Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique were home to a chain of vibrant, well-organised city-states, whose inhabitants lived in stone houses, wore fine silks and decorated their gravestones with fine ceramics and glass. Merchants from as far afield as China and India arrived on the East African coast in their magnificent, wooden sailing boats, then set off again with their holds groaning with trade goods, spices, slaves and exotic beasts. The rulers of these city-states were the Swahili sultans - kings and queens who kept a hold on their domains via their control over magical objects and knowledge of secret religious ceremonies. The Swahili sultans were eventually defeated by Portuguese and Omani conquerors, but the rich cultural melting pot they presided over gave rise to the Swahili language, a fusion of African, Arabic and Portuguese words that still thrives in the present day. The Omani sultans who replaced the Swahili rulers made the fabled island of Zanzibar their headquarters, building beautiful palaces and bathhouses and cementing the hold of Islamic culture on the East African coast.

THE EUROPEAN SLAVE TRADE

There has always been slavery in Africa (slaves were often the by-products of intertribal warfare, and the Arabs and Shirazis who dominated the East African coast took slaves by the thousands), but it was only after Portuguese ships arrived off the African coast in the fifteenth century that slaving turned into an export industry. The Portuguese in West Africa, the Dutch in South Africa and other Europeans who came after them were initially searching for lucrative trade routes, but they soon saw how African slavery worked and were impressed with how slaves helped fuel agricultural production. They figured that slaves would be just the thing for their huge American sugar plantations. At the same time, African leaders realised they could extend their kingdoms by waging war, and get rich trading with Europeans, whose thirst for slaves (and gradual insistence that slaves be exchanged for guns) created a vicious circle of conflict.

Check out Richard Hall's fantastic *Empires* of the Monsoon, an unputdownable history of the Indian Ocean and the various colourful characters who sailed across it, from Vasco da Gama to the Three-Jewel Eunuch.

If you are interested in corruption, leopard-skin hats and pink champagne (and who isn't?), get a copy of Michaela Wrong's excellent book about the infamous President Mobutu of Zaire, In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz.

lonelyplanet.com

A mere 1% increase in world trade from Africa would be the equivalent of five times the foreign aid currently received by the entire continent. Exact figures are impossible to establish, but from the end of the 15th century until around 1870, when the slave trade was abolished, up to 20 million Africans were enslaved. Perhaps half died en route to the Americas; millions of others perished in slaving raids.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade gave European powers a huge economic boost, while the loss of farmers and tradespeople, as well as the general chaos, made Africa an easy target for colonialism.

THE AGE OF THE EXPLORERS

The first European visitors to Africa were content to make brief forays into well-fortified coastal settlements, but it wasn't long before the thirst to discover (and exploit) the unknown interior took hold. Victorian heroes such as Richard Burton and John Speke captured the public imagination with the hair-raising tales from the East African interior, while Mungo Park and the formidable Mary Wesley battled their way through fever-ridden swamps, and avoided charging animals while 'discovering' various parts of West Africa. Most celebrated was missionary-explorer David Livingstone, who was famously encountered by Henry Morton Stanley on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. Livingstone spent the best years of his life attempting to convert the 'natives' to Christianity and searching for the source of the Nile.

Thanks to the Cold War conflicts of the 1970s, and the civil wars that are always raging somewhere on the continent, Africa is awash with cheap guns. An AK-47 can cost as little as USS6 – and once upon a time in northern Kenya, an AK-47 could even be swapped for a loaf of bread.

COLONIALISM

Hot on the heels of the 19th-century explorers came the representatives of European powers, who began the infamous 'scramble for Africa', vying with each other to exploit real or imagined resources for their sovereigns, and demarcating random and unlikely national borders that still remain to this day. At the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, most of Africa was split neatly into colonies. France and Britain got the biggest swathes, with Germany, Portugal, Italy, Spain and Belgium picking up bits and pieces.

Forced labour, heavy taxation, and swift and vengeful violence for any insurrection were all characteristics of the colonial administrations. African territories were essentially organised to extract cheap cash crops and natural resources for use by the colonial powers. To facilitate easy administration, tribal differences and rivalries were exploited to the full, and Africans who refused to assimilate to the culture of their overlords were kept out of the market economy and the education system. Industrial development and social welfare were rarely high on the colonialists' agenda, and the effects of the colonial years, which in some cases only ended a few decades ago, continue to leave their mark on the continent.

AFRICA FOR THE AFRICANS

African independence movements have existed for as long as the foreign overlords, but the formation of organised political resistance gained momentum in the 1950s and '60s, when soldiers who had fought in both World Wars on

DIAMONDS ARE A DICTATOR'S BEST FRIEND

They symbolise love and happiness in the developed world, but the harsh reality is that the smuggling and illegal trade of diamonds has funded conflicts and propped up corrupt regimes in many parts of Africa for decades. In an effort to curb the trade in so-called 'conflict diamonds', the Kimberley System came into force in 2003. The system aims to impose a method of self-regulation for diamond buyers and retailers to ensure that only authenticated diamonds make their way into shops. Critics have suggested, however, that retailers in the US and UK are failing to implement the system effectively, and that conflict diamonds are still for sale.

behalf of their colonial masters joined forces with African intellectuals who had gained their education through missionary schools and universities. Young men and women went abroad to study and were inspired by the fiery speeches of communist figures and the far-reaching goals of nationalist movements from other countries. They returned home dreaming of 'Africa for the Africans'. Some realised this dream peacefully, others only after decades of bloodshed and struggle, but by the 1970s the dream had become a reality, and a new era of independent African governments was born.

In many cases, however, it didn't take long before the dream turned into a nightmare. Fledgling African nations became pawns in the Cold War machinations of self-serving foreign powers, and factors such as economic collapse and ethnic resentment led them to spiral down into a mire of corruption, violence and civil war. For a closer look at the adventures of Africa's postcolonial governments, flip to the History sections of individual country chapters. When Ethiopian rebel forces rolled into Addis Ababa in 1991 they were navigating with photocopies of the Addis Ababa map found in Lonely Planet's Africa on a Shoestring.

The Culture

An estimated 910,571,130 people live in Africa, speaking well over a thousand different languages. From pale northern Berbers to tall, slender Somalians and tiny, golden-skinned San, Africans comprise the most culturally and ethnically diverse group of people on the planet. Many parts of Africa are also home to significant Asian, European and Middle Eastern populations. In addition to the dazzling variety of African languages spoken on the continent, many countries have adopted the language of their former colonial powers (English, French, Portuguese, German, Arabic and Italian), either officially or unofficially.

If you're in London, the Africa Centre (🕿 020-7836 1973; www.africa centre.org.uk; 38 King St, Covent Garden) is a bookshop, cultural centre, gig venue and education

resource for all things

350 million Africans live

on less than US\$1 a day.

The average British

household pays over

£800 a year in extra

European Union subsidy

African farmers a fair

price for their goods.

African.

DAILY LIFE

For the overwhelming majority of African societies, life has changed beyond recognition in the last 100 years. Colonialism, globalisation, technological advances and foreign influences have all been factors in this social revolution. Perhaps the key change in African daily life has been the move to the cities. Population explosions caused by better access to health and medical facilities meant that rural areas became overburdened, with available land for grazing and cultivation declining and extra pressure being put on facilities such as schools and hospitals.

As governments stepped up industrial production in the wake of gaining independence during the 1950s and 1960s, there was a mass movement away from the countryside and towards the cities in search of work. Over a third of Africans now live their daily lives in an urban context. Unfortunately, urban population growth has far outpaced job creation, so that unemployment in many African cities is rife.

Although cultural life remains strong, a whole generation of kids is growing up with no connection to the countryside, its lores and traditions, and the tribal culture that goes along with village life. The average urban African teenager has more interest in basketball and hip-hop than in harvest rituals or traditional songs. In many cases, urbanisation has led to the breakdown of traditional social values such as respect for elders, and the loosening of family structures, leading to escalating levels of crime.

Rural populations in turn have suffered from the absence of males, the primary breadwinners, who are usually the first to leave their villages and seek work in the cities. Urbanisation has accelerated the spread of HIV, with migrant workers passing the disease on to their wives on visits home, and the resulting orphans being forced into the care of their elderly family members or left to fend for themselves.

All of this isn't to say that life in Africa's towns and villages is an unremitting round of doom and gloom. Family bonds are still much stronger than grocery bills thanks to the in many First World societies, with the concepts of community and shared responsibility deeply rooted. Western culture has in many cases been fused system, which also denies with traditional African forms of expression to create new and vibrant art forms, and resilience, patience and humour are still the first traits that strike visitors who make the effort to get acquainted with ordinary Africans.

SPORT

Africans are as sport-mad as the rest of the world, and sport has played a huge part in establishing national identities in the wake of independence. Football (soccer) is the most popular of Africa's sports, and you'll never have to go far before you find someone kicking a ball (or a bundle of plastic bags tied together with string) around on a dusty patch of ground.

The African Nations Cup, held yearly in January and February, keeps tongues wagging across the continent all year round. Cameroon, Egypt and Ghana are the most successful teams in the competition's history, with four titles apiece.

All the national teams have devoted followings, with supporters frequently invoking magic charms and rituals to ensure the success of their teams, who enjoy a range of colourful nicknames, such as the Red Sea Boys (Eritrea),

AIDS

It's impossible to overstate the impact that HIV/AIDS is having on Africa. The figures are mindboggling - within the last 24 hours around 6,500 Africans were killed by HIV/AIDS. There are many possible reasons why HIV/AIDS has taken such a hold in Africa compared to other parts of the world. Collective denial of the problem, migration in search of work and to escape wars and famine, a general lack of adequate healthcare and prevention programmes, and social and cultural factors - in particular the low status of women in many African societies - are all believed to have played a role in the rapid spread of the disease.

The personal, social and economic costs associated with the disease are devastating. HIV/ AIDS predominantly hits the most productive members of society - young adults. This has a huge impact on family income, food production and local economies in general, and large parts of Africa face the loss of a significant proportion of entire generations. Many families are losing their income earners and the families of those that die have to find money to pay for their funerals. Many of those dying have surviving partners who are themselves infected and in need of care. Employers, schools, factories and hospitals have to train other staff to replace those at the workplace who become too ill to work, setting economic and social development back by decades.

The Joint UN programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates that there will be 42 million orphans by 2010, many of whom will end up on the street as nihilistic little crime waves. Some observers believe that HIV/AIDS is causing societal breakdown in some places; certainly, AIDS orphans have become child soldiers in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo and Uganda.

In 2003 US President George W Bush pledged US\$15 billion towards fighting AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean, but the cash may not be available to any organisation that promotes or condones abortion. Drug treatments that are available in the West to increase the life span of AIDS sufferers and reduce the risk of HIV-infected women passing the infection on to their unborn babies are still out of the reach of most Africans (Brazil has managed to halve AIDS deaths by making such drugs free). But in some countries, such as Senegal and Uganda, vigorous education programmes have slowed the spread of the disease. AIDS is by no means Africa's only killer: diseases such as malaria and TB also take their toll.

The Facts

- Scientists think that HIV/AIDS leapt the species barrier from chimpanzees to people around 70 years ago.
- Ninety-five per cent of the world's AIDS orphans live in Africa 12 million in all.
- Almost 26 million people are living with AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.
- There were 3.1 million new infections in 2005, but only one in 10 Africans who needed antiretroviral treatment were receiving it.
- Seventeen million Africans have died from AIDS since the start of the epidemic; 2.4 million died in 2005.
- Average life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa is now 47 years; without AIDS it would have been 62.
- The largest increasing group of HIV-positive people are monogamous, married women, and it's women who do most agricultural work in Africa.

Offering to kick a football about is a sure-fire way to get yourself an instant group of juvenile friends almost anywhere in Africa. Footballs for Fun (www.footballsforfun .com) is a British charity that encourages visitors to Africa to buy footballs as gifts for the locals. The proceeds (£2 per ball) go to African charities. the Zebras (Botswana), the Super Eagles (Nigeria) and the Kilimanjaro Stars (Tanzania). Not even the most frenzied of African Nations Cup activity, however, will compete with the total and utter madness that will descend when Africa hosts its first ever World Cup finals, set to be held in South Africa in 2010...

Other popular African sports include marathon running (at which Kenya and Ethiopia dominate the world) and boxing. Basketball is becoming increasingly popular with the arrival of American TV channels.

MEDIA

Although no-one doubts the potential of mass media such as newspapers, radio stations or TV to be a tool for development in Africa, the media industry on the continent is beset by many problems. Access is one, as many people still live in rural areas, with little or no infrastructure. Many corrupt governments also ruthlessly suppress all but state-controlled media. Many Africans feel that reporting on the continent by the international media paints an unfair portrait of Africa as a hopeless case, beset by war, famine and corruption.

With 40% of Africa's population over 15 years old unable to read, the usefulness of print media is in itself questionable.

Internet

Africa currently has 32 million internet users (or 3.6% of the population, as compared to 38.6% of Europeans and 69.7% of North Americans), with this number growing by 400% in the last five years. The real figures, however, are probably six to eight times higher, as many Africans get online via shared PCs in internet cafés or schools.

Africans are now using the internet to bypass the often unreliable reporting of the state-funded media, while groups such as rural women, who have in the past been denied access to information on healthcare and human rights, are empowered by their access to online education resources. Many such grass-roots cyber-education projects are still in their infancy, but exciting times are ahead.

Newspapers & Magazines

For continental coverage you can't go wrong with the BBC's *Focus on Africa* magazine. Published quarterly, the writing is sharp, and the overview of politics, sport, arts and music perfect for travellers. It's available worldwide on subscription from www.bbc.co.uk and from shops in English-speaking countries in Africa. Other current-affairs mags include monthly *New African* and *Africa Today*. Look out too for *West Africa*, available in most English-speaking West African countries and a few in East Africa. The *East African* is good for an overview of what's happening in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. If you're in West Africa and your French is well oiled, *Jeune Afrique* is a highly regarded weekly news magazine.

Radio

With TV out of the reach of many, radio remains by far the most popular medium of communication in Africa, with even the most remote rural villagers gathering around a crackling radio to listen to funeral or wedding announcements or catch the latest pop releases.

For continental coverage, however, locals and travellers tune into international broadcasters; most have dedicated Africa slots. As well as the trusty BBC World Service (also available in some cities on FM), Voice of America and Radio France Internationale are perennial favourites. If you'd rather hear African news from Africans, try **Channel Africa** (www.channelafrica .org), the international radio service of the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

Television

Americans own one TV set for every one person, according to UN surveys. Africans own one for every 16. Televisions remain luxury items, unavailable to most of Africa's poorer inhabitants. Walk around many African towns and villages after dark, however, and you're likely to come across the dim blue glow of a TV set, often set in a doorway so that an audience of 20 or 30 can gather around it to watch the latest episode of a local soap or a football match. The latest attempt to launch a pan-African TV station comes from a Kenyan journalist called Salim Amin, whose ATV network is slated to launch in late 2007.

RELIGION

Most Africans are deeply religious, with religious values informing every aspect of their daily life. Roughly put, North Africa, West and Central Africa close to the Sahara, together with much of the East African coast is Islamic; while East and southern Africa and the rest of the continent are predominantly Christian. If statistics are to be believed, 40% of Africans are Muslim and 40% Christian, leaving around 20% who follow traditional African beliefs. These figures should be taken with a pinch of salt, however, as many Africans see no contradiction at all in combining their traditional beliefs with Islam or Christianity. Hindus and Sikhs are found in places where immigrants arrived from Asia during the colonial era.

Conflict and religion have always gone hand in hand in Africa, with religion playing a large part in the independence struggle in many African countries, from the diplomatic efforts of clergymen such as Archbishop Tutu of South Africa, to the war prophets of Mozambique and Angola, who promised their followers immunity from bullets if they washed in magic water. Even today, charismatic religious figures enjoy popular followings in many parts of Africa.

RELIGION AFRICAN STYLE

Africa's traditional religions are generally animist, believing that objects such as trees, caves or ritual objects such as gourds or drums are endowed with spiritual powers. Most African religions centre on ancestor veneration, the idea that the dead remain influential after passing from the physical into the spiritual world. Ancestors must therefore be honoured in order to ensure that they intervene positively with other spiritual beings on behalf of their relatives on earth.

The practice of traditional medicine is closely intertwined with traditional religion. Practitioners (often derogatively referred to as 'witch doctors' by foreigners) use divining implements such as bones, prayers, chanting and dance to facilitate communication with the spirit world. Patients are cured with the use of herbal preparations or by exorcist-style interventions to drive out evil spirits that have inhabited the body. Not all magical practitioners are benign – some are suspected of being paid to place curses on people, causing them to experience bad luck, sickness or even death.

Although traditional religious practices can be a force for social good within a community, and herbalists are often very skilled in their craft, there's a flip side: some religious practitioners discourage their patients from seeking conventional medical help at hospitals or clinics, and someone who considers themselves cursed will very often give up the will to live entirely. In some parts of southern Africa, *muti* killings occasionally take place, in which children or adults are abducted and murdered in order to gain body parts for use in magic rituals.

Focus on Africa (www .bbc.co.uk/worldservice /focusonafrica) and Jeune Afrique (www.jeune afrique.com in French) will keep you bang up-to-date on African current events. For more in-depth features, try the National Geographic's Africa Archive at www .nationalgeographic .com/ngm/africaarchive.

WOMEN IN AFRICA

Women form the backbone of African families, institutions that provide an excellent support network. However, these institutions are being sorely tested by the AIDS epidemic and are often upset if the men are forced to leave their homes and move to the cities as migrant industrial workers.

Women usually tackle the lion's share of agricultural work in traditional village societies, and in some nations sexual equality is enshrined in law. Sadly, on the ground, equal rights are some way off and women are often treated as second-class citizens. Families sometimes deny girls schooling, although education is valued highly by most Africans. More serious still are reports of female infanticide, forced marriages, female genital mutilation and honour killings.

African women made history in 2005 when a legal protocol came into force that specifically protects women's human rights in the 17 countries that ratified it. These countries have pledged to amend their laws to uphold a raft of women's rights, including the right to property after divorce, the right to abortions after rape or abuse, and the right to equal pay in the workplace, among many others.

ARTS

Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org); Human Rights Watch (http://hrw.org/women); Womankind (www .womankind.org.uk).

If you're interested in

campaigning for women's

rights in Africa, the fol-

lowing websites provide

a good place to start:

Traditional African art and craft consists of ceremonial masks, figures related to ancestral worship, fetishes (which protect against certain spirits), weapons, furnishings and everyday utensils. All kinds of materials are used (including bronze casting in some regions) and great skill can also be seen in the production of textiles, basketry and leatherwork. Contemporary African artists now use traditional as well as modern media to express themselves, with many now making an impact on the international art scene. Major events such as the Africa Remix (www.africaremix.org.uk) have brought African art to a worldwide audience.

Tourism has greatly affected African art and craft, with considerable effort now going into producing objects for sale rather than traditional use, and popular styles in one part of Africa are widely mimicked elsewhere. Some art forms, such as the *tingatinga* paintings of Tanzania, evolved entirely out of demand from tourists and returning expatriates for 'traditional' African artworks.

In North Africa, ancient Arabic and Islamic traditions have produced some very fine art (ceramics and carpets are particularly beautiful and refined), as well as some phenomenal architecture; in the Sahara, Tuareg silver jewellery is unique and beautiful.

But it's arguably West Africa that produces the most amazing art; Nigeria and Benin have long been associated with fine bronze sculptures and carv-

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Often masquerading as the euphemism 'female circumcision', female genital mutilation (FGM) is still performed on young girls and women in many parts of Africa, despite international pressure and official opposition from many African governments. Amnesty International estimates that 135 million of the world's girls and women have undergone genital mutilation, and two million girls a year are at risk of mutilation. The practice, which is reportedly undertaken in more than 28 African countries, involves the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia, and is usually performed by a midwife or other respected female member of society. There are myriad reasons cited for the practice, which predates Islam. In many societies, an 'altered' woman is seen as chaste, honourable and clean, and ready for marriage. Infection and serious medical complications are common.

CONTEMPORARY FOLK TALES

Nigerian authors dominate the English-speaking West African literature scene and some, like Amos Tutuola, adapt African folklore into their own works. Penned by Tutuola, The Palm-Wine Drunkard is a rather grisly tale of a man who enters the spirit world in order to find his palmwine supplier! Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe is a more contemporary but deeply symbolic tale about a man's rise and fall at the time colonialism arrived in Africa. Another Nigerian writer, Ben Okri, found worldwide fame with his novels The Famished Road and Songs of Enchantment, which draw heavily on folk traditions.

ings, and the Ashanti people of Ghana are renowned for fine textiles and gold sculptures.

Throughout East and southern Africa the Makonde people of Mozambique and the Shona of Zimbabwe produce excellent and widely copied sculptures.

In recent years, recycled art has become popular, with township artists in South Africa and elsewhere producing sculpture and textiles created entirely from discarded objects such as tin cans and bottle tops.

Literature

Evidence of ancient written languages has been found in modern-day Ethiopia and Egypt, while in North Africa the writings of Islamic scholars and academics provide almost 1500 years of history and endless reams of prose and poetry. Swahili (East Africa), Hausa (Nigeria) and Amharic (Ethiopia) contemporary cultures have a more recent literary history, with written language in existence for a few centuries.

Sub-Saharan Africa's rich, multilayered literary history, however, was almost entirely oral. Folk tales, poems, proverbs, myths, historical tales and (most importantly) ethnic traditions were passed down through generations by word of mouth. Some societies have specific keepers of history and storytelling, such as the griots of West Africa, and in many cases stories are sung or tales performed in a form of theatre. As a result, little of Africa's rich literary history was known to the outside world until relatively recently. However, African writers and academics across the continent are now collecting and conserving Africa's disappearing oral heritage, and there are some excellent collections of African tales and proverbs available.

Modern-day and 20th-century African literature have been greatly influenced by colonial education and Western trends. Some African authors have made an effort to employ traditional structures and folk tales in their work, while others write of the contemporary hardships faced by Africans and their fight to shake off the shackles of colonialism using Westerninfluenced narrative methods (and penning their works in English, French or Portuguese).

FOOD & DRINK

Whether it's a group of Kenyans gathering in a nyama choma shop to consume hunks of grilled meat washed down with cold lager, or some Ghanaians dipping balls of *foufou* (see the following section) into a steaming bowl of stew, there's one thing all Africans have in common - they love to eat. Folk tales and traditions from all over the continent feature stories about cooking and consuming food, a process that's the focus of almost all social and family activities. African food is generally bold and colourful, with its rich, earthy textures and strong, spicy undertones showing influences from Arab traders, European colonists and Asian slaves.

Traveller's Literary Companion – Africa edited by Oona Strathern Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa by Charlotte H Bruner, The Book of African Stories, edited by Stephen Gray, and Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry edited by Moore and Beier provide a very useful literary background.

The Africa Cookbook: Tastes of a Continent by food historian Jessica Harris is a perfect companion for those interested in creating traditional African dishes in a non-African kitchen.

Staples & Specialities

In West Africa, don't miss sauce arachide, a thick brown paste made from groundnuts (peanuts), either on its own or mixed with meat or vegetables. Sometimes palm oil is also added. Your fingers turn bright orange but the taste is great.

First Catch Your Eland: a Taste of Africa by Laurens van der Post is a fascinating, if dated, collection of memoirs and observations about food in Africa. Well worth trawling the second-hand bookshops for.

Bottled water is available in most African countries, though not in remote rural areas. Check that the cap seals are unbroken – in some places bottles are refilled with river water and sold to unsuspecting tourists. Each region has its own key staples: in East and southern Africa, the base for many local meals is a stiff dough made from maize flour, called – among other things – *ugali, sadza, pap* and *nsima*. In West Africa millet is also common, and served in a similar way, while staples nearer the coast are root crops such as yam or cassava (*manioc* in French), served as a near-solid glob called *foufou*. In North Africa, bread forms a major part of the meal, while all over Africa rice is an alternative to the local specialities. In some countries, plantain (green banana) is also common, either fried, cooked solid or pounded into *foufou*. A sauce of meat, fish, beans or vegetables is then added to the carbo base. If you're eating local style, you grab a portion of bread or dough or pancake (with your right hand, please!), dip it in the communal pot of sauce and sit back, beaming contentedly, to eat it.

Drinks

Tea and coffee are the standard drinks, and countries seem to follow the flavours of their former colonisers. In (formerly British) East Africa, tea and coffee tends to be weak, grey and milky. In much of (formerly French) West Africa tea is usually served black, while the coffee from roadside stalls contains enough sugar and sweetened condensed milk to keep you fully charged for hours. In North Africa and some Sahel countries (the Sahel region covers Mauritania, Cape Verde, Gambia, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad), mint tea and strong Arab-style coffee are the local delights. Other variations include *chai* (tea) or coffee spiced up with lemongrass or cardamom in East Africa, or flavoured with a woody leaf called *kinkiliba* in West Africa.

International fizzy drinks, such as Coke and Fanta are widely available, while many countries have their own brands that are cheaper and just as good (although often owned by the big multinationals too). You can also get locally made soft drinks and fruit juices, sold in plastic bags, or frozen into 'icesticks', but these are worth avoiding if you're worried about your stomach, as the water they're made from is usually unpurified. Alcohol allegedly kills the bugs, so no health worries about having an alcoholic drink here...

In bars, you can buy local or imported beer in bottles, and a range of spirits, with juice or soft drinks to mix them with. Excellent wines and liqueurs, from South Africa or further afield, are available in more upmarket establishments. Traditional beer is made from millet or maize, and drunk from huge communal pots with great ceremony at special events, and with less pomp in everyday situations.

West Africa's most popular brew is palm wine. The tree is tapped and the sap comes out mildly fermented. In other parts of the continent, alcohol is made using bananas, pineapples or other fruit, sometimes fermented overnight. This homemade alcohol is often outrageously strong, can lead to blindness or mental illness, and is downright illegal in some places, where police stop shared taxis to open any suspicious-looking containers in the baggage and sniff the contents. You have been warned!

Celebrations

In much of Africa, a celebration, be it a wedding, coming-of-age ceremony or even a funeral, is an excuse to stuff yourself until your eyes pop out and you beg for mercy. In non-Islamic countries, this eating-fest could well be accompanied by a lot of drinking, followed mostly by falling down. Celebration food of course varies widely from country to country, but veggies beware – many feasts are preceded by a lot of blood and gore as surprised-looking goats, sheep, cows or chickens are slaughtered and added to the pot.

TASTES LIKE CHICKEN...

In many parts of Africa you'll find the locals chomping with gusto on some – ahem – unusual foods. If you're brave in heart and stomach, why not try some of these more adventurous snacks:

- Giant rat The agouti, a ratlike rodent about the size of a rabbit, frequently turns up in West African stews. Avoid this one though – it's under threat in the wild. If you really can't do without a rodent for your dinner, try a skewer of baby grasscutters (cane rats) roasted over coals and served up in West African markets...
- Land snails Described as having a texture like 'stubborn rubber', giant land snails are eaten in parts of Nigeria.
- Mopane worms These are actually not worms, but caterpillars the green and blue larvae of the emperor moth, which make their home on the mopane trees of southern Africa. These protein-rich critters are boiled and then dried in the sun before being eaten.

If you're lucky enough to be invited to a celebration while you're in Africa, it's polite to bring something (litre bottles of fizzy drink often go down well), and be prepared for a lot of hanging around – nothing happens in a hurry. The accepted wisdom is that it's considered very rude to refuse any food you're offered, but in practice it's probably perfectly acceptable to decline something politely if you really don't want to eat it, as long as you eat something else with gusto!

Where to Eat & Drink FOOD STALLS & STREET FOOD

If you're looking for budget bites, most towns all over Africa have a shacklike stall or 10 serving up cheap local staples. Furniture is usually limited to a rough bench and couple of upturned boxes, and hygiene is rarely a prime concern. However, this is the place to save money and meet the locals. Good places to seek out these no-frills joints include bus stations or markets. Lighter snacks include nuts sold in twists of newspaper, hardboiled eggs (popular for long bus journeys), meat kebabs, or, in some places, more exotic fare like fried caterpillars or baobab fruits. Street food rarely involves plates or knives – it's served on a stick, wrapped in paper, or in a plastic bag.

Ever wondered how to make a pizza oven out of a termite mound? Or prepare bacon and eggs on a shovel? Check out *The African Kitchen* by Josie Stow and Jan Baldwin, a sumptuous cookbook that reveals the secrets of a safari chef.

RESTAURANTS

For something more comfortable, most towns have cheap restaurants where you can buy traditional meals, as well as smarter restaurants with facilities such as tablecloths, waiters and menus. If you're eating in cheaper restaurants, you can expect to be served the same food as the locals, but more upmarket, tourist-orientated establishments serve up more familiar fare, from the ubiquitous chicken and chips to pizzas, pasta dishes and toasted sandwiches.

Colonial influences remain important: you can expect croissants for breakfast in Madagascar, or to pick up Portuguese custard tarts in the bakeries of Mozambique. Africa also has its share of world-class dining, with the best restaurants brilliantly fusing African culinary traditions with those of the rest of the world. Less impressively, even smaller towns are now succumbing to the fast-food craze, with greasy burger and chicken joints springing up with depressing frequency.

Vegetarian & Vegan

Many Africans may think a meal is incomplete unless half of it once lived and breathed but across Africa many cheap restaurants serve rice and beans and other meals suitable for vegans simply because it's all the locals can afford. men whose wives don't understand them head for the pub or the golf course. In East Africa, they gather in the evenings at food-stallcum-butcher's shops lit by bright fluorescent lights and featuring signs saying 'Nyama Choma'.

In the Western world,

Eggs are usually easy to find – expect to eat an awful lot of egg and chips – and fish is available nearer the coast. Be aware that in many places chicken is usually not regarded as meat, and may be served to strict but unsuspecting vegetarians, while even the simplest vegetable sauce may have a bit of animal fat thrown in. Expect to meet with bemusement when you announce that you don't eat meat – the idea of voluntarily giving up something that's seen as an aspirational luxury is hard to understand for many people.

Go to www.recipesource .com/ethnic/africa for a great collection of recipes from across the continent, or check out www.africa.upenn.edu //cookbook/about_cb .html or www.africhef .com for more ideas.

Habits & Customs

In Islamic countries, food is always eaten, passed and touched with the right hand only (the left hand is reserved for washing your bottom, and the two are understandably kept separate). Water in a basin is usually brought to wash your hands before you start eating – hold your hands out and allow the person who brings it to pour it over, then shake your hands dry. It's also customary in some parts of Africa for women and men to eat separately, with the women eating second after they've served the food. In some countries, lunch, rather than dinner is the main meal of the day, and everything stops for a couple of hours while a hot meal is cooked and prepared.

African Music Jane Cornwell

They don't call Africa the Motherland for nothing. The continent has a musical history that stretches back further than any other, a history as vast and varied as its range of rhythms, melodies and overlapping sources and influences. Here, music – traditional and contemporary – is as vital to communication and storytelling as the written word. It is the lifeblood of communities, the solace of the nomad, the entertainment of choice. It can be a political tool – perceived as a threat (France and South Africa are full of exiled African artists) or a campaign winner (African leaders are forever trying to hitch their wagon to popular musicians, many of whom have their own record labels and charitable foundations). Its biggest acts are treated as celebrities, followed wherever they go. Oh, and despite the world music boom, some are relatively unknown in the West. If in doubt, ask a local.

Africa Hit Music TV (www.africahit.com/) is the first internet TV station playing African music videos 24/7. Features thousands of music videos from a host of artists and genres each month.

Without African music there would be no blues, reggae or – some say – rock, let alone Brazilian samba, Puerto Rican salsa, Trinidadian soca or any of a wide array of genres with roots in Africa's timeless sounds. It works

KONONO NO.1

You can hear it, at night, in the suburbs of Kinshasa. Trancelike rhythms – tribal, timeless, primal – bolstered by the ringing sounds of the *likembe*, the region's spiky metal thumb piano. Voices shouting and chanting, calling and responding. Whistles trilling, samba-style. The insistent beat of hand-tooled drums, the rat-a-tat of scrap metal. All of it fizzing through microphones fashioned from old car parts, warping and bulging through home-made amps and colonial-era speakers on stands. The Congo's electro-traditional grooves are always very, very loud.

The combination of traditional trance music – much of it brought into sprawling Kinshasa by displaced, war-scarred bush men – with heavily distorted DIY amplification has transformed the contemporary scene. It's been doing so for some time: 12-member collective Konono No.1 have been together for over 25 years – their 2006 BBC World Music Award Newcomer's gong was a little, well, ironic. Composed of Bazombo people from the Bacongo province on the Congo side of the artificial Congolese/Angolan border, Konono No.1 adapted the ancient Massikulu rhythms their ancestors once played on ivory horns.

Their trademarks – electrified *likembe*, megaphone, rattling snare drum, no guitars – were emulated by other Kinshasa bands, who threw hypnotic *balafons* (xylophones) and sometimes, swirling guitars into the mix. 'But we were the first,' insists Konono No.1 founder Mawangu 'Papa' Mingiedi, 70, sitting dressed in flat cap, pink shirt and braces. 'Many have borrowed from us.'

Thanks to visionary Belgian record label Crammed, Konono No.1 are a cult hit in the West. Their self-titled album, the first release in Crammed's Congotronics series (they are also one of six acts on the second volume), has met with blanket acclaim. Critics have compared them to sonic experimentalists such as Can, Lee Perry, even Jimi Hendrix; put them in bed with Krautrock and punk. Their repetitive, polyrhythmic sound appeals to DJs and clubbers. A folkloric outfit back home, they've become the epitome of left-field cool everywhere else.

'We just do our thing,' says Mingiedi. 'I always loved Cuban music and African jazz. The government encouraged our *likembe* music' – as part of Mobutu's 'Authenticity' drive – 'and they helped us financially for a while.' Some have worried that Konono No.1 feeds stereotypes of 'primitive' African music: 'But it is primitive African music,' Mingiedi shrugs, amused. 'It is the music of my ancestors, sped up. What is the problem?'

The songs of Konono No.1 dispense moral advice about love, family, life – if you can make them out. Everybody likes it loud. 'We're grateful for this new overseas popularity,' says the ever-sanguine Mingiedi. 'But surprised? No. Why should we be?'

lonelyplanet.com

lonelyplanet.com

Music Is the Weapon of the Future: Fifty Years of African Popular Music, by Frank Tenaille, covers Salif Keita, Fela Kuti, Cesaria Evora, the upbeat swing of South African township jazz... Includes thirty portraits of Africa's biggest pop stars, in political and cultural context, with anecdotes. both ways: colonialism saw European instruments such as saxophone, trumpet and guitars integrated into traditional patterns. Independence ushered in a golden era; a swathe of dance bands in 1970s Mali and Guinea spawned West African superstars such as Salif Keita and Mory Kante. Electric guitars fuelled Congolese rumba and soukous and innumerable other African genres (including Swahili rumba). Ghana's guitar-based highlife (urban dance music) blended with American hip-hop to become hip-life; current faves include Da Multy Crew and female star Abrewa Nana. Jazz, soul and even classical music helped form the Afrobeat of late Nigerian legend Fela Kuti (which carries on through his sons, Femi and Seun, and a host of others today).

The mighty Youssou N'Dour kickstarted Senegal's pervasive *mbalax* rhythms when he mixed traditional percussion with plugged-in salsa, reggae and funk – though today it's Wolof-language rap groups that really appeal to the kids (there's a natural rap vibe to the country's ancient rhythmic poetry, *tasso*). Hip-hop hybrids are creating musical revivals in countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Angola and Guinea; down in South Africa, where the ever-popular kwaito rules supreme (think slowed down, rapped-over House music), a new generation is mixing and matching with new-skool, funk, jazz and, often, politics. Elsewhere, militant artists such as Ivory Coast reggae star Tiken Jah Fakoly; former Sudanese child-soldier-turned-rapper Emmanuel Jal; and Somalia's 'Dusty Foot Philosopher', rapper and poet K'Naan (his country's first MTV star) are telling it like it is.

CESARIA EVORA

Cesaria Evora takes a thoughtful drag of her full-strength cigarette and smiles. 'You don't need to have suffered to sing *morna*,' says the 66-year-old, waving away fumes with a fleshy hand. 'But okay, it helps.' Evora sings *morna*, the bluesy music of her beloved Cape Verde, a group of volcanic islands off the coast of West Africa, with a voice – silken, languid, perfectly phrased – that has won her a Grammy (and five nominations) and captured the imagination of millions.

Her 2006 album, *Rogamar* (produced by her long-time pianist, Fernando 'Nando' Andrade), sees Evora backed by strings, percussion and broken, tinkling piano, her Creole lyrics telling of loss and longing, separation and immigration, poverty and hardship. Linking it all is *saudade*, an emotion common to all Cape Verdeans and one that combines a yearning for a better life elsewhere with the hope of returning to loved ones.

Evora rarely thinks of herself when she sings. 'I close my eyes and picture my people, my islands. I remember everything we have been through. Our droughts. Our history of slavery. Our 500 years as a Portuguese colony. Sometimes, when I do this,' she adds, 'I can even hear the waves lapping on the shore.'

Whether singing in New York, Moscow or a ramshackle bar in her home town, Mindelo, on the island of Sao Vincente, Evora always performs barefoot. 'Where I come from, it's hot, so you don't need to wear shoes.' Her on-stage cigarette breaks are equally legendary. 'I like to have a rest in the middle of a set,' says this boss-eyed grandmother. 'And if I don't smoke, I get twitchy.'

Her family was musical: 'But it wasn't until I turned 15 that I realised I had a beautiful voice.' Evora quit her strict religious school and began singing in bars, building a passionate local following and captivating the sailors who cruised into Sao Vincente's deep blue port. 'Discovered' by French/Cape Verdean producer Jose da Silva, her international career began with an album, *La Diva Aux Pied Nus* (The Barefoot Diva), in 1988.

Each Cesaria Evora album – 10 at last count, including 1992's legendary *Miss Perfumado* – makes Cape Verde, out there in a corner of the Atlantic Ocean, seem closer, less mythical. Her government has put her likeness on the national stamp by way of thanks. 'It's another way for me to travel,' she quips, exhaling.

Artists who are popular in the West – Mali's Oumou Sangare, say, or Senegal's Baaba Maal – work in a double market, making different mixes of the same songs for home and abroad, or recording cassette-only albums for local consumption. (Their home-town performances at home are wildly different, too: most start late and run all night.) Cassettes rather than CDs proliferate across Africa, and government pledges to address the gargantuan problem of cassette piracy have so far remained precisely that. Still, if you're looking for a gig or club sans tourists, ask a cassette stall holder. They might send you to a hotel or a dingy club in the suburbs, but it will be an experience.

There is no pan-African music. The Motherland is simply way too big for that. But there are distinct musical trends too important to ignore. Looking north: in Algeria it's the trad-rock genre, rai (think Khaled, Houari Benchenet, recently deceased grand dame Cheikha Rimitti), and the streetstyle pop known as *chaabi* (Arabic for 'popular'). Many of Algeria's Parisbased musicians are starting to perform at home again: check out rocker Rachid Taha; Berber experimentalist Akli D; folk chanteuse Souad Massi; and DJ 'scientist' Cheb i Sabbah. In Egypt the stern presence of late diva Oum Kalthoum, the Arab world's greatest 20th-century singer, is everywhere; scratch the surface for a thrumming industry that includes gypsy band The Musicians of the Nile, master percussionist Hossam Ramzy, and Bedouin singer Awad e'Medic.

There is *chaabi* in Egypt and Morocco, along with the Arabic techno pop called *al-jil* and a wealth of other influences. The Berber shepherdess blues of Cherifa, the Maghreb's very own Aretha, have made her a singersheika (or popular artist) to be reckoned with. The pentatonic healing music of the Gnawa – chants, side drums, metal castanets, the throbbing *guimbri*-lute (long-necked lute) – hijacks Essaouira each June during the huge Gnawa and World Music festival. The Toureg desert blues of guitar bands such as Tinariwen and, with members drawn from Niger's Toureg and Wodaabe tribes, new African music darlings Etran Finatawa. On the Ivory Coast, Abidjan remains a hugely influential centre for music production (if you make it here, you'll probably make it in Paris), while the percussive, melodious and totally vacuous *coupé-décale* sound fills stadiums. Better, perhaps, to seek out the likes of fusionist and newcomer Dobet Gnahoré – in charisma and vocal power not unlike Beninese diva Angelique Kidjo.

Across West Africa the haunting vocals of the *griots* and *jalis*, the region's oral-historians-come-minstrels, are ubiquitous. Mauritania's best-known *griot* is the rotund diva Dimi Mint Abba, who sings the praises of the Prophet and her country while accompanying herself on the *ardin*, a long-necked string instrument. In Senegal the likes of Daby Balde, a singer-songwriter who draws on the traditions of the Fula people (while welcoming flutes, fiddles and accordions into his sound) is challenging the preeminence of the N'Dour/Maal old guard. Mali's Arabic-flavoured *wassoulou* rhythms has its most famous champion in songbird Oumou Sangaré, just as one of the *griot/jali's* traditional instruments, the 21-string kora, is closely linked to Toumani Diabaté. Others are making their mark: Guinea's electric kora master Ba Cissoko is pushing the envelope. Madina N'Diaye is shaping up as Mali's first female kora iconoclast.

With the passing of Ali Farke Touré in 2006, his disciple and nephew Afel Bocoum is – along with Djelimady Tounkara et al – continuing the Malian guitar blues legacy. Guitar heroes abound throughout Africa: the Congo's Diblo Dibala, Malagasy band Jaojoby and South African axeman Louis Mhlanga among them. In the islands of Cape Verde they're singing a database of articles on African music and musicians searchable by artist, style and country. Includes radio shows, reviews and interviews. http://africanmusic.org/ is an online encyclopaedia of African music with links and glossary.

www.afropop.org/ has

www.africmusic.com/ has three webstreaming African channels, featuring the latest hot hits.

Africa Live: The Roll Back Malaria Concert, directed by Mick Csáky (2006), has footage of Africa's biggest ever concert, at the Iba Mar Diop Stadium in Dakar, Senegal.

TEN AFRICAN ALBUMS

- Ali Farke Touré: Savane (World Circuit) desert blues from the late, great Malian guitar maestro.
- Cesaria Evora: Miss Perfumado (Lusafrica) classic morna from a Cape Verdean treasure.
- Youssou N'Dour: Immigrés (Sterns/Earthworks) frenetic mbalax and soaring vocals from Dakar's finest.
- Khaled: Khaled (Barclay/Universal) in which Khaled shows why he's the king of rai.
- Alpha Blondy: Black Samurai (EMI) reggae stylings from a Côte d'Ivoire legend.
- Miriam Makeba: Best of Miriam Makeba and the Skylarks (BMG) vintage stuff from the South African diva and her backing group.
- Fela Kuti: The Black President (Universal) Nigeria's afrobeat hero gives his all.
- Salif Keita: Soro (Sterns) mande music and world beats from a West African superstar.
- Oumou Sangaré: Oumou (World Circuit) Mali's songbird of wassoulou soars.
- Baaba Maal: Djam Leeli (Yoff/Earthworks) acoustic album from the Senegalese star and his family griot and mentor, Mansour Seck.

the wistful, Creole language blues known as *morna*, and a slew of new talent including Lura and Tcheka is bringing up Cesaria Evora's rear. Over in Cameroon they're whooping it up to the guitar-based *bikutsi* or the brass-heavy sound of *makossa* while the polyphonic voices of that country's pygmies have struck a chord with the Western world.

za Busara (Sounds of Wisdom) Swahili Music Festival in Stonetown, Zanzibar, has become one of East Africa's finest annual events. A five-day extravaganza of music, theatre and dance before a horizon dotted with dhow boats.

In a few short years Sauti

In the often musically overlooked East Africa, bongo flava (Swahili rap and hip-hop) is thriving; as ever, so is *taarab*, the Arab/Indian-influenced music of Zanzibar and the Tanzanian/Kenyan coastal strip. Mozambique sways to the sound of *marrabenta* – Ghorwane and Eyuphuro are two such roots-based urban dance bands – and the marimba style known as *timbila*. Down in Zimbabwe they're listening to the *tuku* (swinging, rootsy, selfstyled) music of Oliver Mutukudzi or, in secret, the *chimurenga* (struggle) music of their self-exiled Lion, Thomas Mapfumo. South Africa's giant recording industry continues to rival that of Europe and America, embracing everything from the Zulu *iscathimiya* call-and-response singing as popularised by Ladysmith Black Mambazo to jazz, funk, gospel, reggae, soul, pop, rap and all points in between.

In Africa music is more than a way of life. It is a force. Get ready to feel it.

Environment

If you were to strap on your boots and take a walk across Africa from east to west or north to south, you'd soon find yourself tramping through some pretty mind-blowing surroundings. You'd cross mile upon mile of lowlying grassy plains, shiver on glaciated mountains and boil in desiccated saltpans. You'd have to get across some of the biggest lakes and mightiest rivers on earth, never mind fighting your way through dense woodlands and tropical forests. Africa is a continent liberally sprinkled with enough marvels to keep geologists, geographers and latter-day explorers happy for several lifetimes.

Every conceivable ecological niche is packed with life; you could visit mountain gorillas in the rainforests of Uganda or Rwanda; track desert elephants through semidesert in Burkina Faso and Mali; look for chimpanzees in the hills of Senegal, Guinea and Tanzania; snorkel with sharks off the coast of Djibouti; or just sit back and enjoy the blooming deserts of Botswana and Namibia after the year's first rains.

Many of Africa's more spectacular natural features are concentrated in the vast inland plateau, sometimes called High Africa, that covers most of the lower half of the continent. This plateau is highest in Ethiopia, running south and east and dropping down on either side to tropical beaches and coral reefs just begging to be explored by snorkellers.

THE LAND

MOUNTAINS & VALLEYS

Mountains aren't always the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Africa, but in fact all regions of the continent have their fair share of spectacular peaks. The greatest mountain ranges of Africa are the Atlas in the northeast, the Cape Ranges of Southern Africa and the Ruwenzori that straddle the borders of Uganda and Congo.

TRAVEL WIDELY, TREAD LIGHTLY, GIVE SUSTAINABLY – THE LONELY PLANET FOUNDATION

The Lonely Planet Foundation proudly supports nimble nonprofit institutions working for change in the world. Each year the foundation donates 5% of Lonely Planet company profits to projects selected by staff and authors. Our partners range from Kabissa, which provides small nonprofits across Africa with access to technology, to the Foundation for Developing Cambodian Orphans, which supports girls at risk of falling victim to sex traffickers.

Our nonprofit partners are linked by a grass-roots approach to the areas of health, education or sustainable tourism. Many – such as Louis Sarno (p534) who works with BaAka (Pygmy) children in the forested areas of Central African Republic – choose to focus on women and children as one of the most effective ways to support the whole community. Louis is determined to give options to children who are discriminated against by the majority Bantu population.

Sometimes foundation assistance is as simple as restoring a local ruin like the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan; this incredible monument now draws intrepid tourists to the area and its restoration has greatly improved options for local people.

Just as travel is often about learning to see with new eyes, so many of the groups we work with aim to change the way people see themselves and the future for their children and communities.

Experiencing the wildlife, landscapes and people of all these ranges can make your spirit sing, but if you're a real mountain junkie, then head over to East Africa, which is home to the classic, stand-alone, dormant volcanoes such as Mt Kenya and Mt Kilimanjaro. Alternatively buy a ticket to Ethiopia, Africa's highest country, which lies on a plateau between 2000m and 3000m above sea level. For added drama, you can climb volcanoes such as those in Rwanda's Parc National des Volcans or Tanzania's Crater Highlands, which are far from dormant and spit sulphurous fumes and ash on a regular basis.

The African earth deep beneath your feet is being slowly pulled apart by the action of hot currents, resulting in a gap, or rift. This action over thousands of years has formed what's known as the Great Rift Valley, which begins in Syria and winds over 5000km before it peters out in southern Mozambique. The valley is flanked in many places by sheer escarpments and towering cliffs, the most dramatic of which can be seen in Ethiopia, Kenya, and along the Democratic Republic of Congo–Uganda–Rwanda border. The valley's floor contains the legendary wildlife-watching habitats of the Serengeti and Masai Mara in Tanzania and Kenya, and alkaline lakes such as Bogoria and Turkana.

RIVERS & LAKES

The Nile and Congo Rivers dominate Africa's hydrology, but the Niger (West Africa), Zambezi and Orange (Southern Africa) Rivers are no slouches either – all offer potential for waterborne adventures, with white-water rafters and kayak fiends heading for the Nile in Uganda and the Zambezi below Victoria Falls on the Zimbabwe–Zambia border. Whether you're being poled in a dugout cance past the elephants of the Okavango swamps, or getting to know the fisherfolk and rice growers of the Niger Inland Delta, Africa's inland wetlands offer huge potential for interesting travel.

Many of Africa's lakes are ecological treasure chests, providing habitats for a dazzling variety of plant and animal species. Among the most spectacular of all are the so-called 'soda lakes' of East Africa, such as Lake Nakuru, the site of one of the greatest bird spectacles on earth as more than a million fuchsia-pink flamingos descend periodically to feed on the algae that are the only other life form that can thrive in the boiling, caustic waters. For more information on wild animals and birds in Africa, see the Wildlife chapter (p56).

DESERTS & JUNGLES

If you're after dusty, thirsty adventure, try the Sahara, the world's largest contiguous desert, which occupies a quarter of Africa's surface area, encompassing parts of 11 countries and cutting a swathe through the northern half of the continent before merging imperceptibly into the semidesert Sahel area. Other major deserts include the Namib and Kalahari, which straddle South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. Don't imagine, however, that deserts contain only the white, level sand of your imagination – there

AFRICA'S DIMENSIONS

Africa is the world's second-largest continent, after Asia, covering 30 million sq km and accounting for 23% of the total land area on Earth. From the most northerly point, Cape Blanc (Ra's al Abyad) in Tunisia, to the most southerly point, Cape Agulhas in South Africa, is a distance of approximately 8000km. The distance between Cape Verde, the westernmost point in Africa, and Ras Hafun in Somalia, the continent's most easterly point, is 7440km.

SAVE THE TREES!

- Almost 6.8 million sq km of Africa was originally forest.
- Over 90% of West Africa's original forest has been lost.
- Between 1980 and 1995, an area of forest about the size of Jamaica was cleared in the Congo Basin each year.
- For every 28 trees cut down in Africa, only one tree is replanted.

are also towering sand dunes, long stretches of loose, grey gravel, and areas of bare rock.

Millennia of deforestation and overgrazing have caused the Sahara to expand, a process that is continuing today with results that are all too apparent for humans as well as wildlife. In contrast, the deserts of Namibia are caused by cold-air convection that sucks the moisture from the landscape and creates an arid landscape of rolling sand dunes with their own unique ecosystem.

African forests include dry tropical forests in Eastern and Southern Africa, humid tropical rainforests in Western and Central Africa, montane forests and sub-tropical forests in Northern Africa, as well as mangroves in the coastal zones. Despite the myth of the African 'jungle', Africa actually has one of the lowest percentages of rainforest cover in the world, with over 90% of what's left found in the Congo Basin. Enjoy it while you can – opportunities to explore Africa's forests include gorilla trekking in Uganda and watching chimpanzees in Tanzania. Perfect armchair-travel fodder, the BBC's Wild Africa series, now available on video and DVD, consists of six stunningly filmed documentaries entitled Jungle, Coasts, Mountains, Deserts, Savannahs and Rivers & Lakes.

THE SEA

Africa is bounded to the east and west by two contrasting seas – the chilly, choppy Atlantic and the warmer Indian Ocean, which meet in a whirl of white water at Cape Point in South Africa. Further north, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean separate Africa from Europe and the Middle East. Of Africa's 48 nations, 33 have coastal frontage.

The sea has always determined both the physical shape of Africa's coast and the culture of the people who live near the shore. Southern Africa's rocky shores have been eroded by waves and weather to create dramatic cliffs and headlands, while waves and currents create vast sandy lagoons and spits on the West African coast.

CORAL REEFS & MANGROVE SWAMPS

Along the coasts of East Africa and the Red Sea, warm currents provide perfect conditions for coral growth, resulting in the spectacular underwater formations beloved by divers and snorkellers.

Coral reefs are the most biologically diverse marine eco-systems on earth, rivalled only by tropical rainforests on land. Corals grow over geologic time – ie over millennia rather than the decades that mammals etc live – and have been in existence about 200 million years. The delicately balanced marine environment of the coral reef relies on the interaction of hard and soft corals, sponges, fish, turtles, dolphins and other marine life forms.

Coral reefs also rely on mangroves, the salt-tolerant trees with submerged roots that form a nursery and breeding ground for birds and most of the marine life that migrates to the reef. Mangroves trap and produce nutrients for food and habitat, stabilise the shoreline, and filter pollutants from the land base. Africa, by acclaimed photographer Frans Lanting is a coffee-table book so gorgeous it will have you booking a plane ticket before you get to page three...

The continent's highest point is the perpetually (for now) snow-capped Kilimanjaro (5895m) in Tanzania, and the lowest is Lake Assal (153m below sea level) in Djibouti.

Mainland Africa's largest

country is the Sudan:

Gambia.

its smallest is cute little

For 15 months Wildlife

Conservation Society

biologist J Michael Fay

hiked 3200km across cen

tral Africa, surveying the

land and wildlife of the

Congo River Basin. Read

his findings at www

.nationalgeographic

.com/congotrek.

Both coral reefs and the mangrove colonies that support them are under threat from factors such as coastal degradation and global warming. To make sure your diving holiday doesn't make things worse, consult our Responsible Diving guidelines, p1100.

Need to keep up to date with conservation initiatives in Africa? www .afrol.com is a handy site for all the latest stories, or try www.earthwire .org/africa, an environmental news portal.

Scientists have discovered that elephants can be deterred from raiding the crops of African villagers by smearing rags with chilli and hanging them on wire fences around the fields. For more details, go to www.elephantpepper .com. **CONSERVATION ISSUES**

Conservationists the world over tend to look grave when the subject of Africa comes up. The continent's rapidly growing population has led to soil erosion, declining soil fertility, deforestation, desertification, water pollution and loss of biodiversity. Things are going to get worse, too, as Africa's population is expected to nearly double (to about two billion) in the next 50 years. War, poor governance and corruption are all adding to the environmental destruction. Logging, mineral and oil extraction don't exactly improve biodiversity, regardless of whether it's locals or multinationals sucking up resources.

Rainforests are one of the richest habitats on earth – a single hectare of tropical rainforest may contain more than 600 species of trees – but also one of the most threatened. Over half of the rainforests of the Congo basin are under commercial-logging leases. It's not just rainforest that's under threat: pockets of temperate forest are getting the chop all over Africa, not only for timber, but also for firewood and to be cleared for agricultural land.

The coast's not clear, either – up to 38% of the African coastline is considered to be under a high degree of threat from developments that include cities, ports, road networks and pipelines. Further out to sea, coral reefs are damaged by unsafe fishing practices such as dynamiting, overfishing and the anchoring of boats in living coral.

DESERTIFICATION

According a 2006 academic study, the northern and southern hemispheres' jet streams — fast wind currents high in the atmosphere — are moving nearer the poles. The researchers say more study is needed to assess whether the patterns are linked to natural climatic variation or are a response to human-induced phenomena such as deforestation, overfarming, climate change or the depletion of the ozone layer. The Sahel, the area bordering the Sahara, is shrinking at an alarming rate as animals graze on its fragile land, and trees and bushes are cut for fuel. Without the vegetation to hold it in place, the thin topsoil of the Sahel blows away, leaving stony land where neither grass nor crops can grow.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS

Are genetically modified (GM) crops a magic solution to Africa's agricultural problems or a time bomb that will hit the world's poorest nations first? Some African governments, such as that of South Africa, which is among the top 14 growers of genetically engineered crop varieties worldwide,

MOZAMBIQUE'S MEGA-DAMS

Early in 2006, Mozambique's government proudly announced funding to build a second enormous dam on the Zambezi River. The dam, to be called Mepanda Uncua, would have the capacity to generate about 2000 megawatts of power, equivalent to the output of about four large power stations. Opponents of the dam claim that it will affect the flow of the Zambezi, damaging the ecology and leading to loss of livelihood for the farmers who live along its banks. Like the majority of Mozambique's population, these farmers have no access to electricity anyway.

KILIMANJARO'S MELTING ICE CAP

Glittering white like a mirage behind its veil of cloud, Mt Kilimanjaro's perfect white cap of ice is one of Africa's most iconic images. But scientists who've been studying the mountain over the past few decades have discovered that the ice covering Kilimanjaro's famous silver peak is melting at an alarming rate. A recent study shows that the peak has lost over a third of its ice in the last 20 years alone, with a real possibility that the ice will disappear completely by 2020. Deforestation and global warming are among the factors to blame.

have enthusiastically embraced GM crops, hailing them as the solution to increased production and hunger alleviation. Other countries, such as Zambia, refuse even to accept GM crops in the form of food aid, calling them 'poison'. Sound arguments exist on both sides of the debate, but for now the jury is still out...

CONSERVATION PROJECTS

Large-scale conservation measures are not common in Africa. However, across the continent, governments and aid agencies are instituting projects, many of them community based, aimed at tackling problems on a local level.

In the past, Africans have been kicked off their land to make way for wildlife reserves and national parks. Understandably, this didn't usually lead to their enthusiastic commitment to conservation initiatives, but thankfully community-based conservation is now all the rage: experts have woken up to the fact that conservation is not going to work in the long term unless local people can see real benefits. With over 500,000 sq km of land protected (an amazing feat, even though enforcement is at times lacklustre), some really impressive national parks are found across Africa. By and large the parks in East and Southern Africa are the most organised and exciting, but in the North and West some classic landscapes have also been protected.

AND NOW FOR THE GOOD NEWS...

The news from Africa isn't all doom and gloom. Recent years have seen political successes for environmentalists in many African countries, while many fantastic projects across the continent are making great strides in environmental education and community-based conservation. Read and be inspired – change *can* happen!

- Central Africa: a 2004 census of mountain gorillas in Central Africa's Virunga Mountains recorded an impressive 17% increase in the local population.
- Gabon: in 2002, Gabon's government promised to set aside 26,000 sq km – over 10% of the country – to form a new system of 13 national parks.
- Madagascar: in 2003, the president of Madagascar pledged to triple his nation's total protected areas to 6 million hectares by 2008. He has since increased this figure by more than a million hectares.

Africa's Wildlife

Think 'Africa' and one of the first – if not the first – images that springs to mind will be of large, exotic animals, such as elephants, giraffes and gorillas. Wildlife, including these iconic species and hundreds more, is central to the African experience. Nowhere else on earth can a traveller observe, photograph or otherwise interact with large wild animals in such great numbers and variety. Visitors have been using the well-established safari circuits in East and Southern Africa for decades and, more recently, tracking gorillas in the highlands of Uganda and Rwanda has captured travellers' imaginations. But as more African countries realise the value of preserving wildlife in its natural habitat as a source of income and employment for local people, further wildlife-watching opportunities are opening up for visitors.

ANIMALS

Chimpanzees and humans are the only animals known to deliberately murder their own kind. Not surprisingly, we share 99% of our genetic makeup with chimps.

www.africanconserva tion.org is the website of the nonprofit African Conservation Foundation, with links to countries, projects and info on how to get involved. Africa is home to more than 1100 mammal species, some 2400 bird species and hundreds of species of reptile, amphibian and freshwater fish. Mammals top the list of 'must-sees' for the vast majority of visitors, but a trip to Kenya, Botswana or Cameroon, for example, has turned many a casual bird-watcher into an insatiable 'world birder'. And, unlike in many parts of the world, Africa's most charismatic mammals are often large, and easy to see and photograph.

The term 'Big Five' was coined by white hunters for those five species deemed most dangerous to hunt: elephant, lion, leopard, rhino and buffalo. Hunting is now either banned or strictly controlled (in theory at least) in most African countries where these animals survive, but the label has stuck and many tourists come to Africa determined to see these species. But there's a whole lot more out there, some of it right at your feet, that's no less interesting.

For example, Africa has the biggest diversity of hoofed animals on earth. Antelopes range from the tiny, knee-high dik-dik and duiker, through the graceful gazelle, impala and springbok, to giants such as the eland and kudu. Many of these will be seen on a typical East or Southern African safari, as well as other iconic hoofed animals, such as the three zebra species and giraffes. And don't worry, there's a good chance of seeing buffalo, despite their fearsome reputation (earned, incidentally, by rogue bulls, which really are dangerous).

Meat provides a ready source of first-class protein, and in Africa it walks around in huge herds, so not surprisingly many predators have also evolved here. Among them are lions, unique among cats because they form cohesive prides that hunt cooperatively and share the spoils; the secretive but adaptable leopard, found from rainforests to the edge of human settlements; and the cheetah, fastest of all land mammals, which hunts by running down its prey. The dog family is also well represented, with three species of jackal and the African hunting dog, the most social of dogs, which hunt in fast-moving packs. Maligned and misunderstood, the spotted hyena is superbly adapted to run down fleet-footed antelopes with its seemingly tireless, lolloping gait, and even challenges lions and leopards for their kills.

The African elephant is the largest living land animal and can still be seen in good numbers in many parts of the continent, despite the ravages of poaching. Such huge animals have a voracious appetite, which inevitably brings them into conflict with humans as they trash crops and farms. But the killing of the two rhino species – white and black – is inexcusable. These

CONSERVATION SUCCESSES

In terms of species lost, Africa has been remarkably lucky, despite increasing pressures from human overpopulation and land degradation. However, local-wildlife populations are frequent targets for poaching and hunting, and are often the victims of all-too-frequent wars. Luckily, a high degree of interest around the world often ensures that human and financial resources can be mobilised at short notice when crises arise; and an army of dedicated researchers, volunteers and communities constantly battles to save habitats, species and even individual animals.

And it's not all bad news. Outstanding successes have included the rescue of the southern white rhino, which was brought back from the brink of extinction in South Africa through captive breeding, and is now off the endangered list. Similarly, the mountain zebra was saved by one farsighted farmer, who protected the last 11 surviving zebras on his farm; the species has since recovered to several hundred individuals.

The involvement of local communities is essential to preserve and maintain national parks, and to study the wildlife itself. Tourist encounters with gorillas and chimpanzees provide valuable foreign earnings for countries such as Rwanda, Uganda and Gabon, and teach local communities the value of preserving the forests and their wildlife. Increasingly sophisticated ecotourism developments are being initiated and run by local groups, helping to empower them financially and to remove much of the mystery and superstition with which they have traditionally viewed wildlife. Talented local wildlife guides can command comparatively high earnings for their services in ecotourism 'hotspots'.

inoffensive vegetarians are armed with impressive horns that have made them the target of both white hunters and poachers; rhino numbers plummeted to the brink of extinction during the 20th century.

We owe a lot to the rainforests of Central and West Africa, for it is from here that *Homo sapiens* ultimately evolved. Indeed, all the primates as we know them – humans, the great apes, monkeys and a host of ancient 'primitive' forms such as bushbabies – evolved in Africa. Our obvious kinship with these often-engaging animals has spawned various forms of 'primate tourism', whereby troops of monkeys or apes are habituated to human presence so visitors can observe them in their natural habitat. High on everyone's list should be gorilla- or chimp-tracking at one of several sites now geared up for primate tourism. The West African rainforests are rich in primates – not just gorillas and chimps, but a host of beautiful and strikingly-marked guenons and forest baboons.

Birds are a highlight of any safari, and in most sub-Saharan countries you could see hundreds of species in the course of an average visit. Birds reach their highest profusion in the Congo rainforests, but are easier to see in countries with a mosaic of habitats such as rainforest, savannah and wetland. Several bird families, such as the ostrich, secretarybird, touracos, shoebil, hamerkop and mousebirds are unique to Africa. Apart from endemic species, hundreds more species flood into the continent on migration during the northern winter. For the dedicated birder there are a host of challenges, such as sorting out the bewildering variety of weavers, sunbirds and warblers.

Africa's reptiles are also diverse and include hundreds of species of snake and lizard. Those who have a phobia of such things needn't worry – all lizards are harmless and the danger from snakes is greatly exaggerated. The only really dangerous reptile is the famous Nile crocodile, which generally eats fish, though large specimens wait in ambush for wildebeest and other animals at river crossings, and do occasionally kill people. Some fine specimens can be seen in Kenya's Lake Turkana and in Madagascar. The largest African lizard is the Nile monitor, which sometimes reaches a metre or more in length. The fabulous chameleons, subject of much superstition among Africans, Freshwater lungfish are biological relics found only in Africa, Australasia and South America, showing that these three continents were all once part of the supercontinent Gondwana.

lonelyplanet.com

are difficult to spot among foliage but come in many shapes and colours. Spectacular snakes include the African rock python, which is nonvenomous and kills its prey by constriction, and various species of cobra and viper that you may be lucky enough to see from your safari vehicle. Small, handsome tortoises are often encountered on the plains.

www.africanbirdclub.org, the African Bird Club's website, is a great starting point for any birding trip to Africa, with info on each country and links to trip reports.

Madagascar rates a separate mention for its unique treasure-trove of endemic wildlife that has remained virtually unchanged since this great island split off the African mainland 165 million years ago. Most famous of its inhabitants are the lemurs, monkey-like animals that are found nowhere else on earth. Lemurs have adapted to nearly every feeding niche, and range in size from tiny mouse-lemurs to the indri, which look like a cross between a koala and a giant panda, and has a voice like a police siren. Madagascar's birds and reptiles have also taken some interesting evolutionary turns: the island is famous for the world's largest and smallest chameleons; and the largest bird species ever known, the extinct *Aepyornis* or elephant bird, which stood about 3m tall and laid eggs as big as a football. It roamed Madagascar's remote forests until only a few hundred years ago, and whole (but dried out) eggs are still occasionally found today.

HABITATS

A greatly simplified picture of the African environment would divide it into three major habitats: the vast equatorial rainforests that stretch from the Atlantic to the borders of East Africa; deserts, such as the Sahara stretching across the top of the continent and the Namib in the southwest corner; and, filling the spaces in-between, the savannah plains, dotted with acacias or miombo and populated by the big cats, elephants, giraffes and vast herds of grazing animals. Biologists sometimes use an island metaphor to explain Africa's extraordinary wildlife diversity: 'islands' of habitat have been stranded all over the continent by the expansion and contraction of these three major habitats during alternating wet and dry climatic phases over many millennia.

Africa's rainforests are an evolutionary hothouse, rich in birds and small mammals, that remain largely unexplored biologically. As recently as the early 20th century, new species of large mammal were still being discovered, including the okapi, a horse-sized member of the giraffe family; and the giant forest hog, the world's largest wild pig. Other denizens of the deep forest include pygmy hippos in West African rivers; distinctive forest-dwelling subspecies of elephant, buffalo and bush pig; and the bongo, a large and beautifully marked forest antelope. In remote, uninhabited parts of the Congo basin these generally retiring animals emerge from the forest into clearings called *bais*, naturally-occurring grassy depressions that provide sweet grazing.

Cats of Africa, by L Hunter, is an authoritative but readable book covering the behaviour, conservation and ecology of all Africa's wild cats, with superb photos by G Hinde. Animals that can climb or fly are able to exploit food and other resources high in tree canopies. Thus, rainforests are rich in birds, small climbing predators such as genets and, of course, primates. Birdlife includes a range of large and spectacular species, such as hornbills and touracos, as well as hundreds of smaller species, and hawks and owls rarely seen by humans. From the deep green cathedrals of towering trees, monkeys eventually ventured into the surrounding savannahs and developed complex social systems that enabled them to survive among a new suite of predators.

Deserts typically occur in areas of low rainfall and feature their own unique fauna and flora. Most famous of Africa's deserts is the mighty Sahara, which stretches virtually across the continent's northern side. An expanding human population caused the extinction of nearly all large animals north of the Sahara, and the giraffes, large antelopes and lions that once roamed the Mediterranean coast were all killed off by Roman times. Many large animals, including elephants, rhinos and the majestic gemsbok, eke out a precarious existence in the extraordinarily harsh conditions of the Namib Desert; and a suite of smaller animals has evolved for survival in habitats that have probably never known rain.

But the vast, unpeopled savannah plains probably still epitomise the African wildlife experience for most visitors. It's a beautiful and complex ecosystem that spans a continent, shaped by fire, rainfall and even the wildlife itself. The pounding of millions of hooves over millennia has allowed the survival of only the hardiest grasses; the same grazers deposit vast amounts of manure that fertilise the soil. Fires set by lightning and the destruction of trees by elephants encourages grasslands, but eventually the herds move on, the shrubs and trees regrow, and over centuries and millennia the cycle is repeated across the continent.

The same cold waters that create the southwestern deserts support rich fish stocks, which in turn support a host of seabirds, and sea lions and their predator – the great white shark of the southern oceans. But the wildlife highlights of tropical and subtropical seas are the coral-reef systems that proliferate in warm, sunlit shallow waters. Coral reefs are among the most complex, but least understood, ecosystems on earth. They are home to hundreds of species of fishes, crustaceans and other invertebrates. Superb underwater viewing of these habitats can be had around the shores of the Indian Ocean, particularly in the Red Sea, and East and Southern Africa.

Even freshwater ecosystems occur on a grand scale in Africa, with some of the world's largest lakes and rivers, as well as a host of tributaries. The largest of the aquatic animals is the hippopotamus, which leaves its wallows by night to feed on grasses, sometimes many kilometres from the water's edge. The sitatunga, the world's only aquatic antelope, has splayed hooves for walking on floating vegetation and submerges itself in swamps to avoid predators. The Rift Valley lakes as well as Lake Victoria itself once supported hundreds of unique fish species, the cichlids, but unfortunately many of these have been wiped out by Nile perch, a large predatory fish that was introduced to the lakes.

AFRICA'S WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS

Picking Africa's wildlife highlights is a daunting task, but the following reserves stand out for their ease of access, intrinsic interest or sheer spectacle. East and Southern Africa have well-established safari circuits where sightings of iconic large mammals are virtually guaranteed, but many countries in West and Central Africa also offer outstanding opportunities for bird- and mammal-watching.

North Africa

Most of the large animals are long gone, but there's good bird-watching in Morocco at Boumalne du Dadès (p188), and world-class snorkelling and diving in Egypt's Red Sea (p103).

West Africa

The best parks for large animals are Ghana's Mole National Park (p349), Senegal's Parc National du Niokolo-Koba (p488) and Cameroon's Parc National du Waza (p298). Bird-watchers fare better, with good pickings in tiny Gambia at Abuko Nature Reserve (p325) and Kiang West National Park (p326), the shorebird spectacle at Mauritania's Parc National du Banc d'Arguin (p427) or Senegal's Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj (p487), and great rainforest birding on Mt Cameroon (p288). J Kingdon's Field Guide to African Mammals is an excellent and authoritative guide to all the continent's land mammals. Island Africa, also by Kingdon, is a beautifully illustrated explanation of Africa's extraordinary biodiversity.

Central Africa

Gabon is fast becoming a hot ecotourism destination and Réserve de la Lopé (p592) offers outstanding gorilla- and chimpanzee-viewing. Lesser-known destinations include Central African Republic's Dzanga-sangha (p534), with large populations of rainforest mammals; and Zakouma National Park in Chad (p546) – famous for large herds of elephant and other large animals, including lions.

Among the bewildering array of field guides to African birds, *Birds* of Africa South of the Sahara, by I Sinclair and P Ryan, covers the largest geographical area and is superbly illustrated.

East Africa

The spectacular wildebeest migration is best experienced in either Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve (p700) or Tanzania's Serengeti National Park (p770). Some of Kenya's top birding spots include Kakamega Forest Reserve (p699) and Lake Baringo (p694), and don't miss the millions of flamingos at Lake Nakuru National Park (p693). No East African safari would be complete without a visit to Tanzania's Ngorongoro Crater Conservation Area (p771), and snorkellers and divers won't be disappointed by the coral reefs at Kenya's Malindi–Watamu National Marine Park (p703), or those at Zanzibar (p757) or Pemba (p765) in Tanzania.

Cosy up to gorillas and their impish offspring at Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Forest (p804) or Mgahinga National Park (p811), or at Rwanda's Parc National des Volcans (p726). But don't pass up the chance to track bands of wild chimpanzees too; Kibale Forest National Park (p807) in Uganda is a great choice, or, for exclusive chimp-watching in Tanzania's remotest corner, there's Mahale Mountains (p781) and Gombe Stream (p781) National Parks.

And Ethiopia is coming onto the ecotraveller's radar with exceptional bird- and mammal-watching at Simien Mountains National Park (p666).

Southern Africa

Two legendary reserves for large mammal sightings are Botswana's Chobe National Park (p856) and Namibia's Etosha National Park(p972), both with good populations of iconic species plus excellent bird-watching. Botswana also boasts the world-famous Okavango Delta (p848), while South Luangwa National Park (p1060) is Zambia's finest reserve. The massive Kruger National Park (p1026) in South Africa is a must-see (and the best place in the country for lions) and highlights among a host of smaller reserves include Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park (p1012) and Greater St Lucia Wetland Park (p1012). If you're a diver, don't miss Mozambique's Bazaruto Archipelago (p945).

Madagascar has many wildlife highlights: look for indris in Parc National d'Andasibe–Mantadia (p898), and other lemurs and rainforest birds in Parc National de Ranomafana (p893).

WILDLIFE-WATCHING

Although observing wildlife is often straightforward, here are a few pointers to enhance your wildlife-viewing experience, whether you're in a safari vehicle, a hide or on foot.

When to Go

Some countries, such as Kenya, offer exceptional wildlife-viewing at any time of year. That said, wildlife is generally easier to spot during dry seasons, when waterholes become a focus for activity. Quietly staking out a waterhole is a great way to watch mammals and birds coming to drink. Unfortunately, dry seasons also usually coincide with peak visitor numbers. Wildlife usually disperses during wet seasons, and denser vegetation can make observation more difficult, but you may be rewarded with 'private' viewings of behaviours such as breeding activity.

How to Look

Most animals are naturally wary of people so to minimise their distress (or aggression) keep as quiet as possible (talk softly), avoid sudden movements (such as pointing) and wear subdued colours (such as khaki) when in the field. Try to avoid direct eye contact, particularly with primates, as this is seen as a challenge and may provoke aggressive behaviour. Good binoculars are an invaluable aid to observing wildlife at a distance and are essential for bird-watching. When on foot, stay downwind of animals wherever possible – they'll smell you long before they see or hear you – and in this way close approaches may sometimes be made.

Living with Wildlife

Encounters with animals are a daily fact of life for millions of African people and on safari you will have your share of wonderful experiences. Remember that over much of Africa you are no longer at the top of the food chain – never get out of your vehicle unless it is safe to do so. Always obey park regulations, including traffic speed limits; thousands of animals are needlessly killed on African roads every year. Follow your guide's instructions at all times – it may mean the difference between life and death on a walking safari. And *never* feed wild animals – it encourages scavenging, may adversely affect their health and can cause animals to become aggressive towards each other and humans. www.betterviewdesired .com is the site to visit before you buy a pair of binoculars. It features up-to-date, authoritative and critical reviews of binoculars for wildlifewatchers.

Africa & Development: What Gives? Michela Wrong

In an article entitled 'How to Write about Africa', award-winning Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina once offered a potted summary of Western clichés that was as funny as it was scathing.

'Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book,' recommended Binyavanga, tongue firmly in cheek. 'An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these.' Treat Africa as one country, he urged – don't get bogged down in detail. Taboo subjects included 'ordinary domestic scenes, love between Africans, references to African writers or intellectuals, mention of school-going children who are not suffering from yaws or Ebola'. Last, but not least. 'Readers will be put off if you don't mention the light in Africa... There is always a big sky.'

It's true that few regions have been more sloppily written about than Africa, which is still viewed as a destination for the adventurous, altruistic or nonconformist, those out to test themselves, save others or escape the humdrum. 'People go to Africa and confirm what they already have in their heads,' wrote Nigeria's Chinua Achebe, 'they fail to see what is there in front of them.' In the Western mind, Africa still represents 'otherness' at its most intense.

As with all clichés, such attitudes exist because they are part-rooted in reality. How many other regions can claim the dubious distinction of having US State Department travel warnings – at time of writing – for 12 of its 53 nations? How many areas have introduced the modern world to such medieval horrors as Ebola or Marburg disease? Where else does the whisper of cannibalism regularly surface in connection with some rebel movement or militia chief? And whatever Binyavanga says, anyone who fails to notice the light and skies must have something wrong with either their eyes or their soul.

The point is not that fly-blown refugees or psychopathic warlords don't exist, it is that they don't represent the full picture. After only a few days in Africa, first-time visitors will realise that ordinary life goes on and those they meet fret about taxes, gossip about Manchester United, tell bad jokes and surf the Web just like them. They will leave wanting to know more about the facets of life that never make the headlines, yet encapsulate our common humanity.

If, curious to understand trends and causes, they bother to dig deeper, they're likely to emerge confused. Because just as no other continent has been the target of such misleading hyperbole, no other has been subjected to such indulgent wishful thinking. Whether prompted by liberal guilt, political correctness or unacknowledged racism, predictive analysis comes in extremes, ranging from the All-We-Need-Is-One-Last-Heave school of thought to the Armageddon-Is-Approaching variety.

The upbeat view runs something like this. It took its time, but the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall sounded the death knell for a generation of corrupt 'dinosaur' presidents propped up by Washington or Moscow. The days when Colonel Chanceyourluck seized the radio station and executed the entire cabinet on the beach are also fading: more than two-thirds of African nations have now held multiparty elections. From Angola to Sudan, Somalia to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the players in Africa's most devastating conflicts have been forced and cajoled to the negotiating table. With a new generation of progressive leaders taking the reins, the world's richest nations have something to work with: hence the promise to double

aid at the 2005 G8 meeting in Gleneagles. Africa's crippling debt burden, now widely viewed as indefensible, is being whittled away and the West has also registered a moral imperative to correct trade terms tilted against the developing world. Domestically, the liberalisation of the media and advent of modern technology is ending the continent's isolation, with even remote villages boasting mobile phones and cybercafés. 'In the 19th century, the issue was what we could do to Africa,' says Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, 'in the 20th, what we could do for Africa; in this century, what Africa, empowered, can do for herself.'

The pessimistic view runs as follows. Yes, multiparty elections have become the norm, but that's only because an entrenched political elite has learnt to play the democracy game, rigging polls, co-opting opposition leaders and bribing voters. Cold War manipulation has simply given way to a new distortion, the 'either you're with us or against us' litmus test of the Bush era. While some conflicts are running out of steam, new ones have an uncanny habit of erupting. Darfur showed that despite all the 'never again' statements voiced after Rwanda's genocide, the outside world will still stand by as a regime commits massive human rights abuses against its citizens, and Mugabe's pauperisation of Zimbabwe has shown all the talk of African leaders policing themselves under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) aegis to be just that - talk. Despite an estimated US\$580 billion in Western aid since independence, Africa is the only region in the world that is stagnating; its share of world trade had fallen to under 2% by 2002. Average life expectancy - just 46.1 years in sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 79 years in the rich nations of the OECD - has sunk to 1950s levels and the number of poor is set to rise to 404 million in 2015.

Which version to embrace? The answer, of course, is that both are true. For as Binyavanga highlights, one of Africa's biggest handicaps has always been the basic fact of its geographical shape. So neat, so apparently self-contained, it lures outsiders into dangerously simplifying a continent of 1800 languages, one that contains both snow-capped mountains and green meadowlands, freezing coastlines and crusty deserts; nomads who love their camels and farmers who lust after soil; along with mosques, holy trees, animist shrines, Masonic lodges and vast cathedrals. The French-speaking Maghreb states, to take one example, have far more in common with one another than Angola or Kenya. South Africa's chronicle of apartheid is emphatically not the story of the rest of the continent. Few Africans consider Egypt, which they regard as an extension of the Middle East, as belonging to the continent at all, while Ethiopia, with its 3,000-year-old Queen of Sheba myth, inhabits a cultural universe all its own. The average Nigerian has as much in common with an Eritrean as a Swiss villager has with a Native American. Anyone piecing together the factors that moulded the continent must therefore do what I do here - warn against the dangers of generalisation, while generalising like crazy.

SLAVERY

If Africa sometimes seems like a continent suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, one of the least thoroughly digested of its many traumas was the slave trade. Part of African reality long before the white man set foot there, slavery was the fate of criminals, the indebted and prisoners of war. However, its domestic form was more benign than what came later, when Arab slave traders sent raiding parties into the interior, kidnapping the fittest and strongest. Entire regions became depopulated as villagers fled, and the impact of the Arab tactics of divide and rule, in which one chieftain turned against another, have been insidious. By the 16th century, European powers were hard on the Arabs' heels. With African rulers acting as middlemen – the

Websites provide Africa's diaspora with a way to keep in touch and let off steam, but often seem off-puttingly incestuous or strident to outsiders. For a general overview of the continent, try www allafria.com.

Michela Wrong has spent the last 14 years reporting on Africa. She is author of the awardwinning *In the Footsteps* of Mr Kurtz, which traces the rise and fall of the dictator Mobutu, and *I Didn't Do It for You*, about the tiny nation of Eritrea.

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West African empires of Dahomey and Ashanti in today's Benin and Ghana grew fat on slavery's proceeds – British, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch traders shipped between 12 and 20 million souls across the Atlantic to work the New World's tobacco, sugar and cotton plantations. The brutal trade finally ended in 1833 when Britain, its conscience pricked by the abolition movement, outlawed slavery in its colonies.

What is striking is how deep in the continent's subconscious this terrible episode has been buried. Some academics estimate that had it not been for the slave trade, Africa's mid-19th-century population would have been double its 25 million figure. Yet with the exception of the markets along the Swahili coast (a 2,900km stretch of Kenyan and Tanzanian coastline), Ghana's castles and Senegal's Goree Island, one rarely stumbles upon its traces. The complicity of rulers of the day may explain a reluctance to engage with the issue. As Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade, whose ancestors were slave owners, told African delegates campaigning for reparations: 'If one can claim reparations for slavery, the slaves of my ancestors or their descendants can also claim money from me.' The other complicating factor may be awareness of the time it took many African states to outlaw slavery - Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie, for example, only set about it in the 1920s - and embarrassment at the knowledge that it still quietly persists in countries such as Sudan, Mauritania and Niger. This awkward fact was highlighted in May 2005 when a pressure group arranged a release ceremony for 7,000 slaves in Niger. Humiliated by the media coverage, the government warned those involved they faced prosecution if they admitted to being slave masters, and the ceremony was scrapped.

LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

The Scramble for Africa, by Thomas Pakenham, is a whopping doorstop of a book. But it's also a great, scintillating read, full of ruthless and eccentric characters, tracing the European greed for territory that shaped today's continent. Africa's second whammy was a network of national borders, imposed from outside, which ignored salient geographical features and divisions of tribe, language and religion. The Scramble for Africa was made possible by explorers such as David Livingstone, Richard Burton and Henry Morton Stanley, who traced the continent's contours, and by the discovery of medicines that allowed the white man to survive in the tropics. Until the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, in which Europe's great powers agreed on a continent-wide carve-up, Africa's distinctive contribution to history had been the art of living fairly peacefully while not in states. When the Scramble began, South Africa and Algeria were the only areas of Africa settled by Europeans. By the time it concluded in 1914, only Ethiopia and Liberia remained unspared. As Germany, Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and Italy gobbled up land, driven as much by the need not to be seen lagging behind their competitors as any strategic interest, the missionary societies volunteered to spearhead what they saw as Europe's great civilising mission. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Nobel Prize winner, jokes: 'When whites arrived in South Africa, they had the Bible and the blacks had the land. The whites told the blacks to close their eyes and pray. When they opened their eyes, they had the Bible and the whites had the land.'

By introducing the monetary economy, taxation and paid labour, colonialism effectively propelled rural communities into the industrialised era. Alarmed by the implications of Kwame Nkrumah's Pan-African credo, Africa's postindependence leaders attempted to set those artificial frontiers in stone in 1963 with the doctrine of *uti possidetis* (boundaries shall stay as they are). But much of Africa's postcolonial turmoil can be seen as a straining against them. In Somalia (which now contains unrecognised Somaliland and Puntland), Sudan, DRC and Côte d'Ivoire, the nation state is under pressure as never before.

The Scramble's other poisonous gift was to fix the continent's gaze towards the West. Under colonialism, Africa's economic role was to provide Western markets with raw primary commodities – coffee, cocoa, tea, rubber, gold, copper and diamonds – that would be processed elsewhere. Railways and roads were designed to link the interior with coastal ports, not one African nation with its neighbour. Today, it is still easier to fly from Zambia to Britain or from Togo to France, than it is to travel east to west across the continent. For Frantz Fanon, that orientation formed the basis of a morale-sapping inferiority complex. 'What is often called the black soul is a white man's artefact,' he wrote. If true, it may explain why 70,000 of Africa's brightest head abroad each year to join the diaspora and why 40% of African savings are held outside the continent. Even today, despite determined attempts by writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiongo to reestablish a proud African identity, Africans often seem more interested in the antics of their former colonial masters than in events across the border.

COLD WAR INTERFERENCE

Africa had barely extricated itself from colonialism when it was bound in an even tighter straitjacket. Exsanguinated by WWII, Europe's powers withdrew from their colonies, only to see their place taken by the superpowers, whose behaviour would be dictated by the principle of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. There was nothing subtle about US and Soviet Union interference: fighting a proxy third world war, both sides plotted the assassination of elected African leaders, funded the extravagancies of kleptomaniac dictators, supported atrocity-prone rebel movements and poured lethal weaponry into nations that had until then known the flintlock and spear. The massive arming of Africa that resulted - Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Mariam, for example, received at least US\$9 billion in Soviet hardware - transformed the nature of conflict on the continent. It also taught a generation of black leaders that as long as they sang the appropriate ideological tune, they would always be eligible for World Bank and IMF loans, in the case of the pro-US contingent, and Warsaw Pact funding, in the case of the pro-Communists. 'The Cold War,' writes Ryszard Kapuscinki, 'was one of the most disgraceful pages in contemporary history, and everyone ought to be ashamed.³

Angola, DRC and the Horn of Africa probably bear the deepest scars of this cynicism, which all too often encouraged a numb passivity among citizens who realised the future would be decided not by them, but in Washington and Moscow. While *perestroika* eventually concentrated the minds of South Africa's white rulers, helping to pave the way for Nelson Mandela's release, many of the continent's worst despots succeeded in clinging to power despite the shrivelling of superpower support. The danger today is that after a period in which good governance topped the agenda of foreign donors, the War on Terror has become a new Cold War, with policy towards Africa dictated exclusively by whether a leader has signed up for Washington's campaign against Islamic extremism.

IN SICKNESS & IN WEALTH

Africa boasts so many of the worst diseases known to man for good reason: for millions of years the cradle of humanity provided bacteria and viruses with a venue in which to adapt to the human organism. They are still taking their toll. It's easy to forget that old-fashioned malaria still kills more Africans each year than AIDS, or that three to five million children under the age of five die annually of preventable diseases. As for the new virus, a disastrous combination of factors, from ingrained poverty to women's low status, African machismo and practices such as widow inheritance, have allowed it to wreak havoc. Poor leadership, Africa's great curse, also played its part, with too many rulers either ignoring the problem, presenting it as a Western plot, or presiding over condomburning ceremonies. Today, sub-Saharan Africa is home to 60% of all people living with HIV. The fact that most victims are in their productive years bodes Martin Meredith's *The State of Africa* is a clear and concise run-through of Africa's postindependence history, taking the reader from colonial withdrawal up to the present day.

'Dry sex', practised in parts of southern Africa, has helped spread HIV. Women use herbs, soil, salt or torn newspaper to soak up the vagina's natural lubrication, which is regarded as distasteful. The result is increased friction, greater sensation and greater infection rates. ill for economic trends. While the cost of antiretrovirals is plummeting, it's hard to see long-term treatment for over 25 million infected Africans as viable on a continent where so many already go without basic medical services.

Africa's other ancestral inheritance – its extraordinary natural riches – have proved more curse than blessing. Mimicking a colonial pattern of assetstripping, Africa's governing elites funnelled profits from the oil, diamond, mineral and timber industries into Swiss bank accounts and European real estate. Today, oil-rich states usually boast the worst governance records and with both China and the US – expected to source a quarter of its oil here by 2015 – on the prowl for petroleum, it's easy to see pragmatism again replacing principle in superpower dealings with Africa. The new competition for resources between East and West is likely to be no more uplifting than the last.

HOPES & FEARS

The 21st century is going to be a testing time.

Pick up any guidebook from the '60s, '70s or '80s and one fact strikes you: Africa has become less, not more, accessible. Roads once used by ordinary cars now need 4WDs, popular air routes have been scrapped, hotels no longer exist and ferries are a distant memory.

Apart from being expensive, African visa requirements are one of the most irritating hurdles for the traveller. Accept that they are a form of retaliation for the obstacles the West puts in the way of African migrants, go armed with photos and cultivate a sense of humour. Climate change – likely to have a particularly dramatic impact on Africa's farmers whose livelihoods are rarely secure – is only one of the many looming challenges. Somalia looks set to become the new venue for Washington's crusade against Islamic fundamentalism, with the standoff between its Islamic Courts movement and a weak transitional government threatening to draw Eritrea, Ethiopia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Libya into a devastating proxy war in one of the world's poorest regions. Uganda, which came tantalisingly close to resolving its conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army in 2006, could yet see peace slip through its fingers, while the aftermath of the first democratic elections in DRC in 40 years may prove more disruptive than the polls themselves. Even while policymakers worry about the possible implosion of Zimbabwe and Ethiopia, Nigeria's fragmentation and a permanent split between south and north Sudan, they know from experience that the worst crises are rarely foreseen, for Africa has a great capacity to wrong-foot and surprise.

While some analysts believe African economies are up and running – in the last decade, 16 nations saw average annual growth of over 4% – others warn that their Asian rivals are already at full gallop and the distance between the two is now so wide it may never be bridged. China's current intense interest in Africa may prove a mixed blessing, boosting prices of raw materials while undermining its manufacturing sector with cheap credit.

As for the hopes voiced by the likes of Bob Geldof and Bono that a doubling in Western aid could trigger an African renaissance, sceptics murmur that aid has often damaged accountable government, and twice as much aid may merely mean twice as much damage. 'The best way to keep Africans poor is to continue handing money to political elites who suppress development,' warns Moeletsi Mbeki, South African analyst.

For newcomers, perhaps the best advice they can heed is to resist the insidious notion that they are somehow duty-bound to rescue Africa from itself. It's ironic that a continent that has had so much harm done to it by outsiders is so often perceived as demanding some form of moral reaction from its visitors.

The truth is that Africa's future will be decided not by outsiders but by its own citizens. Extending feelers across the continent, South Africa's businessmen are bringing new dynamism to industries shackled by state intervention and graft. The continent's vast, supremely well qualified diaspora sits watching from abroad, awaiting the moment when its talents can be put to use back home. Terrifyingly, exhilaratingly, more than half of Africa's population is under the age of 17. Less burdened by the ethnic loyalties of yesteryear, harbouring little respect for the geriatric leaders who sabotaged Africa's independence, familiar with the spreadsheet, podcast and MP3 player, they currently have no say over the continent's direction. When that changes, Africa will find its way.

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Algeria

You raise a few eyebrows when you say you're travelling to Algeria. Though the country, ravaged by civil war in the early 1990s, is taking tentative steps towards tourism, it is still a destination mainly for the adventurous and the patient. Yet there is so much to see here: vast parts of the Sahara desert remain unexplored; the Neolithic cave paintings of Tassili N'Ajjer and the volcanic peaks of the Hoggar mountains are Unesco listed; tribal culture is very much alive; the mysterious and ultrareligious towns of the M'zab region offer a peek into life as it was lived hundreds of years ago; and the Tuareg capital, Tamanrasset, is a forest of veiled 'blue men' driving jeeps and drinking mint tea. To the north, the Mediterranean coast is almost completely undeveloped, and the capital, Algiers, is a bombastic mixture of traditional and modern Algeria. Refreshingly, the day-to-day hassle common to many Arab countries is conspicuously absent.

Many Algerians and the country's intrepid explorers like the lack of visitors: the difficult transport and next to no tourist infrastructure make it almost impossible for Algeria to turn into a holiday magnet like its neighbour, Tunisia. Chances of this happening are low, because Algeria's economy doesn't depend on tourism and the continuing reports of militant attacks in certain areas, though seldom reported in Western media, mean that it will be a long time before Algeria is swamped by visitors. So, if you have lots of time, patience and a healthy but cautious sense of adventure, take advantage of this dusty gem and explore Algeria.

FAST FACTS

- Area 2.3 million sq km
- ATMs None
- Borders Niger and Tunisia open; Morocco closed; Mali, Mauritania and Libya crossings not advised
- Budget US\$35 to US\$40 per day
- Capital Algiers
- Languages Arabic, Berber, French
- Money Algerian dinar (DA); US\$1 = DA71
- Population 32.9 million
- Seasons In the north: wet (October to March), dry (June to September); in the south: hot (March to October), cool (November to February)
- Telephone Country code 213; international access code 00
- Time GMT/UTC +1
- Visa US\$40 to US\$50 for one month



ALGERIA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Algiers (p73) See modern and traditional Algeria meet in the country's fascinating capital.
- **Tamanrasset** (p76) Get lost among the Blue Men – the Tuaregs – and explore Saharan culture.
- Assekrem (p77) Watch the sun set beyond a sea of mountains, and absorb Algeria's most breathtaking view.
- **Timimoun** (p76) Explore beautiful desert architecture and sigh over the sand dunes on the edges of town.
- **Ghardaïa** (p75) Bargain for a technicolour carpet, before peeking inside the ancient Muslim town, Beni Isguen.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Algeria has a Mediterranean climate along the coast, with mild, wet winters, and hot, dry summers. The coastal area is best visited in spring and summer months. The Sahara desert has famously ferocious summer temperatures, so visiting this part of Algeria is best done between late autumn and early spring (November to April). Despite daytime temperatures seldom falling below 25°C, desert nights can be cold even in the height of summer. Rainfall ranges from more than 1000mm per year in the northern mountains, to zero in the Sahara. Some places go decades without a drop.

ITINERARIES

• **One Week** Fly to Tamanrasset (p76) and go on a desert expedition trip, walking alongside camels and sleeping under the

HOW MUCH?

- Cup of tea US\$0.50
- Newspaper US\$0.80
- Antique tin box US\$4
- Lamb couscous US\$1.50
- Tuareg shawl US\$5

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- 1L petrol US\$1.50
- 1L bottled water US\$0.50
- Bottle of Algad Power Beer From US\$5
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$4
- Kebab US\$1.50

WARNING

Despite an increase in interest in Algeria as a travellers' destination, parts of the country remain unsafe. You should avoid travelling to the northwest, and the desert and mountain regions of the southeast, in particular. We did on-the-ground research in some parts of the south, east and the country's capital, but as we were not able to do on-the-ground research in the entire country, some information in this chapter might not be reliable. Please check the situation before travelling to Algeria.

stars for five days. Stopping over in Algiers (p73) on your way back gives you the perfect opportunity to explore the capital for a couple of days.

Two Weeks As for the one-week itinerary, but continue onto Ghardaïa (p75) from Algiers. Take in the beauties of this old-fashioned town over two days, with its market, colourful carpets and the daily *souq* (market), and don't miss spending a day inside the ancient town of Beni Isguen (p75), where people have been living according to strict Muslim laws for centuries. Get a bus to Timimoun (p76) and spend a couple of days relaxing, wandering around town, and watching the sand dunes, before catching a bus, then plane back to Algiers.

HISTORY

The modern state of Algeria is a relatively recent creation. The name was coined by the Ottoman Turks in the 16th century to describe the territory controlled by the regency of Algiers – initially a Turkish colony. The regency broke free of the Ottoman Empire and founded a military republic of unusual stability. This endured almost 300 years until spurious diplomatic problems prompted the French to invade in the 19th century.

The Barbary Coast

Before the arrival of the French, Algeria was known to Europeans as the Barbary (a corruption of Berber) Coast, whose notorious pirates preyed on Christian shipping. The dreaded Khayr al-Din, going under the chilling pseudonym of Barbarossa, was the first regent of Algiers during this period, and at one point



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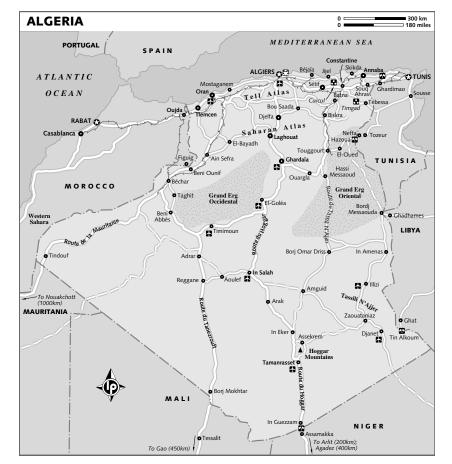
ALGERIA

held no fewer than 25,000 Christian captives in the city. Piracy sent shivers down many a spine until the US Navy defeated a Barbary fleet off Algiers in 1815. Despite this, the feared pirates were not entirely beaten until the French attacked Algiers in 1830 and forced the ruling *dey* (commander or governor) to capitulate. It took another 41 years for French domination of the country to be complete.

The main opposition came from Emir Abdelkader, the great hero of Algeria's nationalist movement. Abdelkader was a sherif (a descendant of the Prophet, not a Wild West figure) who ruled western and central inland Algeria. His forces resisted the French for almost six years before they were defeated near Oujda in 1844. Abdelkader himself finally surrendered in 1846 and spent the rest of his life in exile. He died in Damascus in 1883.

French Rule

The French colonial authorities set about changing the face of Algeria by eliminating anything that was previously thought of as Algerian: local culture was destroyed, mosques were converted into churches and the old medinas were pulled down and replaced with streets laid out in neat grids. The greatest symbol of the change was the conversion of the Great Mosque of Algiers to the Cathedral of St Philippe. The French also distributed large parts of prime farming land to European settlers (known as *pieds-noirs*) – Italian, Maltese and Spanish as well as French.



Algeria's war of independence, led by the newly formed Front de Libération Nationale (FLN; National Liberation Front), began on 31 October 1954 in Batna, east of Algiers. The fighting lasted seven years, with terror campaigns led by both native Algerians and *pied-noir* settlers, costing at least a million Algerian lives. The French president, Charles de Gaulle, aware of the impossibility of continued French rule, agreed to a referendum on independence in March 1962. The result was a resounding six million in favour and only 16,000 against. Independence was declared on 5 July 1962.

Socialism & Democracy

FLN candidate Ahmed ben Bella, who robbed a bank to fund a revolutionary group, became Algeria's first president. He pledged to create a 'revolutionary Arab-Islamic state based on the principles of socialism and collective leadership at home and anti-imperialism abroad'. He was quickly overthrown in 1965 by former colleague Colonel Houari Boumédienne, who effectively returned the country to military rule.

Boumédienne's emphasis on industrial development at the expense of the agricultural sector was to have a major impact in later years, when the country became heavily dependent on food imports and migrant workers. Boumédienne died in December 1978 and the FLN replaced him with Colonel Chadli Benjedid, who was re-elected in 1984 and 1989.

There was very little political change under Boumédienne and Chadli. The FLN was the sole political party, pursuing basically secular, socialist policies. There was little evidence of opposition until October 1988, when thousands of people took to the streets in protest against government austerity measures and food shortages. The army was called in to restore order, and between 160 and 600 people were killed.

The government reacted by pledging to relax the FLN monopoly on political power and work towards a multiparty system. The extent of the opposition became clear at local government elections held in early 1990, which produced landslide victories for previously outlawed fundamentalist Front Islamique du Salut (FIS; Islamic Salvation Front).

The initial round of Algeria's first multiparty parliamentary elections, held in December 1991, produced another landslide win for the FIS. The FLN was left looking like a political irrelevance, taking only 15 of the 231 seats. Chadli's apparent acceptance of this prompted the army to step in, replacing the president with a five-person Haut Conseil d'Etat (HCE; High Council of State) headed by Mohammed Boudiaf, a former leader of the Algerian revolution. The second round of elections was cancelled, and FIS leaders Abbas Madani and Ali Belhadj were arrested while others fled into exile.

Civil War

Boudiaf lasted six months before he was assassinated amid signs of a growing guerrilla offensive led by the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA; Armed Islamic Group). He was replaced by former FLN hardliner Ali Kafi, who oversaw the country's rapid descent into civil war before he was replaced by a retired general, Liamine Zéroual, in January 1994. Zéroual attempted to defuse the situation by holding fresh elections in 1995, but Islamic parties were barred from the poll and Zéroual's sweeping victory came amid widespread claims of fraud.

Hopes for peace went unfulfilled; instead, the war became even more brutal, with Amnesty International accusing both sides of massacres and war atrocities. The GIA, angered by French aid to the government, extended the war to French soil with a series of bombings and hijackings.

Eventually, government security forces began to gain the upper hand, and at the beginning of 1999 Zéroual announced that he would be stepping down. New elections held in April that year resulted in a controversial victory for the establishment candidate Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a former foreign minister, who was elected unopposed after the rest of the candidates in the field claimed fraud and withdrew.

Bouteflika moved quickly to establish his legitimacy by calling a referendum on a plan to offer amnesty to the rebels. War-weary Algerians responded overwhelmingly with a 98% 'yes' vote, and by the end of 1999 many groups had responded and laid down their weapons. However, elements within the GIA remained defiant, and were suspected of assassinating FIS leader Abdelkader Hachani in October 1999 in an attempt to derail the peace process. **Algeria Today**

AL GERIA

Police 2 17

several branches in Algiers.

Telephone office (cnr Rue Asselah Hocine & Blvd Colonel Amirouche) A block from the post office, towards the harbour.

ONAT (Office National Algérien du Tourisme; 🕿 74 44

48; www.onat-dz.com; 126b Rue Didouche Mourad) Has

SIGHTS

Magnificent Turkish palaces are hidden inside the predominantly French-built medina. Most are concentrated around the Ketchaoua Mosque on Rue Hadj Omar; the finest is the Dar Hassan Pacha palace (no admission to the interior).

The distinctive abstract monstrosity dominating the skyline south of the centre is the Martyrs' Monument, opened in 1982 on the 20th anniversary of Algeria's independence. The views over the city here are the best you'll get, and there's also a convenient shopping centre nearby.

SLEEPING & EATING

Cheap accommodation can be found on Pl Port Said on the edge of the medina, but few foreign visitors stay in the area because of its seediness and the likelihood of cockroaches strolling around the beds.

Hôtel el-Aurassi (🖻 74 82 52; www.el-aurassi.com; 2 Ave du Frantz Fanon; s/d US\$120/130; 🔀 💷 😰) Overlooking the city, this atmospheric 1970s hotel has three restaurants offering good French-Algerian cuisine, a massive pool and tennis courts. The large rooms have terraces, many with fabulous sea views.

Hôtel el-Djazaïr (🖻 23 09 33/37; www.hoteleldjazair .dz; 24 Ave Souidani Boudjemma; s/d US\$120/135; 😢 🔲 😰) This classic old five-star hotel has fantastic amenities and service to match. There are four restaurants, a bar, a nightclub, a pool and sports facilities on site. The location is excellent (it's sandwiched between El-Khalifa Bank and the British Embassy).

In the city centre, Algerian snacks can be found on the streets between Pl Emir Abdelkader and Pl Port Said.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Air Algérie (🕿 74 24 28; www.airalgerie.dz; 1 Pl Maurice Audin) and Air France (73 16 10; www.airfrance.com; Immeuble Maurétania, PI de Perou) cover destinations throughout the country. Useful but pricey routes include Tamanrasset (US\$420 return, 2¹/₂ hours, daily), Ghardaïa (US\$150 return,

towards the media (journalists can still be Since 1999 little has changed in this standoff jailed for insulting the president), militant attacks continue to happen every year (though in diminishing numbers; an estimated number of deaths is 500 a year). CULTURE

An estimated 99% of Algeria's population are Sunni Muslims; the majority are ethnically Arab-Berber and live in the north of the country. Berber traditions are best preserved in the Kabylie region east of Algiers, where people speak the local Berber (Tamazight) dialect as their first language, Arabic as their second and French as their third. After sustained protests and rioting, Berber was finally recognised as an official language in 2002. The Tuareg people of the Sahara are also Berbers, but speak their own tribal language, Tamashek.

The most interesting traditional crafts are those of the southern Saharan Tuareg, who are known for their intricate leatherwork and silver jewellery. In the north of Algeria, as in Morocco, carpets are big business, but because there's less tourist custom the selling process is much less pressured.

Music is a big part of life here too, and few road journeys are complete without a constant accompaniment of distinctive wailing vocals. Algeria's contribution to world music culture is rai, a genre that started out as subversive underground protest pop and has now spread around the Arab world. A notable rai star is the excellent Cheb Mami. Egyptian pop is also massively popular.

As very few people depend on tourism for their income, the constant Moroccan-style street hassle you might expect to find in Algeria is very rare - anyone who does accost you will usually be genuinely interested in where you come from and what you're doing. Invitations to tea can be regarded with far less suspicion than elsewhere!

ENVIRONMENT

Algeria is Africa's second-largest country after Sudan. About 85% of the country is taken up by the Sahara, and the mountainous Tell region in the north makes up the balance.

The Tell consists of two main mountain ranges: the Tell Atlas, which runs right along the north coast into Tunisia, and the Saharan Atlas, about 100km to the south. The area between the two ranges is known as the High Plateaus. The Sahara covers a great range

of landscapes, from the classic S-dunes of the great ergs (sand seas) to the rock-strewn peaks of the Hoggar Mountains in the far south.

ALGIERS

a 021 / pop 3.5 million

Algiers (Al-Jazaïr) is a mix of tradition and modernism that reflects Algeria's colonial past in its wide boulevards and elegant white and blue French houses, but keeps its traditional heart hidden deep inside the maze of the medina that sits on the hill above the port. It's a city of steps and labyrinthine uphill streets, with fezzed old men watching the changing world go by, as youngsters stroll, comfortable with their modern attire and lifestyle. Algiers is safer than it's given credit for, with a serious police presence inside the péripherique (ring road). Most points of interest are found in the medina and wandering around this part of the city is a lovely experience, but you should exercise caution if you're alone and completely avoid it at night. Though most people spend just enough time in Algiers to organise their forward journey, it's a fascinating city for a couple of days of exploration.

ORIENTATION

The harbour is an obvious landmark; four main streets run parallel to the waterfront, changing names every 500m or so. The medina lies between Blvd de la Victoire and Rue Ahmed Bouzrina.

The area around the airport is one of the less safe parts of Algiers, as it lies in the suburbs outside the ring road; there are regular buses into town (US\$0.50) but it's better to take a private taxi (US\$8). Don't let pushy locals 'share' it with you.

INFORMATION

There are banks all over the city centre, but none have international ATMs so travellers cheques are the best way to go. Internet access is available in the larger hotels and in several small offices around town. For medical emergencies, call a 115. You'll need good French and/or Arabic to get medical help here.

Fire 🖻 14

Main post office (PI Grande Poste) At the southern end of Rue Larbi ben M'Hidi.

GIA splinter groups continue their campaign against the government, and the army continues its own campaign against the rebels, amid accusations of brutality, executions and failure to prevent massacres. Added to this has been violent unrest among the Berber people, which led to an appeasement package from the government in 2001, when Berber was proclaimed the country's official language, alongside Arabic.

Relations with France have improved considerably in recent years; 2003 was celebrated as the Year of Algeria in France, and President Jacques Chirac made his first official visit to the country. Many Algerians boycotted the festivities in Paris, calling it a whitewash of history and resenting any suggestion of renewed French influence after so many years of abuse.

Parliamentary elections in May 2002, won by Ali Benflis of the FLN, were marred by violence and low voter turnout, and did little to strengthen people's faith in Algerian democracy. Four parties boycotted the vote, including two of the major Berber parties. To cap all the political problems, northern Algeria was rocked by a severe earthquake in May 2003, which killed more than 2000 people.

In April 2004, Abdelaziz Bouteflika secured a landslide election victory and promised to seek a 'true national reconciliation' during his second term. The military - traditionally a key player in Algerian politics - pledged neutrality during the poll. January 2005 saw the government make a deal with Berber leaders, promising more investment in the Kabylie region and enhanced recognition of Tamazight dialect. A referendum for reconciliation was held in September 2005, with voters supporting the government's plans to give amnesty to many of those involved in the 1990s conflict, and a six-month period of amnesty began in March 2006. According to the reconciliation plan, fugitive militants who surrendered were to be pardoned, except for the most serious of crimes, and some jailed Islamic militants were set free during the first part of the year. Despite the 'yes' vote at the referendum, many relatives of the victims killed in the civil war are asking for those involved in the killings to be tried at the national courts and for war crimes to be investigated. There is remaining criticism of the country's repressive attitudes

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Algiers Train Station

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INFORMATION

Main Post Office

Telephone Office

EATING II Hôtel el-Auras

TRANSPORT

Algérie Ferries

Main Bus Station

Air Algérie.

Air France

SNCM

ONAT

Department des Estrangers.

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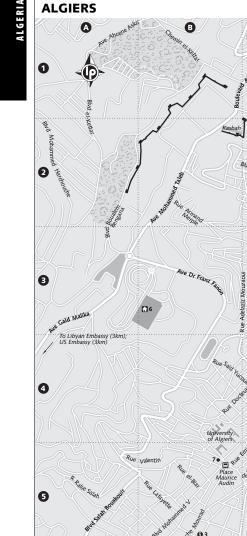
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Agha Train Station SiGHTS & ACTIVITIES Dar Hassan Pacha.....

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To Martyr's Monument (1km); British Embassy (9km); Hilton Algiers (9km); Airport (15km)

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one hour, daily), In Salah (US\$300 return), Oran (US\$150 return, one hour, daily), Constantine (US\$120 return, one hour, daily), Annaba (50 minutes, daily) and Tlemcen (US\$150 return, one hour, daily).

Bus

The main intercity bus station is south of Pl Grande Poste on Rue de Compiégne. There are daily buses to Ghardaïa (US\$15, eight hours) and El-Oued (US\$18, 14 hours).

Train

The train station is on the lower level of the waterfront. Surviving services include Oran (US\$9, six hours, three daily) and Annaba (US\$14, 14 hours, two daily).

GETTING AROUND

The four major city bus stations are at Pl des Martyrs, Pl Grande Poste, Pl Maurice Audin and Pl 1 Mai.

There are private taxis everywhere; prices are negotiable. It costs US\$8 to get to the city centre from the airport, and around US\$3 across town.

NORTHERN ALGERIA

The northern region is still largely unsafe for travellers. If safety advice changes by the time of your visit, make tracks to **Djemila**, a tiny mountain town in the stunning area around Sétif; **Oran**, the modern but fascinating port town made famous by Albert Camus; **Batna**, a charming town in an area known for its Roman ruins; and **Tlemcen**, the beautifully preserved gateway city for Morocco and former capital of the central Maghreb region.

CENTRAL ALGERIA

Here you'll find the mysterious M'zab region, where life remains frozen in time, and the Souf, resting in the Grand Erg Oriental close to the Tunisian border. The M'zab region is home to a conservative Muslim sect known as the Ibadites, which broke from mainstream Islam some 900 years ago, and is, some say, a country unto itself. In the river valley of the Oued M'Zab, is Ghardaïa, a cluster of five towns – Ghardaïa, Melika, Beni Isguen, Bou Noura and El-Ateuf. Ghardaïa is a town whose sand-coloured houses stand on a curious heap, with a single minaret sticking out on top like a one-year birthday cake.

The area is famous for its **carpets** and for the massive daily **souq** in the old town. The most curious and culturally unique town is **Beni Isguen** (admission US\$1), 3km from central Ghardaïa, a fascinating place where Islam is so rigorously enforced that local women, who are draped in white shawls from head to toe, are allowed to have only one eye showing (they apparently alternate the eye to keep their vision from weakening). Men and women lead completely segregated lives, and each gender has its own council. Foreigners are not allowed to enter without a guide, and not at all on Fridays. It's also forbidden to wear shorts, take photos or smoke.

One sleeping option is the **Hotel el-Djanoub** (ⓐ 88 56 31; Quartier Bouhraoua; s/d US\$40/55; 🕃 🕥), a slightly characterless place with long hospitallike corridors and comfortable rooms (the two swimming pools are major pluses). Camping is possible near the river.

Air Algérie flies from Ghardaïa to Algiers (US\$150, one hour, daily) and Tamanrasset (US\$300, 2½ hours, once a week).

Regular buses run to Algiers (US\$15, eight hours, daily) via Djelfa, and Reggane (US\$4, daily) via Timimoun and Adrar.

EL-OUED

🖻 032 / pop 678,000

Tagged the 'Town of a Thousand Domes', El-Oued is the major town of the Souf region in the Grand Erg Oriental. Along with Touggourt it is the main port of call for people heading to or from Tunisia. Most of the buildings have **domes**, built to alleviate the summer heat.

The town is also famous for its **carpets**, which often bear the traditional cross of the Souf. The daily **souq** in the old part of town is at its most animated on Friday.

SOUTHERN ALGERIA

This is Algeria's tourism trump card and the area that has taken in most visitors over the years. The Saharan 'capital' Tamanrasset, home to a large Tuareg population, is a collection of mud houses, international banks and

ALGERIA

the famously veiled 'blue men'. Around here are **Illizi**, a busy desert outpost on the fringes of the Tassili N'Ajjer; **Djanet**, home to some of the best prehistoric rock art in the Sahara; and **Beni Abbès**, a spring-watered town on an escarpment overlooking an oasis in the west of the country. This is also the area from which most desert trekking expeditions start.

Once the security situation in the north improves and stabilises, overland companies might resume using the superb trans-Sahara route via Béchar and Adrar, which skirts the Grand Erg Occidental and passes through some of the most dramatic scenery in North Africa.

On the eastern edge of the Grand Erg Occidental, this little oasis town spouts the sweetest natural water in the whole of the Sahara – it's bottled and sold across the country.

To get here, you'll have to fly to Ghardaïa or In Salah and get a bus from there. There are regular buses to Ghardaïa, Timimoun and In Salah (US\$3, four hours, daily).

TIMIMOUN

🖻 049 / pop 27,000

Timimoun is a storybook Saharan oasis town. Its palmeraie counts over 400,000 palm trees and there are views of an ancient salt lake and distant dunes from the edge of an escarpment upon which the town is built. The architecture is a magnificent terracotta colour, with smooth shapes and soft lines curving around the windows.

A handy highlight that doubles as accommodation is **Hotel Gourara** (20 90 26 27; s/d US523/30; **(D)**), which was constructed in the 1950s by the legendary French architect Fernand Pouillon, who built practical structures whilst respecting local building traditions. The Gourara is an ochre-coloured, slightly dilapidated building, with two swimming pools glittering amid palm trees. There are stunning oasis views from its terrace, especially at sunset, when sighing over the romantic atmosphere is obligatory. The hotel is a 15-minute walk down the main street from the central market towards the palmeraie.

Close to Timimoun is **Tasfaoud village**, a small oasis with a 13th-century Almohad castle and a fascinating desert irrigation system that's a gravitation point for all the village houses. To get here, you'll have to fly to Ghardaïa and get a bus from there. Daily buses go to Béchar (US\$2, 9½ hours) and Ghardaïa (US\$7, 11 hours).

In Salah, the main town between El-Goléa and Tamanrasset, is a laid-back place with a welcoming feel. Its main curiosity is the inescapable salty water – even the local soft drinks are made from it!

The main feature here is the **creeping sand dune**, which has effectively cut the town in two. Scramble to the top for views over both sides.

The only hotel is the upmarket state-run **Hôtel Tidikelt** (**a** 37 03 93) near the bus station.

The bus station is on the main Tamanrasset to El-Goléa road, which passes about 1km east of town. Daily buses go to Tamanrasset (US\$15, 12 to 20 hours) and El-Goléa (US\$3, four hours).

Air Algérie flies here four times weekly (US\$300, 3½ hours). You can fly to Tamanrasset from here (US\$300, three hours, three times a week).

TAMANRASSET

🖻 029 / pop 62,500

Tamanrasset is set at the foot of Algeria's most gorgeous landscape: the Hoggar Mountains. It's a major centre for Algeria's Saharan tourism and the last town on the route south to Niger. Tamanrasset is the 'capital' of the Tuaregs, with the veiled men and tattooed women going about their daily business amid low mud houses. Try to make it here for the **Tuareg Music Festival**, which is held in various venues in the desert from 28 to 31 December.

Tamanrasset is a surprisingly busy place with plenty of modern amenities, including several banks, two Air Algérie offices, innumerable travel agencies and an ONAT branch. The travel agencies and ONAT organise tours to Assekrem (opposite). Almost everything can be found on the main street, Ave Emir Abdelkader.

Slightly unreliable internet access is available at **Tamtamnet** (perhr US\$1.50), across the small square in the centre of town. The consulates of Mali and Niger are next to each other on Rue Fougani, towards the southern end of town.

There are some good camping grounds and a hotel or two in Tamanrasset. **Camping** **4x4** (a 34 22 58; agence4x4tam@hotmail.com; camping perperson US\$55, car/truck US\$1/2, s/d US\$12/22), near the village of Adriane, is popular with foreigners. It's a peaceful, decent place with basic facilities.

Gite Saharien ((2) 344671; Ave Emir Abdelkader; camping perperson US\$8, s US\$20) is an excellent campsite and B&B, with palm and orange trees shading the traditional Tuareg tents. Gite Saharien also offers simple, gravel-floored rooms and delicious food that you can munch by the fireplace in the winter. It's about 3.5km out of town, at the base of Hadrian mountain. The place is run by the Taghant agency, which also provides car and camel excursions, airport transfers and official invitations (for pre-trip visa applications).

Most restaurants in town offer whole grilled chickens for around US\$6. **Restaurant La Couronne** (Ave Emir Abdelkader; mains around US\$9) is one of the few places with good couscous. The unimpressive **Hôtel Tahat** (**a** 344272; Ave Emir Abdelkader) has the only bar in town.

Air Algérie flies between Tamanrasset and the major northern towns – Algiers (US\$300, 2½ hours, daily), Oran and Constantine – as well as El-Goléa, Djanet, Illizi, Ghardaïa (US\$300, 2½ hours, once a week) and In Salah (US\$300, three hours, three times a week). The French company **Point-Afrique** (www.point afrique.com in French) also has very convenient weekly flights to Paris and Marseille.

The bus station is on the road to the north of town. By bus it can take 12 to 20 hours to In Salah (US\$15). There are infrequent buses to In Guezzam (US\$18, 23 hours, weekly), near the border with Niger; regular 4WDs that leave when they're full also cover this route (US\$20, nine hours).

PRACTICALITIES

- El Khabar (www.elkhabar.com), private, Arabic-language daily; Le Quotidien d'Oran (www .quotidien-oran.com), El Watan (www.elwatan.com), Liberté (www.liberte-algerie.com), La Tribune (www.latribune-online.com) are private, French-language dailies; French El Moudjahid (www.elmuoudjahid-dz.com) and Arabic Ech Chaab (www.ech-chaab.com) are state-run.
- Algerian Radio (www.algerian-radio.dz) is operated by state-run Radio-Television Algerienne, and runs national Arabic, Berber and French networks and local stations; BBC World Service is available on shortwave (15485kHz and 12095kHz).
- Enterprise Nationale de Television (ENTV) is the state-run TV station; BRTV is the Berber station, transmitted via satellite from France.
- Electricity is 220V, with two-pin, European-style wall plugs.
- Algeria uses the metric system.

ASSEKREM

Watching the sun set and rise across the sea of mountains from Assekrem, in the Hoggar range, is an unmissable Algerian experience. Assekrem is about 80km northeast of Tamanrasset and hard to get to without your own vehicle. The many travel agencies in Tamanrasset operate tours to Assekrem, with some good deals available for groups. Overnight trips run by ONAT are decent value at US\$90 per vehicle, but there isn't much service. If you're without a vehicle, you could hitch a lift with another tourist group. There is a basic refuge (per person incl dinner & breakfast US\$20) at the top, where you can join in some fun card games or checkers with the Tuaregs. Take warm clothes; it gets chilly at night.

ALGERIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels in Algeria tend to be either expensive state-run tourist hotels with good facilities or cheap, tatty places intended for local visitors. There are some excellent campsites in the south, particularly in Tamanrasset. For travellers on a budget, there are branches of HI-affiliated youth hostels (facilities are minimal) in most towns.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses in Algeria keep standard opening hours (p1102), but everything closes on Friday for the Islamic weekend.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Although safety has significantly increased, a number of measures still have to be observed

LGERIA

when travelling in Algeria. Foreigners are not usually targets of violence, but the indiscriminate nature of bomb attacks on public places, such as markets and bus and train stations, makes caution extremely advisable. The northern part of the country is still unsafe and travel to this area is not advised. Driving alone in the desert has been made illegal after the 2003 kidnappings, and a number of checkpoints exist in the desert in order to ensure people only travel in groups.

The best way to get around is to travel by air or with a group, though air fares are quite expensive and a group of unarmed men did try to hijack a domestic Air Algérie flight in January 2003.

Expeditions into the Sahara pose a whole host of other problems, from fuel shortages to sandstorms and bandits (see Sun, Sand & Safety, p80). Make sure you are adequately briefed and prepared well before departure.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Algerian Embassies & Consulates

Algeria has diplomatic representation in the following neighbouring countries: Morocco (p192), Niger (p449) and Tunisia (p239).

Elsewhere, Algerian embassies and consulates include the following:

Australia (🖻 02-6286 7355; fax 02-6286 7037; www .algeriaemb.org.au; 9 Terrigal Cres, O'Malley, ACT 2606) Canada (Wilbrod St 🖻 613-789 8505/0282; www.amb algott.com; 500 Wilbrod St, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N2; Daly Ave 🖻 613-789 5823/9592; fax 613-789 7022; 435 Daly Ave, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6H3) Embassy is on Wilbrod St, consulate on Daly Ave.

France (2 01 53 93 20 20; fax 01 42 25 10 25; 50 rue de Lisbonne, 75008 Paris)

Netherlands (🖻 070 3522 954; Van Stolklaan 173, 2585 JS Den Haag)

UK (200-7221 7800; www.algerianembassy.org.uk; 54 Holland Park, London W11 3RS) USA (202-265 2800; www.algeria-us.org; 2118 Kalorama Rd, NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Algeria

Countries with diplomatic representation in Algiers include the following: Canada (🖻 91 49 51; 18 Mustapha Khalef St, Ben Akmoum) Also provides consular assistance to Australians. France (🖻 69 24 88; 25 Chemin Gaddrouche, Hydra) Germany (2 74 19 41; 165 Chemin Sfindja) Italy (23 30; 18 Rue Mohamed Ouidir Amellal) Libya (🖻 92 15 02; 15 Chemin Cheikh Bachir el-Ibrahimi, El-Biar)

Mali (🖻 69 13 51; Cité DNC/ANP, Villa No 15, Hydra) Mauritania (2 93 71 06; 30 Rue du Vercors) Morocco (🖻 60 74 08; 8 Rue des Cèdres, Parc de la Reine) Niger (278 89 21; 54 Rue du Vercors) Spain (2 92 27 13; 46 Bis Rue Med Chabane) Tunisia (🖻 69 13 88; 11 Rue du Bois de Bologne) UK (🖻 23 00 68; fax 23 0067; 7th floor, Hotel Hilton International Alger, Pins Maritimes, Palais des Expositions, 16130 El Mohammadia) US (🖻 69 14 25; 4 Chemin Cheikh Bachir el-Ibrahimi, El-Biar)

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexual sex is illegal for both men and women in Algeria, and incurs a maximum penalty of three years in jail and a stiff fine. You're unlikely to have any problems as a tourist, but discretion is advised.

HOLIDAYS

Algeria observes Islamic holidays (p1106) as well as the following national holidays:

Labour Dav 1 Mav Revolutionary Readjustment (1965) 19 June Independence Day 5 July

National Day (Revolution Day) 1 November

INTERNET ACCESS

Access is widely available, though connections vary. Prices are reasonable (around US\$1.50 per hour.

MONEY

Some Algerians, especially in rural areas, might give prices in centimes rather than dinars (there are 100 centimes in a DA1). To confuse matters further, they might also drop the thousands, so a quote of '130' means 130,000 centimes (ie DA1300).

Changing foreign currency is no problem at banks and larger hotels. Travellers cheques might be accepted in Algiers; credit cards can be used only in the international chain hotels where they still use the old fraud-friendly slip system. You'll need dinar for day-to-day expenses, although tourist-oriented businesses (hotels, airlines, tour companies etc) might accept US dollars.

POST & TELEPHONE

The postal system in Algeria is very slow, so it's advisable to send mail from a major town.

International phone calls can be made from any of the public Taxiphone offices found in most towns.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist offices can be found in many southern towns and are generally pretty helpful. The state-run travel agency, ONAT (Office National Algérien du Tourisme; 🖻 021-74 44 48; www.onat-dz.com; 126b Rue Didouche Mourad), organises excursions and is handy for lone travellers wanting to join a tour.

VISAS

Everyone except Moroccan and Tunisian nationals needs a visa to enter Algeria. Nationals of Israel, Malawi and Taiwan are not allowed into the country, and if you have a stamp in your passport from any of these countries your application might be rejected.

If you're getting an Algerian visa before leaving home, you need a letter from your employer or university to say you'll be coming back after your holiday and an 'invitation' to visit the country from an Algerian contact or tourist agency (the latter is available from several travel agencies in Tamanrasset). Applications lodged in Europe might also require three photos. Getting a visa en route is usually pretty straightforward in Niger, Chad and Mali.

Costs of a 30-day visa are around US\$45. Some embassies ask for photocopies of your passport.

Visa Extensions

Visa extensions can be obtained from the Department des Estrangers (Blvd Zighout Youssef 19A, Algiers), but are not easy to obtain.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following countries are available from embassies in Algiers (see opposite) or consulates in Tamanrasset.

Mali One-month visas cost US\$36 and are usually issued in 24 hours. You'll need two photos.

Niger One-month visas are issued the same day, costing between US\$35 and US\$0. Three photos and three application forms are required.

TRANSPORT IN ALGERIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Air Algérie (🗃 021-74 24 28; www.airalgerie.dz; 1 Pl Maurice Audin, Algiers) serves destinations throughout North and West Africa, including Tripoli (Libya), Casablanca (Morocco), Dakar (Senegal) and Bamako (Mali). It also flies daily to

France, three times a week to London, two or three times weekly to Dubai and two to five times weekly to Germany. **Air France** (2021-73 16 10; Immeuble Maurétania, PI de Perou, Algiers) mainly serves Europe. Most travel agents sell tickets for both companies.

Many tourists fly into Algeria by flying to Tamanrasset - either nonstop direct from Europe or with a change of planes at Algiers.

Land LIBYA

The main crossing points into Libya are at Bordj Messaouda and Tin Alkoum (between Djanet and Ghat). However, at the time of research it was not advisable to use these routes.

MALI & MAURITANIA

Algeria's southwestern borders are frequently closed, and there is very little transport along these routes. The road to Mauritania also passes near the disputed territory of Western Sahara, which is best avoided.

MOROCCO

The border with Morocco has been closed for some time due to ongoing political disputes.

NIGER

The border between Algeria and Niger slices through the emptiness of the central Sahara, with just one official crossing point between the sandy outposts of In Guezzam and Assamakka, on the main overland route from Tamanrasset to Agadez (the Route du Hoggar). Driving through the desert alone is now illegal but, surprisingly, there's plenty of traffic (mainly local trucks and 4WDs, plus a few brave travellers in their own vehicles), so backpackers can find lifts, although you'll probably have to pay and do the trip in stages. If you're very lucky you might get one lift all the way.

From Tamanrasset, trucks and battered old 4WDs run to the Algeria border post at In Guezzam (US\$18, nine to 12 hours plus waiting time), where you can complete most formalities. From here you can hitch on a truck to the lonely checkpoint on the actual border and then to the chaotic Niger border post at Assamakka. Lifts on trucks between the border posts will cost about US\$3, but as it's mostly private vehicles they can ask for whatever they want. From Assamakka, numerous trucks and 4WDs head to Arlit (about US\$6) and Agadez (US\$9).

The road is sealed as far as Tamanrasset, a sandy track from there to Arlit, then tarmac to Agadez and beyond. Note that a 'tourist tax' of CFA1000 (US\$2) is payable at the Niger border post. Make sure you have some CFA francs or you'll have to pay DA1000 (US\$15) instead.

TUNISIA

There are numerous border-crossing points between Tunisia and Algeria, but the main one is just outside Hazoua on the route between El-Oued and Tozeur. This is used by *louages* (shared taxis), travellers driving their own vehicle and the odd overland truck.

Sea

At the time of research, Algiers was the only advisable entry port for travellers. The ferry terminal is near the main train station. The French company **SNCM** (20021-73 65 69; 28 Blvd Zighout Youssef, Algiers) operates ferry services between Marseille and Algiers once or twice a week. **Algérie Ferries** (20021-42 30 48; Gare Maritime, Algiers) serves Algiers, Annaba, Béjaia and Oran from Marseille via Alicante (Spain). Tickets between Algiers and Marseille (the most common route) cost around US\$160/240 for a seat/cabin. The voyage takes about 21 hours.

GETTING AROUND Air

Air Algérie (🖻 021-742428; www.airalgerie.dz; 1 PI Maurice Audin, Algiers) offers extensive domestic services. Popular domestic routes are from Algiers to Tamanrasset and Ghardaïa (see p73).

Bus

Long-distance buses are run by various regional companies, mainly in the north but also as far south as Tamanrasset. Tickets can be in great demand on less frequently serviced routes, such as from In Salah to Tamanrasset, so you should book in advance. Fares include the following: In Salah to Tamanrasset (US\$15), Algiers to Ghardaia (US\$8), Adrar to In Salah (US\$1), El-Goléa to In Salah (US\$3) and Adrar to Timimoun (US\$1).

Car & Motorcycle

Driving around the Sahara by yourself is illegal, since 2003 and the kidnapping of tourists. You can rent a car in Algiers and drive along the coast, though locals recommend renting a driver as well, for safety.

Hitching

Independent travel in all parts of Algeria is risky because of the current political situation. However, the Sahara has long been a popular region for adventurers in their own vehicles, so backpackers have traditionally hitched rides. A great deal of patience is often required before securing a lift, especially now, as there are relatively few visitors. Most tourist vehicles are already full of passengers and kit, so drivers might be unwilling to take an extra load. You might be lucky, however, and meet a loner who's happy to offer a spare seat in return for help digging when the car gets stuck in the sand and possibly a contribution towards fuel.

The main route across the Sahara is the Route du Hoggar, which runs from Ghardaïa via El-Goléa and In Salah to Tamanrasset (and then on to the border and Arlit in Niger). The road is tar all the way to Tamanrasset. Other less-used roads include the eastern Route du Tassili N'Ajjer, which runs from Hassi Messaoud to Tamanrasset across the Grand Erg Oriental, and the Route du Tanezrouft, which

SUN, SAND & SAFETY

In February 2003, the dangers of desert driving were dramatically illustrated when no fewer than 32 people disappeared in the Sahara. Several separate expeditions, mostly German and Swiss, vanished in different parts of southeast Algeria. Speculation was rife about their fate: one Algerian source even claimed they were being held illegally in a military facility and the searches were 'nothing but a sordid show aimed at impressing the media'. By March, however, it had become apparent that the travellers were in the hands of an extreme Islamist group, the Salafist.

In May, 17 of the hostages were released unharmed and eventually the remaining party was tracked down to Mali, having crossed the southern Saharan border. They were successfully rescued after long negotiations.

In light of these events, independent travel in the desert areas is not permitted, and Algerian authorities now have checkpoints throughout the desert to ensure people only travel in groups. runs from Adrar to Borj Mokhtar near the Mali border. The latter two routes include sections of sandy track (known as *piste* in all the Sahara countries).

Local Transport

Trucks and 4WDs carrying paying passengers are more common than buses as means of transport in the south. Prices for 4WD transport are negotiable, but you should figure on around US\$20 for a full day's driving (eg Tamanrasset to In Guezzam). *Louages* (shared taxis) operate only in the north of the country. They run when full and are more expensive than buses.

Train

The northern train line connects Oran, Algiers, Constantine and Annaba. Additional lines run south from Oran to Béchar and from Constantine to Touggourt. Many services, including to Tlemcen (for Morocco) and Tunis (Tunisia), were suspended at the time of research.

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Egypt

Egypt is undeniably one of the world's great travel destinations and many of its wondrous sights need no introduction. It is for this very reason, however, that while horse-riding, tomb-raiding and desert safari are all possible, the chances of your enjoying them alone (particularly given the vigilant police protection occasioned by recent events) is minimal. Nor is this a new phenomenon. Even in the 19th century, a writer commented peevishly on the number of pleasure boats cruising the Nile.

This continues to be the reality of Egypt's great sights: for half the year they are overcrowded and beset by overenthusiastic hawkers and guides, and for the other half, they are too hot to handle. Forewarned is forearmed, however, and for many people the best of Egypt is realised not so much through the iconic spectacle of ancient monuments, great though they are, but by chats with a taxi driver, the surprise gathering of a thousand egrets in the trees along the Nile, or hearing a nation in prayer at sunset.

FAST FACTS

- Area 997,739 sq km
- ATMs In most large towns
- Borders Libya, Sudan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories
- Budget US\$50 per day (winter); US\$30 per day (summer)
- Capital Cairo
- Language Arabic
- Money Egyptian pound; US\$1 = E£6
- Population 78.9 million
- Seasons Winter/high season (October to April); summer/low season (May to September)
- Telephone country code 🖻 20; international access code 🖻 00
- Time GMT +2
- Visa Required for citizens of most countries

EGYPT

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Cairo** (p86) Witness life and death in epic proportions in this carpet-weaving, filmmaking city of pyramids.
- White Desert (p109) Visit extraordinary landscapes predating the Pharaohs.
- **Sinai** (p98) Explore the sculpted interior and coral-garden fringe of Egypt's Bedouin heartland.
- Nile Cruise (p94) Enjoy intimate views of riverside life crowned by the splendours of Thebes.
- Sound-and-light show at Abu Simbel (p119) Be dazzled by modern imagery projected across resurrected temple stones.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

From December to February, Lower Egypt (Cairo and north) is often overcast and chilly, with regular downpours of rain in Alexandria, and below-zero temperatures at night in Sinai, while Upper Egypt (south of Cairo) is warm with clear, blue skies.

Between June and September, temperatures range from 31°C on the Mediterranean coast to an unbearable 50°C in Aswan.

The best time to visit is in spring (March to April) or autumn (October and November) when you should pack for hot weather in the south and include a light jacket for the north.

ITINERARIES

- Three Days Be seduced by the pyramids at the sound-and-light show (p119); chart the origins of ancient Egypt in Memphis (p98) and Saqqara (p98); go swapping old lamps for new in Islamic Cairo (p90) and flex the ocular muscles at a bellydancing venue (p96).
- **Two Weeks** When you've exhausted Cairo, take the overnight train to Luxor (p111) and wake up in Thebes (p111) for three days of tomb and temple visiting. Then lounge on a boat to Aswan (p116) visiting Edfu (p116) and Kom Ombo (p116) en route, and make time to savour Abu Simbel (p119) by night.
- One Month Fly back to Luxor and retrace the old caravan route through the oases of the Western Desert (p108), allowing three days to chill in the coffeehouses of Alexandria (p105), or swim with angel fish at the Red Sea resort of Dahab (p99). There's also time to listen for commandments on Mt Sinai (p100), become a

HOW MUCH?

- Cup of tea US\$0.55
- Newspaper US\$0.10
- Small inlaid box US\$6
- Camel ride per hour US\$4.50
- Museum admission US\$7

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.05
- 1L bottled water US\$0.50
- Bottle of Stella US\$1.80
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$5.20
- Fuul sandwich US\$0.10

boat-spotter by the Suez Canal (p102) and sample dates in Siwa oasis (p108).

HISTORY Life on the Nile

Most of Egypt's landmass consists of deserts, with the nation's lifeblood, the Nile River, a green band shivering along the length of the country, drawing to it the nation's settlements, including the disproportionately large capital, Cairo. Charismatic rivers flow through many cities in the world but few govern the ebb and flow of a country's fortunes quite as significantly as the Nile has shaped Egypt and its shifting capitals of the Delta.

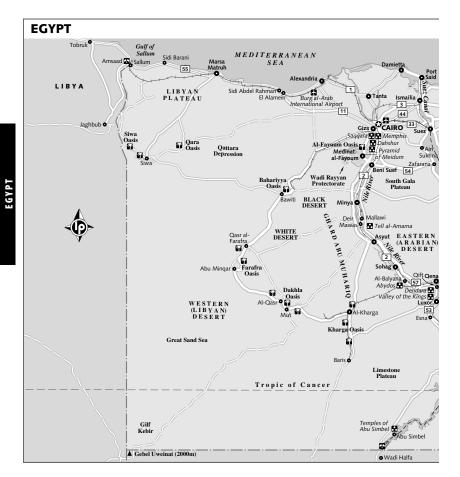
From at least 4000 BC, small settlements clung together in loose affiliations along the Nile, developing into two important states. The delta area in the north became known as Lower Egypt, and the area upstream of the delta was called Upper Egypt. The unification of these two states, around 3100 BC, by the Pharaoh Menes sewed the seeds for the flowering of ancient Egyptian civilisation.

Old, Middle & New Kingdoms

Ancient Egyptian history comprises three principal kingdoms. The pyramids date from the Old Kingdom (2670–2150 BC), when lively trade made ambitious building projects possible. Ruling from the nearby capital of Memphis, Pharaoh Zoser and his chief architect, Imhotep, built the pyramid at Saqqara. Subsequent Pharaohs constructed ever larger temples and pyramids, culminating in the



GYPT



mighty pyramids of Giza built for Cheops, Chephren and Mycerinus.

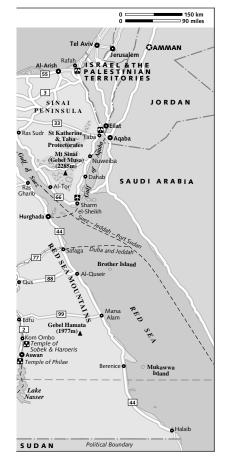
The Middle Kingdom (2056–1650 BC) was marked by the rise of a new and illustrious capital at Thebes (Luxor). It was during the New Kingdom (1550–1076 BC), however, that ancient Egyptian culture blossomed. Wonders such as the Temple of Karnak and the West Bank tombs were the visible expression of a rich culture that established Egypt, under the great dynasties of Tuthmosis and Ramses, as the greatest regional power.

From Alexander to Independence

From 1184 BC, Egypt disintegrated into local principalities and it wasn't until Alexander the Great arrived in the 4th century BC that

the country was reunited. For the next 300 years Egypt was ruled from Alexandria by the descendants of his general, Ptolemy. The Romans arrived in 31 BC, leaving behind little to show for their occupation except the introduction of Christianity in AD 2.

In AD 640, Arab armies brought Islam to Egypt. With it came a cultural revival and the foundation of Cairo in AD 969 by the Fatimid dynasty. Arts and sciences flourished and trade brought wealth into the country. The Turks found the prize irresistible, and in the early 16th century, Egypt became part of the Ottoman Empire. The French followed suitin the 19th century under Napoleon, and the British made Egypt a protectorate during WWI.



After nearly 2000 years of colonisation, revolution resulted in self-rule in 1952. Nasser became Egypt's first president in 1956, establishing his authority by buying out French and British claims to the Suez Canal but losing the 1967 war with Israel. His successor, Sadat, concluded the second war with Israel with the controversial 1979 Camp David Agreement. Widely blamed for betraying pan-Arabist principles, Sadat was assassinated in 1981.

Life After Sadat

Sadat's assassin was a member of Islamic Jihad, a terrorist organisation aiming to establish an Islamic state in Egypt. Sadat's successor, Mubarak, retaliated against the extremists, declaring a state of emergency that continues until today.

While Mubarak has been canny in rehabilitating Egypt's relations with Arab states without abandoning the treaty with Israel, he has not been so successful in domestic policy. The 1980s were marked by violence, partly in response to the country's dismal economic situation. Between 1993 and 1997, Egypt's largest Islamist opposition group targeted foreign travellers in its campaign to overthrow the government, culminating in the massacre of 58 holidaymakers at the Funerary Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor.

Egypt Today

The Luxor massacre destroyed grass-roots support for militant groups and a period of calm ensued until October 2004, when a bomb at Taba, on the border with Israel, killed 34. Mubarak introduced some democratic measures but not enough to appease militant groups. After sporadic violence in Cairo, three bombs at Sharm el-Sheikh killed 64 people, mostly Egyptians. Various groups claimed responsibility and tourism suffered temporarily. In April 2006 three further bombs claimed 23 lives in Dahab, proving that the situation is far from resolved.

Egypt is in serious economic turmoil, and with an ever-burgeoning population, rising unemployment, and a decline in tourism resulting from continuing violence, the future looks precarious.

CULTURE

Egyptians are often teased by neighbouring nationals for being work-shy (Gulf Arabs call a siesta 'Egyptian PT'). The 'insha'allah' (God willing) mentality translates as 'Why do today what you can put off until tomorrow?' Emphasis is placed instead on quality family and social experience rather than on the secondary task of earning a living.

Nonetheless, the country functions, crops are harvested and the great building projects throughout the ages, from Saqqara to Suez, show that the industry of some more than compensates for the lethargy of others.

Despite the emancipated lifestyles depicted in popular Cairo soaps, most families in Egypt live a conservative life based on traditional Islamic values. It may not look like it, but for most urban households, women rule the roost. They are expected to keep house and

GYPT

govern children, but men are kept in abeyance on a wish and a promise and are very often seen as a resource. Women who work are entitled to keep their money rather than share it with their husbands.

The huge discrepancy between rich and poor is the main source of political tension.

PEOPLE

Egypt has the second-highest population in Africa. Growing at a rate of 2% annually, it places enormous strain on infrastructure and the national economy. Unemployment is officially 10%; unofficially it's much higher.

There are three main racial groups: the Hamito-Semites of the Nile (including the Berbers of Siwa in the Western Desert); Bedouin Arab nomads, who migrated from Arabia and live mostly in Sinai; and the Nubians, who inhabit the Aswan area.

About 94% of Egypt's population is Muslim; the remainder is Coptic Christian. The two communities peacefully coexist. Magic plays a role in many people's lives.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Thirty years after her death, Umm Kolthum is still the classical voice of Egypt.

Ahmed Adawiyya is the founding father of *al-jeel* (the generation) and *shaabi* (popular), both forms of repetitive, disposable pop made internationally likeable by his successor, Hakim. Amr Diab is an equally popular male star, with sophisticated production and accessible rhythms that have helped bring Arabic music to a wider audience.

Somewhat ignored locally, but fêted abroad, Nubian music has a warm sound with simple melodies. The most famous exponent is Ali Hassan Kuban.

The work of the recently deceased Nobel prize-winner Naguib Mahfouz is revered in Arabic literature for its profound expression of Egyptian life and language. His works include *The Cairo Trilogy* and *Children of the Alley*, still banned in Egypt as blasphemous.

Nawal al-Saadawi's works include Woman at Point Zero and The Hidden Face of Eve (banned in Egypt). Ahdaf Soueif also tackles taboo subjects; she writes in English and her The Map of Love was short listed for the prestigious Booker Prize.

Egypt has many traditional craft industries, such as silk carpet weaving, copper and brass beating, inlaid woodwork, papyrus painting, alabaster work and fine cotton production. Unfortunately, much of the work in the tourist shops of Giza and Luxor is of poor quality and master craftsmen are hard to locate.

ENVIRONMENT

Egypt's central feature is the Nile Valley, either side of which are barren plateaus punctuated by occasional escarpments and oases. The highest mountains are Mt Sinai (Gebel Musa; 2285m) and Mt St Katherine (Gebel Katrin; 2637m), in the Sinai Peninsular.

Environmental awareness is not top priority in Egypt: Cairo is thick with smog; the Red Sea coast is threatened by opportunistic development and freshwater lakes are blighted by agricultural toxins.

On a positive note, there are now 21 protected areas throughout Egypt and 19 more proposed, and the government is beginning to encourage responsible tourism.

FOOD & DRINK

A combination of Arabic and Mediterranean influences, Egypt's cuisine is focused on minced, seasoned meat, locally made cheese and fresh vegetables such as tomatoes and aubergines. Staples include *fuul* (fava beans cooked with oil and lemon), *ta'amiyya* (felafel), *kushari* (mixture of noodles, rice and lentils) and unleavened bread. Not surprisingly, fish (like Nile perch and sea bream) is an important part of the diet.

Birds (as you'll note from the dovecotes) form an integral part of Egyptian culture, and pigeon – stuffed with rice and raisins – is a popular delicacy.

Although beer and arrak are produced locally, fresh fruit juices are the favoured drink. Sweet mint tea and Turkish coffee are indispensable punctuations to any social interaction.

CAIRO

2 / pop 11 million

In many ways, Cairo *is* Egypt, a top-heavy capital that dominates the country as it dominates Arabic culture, a magnet that draws people from subsistence livelihoods along the Nile Valley towards promises of a better life. What they find when they arrive among the chaos and charisma of Cairo depends on their luck and *wusta* (contacts/influence).

Visitors tend to enjoy Cairo in proportion to their tolerance levels. On a hot summer's

day, surrounded by a mangle of horn-blowing cars, buried under clouds of exhaust fumes, elbowed into the crowd, and tricked into being guided where you didn't want to go, it takes a special patience to enjoy the city.

But there's another side to Cairo: quite apart from the world-class attractions of the pyramids, Egyptian museum and Islamic treasures, there are boulevards of flame trees; overhanging balconies befitting of a Roberts lithograph; and splashes of sunlight glancing off brass lamps. In quiet contrast to the city, the Nile flows equally through fashionable suburb and island allotment, past the mausoleums of the dead now occupied by the living and alongside luxury hotels and floating palaces.

HISTORY

In terms of Egypt's history, Cairo is a relatively modern capital, founded in AD 969 by the Islamic Fatimid dynasty over the ruins of earlier Roman and Islamic settlements. Much of the Fatimid city remains today: the great mosque and university of Al-Azhar are still important Islamic resource centres, while the gates of Bab an-Nasr, Bab al-Futuh and Bab Zuweila straddle the city's main thoroughfares.

Despite spilling beyond its walls, Cairo remained a medieval city at heart for 900 years. It wasn't until the mid-19th century that it started to change significantly.

Before the 1860s, Cairo extended west as far as what is today Midan Opera, surrounded by a swampy plain flooded annually by the Nile. In 1863 French-educated Ismail came to power, inviting architects from Europe to design a modern Cairo beside the old Islamic city. The building boom set in place continues today, with the city's boundaries constantly expanding into the surrounding desert.

Although the pyramids are now almost engulfed by the city, they more properly belong to the capital of ancient Egypt at Memphis, 22km to the south.

ORIENTATION

It may be vast, but Cairo is surprisingly easy to navigate. Midan Tahrir is the centre. Northeast of Tahrir is Downtown, a busy commercial district centred on Sharia Talaat Harb. This is where most budget hotels and restaurants are clustered. Midan Ramses, the city's main train station, marks the northern end of Downtown. The eastern end of Downtown is at Midan Ataba, on the edge of Islamic Cairo. With Khan al-Khalili bazaar at its core, this is the ebullient, medieval heart of Cairo.

In the middle of the Nile is the island neighbourhood of Zamalek, historically favoured by ruling colonials and still a relatively upmarket enclave with foreign residents, midrange hotels and interesting restaurants and bars.

Heavy on concrete and light on charm, the west bank of the Nile is mostly residential. Giza stretches 20km either side of Pyramids Rd (Sharia al-Haram) that ends, as expected, at the foot of the Pyramids.

Maps

The American University in Cairo Press publishes *Cairo Maps: the Practical Guide* (E£30), a collection of 40 street maps with index.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Emergency

Ambulance (2123) Fire department (2180) Police (2122) Tourist police (2126)

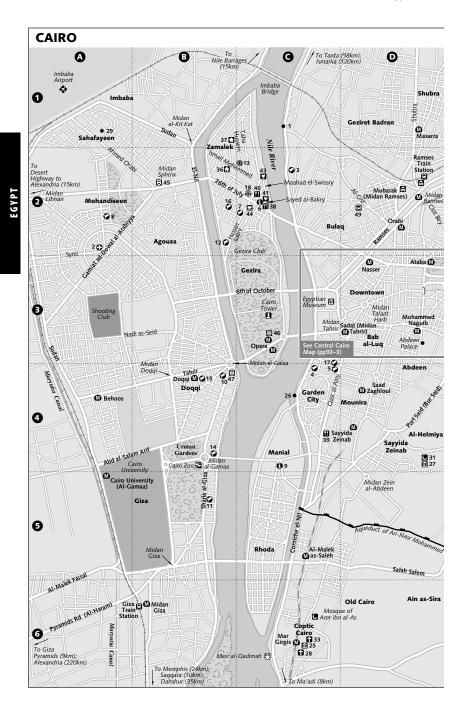
Internet Access

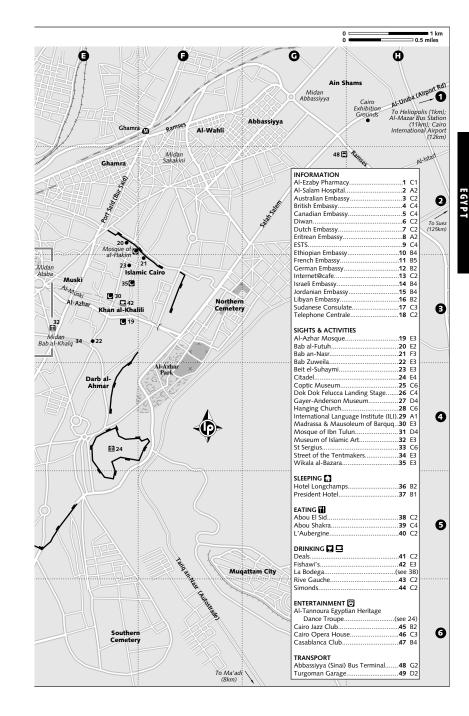
Internet@Cafe (Map pp88-9; 25 Sharia Ismail Mohammed, Zamalek; per hr E£5; 💮 9am-1am)

Medical Services

Al-Ezaby Pharmacy Bulaq (Map pp88-9; Arcadia Mall, Corniche el-Nil); Heliopolis (414 8467; 1 Sharia Tayseer; 24hr)

Al-Salam Hospital (Map pp88-9; 🖻 524 0250, emergency 524 0077; Sharia Syria, Mohandiseen)





Money

There are banks, foreign exchange bureaus and ATMs all over town. Banque Misr exchange office at the Nile Hilton on the corniche is open 24 hours, as are the airport money-changing booths. All the big hotels have ATMs.

Amex (Map pp92-3; 🗃 574 7991; 15 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown; 🕑 9am-4.30pm)

Thomas Cook (Map pp92-3; 🖻 574 3955; 17 Sharia Mahmoud Bassiouni, Downtown; (>) 9am-4.30pm Sat-Thu)

Post

٩Y

Main post office (🕿 391 2615; Midan Ataba, Downtown; 🕑 8am-6pm Sat-Thu, to noon Fri & public holidays)

Telephone

In central Cairo, there are telephone centrales located on Midan Tahrir and on Sharia Mohammed Mahmoud, Bab al-Luq, Sharia Adly. There's also one on Sharia 26th of July in Zamalek (Map pp88-9). All have card phones.

Tourist Information

Main tourist office (Map pp92-3; 2 391 3454; 5 Sharia Adly, Downtown; 🕑 8.30am-7pm) Staff are notoriously unhelpful.

Travel Agencies

The area around Midan Tahrir is teeming with travel agents. Panorama Tours (2 359 0200; www .eptours.com) is a reputable agency for air ticket reservations by phone, with English-speaking staff. They will mail tickets to your hotel.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The biggest source of irritation in Cairo is the bogus guide who uses remarkable ingenuity to steer you into 'no-hassle, government emporiums'. Scams include telling you they are off-duty guides from your hotel wanting to improve their English; insisting the museum is shut for a conference but they know a good place that's open; and offering cheap taxi services to places they have no permit to go. In some places, it can be difficult to walk more than a few metres without being accosted aggressively for such 'services'. The best advice is to plan where to go and how to get there before leaving the hotel.

Women travelling alone are vulnerable to unwanted attention in Cairo. Most hassle, however, tends to be verbal and can be avoided to some extent by dressing conservatively.

SIGHTS **Egyptian Museum**

A bewildering number of exhibits (over 100,000) are housed in the Egyptian Museum (Map pp92-3; 🖻 575 4319; Midan Tahrir, Downtown; adult/ student E£60/30; 🕑 9am-6.15pm). In addition, the museum is old, chaotic, label-less and lacklustre in its display of treasures.

Should you bother going? Without doubt, yes, but it helps to have a plan. To gain a purchase on the magnificence of the museum's collection, consider picking up a pictorial museum guide, such as Masterpieces of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, from the bookshop outside, select a dozen pieces that interest and make a beeline for those. The museum is even more rewarding once you've seen the temples and tombs where the artefacts were found. This is particularly the case with the most famous exhibits of the museum, the magnificent golden treasures of Tutankhamen's Tomb.

Guides cost E£50 per hour and congregate outside the ticket booth. Access to the Royal Mummy Room costs an extra E£80/40, payable outside the room's 1st-floor entrance. You may find the spectacle of the unwrapped, exposed and belittled bodies, viewed in glass cases at close quarters, a rather intrusive experience - it's certainly one that would have appalled the kings who thought they could count on some dignity in perpetuity.

Islamic Cairo

Islamic Cairo is the medieval heart of the capital. For a comprehensive walking tour of its splendid sights, begin at Cairo's most historic institution, Al-Azhar Mosque (Map pp88-9; admission free; 🕑 24hr). One of Cairo's earliest mosques, Al-Azhar is also the world's oldest surviving university. The campus recently moved to Nasser City but the university grounds still function as an Islamic resource centre.

Opposite Al-Azhar Mosque is the great bazaar Khan al-Khalili (Map pp88-9) and midan (city square). Before you dip into its myriad alleyways, however, walk north up Sharia al-Gamaliyya, a once-important medieval thoroughfare and home to fine clusters of Mamluk-era mosques, madrassas (traditional Muslim school) and caravanserais. Visit Wikala al-Bazara (Map pp88-9; Sharia al-Tombakshiyya; adult/student E£10/5; 🕑 10am-5pm), a beautifully restored caravanserai and head for the old northern wall. The square-towered Bab anNasr (Gate of Victory; Map pp88-9) and the rounded Bab al-Futuh (Gate of Conquests; Map pp88-9) were built in 1087. Returning to the bazaar via Sharia al-Muizz li-Din Allah, don't miss the spectacular Beit el-Suhaymi (Darb al-Asfar; Map pp88-9; adult/student E£20/10; 🕑 9am-5pm), a beautifully restored complex of three houses, tucked down an alley. This part of Islamic Cairo is home to the city's most historic prayer-schools, including the Madrassa & Mausoleum of Barquq (Map pp88-9; 🕑 6am-9pm), off Bein-al Qasreen.

Walk east from Al-Hussein, which is the name of both the *midan* and the mosque at the mouth of the bazaar, along Sharia al-Azhar, bear right at the top of the hill, and walk under the overpass to reach the Northern Cemetery (Map pp88–9). Commonly known as the 'City of the Dead', it is home to a sorry city of the living, too.

South of Khan al-Khalili, a busy market street runs past other exquisite madrassa complexes to the twin minarets of Bab Zuweila (Map pp88-9), the only surviving gate in the city's southern wall. Continuing south from Bab Zuweila, enter the Street of the Tentmakers (Map pp88-9), a covered bazaar specialising in appliqué work. Turn right to reach the celebrated Museum of Islamic Art (Map pp88-9; currently closed), or turn left for the Citadel (a long walk uphill that will take at least 40 to 50 minutes and will feel longer in summer).

Commenced by Saladin (Salah ad-Din) in the 12th century, the Citadel (2 512 1735; Midan al-Qala'a; adult/student E£50/25; 🏵 8am-5pm) houses an assortment of mosques and indifferent military museums. A visit is worthwhile, however, for the panoramic city view.

Don't miss the Gayer-Anderson Museum (Map pp88-9; Sharia ibn Tulun; adult/student E£30/15; 🕑 8am-4pm), two 16th-century houses furnished by a British major between 1935 and 1942. Its labyrinthine rooms and passages include a secret room for women to observe the entertainments in the grand hall, and an eclectic set of antiques from around the world. It's just next to the imposing Mosque of ibn Tulun (Beit al-Kritliyya; Map pp88-9; 🖻 364 7822; www.gawp .org; Sharia ibn Tulun; admission E£6; 📎 8am-6pm), 800m southwest of the Citadel.

Returning to the bazaar, shelter from the mayhem in one of Khan el-Khalili's many restaurants with their Moorish-style interiors or pay a visit to Fishawi's, the bazaar's most famous coffeehouse (see p96 for details).

Old Cairo

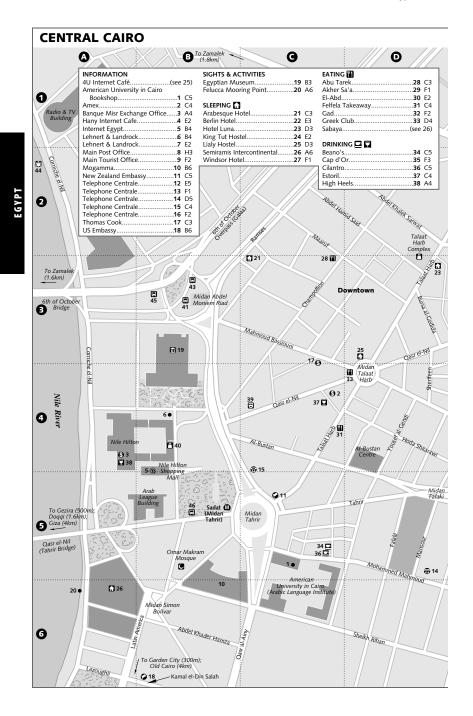
Once known as Babylon, the oldest part of Cairo was built by Coptic Christians and remains a Christian enclave to this day. The Coptic Museum (Map pp88-9; 🖻 363 9742; Sharia Mar Girgis; adult/student E£35/20; 🕑 9am-4pm), with mosaics, manuscripts and tapestries, and the Hanging Church (Kineeset al-Muallaga; Map pp88-9; Sharia Mar Girgis; admission free; 🕑 mass 8-11am Fri, 7-10am Sun), the centre of Coptic worship, are interesting to visit. Among other churches and monasteries here, St Sergius (Map pp88-9; admission free; 🕑 8am-4pm) apparently marks a resting place of the Holy Family during the flight from King Herod. The easiest way to reach here is by Metro (50pt), alighting at Mar Girgis station.

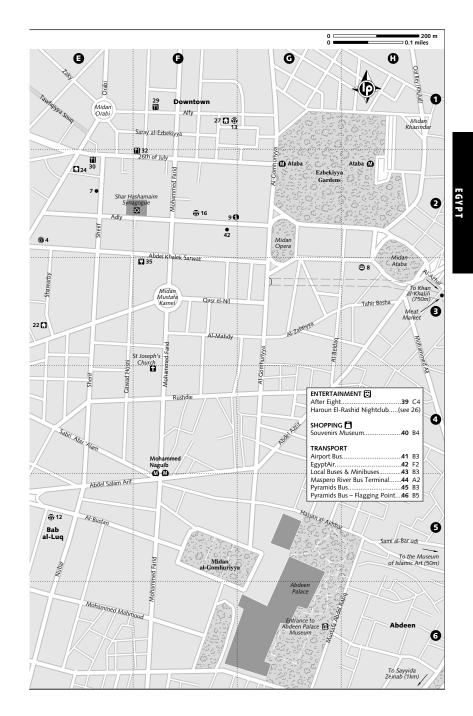
The Pyramids & Sphinx at Giza

Built on a desert plateau encroached upon by the modern city of Cairo, the pyramids here are the last remaining wonder of the ancient world. They were built as the mausoleums of Pharaohs to help their souls on the path to heaven. Representing more a celebration of life (and a desire for life to continue) than a preoccupation with death, they were constructed by thousands of artisans (not slaves as previously imagined) mindful of their part in the creation of something extraordinary.

Completed around 2600 BC, the Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops) is the oldest pyramid at Giza, and the largest (146.5m high). Although there isn't much to see inside, climbing the steep, narrow passage to the heart of the pyramid is an unforgettable, if intensely claustrophobic, experience. The neighbouring Pyramid of Khafre (Chephren) was built by Khufu's son. In deference to his father, he built a slightly smaller pyramid but located it on higher ground, giving the impression of greater size. Part of the original smooth limestone cladding, which once covered the entire structure, still remains. At a height of 62m, the Pyramid of Menkaure (Mycerinus) is the smallest of the three pyramids; it was built by Khafre's son, Menkaure, from blocks of granite floated along the Nile from Aswan.

Known in Arabic as Abu al-Hol (Father of Terror) and guarding the Pyramid of Khafre, the Sphinx is carved from a single piece of wind-eroded limestone. It has the face of a man - perhaps that of Khafre - and the body of a lion. It was buried by sand several times since it was built in 2500 BC, and Napoleon's army shot off its nose (now in the British





THE PYRAMIDS: IN & OUT OF FAVOUR

The pyramids of Giza are so iconic as to defy description. They have been puzzled over and plundered, visited and studied for 4000 years and yet their attraction continues unabated. Not that all spectators have been equally admiring of them. 'Just compare', wrote Frontinus, superintendent of Roman aqueducts, 'this vital aqueduct network [with] those useless pyramids.'

If the Romans were bemused by the apparent redundancy of the pyramids, 16th-century Islamic caliphs understood their spiritual power...and tried to tear them down. Napoleon two centuries later understood their political power...and used them for target practice. The renowned 19th-century traveller, Clarke, understood their aesthetic power, declaring that 'no-one ever approached them under other emotions than those of terror'...and then raced his friend to the top of Cheops.

The changing and dynamic relationship of spectator and pyramid over the centuries - the theories about why and wherefore, the speculations of divine intervention and apocalyptic foreboding - ensure that the pyramids fulfil their function of keeping alive the names of a father (Khufu), his son (Kahfre) and grandson (Menkaure). This is the real wonder of these remarkable mausoleums.

Museum) in the 19th century. Despite these 'mishaps', it remains one of the most evocative monuments of the ancient world.

EGYPT

The necropolis of Giza, which includes valley temples, causeways and satellite pyramids, is open from 7am to 7.30pm daily. There's a general admission fee of E£60/30 per adult/ student, and extra charges to enter each of the three pyramids. Entry to the Great Pyramid costs E£150/75 per adult/student, payable in Egyptian pounds. Only 300 tickets are sold per day. These go on sale at 8am and 1pm at the ticket box in front of the pyramid and the queue forms early. Entry to the other two pyramids costs, respectively, E£30/15 and E£25/15 per adult/student, and tickets are obtained from the booth in front of each pyramid. Useful background information is available at www.guardians.net/hawass, an official antiquities website.

Horses, donkeys or camels are available for rides near the pyramids. Rates range from E£10 per hour for a donkey to E£30 for a carriage. Aggressive attempts for your custom can spoil the moment and baksheesh is expected for any animal photos, whether you want a camel in your composition or not.

Beside the Great Pyramid are five pits that once contained the Pharaoh's funerary barques. One of these wooden vessels was unearthed in 1954 and forms the centrepiece of the Solar **Barque Museum** (adult/student E£35/20; (>) 9am-4pm).

The nightly sound-and-light show (🕿 386 3469; www.sound-light.egypt.com; adult/child E£60/30; (>) 6.30pm, 7.30pm & 8.30pm) provides a magical introduction to the pyramids, despite the crowds. Three

performances in a variety of languages take place nightly below the sphinx. Check the website for the schedule.

Bus 355/357, marked 'CTA', runs from Heliopolis to the Pyramids via Midan Tahrir every 20 minutes. It costs E£2 and takes 45 minutes. For the return journey, buses and minibuses pick up from the junction of Pyramids Rd and the desert road to Alexandria, about 100m east of the Oberoi Mena House Hotel.

It costs about E£20 one way for a taxi if you bargain hard.

ACTIVITIES

A lovely way to enjoy sunset is to take a ride on a felucca (traditional Nile sailing vessel), which comes complete with captain and first mate. It costs about E£30 per hour per person, but bargain hard and expect to pay baksheesh. The captains wait by the mooring point (Map pp92-3) by the Semiramis Intercontinental on the corniche, or at the Dok Dok landing stage (Map pp88-9), just short of the bridge to Le Meridien Hotel

COURSES

A 32-hour Arabic course is offered at the International Language Institute (ILI; 20 02-346 3087; www.arabicegypt.com; 4 Sharia Mahmoud Azmy, Sahafayeen, Cairo).

TOURS

Tours are easily arranged from any hotel. Fathy el-Menesy (🖻 259 3218, 012 278 1572; full-day Cairo excursion E£250) Privately owned taxi service with English-speaking driver.

Noga Tours (205 7908, 012 313 8446; www.first24 hours.com) With excellent English-speaking guides, Egyptologists and drivers, this company offers full-day trips to Giza, Memphis and Saggara for US\$22.50 plus entry fees.

SLEEPING Budaet

Inexpensive accommodation is concentrated in Downtown, on the higher floors of office buildings on and around Sharia Talaat Harb. All tend to be hot in summer.

Lialy Hostel (Map pp92-3; 🖻 575 2802; www.lialy hostel.com; 3rd fl, 8 Midan Talaat Harb, Downtown; dm/s/d E£25/50/60, s/d with air-con E£70/80; 🔀) One of the friendliest hostels in the city.

King Tut Hostel (Map pp92-3; 🗃 391 7897; king _tut_hostel@hotmail.com; 8th fl, 37 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; s/d E£40/60, with air-con & TV E£45/80; 🔀 🛄) This hostel has clean bathrooms and an attractive Oriental-style lounge.

Hotel Luna (Map pp92-3; 🖻 396 1020; www.hotel lunacairo.com; 5th fl, 27 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; s/d E£80/100, with shared bathroom E£60/80; 🔀 🛄) One of the best budget hotels in Egypt, the Luna has large, clean rooms with spotless bathrooms.

Berlin Hotel (🗃 395 7502: berlinhotelcairo@hotmail .com; 4th fl, 2 Sharia Shawarby, Downtown; s/d E£77/97; 🔀 🛄) The helpful management and private showers make this small establishment, just off Sharia Qasr el-Nil, worth the extra pounds.

Midrange

Windsor Hotel (Map pp92-3; 🖻 591 5277; www.windsor cairo.com; 19 Sharia Alfy, Downtown; s/d US\$37/46; 🕄 🛄) Formerly the British Officers' Club, the colonial lounge-bar is a highlight of this ageing but characterful establishment. The rooms are similarly grand but chafed around the edges.

Hotel Longchamps (Map pp88-9; 🖻 735 2311; www .hotellongchamps.com; 21 Sharia Ismail Mohammed, Zamalek; s/d from US\$42/56; 🔀 🔀) This is probably the best midrange option in Cairo thanks to the enthusiastic owner.

Arabesque Hotel (Map pp92-3; 🖻 579 9679; ara besque_hotel@yahoo.com; 11 Sharia Ramses, Downtown; s/d with air-con E£100/150, without bathroom E£60/80; 🕄) A comfortable, clean choice, the lounge here has great views over the Nile. Avoid rooms facing the motorway.

President Hotel (Map pp88-9; 🕿 735 0718; preshotl@thewayout.net; 22 Sharia Taha Hussein, Zamalek; s/d US\$70/55; 🔀 🛄) The rooms in this efficient hotel are comfortable and attractive, and the in-house patisserie, Le Bec Sucré, is one of the best in the city.

Top End

Semiramis Intercontinental (Map pp92-3; 795 7171; www.intercontintal.com; Corniche el-Nil, Downtown; r from US\$170; 🔀 🔀 🛄 😰) Built on the banks of the Nile, this newly rebuilt, topclass hotel has a long history in Cairo and deserves its reputation. Try a club-floor room for US\$200, which includes fantastic Nile views; complimentary breakfast, light supper (6pm to 9pm) and drinks are offered in a private penthouse lounge as part of the room rate.

EATING

Most restaurants are centred around Midan Talaat Harb but for more interesting venues, try the Zamalek neighbourhood. Cairenes are very discerning when it comes to food, so opt for the busy venues if you want to avoid 'Pharaohs' Revenge'. Women on their own should feel reasonably comfortable in Cairo eating and drinking venues, except in traditional ahwas (coffeehouses).

Budaet

Felfela takeaway (Map pp92-3; Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown; meals E£1-3; 🕑 8am-midnight) This place sells excellent fuul and ta'amiyya sandwiches.

El-Abd (Map pp92-3; Sharia 26th of July; Downtown; 8am-midnight) Try the phenomenally popular El-Abd for the best Oriental pastries in town (takeaway only).

Akher Sa'a (Map pp92-3; 8 Sharia Alfy, Downtown; meals E£3-4; 🕑 24hr) This is a frantically busy *fuul* and ta'amiyya takeaway with a no-frills cafeteria next door.

Gad (Map pp92-3; 2 576 3583; 13 Sharia 26th of July, Downtown; meals E£3-4; 🏵 7am-1am; 🕄) This Western-style fast-food outlet offers freshly cooked, good-value fare, popular with young Cairenes.

Abu Tarek (Map pp92-3; 40 Sharia Champollion, Downtown; small/large E£3/4; 🕑 24hr) The place to try kushari (mixture of noodles, rice and lentils).

Midrange & Top End

Greek Club (Map pp92-3; 2 577 4999; 3 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown; mains E£9-16; (>) 7am-2am) There's no menu at this Cairene institution with its neoclassical interior - just a well-informed waiter and delicious Levantine fare.

Abou Shakra (Map pp88-9; 🗃 531 6111; 69 Sharia Qasr al-Aini, Garden City; mains E£15-40; 🕅 9am-2am) Open since 1947, Abou Shakra serves the city's best kofta (mincemeat and spices grilled on a skewer).

L'Aubergine (Map pp88-9; ☐ 738 0080; 5 Sharia Sayed al-Bakry, Zamalek; mains E£16-30; ⓒ noon-2am; €) This atmospheric bistro's menu includes tasty vegetarian dishes. The upstairs bar often features a DJ.

Abou El Sid (Map pp88-9; 735 9640; 157 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek; mains E£20-50; Ponon-2am; 1) With brass lamps and plump cushions, Abou El Sid's Oriental flight of fancy is a fitting place to try traditional Egyptian food.

The city's best restaurants are found in fivestar hotels. **Sabaya** (Map pp92-3; **(20)** 795 7171; Corniche el-Nil, Downtown; mains E£40-60; **(20)** is a world-class Lebanese restaurant in the Semiramis Intercontinental.

DRINKING

Two café chains, Cilantro and Beano's, have branches across Cairo and serve Italian-style coffee.

Simonds (Map pp88-9; $\textcircled{\mbox{\footnotesize of }}$ 735 9436; 112 Sharia 26th of July, Zamalek) At this famous place the barista has been frothing cappuccino (E£5) for over half a century, and the croissants (E£2.50) are simply Parisienne.

Fishawi's (Map pp88-9; Khan al-Khalili; tea E£3, sheesha E£4.50; 论 24hr) A traditional *ahwa*, this ranks as Cairo's elder statesman and a must on any Cairo itinerary. It's a few steps off Midan Hussein.

The best Downtown bars are **Estoril** (Map pp92-3; T 3102; 12 Sharia Talaat Harb;), the **Cap d'Or** (Map pp92-3; Sharia Abdel Khalek Sarwat), and **High Heels** (Map pp92-3; 578 0444; Nile Hilton, Corniche el-Nil).

In Zamalek, expats prop up the bar at the stylish La Bodega () 736 6761; 157 Sharia 26th of July;) noon-2am). For something less sedate, try the rowdy Deals (Map pp92-3;) 736 0502; 2 Sharia Sayed al-Bakry;) 6pm-2am), off Sharia 26th of July, or **Rive Gauche** (Map pp88-9;) 12 210 0129; Sharia Maahad el-Swissry).

ENTERTAINMENT

For full entertainment listings, pick up a copy of the weekly *Cairo Times* (E£10).

Al-Tannoura Egyptian Heritage Dance Troupe (Map pp88-9; 512 1735; admission free; 9 performances 7pm Mon, Wed & Sat) There are regular displays of mesmerising Sufi dancing by this troupe at the El-Gawhara Theatre in the Citadel. A queue forms at the exit gate of the Citadel at least one hour before the performance.

The best belly dancers perform at Cairo's five-star hotels. Current favourites include

Haroun El-Rashid Nightclub (Map pp92-3; @ 7957171, ext 8011; Corniche el-Nil, Downtown; 11pm-3.30am Tue-Sun) at the Semiramis Intercontinental and the Cairo Sheraton's **Casablanca Club** (Alhambra; Map pp88-9; @ 336 9700; Midan al-Galaa, Doqqi; 7pm-4am Tue-Sun). Performances generally begin late (around 1am).

For live music gigs try the **Cairo Jazz Club** (Map pp88-9; **a** 345 9939; 197 Sharia 26th of July, Agouza) or **After Eight** (Map pp92-3; **b** 574 0855; 6 Sharia Qasr el-Nil, Downtown; minimum charge Fri-Wed E£60, Thu E£90; **(Map onon-2am)**. Performances by international classical and jazz musicians are regularly hosted at the **Cairo Opera House** (Map pp88-9; **b** 739 8132/44; www.operahouse.gov.eg; Gezira Exhibition Grounds).

SHOPPING

Brass plates, boxes inlaid with mother-ofpearl, leather slippers, and items made of granite, turquoise and tiger's-eye (priced by the gram) are just some of the many crafts you will find in the labyrinthine passages of Khan al-Khalili (p90). Hand-knotted silk carpets are made in the area between Giza and Saqqara and most carpet schools have a showroom on site. Giza is the area for handpainted papyrus scrolls and shops selling Egyptian cotton goods.

Many shops in Giza and Cairo can arrange for gold or silver cartouches bearing your name in hieroglyphic characters.

For a thankfully hassle-free shopping experience, good-quality items and friendly management, try **Souvenirs Museum** (Map pp92-3; **5**78 0444 ext 661; Nile Hilton, Comiche el-Nil, Downtown), 30m from the Egyptian Museum.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

EgyptAir (Map pp92-3; **a** 392 7649; 6 Sharia Adly, Downtown) has a number of offices around town.

Cairo International Airport () Terminal 1265 5000, Terminal 2 265 2222) is 20km northeast of Cairo. Terminal 1 services EgyptAir's international and domestic flights and Terminal 2 all international airlines except Saudi Arabian Airlines. You'll find ATMs and exchange booths in the arrivals halls.

Bus 356 is air-conditioned, and runs at 20-minute intervals from 7am to midnight between both terminals and Midan Abdel Moniem Riad (Map pp92–3), behind the Egyptian Museum in central Cairo (E£2, plus E£1 per large luggage item, one hour).

A black-and-white taxi to central Cairo costs around E£45 to E£60. To the airport it costs E£30 to E£35.

Bus

Cairo's main bus station is **Turgoman Garage** (Sharia al-Gisr, Bulaq), 1km northwest of the intersection of Sharias Galaa and 26th of July. A taxi to the bus station costs E£5 from Downtown. Buses depart from here to all parts of the country.

Destination	Price (E£)	Duration	Frequency
Alexandria	16	2½hr	hourly
Aswan	85	13hr	1 daily
Bahariyya	20	5hr	2 daily
Dahab	75	9hr	4 daily
Dakhla	50	11hr	4 daily
Farafra	40	8hr	2 daily
Hurghada	60	6½hr	9 daily
Kharga	50	10hr	2 daily
Luxor	85	11hr	1 daily
Port Said	16	3hr	hourly
St Katherine's Monastery	37	7½hr	1 daily
Sharm el-Sheikh	68	7hr	11 daily

There are two other bus stations: Al-Mazar, near the airport, for international services, and **Abbassiyya (Sinai) Bus Terminal** (Map pp88-9; Sharia Ramses, Abbassiyya), where Sinai services arrive (confusingly, these leave from Turgoman).

For details of international bus services from Cairo, see p124.

Service Taxi

Most service taxis depart from stands around Ramses train station and Midan Ulali. Services include Alexandria (E£12, three hours), Ismailia (E£8, 1½ hours), Port Said (E£14, two hours) and Suez (E£7.50, one hour).

Train

Characterful and colonial, **Ramses train station** (Mahatta Ramses; Map pp88-9; 575 3555; Midan Ramses, Downtown) is Cairo's main terminus. It has a leftluggage office charging E£2.50 per piece per day and a **tourist information office** (9am-7pm).

The train is particularly recommended for the journey to Luxor, which, with its Nile views, is something of a classic.

The Abela Egypt Sleeping Train (a 574 9274; www.sleepingtrains.com) leaves at 8pm, arriving in Luxor at 5.05am the next morning, and Aswan at 8.15am. To Luxor costs US\$53/74 per person one way in a double/single cabin. Tickets must be paid for in US dollars or euros (cash only). The price includes dinner and breakfast and the experience is enjoyably oldfashioned.

Aside from the sleeping train, foreigners can only travel to Luxor and Aswan on train 980, departing Cairo daily at 7am; train 996, departing at 10pm; and train 1902, departing at 12.30am. First- and 2nd-class fares to Luxor (10 hours) and Aswan (13 hours) are E£67/45 and E£81/47 respectively.

You must buy tickets at least a couple of days in advance.

GETTING AROUND Bus & Minibus

Cairo's main local bus and minibus stations, serving all parts of the city, are at Midan Abdel Moniem Riad (Map pp92–3).

Metro

The Metro system is startlingly efficient, and the stations are surprisingly clean. A shorthop ticket (up to nine stations) costs 50pt. The first carriage is reserved for women only.

River Bus

On the corniche in front of the Radio & TV Building you'll find the Maspero river bus terminal (Map pp92–3). From here boats depart every 15 minutes between 7am and 10pm for Doqqi, Manial, Giza and Misr al-Qadima (Old Cairo). The trip takes 50 minutes and the fare is 50pt.

Taxi

The easiest way of getting around is by taxi. The following table is a rough guide to taxi fares from Downtown Cairo but expect to bargain hard.

Destination	Fare (E£)	
Abbassiyya (Sinai) Bus Terminal	15	
Airport	30-35	
Citadel	5	
Heliopolis	10-15	
Khan al-Khalili	5	
Midan Ramses	3	
Pyramids	20	
Turgoman Garage	5	
Zamalek	5	

AROUND CAIRO

MEMPHIS, SAQQARA & DAHSHUR

The former Pharaonic capital of Memphis, 24km south of Cairo, is worth visiting for its museum (adult/student E£25/15; 🕅 8am-4pm), which houses an impressive statue of Ramses II.

Nearby Saqqara (adult/student E£50/25; 🕑 8am-4pm) you'll find a massive necropolis strewn with pyramids, temples and tombs where once Pharaohs, generals and sacred animals were interred. The star attraction is the Step Pyramid of Zoser, the world's oldest stone monument. Nearby are the Mastaba of Ti and the Pyramid of Teti.

The best way to visit Memphis, Saqqara and Dahshur is by taxi (E£140). Stipulate the sights you want to see, the length of the trip (five hours is about right) and bargain hard. Otherwise, organise a tour (p94).

SINAI

EGYPT

Occupied by Israel from 1967 to 1982, and sharing more with Asia than Africa, Sinai is the most atypical part of Egypt.

Settled by Bronze Age communities, attracted by Sinai's copper and turquoise deposits, and later by Pharaonic mining parties, Sinai is most celebrated in history for the Exodus of Israelites towards the Promised Land. Though disputed by historians, Jews, Christians and Muslims believe Gebel Mousa (Mt Sinai) marks the spot where Moses received the Ten Commandments. It remains an important pilgrimage site.

If the interior belongs to God, Sinai's coast belongs to mammon. Vast resorts fringe the peninsula, attracting biblical numbers of sun-worshippers, attracted by blue skies and world-class diving.

Despite high tourist revenue, the indigenous Bedouin of the Sinai see little investment in their own communities. In recent years their resentment, encouraged by fundamentalists with their own agenda, has led to violence. Tourism continues unabated, however.

TABA **a** 069

On the Egypt-Israel border, Taba was once a busy hub on the caravan route to Aqaba. It continues as a place of strategic importance: taken during Israeli occupation, it was only returned to Egypt in 1989.

Luxury tourist resorts line the beautiful turquoise coast, particularly at Taba Heights, 17km south of town. Nearby Pharaoh's Island, with its spectacular Byzantine fortress, was occupied by Crusaders in 1116 and conquered by Saladin.

The border between Egypt and Israel is open 24 hours. There's a post and telephone office, and some shops in 'town'. You can change money at the 24-hour Banque Misr booth in the arrivals hall, and there's an ATM nearby. The Taba Hilton can change travellers cheques.

NUWEIBA a 069

Once an important point on the caravan route to Mecca, and protected by the 16th-century Sultan El-Ghuri fortress, Nuweiba is still a busy port. The surrounding coast is now a resort catering for all budgets and offering opportunities for desert and diving safaris.

Nuweiba comprises the port, Nuweiba City and Tarabin, a beach area popular with backpackers.

The Almostakbal Internet Café (🖻 350 0090; per hr E£6; 🕑 10am-midnight) is in Nuweiba City. Next to the bus station, there are post and telephone offices. Nearby Banque du Caire and National Bank of Egypt have ATMs and change travellers cheques.

Well-respected diving centres include Diving Camp Nuweiba (🖻 012 249 6002; www.scuba-college .com), in Nuweiba Village Hotel, and Emperor Divers (352 0321; www.emperordivers.com), in Nuweiba Coral Hilton Resort.

Approach the Bedouin of Tarabin for jeep tours or all-inclusive camel treks (per day E£150) to the Coloured Canyon, Khudra Oasis, Ain Umm Ahmed and Ain al-Furtaga.

In front of a good reef, Fayrouza Village (🕿 350 1133; fayrouza@sinai4you.com; s/d US\$10/14) offers simple but spotless huts. An enthusiastic owner makes Soft Beach Camp (🖻 364 7586; info@softbeachcamp.com; s/d E£15/20; 🛄) the best in Sinai. Breakfast costs E£15 extra. Comfortable four-star Nuweiba Village (🗃 350 0401; www .nuweibaresort.com; s/d huts US\$15/20, r from US\$40/50;

THE SOUTHBOUND CARAVAN FROM TABA

After crossing into Egypt, head south towards Nuweiba. From there, you can cut inland to climb Mt Sinai or aim for one of Sinai's legendary beach resorts.

After exiting the arrivals hall, the bus station is a 10-minute walk straight ahead on the left. A 7am service goes to St Katherine's Monastery (E£26, four hours) via Nuweiba (E£11, one hour) and Dahab (E£21, 2½ hours). Other services include Sharm el-Sheikh (E£26, 3½ hours) at 9am and 3pm, and Cairo (E£55 to E£60, seven hours) at 10.30am, 12.30pm and 4.30pm.

Service taxis to Nuweiba charge E£50 per person, E£70 to Dahab and E£120 to Sharm el-Sheikh.

(R), in Nuweiba City, features a private beach. Habiba Village (🖻 350 0770; www.sinai4you .com/habiba; s/d US\$22.50/55; 🕄) is an attractive and well-run beachside hotel in Nuweiba City. Serving tasty mezze (E£5 to E£20), Dr Sheesh Kebab (350 0273; 🕑 7am-11pm) and Cleopatra Restaurant (🖻 350 0503; 🕑 8am-midnight) are both recommended.

There are ferry services to Cairo (E£60, nine hours, three daily), Sharm el-Sheikh (E£21, 2½ hours), Dahab (E£11, one hour), Taba (E£11, one hour) and St Katherine's (E£21, three hours).

For information about ferries to Aqaba in Jordan, see p124.

The service taxi station is by the port. Per person fares average E£60 to Cairo, E£30 to Sharm el-Sheikh and E£15 to Dahab.

ST KATHERINE'S MONASTERY a 069

A place of pilgrimage for Christians since the Middle Ages, St Katherine's Monastery, at the foot of Mt Sinai, was built in the 6th century by Emperor Justinian. In residence are 22 Greek Orthodox monks whose order was founded in the 4th century AD by the Byzantine empress Helena. She built the monastery chapel beside the **burning bush** (still thriving) from which God allegedly spoke to Moses.

The chapel is dedicated to St Katherine, the 4th-century martyr of Alexandria who was tortured on a spiked wheel. Her body, according to legend, appeared on top of the highest mountain in Egypt, near Mt Sinai, which was renamed Gebel Katrin in her honour.

There's no charge to visit the monastery (🕑 9am-noon Mon-Thu & Sat, except religious holidays), but a donation is requested to see the dazzling icons in the Sacred Sacristy (adult/student E£25/10).

Home to gazelles, stone martens and ibex, St Katherine Protectorate (US\$3) is a 4350-sq-km

national park that encompasses Mt Sinai and the monastery. Local Bedouin camps offer the monastery. Local Bedouin camps offer all-inclusive camel safaris here from E£150 per day. Mt Sinai is an easy and worthwhile climb, offering spectacular views of the arid Sinai landscape. The crowds, however, can be overwhelming.

In the village of Al-Milga, about 3.5km from the monastery, there's a post office, telephone centrale, bank, shops and cafés. The Banque Misr (🕑 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Sat-Thu) changes cash and gives Visa and MasterCard advances. There's no ATM and no internet café.

The friendly El-Malga Bedouin Camp (2347 0042; sheikmousa@yahoo.com; tent per person E£10, dm E£10-15, r with 2 beds E£30; 🛄), a 10-minute walk from the bus station, offers mattresses on straw floors in stone buildings. Internet and kitchen use is free. For those wishing to savour the sanctity of the monastery once the tour parties have departed, Monastery Guesthouse (🖻 347 0353; fax 347 0543; s/d half board US\$55/70) offers plain but adequate rooms. A restaurant serves beer and wine. Nonguests can leave baggage here (E£5) while hiking Mt Sinai. In Al-Milga there's a couple of small restaurants, a bakery opposite the mosque, and two supermarkets.

All buses leave from behind the mosque in Al-Milga. A daily bus at 6am travels to Cairo (E£37, seven hours). To Dahab (E£16, two hours) and Nuweiba (E£21, three hours), there's one bus at 1pm.

DAHAB **a** 069

The bombs that struck Dahab in April 2006 took away the innocence of this favourite backpacker retreat. Although town and tourist have made valiant attempts to pretend nothing happened, a shadow still hangs over the beachside cafés. That said, Dahab (literally 'Gold'), with its friendly shops and restaurants,

has gained a sense of grateful solidarity with its visitors that is particularly appealing after the impersonal experience of neighbouring resorts. It remains an unpretentious place to dive and its windswept beaches are ideal for windsurfing.

There are two parts to Dahab: Dahab City has five-star hotels and the bus station; Assalah, once a Bedouin village, is about 2.5km north and is divided into two sections, Masbat and Mashraba.

Information

EGYPT

Internet access is available at **Download.Net** (per hr Ef5; 24hr), next to the Nesima Resort, and **Felopater Internet** (per hr Ef5; 2 10am-midnight), both in Mashraba.

The National Bank of Egypt (\bigcirc 9am-10pm), on the corniche in Masbat, has an ATM and changes cash and travellers cheques. The post office and telephone centrale (\bigodot 24hr) are in Dahab City.

Activities

Many dive clubs offer camel/dive safaris. The following are recommended:

Fantasea Dive Centre (🖻 364 0483; www.fantasea diving.net; Masbat)

Inmo (🖻 364 0370; www.inmodivers.de; Inmo Divers Home, Mashraba)

Nesima Dive Centre ((2) 364 0320; www.nesima-resort .com; Nesima Resort, Mashraba)

In the morning, the Bedouin congregate along the waterfront offering camel trips to the interior. A three-day trip, including food, costs between E£600 and E£900.

Sleeping

Seven Heaven (☎ 364 0080; www.7heavenhotel.com; Masbat; huts E£10, rE£60; 😢 💷) A bustling camp on the corniche, set back from the beach, Seven Heaven is popular with backpackers. Breakfast costs E£10 extra.

Inmo Divers Home ((2) 364 0370; www.inmodivers .de; Mashraba; s/d US\$37/46; (2) (2) Book ahead for this excellent midrange hotel, popular with divers.

Hilton Dahab Resort (☎ 364 0310; www.hilton .com/worldwideresorts; Dahab City; s/d/ste from US\$65/90/97; ※ ② ② ③) This tranquil resort has impressive leisure facilities including a sandy beach ideal for windsurfing (\$41 for two hours).

Blue Beach Club ((2) 364 0411; www.bluebeachdub .com; Mashraba; s/d E£240/300; (2) (2) With attractive rooms, Blue Beach features include Arabic classes and Dahab's most popular bar, the Furry Cup.

Eating & Drinking

Lakhbatita (a 364 1306; Mashraba; mains E£15-60) Dahab's best restaurant features *mashrabiyya* (wooden lattice screens), red cushions, shelves of home-bottled preserves, and a combination of Asian and Arabic cuisine with salad and antipasto thrown in for good measure.

Carm Inn (2) 364 1300; Masbat; dishes E£25-65; (2) noon-midnight) Vegetarians are well catered for here with a menu designed for 'vitality, building a strong body, muscular development and fun'.

Jasmine Restaurant (364 0852; Mashraba; mains E£35; 7am-1am) Perched on the water's edge, this restaurant is a hit with locals and travellers. With an eclectic menu, the restaurant

CLIMBING MOUNT SINAI

There are two routes to the top of Mt Sinai, both of which meet at a plateau known as Elijah's Basin, 300m below the summit.

One trail takes about two hours to ascend and can be negotiated by camel, hired from near St Katherine's Monastery from E£50.

The other trail comprises the 3750 Steps of Repentance, laid by a monk as a form of penance. The steps – 3000 to Elijah's Basin – are ferociously steep and uneven.

From Elijah's Basin, there are a further 750 steps to reach the 2285m summit. The extra half-hour effort is worthwhile as the views are spectacular, particularly in the blood-red of late afternoon. Most people, however, prefer to make the climb at night to enjoy sunrise, returning by 9am to visit the monastery – a good option in summer when daytime temperatures can make for a gruelling hike.

In winter, when it's bitterly cold and windy, bring food and water, warm clothes and a sleeping bag for resting at Elijah's Basin. Huts along the route provide hikers with blankets (E£5) and hot tea. They also sell Bedouin beadwork purses (E£20 to E£50) that make a fun souvenir of the hike.

offers international dishes, such as satay with peanut sauce and brownies with ice-cream.

Furry Cup (Blue Beach Club, Mashraba; 论 noon-2am) Divers decompress every evening at happy hour (6pm to 8pm) at Furry Cup (Stella E£6, spirits E£15). It serves bangers and mash.

Other popular venues include Tota and Crazy House (Stella E£10 at both), on the Masbat corniche.

Entertainment

Full moon parties ((a) 012 370 7774; admission Ef100; (b) 6pm-6am) Gold Soul Productions organises these parties at a canyon outside town. They feature overseas DJs and live music. The price covers music and transfer from town.

Getting There & Around

The **bus station** (\mathfrak{D} 7.30am-11pm) is located in Dahab City. There are services to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£16, one hour, 10 daily), Nuweiba (E£11, one hour, four daily), Taba (E£22, 2½ hours), St Katherine's Monastery (E£16, 1½ hours), Cairo (E£62 to E£75, 10 hours, four daily), Hurghada (E£90, 2½ hours) and Luxor (E£110, 7½ to eight hours).

A service taxi between Assalah and Dahab City costs E£5.

SHARM EL-SHEIKH & NA'AMA BAY

Sharm el-Sheikh and neighbouring Na'ama Bay cater more for package groups than independent travellers. Built around two principal bays, both famous for snorkelling and diving, the area has plenty of facilities and entertainment, top-class hotels and shopping malls. Budget accommodation is available in Shark's Bay, around 12km northeast of Na'ama Bay.

Information

The many internet outlets include **Sharm Phone Net Café** (ⓐ 3664725; per hr E47; ⓑ 24hr), in the mall opposite Sharm's Old Market. There are numerous ATMs in Na'ama Bay and most major banks have branches in Sharm. The **post office** (ⓑ 8am-3pm Sat-Thu) is on the hill in Sharm and there's a **telephone centrale** (ⓑ 24hr) nearby.

Activities

Diving is the area's star attraction. The following clubs in Na'ama Bay are recommended: **Oonas Dive Centre** ((a) 360 0581; www.oonasdivers.com) **Red Sea Diving College** ((a) 360 0145; www.redsea college.com) Sinai Divers (🖻 360 0697; www.sinaidivers.com) Subex (🖻 360 0122; www.subex.org)

If all that rubber doesn't appeal, many outlets in town offer hour-long glass-bottom boat trips (E£80).

Sleeping

Shark's Bay Umbi Diving & Camp (☎ 360 0942; www .sharksbay.com; s/d huts without bathroom US\$15/19, cabins with air-con US\$25/37; 🕃 💷) With clean clifftop huts and beachside cabins, this is the only laid-back camp in the area.

Youth Hostel (ⓐ /fax 366 0317; City Council St, Hadaba; per person member/nonmember E£25/56; ≥) This youth hostel is just about the cheapest place to stay in town.

Camel Hotel ((☎ 360 0700; www.cameldive.com; King of Bahrain St, Na'ama Bay; s/d from US\$103/126; 😢 🔲 🐑) This small four-star hotel located in the mall at Na'ama Bay is efficiently run. Breakfast is extra.

Eating

Safsafa Restaurant (a 366 0474; Sharm el-Sheikh; meals E£10-45) Popular with locals, this is the most attractive restaurant in the Old Market. Safsafa serves fresh seafood from the Red Sea and the seafood pasta dishes are particularly tasty (E£30).

Tam Tam Oriental Café ((2) 360 0150; Na'ama Bay; mezze E£12, sandwiches E£8-14, mains E£29-66) Located on the beach strip near the main mall, the popular Tam Tam features a range of Egyptian fare.

Sinai Star (🗟 366 0323; Sharm el-Sheikh; set meals around E£20) In the Old Market, this serves the best seafood in Sharm.

Tandoori Indian Restaurant (☎ 360 0700; King of Bahrain St, Na'ama Bay; mains ££24-110, set menus ££145-185; ♈ 6.30-11.30pm) Part of Camel Hotel, this is Sharm's best Indian restaurant.

Drinking & Entertainment

Popular venues include the ubiquitous **Hard Rock Café** ((a) 360 2664; www.hardrock.com), in the mall at Na'ama Bay; the pricey but glamorous **Little Buddha** ((a) 360 1030; Na'ama Bay; (b) 1pm-3am), and the **Pirates' Bar** ((a) 360 0137; Hilton Fayrouz Village, Na'ama Bay), with a popular happy hour from 5.30pm to 7.30pm.

Getting There & Around

Sharm el-Sheikh International Airport (ⓐ 360 1140) is about 10km north of Na'ama Bay. EgyptAir (ⓐ 366 1056; Sharm el-Sheikh; ⓑ 9am-9pm) has four daily flights from Sharm to Cairo (E£733, one hour) and two flights per week to Luxor (E£530, 50 minutes). Microbuses charge E£2 between the airport and Na'ama Bay or Sharm el-Sheikh; taxis charge E£20/40.

A luxury high-speed ferry operated by **International Fast Ferries Co** (www.internationalfastferries .com; one way adult ££250 or US\$40) runs between Sharm el-Sheikh and Hurghada (1½ hr) four times a week. Tickets can be bought from travel agencies or the port ferry office, two hours before departure. Taxis to Na'ama Bay cost ££25 from outside the port compound. Inside the compound, they cost double.

The bus station is between Na'ama Bay and Sharm el-Sheikh. There are frequent services to Cairo (E£68, six hours). Other services include Alexandria (E£88, nine hours, two daily), Dahab (E£11, one hour, six daily), Nuweiba (E£21.50, 2½ hours), Taba (E£26.50, four hours), St Katherine's Monastery (E£28, 3½ hours) and Luxor (E£95, 14 hours).

Microbuses travel regularly between Sharm el-Sheikh and Na'ama Bay for E£1. A taxi costs E£15.

RAS MOHAMMED

Declared a **national park** (admission US\$5) in 1988, the headland of Ras Mohammed is 30km west of Sharm el-Sheikh, at the southern tip of the peninsula. Home to some of the world's most spectacular coral reefs, the park is teeming with most of the Red Sea's 1000 species of fish. You can dive here; most clubs in Na'ama Bay and Sharm offer trips. You need a full Egyptian visa to visit Ras Mohammed.

SUEZ CANAL

The Suez Canal severs Africa from Asia and links the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. Watching super-tankers gliding through the desert as they ply the narrow channel is a bizarre spectacle. A hotly contested triumph of modern engineering, the canal opened in 1869 and remains one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The best way to see the canal is by boat; the view from the Peace Bridge that crosses the canal near Isma'iliya, is a good second best.

PORT SAID © 066 / pop 539,000

With its wooden buildings and Escher-like labyrinth of condemned balconies Port Said is a ramshackle town that nonetheless retains a colonial charm. An obligatory stop for cruise liners using the canal, Port Said is accustomed to visitors. Chances are you'll be waved into Woolworths near the ferry terminal – a quaint 19th-century building of more interest than its wares.

Banque du Caire and National Bank of Egypt have ATMs and you can change travellers cheques at **Thomas Cook** (23227559; 8am-4.30pm), next to the petrol station. On Sharia Palestine you'll find **Amex** (9am-2pm & 6.30-8pm Sun-Thu), the **main post office** (8.30am-2.30pm), **telephone centrales** (24hr) and a helpful **tourist office** (2323 5289; 9am-6pm Sat-Thu, 9am-2pm Fri). Internet access is available from **Compu.Net** (per hr EE3; 9am-midnight), opposite the main post office.

Sights & Activities

The National Museum (ⓐ 323 7419) is currently closed but the Military Museum (ⓐ 322 4657; Sharia 23rd of Jul; admission E£5; ⓑ 9am-4pm Fri-Wed, 9am-10pm Thu) has some interesting relics from the 1956 Suez crisis.

The easiest way to explore the mouth of the canal is to take the free public ferry from near the tourist office to Port Fuad and back.

Sleeping & Eating

Youth Hostel (ⓐ 322 8702; port-said-y.h@hotmail.com; Sharia 23rd of Jul; dm HI members/nonmembers E£13.25/15.25, f per person E£30.25; ເ⊇ □) This enormous, friendly hostel, at the end of the New Corniche, has worn but clean dorms.

Hotel de la Poste () /fax 322 4048; 42 Sharia al-Gomhuriyya; s/d E£39/49; 🕄) Faded but elegant, this spotless hotel is the town's best-value option. You can buy breakfast in the popular hotel patisserie.

Sonesta ((2) 332 5511; sonesta@iec.egnet.net; s/d city view US\$137/186, canal view US\$186/230; (2) (2) This excellent four-star choice is positioned at the entrance to the canal. Its poolside café is the perfect spot for ship-watching.

Pizza Pino ((2) 323 9949; cnr Sharias 23rd of Jul & al-Gomhuriyya; pasta E£7-22, pizza E£11-25) This bright and friendly place serves delicious sundaes.

El-Borg (a 332 3442; New Corniche; meals E£25-50; 10am-3am) Choose your fish from the day's catch at this cavernous fish restaurant.

There's a popular terrace *ahwa* in front of Grand Albatross Building on the New Corniche where locals linger over *sheeshas* (water pipes).

Getting There & Away

Uncomfortable trains (E£18 in 2nd class, five hours) run to Cairo four times a day. It's better to take the bus (E£13.50 to E£17, three hours, hourly). Other services include Alexandria (E£20 to E£22, four hours, four daily), Luxor (E£60, 12 to 13 hours) and Hurghada (E£45, 7½ hours). Taxi fares from the bus station into town (3km) cost E£2. Taxi fares within town cost E£2. Service taxis leave from the bus station and cost E£15 to Cairo.

RED SEA COAST

Sadly, the once-idyllic Red Sea Coast is being spoiled by unattractive construction projects, particularly around the soulless city of Hurghada. The village of Al-Quseir has so far escaped mass development but not for long, we suspect.

For world-class diving in the area, contact **Shagara Eco-Lodge** (a) in Cairo 02-337 1833; www .redsea-divingsafari.com; Marsa Shagra; d with full board in tents/huts/chalets US\$88/100/125).

HURGHADA

Catering for more than 96,000 tourists annually and comprising environmentally disastrous resorts, there's little to commend Hurghada. Even its once-glorious coral reefs have been degraded. The only compensation for travellers is that it offers an alternative route to Sinai from the Nile Valley.

Orientation & Information

Most budget hotels are in Ad-Dahar, north of the resorts. The port is at Sigala. South of Sigala is the 15km upmarket 'resort strip'.

Most banks in Hurghada have ATMs. Express.Net (@ 012 316 2770; resort strip; per hr E£12; Main post office (Sharia an-Nasr, Ad-Dahar) Telephone centrale (Sharia an-Nasr, Ad-Dahar; Main post office (Sharia an-Nasr, Ad-Dahar; Mathematical (Sharia an-Nasr, Ad-Dahar)

Thomas Cook (🖻 354 1870/1; Sharia an-Nasr, Ad-Dahar; 🏵 9am-2pm & 6-10pm).

Tourist office (🗃 344 4421; 🕑 8am-8pm) On the resort strip.

Sights & Activities

Recommended dive centres include **Dive Too** ((2) 340 8414; www.divetoo.net; Seagull Resort, Sharia Sheraton, Sigala) and **Easy Divers** ((2) 354 7816; www .easydivers-redsea.com; Triton Empire Beach Hotel, Corniche, Ad-Dahar).

EGYPT

Popular tours go to the isolated Coptic **monasteries of St Anthony and St Paul** (¹ 9am-5pm). A taxi from Hurghada costs US\$58.

Sleeping

Royal City Hotel (ⓐ 344 7729; fax 344 7195; Sigala; s/d E£80/120; ☑) Near the port, this old favourite is clean and comfortable.

Giftun Beach Resort ((2) 346 3040; www.giftun beachresort.com; resort strip; s/d all-indusive US\$52/81; (2) (2) With chalet-style rooms, diving and windsurfing facilities (from E£25 per hour), this is a recommended resort.

Oberoi Sahl Hasheesh (a 344 0777; www.oberoi hotels.com; Sahl Hasheesh, resort strip; ste from US\$310; a a a) In Hurghada's most opulent hotel, Moorish-style rooms have sunken marble baths, walled private courtyards and panoramic sea views.

Eating & Drinking

Taibeen (354 7260; Sharia Soliman Mazhar, Ad-Dahar; dishes E£3-15) This competent trattoria uses only fresh local ingredients.

Rossi Restaurant ((2) 344 7676; Sharia Sheraton, Sigala; mains ££17-50) Popular with the diving fraternity, solo women may feel less conspicuous here.

Portofino (ⓐ 354 6250; Sharia Sayyed al-Qorayem, Ad-Dahar; ℝ) Portofino offers recommended three-course set menus from E£26.50.

Shanghai Chinese Restaurant (🖻 012 239 6840; Esplanada Bay Mall, resort strip; mains E£30-40; 🔀) This stylish, seaside restaurant prepares delicious fresh seafood (from E£35).

Papas Bar (www.papasbar.com; Rossi Restaurant, Sharia Sheraton, Sigala) Patronised by diving instructors and foreign residents, Papas has a great entertainment programme that rotates between Liquid Lounge and Papas II.

Opposite Seagull Resort, El-Arabi Coffee Shop is a popular tea-and-sheesha spot.

Getting There & Around

EGYPT

The International Airport (🖻 344 2592) is 6km southwest of town. EgyptAir (2 344 3592/3; resort strip) has daily flights to Cairo (E£740, one hour). A taxi to/from town costs between E£10 and E£20 (there are no buses).

A luxury high-speed ferry operated by International Fast Ferries Co (🖻 344 7571; www.inter nationalfastferries.com) departs for Sharm el-Sheikh four times a week from the port in Sigala (one way US\$44, 1½ hours). Tickets are payable in US dollars.

Superjet's bus station is near the main mosque in Ad-Dahar. It offers services to Cairo (E£55 to E£57, six hours, three daily) and Alexandria (E£83, nine hours). At the southern end of Ad-Dahar other services leave for Luxor (E£30, five hours, four daily) and Al-Quseir (E£20, three hours, three daily). The El Gouna Bus Co bus station is on Sharia Al-Nasr in Ad-Dahar, offering 10 daily services to Cairo (from E£40).

It is compulsory for foreigners to travel from Hurghada to Cairo and Luxor by convoy. Check current timings with the tourist office.

The service taxi station is near the telephone centrale in Ad-Dahar. Taxis go to Cairo (E£35) and Al-Quseir (E£15 to E£20). It costs about E£200 per vehicle (up to seven passengers) to Luxor as part of the police convoy.

From Ad-Dahar to the resort strip costs E£10 by minibus. Bargaining is essential. El Gouna Bus Co operates a half-hourly service (E£5) between Ad-Dahar and the end of Sharia Sheraton in Sigala.

AL-QUSEIR

a 065 / pop 25.000

Until the 10th century, Al-Quseir was an important transit point for travellers to Mecca. Later it became an entrepôt for Indian spices destined for Europe. Today it has a sleepy charm absent from other Red Sea towns.

An Ottoman fortress (admission E£5; (>) 9am-5pm) and old coral-block buildings line the waterfront, punctuated by the domed tombs of various saints - pilgrims who died en route to Mecca.

Diving trips and desert excursions can be arranged with Mazenar Tours (🗃 333 5247, 012 265 5044; rockyvalleycamp@yahoo.dk; Sharia Port Said).

For internet access, try Hot Line Internet Café (Sharia Port Said; per hr E£10; 🕑 9am-3am). There's also a 24-hour telephone centrale, a National Bank of Egypt branch (no ATM) and a post office.

Sleeping & Eating

The budget accomodation options in town are not recommended.

Al-Quseir Hotel (🗃 333 2301; Sharia Port Said; s/d E£112/157; 🕄) This charming 1920s merchant's house on the seafront has rooms with clean shared bathrooms.

Mövenpick Sirena Beach (🗃 333 2100; www.moeven pick-quseir.com; r from US\$200; 🔀 🛄 😰) This domed ensemble, 7km north of town, is one of the Red Sea's best resorts. The chain is renowned for its environmentally sensitive approach.

Try Restaurant Marianne (🗃 333 4386; Sharia Port Said; dishes E£15-50) for good grilled fish. Locals lounge in Sahraya Coffeehouse (Sharia Port Said) on the waterfront.

Getting There & Around

The bus and service-taxi stations are 1.5km northwest of the Safaga road (E£3 by taxi). There are buses to Cairo (E£57, 11 hours, five daily) via Safaga (E£5, two hours) and Hurghada (E£15, three hours).

Service taxi destinations include Cairo (E£43, 101/2 hours), Hurghada (E£10, 23/4 hours) and Safaga (E£6, two hours). As in Hurghada, you have to hire the entire taxi for the trip to Luxor (from E£250, eight hours).

Microbus fares around town are between 50pt and E£1.

MEDITERRANEAN COAST

Crowned by the historic city of Alexandria, the Mediterranean Coast has two distinct characters. To the west, the Western Desert impinges on the coast, characterised by an almost continuous strip of Egyptian holiday resorts. To the east, the fertile Nile Delta spills

across a seldom-visited area of rice paddies, date plantations and cotton fields.

ALEXANDRIA

2 03 / pop 3.8 million

Alexandria (Al-Iskendariyya), with its belle époque buildings and grand squares, good coffee and French pastries, has a faded charm that few visitors can resist. Arranged around bays that are currently revealing all kinds of sunken treasure, Alexandria is an easy city to explore and is mercifully free from touts.

History

Established in 332 BC by Alexander the Great, the city became a major trade centre and focal point of learning for the entire Mediterranean. Its ancient library held 500,000 volumes and the Pharos lighthouse was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Alexandria continued as the capital of Egypt under the Roman and Byzantine Empires until the 4th century. The city thereafter went into decline until the 19th century, when Napoleon revived Alexandria as a major port. Despite the 1952 Revolution, in which the nationalistic mood of the moment expelled most foreign interests and stripped the city of its expatriate contingency, something of the city's cosmopolitan character remains.

Orientation

Nearly 20km long from east to west and only about 3km wide, Alexandria is a true waterfront city. The focal point is Midan Ramla, also known as Mahattat Ramla (Ramla station), the terminus for the city's tramlines. Immediately adjacent is Midan Saad Zaghloul, a large square running to the seafront. Most traveller amenities are centred around these two *midans*.

Information

There are many exchange bureaus between Midan Ramla and the corniche and along Sharia Talaat Harb.

HSBC Bank (47 Sharia Sultan Hussein) There's an ATM here and another in the foyer of Le Metropole Hotel. Main post office Two blocks east of Midan Orabi. Main tourist office (🗃 485 1556; Midan Saad Zaqhloul; 🕅 8.30am-6pm) This helpful place is beneath the tourist police station.

MG@Net (per hr E£2; (>) 10am-midnight) Internet access, near Midan Saad Zaghloul.

Passport office (28 Sharia Talaat Harb; 🕎 8am-1.30pm Sat-Thu) For visa extensions; it's off Sharia Salah Salem.

Telephone centrale (Midan Gomhurriya; 1) 24hr) Thomas Cook (🖻 484 7830; 15 Sharia Saad Zaghloul; Sam-5pm) The best option for cashing travellers cheques.

Zawia Computer Internet Café (🗃 484 8014; Sharia Dr Hassan Fadaly; per hr E£4; (> 11am-11pm)

Sights

Relics retrieved from the seabed are displayed at the Alexandria National Museum (Sharia Tarig al-Horreyya; adult/student E£30/15; 🕥 9am-4pm), just east of the city centre.

The marble terraces of the only Roman Amphitheatre (Sharia Yousef; adult/student E£15/10; 🕅 9amprincipadre (snaria Youser; adult/student E£15/10; 🟵 9am-5pm) in Egypt were discovered in 1964. Also worth seeing is the 'Villa of the Birds' **mosaic** (adult/student E£10/5) in the grounds.

Dating from the 2nd century AD, the honeycomb Catacombs of Kom Ash-Suggafa (Carmous; adult/student E£20/10; 🕑 8am-5pm) once housed 300 corpses - and a rather macabre funereal dining chamber used for wakes. The principal tomb combines Egyptian, Greek and Roman iconography.

The catacombs are a five-minute walk from the famed and misnamed Pompey's Pillar (adult/ student E£10/5; 🕑 8am-5pm), the top of which once hosted a party of 22. Louis XIV of France nearly took it home as a plinth for his own statue.

Recently restored, Fort Qaitbey (adult/student E£20/15; 🕑 9am-4pm), at the end of the corniche, was built on the foundations of the destroyed Pharos lighthouse in 1480.

Inspired by the original library, founded in the early 3rd century BC and hailed as the greatest of all classical institutions, Bibliotheca Alexandrina (🖻 483 9999; www.bibalex.org; Corniche al-Bahr; adult/student main library E£10/5, antiquities museum E£20/10, manuscript collection E£20/10; 🕑 11am-7pm Sun, Mon, Wed & Thu, 3-7pm Fri & Sat) is an attempt to put the city back on the world's cultural map. Note the external frieze in letters, pictograms, hieroglyphs and symbols from every known alphabet.

Objects of interest in the Graeco-Roman Museum (🖻 483 6434; 5 Sharia al-Mathaf ar-Romani) include a carved head of Cleopatra and terracotta lanterns depicting the ancient Pharos lighthouse. The museum is currently closed.

Activities

Underwater excavations are ongoing in the eastern harbour and around Fort Qaitbey, bringing to light pavements, platforms, statues and red-granite columns - remnants perhaps

of 'Cleopatra's Palace'. **Alexandra Dive** ((2) 483 2042; www.alexandra-dive.com) offers diving tours of the submerged harbour sites. The office is situated in the grounds of the Fish Market complex on the corniche near Fort Qaitbey.

Window-shopping is a fun activity in Álexandria as there is relatively little pressure to buy, unlike in the rest of Egypt's tourist destinations. Lightweight, hand-painted, glass perfume bottles (E£5 to E£10) make an attractive gift.

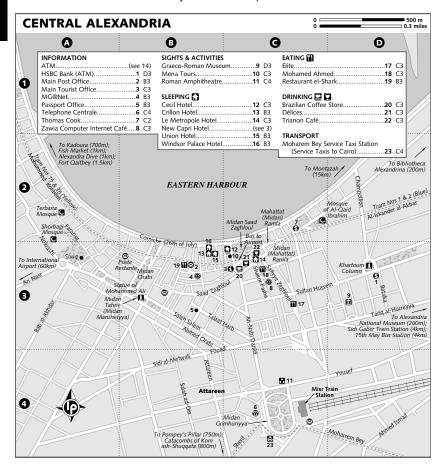
Sleeping

ΕGΥ

Alexandria is one of the few Egyptian cities where hotel rates stay the same year-round. **New Capri Hotel** () /fax 480 9703,) (2480 9310; 8th fl, 23 Sharia el-Mina el-Sharkia; s/d E£39/56) Dilapidated but vaguely charming, New Capri Hotel has a harbour-view breakfast room.

Union Hotel (ⓐ 480 7312; fax 480 7350; 5th fl, 164 Corniche; s/d E£52/70, with air-con E£171/196; ♥) With clean and comfortable rooms, some with harbour views, this is the best budget option. Breakfast is E£8 extra.

Crillon Hotel ((2) 480 0330; 3rd fl, 5 Sharia Adib Ishaq; s/d with private bathroom or view E£60/90) This oldfashioned establishment has polished floors and French windows. Many rooms have harbour views.



Le Metropole Hotel ((2) 484 0910; resamet@paradise inegypt.com; 52 Sharia Saad Zaghloul; s US\$100-135, d US\$120-155; (2) (2) Another four-star hotel, with high ceilings and ornate cornices that hint at Alexandria's 19th-century heyday.

Cecil Hotel ($\textcircled{\sc columnation columnation for the second state of the second stat$

Eating & Drinking

Cheap eating venues abound between Sharia Safiyya Zaghloul and Midan Ramla, and along Sharia Shakor Pasha.

Mohamed Ahmed (a 483 3576; 17 Sharia Shakor Pasha; dishes ££1-10) Popular with locals for the tasty *ta'amiyya*, *fuul* and fried cheese, this place's filling meals are good value. You can sit down or take away.

Restaurant el-Shark (Sharia Hassan ash-Seikh) This is an amiable place to sample local specialities such as grilled dove ($\text{E}\pm8$), gizzard soup ($\text{E}\pm3$) and *fatta* ($\text{E}\pm3.50$ to $\text{E}\pm15.50$), which comprises rice and bread soused in vinegar with lamb or chicken.

Elite ((a) 486 3592; 43 Sharia Safiyya Zaghloul; dishes E£3.50-31; (c) The ever-popular Elite is an odd mixture of 1950s diner and elegant coffeeshop, serving an equally odd mixture of dishes.

Kadoura (Corniche; per person around E£50; \bigcirc 9am-3am; R) At Alexandria's most famous restaurant, you can choose your fish from the day's catch and park at one of the no-nonsense tables while it's cooked. Disappointingly, the staff are rather cold fish too.

Fish Market ((2) 480 5114; per person around E£70; (2) While not quite as characterful as Kadoura, the seafood here is equally fresh with a wide variety to choose from and numerous attendant mezze (E£4). The harbour views are fun – the waiters alas are not.

Alexandria is famous for its cafés and coffeeshops, where an accompanying pastry is *de rigueur*. The **Brazilian Coffee Store** (Sharia Saad Zaghloul) is the oldest coffeeshop in the city. **Trianon Café** (Metropole Hotel; 52 Sharia Saad Zaghloul), with its Parisienne interior, or the elegant **Délices** (a 486 1432; 46 Sharia Saad Zaghloul) both offer cappuccino for E£7 and mouth-watering gateaux from E£4. Try the Rum Baba with a shot of brandy at Délices.

Getting There & Away BUS

The 15th of May bus station is behind Sidi Gaber train station. The tram trip from Midan Ramla takes 30 minutes. There are services to Cairo ($\text{E}\pounds 28$, $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours) every 30 minutes from 5.30am to 10pm.

Hourly buses to Marsa Matruh (£23, 4½ hours) go via El Alamein (E£15, two hours). Daily buses to Siwa (E£27, nine hours) leave at 7.30am, 11am and 10pm. Other services go to Sallum (E£23, eight hours, six daily), Sharm el-Sheikh (E£88, 10½ hours, two daily), Port Said (E£24, four hours, five daily) and Hurghada (E£85, nine hours).

EGYPT

SERVICE TAXI

Service taxis to Cairo (among other cities) leave from Moharrem Bey taxi station (around E£10, three hours). A taxi from Moharrem Bey to Midan Ramla costs E£5, or catch tram 6.

TRAIN

Cairo-bound trains depart from Misr train station, Alexandria's main terminus, and nearby Sidi Gaber train station, next to the main bus station. The fastest and most comfortable trains are the express *Turbini* (E£36/28 in 1st/2nd class, 2¹/₄ hours), which leave at 8am, 2pm and 7pm. To be assured of seats, book ahead.

The **Abela Egypt Sleeping Train** ((2) 393 2430; www.sleepingtrains.com) travels daily to Aswan, via Cairo and Luxor, and leaves at 5.20pm. It arrives in Luxor at 5.25am the next day and terminates in Aswan at 8.50am. It costs US\$56/74 per person one way in a double/ single cabin. Tickets must be paid for in US dollars or euros. The price includes a basic dinner and breakfast.

It costs E£5 for a taxi from the Misr train station to Midan Ramla, or E£10 for a taxi from the parking area.

Getting Around

The **international airport** (a 425 0527) is at Burg al-Arab, 60km west of the city. To reach the airport, take Bus 555 (E£6, one hour) from near Cecil Hotel or take a taxi (E£80).

A short *calèche* (horse-drawn carriage) or taxi trip costs about E£10 but most people rely on the efficient tram service. Midan Ramla is the main station; from here, yellow-coloured trams go west and blue-coloured trams go east. All tickets cost 25pt. The following are the most useful routes:

Tram no Route

- 1 & 2 Ramla to Victoria, via the sporting club & Rushdy 6 Moharrem Bey to Ras el-Tin
- 15 Ramla to Ras el-Tin via El-Gomruk & Anfushi
- 16 Midan St Katerina to Pompey's Pillar
- 25 Ras el-Tin to Sidi Gaber, via Ramla
- 36 Ras el-Tin to San Stefano & Sidi Gaber

EL ALAMEIN

EGYPT

The battle at El Alamein, 105km west of Alexandria, was a turning point of WWII. Today a **war museum** (admission E£5; 😒 9am-4pm) and **cemeteries** mark the scene of one of the biggest tank battles in history.

The easiest way to visit El Alamein is to organise a car and English-speaking driver through **Mena Tours** (a 480 9676; fax 486 5827; Midan Saad Zaghloul; b 9am-6pm Sat-Thu), based next to the Cecil Hotel in Alexandria, for approximately E£350. A private taxi charges between E£150 and E£200 for the round trip.

The journey, past a continuous string of resorts that receive few foreign visitors, is made interesting only by the stone quarries by the side of the road and numerous elaborately constructed dovecotes.

WESTERN DESERT

Forming the northeast flank of the Sahara, the Western Desert spreads from the banks of the Nile towards Libya, covering 2.8 million sq km. The Arabs refer to the area as 'the land abandoned by God' and much of it remains unexplored. The landscape is bizarre and beautiful in equal measure, and a journey through the desert's main oases makes a fascinating alternative route from Cairo to Luxor. Siwa, near the Libyan border, is more easily reached from Alexandria.

For ecologically sound desert trips in the area, **Desert Eco Tours** (www.desertecotour.com) is recommended.

SIWA OASIS

2 046

Ringed by salt lakes, dunes and desert escarpment, Siwa is a haven of date plantations and olive groves. It has a distinctive Berber culture, preserved due to its relative isolation – an asphalt road to the coast was only constructed in the 1980s. With the 13th-century *shali* (fortress) at its core, there's plenty to potter round while relaxing into the rhythm of life in the slow lane.

Women need to be careful if wandering alone in plantations or bathing in springs. Several assaults have been reported. North of the main square, **El Negma Internet Centre** (☎ 460 0761; per hr Ef10; 🏵 9am-midnight) is near the *shali*. **Banque du Caire** (🕾 8.30am-2pm & 5-8pm) has an ATM and there's also a post office and helpful **tourist office** (🕾 9am-5pm Sat-Thu).

Siwa's attractions include **springs** where you can swim, the remains of the **Temple of the Oracle**, where Alexander came to confirm his divinity, and some Graeco-Roman **tombs**. At the edge of town are the towering dunes of the **Great Sand Sea**.

There are innumerable safari companies in Siwa, most of which charge around E£100 to visit the Great Sand Sea and E£120 for an overnight camping trip to White Mountain and Lubbaq Oasis. You can hire **sand boards** at the Nour el-Wahaa Restaurant.

The best buy in town are locally grown dates and olives.

Sleeping & Eating

Make sure your hotel room has screened windows – the mosquitoes are voracious in Siwa.

Yousef Hotel (a 460 0678; s/d E£10/20) In the town centre, this backpacker favourite offers reasonable rooms but no breakfast.

Palm Trees Hotel ((a) 460 1703; salahali2@yahoo.com; d E£35, s/d without bathroom E£15/25) A palm-filled garden partially compensates for grotty bathrooms. Breakfast is E£5.

Kilany Hotel ((a) 460 1052; zaitsafari@yahoo.com; d E£50) Too near the mosque for a lie-in, the roof terrace here is good for a snooze later. Breakfast is E£10.

Shali Lodge (☎ 460 1299; info@eqi.com.eg; Sharia el-Seboukha; s/d E£200/260; 🕄) A night at this romantic mudbrick hotel set in a plantation near the main square is recommended. Breakfast costs E£12.

There are cheap chicken-and-salad restaurants on the market square, including Elahrar Chicken Restaurant, recommended by travellers.

Nour el-Wahaa Restaurant ((a) 460 0293; dishes E£5-15) In palm groves near the Shali Lodge hotel, this attractive garden restaurant is the place to relax over a *sheesha* (E£4.50) and mint tea (E£3). Try *molokhiyva*, a stewed leaf soup (E£5).

Abdo Restaurant (460 1243; 8.30am-midnight) Beloved by backpackers and locals alike, Abdo's serves tasty vegetable couscous (E£10).

Getting There & Around

There are three daily buses to (and from) Alexandria (E£27, eight hours). Buses are often full so buy a ticket in advance from West Delta Bus Co near the Sports Centre.

There is no public transport along the half-finished road linking the oases of Siwa and Bahariyya. Some 4WD owners in town take passengers (approximately E£1300, 10 hours) but you'll need a road permit (US\$10 per person).

Donkey carts within town cost E£5. Bonerattling bikes from the main square cost E£10 per day.

BAHARIYYA OASIS

Bahariyya, the nearest oasis to Cairo, has a friendly atmosphere. It's surrounded by a striking black desert and Pyramid Mountain, where significant dinosaur remains have been found. Buses bring you to Bawiti, the dusty main village.

Attractions include the **Temple of Alexander**, tombs at **Qarat Qasr Salim**, and 10 of the 10,000 famous Graeco-Roman **mummies**, which are on show near the **Antiquities Inspectorate Ticket Office** (admission to 6 sites Ef30; \mathfrak{B} 8.30am-4pm).

Sleeping & Eating

Ahmed's Safari Camp () / fax 847 2090; ahmed_safari@ hotmail.com; camping per person E£10, huts per person E£10, s/d E£40/80, with air-con E£70/100;) A favourite with trans-Africa groups, this camp is 4km outside Bawiti, on the road to Farafra. It has a 24-hour restaurant, kitchen garden, safari company, bakery, and swimming pool fed by a hot spring.

Alpenblick Hotel ((a) 847 2184; alpenblick@hotmail .com; Bawiti; s E£45, d E£90, without bathroom E£60) Rooms are clean and bright, with screened windows and fans.

International Hot Springs Hotel ((2) 847 3014; www .whitedeserttours.com; s/d with half board US\$45/70; (2) (2) This highly recommended hotel, with hot springs in a sheltered courtyard, has spotless chalet rooms with bathroom, fan and screened windows. Located 1km outside Bawiti on the Cairo Rd, it's not a very attractive hotel, but it's well run and the owner, Peter Wirth, is a veteran of the Western Desert and can organise excursions.

Food options are limited to the hotels, a basic cafeteria near the petrol station or the town's **Popular Restaurant** ((20) 847 2239; set meal E£20; (20) 5am-midnight), which lives up to its name and offers good set meals.

Getting There & Away

Buses travel to Cairo (\pm £20, four hours) daily at 1pm and 1am. For Farafra (\pm £20, two hours) or Dakhla (\pm £30, five hours), buses from Cairo stop in front of the Paradise Hotel. See p123 for information about travel permits between Bahariyya and Siwa.

FARAFRA OASIS

The smallest of the oases, Farafra is the best place from which to visit the spectacular **White Desert** – an outstanding area of windblown rock formations. The only tourist attraction in town is **Badr's Museum** (7510091; admission E£5; Sa3am-sunset), a gallery run by enthusiastic local artist Badr Moghny.

El-Waha (Oasis) Hotel (**b** 751 0040; hamdyhamoud@ hotmail.com; s/d E£20/40, without bathroom E£15/30) is basic but bearable with dubious shared bathrooms; the owner's new Arabia Safari Camp may be a better bet.

The Bedouin-owned **Al-Badawiya Hotel** (o 751 1163; www.badawiya.com; s/d E£105/170; o) is built of mudbricks around a central courtyard. Some rooms are split-level with whimsical mosquito nets. The restaurant (breakfast E£15, lunch E£35, dinner E£45) is the best place to eat in town, with home-style lamb and potato stews, and fresh lime juice (E£3). Desert trips can be arranged from here, including a three-hour 4WD excursion to the nearby White Desert (from E£150).

Buses travel to Cairo (E£40, seven to nine hours) via Bahariyya (E£20, 2½ hours) daily

at 10.30am and 10.30pm. Buses coming from Cairo go on to Dakhla (E£20, $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours, two daily) and leave from outside the shops at the Dakhla end of the main street.

EGYPT

The oasis of Dakhla contains two small towns, **Mut** and **Al-Qasr**. Mut is the larger, with most of the hotels.

The **tourist office** (782 1685/6; Sharia as-Sawra al-Khadra; 8am-3pm) is on Mut's main road. The Abu Mohamed Restaurant, opposite the tourist office, offers **internet access** (per hr Ef10; 7am-midnight). In Mut, **Bank Misr** (Sharia Al-Wadi) changes cash and travellers cheques, and gives advances on Visa and MasterCard; it doesn't have an ATM.

There are 600 **hot springs** in the vicinity and an atmospheric mudbrick citadel at Al-Qasr with a small **Ethnographic Museum** (admission ££3; 𝔅) variable). In exchange for baksheesh, aged local guides escort you through the citadel's narrow alleyways, unlock *madrassas*, houses and mosques, and show you working forges. Local traders congregate outside the citadel to sell basketry, including rakish straw hats with ribbon trim (E£20), worn by local farmers.

Sleeping & Eating

El-Kasr Hotel (**Transform Construction Const**

Bedouin Oasis Village (782 0070; bedouin_oasis _village@hotmail.com; Mut; s/d E£50/60, without bathroom E£30/50; () This attractive mudbrick building with outdoor terrace and fort-style annexe is good value.

Beir Elgabal Camp (**Transform Beir Elgabal Camp** (**Transform Beir Elgabal Camp** (**Transform Bedouin**, this peaceful and attractive camp is located at the foot of the escarpment. There are mud or concrete rooms, or you can pitch a tent and use a bathroom for E£20. Dinner costs E£20.

Desert Lodge (7345960; www.desertlodge.net; s/d halfboard US\$45/60; 2 () Perched on a hill near the escarpment overlooking Al-Qasr, this fort-style ecolodge has added some desert whimsy to the landscape. With a billiard room, giant outdoor chess set, licensed restaurant, and Bedouin tent for evening *sheeshas*, it's hard to find the motivation for the desert safaris on offer.

A couple of good restaurants are recommended in town, including the long-established **Abu Mohamed Restaurant** ((2) 782 1431; Sharia as-Sawra al-Khadra; dishes E£8-10) and **Ahmed Hamdy's Restaurant** ((2) 782 0767; Sharia as-Sawra al-Khadra; dishes E£16), popular with the local police.

Getting There & Around

Buses leave from the main square in Mut at 6am and 6pm travelling to Farafra (E£20, 4½ hours), Bahariyya (E£20, seven hours) and Cairo (E£45, eight to 10 hours). Buses leave at 7pm and 8.30pm travelling to Al-Kharga (E£10, 2½ hours) and Cairo (E£50 to E£55, 11 hours).

Service taxis travel to Farafra and Al-Kharga for the same costs. They depart from near the new mosque when full.

Local pick-ups depart from near the police station in Mut and travel to Al-Qasr for 75pt. Abu Mohamed Restaurant hires out bikes for E£10 per day.

KHARGA OASIS

Except for the impressive **Antiquities Museum** (Sharia Gamal Abdel Nasser; adult/student E£20/10; \mathfrak{D} 9am-4pm), which houses mummies and gilded masks, embalmed birds and rams, the town of Al-Kharga is of little interest. You are likely to be escorted by police from your arrival in town.

There's a helpful **tourist office** (2) 722 1206; Midan Nasser; S 8am-3pm, variable evening hours Sat-Thu), and **Banque du Caire** (off Sharia Gamal Abdel Nasser) has an ATM and changes cash and travellers cheques.

North of town is the well-preserved **Temple** of Hibis (admission E£10; 🕑 8am-5pm), built by the Persian emperor Darius I. To the east you'll find the remains of the **Temple of An-Nadura**, built by the Romans, and nearby 4th-century Coptic Necropolis of Al-Bagawat. South of town are the fortified Roman temples of Qasr al-Ghueita and Qasr az-Zayyan.

You can camp in the palm-filled garden of the affable **Kharga Oasis Hotel** (792 1500; Midan Nasser; s/d with fan E£63/88, with air-con E£70/95; \$) for E£7.50 per person and use the shared bathrooms for a few piastres more. Behind the museum is clean and comfortable **El-Radwan Hotel** (792 9897; s/d E£50/80; \$). Four-star, pink confection **Sol YMar Pioneers** (792 7982; www.soly mar-hotels.com; Sharia Gamal Abdel Nasser; s/d with half board E£530/701; \$) [2] [2] [3]) is a favourite with Egyptian businessmen. Dinner costs E£55. Restaurants are scarce in Kharga. Eat in the hotels or try Al-Ahram, at the front of the Waha Hotel on Sharia an-Nabawi, which sells cheap roast chicken and salads.

Checkpoints between Al-Kharga and Luxor close at 4pm, so start your trip in either direction before midday.

Buses leave from the bus station behind Midan Basateen. Services include Cairo (E£40 to E£45, eight hours, three daily) and Dakhla (E£8, two hours, five daily). The 2pm and 1am buses connect with the 6pm and 6am buses to Farafra, Bahariyya and Cairo. Services to Luxor (E£35, five hours) depart on Tuesday and Saturday at 1pm, and on Sunday and Wednesday at 7am.

Minibuses to Dakhla cost E£9 and leave from the bus station.

NILE VALLEY

Measuring 6680km in length, the Nile is the world's longest river. It brought the nation of Egypt into being and its banks are clustered with the temples and tombs of the country's illustrious past. Luxor and Aswan are the jewels in the crown and few can resist time spent on the water itself.

LUXOR

🖻 095 / pop 422,400

Built around the 4000-year-old site of Thebes, the ancient capital of the New Kingdom, contemporary Luxor is an eccentric combination of provincial town and staggering ancient splendour. The concentration of monuments is extraordinary: they tower incongruously above the buzz of everyday life and make this a most compelling destination.

Orientation

Luxor comprises the town of Luxor on the East Bank of the Nile; the village of Karnak, 2km to the northeast; and the villages and ancient monuments on the West Bank of the Nile.

In town, there are three main thoroughfares: Sharia al-Mahatt (running from the station to Luxor Temple), Sharia al-Karnak (Luxor Temple to the Temples of Karnak) and the corniche. Most budget hotels are located between the train station and Sharia Televizyon. Banks, the main tourist office and other services are clustered around the Old Winter Palace Hotel on the corniche.

Information

Thomas Cook (🖻 237 2196; Old Winter Palace Hotel, Corniche el-Nil; 🕑 8am-2pm & 3-8pm)

Sights EAST BANK

The Luxor Museum (Corniche el-Nil; adult/student E£55/30; ⓑ 9am-2pm & 4-9pm) has a select collection of Theban relics and an informative video presentation. To learn more about the ancient journey into afterlife, visit the Mummification Museum (Corniche el-Nil; adult/student E£40/20; ⓑ 9am-1pm & 4-9pm).

The town centre spills around magnificent **Luxor Temple** (C 237 2408; adult/student ££50/25, tripod ££20; C 6am-9pm). Largely built by the New Kingdom Pharaoh Amenhotep III, it was continually added to over the centuries. In the 13th century, the Arabs built a mosque in an interior court.

Of the 730 human-headed, lion-bodied statues lining the **Avenue of Sphinxes** between the temples of Luxor and Karnak, 58 still remain.

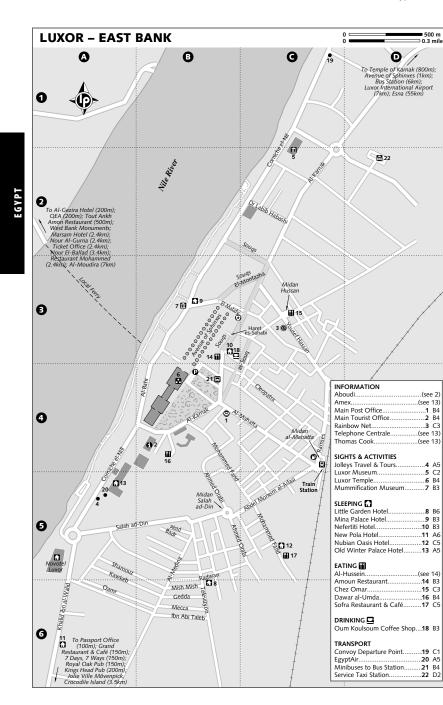
Much more than a temple, **Karnak** (238 0270; adult/student Ef60/30;) 6am-5.30pm) is a spectacular complex of sanctuaries, pylons and obelisks. Its crowning glory is the **Great Hippostyle Hall**, constructed around 134 lotus-blossom pillars. Begun in the Middle Kingdom, the complex was added to, dismantled, restored, enlarged and decorated over 1500 years.

If you can tolerate the crowds, lame script and long walk, then the **sound-and-light show** (2) 237 2241; www.sound-light.egypt.com; adult/student Ef55/44) offers a nonetheless atmospheric introduction to Karnak. Check the website or tourist office for the current schedule.

Microbuses between Luxor town and Karnak cost 50pt. A *calèche* costs E£7; a taxi costs E£10 to E£15.

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

EGYPT



WEST BANK

The West Bank of Luxor was the necropolis of ancient Thebes, a vast city of the dead where magnificent temples were raised to honour the cults of Pharaohs entombed in nearby cliffs, and where queens, nobles, priests and artisans built tombs with spectacular décor.

The first monuments you'll see, 3km west of the ferry crossing, are the 18m-high **Colossi of Memnon**. These statues are all that remain of a temple built by Amenhotep III.

The **main ticket office** (M 6am-4pm) is 500m west of the Colossi. Each monument requires a separate ticket. Students pay half price. To help decide which monuments to target, buy the user-friendly *Egypt Pocket Guide* to the area (E£30). The valleys of the Kings and Queens have separate ticket offices on site.

Couched in a sun-ravaged ravine of Al-Qurn (Horn) escarpment, the celebrated Valley of the Kings (231 1662; for 3 tombs adult/student E£70/35; Som-4pm) is the last resting place of the Pharaohs. Many of them weren't allowed much rest, however, as the pillage of tombs began before the last Pharaohs were buried. Only one tomb, the tomb of Tutankhamen (adult/student E£100/50). found in 1922 by Howard Carter, has so far been discovered intact. If you've seen Tutankhamen's treasures in the Cairo Museum, a visit to the simple tomb of this minor Pharaoh helps indicate what unimaginable riches once attended the tombs of more illustrious Pharaohs such as Tuthmosis I or Ramses II. The corridors and antechambers of the tombs of Sethos I and Ramses IX have some of the best wall paintings, while the tomb of Amenophis II, hidden in the escarpment, is the most exciting to visit. Many tombs are regrettably closed.

Photography is strictly forbidden and police won't hesitate to confiscate film/memory cards.

If you have water and decent walking shoes, you can hike across the **Theban Hills** from the tomb of Seti I in the Valley of the Kings to Deir al-Bahri. The walk takes 50 minutes and is extremely steep in parts.

Rising out of the desert plain in a series of terraces, the **Funerary Temple of Hatshepsut** (Deir al-Bahri; adult/student E£30/15; 🕑 6am-4.30pm) is a spectacular sight. It was vandalised by Hatshepsut's bitter successor, Tuthmosis III, but retains much of its original magnificence, including elaborate friezes.

The tombs comprising the Valley of the Queens (for 3 tombs adult/student E£30/15; 🕑 6am-

4.30pm) contain some exquisite wall painting. Disappointingly, the crowning glory of the site, the **Tomb of Nefertari**, remains closed.

The temple complex of **Medinat Habu** (adult/ student E£30/15; 💬 6am-4.30pm) is dominated by the **Temple of Ramses III.** The largest temple after Karnak, with many colourful reliefs and golden stone that catches fire at sunset, Medinat Habu is a must-see.

A taxi from Luxor town costs E£100 for a three-hour tour. Alternatively, you can hire a bicycle and bring it over on the ferry. From the main ticket office it's 1km to the Valley of the Queens and 5km to the Valley of the Kings.

Activities

For **felucca cruises** (perhrperboat E£50), stand on the corniche and wait for captains to approach.

Horse-riding around West Bank temples is an unforgettable experience, particularly at sunset. The best stables are **Arabian Horse Stables** ($\textcircled{\columbda}$ 231 0024, 010 504 8558; $\textcircled{\columbda}$ 7am-sunset). Horse rides cost E£25 per hour, camels cost E£20 and donkeys E£15.

There are many **alabaster workshops** between the Valley of the Kings and Queens. A handhewn pot costs from E£80. Machine-polished onyx is cheaper.

A **balloon ride** above the West Bank costs around E£450. Ask in the Nefertiti Hotel (p114) for details.

Tours

Travel restrictions for foreigners in the Nile Valley make independent travel challenging, so tours outside Luxor are recommended. **Jolleys Travel & Tours** ((a) 010 183 8894; (b) 9am-10pm) Located next to the Old Winter Palace Hotel; has a good reputation for day trips.

Maher Tadres (a) 012 258 9635; maherhelta@hotmail .com) For a highly recommended, English-speaking taxidriver and guide. Contact in advance of your visit. QEA (a) 231 1667; www.questfortheegyptianadventure .com; Main Rd, Al-Gezira) With a percentage of profits going towards charitable projects in Egypt, this is a worthwhile agency with which you can make advanced bookings.

Sleeping

Many Luxor hotels charge 50% less in summer. For a more tranquil experience, try West Bank hotels.

EAST BANK

Nubian Oasis Hotel (🖻 292 9445; Sharia Mohammed Farid; dm/s/d E£10/10/20, s/d with air-con E£20/35; 🕄) Large

KING TUT & HIS BODY PARTS

After 3500 years King Tutankhamen has been reunited with his genitals. When an X-ray in 1968 showed his penis was missing, it was assumed it had been stolen for private collection. A CT scan, however, has recently revealed the missing member in loose sand around the Pharaoh.

breakfasts, bike hire (E£6 per day) and free use of kitchen/washing machine make this hotel commendable.

Nefertiti Hotel (237 2386; www.nefertitihotel.com; btwn Sharia al-Karnak & Sharia as-Soug; s/d E£40/60; 💦) Helpful cousins run this dark but friendly hotel with rooftop views of Luxor Temple. They can organise balloon rides and desert tours.

Mina Palace Hotel (237 2074; fax 238 2194; Corniche el-Nil; s/d E£80/100; 🕄) Cleanish rooms have balconies with great views of the Nile.

Little Garden Hotel (🖻 238 9038; www.littlegarden hotel.com; Sharia Radwan; s/d US\$18/24; 🔀) Great service and a secluded garden compensates for poor location in this recommended midrange choice.

New Pola Hotel (236 5081; www.newpolahotel.com; Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid: s/d US\$26/35: 🔀 💷 🕥) This excellent-value three-star hotel has a rooftop swimming pool with stunning Nile views.

Jolie Ville Mövenpick (🖻 237 4855; www.moevenpick -hotels.com: Crocodile Island: s/d US\$100/150; 🔀 🔀 🛄 🕥) Located on its own island, this exceptional hotel offers bungalow rooms in magnificent grounds. The infinity pool, among a host of amenities, is magically aligned with the Nile.

Old Winter Palace Hotel (238 0422; h1661@accor -hotels.com; Corniche el-Nil; r Pavilion Bldg US\$125-375, old wing US\$235-1125; 🔀 🕄 😰) Worth a visit in its own right, this colonial landmark on the corniche is set in a semitropical garden and has fine dining, leather-sofa bars and grand Nile-view rooms.

WEST BANK

Marsam Hotel (237 2403; marsam@africamail.com; Gurna; s/d E£65/130, without bathroom E£45/90) A favourite with archaeologists, this is an atmospheric but not exactly spotless budget option.

El-Gezira Hotel (231 0034; www.el-gezira.com; Al-Gezira; s/d E£60/80; 🕄) Offering clean rooms for bargain prices, this hotel also has a rooftop restaurant with Nile views.

Nour al-Gurna (231 1430; nourelgournahotel@yahoo .com; Gurna; s/d E£150/200) Opposite the ticket office, this family-run, mudbrick house with painted murals is full of character. It serves delicious home-grown food.

Nour el-Balad (242 6111; s/d E£150/250) This attractive hotel near Medinat Habu is run by the same friendly family as at Nour al-Gurna.

Al-Moudira (🖻 325 1307; moudirahotel@ yahoo.com; Daba'iyya; r/ste US\$200/275; 🔀 🔣 🛄 😰) If you're a soaker, this atmospheric Moorishstyle hotel has terracotta-coloured rooms with decadent bathtubs. A 15-minute drive from the ferry in glorious gardens, this is a romantic option with excellent dining.

Eating & Drinking EAST BANK

Sandwich stands and other cheap-eat possibilities are found on Sharia al-Mahatta and Sharia Televizyon. Two favourites with travellers are Amoun Restaurant (Sharia al-Karnak; mezze E£2.50-7, mains E£7-19; 🕑 7am-10pm), at the end of the souq near Luxor Temple, and neighbouring Al-Hussein.

Grand Restaurant & Café (🕑 8am-1am; 😢) A favourite with tour groups, the Grand has a pleasant terrace for mezze (E£5) and sheesha (E£5). It's located just off Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid.

Chez Omar (236 7678: Midan Hassan: mains E£15: 24hr) This is a lively place to try pigeon and other Egyptian dishes.

7 Days, 7 Ways (Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; 🕄) With roast beef and Yorkshire pudding (E£29.50, Sunday only), this restaurant is not surprisingly a British favourite.

Dawar al-Umda (🖻 238 0721; Sharia al-Karnak) A top-end dining option: a Thousand and One Nights-style garden restaurant at the Mercure Inn. It hosts popular Oriental buffets (E£85) on Thursday evenings, featuring performances by Sufi and belly dancers.

Sofra Restaurant & Café (235 9752; 90 Sharia Farid St; mains E£145) For a highly recommended dining experience. The café serves traditional Egyptian dishes in intimate, homestyle dining rooms.

Oum Koulsoum Coffee Shop (sheesha & coffee E£4) Next to the Nefertiti Hotel, this is the most popular ahwa in town.

The Royal Oak Pub (Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; 🏹 4pm-2am) and the Kings Head Pub (Sharia Khalid ibn al-Walid; (> 10am-2am) are British-style watering-holes.

WEST BANK

Restaurant Mohammed (🗃 231 1014; Gurna; meals E£8-20; (Y) 24hr) This eccentric but recommended restaurant is set in the peaceful courtyard of Mohammed Abdel Lahi's mudbrick house, near the ticket office. Mohammed's mother cooks delicious kofta tagen (spiced mince meat served in an earthenware pot; E£20), served with home-grown salad leaves.

Tout Ankh Amon Restaurant (231 0118; fixed menu E£35) With rooftop views of the Nile, and a pergola of grapes, this is a good place to try traditional meat dishes cooked in clay pots. To get here, turn left after disembarking from the ferry from the East Bank and walk for 300m along the west bank of the Nile. The restaurant has a signboard, although the outdoor staircase doesn't look too inviting.

Getting There & Away AIR

The EgyptAir office (🖻 238 0580; Corniche el-Nil; 8am-8pm) is next to Amex. There are regular connections with Cairo (E£714, one hour and five minutes) and Aswan (E£360, 40 minutes), and thrice-weekly flights to Sharm el-Sheikh (E£537, one hour and five minutes).

BOAT

During the high season (October to May), an armada of cruise boats travels the Nile between Esna (for Luxor) and Aswan, stopping at Edfu and Kom Ombo en route. They cost from US\$50 per night for full board and can be arranged through any travel agent.

BUS

Minibuses to the **bus station** (Sharia al-Karnak) cost E£5 and leave from the Horus Hotel near Luxor Temple; taxis cost E£25. Bus services include Cairo (E£85, 11 hours, two daily), Hurghada (E£30, five hours, eight daily), Port Said (E£70), Dahab (E£110, 16 hours), Sharm el-Sheikh (E£100, 15 hours) and Al-Kharga (E£40, four hours, four weekly). For Aswan, it's better to take the train.

CONVOY

It's currently compulsory for foreigners to travel from Luxor by convoy. There are numerous checkpoints, making travel outside the convoys impossible. You can drive independently to the Western Desert, but with police escorts that often insist on accompanying you to Al-Kharga. Check current convoy timings with the tourist office.

SERVICE TAXI

The service taxi station is off Sharia al-Karnak. Because of police restrictions you'll have to take an entire car and go in convoy, costing about E£300 for Hurghada and E£200 for Aswan.

TRAIN

Luxor's train station (Midan al-Mahatta) is conveniently located in the centre of town. Abela Egypt services leave at 8.30pm and 9.30pm daily, arriving in Cairo at 5.45am and 6.45am the next morning. The trip costs US#52/74 Sleeping Train (237 2015; www.sleepingtrains.com) morning. The trip costs US\$53/74 per person one way in a double/single cabin. Tickets must be paid for in US dollars or euros. The price includes breakfast.

Foreigners can take train 981, 1903 and 997 (E£67/45 in 1st/2nd class), departing at 9.15am, 9.15pm and 11.10pm. The trip takes approximately 10 hours. Train 981 to Cairo stops near Abydos, Asyut and Minya but tourist police insist on an armed escort for foreigners who alight here.

Foreigners can take three daily services to Aswan (E£30/21 in 1st/2nd class), leaving at 7.15am, 9.30am and 5pm. The trip takes three hours. All three trains stop at Edfu (E£19/15, 1½ hours) and Kom Ombo (E£25/18, 2½ hours).

There's a train from Luxor to Al-Kharga every Thursday (E£11/10.25 in 2nd/3rd class, seven hours) at 6am or 7am, depending on the time of year.

Getting Around

A taxi from Luxor International Airport (2237 4655), 7km east of town, costs around E£25 to East Bank destinations and E£50 to West Bank destinations. There are no buses between the airport and town.

For about E£20 per hour you can get around town by horse-drawn calèche but bargain hard.

Regular baladi (municipal) ferries carry passengers between the East and West Banks. You'll find the East Bank stop in front of Luxor Temple, and the West Bank stop in front of the dusty car park where the pickups congregate. A ticket costs E£1 each way. Private launches charge E£5 each way for the same trip.

Consider hiring a bike (E£6 per day) from the unmarked bike-hire place next to the Nour Al-Gurna Hotel; it's one of the best ways to get to the sights.

SOUTH OF LUXOR Edfu

The attraction in this town is the **Temple of Horus** (adult/student ££50/25; ⓑ 6am-4pm), the most completely preserved temple in Egypt. Built by the Ptolemies over a period of 200 years, it was dedicated to the falcon-headed son of Osiris.

Trains running between Luxor and Aswan stop here (see p115 and p118); the station is approximately 4km from the temple and taxis to the site cost $E \pounds 10$. Most cruise boats stop here and a *calèche* from the waterfront costs around $E \pounds 20$.

Spectacularly perched on the Nile near the village of Kom Ombo, the **Temple of Sobek & Haroeris** (adult/student E£30/15; 🕑 6am-4pm) is dedicated to the crocodile god and falconheaded sky god respectively. In ancient times sacred crocodiles basked themselves in the sun along the river bank here; these days, crocodiles are unable to swim past the High Dam at Aswan.

If you're travelling from Luxor you can stop here on the train (p118) and take a taxi to the site (E£10). A return taxi from Luxor to Edfu and Kom Ombo costs E£225 to E£250. Cruise boats moor alongside the temple steps.

ASWAN

🖻 097 / pop 241,000

Egypt's southernmost city sits on the banks of a particularly beautiful stretch of the Nile, decorated with palm-fringed islands and flotillas of white-sailed feluccas. Associated with the Nubian people, a distinct ethnic group with their own language and customs, the town is more African in character than the cities of the north.

Orientation

The bus and train stations are at the northern end of town. The lively *souq* (Sharia as-Souq) runs parallel to the corniche. Banks, restaurants and shops are located on the corniche, which ends at the imposing Coptic cathedral, the Nubia Museum and the city's better hotels.

Information

The main banks have branches on the corniche; there are ATMs at Banque Misr, Banque du Caire and the National Bank of Egypt. **Amex** ((2) 230 6983; Corniche el-Nil; (2) 9am-5pm) Cashes travellers cheques.

Aswan Internet Café (🖻 231 4472; Corniche el-Nil; per hr E£10; 🕑 9am-midnight)

Aswanet (231 7332; Keylany Hotel, Sharia Keylany; per hr E£10; 9am-1am) Internet access. Main post office (Corniche el-Nil; 8am-2pm Sat-

Thu) Next to the Rowing Club.

Main tourist office ((231 2811; Midan al-Mahatta;) 8am-3pm & 6-8pm) Next to the train station.

Passport office (1st fl, Police Bldg, Corniche el-Nil;

♥ 8.30am-1pm Sat-Thu) Visa extensions are available here. Telephone centrale (Corniche el-Nil; ♥ 24hr) Just past the EgyptAir office.

Thomas Cook (🖻 304 011; Corniche el-Nil; 🕑 8am-2pm & 5-9pm) Cashes travellers cheques.

Sights

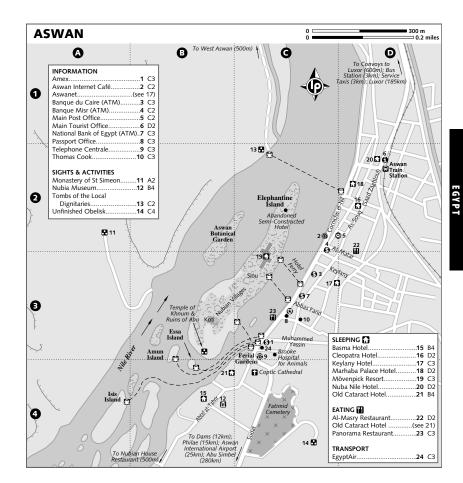
You don't have to be in Aswan long to recognise local ethnic pride. Justice is given to the history, art and culture of the local people in the excellent **Nubia Museum** (Sharia Abtal at-Tahrir, adult/student Ef50/25; 💮 9am-1pm & 5-9pm). The 'Nubia Submerged' exhibition, which includes photographs of Philae and Abu Simbel before they were re-sited, tells the story of how the Nubian homeland was submerged by the building of Lake Nasser. The entrance is opposite the Basma Hotel, a 15-minute walk from the town centre.

The **unfinished obelisk** (adult/student E£30/15; 7am-5pm) lies in the granite quarries that supplied the stone for pyramids and temples. Three sides of the shaft, which is nearly 42m long, were excavated before it was discarded due to a flaw in the granite. Taxis charge E£5 from the centre of town.

From Aswan, felucca trips (E£25 per hour) can be organised to Kitchener Island's verdant **botanical garden** (admission E£10; ☆ 8am-5pm) and the 6th-century Coptic **Monastery of St Simeon** (adult/ student E£20/10; ☆ 7am-4pm winter). To reach the monastery, take a camel from the dock (E£40). You can also get a boat to Old and Middle Kingdom **tombs** (adult/student E£20/10; ☆ 8am-4pm) of local dignitaries on the West Bank.

Tours

Travel restrictions for foreigners in the Nile Valley make independent travel challenging, so consider taking a tour.



One highly recommended and energetic local tour operator is **Montasser Mohammed** (\bigcirc 012 335 9105; montasser200@yahoo.com). He can arrange just about anything to anywhere for individual travellers.

Sleeping

Nuba Nile Hotel (☎ 231 3267; hamdi _abed@hotmail .com; s/d ££50/70; 🕄 🛄) This comfortable, localflavour hotel is a short walk from the train station.

 few midrange hotels, the Cleopatra has a small rooftop pool.

Marhaba Palace Hotel (a 233 0102; marhabaaswan@ yahoo.com; Corniche el-Nil; s/d US\$50/60; R) This recommended bright and friendly hotel has rooftop views of the Nile.

Old Cataract Hotel (231 6000; www .sofitel.com; Sharia Abtal at-Tahrir; r US\$168-1500; 💦 🗩) It's not difficult to imagine Agatha Christie penning Death on the Nile from her riverside balcony in this grand old dame of a hotel. Don't even think of turning up for supper in the Moorish-style restaurants without a reservation: ad hoc callers are unwelcome.

Eating & Drinking

The most popular snack stand in town is next to Aswan Coffee Shop. It's opposite a public oven and uses freshly baked bread for ta'amiyya sandwiches.

Nubian House Restaurant (🖻 232 6226; mezze E£4-5, mains E£7-20) Serving authentic Nubian dishes, this restaurant has stunning sunset views of the First cataract.

Panorama Restaurant (231 6108; Corniche el-Nil; mains E£8-15) Try the delicious fish tagen (E£15) and enjoy the view of Elephantine Island from this recommended Nile-side restaurant.

Al-Masrv Restaurant (230 2576; Sharia al-Matar; meals around E£25) A local institution, Al-Masry produces tasty kebabs and kofta, served with bread, salad and tahini.

Old Cataract Hotel (Sharia Abtal at-Tahrir: 1988) 8am-11pm) Enjoying tea or an apéritif on the Nileside terrace at the Old Cataract is on many a traveller's 'must-do' list. The hotel discourages an inundation of tourists by charging E£80 per person for this privilege, which goes only partially towards the price of afternoon tea (E£43 to E£55). The remainder, we suppose, can be put down to experience.

The cafés on the busy corner of Midan al-Mahatta and Sharia as-Souq are great places to linger over honey-drenched baklava and tea.

Getting There & Away ΔIR

EgyptAir (🖻 231 5000; Corniche el-Nil; 🕑 8am-8pm) has six flights to Cairo (E£1037, 1¼ hours) and a daily flight to Luxor (E£364, 30 minutes).

BOAT

See p124 for details of the weekly ferry to Sudan via Wadi Halfa.

Aswan is the best place to arrange overnight felucca trips because even if the winds fail, the Nile's strong currents propel boats north. The most popular trips are to Kom Ombo (one night, two days; E£31.50 per person) or Edfu (two nights, three days; E£56.50). Boats sleep six and passengers pay an extra E£5 per

'GOING TO SUDAN - WHAT, TODAY?'

If you're planning on crossing the Sudanese border to Wadi Halfa, make sure you're not in a hurry. Michael Palin describes the experience in his famous Pole to Pole adventure. You can read about his 'Day 62', tolerancetesting, sofa-riding border exploits on the web at: www.palinstravels.co.uk/book.

person for a permit, plus the cost of food and drink supplies.

You could also try a three-night cruise on one of the superbly luxurious boats that slide along the Nile towards Esna, near Luxor. They cost E£50 per night full board and leave from the corniche; trips and can be arranged by any travel agent or hotel.

BUS

Bus services include Cairo (E£85, 13 hours), Luxor (E£15, four to five hours, six daily) and Hurghada (E£45, seven hours).

CONVOY

It is compulsory for foreigners to travel between Luxor and Aswan by convoy. Check current convoy timings with the tourist office.

SERVICE TAXI

A taxi to Luxor costs about E£250 if you stop at Kom Ombo, Edfu and Esna en route.

TRAIN

Abela Egypt Sleeping Train (230 2124; www.sleeping trains.com) services leave at 5pm and 6.30pm, arriving in Cairo at 5.45am and 6.45am the next morning. The first service travels on to Alexandria. Tickets cost US\$53/74 per person one way in a double/single cabin. Tickets must be paid for in US dollars or euros. The price includes a basic dinner and breakfast.

Air-conditioned tourist trains to Cairo (E£43/E£81 in 1st/2nd class, 13 hours) via Luxor (E£30/E£21 in 1st/2nd class, three hours) leave at 6am, 6pm and 8pm. All three of these trains stop at Kom Ombo (E£15/12 in 1st/2nd class, 45 minutes) and Edfu (E£19/10, 1¾ hours).

GETTING AROUND

Service taxis from the Aswan International Airport (248 0333) to the town centre cost E£1. A private taxi should be no more than E£25.

You can get around Aswan by calèche (E£10 per hour). A 3½-hour taxi tour to the Temple of Philae, High Dam and Unfinished Obelisk costs around E£30. A taxi anywhere within town (including from the town centre to the bus station) costs E£5.

AROUND ASWAN High Dam

The original dam across the Nile was built by the British at the beginning of the 20th century; however, it was insufficient to keep the Nile in check during the annual spate. The Egyptian government was assisted by various nations in building a new dam in the 1960s. It was opened with due pomp and ceremony in 1971 and came to be seen as a symbol of Egypt's independence in the modern world. As the full environmental impact of the dam began to be understood, however, it became source of controversy, not least on account of the disruption it caused to the Nubian communities swallowed up by the creation of Lake Nasser.

To reach the High Dam, taxis cost E£40 (round trip).

Philae (Aglikia Island)

Built by the Ptolemies and Romans and relocated to a different island after the building of the High Dam in the 1960s, the Temple of Philae (adult/student E£50/25; 🕑 7am-4pm) is a romantic sight. It was dedicated to Isis, who found the heart of her slain brother, Osiris, on Philae Island. Early Christians later turned the hypostyle hall into a chapel.

To reach Philae, taxis cost E£40 for the round trip and the boat costs E£35.

HIGH DAM FACTS

- Old Dam built by British in 1902
- High Dam completed in 1971
- 2.3 million stones in Cheop's Pyramid
- 40 million stones in High Dam
- Third-largest dam in the world
- Lake Nasser is second-largest manmade lake in the world
- Plus points: provides protection from flooding
- Minus points: enormous environmental impact

A nightly sound-and-light show (230 5376; admission E£55), lasting 11/2 hours, is held at the temple.

Abu Simbel **a** 097

Perhaps the most striking temple in Egypt, the magnificent Great Temple of Abu Simbel (🗟 400 325; adult/student E£70/35; 🕑 5am-5pm) was cut from the hillside to honour the gods Ra-Harakhty, Amun, Ptah and the deified Pharaoh Ramses II. Discovered by Burkhart in 1813, protruding from the interring desert sands, the four famous colossal statues of Ramses II sit majestically facing east. Each statue is over 20m tall and flanked by smaller statues of the Pharaoh's mother and his beloved wife, Nefertari.

The neighbouring Temple of Hathor is guarded by six further standing statues of Ramses and Nefertari. In the 1960s both temples were winched to higher ground to avoid the rising waters of Lake Nasser in an ingenious feat of engineering.

Don't miss the spectacular sound-and-light show (admission E£60); with a succinct script and inventive imagery, it's the best in Egypt. With the waters of Lake Nasser quietly lapping the shore behind, a canopy of stars presiding overhead, and the repeated forms of Ramses teased into life by the caresses of superimposed images in front, this is one show that could best be described as 'in the round'. Particularly effective are the sequences of hieroglyphic warriors and musicians that float across the surface of the burnished statues, reinventing the forms for a postmodern sensibility without damaging or diminishing the original. As such, the show is more than a piece of historical explication, it is an 'art experience' or a piece of magic, if you prefer.

There are banks in town, but no ATMs.

Abu Simbel Village (Hotel Abbas; 🖻 /fax 400 092, @ 012 363 9794; r E£110; 🔡) is the cheapest accommodation option in town. Attached to a cultural centre, the mudbrick Eskaleh (2012 368 0521; fikrykachif@genevalink.com; s €30-35, d €40-50; (III) features comfortable accommodation, and regular performances of Nubian music and dance. Meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner E£15/30/40) feature organic, home-grown vegetables. Despite catering largely for topend tour groups, Nefertari Hotel (a 683 1677; www.nefertarihotelabusimble.com; s/d US\$100/120) manages a peaceful atmosphere with great views

overlooking Lake Nasser. The monuments are a five-minute walk away.

You can eat at the Seti Abu Simbel or at a clutch of ramshackle restaurants, including ta'amiyya and shwarma (sliced minced meat shaved from a rotating skewer of meat, wrapped in Arabic bread with salad garnish) stands, on the main street.

Most tourists travel to Abu Simbel on a coach tour (E£60 to E£100) in one of the two daily convoys from Aswan. These currently leave at 4am and 11am, take 31/2 hours and allow two hours before returning. You can also get there by hiring a taxi (E£150) for 24 hours, allowing you to enjoy sunset on Lake Nasser and the recommended sound-andlight show.

EgyptAir has two daily flights from Aswan to Abu Simbel (E£640 return), leaving at 6.30am and 9am. You can also go by boat from the High Dam, across Lake Nasser. Ask any travel agent for details.

EGYPT DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

There are many budget hotels in Egypt, including beachside camps in Sinai. Midrange hotels are harder to find but top-end accommodation abounds, with world-class hotels charging less than international prices.

Prices in this chapter are for high-season rooms and include tax, breakfast and private bathroom unless indicated otherwise. Budget hotels are defined as those charging up to E£100 (US\$17), midrange between E£100 and E£580 (US\$17 to US\$100) and top end as more than E£580 (US\$100) for a double room. In the low season, significant discounts are offered.

Not all hotels in Egypt accept credit card payments.

ACTIVITIES

For those with monument fatigue, nonarchaeological pursuits include desert safaris in the Sinai and Western Desert and worldclass diving and snorkelling in the Sinai and Red Sea area.

BUSINESS HOURS

The official weekend is Friday and Saturday. Note that during Ramadan, all banks, offices, shops, museums and tourist sites keep shorter hours. Note also that all tourist sites are officially open an hour later in summer months: in reality, it's rather more ad hoc.

Banks & government offices 8.30am to 1.30pm Sunday to Thursday.

Post offices 8.30am to 2pm Saturday to Thursday. Private offices 10am to 2pm and 4pm to 9pm, except Friday.

Restaurants & cafés Noon to midnight daily. Shops 9am to 2pm and 5pm to 10pm summer, 10am to 7pm winter; some close on Sundays.

CUSTOMS

Visitors may import duty-free 1L of alcohol and 400 cigarettes. Currency, cameras, sports equipment; electronic devices and jewellery are meant to be declared on entry. Note that you can't take Egyptian pounds out of the country.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

All travel in Upper Egypt between Aswan and Cairo, and in many parts of the Sinai, is restricted. This means that although you can hire a car, for example, you are obliged for much of your journey to have armed policemen accompany you, either as passengers or as an escort – or both. Although the purpose of these measures is to protect the tourist, it's hard not to find the experience obtrusive and dispiriting.

A further annoyance is the constant badgering to buy souvenirs or guiding services at the main tourist destinations; the aggressive nature of this solicitation can mar the

PRACTICALITIES

- Local news/information in English: Egyptian Gazette (50pt); Al-Ahram Weekly (www.ahram.org.eg/weekly; E£1) appears every Thursday with good what's-on listings
- English Broadcasts: BBC World Service (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice), FM95 (557kHz) and Nile FM (104.2kHz)
- TV News: CNN and BBC World in hotels
- Electrical current: 220V AC, 50Hz (except Alexandria and parts of Cairo: 110V AC, 50Hz)
- Sockets: round, two-pin, European-type
- Measurements: metric

pleasure of Egypt's monuments if you're not prepared for it. You should also be on the alert for scams such as con men posing as guides or archaeologists.

In the Sinai, beware of wandering off the beaten track: unexploded ordinance still litters parts of the desert.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Discounts to museums and sites are available for students with an International Student Identity Card (ISIC). With proof of status, you can obtain one of these in Cairo from ESTS (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-531 0330; www .estsegypt.com; 23 Sharia Manial, Midan el-Mammalek, El-Roda). Avoid buying bogus cards, or discounts for bone fide students may be jeopardised.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Egyptian Embassies & Consulates

There is a listof Egyptian diplomatic and consular missions at www.mfa.gov.eg. Australia Canberra (🖻 02-6273 4437/8; fax 02-6273 4279; 1 Darwin Ave, Yarralumla 2600, ACT); Melbourne (🖻 03-9654 8869, 03-9654 8634; consgened@primus .com.au; 9th fl, 124 Exhibition St, Melbourne 3000, Vic); Sydney (2 02-9281 4844; www.egypt.org.au; 3rd fl, 241 Commonwealth St, Surry Hills 2010, NSW) Canada Montreal (2 514-866 8455; www.egyptian consulatemontreal.org; 1 PISainte Marie, 2617 Montreal, Ouebec H3B 4S3); Ottawa (🕿 613-234 4931-5; egyptemb@sympatico.ca; 454 Laurier Ave E, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6R3)

Eritrea (🖻 123294; fax 123295; 5 Dej Affworki St, Asmara)

Ethiopia (🖻 550021; fax 552722; Sidist Kilo, Woreda 11.K.17, Addis Ababa)

France Marseilles (🕿 04 91 25 04 04: 166 Ave d'Hambourg, 13008); Paris (🖻 01 53 67 88 30/2; www .ambassade-egypte.com; 56 Ave d'Iena, 75116) Germany Berlin (2 30-477 54 70; www.egyptian -embassy.de; Stauffenberg Str 6-7, 10785); Frankfurt-am-Main (26 69-955 13 40/1; Eysseneckstrasse 34, 60322) Israel Eilat (🕿 08-637 6882; 68 Ha Afroni St); Tel Aviv (🖻 03-546 4151; fax 03-544 1615; 54 Basel St, 64239) Jordan Amman (🖻 06-560 5175; egypt@embegypt jordan.com; 22 Qurtubah St, Amman) Agaba (🕿 03-201 6171; cnr Al-Istiglal & Al-Akhatal Sts)

Libya (🖻 222 3099; fax 223 2523; El-Awarsi St, Western Fuwaihat, Tripoli)

Netherlands (2 70-354 45 35; ambegnl@wanadoo.nl; Badhuisweg 92, 2587 CL, The Hague)

New Zealand Apply via the Australian embassy. Sudan (2 183 777646; sphinx-eqysud@yahoo.com; University St, Al-Mogran, Khartoum)

UK Lowndes St, London (200-7235 9777; 2 Lowndes St, SW1); South St, London (🕿 020-7499 2401; www .egyptianconsulate.co.uk; 26 South St, Mayfair W1) USA Chicago (🕿 312-828 9162-4; Suite 1900, 500 N Michigan Ave, IL 60611); Houston (2713-961 4915/6; Suite 2180, 1990 Post Oak Blvd, TX 77056); New York City (🕿 212-759 7120-2; 1110 2nd Ave, NY 10022); San Francisco (🕿 415-346 9700/2; 3001 Pacific Ave, CA 94115); Washington, DC (a 202-895 5400; www.embassyofegypt washingtondc.org; 3521 International Court NW, Washington, DC, 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Egypt Most foreign embassies and consulates open from 8am to 2pm Sunday to Thursday. 11th fl, World Trade Centre, 1191 Corniche el-Nil, Bulag) Canada (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-794 3110; fax 02-796 3548; 26 Sharia Kamal el-Shenawy, Garden City) Eritrea (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-303 3503; eritembe@yahoo .com; 6 El Fallah St, Mohandessine) Ethiopia (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-335 3693; ethio@ethioembassy.org.eg; El Mesaha Sq Villa 11, Doqqi) France (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-570 3916; fax 02-571 0276; 29 Sharia al-Giza, Giza) Germany (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-735 3687; fax 02-736 0530; 8 Hassan Sabry, Zamalek) Israel (Map pp88-9; 🕿 02-761 0545; fax 761 0414; 6 Sharia ibn Malek, Giza) Jordan (Map pp88-9; 2 02-748 5566; fax 02-760 1027; Al-Shaheed Basem al-Khatib, Doggi) Libya (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-735 1269; fax 02-735 0072; 7 Sharia el-Saleh Ayoub, Zamalek) Netherlands (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-739 5500; fax 02-735 5959; 18 Hassan Sabry, Zamalek) New Zealand (Map pp92-3; 2 02-574 9360; emeco@ attmail.com; 4th fl, 2 Sharia Talaat Harb, Downtown) Sudan (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-794 9661; fax 02-354 2693; 3 Sharia al-Ibrahimy, Garden City) UK (Map pp88-9; 🖻 02-794 0852; 7 Sharia Ahmed Ragheb, Garden City) USA (Map pp92-3; 20 02-797 3300; fax 02-797 3200; 8 Sharia Kamal el-Din Salah, Garden City)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS Surprisingly, there aren't many headline

events on the national cultural calendar. These are the most notable:

Cairo International Book Fair January/February.

Egyptian Marathon (egyptianmarathon@egypt.net) In February, when competitors race around the monuments on Luxor's West Bank.

Ascension of Ramses II At Abu Simbel on 22 February and 22 October each year, when the sun penetrates the inner temple.

FOOD

From kebabs and pizzas to noodles and roast beef, there is a wide variety of food available, though there's limited choice for vegetarian travellers. See p86 for a description of national dishes.

It is advisable to stick to bottled water (check the seal as rogue traders fill up bottles from the tap).

HOLIDAYS

In addition to the main Islamic holidays (p1106) and moveable Coptic Christian holidays, Egypt celebrates the following: **New Year's Day** 1 January

New Year's Day 1 January Unity Day 10 February Sinai Day 25 April May Day 1 May Liberation Day 18 June Revolution Day 23 July Armed Forces Day 6 October Suez Day 24 October Victory Day 23 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Access to the internet is widely available throughout Egypt. In this chapter, selected internet cafés are listed in each town.

MAPS

Excellent site maps of all the major monument areas are provided in Alberto Siliotti's informative booklets in the *Egypt Pocket Guide* series (E£30 each), published by the American University in Cairo Press. The *Bartholomew World Educational Map of Egypt* (E£60) is user-friendly. See p87 for recommended maps of Cairo.

MONEY

The official currency is the Egyptian pound (E£; in Arabic, a *guinay*). One pound consists of 100 piastres (pt). Collect plenty of E£1 and E£5 notes for baksheesh.

Money can be changed at commercial banks, foreign exchange bureaus and some hotels. Rates don't vary much. Travellers cheques can be cashed at banks, Amex and Thomas Cook offices.

ATMs are found in major towns throughout Egypt, though they are less common in the Western Desert. In general, those belonging to Banque Misr, Banque du Caire, the National Bank of Egypt and HSBC accept Visa and MasterCard for cash advances. Although now widely accepted throughout Egypt, credit cards still aren't accepted in budget hotels and restaurants, nor in remote areas such as the Western Oases.

Bargaining, for everything from hotel rooms to clothes, is part of life in Egypt. Tipping, called baksheesh, is indispensable and is relied upon to supplement low salaries. In hotels and restaurants, taxes of up to 25% are added to the bill and a further 15% should be given to the waiter. A guard who shows you something at an archaeological site expects a pound or two. Asking for directions is about the only service that is baksheesh-exempt.

POST

Postcards cost E£1.15 to post and take five days to get to Europe and a week to 10 days to the USA and Australia. Letters of 20g cost between E£1.60 and E£2.20 (depending on destination) and 1kg parcels cost between E£65.40 and E£88.40 to send surface mail. Blue post boxes are for international airmail.

SHOPPING

Egypt has a long lineage in arts and crafts, as a glimpse of Tutankhamen's treasure amply shows. Hand-made beadwork from Sinai, basketry from the Western Oases, glass from Alexandria and alabaster pots from Luxor form part of that ancient tradition. See the shopping section (p96) for details of specific crafts in the capital area.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Calls can be booked at telephone offices, known as centrales, in main cities. Alternatively, card phones for direct-dial international calls are widely available; telephone cards (E£10, E£15, E£20 and E£30) can be bought at shops and kiosks. Off-peak is from 8pm to 8am Sunday to Thursday, and all day Friday and Saturday.

Egypt's mobile-phone network runs on the GSM system. There are two mobile-phone companies operating in Egypt: **MobiNil** (⁽²⁾) in Cairo 02-760 9090; www.mobinil.com) and **Vodafone** (⁽²⁾) in Cairo 02-529 2000; www.vodafone.com.eg, www.mobileconnect.vodafone.com). Both sell widely available prepaid cards. Mobile-phone numbers begin with an 010 or 012 prefix.

Fax services are available at the main centrales in the big cities. A one-page fax costs E£7.65. TIME

Egyptian time is two hours ahead of GMT.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There are tourist offices throughout Egypt; all provide free maps and brochures. The office in Cairo is notoriously sluggish but in most other big cities staff are immensely helpful.

VISAS

Visas at the airport (US\$15 or €15) are available for nationals of all western European countries, UK, USA, Australia, all Arab countries, New Zealand, Japan and Korea. Nationals from other countries must obtain visas in their countries of residence.

If you are travelling overland you can get a visa at the port in Aqaba, Jordan, before getting the ferry to Nuweiba. If you are coming from Israel, you *cannot* get a visa at the border; you must apply for one from the embassy in Tel Aviv or the consulate in Eilat.

A single-entry visa is valid for a stay of one month and is valid for three months from the time it is issued.

Free entry stamps allowing 15-day visits to Sinai (between Taba and Sharm el-Sheikh, including St Katherine's Monastery but not Ras Mohammed National Park) are issued at Taba, Nuweiba (port), St Katherine's (airport) and Sharm el-Sheikh (airport or port).

Military permits, issued by either the Ministry of the Interior or the border police, are needed to travel in the Eastern Desert south of Shams Allam, on or around Lake Nasser, off-road in the Western Desert, or between the oases of Bahariyya and Siwa. These can be obtained through a safari company or travel agency at least a fortnight in advance.

Visa Extensions & Re-entry Visas

In Cairo, all visa business is carried out at the monolithic, Egypto-Stalinist **Mogamma** (Map pp92-3; Midan Tahrir, Downtown; 论 8am-1.30pm Sat-Wed). Collect and submit a form (window 12 on the 1st floor) with stamps (from window 43), one photograph and photocopies (both available on ground floor) of the photo and visa pages of your passport. The visa extension is processed overnight and available for collection from 9am the next day.

In other cities, extensions of tourist visas (from E£11) are easily obtained at passport offices. Bring one photograph and photocopies of the photo and visa pages of your passport. You have 14 days to apply for an extension after your visa has expired. Thereafter there's a fine of E£100 and you'll need a letter of apology from your embassy.

Visas for Onward Travel

See the Embassies & Consulates section (p121) for contact details.

Eritrea Visas cost US\$30 and are usually issued the same day.

Ethiopia Bring two photos and a return air ticket. Onemonth visas cost US\$69, and are usually issued within 24 hours.

Jordan Visas cost nothing for Australians, US\$20 for UK and US citizens, and are usually issued the same day. Bring one photo.

EGYPT

Libya Visas for independent travel to Libya are not being granted at present.

Sudan Visas take from 24 hours to a month to issue and cost US\$85 for one month; you need a letter of invitation and three photos.

VOLUNTEERING

For voluntary activity in Egypt, contact the **Near East Foundation** (www.neareast.org/main/Egypt), which covers wide-ranging projects including bridge-building, establishing veterinary units, and tutoring classes. Alternatively, try **Volunteers for Peace** (www.vfp.org); with no religious or political affiliation, its agenda focuses on fostering peaceful international relations.

Incidentally, if you have no specialist training, you are unlikely to find voluntary work on archaeological digs.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Hassling is more or less constant in Egypt though assault is rare. To avoid problems, dress conservatively (ie no shorts or bare shoulders except in beach resorts).

A couple of useful Arabic phrases are: *la tilmasni* (don't touch me) and *ihtirim nafsak* (behave yourself). Swearing at would-be Romeos only makes matters worse.

TRANSPORT IN EGYPT

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Most air travellers enter Egypt through Cairo, Alexandria or Sharm el-Sheikh.

Egypt's international and national carrier is **EgyptAir** ((2) 0900 70000; (2) 8am-8pm), which is neither good nor cheap.

DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax is included in each international air ticket. Departure tax at land borders costs E£2 (Sinai-only visas are exempt).

Air tickets bought in Egypt are subject to hefty government taxes, which make them extremely expensive. It is better to fly in on a return or onward ticket to other parts of Africa.

Land Egypt Palest

Egypt has land borders with Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Libya and Sudan. The land border with Sudan, however, is closed and the only way to travel between Egypt and Sudan is to fly or take the Wadi Halfa ferry (p211).

It's worth noting that almost all international bus and ferry tickets must be paid for in US dollars.

ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

The Taba border with Israel is open 24 hours. Taxis or buses to Eilat (4km from the border) are available on the Israeli side, with frequent connections to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The Rafah border is currently closed to foreigners.

Coming from Israel to Egypt, you must have a visa in advance unless your visit is limited to eastern Sinai (see p123) or you have prearranged your entry with an Egyptian tour operator. There is an entry tax of $E \pm 30$ payable at a booth about 1km south of the border on the main road.

Vehicles can be brought into Egypt from Eilat; the amount of entry duty depends on the type of vehicle, but averages about E£100.

JORDAN

From Cairo, there's a twice-weekly Superjet service to Amman (US\$70, 15½ hours), leaving Al-Mazar Garage near Cairo airport on Sunday and Thursday at 5am. There's also a daily East Delta service to Aqaba (US\$41, 10 hours) at 8pm.

Departing Alexandria, there's one daily Superjet service to Amman (US\$72, 18 hours) at 4pm and another to Aqaba (US\$34, 12¹/₂ hours) at 6pm.

These services use the ferry between Nuweiba and Agaba.

LIBYA

Long-distance buses run from Benghazi to Cairo (24 hours). On the Egyptian side of the border, shared taxis go from Sallum and service taxis travel from Marsa Matruh to the Libyan border.

There are service taxis to the border crossing at Amsaad (E£5) and on to Al-Burdi (LD2) in Libya. At present, however, the Libyan government is not granting visas for independent travel to Libya, only for people on tours organised by a recognised Libyan travel agency.

Sea & Lake JORDAN

The excellent fast-ferry service between Nuweiba in Egypt and Aqaba in Jordan leaves Nuweiba at 2pm and takes one hour. One-way tickets cost US\$55, payable only in US dollars. Be at the port two hours before departure. A slow ferry (US\$41/29 per adult/child, 2½ hours) leaves at noon daily.

Free Jordanian visas can be obtained on the ferry if you have an EU, US, Canadian, Australian or New Zealand passport.

SUDAN

The Nile River Valley Transport Corporation (() in Aswan 097-303 348, in Cairo 02-575 9058) runs a twiceweekly car/passenger ferry to Wadi Halfa in Sudan, leaving Aswan on Mondays around noon. Trips take between 16 and 24 hours. You need a Sudanese visa (available from Cairo). Single fares are E£250 for airline-style seat; E£380 for cabin with bunk. The ferry service is occasionally suspended.

Coming from Sudan, you need an Egyptian visa (available from Khartoum). To bring a private vehicle, you must have a *triptyque* (available from automobile clubs) from the country of registration, or pay hefty customs duty.

Tours

Literally thousands of companies offer tours to Egypt. For one of the most famous, try **Thomas Cook** (www.thomascook.com), which has been showing people the pyramids for over a century.

PORT TAX

Egyptian international ferries charge E£50 port tax per person on top of the ticket price.

GETTING AROUND Air

EgyptAir ((2) 0900 70000; (2) 8am-8pm) is the main domestic carrier. Fares are expensive and there are no student discounts. During the high season (October to May), many flights are full so it's wise to book ahead.

Bicycle

While you'd have to have a death wish to contemplate cycling in Cairo, it's a great way of getting round the sights of the Delta and the flat Nile Valley. Cycling is a particular pleasure in Luxor, where hiring a bicycle is cheap (around E£6 per day) and easy. Bringing your own is another matter: police restrictions in Upper Egypt mean that you'll have to take the bike on the train between most points of interest on the Nile.

Boat

From liners plying the Suez Canal to ferries crossing the Nile, transport in Egypt has traditionally taken place on the water, and some form of boat ride is an experience you shouldn't miss. Options include taking a glassbottom boat in Sharm el-Sheikh, crossing the Red Sea to Hurghada, cruising from Luxor to Aswan in luxury, and sailing around the islands near Aswan in a traditional whitesailed felucca.

For more see the Sharm el-Sheikh, Luxor and Aswan sections of this chapter.

Note there are no student discounts on ferry fares.

Bus

Bus services cover almost every destination in Egypt. Deluxe buses, with decent seats, air-con and loud Arabic videos, travel between main cities. Superjet offers the best service. Keep your ticket until you disembark as inspectors board the bus to check fares. There are no student discounts on bus fares.

Car & Motorcycle

Driving in Cairo requires a bewildering knowledge of horn blows and hand gestures. In Upper Egypt the obligation to drive in convoy defeats the purpose of hiring a car, and in the Western Desert police escorts accompany you between the southernmost oases. Some car-hire firms even insist on providing the driver. If you're not put off by this and the numerous checkpoints, then Avis, Budget and Hertz have offices at the airport.

Rates range from US\$50 a day for a Toyota (100km included, US\$0.25 per km thereafter) to US\$90 a day for a Cherokee 4WD, excluding taxes. Fill up when you can – many stations run out of petrol.

EGYPT

The official speed limit is 100km/h on motorways. For those caught speeding, driving licences are confiscated and fines are payable at the police station.

Foreign drivers need an International Driver's License.

Hitching

With police checkpoints throughout Egypt, hitching is not recommended.

Local Transport

Travelling by *servees* (usually microbuses or Peugeot 504 cars) is a quick way of travelling between cities. A driver won't leave until all the seats are paid for.

Calèche (horse-drawn carriages) are a popular way to get around many towns.

Train

The train is rather a hangover from colonial days and in need of modernisation. Travelling by deluxe bus is preferable to the train except on the Cairo to Luxor/Aswan route, when the sleeper service is recommended as something of a train classic. Students with an ISIC card receive discounts of 33% on fares except sleeping-car services.

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Libya

Libya is a crossroads of history, continents and ancient empires. Home to the Mediterranean's richest store of Roman and Greek cities - Sabratha, Cyrene and, above all, Leptis Magna – each of which is overlaid by remnants of Byzantine splendour, it's a place where history comes alive through the extraordinary monuments on its shores. Every corner of cosmopolitan Tripoli resonates with a different period of history. It's where the Sahara meets the Mediterranean.

Libya is also home to Africa's most exceptional and accessible desert scenery. The Sahara engulfs over 90% of the country, offering up vast sand seas the size of small European countries. Visit the enchanting oasis towns of Ghadames and Ghat, where the caravans once showcased the riches of Africa. Marvel at palm-fringed lakes surrounded by sand dunes in the desert's heart. Be bewitched by extinct volcanoes, such as Waw al-Namus, where black sand encircles multicoloured lakes. Go deeper into the desert and experience Jebel Acacus, one of the world's finest open-air galleries of prehistoric rock art.

One important point to note is that visits to Libya can only be made as part of an organised tour. While those of you accustomed to travelling independently would probably love the chance to do so in Libya, remember that Libya is a vast country and on a tour you'll be able to cover so much more territory than you otherwise could. Remember also that organised groups can be as small as a party of one (plus guide) and with most tour companies you can design your own itinerary.

FAST FACTS

LIBYA

- Area 1.8 million sq km
- ATMs One, but likely to be more soon
- Borders Tunisia (Ras Adjir) and Egypt (Amsaad) open; Algeria, Chad, Sudan and (usually) Niger closed to non-Libyans
- Budget US\$50 to US\$100 per day
- Capital Tripoli
- **Languages** Arabic, Berber
- Money Libyan dinar (LD); US\$1 = 1.3LD
- Population 5.5 million
- Seasons Hot (June to August), wet (March and October), dry (rest of the year)
- Telephone Country code 218; international access code 200
- Time GMT/UTC +1
- Visa Arranged as part of organised tour; can be picked up on arrival

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Leptis Magna** (p134) Tread softly through one of the world's best-preserved Roman cities, with exceptional bath complexes, theatres and forums in a stunning seaside location.
- **Tripoli** (p131) Lose yourself in the delightful, whitewashed medina replete with Ottoman mosques and houses and the world-class Jamahiriya Museum.
- Ghadames (p137) Find the oasis town of your imagination in the labyrinthine, palm-fringed old city and the most enchanting caravan post in the Sahara.
- Jebel Acacus (p137) 4WD through the striking mountain range which is home to the indigenous Tuareg and magnificent 12,000-year-old rock art.
- Waw al-Namus (p138) Marvel at the remote volcanic crater, off the beaten track in the heart of the Sahara, with black sand and red, green and blue lakes.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Libva is at its best in November and from February to April. Summer (June to September) is generally very hot with average temperatures on the coast around 30°C, often accompanied by high humidity. Don't think of going into the desert from mid-May until October, when temperatures reach a sweltering 55°C. Desert nights can drop below freezing.

ITINERARIES

Two Weeks Two weeks is the minimum time required to get a real taste of the country. Tripoli (p131) deserves at least two days (preferably one at the begin-

VISITING LIBYA

Since late 2000, visits to Libya have only been possible as part of organised tours and visas are only issued to those with an invitation from a Libyan tour company. The official reason for such a rule is that freewheeling European tourists were caught red-handed trying to take priceless antiquities and prehistoric rock art out of the country.

You will at all times be accompanied by a guide from the Libyan tour company who organised your visa and is responsible for you throughout your stay. Discuss your itinerary in advance with the tour operator, although most likely you will have little choice when it comes to hotels and restaurants. All your transport while in Libya will be similarly organised by the tour operator and, apart from domestic air travel, it is highly unlikely that you will travel by public transport. For this reason, we have covered sleeping, eating and transport options only in brief throughout this chapter.

For a full list of Libyan tour operators, see p141. Information on obtaining visas can be found on p140.

HOW MUCH?

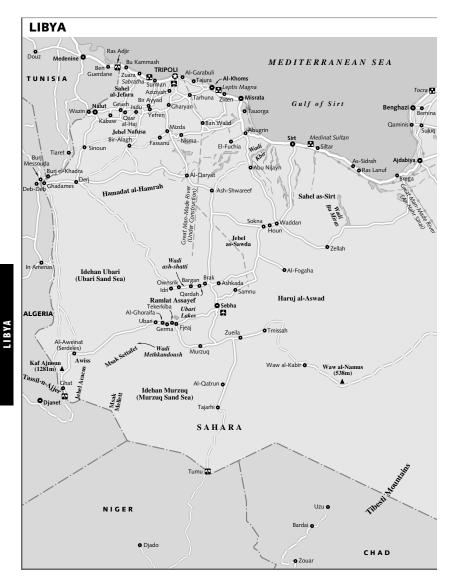
- Museum admission US\$2.40
- Tripoli-Sebha flight US\$30
- Colonel Qaddafi watch US\$4 to US\$32
- Internet connection per hour US\$0.80
- 4WD hire per day US\$71

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.10
- 1L bottled water US\$0.80
- Bottle of (nonalcoholic) beer US\$1.20
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$9
- Shwarma US\$0.80

ning and another at the end of your trip), with a further day each for Leptis Magna (p134) and Sabratha (p134). You can see the best of the Jebel Nafusa (p136) on a long day en route to Nalut (p136) or Ghadames (p137); you'll need at least a minimum of a good half day for the latter. Crossing to the Ubari Lakes (p137) takes a minimum of two days. Allow a few days for the Jebel Acacus (p137). Flying back to Tripoli saves a full day's journey by road.

One Month With a month you could see everywhere covered in this chapter. Adding Waw al-Namus (p138) and Ghat (p137) to the two-week itinerary is a must, while you could also spend more time exploring the Idehan Ubari and Jebel Acacus. A week in Cyrenaica visiting the ancient cities of



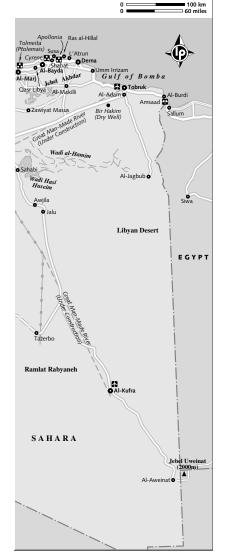
Cyrene (p135), Apollonia (p136), as well as Benghazi (p135) and Tobruk (p136) should round off your trip nicely.

HISTORY

Throughout history Libya has been blighted by its geography, lying in the path of invading empires and someone else's war.

The Great Civilisations of Antiquity

From 700 BC, Lebdah (Leptis Magna), Oea (Tripoli) and Sabratha formed some of the links in a chain of safe Phoenician (Punic) ports stretching from the Levant around to Spain. Traces of the Phoenician presence in Libya remain at Sabratha (p134) and Leptis Magna (p134).



On the advice of the Oracle of Delphi, in 631 BC Greek settlers established the city of Cyrene (p135) in the east of Libya. Within 200 years the Greeks had built four more cities of splendour as part of the Pentapolis (Five Cities), which included Apollonia (p136). But with Greek influence on the wane, the last Greek ruler, Ptolemy Apion, finally bequeathed the region of Cyrenaica to Rome in 75 BC.

Meanwhile, the fall of the Punic capital at Carthage (in Tunisia) prompted Julius Caesar to formally annex Tripolitania in 46 BC. The Pax Romana saw Tripolitania and Cyrenaica become prosperous Roman provinces. Such was Libya's importance that a Libyan, Septimus Severus, became Rome's emperor (r AD 193–211).

Islamic Libya

In AD 643, Tripoli and Cyrenaica had fallen to the armies of Islam. From 800, the Abbasidappointed emirs of the Aghlabid dynasty repaired Roman irrigation systems, restoring order and bringing a measure of prosperity to the region, while the mass migration of two tribes – the Bani Salim and Bani Hilal – from the Arabian Peninsula forever changed Libya's demographics. The Berber tribespeople were displaced from their traditional lands and the new settlers cemented the cultural and linguistic Arabisation of the region.

The Ottomans occupied Tripoli in 1551. The soldiers sent by the sultan to support the Ottoman pasha (governor) grew powerful and cavalry officer Ahmed Karamanli seized power in 1711. His Karamanli dynasty would last 124 years. The Ottoman Turks finally reined in their erstwhile protégés in 1835 and resumed direct control over much of Libva.

On 3 October 1911, the Italians attacked Tripoli claiming somewhat disingenuously to be liberating Libya from Ottoman rule. During almost three decades of brutal Italian rule, a quarter of Libya's population died as a result of the occupation.

With the onset of WWII, devastating fighting broke out in the area around Tobruk. By January 1943, Tripoli was in British hands and by February the last German and Italian soldiers were driven from Libya.

Qaddafi's Libya

Desperately poor Libya became independent in 1951, but the country's fortunes were transformed by the discovery of oil in 1959 at Zelten in Cyrenaica. Over the decade that followed, Libya was transformed from an economic backwater into one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

With the region in turmoil, it came as no surprise when a Revolutionary Command Council, led by a little-known but charismatic 27-year-old Mu'ammar Qaddafi, seized power in Libya on 1 September 1969. Riding on a wave of anti-imperialist anger, the new leader closed British and American military bases, expanded the armed forces and closed all newspapers, churches and political parties. Some 30,000 Italian settlers were deported.

As the colonel balanced his political theories of participation for all Libyans with the Revolutionary Committees that became famous for assassinating political opponents throughout Europe, the US accused Libya of involvement in a string of terrorist attacks across Europe and on 15 April 1986, the US Navy fired missiles into Tripoli and Benghazi.

After Libyan agents were charged with the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie and the 1989 explosion of a French UTA airliner over the Sahara, UN sanctions came into effect. Finally, in early 1999, a deal was brokered and the suspects were handed over for trial by Scottish judges in The Hague. The sanctions, which had cost Libya over US\$30 billion in lost revenues and production capacities, were immediately lifted.

LIBYA

Libya today is like a country awakening from a nightmare. Libya's payment of compensation to victims of the Lockerbie disaster and its announcement on 19 December 2003 that it would abandon its chemical and nuclear weapons programmes, finally ended its international isolation. Suddenly, Libya was the West's best friend, held up as an example to so-called rogue states across the region.

World leaders have since flocked to Libya, the US will soon reopen its embassy in Tripoli, and Western businesspeople are clamouring for lucrative oil contracts. The Libyan government has promised far-reaching economic reforms as part of its plans to overhaul Libya's moribund economy.

CULTURE

In some ways, Libyans are everything that Colonel Qaddafi isn't - reserved, famed for tolerance and discreet. They are self-sufficient and wonderful improvisers, characteristics fostered during the long years of sanctions. Libyans are also deeply attached to their land, proud of it and even loathe to leave it, especially at such an exciting time in their history. Libyans never forget where they came from,

whether it be their home village or the dark years of isolation. Surprisingly knowledgeable about the world, they remain refreshingly untouched by it. Above all, for the first time in decades, Libyans are optimistic, convinced that the future is theirs.

Life revolves around the family, a bond that took on added significance during the years of international isolation when Libyan society turned inwards in search of company and support. Grafted onto the immediate family are multiple layers of identity, among them extended family, tribe and village, with an overarching national component of which every Libyan is proud.

Libyan women nominally have equal status with men, from marriage and divorce laws to rights of equal pay in the workplace. The reality is somewhat different from the theory, with men still the predominant players of public life and few women reaching the summit of any industry.

PEOPLE

Libya's population density (less than three per square kilometre) is one of the lowest in the world. Up to 90% of people live in urban centres, in stark contrast to Libya's pre-oil days, when less than 25% lived in cities. Libya also has an overwhelmingly youthful population, with almost half under 15 years of age.

Libya's demographic mix is remarkably homogenous - 97% are of Arab or Berber origin. Other groups include the Tuareg and Toubou, who both inhabit Libya's southern desert regions.

More than 95% of Libya's population is Sunni Muslim with most following the Maliki school of Quranic interpretation, which preaches the primacy of the Quran (as opposed to later teachings) and tolerance.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Libva's best-known writer is Ibrahim al-Kouni, whose works reveal a fascination with the desert. He has published eight volumes of short stories and a number of novels, including The Bleeding of the Stone and Anubis, which have both been translated into English. Al-Kouni may soon be eclipsed by Hisham Matar, a young novelist from an exiled Libyan family whose In the Country of Men took the literary world by storm in 2006.

One of the most famous traditional music forms in Libya is the celebratory mriskaawi,

which came from Murzug and forms the basis for the lyrics of many Libyan songs. Malouf, with its origins in Andalucía, involves a large group of seated revellers singing and reciting poetry of a religious nature or about love.

Important popular singers to watch out for include Mohammed Hassan, Salmin Zarou and Ayman al-Aathar.

ENVIRONMENT

Libya is the fourth-largest country in Africa; it's twice the size of neighbouring Egypt and over half the size of the EU. Despite the fertile coastal plain of Sahel al-Jefara, and the mountains of Jebel Nafusa and Jebel Akhdar in northern Libya, 95% of the country is swallowed up by the Sahara Desert.

Apart from desert species such as gazelles, fennec foxes, wolves, snakes, scorpions and the notoriously shy waddans (large goatlike deer), Libya's once-abundant wildlife has largely been wiped out.

Colonel Qaddafi's brainchild - the Great Man-Made River, which pipes water from vast under-desert reservoirs to thirsty coastal cities – is a temporary solution for a country critically short on water and there are increasing concerns over the project's long-term environmental impact.

Other environmental concerns include Libya's near-total dependence on fossil fuels for its power needs and the rubbish that all too often litters Libya's wilderness.

FOOD & DRINK

The staple tourist diet consists of couscous and chicken in Tripolitania and the Fezzan, with rice replacing couscous in Cyrenaica. For a little variety, there are also macaroni-based dishes inspired by the Italians; vegetable stews and potatoes might be a recurring theme if you're lucky.

Tripoli, Benghazi and a few other cities have some wonderful restaurants serving dishes of great variety. Particular highlights are the seafood dishes at specialist fish restaurants in Tripoli.

Many restaurants will assume that you will have a banquet-style meal, which consists of soup, salad, a selection of meat (or fish) dishes, rice or couscous, a few vegetables and tea or coffee.

Vegetarians should always specify their requirements as soon as they arrive in the restaurant. Vegetarianism is rare in Libya,

but most restaurants are obliging and keen to make sure you don't leave hungry.

For drinks, soft drinks and bottled mineral water will be your staples, along with coffee or tea. Nonalcoholic beer is also widely available.

TRIPOLI

2 021 / pop 1.15 million

Set on one of North Africa's best natural harbours, Tripoli exudes a distinctive Mediterranean charm infused with a decidedly Arabic-Islamic flavour. Tripoli (Al-Tarablus in Arabic) is Libya's largest and most cosmopolitan city. Its rich mosaic of historical influences - from Roman ruins and artefacts to the Ottoman-era medina - will leave few travellers disappointed.

ORIENTATION

The city's most recognisable landmark is the castle, Al-Saraya al-Hamra, at the eastern corner of the medina alongside the central Martyrs Sq (Green Sq). All the main shopping and business streets radiate from the square.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Fergiani's Bookshop (🖻 4444873; fergi_u@hotmail .com; Sharia 1st September; 🏵 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Sat-Thu) An excellent selection of hard-to-find Englishlanguage books on Libya.

Emergency

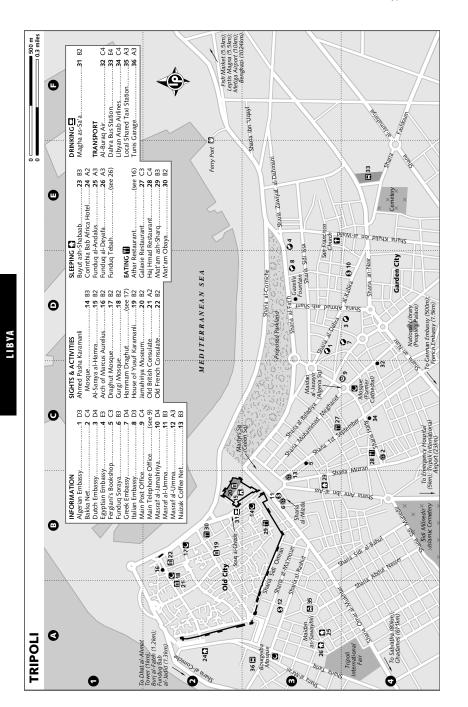
Emergency Hospital (2 121) Five kilometres south of the centre

Internet Access

Bakka Net (cnr Sharias Mizran & Haity; per hr US\$0.80; State in the second state of the second state in the second state of the second state is the second state of the second state Fundug al-Soraya (per hr US\$0.80; 🕑 9am-midnight Sat-Thu, 5pm-midnight Fri) Off Sharia Omar al-Mukhtar.

Monev

The most easily accessible masraf (banks) are in the streets between Martyrs Sq and Maidan al-Jezavir (Algeria Sq). Masraf al-Tijara Watanmiya (Bank of Commerce & Development) has a branch on the ground floor of the Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 1 and on the 1st floor of the Burj al-Fateh, where you can obtain cash advances on your Visa card.



Post & Telephone

Main post & telephone office (Maidan al-Jezayir; Sam-10.30pm Sat-Thu) The telephone office, where you can make international and local calls, is on your left as you enter the main post office hall.

Travel Agencies

See p141 for a list of the tour operators and travel agencies operating out of Tripoli.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Housed in the eastern corner of the sturdy Al-Saraya al-Hamra (Tripoli Castle or Red Castle), the Jamahiriya Museum (🗃 3330292; Martyrs Sq; adult/child US\$2.40/0.80, camera/video US\$4/8; 9am-1pm Tue-Sun) is home to one of the finest collections of classical art anywhere in the Mediterranean. The museum, developed in consultation with Unesco, provides a comprehensive overview of all periods of Libyan history and is especially strong on Roman and Greek Libya.

Tripoli's whitewashed medina mostly dates from the Ottoman period, although it is watched over by the Arch of Marcus Aurelius, the only intact remnant of the ancient Roman city of Oea and completed in AD 163 to 164. Nearby, the 19th-century Gurgi Mosque has one of the most beautiful interiors in the city with imported marble pillars from Italy, ceramic tilework from Tunisia and intricate stone carvings from Morocco. The 16th-century Draghut Mosque has elegantly rendered pillars and arches (15 in the prayer hall alone), while the Ahmed Pasha Karamanli Mosque, the largest mosque in the medina, has a beautiful octagonal minaret and intricate carvings around the five doorways and 30 domes.

Clustered around the north of the medina are the Old British Consulate (Sharia Hara Kebir;

ENTERING MEDINA MOSQUES

None of the mosques in Tripoli's medina have official opening hours, but the custodians of the keys are never far away. A gentle knock on the door should elicit some response if you're prepared to be patient. If no-one appears, ask a nearby shopkeeper who will invariably know where the miftah (key) is. Avoid visiting during prayer time, especially Friday prayers around noon. Entry is free, but a tip for the caretaker is appreciated.

admission US\$1.60, camera/video US\$1.60/4; N 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu), the Old French Consulate (Zenghet el-Fransis; admission US\$1.60, camera/video US\$1.60/4; (>) 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu) and the House of Yusuf Karamanli (admission US\$1.60, camera/video US\$1.60/4; 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu); each is a fine example of an Ottoman mansion arrayed around an interior courtyard.

For a traditional hammam (bathhouse) experience, try Hammam Draghut (Draghut Mosque; steam bath US\$0.80, massage US\$1.60; 🕑 women 7am-5pm Mon, Wed & Thu, men 7am-5pm Tue, Sat & Sun).

SLEEPING

As travel to Libya is only possible as part of an organised tour, you're unlikely to have much choice when it comes to accommodation. If you do get a chance to choose, the following places are recommended.

Buyut ash-Shabaab (Central Youth Hostel; 🖻 4445171; fax 3330118; Sharia Amr ibn al-Ass; dm Hl nonmembers/members US\$3.20/4.80) This hostel is a pretty basic place, but the location is ideal and the shared bathrooms are fine.

Fundug Bab al-Jadid (🕿 3350670; fax 3350670; Sharia al-Comiche; s/dU\$\$24/32; 🕄) With a good seafront location, this popular place is outstanding. It has small but spotless, well-appointed rooms.

Funduq al-Deyafa (2 4448182; diafatip@hotmail .com; Sharia al-Raza; s/d US\$32/39; 😢) A good choice in the area, Funduq al-Deyafa is as friendly as Funduq al-Andalus, although the rooms lack character.

Funduq Tebah (🖻 3333575; www.tebah-ly.com; Sharia al-Raza; s/d US\$32/39; 🕄) Similarly impressive, this place has very tidy rooms with exactly the kind of attention to detail that government hotels lack.

Fundug al-Andalus (23343777; www.andalushotel .com; Sharia al-Kindi; s/d US\$39/48; 🕄) It can be hard to choose between the new private hotels, but our favourite is Funduq al-Andalus, which has all the necessary bells and whistles - satellite TV, minibar, air-conditioning - but with decoration that is more stylish than most and service that is attentive.

Corinthia Bab Africa Hotel (🖻 3351990; tripoli@ corinthia.com; Soug al-Thulatha; d from US\$290; P 🔀 () A towering temple of glass and elegance, this is Libya's classiest hotel. The rooms are enormous and luxurious, the restaurants of the highest order, and the service and facilities everything you'd expect for the price.

EATING & DRINKING

Haj Hmad Restaurant ((20) 0913136367; Sharia Haity; meals from US\$6; (20) lunch & dinner) Haj Hmad is a great place to enjoy traditional Libyan dishes heavy on internal organs, feet and heads. But there are plenty of nonoffal dishes to choose from (including fish and beans) and it's popular with locals – always a good sign.

Mat'am Obaya (Óbaya Seafood Restaurant; ② 0925010736; Souq al-Turk 114; meals US\$8 ∑ lunch Sat-Thu) This place is small with no pretensions to luxury, but there's no finer seafood in Libya and all of it's home-cooked. The stuffed calamari is the tastiest restaurant dish you'll find and the *shola* (fish with sauce) is not far behind.

Mat'am ash-Sharq (Mat'am al-Bourai; (20) 0913157772; Sharia al-Halqa; meals from US\$8; (22) lunch & dinner) Above one of the liveliest thorough fares in the medina, this bright, busy restaurant has excellent food. Its speciality is the delicious *rishda* (noodles with chickpeas and onions).

Galaxie Restaurant () 4448764; galaxie_libya@ yahoo.com; Sharia 1st September 135; meals US\$11-14;) lunch & dinner) One of the best restaurants in the area, Galaxie is tastefully decorated and does the usual dishes with a touch more imagination than similar places elsewhere. The *jara* (meat stew) is excellent, but needs to be ordered three hours in advance. **Athar Restaurant** () 4447001; meals US\$13-16;

© lunch & dinner) This excellent place, next to the Arch of Marcus Aurelius, has a wonderful location and the outdoor tables are among the most pleasant in Tripoli. The high-quality food ranges from more traditional couscous or tajine (a lightly spiced lamb dish with a tomato-and-paprika-based sauce) to mixed grills and fish. Visa_cards are accepted.

Magha as-Sa'a (**©** 0925032511; Maydan al-Sa'a; ***** 7am-2am) Opposite the Ottoman clock tower in the medina, this is Tripoli's outstanding traditional teahouse.

For a totally different eating experience, head 5.5km east of the port along the road to Tajura where there's a ramshackle fish market. Choose the fish or other seafood that you want, buy it and then take it to one of the basic restaurants where they'll grill it for you for a small fee (around US\$1.20).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Libyan Arab Airlines ((2) 3331143; www.libyanarabairline .com; Sharia Haity) flies from Tripoli International Airport, 25km south of the city, and **Al-Buraq Air** ((2) 4444811; www.buraqair.com; Sharia Mohammed Megharief) flies from Metiga Airport, 10km east of Tripoli. They both operate domestic flights to Benghazi (from US\$30). Libyan Arab Airlines also flies to Ghat (US\$44, twice weekly) and Sebha (US\$30, daily).

Long-distances buses and shared taxis for most cities around Libya depart from the area near Tunis Garage at the western end of Sharia al-Rashid or Dahra Bus Station; the latter is 1.5km east of the centre.

GETTING AROUND

A private taxi to/from Tripoli International Airport costs US\$8. Elsewhere in the city, a trip rarely costs more than US\$1.60.

NORTHERN LIBYA

SABRATHA

The ruins of ancient **Sabratha** (2024-622214; admission US\$2.40, compulsory guide US\$40, camera/video US\$4/8; 3am-6.30pm), 80km west of Tripoli, are among the highlights of any visit to Libya, especially as they are home to one of the finest theatres of antiquity.

Settled by the Phoenicians in the 4th century BC, Sabratha was resettled by the Greeks in the 2nd century BC. In the 1st century AD, the Romans made the city their own.

Highlights of Sabratha include the mosaics and frescoes of the **Roman Museum** (admission US\$2.40; 🕑 8am-6pm Tue-5un) as well as the elevated **Antonine Temple**, Judicial Basilica, Roman forum, the **Capitoleum** and the **Temple of Liber Pater**, which dominate the monumental heart of Sabratha. The 6th-century **Basilica of Justinian** is the finest remnant of Byzantine Sabratha, but it is the magnificent 2nd-century Roman **thea tre** that will live longest in the memory. The largest in Africa, its three-tiered façade with 108 fluted Corinthian columns is adorned with exquisite carvings of Roman divinities.

Most groups visit Sabratha on a day trip from Tripoli.

LEPTIS MAGNA

Leptis Magna (Lebdah in Arabic; ☎ 031-624256; admission US\$2.40, compulsory guide US\$40, camera/video US\$4/8; 𝔅 8am-6.30pm) is one of the best-preserved, most evocative Roman cities in the Mediterranean. It's a testament to extravagance with examples of lavish decoration, grand buildings of monumental stature, indulgent bath complexes and forums for entertainment. First settled in the 7th century BC, Leptis Magna became Africa's premier Roman city during the reign of Leptis' favourite son, Septimus Severus (r AD 193–211).

The ornately carved **Arch of Septimus Severus** is a grand introduction to the architectural opulence of Leptis, but its grandeur is rivalled by the superb **Hadrianic Baths**, one of the social hubs of the ancient city. Equally splendid are the **Severan Forum**, **Severan Basilica**, the octagonal halls of the **market** and Leptis' **theatre**, one of the oldest stone theatres anywhere in the Roman world. Around 1km east of the city is the evocative **amphitheatre** (admission US52.40, camera/video US\$4/8; 🏵 8am-6.30pm Tue-Sun), which once held 16,000 people and overlooks the Roman **circus** where chariot races were held. Close to the site entrance, the **museum** (admission US52.40; 𝔅 8am-6.30pm Tue-Sun) is outstanding.

Although most people visit Leptis on a day trip from Tripoli, it's possible to camp (US\$4) in car park No 1 under the pine and eucalyptus trees. In the neighbouring town of Al-Khoms, the following accommodation options are all recommended:

Inside Leptis, between the ticket office and the museum, is **Mat'am Addiyafa** ($\textcircled{\baselinetwise}$ ($\textcircled{\baselinetwise}$ bus) (1.80; $\textcircled{\baselinetwise}$ lunch), with a good atmosphere.

BENGHAZI

🖻 061 / pop 650,629

Libya's second-largest city makes a comfortable base for exploring the ancient cities of eastern Libya. While it may lack the cosmopolitan charm of Tripoli and has few monuments to its ancient past, Benghazi is known for its pleasant climate and friendly people.

Benghazi's **Old Town Hall** runs along the western side of **Freedom Sq**. It's largely derelict, but strong traces of its former elegance remain in its whitewashed Italianate façade. The covered **Souq al-Jreed** stretches for more than a kilometre and, like any African market worth its salt, it offers just about anything you could want and plenty that you don't.

If you end up staying at any of the following places, you'll be well pleased.

Funduq an-Nadi Libya ((☎ 3372333; fax 3372334; Sharia Ahmed Rafiq al-Madawi; s/d US\$20/32; (爻) is an excellent place 3km north of the centre. It has comfortable, quiet and spacious rooms with satellite TV.

Built in 2003, **Funduq al-Fadheel** (@ 9099795; elfadeelhotel@hotmail.com; Sharia el-Shatt; s/d from US\$29/43; @) is one of the best hotels in Libya. The pleasant rooms are spacious and well appointed, and come with laundry service. There are two restaurants, a swimming pool, largescreen TVs and an internet café onsite.

One of Benghazi's top hotels, **Funduq Uzu** ((2) 9095160; www.uzuhotel.com; Sharia al-Jezayir; s/d from US\$40/52) has superbly appointed rooms with all the requisite bells and whistles. The buffet breakfasts are among the best in town.

On the northern side of the harbour, **Funduq Tibesti** (**@** 9090017; fax 9098029; Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser; s/d from US\$59/80) is another classy hotel with a luxurious ambience. Facilities include a patisserie, a health club, three coffee shops and four restaurants. Visa card is accepted.

For a bite to eat you can't go past **Mat'am al-'Arabi** (**@** 9094468; Sharia Gulf of Sirt; meals US\$13; **(**) lunch & dinner Sat-Thu, dinner Fri), one of Benghazi's finest restaurants. It has a delightful ambience, with a mosaic floor, tented roof, soft lighting and eminently reasonable price tag.

Benghazi's Bernina Airport handles both international and domestic flights. **Libyan Arab Airlines** (() 9092064; www.libyanarabairline.com; Sharia al-Jezayir) and **Al-Buraq Air** (() 2234469; www .buraqair.com; Bernina Airport) share four daily flights to Tripoli (from US\$30).

There are daily buses and shared taxis to Tripoli, Sirt, Al-Bayda, Sebha and Tobruk from Al-Funduq Market.

Looking out towards the Mediterranean from its hilltop perch, **Cyrene** (admission US\$2.40, compulsory guide US\$40, camera/video US\$4/8; 🕑 8am-6.30pm) rivals Leptis Magna for the title of Libya's most captivating ancient city.

Founded by Greek settlers from the island of Thera (modern Santorini) in 631 BC, Cyrene was the pre-eminent city of the Greek world in the 4th century BC, renowned for its philosophers and scholars. After the change from Greek to Roman administration in 75 BC, it became an important Roman capital.

The large, open **gymnasium**, originally built by the Greeks in the 2nd century BC and later converted by the Romans into a forum, is most people's introduction to the city. Nearby, the mosaics of the House of Hesychius are remarkable, while the agora - the heart of ancient Cyrene - is littered with stunning monuments such as the Temple of the Octagonal Bases, the Naval Monument, the unusual Sanctuary of Demeter & Kore and the Capitoleum. Down the hill from the agora, the Sanctuary of Apollo includes the 6th-century-BC Temple of Apollo and the adjacent Temple of Artemis, which may predate the Apollo temple. The spectacularly situated theatre is also fascinating, while the 5th-century-BC Temple of Zeus, up the hill from the rest of Cyrene, was once larger than the Parthenon in Athens. Cyrene's museum (admission US\$2.40, camera/video US\$4/8; 🕑 8am-6.30pm Tue-Sun), southeast of the Temple of Zeus, has wonderful statues, sculptures and other artefacts that once adorned this extraordinary Graeco-Roman city. Although many tour groups stay in the

cut into one of the caves. Also in the hills around Cyrene **Cave Restaurant** ((a) 635206; elbadertours@hotmail.com; meals from US\$12; (b) lunch), living up to its name, is a friendly, atmospheric place offering tasty food and good views down towards the coast.

nearby town of Al-Bayda, the hills around

Cyrene are home to the Buyut ash-Shabaab (Youth

Hostel: a 637371; camping US\$4, dm HI members/nonmem-

bers US\$2.40/4) and the Cyrene Resort (2 0851-64391;

s/d US\$28/35; P 😫); the latter has pleasant

rooms and an excellent café and restaurant

APOLLONIA

2 084

Another wonderful ancient Greek city, **Apollonia** (admission U\$\$2.40, compulsory guide U\$\$40, camera/ video U\$\$4/8; 💬 8am-7pm Oct-Apr) was the port of Cyrene and came to rival its mother city in significance in the late Roman period. Most of what remains today dates from the Byzantine era when Apollonia was known as the 'city of churches'.

The Apollonia ruins are strung out along a narrow strip of coastline and include the **Western Church**, with its mixture of Roman and Byzantine columns; the 2nd-century **Roman baths** and **gymnasium**; and the **Byzantine Duke's Palace**, once one of the biggest palaces in Cyrenaica. Some mosaics remain in the **Eastern Church**, while the plunging and picturesque **Greek theatre** stands at the eastern reaches of the site. lonelyplanet.com

TOBRUK

🕿 087 / pop 121,052

The **Knightsbridge (Acroma) Cemetery**, 20km west of town, is the largest in Tobruk with 3649 graves of Allied soldiers. Between the Knightsbridge Cemetery and Tobruk is the former battlefield dressing station known as the **Australian (Fig Tree) Hospital**. The **Tobruk (Commonwealth) War Cemetery**, 6km south of the harbour, also has an air of simplicity and dignity and contains 2479 graves. More than 300 soldiers are buried in the **French Cemetery**, 8km south of the harbour, while the names of 6026 German soldiers are inscribed in mosaic slabs lining the inside walls of the **German Cemetery**, a forbidding sandstone fort 3.2km south of the harbour.

Funduq al-Masira ((a) 625761; fax 625769; s/d US\$28/35; (c) is a concrete eyesore on the southwestern corner of the harbour and also happens to be Tobruk's finest hotel with satellite TV in the comfortable rooms.

SOUTHERN LIBYA

JEBEL NAFUSA

The barren Jebel Nafusa (Western Mountains) protect Libya's northeastern coast from the Sahara, which stretches away deep into the heart of Africa from the mountains' southern slopes. It's a land of rocky escarpments and stone villages clinging to outcrops high above the plains. It's worth exploring as you make your way to Ghadames.

Gharyan sprawls across the top of a plateau and has a number of unusual underground Berber houses. It's famous for its pottery.

Further west, **Qasr al-Haj** is home to a stunning *qasr* (fortified granary) that has stored the local harvests since the 12th century. The main courtyard is breathtaking, with the walls completely surrounded by 114 cavelike rooms. Other stunning *qasrs* are to be found in **Kabaw**, which hosts the **Qasr Festival** in April, and **Nalut**.

GHADAMES

🖻 0484 / pop 16,752

The Unesco World Heritage–listed old city of Ghadames has everything that you imagine a desert oasis to have – abundant palm groves, a wonderfully preserved, labyrinthine old town, and a pace of life largely unchanged for centuries. It's an extraordinary place.

The old city was founded around 800 years ago and was occupied by both the Ottomans and Italians. In recent decades, Libya's old cities, including that of Ghadames, have fallen victim to the revolutionary government's push towards modernisation. In 1982–83 the Libyan government began building a new town beyond the walls and new houses were given to Ghadamsis to encourage them to leave the homes of their ancestors. In 1984 there were 6666 people living in the old town; four years later there was just one family left.

Old Ghadames (adult/child US\$2.40/0.80, compulsory guide half/full day US\$32/47, camera/video US\$4/8) is another world of covered alleyways, whitewashed houses and extensive palm gardens irrigated by wells. The old city comprised loosely configured concentric areas containing residential and commercial districts and covering around 10 hectares. The city was divided into seven 'streets', each the domain of a different subsection of the Bani Walid and Bani Wazid tribes. Each 'street' was essentially a self-contained town, with a mosque, houses, schools, markets and a small communal square for public events.

The designers of the **traditional houses** of Ghadames made maximum use of vertical space and visiting one is a must while in Libya. Eye-catching with whitewashed walls and brightly painted interiors, all of the houses were connected. The rooftops were the domain of women in the same way that the public laneways below belonged to men. At least three of the old houses have been stunningly restored and are now open to the public: **Dan Do Omer** (a 62300; dandoomer731@yahoo .com); Dan Bero (ask at Dan Bero Coffee Shop) and Dan Magrumah. Talk to your guide about arranging a visit.

In the new part of town, **Ghadames Museum** ((a) 62225; adult/child US\$2.40/0.80, camera/video US\$4/8; (b) 9am-1.30pm Sat-Thu) is a worthwhile window on old Ghadames.

In October every year, the annual three-day **Ghadames Festival** brings the old city alive in a riot of colour and activity.

Ghadames has a shortage of good accommodation, but there are villas (private homes) that open their doors to travellers all across town (B&B US\$16). Otherwise, Ghadames' best hotels are:

Winzrik Motel (() /fax 82485; camping US\$4, s/d US\$24/ 28; ()

The only problem with **Restaurant Awwal** ($\textcircled{\baselinetic{constraint}{2}}$ ($\textcircled{\baselinetic{constraint}{2}}$ ($\textcircled{\baselinetic{constraint}{2}}$); we have closed. Its chicken and lamb dishes, especially the tajine, are great.

The ultimate eating experience in Ghadames is, however, lunch in one of the traditional houses of the old town. The most frequently prepared meal is the delicious *fitaat* (lentils, mutton and buckwheat pancakes cooked together in a tasty sauce in a low oven and eaten with the hands from a communal bowl). **Dan Do Omer** (a 62300; dandoomer731@yahoo .com) does this to perfection; ask for the owner of the house, At-Tayeb Mohamed Hiba.

IDEHAN UBARI & THE UBARI LAKES

LIBYA

The Idehan Ubari (Ubari Sand Sea) is a dramatic sea of towering sand dunes. There are at least 11 lakes in the area. Although many have dried up and most require longer expeditions, three – pretty **Mavo**, dramatic **Gebraoun** and enchanting **Umm al-Maa** (Mother of Water) – are easily accessible and majestically beautiful at sunset. Swimming in the buoyant waters surrounded by sand dunes and palm trees is one of *the* great desert experiences.

GHAT & THE JEBEL ACACUS © 0724 / pop 24,347

The ancient trading centre of Ghat is one of the most attractive of the Libyan oasis towns. There's an evocative mud-brick **medina** in the heart of town and a superb setting: a backdrop of stunning sand dunes, the dark ridges of Jebel Acacus to the east and the distant peaks of the Tassili-n-Ajjer (in Algeria) to the west.

The Jebel Acacus is an otherworldly landscape of dark basalt stone monoliths rising up from the sands of the central Sahara. This Unesco World Heritage–listed area is home to some wonderful scenery, which features a number of unique natural rock formations enhanced by the ever-shifting sands of the desert, not to

mention prehistoric rock paintings and carvings including elephants, giraffes, wedding ceremonies and dancing human figures.

The **Acacus Festival** (December to January) features a spectacular sunset concert amid the cathedral-like Jebel Acacus, with Tuareg dancing and re-enactments of traditional ceremonies in the medina to bring in the New Year.

WAW AL-NAMUS

The extraordinary volcanic crater of Waw al-Namus is a weird and wonderful place, and one of the most remote destinations in the world, 300km southeast of where the paved road ends at Tmissah. The black-and-white volcanic sand is stunning, as are the three palm-fringed lakes in which the water is red, green and blue. The crater is 7km in circumference and the summit of the rocky mountain in the centre affords stunning views. Be sure to use the existing tracks down into the crater to avoid scarring the landscape for others. Visiting here is a major undertaking and involves a two-day round trip in reliable, well-equipped vehicles. A permit is officially needed to visit Waw al-Namus, but this should be handled by your tour company and the price included in the overall cost of your tour.

LIBYA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Libya has an extensive network of buyut ashshabaab (youth hostels), which are pretty basic but dirt-cheap and fine for a night. As for camping, sleeping on the desert sand under a canopy of stars is free and unrivalled in beauty. Fundua (government-run hotels) are often well situated and possess rooms of a reasonable standard, but service is often dysfunctional. The crop of new private hotels is cheaper, friendlier and much better maintained. Although the choice of hotel is generally a decision for the tour company, if you're armed with good information (such as this guide!), most tour companies are willing to accede to specific requests. Bear in mind, however, that choosing some hotels may increase the cost of your visit from the company's quoted prices.

ACTIVITIES

Desert safaris by 4WD (and occasionally camel) enable you to experience some of the finest scenery the Sahara has to offer. All

PRACTICALITIES

- International newspapers and magazines are not available in Libya.
- Radio coverage in Libya includes the BBC World Service (15.070MHz and 12.095MHz) and other European radio on short wave.
- International satellite TV channels are available in most hotels.
- Libya has the PAL (B) video system, as in Western Europe.
- Libya's electricity system caters for 220V to 240V AC, 50Hz; plugs are of the European-style two-pin type.
- Libya uses the metric system for weights and measures.

Libyan tour companies (p141) can arrange such expeditions lasting from two days up to deep desert expeditions of two weeks.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks 9am to 1pm Sunday to Tuesday and Thursday, 8am to 12.30pm and 3.30pm to 4.30pm or 5.30pm Wednesday & Saturday

Government offices 7am to 2pm Saturday to Thursday April to September, 8am to 3pm Saturday to Thursday October to March

Internet cafés 9am to 1am Saturday to Thursday and 3pm to 1am Friday

Restaurants 12.30pm to 3pm and 6pm to 10pm Saturday to Thursday, 6pm to 10pm Friday

Shops 10am to 2pm and 5pm to 8pm Saturday to Thursday

CUSTOMS

Libyan customs checks on arrival are pretty cursory although bags are X-rayed. Don't even think of trying to bring alcohol into the country. If you're bringing your own car into the country (see p141), expect an hour or two of inspections at the border. Customs inspections upon departure tend to be slightly more rigorous; they're especially concerned about antiquities and fragments from the Saharan rock art of southern Libya.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Libya is a very safe country in which to travel and Libyans are generally a hospitable and friendly bunch. Police checkpoints can be tiresome and slow your journey, but you'll rarely be asked to show identification. Don't point your camera at restricted sites (ie government buildings or police stations). Driving in Libya can be hazardous, with the major danger being people driving at high speed.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Libyan Embassies & Consulates

Libyan embassies abroad are known as Libyan People's Bureaus.

Algeria (
 92 15 02; 15 Chemin Cheikh Bachir el-Ibrahimi, El-Biar, Algiers)

Australia (🖻 02-6290 7900; 50 Culgoa Circuit, O'Malley, ACT 2606)

Canada (🖻 0613-230 0919; Suite 1000, 81 Metcalfe St, Ottawa, Ont K1P6K7)

Chad (🗟 519289; Rue de Mazieras, N'Djaména)

Egypt ((a) 02-735 1269; fax 02-735 0072; 7 Sharia el-Saleh Ayoub, Zamalek)

Netherlands (🖻 020-355 8886; Parkweg 15, 1285 GH, The Hague)

US (212-752 5775; lbyun@undp.org; 309 East 48th St, New York, NY 10017)

Embassies & Consulates in Libya

Countries with diplomatic representation in Tripoli (Map p132) include: Algeria (🖻 021-4440025; Sharia Kairaoun)

Belgium (021-3350115; Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 4, Level 5)

France (201-4774891; Sharia Beni al-Amar, Hay Andalus)

Germany (C 021-3330554; Sharia Hassan al-Mashai) Italy (0 021-3334131; italconstrip@esteri.it; 1 Sharia Uaharan)

Netherlands (© 021-4441549; 20 Sharia Galal Bayar) UK (© 021-3351422; Burj al-Fateh, Level 24) US (c/o US Interests Section, Belgian Embassy)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Qasr Festival (p136) Honours the Berber traditions of the Jebel Nafusa and centres on Kabaw's evocative *qasr*. Held in April.

Ghadames Festival (p137) Held each October in the old city with celebrations of traditional culture and weddings.

Acacus Festival (p137) Held in Ghat during December and January. Celebrates the town's Tuareg heritage and includes concerts in the mountains.

HOLIDAYS

For a full list of religious holidays that are celebrated in Libya, see p1106. The main national holidays include the following: **Declaration of the People's Authority Day** 2 March **British Evacuation Day** 28 March **US Evacuation Day** 11 June **Revolution Day** 1 September **Day of Mourning** 26 October

INTERNET ACCESS

Libya has joined the internet revolution and internet cafés are present in almost every small town – look for the blue Internet Explorer sign on the window. Connections can be slow, and costs range from US\$0.60 per hour in Tripoli to US\$1.20 per hour in remote places.

MAPS

For desert expeditions in remote areas, the most reliable map is Michelin's Map No 953, *Africa North and West* (1:4,000,000). The best maps available in Libya include Malt International's *Map of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya* (1:3,500,000) and Cartographia's *Libya* (1:2,000,000), which would be the map of choice did it not omit the Jebel Acacus and Waw al-Namus.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Libyan dinar. For changing money, the bank and black-market exchange rates are all but identical. Largedenomination euros, US dollars or British pounds are preferred. No banks change travellers cheques – cash is king in Libya.

It's now possible to obtain a cash advance on your Visa card at the Masraf al-Tijara Watanmiya (Bank of Commerce & Development) branches in Tripoli and Benghazi.

POST

Almost every town has a post office; they're easily recognisable by the tall telecommunications mast rising above the centre of town. It costs US\$0.25/0.40 to send a postcard/letter to most places, including Europe and Australia.

TELEPHONE

Libya's telephone country code if you're dialling from outside Libya is 218. To make an

international call from inside Libya, dial 00 and then the number. Area codes (listed beneath each destination heading) are required as a prefix to numbers listed throughout this chapter if you're calling long distance. Numbers beginning with 091 or 092 are Libyan mobile numbers.

Calls within Libya invariably receive instant connections and are quite cheap (around US\$0.20). The cheapest international phone calls are made in internet cafés; most cafés sell 8LD (US\$6.30) cards and can help you connect. For 8LD, you will have 210/145/152 minutes to the UK/USA/Italy.

You're unlikely to get coverage for your mobile phone in Libya – check with your company at home before travelling.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Libya's Tourism Ministry operates as an overseer of the tourism industry and tour companies rather than sources of practical information. Your tour company should be able to provide you with all the information you need.

To obtain a Libyan visa, you'll need an invitation from a Libyan tour company. The tour company will then send you a visa number. Make sure you have an Arabic-language confirmation to smooth the process with airlines, the embassy or immigration officials. You can collect your visa either from the Libyan embassy in your home country or at your entry point to Libya, but specify which you prefer when making contact with the tour company. The process generally takes two weeks, but allowing for a month is safer. Visas are valid for 30 days from the date of entry. For a list of Libyan tour operators, see opposite.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas to Tunisia and Egypt are available at the border crossings, while visas to Chad, Sudan, Niger and Algeria are not available from the embassies of these respective countries in Tripoli.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

In general, Libya is one of the easiest countries in North Africa for women to travel in, largely because of Libyan government policies in relation to women that have contributed to a less-misunderstood view of Western women than in some other countries of the region. As a result, most female travellers have reported being treated with respect, with few incidents of unpleasant behaviour.

TRANSPORT IN LIBYA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

The vast majority of international flights into Libya arrives at Tripoli International Airport, Benghazi's Bernina Airport. A small number of flights also use Tripoli's Metiga Airport and Sebha's airport.

Many airlines serve Tripoli, including the following:

Afriqiyah Airways (🖻 021-3333647; www.afriqiyah .aero)

Air Malta (@ 021-3350579; www.airmalta.com) Alitalia (@ 021-3350298; www.alitalia.com) Austrian Airlines (@ 021-3350242; www.aua.com) British Airways (@ 021-3351281; www.britishairways .com)

Emirates (@ 021-3350597; www.emirates.com) KLM Royal Dutch Airlines (@ 021-3350018; www .klm.com)

Lufthansa (201-3350375; www.lufthansa.com) Point-Afrique (www.point-afrique.com) Royal Jordanian (201-4442453; www.rja.com.jo) Swiss International Airlines (201-3350022; www

swiss.com)

Land

Libya's borders with Algeria, Chad, Niger and Sudan were not open to travellers at the time of writing. Niger's border does open from time to time depending on the political winds; check the situation in Tripoli before setting out as it's a long road back to anywhere if it's closed.

EGYPT

The Libya–Egypt border, 139km east of Tobruk at Amsaad and 12km west of Sallum in Egypt, is remote, chaotic and, in summer, perishingly hot; bring your own water. Foreign travellers are often, embarrassingly, shepherded to the front of the queue. We've never heard of anyone turning down such an offer as a matter of principle. Long-distance buses run from Benghazi to Cairo (24 hours). On the Egyptian side of the border, shared taxis go from Sallum and service taxis travel from Marsa Matruh to the Libyan border, where your Libyan tour operator will meet you by prior arrangement.

TUNISIA

To get to Libya many travellers fly to Tunisia (for which there are numerous cheap flights) and then cross the Tunisia–Libya border by land at Ras Adjir. There are numerous buses and shared taxis between Tripoli and Tunis (10 to 12 hours), although most travellers take a Tunisian shared taxi from Sfax or Ben Guerdane as far as the border, where their Libyan tour company will meet them and arrange onward travel.

GETTING AROUND

In this era of organised tours, getting around Libya couldn't be easier because all transport within the country will be organised by your tour company.

Air

Libya's domestic airline network is expanding rapidly with flights connecting Tripoli to Benghazi, Ghat, Houn, Lebreq (near Al-Bayda) and Sebha. There are also occasional flights to Ghadames, with more regular flights planned.

The two airlines that fly domestically in Libya are **Al-Buraq Air** (2012) 021-4444811; www.buraqair .com) and **Libyan Arab Airlines** (2012) 021-3616738; www .libyanarabairline.com).

Car & Motorcycle

If you have your own vehicle, especially a 4WD, there are few limits on where you can go – the Tibesti region in the far southeast of the country is one area that is off-limits to travellers. You must be accompanied by at least one representative of the Libyan tour company who arranged your visa and who remains responsible for you for the duration of your stay. For information on customs inspections when bringing your own car into the country, see p138.

Driving is on the right-hand side of the road, and Libyans generally drive as fast as they think they can get away with. For the record, all cars (including 4WDs) must stay on or below 100km/h on highways and 50km/h inside towns.

NO ANSWER, TRY AGAIN

Libya has numerous professionally run tour companies, although all of them suffer from an occasional inability to answer emails promptly. In fact, many don't answer at all. The actual visa process takes only a couple of weeks, but you're advised to start contacting tour companies long before that to take into account the incomprehensible periods of silence from Tripoli. This problem particularly afflicts lone travellers, but is something of an established Libyan business practice in all fields. Be persistent by following up with phone calls and, as a last resort, threaten to write to us if visa deadlines are approaching.

Libyan roads are maintained in excellent condition and petrol is cheap; you'll fill your tank for around US\$4. No matter how many times you've been waved through a checkpoint, never assume that you will be. Always slow down or stop until you get the wave from your friendly machine-gun-toting soldier.

LIBYA

Tours

The following companies are among those that we either recommend or have had recommended to us by travellers. All are based in Tripoli unless stated otherwise.

Al-Muheet Tours (a in Benghazi 061-9082084; www .almuheettours.net) The owner, Samy al-Ghibani, has a reputation for running an efficient and flexible company. It's Benghazi-based.

Destination Libye (a) in Tripoli 021-4779854; www.dli bye.com) Specialises in French-language tours.

Robban Tourism Services ((2) 021-4441530; www .robban-tourism.com) Outstanding and professional small company with flexible itineraries and good guides; Hussein Founi should be your first port of call.

Sahara Link Travel (🖻 021-3343209; saharalink@ hotmail.com)

Shati Zuara Travel & Tourism () in Zuara 091315 8229; www.shati-zuara.de in German) Very good Libyan company with its main base in Germany.

Sukra Travel & Tourism (🖻 021-3340604; www.sukra -travel.com)

Taknes Co ((a) 021-3350526; fax 021-3350525) The owner is the helpful Ali Shebli.

Wings Travel & Tours ((a) 021-3331855; www.wings tours.com)

Winzrik Tourism Services ((a) 021-3611123; www.winz rik.com) Libya's largest and longest-standing tour company.

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Morocco

Morocco is sensory overload at its most intoxicating, from the scents and sounds that permeate the medinas of Fès and Marrakesh to the astonishing sights of the landscape.

Morocco has always been a crossroads between Africa, Europe and the Middle East, and nowhere evokes this sense more than Tangier, that faded poster boy for Europe's often decadent but sometimes creative presence on Moroccan shores. From Tangier, turn south along Morocco's Atlantic Coast and you'll be accompanied by a sea breeze that massages the ramparts of wonderful cities whose names - Essaouira, Casablanca, Asilah, Rabat - and atmosphere carry a whiff of African magic. Travel east along the Mediterranean coast and you'll be bidden into enchanting towns and the mountains of the Rif.

If it's mountains you love, Morocco has them in abundance, rising from the Rif into the Middle Atlas and on into the extraordinary contours of the High Atlas. This is land custom-built for trekking as you follow quiet mountain trails amid Berber villages and fields of flowers.

Then, suddenly, everything changes. The mountains fissure into precipitous gorges the colour of the earth, mud-brick kasbahs turn blood-red with the setting sun and the sense that one has stumbled into a fairytale takes hold. From rocky fortresses such as these, the Sahara announces its presence in Morocco with perfectly sculpted seas of sand.

At journey's end, the solitude of the Sahara is ideal for contemplating why it is that Morocco has such cachet. The answer is simple: there is no place on earth guite like it.

FAST FACTS

- Area 446.550 sg km (710.000 sg km if vou include Western Sahara)
- ATMs Throughout the country except in small villages
- Borders Algeria closed; Mauritania open but no public transport
- Budget US\$15 to US\$25 per day
- Capital Rabat
- Languages Arabic, French, Berber
- Money Dirham (Dh); US\$1 = Dh8.5
- Population 33.2 million
- Seasons Hot (June to August), cold (November to February)
- Telephone Country code 🛱 212; international access code 🛱 00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visas 90-day visas issued on entry for most nationalities

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marrakesh (p178) Dive into the clamour and endless spectacle that is Morocco's most dynamic city.
- Fès (p161) Lose yourself in the exotic charms of a medieval city replete with sights, sounds and smells.
- **Essaouira** (p173) Laze by the sea in Morocco's coolest and most evocative resort.
- High Atlas (p185) Trek deep into a world of stunning scenery and isolated Berber villages.
- Drâa Valley (p186) Explore Morocco's richest collection of kasbahs and then soak up the solitude of the Sahara.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Morocco is at its best in spring (mid-March to May), when the country is lush and green, followed by autumn (September to November), when the heat of summer has eased. At other times, don't underestimate the extremes of summer heat and winter, particularly in the High Atlas, where snowcapped peaks persist from November to July. If you are travelling in winter, head for the south, although be prepared for bitterly cold nights. The north coast and the Rif Mountains are frequently wet and cloudy in winter and early spring.

Apart from the weather, the timing of Ramadan (the traditional Muslim month of fasting and purification, which occurs during September or October depending on the calendar) is another important consideration as some restaurants and cafés close during the day and general business hours are reduced.

ITINERARIES

- **Two Weeks** From Tangier (p151), head to Tetouan (p156) or the mountains around chilled-out Chefchaouen (p157), where you'll end up staying longer than you planned. Then make a beeline for Fès (p161) and Marrakesh (p178), imperial cities in the Moroccan interior that deserve as much time as you can spare. If you've time, a detour to artsy Essaouira (p173) is a wonderful way to step down a gear after the onslaught of Morocco's most clamorous cities.
- **One Month** Follow the itinerary above, but on your way south check out cosmopolitan Casablanca (p169), imperial Rabat (p147) or laid-back Asilah (p169), depending on your inclination. Save time

HOW MUCH?

- Dorm bed US\$3.40 to US\$5
- Pot of mint tea US\$0.60
- Museum admission US\$1.20
- Hammam US\$1.20
- Petit-taxi ride US\$1.20

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.20
- 1L bottled water US\$0.60
- Bottle of Flag US\$0.50 to US\$0.70
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$12
- Grilled brochette US\$3.40 to US\$4.50

also for a detour to Meknès (p166) while you're in Fès. Count on a three-day round trip from Marrakesh to trek up Jebel Toubkal (p185), and four or five days to explore Aït Benhaddou (p186), Todra Gorge (p188), Dadès Gorge (p188), the Drâa Valley (p186) and the sand dunes around Merzouga (p189).

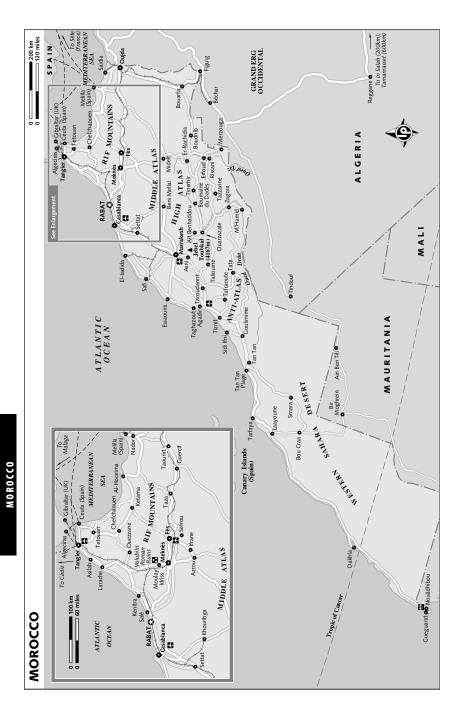
HISTORY Live Free or Die Trvina: The Berbers

Morocco's first-known inhabitants were Near Eastern nomads who may have been distant cousins of the ancient Egyptians. Phoenicians appear to have arrived around 800 BC, and when the Romans arrived in the 4th century BC, they called the expanse of Morocco and western Algeria 'Mauretania' and the indige-nous people 'Berbers', meaning 'barbarians'. In the 1st century AD, the Romans built up

Volubilis into a city of 20,000 (mostly Berber) people, but, fed up with the persistently unruly Berbers, the Roman emperor Caligula declared the end of Berber autonomy in North Africa in AD 40. But whereas the Vandals and Byzantines failed to oust the Romans from their home turf. Berbers in the Rif and the Atlas ultimately succeeded through a campaign of near-constant harassment - a tactic that would later put the squeeze on many an unpopular Moroccan sultan.

As Rome slipped into decline, the Berbers harried and hassled any army that dared to invade to the point where the Berbers were free to do as they pleased.





Islamic Morocco

In the second half of the 7th century, the soldiers of the Prophet Mohammed set forth from the Arabian Peninsula and overwhelmed the peoples of North Africa. Within a century, nearly all Berber tribes had embraced Islam, although, true to form, local tribes developed their own brand of Islamic Shi'ism, which sparked rebellion against the eastern Arabs.

By 829, local elites had established an Idrissid state with its capital at Fès, dominating all of Morocco. Thus commenced a cycle of rising and falling Islamic dynasties, which included the Almoravids (1062-1147), who built their capital at Marrakesh; the Almohads (1147-1269), famous for building the Koutoubia Mosque (p179); the Merenids (1269-1465), known for their exquisite mosques and madrassas (Quranic schools), especially in Fès; the Saadians (1524-1659), responsible for the Palais el-Badi (p179) in Marrakesh; and the Alawites (1659-present).

France took control in 1912, making its capital at Rabat and handing Spain a token zone in the north. Opposition from Berber mountain tribes was officially crushed, but continued to simmer away and moved into political channels with the development of the Istiqlal (independence) party.

Roval Morocco

Under increasing pressure from Moroccans and the Allies, France allowed Mohammed V to return from exile in 1955, and Morocco successfully negotiated its independence from France and Spain in 1956.

When Mohammed V died suddenly of heart failure in 1961, King Hassan II became the leader of the new nation. Hassan II consolidated power by crackdowns on dissent and suspending parliament for a decade. With heavy borrowing and an ever-expanding bureaucracy, Morocco was deeply in debt by the 1970s. In 1973, the phosphate industry in the Spanish Sahara started to boom. Morocco staked its claim to the area and its lucrative phosphate reserves with the 350,000-strong Green March into Western Sahara in 1975, settling the area with Moroccans while greatly unsettling indigenous Sahrawi people agitating for self-determination.

Such grand and patriotic flourishes notwithstanding, the growing gap between the rich and the poor ensured that dissent remained widespread across a broad cross-section of

Moroccan society. Protests against price rises in 1981 prompted a brutal government crackdown, but sustained pressure from human rights activists achieved unprecedented results in 1991, when Hassan II founded the Truth & Reconciliation Commission to investigate human rights abuses that occurred during his own reign - a first for a king.

Morocco Today

Hassan II died in 1999 and Morocco held its breath. In his first public statement as king, Mohammed VI vowed to right the wrongs of the era known to Moroccans as 'the Black Years'. Today, Morocco's human rights record is arguably the cleanest in Africa and the Middle East, though still not exactly spotless - repressive measures were revived after 9/11 and the 2003 Casablanca bombings. But the Commission has nonetheless helped cement human rights advances by awarding reparations to 9280 victims of the Black Years, and the new parliament elected in 2002 has implemented some promising reforms. Foremost among these are Morocco's firstever municipal elections, the introduction of Berber languages in some state schools, and the much-anticipated Mudawanna, a legal code protecting women's rights to divorce and custody.

CULTURE

Moroccans cast their eye in many directions to Europe, the economically dominant neighbour: to the east and the lands of Islam; and to its traditional Berber heartland. The result is an intoxicating blend of the modern and the traditional, the liberal and the conservative, hospitality and the need to make a dirham. Away from the tourist scrum, a Moroccan proverb tells the story – 'A guest is a gift from Allah'. The public domain may belong to men, but they're just as likely to invite you home to meet the family. If this happens, consider yourself truly privileged but remember: keep your left hand firmly out of the communal dish and feel free to slurp your tea and belch your appreciation loudly.

In present-day Morocco, jellabas (flowing cloaks) cover Western suits, turbans jostle with baseball caps, European dance music competes with sinuous Algerian rai and mobile phones ring in the midst of perhaps the greatest of all Moroccan pastimes - the serious and exuberant art of conversation. An inherently social

people, Moroccans have a heightened sense of mischief, love a good laugh and will take your decision to visit their country as an invitation to talk...and drink tea, and perhaps buy a carpet, a very beautiful carpet, just for the pleasure of your eyes...

PEOPLE

People of Arab-Berber descent make up almost 100% of Morocco's population, which is mainly rural (about 60%) and young (70% are under 30 years). With a growth rate of 2.2%, the population will double almost every 25 years.

Ninety-nine percent of Moroccans are Muslim. Muslims share their roots with Jews and Christians and respect these groups as Ahl al-Kteb (People of the Book). Fundamentalism is mostly discouraged but remains a presence, especially among the urban poor who have enjoyed none of the benefits of economic growth. That said, the majority of Muslims do not favour such developments and the popularity of fundamentalism is not as great as Westerners imagine.

Emigration to France, Israel and the US has reduced Morocco's once robust Jewish community to approximately 7000 from a high of around 300,000 in 1948. The Jewish communities that once inhabited the historic mellahs (Jewish quarters) of Fès, Marrakesh, Safi, Essaouira and Meknès have largely relocated to Casablanca.

ARTS & CRAFTS Architecture

Moroccan religious buildings are adorned with hand-carved detailing, gilded accents, chiselled mosaics and an array of other decorative flourishes. A mosque consists of a courtyard, an arcaded portico and a main prayer hall facing Mecca. Great examples include the 9th-century Kairaouine Mosque (p161) in Fès and the colossal Hassan II Mosque (p170) in Casablanca. While all but the latter are closed to non-Muslims, the madrassas that bejewel major Moroccan cities are open for visits.

Although religious architecture dominates, Casablanca in particular boasts local architectural features grafted onto whitewashed European edifices in a distinctive crossroads style that might be described as Islamic geometry meets Art Deco.

The street façade of the Moroccan riads (traditional courtyard houses; also called

dars) usually conceals an inner courtyard that allows light to penetrate during the day and cool air to settle at night. Many classy guesthouses occupy beautifully renovated traditional riads.

Music

The most renowned Berber folk group is the Master Musicians of Jajouka, who famously inspired the Rolling Stones and collaborated with them on some truly experimental fusion. Lately the big names are women's, namely the all-female group B'net Marrakech and the bold Najat Aatabou, who sings protest songs in Berber against restrictive traditional roles. Joyously bluesy with a rhythm you can't refuse, Gnaoua music, which began among freed slaves in Marrakesh and Essaouira, may send you into a trance and that's just what it's meant to do. To sample the best in Gnaoua, head to Essaouira on the third weekend in June for the Gnaoua & World Music Festival (p192). Rai, originally from Algeria, is one of the strongest influences on Moroccan contemporary music, incorporating elements of jazz, hip-hop and rap. À popular artist is Cheb Mami, famous for vocals on Sting's 'Desert Rose'.

ENVIRONMENT

Morocco's three ecological zones - coast, mountain and desert - host more than 40 different ecosystems and provide habitat for many endemic species, including the iconic and sociable Barbary macaque (also known as the Barbary ape). Unfortunately, the pressure upon these ecosystems from ever-moresprawling urban areas and the encroachment of industrialisation in Morocco's wilderness has ensured that 18 mammals (a staggering 15% of the total) and 11 bird species are considered endangered.

Pollution, desertification, overgrazing and deforestation are the major environmental issues among many facing the Moroccan government. Despite plantation programmes and the development of new national parks, less than 0.05% of Moroccan territory is protected, one-third of Morocco's ecosystems are disappearing, 10% of vertebrates are endangered and 25,000 hectares of forest are lost every year.

FOOD & DRINK

Influenced by Berber, Arabic and Mediterranean traditions, Moroccan cuisine features a sublime use of spices and fresh produce.

It would be a culinary crime to skip breakfast in Morocco. Sidewalk cafés and kiosks put a local twist on a Continental breakfast with Moroccan pancakes and doughnuts, French pastries, coffee and mint tea. Follow your nose into the sougs, where you'll find tangy olives and local *jiben* (fresh goat's or cow's milk cheeses) to be devoured with fresh khoobz (Moroccanstyle pita bread baked in a wood-fired oven).

Lunch is traditionally the biggest meal of the day in Morocco. The most typical Moroccan dish is tajine, a meat and vegetable stew cooked slowly in an earthenware dish. Couscous, fluffy steamed semolina served with tender meat and vegetables, is another staple. Fish dishes also make an excellent choice in coastal areas, while harira is a thick soup made from lamb stock, lentils, chickpeas, onions, tomatoes, fresh herbs and spices. Pastilla, a speciality of Fès, includes poultry (chicken or pigeon), almonds, cinnamon, saffron and sugar, encased in layer upon layer of very fine pastry.

Vegetarians shouldn't have any problems fresh fruit and vegetables are widely available, as are lentils and chickpeas. Salads are ubiquitous in Morocco, particularly the traditional salade marocaine made from diced green peppers, tomatoes and red onion. Ask for your couscous or tajine sans viande (without meat).

For dessert, Moroccan patisseries concoct excellent French and Moroccan sweets. Local sweets include flaky pastries rich with nuts and aromatic traces of orange-flower water. Another variation is a *bastilla* (multilayer pastry) with toasted almonds, cinnamon and cream.

Café culture is alive and well in Morocco and mint tea, the legendary 'Moroccan whisky', is made with Chinese gunpowder tea, fresh mint and copious sugar. Fruit juices, especially freshly squeezed orange juice, are the country's greatest bargain. It's not advisable to drink tap water in Morocco. Beer's easy to find in the villes nouvelles (new towns) - local brands include Stork or Flag.

RABAT

pop 1.7 million

Relaxed, well-kept and very European, flagwaving Rabat is just as cosmopolitan as Casablanca down the coast, but lacks the frantic pace and grimy feel of its economic big brother. Its elegant tree-lined boulevards and imposing administrative buildings exude an

unhurried, diplomatic and hassle-free charm that many travellers grow to like.

ORIENTATION

Ave Hassan II divides the medina from the Ville Nouvelle and follows the line of the medina walls to the Oued Bou Regreg, the river that separates the twin cities of Rabat and Salé. The city's main thoroughfare - the wide, palm-lined Ave Mohammed V - is home to many hotels, while most embassies cluster around Pl Abraham Lincoln and Ave de Fès east of the centre.

INFORMATION

American Bookshop (cnr Rues Moulay Abdelhafid & Boujaad)

BMCE (Bangue Marocaine du Commerce Extèrieur; Ave Mohammed V; (Sam-8pm Mon-Fri) BMCE has banks and ATMs along Ave Mohammed V.

Main post office (cnr Rue Soékarno & Ave Mohammed V) Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT;

© 037 673756; visitmorocco@onmt.org.ma; cnr Rue Oued El Makhazine & Rue Zalaka, Agdal; 🕑 8.30am-noon & 3-6.30pm Mon-Fri)

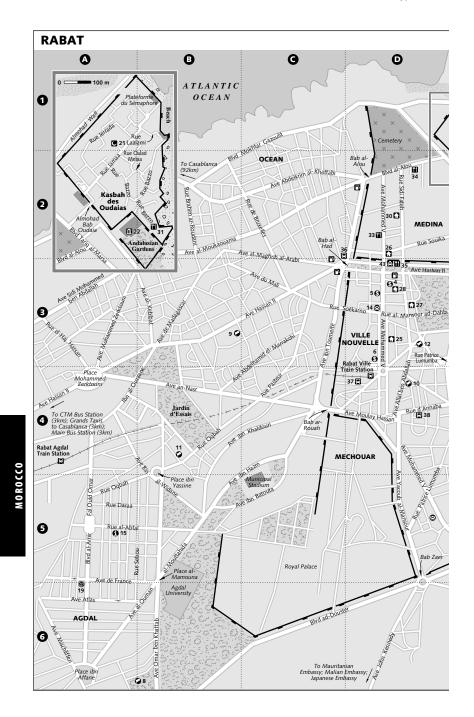
SAMU (2010) OST 737373) Private ambulance service. **SOS Médecins** (**2** 037 202020; house call US\$35; 24hr) Doctors on call.

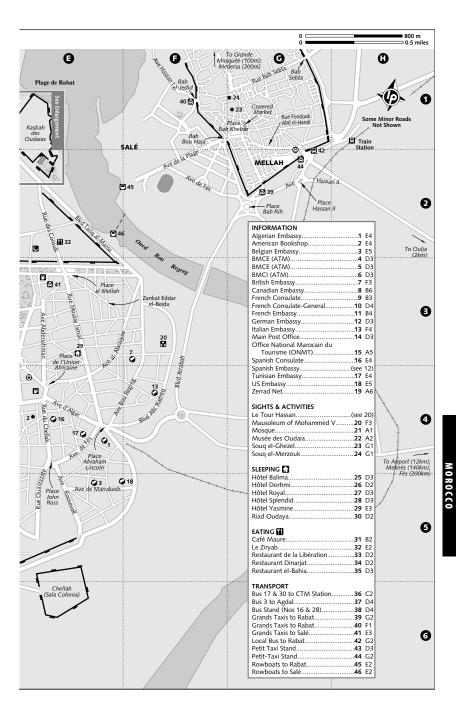
Zerrad Net (🕿 037 686723: 68 Blvd al-Amir Fal Ould Omar, Agdal; per hr US\$0.90; 🕑 8am-midnight)

SIGHTS

Dating from the 17th century, the walled medina isn't a patch on the medinas of Fès or Marrakesh, although it still piques the senses with its rich mixture of spices, carpets, crafts, cheap shoes and bootlegged DVDs. The **Kasbah des Oudaias** sits high up on the bluff overlook-ing the Oued Bou Regreg and contains within its walls the oldest **mosque** in Rabat, which was built in the 12th century and restored in the 18th. The southern corner of the kasbah is home to the Andalusian Gardens (🕑 sunrise-sunset), laid out by the French during the colonial period. The centrepiece is the grand 17thcentury palace containing the Musée des Oudaia (🖻 037 731537; admission US\$1.20; 🕑 9am-noon & 3-6pm May-Sep, 9am-noon & 3-5pm Oct-Apr).

Towering above the Oued Bou Regreg is Rabat's most famous landmark, Le Tour Hassan (Hassan Tower). In 1195, the Almohad sultan Yacoub al-Mansour began constructing an enormous minaret, intending to make it the highest in the Islamic world, but he died before the project was completed. Abandoned at





44m, the beautifully designed and intricately carved tower still lords over the remains of the adjacent mosque.

The cool marble Mausoleum of Mohammed V (admission free; 🕅 sunrise-sunset), built in traditional Moroccan style, lies opposite the tower. The present king's father (the late Hassan II) and grandfather are laid to rest here, surrounded by an intensely patterned mosaic of zellij (traditional tiles) from floor to ceiling.

SLEEPING

Hôtel Dorhmi (🗃 037 723898; 313 Ave Mohammed V; s/d US\$9/14, hot showers US\$1.20) Immaculately kept, very friendly and keenly priced, this familyrun hotel is the best of the medina options. The simple rooms are bright and tidy and surround a central courtyard.

Hôtel Splendid (🖻 037 723283; 8 Rue Ghazza; s with/without bathroom US\$15/12, d with/without bathroom US\$21/18) Right in the heart of town, this hotel has spacious bright rooms with high ceilings, big windows, cheerful colours and simple wooden furniture. Bathrooms are new and even rooms without them have a hot-water washbasin. The hotel is set around a pleasant courtyard.

Hôtel Royal (🖻 037 721171; royal hotel@mtds.com; 1 Rue Jeddah Ammane; s/d US\$40/45; **P**) The tastefully renovated rooms at the Royal are very comfortable with polished-wood furniture and sparkling new bathrooms. Each has a balcony overlooking the park or street. Hôtel Yasmine (🖻 037 722018; fax 037 722100; cnr

Zankat Marinyne & Mekka; s/d US\$40/53; P) Strong

on traditional Moroccan style and popular

with local business travellers, the public areas

of this elegant hotel are all marble floors,

zellij and leather furniture. The bedrooms

are more mundane, but they are tasteful and

comfortable. Hôtel Balima (🕿 037 707755; fax 037 707450; Ave Mohammed V; s/d US\$47/61) The grand dame of Rabat hotels has seen better days but the rooms here are slowly being renovated. Ask for a newer room or be prepared to put up with the timewarp furniture and fabrics. The hotel has a decent restaurant, a nightclub and a glorious shady terrace facing Ave Mohammed V.

Riad Oudaya (🖻 037 702392; www.riadoudaya.com; 46 Rue Sidi Fateh; r/ste US\$153/187) Tucked away down an alleyway in the medina, this gorgeous guesthouse is a real hidden gem. The rooms are beautifully decorated with a wonderful blend of Moroccan style and Western com-

fort. Subtle lighting, open fires, balconies and the gentle gurgling of the fountain in the tiled courtyard below complete the romantic appeal. Meals here are sublime.

EATING & DRINKING

Restaurant de la Libération (256 Ave Mohammed V; mains US\$3.50) Cheap, cheerful and marginally more classy than the string of other eateries along this road (it's got plastic menus and tablecloths), this basic restaurant does a steady line in traditional favourites. Friday is couscous day when giant platters of the stuff are delivered to the eager masses.

Restaurant el-Bahia (🖻 037 734504; Ave Hassan II; mains US\$4.50-8; (Gam-midnight, to 10.30pm in winter) Built into the outside of the medina walls and an excellent spot for people-watching, this laid-back restaurant has the locals lapping up hearty Moroccan fare. Choose to sit in the pavement terrace, in the shaded courtyard or upstairs in the traditional salon.

Le Ziryab (🖻 037 733636; 10 Zankat Ennajar; mains US\$10-16) This chic Moroccan restaurant is in a magnificent building just off Rue des Consuls. The blend of old-world character and stylish contemporary design is also reflected in the excellent menu of interesting variations on tajine, couscous, pastilla and grilled meat and fish.

Restaurant Dinarjat (🖻 037 724239; 6 Rue Belgnaoui; mains around US\$17, bottle wine US\$9) A favourite with locals and visitors alike, this traditional Moroccan restaurant is set in a 17th-century house at the heart of the medina. It's wildly fanciful with Andalucian-style palace décor and belly dancers sashaying across the lush carpets. The food is traditional Moroccan with local specialities such as *pastilla* on the menu. Book in advance.

Café Maure (Kasbah des Oudaias; 🕑 9am-5.30pm) Sit back, relax and just gaze out over the estuary to Salé from this chilled little open-air café near the Andalusian Gardens. Mint tea is the thing here, accompanied by little almond biscuits delivered on silver trays. It's an easy place to while away some time writing postcards, and a relaxed venue for women.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Bus

Rabat has two bus stations: the main bus station (gare routière; 🖻 037 795816), where most buses depart and arrive, and the less chaotic CTM bus station (🖻 037 281488). Both are about 5km

southwest of the city centre on the road to Casablanca. CTM has the following services:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)	Daily services
Casablanca	3.80	1½	8
Essaouira	1.70	3	3
Fès	6.50	31/2	7
Marrakesh	12	5	3
Tangier	9	41⁄2	5
Tetouan	9	4-5	1

The main gare routière has 13 ticket windows, each one clearly marked by destination.

Taxis

Grands taxis (shared taxis) leave for Casablanca (US\$3) from just outside the intercity bus station. Other grands taxis leave for Fès (US\$6.50), Meknès (US\$4.50) and Salé (US\$0.40) from a lot off Ave Hassan II behind the Hôtel Bouregreg.

Train

Rabat Ville train station (2 037 736060) is right in the centre of town. From here trains run every 30 minutes between 6am and 10.30pm to Casa-Port train stations (US\$3.40). Second-class services also run daily to Fès (US\$8, 3¹/₂ hours, eight daily) via Meknès (US\$6.40, 2¹/₂ hours), Tangier (US\$10, 4¹/₂ hours, seven daily) and Marrakesh (US\$12, 41/2 hours, eight daily).

GETTING AROUND

Rabat's blue petits taxis are plentiful, cheap and quick. A ride around the centre of town will cost about US\$1.20.

AROUND RABAT

SALÉ

pop 400,000

A few hundred metres and half a world away, Salé is a walled city and strongly traditional backwater on the far side of the Oued Bou Regreg estuary.

Salé is best seen on a half-day trip from Rabat. The main entrance to the medina is Bab Bou Haja, on the southwestern wall, which opens onto Pl Bab Khebaz. The Grande Mosquée is 500m further northwest along Rue Ras ash-Shajara; it's closed to non-Muslims, but the

madrassa (admission US\$1.20; Y 9am-noon & 2.30-6pm) is open as a museum.

Shaded by trees and unchanged for centuries, the Souq el-Ghezel (Wool Market), is an interesting stop. In the nearby Soug el-Merzouk, textiles, basketwork and jewellery are sold.

The most atmospheric way to reach Salé is to take one of the small rowboats (US\$0.10 per person) that cross the Oued Bou Regreg from just below the mellah. Alternatively, take bus 16 (US\$0.40) and get off after passing under the railway bridge.

In the village of Oulja, 3km southeast of Salé, the **Complexe de Potiers** (Potters' Cooperative; Sunrise-sunset) is a top spot for the souvenir hunter. A huge selection of ceramics is produced and sold here, including tajine dishes of every size and colour.

THE MEDITERRANEAN **COAST & THE RIF**

Bounded by the red crags of the Rif Mountains and the crashing waves of the Mediterranean, northern Morocco's wildly beautiful coastline conceals attractions as diverse as the cosmopolitan hustle of Tangier, the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the old colonial capital of Tetouan, and the superbly relaxing town of Chefchaouen. Further inland, Fès is Morocco's most enchanting city.

TANGIER pop 650,000

More than any other city, Tangier has been Morocco's face to the world for more years than anyone cares to remember. For half the 20th century, it was home to a shotgun marriage between Western powers who controlled the port via dubious international council. Today, Tangier is an ageing libertine propped up languidly at a bar, having seen it all.

The brigade touristique (tourist police) has cracked down on Tangier's legendary hustlers, but the city is not altogether hassle free. If you take it head on and learn to handle the hustlers, you'll find it a likable, lively place. The nightlife is vibrant, the population is cosmopolitan and the cultural vibe is infamous.

Orientation

Tangier's small medina climbs up the hill to the northeast of the city, while the Ville Nouvelle surrounds it to the west, south and southeast. The large central square known as the Grand Socco (officially named Pl du 9 Avril 1947) provides the link between the two.

Information

BMCE (Banque Marocaine du Commerce Extérieur; Blvd Pasteur; ∑ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun)

Cyber Café Adam (Rue ibn Rochd; per hr US\$1.20; 9.30am-3.30am)

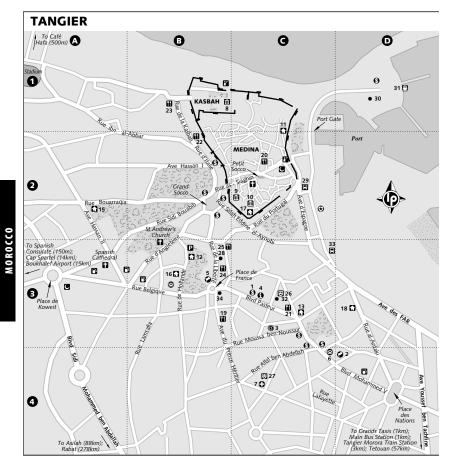
Délégation Régionale du Tourisme (0NMT; ☎ 039 948050; fax 039 948661; 29 Blvd Pasteur; ☜ 8.30amnoon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri)

Emergency service (@ 039 373737; 224hr) Main post office (Blvd Mohammed V) Pharmacy El Yousr (Blvd Mohammed V) Red Cross Clinic (Clinique du Croissant Rouge; 🖻 039 946976; 6 Rue al-Mansour Dahabi)

Sights & Activities

The **kasbah** sits on the highest point of the city, behind stout walls. Approaching from the medina, you enter through Bab el-Aassa, the southeastern gate, to find the 17th-century **Dar el-Makhzen** (@ 039 932097; admission US\$1.20; \bigcirc 9am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Wed-Mon, closed Fri afternoon), the former sultan's palace and now a worthwhile museum devoted to Moroccan arts. Before leaving, take a stroll around the Andalucianstyle **Sultan's Gardens**.

In the southwest corner of the medina, the **Old American Legation Museum** ((2) 039 935317; www.legation.org; 8 Rue d'Amerique; admission free, donations



appreciated; 论 10am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) is an intriguing relic of the international zone, with a fascinating collection of memorabilia from the international writers and artists who passed through Tangier.

Housed in a former synagogue, the **Musée de la Fondation Lorin** (**@** 039 930306; lorin@wanadoo.net .ma; 44 Rue Touahine; admission free, donations appreciated; **11am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Sun-Fri**) is an engaging collection of photographs, posters and prints of Tangier from 1890 to 1960.

Sleeping BUDGET

Youth Hostel ((2) 039946127; 8 Rue al-Antaki; dm with/without HI card US\$3.40/4.50, hot showers US\$0.60; (2) 8-10am, noon-3pm & 6-11pm) Just off Ave d'Espagne and

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	British Consulate2 D4	0
	Cyber Café Adam3 C3	U
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/	Hôtel Dawliz12 B3	-
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ingier	Pension Hollanda	
	Riad Tanja17 C2	
	Youth Hostel18 D3	
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	Restaurant el-Khorsan	<u> </u>
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5	Local Buses for Train Station	
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	Trasmediterranea Ticket Office(see 32)	

close to an area with plenty of bars, Tangier's youth hostel is fair value as Moroccan youth hostels go – clean enough but a bit tired.

Pension Hollanda ((2) 339 937838; 139 Rue de Hollande; s/d US\$12/17; (2) Tucked away in a quiet street a short walk from Pl de France, this friendly *pension* (guesthouse) has sparkling clean whitewashed rooms, all with sinks; doubles come with a shower.

Hôtel Continental (**(c)** 039 931024; hcontinental@iam .net.ma; 36 Rue Dar el-Baroud; s/d ind breakfast US\$35/45) Something of a Tangerine institution, the Hôtel Continental is the pick of the bunch in the medina. Overlooking the port with a charming eccentricity, rooms are well-sized, with bathrooms and TV. The terrace is great for views and imagining you're a character in a Paul Bowles novel (scenes of *The Sheltering Sky* were filmed here).

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hôtel Rembrandt ((2) 039 937870; rembrandt@menara .ma; Blvd Mohammed V; s/d US\$48/64; (P) (2) (2) The Rembrandt is a reliable midrange choice in the heart of the Ville Nouvelle. Rooms are comfortable and modern, with only the plastic 'marble' bathrooms striking an odd note. The green garden café is a tranquil spot to relax.

Hôtel Schéhérazade (2003) 940803; fax 039 940801; Ave des FAR; s/d US\$61/70; 20) Of all the midrange places on this stretch of road, the Schéhérazade probably offers the best sea views. Rooms are plain but comfortable, and come complete with satellite TV and telephone.

Hôtel Solazur (ⓐ 039940164; fax 039945286; Ave des FAR; s/d US\$73/88; ₴) The Solazur offers comfortable if nondescript rooms with all the standard four-star amenities and the lobby has a cool, trompe l'oeil stairwell. Views from the rooms facing the ocean are fantastic.

Hôtel Dawliz (2039 333337; www.ledawliz.com; 42 Rue de Hollande; s/d UIS\$80/103; (2) (2) This complex offers four-star comforts and unbeatable views of the medina and the Bay of Tangier – which goes a long way to make up for the unexciting décor. Rooms have the expected facilities (the fridge is a nice touch), while the hotel has several shops, restaurants and an ATM. Prices drop by up to 20% outside high season.

Riad Tanja (a 039 333538; Rue du Portugal, Escalier Américain; r US\$90-115; 3) On the edge of the medina, the Tanja combines modern Spain with traditional riad in a very stylish mix. Rooms are extremely comfortable, and decorated with myriad paintings and prints that speak

lonelyplanet.com

of Tangier's artistic heritage. Some rooms look over the city while the terrace offers grand views over the straits to Spain.

Eating MEDINA

Café Andalus (7 Rue du Commerce; salad US\$0.60, mains from US\$3) Very much a local's place, the Andalus is a tiny place, dishing out cheap and tasty plates of fish and brochettes and bowls of soup. Definitely not a palace, but none the worse for it.

Hamadi ((2) 039 934514; 2 Rue de la Kasbah; mains US\$4.50-7) A traditionally styled place just outside the medina walls. The surroundings are sumptuous, and live music accompanies your Moroccan meal (the *pastilla* is good).

Marhaba Palace (2003) 937927; Rue de la Kasbah; mains from US\$14) This garden house is lovingly decorated in traditional style, and music and folklore shows thrown into the cost of your meal. Set meals follow the classic soup, salad, tajine or couscous plus dessert pattern, all well cooked and presented.

VILLE NOUVELLE

Agadir (ⓐ 068 827696; 21 Ave du Prince Héritier; mains US\$3.50-4.50, set menu US\$5.50) The interior is thoroughly unassuming, but the check tablecloths, red wine and Gallic crooning in the background give this place a hint of French bistro. Meals are good and hearty, with the free use of fresh herbs raising the succulent tajines to a level above the usual fare. Casa de España (ⓐ 039 947359; 11 Rue el-Jebha el-

Ouatania; mains from US\$7, lunch set menu US\$7) Buzzing

with Spanish expats, local businessmen and

the occasional tourist, this joint is as lively as

they come. Snappily dressed waiters serve up

classic Spanish dishes, with some wonderful specials such as lamb with summer fruits. **Restaurant el-Khorsan** (2039 935885; El-Minzah Hotel, 85 Rue de la Liberté; mains around US\$15) One of Tangier's classier restaurants, this place serves well-presented Moroccan classics to the soft playing of live musicians, and often traditional dancing later in the evening. It's not cheap

and you should dress smart, but the ambience is worth it. Meknès Restaurant Populaire Saveur ((20) 039 336326; 2 Rabat

Escalier Waller; set menu US\$17; \bigcirc Sat-Thu) This attractive and welcoming little fish restaurant down the steps from Rue de la Liberté serves excellent, filling set menus. It's as rustic as you could imagine – quaint decoration and roughhewn wooden cutlery. The food is delicious though, with steaming fish soup, and plenty of grilled fish. Dessert is typically sticky *seffa* (sweet couscous), all washed down with the house fruit juice cocktail. Not just a meal, a whole experience.

Drinking & Entertainment

Café Hafa (Ave Mohammed Tazi; O 10am-8pm) With a shady terrace overlooking the straits and where Paul Bowles and the Rolling Stones came to smoke hashish, the indolent air still lingers among the locals who hang out here. Come here to enjoy the view and a game of backgammon.

Caid's Bar (El-Minzah, 85 Rue de la Liberté; wine from US\$2.50; ∑ 10am-midnight) Long the establishment's drinking hole of choice, this bar is a classy relic of the grand day of international Tangier, and photos of the famous and infamous who've preceded you adorn the walls. Women are more than welcome.

Tangier's clubbing scene peaks in the summer when cover charges are typically US\$12, with drinks three times the normal bar price.

Good places include **Regine's** (8 Rue al-Mansour Dahabi; M 11.30pm-3am Mon-Sat), a large club popular with trendy young Tangerines, where DJs spin a bit of everything from rai to Europop to house, and **Morocco Palace** (Rue du Prince Moulay Abdallah; M 9pam-4am Mon-Sat), a purely Moroccan interpretation of the nightclub experience, with traditional décor and mostly Arabic pop.

Getting There & Away BUS

The **CTM bus station** (**(()** 039 931172), beside the port gate, offers the following departures:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)	Daily services
Asilah	1.80	1	4
Casablanca	14	6	4
Chefchaouen	4	3	1
Fès	11	6	4
Marrakesh	20	10	1
Meknès	9	5	3
Rabat	10	41⁄2	4
Tetouan	1.70	1	1

Cheaper bus companies operate from the **main bus station** (gare routière; **(a)** 039 946928; Pl Jamia el-Arabia), about 2km south of the city centre.

TAXI

You can hail *grands taxis* to places outside Tangier from a lot next to the main bus station. The most common destinations are Tetouan (US\$3.40, one hour), Asilah (US\$1.80, 30 minutes) and, for Ceuta, Fnideq (US\$3.40, one hour).

TRAIN

Four trains depart daily from Tangier Ville, the swish new train station 3km southeast of the centre. One morning and one afternoon service go to Casa-Voyageurs in Casablanca (US\$13, 5½ hours); a midday service travels via Meknès (US\$9, four hours) to Fès (US\$11, five hours); and a night service (with couchettes) goes all the way to Marrakesh (1st-/2nd-class US\$31/28, without couchette US\$24/16).

Getting Around

Distinguishable by their ultramarine colour with a yellow stripe down the side, *petits taxis* do standard journeys around town for US\$0.80 to US\$1.20; fares are 50% higher at night. From **Boukhalef Airport** (O 039 393720), 15km southeast of the city, take a cream-coloured *grand taxi* into the centre (US\$8).

AROUND TANGIER

Just 14km west of Tangier lies the dramatic **Cap Spartel**, the northwestern extremity of Africa's Atlantic Coast. Below Cap Spartel, the lovely beach **Plage Robinson** stretches to the south. Five kilometres along here you reach the **Grottes d'Hercule** (admission US\$1.20), next to Le Mirage hotel. Mythically, these caves were the dwelling place for Hercules when he mightily separated Europe from Africa.

CEUTA (SEBTA)

pop 75,000

Jutting out east into the Mediterranean, this 20-sq-km peninsula has been a Spanish enclave since 1640. Its relaxed, well-kept city centre with bars, cafés and Andalucian atmosphere provides a sharp contrast to the other side of the border. Nonetheless, Ceuta is still recognisably African. Between a quarter and a third of the population are of Rif Berber origin, giving the enclave a fascinating Iberian-African mix.

Orientation & Information

Most of the hotels, restaurants and offices of interest are on the narrow spit of land linking

the peninsula to the mainland. The Plaza de Africa, unmistakable for its giant cathedral, dominates the city centre. The port and ferry terminal are a short walk to the northwest. The border is 2km to the south along the Avenida Martinez Catena.

To phone Ceuta from outside Spain, dial **©** 0034 before the nine-digit phone number. Also remember that Ceuta is on Spanish time and uses the euro.

Sights

Ceuta's history is marked by the **Ruta Monu**menta, a series of excellent information boards in English and Spanish outside key buildings and monuments.

The impressive remnants of the **city walls** (**(a)** 956 511770; Avenida González Tablas; admission free; **(b)** 10am-2pm & 5-8pm) and the walled **moat of Foso de San Felipe** remain from the Hispano-Portuguese period in the 16th century.

The most intriguing museum is the **Museo** de la Legión (o 606733566; Paseo de Colón; admission free, donations appreciated; o 10am-1.30pm &4-6pm Mon-Fri, 4-6pm Sat & Sun), dedicated to the Spanish Legion, an army unit that was set up in 1920 and played a pivotal role in Franco's army at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

Sleeping Pensión La B

Pensión La Bohemia (956 510615; 16 Paseo de Revellín; r US\$38) A charming and spotless little place located above a shopping arcade, with potted plants, shiny tile floors and a surfeit of Marilyn Monroe pictures. The rooms are fresh and clean and there are piping-hot communal showers.

Ulises Gran Hotel (@ 956 514540; fax 956 514546; 5 Calle Camoens; s/d incl breakfast US\$67/106; ? D Falling one short of its four-star aspirations, the Ulises is nevertheless a fine, well-appointed

place to stay. Rooms with balconies have views of the sea, and the recently refurbished lobby gives the whole place a lift.

Parador Hotel La Muralla (🖻 956 514940; ceuta@ parador.es; 15 Plaza de Africa; s/d from US\$83/115; P 🔀 🔀) Ceuta's top address is this grand four-star hotel on the main square. It is mostly a 1970s creation, although some rooms occupy converted munitions stores lining the Foso de San Felipe. Rooms are spacious and comfortable.

Eating

In addition to the places listed here, the Pablado Marinero (Seamen's Village) beside the vacht harbour is home to a number of reliable if not outstanding restaurants, ranging from Italian to burger places.

La Tasca del Pedro (🗃 956 510473; 3 Avenida Alcalde Sánchez Prados; mains US\$6.50-13; (Science Mon-Sat) Small, friendly and popular with the locals, this restaurant has a good range of seafood, Spanish and simple Italian dishes.

Club Nautico (🖻 956 514440; Calle Edrisis; set menu from US\$9) This simple fish restaurant has a nice location overlooking the yacht harbour. The three-course menú del diá (daily set lunch menu) is a popular choice.

La Marina (2 956 514007; 1 Alférez Bayton; mains US\$13-15, set menu US\$10; 🕑 Mon-Sat) This smart, friendly restaurant is often crowded at lunch time. It specialises in fish dishes, but also does a great value three-course set menu of the chicken/fish and chips variety.

Getting There & Away

MOROCCO

Bus 7 runs up to the Moroccan frontera (border) every 10 minutes from Plaza de la Constitución (US\$0.80). The large grand-taxi lot next to Moroccan border control has departures to Tetouan (US\$3.40, 40 minutes). For Tangier, take a grand taxi to Fnideq (US\$0.60, 10 minutes), just south of the border.

The ferry terminal (estación marítima: Calle Muelle Cañonero Dato) is west of the town centre and from here there are several daily high-speed ferries to Algeciras (p195).

TETOUAN

pop 320,000

Tetouan is quite unlike anywhere else in the Rif, or even Morocco. For more than 40 years, from 1912 to 1956, it was the capital of the Spanish Protectorate, bequeathing it a unique Hispano-Moorish atmosphere. The neat me-

dina - a Unesco World Heritage site - sits hard against the modern Spanish part of town, with its whitewashed buildings, high shuttered windows and a spectacular backdrop of the Rif Mountains.

Orientation & Information

The Ville Nouvelle is centred on Place Moulay el-Mehdi and the pedestrian stretch of Ave Mohammed V, which runs west to the vast Place Hassan II. Around here you'll find the hotels, banks, most of the restaurants and cafés, and the bus station. The entrance to the medina is off the grand Place Hassan II, flanked on the north side by the Royal Palace. From a compact centre the town sprawls along the hillside and down into the valley.

BMCE Foreign Exchange Office (Pl Moulay el-Mehdi; 10am-2pm & 4-8pm)

Délégation Régionale du Tourisme (ONMT;

© 039 961915; fax 039 961914; 30 Ave Mohammed V; 11am & 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30-11am & 3-6.30pm Fri)

Post office (PI Moulay el-Mehdi)

Remote Studios (🖻 039 711172; 13 Ave Mohammed V; per hr US\$1; Y 24hr) Internet access.

Siahts

The bustling Unesco World Heritage-listed medina (which is home to some 40 mosques, of which the Grande Mosquée and Saidi Mosque are the most impressive) opens through its main gate, Bab er-Rouah, onto Pl Hassan II, Tetouan's grand main square. At the opposite end of the medina, the Musée Marocaine (Musée Ethnographique; admission US\$1.20; 🏵 9.30am-noon & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri) is housed inside the bastion in the town wall.

Opposite Bab el-Okla, the medina's oldest gate, children learn traditional arts and crafts at the artisanal school (2 039 972721; admission US\$1.20; 🕑 8am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat).

Sleepina

Hotel Bilbao (🖻 039 964114; 7 Ave Mohammed V; s/d US\$6/8) Virtually on Pl al-Jala, this reliable cheapie has surprisingly big rooms, many with wrought-iron balconies. That rooms come with showers is also a big selling point. Be on your best behaviour though - feisty chambermaids rule the hotel with a rod of iron.

Hotel Victoria (🕿 039 965015; 23 Ave Mohammed V; s/d/tr US\$6/9/14) Small but nicely formed, the Victoria gives guests a warm welcome. Rooms are simple but comfortable, and the shared

bathrooms scrubbed spotlessly clean. It has just a clutch of rooms, so consider booking ahead at busy times of year.

Hôtel Panorama Vista (🖻 039 964970; fax 039 964969; Rue Moulay Abbas; s/d incl breakfast from US\$27/36; 🔀 🔀) This three-star hotel is a rare piece of class in the centre of Tetouan that more than lives up to its name. Rooms are immaculate, and the best have dramatic views over the Rif Mountains. The 1st-floor café, Salon de Thé Panorama Vista (below), is popular.

Eating

Snack Yousfi (Rue Youseff ben Tachfine; sandwiches from US\$2; 🕑 until midnight) Fill up on a sandwich here for lunch and you might not be hungry again until breakfast. Baguettes are stuffed to overflowing with various fillings, topped out with salad and a handful of chips. Great value.

Restaurant Restinga (21 Ave Mohammed V; fish dishes from US\$4.50; 🕑 noon-2.30pm & 7-9.30pm) Easily Tetouan's top dining spot is the vine-covered courtyard of this charming restaurant. The abundance of fish and seafood on the menu is a reminder of the town's proximity to the coast. As the only restaurant serving alcohol, it's always busy - something the management takes advantage of by automatically adding a 10% service charge to the bill.

Restaurant Palace Bouhlal (🖻 039 998797; 48 Jamaa Kebir; set menu US\$12; 🕑 10am-4pm) The only palace restaurant in Tetouan is popular with Spanish tour groups, so reservations are essential. The palace is suitably sumptuous: plush carpets, gurgling fountains and rose petals. Live folk music accompanies the classically Moroccan four-course meal - soup, salad, brochettes, couscous and taiines.

Salon de Thé Panorama Vista (🖻 039 964970; fax 039 964969; Hôtel Panorama Vista, Ave Moulay Abbas) Tetouan's trendiest café, this hotel café has quite glorious views over the Rif Mountains. Waiters work hard, and you'll need to do the same to grab their attention.

Getting There & Away

All buses depart from the bus station (cnr Rue Sidi Mandri & Rue Moulay Abbas). CTM (🕿 039 961688) has buses to Tangier (US\$1.70, one hour, one daily); Casablanca (US\$12, six to seven hours, two daily) via Rabat (US\$9, four to five hours); and Chefchaouen (US\$2.30, 11/2 hours, three daily). There are daily non-CTM departures to Meknès (US\$7, five hours) and Marrakesh (US\$16, 11 hours).

Grands taxis to Fnideq (for Ceuta; US\$3.20, 30 minutes), Martil (US\$0.50, 15 minutes), Cabo Negro and M'diq (US\$0.60, 20 minutes) leave from Ave Hassan II, southeast of the bus station.

CHEFCHAOUEN pop 45,000

Set beneath the striking peaks of the Rif Mountains, Chefchaouen has long been charming travellers. One of the prettiest towns in Morocco, its old medina is a delight of Moroccan and Andalucian influence with redtiled roofs, bright blue buildings, and narrow lanes converging on a delightful square.

Information

Most of the hotels, restaurants and offices of interest are on the narrow spit of land linking the peninsula to the mainland. The Plaza de Africa, unmistakable for its giant cathedral, dominates the city centre. The port and ferry terminal are a short walk to the northwest. The border is 2km to the south along the Avenida Martinez Catena.

Banque Populaire (Plaza Uta el-Hammam; 🏵 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-9pm)

Hospital Mohammed V (🖻 039 986228; Ave al-Massira al-Khadra)

Pharmacy Alhambra (Rue Moulay Ali ben Rachid) Post office (Ave Hassan II)

Saadoune.net (Plaza Uta el-Hammam; per hr US\$1.20; 10am-midnight)

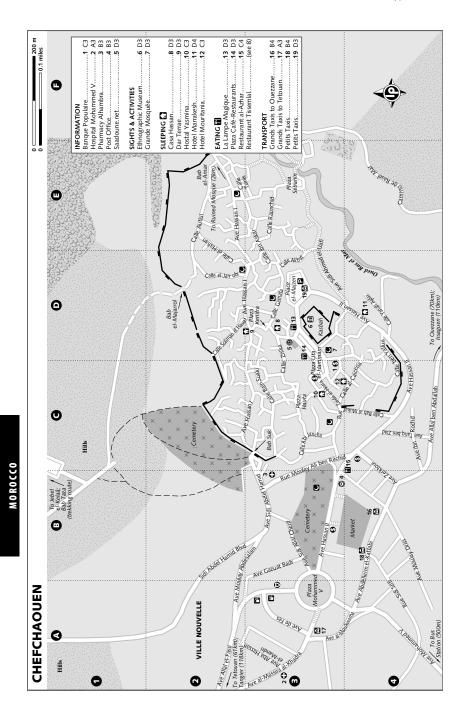
Sights & Activities

Chefchaouen's medina is one of the loveliest in Morocco with blinding blue-white hues and an unmistakeably Andalucian flavour. The heart of the medina is the shady, cobbled **Plaza Uta el-Hammam**, which is dominated by the red-hued walls of the kasbah (2 039 986343; admission US\$1.20; 🕑 9am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Wed-Mon) and the striking Grande Mosquée, which is noteworthy for its unusual octagonal tower. Inside the kasbah's gardens is a modest ethnographic museum where the photos of old Chefchaouen are the highlights.

Trekking in the Rif Mountains is another Chefchaouen drawcard, especially Jebel el-Kelaâ (1616m) which towers over the town and can be easily climbed in one day.

Sleepina

Hotel Mouritania (🖻 039 986184; 15 Rue Oadi Alami; s/d US\$5/8) For budget value, you'll have to go a



long way to beat the Mouritania. Rooms are simple, but there's the obligatory roof terrace and a comfy courtyard lounge that's ideal for hooking up with other travellers. Staff are helpful, and the breakfasts (US\$1.70) are great too.

Hostal Yasmina (🖻 039 883118; yasmina45@hotmail .com; 12 Rue Zaida al-Horra; r per person US\$7) For the price bracket, this place sparkles. Rooms are bright and clean, and there's lots of hot water in the showers and a great roof terrace.

Hotel Marrakesh (2039 987774; Ave Hassan II; s/d US\$16/28, with shower US\$23/34) Set downhill from the action, the Hotel Marrakesh has soul. Bright blue rooms invite fresh air in and the roof terrace offers fine views over the valley.

Dar Terrae (🖻 039 987598; darterrae@hotmail.com; Ave Hassan I; rincl breakfast US\$28-51) Dar Terrae feels like an escape from the outside world - cheerfully painted rooms are individually decorated with their own bathroom and fireplace, all hidden up and down a tumble of stairs and odd corners. Three terraces add to the hideaway factor. The Italian owners prepare a fantastic breakfast spread every day, and other meals on request.

Casa Hassan (🖻 039 986153; www.casahassan.com; 22 Rue Tarqui; s/d/tr half board from US\$51/68/85; 🔀) A longestablished upmarket choice, this guesthouse has more than a hint of the Arabian Nights about it. Rooms are individually decorated with carved wooden doors, beds tucked into coves, colourful tiled bathrooms and locally woven rugs, all stylishly comfortable. The terrace is set for elegant lounging and you'll want to try Restaurant Tissemlal (see right).

Eating

Plaza Café-Restaurants (Plaza Uta el-Hammam; breakfast from US\$1.70, mains from US\$3; 🕑 8am-11pm) One of the most popular eating options in Chefchaouen is to choose one of the dozen or so café-restaurants on the main square. Menus are virtually identical - continental breakfasts, soups and salads, tajines and seafood - but the food is good and they have the best ambience in town.

Restaurant al-Azhar (Ave Moulay Driss; mains from US\$3; 🕑 8am-9pm) Tucked in by the steps down from the post office, this place does a roaring trade, attracting workers and families in equal measure. Tajines and the like are all on offer; a better option is to check out the fish counter out front and order a huge seafood platter (US\$6).

La Lampe Magique (🗃 065 406464; Rue Targui; mains from US\$5, set menu US\$8.50) This magical place overlooking Plaza Uta el-Hammam serves delicious Moroccan staples in a grand setting. Three floors include a laid-back lounge, a more formal dining area, and a rooftop terrace that's open to the stars. Painted blue walls bring Chefchaouen's charm inside, while brick floors and dark wooden tables enhance the local flavour. The food - featuring favourites such as lamb tajine with prunes and some great cooked salads - is delicious.

Restaurant Tissemlal (🖻 039 986153; 22 Rue Tarqui; set menu US\$7) The restaurant inside the Casa Hassan is another sure bet for a fine meal in enchanting surroundings. Always hospitable, this place is especially welcoming on a chilly evening, when a fire roars and warms the bones. The menu includes the Moroccan standards with a few twists. Don't pass on the fresh goat cheese salad, a local Rif speciality.

Getting There & Away

CTM ((20039 988769) has two afternoon buses passing through Chefchaouen en route to Fès (US\$7, four hours) and one afternoon bus to Tangier (US\$4, three hours) via Tetouan (US\$2.30, 1¹/₂ hours); reserve your seat at least a day in advance.

Grands taxis heading to Tetouan (US\$3.40, one hour) leave from just below Plaza Mohammed V.

MELILLA pop 65.000

Melilla is the smaller and less affluent of the two enclaves that mark the last vestiges of Spain's African empire and with a third of its inhabitants being of Rif Berber origin, it has an atmosphere all of its own – neither quite European nor African. The centre of Melilla is a delight of modernist architecture and quiet gardens.

Orientation & Information

The Ville Nouvelle is centred on Place Moulay el-Mehdi and the pedestrian stretch of Ave Mohammed V, which runs west to the vast Place Hassan II. Around here you'll find the hotels, banks, most of the restaurants and cafés and the bus station.

To phone Melilla from outside Spain, dial ☎ 0034 before the nine-digit phone number. Also remember that Melilla is on Spanish time and uses the euro.

KIF IN THE RIF

The smoking of kif (marijuana) is an ancient tradition in northern Morocco (the word stems from the Arabic word for 'pleasure'), and cultivation is widespread in the Rif Mountains; some villages grow nothing else. In fact, one theory claims that the Rif is the source of the Western slang term 'reefer'.

Hashish, which is essentially compressed kif, is a stronger, modern (1960s) invention developed for export. While an old goatherder in the mountains may break out his kif pipe should you stop to chat, hashish is favoured by younger, more Westernised Riffians.

The Rif is one of the most economically deprived areas of Morocco, and kif has become the mainstay of the economy, flourishing with the aid of a blind eye from the authorities. In recent years though, pressure from the US and particularly the EU has lead to a less favourable opinion of this illicit activity. International aid programmes have started to target ecological and cultural tourism as sectors of development, although spend any time in the region and you'll quickly realise that much remains to be done to bring the local infrastructure up to scratch and hence many locals remain dependent on kif for their livelihoods.

In 2004, the production of kif was technically made illegal and farmers can now be prosecuted. In practice, only a few prosecutions have occurred, and the discreet possession and use of kif is still largely tolerated. That said, never travel in possession of kif and mistrust all dealers - many double as police informers.

Siahts

The main entrance to the fortress of Melilla la Vieia (Old Melilla), which perches over the Mediterranean, is Puerta de la Marina (Calle General Macías), where you'll find a pair of 15th-century water cisterns, Aljibes de las Peñuelas (admission US\$1.60; 🎦 10am-2pm & 5-9.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar). The terrace of the small Museo de Arqueología e Historia de Melilla (2 952 681339; Plaza Pedro de Estopiñán; admission free; 🏵 10am-1.30pm & 4-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has fantastic views overlooking the city. The new part of town, west of the fortress,

Sleeping & Eating

the Palacia de la Asamblea.

Hostal Residencia Parque (2 956 682143; 15 Calle General Marina; s/d US\$26/51) This popular pension overlooks Parque Hernandez. Rooms are small, but clean and bright, with TV and bathroom. Advance booking advised.

is considered by some to be Spain's 'second

modernist city', after Barcelona. The highlight

is Plaza de España, with the lovely façade of

Hostal Residencia Cazaza (🖻 956 684648; 6 Calle Primo de Rivera; s/d US\$29/45) A decent-value pension, the Cazaza has eleven smallish, highceilinged rooms, with TVs, bathtubs and balconies. Management is friendly.

Parador de Melilla (🖻 956 684940; Avenida Cándido Lobera; r US\$124; 🕑 🕱 😰) From the outside, Melilla's top hotel looks covered with strange sci-

fi towers. Inside, there are large, grand rooms with shiny fittings and lots of marble. The best have balconies, with great views out to sea.

La Onubense (5 Calle Pareja; tapas from US\$1; 🕑 noon-3pm & 7pm-midnight Mon-Sat) With its rough-hewn wood furniture and unpolished décor, this place looks like the quintessential tapas bar. The house speciality is spicy bollito de Pringá (meatball) and other classic tapas delicacies.

La Cervecería (Calle de General O'Donnell; tapas from US\$1.30; 🕑 12.30-4pm & 8.30pm-midnight) Classier than the Onubense across the street, La Cervecería is decorated in Gaudíesque fashion by the Melillan architect Carlos Baeza.

Café Central (Plaza de España; breakfast from US\$2.60, sandwiches from US\$2; 🕑 7am-1pm & 4-10pm) Next to the park, this is a busy breakfast spot, with great coffee, pastries and cooked items. The inside can sometimes be a bit smoky, but there's a seating area outside.

Getting There & Away

To get to the border, you'll need to catch the local bus 2 (marked 'Aforos'), which runs between Plaza de España and the Beni Enzar border post (US\$0.80) every 30 minutes from 7.30am to 11pm.

Ferry and hydrofoil services are operated by Trasmediterránea (🖻 956 690902; www.trasmediterranea .es; Plaza de España; 🕎 9am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9amnoon Sat). Tickets are also available at the ferry terminal (estación marítima; 🖻 956 681633). There are daily ferries to Malaga and Almería.

FÈS

pop 1 million

The medina of Fès el-Bali (Old Fès) is the largest living medieval Islamic city in the world. Nothing quite prepares you for your first visit, which can truly be an assault on the senses. Its narrow winding alleys and covered bazaars are crammed with shops, restaurants, workshops, mosques, madrassas and extensive dye pits and tanneries - a riot of sights, sounds and smells.

Orientation

Fès can be neatly divided into three distinct parts: Fès el-Bali (the core of the medina; the main entrance is Bab Bou Jeloud) in the east; Fès el-Jdid (containing the mellah and Royal Palace) in the centre; and the Ville Nouvelle, the administrative area constructed by the French, to the southwest. Frequent local buses connect the Ville Nouvelle with the medina, a 10-minute journey (US\$0.40).

Information INTERNET ACCESS

London Cyber (Map p162; Ave de la Liberté; per hr US\$1.20; (10am-10pm) Teleboutique Cyber Club (Map p164; Blvd Mohammed V: per hr US\$0.80; (> 9am-11pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hôpital Ghassani (Map p162; 🖻 055 622777) Located east of the Ville Nouvelle in Dhar Mehraz. Night Pharmacy (Map p164; 🖻 055 623493; Blvd Moulay Youssef; 🕑 9pm-6am) Located in the north of the Ville Nouvelle; staffed by a doctor and pharmacist.

MONEY

Société Générale (Map p162; Ave des Français; 8.45am-noon & 2.45-6pm Mon-Thu, 8.45-11am Fri, 8.45am-noon Sat) Immediately outside Bab Bou Jeloud.

POST

Main post office (Map p164; cnr Ave Hassan II & Blvd Mohammed V)

Post office (Map p162; PI de l'Istiglal) In the medina.

TOURIST INFORMATION Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT: Map

p164; 🖻 055 623460; fax 055 654370; Pl de la Résistance; (8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30-11.30am & 3-6.30pm Fri)

Dangers & Annoyances

Fès has long been notorious for its faux guides (false guides). The situation has improved

with the introduction of a *brigade touristique*; still, high unemployment forces many to persist. A few hustlers hang about Fès train station and hotels, but the worst place is around Bab Bou Jeloud, the main western entrance to the medina.

Sights FÈS EL-BALI (OLD FÈS)

Within the old walls of Fès el-Bali lies an incredible maze of twisting alleys, blind turns and hidden sougs. Navigation can be confusing and getting lost at some stage a certainty, but this is part of the medina's charm: you never quite know what discovery lies around the next corner.

If Fès is the spiritual capital of Morocco, the Kairaouine Mosque (Map p162) is its true heart. Built in 859 by refugees from Tunisia, and rebuilt in the 12th century, it can accommodate up to 20,000 people at prayer. Non-Muslims are forbidden to enter and will have to suffice with glimpses of its seemingly endless columns from the gates on Talaa Kebira and Pl as-Seffarine.

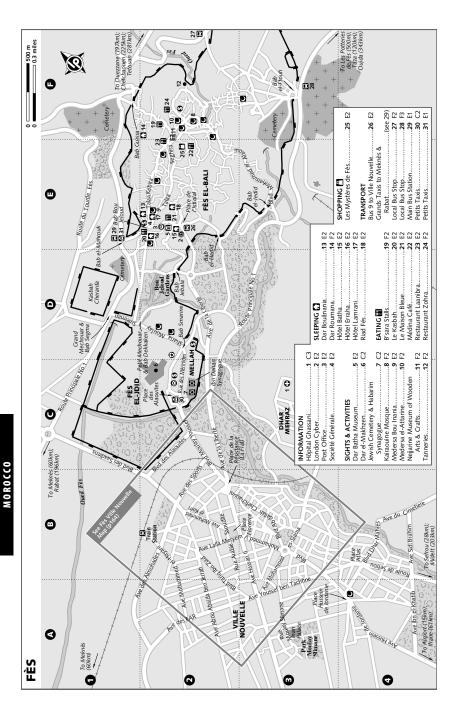
Located 150m east of Bab Bou Jeloud, the 14th-century Medersa Bou Inania (Map p162; admission US\$1.20; 🕑 8am-5pm) is said to be the finest of Fès' theological colleges constructed by the Merenids. The zellij, muqarna (plasterwork) and wood carving are amazingly elaborate, and views from the roof are also impressive.

Founded by Abu Said in 1325 in the heart of the medina, the Medersa el-Attarine (Map p162; admission US\$1.20; 🕑 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm) displays the traditional patterns of Merenid artisanship. The *zellij* base, stucco work and cedar wood at the top of the walls and the ceiling is every bit as elegant as the artistry of the Medersa Bou Inania. ship. The *zellij* base, stucco work and cedar

The Nejjarine Museum of Wooden Arts & Crafts (Map p162; 2 035 740580; Pl an-Nejjarine; admission US\$2.30; 🕑 10am-5pm) is in a wonderfully restored funduq (a caravanserai for travelling merchants). Photography is forbidden.

In a century-old Hispano-Moorish palace, the Dar Batha Museum (Museum of Moroccan Arts & Crafts; Map p162; 🖻 035 634116; Pl de l'Istiglal; admission US\$1.20; 🕅 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm Wed-Mon) houses an excellent collection of traditional Moroccan arts and crafts.

The tanneries (Map p162) of Fès are one the city's most iconic sights (and smells). Head northeast of Pl as-Seffarine and take the left fork after about 50m; you'll soon pick up



the unmistakeable waft of skin and dye that will guide you into the heart of the leather district.

FÈS EL-JDID (NEW FÈS)

The entrance to Dar el-Makhzen (Royal Palace; Map p162; Pl des Alaouites) is a stunning example of modern restoration, but the 80 hectares of palace grounds are not open to the public.

During the 14th century, Fès el-Jdid became a refuge for Jews, thus creating a mellah. The mellah's southwest corner is home to the fascinating Jewish Cemetery & Habarim Synagogue (Map p162; admission free, donations appreciated; 🏵 7am-7pm).

Festivals & Events

Every June the Fès Festival of World Sacred Music (🖻 055 740535; www.fesfestival.com) brings together music groups and artists from all corners of the globe. It's become an established favourite on the 'world music' festival circuit.

Sleeping MEDINA

Hôtel Erraha (Map p162; 🖻 035 633226; Pl Bou Jeloud; s/d US\$6/9, hot showers US\$1.20) Just outside Bab Bou Jeloud, this cheapie has large airy rooms and a roof terrace. Murals give the place a bit of a lift. As with many places in this bracket, the shared bathroom facilities reflect the price tag.

Hôtel Lamrani (Map p162; 🖻 035 634411; Talaa Seghira; r US\$17-23) Another place with a great location, just away from the hustle of Bab Bou Jeloud. Rooms are of a good size and bathrooms are clean with hot showers. If only the management weren't so grumpy, this would be fantastic.

Dar Bouânania (Map p162; 🖻 035 637282; 21 Derb be Salem; s with/without shower US\$28/23, d with/without shower US\$34/28) Fès has long lacked any riadstyle budget accommodation, so this new hotel makes a welcome appearance on the scene. Well signed off Talaa Kebira, it's very much a traditional Moroccan house, with a lovely zellij and stucco courtyard, a series of nicely decorated bedrooms over several floors and a small roof terrace.

Hôtel Batha (Map p162; 🖻 035 741077; fax 035 741078; Pl Batha; s/d incl breakfast US\$37/51; (P) 🔀 💽) Great value on the edge of the medina, this old favourite is a mix of the reasonably modern with the traditionally decorated. Rooms come with sunken bathtubs, although hot water can be

erratic. The whitewashed courtvard is a wonderful, cool refuge from the city heat - as is the pool.

Dar Roumana (Map p162; 🖻 035 741637; www.dar roumana.com; 30 Derb el Amer, Zkak Roumane; r US\$79-136; 🔀 🛄) Many riads claim to have the best views of Fès' medina, but this beautiful house might just take the prize. There are just five rooms, all immaculate and subtly decorated to show off the painstaking restoration process that brought the building back to life, plus some modern touches such as wi-fi throughout. The roof terrace is a gorgeous place for breakfast or a drink over dinner - you may even get to lend a hand in the kitchen as the owner (a Cordon Bleu chef) offers Moroccan cookery lessons.

Riad Fès (Map p162; 🖻 035 741012; www.riadfes.com; 5 Derb ibn Slimane; r/ste incl breakfast from US\$203/339; P 🕄 😰) The labyrinthine Riad Fès blends the ancient and modern with impressive panache. The older section features the best of traditional décor, while the newer quarters would not look out of place in a Parisian boutique hotel yet remain unmistakeably Moroccan.

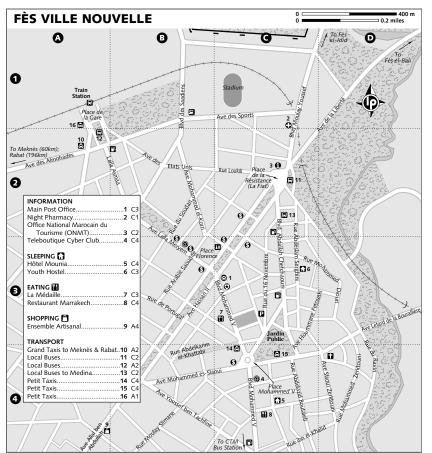
VILLE NOUVELLE

Youth Hostel (Map p164; 🖻 035 624085; 18 Rue Abdeslam Serghini; dm US\$5; 🕑 8-10am, noon-3pm & 6-10pm) Easily one of the better youth hostels in Morocco, the Fès branch is well looked after and right in the centre of the Ville Nouvelle. Tidy rooms and facilities (including Western-style toilets) are super clean. If you're not a Hostelling International member, there's a US\$0.60 surcharge. Cold showers mean that you should look to *hammams* (traditional bathhouse) for charge. Cold showers mean that you should your ablutions.

Hôtel Mounia (Map p164; 🖻 035 624838; www.hotel mouniafes.ma in French; 60 Blvd Zerktouni; s/d incl breakfast from US\$48/61; **P** 😫) A *zellij*-tiled lobby guides you into the modern and classy Hotel Mounia. Rooms are bright and tidy, and all have satellite TV. The onsite restaurant is good, and there's a smokier bar with plenty of water pipes. Staff are exceedingly helpful. It's popular with tour groups and good discounts are often available.

Eating MEDINA

B'sara Stalls (Map p162; soup US\$0.40) You shouldn't leave town without sampling this Fassi speciality. A butterbean and garlic soup, b'sara



is served out of hole-in-the-wall places throughout the medina – our favourites are in the Acherbine area. Look for the big cauldrons facing the street, and a guy serving great ladlefuls into rough pottery bowls. Delicious with an extra dash of olive oil and a hunk of bread, *b'sara* is perfect fuel for exploring the city.

Le Kasbah (Map p162; Rue Serrajine; mains US\$4.50, set menu US\$8) On several floors opposite the cheap hotels at Bab Bou Jeloud, this restaurant occupies a prime spot – the top floor looks out over the medina. The food is good standard Moroccan fare; the four-course menu is particularly good value.

Restaurant Zohra (Map p162; 🖻 055 637699; 3 Derb Ain Nass Blida; set menu US\$8-10) Tucked away in the backstreets north of the Kairaouine Mosque, this simple little place is well regarded for its home cooking and warm family welcome.

[^] Médina Café (Map p162; [™] 035 633430; 6 Derb Mernissi; menus US\$8-13; [™] 8am-10pm) Just outside Bab Bou Jeloud, this small restaurant is an oasis of serenity, decorated in a traditional yet restrained manner, with a fine attention to details. During the day it's a good place to visit for a quick bite or a fruit juice, in the evening the best of Moroccan fare is on offer – the lamb tajine with dried figs and apricots is a real winner, while the plates of couscous are big enough for two.

Restaurant Laanibra (Map p162; 🖻 035 741009; 61 Ain Lkhail; set menu US\$14-45) This is a sumptuously

THE LIFE OF A FAUX GUIDE

Anas is 17. He is the oldest of his three brothers and sisters. Until he was 13 he did well at school and hoped to go to university one day. Anas' world turned upside down when his father died unexpectedly and he was thrust into being the head of his household. To support his mother and family, he dropped out of school and tried to find work with the tourists visiting Fès' medina.

Like many others before him, Anas hung around Bab Bou Jeloud trying to find tourists he could guide to carpet and handicrafts shop, in hope of a little commission, picking up some of the patter of the official guides, and pointing out the names of streets and fountains along the way. On a good day he could earn Dh100 (US\$12) or so, but the police were a constant worry. He never spent a night in jail (unlike several of his *faux guide* friends), but had his knuckles rapped plenty of times – and his day's earnings confiscated.

When the tourist numbers died down in the winter, Anas tried a brief stint working at the tanneries, but it was a tough job for a small boy, carrying heavy wet skins for less than Dh40 (US\$4.50) a day. He left after a few months, worrying that the chemicals in the dye pits were affecting his health.

Anas has now moved to Chefchaouen, where he touts for a handicrafts shop and has a casual line in selling kif to backpackers. The money isn't as good as in Fès, but he says it's worth it to no longer get hassled by the police. He'd eventually like to finish school, but earning to help support his family will remain his number one priority for the foreseeable future.

decorated 14th-century palace, with all the craftsmanship you'd expect to find in a riad, with side alcoves forming a series of private dining areas. The menu shows equal care and attention – the rich *pastilla* is a favourite, but difficult to finish if you've loaded up on starters (vegetarians will love the cooked salads). This place is open for lunch year-round, but for dinner only in summer.

La Maison Bleue (Map p162; 2 035 636052; 2 Pl de l'Istiqlal; set menu incl drinks guests/nonguests US\$57/62; 2 dinner) Reservations are necessary at this elegant riad restaurant. The setting is intimate and romantic, with diners serenaded by an oud player (replaced by livelier Gnaoua song and dance later in the evening). Set menus run along traditional lines – salads, tajines and the like – but the preparation and presentation are a definite cut above most other places. Alcohol is served.

VILLE NOUVELLE

Restaurant Marrakech (Map p164; ⁽²⁾ 035 930876; 11 Rue Omar el-Mokhtar; mains from US\$6) This restaurant's recent makeover has added hugely to its charm – red plastered walls and dark furniture, with a cushion-strewn salon at the back. But the menu's variety continues to be its strength, offering delights such as chicken tajine with apples and olives, or lamb with aubergines (eggplants) and peppers. Delicious food in lovely surroundings.

Shopping

Fès is and always has been the artisanal capital of Morocco. The choice of crafts is wide, quality is high, and prices are competitive. As usual, it's best to seek out the little shops off the main tourist routes.

Ensemble Artisanal (Mapp164; Ave Allah ben Abdullah; ⁽¹⁾ 9am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm) Slightly out of the way in the Ville Nouvelle, the state-run Ensemble Artisanal is always a decent place to get a feel for quality and price.

Les Potteries de Fès (Bab el-Ftouh) An attraction in itself, this is the home of the famous Fassi pottery. You can see the entire production process, from pot throwing to the painstaking hand painting and laying out of *zellij* – it's a joy to behold.

Les Mystères de Fès (53 Derb bin Lemssari) This place is stuffed to the rafters with jewellery, furniture, pots and trinkets.

Getting There & Away BUS

The main station for **CTM buses** (**a** 035732992) is near Pl Atlas in the southern Ville Nouvelle. CTM runs the following services:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)	Daily services
Casablanca	10	5	7
Chefchaouen	7.50	4	3
Marrakesh	17	9	2
Meknès	2	1	6
Rabat	7	31/2	7
Tangier	9	6	3
Tetouan	9	5	2

Non-CTM buses depart from the **main bus station** (Map p162; **(a)** 035 636032) outside Bab el-Mahrouk.

ΤΑΧΙ

There are several *grand-taxi* ranks dotted around town. Taxis for Meknès (US\$1.60) and Rabat (US\$6.30) leave from in front of the main bus station (outside Bab el-Mahrouk) and from near the train station.

TRAIN

The **train station** (**C** 035 930333) is located in the Ville Nouvelle, a 10-minute walk northwest of Pl Florence. Trains depart every two hours between 7am and 5pm to Casablanca (US\$11, 4½ hours), via Rabat (US\$8, 3½ hours) and Meknès (US\$2, one hour), plus there are two overnight trains. Five trains go to Marrakesh (US\$20, eight hours) and one goes to Tangier (US\$11, five hours).

Getting Around

There's a regular bus service (No 16) between the airport and the train station (US\$0.40, 25 minutes), with departures every half-hour or so. *Grands taxis* have a set fare of US\$14.

Drivers of the red *petits taxis* generally use their meters without any fuss. Expect to pay about US\$1.20 from the train or CTM station to Bab Bou Jeloud.

MEKNÈS

pop 680,000

Morocco's third imperial city is often overlooked by tourist itineraries, but Meknès is worth getting to know. Quieter and smaller than its neighbour, it's also more laid-back and less hassle but still awash with the winding narrow medina streets and grand buildings befitting a one-time capital of the sultanate.

Orientation

The valley of the (usually dry) Oued Bou Fekrane neatly divides the old medina in the west and the French-built Ville Nouvelle in the east. Ave Moulay Ismail connects them, then becomes the principal route of the Ville Nouvelle, where its name changes to Ave Hassan II.

Moulay Ismail's tomb and imperial city are south of the medina. Train and CTM bus stations are in the Ville Nouvelle, as are most offices and banks, as well as the more expensive hotels. It's a 20-minute walk from the medina to the Ville Nouvelle, but regular (and crowded) local buses and urban grands taxis shuttle between the two.

Information

BMCE (Banque Marocaine du Commerce Extérieur; 98 Ave des FAR;
→ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm) Cyber de Paris (Zankat Accra; per hr US\$0.90;
→ 9-2am) Délégation Régionale du Tourisme (0NMT;
) 524426; Pl de l'Istiqlal;
→ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8-11.30am & 3-6.30pm Fri) Hôpital Moulay Ismail () 035 522805) Off Ave des FAR. Main post office (Pl de l'Istiqlal) Night Pharmacy (Rue de Paris)

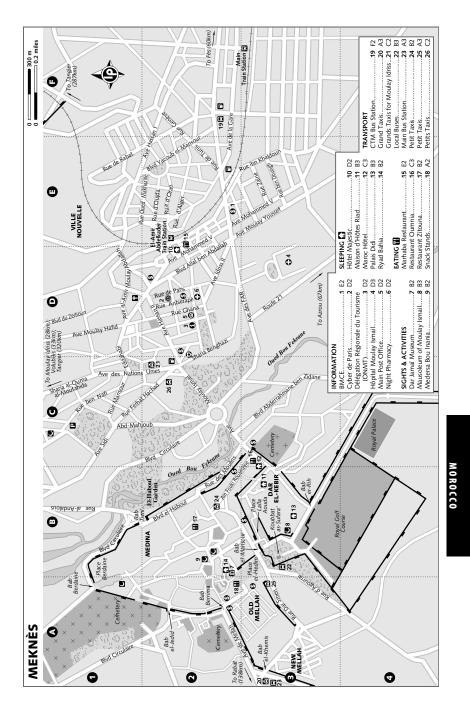
Sights

The heart of Meknès' medina lies to the north of the main square, Pl el-Hedim, with the *mellah* to the west. To the south, Moulay Ismail's **imperial city** opens up through one of the most impressive monumental gateways in all of Morocco, **Bab el-Mansour**. Following the road around to the right, you'll come across the grand **Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail** (admission free, donations appreciated; 🕑 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Sat-Thu), named for the sultan who made Meknès his capital in the 17th century.

Overlooking Pl el-Hedim on the north is the 1882 palace that houses the **Dar Jamaï museum** (2005 530863; Pl el-Hedim; admission US\$1.20; 20 9amnoon & 3-6.30pm Wed-Mon). Deeper in the medina, opposite the Grand Mosque, the **Medersa Bou Inania** (Rue Najjarine; admission US\$1.20; 20 9am-noon & 3-6pm) is typical of the exquisite interior design that distinguishes Merenid monuments.

Sleeping

Maroc Hôtel (🖻 035 530075; 7 Rue Rouamzine; s/d US\$7/14) Despite its inauspicious exterior,



Maroc Hôtel is a budget gem. Friendly and quiet, rooms (with sinks) are freshly painted, and the shared bathrooms are clean. The great terrace and orange-tree-filled courtyard add to the ambience.

Hôtel Majestic (🗃 035 522035; 19 Ave Mohammed V; s with/without bathroom US\$24/15, d with/without bathroom US\$27/20) Built in the 1930s, this grand old lady carries her age well. There's a good mix of rooms (all have sinks) and there's plenty of character to go around, plus a peaceful patio and panoramic roof terrace. Management are helpful and breakfast is included in the price.

Maison d'Hôtes Riad (🖻 035 530542; www.riad meknes.com; 79 Ksar Chaacha; r incl breakfast US\$57-90; P 🔀 🔊) Meknès' first riad is located amid the ruins of the Palais Ksar Chaacha, the 17thcentury imperial residence of Moulay Ismail. There are just six rooms, each individually and tastefully decorated in traditional style. There's an excellent restaurant on the ground floor and a small plunge pool.

Ryad Bahia (🖻 035 554541; www.ryad-bahia.com; Derb Sekkaya, Tiberbarine; r incl breakfast US\$57-90; 🕄) This charming little riad is just a stone's throw from Pl el-Hedim. The alley entrance opens onto a courtyard (which also hosts a great restaurant), with stairs leading off in all directions to quaint, pretty rooms that have been carefully restored and decorated with fine attention to detail, from the bathroom fittings to the plush rugs. Palais Didi (🖻 035 558590; www.palaisdidi.com; 7 Dar

el-Kbira: r/ste incl breakfast US\$136/170; 🔊 🕄) Didi is

the fancy older sister to the other riads in

Meknès' medina, and easily the largest. Five

sumptuous suites and five romantic rooms, all

different and decked out with antique furni-

ture in the luxurious rooms and deep bathtubs

in the zellij bathrooms, are set around a sleek

Eating

marble-tiled courtyard.

Snack stands (PI el-Hedim; sandwiches around US\$2; Tam-10pm) This cluster of snack stands on the northwest corner of Pl el-Hedim is ideal for a lunchtime snack, which can easily stretch into an afternoon of people-watching on the square. There's a wide range of grilled meat fillings, all topped out with generous handfuls of salad.

Marhaba Restaurant (23 Ave Mohammed V; tajines US\$3; (noon-9pm) 'Never beaten on price' should be this place's proud motto. More a canteen than restaurant, it packs in everyone from lunchtime workers to gangs of schoolgirls. Food is cheap and tasty - a bowl of harira and a plateful of makoda (fried potato patties) will fill you up and still give change from US\$1.20. Superb.

Restaurant Oumnia (🕿 035 533938; 8 Ain Fouki Rouamzine; set menu US\$7.50; 🕎 7am-10pm) This informal restaurant is inside a family home, just off the main drag of the Meknès medina, giving diners a warm welcome. There's just a threecourse set menu, but it's a real winner, with delicious harira, salads and a choice of several tajines of the day.

Restaurant Zitouna (🖻 055 530281; 44 Djemma Zitouna; set menu from US\$13) In the heart of the medina, this grand establishment offers the same palace-restaurant style you'd find in Fès. Its ornate covered courtyard is done up with zellij and stucco, with several small salons for more restrained dining. Traditional Moroccan dishes are naturally the order of the day, with pastilla being something of a house speciality.

Getting There & Away

The **CTM bus station** (**a** 035 522585; Ave des FAR) is about 300m east of the junction with Ave Mohammed V. The main bus station lies just outside Bab el-Khemis, west of the medina. CTM departures include the following: Casablanca (US\$8, four hours, six daily) via Rabat (US\$5, 21/2 hours, six daily), Marrakesh (US\$15, eight hours, daily) and Tangier (US\$9, five hours, three daily).

The principal grand-taxi rank is a dirt lot next to the bus station at Bab el-Khemis. There are regular departures to Fès (US\$2, one hour) and Rabat (US\$4.50, 90 minutes). Grands taxis for Moulay Idriss (US\$1.20, 20 minutes) leave from opposite the Institut Français - this is also the place to organise round trips to Volubilis.

AROUND MEKNES

In the midst of a fertile plain about 33km north of Meknès, Volubilis (Quailili; admission US\$2.30, parking US\$0.60, guided tour US\$14; 🕅 8am-sunset) are the largest and best-preserved Roman ruins in Morocco. One of the country's most important pilgrimage sites, Moulay Idriss, is only about 4.5km from Volubilis. The simplest and quickest way to get here from Meknès is to hire a grand taxi for the return trip. A half-day outing will cost around US\$34.

THE ATLANTIC COAST

Miles of glorious sands peppered with small fishing villages, historic ports and fortified towns weave along Morocco's blustery Atlantic Coast. It's a region that sweeps from pristine beachfront to urban sprawl around Casablanca, from the long, windswept beaches in the south to mountain valleys, green as green.

ASILAH pop 29,500

The bijou resort town of Asilah has become a firm favourite on the traveller's trail of the North Atlantic Coast. It's an intimate, sophisticated introduction to Morocco, with galleries lining the narrow streets. Given its increasing popularity, consider visiting out of season to appreciate the old-world charm of this lovely whitewashed town at its best.

Sights & Activities

Asilah's medina, surrounded by sturdy stone fortifications built by the Portuguese in the 15th century, has been largely restored (and sanitised) in recent years. The narrow streets lined by whitewashed houses are well worth a wander amid the ornate wrought-iron window guards and colourful murals. The southwestern bastion of the ramparts is the best for views over the ocean.

Paradise Beach, Asilah's best beach, is 3km south of town and is a gorgeous, pristine spot that really does live up to its name.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Sahara (🕿 039 417185; 9 Rue Tarfava; s/d US\$11/14, hot showers US\$0.60) By far Asilah's best budget option, this small, immaculately kept hotel offers simple rooms arranged around an open courtyard. Patterned tiles and potted plants adorn the lovely entrance and the compact rooms, though fairly Spartan, are comfortable and well maintained. The shared toilets and showers sparkle.

Hôtel Azayla (🕿 039 416717; e-elhaddad@menara .ma; 20 Rue ibn Rouchd; s/d from US\$34/39) Big, bright, comfy and well-equipped, the rooms here are a really good deal. The bathrooms are new, the décor is tasteful and the giant windows bathe the rooms in light. Prices drop by up to 20% out of high season.

Hôtel Patio de la Luna (📾 039 416074; 12 Pl Zellaka; s/dUS\$34/53) The only accommodation option in Asilah with any local character, this intimate Spanish-run place is secluded behind an unassuming door on the main drag. The simple, rustic rooms have wooden furniture, woven blankets and tiled bathrooms, and are set around a lovely leafy patio.

Restaurant Yali (🕿 071 043277; Ave Hassan II; mains US\$3-6) Although there's little to choose between them, this is one of the most popular of the string of restaurants along the medina walls. It serves up a good selection of fish, seafood and traditional Moroccan staples.

Restaurant de la Place (🕿 039 417326; 7 Ave Moulay Hassan ben el-Mehdi; mains US\$4.50-9) Friendly, less formal and more varied than its neighbours, this restaurant offers a choice of traditional Moroccan dishes as well as the ubiquitous seafood. For the best of both worlds try the delicious fish tajine.

Casa García (🖻 039 417465; 51 Ave Moulay Hassan ben el-Mehdi; mains US\$9) Spanish-style fish dishes are the speciality at this small restaurant opposite the beach. Go for succulent grilled fish fresh from the port or, more adventurously, octopus, eels, shrimp and barnacles.

Getting There & Away

The tiny bus station is on Ave de la Liberté, where CTM has a ticket office. The train station is 2km north of Asilah. CTM has services to Casablanca (US\$8, 4½ hours) via Rabat (US\$7, 3¹/₂ hours), Fès (US\$7, 4¹/₂ hours) via Meknès (US\$6, 3½ hours), Tangier (US\$1.20, one hour) and Marrakesh (US\$2.30, nine hours). Cheaper non-CTM buses to Tangier and Casablanca leave roughly every half hour.

Three trains run daily to Rabat (US\$9, 3½ ours) and Casablanca (US\$11, 4½ hours), ne to Meknès (US\$6.30, three hours) and hours) and Casablanca (US\$11, 4¹/₂ hours), one to Meknès (US\$6.30, three hours) and Fès (US\$9, four hours) and six daily to Tangier (US\$1.60, 45 minutes). One overnight train goes directly to Marrakesh (US\$20, nine hours).

CASABLANCA pop 3.8 million

Casa, as Casablanca is popularly known, is a city of incredible contrasts, offering a unique insight into modern Morocco. This sprawling, European-style city is home to racing traffic, simmering social problems, wide boulevards, public parks and imposing Hispano-Moorish and Art Deco buildings that line the streets, their rundown façades in sharp contrast to Casablanca's modernist landmark.

the enormous and incredibly ornate Hassan II mosque.

Orientation

The medina – the oldest part of town – is relatively small and sits in the north of the city close to the port. To the south of the medina is Pl des Nations Unies, a large traffic junction that marks the heart of the city. The CTM bus station and Casa-Port train station are in the centre of the city. Casa-Voyageurs train station is 2km east of the centre and the airport is 30km southeast of town.

Information EMERGENCY

Service d'Aide Médicale Urgente (SAMU; ☎ 022 252525) Private ambulance service. SOS Médecins (☎ 022 444444; house call US\$35; Ŷ 24hr) Private doctors who make house calls.

INTERNET ACCESS

MONEY

BMCE (Banque Marocaine du Commerce Extérieur; Hyatt Regency Hotel; 🏵 9am-9pm) Crédit du Maroc (🖻 022 477255; 48 Blvd Mohammed V)

POST

MOROCCO

Central Market post office (cnr Blvd Mohammed V & Rue Chaouia) Main post office (cnr Blvd de Paris & Ave Hassan II)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT;

© 022 271177; 55 Rue Omar Slaoui; S 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Sights

Rising above the Atlantic northwest of the medina, **Hassan II Mosque** is the world's thirdlargest mosque, built to commemorate the former king's 60th birthday. The mosque rises above the ocean on a rocky outcrop reclaimed from the sea. It's a vast building that holds 25,000 worshippers and can accommodate a further 80,000 in the courtyards and squares around it. To see the interior of the mosque you must take a **guided tour** (2022) 482886; adult/student/child US\$14/7/3.40; 🕑 9am, 10am, 11am & 2pm Sat-Thu).

Set in a beautiful villa surrounded by lush gardens, the **Jewish Museum of Casablanca** (2022 994940; 81 Rue Chasseur Jules Gros, Oasis; admission US\$2.30, with guide US\$3.40; 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) is the only Jewish museum in the Islamic world.

In the trendy suburb of Aïn Diab, the beachside **Blvd de la Corniche** is lined with beach clubs, four-star hotels, upmarket restaurants, bars, coffee shops, nightclubs and a new multiplex cinema. Take bus 9 from Pl Oued al-Makhazine, just west of Pl des Nations Unies.

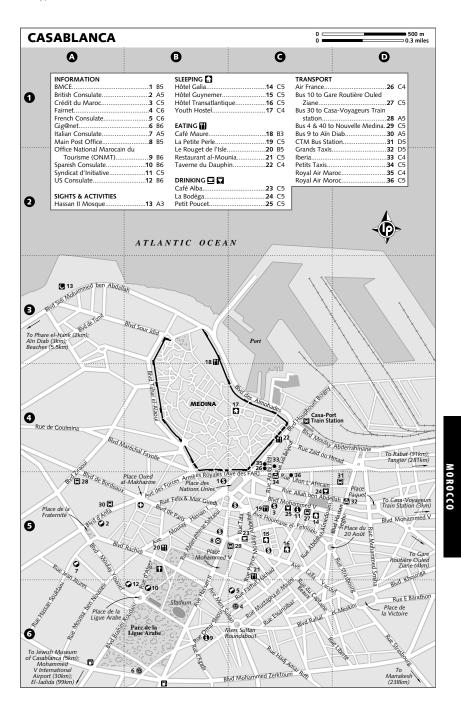
Sleeping

Hotel Galia (a 22 481694; 19 Rue ibn Batouta; s with/ without shower US\$19/17, d with/without shower US\$28/25) Tiled floors, plastic flowers, gold tasselled curtains and matching bedspreads adorn the rooms at the Galia, a top-notch budget option with excellent-value rooms and a rather dubious taste in décor. Management is friendly and helpful.

Hôtel Guynemer (2022 275764; www.geoities.com /guynemerhotel; 2 Rue Mohammed Belloul; s/d/trind breakfast US\$42/61/76; 2) This family-run hotel has 29 recently redecorated rooms tastefully decked out in cheerful colours. Fresh flowers, TVs, new bathroom fittings and firm, comfortable beds make them a steal and the service is way above average. There's also wi-fi access in the lobby and a dedicated PC for guest use.

Hótel Transatlantique (🖻 022 294551; www.transat casa.com; 79 Rue Chaouia; s/d US\$70/84; 🕄) Set in one of Casa's Art Deco gems, this 1922 hotel has buckets of neo-Moorish character. The grand scale, decorative plaster, spidery wroughtironwork and eclectic mix of knick-knacks give it a whiff of colonial-era decadence crossed with '70s retro. There's a lovely outdoor seating area and comfortable, but fairly plain, bedrooms.

Hôtel le Littoral (☎ 022 797373; www.hotel-littoral .ma; Blvd de l'Océan Atlantique, Aïn Diab; s/d US\$79/96; (२ 至) This cavernous, well-kept hotel is rather dark with rooms that were once the height of fashion but now look dangerously '80s. However, they've got large balconies and wonderful views over the waterfront.



Eating

La Petite Perle ((2) 022 272849; 17-19 Ave Houmane el-Fetouaki; mains US\$2.50-5; (3) 11.30am-3pm & 6-11pm) Popular with young professionals and a quiet break for women travelling alone, this spotless, modern café serves up a range of sandwiches, crêpes, pastas and pizzas as well as a great choice of breakfasts.

Café Maure (ⓐ 022 260960; Blvd des Almohades; mains US\$7-10; ⓑ 10-12am, to 6pm in winter) Nestled in the ochre walls of the sqala (an 18th-century fortified bastion), this lovely restaurant is a tranquil escape from the city. The menu favours seafood and salads, although meat dishes are also available. The exotic fruit juices are simply sublime.

Taverne du Dauphin () 202 221200; 115 Blvd Houphouet Boigny; mains USS8-10, set menu USS12; () Mon-Sat) A Casablanca institution, this traditional Provençal restaurant and bar has been serving up *fruits de mer* since it opened in 1958. On first glance it's a humble, family-run place but one taste of the succulent grilled fish, fried calamari and *crevettes royales* (royal shrimps) will leave you smitten.

Le Rouget de l'Isle (🖻 022 294740; 16 Rue Rouget de l'Isle; mains US\$10-15; 🕑 closed Sat lunch & Sun) Sleek, stylish and renowned for its simple but delicious French food, Le Rouget is one of Casa's top spots. Set in a renovated 1930s villa, it is an elegant place filled with period furniture and contemporary artwork. The impeccable food is reasonably priced and there's a beautiful garden. Book in advance.

garden. Book in advance. **Restaurant al-Mounia** (© 022 222669; 95 Rue Prince Moulay Abdallah; mains US\$10-16) Dine in style at this wonderfully traditional restaurant where you can choose to sit in the elegant Moroccan salon or the cool, leafy garden to enjoy the sumptuous Moroccan cuisine. There's a selection of salads worthy of any vegetarian restaurant and an array of exotic delicacies such as chicken *pastilla* and pigeon with raisins.

Drinking & Entertainment

Café Alba ($\textcircled{\mbox{\scriptsize one}}$ 022 227154; 59-61 Rue Driss Lahrizi; $\textcircled{\mbox{\scriptsize one}}$ 8-1am) High ceilings, swish, modern furniture and subtle lighting mark this café out from the more traditional smoky joints around town. It's hassle-free for women and a great place for watching Casa's up-and-coming.

La Bodéga (20 022 541842; 129 Rue Allah ben Abdellah; (2) 12.30-3pm & 7pm-midnight) Hip, happening and loved by a mixed-aged group of Casablanca's finest, La Bodega is a tapas bar where the music (everything from salsa to Arabic pop) is loud and the alcohol flows freely. It's a fun place with a lively atmosphere and a packed dance floor after 10pm.

Petit Poucet (Blvd Mohammed V; ∑ 9am-10pm) A die-hard relic of 1920s France, this strictly male-only bar was where Saint-Exupéry, the French author and aviator, used to spend time between mail-flights across the Sahara. Today, the bar is pretty low key but it's an authentic slice of old-time Casa life.

La Petite Roche ((2) 2395748; Blvd de la Corniche, Phare el-Hank; (2) 12.30-3pm & 7pm-midnight) With stunning views across to Hassan II Mosque, La Petite Roche is another favourite Casa hang-out. Littered with pillows thrown across low-level seating and lit by an army of candles, this place has a laid-back but exotic atmosphere.

The beachfront suburb of Aïn Diab is the place for late-night drinking and dancing. However, hanging out with Casablanca's beautiful people for a night on the town doesn't come cheap. Expect to pay at least US\$12 to get in and as much again for your drinks. The strip of disco joints along the beachfront ranges from cabaret-style barcum-restaurants such as **Balcon 33** (33 Blvd de la Corniche) to the pastel-coloured pop sensation **Candy Bar** (55 Blvd de la Corniche) and the catch-all **VIP club** (Rue des Dunes).

Getting There & Away BUS

The modern **CTM bus station** ((2) 022 541010; 23 Rue Léon L'Africain) has daily CTM departures as outlined in the table below.

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)	Daily services
Essaouira	13.60	7	3
Fès	10	5	12
Marrakesh	8	4	9
Meknès	8	4	11
Rabat	2.80	1	11
Tangier	14	6	6
Tetouan	14	7	3

The modern **Gare Routière Ouled Ziane** (C 022 444470), 4km southeast of the centre, is the bus station for non-CTM services.

TRAIN

All long-distance trains as well as trains to Mohammed V International Airport depart from **Casa-Voyageurs train station** (2022 243818), 4km east of the city centre. Catch bus 30 (US\$0.40), which runs all down Blvd Mohammed V, or hop in a taxi and pay about US\$1.20 to get there. Destinations from Casa-Voyageurs include Marrakesh (US\$9, three hours, nine daily), Fès (US\$11, 4½ hours, nine daily) via Meknès (US\$9, 3½ hours, nine daily) and Tangier (US\$13, 5½ hours, three daily).

The **Casa-Port train station** (**@** 022 223011) is a few hundred metres northeast of Pl des Nations Unies. Although the station is more convenient than Casa-Voyageurs, the only trains that run from it are those to Rabat (US\$3.40, one hour).

Getting Around

The easiest way to get from Mohammed V International Airport to Casablanca is by train (US\$3.40, 2nd class, 35 minutes); they leave every hour from 6am to midnight from below the ground floor of the airport terminal building. A *grand taxi* between the airport and the city centre costs US\$28.

Casa's red *petits taxis* are excellent value. The minimum fare is US\$0.80, but expect to pay US\$1.20 in or near the city centre.

ESSAOUIRA

pop 69,000

The laid-back attitude, plum accommodation, artsy atmosphere, bracing sea breezes and picture-postcard ramparts make Essaouira a firm favourite on the traveller's trail. It's the kind of place where you'll sigh deeply and relax enough to shrug off your guarded attitude and just soak up the atmosphere.

Sights & Activities

Essaouira's walled **medina** was added to Unesco's World Heritage list in 2001, its wellpreserved, late-18th-century fortified layout a prime example of European military architecture in North Africa. The mellow atmosphere and narrow winding streets lined with colourful shops, whitewashed houses and heavy old wooden doors make it a wonderful place to stroll. The easiest place to access the ramparts is at **Skala de la Ville**, the impressive sea bastion built along the cliffs. Down by the harbour, the **Skala du Port** (adult/child US\$1.20/0.40; 🕑 8.30amnoon & 2.30-6pm) offers picturesque views over the fishing port and the **Île de Mogador**.

A number of outlets rent watersports equipment and offer instruction along Essaouira's wide sandy beach. **Magic Fun Afrika** (2024473856; www.magicfunafrika.com; Blvd Mohammed V; 💬 9am-6pm Mar-Dec) rents windsurfing equipment (US\$17 per hour) and surfboards (US\$7 per hour). It also offers kite surfing (from US\$28 per hour) and kayaking (US\$12 per hour, US\$37 per day).

Festivals & Events

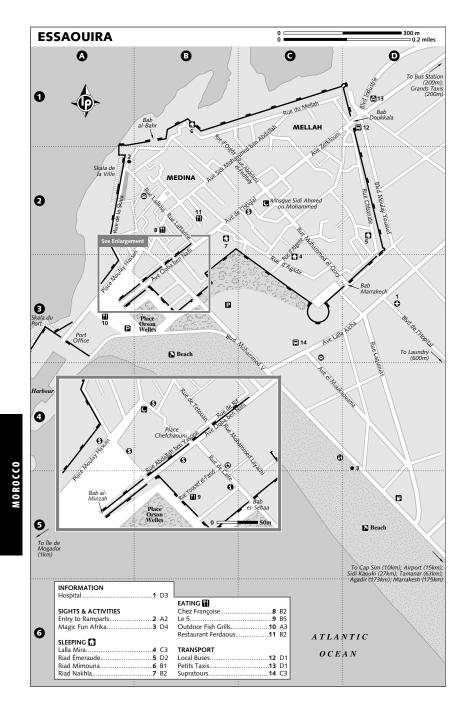
The **Gnaoua & World Music Festival** is a four-day musical extravaganza held on the third weekend in June. It features concerts on Pl Moulay Hassan.

Sleeping

Riad Nakhla () /fax 024 474940; www.essaouiranet.com /riad-nakhla; 2 Rue d'Agadir; s/d US\$23/34) For budget travellers who have endured countless nights in grotty hotels, the Riad Nakhla is a revelation. The stone columns and the fountain trickling in the courtyard immediately make you feel like you're somewhere much more expensive, and the bedrooms, though simple enough, are immaculately kept. Breakfast on the stunning roof terrace is another treat.

Riad Émeraude ((2) 024 473494; www.essaouirahotel .com in French; 228 Rue Chbanate; s/d ind breakfast US\$38/50) This gorgeous little place opens up from a stunning central courtyard with stone arches and tiled floors to 12 charming rooms bathed in light. Elegantly simple with brilliant white linens, minimalist local touches and splashes of blues or yellow, these rooms offer incredible value for money.

Lalla Mira ((2) 024 475046; 14 Rue d'Algerie; www.lal lamira.ma; s/d/ste US\$49/78/104; (2)) Lalla Mira claims to be Morocco's first ecohotel and has a selection of simple rooms with ochre *tadelakt* (smooth-polished lime) walls, wrought-iron furniture, natural fabrics and solar-powered underfloor heating. The anti-allergy beds, onsite *hammam* (heated by solar power) and cheerful restaurant (mains US\$10 to US\$14) serving a good selection of vegetarian food are all nice touches.



grand Moorish design with sumptuous ceilings carved from thuya (an indigenous Moroccan conifer), plush carpets, the whiff of incense as you walk into your room and glorious sea views. There's also a fantastic roof terrace, a *hammam* and a subtly lit restaurant (mains US\$18).

Eating

One of Essaouira's best food experiences is the outdoor fish grills that line the port end of Pl Moulay Hassan. Just choose what you want to eat from the colourful displays of fresh fish and seafood outside each grill, agree a price (expect to pay about US\$4.50 for lunch) and wait for it to be cooked on the spot.

Restaurant Ferdaous (ⓐ 024 473655; 27 Rue Abdesslam Lebadi; mains US\$6, set menu US\$8.50) Don't be put off by the grimy back street this place is on − it's one of the best spots in town for traditional Moroccan food. The seasonal menu offers an innovative take on traditional recipes and the low tables and padded seating make it feel like the real McCoy.

Chez Françoise (**C** 086 164087; 1 Rue Hommane el-Fatouaki; lunch set menu US\$6.80; **C** Mon-Sat) An excellent choice for a light, healthy meal, this paredback little place offers a choice of savoury tarts served with three tangy salads. It serves simple, well-made food and is a glorious find after a diet of tajine and kefta (lightly spiced meatballs).

Le 5 (a 024784726; 5 Rue Youssef el-Fassd; menu US\$17; 7pm-11pm Wed-Mon & noon-3pm Sat & Sun) Deep purple seating, warm stone arches and giant lampshades dominate this slick newcomer on the Essaouira restaurant scene. It was *the* place to see and be seen in town at the time of research, and serves a good choice of international and Moroccan dishes.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** ($\textcircled{\mbox{\footnotesize 0}}$ 024 784764) is about 400m northeast of the medina, an easy walk during the day but better in a *petit taxi* (US\$0.70) if you're arriving or leaving late at night. CTM has two buses daily for Casablanca (US\$12, six hours) and one to Marrakesh (US\$6, 2½ hours).

Supratours (**@** 024475317) runs buses to Marrakesh train station (US\$7, 2½ hours, four daily) to connect with trains to Casablanca. You should book several days in advance for this service, particularly in summer.

AGADIR pop 679,000

Devastated by a terrible earthquake in 1960, Agadir has managed to rise from its ruins as Morocco's main beach resort. Rebuilt into a neat grid of residential suburbs and wide boulevards, the town feels strangely bereft of the sort of bustling life often associated with Moroccan cities. Its lure, however, lies in its huge sandy bay, which is more sheltered than many other Atlantic beaches.

Orientation

Agadir's bus stations and most of the budget hotels are in Nouveau Talborjt in the northeast of the town. From here it's about a 15-minute walk down to Blvd du 20 Août, the main strip, which is lined with cafés and restaurants and big hotels.

Information

Banque Populaire (Blvd Hassan II) Crown English Bookshop (Immeuble A, off Ave Sidi Mohammed)

Délégation Régionale du Tourisme (0NMT; ☎ 028 846377; fax 028 846378; Ave Mohammed V; ↔ 8.30amnoon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30-11.30am & 3-6.30pm Fri) Internet Swiss (Blvd Hassan II; per hr US\$1.20; ↔ 9am-11pm)

Post office (cnr Ave du Prince Moulay Abdallah & Sidi Mohammed; № 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) Wafa Bank (Ave du 29 Feiner)

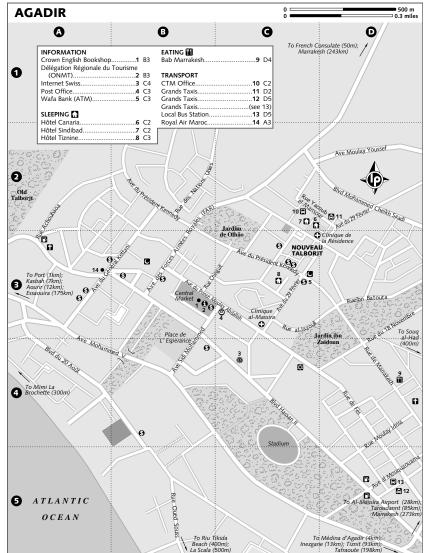
Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Canaria (20 028 846727; Pl Lahcen Tamri; s/d US\$9/12) One of the better crash pads near the bus offices, Hôtel Canaria overlooks a pleasant square and the rooms are a notch above basic, with pine furniture and potted plants around the upstairs courtyard.

Hôtel Tiznine (20 208 843925; 3 Rue Drarga; s with/without shower US\$14/10, d with/without shower US\$17/14) This tidy hostel has immaculate rooms, arranged around a green-and-white tiled courtyard with geraniums. The showers and toilets are spotless, and the manager speaks good English.

Hôtel Sindibad (2028 823477; fax 028 842474; Pl Lahcen Tamri; d US\$35; 2) Popular midrange option, with smart rooms, all with TV, phone and a tiny balcony overlooking a square. It also has a bar, a restaurant, money-changing facilities (cash only), a small rooftop pool and sun terraces.

Riu Tikida Beach (2028 845400; resabeach@tikida hotels.co.ma; Chemins des Dunes; s/d from US\$127/180;



MOROCCO

(P) 🔀 🛄 🔊) Simply the best of the beach hotels, this tasteful low-rise building sits amid landscaped gardens with direct beach access. Rooms are set around internal courtyards, and onsite there is a Thalasso spa and Palace Nightclub, Agadir's most popular club.

Bab Marrakesh (🖻 028 826144; Rue de Massa; tajine for 2 US\$10, couscous US\$7, sandwiches US\$3-4) This is

the real thing, far removed from the tourist traps near the beach. Highly regarded by locals, it serves authentic Moroccan food at authentic prices.

Mimi La Brochette (🖻 028 840387; Rue de la Plage; mains US\$8-11) Up at the north end of the beach, Mimi's kitchen reflects her mixed origins: Jewish, French and Spanish. Her cooking is divine, and the menu features everything from brochettes and pasta to smoked eel and duck's gizzards - they go down a treat with raspberry sauce.

La Scala (🖻 028 846773; Rue du Oued Souss; meal with wine US\$40) This excellent Moroccan restaurant is popular with wealthy Moroccans, Arab tourists and Westerners, which makes for a pleasantly cosmopolitan atmosphere. The food is elegant and fresh, and beautifully present. Book ahead.

Getting There & Away

For the moment, buses stop at their respective company offices along Rue Yacoub el-Mansour in Nouveau Talborjt, but they will all move to the new gare routière on Rue Chair al Hamra Mohammed ben Brahim, past the Soug el-Had, once it is finished.

CTM (🖻 028 822077) has buses to Casablanca (US\$18, nine hours, six daily). The 10.30pm bus continues to Rabat (US\$20, 10 hours, two daily). There are also departures for Marrakesh (US\$8, four hours, seven daily) and Essaouira (US\$6, four hours, one daily).

Getting Around

A comfortable shuttle bus (🖻 028 822139; www .almassirabus.com; adult/child US\$7/3.40) connects the airport with the city. Grands taxis (US\$23) and bus 22 also make the journey. Orange petits taxis run around town; prices are worked out by meter, so ask for it to be switched on.

TAFRAOUTE

pop 5000

Nestled in the enchanting Ameln Valley is the village of Tafraoute. Surrounded on all sides by mountainous boulders, it's a pleasant and relaxed base for exploring the region. In late February and early March the villages around Tafraoute celebrate the almond harvest with all-night singing and dancing.

There are two banks in Tafraoute - BMCE (behind the post office) and Banque Populaire (PI Mohammed V; 🕑 Wed).

Sights & Activities

The best way to get around the beautiful villages of the Ameln Valley is by walking or cycling. Bikes can be rented from Artisanat du Coin (US\$7 per day). You can also rent mountain bikes or book a mountain-biking trip from Tafraoute Aventure (🖻 061 387173) and Au Coin des Nomades (🖻 061 627921), who offer

mountain-biking and trekking trips either up Jebel Lekst (2359m) or along the palmfilled gorges of Aït Mansour, which leads towards the bald expanses of the southern Anti-Atlas.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Salama (🖻 028 800026; s/d US\$13/17; 💦) Hôtel Salama has some Moroccan flavour, with large, comfortable rooms, great views from the terrace and a salon de thé (tea room) overlooking the market square.

Hôtel Les Amandiers (🖻 028 800088; hotellesaman diers@menara.ma; s/d from US\$35/47; 🔀 🔊) Sitting on the crest of the hill overlooking the town, this is Tafraoute's top hotel. Designed in the kasbah-style, it has spacious ensuite rooms and a pool with spectacular views, as well as a bar and restaurant (menu US\$13.60).

Restaurant Marrakech (couscous \$2.80) A cheap, family-run restaurant on the road up from the bus station. It attracts a local crowd and knocks up a mean couscous.

Restaurant L'Étoile d'Agadir (🖻 028 800268; Place de la Marche Verte; mains around US\$4; 🕑 8am-6pm) Locals swear by this place for its succulent tajines, all beautifully presented.

Getting There & Away

Buses depart from outside the various company offices on Sharia al-Jeish al-Malaki. Trans Balady has buses running to Agadir (US\$4.50, four hours, four daily). Other companies also service Casablanca (US\$14, 14 hours, five daily) and Marrakesh (US\$10, seven hours, four daily).

TAROUDANNT pop 70,000 Hidden by magnificent red-mud walls and with the snowcapped peaks of the High Atlas beckoning beyond, Taroudannt appears a touch mysterious at first. It is, however, every inch a market town with busy sougs where the produce of the rich and fertile Souss Valley is traded.

Information

There are three banks with ATMs on Pl al-Alaouyine, and all have exchange facilities and accept travellers cheques. BMCE also does cash advances. The main post office (Rue du 20 Août) is off Ave Hassan II, to the east of the kasbah. Internet access is available at Wafanet (Ave Mohammed V; per hr US\$0.90).

Sights & Activities

The 5km of ramparts surrounding Taroudannt are the best-preserved in Morocco, their colour changing from golden brown to the deepest red depending on the time of day. They can easily be explored on foot (11/2 hours); preferably in the late afternoon.

Taroudannt is a great base for trekking in the western High Atlas region and the secluded Tichka Plateau, a delightful meadow of springtime flowers and hidden gorges. There are several agencies in town offering treks, but beware as there are many stories of rip-offs and unqualified guides.

Sleeping

Hôtel Taroudannt (🖻 028 852416; s/d/tr US\$14/16/18) Hôtel Taroudannt is an institution and by far the best budget hotel in town. Yes it is fading, but it has a unique flavour, from the jungle-style courtyard to the faintly colonial public areas. There's a restaurant (mains US\$8 to US\$10) on site, and the hotel organises great treks in the surrounding mountains with the excellent guide El Aouad Ali (🖻 066 637972).

Résidence Riad Marvam (🖻 066 127285: Derb Maalen Mohammed, off Ave Mohamed V; d with/without shower US\$68/45) This popular, family-run guesthouse offers five spotless and comfortable rooms around a cool courtyard full of trees and birdsong.

Riad Hida (🖻 028 531044; www.riadhida.com; d from US\$85; 🔊) The spacious rooms in this superb 19th-century pasha's palace are richly furnished and have windows onto a luxuriant garden, with peacocks and a fine swimming pool. It's located in Oued Berhil, 40km east of Taroudannt.

Centre Culturel & Environmental (🖻 028 551628; www.naturallvmorocco.co.uk: 422 Derb Afferdou: week package per person £215) Naturally Morocco is all about sustainable tourism and cultural contact. A package includes accommodation for the week, meals, excursions and cultural experiences; it needs to be booked online. The staff at the centre can arrange ecotours on botany, bird-watching, flora and fauna.

Eating

The best place to look for cheap eateries is around Pl an-Nasr and north along Ave Bir Anzarane, where you find the usual tajine, harira and salads.

Chez Nada (🖻 028 851726; Ave Moulay Rachid; set menu US\$8) West of Bab al-Kasbah, this is a quiet, modern place, famous for its excellent, good-value tajines. If you can, get a table on the terrace with views over the surrounding flower-filled gardens.

Jnane Soussia (🖻 028 854980; outside Bab Zorgane; set menu US\$8.50; 🕅 dinner only; 🕄 🖳) This delightful restaurant has tented seating areas set around a large pool, in a garden adjacent to the ramparts. The house specialities are a mouth-watering m'choui (whole roast lamb) and pigeon pastilla, which have to be ordered in advance, but everything is good.

Getting There & Away

CTM has an office at Hotel Les Arcades, on Pl al-Alaouvine. It has the most reliable buses, with one daily departure for Casablanca (US\$17, 10 hours) via Marrakesh (US\$10, six hours). Other companies run services throughout the day to both these cities as well as to Agadir (US\$2, 21/2 hours) and Ouarzazate (US\$8.50, five hours). All buses leave from the gare routière outside Bab Zorgane.

CENTRAL MOROCCO & THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS

Marrakesh is Morocco's showpiece performer, but it also serves as a gateway to wonderful trekking in the High Atlas Mountains and to the valleys and gorges that empty down into the Sahara with its astonishing dune-scapes.

MARRAKESH

pop 1.1 million

Capital of the south and epicentre of Moroccan tourism, Marrakesh is changing fast. Once the hub of camel caravans from the south. Marrakesh remains exotic, but just as Moroccans craved modern housing, Europeans arrived dreaming of old houses in the heart of the medina. This happy exchange has transformed the place, bringing money and work to a city that lives off its looks and its wits.

The looks are still there, as the first glimpse of its 16km-long, time-worn ramparts confirm. And some things have remained - the Djemaa el-Fna and the area around remains the beating heart of the city and the greatest soug in the south.

Orientation

The medina or old city and the Ville Nouvelle of Marrakesh are roughly the same size. It takes 30 minutes to walk from the centre of the Ville

Nouvelle to Djemaa el-Fna, the main square in the heart of the old city; you may want to use public transport between the two.

The main areas of the Ville Nouvelle are Guéliz and Hivernage. The latter is home to the majority of midrange and luxury hotels. In Guéliz you'll find the bulk of offices, restaurants, cafés and shops, plus a few hotels, clustered on or near the main thoroughfare, Ave Mohammed V. The train station lies southwest of Guéliz, following Ave Hassan II from the central Place du 16 Novembre. The main bus station is near Bab Doukkala; it's roughly a 10minute walk northeast of this same square, and about 20 minutes from Djemaa el-Fna.

Most budget hotels are clustered in the narrow streets and alleys south of Djemaa el-Fna. The sougs and principal religious buildings lie to the north and the palaces to the south. To the southwest rises the city's most prominent landmark, the minaret of the Koutoubia Mosque.

Information

EMERGENCY Ambulance (🕿 024 443724) Brigade touristique (Map p182; 🖻 024 384601; Rue Sidi Mimoun: (24hr)

INTERNET ACCESS

Cyber Park (Map pp180-1; Ave Mohammed V; per hr US\$0.60; Y 9.30am-8pm) Hassan (Map p182; 🖻 024 441989; Immeuble Tazi, 12 Rue Riad el-Moukha; per hr US\$0.90; 🏵 7am-1am)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Pharmacie de l'Unité (Map pp180-1; 🖻 024 435982; Ave des Nations Unies, Guéliz; 🕑 8.30am-11pm) **Polyclinique du Sud** (Map pp180-1; 2 024 447999; cnr Rue de Yougoslavie & Rue ibn Aicha, Guéliz; 🕑 24hr emergency service) A popular private clinic used by many resident expats.

MONEY

Crédit du Maroc (Map p182; Rue de Bab Agnaou; 8.45am-1pm & 3-6.45pm Mon-Sat) ATM and moneychanging facilities.

POST

Main post office (Map pp180-1; 🖻 024 431963; Pl du 16 Novembre; 🕅 8.30am-2pm Mon-Sat) In the Ville Nouvelle.

Post office (Map p182; Rue de Bab Agnaou; 🕑 8amnoon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) A convenient branch office in the medina.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT; Map pp180-1; 🕿 024 436131; PI Abdel Moumen ben Ali, Guéliz; 🕅 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9amnoon & 3-6pm Sat)

Sights

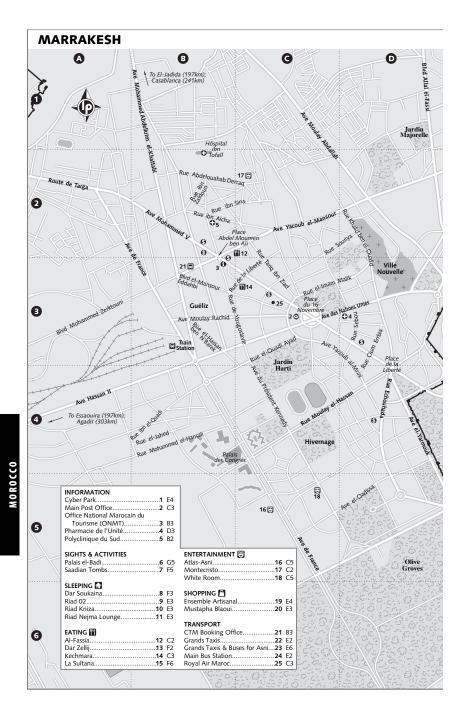
The focal point of Marrakesh is Djemaa el-Fna (Map p182), a huge square in the medina, and the backdrop for one of the world's greatest spectacles. Although it can be lively at any hour of the day, Djemaa el-Fna comes into its own at dusk when the curtain goes up on rows of open-air food stalls smoking the immediate area with mouth-watering aromas. Jugglers, storytellers, snake charmers, musicians and the occasional acrobats and benign lunatics consume the remaining space, each surrounded by jostling spectators.

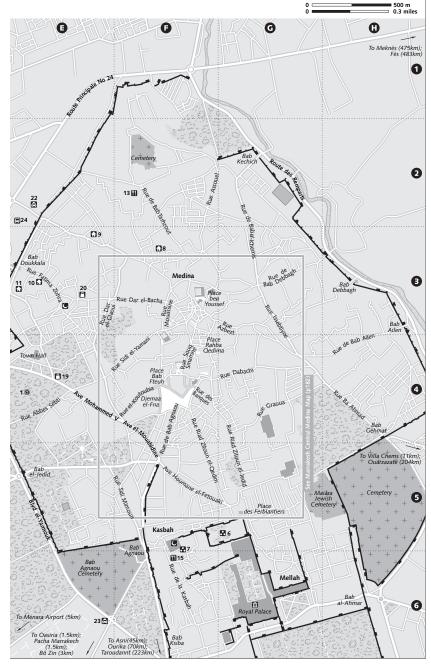
Dominating the landscape, southwest of Djemaa el-Fna, is the 70m-tall minaret of Marrakesh's most famous and most venerated monument, the Koutoubia Mosque (Map p182). Visible for miles in all directions, it's a classic example of Moroccan-Andalucian architecture.

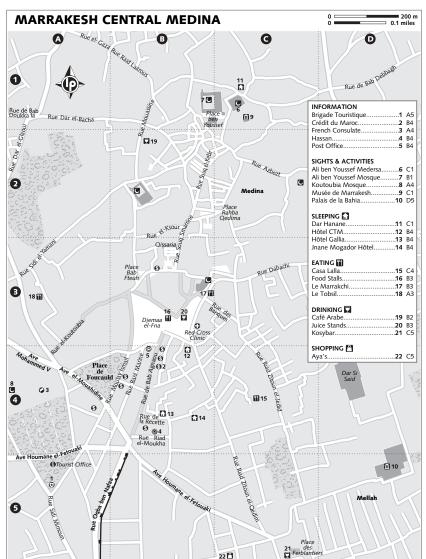
The largest and oldest-surviving of the mosques inside the medina is the 12th-century Ali ben Youssef Mosque (closed to non-Muslims), which marks the intellectual and religious heart of the medina. Next to the mosque is the 14th-century Ali ben Youssef Medersa (Map p182; 2 024 441893; PI ben Youssef; admission US\$4.50; 🕑 9am-7pm summer, 9am-6pm winter), a peaceful and meditative place with some stunning examples of stucco decoration.

Inaugurated in 1997, the **Musée de Marrakesh** (Map p182; @ 024 390911; www.museedemarrakech.ma in French; PI ben Youssef; admission US\$4.50; 🕑 9am-7pm) is housed in a beautifully restored 19th-century palace, Dar Mnebhi.

South of the main medina area is the **kasbah**. which is home to the most famous of the city's palaces, the now-ruined Palais el-Badi (Map pp180-1; PI des Ferblantiers; admission US\$1.20; 🏵 8.30-noon & 2.30-6pm), 'the Incomparable', once reputed to be one of the most beautiful palaces in the world. All that's left are the towering pisé walls, taken over by stork nests, and the staggering scale to give an impression of the former splendour. The Palais de la Bahia (Map p182; 🖻 024 389564; Rue Riad Zitoun el-Jedid; admission US\$1.20; (> 8.30-11.45am & 2.30-5.45pm Sat-Thu, 8.30-11.30am & 3-5.45pm Fri), 'the Brilliant' is the perfect antidote to the simplicity of the nearby el-Badi.







Long hidden from intrusive eyes, the area of the **Saadian Tombs** (Map pp180-1; Rue de la Kasbah; admission US\$1.20; (\sum 8.30-11.45am & 2.30-5.45pm), alongside the Kasbah Mosque, is home to ornate tombs that are the resting places of Saadian princes.

Marrakesh has more **gardens** than any other Moroccan city, offering the perfect escape from the hubbub of the *souqs* and the traffic. The rose gardens of Koutoubia Mosque in particular offer cool respite near Djemaa el-Fna.

Sleeping

Hôtel CTM (Map p182; 🗟 024 442325; Djemaa el-Fna; s with/without bathroom US\$12/8, d with/without bathroom US\$17/12, tr with/without bathroom US\$23/18; P) Something of an institution, this hotel is in the thick of things, with unbeatable views from the roof and the (noisy) front rooms, though most rooms open onto an unspectacular courtyard. The communal facilities have definitely seen better days.

Hôtel Gallia (Map p182; 🖻 024 445913; fax 024 444853; www.ilove-marrakesh.com/hotelgallia; 30 Rue de la Recette; s/d US\$31/48; 🕄) This delightful budget hotel in a quiet backstreet near the Djemaa el-Fna has been run by the same French family since 1929. The 20 pleasant rooms are located around two lovely courtyards and the entire place is scrubbed clean daily. Most rooms have air-con, while the central heating is welcome in winter. The breakfast is excellent. Needless to say, you'll need to book (by fax only) weeks if not months in advance.

Jnane Mogador Hôtel (Map p182; 2024 426323; www.jnanemogador.com; Derb Sidi Bouloukat, 116 Riad Zitoun el-Qedim; s/d/q US\$33/43/59) The Jnane Mogador is a wonderfully restored 19th-century riad around an elegant central courtyard complete with a tinkling fountain, a grand marble staircase, a *hammam* and attractive rooms decorated in Moroccan style.

Riad Nejma Lounge (Map pp180-1; 2024 382341; www.riad-nejmalounge.com; 45 Derb Sidi M'hamed el-Haj, Bab Doukkala; d ind breakfast US\$34-68; 20) This is one of the coolest riads in town and at cool prices. The French owners have painted it all in white, with bright colours in the details and blood-red carpets. With lots of palms and exotic plants and a groovy roof terrace, this laid-back house attracts the young 'lounge' crowd. Prices increase by up to 30% during the Christmas holiday period.

Riad 02 (Map pp180-1; [™] © 024 377227; www.riado2 .com; 97 Derb Semmaria, Sidi Ben Slimane, Sidi Ahmed Soussi, Zaouia; s/d ind breakfast US\$57/115, s/d ste US\$102/135; [™] [™] [™]) The architecture says it all in this large riad, which has been lovingly restored with almost monastic simplicity. After a hectic day in the medina you can relax in the small pool or steam away in the *hammam*. Bedrooms are equally pleasant, decorated in a fusion of modern Western and traditional Moroccan style; all come with *tadelakt* bathrooms.

Dar Soukaina (Map pp180-1; 🖻 024 376055; www.darsouqaina.com; 19 Derb el-Ferrane; s/d/tr ind breakfast US\$86/97/114) This traditional riad has been carefully restored to retain all its quirky features. Beautifully whitewashed with a lilac trim, Dar Soukaina is a peaceful haven with orange trees in the courtyard.

Dar Hanane (Mapp182; 2024377737; www.dar-hanane .com; 9 Derb Lalla Azzouna; d ind breakfast US\$99-149, ste US\$124-187) Dar Hanane is an unusually spacious riad with good-sized rooms, luxuriously but simply decorated in muted tones to bring out the best from the architecture. The house, near Ali ben Youssef Medersa, exudes a zenlike tranquillity, and the service is friendly.

Riad Kniza (Mappp180-1; O24376942; www.riadkniza .com; 34 Derb l'Hôtel, Bab Doukala; d ind breakfast US\$255-288, ste US\$352-410; D Most of Marrakesh's luxury hotels are backed or run by foreigners, but the Kniza is Moroccan through and through, from the antique decorations to the efficient staff and generous welcome. The seven rooms are spacious and sumptuous, and a pool and spa were under construction at the time of writing.

Eating

The cheapest and most exotic place to eat in town remains the food stalls on Djemaa el-Fna, which are piled high with fresh meats and salads, goats' heads and steaming snails.

Kechmara (Map pp180-1; 20 024 434060; 3 Rue de la Liberté, Guéliz; set menu US\$9-14; 20) Kechmara features carefully chosen contemporary décor, good music all day and night and beautiful staff. Most importantly, it's one of the few trendy places in Marrakesh that does not charge the world for excellent, well-presented Moroccan-Mediterranean food.

Le Marrakchi (Map p182; **(Map p182)**; **(Ma**

Dar Zellij (Map pp180-1; **(Map pp180-1; C)** 024 382627; 1 Kassour Šidi Ben Slimane, Bab Taghzout; mains US\$28-39; **(Map)** dinner Wed-Mon) This superb 17th-century riad has a courtyard of orange trees, traditional Moroccan salons with carved cedarwood ceilings, and a rooftop terrace with views over the medina. The food is traditional, but looks even better. The Moroccan owner serves dishes that can be hard to find elsewhere, such as lamb tajine with fresh figs, and trid (pigeon wrapped in a pancake).

Casa Lalla (Map p182; 🖻 024 429757; www.casalalla .com; 16 Derb Jamaa, off Riad Zitoun el-Qedim; set menu US\$40; (Y) 7-11pm Tue-Sun) Michelin-starred chef Richard Neat left Europe for a quieter life in Marrakesh. He runs a small unlicensed restaurant in his guesthouse, delights in shopping in the market every morning, and prepares a set six-course menu of beautifully presented delicacies that are a fusion of Moroccan and French haute cuisine. You need to book well in advance, bring your own wine (no corkage) and arrive at 8pm prompt.

La Sultana (Map pp180-1; 🖻 024 388008; set menu from US\$45; 🕑 lunch daily, dinner by reservation for nonresidents) The food is as refined, sumptuous and exotic as the setting - a happy fusion of French with traditional Moroccan - using only the freshest seasonal ingredients. Have a romantic dinner under the stars overlooking the Saadian Tombs or sit in the warm patio in winter.

Le Tobsil (Map p182; 🖻 024 444052; 22 Derb Abdellah ben Hessaien, Bab Ksour; set menu incl drinks US\$68; 🕅 dinner Wed-Mon) Intimate and elegant, this Frenchowned place is downright classy. Service is impeccable, though perhaps less formal than at some of the other venues. Some foodies consider it the best restaurant in Marrakesh.

Drinking

The number one spot for a cheap and delicious drink is right on Djemaa el-Fna, where freshly squeezed orange juice is only US\$0.40. The juice stands are open all day and much of the night for a thirst-quenching, refreshing treat.

Kosybar (Map p182; 🕿 024 380324; http://kozibar.tri pod.com; 47 Pl des Ferblantiers; 🏵 noon-1am; 🕄) The Kosybar combines three different venues within one riad near the mellah. The ground floor is a piano bar, the 1st floor a Moroccan salon, and, best of all, the gorgeous terrace overlooks the medina and the storks nesting on the city walls. It has one of Marrakesh's largest selections of wines.

Čafé Arabe (Map p182; 🗃 024 429728; 184 Rue el-Mouassine; 🕅 10am-midnight; 🕄) Another bar-tearoom-restaurant in a large riad in the medina, Café Arabe is perfect for a sunset drink or a light meal with a beer. The décor is funky Moroccan, with a large courtyard and more intimate salons inside, while the terrace commands great medina views.

Entertainment

Marrakesh no longer sleeps, and nightlife is fast becoming one of its attractions. Most of the hottest clubs are in the Ville Nouvelle or a new zone outside the city. Cover charges range from US\$17 to US\$34, including the first drink. Each drink thereafter costs at least US\$5.50. Dress smartly and remember that most places don't get going until after midnight or 1am.

Highlights include the following: Atlas-Asni (Map pp180-1; 🖻 024 447051; Hôtel Atlas, 101 Ave de France; cover US\$17; (Y) midnight-4am) A dark and exotic place where the crowd and music is predominantly Arab.

Montecristo (Map pp180-1; 🗃 024 439031; 20 Rue ibn Aicha; admission free with drink; (>>> 8pm-2am) A hugely popular Latin club and salsa bar.

Pacha (🖻 024 388405; www.pachamarrakech.com; Complexe Pacha Marrakech, Blvd Mohammed VI; admission Mon-Fri before 10pm free, after 10pm US\$17, Sat & Sun US\$34; 🕑 8pm-5am) A superclub that boasts famous DJs. White Room (Map pp180-1; 🖻 060 595540; Hôtel Royal Mirage, Rue de Paris, Hivernage; admission US\$12; > 10pm-dawn) For a groovy mix of contemporary Arab dance tracks, techno beats, 1980s new wave and salsa.

Shopping

Marrakesh is a shopper's paradise - its sougs are full of skilled artisans producing quality products in wood, leather, wool, metal, bone, brass and silver.

Ensemble Artisanal (Map pp180-1; Ave Mohammed V; 8.30am-7.30pm) To get a feeling for the quality of merchandise it is always good to start at this government-run place in the Ville Nouvelle.

Mustapha Blaoui (Map pp180-1; 🖻 024 385240; 142-4 Bab Doukkala; 🕑 9am-8pm) Knock on the huge, unmarked door and enter an Aladdin's cave - this is the best warehouse in town and the source of many of those chic riad furnishings.

Aya's (Map p182; 🖻 024 383428; 11bis Derb Jdid Bab Mellah; 🕑 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-8pm) The delightful Nawal and her husband Simohamed run this tiny boutique, a well-kept secret among local residents. Her gorgeous, very wearable clothes in wool, silk and cotton are based on traditional Moroccan designs and handmade by the finest tailors. Her shop is in the little alley beside the restaurant Douiria near Pl des Ferblantiers.

Getting There & Away BUS

The main bus station (Map pp180-1; 🖻 024 433933; Bab Doukkala) is just outside the city walls, a 20minute walk from Djemaa el-Fna (a US\$0.60 to US\$1.20 taxi ride). Services run to Fès (US\$14, 81/2 hours, at least six daily) and Meknès (from US\$13, six hours, at least three daily).

CTM (Window 10, main bus station, Bab Doukkala; © 024 434402) has buses servicing Ouarzazate (US\$8, four hours, one daily), Fès (US\$17, 8½ hours, one daily), Casablanca (US\$9, four hours, three daily) and Essaouira (US\$7, three hours, one daily).

TRAIN

For the train station (Map pp180-1; 2 024 447768, 090 203040; www.oncf.ma; cnr Ave Hassan II & Blvd Mohammed VI, Guéliz), take a taxi or city bus (buses 3, 8, 10 and 14, among others; US\$0.40) from the centre. There are trains to Casablanca (US\$9, three hours, nine daily), Rabat (US\$12, 41/2 hours, eight daily) and Fès (US\$20, eight hours, eight daily) via Meknès (US\$17, seven hours). A night service goes to Tangier (US\$16 to US\$31).

Getting Around

A petit taxi to Marrakesh from the airport (6km) should be no more than US\$7. Alternatively, bus 11 runs irregularly to Djemaa el-Fna. The creamy-beige petits taxis around town cost between US\$0.60 to US\$1.70 per journey.

HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS

The highest mountain range in North Africa, the High Atlas runs diagonally across Morocco, from the Atlantic Coast northeast of Agadir all the way to northern Algeria, a distance of almost 1000km. In Berber it's called Idraren Draren (Mountain of Mountains) and it's not hard to see why. Flat-roofed, earthen Berber villages cling tenaciously to the valley sides, while irrigated terraced gardens and walnut groves flourish below.

Trekkina

The ONMT publishes an extremely useful booklet, The Great Trek Through the Moroccan Atlas (1997), which contains a list of guides and trekker accommodation. Marrakesh's tourist office has the most reliable stock.

Treks of longer than a couple of days will almost certainly require a guide (US\$28 per day) and mule (US\$12; to carry kit and supplies). There are bureaux des guides (guide offices) in Imlil, Setti Fatma, Azilal, Tabant (Aït Bou Goumez Valley) and El-Kelaâ M'Gouna, where you should be able to pick up a trained, official guide. Official guides carry ID cards.

Club Alpin Français (CAF; 🖻 022 270090; www.caf maroc.co.ma in French; 50 Blvd Moulay Abderrahman, Quartier Beauséjour, Casablanca) operates key refuges in the Toubkal area, particularly those in Imlil and Oukaimeden and on Jebel Toubkal. The club website is a good source of trekking information and includes links to recommended guides.

JEBEL TOUBKAL TREK

One of the most popular trekking routes in the High Atlas is the ascent of Jebel Toubkal (4167m), North Africa's highest peak. The Toubkal area is just two hours' drive south of Marrakesh and easily accessed by local transport.

You don't need mountaineering skills or a guide to reach the summit, provided you follow the standard two-day route and don't do it in winter. You will, however, need good boots, warm clothing, a sleeping bag, food and water, and you should be in good physical condition before you set out. It's not particularly steep, but it's a remorseless uphill trek all the way (an ascent of 1467m) and it can be very tiring if you haven't done any warm-up walks or spent time acclimatising.

The usual starting point is the picturesque village of Imlil, 17km from Asni off the Tizi n'Test road between Marrakesh and Agadir. Most trekkers stay overnight in Imlil.

The first day's walk (10km; about five hours) winds steeply through the villages of Aroumd and Sidi Chamharouch to the Toubkal Refuge (🖻 061 695463; camping per person/tent US\$0.70/14, dm CAF members/HI members/nonmembers May-Oct US\$9/12/15, Nov-Apr US\$5/7/9, hot showers US\$1.20). The refuge sits at an altitude of 2307m and sleeps more than 80 people.

The ascent from the hut to the summit on the second day should take about four hours and the descent about two hours. It can be bitterly cold at the summit, even in summer.

OTHER TREKS

In summer, it's quite possible to do an easy one- or two-day trek from the ski resort of Oukaïmeden, which also has a Club Alpin Français (CAF; French Alpine Club) refuge, southwest to Imlil or vice versa. You can get here by grand taxi from Marrakesh.

From Tacheddirt (where the CAF refuge charges US\$6 for nonmembers) there are numerous trekking options. One of these is a pleasant two-day walk northeast to the village of Setti Fatma (also accessible from Marrakesh)

via the village of **Timichi**, where there is a welcoming *gîte* (literally 'resting place'; a village house with rooms and kitchen facilities). A longer circuit could take you south to **Amsouzerte** and back towards Imlil via **Lac d'Ifni**, Toubkal, **Tazaghart** (also with a refuge and rock climbing) and **Tizi Oussem**.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel el-Aïne (a 024 485625; Imlil; rooftop beds US\$3, r perperson US\$4.50) Bright, comfortable rooms, hot showers and squat toilets are clustered around a tranquil courtyard with an old walnut tree. Below, the hotel's eatery, Café de la Source, serves reasonable food.

Dar Adrar (**C** 070 726809; http://toubkl.guide.free .fr/gite; Imlil; s/d ind breakfast US\$7/13, half board per person US\$12) This lovely place at the top of Imlil is run by one of the star guides of the Atlas, Mohamed Aztat. Dar Adrar has great views, peaceful rooms with hot showers, and an inhouse *hammam*.

Café-Hotel Soleil (**(**) /fax 024 485622; Imlil; d ind breakfast with/without bathroom US\$23/17) The rooms at this hotel are Spartan but clean; some rooms have beds, others have mattresses on the floor. Showers are hot. The café-restaurant on the terrace overlooking the river is among the village's most pleasant places for a meal (breakfast US\$2.80, lunch and dinner US\$7).

Kasbah du Toubkal (**b** 024 485611, 061 343337; www .kasbahdutoubkal.com; Imlil; dind breakfast US\$170-260) This spectacular former summerhouse of the local ruler sits 60m above Imlil and has stunning views of the mountains. UK travel company Discover Ltd has restored and developed it along environmentally sustainable lines, involving people from Imlil in the project. The eight luxurious double rooms and three suites have been decorated with the utmost care and there is a library, a traditional *hammam*, open fires, board games and attentive staff. Discover Ltd also runs other luxury lodges in the region.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses (US\$1, 1½ hours) and *grands taxis* (US\$1.50) to Asni from Bab er-Rob in Marrakesh. Local minibuses and occasional taxis then travel the final 17km between Asni and Imlil (US\$1.50 to US\$1.80, one hour).

AÏT BENHADDOU

Aït Benhaddou, 32km from Ouarzazate, is one of the most exotic, best-preserved kasbahs in the Atlas region. This is hardly surprising, since it has had money poured into it as a result of being used for scenes in many films, notably *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Jesus of Nazareth* (for which much of the village was rebuilt) and, more recently, *Gladiator*. The kasbah is now under Unesco protection.

The best place to stay is **Dar Mouna** (© 024 843054; www.darmouna.com; s/d ind breakfast US\$40/68, half board US\$50/85; **(2)** (**c)**), a charming guesthouse with a welcome swimming pool and spectacular views over the kasbah. It has comfortable rooms tastefully decorated with local finds, and the atmosphere is really friendly. Dinner on the terrace overlooking the kasbah is a treat (mains from US\$12).

Three kilometres toward Tamdaght, **Defat Kasbah** (2488020; fax 024883787; camping per person/campervan US\$1.70/2.80, mattresses on roof US\$3.40, d with/without bathroom US\$16/12; **(R)** is a beautiful budget place run by a charming French-Moroccan couple. It has a range of nicely decorated and very clean rooms, a fine swimming pool, a bar and a restaurant. Nonguests can use the pool for US\$2.80.

To get to Aït Benhaddou from Ouarzazate, take the main road towards Marrakesh as far as the signposted turn-off (22km). Aït Benhaddou is another 9km down a bitumen road. *Grands taxis* run from outside Ouarzazate bus station when full (US\$2.30 per person); chartering a *grand taxi* from Ouarzazate will cost from US\$28 for half a day.

DRÂA VALLEY

The magical Dråa Valley is a ribbon of technicoloured palmeraies, orchards, earth-red kasbahs and stunning Berber villages. It's a magical route, especially in the soft mauve light of the early evening. The longest river in Morocco, Oued Dråa originates in the High Atlas before reaching the Atlantic at Cap Dråa, just north of Tan Tan. In reality, the waters generally seep away into the desert long before they reach the sea.

Zagora pop 34,850

The modern town of Zagora is largely a French creation, although the oasis has always been inhabited. It was from here that the Saadians launched their expedition to conquer Timbuktu in 1591. The now famous, somewhat battered sign still reads 'Tombouctou 52 jours' (by camel caravan), although it took the Saadian army 135 days to get there.

Zagora feels very much like a border town, fighting back the encroaching desert with its lush palmeraie. Though modern and largely unappealing, it does have its moments, particularly when a dust storm blows up out of the desert and the light becomes totally surreal. The spectacular **Jebel Zagora**, which rises up across the other side of the river Drâa, is worth climbing for the views.

INFORMATION

The Banque Populaire, Crédit Agricole and BMCE are all on Blvd Mohammed V, and all have ATMs and are open during normal banking hours. **Pharmacy Zagora** (2024 847195; Blvd Mohammed V; 2008 8.30am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) is opposite the Bank Populaire.

Placenet Cyber Center (95 Blvd Mohammed V) and **Cybersud** (Ave Hassan II) both offer internet access for Dh10 per hour.

ACTIVITIES

It may seem like everyone in Zagora has a camel for hire. Prices start at about US\$34 per person per day. In addition to the hotels, recommended agencies include:

Caravane Dèsert et Montagne (🗟 024 846898, 066 122312; http://caravanedesertetmontagne.com; 112 Blvd Mohammed V)

Caravane du Sud ((a) 024 847569; www.caravanedusud .com)

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Les Jardins de Zagora ((2) 024 846971, 068 961701; Amezrou; camping for 2 ind tent & car US\$6, dUS\$17) This clean camping ground is full of flowers and shady palm trees overlooking Jebel Zagora. Communal bathrooms are very clean. Also available are two simple rooms with private bathroom, and beds in small Berber tents with electricity (US\$3.40 per person). The hostess cooks delicious tajines to order (set menu US\$9).

Kasbah Tifawte (2024 848843, 067 596241; www.ti fawte.com; mattresses on terrace US\$6, half board with/without air-con US\$57/40; 2) Hidden in a quiet backstreet, Kasbah Tifawte overlooks the palmeraie and the mountain. It has five traditional rooms uniquely and stylishly decorated but with the advantage of modern bathrooms.

Auberge Restaurant Chez Ali (☐ /fax 024 846258; chez_ali@hotmail.com; s with/without shower US\$12/8, d with/without shower US\$23/14) A real oasis, Chez Ali has four impeccably clean rooms and four cosy Berber tents in the luxuriant garden. Home-cooked food (menu US\$9) can be eaten gazing at the greenery of the garden.

Villa Zagora (2024 846093; www.mavillaausahara .com; Amezrou; d ind breakfast US\$57; 2 () This is undoubtedly the most charming place to stay in Zagora. The comfortable guesthouse has just five stylish and delightful rooms with beautiful paintings and a mosquito net, and very friendly staff. In winter, dinner is served by a roaring fireplace; in summer, you sit on the terrace with great views over the mountain and the palms (mains US\$14).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A daily CTM bus travels from M'Hamid to Zagora (US\$2.30, two hours). Minibuses also connect Zagora with M'Hamid, while other daily buses leave Zagora for Boumalne du Dadès, Casablanca, Erfound, Marrakesh, Ouarzazate and Rabat.

Tinfou

About 23km south of Zagora, you get your first glimpse of Saharan sand dunes, the **Tinfou Dunes**. If you've never seen a sandy desert, Tinfou is a pleasant spot to take a breather and enjoy a small taste, although the dunes at Merzouga or around M'Hamid are better.

Kasbah Sahara Sky (2024 848562; www.hotel-sa hara.com; s/d/tr US\$37/44/62; **P**) is a comfortable three-star hotel with well-appointed rooms and a good observatory on the roof. It also has a fully licensed restaurant, a snooker table and a *hammam*. Excursions to the dunes of the Erg Chigaga can easily be arranged from here.

The daily CTM bus that travels from M'Hamid to Zagora passes through Tinfou.

M'Hamid pop 3000

The oasis of M'Hamid is the end of the road. It used to be an important market place for the trans-Saharan trade, and the town's many different ethnicities (Blue Men, *Harratine*, Berber, *Chorfa* and Beni Mhamed) bear witness to that. M'Hamid Jdid, the modern town, is the typical one-street administrative centre with a mosque, a few restaurants, small hotels, craft shops and a Monday market. M'Hamid Bali, the old town, is 3km away across the Oued Drâa. It has an impressive and very well-preserved kasbah.

The dunes near M'Hamid, such as **Erg Chigaga** or **Erg Lehoudi** (Dunes of the Jews), are arguably as spectacular as Merzouga's, but with fewer hustlers and crowds. Most overnight camel treks cost from US\$40 per person. **Sahara Services** (o 061 776766; www.saharaservices .info), on the central square, is a reliable and professional agency in M'Hamid.

Right next door to (and owned by) Sahara Services, **Hôtel-Restaurant Les Dunes D'Or** (© 024 848009; 5/d ind breakfast US\$4.50/8) is a small hotel with three simple but clean rooms and a good restaurant (mains US\$7.35) with a terrace where you can watch the world, or camels and 4WDs, go by.

At the entrance of M'Hamid is **Dar Azawad** (a) 24848730, 061 247018; www.darazawad.com; Douar Ouled Driss s/d incl breakfast US\$62/90; P (2), a comfortable hotel with 13 air-conditioned rooms stylishly decorated with Marrakshi flair. It also has a restaurant (set menu US\$12).

A daily CTM bus travels from M'Hamid to Zagora (US\$2.30, two hours), Ouarzazate (US\$7, four hours) and Marrakesh (US\$14, 12 hours). Minibuses also connect M'Hamid with Zagora, while other daily buses leave Zagora for Boumalne du Dadès, Casablanca, Erfound, Marrakesh, Ouarzazate and Rabat.

DADÈS GORGE

The towering ochre-coloured cliffs and fabulous rock formations of the Dadès Gorge, are among Morocco's most magnificent natural sights. If there is a drawback, it's the crowds who are increasingly drawn here.

The main access to the gorge is from **Boumalne du Dadès**, a pleasant, laid-back place with a good Wednesday market. From there, a good sealed road wriggles past 63km of palmeraies, fabulous rock formations, Berber villages and some beautiful ruined kasbahs to Msemrir, before continuing as dirt track to Imilchil in the heart of the High Atlas. If you have plenty of time, you could eas-

If you nave plenty of time, you could easily spend several days pottering about in the gorge – watching nomads bring vast herds of goats down the cliffs to the river, fossicking for fossils and generally enjoying the natural splendour.

There are a number of places to stay; the kilometre markings of the following places refer to the distance into the gorge from Boumalne du Dadès.

 tresses on roof US\$1.70, half board per person US\$17) offers clean, bright rooms with clean linen. The owner is licensed to organise tours, including guided day hikes and 4WD trips to Todra, and rents out mountain bikes (US\$12 per day).

Overlooking the river with a shaded camping area, **Auberge des Gorges du Dadès** (2024 831719; www.aubergeaitoudinar.com in French; 25.5km; camping per person US\$1.70, s/d US\$20/27) has pleasantly decorated en-suite rooms, the best being on the 2nd floor.

The **Hôtel la Gazelle du Dadès** ((2) 024 831753; 28km; mattress on fl US\$2.30, s/d/tr rooms only US\$14, half board per person US\$15) has 16 neat rooms, all simply decorated with Berber bedcovers. They're good value, especially the ones at the front with views of the gorge. The (hot) showers and communal toilets are spotless.

The best hotel in the gorge is the stylish, elegant and comfortable **Chez Pierre** (204830267; 27km; half board per person US\$62; 2). The kasbah and its flowering terraces cling to the slopes of the gorge in an impossible balancing act. The airy rooftop pool and sun decks have precipitous views of the gorge and the restaurant is justifiably famous.

Grands taxis and minibuses run up the gorge from Boumalne du Dadès and charge US\$1.70 per person to the cluster of hotels in the middle of the gorge and US\$3.40 to Msemrir. You can ask to be dropped at your chosen hotel. To return, simply wait by the road and flag down a passing vehicle.

TODRA GORGE & TINERHIR

The spectacular pink canyons of the Todra Gorge, 15km from Tinerhir, at the end of a lush valley thick with stunning palmeraies and Berber villages, are one of the highlights of the south. A massive fault in the plateau dividing the High Atlas from Jebel Sarhro, with a crystal-clear river emerging from it, the gorge rises to 300m at its narrowest point. It's best in the morning, when the sun penetrates to the bottom of the gorge turning the rock from rose pink to a deep ochre. In the afternoon it can be very dark and, in winter, bitterly cold.

Sights & Activities

This is prime trekking and climbing country. For treks, mountain-biking, rock-climbing and horse-riding expeditions, contact Driss at **Assettif Aventure** (2024 895090; www.assettif.org in French). Advance booking is recommended, especially at busy periods.

Sleeping & Eating TODRA GORGE

Auberge-Camping Le Festival (© 061 267251, 073 494307; aubergelefestival@yahoo.fr; half board per person s US\$34, d with/without shower US\$26/24, camping per person US\$2.80) Right in the heart of the gorge, this wonderful stone auberge has breezy rooms with fantastic views, furnished with wroughtiron beds and spotless white linens. The charming owner Adi, who built the house, speaks French, Spanish and English and can arrange trekking and climbing.

Hôtel Restaurant la Vallée ((2) 024 895126; s/d/tr ind breakfast without bathroom US\$8/9/14, with bathroom US\$17/23/28) With a brilliant location on the river, before the Yasmina, this simple hotel has eleven rooms, some renovated, some looking tired. Those on the 2nd floor have lovely views of the gorge. There are plenty of nice touches, including chequered tablecloths, fabric wallhangings and clean communal facilities.

Hôtel Amazir (© 024895109; s/d half board US\$42/55) On a bend in the road at the opposite end of the gorge, 5km before you enter, is the attractive and stone-built Amazir. Rooms are comfortable and bright (try for a balcony), and there's a lovely terrace restaurant by the riverside.

Hôtel Restaurant Yasmina ((2) 024 895118; www todragorge.com; s/d/tr halfboard US\$25/34/54) A fantastic location beside the fjord and beneath the sheer rock walls at the heart of the gorge, the Yasmina has fairly small functional rooms and a good terrace restaurant (menu US\$8 to US\$12) to take in the views. Because of its location, it is overrun by tour groups during the day.

TINERHIR

Hôtel Tomboctou (2024 834604; www.hoteltomboctou .com; 126 Ave Bir Anzarane; s/d/tr half board US\$49/70/93, ind breakfast US\$40/53/68; 20) Tinerhir's most characterful hotel is a kasbah built in 1944 for the local sheikh. Rooms tend to be small and dark and service irregular, so you are paying for the kasbah 'experience' rather than the room. There's a very mediocre restaurant. Mountain trekking and bicycle trips can be organised.

Kasbah Lamrani (2024 835017; www.kasbahlamrani .com in French; s/d half board US\$55/65; P 20 1 Lamrani is a privately run *faux*-kasbah built in a kitsch Disney-esque fashion. The bright ensuite rooms are well equipped and have satellite TV and air conditioning. The hotel is opposite the Monday *souq*, 2.5km west of town.

Getting There & Away

El Fath buses run from Tinehir to Marrakesh (US\$10, five daily) via Ouarzazate (US\$4.50), and to Casablanca (US\$16, one daily), Erfoud (US\$3.40, three daily), Meknès (US\$12, six daily), Rissani (US\$4, one daily) and Zagora (US\$8, one daily). Anything westbound will drop you in Boumalne du Dadès (US\$1.20).

MERZOUGA & THE DUNES

Erg Chebbi is Morocco's only genuine Saharan erg, an impressive, drifting chain of sand dunes that can reach 160m and seems to have escaped from the much larger dune field across the nearby border in Algeria. The erg is a magical landscape that deserves much more than the sunrise or sunset glimpse many visitors give it. The dunes are a scene of constant change and fascination as sunlight transforms them from pink to gold to red. The largest dunes are near the villages of Merzouga and Hassi Labied. At night, you only have to walk a little way into the sand, away from the light, to appreciate the immense clarity of the desert sky and the brilliance of its stars.

Merzouga, some 50km south of Erfoud is a tiny village, but does have *téléboutiques*, general stores, a mechanic and, of course, a couple of carpet shops. It also has an internet place, **Merzouga.net** (per hr US\$0.90; 论 8am-midnight), and is the focus of fast-expanding tourism in the area. As a result, it is acquiring a reputation for some of the worst hassle in Morocco.

Most hotels offer excursions into the dunes and it's here that they make their money. Asking prices can be high. At the time of our visit, prices ranged from US\$9 to US\$14 for a surrise or, more usual, sunset camel trek lasting a couple of hours. Overnight trips (including a bed in a Berber tent, dinner and breakfast) ranged from US\$34 to US\$73 per person. Outings in a 4WD are more expensive, costing up to US\$136 per day for a car taking up to five passengers.

Sleeping & Eating

A string of camps and auberges, most built in similar kasbah style, flank the western side of Erg Chebbi for many miles to the north and south of the villages of Merzouga and Hassi Labied. Most offer half-board options, which isn't a bad thing as there aren't many standalone restaurants. In many of these places you can sleep on a mattress on the roof, in the salon or in a Berber tent for between US\$2.30 and US\$3.40 per person.

HASSI LABIED

This tiny village, 5km north of Merzouga and some way off the tarmac, has a good range of accommodation.

Kasbah Mohajut ((2) 066 039185; mohamezan@yahoo .fr; s/d/ste half board US\$18/23/25; (P) A delightful, small kasbah with two courtyards and only eight rooms, all soothingly decorated in terracotta and two-colour *zellij*. It has nice attention to detail, including old doors, Berber rugs and wrought-iron fittings. Great value for money.

Kasbah Tomboctou ((☎ 035 577091; www.xaluca.com; s/d half board US\$40/54; (₽) (☎) A big, noisy, popular place in an excellent location, with very friendly management and lots of excursions on offer. Rooms are large, well-equipped and decorated in *tadelakt*, communal facilities are spotless and the Ettayek family contagiously friendly.

MERZOUGA

Chez Julia (**©** 070 181360; s/d/trUS\$15/18/23) A lovely auberge in the heart of Merzouga, with nine spotlessly clean, simply furnished rooms in blues and yellow. The Moroccan ladies who run the place can cook up a storm of delicious Moroccan meals (US\$12); breakfast is available for US\$4.30. It's very popular and fills up fast.

Auberge La Tradition (**©** 070 039244; half board per person US\$17; **P**) Another would-be kasbah with simple en-suite rooms in a quiet location near the Ksar Sania and the foot of the dunes.

NORTH OF HASSI LABIED

Getting There & Away

Thankfully, the sealed road now continues all the way to Merzouga. Most hotels are located at least a kilometre off the road at the base of the dunes, but they are all accessible by car. The *pistes* (sandy tracks) can be rough and there is a possibility, albeit remote, of getting stuck in sand, so make sure you have plenty of water for emergencies and a mobile phone. Without your own transport you'll have to rely on *grands taxis* or on the minivans that run from Merzouga to Rissani and Erfoud and back.

MOROCCO DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Auberges de jeunesses (youth hostels) operate in Casablanca, Chefchaouen, Fès, Meknès, Rabat and Tangier. Hotels vary dramatically, ranging from dingy dives to gorgeous guesthouses and fancy five-stars (the latter mostly in larger cities). Cities that see many tourists also offer gorgeous guesthouses in the style of a riad (traditional courtyard house).

Price categories in this chapter include budget (up to US\$45), midrange (US\$45 to US\$115) and top end (US\$115 and up); places are generally listed in order of price and include a private bathroom unless otherwise stated. Prices given are for high season and include tax; always check the price you are quoted is TTC (all taxes included).

Advance reservations are highly recommended for all places listed in this chapter, especially in summer.

ACTIVITIES Camel Treks & Desert Safaris

Exploring the Moroccan Sahara by camel is one of the country's signature activities and one of the most rewarding wilderness experiences, whether done on an overnight excursion or a two-week trek. The most evocative stretches of Saharan sand include the Drâa Valley (p186), especially the Tinfou Dunes and Erg Chigaga, and the dunes of Erg Chebbi (p189) near Merzouga.

Autumn (September to October) and winter (November to early March) are the only seasons worth considering. Prices start at around US\$34 per person per day (or US\$40 for an overnight excursion), but vary depending on the number of people involved, the length of the trek and your negotiating skills.

Hammams

Visiting a *hammam* (traditional bathhouse) is a ritual at the centre of Moroccan society (especially for women) and a practical solution for those who don't have hot water at home (or in their hotel). For travellers, it is an authentic local experience akin to visiting a spa – thoroughly cleansing and totally relaxing. Every town has at least one public *hammam*. A visit usually costs US\$1.20, with a massage costing an extra US\$1.70 or so.

Trekking

Morocco is a superb destination for mountainlovers, offering a variety of year-round trekking possibilities. It's relatively straightforward to arrange guides, porters and mules for a more independent adventure. Jebel Toubkal (4167m), the highest peak in the High Atlas (p185), attracts the lion's share of visitors, but great possibilities exist throughout the country, including in the Rif Mountains around Chefchaouen (p157). Spring and autumn are the best seasons for trekking.

BUSINESS HOURS

Cafés 7am-11pm

Restaurants noon-3pm & 7-11pm Shops 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-8pm Mon-Sat (often closed longer at noon on Friday)

Tourist offices 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Morocco's era as a hippy paradise is long past. Plenty of fine kif (marijuana) is grown in the Rif Mountains, but drug busts are common and Morocco is not a good place to investigate prison conditions.

A few years ago the *brigade touristique* (tourist police) was set up in the principal tourist centres to clamp down on notorious *faux guides* (false guides) and hustlers. Anyone convicted of operating as an unofficial guide faces jailtime and/or a huge fine. This has reduced – but not eliminated – the problem. You'll still find plenty touts hanging around the entrances to medinas and outside train stations, especially at Tangier port and near Bab Bou Jeloud in Fès. If you end up with one of these people remember their main interest is the commission gained from certain hotels or on articles sold to you in the *souqs*.

Official guides can be engaged through tourist offices and hotels at the fixed price of US\$14 per half-day (plus tip).

PRACTICALITIES

- For a full list of Moroccan newspapers online, go to **onlinenewspapers.com** (www.onlinenewspapers.com/morocco.htm).
- Radio Moroccan radio encompasses only a handful of local AM and FM stations, the bulk of which broadcast in either Arabic or French. Midi 1 at 97.5 FM covers northern Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, and plays reasonable contemporary music.
- TV Satellite dishes are everywhere in Morocco and pick up dozens of foreign stations. There are two governmentowned stations, TVM and 2M, which broadcast in Arabic and French.
- The electric current is 220V/50Hz but older buildings may still use 110V.
 Moroccan sockets accept the European round two-pin plugs.
- Morocco uses the metric system for weights and measures.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

For details of all Moroccan embassies abroad and foreign embassies in Morocco, go to www .maec.gov.ma.

Moroccan Embassies & Consulates

Morocco has diplomatic representation in the following countries, among others: Algeria (🖻 60 74 08; 8 Rue des Cèdres, Parc de la Reine, Algiers) Australia (2 02-9922 4999; Suite 2, 11 West St, North Svdnev, NSW 2060) Canada (🖻 613-236 7391, www.ambassade-maroc .ottawa.on.ca; 38 Range Rd, Ottawa, Ont KIN 8J4) France (🖻 01 45 20 69 35; www.amb-maroc.fr; 5 Rue Le Tasse, 75016 Paris) Germany (🖻 030-206 1240; www.maec.gov.ma/berlin; Niederwallstr 39, 10117 Berlin) Japan (🖻 03-3478 3271; www.morocco-emba.jp; 5-4-30 Miami Aoyama Minat 107-0062, Tokyo) Mauritania (🕿 525 14 11: sifmanktt@mauritel.mr: Av du Général de Gaulle, BP 621, Nouakchott) The Netherlands (🕿 070-346 9617; www.marokkaanse -ambassade.nl; Oranjestraat 9, 2514 JB, The Hague) Spain (🖻 91 563 1090; www.maec.gov.ma/madrid; Calle Serrano 179, 28002 Madrid) UK (200-7581 5001; mail@sifamaldn.org; 49 Queen's Gate Gardens, London SW7 5NE)

US (**a** 202-462 7979; fmehdi@embassyofmorocco.us; 1601 21st St NW, Washington, DC 20009)

Embassies & Consulates in Morocco

Countries with diplomatic representation in Rabat (Map pp148–9) include: Algeria ((212 - 37 76 559; Angle 31 cnr rue Ouid Fes &

ave al Ab Tal Agdal, Rabat 212) Belgium (🖻 037 268060; info@ambabel-rabat.org.ma;

6 Ave de Marrakesh)

Canada (🖻 037 687400; fax 037 687430; 13 Rue Jaafar as-Sadig, Agdal)

France (🖻 037 689700; www.ambafrance-ma.org; 3

Rue Sahnoun, Agdal)

Germany ((a) 037 709662; www.amballemagne-rabat .ma; 7 Rue Madnine)

Italy (🖻 037 706598; ambaciata@iambitalia.ma; 2 Rue ldriss el-Azhar)

Japan (🖻 037 631782; fax 037 750078; 39 Ave Ahmed Balafrej Souissi)

Mauritania (🖻 037 656678; ambassadeur@mauritanie .org.ma; 7 Rue Thami Lamdaouar, Soussi I)

The Netherlands ((a) 037 219600; nlgovrab@mtds .com; 40 Rue de Tunis)

US (🖻 037 762265; www.usembassy.ma; 2 Ave de Marrakesh)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Religious festivals are of more significance to Moroccans, but local *moussems* (saints days) are held all over the country throughout the year and some draw big crowds.

Major festivals include the following: Festival of Folklore (www.maghrebarts.ma in French) Held in Marrakesh in June. Gnaoua & World Music Festival (www.festival-gna

Gnaoua & World Music Festival (www.festival-gna oua.co.ma) Held in Essaouira on the third weekend in June. Festival of World Sacred Music (www.fezfestival.org) Held in Fès during June and July.

International Cultural Festival Held in Asilah during July and August.

Moussem of Moulay Idriss II Held during September and October, the largest city *moussem* in holy Fès when thousands gather to watch the processions to the saint's tomb.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexual acts (including kissing) are officially illegal in Morocco – in theory you can go to jail and/or be fined. In practice, although not openly admitted or shown, male homosexuality remains relatively common and platonic affection is freely shown, more so among men than women. In most places, discretion is the key and public displays of affection should be avoided (aggression towards gay male travellers is not unheard of) – this advice applies equally to homosexual and heterosexual couples as a means of showing sensitivity to local feelings.

Some towns are certainly more gay-friendly than others, with Marrakesh winning the prize, followed by Tangier. That said, gay travellers generally follow the same itineraries as everyone else and although 'gay' bars can be found here and there, Moroccan nightlife tends to include something for everybody.

Useful websites which give the lowdown on local laws and attitudes to homosexuality include the following:

Behind the Mask (www.mask.org.za/index.php?page =morocco) Detailed information for every African country. Gay Morocco (http://gaymorocco.tripod.com) Yahoo! discussion groups for gay travellers to and residents of Morocco. Global Gayz (www.globalgayz.com) Another good resource with good links on Morocco.

Kelma (www.kelma.org) Website for gays from North Africa. Spartacus International Gay Guide (www.sparta cusworld.com/gayguide) Renowned guide to gay travel around the world with frequent information on Morocco.

HOLIDAYS

All banks and post offices and most shops shut on the main public holidays, including the following: New Year's Day 1 January Independence Manifesto 11 January Labour Day 1 May Feast of the Throne 30 July Allegiance of Oued-Eddahab 14 August Anniversary of the King's & People's Revolution 20 August

Young People's Day 21 August Anniversary of the Green March 6 November Independence Day 18 November

In addition to secular holidays there are many national and local Islamic holidays and festivals, all tied to the lunar calendar. **Aïd al-Adha** Marks the end of the Islamic year. Most things shut down for four or five days.

Aid al-Fitr Held at the end of the month-long Ramadan fast, which occurs during September or October (depending on the calendar) and is observed by most Muslims. The festivities last four or five days, during which Morocco grinds to a halt. Mawlid an-Nabi (Mouloud) Celebrates the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed.

FESTIVAL OF FOLKLORE

Now more than 40 years old, the Festival of Folklore is a unique celebration of Berber culture. The all-singing, folk-dancing extravaganza – which takes place every year in June in Marrakesh – features many of the country's best performers. All performances take place in the grounds of the magnificent Palais el-Badi.

Each year the festival takes a different theme, such as wedding ceremonies or war rituals. Troupes from all over Morocco sing their songs and dance, reflecting the country's wide variety of ethnic groups and their specific traditions and culture. There are Berbers and Guedra, but it is often the Gnawa, with their sub-Saharan origins, who steal the show. Using lutes, drums, castanets, shells and beads, they produce a hypnotic sound, which builds to a crescendo. The music inspires them to break into tremendous acrobatic displays.

Besides the performances, various groups host exhibitions, theme nights and academic meetings. The festival is also an excellent opportunity to witness the famous *fantasia*, a charge of Berber horsemen, which takes place each sunset outside the ramparts near Bab el-Jdid.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is widely available, efficient and cheap (US\$0.60 to US\$1.20 per hour) in internet cafés, although connections can be slow.

MAPS

Michelin's No 742 (formerly No 959) map of Morocco is arguably the best map of the country. In addition to the 1:4,000,000 scale map of the whole of Morocco, including the disputed territory of Western Sahara, there is a 1:1,000,000 enlargement of Morocco and 1:600,000 enlargements of Marrakesh and the High Atlas, Middle Atlas and Meknès areas.

Preferred by many and with similar, often clearer, detail (and occasionally available in Morocco) is the GeoCenter World Map *Morocco*, which shows the country at a handy 1:800,000 scale.

MONEY

Guichets automatiques (ATMs) are now a common sight across Morocco and many accept Visa, MasterCard, Electron, Cirrus, Maestro and InterBank systems. Major credit cards are widely accepted in the main tourist centres, although their use often attracts a surcharge of around 5% from Moroccan businesses.

American Express, Visa and Thomas Cook travellers cheques are widely accepted for exchange by banks. Australian, Canadian and New Zealand dollars are not quoted in banks and are not usually accepted.

Tipping and bargaining are integral parts of Moroccan life. Practically any service can warrant a tip, and a few dirham for a service willingly rendered can make life a lot easier. Tipping between 5% and 10% of a restaurant bill is appropriate. A supply of small coins is vital for the payment of taxis, tips and guides. It is a good idea to load up at a bank when you arrive so you are well prepared.

POST

Post offices are distinguished by the 'PTT' sign or the 'La Poste' logo. You can sometimes buy stamps at *tabacs*, the small tobacco and newspaper kiosks you see scattered about the main city centres.

The postal system is fairly reliable, but not terribly fast. It takes about a week for letters to get to their European destinations, and two weeks or so to get to Australia and North America. Sending post from Rabat or Casablanca is quickest.

The parcel office, indicated by the sign 'colis postaux', is generally in a separate part of the post office building. Take your parcel unwrapped for customs inspection. Some parcel offices sell boxes.

TELEPHONE

A few cities and towns still have public phone offices, often next to the post office, but more common are privately run *téléboutiques*, which can be found in every town and village on almost every corner.

Morocco has two GSM mobile-phone networks, Méditel and Maroc Telecom, which now cover 85% of the population. For a map of the mobile coverage for Morocco's two carriers, click on www.cellular-news.com/cover age/morocco.php. Moroccan mobile numbers start with the codes (2006) 10 (2006).

TOURIST INFORMATION

The national tourism body, **Office National Marocain du Tourisme** (ONMT; www.visitmorocco.com), has offices in the main cities, with the head office in Rabat. These offices are often called Délégation Régionale du Tourisme. Regional offices, called Syndicat d'Initiative are to be found in smaller towns. Although there are some notable exceptions, most tourist offices inside Morocco are of limited use, offering the standard ONMT brochures and the simplest of tourist maps, along with helpless smiles.

VISAS

Most visitors to Morocco do not require visas and are allowed to remain in the country for 90 days on entry. Exceptions to this include nationals of Israel, South Africa and Zimbabwe; these people can apply for a threemonth, single-entry visa (about US\$30). In all cases, your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your date of entry.

As visa requirements change, it's a good idea to check with the Moroccan embassy in your country or a reputable travel agency before travelling.

The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla have the same visa requirements as mainland Spain.

Visa Extensions

MOROCCO

If 90 days is insufficient, the simplest thing to do is to leave (eg travel to the Spanish enclaves) and come back a few days later. Your chances improve if you re-enter by a different route.

Visas for Onward Travel

Algeria Although Algeria has now emerged from over a decade of civil war, the border with Morocco remains closed and visas are not being issued.

Mali Visas are required for everyone except French nationals and are valid for one month (US\$27), but are renewable inside Mali. Two photographs and a yellow-fever vaccination certificate are required and the visa is usually issued on the spot. Malian visas are available at Malian border posts, but by no means count on that if you're crossing at a remote desert crossing.

Mauritania Everyone, except nationals of Arab League countries and some African countries, needs a visa, which is valid for a one-month stay. These can be issued the same day at the Mauritanian Embassy in Casablanca if you apply between 9am and 10am (get there by 8.30am). Visas cost US\$23 and you need two photos and an onward air ticket. They can also be obtained at the border for US\$25.

VOLUNTEERING

A good place to start looking for volunteer work is the Morocco page for **Volunteer Abroad** (www.volunteerabroad.com/Morocco.cfm), which provides links to NGOs with Morocco-specific programmes. Also worth getting hold of is Lonely Planet's *The Gap Year Book*, which lists hundreds of NGOs that organise volunteer and other work and study programmes around the world.

International or local NGOs that sometimes have Morocco placements or camps include the following:

Chantiers Sociaux Marocains (2017) 037 297184; ccsm@planete.co.ma; BP 456, Rabat) A local NGO with international links.

International Cultural Youth Exchange (www.icye .org) Allows you to search for upcoming Moroccan volunteer opportunities.

Jeunesse des Chantiers Marocains (http://perso.men ara.ma/youthcamps; internationalcamps@yahoo.com) A nonprofit group that promotes cultural exchange through three- to four-week courses in Moroccan Arabic during which you stay with local families and take part in cultural events.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Women can expect a certain level of sexual harassment when travelling in Morocco. It comes in the form of nonstop greetings, leering and other unwanted attention, but it is rarely dangerous. It is best to avoid overreacting and to ignore this attention. In the case where a would-be suitor is particularly persistent, threatening to go to the police or the *brigade touristique* is amazingly effective. Women will save themselves a great deal of grief by avoiding eye contact, dressing modestly and refraining from walking around alone at night.

TRANSPORT IN MOROCCO

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Morocco's main international entry point is the **Mohammed V International Airport** (@ 022 539040), 30km southeast of Casablanca. Other international airports include the following: Fès Airport (🖻 055 674712) Fifteen kilometres south of Fès at Saïss.

Ibn Batouta Airport ((a) 039 393720) Eighteen kilometres south of Tangier.

Ménara Airport (🖻 044 447865) In Marrakesh. Rabat-Salé Airport (🖻 037 808090) Ten kilometres east of Salé.

For comprehensive information on all of Morocco's airports, log on to the website of the **Office National des Aéroports** (www.onda.org.ma in French & Arabic).

Airlines flying to and from Morocco include the following:

Air France (www.airfrance.com; 🖻 022 294040) Alitalia (www.alitalia.it; 🖻 022 314181)

British Airways (www.britishairways.com; 🖻 022 229464)

EasyJet (www.easyjet.com)

Lufthansa Airlines (www.lufthansa.com; 20 022 312371) Regional Air Lines (www.regionalmaroc.com; 20 022 536940)

Royal Air Maroc (www.royalairmaroc.com; 🖻 022 321122) Ryan Air (www.ryanair.com)

Land

The Moroccan bus company, **Compagnie de Transports Marocains** (CTM; ⁽²⁾) in Casablanca 022 458080; www.ctm.co.ma) operates buses from Casablanca and most other main cities to France, Belgium, Spain, Germany and Italy. Buses to Spain leave Casablanca daily except Sunday. Book at least a week in advance.

Another Moroccan bus service with particularly good links to Spanish networks is **Tramesa** (202245274; www.tramesa.ma). UK-based companies with service to Morocco include **Eurolines** (208705 808080; www.eurolines.co.uk) and **Busabout** (202-7950 1661; www.busabout.com).

ALGERIA

The border with Algeria has been closed for some time due to ongoing political disputes.

MAURITANIA

The trans-Saharan route via Mauritania is now the most popular route from North Africa into sub-Saharan Africa, and hundreds of adventurous souls do it every year.

The route into Mauritania runs from Dakhla south along the coast for 460km to Nouâdhibou across the border and then south along the coast to the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott. It's advisable to fill up with petrol at every available station. Some stations south of Dakhla may be out of fuel, in particular, the last station 50km before the border.

Moroccan border formalities are processed in the basic settlement of Guergarat. The border, about 15km from the settlement, is heavily mined, so stay on the road. Coming from Morocco, you can buy the Mauritanian visa at the border (\in 20). Expect to pay another \in 20 for various 'taxes' on top of the visa price. Although there are no longer any currency declaration forms, some customs officials still ask for it and, of course, if you can't present it, they will expect a small bribe.

Note that there's no public transport between Morocco and Mauritania.

Sea

Regular ferries run to Europe from several ports along the Moroccan Mediterranean coast. The most trafficked is Tangier, from where there are boats to Algeciras, Spain (US\$40, 60 to 70 minutes, hourly); Tarifa, Spain (US\$28, 35 minutes, five daily); and Sète, France (US\$281, 36 hours, two weekly). Hourly ferries also run from Ceuta to Algeciras (US\$32, 35 minutes, hourly). Daily ferries go from Al-Hoceima (summer only), Melilla and Nador to Almería and Malaga in Spain. Taking a bicycle onboard is an additional US\$10 to US\$20, while a car is US\$64 to US\$102. Children travel for half the price. Tickets are available at the port of departure or from any travel agent in town.

Ferry companies include the following: Comarit (www.comarit.com) Casablanca (C 022 293320; Blvd d'Anfa); Tangier (O 039 947402; Tangier Port) Ferry Rapidos del Sur (FRS; www.frs.ma) Morocco (0 039 942612); Spain (956 681830) Transmediterránea (902 454645; www.trasmediter

ranea.es; Calle Alcalá 61, Madrid)

GETTING AROUND Air

Royal Air Maroc (RAM; [®] in Casablanca 022 912000; www .royalairmaroc.com) dominates the Moroccan air industry with paltry competition from **Regional** Air Lines ([®] in Casablanca 022 538080). Internal airports serviced by RAM include Casablanca, Essaouira, Fès, Marrakesh, Rabat and Tangier.

Student and under-26 youth discounts of 25% are available on all RAM domestic flights – but this is only if the ticket is bought

MOROCCO

in advance from one of their offices. Group reductions are available and children aged from two to 12 travel at half price.

Bicycle

There are no special road rules pertaining to cyclists and they're really not given much consideration by drivers. Distances are great and those on bikes will need to carry all supplies with them (including any spare parts you may need, food and plenty of drinking water). You can transport bikes on both buses and trains.

Bus

A dense network of buses operates throughout Morocco, with many private companies competing for business alongside the main national carrier, **Compagnie de Transports Marocains** (CTM; **(C)** in Casablanca 022 753677; www.ctm.co.ma).

The ONCF train company runs buses through Supratours to widen its train network. Morocco's other bus companies are all privately owned and only operate regionally. It's best to book ahead for CTM and Supratours buses.

Bus travel is relatively cheap considering the distances that have to be covered. Typical fares from Casablanca to Marrakesh, Fès and Tangier are US\$8, US\$10 and US\$14. More often than not you'll be charged for baggage handling – US\$0.60 is common.

Car & Motorcycle

Taking your own vehicle to Morocco is straightforward. In addition to your vehicle registration document and an International Driving Permit (although many foreign licences, including US and EU, are acceptable), a Green Card (proof of insurance for your vehicle) is required from the car's insurer. Not all insurers cover Morocco.

Renting a car in Morocco isn't cheap, starting from US\$395 per week or US\$57 per day for a basic car with unlimited mileage. Most companies demand a returnable cash deposit (US\$340 to US\$565) unless you pay by credit card. The best cities in which to hire cars are Casablanca, Marrakesh and Tangier, where the competition is greatest and prices lower. However, it is usually cheaper to arrange car rental in advance through a travel agent or international agency.

By law, insurance must be sold along with all rental agreements.

In Morocco you drive on the right, as in Continental Europe. Speed limits in built-up areas range from 40km/h. Outside towns there is a national speed limit of 100km/h, rising to 120km/h on the motorways. It's compulsory for drivers and passengers to wear seat belts in cars, but no-one does.

In many Moroccan towns, parking zones are watched by *gardiens de voitures* in characteristic blue coats. The going rate is US\$0.40 for a few hours and US\$1.20 overnight. In an increasing number of big city centres, parking tickets are issued from blue kerbside machines (US\$0.30 per hour for a maximum stay of 2½ hours). Parking is free on Sundays.

Petrol in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla is tax-free, so drivers heading to Morocco and mainland Spain via the enclaves should arrive with a near-empty tank. Moroccan mechanics are generally extremely good and all decent-size towns will have a garage.

Local Transport

The elderly Mercedes vehicles you'll see belting along Moroccan roads and gathered in great flocks near bus stations are *grands taxis* (shared taxis). They link towns to their nearest neighbours. *Grands taxis* take six extremely cramped passengers and leave when full.

Cities and bigger towns have local *petits taxis*, which are a different colour in every city. *Petits taxis* are not permitted to go beyond the city limits. They are licensed to carry up to three passengers and are usually metered.

Train

Morocco's train network is run by the **Office National des Chemins de Fer** (0NCF; www.oncf.ma in French). There are two lines that carry passengers: the line from Tangier in the north down to Marrakesh, and the line from Oujda in the northeast, also to Marrakesh, joining with the Tangier line at Sidi Kacem. The Belgian-made trains are comfortable, fast and preferable to buses. There are different 1st- and 2nd-class fares; 2nd-class is more than adequate.

Couchettes are available on the overnight ordinaire trains between Marrakesh and Tangier. The compartments fold up into six bunks (couchettes) and they're well worth the extra US\$10. Sample 2nd-class fares include Casablanca to Marrakesh (US\$8.50, three hours), Rabat to Fès (US\$8, 3½ hours) and Tangier to Marrakesh (US\$21, 9½ hours).

Children aged under four travel free. Those aged between four and 12 years get a reduction of 10% to 50%, depending on the service. © Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Sudan

Sudan is the largest, yet one of the least visited, countries in Africa. Although various ongoing conflicts mean much of this vast nation remains off limits, the northeast is one of the safest places in the world, and the easing of travel restrictions is opening up new swathes of territory to explore in the lovely south, where Africa transitions into the tropics. The pyramids and other ancient sites littering the northern deserts may pale compared to the best Egypt has on offer, but you can usually experience these without another person in sight – and this sense of discovery often repeats itself in the towns, too, since Sudan's tourist trail is still no more than a trickle. And while the solitude is a top draw, visitors invariably agree that the Sudanese are among the friendliest and most hospitable people on earth, with a natural generosity that belies their poverty, and this alone makes any trip worthwhile. Whether you rush through on a Cairo to Cape Town trip, or spend a slow month soaking up the history and hospitality, visiting Sudan is an eye-opening and rewarding experience.

FAST FACTS

- Area 2.5 million sq km
- ATMs Only work with local accounts
- Borders Egypt and Ethiopia open; crossing to Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Libya and Uganda not recommended; Eritrea closed but likely to reopen; Chad closed
- Budget US\$20 to US\$30 a day
- Capital Khartoum
- Languages Arabic, English, over 100 regional languages
- Money Sudanese dinar; US\$1 = SDD200
- Population 41 million
- Seasons Rainy season in north (July to September), Red Sea coast (October to December) and south (April to November)
- Telephone Country code 249, international access code 200
- Time GMT/UTC +3
- Visas Best bought in Cairo (Egypt), or with the help of a Khartoum travel agent

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Begrawiya** (p205) Sudan's best-preserved pyramids, in a stunning desert location.
- Wadi Halfa to Dongola (p206) Remote country with many rewards.
- **Kassala** (p207) Dramatic mountains and diverse markets.
- **Omdurman** (p203) Khartoum's more traditional twin is home to the largest *souq* in the country and some whirling dervishes.
- **Nuba Mountains** (p208) New frontier for tourism in Sudan.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Sudan's climate ranges from hot and dry in the north to humid and tropical in the equatorial south. September to April is the best time to visit. Northern temperatures can exceed 40° C year-round, but peak from April to July. The heaviest rains (rarely more than 150mm in Khartoum) in July and August (Port Sudan's meagre rainy season is October to December) present few problems for travel in the north, though wreak havoc on roads in the Nuba Mountains. Fierce dust storms (the *haboob*) blow occasionally from July to August and November to January. In the slightly cooler south it rains year-round, but April to November is the wettest time.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Three days is plenty of time to visit Khartoum (p201) and get out to the Meroe Sites (p205).
- One Week After seeing Khartoum and the Meroe Sites, head north for the pyramids and other ruins, making sure not to miss those near Karima (p207). Then travel east for some Red Sea scuba diving out of Port Sudan (p209) or south to explore the surprisingly green Nuba Mountains (p208), where few other tourists tread.

HISTORY

Modern Sudan is situated on the site of the ancient civilisation of Nubia, which predates Pharaonic Egypt. For centuries sovereignty was shuttled back and forth between the Egyptians, indigenous empires such as Kush, and a succession of independent Christian kingdoms.

After the 14th century AD the Mamelukes (Turkish rulers in Egypt) breached the formidable Nubian defences and established the dominance of Islam. By the 16th century

WARNING

The south remains volatile despite the peace deals, and there's no end in sight to the violence in Darfur to the west. Westerners have been targeted in both places. Tribal fighting has flared around Dilling in the Nuba Mountains and some fear it could spread.

the kingdom of Funj had become a powerful Muslim state and Sennar, 200km south of present-day Khartoum, was one of the great cultural centres of the Islamic world.

Colonialism & Revolt

In 1821 the viceroy of Egypt, Mohammed Ali, conquered northern Sudan and opened the south to trade, with catastrophic results. Within a few decades British interests were also directed towards Sudan, aiming to control the Nile, contain French expansion from the west and draw the south into a British-East African federation. The European intrusion, and in particular the Christian missionary zeal that accompanied it, was resented by many Muslim Sudanese.

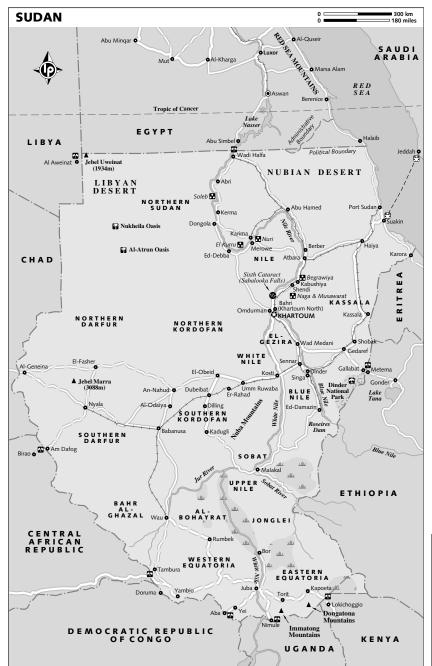
The revolution came in 1881, when one Mohammed Ahmed proclaimed himself to be the Mahdi – the person who, according to Muslim tradition, would rid the world of evil. Four years later he rid Khartoum of General Gordon, the British-appointed governor, and the Mahdists ruled Sudan until 1898, when

HOW MUCH?

- Small food-covering basket US\$3.40
- 100km bus ride US\$0.50
- Jebbana (spiced coffee) US\$0.50
- One hour internet US\$0.50
- Falafel US\$0.50

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.40
- 1.5L of bottled water US\$0.80
- Bottle of beer Priceless
- Dagger US\$19
- Plate of legemat (doughnut holes) US\$0.30



they were defeated outside Omdurman by Lord Kitchener and his Anglo-Egyptian army. The British then imposed the Condominium Agreement, effectively making Sudan a British colony.

Independence & Revolt

Sudan achieved independence in 1956, but in a forerunner of things to come, General Ibrahim Abboud summarily dismissed the winners of the first post-independence elections. Ever since, flirtations with democracy and military coups have been regular features of the Sudanese political landscape. So has war in the mostly non-Muslim south, which revolted after its demands for autonomy were rejected.

In 1969 Colonel Jaafar Nimeiri assumed power and held it for 16 years, surviving several coup attempts, and making numerous twists and turns in policy to outflank opponents and keep aid donors happy. Most importantly, by signing the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement to grant the southern provinces a measure of autonomy he quelled the civil war for more than a decade.

...And More Revolt

In 1983 Nimeiri scrapped the autonomy accord and imposed *sharia* (Islamic law) over the whole country. Exactly what he hoped to achieve by this is unclear, but the effect on the southern population was entirely predictable, and hostilities recommenced almost immediately. Army commander John Garang deserted to form the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which quickly took control of much of the south.

Nimeiri was deposed in 1985 and replaced first by a Transitional Military Council, then, after elections the next year, Sadiq al-Mahdi became prime minister. In July 1989 power was seized by the current president, Lieutenant General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir; however, Hassan al-Turabi, fundamentalist leader of the National Islamic Front (NIF), was widely seen as the man with real power.

The government's brand of belligerent fundamentalism, border disputes with half its neighbours and possible complicity in a 1995 assassination attempt on Egypt's president soon cost Sudan all its regional friends.

1999: Infighting (& Revolt)

SUDAN

The year 1999 was something of a watershed in Sudanese politics: in December, just when

the country's domestic and international situation seemed to be improving, President al-Bashir dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution and imposed a three-month state of emergency; all as part of an internal power struggle with Al-Turabi. The subsequent elections in December 2000 were boycotted by opposition parties, giving al-Bashir an easy win, and in 2001 Al-Turabi and several members of his party were arrested after signing an agreement with the SPLA.

By 2002 things were looking up again – the economy had stabilised and a ceasefire was called after President al-Bashir and SPLA leader John Garang met in Nairobi – but it seems good news in Sudan is always followed by bad. In February 2003 black African rebels in the western Darfur region rose up against the government they accused of oppression and neglect. The army's heavy-handed response, assisted by pro-government Arab militias (the Janjaweed), escalated to what many have called genocide. The government's scorched-earth campaign killed some 200,000 Sudanese and uprooted millions more.

Sudan Today (An End to Revolt?)

While Darfur spun out of control, peace crept forward in the south, and in January 2005 a deal was signed ending Africa's longest civil war. It included accords on sharing power and wealth (including equal distribution of oil export revenue), and six years of southern autonomy followed by a referendum on independence. In July the beloved Garang became the first vice president in a power-sharing government, and president of the south, but was killed less than a month later in a helicopter crash. Garang's No.2, Salva Kiir, took his place and has earned praise.

By the middle of 2006 Sudan was at a crossroads. While a Darfuri peace accord with some rebel factions was signed in May, the killing got worse and al-Bashir, fearing they will arrest people on war-crimes charges, has refused to allow UN peacekeepers to replace the small and ineffective African Union force. Meanwhile foot-dragging on the implementation of key elements of the peace agreement threatens to derail the peace in the south.

CULTURE

Although there are differing perspectives on the issue, the reunification of north and south is on everybody's mind. Northerners hope peace will bring back 'the old and nice days' when the economy was strong, while southerners talk of a 'new Sudan'. The more practical minded in both halves are dreaming of dinar: peace brings many new business opportunities.

Sharia is not as strictly enforced as it once was. Alcohol is pretty easy to find (foreigners are *usually* spared the 40 lashes Sudanese get when caught with it), and there is much more of a sense of ease in the air. As one Sudanese man put it, there are 'a lot more beautiful women on the streets of Khartoum these days'.

PEOPLE

Sudan's 41 million people are divided into hundreds of ethnic groups. Some 75% of Sudan's population, including around two million nomads, live in rural areas, and agriculture still employs 80% of the workforce. About 70% of the population is Muslim (Sunnis, mostly), although the south is dominated by traditional animists (25%) and Christians (around 5%). Despite their differences, hospitality is a key concept for all Sudanese, and wherever you go you'll constantly find people paying for things for you, sharing meals or even inviting you to stay in their homes!

ENVIRONMENT

Northern and western Sudan are vast, desolate areas of desert that support little life, and Nubia in the northeast is semidesert. Except for a few mountain ranges, the country is largely flat.

FOOD & DRINK

Sudanese food isn't particularly varied – the staples are *fuul* (stewed brown beans) and *ta'amiya*, known elsewhere as falafel. Outside the larger towns you'll find little else.

Meat dishes include *kibda* (liver), shish kebabs and *shwarma*, hunks of chicken or lamb sliced fresh from the classic roasting spit. Along the Nile you can find excellent fresh perch.

Tea is the favourite drink, served as *shai* saada (black, sometimes spiced), *shai bi-laban* (with milk) or *shai bi-nana* (with mint). Also common is *qahwa turkiya* (Turkish coffee) and *jebbana* (spiced coffee), served in distinctive clay or metal pots and spiked with cardamom, cinnamon or ginger. Local fruit juices are usually made with untreated water/ice.

KHARTOUM

pop 4.5 million

Built where the two Niles meet, Khartoum is one of the more modern cities in Central Africa, with paved roads, high-rise buildings and all the services you might want or need. Some travellers consider it nothing but a dusty, congested and joyless (nightlife is nearly nonexistent) stopover. But those looking to uncover its culture will appreciate what they find when they start walking around. Besides, its people are hospitable, the riverside setting is attractive and it's one of the safest cities in Africa – so for one reason or another most people end up liking it here.

ORIENTATION

Three cities sit at the confluence of the White and Blue Niles: Khartoum, Bahri (Khartoum North) and Omdurman, each separated by an arm of the river. You'll find anything you need in central Khartoum; continuing south, the city gets more upscale and international.

INFORMATION

The **Sudanese-French Bank** (Map p204; al-Quasar St) and **Bank of Khartoum** (Map p204; al-Barlman St) do foreign exchange. So do Alamon Exchange and UAExchange (multiple locations), which are also agents for Travelex money transfers. **Blue Nile Mashreg Bank** (Map p204; al-Barlman St) handles Western Union.

Al-Faisal Hospital (Map p204; 🖻 83789555; al-Isbitalya St) has a 24-hour casualty centre.

The **post office** (Map p204; al-Khalifa St) has an EMS branch at the back, and **DHL** (Map p204; **2** 83777500; al-Nijomi St) is not far away.

For novels in English, try the **New Bookshop** (Map p204; al-Ziber Basha) and **Central Bookshop** (Map p204; al-Jamhurya St).

Cultural Centres

British Council (Map p204; 🗟 83780817; Abo Sin St) French Cultural Centre (Map p204; 🗟 83798035; Ali Dinar St)

German Kulturzentrum (Map p204; 🖻 83777833; al-Mak Nimir St)

Internet Access

Azza Business Center (Map p204; Sayyd Abdul al-Rahman St; per hr SDD100; ∑ 9am-9pm Sat-Thu; ≳) Khartoum Internet Club (Map p204; al-Quasar St; per hr SDD200; ∑ 9am-10pm; ≳) Net Gate (Map p204; 2nd fl, al-Sharif al-Hindi St; per hr SDD100; SDD100

Travel Agents

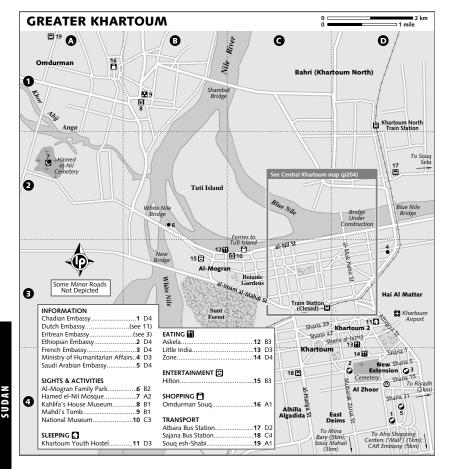
Air Handling (Map p204; 🕿 83770692; al-Jamhurya St) Khartoum Travel & Tourism (Map p204; 🖻 8377 2962; al-Jamhurya St)

SIGHTS

The National Museum (Map p202; al-Nil St; admission SDD100; 🕑 8.30am-6.30pm, closed noon-3pm Fri & Mon) has some fine exhibits, notably the Pharaonic stone carvings and the stunning Christian frescoes. The masks, drums, boats and other cultural curiosities in the superb Ethnographical Museum (Map p204; al-Jamia St; admission free; 🕅 8.30am-6pm Tue-Sun, closed noon-3pm Fri)

show just how diverse Sudan is. The mostly unlabelled taxidermied animals in the Natural History Museum (Map p204; al-Jamia St; admission free; 8.30am-6pm Tue-Sun, closed noon-3pm Fri) do so in their own way. The Republican Palace Museum (Map p204; al-Jamia St; admission SDD50; 🕑 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Wed & Fri-Sun) is a hall of heroes, of sorts, with mementos such as presidential limos and General Gordon's piano.

The confluence of the Blue and White Niles, best seen from the White Nile Bridge (Map p202), is a languid high point of the world's longest river. You can actually see the different colours of each Nile flowing side by side before blending further downstream. For an original perspective, try the fast-moving Ferris wheel in the Al-Mogran Family Park (Map p202;



al-Nil St; admission SDD150; (> 10am-11pm) or rent a motorboat (US\$50 per hour) from the Blue Nile Sailing Club (below).

The traditional Muslim city of Omdurman (Map p202), founded by the Mahdi in the 1880s, is a big attraction; the famous Omdurman soug (Map p202) - the largest in the country has an amazing variety of wares. The camel market (Souq Moowaileh) on the far western edge of the city is equally spectacular, especially on Saturday, but there is no public transport. The rocket-topped Mahdi's Tomb (Map p202; admission free; 🕅 8am-5pm Mon & Fri) is worth making the effort to see, though foreigners aren't always allowed inside. The original was destroyed on Kitchener's orders by General Gordon's nephew 'Monkey', who, somewhat unsportingly, threw the Mahdi's ashes into the Nile! The Mahdi's successor lived across the street and the 1887 Khalifa's House Museum (Map p202; admission SDD100; 🕑 9am-1pm Tue-Sun) showcases the history of the Mahdi era.

Every Friday afternoon you can see the Halgt Zikr, where a colourful local troupe of whirling dervishes stir up the dust in worship of Allah at Omdurman's Hamed el-Nil Mosque (Map p202). Things start at 4pm, but don't really get going until about 5.30pm (5pm in winter), and they don't dance during Ramadan. Over in Bahri (Map p202; take a minibus for Haeyosif and get off at Souq Seta), traditional Nuba wrestlers go through their paces at roughly the same time. They're both very friendly occasions.

The Acropole Hotel (Map p204; 🖻 83772860; al-Ziber Basha St) runs a four-hour Friday city tour. If there are free seats, nonguests can join for SDD2500.

SLEEPING

Blue Nile Sailing Club (Map p204; 2 012296014; al-Nil St; camp site per person US\$3, motorcycle/car US\$2/5) Most overlanders pitch their tents here, where the office is in Kitchener's old gunboat, Melik.

1000 Nights Hotel (Map p204; 🖻 0912-3-52477; al-Sharif al-Hindi St; dm SDD1000) One of Khartoum's cleanest and friendliest lokandas (basic lodge), with many two-bed rooms.

Wadi Halfa Hotel (Map p204; 🗃 83776054; Hashm Baeh St; dm SDD1000) The Wadi Halfa is just as good as 1000 Nights. Like most lokandas, it's signed only in Arabic, but unusually, it even has a couple of singles.

Khartoum Youth Hostel (Map p202; 🗃 83480385; info@sudaneseyha.net; Sharia 47; dm SDD2500-3500; 🔀) In

a quiet compound in Khartoum 2, near many restaurants, Khartoum's HI-affiliated hostel was getting spruced up during our visit and should be quite nice when it reopens. Some rooms have just two beds.

Al-Nakhil Hotel (Map p204; 🖻 83786709; al-Sharif al-Hindi St; s/d SDD3500/5000; 🕄) Scruffier than the two lokandas above, but with private bathroom and air-conditioning.

Central Hotel (Map p204; a 83772949; Abdul al-Munami Mhammad St; s/d/t SDD7000/9000/11,000; 💦) Rooms are spiffier than you'd expect from the reception and stairwell, but except for the balconies, they're pretty plain.

Inamm Hotel (Map p204; 🕿 83786635; off Tayyar Izz al-Din; s/d US\$52/60; 🔀 🛄) The best value in the class (satellite TV, hot water, refrigerator), Inamm Hotel is favoured by Sudanese business travellers, though many of the similar places nearby will lower their prices at the drop of a hat.

Bougainvilla Guesthouse (🖻 83222104; www .bougainvillaguesthouse.com; Block 21; s/d without bathroom SDD11,000/15,500, d with bathroom SDD20,000; 🔀 🔲) A Norwegian-owned hotel in the upscale Rivadh neighbourhood with a rooftop restaurant that they hope to make a rooftop bar. Breakfast and airport pickup included.

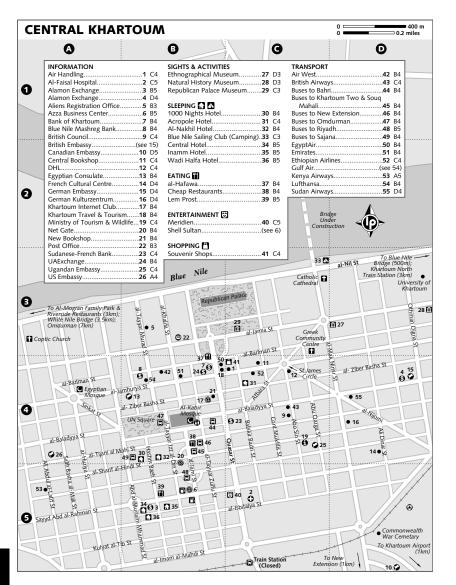
Acropole Hotel (Map p204; 🖻 83772860; www.acropole khartoum.com; al-Ziber Basha St; s/d/t US\$140/215/290; 🔀 🗳) The first choice of journalists lacks the four-star flash and facilities of the Hilton and Grand Holiday Villa, but it is second to none in service and the Pagoulatos family knows everything about Sudan. All meals, city tours and many other extras are included in the price. In some cases, two rooms share a bathroom.

EATING

The many informal, cheap joints south of Al-Kabir Mosque (Map p204) serve the staples for SDD100 per plate, and plenty of larger restaurants throughout the city centre also serve kebabs, burgers and shwarma for around SDD100 to SDD300. As a rule they're all pretty much of a muchness.

Lem Prost (Map p204; Sayyd Abdul al-Rahman St; shish kebabs SDD300; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner) One of several popular night-time barbecue joints in this area.

Zone (Map p202; Sharia 1, Khartoum 2; tr scoop ice cream SDD400: M breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri-Wed) Toin Sudan's well-heeled inside this traffic circle garden for drinks and snacks.



Little India (Map p202; al-Jazeera St, Khartoum 2; mains SDD700-3500; Sbreakfast, lunch & dinner) Expensive, but wonderful Indian. Thai and continental cuisine.

SUDAN

al-Hafawa (Map p204; al-Barlman St; large pizza SDD1000-1700; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Far from a slice of Italy, this parkside pizzeria is still pleasant.

Askela (Map p202; al-Nil St; mains up to SDD2200; breakfast, lunch & dinner) A large riverside restaurant opposite the National Museum.

ENTERTAINMENT

Afra Shopping Centers ('Mall', Afriqyyah St) With its bowling alley, fun fair and movie theatre, this is the most entertaining place in the city.

Askela (Map p202; al-Nil St) Features children's theatre on Thursday nights (8pm to 10pm) and comedy for adults on Tuesdays.

Hotels provide the bulk of entertainment in the city centre. At the Meridien (Map p204; Sayyd Abdul al-Rahman St) the Ethiopian dance show (Friday, Sunday and sometimes Tuesday; SDD2500) gets pretty risqué by Sudanese standards. The Hilton (Map p202; al-Jamia St) has Sudanese music (SDD1500 minimum tab) from Wednesday to Friday. Both shows run from 9pm to 11pm.

Shell Sultan (Map p204; Sayyd Abdul al-Rahman St; pipes SDD150; 🕑 dinner) A great place for a pre- or post-dinner smoke.

SHOPPING

There is a cluster of good souvenir shops (Map p204) near the tip of al-Quasar St (Map p204), though it's more enjoyable, and usually cheaper, to shop at the Omdurman soug (Map p202). The mainstays of Sudanese souvenirs are ebony, ivory and crocodile skins, all of which should be avoided.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

See p211 for flight information to destinations throughout Africa and the rest of the world.

Bus

Most road transport departs from one of four bus stations. Almost everything rolling south, east and west, including El-Obeid, Gederaf, Kassala and Port Sudan, goes from the modern and chaotic mina bary (land port) near Souq Mahali (Map p202) in southern Khartoum. The Sajana bus station (Map p202) serves Dongola and Wadi Halfa; Karima and Merowe buses use Omdurman's Soug esh-Shabi (Map p202); and the Atbara Bus Station (Map p202) is in Bahri.

GETTING AROUND

Buses (SDD40 to SDD80) and minibuses (SDD100) cover most points in Khartoum and run very early to very late. See the Central Khartoum map (Map p204) for major departure points.

Taxi prices (and if they have no passengers the minibuses work like taxis and often cost less) are negotiable: expect to pay around SDD400 to SDD500 for journeys within the city centre and SDD800 to destinations within greater Khartoum. For shorter trips (except in

central Khartoum) there are also motorised rickshaws, which should cost no more than SDD300.

The short ride by taxi from Khartoum airport (Map p202) to the city centre is unofficially fixed at SDD2500, though you can sometimes bargain this down. Better yet, try sharing the ride.

AROUND KHARTOUM

MEROE SITES

The ancient royal cemetery of Begrawiya (which many people call Meroe) is one of Sudan's most spectacular sights. The Meroitic Pharaohs thrived from 592 BC until overrun by the Abyssinians in AD 350. Although nothing here compares with better-known sites in Egypt, the clusters of narrow pyramids blanketing the sand-swept hills are quite a sight and some well-preserved hieroglyphics can still be seen in the tombs' antechambers. You can also visit the remains of the Royal City across the highway, where the so-called Roman bath is the top attraction.

Two other Meroitic sites, Naga (admission SDD2500) and Musawarat (admission SDD2500), lie 35km off the highway south of Shendi, and are about the same distance from each other. Naga's Lion Temple has wonderful exterior carvings, while the crumbling foundations in Musawarat's Great Enclosure let you imagine how this former pilgrimage site once looked.

If you want to catch the sunset over the pyramids, you can sleep in the desert (head towards the mountains) or splash out at a pair of luxury lodgings about 4km away. The Meroe Tented Camp (🖻 83487961; www.italtoursudan .com; s/d incl 2 meals SDD35,000/42,500) has 10 comfy walk-in tents on concrete slabs with private toilets nearby, while Apedemak Hotel (200912 288214; blueskytours@yahoo.com; s/d incl 2 meals SDD17,000/ 27,000) is more solid, but just as cosy. Both have thatched-roof restaurants with dinner costing SDD8000 and SDD2000 per person respectively.

These ruins are easily visited from Khartoum. If you hire a car and driver (starting at about SDD35,000 plus fuel), you can visit the Sixth Cataract (Sabalooka Falls), too. A pick-up truck in Shendi should cost around half about SDD35,000 plus fuel), you can visit the that. Begrawiya is just 700m off the highway and easily reached by public transport: take an Atbara bus (SDD2300) from Bahri and ask

to be let out at Al-Ahram ('Pyramids'). Coming back, flag down vehicles heading south; you'll probably have to change in Shendi.

NORTHERN SUDAN

WADI HALFA

Founded by a handful of Nubian families from the original Halfa (now buried under Lake Nasser) who resisted the government's forced relocation, Wadi Halfa is where the ferry to Egypt docks.

The biggest difference between the dozen or so rough lokandas (dm SD500 to SDD700) are the names - snag the first bed you can find when the ferry is in town because they fill fast.

Most transport runs in line with the ferry, though the weekly plane from Khartoum (SDD29,000, 11/2 hours) comes on Friday (if it comes at all), but might change back to Wednesday. You can get off the boat and right on a bus to Khartoum (SDD6500, 24 hours) or take the train (sleeper/1st/2nd/3rd class 24,000/8000/6500/5500, 36 to 50 hours) on Wednesday. From Khartoum, these both leave on Monday morning.

WADI HALFA TO DONGOLA

Hundreds of historic sites and some striking desert and river scenery line this 400km stretch of the Nile, while the many villages offer a fascinating taste of Nubian life. Travel can be tough through here, but it's the highlight of Sudan for many visitors.

The first significant town is Abri (market day is Monday), the base for visiting Sai Island, 10km south, which, with a temple from Egypt's Middle Kingdom, a medieval church and an Ottoman fort among the many ruins, is something of a synopsis of ancient Sudanese history. None are in good condition, but walking between them is fun. El-Fager (dm SDD500), Abri's only lokanda, is not so clean.

A little further south, easily reached by boat from Wawa, Soleb is not only one of the few west-bank sites in good enough condition to warrant a visit, it is the only one easy to reach without your own transport. It was built in the 14th century BC by Amenhotep III, the same Pharaoh who gave us Luxor in Egypt, and the design and carvings are similar. To enter you need to buy an SDD2500 permit in Wadi Halfa or Dongola, or hope the guard is in a good mood.

SUDAN

Kerma (market day Sunday) was an important trade centre during Egypt's Middle Kingdom and is presumed to have been the capital of the first Kingdom of Kush. Around 2400 BC Kerma's kings built two giant mud-brick temples, known as deffufas (admission SDD2500). The western deffufa, a 15minute boksi (Toyota pick-up; plural bokasi) ride and 15-minute walk away from town, stood about 19m high and stretched 50m long. Today is has crumbled into an oddly appealing form and you can still climb to the top. A museum was under construction at the site at the time of writing and a bit of ancient road can be seen 2km east. Few people visit the smaller eastern deffufa, about 3km away; and many locals don't even know that it exists, which makes finding it difficult. The Kerma Hotel (dm SDD500) is a pretty grim lokanda, but the town's Nile-side restaurants sort of compensate.

There is a bus that runs from Wadi Halfa to Abri (SDD1500, six hours) on Wednesday, otherwise you need to rely on the various trucks that head south. After Abri, many bokasi connect the villages so you can get around pretty easily, though not necessarily quickly.

DONGOLA

Famous for its palm groves, the relaxed little town of Dongola is full of character and boasts good amenities. The east-bank ruins of the Temple of Kawa, which are mostly buried under sand, are about 4km south of the bus station (which is where, if you're being official, you buy the SDD2500 permit). It's a pleasant walk.

Most hotels and restaurants are clustered together on the main road, near the market. Lord Hotel (2 0241-8-22405; dm SDD500) and Haifa Hotel (2 0241-8-23573; dm SDD700) are two appropriately priced lokandas. Olla Hotel (2 0241-8-21848; r SDD3000; 🕄), a block off the main road, is almost as scruffy as Lord, but it's got airconditioning. Al-Moltaga (mains SDD100-1500; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner), decorated with coloured lights, stands out for both good food and sometimes offering rice and macaroni besides the standards.

Most transport, including bokasi to Kerma (SDD700, two hours) and Karima (SDD2500, four hours), departs from across the river, though buses to Khartoum (SDD4000, eight hours) leave from town.

KARIMA

Karima is an exceptionally ordinary town, but the area's interesting ancient sites means it gets a steady trickle of visitors. Jebel Barkal, the mountain hanging on the city's south side, was sacred ground for the Egyptians at the time of the 18th-dynasty Pharaohs and has some well-preserved pyramids and a temple complex around it. It costs SDD2500 to enter the **Temple of Mut**, but otherwise the sites are free. The **museum** (admission SDD500; 🕅 8am-3pm Sat-Thu) is pretty good.

There are also some delightfully dilapidated pyramids (among the largest in Sudan) across the river at Nuri (not to be confused with the nearby village of Nuri). Nuri tickets (SDD2500) are sold at Jebel Barkal, but there's rarely anyone to collect them. Take a minibus (SDD100, 30 minutes) from the city of Merowe, across the river. Currently it's reached only by ferry, but a bridge should be finished soon. El Kurru (admission SDD2500), 20km south of Karima, has twin tombs cut into the rock with wonderful paintings. Minibuses (SDD100, 30 minutes) leave from Karima.

The lovely and expensive Nubian Rest-House (2 83487961; www.italtoursudan.com; s/d incl 2 meals SDD35.000/42.500) sits at the foot of Jebel Barkal. Al Nasser (20 0231-8-20319; dm SDD500) is the best of the city's lokandas. Most of Karima's restaurants fill a block on a nearby street. There is a tiny internet café using mobile phones to get online just east of the restaurants.

There are frequent bokasi to Dongola (SDD2500, four hours) and Atbara (SDD3000, seven hours). One bus leaves every morning for Khartoum (SDD2500, seven hours), though there is more frequent transport from Merowe.

ATBARA

pop 110,000

Atbara was the scene of the first battle between Kitchener's advancing troops and the Mahdists, but you'd have trouble finding any modern Britons who would fight over it. These days the town is basically a transport hub for those heading to or from the north.

The bright and friendly Nile Hotel (20 0211-8-22111; s/d SDD3000/6000, plus satellite TV SDD1500; 🔀) has smart, clean rooms, decent food (SDD1300 for the set dinner) and hot water in the shared showers. Closer to the town centre, Harar Hotel (@ 0917-5-09753; dm SDD500) is your usual lokanda.

There are many buses to Khartoum (SDD2300, four hours) and several through the desert to Port Sudan (SDD4000, 10 hours), plus bokasi to Karima (SDD3000, seven hours). The weekly train to/from Wadi Halfa passes through town and a bus (SDD6000, 20 hours) goes on Thursday.

EASTERN SUDAN

KASSALA pop 420,000

Kassala is a city known for the many tribes represented in the sougs, but your attention surely will be drawn to the melting granite of the Taka Mountains behind it. The authorities won't even let you into the city if your travel permit isn't in perfect order, though they no longer seem to care if you climb the peaks: but get local advice first, there are still rebels in the area and a landmine risk well beyond the city. There are famous camel races annually in September or October.

The colourful Toteel Hotel (@ 0411-8-24297: dm/r SDD600/3500; 🕃) is a good budget option. Nearby, El-Safa Hotel (2 0411-8-22711; r SDD3000-5000; 🔀) has a range of rooms with amenities from shared bathroom and fan to satellite TV and fridge. The recently renovated Sahiron Hotel (🖻 0411-8-27707; d/t SDD6500/7500, chalet SDD15,000; 🕄) has the best-appointed rooms.

Cheap eats abound around town, but UN personnel and well-heeled locals gravitate to Shamadourn Restaurant (dishes SDD100-2400; 🕑 breakfast Sat-Thu, lunch & dinner daily; 🔀) for burgers, pasta dishes and many chicken choices. Have a post-hike coffee or shisha at Toteel Park (SDD50; breakfast, lunch & dinner) at the rocky base of the mountains southeast of town.

Minibuses (SDD50) and taxis (SDD500) shuttle from town to Soug esh-Shabi (about 6km), where the buses to Port Sudan (SDD3500, six hours) and Khartoum (SDD4700, seven hours) arrive and depart.

PORT SUDAN pop 475,000

Sudan's only major industrial port is the base for some of the Red Sea's best diving (see p209). **Port Sudan Tourism** (c) 3311-8-22927; www portsudantourism.com) can put you in touch with local captains. On land, watching ships unload in the port is about as exciting as it gets in this sprawling but surprisingly laid-back

city, though strolling the streets reveals some scattered colonial buildings. All the services you might need are here, including foreign exchange and fast internet access, but despite its prosperity, power and water are unreliable.

Sleeping & Eating

There are plenty of *lokandas* around the market with facilities ranging from basic to bomb site.

Marhaba Hotel ((2) 0311-8-24585; dm SDD700) Its three-bed rooms are above average.

Zahran Hotel (**C** 0311-8-23820; s/d SDD1500/2500) Across the road from the Marhaba, this friendly hotel, with big en suites, is a bit scruffy but still offers the best value in the city.

Hilton (a) 311-8-39800; s/d US\$180/210, ste from US\$270; a) Inis four-star facility has harbour views and all the mod cons, including a gym.

The area around the local bus station teems with brightly lit, cheap restaurants and juice bars, giving it a fairground atmosphere at night. The restaurants along the waterfront, which do a good range of meat and fish dishes for a few bucks, also bustle after dark. The global dinner buffet at the Hilton (buffet SDD5300) is truly decadent.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses (SDD250, 45 minutes) for Suakin leave from the city centre. The major bus companies serving Kassala (SDD3500, six hours) and Khartoum (SDD9000, 13 hours) have offices in the city centre and at the bus station (Souq esh-Shabi). Buses for Atbara (SDD4000, 10 hours) have their own bus station nearby. Minibuses (SDD50) from the city centre drop you nearly 1km away from the main bus station, so consider a taxi (SDD400).

The train to Atbara (1st/2nd class SDD4300/3300) departs sometime around the 8th of each month, and there are daily flights to/from Khartoum (SDD21,000, one hour). Sudan Airways' Saturday flight to Cairo stops in Port Sudan on the way.

in Port St SUAKIN

Suakin was Sudan's only port before the construction of Port Sudan, once handling the thousands of pilgrims bound for Mecca and slaves bound for Jeddah and Cairo. Abandoned in the 1930s, it became an intriguing ghost town, full of crumbling **coral buildings**. The **ruins** (admission SDD1000; 🏵 6am-5pm), connected to the mainland by a short causeway, are fascinating to explore, and the 'modern' town also has a delightfully sleepy feel to it. Suakin is best visited as a day trip from Port Sudan.

SOUTH OF KHARTOUM

EL-OBEID pop 410,000

El-Obeid has long been a prosperous market centre and today over half the world's supply of gum arabic passes through. The **Kordofan Museum** has some intriguing displays, including old weapons and massive pottery, but has been closed since the money for a planned renovation disappeared, and its future is uncertain. This leaves the nearby tan and red **El-Obeid Cathedral** as the town's only attraction, and it's usually closed.

The John Hotel ((☎ 0611-8-22282; r with fan/air-con SDD4000/8000; (℃) in the town centre is simple, but cheery, with plenty of plastic flowers. Toilets are shared. The Kordofan Hotel ((☎ 0611-8-23020; s/d without bathroom SDD8000/10,000, r with bathroom SD12,500; ℃) is tops in town, but it feels institutional. If you're looking for a *lokanda* (most priced around SDD500 per bed) wander west of the *souq* until you find an acceptable one; this may take a while as they are all quite grim.

Surri Restaurant (dishes SDD200-1500; [™]) breakfast, lunch & dinner) in a big green building at the southwest corner of the main *souq* has the biggest menu in town, with chicken, beef macaroni and some fun fruity drinks. The Kordofan Hotel ([™]) 0611-8-23020) promises pizza (SDD1200 to SDD1500) but rarely comes through.

Most of the many buses to Khartoum (SDD4700, seven hours), including some overnighters, depart from the central bus station, but a few older ones use Salahin Station, the departure point for Kadugli (SDD2200, five hours), on the southern highway.

NUBA MOUNTAINS

Smack in the heart of the country, the Scotlandsized Nuba Mountains are, in a sense, a gateway to sub-Saharan Africa. The Nuba people, 60some related tribes and subtribes with as many differences as similarities, were made famous by the photographs of Leni Riefenstahl. During the autumn harvest, generally November to February, you might get to see some of the Nuba's famous festivals (called Sebir), which usually include wrestling and dancing.

Parts of the area have recently opened up to intrepid travelers, though there are still several difficulties and dangers, particularly the unexploded ordinance and landmines left behind after the war – get local advice (or find a guide) before leaving any road, and don't climb to the tops of hills. Most villages do not welcome visitors, so you will probably not be allowed to spend the night if you just show up. *Bokasi* connect towns along the highway to some nearby villages, but beyond this you'll need to rely on the occasional truck or walk and bike, as most locals do.

Kadugli, home of the UN peacekeepers and a who's who of NGOs, is the best base for exploring Nuba. (There are interesting villages around Dilling, too.) The surrounding peaks have been cleared of mines and it has the most public transport. The simple South Kordofan Lokanda ([®] 0631-8-22119; dm/dSDb600/2000) has bucket showers, but good mattresses. The unnamed café known as the Egyptian Restaurant (dishes SDD300-800; [®] breakfast, lunch & dinner) features tasty lentil soup, lasagna, jelly and other welcome breaks from the usual. Buses sometimes go direct to Khartoum, but it's faster to switch rides in El-Obeid.

SUDAN DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Due to the influx of oil and aid workers, prices have risen sharply over the past few years and you rarely get good value for your money.

The most basic places to stay are called *lokandas*, with beds in shared rooms or courtyards, though you can take all the beds in a room if you want privacy. It's best to pack a sleep sheet if you will be using them. Women are often not welcome in *lokandas*.

In many cheap and midrange places you'll be asked to register with the police before checking in – whatever time you arrive!

ACTIVITIES

With many sharks, manta rays and incredible visibility, Sudan's Red Sea dive sites are as good as Egypt's, but without the crowds. Most people use live-aboard operations, but there are captains in Port Sudan.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banking hours are 9am to 12.30pm, while most government, airline and similar offices are usually closed by 3pm. Most local shops stay open late, but might close briefly between 1pm and 5pm. Few places open on Friday. Breakfast, which most people take between 9am and 10am, is a Sudanese institution – don't be surprised if that vital functionary isn't at his desk.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

While there are still many no-go areas (see the boxed text, p198), the rest of Sudan is a very safe place – one of the safest in Africa, in fact. Crime is almost unheard of – almost: watch your wallet in crowds and lock your luggage in hotels.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Sudan Embassies & Consulates

.org; 11 rue Alfred Dehodenceq, Paris) Germany (a 030-890 6980; www.botschaftsudan.de;

PRACTICALITIES

- Sudan uses mostly British weights and measures, but distances are measured in kilometres.
- Electricity is 230V/50Hz and plugs usually have two round pins.
- There are several private Englishlanguage daily newspapers, such as *Khartoum Monitor* and the *Citizen*, but press freedom is limited.
- Satellite TV is so common that few people watch the three government-owned stations.
- Both the government-owned Omdurman Radio (95FM) and BBC World Service (95FM) occasionally broadcast news in English.

UK (
 O20-7839 8080; www.sudan-embassy.co.uk; 3 Cleveland Row, St James's, London)
USA (
 O20-338 8565; www.sudanembassy.org; 2210 Massachusetts Ave, Washington DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Sudan

Chad (Map p202; 283471084; Sharia 59, New Extension) Democratic Republic of Congo (2012-4-91470; Salaman St, Riyadh)

Egypt (Map p204; 83772190; al-Jamhurya St) **Eritrea** (Map p202; 83483834; off Sharia 15, New Extension)

Ethiopia (Map p202; 🖻 83471156; off Mubarak Zarua St, Khartoum 2)

France (Map p202; 🖻 83471082; off Sharia 15, New Extension)

Germany (Map p204; 🖻 83745055; al-Baladyya St) Kenya (🖻 83472583; Riyadh)

Libya (🖻 83222085; Mashtel St, Riyadh) Netherlands (Map p202; 🖻 83471200; Sharia 47,

Khartoum 2)

Saudi Arabia (Map p202; 🖻 83472583; Sharia 33, New Extension)

Uganda (Map p204; 🖻 83797869; Abu Qarga St) UK (Map p204; 🖻 83777105; al-Baladyya St) USA (Map p204; 🖻 83774701; Ali Abdul al-Latif St)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106), following are the principal public holidays in Sudan: **1 January** Independence Day **30 June** Revolution Day

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés in Khartoum offer fast connection for a good price. Reliable access is available in Port Sudan and, increasingly, in smaller towns, though these are more expensive.

MONEY

SUDAN

Sudanese money can be confusing when you first arrive. Although banknotes are in dinars, prices are almost always quoted in the old Sudanese pounds (1 dinar = S£10). Assume that the real price is minus a zero. Just to confuse matters further, some people drop the thousands, so '10 pounds' means S£10,000, ie SDD1000. In addition to this, the government has announced a new currency (also to be called the pound), but has not said when it will begin or what the rate will be compared

to the dinar – expect even more dancing with zeroes.

Private exchange offices have the same rates as banks, but longer hours. US dollars are the easiest to change (outside Khartoum you'll be hard pressed to change anything else), though euros, British pounds and most Middle Eastern currencies are widely accepted in Khartoum and Port Sudan. The only way to change Egyptian pounds and Ethiopian Birr is on the black market, which is easy at the borders and a little risky in Khartoum.

Money can be wired to Khartoum and Port Sudan (even from the US and Britain, though this could always change because of sanctions) with Western Union and Travelex. Credit cards and travellers cheques are useless.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photo permits are obligatory for foreigners. Get one from Khartoum's **Ministry of Tourism & Wildlife** (Map p204; 🖻 83773711; Abu Sinn St). It's free, but you need a passport photo and copies of your passport and visa. The permit expressly forbids sensitive sites, including bridges, 'slum areas, beggars and other defaming subjects'. Travellers have been arrested for taking photos of the confluence of the Blue and White Niles from the main bridge to Omdurman, but it's OK from Al-Mogran Family Park.

POST & TELEPHONE

Mail in and out of Sudan, like the poste restante services throughout the country, is unreliable.

Private telephone centres are found all over the country, and many in big cities offer Net2phone service (as low as SDD30 per minute) for international calls. If you have a GSM mobile phone, you can buy a SIM card with Mobitel for SDD3000, which is good for one month and includes about 30 minutes of local calls: incoming calls are free. Mobile area codes are 011, 091 and 092. Add 01 to land lines when calling from a mobile.

TOURS

Most of Sudan's tour operators work out of Khartoum, including these reliable ones: **Globtours** (@ 0912-2-53484; globtours_sudan@yahoo .com) Specialises in the Nile archaeological sites. **Italian Tourism Company** (@ 83487961; www.ital toursudan.com) European owned. **Kush Travel** (@ 0912-8-74080; waleed_kush19@

yahoo.com) Tours to the north and the Nuba Mountains.

VISAS & DOCUMENTS

Everyone except Egyptians needs a visa (most people pay US\$160, and if there is evidence of travel to Israel you will be denied) and getting one could be the worst part of your trip. Except in Cairo, where visas are often issued in a day or two (but not for Americans and Britons), you should expect a wait of at least two weeks and probably more (you should see the twinkle in the eye of the official in Addis Ababa when he tells you it will take one month!) and there is no guarantee it will ever come.

If you won't be in Egypt, it helps to let an agent (see Tours, opposite, for recommendations) arrange it. Most of the time they will get you a counter visa: they arrange everything at the Ministry of Interior in Khartoum and you pick it up at the airport. This service will likely cost around US\$150 and if you are lucky can take as little as two days. The other option, used primarily by those crossing overland since it costs more, is an invitation visa, in which you are sent a number that you give the embassy or consulate, which *should* speed up the normal process. With either option, there is a good chance something will go wrong along the way, so get started as early as possible.

Registration

You have to register within three days of arrival in Khartoum, Port Sudan, Gallabat or Wadi Halfa. In Khartoum, go to the **Aliens Registration Office** (Map p204; al-Tayyar Murad St; 🏵 9am-3pm); the process costs SDD8700 and you need one photo and photocopies of your passport and visa (there's a copier in the building). If you registered on entry at a land border (which only costs SDD6600), you need to do it again in Khartoum, but you don't have to pay again. In many towns you will need to register with the police; this is free.

Travel Permits

A travel permit is required for most journeys outside Khartoum, excepting northern destinations. Take two photos, a copy of your passport and SDD8700 to the **Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs** (Map p202; al-Ziber Basha St) and expect to wait a day or two. Carry photocopies of this permit along with copies of your passport and visa to give to police.

Visa Extensions

Visa extensions are issued at the **Aliens Registra**tion Office (Map p204; al-Tayyar Murad; 🏵 9am-3pm) in Khartoum. You need one photo and varying amounts of money and patience to get your extra 30 days.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following neighbouring countries are available from embassies in Khartoum. **Central African Republic** A one-month visa costs SDD13,500; you'll need two photos and it takes two days. **Chad** The embassy was closed at the time of research, but should reopen soon.

Democratic Republic of Congo A one-month visa costs SDD15,000; you'll need two photos and the visa is ready in two days.

Egypt This consulate is not the most organised place – arrive early to beat the worst queues. Most people pay SDD7500 and you'll need two photos. The visa is ready the same day. It's easier to get a tourist visa on arrival (which most but not all nationalities can do), especially if you're flying. Eritrea One-month visas cost US\$40 and are ready in three days, or pay an extra \$10 for same-day service. You need two photos and a copy of your passport. Ethiopia Three-month visas cost US\$20 and require two photos. You can pick it up the same day.

Kenya A single-entry visa valid for three months costs US\$50 and is issued the same day. You need one photo and photocopies of your passport and plane ticket. Libya Applications must go through a Libyan travel agent,

but you can pick up the visa here. **Saudi Arabia** Visa applications are handled by travel

agents (many of which surround the embassy), which can get you a transit visa in two days (perhaps one day if you go very early). You need two photos, a letter of introduction from your embassy and US\$100.

Uganda Single-entry visas valid for up to three months cost US\$30 and are ready in two days. You need two photos and a letter of invitation from someone in Uganda, though this last requirement is sometimes waived.

VOLUNTEERING

The London-based **Sudan Volunteer Programme** (SVP; © 020-7485 8619; www.svp-uk.com) sends people to Sudan to teach English. Volunteers must pay for their own travel, but SVP arranges subsistence, accommodation and some health insurance.

TRANSPORT IN SUDAN

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Khartoum is well connected to Africa and the world. **Sudan Airways** (Map p204; 🖻 83787103) has frequent flights to north and east Africa

DEPARTURE TAX

The airport departure tax for international flights is SDD3500.

and the Middle East, though its competitors usually have similar prices and better service. African airlines connecting Khartoum to their capitals include **EgyptAir** (Map p204; 🕲 83780064), **Kenya Airways** (Map p204; 🕲 83781080) and **Ethiopian Airlines** (Map p204; 🕲 83762088). **Lufthansa** (🕲 83774579) fly to North America through Europe, while **Emirates** (Map p204; 🕲 83769473) and **Gulf Air** (Map p204; 🕲 83762381) go worldwide via the Middle East.

Land & Sea

Sudan shares borders with many countries, but there are few crossing options. The south is slowly opening up, but overland travel to the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Uganda remains dangerous and difficult. Libya is also risky, and, because of that country's travel regulations, would be impractical anyway. The Chadian border is officially closed.

EGYPT

SUDAN

The roads between Sudan and Egypt are for cargo traffic only, but you can take the weekly passenger ferry on Lake Nasser from Wadi Halfa to the port near Aswan in Egypt. It heads north at about 5pm on Wednesday (though if the train is delayed, the ferry waits), returning on Monday. The journey takes around 17 hours plus immigration time, and costs SDD13,900/8700 in 1st/2nd class. First-class passengers share two-bunk cabins, whereas in 2nd class you fight for seats with hundreds of others. You can buy tickets in Wadi Halfa (© 0251-8-22256) and Khartoum (© 85333807).

Vehicles go on the Thursday cargo ferry, which takes two or three days. **Mazar Mahir** (20122-3-80740), who has an office in Wadi Halfa and meets the boat on his bicycle, has a good reputation for speeding people through the paperwork.

ERITREA

The crossing between Kassala and Teseney has reopened.

ETHIOPIA

From Gederaf take a pick-up to the border town of Gallabat (SDD1500, five to six hours) and walk over the bridge to Metema, where buses go direct to Gondor (30 Birr, seven hours) or, if you miss the bus, you can reach Gondor by changing vehicles in Shihedi.

SAUDI ARABIA

Regular ferry services run between Suakin and Jeddah (1st/2nd class US\$115/100, 13 hours). Tickets are available through travel agents in Khartoum and Port Sudan.

GETTING AROUND

Half a dozen airlines connect Khartoum to all large Sudanese cities. **Sudan Airways** (Map p204; **a** 83787103; al-Baladaya St; **b** 8am-6pm Sat-Thu, 9-11amFri) has the most flights, and, along with **Air West** (Map p204; **a** 83742513; al-Barlman St), the fewest problems with cancellations and overbookings; though neither company will win a reliability award. There's a domestic airport tax of SDD1500.

Local Transport

Sudan is undergoing a road-building frenzy and all significant towns northeast of El-Obeid will probably be linked by paved roads within the lifetime of this book. Fast comfortable buses, which already link Khartoum to Port Sudan, El-Obeid and Atbara, will replace most of the *bokasi* that bounce over the desert tracks. It's best to buy bus tickets a day in advance. Bus prices quoted in this chapter are for the fastest service available.

Train

The only remaining practical passenger service is the Khartoum to Wadi Halfa run, though there is a monthly train from Atbara to Port Sudan and a western line to Nyala. Sleepers and 1st-class seats are expensive but comfortable; 2nd class is bearable and in 3rd class you really get what you paid for!

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TUNISIA

Tunisia

Tunisia is one of Africa's easiest destinations, a place where tourists almost outnumber the locals in high summer, and flock here for the golden sandy beaches, non-stop sunshine, and exoticism on tap. It's a country where sand dunes peak like brushstrokes in the Sahara desert; the beautiful sun-bleached round houses of Jerba hide a multitude of ethnic groups, and the parched southern landscapes of the Sahara are contrasted with the sparkling water of the Mediterranean sea that frames Tunisia's northern and eastern shores. The quiet beaches of the northern coast are a secret from package tourists sizzling on the heaving sandy stretches of Hammamet and Monastir. *Star Wars* film sets are crammed with tourist groups. The country's capital, Tunis, is a gritty yet lively urban centre, where the walls of the medina get clogged by day visitors and shopkeepers keen to make a buck.

Tunisia also has some fascinating places to stay: a luxury, air-conditioned camp site in the middle of the desert, a revamped, stylish rural dwelling on Jerba island, or old merchants' inns with kaleidoscopic tiles and sunny courtyards. Though package tourism has brought jobs and relative prosperity to parts of the country, much of traditional local culture still grates uncomfortably against modern influences, so tread lightly and enjoy this diverse, fascinating country.

FAST FACTS

- Area 164,000 sq km
- ATMs In all large towns
- Borders Algeria, Libya
- Budget US\$30 per day
- Capital Tunis
- Languages Arabic, French
- Money Tunisian dinar US\$1 = TD1.3
- Population 9.8 million
- Seasons Cool (November to April), warm (May to October)
- Telephone Country code 216; international access code 00
- Time GTM/UTC + 1
- Visa US\$8 for Australians and South Africans, available at airport; US\$6.50 for others, need to apply in advance; unnecessary for Western Europeans, American, Canadian and Japanese citizens

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HIGHLIGHTS Sidi Bou Said Mediterranea

- Sidi Bou Said (p223) Explore this gorgeous Mediterranean town covered in bougainvillea.
- Jerba (p235) Experience ethnic diversity amid fascinating architecture and great beaches.
- **Grand Erg Oriental** (p234) Melt in sunsets and sighs from dreamy dunes, postcard-style.
- Bardo Museum (p220) Exercise the other side of your mind in this fascinating collection of Islamic art and Roman remains.
- Best journey (p232) Travel the road running in the middle of Chott el-Jerid, an endless, mirage-inducing salt lake.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Tunisia has a Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and mild winters. Visiting is best in springtime, between mid-March and mid-May, with warm (but not scorching) temperatures and wild flowers covering the countryside. Summers are great for beach frolics, but this is Tunisia's high season, so expect prices to go up and crowds of northern Europeans on package holidays to take over the beaches. The desert is much too hot in summer, and the best time to visit Tunisia if you want to see the Saharan dunes is in late autumn. November is when date harvests have just finished and some of the music festivals begin, so this time is perfect for visiting the desert.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** If you're in the north, spend the day in beautiful Tunis suburb of Sidi Bou Saïd (p218) and go along the northern coast towards Tabarka (p223) for the day. Check out the castle and narrow streets of Le Kef (p224) before going back to Tunis (p218).
- **One Week** Jerba (p235) is the most amazing place in Tunisia, so spend at least three days here. Head back onto mainland Tunisia, get lost (though not literally) in the great expanse of the desert, visiting the incredible *ksour* (fortified Berber village) around Tataouine (p237) for a day, and go up towards Douz (p234), where you can organise a trip into the desert.
- **Two Weeks** Perfect for incorporating a bit of the north and a lot of the south. Starting with the north as described above, drive down to Kairouan (p228) from

HOW MUCH?

- Cup of tea US\$1
- Newspaper US\$1.50
- Bowl of couscous US\$2.50
- Museum admission US\$5
- Hammam with massage US\$4

Tunis and see one of Islam's most important towns. From here, head to Mahdia (p230) and enjoy its gorgeous harbour. Drive down to Jerba (p235), via Sousse (p227), stopping for a swim along the lovely beaches on the way. Stay for four to five days in Jerba, exploring its architecture and relaxing on the beaches. Then go to the Sahara, see the *ksour* at Tataouine (p237), ride a camel into the desert from Douz (p234) and see the enormous palmeraie at Tozeur (p232). Head back north along the east coast beaches.

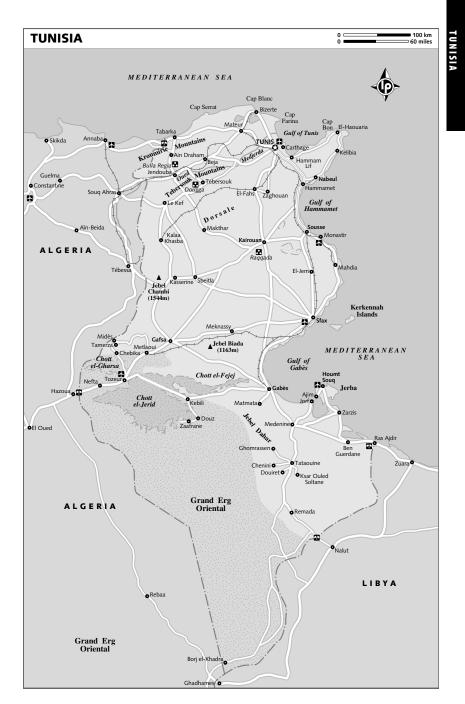
HISTORY

Nature, luck and canny political stewardship have produced a calm, safe country, despite Tunisia having been the subject of fights between successive great civilisations. Its lush cultivated areas – once the breadbasket of Rome – still account for a reasonable portion of the economy, and its strategic position has long ensured it was dealt an economically viable hand.

Empires Strike Back

The Phoenicians marched into Tunisia around 1100 BC, establishing their capital, Carthage (just north of today's Tunis), as the main power in the western Mediterranean by the 6th century. The emerging Roman Empire was not happy with these events, and 128 years of Punic Wars ensued. The legendary general of Carthage, Hannibal, nearly conquered the Romans after his invasion of Italy in 216 BC, but the Romans finally won, razed Carthage, sold its population for slaves and then re-created it as a Roman city in 44 BC. Roman Tunisia boomed, creating the templedecked city of Dougga and the extravagant El Jem colosseum.

The Roman decline and fall in the 5th century was followed by the rampaging Vandals,



who saw their opportunity and captured Carthage in 439. Unhappy with the nihilistic rule of the Vandals, the local Berber population formed small kingdoms and rebelled, but both groups were conquered, and the Vandals ousted by the approaching Byzantines in 533.

216 TUNISIA •• Culture

In the 7th century the Arabs arrived from the east, bringing Islam with them. Despite continuous Berber belligerence, the Arabs ruled Tunisia until the 16th century, leaving behind the strongest ongoing cultural impact of all of Tunisia's invaders. Stuck between the Spanish Reconquistas and the powerful Ottoman empire, Tunisia became an outpost of the Ottomans until France began to gain ground in the region during the 19th century. Establishing their rule in 1881, the French proceeded to spend the next 50 years attempting to transform Tunisia into a Europeanstyle nation.

Bourguiba & Ben

Tunisia became a republic in 1957, with Habib Bourguiba as the first president and the country's major reformist. He swore to eradicate poverty, and separate politics from religion, while 'righting all the wrongs done to women'. He introduced liberal laws, instituted a secular state, established women's rights, free education and the abolition of polygamy, and laid out the groundwork for the tolerant and economically savvy structure of today's Tunisia. However, he wasn't too keen to give up power, and reports of senility ended his rule with a bloodless coup in 1987.

Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali took over the steering wheel and continues down similar roads to Bourguiba, especially when it comes to handing over leadership. The dubiously overwhelming results at the 1989 and 1994 elections affirmed his stranglehold on presidency, peaking with a 99.44% majority in the 1999 and 2004 elections. Having been expected to retire in 2004. Ben Ali tweaked the constitution and allowed himself to run for another two terms. The main opposition group, the Democratic Progressive Party, pulled out in protest two days before the vote, calling its country's political system 'a masquerade of democracy'.

International criticism over suspicious election results, and alarm at the suppression of opposition and freedom of speech by the government, is dampened by the fact

that Tunisia is one of the most stable and moderate Arab states. It has developed close ties with both the USA and Germany, which supply the bulk of its foreign aid, and carefully developed a diverse economy resting mainly on agriculture, mining, energy and manufacturing. Tourism is another driving economic force, with thousands of Europeans thronging to Tunisian beaches and bringing in the much-needed euros. Global events affected Tunisia's popularity as a holiday resort, particularly when, in 2002, Jerba's oldest synagogue suffered a suicide bomber's attack in which 21 tourists died (Al-Qaida claimed responsibility). But things improved as security was stepped up, and the tourists returned to this welcoming and tolerant North African country.

Tunisia Today

Tunisia's strong trade links with Europe make it more prosperous than its neighbours, and its relatively modern outlook on religion means that millions of European tourists keep coming back here. The Tunisian government, though flourishing in terms of economy and trade, has been criticised by human rights groups for clamping down on political dissent. Its strong stand against any form of religious fundamentalism was reasserted once again in October 2006, when the authorities launched a campaign against the wearing of headscarves - an echo of the monumental fuss over the same subject in Europe.

CULTURE

Tunisia's ethnic and religious uniformity allows for a certain social ease, blanketed by the predominant Islam, which is relatively relaxed. Rural life has been centred on the family, the mosque and the hammam (bathhouse) for centuries, and strong ties between family members are of utmost importance. Many villagers have, however, left their rural set-up for education and careers in the cities, and a new class of individualistic, independent Tunisians is emerging. The disparity between the incomes earned in urban and rural communities is creating a gap between the rich and poor. This poses a challenge to the government battling with the aspiring middle classes on the one hand, the cluster of the opportunity-lacking educated, the poor, and the religiously fervent on the other.

Traditional Tunisian customs survive mainly in the countryside, where strangers will sometimes be invited into people's homes and shown the typical Arabic-African generosity: food will be shared, talk forthcoming and you'll get a unique insight into local life.

Gender segregation is strong in Tunisia, where men sit and chat in the cafés, and women visit each other at home. Evenings about town are particularly women-free. Things are more relaxed in Tunis, where couples intermingle and hold hands, though male presence in the streets is still overwhelming.

PEOPLE

Almost 98% of Tunisia's population is Arab-Berber. Although Arabs and Berbers have mixed for 14 centuries, people living in the south of the country, along the fringe of the Sahara desert, claim a purely Berber heritage. Europeans and Jews make up the remaining 2%.

Islam is the official religion in Tunisia, and over 98% of the population are Sunni Muslims. Jews and Christians make up the remaining 2% of the population.

Tunisian society is quite liberal in its views of religion, though traditional values are still dominant.

ARTS

Tunisia's national poet is Abu el-Kacem el-Chabbi; his poem Will to Live is taught to every school child. Not many authors have been translated into English, but Mustapha Tlili is one, and his novel Lion Mountain addresses the impact of progress and tourism on a remote village. Tunisian by birth, Albert Memmi lives in Paris and has written acclaimed works in French about the Jewish–North African immigrants' identity crisis.

During the colonial period, European artists were drawn to Tunisia, attracted by its exotic light, architecture and lifestyle. The most famous to be inspired here were Paul Klee and Auguste Macke, who visited in 1914 and produced many works inspired by what they saw.

Yahia Turki is considered the father of Tunisian figurative painting, and depicted scenes of daily life. After independence, artists such as Hédi Turki and Nja Mahdaoui began to explore the Islamic traditions of geometric decoration and calligraphy.

ENVIRONMENT

It may be small, but Tunisia packs in a range of landscapes worthy of a continent, from its thickly forested northern mountains to its thickly forested northern mountains to crystallised salt lakes and silky dunes in the south.

The Kroumirie and Tebersouk Mountains in the north are the easternmost extent of the High Atlas Mountains, covered with dense forests where there's a chance of glimpsing wild boars, jackals, mongooses and genets. Their foothills dive down to the lavish, northern coastal plain. Further south, the country's main mountain range is the rugged, dry central Dorsale, which runs from Kasserine in the west and peters out into Cap Bon in the east. Between these ranges lies the lush Medjerda Valley, once the Roman larder, watered by the country's only permanent river, Oued Medjerda. Olives cover the east coast, particularly around Sfax. South of the Dorsale, a high plain falls away to a series of huge, glittering chotts (salt lakes) and the silent erg (sand sea).

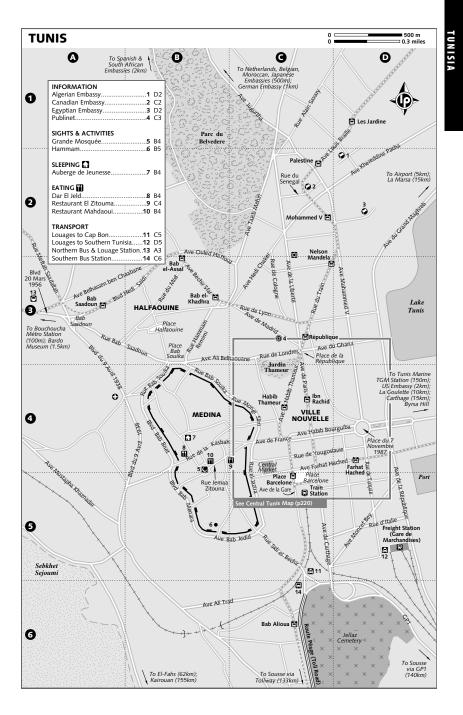
Tunisia's environmental headaches include regional desertification and various forms of pollution: industrial pollution, sewage disposal and litter. Its trawler fleet has been accused of serious overfishing and seabed degradation in the Gulf of Gabès. In the south, the huge water requirements of the tourist industry have depleted artesian water levels and dried up springs, though dam construction in the north has ensured a steady supply to most places.

FOOD & DRINK

Tunisians love spicy food, zinging everything with harissa, a fiery chilli paste added to snacks, stews and salads. There's lots of fresh produce here, and salads feature heavily. The most popular are salade tunisienne, a mix of tomato, onions, cucumber and lemon and olive oil dressing; and salade mechuoia, a smokey aubergine paste, delicious with fresh bread.

Couscous is ubiquitous. Apparently there are more than 300 ways of preparing the stuff, sweet as well as savoury. Generally couscous is served with lamb and vegetables, but Tunisians differ from their Arab neighbours in that they serve theirs with fish too, a thing unheard of in, say, Morocco.

You'll find fresh French loaves everywhere, and in some places tabouna, traditional flat Berber bread



Tunisians love snacks too, and tuck into variations of *briq*, a deep-fried, thin pastry pocket that comes with a range of fillings (always including egg), excellent with shrimp, or *chappati*, a bread envelope filled with tuna, egg and *harissa*.

TUNIS

UNISIA

🖻 71 / pop 702,000

Tunis is a good introduction to the opposing character of Tunisia's Western and Eastern influences, though it's by no means the country's most interesting city. The tangled streets of the medina are crammed with people selling, buying and carting goods around, enveloped in the scent of spices and sweat. Its chaos is infectious and you may end up bargaining to the last dinar with a shopkeeper, before flopping onto a pavement café, savouring your purchase. The medina's maze is contrasted by the straight lines of the Ville Nouvelle, centred on Ave Habib Bourguiba, a wide, tree-lined street where locals stroll in the evenings amid cafés that dot the sidewalks. Tunis' best attractions are outside of town: the wonderful Bardo Museum and mysterious ruins of the ancient Carthage are Tunisia's most comprehensive and fascinating archaeological and artistic sights. The evening hubbub is all strolling families and shy couples, while the younger and the hipper head out to the gorgeous Mediterranean suburb of Sidi Bou Saïd for night-time fun. Tunis is best enjoyed in a day, after which you can move on to smaller and better things.

ORIENTATION

The airport is 8km northeast of the centre: a taxi costs around US\$8, or bus 35 (US\$1, half-hourly 6.30am to 5.30pm) heads to Ave Habib Bourguiba, the city's main thoroughfare, which runs east-west from Lake Tunis to Place de l'Indépendance. It is lined with cafés, banks, cinemas and restaurants, and is a favourite stretch to strut up and down in the evenings. The main north-south thoroughfare of the Ville Nouvelle is the street known as Ave de Carthage to the south of Ave Habib Bourguiba and as Ave de Paris to the north. Ave de Carthage runs east to Place Barcelone, hub of the Métro Léger network, and with the train station on its southern side. The western extension of Ave Habib Bourguiba is Ave de France, which terminates in front of Bab Bhar (Porte de France), a huge arch, beyond which is the medina. The medina's two main streets lead off the western side of the square: Rue de la Kasbah, which leads to Place du Gouvernement at the other side of the medina; and Rue Jemaa Zitouna, which leads to the Zitouna mosque at its heart. At the eastern end of Ave Habib Bourguiba, a causeway carries road and light-rail traffic across to La Goulette, a port, and then north along the coast to the rich suburbs of Carthage, Sidi Bou Saïd and La Marsa.

Tunis has two bus stations. The one for northern destinations (Map p219, Gare Routière Nord de Bab Saadoun) is served by Métro Léger lines 3 and 4 (Bab Saadoun station), or you can take bus 3 to Ave Habib Bourguiba. Louages (shared taxis) from the north also arrive and leave from here. The other station is for international buses and the south (Map p219, Gare Routière Sud de Bab el-Alleoua). Louages for Cap Bon leave from/arrive near here. It's a 10-minute walk north to Place Barcelone in the city centre, where the train station and numerous hotels are situated. Métro Léger line 1 runs from Tunis Marine to Ben Arous via Place Barcelone. Bab Alioua, one stop south of Place Barcelone, is the closest stop to Gare Routière Sud.

INFORMATION Bookshops

There's a **second-hand bookshop** (Map p220; Rue d'Angletere) with an English selection, where the owner will buy and exchange books.

Internet Access

Publinet (per hr US\$1); 28 Ave Habib Bourguiba (Map p220); Ave de Madrid (Map p219)

Money

There are lots of banks with ATMs, mostly along Ave Habib Bourguiba. There's a branch of **Amex** (Map p220; 254 304; UIBC Bank, 156 Ave de la Liberté).

Post & Telephone

The **main post office** (Map p220; Rue Charles de Gaulle) is open daily and has a poste-restante service.

Taxiphone offices dot the city centre. Two of the most convenient are on Rue Jamel Abdelnasser and Ave de Paris (Map p220).

Tourist Offices The tourist office (Map p220; 🖻 341 077; Place de l'Afrique; 🕑 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) has a map of Tunis, a road map of Tunisia and brochures on Carthage and the medina, all free. There's another branch at the train station, open the same hours. You'll be able to find someone who speaks English.

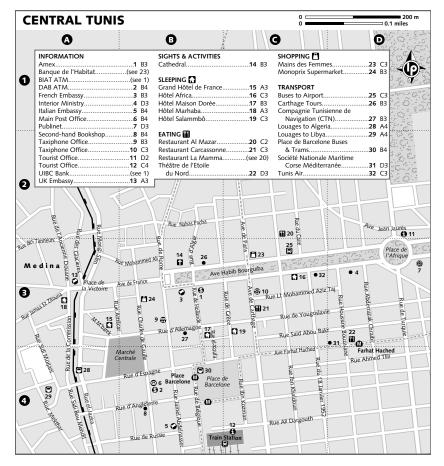
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

UNISI

The ants' nest-like medina is a sprawling maze of tiny streets, alleyways, tunnel-like coves and tiny shops selling anything from shoes to shisha pipes. There are busy souqs, gorgeous, ancient doorways and tiled cafés. An atmospheric time to explore is the early morning, before the stalls are set up and people

are clustered around the coffee shops. If you go for a stroll at noon, expect tireless calls of 'just look, no buy', getting out of the way of heavily loaded cartwheels, and bargaining with hardened salesmen for jewellery, chechias (traditional red-felt caps) or stuffed camel toys. At the medina's heart lies the Grande Mosquée (Map p219; 🕑 8am-noon) - its forest of columns is scrounged from Roman Carthage. There is also a steam-filled, darkened hammam (Map p219; admission incl massage US\$4; 🕅 men 5am-1pm, women 1-8pm).

The country's top museum is the Bardo Museum (🖻 513 650; Ave du 2 Mars; admission US\$5, camera US\$1; Y 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-Mar, 9am-5pm Apr-mid-Sep). This magnificent, must-see collection provides a taste of ancient life, housed



in a glorious palace. The many, incredibly well-preserved mosaics, with their images of gods feasting and farming, are stunning, and are some of Africa's oldest. It's 3km northwest of the city centre. The best way to get there is by Métro Léger line 4 (US\$0.50) to the Bardo stop. A taxi costs US\$4.

The remains of Punic and Roman Carthage lie northeast of the city centre and are easily reached by Tunis-Gouette-Marsa (TGM) suburban train from Tunis Marine station. Get off at Carthage Hannibal station and wander up to the top of Byrsa Hill for a fine view across the site. Once the city held 400,000 people and was surrounded by 13mhigh walls. You'll have to use a bit of imagination, as the ruins are scant and scattered over a wide area; they include impressive Roman baths, houses, cisterns, basilicas and streets. The Carthage Museum (Map p220; admission to all sites US\$5, camera US\$1; 🕑 8.30am-5pm mid-Sep-Mar, 8am-7pm Apr-mid-Sep) gives an idea of the site's former glories, with such wonders as monumental statuary, mosaics and extraordinary everyday stuff such as razors and kohl pots. It's next to the 19th-century, deconsecrated, neo-Gothic monster of a cathedral (Map p220; admission US\$1.50; 🕑 8.30am-5pm mid-Sep–Mar, 8am-7pm Apr-mid-Sep) and the Byrsa Quarter, an excavated quarter of the Punic city, in the grounds of the museum.

SLEEPING

There are lots of rock-bottom budget places in and around the medina, but if you pay a bit more you get a leap up in quality.

Auberge de Jeunesse (Map p219; 🖻 567 850, 25 Rue Es Saida Ajoula; dm incl breakfast US\$5) A wonderful building in the midst of the medina, where you get to see the 18th-century Dar Saida Ajoula palace. The rooms here are fairly basic: white walls and bunk beds, and there's a pretty, communal area with Arabic musical instruments. The welcome is friendly, though there are a few regulations that you may find irritating: it's closed from 10am to 2pm, there's a 10pm curfew and no showers can be had between 7.30pm and 9am.

Hôtel Salammbô (Map p220; 🗃 334 252, hotel .salammbo@gnet.tn; 6 Rue de Grèce; s/d with private bathroom US\$16/23, with shared bathroom US\$13/21) White walls, blue shutters and little balconies are the highlights here, combined with clumsy, stand-alone, air-conditioning units and friendly workers.

Grand Hôtel de France (Map p220; 326 244; hotelfrancetunis@yahoo.fr; 8 Rue Mustapha M'barek; s/d with private bathroom US\$18/24, with shared bathroom US\$13/15; CD Faddd elegrance, wrought-iron banisters, Faded elegance, wrought-iron banisters, coffin-like wooden lift, airy rooms with high ceilings, a funny mix of '50s and '70s furniture and friendly staff. The best rooms are those on the top floor, with a balcony and good views. Hôtel Maison Dorée (Map p220; 🖻 240632; 3 Rue el-Koufa; s/d with private bathroom US\$25/30, with shared

bathroom US\$21/23) Maison Dorée is charming: simple and spotless with an old-fashioned formality, shuttered balconies and comfortingly 1950s furnishings.

Hotel Africa (Map p220; 🗃 347 477; www.elmouradi .com; 50 Ave Habib Bourgiba; s/d from US\$100/150; 🕃) A five-star skyscraper in the middle of Ave Habib Bourgiba, with all the plushness it promises and a fabulous top-floor bar. If you want to feel special in Tunis, this is the place.

EATING

You can buy slightly addictive spicy tunafilled chapattis (a mixture of egg and spicy harissa paste stuffed inside a wonderful, hot bread parcel, tuna optional) in the medina for US\$1.50, or dine like a sultan in one of the traditional restaurants.

Théâtre de l'Etoile du Nord (Map p220; 🕿 256 242; www.etoiledunord.org; 41 Ave Farhat Hached; sandwiches US\$3) This cool, spacious theatre-café-bar is the city's sole 'alternative hangout' frequented by both men and women. It's a refreshing place with good music and theatrical events.

Restaurant Mahdaoui (Map p219; 2 Rue Jemma Zitouna; dishes US\$3-5) An excellent place in the medina, in a tiled space with tables in the narrow, covered alley by the Grand Mosquée. The menu has the usual suspects of couscous with fish and chicken, tajines and kebabs.

Restaurant El Zitouma (Map p219; dishes US\$2.50) Around the corner from Restaurant Mahdaoui, and quieter, this is where to come if you want simple spaghetti with tomato sauce, though don't expect it to be al dente.

Restaurant Carcassonne (Map p220; 8 Ave de Carthage; 4-course menu US\$3.50) A great place if you want to eat plenty and spend little: there's a generous four-course menu, and it serves alcohol.

Restaurant Al Mazar (Map p220; 🗃 355 077; 11 Rue de Marseilles; most mains US\$4) A good atmosphere for a bar cunningly disguised as a restaurant. With paintings on the walls and big, globe light shades, you might think yourself in

Paris if it weren't for the drunken Tunisians singing. The food is excellent, with special mention going to the chocolate mousse (US\$2).

Restaurant La Mamma (Map p220; 🖻 241 256; Rue de Marseilles; dishes US\$4-13) A red interior, plastic flowers, and dishes such as barbecued octopus, with occasional, retro-looking live musicians. It serves alcohol.

Dar El Jeld (Map p219; 🖻 560916; 5-10 Rue Dar El Jed; mains US\$14-20) Upon entering this immaculately restored, elaborate 18th-century tiled and stuccoed mansion, you will find a magnificent main dining room in a covered central courtyard, with intimate, alcove tables around the edge. Begin your meal with the mixed hors d'oeuvres, then sample the delicious traditional Tunisian dishes, such as kabkabou (fish with fresh tomatoes, capers and olives), on offer.

SHOPPING

Mains de Femmes (Map p220; 47 Ave Habib Bourguiba) A co-operative that sells quality handicrafts at fixed prices; the profits are ploughed back into the rural communities that make them.

For perfume, tiles, chechias, cheap clothes, accessories and tons of glorious tat, head to the medina. Delicious (though not always entirely fresh) food can be found at and around Marché Centrale (Map p220) and near the Grand Hôtel de France. There are alluring delicatessens selling succulent olives, differing date varieties, harissa (spicy chilli paste) and cheeses. There's also a Monoprix supermarket (Ave Charles de Gaulle) where you can buy local wine.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Tuninter, the internal airline of **Tunis Air** (🕿 330 100; www.tunisair.com; 48 Ave Habib Bourguiba), flies from Tunis to/from Jerba, Sfax and Tozeur; each flight costs around US\$80, but cheaper deals are sometimes available.

Boat

Ferries from Europe arrive at La Goulette, at the end of the causeway across Lake Tunis. The cheapest way to reach the city from here is by TGM suburban train. A private taxi from the port to Ave Habib Bourguiba shouldn't cost more than US\$5.

Tirrenia Navagazione, whose agent is Carthage Tours (Map p220; 🖻 344 066; www.carthage

tours.com.tn; 59 Ave Habib Bourguiba), runs boats between Tunis and Trapani (passenger/car from US\$50/100, Monday), Naples (US\$100/170, Sunday), and sometimes La Spezia in Italy. Compagnie Tunisienne de Navigation (CTN; Map p220; 22 802; www.ctn.com.tn; 122 Rue de Yougoslavie) runs services to/from Genoa (Italy; US\$150/250) and Marseilles (France; US\$180/380). Société Nationale Maritime Corse Méditerranée (SNCM; Map p220; 🗃 338 222; www.sncm.fr; 47 Farhat Hached) runs to/from Marseilles for similar prices as well as Bastia (Corsica; US\$170/370).

Local Transport

Services to/from Tozeur (US\$16, seven hours, five daily), Tataouine (US\$19, 81/2 hours, three daily), Matamata (US\$14, eight hours, one daily), Jerba (US\$17, eight hours, three daily), Sfax (US\$10, four hours, hourly), Sousse (US\$7, 2½ hours, hourly) and Tripoli (Libya; US\$25, 111/2 hours, several weekly) are found at the southern bus station; louages to the same destinations (except Tripoli) leave regularly nearby. At the northern bus station, services go to/from Tabarka (US\$8, three hours, hourly), Ain Draham (US\$8, 41/2 hours, four daily), Jendouba (US\$7, three hours, six daily) and Le Kef (US\$8, 3½ hours, hourly) via Tebersouk. Louages for eastern Algeria leave from Rue el-Jazira and to Tripoli US\$25, 10 hours) from Place Sidi Bou Mendil at the southeast corner of the medina.

Train

The most popular route is the line from Tunis to Sousse (US\$7), Sfax (US\$9) and Jendouba (US\$5).

GETTING AROUND

Taxi

Private taxis are cheap. It's hard to run up a fare of more than US\$15. A short hop will cost less than US\$3, and a longer one, such as to the Bardo Museum, around US\$4.

Train

The TGM rail system connects central Tunis with the northern beachside suburbs of La Goulette, Carthage, Sidi Bou Said and La Marsa (US\$1, 5am to midnight).

Tram

The modern (Métro Léger) tram system has five routes running to various parts of the city. The useful lines are 1 for the southern bus and *louage* stations, 2 for consulates on Ave de la Liberté, and 3 and 4 for the northern bus and *louage* stations. Line 4 also has a stop for the Bardo Museum. The main stations are Place Barcelone and Place de la République. Tram fares are usually around US\$1.

AROUND TUNIS

It's not unfair to say that the best thing about Tunis is its proximity to the enchanting village of Sidi Bou Saïd, a few stops up the TGM line. Here, the narrow cobbled streets are lined with gleaming white houses and turquoise doors, drowned in bougainvillea and perfumed by the sea. Once the haven for Andalusian refugees (who are responsible for the gorgeous architecture), it's now mainly enjoyed by the rich youngsters from Tunis. The little village, perched high on a cliff overlooking the sea, has lovely hotels and at least one excellent restaurant. Au Bon Vieux Temps (🖻 774733; Rue Hedi Zarrouk; mains from US\$12) serves up an ultradelicious and romantic dinner, while you gaze out towards the sea and candles flicker in the breeze. A starter of traditional brig with prawns followed by a main course consisting of 'Mediterranean Harmony' - fantastic seafood accompanied by a bowl of wild and white aromatic rice - are perfectly complemented by a fresh fruit selection and frosty white wine. It's advisable took a table in advance. You'd be mad not to take up the opportunity to stay a night or two in Sidi Bou Saïd, enjoying its relaxed vibe. The village also hides one of the world's top 50 places to stay. Hôtel Dar Saïd (2729 666; www.darsaid.com.tn; Rue Toumi; r from US\$160; (R), housed in a converted villa, features sweeping views of the sea and bay from its shady, flower-scented garden and pool. The rooms here are comfortable and decorated in colonial-style and the service is friendly but discreet.

NORTHERN TUNISIA

Northern Tunisia is like rural Italy from the 1970s - a rolling, green, magnificently lush region, little explored by foreign visitors. With endless views of hazy valleys from its hills and wonderfully preserved Roman cities of Dougga and Bulla Regia, this is an area well worth visiting.

TABARKA

 Image: A state of the stat old Genoese fort (closed to the public) backing a long curve of alluring white sand that stretches below, is locally known as 'music town', thanks to all the music festivals that take place here. In just a few months you can go from the sophisticated jazz festival to the sounds of Raï or Latin beats, when everyone gets down and dances all day. Tabarka is a Tunisians' resort, rarely visited by foreigners. It's therefore little developed, with an old-fashioned feel, and pavement cafés where men suck on shishas and watch the world go by.

The small town has a grid layout, bisected by the main street, Ave Habib Bourguiba. There are banks and ATMs along Ave Habib Bourguiba in the centre, a **post office** (Ave Hedi Chaker) and **Publinet** (Route Touristique), which charges US\$1 per hour.

Sleeping & Eating

Tabarka has cheap, unremarkable accommodation, save for one option.

Hôtel de Corail (🖻 673 789; Rue Tazarka; s/d US\$8/13) Old-fashioned rooms with high ceilings and balconies. However, the bathrooms are a bit grubby, and there's no hot water.

Hôtel Mamia (🖻 671 058; 3 Rue de Tunis; s/d US\$9/15) Set around a tiled courtyard and run by an old man and his family, Mamia is clean though there aren't too many smiles bouncing around from the management.

Hôtel Les Mimosas (2 673 018; s/d US\$25/45; 🔀 😰) An elegant hotel, slightly run-down though still full of charm. It's an old French villa with an Arabic twist of coloured glass, arched doorways and bright-yellow shutters. Sitting on a hill overlooking Tabarka and the sea, there is a good pool that can save lives in the summer heat. Helpfully, it also happens to be the top spot for evening drinks around the pool. The air-con doesn't work too well, however.

Hôtel Novelty (🕿 670176; 68 Ave Habib Bourguiba; set menu US\$8) Friendly staff and management, and decent food, especially the set menu offering the standards such as brig and couscous. The best thing about it is the lovely seating outside, shaded by vine-covered trees.

Café Andalous (Ave Heidi Chaker) The classic male coffeehouse, with chairs and tables all over the pavement, smoke billowing over the worried

faces contemplating their next move at chequers or backgammon. The elaborately tiled interior is deliberately sprinkled with oddities such as spiky antlers.

Getting There & Away

The SNTRI bus station is on Rue du Peuple and has services to/from Tunis (US\$7, three hours, six daily), Jendouba (US\$3, 11/2 hours, five daily), Ain Draham (US\$2, 45 minutes, 11 daily) and Le Kef (US\$5, three hours, two daily). Louages leave from Ave Habib Bourguiba for Ain Draham (US\$2), Jendouba (US\$3) and Tunis (US\$7).

AIN DRAHAM

In the middle of the cork forest of the Kroumirie Mountains you'll find the village of Ain Draham, whose primary appeal lies in the hunting and hiking opportunities it affords and the welcome respite offered by the cooler, alpine temperatures during the summer heat. Here, among the alpine houses, gnarled men sit by the pavements, veiled women swish past you with their tomato-filled bags, and butchers' shops display stags' heads and other hunting trophies ready for the oven. Situated at an altitude of around 900m, Ain Draham usually has snow during winter. The road between here and Tabarka snakes through huge hills thick with trees, with vast views opening up.

Paragliding wild boar welcome you into the Hôtel Beauséjour (🖻 655 363; r per person US\$19; 3-course menu US\$12) hunting lodge, where the not-quite value for money, pretty basic rooms are housed in an adjacent building. Sipping a coffee or beer under the shady fig tree on the veranda is a delight. Résidence Le Pins (2666 200; s/d US\$25/30) offers Granny's house-type rooms, a friendly owner and a place to shoot some pool, as well as sweeping views from the roof terrace.

There are regular buses to Jendouba (US\$2, one hour, seven daily) and Tabarka (US\$2, 45 minutes, 11 daily), Le Kef (US\$3, three hours, nine daily) and Tunis (US\$7, 4¹/₂ hours, four daily). Regular *louages* go to/from Tabarka and Jendouba, and occasionally Tunis.

BULLA REGIA

This remarkably well-preserved Roman city (admission US\$2, camera US\$1; 🎦 7am-7pm Apr-Sep, 8.30am-5.30pm Oct-Mar) is famous for its extraordinary

underground villas. To escape the summer heat, the ever-inventive Romans retreated below the surface and created extensive, elegant homes for their moneyed inhabitants. The 'houses' are themed according to their mosaic subjects, and especially lovely examples can be seen at the oldest though simplest structure, the House of Fishing, which dates from the 2nd-century. The newer villas become increasingly more elaborate: most impressive is the House of the Hunt. Some of the stunning works have been moved to the Bardo Museum in Tunis, but lots remain in place. Used as flooring here, you can't but think what ideas the mosaics might give to Martha Stewart, if she were ever to visit. The most striking is found in the House of Amphitrite: Venus and centaurs, with attendant cherubs.

Bulla Regia is approximately 160km west of Tunis, 9km north of Jendouba, and may be easily visited on a day trip from Tunis, Le Kef or Tabarka. If you visit en route to somewhere, you can leave your luggage at the ticket office.

Trains to Jendouba are your best bet when travelling to/from Tunis, and there are also regular buses and louages to/from Le Kef and Tabarka. A taxi from Jendouba costs around US\$2, or shared taxis to/from the site cost US\$0.30.

LE KEF (EL KEF) **2** 78 / pop 46,000

High in the hills, Le Kef (el Kef, Arabic for 'rock') is topped by a storybook Byzantine kasbah. Skirted by fields dotted with figures in woolly hats and headscarves, the city is characterised by narrow, hilly, cobbled streets and blue-shuttered buildings, and is centred around a scoop of park. Not many travellers come out this way, so you should be able to savour the friendly atmosphere, and partake in the lazy coffee drinking without being disturbed by the package tour groups. The city centre, around Place de l'Indépendance, is a 10-minute walk uphill from the bus and louage station, or a US\$0.50 ride in a shared taxi.

There are several banks scattered throughout Place de l'Indépendance, and a busy post office is located nearby on Rue Hedi Chaker. For internet access head to Publinet (Place de l'Indépendance) which charges US\$1.50 per hour.

Sights

The kasbah (admission free; 🕑 8am-5pm), frequently used as a film location, dominates the city from a spur running off Jebel Dyr. From here, there are great views looking out across the rolling blue-green landscape dotted with Tuscan trees. The structure that stands today is the latest in a long string of fortresses that have occupied the site since the 5th century BC. To get to the kasbah, follow the stone steps leading uphill through the old medina from Place de l'Indépendance. The road that flanks the kasbah leads to the well-laid-out Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires (admission US\$1, camera US\$1; 🕑 9.30am-4.30pm mid-Sep-May, 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Apr-mid-Sep), situated in a beautiful, high-ceilinged, former zaouia (complex surrounding the tomb of a saint) dating from 1666. The museum concentrates on the culture of the region's Berber nomads, and exhibits include Berber tents. Below the kasbah sits the beautiful 17th-century Mosque of Sidi Boumakhlouf, with its white cupolas and a brilliantly tiled interior. Outside the mosque you'll find an enchanting stepped area, shadowed by a single tree and dotted with café chairs.

The Synagogue Al Ghriba (Rue Farhat Hached) is a curiosity - there are no Jews here now, and the restored synagogue pays tribute to a part of local culture that's disappeared. As well as the restored interior, there are fragments of newspapers and old manuscripts, like relics. The caretaker will let you in; you should tip him.

Sleeping & Eating

All the hotels are on or around Place de l'Indépendance.

Hôtel Le Source (🖻 204 397; s/d US\$14/22) This place offers eccentric management and some attractive rooms with balconies (though the bathrooms are not always squeaky clean). Ask the owner to stay in the best room: it's an elaborately tiled place with an attached bathroom.

Résidence Venus (🕿 204 695: Rue Mouldi Khamessi: s/d incl breakfast US\$18/25) A smart place, nestled beneath the walls of the old kasbah; it's a small, family-run pension where the comfortable rooms come with heating and a good breakfast.

Restaurant Bou Maklouf (Rue Hedi Chaker; mains around US\$2) Diagonally opposite the post office, with a welcoming atmosphere and good chicken and potatoes, and *lablabi* (chickpea soup).

Restaurant Venus (🗟 200355; Rue Farhat Hached; mains around US\$8) This is the town's best restaurant, and it serves alcohol.

Getting There & Away

There are buses travelling to/from Tunis (US\$7, 3½ hours, hourly). To visit Dougga, take the Le Kef-Tunis bus and ask to be dropped off at the New Dougga turnoff (US\$3, one hour).

DOUGGA

Perched above the rolling, Sound of Music landscape of the Kalled Valley and Tebersouk Mountains lies the Roman city of Dougga (admission US\$2, camera US\$1; 🕑 8am-7pm Apr-Sep, 8.30am-5.30pm Oct-Mar). It's a wonderfully complete site, with the Roman comforts and culture around which life was centred: the baths, the theatre and temples (21 have been identified here). The city was built on the site of ancient Thugga, a Numidian settlement, which explains why the streets are so uncharacteristically tangled. The semi-circular sweep of the theatre, built in AD 188, accommodated more than 3500 spectators. Today, it allows the audience beautiful views, and is used to good effect during the Dougga Festival in July and August. The town is dominated by the imposing, hilltop Capitol of Dougga (AD 166), with 10m-high walls and six mighty, showoff columns supporting the portico. Nearby are the Licinian Baths - their size is a further indication of the town's prosperity. A tunnel for the slaves, who kept the baths operating, is a reminder of how all this good life was maintained.

The site is located 110km southwest of Tunis; Tebersouk is the closest town. It's easy enough to visit the site on a day trip from Tunis or Le Kef - or en route between the two; you can leave your pack at a local business. Frequent buses or louages between Tunis and Le Kef all call at Tebersouk. At the bus stop you'll find locals asking US\$5 to transport you the remaining 7km to the site and pick you up at a time of your choice. Alternatively, if you're coming from Le Kef, you can get off the bus at the New Dougga turn-off on the main road. From here it's a 3km walk to the ruins, but, again, locals will offer to take you there and pick you up later for US\$5.

TUNISIA

As you move from the north into the south, the greenery dissipates and the landscape becomes unobstructed and parched. This part of Tunisia is among the most fascinating, with the vibrancy of Sousse, a Mediterranean city with a lovely beach and a tangled medina, the sparkling harbour at Mehdia, the incredible colosseum at El-Jem, and the fascinating architecture of the beach-fringed Jerba island.

CENTRAL TUNISIA

SOUSSE

2 73 / pop 155,900

Sousse is Tunisia's liveliest town, full of the daily bustle of visitors, students and locals who fill the streets all day long. The huge medina draws people in, spitting them out hours later sweaty and laden with shopping, but mostly happy. The medina stands in the centre, cordoned off from the rest of town by high, medieval fortifications that look like a sandcastle cake. Sousse also has one of the most attractive beaches, with sand so smooth and perfect you'll enjoy just rolling around in its softness, though it might take you a while to get it out of every crevice later.

Orientation & Information

Everything of importance is close to the main square, Place Farhat Hached, on the northeast side of the medina. The **tourist office** (225 157; Place Farhat Hached; 🟵 8.30am-1pm & 3-5.45pm Sun-Thu, 8.30am-1.30pm Fri & Sat) is efficient and English is spoken. The **post office** (Ave de la République) is nearby. There are banks along Ave Habib Bourguiba. There's a **Publinet** (Ave Mohammed Maarouf) and a **Taxiphone office** (Place des Martyrs).

Sights

The medina's pride and joy is the **ribat** (admission US\$2, camera US\$1) a monastery that reminds the visitor of a fortress, with beaten stone pillars and great views from the tower. Nearby is the wide, sunny courtyard of the **Grande Mosquée**. Both are in the northeast corner, near Place Farhat Hached.

The **kasbah** on top of the hill contains the **Musée de Source** ((a) 7322 7256; admission US\$3, camera US\$1; (b) 9am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Thu, 9am-6pm Fri-Sun). This collection is second only to the Bardo Museum in Tunis, and it displays some incredible Roman mosaics, beautifully restored and presented in buildings around courtyards,

providing a glimpse of the glory of Roman life. Subjects include a swirling-haired, sadeyed Neptune, muscular gods and lots of fish. There's no access to the kasbah from inside the medina; access is from an entrance outside the medina walls.

The odd and creepy, walled-off **red-light district** in the northwestern corner of the medina is a surprise amid all the lively antiquities.

Sleeping

The hotels vary from medina fleapits to seaside medium comfort, though none are outstanding.

Hôtel Ezzouhour (a 228 729; 48 Rue de Paris; s/d US\$6/15) Dirt cheap, but with clean, tiled rooms in alcove settings. It is at the core of the medina, so you can get your souvenirs at a moment's notice.

Hôtel de Paris (220 564; 15 Rue du Rempart Nord; s/d US\$10/15) A jolly, house-proud man welcomes you into this bright place just inside the medina's north wall, with sparkling clean rooms, a roof terrace and a wide patio.

Hôtel Residence Monia (210 469; Rue Remada; r per person US\$15; 20) Best value in town with good clean rooms, balconies, a family atmosphere and a friendly smile.

Hôtel Hadrumete (226 291; Place Farhat Hached; s/d from US\$18/26) This fading '60s princess must have rocked Sousse when it first opened. African designs, a seaside-inspired copper staircase banister, bright rooms and an empty pool, now all dusty and forgotten.

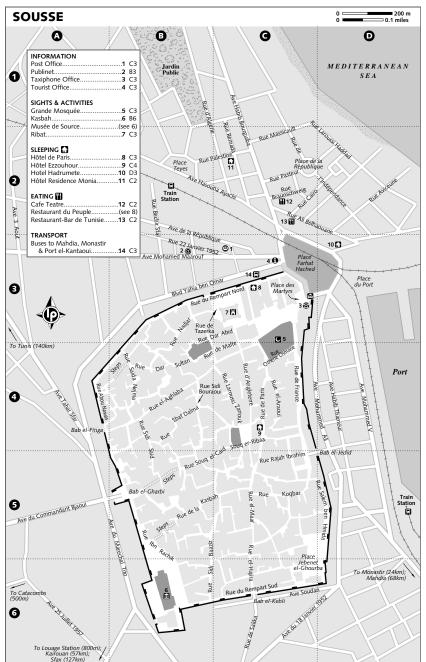
Eating

For quick snacks go to Rue Remada, between the train station and Ave Habib Bourguiba, or the medina, particularly along Rue de Paris.

Café Teatro (Rue Braunschweig; breakfast US\$2.50) Excellent for a breakfast of fresh croissants, coffee and huge glass of fresh orange juice on the pavement terrace, and people-watching on a quiet morning.

Restaurant du Peuple (226 182; Rue du Rempart Nord; set menu US\$4) Super-popular with travellers, who write their appreciative comments on napkins and hang them up on walls or press them under the glass table top. The five-course set menu is excellent value; the owner, Walid, is welcoming and friendly; and everything is sparkling clean. You can bring your own wine.

Restaurant-Bar de Tunisie (Rue Ali Belhaouane; dishes US\$3.50-7) Smart and popular, specialising in seafood, and it serves booze.



Getting There & Away UNISIA

The train stations are conveniently central, making train the best way to travel. The station for Sfax and Tunis is just northwest of Place Farhat Hached, whereas trains to Monastir and Mahdia (US\$2, 1½ hours, half-hourly), via the airport (20 minutes), leave from Bab Jedid station at the southern end of Ave Mohammed V. Watch out for pickpockets - several travellers have reported having stuff stolen here.

The bus and *louage* stations are at Souq el-Ahad. 1km southwest of the medina on the road to Kairouan. There are buses to/from El Jem (US\$3, one hour, three daily), Tataouine (US\$15, 61/2 hours, one daily), Matmata (US\$11, 51/2 hours, one daily), Jerba (US\$14, seven hours, one daily), Douz (US\$14, seven hours, one daily), Tunis (US\$6, 21/2 hours, 10 daily), Nefta (US\$13, six hours, one daily) and Tripoli (Libya; US\$23, one Monday, Tuesday and Friday). There are louages to the same destinations for around the same fares, as well as to Kairouan (US\$3, 1½ hours), Gabès (US\$10, three hours) and Sfax (US\$6, 21/2 hours).

KAIROUAN

27 / pop 110,000

The walled city of Kairouan is one of Islam's most holy cities, where praising God and selling carpets are the most revered of occupations. If you haven't been lost in any of Tunisia's other medinas, the streets of Kairouan are sure to confound you. The crumbling, white-washed, blue- and green-edged houses, some hung with birdcages or marked by the hand of Fatima, are haunting and beautiful. It was here that Arabs established their first base when they arrived from the east in AD 670, and Kairouan became so important in the Islamic hierarchy that seven visits to this tiny place equal one visit to Mecca.

Watch out for tiresome carpet touts and people offering 'professional guide services', as well as those telling you of a one-day carpet festival 'which will finish very soon'.

Information

There's an ONTT tourist office (231897, 231797, 221 452, 230 452; Place des Martyrs; 🕥 8am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 8amnoon Sun) and a **tourist office** (Ave Ibn el-Aghlab; 🕅 8am-6pm Apr-Sep, 8am-5.30pm Nov-Mar) near the Aghlabite Basins that sell combined tickets that allow you into most of the town's attractions (US\$3.50).

All the major banks are on the streets south of Place des Martyrs, and there's a post office

(Ave de la République). Travellers can check email at **Publinet** (Ave Zama el-Belaoui) for US\$1 per hour. It's open 24 hours.

Sights

The 9th-century Grande Mosquée (Rue Okba ibn Nafâa; (8am-noon Tue-Sun, 8am-2pm Mon) surprises with its enormous courtyard and fills up a large area of the northeastern corner of the medina. The prayer hall, supported by around 400 pillars, is a cool shadowy space on the southern side - non-Muslims are not allowed in this part. If you're here on a Friday, take a look at the crowded courtyard in the afternoon, when everyone pours out after prayer.

Other sites in the medina include the Mosque of the Three Doors (closed to non-Muslims), also 9th century, with rare inscriptions in its facade; 14th-century Zaouia Sidi Abid el-Ghariani with fine stucco and woodwork; and depressing Bir Barouta where a blindfolded camel walks in a circle, drawing water from a well said to be connected to Mecca.

Northwest of the medina is the 17th-century Zaouia Sidi Sahab (2.30am-6pm), tiled in luminescent colours and known as the 'barber mosque', because it contains the mausoleum of one of the prophet's companions, Abu Zama el-Belaoui, who used to carry around three hairs from the Prophet's beard.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Sabra (230263; Place des Martyrs; s/d US\$9/14) A good place to spend the night if you're counting your pennies, and you can get yourself a scrub at the hotel's hammam. Windows overlook the medina.

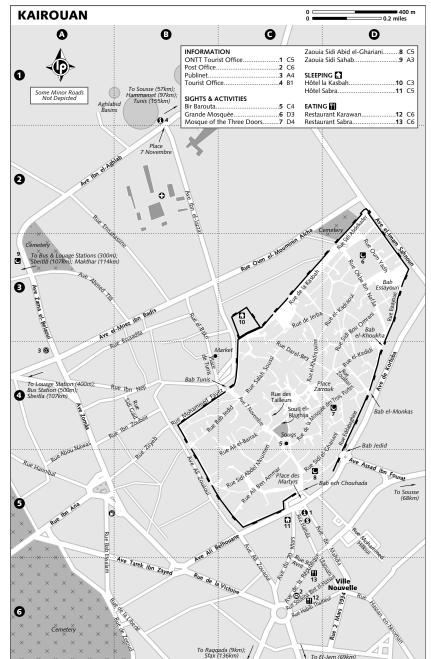
Hôtel la Kasbah (🕿 237 301: Ave Ibn el-Jazzar: s/d US\$45/67; 🔀 😰) The elegant interior is galaxies away from the dusty world outside.

Restaurant Sabra (235 095; Ave de la République; set menu US\$3) A popular local eatery with a set menu and a mad bird in a cage, this is the place for good food in friendly surroundings.

Restaurant Karawan (🖻 232 556; Rue Soukina Bint el-Hassan; set meal US\$5) Alternatively, try this spotless, airy restaurant with juicy salads, egg-dripping brigs and fluffy couscous.

Getting There & Away

The bus and *louage* stations are northwest of the medina on the road to Sbeitla, off Ave Zama el-Belaoui. Kairouan has good transport connections with the rest of Tunisia. Buses travel to Tunis (US\$6, three hours, hourly),



Jerba (US\$12, five hours, twice daily), Douz (US\$14, seven hours, once daily) and Tozeur (US\$11, 4½ hours, three times daily).

MAHDIA

🖻 73 / pop 44,600

Mahdia is a sparkling Mediterranean port town, with an old-fashioned medina area that hasn't changed for decades. The town dates back to the 10th century, when it was the capital of the Fatimids, a Muslim dynasty ruled by Mahdi, which dominated North Africa from 909 to 1171. The medina is wonderfully free of tourists, and you can see fishermen getting ready for work on the marina. Mahdia is famous for silk-weaving, and there are workshops hidden away in the back streets. Some of the burly artisans spend half the week fishing, and the other half making silk scarves.

The lovely central **Place du Caire** is filled with cafés, shaded by trees and vines, and borders the 18th-century **Mosque of Mustapha Hamza** (non-Muslims allowed in courtyard outside prayer times). Access to the old medina is through the massive **Skifa el-Kahla gate** (more of a tunnel), which is all that remains of the fortifications that protected ancient Mahdia. The unadorned **Grande Mosquée** (Place Khadi en-Noamine; 💬 non-Muslims allowed in courtyard outside prayer times) is a 20th-century replica of the mosque built by the Fatimids in the 10th century. The **Borj el-Kebir** (admission US\$1; 🏵 9am-non & 2-6pm) is a large fortress; there's not much left to see, but the views are worth paying for.

Mahdia's **docks** were used as the seafront at Benghazi in *The English Patient*. There are two **bain maures** (hammams; 论 men 4am-2pm & 7pmmidnight, women 2-7pm) in the centre.

There are two hotels inside the medina. **Hôtel el-Jazira** () 681629; 36 Rue Ibn Fourat; s/d US\$7/18) has a top location with rooms overlooking the sea. **Hôtel Médina** () 694664; Rue el Kaem; s/d US\$7/18) offers a family feel with clean rooms and a distinguished owner. Chicken and fish couscous, fresh salads, and hearty portions are available at **Restaurant el-Moez** (mains US\$1.50), while **Restaurant Le Lido** () 681 339; Ave Farhat Hached; dishes US\$3-15) is a leap upmarket, with tablecloths. You can sit outside, and sip wine or beer.

The train station is 500m west of the town centre, beyond the port. There are regular

trains to Sousse (1st/2nd class US\$3/2) and one daily to Tunis (US\$9/6, four hours). The bus and *louage* station are about 800m further west on the road to Sfax. There are *louages* to Tunis (US\$7), Sousse (US\$2, one hour), Sfax (US\$4), Karaouan (US\$4) and El-Jem (US\$2, 30 minutes), and buses to Sfax (US\$4, 2½ hours) and Sousse (US\$2, 1½ hours, hourly).

EL-JEM

🖻 73 / pop 19,500

El-Jem's only claim to fame is the huge honeycoloured Roman Colosseum (admission US\$4, camera US\$1; Nor-7pm Apr-mid-Sep, 7.30am-5.30pm mid-Sep-Mar), a mighty monument that makes the rest of the already-tiny town look minuscule. Built nearly 2000 years ago by olive-oil traders with money to burn, it showcased gladiatorial combat, executions and other such popular Roman entertainments, and it had state-of-the-art features including a movable floor. The town was once a kind of Roman Las Vegas, with lots of feasting and merry-making between the bloodletting. There are more than 20 El-Jem mosaics on Dionysian themes in the Bardo Museum in Tunis. Today, the town is not more than a few streets interlinked by cafés and antique shops, plus the inevitable souvenir touts.

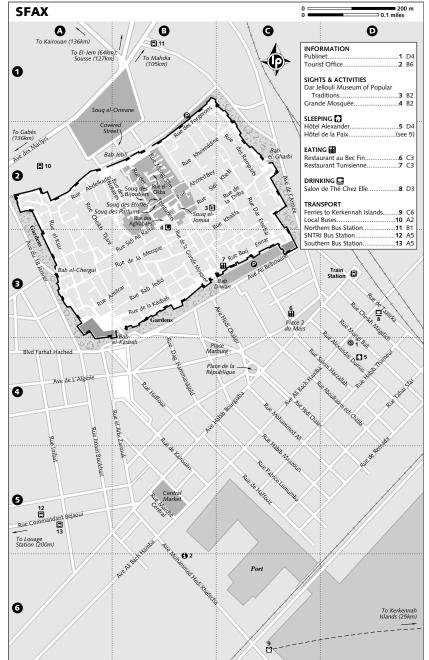
Admission to the colosseum also gets you into the **museum**, which is about 500m south of the train station on the road to Sfax. It houses some excavated villas of the former locals, and complete mosaics, including such subjects as the coy-looking *Genius of the Year*. Staying in El-Jem would prove a depressing experience, but you can eat at **Restaurant Le Bonheur** (a 630 306; dishes U\$53-6) where the ubiquitous couscous and *salade tunisienne* or *salade mechouia* are pretty yummy.

The *louage* station is near the museum and serves Sfax (US\$3, one hour), Sousse (US\$3, 1½ hours) and Mahdia (US\$2, 30 minutes). There are trains to/from Sfax (US\$3, one hour, three daily) via Sousse (US\$3, 30 minutes, three daily). You can leave your luggage at the train station for US\$1.50.

SFAX

2 74 / pop 249,000

Most Tunisians will advise you to skip Sfax and carry on down to Jerba, but this secondlargest city is worth stopping in for a couple of hours, en route to Jerba, if only to have a



lunch of delicious *ojja* (prawn stew with eggs and tomatoes), a Sfaxian speciality, and check out the town medina, a space untouched by tourism. Sfaxiens have the reputation of being hardworking business people, which, in Tunisia, doesn't bring them much popularity. The medina hasn't been prettified for visitors, but contains blacksmith workshops and butchers as it has for centuries. It dates from the 7th century and is surrounded by crenulated walls that could have been filched from a child's toy castle. Female travellers might find the atmosphere somewhat oppressive here, as local men are not so used to seeing foreign women.

232 SOUTHERN TUNISIA •• Tozeur

The tourist office (🖻 497 041; Ave Mohammed Hedi Khefecha) is by the port. There are lots of banks around Ave Habib Bourguiba, several with ATMs. Publinet (Ave Ali Bach Hamba) charges US\$1.50 per hour. The old medina, used to represent Cairo in the film The English Patient, contains the major attractions. Highlights include the atmospheric old covered sougs, just north of the 9th-century Grande Mosquée (Rue de la Grande Mosquée: 🕅 closed to non-Muslims), and the Dar Jellouli Museum of Popular Traditions (admission US\$1, camera US\$1; 🕑 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun), housed in a beautiful 17th-century mansion with carved wooden panelling and ornate stucco, displaying jewellery, costumes and painted glass.

Hôtel de la Paix (🖻 296 437; 10 Rue Alexandre Dumas; s/d US\$13/16), in the Ville Nouvelle, has tiredlooking rooms, but they do have balconies, while Hôtel Alexander (🖻 221 911; 16 Rue Alexandre Dumas; s/d US\$17/20) provides a classier option, with comfortable, shuttered rooms. Restaurant Tunisienne (Rue Borj Ennar; mains around US\$2) is perfect for flopping down after traipsing around the medina and get yourself some 'traditional' spaghetti, or a bowl of couscous. Restaurant au Bec Fin (Place 2 du Mars; mains US\$5) is the top place to try the shrimp ojja, seafood bathed in spicy tomato and egg sauce - it's divine. Unusual Salon de Thé Chez Elle (Ave Ali Bach Hamba: coffee US\$0.50) is an all-women café (at least in the downstairs room). It features dusty tinsel decorations, goldfish and local women smoking furiously.

Trains are the most convenient way to travel. The train station is at the eastern end of Ave Habib Bourguiba. There are trains north to El-Jem, Sousse (1st/2nd class US\$7/5, halfhourly) and Tunis (US\$11/9); south to Gabès (US\$7/6); and west to Metlaoui (US\$10/8). The SNTRI bus station is on Rue Commandant Bejaoui. SNTRI has regular buses to Tunis (US\$10, four hours, nine daily) via Sousse (US\$6, two hours, nine daily), and also travels to Douz (two daily), Matmata (one daily), Jerba (US\$10, four hours, three daily) and Tataouine (US\$11, four hours, two daily). The *louage* station is 300m west of the bus station, and has services to all these destinations for around the same price, as well as to El-Jem (US\$3) and Tripoli (US\$22, seven hours).

Ferries to the Kerkennah Islands (US\$1, seven daily) leave from the docks on Ave Mohammed Hedi Khefecha.

SOUTHERN TUNISIA

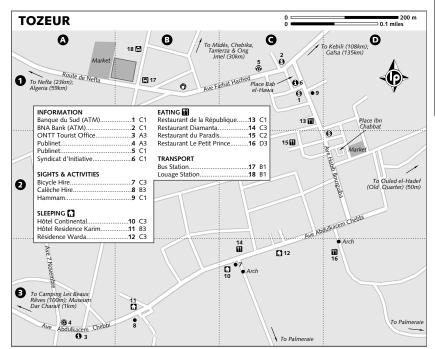
In the south you'll find the blinding heat and dust of the desert, with landscapes that stretch for miles with wonderful (or awful) nothingness. Life-giving palmeraies (palm groves) grow like tufts of hair mid-desert and promise autumn harvests of sweet dates. Salt lakes shimmer in the sun like mirages. Fortified towns stare from barren hilltops over scarred scrubland. Hot springs offer pampering dips deep in desert towns, and a luxury, desert camp site gives 'oasis' a whole new meaning. The isle of Jerba is a fascinating place to be. This is Tunisia's best.

TOZEUR

🖻 76 / pop 33,500

Once you've passed the mesmerising landscape of the salt lake **(hott el-Jerid**, you start getting the glimpse of the enormous palmeraie that shields Tozeur. The salt lake is a snowy-white sheet, stretching for miles. If you step on the crackling surface, the salt sticks to your shoes, and the lake's water can still be seen underneath. This largest of Tunisia's salt lakes is dry for 10 months of the year and has a causeway running over it – it's an extraordinary sight, not to be missed. Tozeur town's old quarter is a small maze of fascinating and intricate brickwork houses, arches and walls.

There's an **ONTT tourist office** (a 450 088; 8am-noon & 3-6pm) located on Ave Abdulkacem Chebbi. Another tourist office is the **Syndicat d'Initiative** (462 034; Place Bab el-Hawa). There are several banks with ATMs on Ave Habib Bourguiba.



There are two Publinets at Ave Farhat Hached (open 24 hours) and at Ave Abdulkacem Chebbi, both charging US\$1.50 per hour for internet access.

Sights & Activities

The town's small, labyrinthine old quarter, **Ouled el-Hadef**, has unique, striking architecture of patterned brickwork in sandy and darkgreen shades. All the families living in the quarter come outside at dusk, and strolling at this time is lovely.

The enormous **palmeraie** (palm grove) is best explored by bicycle, which can be hired (US\$5 per hour) from west of Résidence Warda on Ave Abdulkacem Chebbi. You can take a *calèche* (carriage) ride around the palmeraie – they wait outside Résidence Warda. It should cost around US\$8 for half an hour.

Excursions that can be made from Tozeur include a half-day trip via 4WD to **Ong Jmel**, a dramatic location used in both *Star Wars* and *The English Patient*, Nefta (see Top Ten *Star Wars* Locations box, p238), or the beautiful Berber villages of Midés, Chebika and Tamerza. Each half-day trip costs about US\$25 – all hotels arrange tours and they seem to have made an agreement about prices, because everyone charges the same.

There's a friendly **hammam** (admission US\$1; off Ave Habib Bourguiba; 💬 men noon-6pm, women 7-11pm).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Les Beaux Rêves ((2) 453 331; Ave Abdulkacem Chebbi; camp sites per person US\$4, dm US\$5, hot showers US\$1) At this lovely site, you can camp, or sleep in three-bed, thatched-hut bungalows.

Résidence Warda (🖻 452 597; 29 Ave Abdulkacem Chebbi; s/d with bathroom US\$14/23, with shared bathroom

US\$10/17) Friendly, neat and good-value place (breakfast is included), looking into a courtyard. The rooms facing the street are particularly good.

Hôtel Continental (🕿 461 411; Ave Abdylkacem Chebbi; s/d US\$35/55; 🖹 😰) The cheapest of the top-end options, with a lovely swimming pool shaded by palm trees. The rooms are large and comfortable.

Restaurant du Paradis (off Ave Habib Bourguiba; dishes US\$0.50-1.50) A tiny, quaint place, this restaurant is run by two elderly charmers, serving chorba and couscous.

Restaurant Diamanta (Ave Abdulkacem Chebbi; dishes US\$1-5) A husband and wife employ their son as the waiter, serving very good meals, particularly the salade mechouia and the vegetable couscous.

Restaurant de la République (off Ave Habib Bourquiba; dishes US\$1-5) Under an arched entrance off the main street, this is a good place for a simple couscous and salad, followed by a slice of juicy, fresh watermelon in high summer

Restaurant Le Petit Prince (2 452 518; off Ave Abdulkacem Chebbi; mains around US\$8) Romance is high on the menu in the restaurant's palm-shaded courtyard, and food is a stylish serving of Tunisian and French specialities and plenty of booze.

Getting There & Away

The bus and *louage* stations are near each other just north of the road to Nefta. There are buses travelling daily to/from Tunis (US\$16, seven hours, five daily), via Kairouan (US\$11, three hours) and Gafsa (US\$4, 11/2 hours), Nefta (US\$2, 30 minutes, five daily), Douz (US\$6, 1½ hours, one daily) and Gabès (US\$9, 3½ hours, two daily). There are louages travelling to/from Nefta, Tunis and Gabés for the same prices, and to/from Kebili (US\$4, $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours).

DOUZ

275 / pop 27,400

Douz, an oasis at the edge of the Grand Erg Oriental, is best for its tours into the desert. The dunes are tall and smooth, fulfilling all fantasies of the mysterious and silent desert space. The town itself is not too exciting, with a busy central square, and fruit and carpets on sale. At its edge is an enormous palmeraie, where more than 400,000 trees slice into the fierce sunlight. As soon as you

enter, you'll be accosted by desert-expedition touts. Make sure you get a professional guide from the tourist office, as unofficial guides are unreliable.

Information

The ONTT tourist office (🖻 470351; Ave Mohammed V; 8.30am-1pm & 3-6pm) is near the palmeraie. Société Tunisienne de Banque (STB; Ave Taieb Mehiri) and Banque de Sud (Ave du 7 Novembre 1987) change cash and travellers cheques. Publinet (Rue el-Hounine) charges US\$1 per hour for internet access.

Sights & Activities

Most people come to Douz to organise camel trekking. To appreciate the desert, it's best to take an overnight trip, which costs from US\$30 per day.

The desert immediately south of Douz is crowded and not very interesting. You'll find more interesting country around Zaafrane, 14km southwest of Douz, as well as lots of camels and similar prices. The giant dunes of the Grand Erg Oriental are situated some distance further south. If you want to reach the huge dunes, you will need to take a 4WD, at least for the first section. If you choose to hire a driver and 4WD for the whole day, the guide price is US\$180 per day or US\$220 for an overnight trip.

Everyone in town claims to be a cameltrekking guide, but it's safer to use an agency or your hotel, or to seek advice from the tourist office.

Try to visit in time for the famous Thursday market, where livestock, leather, pots n' pans and other goods are on sale, and where the last of Tunisia's nomadic camel-herders come to trade.

The **palmeraie**, the largest in the country, is a wonderful, cool place for a stroll.

The Sahara Festival usually takes place in November. This is very popular with Tunisians as well as foreign tourists, and has displays of traditional desert sports, colourful parades and music.

Sleeping & Eating

Desert Club (🖻 470 575; Ave 7 Novembre; camp sites per person US\$3) An excellent, shady camp site inside the palmeraie, with professional service, hot water, laundry, a restaurant and bar.

Hôtel 20 Mars (🕿 470 269; Rue 20 Mars; s/d US\$18/23) Sunny rooms with arched brick ceilings, lots of small courtyards and friendly service. The hotel also has an agency that organises desert trips.

Hotel Pansea (🖻 621 870; www.pansea .com/ksar.html; Ksar Ghilane; s/d US\$90/120; 🕄 🗩) High-style travel magazines are crazy about this place and you can see why. Luxurious linen tents in the middle of a desert oasis, with their own bathrooms, air-conditioning and heating, a central swimming pool and a classy restaurant. It is located in Ksar Ghilane village, 138km south of Douz. Staying here is an experience to be cherished.

Restaurant Ali Baba (🖻 472 498; Ave du 7 Novembre 1987; mains around US\$3) Popular and friendly, with a Bedouin tent in the little garden for puffing on a hookah after a dinner of couscous.

Restaurant La Rosa (🕿 471 660; Ave du 7 Novembre 1987; dishes US\$3-4) A good, air-conditioned place with delicious vegetable couscous and juicy kebabs.

Getting There & Away

There are regular local buses and louages running to Kebili (US\$2, 30 minutes) and Zaafrane (US\$0.50, five daily), and daily services to Tozeur (US\$6, 11/2 hours) and Gabès (US\$5, three hours, two daily). SNTRI has air-conditioned services to Tunis (US\$17, nine hours, two daily), either via Tozeur or via Gabès and Sfax.

MATMATA

a 75

If you want to get to the 'heart of Star Wars', Matmata's your place. It's not often you get the locals offering to show you the outer space, but this little village brims with such delights, having been the set of George Lucas' first Star Wars film and never living it down. The Berbers of Matmata tried to escape the incessant summer heat by burrowing underground and creating cave-houses. Their odd, otherworldly homes are set among sculpted sand hills, the colour of sawdust.

Matmata boasts dozens of troglodyte pit homes, which are all built along the same lines and generally feature a large central courtyard, usually circular, dug out of the soft sandstone, and rounded rooms that are tunnelled off the perimeter.

The most famous place to stay is Hotel Sidi Driss (240 005; s/d incl breakfast US\$12/24), the setting for the Lars family homestead in Star Wars, also used for Attack of the Clones. Though it's a major tour-group lunch date,

staying here is a rather depressing prospect, since the rooms are like prison cells. It's best to stop for lunch and carry on your way.

There are regular buses and *louages* to/from abès (US\$3, 45 minutes) or 1 Gabès (US\$3, 45 minutes) and one SNTRI bus to Tunis (US\$16, eight hours).

JERBA & HOUMT SOUQ a 75

Jerba is an island with a harmonious mixture of Mediterranean brightness and sandy beaches, strong desert heat and lack of vegetation, and peculiar, beautiful, whitewashed domed-hut architecture. This extends to the island's ethnic mix: Berber culture is dominant here and local women are wrapped in cream-striped textiles, topped with straw hats. A Jewish community, once integral to the island's ethnic make-up, still remains on the island in small numbers, despite mass emigration to Israel. And the tourists, most of them on package holidays, splash around the island in seasonal waves, bringing precious employment and taking precious water resources.

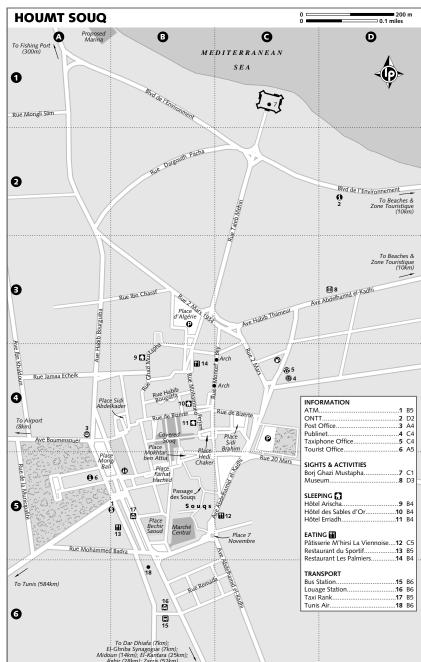
The island is linked to the mainland by a causeway built in Roman times, and convenient 24-hour car ferries between Ajim (where Obi-Wan Kenobi had his house; see the Top Ten Star Wars Locations boxed text, p238) and Jorf. Jerba claims to be the Land of the Lotus Eaters described in Homer's Odyssey, where people lived 'drugged by the legendary honeyed fruit' - Ulysses had a lot of trouble prising his crew away.

Houmt Souq is the island's 'capital', standing in the middle of the north coast. It's a small town with a lovely central area, where a narrow tangle of souvenir sougs open onto lazy, café-lined squares. A highlight is staying in funduqs, the old merchant inns converted into charming hotels. There's a tourist office (🕿 650 915; off Ave Habib Bourguiba; 🏵 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri & Sat) in the middle of town and an ONTT (Office National du Tourisme Tunisien; 🖻 650 016; 🏵 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri & Sat) near the fort. There are also banks with ATMs and a post office (Ave Habib Bourguiba). Publinet (off Ave Abdelhamid el-Kadhi) charges US\$1.50 per hour for internet access. There's a Taxiphone office (Ave Abdelhamid el-Kadhi).

Sights & Activities

The old fort, Borj Ghazi Mustapha (off Blvd de l'Environment), on the beach, 500m north of town,





looks like stuff from fairy tales. It dates from the 13th century, but was extended in the 16th. A massacre took place here in 1560, when the Ottomans captured the fort and stacked the skulls of their Spanish victims just west of it, leaving the menacing warning standing for about 300 years.

The **museum** (Ave Abdelhamid el-Kadhi) is housed in a beautiful, simple Zaouia of Sidi Zitouni – a former religious fraternity based around a marabout – with whitewashed domes, a cedarwood painted ceiling and small courtyards. It has mementos from the Berber and Jewish communities. The busy **fishing port** is a nice place for a walk, about 500m north of town along Ave Habib Bourguiba.

Outside town, visit the oldest synagogue in North Africa, the **El-Ghriba Synagogue** (admission US\$1; \bigcirc 7.30am-6pm Sun-Fri) in the village of Erriadh, 7km south of Houmt Souq. Bring ID for the security checks outside.

Sleeping & Eating

Houmt Souq has some wonderful places to stay, converted from *funduqs* – lodging houses for the camel caravans that stopped here in Ottoman times; the merchants stayed on the top floor while their animals were housed below.

Hôtel des Sables d'Or (🖻 650423; Rue Mohammed Ferjani; s/d US\$10/18) A pretty townhouse with charming, tiled rooms around a lovely inner courtyard.

Hôtel Erriadh (ⓐ 650756; 10 Rue Mohammed Ferjani; s/d US\$18/23; ⓐ) Popular, attractive, tiled *fun*-*duq*, where rooms look onto a courtyard and the service is friendly.

Hôtel Arischa (☐ 650384; 36 Rue Ghazi Mustapha; rperperson US\$22; ☑ ☑) A gorgeous *funduq* with soft lilac rooms, stylish tiled showers, and a swimming pool in a courtyard full of blooming bougainvillea.

Dar Dhiafa (☎ 671 166; www.hoteldardhiafa.com; Erriadh village; r from US\$150; № №) One of Tunisia's loveliest hotels, set in a collection of traditional Jerba houses, with courtyards, pools, traditional décor and scrumptious rooms.

Restaurant du Sportif (147 Ave Ĥabib Bourguiba; dishes US\$1-4) Under a long, arched arcade, perfect for watching Houmt Souq go by while you bite into an egg *briq*.

Restaurant Les Palmiers (Place d'Algérie; dishes US\$3-5) Waiters with tilted straw hats serve you at this simple place with traditional food. A set menu has the usual *briq* and couscous,

but the seafood spaghetti is whisker-licking good.

Pâtisserie M'Hirsi La Viennoise (Ave Abdelhamid el-Kadhi) Good for breakfast and early-morning coffee on a sunny square.

Getting There & Away

There's a **Tunis Air office** (Ave Habib Bourguiba) and the airport is to the northwest of the island. The bus and *louage* stations are at the southern end of the main street, Ave Habib Bourguiba. There are frequent buses to Gabès (US\$5, two hours), Sfax (US\$10, four hours), Tunis (US\$17, eight hours), Sousse (US\$14, seven hours) and Matmata (US\$6, seven hours). *Louages* head to the same destinations for around the same prices, as well as to Tataouine (US\$6, two hours).

TATAOUINE

🖻 75 / pop 57,800

This is a gentle town, a slow-paced base for visiting the extraordinary *ksour* villages (fortified Berber villages) in the surrounding dry golden hills. Made up of stacked *ghorfas*, narrow barrel-vaulted rooms, their architecture is surreal and organic and you walk around expecting a hobbit to hobble outside. *Star Wars* location scouts loved the look so much they used the villages as film sets.

The best sites are quite a way from town, but can be easily reached by chartering a taxi (half-day excursion costs about US\$16), or local transport with luck, patience and a bit of timing. Don't miss the beautiful Ksar Ouled Soltane, 24km southeast of Tataouine, where the ghorfas rise a dizzying four storeys, reached by precarious fairy-tale staircases, and overlook desert-scrub hills. Equally impressive are the ancient hilltop villages of Chenini and Douiret, which spill across and merge with the rocky ochre slopes, southwest of Tataouine. Chenini's mysterious underground mosque contains 5m-long graves apparently Christians hid from the Romans here and, sleeping, grew to an enormous height, only to die when they awoke 400 vears later.

There's a **festival** at Ksar Ouled Soltane in April, which uses the courtyards for music, dance and other festivities.

Tiny **Hôtel Résidence Hamza** (**a** 863 506; Ave Hedi Chaker; s/d US\$12/13) has just four very clean, spartan rooms and friendly owners. Inside a walled compound, 3km southwest of town, is

TUNISIA

TOP TEN STAR WARS LOCATIONS

Talk about a country with a CV to match any international film star's: Tunisia's sensuous desert curves hosted *The English Patient*, its impressive fortifications served as a Middle Eastern backdrop to *Monty Python's The Life of Brian*, but its most famous role was providing the fascinating architecture and wild desertscapes that gave the *Star Wars* canon such a powerful visual identity. The makers not only left bits of sets behind, but also a legacy of guided *Star Wars* tours. If you want to walk in the steps of R2-D2, try a hotel or agency tour in Tozeur, where most charge the same reasonable prices.

- Sidi Driss Hotel (Matmata) The famous Sidi Driss was used for interior shots of the Lars family homestead in Star Wars. Bits of set are still in place here (it was used again in The Phantom Menace and Attack of the Clones), complete with writing in black marker pen on the back. A dining room is spangled with ceiling paintings – this is where Luke tucked into blue milkshake and went head to head over the harvest with his Uncle Owen.
- Ong Jemel (30km north of Tozeur) This was Darth Maul's lookout in *The Phantom Menace* and the location for his and Qui-Gon's tussle, as well as lots of pod-race scenes. The road here was built by *The English Patient* crew, who indulged in a lot of billowing sand-blown romantic stuff in the area.
- Mos Espa (30km north of Tozeur) Near Ong Jemel, Mos Espa village is a construct in the middle of the desert used for the prequel films; its battered sets echoing local Berber architecture.
- Sidi Bouhlel (east of Tozeur on the edge of Chott el-Jerid) Nicknamed Star Wars Canyon, this has seen jawas parking their sand-crawlers, R2-D2 trundling plaintively along, Luke attacked by Tusken Raiders, and Ben and Luke overlooking Mos Eisley. Scenes from The Phantom Menace and Attack of the Clones were filmed here too.
- Ksar Haddada (near Tataouine) A location for the Mos Espa slave quarters, Ksar Haddada has stunningly weird architecture, and is where Qui-Gon learned the truth about Anakin's parentage in *The Phantom Menace*. Though the hotel is falling into ruin, it retains some brightly painted doors from the set.
- Ksar Ouled Soultane (near Tataouine) Here are more slave quarters these are perhaps the finest example of the curious moulded courtyard-centred buildings.
- La Grande Dune (near Nefta) This stood in for the Star Wars Dune Sea, where C-3PO staggered past a Krayt dragon skeleton, and if you're lucky, you might pick up some fibre-glass bones.
- Chott el-Jerid (east of Nefta) Here, in the first film, Luke contemplated two suns while standing soulfully at the edge of a crater, peering over these vast, dry salt flats. The landscape around its fringes doubled as Junland Wastes populated by Krayt dragons and sand people.
- Medenine (near Tataouine) Anakin Skywalker's Phantom Menace slave-quarters home is off bustling Ave 7 Novembre.
- Ajim (Jerba) Obi-Wan Kenobi's house exterior is about 3km out of town, while the freakfilled Star Wars Cantina scene was filmed in the centre (not, as many think, at the Sidi Driss).

stylish **Hôtel Sangho Tataouine** (a 860 124; off Route de Chenini; s/d US\$60/80; **2 ()** where rooms are decked out in a traditional style with antiques and bric-a-brac. There's also a good restaurant onsite, or try **Restaurant Essendabad** (Rue 2 Mars; dishes US\$0.50-2) for a wholesome lunch of spicy *chorba* and Arabic flat bread. **Restaurant La Medina** (Rue 1 Juin 1955; mains around US\$2) serves simple

Tunisian food and has alfresco seating, perfect for hungry people-watchers.

Buses and *louages* leave from the centre of town. SNTRI buses go to Tunis (US\$19, 8½ hours) via Gabès (US\$6, two hours), Sfax (US\$11, four hours) and Sousse (US\$15, 6½ hours). Regular *louages* run to Tunis (US\$16, eight hours) and Gabès (US\$5, two hours). You can reach Chenini, Douiret and sometimes Ksar Ouled Soltane via *camionnette* (pick-up; US\$2). These leave from near the Banque du Sud on Rue 2 Mars; however, these serve the destinations only in the mornings, so unless you start out early you could get stuck there.

TUNISIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Tunisia has few camp sites with good facilities, but you can pitch a tent anywhere if you have the landowner's permission. In many Tunisian towns, there is a *zone touristique* – a separate area with lots of larger hotels. These tend to be bland places, used by large package operators. The advantage of these zones is that it leaves Tunisia's historic centres free of major tourist developments and lessens the impact of the large numbers of tourists passing through.

Women are likely to feel uncomfortable in bottom-end budget places, which are used mainly by men and tend to have a seedy atmosphere. Tunisia's Auberges de Jeunesse are excellent and fine for women travelling alone, and cheap hotels outside the medina are usually better. Midrange options are usually decent, with air-conditioning, some with swimming pools. Top end hotels don't usually compare to four or five star Western hotels, but are good enough and cheap by Western standards.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Tunisia is a generally safe place to travel around, and aside from the 2002 suicide bomber attack (see p216), violence of this sort is extremely rare. Most travellers complain about sexual harassment (see Women Travellers, p240) and carpet touts, and you're well advised to keep an eye on your bag in crowded medinas.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

The following embassies and consulates are in Tunis. The Canadian embassy handles consular affairs for the Australian government. **Algeria** (Map p219; 18 Rue du Niger, 1002 Tunis) **Belgium** (781 655; fax 792 797; 47 Rue du 1 Juin,

1002 Tunis)

Canada (Map p219; 🖻 104 000; 3 Senegal St) Egypt (Map p219; 🖻 791 181; Ave Mohammed V) France (Map p220; ⓐ 245 700; Place de l'Indépendance, Ave Habib Bourguiba) Germany (ⓐ 786 455; 1 Rue el Hamra) Italy (Map p220; ⓐ 321811; fax 324155; 37 Rue Jamel Abdelnaceur) Japan (ⓐ 791 251; fax 786 625; 9 Rue Apollo XI, 1082 Mohrajene-Tunis) Morocco (ⓐ 782 775; fax 787 103; Rue du 1 Juin, 1002 Tunis) Netherlands (ⓐ 799 442; fax 785 557; 8 Rue de Meycen, 1002 Tunis) South Africa (ⓐ 798 449; fax 791 742; 7 Rue Achtart Nord, Hilton, 1002 Tunis) Spain (ⓐ 782 217; fax 786 267; 22-24 Rue Dr Ernest Conseil, 1002 Tunis)

UK (Map p220; 🖻 340239; 5 Place de la Victoire) USA (🖻 962 115; Zone Nord-Est de Berges du Lac)

Tunisia has embassies in Libya, Algeria, Egypt and Morocco.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Ksar Ouled Soltane Festival (April) Music, dance and other festivities.

Tabarka Raï Festival (May & June) Algerian and Tunisian youngsters get together and dance alfresco. Tabarka Jazz Festival (July) Outdoor concerts, sometimes with international stars.

Carthage International Stars. Carthage International Festival (July & August) Music. dance and theatre.

Music, Garice and Infeatre. **Dougga Festival** (July & August) Classical drama. **Carthage International Film Festival** (October, odd years only, even years in Burkina Faso) Shows Middle-Eastern and African films.

Douz Sahara Festival (November) Camel racing, colourful parades and music.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106) the principal public holidays in Tunisia are as follows: **1 January** New Year's Day **20 March** Independence Day **21 March** Youth Day **9 April** Martyrs' Day **1 May** Labour Day **25 July** Republic Day **3 August** Public Holiday **13 August** Women's Day **15 October** Evacuation Day **7 November** Anniversary of Ben Ali's Accession

INTERNET ACCESS

Public access to the internet is handled by Publinet, which operates offices in all the

per hour. You might find it difficult to get on to Hotmail and Yahoo, though Publinet staff can sometimes suggest ways to get around this.

MEDIA

Freedom of speech is guaranteed under the Constitution, but the government places strict restrictions on the media – print, broadcasting and the internet.

main towns. Most charge around US\$1.50

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Tunisian dinar (TD), which is divided into 1000 millimes (mills). It's illegal to import or export dinars and they are not accepted in the duty-free shops at Tunis Airport.

You can re-exchange up to 30% of the amount you changed into dinar, up to a limit of TD100. You need bank receipts to prove you changed the money in the first place.

Major credit cards such as Visa, American Express and MasterCard are widely accepted at big shops, tourist hotels, car-rental agencies and banks. ATMs are found in major towns and resort areas. Cash advances are given in local currency only.

POST & TELEPHONE

The Tunisian postal service is slow but reliable: allow a week to Europe and 10 days to North America, Asia and Oceania.

The telephone system is fairly modern and easy to operate. Few people have a phone at home, so there are lots of public telephones – known as Taxiphones. They accept 100-mill, 500-mill and one-dinar coins. An attempt to introduce card phones appears to have fizzled out.

All public telephones can be used for international direct dialling. Some places advertise themselves as International Taxiphones; all it means is that the meters accept only 500-mill and one-dinar coins.

TOURIST INFORMATION

To get tourist information before you leave home, contact the government-run **Office National du Tourisme Tunisien** (www.tourismintunisia .com). Inside Tunisia, most tourist offices are not too efficient, though they are generally friendly and will offer glossy brochures and basic local information.

VISAS

Nationals of most Western European countries can stay in Tunisia for up to three months without a visa – you just roll up at the port or airport and collect a stamp in your passport. Americans, Canadians, Germans and Japanese can stay up to four months. Other nationalities have to apply for a visa before travel.

Australians and South Africans travelling independently can get a three-month visa at the airport for US\$8. Other nationalities need to apply before they arrive; the visa costs US\$7 and takes three to four weeks in person or six weeks via post, and the length of stay is up to the embassy.

Israeli nationals are not allowed into the country, apart from on group trips organised from Israel.

Visa Extensions

Extending a visa is a process to be avoided. Applications can be made only at the Interior Ministry on Ave Habib Bourguiba in Tunis. They cost US\$2 to US\$8 (payable only in *timbres fiscales*, revenue stamps) and take up to 10 days to issue. You'll need two photos, and may need bank receipts and a *facture* (receipt) from your hotel, for starters. It'd be easier to leave the country and return to get another three-month stint.

Visas for Onward Travel

If you're planning on travelling to Algeria (check travel warnings before you do so) or Libya (difficult) you should apply for visas in your home country.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Prior to marriage, Tunisian men have little opportunity to hang out with women, and the expense of getting married means that, for many, this mixing of the sexes is being delayed still further. Foreign women exist outside the social structure, and are seen as an entirely separate and enticing species. Sexual harassment is par for the course, and the tidal waves of testosterone that you encounter in some places can be quite intimidating. Harassment usually takes the form of being stared at, subjected to slimy chat-up strategies and very occasional physical harassment - though this is not half as likely as in Egypt. You can try a few strategies to reduce your hassle quota: the first is by modest dressing. In remote areas, a headscarf can be useful to indicate modesty. Probably the best policy is to ignore sexist remarks and sound effects – sunglasses are a good way of avoiding eye contact. It's advisable to sit next to other women on buses and *louages*, sit in the back seat of taxis, and avoid staying in cheap medina hotels. If someone does touch you, '*Harem alek*' (Arabic for 'Shame on you') is a useful phrase.

TRANSPORT IN TUNISIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

There are regular flights, both scheduled and chartered, from Tunisia to destinations all over Europe, but no direct flights to the Americas, Asia or Oceania. **Tunis Air** (71-330 100; www.tunisair.com; 48 Ave Habib Bourgiba, Tunis) flies to most European destinations.

Other airlines flying to and from Tunisia: **Air France** (**7** 71-355 422; www.airfrance.com; 1 Rue d'Athénes, Tunis) Hub: Paris

Alitalia (🖻 71-331 377; www.alitalia.com; 17 Ave Habib Thameur, Tunis) Hub: Rome

British Airways ((2) 71-330 046; www.british-airways .com; 17 Ave Habib Bourgiba, Tunis) Hub: London Lufthansa Airlines ((2) 71-941 344; www.lufthansa .com; Ave Ouled Haffouz, Tunis) Hub: Frankfurt

Boat

Boats run from Tunis to Trapani, Naples, sometimes La Spezia, and Genoa in Italy. They also serve Marseilles (France) and Bastia (Corsica). See Getting There and Away under Tunis (p222) for more details.

Land

ALGERIA

There are numerous border-crossing points, and *louages* travel between Tunis and various towns in eastern Algeria. For travellers, the southern border crossing between Nefta and El-Oued is the best bet, but check the current situation before heading for Algeria. You reach Nefta from Gafsa and Tozeur, and take a bus or *louage* from Nefta to the border post at Hazoua.

LIBYA

Visiting Libya is only an option as part of an organised tour, so transport options will finish at the border, where the tour opera-

DEPARTURE TAX

There is no departure tax to be paid when leaving Tunisia. The tax is included in the price of your ticket.

tors meet travellers by prior arrangement. The coast road from Gabès to Tripoli runs via the border crossing at Ras Ajdir. *Louages* make the journey from Gabès, Medenine, Sfax, Sousse and Tunis to Tripoli (US\$25, 10 hours), and there are several weekly buses from the southern Tunis bus station to Tripoli (US\$25, 11¹/₂ hours).

GETTING AROUND Air

Tuninter operates internal flights from Tunis to/from Jerba, Sfax and Tozeur. Tuninter tickets can be bought from its parent **Tunis Air** ((2) 71-330 100; www.tunisair.com; 48 Ave Habib Bourgiba, Tunis), or from any travel agent. **Tuninter** (2) 701 717) also has a special reservations service.

Boat

There is a 24-hour car ferry between Jorf, on the mainland, and Ajim on the island of Jerba (15 minutes, 800 mills per car). There are ferries from Sfax to the Kerkennah Islands, but not many reasons to go there.

Hitching

Hitching is possible down the coast to the Libyan border and as far south as Tozeur, although you may be expected to pay the bus fare equivalent. Hitching in the north is easier away from the main tourist areas, and you'll seldom be expected to pay.

Although many people do hitch, bear in mind that it is not an entirely safe means of transport. Women should never hitch alone, and even in pairs it will be much more hassle than it could possibly be worth, and not necessarily safer.

Local Transport

The national bus company, Société Nationale du Transport Interurban (SNTRI), has daily air-conditioned buses between Tunis and most towns. Advance booking is advisable, especially in summer and around important holidays. Sample one-way fares from Tunis include Sousse (US\$6) and Jerba (from US\$18 to US\$20). Local buses are run by regional companies and go to all but the most remote villages.

Louages are large cars or minibuses. They are always white with a red stripe across the front and along the side, and they ply the same routes as the buses. They are usually cheaper and faster than buses and are quite safe. They leave when full – you rarely have to wait long for departure. Prepare to be cramped inside and avoid the back seat and the middle seat in the front (seriously lacking in head and leg room respectively). All towns have metered private yellow taxis. These can either be hired privately or they operate on a collective basis – they collect four passengers for different destinations. If you take a shared taxi, your fare will be much cheaper.

Train

The rail network isn't huge, but it's the best way to get to certain places. The best-serviced route is the line from Tunis to Sousse (US\$5) and Sfax (US\$8).

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Burkina Faso

Standing at the geographical heart of West Africa, Burkina Faso (formerly Haute or Upper Volta, or just Burkina to the locals) is the sort of place that captures the imagination – how many of your friends back home even know that Burkina Faso exists? – and wins the hearts of travellers with its relaxed pace of life, friendly people and wealth of interesting sights.

From the deserts and unrivalled Gorom-Gorom market in the north, to the green countryside and strange rock formations of the country's southwest, Burkina spans a rich variety of landscapes. The country, too, is home to a fascinating cultural mix, with the Burkinabé (people from Burkina Faso) almost as diverse as the terrain.

This may be one of the world's poorest countries, but it's also one of the most stable in the region and runs with an efficiency that's the envy of many of its neighbours. Throw in the continent's most important film festival, the delightful small-town atmosphere of Bobo-Dioulasso, wildlife safaris in the south, the enjoyable and gloriously named capital, Ouagadougou, and there's enough here to transform Burkina from the country that no-one knows to an experience you'll never forget.

FAST FACTS

- Area 274,122 sq km
- ATMs Major towns only
- Borders Mali, Niger, Togo and Ghana open; crossing at Niangoloko with Côte d'Ivoire closed
- Budget US\$15 to US\$25 per day
- Capital Ouagadougou
- Languages French, Moré, Fulfulde and Lobi
- Money West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 11.9 million
- Seasons Wet (June to October), dry (November to February), hot (March to June)
- Telephone Country code 226, international access code 00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visa Available at borders (CFA10,000) or Burkina Faso embassies (up to CFA30,000)

HIGHLIGHTS

- Gorom-Gorom's Thursday market (p272) Lose yourself in one of West Africa's most colourful experiences.
- Bobo-Dioulasso (p269) Kick back in the languid charm of the old quarter and the beautiful Grande Mosquée.
- **Ouagadougou** (p265) Explore one of West Africa's most agreeable capital cities, with great restaurants and friendly people.
- Sindou Peaks (p271) Track down hippos and explore the otherworldly landscape here, near Banfora.
- **Tiébélé** (p272) Get off the beaten track to the colourfully painted fortress houses of the south.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Burkina Faso is at its best from mid-October to December. It can be downright wet between June and September, when the south can be uncomfortably humid and many roads are impassable. From December to February the weather is marginally cooler, although dusty harmattan winds can produce hazy skies in January and February. The hot season is from March to early June.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** With only a week at your disposal, charming Bobo-Dioulasso (p269) is worth at least two days' stay, while the country around Banfora (p271) merits a couple more. Pause for a day in Ouagadougou (p265), an unusually friendly and relaxed capital city with an active nightlife, before heading north for the Thursday market of Gorom-Gorom (p272) for another two days.
- **Two Weeks** With two weeks to spare, plan on spending more time in the southwest; allow at least two extra days exploring around Banfora (p271). Gaoua (p271), in the heart of Lobi country, is also worth a few days. A two-day round trip from Ouagadougou (p265) to the colourful village of Tiébélé (p272) is likewise hugely rewarding.

HISTORY The Mossi & the French

By the 14th century the territory of present-day Burkina Faso was occupied by the Bobo, Lobi, Gourounsi and the Mossi. The Mossi, who now make up almost half of Burkina Faso's

HOW MUCH?

- Ouagadougou-Bobo-Dioulasso bus ride US\$11
- Museum admission US\$1.80
- Guide per day US\$18 to US\$27
- Internet connection (per hour) US\$0.60 to US\$1.40
- 4WD rental (per day) US\$72 plus petrol

LP INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.10
- 1L bottled water US\$0.90
- Bottle of beer US\$1.35
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$9
- Serve of Riz sauce US\$0.90

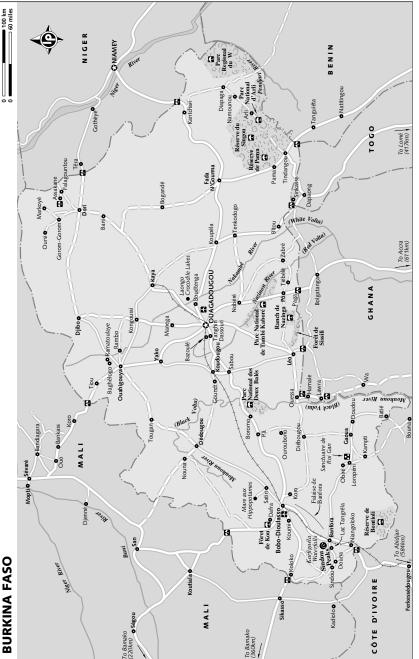
population, founded their first kingdom more than 500 years ago in Ouagadougou. Three more Mossi states ruled over the remainder of the country, known for their devastating attacks against the Muslim empires in Mali.

During the Scramble for Africa in the second half of the 19th century, the French broke up the traditional Mossi states, but French rule in Upper Volta, as Burkina Faso was then known, saw money and resources go elsewhere. By the time that independence came in 1960, Upper Volta was neglected, desperately poor and had become little more than a repository for forced labour.

Thomas Sankara

Maurice Yaméogo, Upper Volta's first president, proved to be an autocratic ruler more adept at consolidating his own power than managing the challenges of the fledgling state. Between 1966 and 1982 Upper Volta suffered a cycle of coups and counter-coups and the country stagnated. In November 1982 Captain Thomas Sankara, an ambitious young leftwing military star, seized power.

Over the next four years 'Thom Sank' (as he was popularly known) recast the country. He changed its name to Burkina Faso (meaning 'Land of the Incorruptible'), restructured the economy to promote self-reliance in rural areas, launched literacy and immunisation drives and tackled corruption with rare zeal.



The economy improved, financial books were kept in good order and people developed a genuine pride in their country. In December 1985 Sankara engaged the country in a fiveday war with Mali, which merely enhanced his appeal among ordinary Burkinabés.

Despite his popularity, in late 1987 a group of junior officers seized power; Sankara was taken outside Ouagadougou and shot.

The Compaoré Years

The new junta was headed by Captain Blaise Compaoré, Sankara's former friend and co-revolutionary, and son-in-law of Côte d'Ivoire's long-standing leader, the late Houphouët-Boigny. In late 1991 Compaoré achieved a modicum of legitimacy when, as sole candidate and on a low turnout, he was elected president. Clément Ouédraogo, the leading opposition figure, was assassinated a couple of weeks later.

In disputed legislative and presidential elec-

tions in 1997 and 1998, the president and his

supporters won more than 85% of the vote.

Since 2000 President Compaoré has been ac-

cused of involvement in the trade of illegal

diamonds, and of meddling in the conflicts in

Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Burkina Faso Today

Burkina Faso remains one of the more stable countries in the region, although rumblings of discontent continue. Street demonstrations in April 2000 forced the government to draft a constitutional amendment that limits presidents to two terms. Arguing that the two-term limit did not apply to terms served before the amendment was passed, and with the opposition divided, President Compaoré won re-election on 13 November 2005 with 80% of the vote.

CULTURE

Burkinabés are a laid-back lot, have a genuine pride in their country and, like so many Africans, often find themselves torn between the modern world and the emotive tug of tradition. Although ethnicity (along with religion) is the bedrock of identity, you'll see little if any antagonism between members of different ethnic groups.

Life for the Burkinabé is as tough as it gets. In 2005 the UN ranked Burkina Faso 175th out of 177 countries across a range of quality-of-life indicators. Almost 50% of the population survives on less than US\$1 a day. Adult literacy stands at 13% and one in every five Burkinabé is malnourished. Just 2% of the government's budget is spent on health. Over one-third of Burkinabés will not live to 40. Thus it is that daily life for Burkinabés is all about survival.

PEOPLE

The largest of Burkina Faso's 60 ethnic groups is the Mossi (48%), who are primarily concentrated in the central plateau area. Important groups in the south include the Bobo (7%), Lobi (7%) and Gourounsi (5%). In the Sahel areas of the north are the Hausa, Fulani (8%), Bella and Tuareg. Some 80% of Burkinabés live in rural areas.

Around 90% of Burkina Faso's population observes either Islam (about 50%) or traditional animist beliefs based on the worship of ancestors and spirits (40%) – although there is often considerable overlap.

ARTS

While each ethnic group in Burkina Faso has its own artistic style, the work of the Mossi, the Bobo and the Lobi are the most famous; in the museums of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, you'll see examples of all three. The tall antelope masks of the Mossi and the butterfly masks of the Bobo are perhaps the most recognisable, but the Lobi are also well known for their figurative sculptures.

Burkina Faso has a thriving film industry, which receives considerable biennial stimulation from the Fespaco film festival held in Ouagadougou (see opposite).

ENVIRONMENT

Landlocked Burkina Faso's terrain ranges from the harsh desert and semidesert of the north, to the woodland and savannah of the green southwest. The country's dominant feature, however, is the vast central laterite plateau of the Sahel, where hardy trees and bushes thrive.

Parc National d'Arli, close to the border with Benin, is home to Burkina Faso's few remaining species of large animals, among them elephants, hippos, warthogs, baboons, monkeys, lions, leopards, crocodiles and various kinds of antelope.

Burkina Faso suffers acutely from deforestation and soil erosion, not to mention drought. Some sources attribute an annual GNP loss as high as 9% to such degradation. Ouagadougou, for example, is surrounded by a 70km stretch of land virtually devoid of trees. Firewood accounts for more than 90% of the country's energy consumption, while commercial logging, slash-and-burn agriculture and animal grazing also take their toll.

FOOD & DRINK

Burkina Faso's culinary tradition has little to mark it out as distinctive from its neighbours. Sauces are the mainstay and are always served with a starch – usually rice or the Burkinabé staple, $t\hat{o}$, a millet- or sorghum-based pâte (a pounded dough-like substance).

Stewed *agouti* (grasscutter, a large rodent that is a whole lot easier to stomach if you don't see its rat-like resemblance) is a prized delicacy, as is *capitaine* (Nile perch). Grilled dishes of chicken and fish are available on seemingly every street corner and are often the cheapest food around. Lunch is the main meal; at night grilled dishes are popular.

Castel, Flag, Brakina and So.b.bra (pronounced so-bay-bra) are popular and palatable lager-type beers. As one Burkinabé said, if you learned to drink beer in Bobo-Dioulasso, you drink Brakina. If it was in Ouaga, then it just has to be So.b.bra.

OUAGADOUGOU

pop 1.09 million

Most travellers end up liking Ouaga (as locals call it). While it could just be that the city's name rolls off the tongue in a wonderfully rhythmical African way, there's no mistaking the fact that, for the capital of the world's third-poorest country, Ouagadougou is surprisingly upbeat, friendly, and home to good hotels, restaurants and nightspots.

ORIENTATION

Take your bearings from the unmistakable globe at the centre of the busy Place des Nations Unies, from where the city's five main boulevards lead. The city centre – where the majority of shops, hotels, restaurants and other services are located – lies west and southwest of this crossroads.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Librairie Diacfa ((2) 50 30 65 47; Rue du l'Hôtel Ville; (2) 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Sells a wide range of magazines and newspapers, including some in English.

Cultural Centres

Centre Culturel Français Georges Mélies (a 50 30 60 97; ccf@fasonet.bf; Ave de la Nation; 9 am-noon & 3-6.15pm Tue-Sat) A full programme of concerts, exhibitions and movies.

Emergency

Commissariat Central (50 30 62 71; Ave Loudun) Police station. Emergency (17, 18)

Internet Access

Cyber K (Ave Dimdolobsom; per hr CFA500; 论 24hr Mon-Fri)

Éspace Internautes (Ave Kwame N'Krumah; per hr CFA750; 🏵 7.30am-4am) Fastest connections in Burkina.

Medical Services

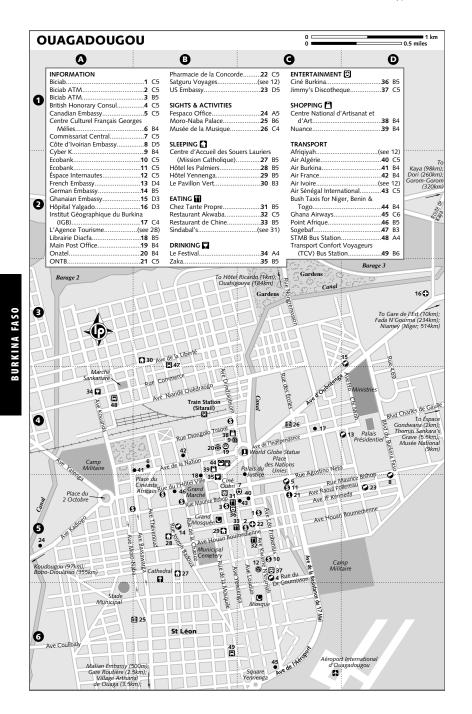
Money

Biciab (1st fl, Ave Kwame N'Krumah) Has an efficient exchange office. ATMs (Visa only) are located here, and on Ave Loudun and Ave Yennenga.

FESPACO

From humble origins in 1969, **Fespaco** (Festival Pan-Africain du Cinema; 🗟 50 39 87 01; www.fespaco.bf; Ave Kadiogo/Route de Bobo, Ouagadougou) has become Africa's most prestigious film festival. Fespaco, held in Ouagadougou every odd year in February/March, sees 20 African films selected to compete for the prestigious Étalon D'Or de Yennenga – Fespaco's equivalent of the Oscar.

Since its early days Fespaco has helped stimulate film production throughout Africa and built on the passion for films among Burkina Faso's film-literate population. It has also become such a major African cultural event that it attracts celebrities from around the world, and Ouagadougou is invariably spruced up for the occasion. Tickets and hotel rooms can be hard to find at this time, so book ahead.



MORO-NABA CEREMONY

Such is the influence of the Moro-Naba of Ouagadougou, the emperor of the Mossi and the most powerful traditional chief in Burkina Faso, that the government will still make a show of consulting him before making any major decision.

The Moro-Naba ceremony, la cérémonie du Nabayius Gou, takes place at 7.15am every Friday. It's a very formal ritual that lasts only about 15 minutes. Prominent Mossis arrive by taxi, car and moped (also known as mobylettes), greet each other and sit on the ground according to rank. The Moro-Naba appears, dressed in red, the symbol for war, accompanied by his saddled and elaborately decorated horse. There's a cannon shot, his most senior subjects approach to give obeisance and His Majesty retires, while his horse is unsaddled and beats the bounds of his palace at a brisk trot.

The Moro-Naba reappears, dressed all in white (a sign of peace) and his servants invite his subjects to the palace for a drink; millet beer for the animists and a Kola nut concoction for Muslims. It's much more than an excuse for an early morning tipple as, within the palace, the Moro-Naba gives audience and hands down his verdict on local disputes and petty crimes. The preceding ritual serves to reinforce the Mossi social order.

To be able to view the ceremony, approach the compound from the east. Bear in mind that it's a traditional ceremony, not something put on for tourists. Photos during the ceremony are not permitted.

Ecobank (cnr Rue Maurice Bishop & Ave de la Résistance du 17 Mai) There's another branch on Ave Kwame N'Krumah.

Post

Main post office (off Ave de la Nation: 1977.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Telephone

Onatel (off Ave de la Nation; 🕑 7am-10pm) Near the main post office; good for international calls.

Tourist Information

ONTB (Office Nationale du Tourisme Burkinabé: 🕿 50 31 19 59; Ave de la Résistance du 17 Mai; 🏵 7am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Travel Agencies

Le Pavillon Vert (2 /fax 31 06 11; pavillonvert@liptinfor .bf; Ave de la Liberté) organises tours at a reasonable price (see p268). Otherwise, try L'Agence Tourisme (25 50 31 84 43; www.agence-tourisme.com; Hôtel les Palmiers, Rue Joseph Badoua).

To purchase airline tickets, go to Satguru **Voyages** (🕿 50 30 16 52; Ave Kwame N'Krumah).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Thanks to a crackdown by police, Ouagadougou is one of the safer cities in the region. Nonetheless, you should try to avoid walking around alone at night, especially along Ave Yennenga, the southern reaches of Rue Joseph Badoua and the Ave Kwame

N'Krumah nightclub strip. Never carry valuables on your person.

SIGHTS

The Musée National (🖻 50 39 19 34; Blvd Charles de Gaulle; admission US\$2; 🕑 9am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sat), almost 10km east of the city centre, has displays of masks, ancestral statues (especially from Lobi country) and traditional costumes of Burkina Faso's major ethnic groups. To get here, take Sotrao bus 1 (US\$0.20) along Ave de la Nation.

The engaging little Musée de la Musique (🖻 50 31 09 27; Ave d'Oubritenga; admission US\$2; 🏵 9am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sat) is also worthwhile.

On Fridays at 7.15am the Moro-Naba of Ouagadougou, emperor of the Mossi and the most powerful traditional chief in Burkina Faso, presides over the Moro-Naba ceremony (la cérémonie du Nabayius Gou) at the Moro-Naba Palace (Ave Moro-Naba), which travellers are welcome to attend.

The grave of the charismatic Thomas Sankara (see p262) is on the depressing and ill-kept eastern outskirts of Ouagadougou, 6km east of the city centre. To get there, charter a taxi for the hour (CFA5000).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The biennial Fespaco (see p265) alternates with the Salon International de l'Artisanat de Ouagadougou (www.siao.bf), which is held in Ouaga in even-numbered years in late October or

early November; the latter attracts artisans and vendors from all over the continent.

SLEEPING

Centre d'Accueil des Soeurs Lauriers (Mission Catholique; a 50 30 64 90; off Rue Joseph Badoua; d US\$7.20) The only budget beds that we recommend for lone women travellers, the Mission Catholique, within the cathedral compound, is simple, spotless and rooms come with a mosquito net, shower and fan.

Hôtel Yennenga (🖻 50 30 73 37; Ave Yennenga; s with fan & shared/private bathroom US\$11.20/13.30, d US\$13/15.15, s/d with private bathroom & air-con US\$20.75/22.60; 💦) Hôtel Yennenga represents top budget value and gets the thumbs-up from travellers. The rooms are simple, well-maintained and all come with mosquito nets. Le Pavillon Vert (() / fax 31 06 11; pavillonvert@liptinfor

yard bar and restaurant are lovely. Hôtel Ricardo (🖻 50 30 70 72; ricardo@cenatrin.bf; North of Barrage 2; s/d US\$55/64; P 🔀 😰) With lovely, leafy grounds, a pleasant pool, a restaurant, disco, quiet location and satellite TV in all rooms - it's not hard to see why the colonial-style Ricardo is popular. The rooms are a touch spartan for the price, but spacious enough.

Hôtel les Palmiers (2 50 33 33 30; hotellespalmiers@ cenatrin.bf; Rue Joseph Badoua; d from US\$54; P 🔀 😰) This place is something special, blending the best of African style with European levels of comfort. The rooms are ranged around a tranquil compound and adorned with local decoration; the more expensive rooms have satellite TV and an internet connection for laptops.

EATING

Sindabal's (Ave Loudun; entrées US\$2-6, sandwiches & hamburgers US\$1.25-3, mains US\$3-7; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Most travellers who come to Ouaga on a budget end up at this low-key place with a varied menu (including spaghetti bolognese and some Lebanese dishes).

Chez Tante Propre (Ave Loudun) A wildly popular hole-in-the-wall that turns out yogurt sandwiches and simple rice dishes. There are plenty of other cheap places in the area.

Restaurant Akwaba (Ave Kwame N'Krumah; entrées US\$3-5, mains US\$5-8; Yelunch & dinner) Friendly service and decent African food are the order of the day. The foutou (sticky yam or plantain paste) is strangely addictive and goes perfectly with the poulet de kedjenou (slowly simmered chicken with peppers and tomatoes, US\$6).

Restaurant de Chine (Ave Houari Boumedienne; mains US\$5.50-11; 🕑 lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Ouaga's best Chinese restaurant promises fine cuts of meat and the freshest of ingredients. Not surprisingly, it's a popular place, especially on weekends when the extensive menu draws the crowds.

Éspace Gondwana (Rue 13-14, off Blvd Onatel; mains mostly US\$6-9; 🕑 6pm-late) Tucked away in eastern Ouaga, this stunning restaurant has three dining rooms richly adorned with masks and traditional furniture. The food is splendid, from the brochette de capitaine, sauce Hollandaise (US\$11) to bite-sized tapas (six for US\$10).

DRINKING

Zaka (drinks from US\$1; (*) noon-1am) In the heart of Ouaga, Zaka is a hybrid live-performance venue and cultural centre, with groups playing traditional or modern music from around 8.30pm. Otherwise it's a pleasant open-air watering hole.

For late-night drinking, one of the liveliest areas is north of the city centre, around Ave de la Liberté. Our favourite is Le Festival (Ave Kouanda).

ENTERTAINMENT

Ciné Burkina (Ave Loudun) Built for Fespaco in the late 1960s, Ciné Burkina has a wide screen and good seats. It regularly shows Africanproduced films, as well as recent international releases and a diet of kung fu and Bollywood hands-in-the-air extravaganzas.

Nightclubs abound along Ave Kwame N'Krumah. Jimmy's Discotheque (Ave Kwame N'Krumah: admission US\$5) is an old favourite, with Western dance music with occasional African rhythms.

SHOPPING

Ouagadougou is an excellent place to shop. Following are good places:

Centre National d'Artisanat et d'Art (🗃 50 30 68 35; Ave Dimdolobsom; 🕑 8am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) Éspace Gondwana (🗃 50 36 11 24; Rue 13-14, off Blvd Onatel: (for 6pm-late)

Nuance (🖻 50 31 72 74; nuancebf@yahoo.fr; Ave Yennenga; (8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun)

Village Artisanal de Ouaga (🖻 50 37 14 83; village .artisanal@cenatrin.bf; Blvd Tengsoba, known as Blvd Circulaire; Y 7am-7pm)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most buses leave from their own private depots, which are dotted around town. Most useful are Transport Confort Voyageurs (TCV; 🖻 50 39 87 77; Rue de la Mosquée), which has services to Bobo-Dioulasso (US\$11, five hours, five daily), and STMB (🖻 50 31 34 34; off Rue Commerce), which has good buses to Bobo-Dioulasso, Dori and Ouahigouya.

Most bush taxis and minibuses leave in the early morning from the gare routière (bus station), 4km south of the city centre.

GETTING AROUND

Sotrao city buses (US\$0.20) run throughout Ouaga with well-marked bus stops along major routes.

Shared taxis, mostly beaten-up old green Renaults, cost US\$4.50 for a ride within the city. The basic rate for a private taxi (orange or green), which you commission just for yourself, is US\$0.90 - more for longer journeys.

SOUTHERN BURKINA FASO

BOROMO

Halfway between Ouagadougou and Bobo, Boromo serves as the gateway to the Parc National des Deux Balés. Although the main section of the park is some distance from town, there are several areas close to Boromo that are great places to see elephants. On the road to the national park, 7km from Boromo, is the well-run Campement Le Kaicedra (2 76 62 17 78; http://kaicedra. waika9.com/camp.htm; 2-/4-bed bungalow US\$32/40, meals US\$10). Accommodation is in bungalows by the river, where elephants come to drink. The staff can arrange guides (US\$4), three-hour 4WD elephant safaris (US\$60 per 4WD) or pirogue (traditional canoe) trips (US\$2). They may even pick you up from the bus station in Boromo if you ask politely.

BOBO-DIOULASSO

pop 360,106

Bobo, as it's widely known, may be Burkina Faso's second-largest city, but it has a smalltown charm and its quiet tree-lined streets

exude a languid, semitropical atmosphere that makes it a favourite rest stop for travellers. It has a thriving market, a fine mosque and a small popular quarter, Kibidwe, which is fascinating to roam around. There's also a lively music scene.

Information

Centre Culturel Français Henri Matisse (🗃 20 97 39 79; cnr Ave Général de Gaulle & Ave de la Concorde; 9am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) A monthly programme of concerts and exhibitions. Emergency (🖻 17, 18) Intelec Cyber Café (Ave Ouédraogo; per hr CFA300; 8am-midnight) Librairie Diacfa (🖻 20 97 10 19; Rue Joffre; 🕅 8am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

Sights

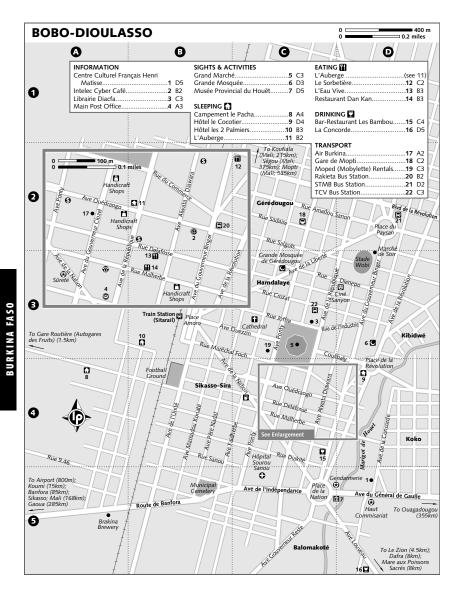
Bobo's Grande Mosquée (admission to grounds CFA1000), built in 1893, is an outstanding example of Sahel-style mud architecture and is easily Bobo's stand-out sight. Although entry is forbidden for non-Muslims, it's the exterior that is so captivating, especially at sunset when the façade turns golden. A powerful sense of community life revolves around the mosque and much of it comes from **Kibidwe**, the old-est part of the city that straddles the river. Roba-Dioulasso's centrepiece the expansive Bobo-Dioulasso's centrepiece, the expansive Grand Marché, is Burkina's most atmospheric market.

The small but interesting Musée Provincial du Houët (Place de la Nation; admission US\$2; 🕑 9am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sat) showcases masks, statues and ceremonial dress from all over Burkina Faso, and there are full-scale examples of traditional buildings in the grounds.

Sleeping

Campement le Pacha (20 98 09 54; lepachabo@yahoo .fr; Rue Malherbe; camping per person/moto/car/campervan US\$3/3/4/6, s/d from US\$8/16; P 🕄) The Franco Swiss-owned Campement le Pacha is arrayed around one of Bobo's prettiest courtyards, with a veritable forest of palms and potted plants. The rooms are among the nicest budget beds in Burkina Faso.

Le Zion (🕿 78 86 27 25; cbodelet@voila.fr; r US\$6-11) Some 5km south of the town centre, Le Zion offers simple, comfy rooms, live music, a shady mango tree, home-cooked meals, mobylette (moped) rental, an artisan's workshop, loads of advice on the surrounding area and a wonderfully chilled ambience. It can be difficult



to find, so call and staff will pick you up from the city centre.

Hôtel le Cocotier (🕿 70759009: Place de la Revolution: d with fan & without bathroom from US\$9) This is Bobo's best budget hotel in the city centre, with a good mix of bare but tidy rooms (all with mosquito nets), friendly staff and a rooftop bar-terrace.

L'Auberge (20 97 17 67; hoberge@fasonet.bf; Ave Ouédraogo; s/d/ste US\$52/56/86; 😰 🗩) Bobo's best hotel, L'Auberge is a well-run place with large, comfortable rooms, many of which have balconies overlooking the good-sized pool and fragrant, palm-filled garden.

Hôtel les 2 Palmiers (🖻 20 97 27 59; fax 20 97 76 45; off Rue Malherbe; d from US\$58; (P) 🔀) This fine hotel has traditional masks in all the public spaces and the rooms are spacious, nicely decorated and quiet. The location is better than it looks on the map - an easy walk into town but on a nice quiet street.

Eating

Restaurant Dan Kan (Rue Malherbe; entrées & soups US\$1.50-3, mains US\$1-5; 🕑 8.30am-3.30pm & 6-10.30pm) With agreeable outdoor (but covered) tables, very reasonable prices and a varied menu, Restaurant Dan Kan is an excellent deal. It's kept spotlessly clean and service is attentive.

L'Eau Vive (Rue Delafosse; mains US\$4-8; 🕅 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Run by nuns, L'Eau Vive offers imaginative French cooking and a varied menu. Main dishes come with potatoes or vegetables, and the dining area offers a star-filled canopy of the night sky.

L'Auberge (🗟 20 97 17 67; Ave Ouédraogo; 3-course menu US\$10; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Far and away the best restaurant, with everything from sardine salads to crêpes and flourishes like fresh basil and a garlic-and-chive butter to accompany your entrecôte. If you've been on the road for a while, it will all taste like paradise.

La Sorbetière (Ave du Gouverneur Binger; 🕑 8am-10pm) Try this place for pastries and snacks.

Drinking & Entertainment

The popular quarter of Balomakoté, which is rich in traditional music, offers great music in small, unpretentious buvettes (small cafés that double up as drinking places), where you can drink chopolo, the local millet-based beer. Elsewhere, bars we like for a drink include Bar-Restaurant Les Bambou (Ave du Gouverneur Binger; admission US\$1.10; 🕑 6am-2.30pm & 6pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 6pm-midnight Sun) and La Concorde (Ave Louveau).

Getting There & Away

The bus companies STMB (20 97 08 78; Blvd de la Révolution) and **TCV** (2097 23 37; Rue Crozat) have the best buses to Ouagadougou (US\$11, five hours), with five daily departures each. For getting around the southwest, Rakieta (2097 1891; Ave Ouédraogo) is a good local company that has regular departures to Banfora (US\$4, 11/2 hours, 10 daily) and Gaoua (US\$7.50, around five hours, two daily).

Getting Around

To hire a bicycle, ask at your hotel or around the market. A reasonable rental price is US\$3.75 per day. For a mobylette, expect to

pay at least US\$7.50 per day, and US\$11 for a motorbike.

Shared taxis are plentiful and most trips within town cost US\$0.40 to US\$0.55. Prices increase after 10pm and luggage costs extra.

BANFORA pop 60,288

Banfora is a dusty, sleepy little town in one of the more beautiful areas in Burkina Faso. As such, it serves as a good base for exploring the lush green surrounding countryside.

For the nicest beds in town, look no further than Hôtel la Canne à Sucre (🖻 20 91 01 07; hotelcannasucre@fasonet.bf; off Rue de la Poste; d with aircon US\$34, 4-bed apt US\$89; 🔀 🔊), an unexpected touch of class in Banfora with immaculate rooms and a super restaurant. The next best alternative is Hôtel le Comoé (🖻 2091 01 51; Rue de la Poste; d from US\$13; 🔀).

Banfora's other stand-out restaurant is McDonald (off Rue de la Préfecture; entrées US\$1-2, mains mostly US\$1-4; 🕑 7am-10pm Thu-Tue, 7am-1pm Wed), with enormous servings of brochettes (kebabs), fish, pasta and hamburgers.

Rakieta (20 91 03 07; Rue de la Poste) has regular departures for Bobo-Dioulasso (one way/ return US\$2/4, 1½ hours, 10 daily) and Gaoua (US\$6, 3½ hours, two daily). **STMB** (@ 209105 81; Rue de la Poste) also leaves five times daily for Bobo-Dioulasso.

AROUND BANFORA

Just 7km west of Banfora, Lac Tengréla (admission US\$4) is home to a variety of birdlife and, if you're lucky, hippos. The admission price includes a pirogue trip.

Some 15km northwest of Banfora, Karfiguéla Waterfalls (Cascades de Karfiguéla; admission US\$2) are reached through a magnificent avenue of mango trees.

The Sindou Peaks (Pics de Sindou; admission US\$2) are a narrow, stunningly craggy chain that extends northwest from Banfora. The tortuous cones of these structures, sculpted and blasted by the elements, were left behind when the surrounding softer rocks eroded away. This area is ideal for a short steep stroll, a day hike or even a couple of days' trekking, for which you'll need to be self-sufficient.

GAOUA

Gaoua is a good base for exploring Lobi country, a region that's culturally distinct from the rest of the country. There's a vital

Sunday market and, if you like your music traditional and untainted, Gaoua has plenty of great boîtes (informal nightclubs) with live music. There's also the small Musée de Poni (a 20 87 01 69; admission US\$2) devoted to Lobi culture.

Hôtel Hala (20 87 01 21; d from US\$18) is the town's only habitable hotel and, thankfully, it's a reasonable if unexciting place. It also serves excellent Lebanese fare. It's just outside of town on the road to Banfora.

Rakieta (2087 02 18) has a twice-daily service to Bobo-Dioulasso (US\$8, five hours) via Banfora (US\$6, 3½ hours).

TIÉBÉLÉ

Tiébélé, 40km east of Pô via a dirt track, is a wonderful detour if you're travelling up from Ghana, but it's also well worth visiting from Ouagadougou. Set in the heart of the green, low-lying Gourounsi country, Tiébélé is famous for its colourful and fortress-like windowless traditional houses. Once a Gourounsi capital, Tiébélé has an exceptional chief's compound (admission US\$3), as well as other beautiful structures throughout the town. Auberge Kunkolo (🖻 50 36 97 38, 76 53 44 77; dm US\$8,

From Ouagadougou, STMB has five daily buses to Pô (US\$4, three hours).

NORTHERN BURKINA FASO

DORI

pop 27,380

Dori is dusty and has few charms of its own, other than as a quintessentially somnambulant and dusty Sahel town - most people come here only as a means of reaching Gorom-Gorom, two hours further north. If you do stay long enough to visit the market, one speciality is the prized Dori blankets, woven from wool provided by the seminomadic pastoralists who camp around the town.

Hérbergement de Dori (d US\$15; 🔀) offers simple campement (guesthouse) accommodation at the eastern end of town. In the centre of town, Auberge Populaire (Chez Tanti Véronique; d with/ without shower US\$8.50/7) is cheap, basic and noisy. You can eat simply at Café la Joie de Vivre (riz gras US\$0.50, spaghetti US\$7).

Numerous bus companies run between Dori and Ouagadougou (US\$9, five to seven hours). STMB (a 40 66 98 67) is generally the best. For Gorom-Gorom, it's shake, rattle and roll on a rough track all the way. Bush taxis (US\$4, two hours) are plentiful on market day; most pull out by 8am.

GOROM-GOROM pop 6840

Gorom-Gorom's Thursday market is the most colourful in Burkina Faso, and one of the best in all West Africa. Its charm lies in the fact that it's an authentic local market, drawing traders - Tuareg, Bella, Songhaï and Fulani among others - from all around the surrounding countryside. As such, tourists are simply part of the menagerie. The market gets into full swing by about 11am.

Upon entering the town, you have to register at the commissariat (police station) and pay a 'tourist tax' of US\$2.

The best place to stay and eat is Le Campement Rissa (🖻 40 46 93 96; r from US\$7.50), a simple, family-run campement, where you can organise trips into the surrounding desert.

On market day, Sogebaf, CTI and ZSR buses depart from Gorom-Gorom soon after 2pm bound for Ouagadougou (US\$11, eight hours). Bush taxis head back to Dori (US\$4, two hours) around 7pm after the market's all said and done.

OUAHIGOUYA pop 61.096

Most people stay in Ouahigouya (waee-geeya), 182km northwest of Ouagadougou by sealed road, only long enough to find onward transport to Mali.

A short walk northeast from Ouahigouya's market, the expansive but modest Maison du Naba Kango dates back to the days of the Yatengo kingdom, a pre-colonial rival of the principal Mossi kingdom, centred in Ouagadougou.

Hôtel Dunia (🕿 40 55 05 95; Rue de Paris; s/d with fan US\$11/15, d with air-con from US\$27; 🔀) is a wonderfully homey place to stay and the cooking is easily the best in town. In the evening you can get grilled chicken and brochettes at Caïman Bar & Restaurant.

There are almost hourly departures to Ouagadougou (US\$6, two to three hours), but only STMB ((40 55 00 59) has buses (six daily) that you can be sure will not break down. For details of getting to Mali, see p275.

BURKINA FASO DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso and, to a lesser extent, Banfora and Ouahigouya have excellent accommodation. Elsewhere, choice is extremely limited.

Expect to pay US\$6 to US\$7.50 for a bed in a dorm, while singles/doubles in a decent cheapie cost US\$6/9 to US\$15/18. Midrange hotels, where you'll get a private bathroom and TV, cost US\$18/22 for a single/double to US\$60/72. In Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso you pay a *taxe de séjour*, also known as a taxe communale, at each place you stay, a once-off payment of US\$1 per person.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks open from 7am to 11am and 3.30pm to 5pm Monday to Friday; Ecobank is open 7.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and 8am to noon Saturday. Bars are open from noon until late, and nightclubs from 9pm until late. Restaurants open from 11.30am to 3pm and 6.30pm to 10.30pm. Shops open from 7.30am to noon and 3pm to 5.30pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 1pm Saturday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Burkina Faso is one of the safest countries in West Africa. Crime isn't unknown, particularly around big markets, cinemas and gares routières, but it's usually confined to petty theft and pickpocketing.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Burkina Faso Embassies & Consulates

In West Africa, Burkina Faso has embassies in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria. For more details, see the Directory section for each relevant country chapter. Following are embassies further afield:

Belgium (2 02-345 99 12; www.ambassadeduburkina.be; 16 Place Guy-d'Arezzo, Brussels 1180)

Canada (🖻 613-238 4796; www.burkinafaso.ca; 48, Chemin Range, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8J4)

France (🖻 01 43 59 90 63; www.ambaburkinafrance.org; 159 Blvd Haussmann, 75008 Paris)

Germany (🗃 030-301 05 990; Karolingerplatz 10-11, 14052 Berlin)

USA (a 202-332 5577; www.burkinaembassy-usa.org; 2340 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

PRACTICALITIES

- Electricity supply is 220V and plugs are of the European two-round-pin variety.
- International versions of French- and (a few) English-language publications are available in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso.
- BBC World Service (www.bbc.co.uk /worldservice) is on 99.2 FM in Ouagadougou. For French-language FM services, tune in to Horizon FM (104.4) and RFI (94).
- Burkina Faso uses the metric system.

Embassies & Consulates in Burkina Faso

For details of getting visas for neighbouring countries, see p274. Embassies and consulates in Ouagadougou include the following: Canada (🖻 50 31 18 94; ouaga@dfait-maeci.gc.ca; 586 Rue Agostino Neto) Represents Australia in consular matters. Côte d'Ivoire (🕿 50 31 82 28; cnr Ave Raoul Follereau &

Blvd du Burkina Faso)

France (🖻 50 30 67 74; www.ambafrance-bf.org; Ave de l'Indépendance)

Germany (2 67 30 67 31; amb.allemagne@fasonet.bf; Rue Joseph Badoua)

Ghana (🕿 50 30 76 35; Ave d'Oubritenga) Opposite the Unesco office.

Mali (🖻 50 38 19 22; 2569 Ave Bassawarga) Just south of Ave de la Résistance.

UK (🕿 50 30 73 23; fax 50 30 59 00; Hôtel Yibi, cnr Ave Kwame N'Krumah & Rue du Dr Gournisson) British honorary consul.

USA (🖻 50 30 67 23; www.ouagadougou.usembassy.gov; 622 Ave Raoul Follereau)

There was no Niger embassy or consulate in Burkina Faso at the time of writing.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

For details of the festivals held in Ouagadougou, see p267. In March/April of even years, Bobo hosts the Semaine Nationale de la Culture (www.snc.gov.bf), a week of music, dance and theatre.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January Women's Day 8 March Good Friday & Easter Monday March/April Labour Day 1 May Ascension Day 4 to 5 August Anniversary of Sankara's Overthrow 15 October All Saints Day 1 November Christmas Day 25 December

Burkina Faso also celebrates Islamic holidays, which change each year. See p1106 for details of Islamic holidays.

INTERNET ACCESS

Far and away the best connections are in Ouagadougou (p265), where you'll pay US\$0.60 to US\$1.40 per hour. In Bobo, they're painfully slow, while elsewhere they often charge by the minute.

MAPS

MONEY

Burkina Faso (1:1,000,000), a map published by the French-based Institut Géographique National (IGN), is the most widely available. It's available at the Institut Geographique du Burkina (IGB; 🖻 50 32 48 23; Ave de l'Indépendance) in Ouagadougou. IGB and Librairie Diacfa in Ouagadougou sell detailed city maps (US\$11) for Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso.

The unit of currency in Burkina Faso is the West African CFA franc.

Banks that will change money (usually euros in cash only) with a minimum of fuss include Banque Internationale du Burkina (BIB), Ecobank and Banque Internationale pour le Commerce, l'Industrie et l'Agriculture du Burkina (Biciab).

Biciab's ATMs in larger cities issue easy cash advances against Visa (but not Master-Card), although transaction fees are prohibitive; take out as much as the machine lets you each time.

TELEPHONE & FAX

You can make international phone calls at Onatel offices from 7am to 10pm daily. A three-minute call costs US\$4.80 (US\$1.50 for each additional minute) to Europe or the USA, and US\$7.50 (US\$2.30 for each additional minute) to Australia. The only place where you may be able to make internet-connected calls is at **Éspace Internautes** (Ave Kwame N'Krumah; (7.30am-4am) in Ouagadougou.

The main post office (fax 50 33 81 30; off Ave de la Nation; (> 7.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) in Ouagadougou has a fax restante service.

Most mobile phones from European countries work in Burkina Faso; local SIM cards cost from US\$36. Local mobile companies include Telemob, Celtel or Telecel.

lonelyplanet.com

VISAS

Everyone except Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) nationals needs a visa. You can buy a tourist visa at Ouagadougou's airport, Aéroport International d'Ouagadougou, for US\$18 (paid in local currency; there's an exchange booth at the airport). Travellers also report that visas are issued at Burkina Faso's land borders for the same price, although they're invariably issued on the spot.

Burkina Faso embassies usually require at least two photos, may ask for proof of yellow fever vaccination and charge US\$45 to US\$75. In countries where there is no Burkina Faso embassy, French embassies sometimes issue 10-day visas on their behalf.

Visas for Onward Travel

Benin, Niger and Togo do not have embassies in Burkina Faso. If you just want to slip over the border to Benin, you can get a 48-hour visa at the border post for US\$18.

Visas for the following neighbouring countries can be obtained in Burkina Faso. See p273 for embassy information.

Côte d'Ivoire Single-entry, 30-day visa (US\$18) requires two photos.

Ghana One-month visa (US\$27) is issued within 24 hours and requires four photos.

Mali One-month visa (US\$36) is issued within the hour.

TRANSPORT IN BURKINA FASO

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

The country's two international airports are Aéroport International d'Ouagadougou and Aéroport International Borgo (Bobo-Dioulasso). The following airlines have offices in Ouagadougou:

Afrigiyah (8U; 🖻 50 30 16 52; www.afrigiyah.aero) Air Algérie (AH; 🖻 50 31 23 01; www.airalgerie.dz) Air Burkina (2J; 🖻 50 30 76 76; www.air-burkina.com) Air France (AF; 🗃 50 30 63 65; www.airfrance.com) Air Ivoire (VU; 🕿 50 30 11 95; www.airivoire.com) Air Sénégal International (V7; 🖻 50 31 39 05; www .air-senegal-international.com)

Ghana Airways (GH; 🖻 50 30 41 46; www.ghana-airways

Point Afrique (🗃 50 33 16 20; www.point-afrique.com)

Land

The main border crossings are at Niangoloko for Côte d'Ivoire; Porga (on the Beninese side) for Benin; 15km south of Pô or Hamale (on the Ghanian side) for Ghana; Sinkasse (on the Togolese side) for Togo; east of Kantchari for Niger; and Koloko or west of Tiou for Mali. Borders tend to be closed by 5.30pm or 6.30pm at the latest. Remember that Benin and Niger are one hour ahead of Burkina Faso time.

BENIN

A TCV bus runs every Sunday from Ouagadougou to Cotonou (ÚS\$36). The alternative is to take a bus (eg STMB) to Fada N'Gourma (US\$7, five hours), from where infrequent bush taxis and minibuses lie in wait. Minibuses leave for Natitingou from the Total petrol station immediately north of Zaka on Ave Yennenga in Ouagadougou.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Passenger train services were suspended at the time of writing, cross-border traffic was minimal and the border frequently closed.

GHANA

A Ghanaian Intercity STC bus leaves Ouagadougou's main gare routière three mornings a week bound for Accra (US\$29, 1000km) via Tamale (US\$20, 363km) and Kumasi (US\$23, 720km). Purchase tickets a day in advance.

STMB has five daily buses from Ouagadougou to Pô (US\$4, three hours), 15km from the border, from where there's infrequent transport to Paga (US\$3) and on to Bolgatanga in Ghana (US\$2.50).

The other frequently used border crossing is at Hamale in the southwest of Burkina Faso. Rakieta has a daily bus between Bobo-Dioulasso and Hamale (US\$11.20), departing from Bobo at 2.30pm.

MALI

Almost every bus company offers a daily service to Bamako from Bobo-Dioulasso (US\$16.50, 15 hours), leaving Bobo at 1pm or Ouagadougou (US\$27) at 8am. All travel via Sikasso and Segou and arrive after midnight.

If you're heading from Bobo-Dioulasso to Mopti, Peugeot taxis (US\$17, 15 hours) leave from Bobo's Gare de Mopti from about 7am or in the early evening.

If you're heading for Dogon country, STMB buses depart from Ouahigouya for Koro (US\$4.50, two to four hours). From Koro you'll need to connect by bush taxi to Bankass and then Mopti.

NIGER

The Niger-registered SNTV bus runs between Ouagadougou and Niamey (US\$18, nine to 11 hours) a couple of times a week from the gare routière. Minibuses from Ouagadougou to Niamey (US\$14.60, 10 to 12 hours) leave from the Total petrol station immediately north of Zaka in Ouagadougou.

TOGO

Sogebaf has a daily service between Ouagadougou and Lomé (US\$23 to US\$27, 18 hours), while at least three Togolese companies offer a similar service from Ouagadougou's gare routière.

There are direct bush taxis from Ouaga-dougou's *gare routière* to Lomé (US\$27, 24 to 36 hours), but consider breaking up the journey en route. Minibuses to the Togolese border often leave in the morning from the Total petrol station immediately north of Zaka in Ouagadougou.

GETTING AROUND Air

Air Burkina has at least three flights a week between Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso (US\$64).

Bus

Buses are the most reliable and comfortable way to get around. STMB buses are generally better maintained and more reliable than the host of private companies tormenting Burkina's roads. TGV is the exception, with the best buses, but it only travels between Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. Buses almost always operate with guaranteed seating and fixed departure times.

Bush Taxi & Minibus

Bush taxis and minibuses, mostly ageing Peugeot 504s, cover major towns, and outlying communities that large buses don't serve. Most leave from the gares routières, and morning is the best time to find them. Minibuses are usually a third cheaper than Peugeot taxis, but can take an age to fill up.

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Cameroon

Cameroon's tourist industry is a victim of geography. It sits in a tough neighbourhood, bordered by some problematic countries. But this shouldn't put you off, as Cameroon really has just about everything a traveller could want. One of the most culturally diverse countries on the continent, its people include ancient tribal kingdoms, Muslim pastoralists and forest-dwelling pygmies.

The landscape is no less dizzying in its diversity. Mt Cameroon (4095m) is the highest peak in West Africa and attracts plenty of trekking interest. A still-active volcano, it rises almost straight from the sea in a spectacular manner. Further north are the rolling grassfields of the Ring Road area, while the Mandara Mountains are a complete contrast again – dry and rocky, with isolated villages eking out a living. Fringing all of this are some of Africa's oldest rainforests, and the excellent Parc National de Waza, with abundant mammal and birdlife, and large herds of elephants gathering at water holes in the dry season.

If all this exhausts you, you can retire to some fine palm-fringed beaches and fantastic seafood, which should help to recharge your batteries. Throw in a cold beer or two, some lively home-grown *makossa* music and the Indomitable Lions of the national football team, and you'll be revelling in your discovery.

FAST FACTS

- Area 469,440 sq km (a little smaller than Spain, a little bigger than California)
- ATMs At banks in large cities, linked to Visa

- Borders Nigeria, Chad, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central Africa Republic (CAR) all open; borders with Democratic Republic of Congo sometime closed, check in advance
- Budget US\$40 per day
- Capital Yaoundé
- Languages French, English and many local languages
- Money Central African CFA; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 16.4 million
- Seasons Hot year-round; north: wet (April to September); south: heavy rain (June to October)
- Telephone Country code 🖻 237, international access code 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC +1
- **Visas** Required by all, available in neighbouring countries for US\$60

HIGHLIGHTS

- Mount Cameroon (p288) Don your hiking boots to climb the mist-shrouded slopes of West Africa's highest peak.
- **Kribi** (p293) Chill on the white beaches and practise your French with the locals over grilled fish.
- Ring Road (p291) Explore the cool green scenery and rolling countryside near Bamenda.
- Mandara Mountains (p298) Head into the remote landscape and trek from village to village.
- **Parc National de Waza** (p298) Watch elephants at the water holes of one of the region's best national parks.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The north has rains from April/May to September/October. The hottest months are March to May, when temperatures can soar to 40°C, although it's a dry heat. The south has a humid, equatorial climate, with rain scattered throughout the year. The main wet season there is June to October, with light rain from March to June. Throughout Cameroon, November to February are the driest months.

The best months to visit are November to February, although you'll have harmattan haze during much of this time. The worst months are July to October, when it's raining almost everywhere, and many roads impassable.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Starting from either Douala (p284) or Yaoundé (p280), go to Limbe (p288) for a night or two to get your bearings before climbing Mt Cameroon (p288). Alternatively leave the cities for Foumban (p292) or Bamenda (p289) and then head to the open country of the Ring Road area (p291). Finish back in Douala or Yaoundé.
- Two to Three Weeks Spend the first week exploring the Ring Road area (p291) and visiting Foumban (p292). Then head to Yaoundé (p280), fly north to Maroua (p296) and venture into the Mandara Mountains (p298) for a few days trekking. With more time, you could go from Yaoundé to N'Gaoundéré (p294) by train, and from there make your way north by road to Maroua.
- **One Month** Start with a night or two in Limbe (p288), followed by a climb of Mt

HOW MUCH?

- Ingredients for juju fetish US\$1
- 100km bus ride US\$1.60
- Moto-taxi ride across town US\$0.20
- Bottle of palm wine US\$2
- Carved mask US\$30

LP INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.60
- 1.5L of bottled water US\$0.90
- Bottle of '33' beer US\$1.20
- Souvenir football shirt US\$6.80
- Stick of brochettes US\$0.20

Cameroon (p288) before making your way up to Bamenda (p289) and the Ring Road area (p291). Cross to Foumban (p292), and from here make your way to Yaoundé (p280) before taking the train to N'Gaoundéré (p294). Spend the remainder of your time exploring northern Cameroon (p294).

HISTORY

Cameroon is another example of colonial powers creating a country without regard for tribal boundaries or geography. The parts of what is now Cameroon were divided and ceded between European countries throughout the colonial era until the modern boundaries were established in 1961, creating a part-Anglophone, part-Francophone nation.

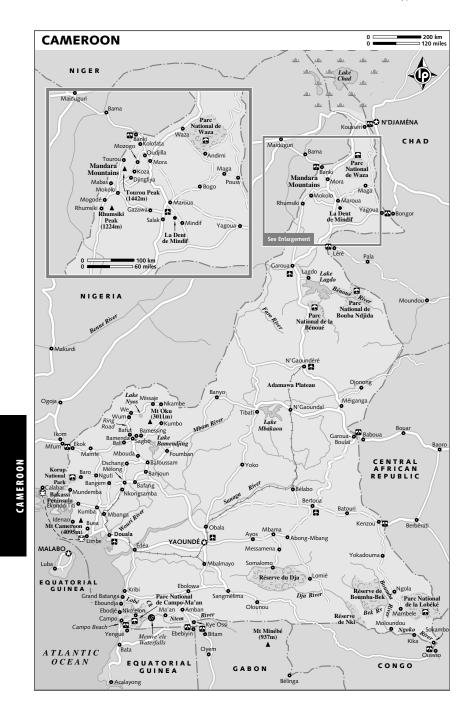
CAMEROON

Prawns for Starters

Portuguese explorers first sailed up the Wouri River in 1472, and named it Rio dos Camarões (River of Prawns). Soon after the Portuguese arrived by sea, Fulani pastoral nomads from what is now Nigeria began to migrate overland from the north, forcing the indigenous forest peoples southwards. The Fulani migration took on added urgency in the early 17th century as they fled the increasingly predatory attentions of Dutch, Portuguese and British slave-traders.

British influence was curtailed in 1884 when Germany signed a treaty with the well-organised chiefdoms of Douala and central Bamiléké Plateau, although for the





local inhabitants the agreement meant little more than a shift from one form of colonial exploitation to another. After WWI the German protectorate of Kamerun was carved up between France and Great Britain.

Local revolts in French-controlled Cameroon in the 1950s were brutally suppressed, but the momentum throughout Africa for throwing off the shackles of colonial rule soon took hold. Self-government was granted in French Cameroon in 1958, quickly followed by independence on 1 January 1960.

Wily Ahidjo

Ahmadou Ahidjo, leader of one of the independence parties, became president of the newly independent state, a position he was to hold until his resignation in 1982. Ahidjo, a man with a total lack of charisma, ensured his longevity through the cultivation of expedient alliances, brutal repression and wily if authoritarian regional favouritism.

In October 1961 a UN-sponsored referendum in British-mandated northwestern Cameroon ended up splitting it in two, with the area around Bamenda opting to join the federal state of Cameroon and the remainder joining Nigeria. In June 1972 the federal structure of two Cameroons was replaced by the centralised United Republic of Cameroon – a move that is bitterly resented to this day by Anglophone Cameroonians, who believe that instead of entering a true union they have become second-class citizens.

The Biya Era

In 1982 Ahidjo's hand-picked successor, Paul Biya, distanced himself from his former mentor, but adopted many of Ahidjo's repressive measures, clamping down hard on calls for multiparty democracy. Diversions such as the national soccer team's stunning performance in the 1990 World Cup bought him time. But the demands for freedom would not go away and Biya was forced to legalise 25 opposition parties. When it became apparent that plurality placed limitations upon the president, these parties were quickly, though temporarily, suspended, along with the constitution.

The first multiparty elections in 25 years were grudgingly held in 1992 and saw the Cameroonian Democratic People's Movement – led by Biya – hanging on to power with the support of minority parties. International observers alleged widespread vote-rigging and intimidation – allegations repeated in elections in 1999 and, most recently, in 2004.

Cameroon Today

The international anticorruption organisation, Transparency International, consistently ranks Cameroon among the world's most corrupt countries. This phenomenon affects every aspect of daily life, from dealings with petty government officials to the rampant destruction of the country's rainforests by logging interests and kickbacks from the recently completed oil pipeline from Chad to Kribi. Until this malaise is seriously addressed and genuine political openness is permitted, Cameroon will continue to limp along for the foreseeable future.

CULTURE

Traditional social structures dominate life. Local chiefs (known as *fon* in the west, or *lamido* in the north) still wield considerable influence, and when travelling in places that don't receive many tourists, it's polite to announce your presence. You'll also need to get the chief's permission to enter tribal lands, including various mountains and crater lakes. In many cases, a small gift is expected – a bottle of whisky is common currency.

There's a distinct cultural and political gap between the Francophone and Anglophone parts of Cameroon, albeit one felt predominantly by the Anglophone minority. The country is far from being truly bilingual, and Anglophones complain of discrimination in education (most universities lecture in French only) and in the workplace.

PEOPLE

Cameroon is home to around 280 distinct ethnolinguistic groups. Most Cameroonians are involved in agriculture, and the country is a major regional exporter of food, as well as being the seaport for Chad and Central African Republic (CAR). While Cameroonians may have a reputation as hustlers, it's a skill they often need to navigate a faltering economy and corrupt bureaucracy.

ARTS

Cameroon has produced a few of the region's most celebrated artists. In literature, Mongo Beti deals with the legacies of colonialism. Musically, Manu Dibango is the country's brightest star.

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BEER MONEY

If there's one thing Cameroonians love as much as football, it's drinking beer. Breweries recently tried luring punters with free prizes hidden under the tops of beer bottles. Cars, phones or just more free booze were all on offer. So many promotional bottle tops were produced in 2006 that for a short time the tops became an unofficial form of currency – the value of a free beer being roughly equivalent to a taxi fare. Even the traffic police got in on the game, accepting bottle tops instead of the usual bribes for minor infractions.

Woodcarving makes up a significant proportion of traditional arts and crafts. The northwestern highlands area is known for its carved masks. These often are representations of animals, and it's often believed that the wearer of the mask can transform themselves and take on the animal's characteristics and powers. Cameroon also has some highly detailed bronze- and brass-work, particularly in Tikar areas north and east of Foumban. The areas around Bali and Bamessing (both near Bamenda), and Foumban, are rich in highquality clay, and some of Cameroon's finest ceramic work originates here.

SPORT

Cameroon exploded onto the world's sporting consciousness at the 1990 World Cup when the national football team, the Indomitable Lions, became the first African side to reach the quarterfinals. Football is truly the national obsession. Every other Cameroonian male seems to own a copy of the team's strip, and go into any bar and there'll be a match playing on the TV. When Cameroon narrowly failed to qualify for the 2006 World Cup, the country's grief was almost tangible. Nevertheless, the Lions hold a proud record in the continent-wide Cup of Nations, winning the trophy four times – most recently in 2002.

The land, like its people, contains many different elements thrown together by colonial-era boundaries. The south is deep rainforest in a low coastal plain. In the centre of the country the jungle gives way to a sparsely populated savannah. The north and extreme north are close to the Sahel, with arid, sandy conditions all the way up to Lake Chad. Mountains run up the west of the country, from Mt Cameroon near the Atlantic coast to the Bamenda Highlands and further to the Mandara Mountains in the north.

Cameroon has abundant wildlife, though it is threatened by habitat encroachment and poaching for the bushmeat trade. In the south there are gorillas, chimpanzees, forest elephants and a variety of rare Central African species, but they're almost impossible to see in the dense forest. In the scrublands up north the animals are much easier to find. Your best bet for wildlife-viewing is Parc National de Waza in the far north of the country. Many other national parks are being established and made accessible to visitors in the hope of developing an ecotourism industry while protecting endangered habitats.

FOOD & DRINK

Cameroon has a wide cuisine. The staple dish is some variety of peppery sauce served up with a plate of heavy starch. This is usually rice or fufu – mashed yam, corn, plantain or couscous. One of the most popular sauces is *ndole*, made with bitter leaves similar to spinach and flavoured with smoked fish.

Grilled meat and fish are eaten in huge quantities, along with plenty of fruit.

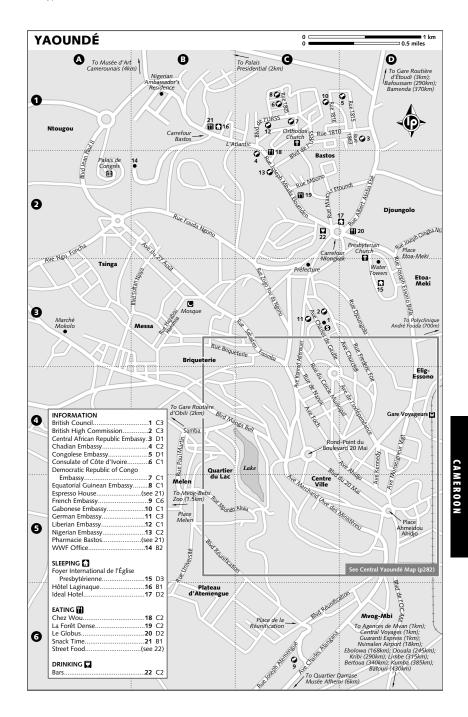
YAOUNDÉ

pop 1.1 million

Yaoundé is unique among West African capitals for its green and hilly setting. Set at an altitude of 750m, this gives the city a slightly more pleasant air than sweaty Douala. If its rival to the west is livelier, Yaoundé is better placed for travellers – anyone heading from north to south will pass through, and it's a good place to pick up onward visas, rest from the road and charge your batteries.

ORIENTATION

Its hilly geography means that Yaoundé's street plan has evolved without any discernible pattern, and it can take a while to get your bearings. The focal point of the lower-lying Centre Ville is Place Ahmadou Ahidjo. From here, Blvd du 20 Mai runs northwest to the landmark Hilton hotel and the administrative district (Quartier du Lac). North from here,



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the road winds uphill to Carrefour Nlongkak, a major intersection. About 1.5km further up is Carrefour Bastos and the upscale Bastos residential quarter, where many embassies are located as well as some good restaurants.

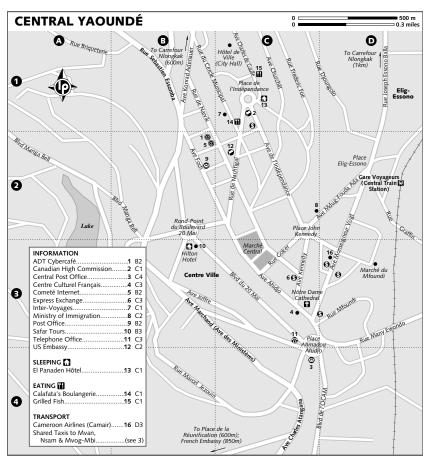
Buses from other cities stop at various gare routières (bus stations) around Yaoundé, usually a quick taxi ride away from the city centre. The train station, however, is centrally located, with some hotels in walking distance.

INFORMATION **Cultural Centres**

CAMEROON

British Council (Map p281; 220 3172; Ave Charles de Gaulle)

Centre Culturel Français (Map p282; 222 0944; Ave Ahidjo)



Internet Access

Expect to pay around CFA400-500 per hour. ADT Cybercafé (Map p282; Rue de Narvik) Cometé Internet (Map p282; Rue de Narvik) One of several near the US embassy. Espresso House (Map p281; per 30min CFA1000; Carrefour Bastos) Offers broadband.

Medical Services

Pharmacie Bastos (Map p281; 🖻 220 6555; Carrefour Bastos) Well-stocked pharmacy. Polyclinique André Fouda (🖻 222 6612) For medical emergencies; in Elig-Essono southeast of Carrefour Nlongkak.

Money

There are ATMs at most of the major banks; see the maps for locations. As always in Cameroon,

travellers cheques are problematic to change in banks - try Express Exchange (Map p282; Ave Kennedy), which also accepts US dollars.

Post

Central post office (Map p282; Place Ahmadou Ahidjo; (7.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-noon Sat)

Travel Agencies

Inter-Voyages (Map p282; 🕿 222 0361, 223 1005) One block west of the US embassy. Safar Tours (Map p282; 222 8703; safar@safartours .com) At the Hilton.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Yaoundé is more relaxed than Douala, but there's still a small risk of street crime. Be particularly wary around the Marché Central (Map p282), and don't carry too many valuables with you. Take a taxi if you're out at night.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At the Benedictine monastery on Mt Fébé, north of the city centre, the Musée d'Art Camerounais (Quartier Fébé; donation requested; 🕑 3-6pm Thu, Sat & Sun) has an impressive collection of masks, bronzes, woodwork and other examples of Cameroonian art. The chapel is also worth a look.

Mvog-Betsi Zoo (Mvog-Betsi; admission CFA2000, camera (FA500: Y 9am-6pm) is one of the better zoos in West Africa, co-run by the Cameroon Wildlife Aid Fund (CWAF; www.cwaf.org), with a sizeable collection of native primates, rescued from poachers and the bushmeat trade.

SLEEPING

Foyer International de l'Église Presbytérienne (Map p281; a mobile 985 236; off Rue Joseph Essono Balla; tent/dm/tw CFA2000/3000/5000; P) Favoured by overlanders, this no-frills guesthouse is tucked behind the water towers looming over Nlongkak. Rooms and (communal) facilities are simple but clean, and the grounds have enough trees to laze under or kick a ball between. It's unsigned - look for the orange brick building trying to appear grand.

Ideal Hotel (Map p281; 🖻 220 9852; Carrefour Nlongkak; r (FA6000-8000; (P)) Tucked behind a six-storey building on lively Carrefour Nlongkak. Some rooms are a bit dark, but balconies make up for this, and the hotel is a well-located budget option, particularly if you're in town hunting for visas.

El Panaden Hotel (Map p282; 22 2765; elpanaden@ yahoo.fr; Place de l'Indépendance; r CFA15,500-28,000; 🔀) This centrally located hotel is an old travellers' favourite. Helpful staff complement clean and generously sized rooms, most with balconies. La Terrase bar next door is a handy late-night stagger away.

Hotel Laginague (Map p281; 🖻 221 0554; mang wachuisse@yahoo.fr; Carrefour Bastos; r CFA20,000-35,000; (R) Just off the main road this place has soft beds in very comfortable rooms, some with good views over the city. The management could be more efficient; room service makes up for the lack of restaurant, but order in good time.

EATING

Calafata's Boulangerie (Map p282; Rue de Nachtigal; pastries from CFA200; (8am-6pm) People cross the city to get their pastries from Calafatas and you should, too. Although it's open all day, the best choices are gone by late morning leaving little but baguettes.

Chez Wou (Map p281; Rue Joseph Mballa Eloumden; mains from CFA4000; 12-3.30pm & 6-11pm) One of Yaoundé's older Chinese restaurants, this has nice tables set under a wide porch, and a comprehensive menu.

Le Globus (Map p281; Carrefour Nlongkak; dishes from N700; 🏵 7am-11pm) A good watering hole as well as restaurant, Globus has Cameroonian dishes and a few trusty standards, like chicken with rice. Raised above Nlongkak, it's great for watching the world go by and catching some gorgeous sunsets.

Snack Time (Map p281; Carrefour Bastos; mains from CFA2700; C 10am-11pm) This bright place serves up a menu straight from an American diner, with a few Lebanese and Italian dishes thrown in for good measure. The bean burritos (CFA3000) are real winners, and the vegetarian pasta a treat for those suffering from a surfeit of meaty Cameroonian stews.

La Forêt Dense (Map p281; Rue Joseph Mballa Eloumden; meals from CFA5500) This is pricey place serves traditional Cameroonian dishes in an upscale setting. If you have ever wondered what crocodile *mbongo* tastes like, this is the place to find out.

Around Carrefours Bastos and Nlongkak you can find grills serving suya (brochette) throughout the day. On Place de l'Indépendance, near El Panaden Hotel, there are women grilling delicious fish, served with chilli or peanut sauce from CFA1000.

DRINKING

The best bars are in Carrefours Bastos and Nlongkak, most with open-air seating facing the street - great for people watching. Solo female travellers might find the atmosphere uneasy in some bars once the sun dips.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Flights from Yaoundé's Nsimalen airport are available with Cameroon Airlines (Map p282; 223 0304; Ave Monseigneur Vogt) to Douala, Maroua, Garoua, N'Gaoundéré and Bertoua, from around CFA65,000 one way. Services also connect Yaoundé to Gabon, Nigeria and other regional centres.

Bus

There are buses between Yaoundé and all major cities in Cameroon. Buses leave from their companies' offices, spread out on the outskirts of town. For Douala (CFA3800, three hours), Central Voyages (in Mvog Mbi) and Guaranti Express (in Quartier Nsam) are recommended. Guaranti Express is also recommended for Limbe (CFA5000, five hours), Bamenda (CFA5000, six hours), Bafoussam (CFA2500, three hours) and Kumba (CFA4000, four hours).

Otherwise, all agency and nonagency buses for Kribi, Bertoua, Batouri Ebolowa, Limbe and Buea depart from Blvd de l'Ocam, about 3km south of Place Ahmadou Ahidjo (direct taxi drivers to Agences de Mvan).

Transport to Bafoussam, Bamenda and points north departs from Gare Routière d'Etoudi, 5km north of Centre Ville.

c a m e r o o n Train

The most popular and convenient way to travel north from Yaoundé is by train, which runs all the way to N'Gaoundéré. Trains depart daily at 6pm, taking around 18 hours. Delays on the line are not uncommon.

There's a choice of comfortable 1st-class couchettes (sleeping compartments) for CFA25,000/28,000 per person in a four-/ two-bed cabin; 1st-class airline-style seats (CFA17,000); and crowded 2nd-class benches (CFA10,000). The couchettes are the only recommendable option, in part because you'll be in an enclosed cabin. Couchettes can be reserved 24 hours in advance, but are paid for on the day of travel. Seats in 1st and 2nd class are in open wagons, with no way to secure your bag. Even in couchettes, be alert for thieves.

The train has a restaurant car where you can buy surprisingly good meals (breakfast/dinner CFA1000/2500). If you're in 1st class, someone will come and take your order and deliver to your couchette. At every station stop, people will offer street food at the windows.

There are also services between Yaoundé, Douala and Kumba, though these are used much less frequently, as buses are cheaper, faster and more convenient.

GETTING AROUND

Shared taxis are the only public transport option. Fares are set at CFA175 for short- to medium-length rides. Flag them down on the street and shout out the name of your destination - the driver will sound his horn if he's not going your way. A private taxi to Nsimalen airport from central Yaoundé should cost CFA3000 to CFA4000 (40 minutes).

WESTERN CAMEROON

Cameroon's lush western provinces are the most bountiful parts of the country. There's a riot of vegetation and a colourful selection of produce in the markets. Douala is the jumping-off place for Mt Cameroon and the Ring Road, as well as the lazy beaches around Limbe. Throw in several tribal kingdoms and sultanates, and it's a traveller's paradise.

DOUALA

pop 1.7 million

Yaoundé might be Cameroon's capital, but Douala is the economic powerhouse. With little in the way of tourist attractions, it's a swelteringly hot mess of dusty honking traffic jams. Hard to love initially, give it some time and you may begin to appreciate this port city's good restaurants, lively nightlife and decaying tropical ambience. As the Cameroonians say, 'Yaoundé sleeps, Douala moves'.

Orientation

Akwa district is at the heart of Douala, bisected by Blvd de la Liberté, where you'll find many hotels, internet cafés, banks and restaurants. South of here, near Rue Joss in Bonanjo, is the administrative quarter, with airline offices and government buildings. The airport is a couple of kilometres south of town.

Information **INTERNET ACCESS**

There are internet cafés all along Blvd de la Liberté; Cyberbao (Blvd de la Liberté, per hr CFA400) is reliable.

MEDICAL SERVICES Pharmacie de Centre (Blvd de la Liberté) Pharmacie de Douala (Blvd Ahidjo) Polyclinique Bonanjo (🕿 342 7936; Ave de Gaulle) For medical emergencies.

MONEY

For changing money, try the banks along Blvd de la Liberté or Rue Joss - most have ATMs. Express Exchange (Blvd de la Liberté) conveniently changes travellers cheques and US dollars. Hôtel Akwa Palace (Blvd de la Liberté) has plenty of touts outside for changing cash out of hours, but watch yourself.

POST

Central Post Office (Rue Joss)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Saga Voyages (2 342 3317; Rue Joss) Well-organised agency.

Trans Africa Tours (🖻 342 8307; near Rond Point Dëido) Good for African flight connections.

Dangers & Annoyances

Douala has a poor reputation for muggings and you need to be streetwise. Taxis are always a good idea after dark, and leave your valuables in your hotel. The beggars near Hôtel Akwa Palace can sometimes be aggressive.

Sleepina

Centre d'Accueil Missionaire (2 342 2797; progemis .douala@camnet.cm; Rue Franceville; r without/with shower (FA7000/8000; P 🔀 🔊) This is a real oasis. There are clean twin rooms, a pleasant veranda and a pool to cool off in. Part of the Catholic Mission, it's poorly signed - it's next to the pink Axa Building.

Hotel Hila (🗃 342 1586; Blvd de l'Unité; s CFA10,000-12,000, d (FA15,000; 🕄) Ideally located for the Yaoundé bus agencies, the Hila sits on a very busy road, so get a room at the back if you can. Rooms are a little threadbare, but fair value for the price.

Foyer du Marin (🕿 342 2794; douala@see mannsmission.org; Rue Gallieni; s/d CFA15,000/28,000; (P) 🔀 🛄 😰) Otherwise known as the German Seaman's Mission, tidy comfortable rooms

are kept ship-shape for visiting sailors - and other travellers - coming into port. It's equally popular as a drinking spot with Douala's expats, who visit for the nightly sausage and meat grill from 7pm. There's an eclectic multilingual book exchange. Douala's bargain, it's regularly full so advance booking is essential.

Hotel Beausejour Mirabel (🖻 342 3885; info@beausejour-mirabel.com; Rue Joffre; r CFA25,000-27,000; 😢 😰) This hotel's bright exterior puts forward a warm welcome. The corner location can make the interior seem like it's all corridors, but at the end of them you'll find large tidy rooms with balconies. Nonresidents can use the pool for CFA1500 per day.

Parfait Garden (2 342 6357; hotel.parfait-garden@ globalnet2.net; Blvd de la Liberté; r from CFA35,000; 🔀) Rooms are spacious and plush. There's a nice bar and restaurant, and the liveried bell boys inject a little class.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of good restaurants along Blvd de la Liberté, selling a spectrum of international cuisine.

Delice (Blvd de la Liberté: snacks from CFA500; Y 7am-9.30pm) A great early morning stop for pastries and a shot of coffee; there are also some good toasted sandwiches. The 'delice' surely refers to the cool air-conditioning and comfy seating.

Grilled fish & beer (Rue de la Joie: fish from CFA1000: 10am-late) This street of bars off Blvd de la Réunification is punctuated at regular intervals by women with stalls selling grilled fish with plantain or baton (steamed manioc).

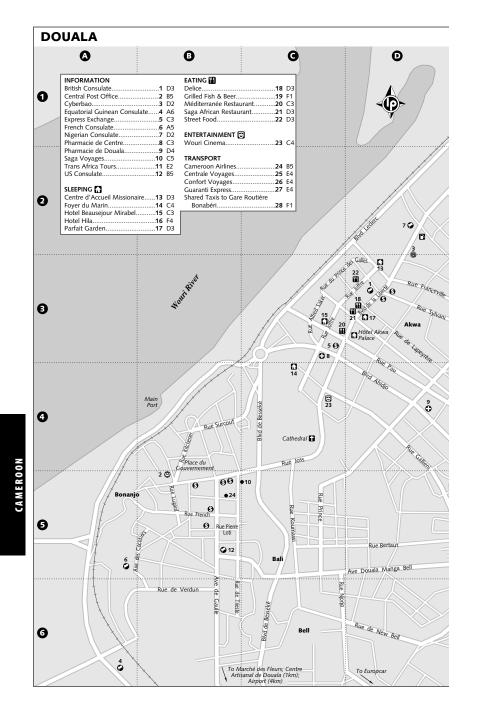
Order, then retire to a drinking hole to sink a cold one while your meal is prepared. Saga African Restaurant (Blvd de la Liberté; mains from (FA1200; ≌ noon-10pm) Opposite the Parfait Gar-den hotel, the Saga offers an interesting mix of continental dishes with some local classics, such as *ndole*. It's nicely decked out, with a bar out the front and restaurant behind.

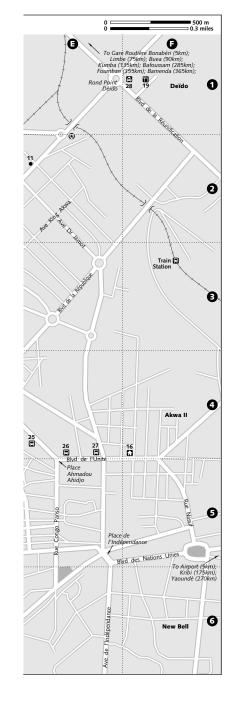
Méditerranée Restaurant (Blvd de la Liberté: mains from CFA2500; 🕑 8am-midnight) With an open terrace but still cleverly sheltered from the busy road, the Méditerranée is perennially popular. The menu is a good mix of Greek, Italian and Lebanese dishes.

You can find good Cameroonian food from the street stalls along Rue Joffre.

Entertainment

Douala is known for its nightlife. Asking locals is the best way to find the current hotspots,





but when we visited Rue de la Joie near Rond Point Dëido was one of the happening streets, with bars and nightclubs dancing until dawn on the weekend.

Wouri cinema (Blvd de la Liberté) Shows recent Hollywood and European hits in French.

Getting There & Away

Douala has a major international airport with links to cities around the region. **Cameroon Airlines** (342 2525; Rue Joss, Bonanjo) is the main carrier.

Buses to Yaoundé (CFA3800, three hours) depart from agency offices along Blvd de l'Unité throughout the day.

For other destinations, use the sprawling Gare Routière Bonabéri, 6km north of the city centre. Routes include Limbe (CFA1000, 1½ hours), Bamenda (CFA5000, seven hours), Bafoussam (CFA4000, five hours) and Foumban (CFA4500, six hours).

Getting Around

The main ways of getting around are shared taxis and *moto-taxi* (motorcycle taxi), of which there are thousands and they are cheaper than taxis (CFA100). Charter taxis from central Douala to Bonabéri generally charge CFA3000. A taxi to the airports CFA2500.

BUEA

Buea is a cool and breezy mountain town and the base for hiking and trekking on Mt Cameroon. It's a laid-back, Anglophone town spread over several steep hills. Even if you don't climb, it's a nice place to relax and enjoy the cooler weather.

Conveniently, **Express Exchange** (Molyko Rd) will exchange euros, dollars and travellers cheques.

At the **Presbyterian Church Synod Office** (O 332 2336; Market Rd; camp sites CFA1000, s/d without bathroom CFA2500/4000, with bathroom CFA3000/5000; P) rooms are comfy and spotless, and there's a tidy communal sitting room and cooking facilities. This church mission is a gem.

The **Paramount Hotel** ($\textcircled{\baselinetwidth{\baselinetwidth{\mathbb{R}}}\baselinetwidth{\baselinetwidth{\mathbb{R}}}\baselinetwidth{\baselinetwidth{\mathbb{R}}\baselinetwidth{\baselinetwidth{\mathbb{R}}\baselinetwidth{\mathbb{R}$

There are several cheap eating establishments on Molyko Rd around the Paramount Hotel.

TREKKING MOUNT CAMEROON

Most treks to the summit of West Africa's highest peak take two or three days, but it's no stroll in the park. The difficulty stems not only from its height (4095m), but from the fact that you start from near sea level, making a big change in altitude in a relatively short distance. November to April is the main climbing season and although it's possible to climb the mountain year-round, you won't get much in the way of views during the rainy season. Warm clothes and waterproofs are a must. A popular ascent is a two-night, three-day trek via the Mann Spring route and descending via the Guinness Route.

Treks are arranged in Buea through the Mount Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation (2 332 2038; mountceo@yahooo.uk; Buea Market; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7am-noon Sat-Sun). The organisation works closely with the 12 villages around the mountain, employing many villagers as guides and porters. All trekkers pay a flat 'stakeholder fee' of CFA3000, which goes into a village development fund and is used for community projects, such as improving electricity and water supply. The organisation's office also has a small shop selling locally produced handicrafts.

Guides, well versed in the local flora and fauna, cost CFA6000 per day and porters CFA5000 per day. Equipment can also be hired on a daily basis, including tents (CFA5000), sleeping bags (CFA2000), sleeping mats (CFA300) and raincoats (CFA300). Expect to spend around CFA2000 per day on food for the trek - Buea Market has a decent selection of basics.

LIMBE

CAMEROON

The easygoing port of Limbe is the centre of Anglophone Littoral Province. It sits in the shadow of Mt Cameroon, surrounded by banana and coconut plantations, and is best known as a weekend getaway from Douala, with people coming to enjoy the languid air and fresh seafood.

Information

The Fako Tourist Board (🗃 333 2861; Banley St; (>) 7.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) can arrange local tours, hotels and bookings with the Mt Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation. Internet access is available at Computer World (Banley St; per hr CFA400; (Sclosed Sun) and **Bifunde Computer Centre** (Bota Rd; per hr (FA800), which has very fast connections. Ahidjo St has several ATMs.

Sights

Most zoos in Africa are depressing places, but the Limbe Wildlife Centre (www.limbewildlife .org; admission CFA3000; 🕑 9am-5pm) is a shining exception. Jointly run by the Ministry of the Environment and the primate charity Pandrillus, it contains rescued chimpanzees, gorillas, drills and other primates, all housed in large enclosures, with heaps of information about local conservation issues. Staff are well informed, and are heavily involved with community education. Interested visitors may even 'adopt' a primate to help pay for their care from CFA20,000 per year.

The botanic gardens (admission CFA1000, camera CFA2000; 🕑 8am-6pm) are a pleasant place to while away an afternoon. There's a small visitors' centre and an area with Commonwealth War Graves. Those with particular botanic interests will profit from hiring a knowledgeable guide for CFA1000.

The best of Limbe's beaches are north of town and known by their distance from Limbe. Mile 6 and Mile 11 beaches are popular, but the best is at the village of Batoké at Mile 8, from where the lava flows of Mt Cameroon's eruption a few years ago are still visible.

Sleepina

Bay Hotel (🖻 mobile 773 3609; off Makangal St; s/d/ste CFA5000/7000/10,000) Ignore the peeling paint work, this old colonial building has wide verandas and airy rooms to catch the best of the sea breeze. A tidy choice, the huge suites are an absolute steal at the price.

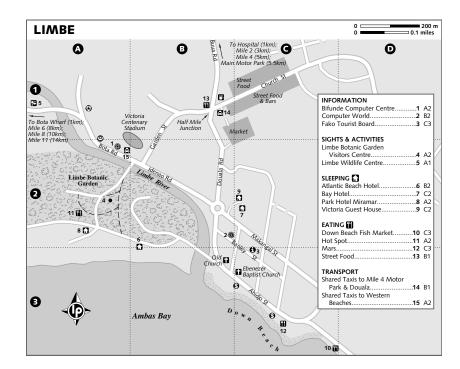
Victoria Guest House (🖻 333 2446; off Makangal St; r CFA12,000-16,000; 🔀) Fine in a pinch, this budget option has adequate accommodation.

Park Hotel Miramar (🖻 332 2332; Botanic Garden road; camp sites CFA5000, s/d CFA13,650/18,400, all incl breakfast; **P X (a)** Individual chalets are the order of the day here. With a terrace right on the water, there's a relaxing, almost languid air that makes this Limbe's most popular hotel.

Atlantic Beach Hotel (2 332 2689; near Limbe Bridge; r (FA16,500-23,500; P 🔀 😰) This hotel's days as Limbe's top dog are sadly over, and there's an air of past glories here. Rooms are fine, but only those overlooking the bay with their stunning sea views really justify the price tag.

Eating

Down Beach Fish Market (Down Beach: dishes from (FA1000) Perfectly located where the fishing boats haul up on the beach, you'll find this



cluster of shacks grilling the day's catch. Soak up your beer with fish, crab or sticks of delicious crevettes (shrimps). The dish of the day doesn't come any fresher.

Mars (Beach road; mains from CFA2000) This decent place has the usual range of Cameroonian dishes, but come here for the seafood and the terrace sticking out into the bay - a great place for a sundowner.

Hot Spot (off Botanic Garden road; mains from CFA2000) On a low hill, there are great views overlooking the water, and good meals to boot. Take a torch for the walk home at night.

Getting There & Away

The main motor park is Mile 4, about 6km out of town. Minibuses and bush taxis leave approximately hourly to Buea (CFA500, 25 minutes) and Douala (CFA1500, 70 minutes). From Mile 2, there are buses to Yaoundé (CFA5000, five hours).

Ferries travel every Monday and Thursday from Limbe to Calabar in Nigeria (CFA35,000, 10 hours), departing at around 11pm and returning on Tuesday and Friday at 6pm. Operator Destiny (r mobile 755 3435) sell tickets

on the day of departure at Bota Wharf, from where the ferry sails. Take your own food and water, and fight hard for a seat.

BAMENDA

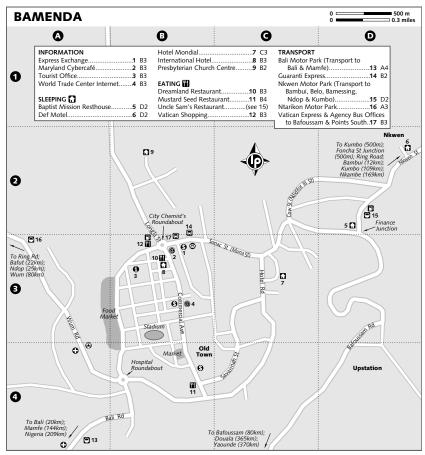
The capital of Northwest Province is a slightly unkempt, sprawling place tumbling down a hill at over 1000m altitude. With a decent range of hotels and restaurants, it's a good jumping-off point for exploring the Ring Road circuit. Anglophone Bamenda is the centre of political opposition to President Biya.

Information

The tourist office (🖻 336 1395) can provide basic maps and dates of local festivals. You can access the internet at Maryland Cybercafe (per hr (FA300), which also has internet phone for CFA250 per minute, and World Trade Center Internet (per hr CFA3000). Express Exchange (City Chemist's Roundabout) changes travellers cheques as well as US dollars cash.

Sleepina

Baptist Mission Resthouse (🗃 336 1285; Finance Junction; dm (FA2500; (P)) A bit far from Bamenda's



centre, but this is still a great place to lay your head. Rooms are immaculate, with spotless shared-bathroom facilities proving that cleanliness is indeed next to godliness.

Presbyterian Church Centre ((2) 336 4070; offLongla St; dm/r CFA4000/6000; (P) Hidden away from the bustle of the town centre, this is a good budget option. Private rooms are self-contained and the generous grounds are a good place to relax.

Def Motel (**C** 366 3748; off Nkwen St; r (FA6000-10,000) Right in the middle of the lively Nkwen district, this place offers decent value. Prices increase as you go up each floor – those climbing all the stairs get rewarded with a TV and hot-water heater.

Hotel Mondial (🗟 336 1832; off Hotel Rd; s/d CFA12,500/14,000; P) The Mondial feels a little more modern than its equivalents elsewhere in Bamenda. Comfortable rooms come with water heater and satellite TV, and there are a few decent cheaper options without, for those with slimmer budgets (CFA 7500).

International Hotel ((2) 336 2527; off Commercial Ave; r(FA15,000-18,000) This option fits solidly into the Cameroonian business person's class. Usually busy, rooms are big and have balconies, while the restaurant serves a great breakfast. The higher tariff gets you a TV and 'guaranteed' hot water.

Eating

Mustard Seed Restaurant (Commercial Ave; mains from CFA800; ⓑ 8am-10pm) This joint serves decent local food – the usual Cameroonian stand-

ards plus local speciality *amajama* – meat sauce with chopped huckleberry leaf. There are plenty of similar options along this stretch of Commercial Ave and across the road on Savannah St.

Uncle Sam's Restaurant (mains from CFA1000; 🕑 10am-11pm) Handily located next to Nkwen Motor Park, this is a reliable joint with a brightly painted red-and-blue façade.

Dreamland Restaurant (Commercial Ave; mains from (FA1300; ^(C) 7am-11pm) A fancy dining option dishing up excellent-value food for such swish surroundings. Choose from a good selection of local and international dishes (and a large wine list), or graze on the salad buffet every Friday from 7pm to 9pm (CFA2000, including two drinks).

Vatican Shopping (City Chemist's Roundabout) is well stocked for self-caterers.

Getting There & Away

Most agency offices for points south are on Sonac St. Destinations include Yaoundé (CFA5000, six hours), Douala (CFA5000, seven hours) and Bafoussam (CFA1200, 1¹/₂ hours).

Nkwen Motor Park has transport to the east stretch of the Ring Road, including Ndop (CFA1000, 1½ hours) and Kumbo (CFA3000, five hours). The west stretch of the Ring Road is served by Ntarikon Motor Park, with minibuses to Wum (CFA2000, two hours). Transport also leaves for Bafut from here (CFA300, 20 minutes). Shared taxis to the further motor parks shouldn't cost more than CFA150.

THE RING ROAD

The Ring Road is a circular 367km route through the heart of Cameroon's northwestern highlands, better known as the Grassfields. It's a particularly scenic part of the country, with rolling hills and mountains, lakes and waterfalls, and traditional kingdoms. There's great potential for hiking, but ask permission from the local chief before camping.

Transport links along the Ring Road are reasonable but not always particularly frequent, with minibuses usually leaving very early in the morning. Roads are poor throughout. Kumbo is the Ring Road's largest town, but apart from here (and to a lesser extent Nkambe), there's little infrastructure in the area, and nowhere to change money, so stock up on CFA before leaving Bamenda. There are basic hotels in Ndop, Kumbo, Nkambe and Wum. Starting from Bamenda and heading east, you pass through the villages of **Bamessing**, with a handicraft centre and pottery workshop, **Sagbo**, with a hill with spectacular views, and Ndop. After that you reach **Kumbo**, dominated by its Catholic cathedral and *fon's* palace of the traditional chief. It's a good place to base yourself, with a good market and the Ring Road's best hotels. From there you go north to Nkambe, then Missaje and the end of the road.

The road from Missaje to We is just a dirt track in places, and in the rainy season you might not even find that. Some travellers continue on foot, sometimes with help from Fulani herdsmen. It can take a couple days to get to We, so bring supplies.

After We you pass **Lake Nyos**, a volcanic crater lake that was the site of a natural gas eruption in 1986, which resulted in around 1700 deaths. Continuing south you reach **Wum**, the biggest village on the west side of the ring. South of Wum the road passes the **Metchum Falls**, where most shared taxi drivers will stop to let you have a quick peek or photo. The falls are most impressive in the rainy season but are worth a stop year-round.

The last town on the Ring Road (or the first, if you're heading clockwise) is **Bafut**, traditionally the strongest of the kingdoms in this region. The **fon's palace** (admission CFA1000, camera CFA1500, museum CFA2000) here is a highlight of the Ring Road tour and includes a tour of the compound where the *fon's* large family lives.

BAFOUSSAM

A thriving business centre, Bafoussam is a Bamiléké stronghold in the middle of a coffee- and cocoa-producing area. The town has outgrown its farming routes too quickly, and there's little of great interest to travellers as a result, barring the large **chefferie** (www.museum cam.org; chief's compound; admission CFA2000; 论 10am-5pm), about 15km south at Bandjoun.

MEROOI

Good value and with a decent bar to boot, the rooms at **Hotel Federal** ((2) 344 1309; Route de Foumban; r CFA6000-9000) are neat and tidy. Take one at the back, choosing the balconied options over those with no external window.

As well located as the name suggests, and a useful landmark, the rooms at **Hotel du Centre** (**a** 344 2079; Carrefour Total; s/d CFA12,000/15,000) are bright and airy. They have balconies, but choose one away from the noisy road.

At the southern end of town along the main highway, the restaurant La Bonne Table de l'Ouest (mains from CFA1500; 🕑 10am-11pm) offers excellent value, with a pleasant atmosphere and local and Western cuisine.

Les Arcades de l'Ouest (🕑 9am-late), opposite the market and just off Ave de la République, is good for cheap Cameroonian food, washed down with copious amounts of beer deep into the night.

Rue de Marché and Route de Foumban are good for street food and cheap eats.

Minibuses to Foumban (CFA800, one hour) depart from near Carrefour Total, along with shared taxis. Agencies to Yaoundé (CFA2500, three hours) and Douala (CFA4000, five hours) have offices along the main road south from the town centre. Transport to Bamenda (CFA1200, 1½ hours) leaves from the Bamenda road, north of the town centre (CFA150 in a shared taxi).

FOUMBAN

Predominantly Muslim, Foumban is a great contrast to the rest of southwestern Cameroon. If you're heading north, this is the first place you'll hear the call to prayer. Home to the Bamoun people, it's also a great centre for Cameroonian handicrafts. Tabaski is a great time to be in Foumban, when horse races and parades mark the end of Ramadan (see right).

The Grande Marché is a warren of narrow stalls and alleys leading to a square where the Grande Mosquée faces the palace. Wednesday and Saturday are the biggest market days.

Siahts

c a m e r o o n

The must-see attraction of Foumban is the Palais Royal (Rue du Palais; admission CFA2000, camera CFA1500; 🕑 8.30am-6pm), the sultan's palace, currently home to the 19th sultan of the Bamoun dynasty. The palace has a fascinating and wellorganised museum containing previous sultans' possessions such as royal gowns, musical instruments, war garments and jewellery.

South of town, the Village des Artisans (Rue des Artisans) seems to produce more handicrafts than the rest of Cameroon combined. The village is one of the few places in the country where you can expect some tourist hustle, so get haggling. Close by, the Musée des Arts et Traditions Bamoun (admission CFA1000; 🕑 9am-5pm) houses a private collection of art and historical artefacts.

Festivals & Events

Every year at Tabaski (the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha), Foumban attracts thousands of pilgrims for an extraordinary blend of Muslim and traditional Bamoun ceremonies.

It all starts before sunrise with the call to prayer blasting from loudspeakers at the mosque. Thousands of men and boys, dressed in their finest, climb the hill to the Sacred Mountain and kneel in prayer. Around dawn the imam arrives, followed by the sultan in his white Cadillac. There are sunrise prayers, a sermon from the imam and a blessing from the sultan (on Eid al-Adha this is when the sheep is sacrificed). The heavy-set sultan then gets on his skinny little horse surrounded by his warriors in their full regalia, and everyone follows him in an enormous parade to the palace, while the women and girls, so far absent from the proceedings, line the streets dressed all in white and ululate as the sultan passes.

After the parade there's a rest, and then horse races through the town streets. Then another break until it gets dark, when the drumming and dancing start in front of the Palais Royal. Meanwhile (this is still Cameroon, after all) people pack the bars and clubs, and when these are full they set up speakers on the streets for heavy drinking and dancing until the sun comes up.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Beau Regarde (🗃 348 2183; Rue de l'Hotel Beau Regarde; r without bathroom CFA3000-4000, with bathroom (FA6000) Thirty years ago this would have been a cracking hotel. A little tired now, it's still a decent cheap option. Rooms at the back overlook the town to good effect.

Hotel Complexe Adi (🖻 mobile 743 1181; Rue de l'Hotel Beau Regarde; r CFA7000-9000) One of the nicer budget options in Foumban, rooms are simple but good value. Eat in the hotel restaurant, or enjoy the grilled meat vendors a stone's throw away.

Rifam Hotel (2 348 2878; Route de Bafoussam; s/d (FA15,000/25,000; 🔀) Near the bus agency offices, this hotel is easily Foumban's plushest. Doubles are huge and come with balconies large enough to play football on.

Roval Café (meals from CFA2000; No 8am-10pm) On the southern side of the Grand Marché, this eatery has good meals and a patio with views. It's down a flight of steps and is easy to miss; look for the white building and red signboard.

Restaurant de la Maturité (meals from CFA2000; 8am-10pm) Opposite the gare routière at the eastern end of the Grand Marché, this is a decent option, with good salads and omelettes.

The area just east of the gare routière is good for grilled meat; the streets along the Grande Marché are also good for eating on the hoof. Bars, as across Cameroon, are abundant.

Getting There & Away

There are a few direct buses to Yaoundé (CFA3000, five hours) and Douala (CFA4500, six hours); otherwise head for Bafoussam (CFA800, one hour) and change there. Bus agency offices are on the west side of town, about 3km from the Grande Marché (CFA100 in a shared taxi).

Transport between Foumban and Kumbo (CFA3000, around six hours) runs yearround, with times varying according to the rains. Although the road is very poor, it's easily one of the most beautiful in the country, skirting along the edge of the spectacular Mbam Massif.

SOUTHERN CAMEROON

The area to the south of Yaoundé is mostly rainforest and includes Cameroon's number one beach destination. Kribi. It's also the route for overland travel to Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

KRIBI

It's easy to see why Kribi is Cameroon's most popular beach resort. A weekend getaway for government ministers and expats alike, it can be sleepy during the week, when you'll have the palm-fringed beaches almost to yourself. Check locally before diving in though, as the oceanic waters can have strong currents and rip tides.

Most of Kribi's hotels, usually with their own beachfronts, start at the southern end of town, but camping isn't advised. The Chutes de la Lobé, 8km south of town (moto-taxi CFA500), are an impressive set of waterfalls that empty into a pool by the sea.

Stock up on CFA before coming to Kribi the banks don't like changing money and there's no ATM.

Sleeping

If you're visiting in the rainy season, ask for a discount.

Auberge du Phare (🗃 346 1106; off Route de Campo; r without air-con CFA12,000, with air-con CFA16,000-25,000; ▶ 🕄) Conveniently near the town centre, this long-standing favourite has a good beachside location with a great restaurant. The hotel is usually closed in October, so call ahead.

Hotel Tara Plage (🗃 346 2038; Route de Campo; r without/with air-con CFA12,000/16,000; P 🕄) A popular beachside option with a mellow vibe. A great place to get away from town, with a restaurant serving good food. Advance booking is recommended.

Hotel de l'Océan (🕿 346 1635; Route de Campo; r (FA20,000-24,000; P 🕄) This hotel wins the prize for being the closest to the beach in Kribi if the rooms were any nearer the sea, you'd have to swim to breakfast. Rooms are cute but simple, and there's a veranda restaurant-bar for sundowners.

New Coco Beach Hotel (🖻 346 1584; off Route de Campo; s/d/t CFA25,000/32,000/46,000; 🕑 🔀 😰) Small but very nicely formed and run with a little Gallic flair, this hotel is popular with families. It's no problem that the swimming pool is only big enough for kids - the sea is just metres away.

Hotel llomba (🖻 346 1744; Route de Campo; s/d (FA25.000/30.000; P 🔀 🔲 🔊) Some way out of Kribi, this is the loveliest hotel in the area. Rooms are in boukarous (open-sided circular mud huts), all well furnished and tastefully decorated. The restaurant has a good menu and there's a lazy beachside bar. The Ilomba is just a short walk to the Lobé waterfalls.

Eating

All the beach hotels have restaurants, and are the nicest dining options in Kribi. Expect to pay from CFA3000 per meal; seafood is an obvious feature on menus.

Hot & Cold Snack Bar (snacks & fast food CFA500-1500; 🕑 8am-10pm) This place is clean, efficient and reasonably priced. The menu includes really good filled baguettes, omelettes, chicken and chips, and the like.

Fish Market (meals from CFA1000; 🕑 10am-5pm Wed & Sat) This market at the marina grills the day's catch over coals. From crab and lobster to massive barracuda, you'd be hard pressed to find a better, and tastier, selection of seafood anywhere else in Cameroon.

When the fish market is closed, head over to Carrefour Kingué, where you will find plenty of fish & meat stands (meals from CFA1000; 🕑 10am-late) lined up in front of the bars. Just order your food, then sink a beer while it's being cooked. They will bring it out to your table.

Getting There & Away

Bus agencies have offices on Rue du Marché in the town centre. Nonagency transport leaves from the main *gare routière* (bus station). Buses for Douala (CFA18,000, three hours) leave throughout the day, along with transport to Campo (CFA2000, three hours) and Yaoundé (CFA3000, 3½ hours).

EBOLOWA

Ebolowa, capital of Ntem district, is a bustling place and a possible stopping point en route between Yaoundé and Equatorial Guinea or Gabon. Its main attraction is the artificial Municipal Lake in the centre of town.

The best accommodation is at **Hôtel Porte** Jaune (228 4339; Route de Yaoundé; r CFA10,000) in the town centre, with some cheaper *auberges* (hostels) near the main roundabout, including **Hôtel Âne Rouge** (Place Ans 2000; r CFA4000).

During the dry season there's at least one vehicle daily along the rough road between Ebolowa and Kribi. There are also plentiful buses daily to Yaoundé (CFA3000, three hours). Several vehicles depart in the morning for Amban (CFA1000, one hour), from where you can find transport towards Ebebiyin (Equatorial Guinea) or Bitam (Gabon).

CAMPO

Campo is the last town before the Equatorial Guinea border. It's the jumping-off point for visiting Parc National de Campo-Ma'an. The best accommodation is at **Auberge Bon Course** (r CfA5000) at Bon Course Supermarché at the main junction. There are three simple but decent rooms, and meals are available. There are daily minibuses between Campo and Kribi (CFA1500).

A small fishing village 25km north of Campo, Ebodjć is home to a conservation project run by the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV). Accommodation is in **local homes** (r CFA2000, meals CFA2000, environmental protection fee CFA1000). You'll need to bring your own water or filter, mosquito net and sleeping sheet.

Parc National de Campo-Ma'an (2608 sq km) protects rainforest, many plants and various animals, including buffaloes, elephants and mandrills. The park is being developed by

WWF as an ecotourism destination, with plans for canopy walks and river trips on the drawing board. Before planning a trip, check with the **WWF office** (2216267; www.wwfcameroon .org; Bastos) in Yaoundé to see what progress is being made.

You'll need your own 4WD to get here. The CFA5000 entry fee can be paid at the tourist office in Campo; get a receipt to show at the park entrance at the village of Nko'elon. Staff at the office can also help you arrange a guide (obligatory, CFA3000 per day). You'll need to be self-sufficient with equipment and supplies.

NORTHERN CAMEROON

Cameroon's northern provinces are a world apart from the lush south. Rolling grasslands give way to barren rocky outcrops of striking beauty, dotted with picturesque villages. Roads to the south are barely existent, so getting there means taking an overnight train or internal flight. Mainly Muslim, the north draws adventure travellers for the hiking and wildlife-viewing opportunities, all conveniently reached from the town of Maroua.

N'GAOUNDÉRÉ

Leafy N'Gaoundéré is the terminus of Cameroon's main railway line and the first major town in northern Cameroon. It makes a relaxing stop, particularly if you've taken the overnight train, and at an altitude of 1100m the evenings are pleasantly cool.

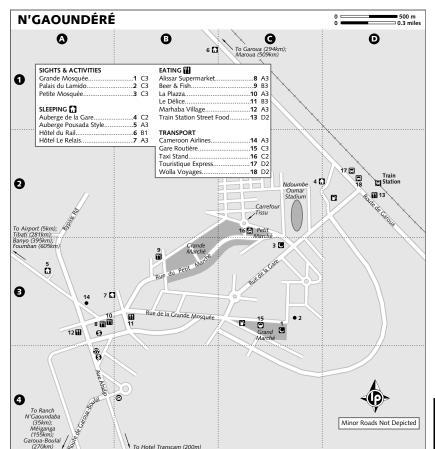
Some areas of N'Gaoundéré have bad reputations for safety at night, including the area around the stadium and north of the cathedral. If in doubt, take a *moto-taxi*.

Sights

The **Palais du Lamido** (admission CFA2000, guide CFA1000, camera CFA1000; 🕑 9am-5pm), also known as the *lamidat*, is worth a trip inside for a taste of local culture. Friday (especially) and Sunday are the best days to visit, as you'll be able to see many nobles from the surrounding area who come to pay their respects, and the procession from the palace to the **Grande Mosquée** next door for midday prayers.

Sleeping

The cool air of N'Gaoundéré means there's no need for air-conditioning.



Auberge Pousada Style (225 1703;r (FA4000-5000) A basic but friendly resthouse, there was a reassuringly clean smell of bleach throughout when we visited. Take a *moto-taxi* late at night in this area.

Auberge de la Gare (🗟 225 2217; r (FA5000-7000) Rooms are basic but reasonably clean and tidy, and there's an attached restaurant. It's convenient to the train station and bus agencies.

Hôtel Le Relais (225 1138; r without/with TV (FA9000/12,000) Well located near the intersection of Rue du Petit Marché and Rue de la Grande Mosquée, rooms are clean, if sometimes a little musty. All are good sized; the more expensive ones are even larger. There's a small bar.

Hôtel du Rail (a 225 1013; Route de Garoua; r from (FA13,500) A good place with large rooms, and al-

though it's handy for the train station, it's some way from the action in town. Luckily there's a restaurant, and (French) TV in all rooms.

Hôtel Transcam (225 1252; r (FA25,000-35,000) N'Gaoundéré's best hotel, with fine rooms and a posh restaurant. It's in a quiet setting 1.5km southwest of the town centre.

Eating

The best street food is easily found at the row of shops, stalls and bars opposite the train station – worth the detour even if you don't have a train to catch.

Beer & Fish (fish from CFA1000; [™] 10am-late) A generic row of bars runs behind Rue du Petit Marché, interspersed with women grilling fish over coals. Order the fish, then sink a beer

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

while waiting for your meal to arrive – a recipe for a great Cameroonian evening.

Marhaba Village (mains from (FA1200; 99 9am-11pm) An open-air restaurant, with a snack bar and a more formal eating area. Its central location makes it a good place to hang out and people-watch.

Le Délice (meals about CFA1500; S 9am-11pm) Friendly place off the western end of Rue de la Grande Mosquée, and one of several in the immediate area serving Western and Cameroonian dishes.

La Plazza (meals from (FA3000; ∑ 9am-midnight) Something of an N'Gaoundéré institution, this place has live music nightly and cold draught beer from the thatched bar. The Lebanese and pasta dishes are excellent, but don't miss the perennially popular Sunday buffet from 12pm (CFA5000).

Alissar supermarket is well stocked for essentials and imported goods. The main market is the Petit Marché; the Grand Marché only sells vegetables.

Getting There & Away

Cameroon Airlines has flights most days connecting N'Gaoundéré with Garoua, Maroua, Yaoundé and Douala. The airport is situated about 4km west of town (CFA1000 in a taxi).

The train station is at the eastern end of town. Trains to Yaoundé leave daily at around 7pm (CFA25,000 in 1st-class *couchette*, 18 to 36 hours), and you can reserve your seat a day in advance. See p284 for more information.

By bus, Touristique Express and Woïla Voyages are best, with several buses daily to Garoua (CFA3500, five hours) and Maroua (CFA6000, eight hours). Kawtal Voyages operates a battered Garoua-Boulaï (CFA4000, 12 hours) service most days from the *gare routière* by the Grande Mosquée. Think twice before attempting this during the rains. Equally strenuous is the appalling road south to Foumban. Kawtal Voyages also operates along this route, as far as Banyo (CFA5000, around 10 hours), from where you can change for Foumban.

GAROUA

On the Benue River, the port-town of Garoua is the commercial hub of the north. There's little to hold the interest of travellers, but as it's a transport junction you might find yourself passing through. Garoua has a large Chadian population, with direct flights to N'Djaména and a handy consulate for visas (see p300).

Near the port, **Auberge Hiala Village** (227 2407; Rue Cicai; r CFA5000-7000; **P** (3) has decent self-contained rooms and is the best bet in town, with a good bar and restaurant. **Super Restaurant** (Route de Maroua; mains from CFA1000) is a breezy place, with good food and juices.

Several bus companies run daily to Maroua (CFA2500, 2½ hours), N'Gaoundéré (CFA3500, five hours), while Camaroon Airlines flies to Yaoundé and Douala.

MAROUA

Dusty Maroua, Cameroon's northernmost major town, is popular with travellers. It's a good starting point for exploring the nearby Mandara Mountains and Parc National de Waza, or to catch your breath if you're tackling the nearby borders with Chad and Nigeria. Neem trees lines the streets, and there's an easygoing feel in the air. With its good range of accommodation and facilities, you can easily spend a little longer here than you had anticipated.

Information

The fastest, most reliable internet is at **Braouz** (per hr CFA750), with **Marouanet** (per hr CFA400) a cheaper option.

For medical emergencies, try Meskine Hospital, southwest of town off Garoua road.

Maroua's banks can be reluctant to change even cash euros. If the main banks won't help, try CCA Bureau de Change next to SGBC. The latter also has an ATM.

Maroua has numerous tour operators that can arrange trekking in the Mandara Mountains and visits to Parc National de Waza. Better ones include:

Extrême Nord Safaris (229 3356; deliteri@hotmail .com)

Fagus Voyages (🖻 986 1871; www.fagusvoyages.com) Porte Mayo Voyages (🗟 984 1573) Through Relais de la Porte Mayo.

Sleeping

Auberge le Voyageur (ⓐ 229 2100; Rue Mobil; r CFA5525-8500; €) This standard-issue hotel is handy to the town centre. Some rooms are a bit dreary, and you pay extra for air-conditioning. Nothing special, but a decent option.

Relais Ferngo (229 2153; off Blvd de Diarenga; r (FA6000; ●) This is a delightful budget choice. Simply furnished but spotless *boukarous* sit between shady trees, ideal for whiling away the hours. Well located for buses and some great *suya* stalls.

Motel Coffana (mobile 970 9643; off Blvd de Diarenga; r (FA6000-10,000; **P**) You'll find nicely turned out *boukarous* here, freshly painted and welcoming. Cheaper rooms in the main block have fan only, but are airy enough with high ceilings.

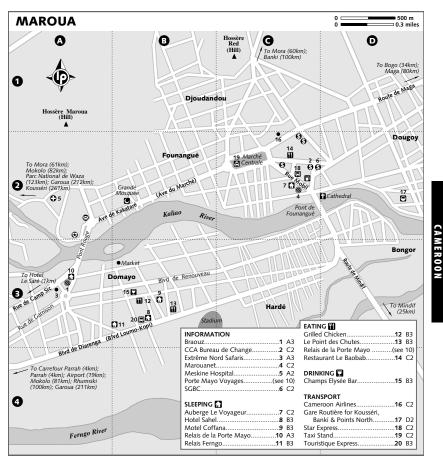
Relais de la Porte Mayo (229 2692; Pont Rouge; s/d (FA13,900/15,000, apt (FA17,500; 2)) There's a lovely relaxed ambience at this French-run establishment, with well-planted grounds and freshly uniformed staff. Rooms in *boukarous* are well presented, but sometimes a little small for the price. The restaurant-bar is good, and there's a fancy souvenir shop-cum-boutique.

Hotel Sahel (ⓐ 229 2960; Blvd de Diarenga; SCFA14,500-18,000, d CFA21,500; **● ≥**) This whitewashed, modern hotel is a lot bigger than the exterior promises. The rooms are good, and there are lots of outside sitting areas and a posh bar. Check out the traditional beehive-houses in front of reception.

Eating & Drinking

Maroua has plenty of bars, the liveliest of which are strung along Blvd de Renoveau.

Grilled Chicken (dishes from CFA1000; 10ammidnight) Opposite the Champs Elysée Bar, this place does fantastic whole chicken covered over coals, served with bread and a green salad (ask for no sugar in the dressing, though). As it's Muslim-run there's no alcohol, but staff



will happily bring your meal to you if you prefer to sit in the bar next door.

Several stalls on Blvd de Renouveau offer *brochettes* (kebabs), *suya* and grilled fish, all of which can be eaten in the bar of your choice in the same way.

Le Point des Chutes (meals from CFA1500; 论 8am-11pm) Just off the main drag, this small oneroom outfit does great breakfasts for CFA1000, generously portioned Cameroonian standards and freshly squeezed fruit juice to die for.

Restaurant Le Baobab (dishes from CFA2000; \bigcirc 7am-11pm) This pleasant spot has outdoor seating under a thatched roof, a great atmosphere and good food. Check what's available – the lunchtime menu can be a bit limited.

Relais de la Porte Mayo (dishes from CFA4500; \bigcirc 7am-11pm) For upscale dining, this is Maroua's best option, and very popular with the local French community. The restaurant has great French and Italian options, while there's a cheaper snack menu available from the bar.

Getting There & Away

Flights are available three or four times a week with **Camaroon Airlines** (229 2019) to Yaoundé and Douala (both around CFA89,500), sometimes via Garoua. The airport is 20km south of town along the Garoua road (CFA3000 in a chartered taxi, if you can find one).

Touristique Express has several daily buses to Garoua (CFA2500, 2½ hours) and N'Gaoundéré (CFA6000, eight hours). You can also book tickets for the N'Gaoundéré-Yaoundé train here at the same time. Several other agencies operate along the N'Gaoundéré route, with depots on the same road; Star Express in the town centre is also good.

Plentiful transport to Mokolo (CFA1000, 1½ hours) and less frequently to Rhumsiki (CFA2000, around three hours) departs from Carrefour Parrah in Djarangol at the southern end of town.

Transport to Kousséri for the Chad border (CFA3500, five hours) departs from the *gare routière* on Maroua's eastern edge. Minibuses to Banki for the Nigerian border (CFA2000, two hours) also depart from here.

MANDARA MOUNTAINS

Running west of Maroua to the Nigerian border, the Mandara Mountains area is one of the most enjoyable places in Cameroon – rich in tribal culture, natural wonders and beautiful scenery. With traditional hillside villages of round huts, huge stone formations and wide green valleys, it's no surprise that the area offers Cameroon's best trekking.

There are many fascinating villages, including **Rhumsiki**, with its striking mountain scenery; **Djingliya** and **Koza** set against steep terraced hillsides; **Tourou**, known for the calabash hats worn by local women; and **Maga**, with its unique domed houses made entirely of clay. **Mora** has a particularly notable weekly market. Hiking between villages is one of the best ways to appreciate the scenery and culture alike.

Rhumsiki is the main entrance point for visitors to the Mandara Mountains, and is the one place where there's a tangible feeling of a tourist scene, although being Cameroon this is something of a relative term.

There's accommodation in Rhumsiki, Mokolo, Mora, Waza, Maga and a few other villages, but otherwise, no infrastructure. If you're travelling independently, allow plenty of time and plan to be self-sufficient with food and water. Local minibuses usually set off around 6am. *Moto-taxis* are sometimes the only option for getting around.

For those with limited time, travel agencies in Maroua can organise visits, although it's just as easy to arrange things on the spot in Rhumsiki or Mokolo, which will ensure that more of the money you spend is pumped directly into the local economy. Expect to pay around CFA9000 per day, including guide, simple meals and accommodation.

PARC NATIONAL DU WAZA

The most accessible of Cameroon's national parks **Waza** (admission CFA5000, vehicle CFA2000, camera CFA2000;) adm-6pm November 15-May 15) is the best for viewing wildlife. While it can't compare with East African parks, you're likely to see elephants, hippos, giraffes, antelopes and – with luck – lions. Late March to April is the best time for viewing, as the animals congregate at water holes before the rains. Waza is also notable for its particularly rich birdlife. The park is closed during the rainy season.

A guide (CFA3000) is obligatory in each vehicle. Walking isn't permitted.

The park entrance is signposted and about 400m off the main highway. Unless you have your own vehicle, the best way to visit is to hire a vehicle in Maroua (about CFA30,000 per day plus petrol). See p296 for listings of tour operators. A 4WD vehicle is recommended. Accessing the park by public transport is difficult; any bus between Maroua and Kousséri should be able to drop you at the park turn-off, but after that you'll be reliant on hitching a lift into the park itself, which is likely to involve a long wait.

Sleeping

Waza can easily be done as a day trip from Maroua if you start early (bring a packed lunch). Otherwise, there are three places to stay near the park entrance.

Centre d'Accueil de Waza (229 2207; camp sites per person CFA2500, r CFA7000) This simple place at the park entrance has accommodation in no-frills two-person *boukarous* with shared bathroom facilities. Meals can be arranged (CFA2000) and it has a small kitchen.

GIC-FAC Café-Restaurant du lime Millénaire (raround CFA4000) The local women's group has a few very simple rooms in a basic guesthouse. Meals can be arranged. It's just off the main road along the park access road.

Campement de Waza (^[®] 229 1646, in Maroua 229 1165, in Waza 765 7717, 765 7558; s/d CFA14,800/16,000; [№]) This is the most luxurious option, with accommodation in reasonably comfortable *boukarous* and an attached restaurant. There are also a few cheaper rooms with fan only. It's located on a small hill about 700m from the park entrance, on the opposite side of the main road.

There's also basic accommodation in Waza village, just north of the park entrance.

EASTERN CAMEROON

Cameroon's remote east is wild and untamed. Seldom visited by travellers, it's very much a destination for those with plenty of time and the stamina to back up an appetite for adventure. There's little infrastructure and travel throughout is slow and rugged, with dense green forest and red laterite earth roads. The rainforest national parks are the main attraction, along with routes into the CAR and Congo.

BERTOUA

The capital of East Province, Bertoua is a genuine boomtown, born of logging and mining. Here you'll find all the facilities lacking elsewhere in the region, including banks and sealed roads. Hôtel Mansa (224 1650; Mokolo II; r CFA25,000; €) is the town's best, worth a splurge if you've been lost in the forest. Hôtel Montagnia, near the gare routière, and Hôtel Mirage, near the post office, have basic rooms for around CFA6000. Café Moderne (meals from CFA500) is at the gare routière; also try Grille de la Ménagère (near the Orange phone mast) or Chez Odette, near La King textile store.

Cameroon Air flies from Bertoua to Yaoundé and Douala. Buses to Yaoundé (CFA5000, seven hours), Bélabo (for the train; CFA1000, one hour) and Garoua-Boulaï, leave from the *gare routières* near the market.

GAROUA-BOULAÏ

If you're looking for a picture of a rough African frontier town, Garoua-Boulaï is it. On the CAR border, it's a place of bars, trucks and prostitutes. The *auberges* (hostels) aren't recommended, so try the **Mission Catholique** (dm for a donation, r about (FA5000) instead.

There's a bus to N'Gaoundéré (CFA4000, 12 hours, one daily) during the dry season and year-round service to Bertoua; both roads are just tolerable. The CAR border is on the edge of Garoua-Boulaï next to the motor park.

CAMEROON DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Cameroon has a decent range of accommodation options, from simple *auberges* and dorm beds in religious missions to luxury hotels. Expect to pay around CFA12,000 for a decent single room with bathroom and a fan. Most hotels quote prices per room – genuine single and twin rooms are the exception rather than the norm.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking is a big draw card in Cameroon. The two most popular trekking regions are Mt Cameroon (p288) near the coast and the Mandara Mountains (opposite) in the north. The Ring Road (p291) near Bamenda also offers great hiking possibilities, but there's nothing organised so you'll need to be selfsufficient.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are officially open from 7.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday. Businesses are open from 7.30am or 8am until

PRACTICALITIES

- The Cameroon Tribune is the government-owned bilingual daily. The thriceweekly Le Messager (French) is the main independent newspaper.
- Most broadcast programming is government run and in French, through Cameroon Radio-TV Corporation (CRTV). TVs at top-end hotels often have CNN or French news stations.
- Electricity supply is 220V and plugs are of the European two-round-pin variety.
- Cameroon uses the metric system.

6pm or 6.30pm Monday to Friday, generally with a one- to two-hour break sometime between noon and 3pm. Most are also open from 8am to 1pm (sometimes later) on Saturday. Banks are open from 7.30am or 8am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The major cities, Douala and Yaoundé, both have reputations for petty crime, especially in the crowded central areas. The roads pose a greater risk, with plenty of badly maintained vehicles driven at punishing speeds.

Scams and official corruption are a way of life in Cameroon; keep your guard up and maintain a sense of humour.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Cameroon Embassies & Consulates

c a m e r o o n In West Africa, Cameroon has embassies in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal. Check the appropriate country chapter for details. Elsewhere, embassies and consulates include the following:

Australia (2 02-9876 4544; www.cameroonconsul.com; 65 Bingara Rd, Beecroft, NSW)

Belgium (🖻 02-345 1870; Ave Brughmann 131-133, Brussels)

Canada (🖻 613-236 1522; 170 Clemow Ave, Ottawa, Ontario)

Central African Republic (🖻 611687; Ave de la France, Bangui)

Chad (🖻 512894; Rue des Poids Lourds, N'Djaména) Democratic Republic of Congo (🖻 833404; Rue Général Bayardelle, Brazzaville)

Equatorial Guinea (🕿 2263; 19 Calle Rey Boncoro, Malabo)

Ethiopia (🕿 448116; Bole Rd, Addis Ababa)

France (🖻 01 47 43 98 33; Rue d'Auteuil, 75016 Paris) Gabon (🕿 732910, 732800; Blvd Léon Mba, Libreville) Germany (20 0228-356 038; Rheinallee 76, Bonn) Italy (2006-4429 1285, 3558 2234; Via Syracusa 4/6, Rome)

Netherlands (2 70-346 9715; www.cameroon-embassy .nl; Amalistraat 14, The Hague) Switzerland (🕿 022-736 2022; 6 Rue Dunant, Geneva) UK (🖻 020-7727 0771; www.cameroon.embassyhome

page.com; 84 Holland Park, London) USA (🖻 202-265 8790; www.ambacam-usa.org; 2349 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Cameroon

The following embassies and consulates are located in Yaoundé, except as noted. Australians and New Zealanders should contact the Canadian High Commission in the case of an emergency. Opening hours listed are for visa applications.

Canada (Map p282; 🕿 223 2311; Immeuble Stamatiades, Ave de l'Indépendance, Centre Ville)

Central African Republic (Map p281; 🕿 220 5155; Rue 1863, Bastos; 🕑 8am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Chad Yaoundé (Map p281: 221 0624: Rue Joseph Mballa Eloumden, Bastos: 🏹 7.30am-noon & 1-3.30pm Mon-Fri); Garoua (🖻 227 3128)

Congo (Map p281: 221 2458; Rue 1815, Bastos; 8 8am-noon Mon-Fri)

Democratic Republic of Congo (Map p281; 220 5103; Blvd de l'URSS, Bastos; Y 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) Equatorial Guinea (Map p281; 221 0804; Rue 1805, Bastos; 🕑 9am-3pm Mon-Fri); Douala (🖻 342 2729; Rue Koloko; 🕑 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

France (Map p281; 🕿 223 6399; Rue Joseph Atemengué, near Place de la Réunification); Douala (2 342 6250; Ave des Cocotiers, Bonanio)

Gabon (Map p281: 🕿 220 2966; Rue 1816, Bastos; 9.30am-3pm Mon-Fri)

IDENTIFY YOURSELF

In Cameroon it's a legal requirement to carry identification with you at all times. If you're not happy with always carrying your passport, it's possible to get an official certified copy. Photocopy the title and visa pages and go to the main police office in any large town during office hours and ask to be 'legalised'. The process is quick and easy, leaving you with a passport copy with enough official stamps to satisfy even the surliest of checkpoint police. The certification costs CFA1000.

Germany (Map p281; 221 0056; Ave Charles de Gaulle, Centre Ville)

Liberia (Map p281; 221 1296; Blvd de l'URSS, Bastos) Nigeria (Map p281; 🖻 221 3509; Rue Joseph Mballa Eloumden, Bastos; Y 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri); Douala (🕿 343 2168; Blvd de la Liberté); Buea (🕿 332 2528; Nigeria Consulate Rd; (8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Visas not issued in Douala.

UK (Map p281; 222 0796; Ave Churchill, Centre Ville); Douala (🗃 342 3612; Immeuble Standard Chartered, Blvd de la Liberté)

USA (Map p282; 🖻 223 0512; Rue de Nachtigal, Centre Ville); Douala (🗃 342 0303; Immeuble Flatters, off Ave de Gaulle, Bonanjo)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Tabaski (p292) is the biggest festival celebrated in Cameroon, with the most festivities taking place in Foumban. Each February Cameroonian and international athletes gather for the Race of Hope to the summit of Mt Cameroon, attracting large crowds of spectators. Considerably faster than the leisurely trek most people opt for, winners usually finish in a staggering 41/2 hours for men and 51/2 hours for women. For more information contact Fako Tourist Board in Limbe or the Fédération Camerounaise d'Athlétisme (222 4744) in Yaoundé.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays include the following: New Year's Day 1 January Youth Day 11 February Easter March/April Labour Day 1 May National Day 20 May Assumption Day 15 August Christmas Day 25 December

Islamic holidays are also observed throughout Cameroon (see p1106).

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access can be found in any town of a reasonable size, usually with pretty good connections. Costs average CFA300 to CFA600 per hour.

MONFY

The unit of currency is the West African CFA. Cash is king in Cameroon, especially in remote regions where it's the only way to pay - bring plenty of euros. Banks regularly refuse to change travellers cheques, and charge

around 5% commission when they do - try Bicec, SGBC, Crédit Lyonnais and Standard Chartered Bank.

Most towns now have at least one ATM, always tied to the Visa network. SGBC is usually the most reliable when using foreign cards. Banks won't generally offer cash advances on credit cards. If you get stuck, Western Union has branches throughout Cameroon for international money transfers.

Express Exchange moneychangers change cheques and US dollars cash; there are branches in Yaoundé, Douala, Bamenda and Buea, with further plans for expansion.

POST

Yaoundé and Douala have reliable poste restante services at their central post offices, with letters held for about two weeks (CFA200 per letter collected). International post is fairly reliable for letters, but international couriers should be preferred for packages - there are branches in all large towns.

TELEPHONE

There are private teleboutiques or streetside phone stands in all towns. International calls cost about CFA1000 per minute. Internet telephony is increasingly popular, costing around a quarter of normal rates.

VISAS

Visas are required by all travellers and must be bought prior to arrival in the country. At Cameroonian embassies in neighbouring countries, visas are issued quickly for around US\$60. Applications in Europe and the USA may require a confirmed flight ticket, hotel reservation and proof of funds for the trip (a copy of a recent bank statement should suffice).

Visa Extensions

You can obtain visa extensions at the Ministry of Immigration (Map p282; Ave Mdug-Fouda Ada) in Yaoundé, where one photo plus CFA15,000 is required.

Visas for Onward Travel

Thirty-day visas for CAR (CFA35,000), Chad (CFA30,000), Congo (CFA70,00), Equatorial Guinea (CFA37,000), Gabon (CFA37,000) and other nearby countries are available from embassies in Yaoundé; see opposite for address details. For visas to Nigeria, see p470.

TRANSPORT IN CAMEROON

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Both Yaoundé and Douala have international airports linking Cameroon to major cities in Africa and Europe. Cameroon Airlines is the local carrier, with flights to major cities throughout Central and West Africa.

Regional flights from Douala include Lagos (Nigeria; one way CFA172,000), Nairobi (Kenya; one way CFA536,000) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia; one way CFA537,000).

DEPARTURE TAX

A departure tax of CFA10,000 is charged for all flights leaving Cameroon. Domestic flights incur a departure tax of CFA2500.

Land

Neighbouring countries' borders are open.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The standard, if rough, route is via Garoua-Boulaï (p299), which straddles the border, and on to Bangui (via Bouar). An alternative is to travel to Kenzou, south of Batouri.

CHAD

For Chad, travellers head to Kousséri in the extreme north for the border near N'Djaména. Minibuses go to Kousséri from Maroua; the border is notorious for its greedy officials.

CONGO

CAMEROON

This border is as remote as you can get, and near impossible in the rains. From Yokadouma, travel south to Sokamba, where you can catch a ferry (large enough for 4WDs) or pirogue across the Ngoko River to the Congolese port of Ouesso. From there, head for Pokola and the logging road to Brazzaville.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA & GABON

The main border crossings into Equatorial Guinea and Gabon are a few kilometres from

each other, and are accessible from Amban. The road splits here, with the easterly route heading for Bitam and Libreville (Gabon) and the westerly route heading for Ebebiyin and Bata (Equatorial Guinea).

The Cameroon–Equatorial Guinea border at Campo is normally closed.

NIGERIA

To/from Nigeria the main crossing points are Ekok, west of Mamfé, where you cross to Mfum for shared taxis to Calabar (treacherous in the rainy season), and at Banki in the extreme north for crossings to Maiduguri.

Sea NIGERIA

A twice-weekly ferry sails from Limbe to Calabar on Monday and Thursday, and in the opposite direction every Tuesday and Friday – see p289.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Cameroon Airlines has flights connecting Yaoundé and Douala daily, and travels three times weekly to Garoua, Maroua, N'Gaoundéré and Bertoua from both major cities. One-way fares from Douala to N'Gaoundéré cost CFA125,000 and Yaoundé to Maroua CFA89,500.

Bus

Agences de voyages (agency buses) run along all major and many minor routes in Cameroon. Prices are low and fixed, and on some bus lines you can even reserve a seat. From Yaoundé to Douala costs CFA3800 and N'Gaoundéré to Maroua CFA6000. However, some drivers are extremely reckless, and bus accidents occur all too frequently. *Taxis brousses* (bush taxis) are also popular.

Train

Cameroon's rail system (Camrail) operates three main lines: Yaoundé to N'Gaoundéré, Yaoundé to Douala and Douala to Kumba. In practice, only the first is of interest to travellers, as it's the main way to get between the southern and northern halves of the country. For details, see p284.

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Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire was once the economic miracle of Africa and a role model for stability on the continent. Never completely breaking from their colonial masters, the post-independence leaders wooed French capital to build a modern infrastructure and considerable prosperity. The long-serving and charismatic first president, Houphouët-Boigny, promoted the notion of a happy amalgam of pragmatic Western capitalism with benign African values. The society he presided over, however, was far from liberal and the dream ended with his death.

A consequent string of coups and popular insurgencies shook the country, and northernled rebellion in 2002 violently split it in half. Most of the huge French-expat community jumped ship, and the economy has since crumbled. However, the country abounds in some of the best natural attractions in West Africa, such as Parc National de Taï's vast patch of rainforest and the string of beaches along the Atlantic coast. It's also a land rich in tradition due to a diverse tribal mix that includes Dan, Lobi, Baoulé and Senoufo peoples.

But it's really the modernity that sets Côte d'Ivoire apart from other West African nations. Abidjan is decidedly dog-eared these days, but its shimmering skyscrapers will still astound. Yamoussoukro is famous for its basilica, an astonishing replica of Rome's St Peter's, which epitomises the Houphouët-Boigny era and, in a way, Africa's current place in today's world, since the Big Man philosophy shows few signs of fading.

FAST FACTS

- Area 322,465 sq km
- ATMs Found throughout the governmentcontrolled south
- Borders All borders open, but only Ghana safe
- Budget US\$40 minimum daily in Abidjan, US\$15 to US\$20 elsewhere
- Capital Yamoussoukro
- Languages French, Mande, Malinké, Dan, Senoufo, Baoulé, Agni, Dioula
- Money West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 17.3 million
- Seasons Wet seasons: south (May to July and October to November), north (June to October)
- Telephone Country code 🖻 225; international access code 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visas Required by all except citizens of the US and most West African countries; get one before you arrive

lonelyplanet.com

HIGHLIGHTS

- West Coast beaches (p309) Soak up the sun or search for wildlife at these rainforestclad strands.
- **Parc National de Taï** (p309) Commune with chimpanzees on a safari expedition.
- **Yamoussoukro** (p310) Gaze up at the aweinspiring basilica.
- **Grand Bassam** (p309) Wander through the town and enjoy the faded colonial charm.
- Man (p311) Experience live performances of exhilarating music and masked dance.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The south has two wet seasons: May through July and October through November. In the drier north, the wet season lasts from June to October. The south is very humid, with temperatures averaging 28°C. In the less-humid north, the average is 26°C from December to February, with midday maximums regularly above 35°C. Temperatures can drop to 10°C in the western highlands.

Since most intercity roads are sealed, the rains shouldn't impede travel too much; however, they will affect visits to beaches and national parks. Come December, the harmattan winds blowing in from the Sahara greatly reduce visibility.

ITINERARIES

• **Three Days** Most short-term visitors limit themselves to Abidjan (p307), though you could also get up to see the vainglory of Yamoussoukro (p310), or soak

HOW MUCH?

- Small wooden statue US\$3
- 100km bush-taxi ride US\$3.60
- Bottle of Youki US\$0.60
- Small Korhogo cloth wall hanging US\$8
- A night at a live music show US\$10

LONELY PLANET INDEX

1L petrol US\$1.10

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

- 1.5L of bottled water US\$1
- Bottle of Flag beer US\$0.80
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10
- Plate of Aloco US\$1

WARNING

Côte d'Ivoire remains unstable. A few people still travel to Abidjan and the nearby beaches, but seek up-to-the-minute information if you decide to join them.

up some sun in Grand Bassam (p309) or Assinie (p309).

- **One Week** With a week at your disposal you can see everything mentioned above at a comfortable pace, or instead enjoy a mix of surf, sand and simians around Sassandra (p309) and in Parc National de Taï (p309).
- Two Weeks Two weeks is enough time to see most of what we've detailed here in government-controlled territory, or, depending on the current security situation, the intrepid could attempt to secure permission to visit The North (p310), though this is not to be undertaken lightly.

HISTORY

Until the 1840s, the indigenous people of Côte d'Ivoire were protected from European colonialism by the inhospitable coastline. In this relative isolation, kingdoms such as the Krou, Senoufo, Lubi, Malinké and Akan flourished. When the French began a big push towards colonial exploitation, they met fierce resistance, but eventually took control, trading for ivory, and establishing coffee and cocoa plantations, which are still the backbone of the economy.

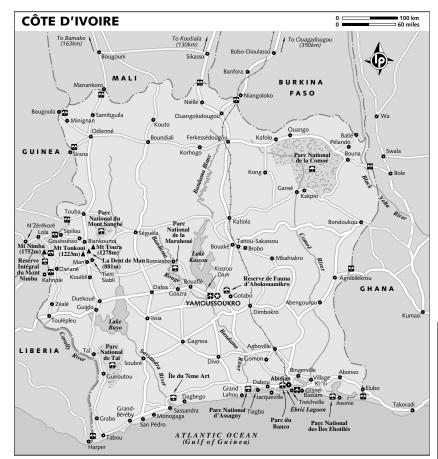
Born in 1905, Félix Houphouët-Boigny became the country's father of independence. A labour leader who turned his trade union into a pro-Independence political party, he was elected to the French parliament and eventually became the first African to be a minister in a European government. When independence came in 1960, he was the obvious choice for president.

Houphouët-Boigny's policies, maintaining close economic ties with France and relying on agriculture, were wildly successful. Côte d'Ivoire was the world's largest producer of cocoa and the economy maintained 10% annual growth rate for 20 years. But it couldn't last. World recession, drought, collapsing prices on agricultural products and overlogging all contributed to Côte d'Ivoire's economic troubles. President Houphouët-Boigny initiated hardship measures, which sparked civil unrest. The 1990 elections were open to other parties for the first time, but Houphouët-Boigny won easily. He died in 1993 after 33 years as the country's president.

His hand-picked successor, Henri Konan-Bédié, responded to the nation's problems by scapegoating immigrants (mostly those living in the north, from neighbouring Burkina Faso) who had been the backbone of the agricultural economy during the good years.

In December 1999, Côte d'Ivoire suffered its first coup. President Bédié was overthrown by forces loyal to General Robert Guéi, who promised free elections but in fact intensified Bédié's xenophobic policies of Ivoirité. While the country reeled from military rebellions and civil unrest, Guéi had the supreme court declare popular Muslim candidate Alasanne Ouattara ineligible to run for president because his mother was from Burkina Faso (even though he had papers proving otherwise). Despite this, Laurant Gbagbo won the October 2000 presidential election. Guéi declared himself the official winner, but was chased from power by massive popular uprisings. The following two years of Gbagbo's presidency were marked by attempted coups and tensions.

On 19 September 2002, troops from the north gained control of much of the country. Initially the government agreed to a ceasefire with the rebels, who had the full backing of the mostly Muslim northern populace. But this truce was short-lived, and fighting over



the prime cocoa-growing areas resumed. France sent in troops to maintain the ceasefire boundaries, and Liberian militias took advantage of the crisis to seize parts of the western-border region, and began full-scale looting and pillaging.

In January 2003, President Gbagbo and leaders of the New Forces, as the rebels are now called, signed accords creating a 'government of national unity', with representatives of the rebels taking up places in a new cabinet. Curfews were lifted and French troops cleaned up the lawless western border, but the harmony was intermittent and neither side lived up to most of this or further peace agreements.

Côte d'Ivoire Today

By 2004 the country was less stable and more violent. UN peacekeepers arrived in March, but on 4 November Gbagbo broke the ceasefire and bombed rebel strongholds, including Bouaké. Two days later, jets struck a French military base killing nine French peacekeepers. The French destroyed the Ivorian air force in retaliation, and then all hell broke loose. Government soldiers clashed with peacekeepers, while state-run TV and radio whipped citizens into a frenzy, imploring them to take revenge against French soldiers and citizens. Most French citizens fled, and dozens of Ivorians died in the clashes. The government called off the mayhem after a few days, but for many, the anti-French sentiment behind it lingers. Both sides settled back into the routine of peace deals brokered and broken, and violence still breaks out sporadically.

Elections called for October 2005 were cancelled, and Gbagbo declared he would remain president despite his constitutional mandate expiring. In December 2005, African mediators declared Charles Konan Banny an interim prime minister, and charged the respected economist with organising elections by October 2006, which also failed to happen. The government has made few serious efforts at compromise, and the rebels, having enriched themselves through extortion and black-market trade, have lost their moral authority. Côte d'Ivoire remains trapped in an untenable status quo.

CULTURE

D'IVOIRE

CÔTE

Evervone in Côte d'Ivoire worries about the war and dreams of peace, but after riding a five-year rollercoaster many are losing hope.

Business owners are struggling or closing up shop, farmers are barely breaking even, and many people are giving up and getting out. People understand that, even when peace comes, there will still be problems.

Before the war, despite the economic wonders the country was famous for, the literacy rate was below 50% and life expectancy was only 45 years. No one is able to take statistics on such things these days, but, not surprisingly, things have deteriorated.

PEOPLE

Côte d'Ivoire has over 60 tribal groups. About 35% of the people are Christian and 40% Muslim; the rest practice traditional religions based on ancestral worship, which can be loosely termed animist.

ARTS & CRAFTS

The definitive Ivorian craft is Korhogo cloth, a coarse cotton painted with geometrical designs and fantastical animals. Also prized are Dan masks from the Man region and Senoufo wooden statues, masks and traditional musical instruments from the northeast.

ENVIRONMENT

Côte d'Ivoire used to be dense rainforest, but most of it was cleared during the agricultural boom, and what remains today is under attack from illegal logging. The largest tract is in Parc National de Taï. Several peaks in the west rise over 1000m, and a coastal lagoon with a unique ecosystem stretches 300km west from the Ghanaian border. The north is dry scrubland.

FOOD & DRINK

There are three staples in Ivorian cooking: rice, fufu and attiéké. Fufu is a dough of boiled yam, cassava or plantain, pounded into a sticky paste. Attiéké is grated cassava and has a couscous-like texture. They're invariably served with a sauce, such as sauce arachide, made with groundnuts (peanuts); sauce graine, a hot sauce made with palm-oil nuts; sauce aubergine, made with eggplant; or sauce gombo and sauce djoumgbré, both with a base of okra. Aloco, a dish of ripe bananas fried with chilli in palm oil, is a popular street food. Kedjenou chicken, or sometimes guinea-fowl, simmered with vegetables in a mild sauce and usually served in an attractive earthenware pot - is almost a national dish. The most popular places

to eat out are maquis, reasonably priced openair restaurants, usually under thatch roofs, that grill meats each evening.

Youki Soda, a slightly sweeter version of tonic water, is a good thirst quencher. Bandji is the local palm wine, and is especially palatable when freshly tapped. Distilled, it makes a skull-shattering spirit known as koutoukou. The standard beer is Flag, but for a premium brew, call for a locally brewed Tuborg.

ABIDJAN

Abidjan, the country's capital in all but name, has always had a mixed reputation with travellers. On one hand, it's a glitzy, vibrant city of high-rise buildings, smart boutiques and chic Ivorian ladies clacking along in high heels on their way to restaurants of four-star Parisian quality - although the 'Paris of West Africa' moniker was a bit of an exaggeration, even during the boom years. On the other hand, there are the beggars, the street hawkers and now the gun-toting soldiers who seem to have slipped in from another world.

ORIENTATION

Abidjan spreads around the inlets of the Ébrié Lagoon. Le Plateau, with its boulevards and skyscrapers, is the hub of the business and government districts. It's nearly a ghost town at night. Across a finger of the lagoon, east of Le Plateau, is the exclusive residential district of Cocody. North of Cocody lies the residential and restaurant district of Les Deux Plateaux. South of Le Plateau, Treichville has a little of everything.

INFORMATION Internet Access

Internet access is widely available in Abidjan.

Medical Services

Polyclinique Internationale St Anne-Marie (Pisam; 22-445132; off Blvd de la Corniche, Cocody) The only hospital with a 24-hour intensive-care unit.

Monev

In addition to banks, most hotels and many Lebanese-owned stores, including Hayat supermarkets, change euros. Bicici Bank (Ave Delafosse) Has an ATM. SGBCI Bank (Ave Anoma) Has an ATM.

Post & Telephone

At the central post office, opposite Place de la République, post-restante letters cost US\$1.70 each to collect and are held for one month.

Rates for international phone calls are as low as US\$0.40 per minute at internet cafés.

Tourist Information

Côte d'Ivoire Tourisme (20-251610; Place de la République, Le Plateau) There's also an airport welcome centre.

Travel Agencies

Net Voyages Côte d'Ivoire (🖻 20-336121; info@ voyager-en-afrique.com; Immeuble Borija, Ave Noguès, Le Plateau)

Osmosis Akan (@ 07-801518; osmosisak@yahoo.fr; off Blvd Latrille, Les Deux Plateau)

Prestige Voyages (22-417673; prestigevoyages@yahoo .fr; Rue des Jardins, Centre Commercial Louis Panis, Les Deux Plateaux)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime is a serious problem in Abidjan. Take a taxi after dark. Despite its reputation, Treichville is relatively safe up to 15th Ave, but, for the time being, Marcory and Adjamé are best avoided as much as possible since the chance of travellers getting mugged there remains high. Don't ever walk over the bridges between Treichville and Le Plateau. You might not even want to drive over Pont du Général de Gaulle during rush hour when many taxi passengers get robbed.

Getting around the city can be frustrating because police regularly stop vehicles, especially shared taxis, demanding bribes from the drivers, and sometimes passengers. Those presumed to be French often get a little extra hassle. If someone is picking you up at the airport, make sure the person holding the sign with your name is really who he says he is.

tower of the Cathédrale St-Paul (Blvd Angoulvant; (8am-7pm) is a huge stylised figure of St Paul,

with the nave sweeping behind him like trailing robes. It's an impressive sight.

Stroll Le Plateau and you'll find some of the buildings are as breathtaking up close as from a distance. La Pyramide (cnr Ave Franchet d'Esperey & Rue Botreau-Roussel), designed by the Italian architect Olivieri, was the first daring structure. The shimmering Ministry of Post & Telecommunications (cnr Ave Marchand & Rue Lecoeur) is all curves.

SLEEPING

Hôtel International (ⓐ 21-240747; Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Treichville; s/dUS\$22/32; €) When they finish renovations, this hotel should be a pretty good option.

Hôtel Terminus ((21-241577; Blvd Delafosse, Treichville; r US\$27; (2) Treichville's most comfortable option is in a good, busy location, though it's not great value.

Grand Hôtel (@ 20-332109; Rue du Commerce, Le Plateau; r US\$45-81; ♥) Good value and accommodating staff.

Hostellerie de la Licorne (22-410730; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateau; r US\$54-72; Rue des) Immaculate and friendly, the garden adds to the great ambience.

Ibis Marcory (2 21-756300; Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing; r US\$75-88; **2 (a)** Handy to the airport, it has become popular thanks to its location near a French military camp.

Hôtel Ivoire (22-408000; Blvd Latrille, Cocody; s/ d \$54/100; 2 (2) More than just a nearly empty hotel, the famous 750-room Ivoire is a monument to Abidjan's bygone glory. The complex has tennis courts, swimming pools, a cinema, casino, nightclub, sauna, bowling alley and more.

EATING

D'IVOIRE

CÔTE

Le Plateau is superb for street food at lunchtime. Look around Cité Administrative and east of the Grande Mosquée.

Allocodrome (Rue Washington, Cocody; mains around US\$3.60; dinner) This fantastic outdoor spot, with dozens of vendors grilling meats, sizzles until late.

Restaurant des Combattants (Ave Marchand, Le Plateau; mains US\$3.60-9; breakfast, lunch & dinner) A huge colonial building featuring many African dishes not often found in sit-down restaurants.

La Cascade (Ave Chardy, Le Plateau; mains US\$18; ${\hfill}$ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The French cuisine

at Cascade is superb, so the place is usually packed. A gushing waterfall and pond add to the ambience.

La Pagode Flottante (Blvd de Marseille, Zone 4; mains around \$U\$27; 论 lunch & dinner) High-priced but very tasty Vietnamese served on a barge on the lagoon. Eat indoors or out.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

With the young Ivorian elite spending freely on cocktails, **Butterfly** (off Blvd de Marseille, Zone 4) pulls off a New York vibe. There's live jazz in the garden on Thursday nights. **Scotch** (Rue Paul Langevin, Zone 4), the latest 'in' venue, sports a swimming pool in the courtyard. **Jamaica City** (opposite Prima Center, Zone 4) has cheap drinks, a fun atmosphere and excellent reggae bands. **Bardes Sports** (Rue du Commerce, Le Plateau) is a favourite watering hole for French expats and old-school Ivorian professionals.

Midnight (Blvd Delafosse, Treichville) is one of the oldest dance clubs in Abidjan, and one of many in this happening part of Treichville. You can sometimes dance to Afro-Cuban rhythms at **Place Vendôme** (Blvd de la République, Le Plateau).

SHOPPING

Marché de Treichville (Ave Victor Blaka) is an ugly Chinese-built building, but inside it's African to the core. Marché de Cocody (Blvd de France) has the usual tourist trinkets.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most buses and bush taxis leave from the shambolic Gare Routière d'Adjamé, some 4km north of Le Plateau. For destinations east along the coast, such as Grand Bassam and the Ghanaian border, it's better to use Gare de Bassam at the corner of Rue 38 and Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, south of Treichville.

GETTING AROUND

Public buses and *woro-woro* (shared taxis) ply fixed routes, but it's tough to figure out the system, so it's easier to take a taxi. Taxis are reasonably priced, but drivers probably won't switch on their meter without prompting: tariff number 2 only applies midnight to 6am. At the airport you'll need to set a price, which shouldn't exceed \$US8 during the day. The fanciest hotels have free shuttles.

Taking a *bateau-bus* (boat-bus) between Le Plateau and Treichville offers a lovely perspective on the city.

The big car-rental companies are still here, but most journalists hire cars from **Mr Konan** (**(20)**07-675508) who keeps his Mercedes in front of Hôtel Tiama. Expect to pay about US\$27 to US\$35 per day.

THE EASTERN COAST

The beaches east of Abidjan are still the playground of wealthy Ivorians and expats; there are just far fewer of them soaking up the sun these days.

GRAND BASSAM

Colonial glory fading in the salt air, and long stretches of beach lined with seafood restaurants are the main attractions at this oncepopular getaway near Abidjan. The city is laid out on a long spit of land, with a quiet lagoon on one side and the turbulent Atlantic Ocean on the other. There are many beachfront hotels and restaurants, but a dramatic increase in petty crime and muggings means most people now weekend at Assinie.

A walk through town will take you past the **colonial buildings** the city is known for, some being restored while others are slowly falling apart. The **Musée National du Costume** (admission US\$1.80) in the former governor's palace has a nice little exhibit showing housing styles of various tribal groups. **Pirogue tours** of the lagoon and the mangrove swamps can be arranged with local boatmen.

The attractive *paillote* bar is the best part of **Auberge de la Plage du Parrain** (21-301541; r \$14.50). Lovely **Taverne la Bassamoise** (21-301062; r/bungalow ind breakfast \$45/52; 2) mixes African design with old-world charm, and adds tennis courts and a swimming pool.

Seafood-dining in *maquis* with views of the water (mostly the lagoon) is the mainstay of the dining scene.

Minibuses and bush taxis leave from the *gare routière* by the Place de Paix roundabout often to Abidjan (US\$0.90) and irregularly to Assinie (US\$2.70).

ASSINIE

Formerly the preserve of package tours from Europe, Assinie has little to do with Africa. Accommodation is largely top end, but **Blue Cargo** (207-539276; huts with shared bathroom US\$21; (20) has funky huts with fans on the lagoon. There is a swimming pool, and the *brochettes* (kebabs) are fantastic. Take a bush taxi from Abidjan, and change cars in Grand Bassam.

THE WESTERN COAST

The western coast has some of the country's best beaches and seaside villages, with rainforest scenery and wildlife-filled parks running inland.

TIAGBA

SASSANDRA

Sassandra is the jumping-off point for a string of beaches to the west, some with good surfing, and an interesting fishing village in its own right. It's also the gateway to the **Île du Tème Art**, 12km north. For US\$14 you can take a boat tour along the river (and possibly see hippos and manatees) and there are two simple rooms and a **bungalow** (22-424394; r US\$29) if you want to spend the night.

Hôtel la Côtière ((2) 34-720120; r with fan/air-con US\$11/18; (2) has small bungalows on the estuary and some delicious African fare (fish dishes cost US\$5.50). Other seaside hotels also serve good food and there are several *maquis* near the post office. West of town you can still find a few Robinson Crusoe-style huts, otherwise, talk to village chiefs about spending the night.

At Dagbego, about 35km east, is **Best of Africa** (2) 34-720606; www.bestofafrica.org; bungalows US\$72-108; **2** (2), a gorgeous and luxurious resort with ultra-friendly owners.

Buses run four times daily to Abidjan (\$U\$7.50), while bush taxis and minibuses leave when full for San Pédro (U\$\$5.50). To get to the western beaches you'll need to hire a cab.

PARC NATIONAL DE TAÏ

Parc National de Taï ((2) 34-712353; www.parc-national-de -tai.org) protects one of the largest remaining virgin rainforests in West Africa. Thanks to

the World Wildlife Fund and other agencies, anti-poaching patrols have continued through the crisis. Though not fully operational, visits can be arranged. A two-day, all-inclusive expedition to visit habituated chimpanzees costs US\$117 per person, though cheaper options are available.

THE CENTRE

Though it's still possible to travel to the capital, the nearby national parks are off limits until the crisis ends, and even then, unfortunately, it's hard to believe there will be much forest or wildlife left.

YAMOUSSOUKRO

A capital city with no embassies, government ministries or significant commercial activity, Yamoussoukro is known mainly for its basilica and other overweening excesses, all pet projects of Félix Houphouët-Boigny who was born here. It's a sad, but interesting testament to Africa's greatest curse - the Big Boss who can get away with anything.

Siahts

Bring your passport to enter the main attraction, the Basilique de Notre Dame de la Paix (Route de Daloa: admission US\$1.75: 8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat. 2-5pm Sun), which resembles St Peter's in Rome and is such a point of pride it was spared during the November 2004 riots. Walking around the interior can be overwhelming. The presidential palace, where Houphouët-Boigny is now buried, can only be viewed from afar. The lake's crocodiles are fed every day around 5pm. The tourist office (🖻 30-640814; Ave Houphouët-Boigny; 🕑 8am-noon, 3-6pm Mon-Fri) arranges Baoulé dancing performances in nearby villages for around US\$90.

Sleeping & Eating

D'IVOIRE

CÔTE

Like an African village within the lively Habitat quarter, Hôtel Sialou-Mo (36-641364; r & paillotes US\$9-11) is a fun place to stay. Attractive paillotes with fans and bathrooms cost the same as the undistinguished, shower-only rooms in the main block. The city's better hotels were looted during the November 2004 riots, but Yamoussoukro's best, the Hôtel Président (2 30-641582; Route d'Abidjan; s/d/ste US\$56/65/117; 🕄 🗩) has been fixed up. There's a golf course, nightclub, and the 14th-floor Restaurant Panoramique.

French-owned A la Bella Pizza (Ave Houphouët-Boigny; mains US\$6-9; 🕑 lunch & dinner) serves great pastas, crêpes and local fare, as well as its namesake pizzas.

Getting There & Away

Yamoussoukro is a major transport hub, and vehicles leave, mostly from Ave Houphouët-Boigny south of the lake, to Abidjan (US\$7), Bouaké (US\$6), Man (US\$9) and San Pédro (US\$11).

When the security situation improves, you'll again be able to catch buses directly to Bamako (Mali), and Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso.

THE NORTH

The rebel-held half of Côte d'Ivoire, one of the most fascinating cultural destinations in West Africa, is suffering. The infrastructure is crumbling, jobs are scarce, and rag-tag soldiers shouldering Kalashnikovs are everywhere (keep plenty of coins handy). Even if you have all your papers in order, travel here is risky.

BOUAKÉ

Bouaké is the country's second-largest city and the capital of the New Forces. Even before the war there was little reason to come other than Le Carnaval de Bouaké, previously held every March. You can't get here without a laissez-passer (travel permit) from the rebels, and they don't just hand them out to anyone. Despite all this, Bouaké is much safer than Abidjan.

Hôtel Printemps (🖻 07-845632; Rue de la BCAO; r US\$18-15; 🕄) is safely inside the Moroccancontrolled UN compound. Visiting journalists often stay with Madame Delon (20 06-349749; US\$36-45; 🕄), a well-known French woman who offers B&B-style accommodation and serves Bouaké's best French cuisine. The French-run Pâtisserie les Palmiers (Ave Gabriel Dadié: breakfast US\$2.70; 🕅 breakfast, lunch & dinner) is unbeatable for breakfast and coffee, and the intimate, outdoor, thatched terrace at Restaurant Black & White (Ave Jacque Aka; mains US\$7.50-11; 🕥 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) is popular with rebel leaders for drinks at night. The area around the market abounds with cheap, simple stalls.

Most of the buses and bush taxis travelling to/from San Pédro (US\$14.50) and Abidjan (US\$12.50), both via Yamoussoukro (US\$6.50), leave from Gare Routière du Grand Marché.

MAN

Rich in traditional culture and natural attractions, the city of 18 mountains was once a travellers' mecca. Today it is falling apart due to neglect. The centrally located Hôtel Leveneur (🖻 33-791481; r US\$14; 🕄) is in sorry shape, but it's the best place still operating. Everybody from rebel commanders to stranded legionnaires gather here for drinks on the terrace. Many simple maquis cluster around the centre, and Pâtisserie la Brioche (Rue du Commerce; croissants US\$0.40; Y breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) has amazing pastries.

UTB and CTM run several buses to Abidjan (US\$13) via Yamoussoukro (US\$9), and one a day to San Pédro (US\$11). Most taxis for N'zérékoré (Guinea) run via Sipilou, but check the security situation before attempting this route.

AROUND MAN

The lush green hills (now mostly cleared by illegal loggers) around Man cradle many traditional villages that used to do regular business staging dances. The nearest to Man is Bloé, where a Yacouba dance is performed by girls wearing old Goua masks. **Diourouzon** is one of the places where the famous child-juggling is performed (it's not as dangerous as it sounds, and children are caught with two arms). Arranging dances (this used to cost about US\$36) must be done with the chief in the morning to give the village enough time to prepare for a later performance.

La Dent de Man, 12km northeast of town, was a popular hike. Named for its molar shape, 'the Tooth of Man' is 881m high at the summit, and a round trip takes about four hours. The trail starts in the village of Zobale, where you'll pay a small village tax. Some 5km west of town is La Cascade (US\$0.60), a waterfall within a bamboo forest. Ask your guide to take you to see the monkeys nearby.

Don't leave Man without getting a laissezpasser (travel permit) from the rebel chief. He is no pushover; expect to be interrogated thoroughly.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Many hotels have shut down and most that remain are going to pot. Before the war, accommodation was generally expensive and poor value for money, but now places are so desperate for guests that you can bargain over the already-low rates in some four-star hotels. Note that there is no running water in the north.

ACTIVITIES

Several spots on the coast, most notably Dagbego and Drewen, have decent surfing. Côte d'Ivoire also has a lot to offer bird-watchers.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Côte d'Ivoire can be visited safely, but overall it's still not a safe country. Violence is only sporadic, but the situation remains volatile and the possibility of further unrest can't be discounted. Generally, however, the biggest concern is crime. Poverty and unemployment are rampant, and there is no shortage of guns.

Security checkpoints are frequent in the north and south, particularly near the Zone of Confidence, the ceasefire line between the north and the south, and on the outskirts of cities. Soldiers inspect documents and frequently demand money or cigarettes.

PRACTICALITIES

- Uses the metric system.
- Electricity voltage is 220V/50Hz and plugs have two round pins.
- Most of the nearly 20 daily newspapers, all in French, are political-party mouthpieces, though Soirinfo, 24 Heures and L'Intelligent d'Abidjan steer independent courses.
- La Premiere and TV2 are governmentrun stations, while TVNP, run on a shoestring from Bouaké, is the voice of the rebels.
- Radio Jam (99.3FM) and Radio Nostalgie (101.1FM) play hit music, while the BBC World Service broadcasts some programs in English on 94.3FM.

These encounters can be friendly or tense. Either way, just remain calm, talk with them, and hand over what they ask for – usually CFA500.

Travelling to the north without proper paperwork from rebel leaders (the Abidjan rebel headquarters is at the Hôtel du Golf) is foolish. Even when documents are in order, Westerners are greeted with suspicion, especially in Bouaké.

Finally, take care at the beach. The Atlantic has fierce currents and a ripping undertow, and people drown every year; often strong, overly confident swimmers. Heed local advice.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Côte d'Ivoire Embassies & Consulates

Côte d'Ivoire has embassies in the countries it borders. See the relevant chapters for details. **Belgium** ((2) 02-661 34 50; 234 Ave Franklin-Roosevelt, Brussels 1050)

Canada ((2) 613-236 9919; www.ambaci-ottawa.org; 9 Marlborough Ave, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 8E6) France ((2) 01-53 64 62 62: 02 Ave R-Poincaré, Paris

75116)

Germany (🖻 0228-26 30 45; Clausewitz St 7, Berlin 10629)

UK ((200-7201 9601; 2 Upper Belgrave St, London SW1X 8BJ)

USA (202-797-0300; 2424 Massachusetts Ave, Washington DC, NW, 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Côte d'Ivoire

The following are in Le Plateau unless otherwise indicated.

Burkina Faso (20-211501; Ave Terrasson de Fougères) Also a consulate in Bouaké.

Canada (🖻 20-300700; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/abidjan; Immeuble Trade Centre, 23 Ave Noguès) Assists Australian nationals.

France (a 20-200404; www.ambafrance-ci.org; 17 Rue Lecoeur)

Germany (22-442030; www.abidjan.diplo.de; 39 Blvd Hassan II, Cocody)

Liberia () 20-324636; Immeuble Taleb, Ave Delafosse) Mali () 20-311570; Maison du Mali, Rue du Commerce) Also a consulate in Bouaké.

D'IVOIRE

CÔTE

UK (
20-226850; Immeuble les Harmonies, Blvd Carde) Operations have been suspended.

USA ((a) 22-494000; http://abidjan.usembassy.gov; Riviera Golf)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Cities and villages hold traditional ceremonies, but few adhere to a fixed calendar; you'll have to ask around. Many popular festivals are on hold during the crisis.

Fête du Dipri Held in Gomon, northwest of Abidjan, in March or April. An all-night and all-the-next-day religious ceremony where people go into trances.

Fête de l'Abissa Held in Grand Bassam in October or November. A week-long ceremony honouring the dead. Fête des Harristes Held in Bregbo, 15km east of Abidjan, on 1 November. A born-again religious gathering. Trepoint Mask Festival Held near Dagbego on 7 August and 31 December. A partnership between the Best of Africa resort and local villages.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106), these are the principal public holidays in Côte d'Ivoire: **1 January** New Year's Day **1 May** Labour Day

7 August Independence Day 15 November Fête de la Paix 25 December Christmas

INTERNET ACCESS

Most cities in government territory have cybercafés, though outside Abidjan connections can be slow and unreliable. Rates average US\$0.70 per hour.

MAPS

The Michelin 1:800,000 map gives the best coverage of Côte d'Ivoire.

MONEY

Endeavour to bring a Visa card and euros, otherwise you'll find obtaining CFA costly and time-consuming in Abidjan, and nearly impossible most other places. You won't be able to pay with credit cards very often, but Sgbci and Bicci have ATMs in Abidjan, San Pédro and Yamoussoukro that reliably provide holders of Visa cards with CFA. Commission charged on travellers cheques varies significantly from bank to bank. There are no banks in rebel territory. Don't change on the black market unless a friend makes the introduction; there is a lot of counterfeit money floating around.

POST & TELEPHONE

You'll find there are good international phone connections at CI Telecom offices throughout

the south, but calls from private *télécentres* and cybercafés are cheaper. If you have a GSM mobile phone, you can buy a SIM card for as low as US\$9.

Postal services remain pretty reliable in Abidjan.

VISAS

All visitors, except US and the Ecowas community nationals, require visas and they must be bought before arrival.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be extended at **La Sureté Nationale** (Police de l'Air et des Frontieres, Blvd de la République, Immeuble Douane; 论 8am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) near the main post office in Le Plateau in Abidjan. An extension, valid for up to three months, costs US\$36 (plus two photos) and is ready the same day if you apply early.

Visas for Onward Travel

Burkina Faso Three-month, single-/multiple-entry visas cost US\$45/54 and require two photos. They are usually issued the same day.

Ghana Four photos, US\$27 and 24 hours are required of most nationalities for one-month, single-entry visas. **Guinea** One-month single-entry visas cost US\$57 for most nationalities, though you pay US\$100 if you're from the USA. You need three photos and visas might be ready the same day.

Liberia One-month, single-entry visas, issued the same day, cost US\$48 for most nationalities. Multiple-entry visas are good for a year and cost US\$100. You need two photos.

Mali For most nationalities, one-month single-entry visas cost US\$36; three-month multiple entry visas cost US\$72; and one-year multiple-entry visas cost US\$108. Americans are charged US\$100. Bring a photo and a letter detailing your reason for visiting Mali. You can pick up the visa within 24 hours.

TRANSPORT IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Côte d'Ivoire is a busy air hub, and you can reach most West African capitals and many other large cities elsewhere in Africa. Many airlines link Abidjan with Paris – only Air France and Air Ivoire fly nonstop – and prices can go as low as US\$800 return. SN Brussels has a nonstop connection from Brussels.

Land

At the time of research all borders were open, and buses and bush taxis continue to run, though this is subject to change, and only the crossing from Ghana is currently considered safe for travellers. Buses charge around US\$36 to Accra from Abidjan, plus US\$0.50 per kilogram for luggage. There will probably also be a whip-round at the border to cover bribes. Buy tickets a day in advance. It's quicker to take a bush taxi from the Gare de Bassam in Abidjan to the border, walk across and continue in another car.

GETTING AROUND

Locals aren't travelling as much as they used to, and consequently there is less transport available; however, all sizable towns – even those in the north – are still connected. Buses are more comfortable than taxis and minibuses, and have fixed departure times. However, with deteriorating roads and frequent security checkpoints, they are now much slower.

The only internal flights are between Abidjan and San Pédro with **Sophia Airlines** (**3**4-713434; one-way/return US\$135/251).

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The Gambia

It's easy to miss The Gambia on a map of mighty Africa. This tiny sliver of land is a mere 500km long and 50km wide, and, with the exception of an 80km shoreline, it's entirely enveloped by Senegal. But beach-bound tourists have long known how to trace this oddly shaped country on the map. Its magnificent coast invites visitors to laze and linger, tempting with luxurious beach resorts and bustling fishing villages. But there's more to Africa's smallest country than sun and surf. Stunning nature reserves, such as Abuko and Kiang West, and the historical slaving stations of St James Island and Jufureh offer peaceful pauses from the clamour of the nearby coast. And The Gambia's vibrant culture is always there to be taken in by open-eyed visitors. Traditional wrestling matches regularly take place in Serekunda's arenas, the heaving markets of Banjul and Serekunda have you soaking up the atmosphere and sharpening your negotiation skills, and the striking performances of kora-strumming griots can be experienced during weddings, baptisms or public concerts.

Bird-lovers will easily be seduced by this compact country. On a tour upriver, the cries of over 300 species will follow you as your *pirogue* (traditional canoe) charts a leisurely course through mangrove-lined wetlands and the island of Georgetown. Even if your ornithological skills don't go beyond identifying an inner-city pigeon, you'll be tempted to wield binoculars here, and can rely on an excellent network of trained guides to help you tell a pelican from a flamingo.

FAST FACTS

- Area 11,295 sq km
- ATMs At banks in Banjul, on the Atlantic Coast, in Serekunda and at the airport
- Borders Senegal
- Budget US\$20 to US\$40 per day
- Capital Banjul
- Languages English, Mandinka, Wolof, Fula
- Money Dalasi; US\$1 = D27
- Population 1.6 million
- Seasons Dry (November to April), hot (May to June), wet (July to October)
- Telephone Country code 220; international access code 200
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visa Cost US\$25 to US\$45, but are not required by citizens of the British Commonwealth, Scandinavian countries, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and Spain

HIGHLIGHTS

- Serekunda market (p324) Weave your way through The Gambia's most crammed market to the sound of booming reggae and beeping car horns.
- Abuko (p325) Look out for rare birds and giant crocodiles in Africa's smallest nature reserve.
- **Kololi** (p320) Lounge at the beach, then dance till you drop in The Gambia's glitzy tourist resorts.
- **Gunjur** (p325) Beaches aren't for sunbathing only; soak up the busy atmosphere of this traditional fishing village.
- River Gambia National Park (p326) Cruise down the Gambia River with an amazing array of birdlife for company.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Most tourists travel to The Gambia during the dry and relatively cool months from November to February (daytime maximums around 24°C). This is also the best time to watch wildlife and birds.

The wet season starts around late June and lasts until late September, when temperatures rise to around 30°C, the rains make some upcountry roads inaccessible, vegetation is lush and the rivers swelling.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Spend a good amount of time at the beaches of the Atlantic Coast (p320), and tie in the occasional day trip to the busy market of Serekunda (p324), sleepy Banjul (p318), the pretty museum and bird reserve of Tanji (p325), the fishing village of Gunjur (p325) and the cute Abuko Nature Reserve (p325).
- **Two Weeks** Follow the one-week itinerary, then go on a *Roots* tour to Jufureh (p325) and take a ride to mangrove-hidden Bintang Bolong (p326). Treat yourself to a river trip up to Georgetown (p326), where you can take *pirogue* excursions to Wassu (p326), River Gambia National Park (p326) and Basse Santa Su (p327).

HISTORY

The Empires of Ghana (5th to 11th centuries) and Mali (13th to 15th centuries) extended their influence over the region that is now The Gambia. By 1456 the first Portuguese navigators landed on James Island and quickly monopolised trade along the West African

Soft drink US\$0.55

HOW MUCH?

- Newspaper US\$0.35
- Sandwich US\$2
- French bread US\$0.30
- One hour internet US\$0.60

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.10 (and rising)
- 1L bottled water US\$1
- Bottle of Flag/Julbrew US\$0.60
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$9
- Shwarma US\$1.50

coast throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, exchanging salt, iron, pots and pans, firearms and gunpowder for ivory, ebony, beeswax, gold and slaves.

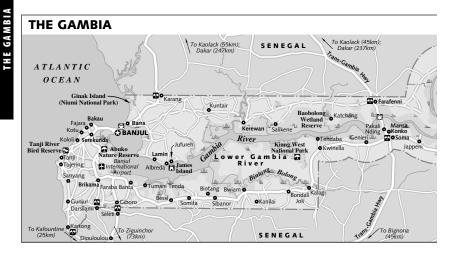
Baltic Germans first built a fort on James Island in 1651, and were displaced in 1661 by the British, who found themselves under constant threat from French ships, pirates and African kings. New forts were built at Barra and Bathurst (now Banjul), at the mouth of the Gambia River, to control the movement of ships. Fort James continued to be an important collection point for slaves until the abolition of slavery in 1807.

The British continued to extend their influence further upstream until the 1820s, when the territory was declared a British protectorate ruled from Sierra Leone. In 1888 Gambia became a crown colony, by which time the surrounding territory of Senegal had fallen into French custody.

Gambia became self-governing in 1963 though it took two more years until real independence was achieved. Gambia became The Gambia, Bathurst became Banjul, and David Jawara, leader of the People's Progressive Party, became Prime Minister Dawda Jawara.

High groundnut prices and the advent of package tourism led to something of a boom in the 1960s. Jawara consolidated his power, and became president when The Gambia became a fully fledged republic in 1970. As groundnut prices fell in the 1980s, and tourism revenues did not trickle down the economic scale, two coups were hatched – but thwarted with





Senegalese assistance. This cooperation led to the 1982 confederation of the two countries under the name of Senegambia, reportedly the first step to unification, but the union collapsed by 1989. Meanwhile, corruption increased, economic decline continued and popular discontent rose. Finally, in July 1994, Jawara was overthrown in a reportedly bloodless coup led by Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh.

The Gambia Today

After a brief flirtation with dictatorship, the 30-year-old Jammeh bowed to international pressure, inaugurated a Second Republic and won the 1996 presidential election comfortably. Human-rights groups and democratic watchdogs were all put at high alert when, in 2004, prominent journalist Deyda Heydara was assassinated after having expressed his opposition to a new controversial media law, and in March 2006, an alleged coup d'état attempt led to the 'cleansing' of governmental ranks. That same year, the country again prepared for elections, this time against a background of increasing autocracy. It now seems unlikely that the future direction of The Gambia will change dramatically, as Yahya Jammeh was sworn in as president for another five years after defeating his main rival Oussainou Daboe.

CULTURE

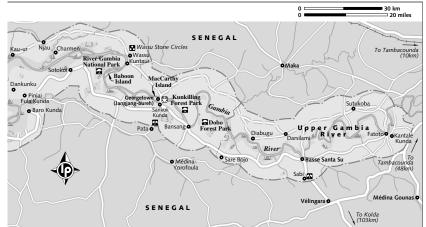
Holiday brochures like to describe The Gambia as the 'Smiling Coast', a welcoming 'gateway to Africa', where local culture is easily accessible. Wiping the gloss off those descriptions, some of the smile still remains, though real hospitality is easier found upcountry, away from the coastal resorts where mass tourism has somewhat distorted social relations and the respectful interaction otherwise typical of the country.

Years of authoritarian rule have also resulted in a certain climate of distrust. Conversations are often conducted with care, and few people will express their views on governmental politics openly – you never know who might be listening. Being aware of the troubles that plague the population will help you to understand silences in conversation or the avoidance of topics, and gradually grant you an insight into the real Gambia, the one that lies beyond the polished smiles and tourist hustling.

Modern Gambian life consists of the scramble to make ends meet and get ahead, tempered by the pleasures of family, the obligations of community and a genuine concern for others' welfare. Further upriver, an alternative reality emerges, one that is poorer and more isolated. Opportunities may be thinner on the ground, but the rhythms of river life are calmer and more dignified.

PEOPLE

With around 115 people per sq km, The Gambia has one of the highest population densities in Africa. The strongest concentration of people is around the urbanised zones at the Atlantic Coast, the area many people migrate to from the upcountry towns to try and make a living from



the tourist industry. Forty-five percent of The Gambia's population is under 14 years old.

The main ethnic groups are the Mandinka (comprising around 42%), the Wolof (about 16%) and the Fula (around 18%). Smaller groups include the Serer and Jola.

About 90% of The Gambia's population is Muslim. Christian faith is most widespread among the Jola and to a lesser extent the Serer.

ARTS & CRAFTS

The Gambia is a major centre of the kora (a stringed instrument combining features of the hap and lute), an icon of African music throughout the world whose history is deeply connected to The Gambia. This tiny country became a veritable centre of kora playing when Malinké groups settled in the region after the gradual collapse of the mighty Empire of Mali. Famous kora players include Amadou Bansang Jobarteh, Jali Nyama Suso, Dembo Konte and Malamini Jobarteh.

In the 1960s The Gambia was hugely influential in the development of modern West African music. Groups like the Afro-funky Super Eagles and singer Labah Sosse had a huge impact in The Gambia, Senegal and beyond. Today The Gambia's music scene is mainly dominated by Senegalese artists and Jamaican reggae. Renowned local musicians include the kora-playing brothers Pa Bobo and Tata Dindin Jobarteh, singer Jelibah Kuyateh and reggae artists such as the Dancehall Masters and Rebellion the Recaller. Banjul's national museum has a few good examples of traditional statues and carved masks on display. Also fascinating is the art of batik making (where fabric is printed using wax to cover areas not to be dyed), which contemporary artists such Baboucar Fall and Toimbo Laurens push into new creative directions.

ENVIRONMENT

At only 11,295 sq km, The Gambia is the smallest country in Africa (half the size of Wales, or less than twice that of Delaware) and its territory is entirely dominated by the Gambia River. There are few significant variations in altitude (the Gambia River loses less than 10m in elevation over 450km) or vegetation, which consists largely of savannah, gallery forests and saline marshes.

The Gambia has six national parks and reserves, covering 3.7% of the landmass. The four most accessible and interesting – Abuko, Kiang West, Gambia River and Tanji – are mentioned in this chapter.

The most visible environmental problem is beach erosion on the Atlantic Coast, caused by illegal sand mining. The Gambia's fishing villages also face dwindling stocks as a result of overfishing, while deforestation plagues the upcountry regions.

FOOD & DRINK

National dishes include *domodah* (rice with groundnut sauce) and *benechin* (rice cooked in tomato, fish and vegetable sauce).

JulBrew, the local beer, is a refreshing beverage. Local palm wine and various 'firewaters' (made from distilled sugar cane or rice) are also available, especially in the upcountry areas. For a nonalcoholic drink, try any of the local juices from *bissap* (made from sorrel), to *bouyi* (made from the fruits of the baobab tree).

BANJUL

pop 50,000

GAMBIA

: :

It's hard to imagine a more unlikely, more consistently ignored capital city than the tiny seaport of Banjul. Yet despite the shadow of neglect that haunts its sand-blown streets, Banjul is truly worth a visit. Its colourful markets and hectic harbour show urban Africa at its busy best, while the old museum and fading colonial structures are imbued with a sense of history that The Gambia's plush seaside resorts lack.

ORIENTATION

The July 22 Sq is the centre of town. From here, several main streets run south, including Russell St, which leads past the bustling Albert Market into Liberation St. West of the October 17 Roundabout is the old part of Banjul – a maze of narrow streets and ramshackle houses rarely visited by tourists.

INFORMATION

(8am-midnight) Internet access.

IBC Bank ((a) 4428145; Liberation St) Changes travellers cheques and has an ATM that accepts Visa cards. **Main post office** (Russell St;) 8am-4pm Mon-Sat)

Has telephone facilities next door.

Quantumnet (Nelson Mandela St; per hr US\$1; 论 9am-10pm) Internet access.

Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital (a 4228223; July 22 Dr) The Gambia's main hospital has an A&E Department, but facilities aren't great.

Standard Chartered Bank ((2) 4222081; Ecowas Ave) Changes travellers cheques and has an ATM that accepts Visa cards.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The Barra ferry is rife with pickpockets, and tourists are easy prey at the ferry terminals and at Albert Market.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Since its creation in the mid-19th century, **Albert Market** (Russell St), an area of frenzied buying, bartering and bargaining, has been Banjul's hub of activity. From shimmering fabrics and false plaits to tourist-tempting souvenirs at the **Craft Market**, you can find almost anything here and then some.

Tucked away in an ancient Portuguese building, the **St Joseph's Adult Education & Skills Centre** (2428836; stjskills@qanet.com; Ecowas Ave; 9 9am-2pm Mon-Thu, to noon Fri) offers tree tours and sells beautiful craftwork at reasonable prices.

Arch 22 (July 22 Dr; admission US\$1.25; 😒 9am-11pm), a massive, 36m-high gateway built to celebrate the military coup of 22 July 1994, grants excellent views. There's also a cosy café, souvenir shop and a small museum about the coup d'état.

The **National Museum** (July 22 Dr; admission US\$1; 3am-4pm Mon-Thu, to 1pm Fri & Sat) has some dogeared, dated exhibits that are worth a look.

SLEEPING

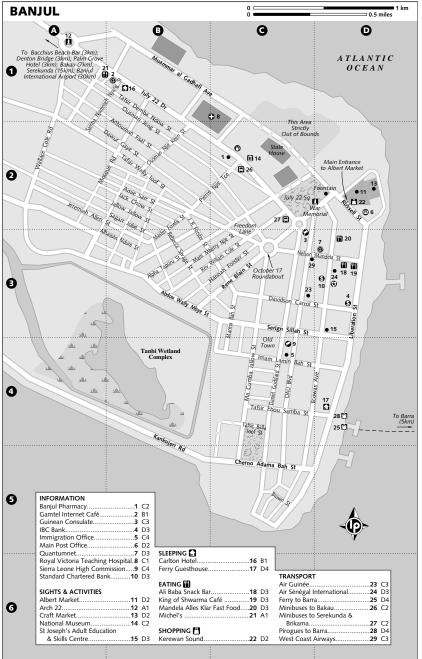
Carlton Hotel (4228670; fax 4227214; 25 July 22 Dr; s/d US\$18/20, with air-con US\$28/30; 1 This is a little more upmarket, with luxuries like running water and indoor toilets.

EATING & DRINKING

Banjul is hardly a culinary haven, offering little beyond fast-food joints. Around the north end of Liberation St and Albert Market, you'll find several cheap chop shops and streets stalls where plates of rice and sauce start at about US\$0.80.

Mandela Alles Klar Fast Food (🗟 4223455; Ecowas Ave; snacks from US\$1.50) This is not only The Gambia's snack bar with the prettiest name, it also serves great fish and chips.

Ali Baba Snack Bar (2424055; Nelson Mandela St; snacks from US\$2, meals US\$5-7; 9 9am-5pm) More than just a kebab shop, this place is an institution with a deserved reputation for its *shwarmas* and felafel.



King of Shwarma Café (229799; Nelson Mandela St; meals US\$5-10; 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) This friendly place serves excellent Lebanese food, and what's even better, large glasses of freshly pressed juice.

Bacchius Beach Bar ((a) 4227948; meals US\$5-15) Next to the Palm Grove Hotel, this busy little beach bar is a great place to sip a drink and dig into a platter of grilled fish.

SHOPPING

In Banjul, the best place to go shopping is Albert Market (p318). Near the main entrance, you'll also find **Kerewan Sound** (Russell St), The Gambia's best place to buy CDs and cassettes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For information on travelling to/from Banjul by air, see p329.

Ferries (a) 4228205; Liberation St; passengers D10, cars US\$5-7) travel between Banjul and Barra, on the northern bank of the river. They normally run every one to two hours from 7am until 7pm and take one hour, though delays and cancellations are frequent. Small, overcrowded *pirogues* also make the crossing (US\$2 per person or US\$20 if you hire the whole boat).

Minibuses and Mercedes buses to Brikama and upcountry towns, and to places in southern Senegal, all go from Serekunda garage. For details, see p329.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

A green tourist taxi from Banjul International Airport to Banjul costs around US\$10 to US\$15. With yellow taxis, the price you pay depends entirely on your haggling skills; expect to pay US\$5.50 to US\$7 to Banjul. There is no airport bus.

Minibus & Shared Taxi

From Banjul, minibuses to Bakau leave from the stand opposite the Shell station on July 22 Dr. Minibuses to Serekunda and Brikama leave from a roadside corner opposite July 22 Sq. See p329 for more information.

Private Taxi

In a taxi to yourself (known as a 'town trip'), a short ride across Banjul city centre will cost about US\$1, after bargaining. A private taxi from Banjul to Bakau, Serekunda, Fajara, Kotu or Kololi costs around US\$5.50 to US\$7.

SEREKUNDA & THE ATLANTIC COAST

pop 260,000

Chaotic, splitting-at-the-seams Serekunda is the nation's largest urban centre, and appears to consist of one big, busy market. The nearby Atlantic Coast resorts of Bakau, Fajara, Kotu Strand and Kololi are where the sun'n'sea tourists flock. If you can manage to dodge the persistent ganja peddlers and beach 'bumsters' (touts and hustlers), this is a great place to spend long days on the beach and late nights on the dance floor.

ORIENTATION

Running north-south, Bakau, Fajara, Kotu Strand and Kololi are a string of former fishing villages that have now merged into one big tourist centre. Serekunda, a couple of kilometres inland, is a real city, and Westfield Junction is the hub of its wheel.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Timbooktoo ((2) 4494345; cnr Kairaba Ave & Garba Jahumpa Rd, Fajara; (2) 10am-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Fri, 10am-8pm Sat) The best place for international papers.

Cultural Centres

Alliance Franco-Gambienne (🖻 4375418; www.alli ancefrance.gm; Kairaba Ave, Serekunda; 🏵 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Has regular concerts, films and exhibitions, and a good, cheap restaurant (meals from US\$1).

Internet Access

There are now dozens of cybercafés in this area, especially along Kairaba Ave. Gamtel Kololi (🖻 4377878; Senegambia Strip; 💟 9am-11pm); Serekunda (Westfield Junction; 🏠 8am-11pm) Quantumnet (🖻 4494514; Kairaba Ave; 🏠 8.30am-10om)

Medical Services

Medical Research Council (MRC; **(MRC)**; **(MRC)**; Fajara) If you find yourself with a potentially serious illness, head for this British-run clinic, off Atlantic Rd.

Money

The main banks, Standard Chartered, Trust Bank and IBC have branches with Visa-loving ATMs all across the resort zone (see p327 for standard opening hours). There are also a few exchange bureaus scattered around the busy tourist miles, some part of supermarkets, but you're unlikely to get a better rate. The Gambia Experience Office next to the Senegambia Hotel gives cash advances on Mastercards for a fee.

Standard Chartered Bank Bakau (@ 4495046); Serekunda (@ 4396102; Kairaba Ave) Trust Bank Bakau (@ 4495486); Kololi (@ 4465303; Badala Park Way, near Senegambia)

Post & Telephone

The main post office is located about halfway between Fajara and Serekunda, off Kairaba Ave. There are plenty of Gamtel offices and private telecentres in Bakau, Kololi and Serekunda.

Tourist Information

Tropical Tour & Souvenirs (🖻 4460536;

tropicaltour@gamtel.gm; Kairaba Hotel, Senegambia) One of the best sources of information in the absence of an official tourist information service.

Travel Agencies

Most travel agencies are on Kairaba Ave. Gambia River Experience (🖻 4494360; gambiariver@yahoo.com; www.gambiariver.com; off

Kairaba Ave, Fajara)

Gambia Tours (🗃 446260; www.gambiatours.gm; off Coastal Rd, south of Koloi) An independent tour operator with a good catalogue of excursions.

Olympic Travel ((2) 497204; Garba Jahumpa Rd) A good place for booking tickets.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime rates in Serekunda are low; however, tourists, and especially women, will have to deal with the constant hustling by 'bumsters'. Be firm but polite when you decline any unwanted offers, and to be safe, rely on the services of the official tourist guides (OTGs) based outside Kairaba Hotel. Women should always avoid going to beaches on their own.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

In Bakau, the **Botanic Gardens** (7774482; Atlantic Rd, Bakau; adult/child US\$1.80/free; Sam-4pm) are a peaceful place that offers some shade in calm surroundings, and good bird-spotting chances.

You can get up close and personal with a croc at the **Kachikaly Crocodile Pool** (Bakau village; admission US\$1; 🕑 9am-6pm), a sacred site for the local people and perhaps for tourists, too, judging by their numbers.

Bijilo Forest Park (admission US\$1; 论 8am-6pm) is a small nature reserve on the Atlantic Coast at Kololi. The 4.5km nature trail is great for spotting monkeys and birds.

The **Sportsfishing Centre** (**(()**7765765; Denton Bridge) is the best place to arrange fishing and *pirogue* excursions. Various companies are based there, including the **Watersports Centre** (**(()**7765765; Denton Bridge), which can organise your jet-skiing, parasailing, windsurfing or catamaran trips.

The Gambia's beaches suffer badly from erosion. The best ones are in Fajara and Kotu. Note that currents can be very strong.

If drumming appeals more than swimming, try **Batafon Arts** (() in UK 01273 605791, in Gambia 4392517; www.batafonarts.co.uk; Kairaba Ave, Serekunda) for excellent African percussion and dance workshops.

SLEEPING Budget

Kanifeng YMCA (**Heat State 1** 4392647; www.ymca.gm; Fajara; B&B US\$6.25) This huge building has just about passable rooms for the budget-bound.

Bakau Lodge ((a) /fax 4496103; Bakau; d from US\$23; (a) Located in the heart of the Bakau 'hood, the small Bakau Lodge pleasantly surprises with spotless, two-room bungalows set around a swimming pool. ATLANTIC COAST RESORTS & SEREKUNDA

1 km

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6

Saitmathy Rd (Cape Rd)

Banjul (14km)

⊐05 miles

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Some Minor Roads

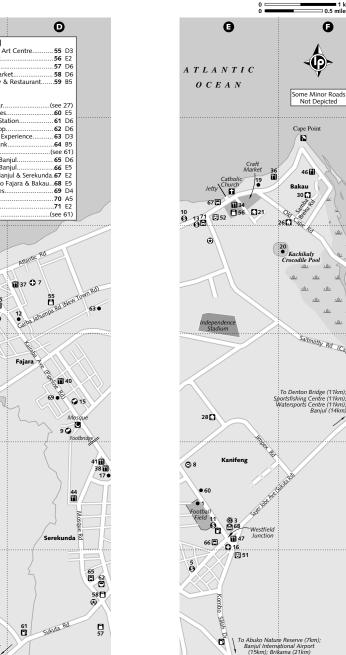
Not Depicted

Cape Point

4600

Bakau

30 🔂



Midrange

Leybato (🕿 4497186; www.leybato.abc.gm; Fajara Beach; d US\$30, with kitchen US\$43) This cosy guesthouse has acceptable rooms stunningly located at a calm stretch of beach.

Fajara Guesthouse (🖻 4496122; fax 4494365; Fajara; r incl breakfast US\$23 to US\$34; 😰 🚯) A leafy courtyard and welcoming lounge give it character. Rooms are basic but clean, and some are big enough to house couples with children.

Safari Garden Hotel (🖻 4495887; www.gamspirit .com; Fajara; s/d incl breakfast US\$34/57; 🔀 😰) Pretty rooms, a good restaurant, and exceptionally welcoming management have turned this into a travellers' favourite.

Roc Height's Lodge (2 4495428; www.rocheights lodge.com; Samba Breku Rd, Bakau; s/d US\$36/54; 🕄 🕃) This stunning three-storey villa sits in a quiet garden, and has stylish rooms and apartments with fully equipped kitchen.

Bakotu Hotel (🗟 4465555; fax 4465959; Kotu Beach; s/d US\$45/54; 🔀 😰) Compared to its resort neighbours, this is pleasantly understated, and has comfy terrace apartments in a pleasant garden.

Top End

Coconut Residence (2 4463377; info@coconutresidence .com; Badala Park Way; ste from US\$190; 🔀 😰) At this classy five-star palace, all amenities and services come wrapped in sophisticated chic, and character flavours the air of the lush tropical gardens and the carefully designed rooms.

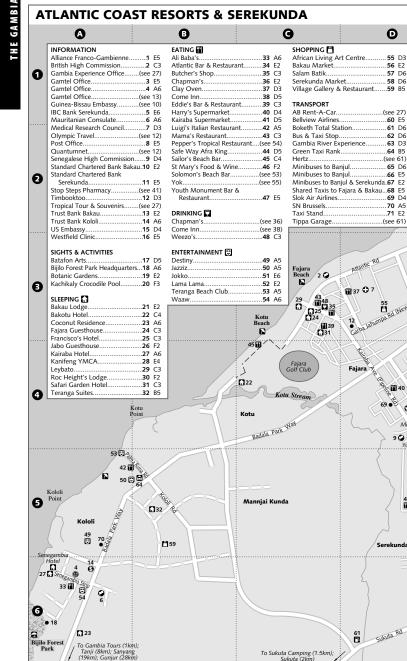
Kairaba Hotel (2 4462940; www.kairabahotel.com; Senegambia; s/d US\$155/190; P 🔀 🗳 🐑) This government-owned hotel is the kind of vast, labyrinthine, anything-can-be-arranged place you might be tempted not to leave during your whole holiday.

EATING

There are several cheap eateries in Kololi around the market and taxi station entrance, and several others scattered through the streets of Serekunda. For supermarkets in Fajara, head for Kairaba Ave where there's plenty of choice. To buy groceries in Bakau, go to St Mary's Food & Wine (Cape Point), Bakau market or any of the small Bakau supermarkets.

Budaet

Youth Monument Bar & Restaurant (Westfield Junction, Serekunda; meals around D100; 🕥 lunch & dinner) This is a local favourite thanks to cheap food and football matches on screen.



Safe Way Afra King (Mosque Rd, Serekunda; dishes CFA50-150; 🕑 5pm-midnight) Good for afra (grill food), fufu (a staple along the southern coast of West Africa made with fermented cassava, vams, plantain or manioc which is cooked and puréed) and other African dishes.

Atlantic Bar & Restaurant (🕿 4494083; Atlantic Rd, Bakau; dishes from US\$2; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This place serves decent Gambian meals and snacks.

Eddie's Bar & Restaurant (Fajara; dishes US\$2.50; Sam-2am) This tiny spot serves excellent afra and other Gambian dishes.

Mama's Restaurant (cnr Atlantic Rd & Kairaba Ave, Fajara; dishes around US\$3.60; 11am-10pm Tue-Sun) This vibrant place is as much renowned for its delicious buffet dinners as for the raw charm of Mama the manager.

Come Inn (🖻 4391464; Fajara; meals US\$4-7; 🕑 10am-2am) For a hearty European meal, a good draught beer and a solid dose of local gossip, there's no better place than this German-style beer garden.

Solomon's Beach Bar (🖻 4460716; Palma Rima Rd, Kololi; meals US\$4-8; 🕑 10am-midnight) At the northern end of Kololi beach, this cute round house with a light reggae feel does great grill food.

Midrange & Top End

Sailor's Beach Bar (2 4464078; Kotu; meals US\$5; 9am-midnight) This is one of the best beach bars along the coast, serving excellent grilled barracuda.

Chapman's (2 4495252; Atlantic Rd, Bakau Beach; meals around US\$5-US\$9; 🏵 11am-10pm Thu-Tue) This popular pub-cum-restaurant in Bakau has a mixed menu with a focus on European food and cheap beer.

Peppers Tropical Restaurant (🕿 4464792; Senegambia Strip, Kololi; meals around US\$5-10; 🕑 24hr) This tiny place serves good Caribbean and Gambian food to the sounds of live salsa.

Butcher's Shop (2 4495069; www.thebutchersshop gambia.com; 130 Kairaba Ave, Fajara; dishes US\$6-10; 🕑 8am-11pm) Everything at this stylish Moroccan restaurant - from the rich local juices to flavour-dripping three-course dinners - is rounded off to tasty perfection. Don't miss Sunday brunch (US\$7) from 10am to 4pm.

Ali Baba's (🖻 4461030; Senegambia Strip, Kololi; meals around US\$7; 🕑 11am-2am) Famous Ali Baba's serves quality snacks and European cuisine. There's occasional live music.

Clay Oven (🖻 4496600; Fajara; dishes US\$7; 🕎 7-11pm) For Indian food, this peaceful, pretty place is one of the best in the whole of West Africa.

Luigi's Italian Restaurant (🖻 4460280; Palma Rima Rd, Kololi; dishes US\$7-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner; 🛄) Luigi knows his job: the pasta here is al dente and the pizzas crisp.

Yok (2 4495131; African Living Arts Centre, Fajara; meals around US\$9; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Enjoy great cocktails and excellent Singaporean, Thai and Chinese fusion-cuisine to the gentle flow of waterfalls and the rustling of palm trees.

DRINKING

All the major hotels have bars and most restaurants turn the lights down and the music up at night.

Chapman's (🖻 4495252; Atlantic Rd, Bakau; 🕑 11am-10pm Thu-Tue) The best beer option.

Weezo's (Atlantic Rd, Fajara; 🕑 11am-3am) The cocktails here taste sweeter with every passing hour.

🕻 Come Inn (🖻 4391464; Kairaba Ave; 🕑 10am-2am) A proper, German-style beer house.

ENTERTAINMENT

Teranga Beach Club (2 9982669; abdulkabirr@hotmail .com; Palma Rima Rd, Kololi; 🕑 10am-2am) This vast place. run by a renowned Gambian musician, holds occasional jazz afternoons and concerts.

Jazziz (🖻 4462175; Palma Rima Rd, Kololi 🕑 10pmlate) A colourful salsa place with a vibrant atmosphere.

Lama Lama (🖻 4494747: Atlantic Rd, Bakau) Bakau's hottest club.

Waaw (🖻 4460668; Senegambia) The Gambia's biggest dancehall DJ mixes at this place in Kololi on a Thursday night.

Jokko (Westfield Junction) This open-air place in Serekunda is a raucous local affair

Destiny (off Badala Park Way, Kololi) A sparkling disco heaven that draws glittering crowds on weekends

SHOPPING

African Living Art Centre (🖻 4495131; Garba Jahumpa Rd, Fajara) A fairy-tale place, great to rummage for quality artworks and original souvenirs.

Salam Batik (Amadou Jallow 🖻 4395103, Sheikh Tijan Secka 2 982 0125; salam_batik_mp_art@yahoo.co.uk; Serekunda Market, Serekunda) The place to get your personalised clothes dyed and tailored.

Village Gallery & Restaurant (🖻 4463646; 🕑 10ammidnight) For quality contemporary paintings.

Serekunda market (cnr Sukuta & Mosque Rds; 🕅 6am-5pm) The African real deal, where you find just about anything you care to imagine. To reach the sky-high stacks of colourful goods, you have to weave your way through crowds, cars and dodge the ambulant traders. All part of pure urban Gambian fun.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bush taxis and minibuses for most destinations in The Gambia leave from the garage (bus and taxi stop) in Serekunda. Destinations include Brikama (US\$0.50, one hour), Soma (US\$2, four hours) and Sanyang (US\$0.60, 30 minutes). For southern destinations including Gunjur (US\$1, 45 minutes) try also the Tippa Garage near the Shell Station in Serekunda.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

A green tourist taxi from Banjul International Airport to Serekunda is US\$10, and to any Atlantic Coast resort US\$15. Yellow taxis cost about US\$5, but depend on negotiation.

Taxi

Shared taxis around the Atlantic resorts and Banjul cost US\$0.20. You just hail them.

You can hire yellow taxis for private trips. A 'town trip' - any stretch between Bakau, Fajara, Kololi and Kotu - is usually charged at US\$1. Hiring a taxi for a day around the Atlantic resorts and Banjul should cost around US\$35 to US\$50. The green 'tourist taxis' that are usually parked around the larger hotels usually charge two to three times the rate of yellow taxis.

AROUND BANJUL & SEREKUNDA

ABUKO NATURE RESERVE

Abuko Nature Reserve (2 7782633; www.darwingambia .gm; admission US\$1.10; 🕑 8am-7pm) is one of Africa's tiniest wildlife reserves, but boasts an amazing variety of vegetation and animals. It's particularly good for bird-watchers. Around 250 species have been recorded here, and many are easily spotted from well-placed hides.

To get here, take a private yellow taxi (around US\$14) or a minibus headed for Brikama from Banjul or Serekunda (US\$0.35). The reserve is signposted.

TANJI

The village of Tanji is a tranquil spot, perfect for a day trip from the hectic Atlantic Coast resorts.

Tanji River Bird Reserve (🕿 9919219; admission US\$1.10, guided walks US\$7; () & am-6pm), 3km north of Tanji village, is in an area of lagoons, dunes, dry woodland and coastal scrub that attracts an excellent range of birds. It is also an important breeding area for turtles and Caspian terns.

About 2km south of the village is the Tanji Village Museum (2 9926618; tanje@dds.nl; adult/child US\$3.50/1; (9am-5pm), with excellent displays of traditional artefacts, including musical instruments, and an artisans' corner. There's a simple **hostel** (r per person US\$9) and restaurant.

The most attractive hotel is the Paradise Inn Lodge (🖻 8800209; www.paradiseinngarden.com; r per person incl breakfast US\$24), which is stunningly located amid mangroves and forest, and runs birding excursions and music courses. A little further south in Tujering, the rootsy Bendula Lodge (🖻 7717481; www.bendula.com; s/d US\$18/24) has accommodation in simple huts placed near a lush tropical forest and the beach.

SANYANG & GUNJUR

Twenty kilometres south of Serekunda, Sanyang is a much-loved day-trip destination for Gambians. It's got a pretty beach, where bars, such as the excellent Rainbow Beach Bar (2 9827790; dishes US\$5-20) tempt with a mouthwatering selection of fresh seafood dishes. The Kobokoto Lodge (2 9984838; www.salla.se/kkl; r per person US\$9) has simple but attractive rooms.

Another 10km along the coast lies the tranquil fishing village of Gunjur, where the holiday hype subsides and 'real life' makes its entrance. This is one of The Gambia's largest fishing centres, so the beach is all pirogues, catch and nets. The African Lodge (2 4486143; fax 4486026; r per person incl breakfast US\$14), in the heart of Gunjur village, is perfect for a feel of 'real life' away from the tourist zones. The Footsteps Eco Lodge (2 7706830; www.natureswaygambia.com; camp sites US\$9, d US\$63) is one of The Gambia's most fully developed ecolodges, from the compost toilets, solar power, and freshwater pool to the extensive vegetable garden.

LOWER GAMBIA RIVER

JUFUREH & JAMES ISLAND

When Alex Haley, the American author of *Roots*, traced his origins to Jufureh, the tiny village quickly turned into a favourite tourist destination. Apart from the Kinteh family, Haley's supposed relatives, there's little

to see, though a *pirogue* trip to **James Island** with its crumbling foundations of its slave fort is worth doing. You can stay in the colourful bungalows of the **Kunta Kinte Roots Camp** (**@** 9905322; baboucarlo@hotmail.com; s/d US\$18/35) and try the renowned African buffet (US\$5 per person, call in advance).

To get to Jufureh from Banjul, take an early ferry to Barra, dodge the touts and find a bush taxi (US\$2), or take an organised tour; see p321 for touring agencies.

BINTANG BOLONG

Tucked away among the maze of shrubs lining the shores of the Bintang River is the intimate and ecofriendly **Bintang Bolong Lodge** ((2) 4488035; www.bintang-bolong.com; r per person US\$14; (2). Huts made entirely from local materials sit on stilts in the river; you can leap from your balcony into a *pirogue* for a **boat tour** (per hr US\$30).

Twice a day, there's a bus from Brikama to Bintang (one hour, US\$1). A private taxi costs around US\$65.

KIANG WEST NATIONAL PARK

The mangrove creeks and mud flats, dry woodland and grassland of **Kiang West** (admission US\$1.10, payable at the parkheadquarters in Dumbuntu), The Gambia's largest national park, are home to an extraordinary variety of species, including bushbabies, baboons, colobus monkeys, warthogs, marsh mongooses and bushbucks. Rarely sighted species include hyenas, dolphins and crocodiles. Birds are also plentiful, with more than 300 species recorded.

Most people stay at nearby **Tendaba Camp** (a) 4541024; tendaba@qanet.gm; bungalows with/without bathroom US\$8.75/8, luxury r US\$10), a classic on the travellers' scene. Accommodation ranges from small bungalows to 'luxury' rooms, fully equipped with a river-edge veranda and TV.

UPPER GAMBIA RIVER

GEORGETOWN

Georgetown (Jangjang-bureh) is a sleepy, crumbling former colonial administrative centre, and a fine place to relax or venture for day trips into the surrounding area. It is situated on the northern edge of MacCarthy Island, a 10km-long and 2.5km-wide island in the Gambia River, about 300km upstream from Banjul. It has ferry links to both riverbanks, but there is little in terms of infrastructure – no banks and no hospital. There is, however, plenty to please those with a weak spot for birds and history.

In town, the **Central River Division Forestry Project** (CRDFP; **(CRDFP)**; **(CRDFP)**;

Sleeping & Eating

Jangjang-bureh Camp (C /fax 5676182, 9920618; www .gambiariver.com; r per person US\$7) Beautifully located on the north bank, this rustic place has basic bungalows with oil lamps in a mazelike garden. You reach the place by boat from Dreambird Camp (C /fax 5676182).

Baobolong Camp (**B** 5676133; fax 5676120; 0wens St; s/d US\$11/14) This leafy camp features wellmaintained rooms, friendly staff and the luxury of a generator.

Bird Safari Camp ((26) 5676108; www.bsc.gm; r with half-board per person US\$35; (26) In a secluded spot, accommodation is in bungalows or luxury tents. Bird-watching trips are recommended.

Getting There & Away

MacCarthy Island can be reached by ferry (passenger/car US\$0.20/1.80) from either the southern or northern bank of the river. Most bush taxis turn off the main road between Soma and Basse Santa Su to drop off passengers at the southern ferry ramp; request this when entering the taxi.

RIVER GAMBIA NATIONAL PARK

River Gambia National Park (also known as Baboon Island) consists off five islands in the Gambia River. It's home to a primate protection project that helps once-captured chimpanzees to live in the wild again. Visitors are not allowed to land on the islands, but touring them by boat is pleasant enough. Boat trips can be arranged by all Georgetown hotels (around US\$125 per *pirogue*), or you can go to Kuntaur and hire a *pirogue* (around US\$10 for a four-hour trip).

WASSU STONE CIRCLES

About 25km northwest of Georgetown near the town of Kuntaur are the **Wassu Stone Circles** (admission D30), which archaeologists believe are burial sites constructed about 1200 years ago. Each stone weighs several tonnes and is between 1m and 2.5m in height.

The hotels in Georgetown have more information and can arrange excursions here (US\$140 for the tour to the national park and the stone circles).

BASSE SANTA SU

Basse Santa Su, commonly called Basse, is The Gambia's most easterly town of any size. Though haunted by neglect, Basse Santa Su is the liveliest upcountry settlement. Trust Bank and Standard Chartered Bank have branches in Basse, and there's an internet café.

The **Basse Guesthouse** (C 5668283; r US\$5.30), above a tailor shop, has dingy rooms with shared toilets. The only plus: the 1st-floor balcony with view across the market.

Though slightly run-down since the death of its former manager (his teenage son has now taken over), the **Jem Hotel** ((2) 5668356; s/d US\$10/20) is one of the cleaner Basse options. The restaurant gets good reviews.

The best place to stay and eat is **Fulladu Camp** (26) 5668743; r per person US\$11), on the north bank of the Gambia River, which has accommodation in comfortable bungalows.

The cultural centre **Traditions** ($\textcircled{\sc opt}$ 5668533; sul aymanjallowtraditions@yahoo.com; $\textcircled{\sc opt}$ 9am-6pm) exhibits locally made cloth and crafts, has a river-view café and can also dust of a couple of rooms for unexpected visitors (US\$9).

Getting There & Away

There are daily minibuses and bush taxis between Basse and Georgetown (US\$2, one hour) and Soma (US\$5.30, four hours). A bush taxi to Vélingara in Senegal costs US\$1 (40 minutes). From there, you can get frequent connections to Tambacounda via Vélingara in Senegal (see p329). Even further afield, a Peugeot taxi goes more or less daily (passengers depending) to Labé in northern Guinea. The fare is US\$55 and the trip takes 24 hours, or much, much longer.

THE GAMBIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

At the Atlantic Coast resorts of Bakau, Fajara, Kotu Strand and Kololi the choice of accommodation ranges from simple hostels to five-star hotels. Upcountry, your options are normally limited to basic guesthouses and hotels, with the exception of a few luxury lodges.

ACTIVITIES

Beach-related activities, such as swimming, water sports and fishing are popular around the coast. Upcountry, it's all about birdwatching tours around the national parks and *pirogue* excursions.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are open from 8am to 3pm or 4pm Monday to Thursday, and 8am to 12.30pm Friday. Banks, shops and businesses usually open 8.30am to noon and 2.30pm to 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and 8am to noon Friday and Saturday. Restaurants tend to serve lunch from around 11am to 2.30pm and dinner from 6pm onwards.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Serious crime is still fairly rare in The Gambia. However, muggings and petty theft do occur, particularly around the tourist centres near the coast. Avoid walking around alone after dark, particularly in areas you don't know well. Women in particular should be careful at the beaches, where some readers have reported instances of sexual assault.

Many visitors complain about the beach boys (known as 'bumsters') who wait outside hotels and offer tourists anything from souvenirs to drugs and sex. It's best to ignore these guys completely. They might respond with verbal abuse, but it's all hot air.

PRACTICALITIES

- Africa Today (Afro Media) has good political and economic news, plus business, sport and tourism.
- Focus on Africa (BBC) has excellent news stories, accessible reports and a concise run down of recent political events.
- West Africa (West Africa Publishing) is a long-standing, respected weekly with a focus on political and economic news.
- The electricity supply in The Gambia is 220V. Plugs either have two round pins, as those in continental Europe, or three square pins, as used in Britain.
- The Gambia uses the metric system.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES The Gambia Embassies & Consulates

France (🗃 01 42 94 09 30; 117 Rue Saint-Lazare, 75008 Paris)

Germany ((a) 030-892 31 21; fax 030 891 14 01; Kurfurstendamm 103, Berlin)

Guinea-Bissau (20203928; Av de 14 Novembro, Bissau) Located 1km northwest of Mercado de Bandim. Nigeria (209-523 8545; Plot 25, Ontario Crescent, 5085 Wuse, Abuja)

USA (🖻 0202-785 1399; gamembdc@gambia.com; Suite 1000, 1155 15th St NW, Washington, DC, 20005)

Embassies & Consulates in The Gambia

Guinea (Map p319; 🗃 4226862; 78A Daniel Goddard St, Banjul)

Guinea-Bissau (Map pp322-3; 🖻 4494854; Atlantic Rd, Bakau)

Mauritania (Map pp322-3; 🖻 4461086) Opposite Tafbel Maisonettes, Fajara.

Senegal (Map pp322-3; 2 4373752) Off Kairaba Ave. Sierra Leone (Map p319; 2 4228206; 67 Daniel Goddard St, Banjul)

UK (Map pp322-3; 🖻 4495133; 48 Atlantic Rd, Fajara) US (Map pp322-3; 🖻 4392856; Kairaba Ave, Fajara)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Held every June, the one-week **Roots Homecoming Festival** features concerts by Gambian and Diaspora artists, seminars and lectures. The high point is the weekend in Jufureh, where local dance troupes and bands drown the village in music.

VACCINATION CERTIFICATES

A yellow-fever vaccination certificate is required of travellers coming from an infected area.

HOLIDAYS

As well as the religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106), these are the public holidays observed in The Gambia: **1 January** New Year's Day **18 February** Independence Day **1 May** Workers' Day **15 August** Assumption

INTERNET ACCESS

There are plenty of internet cafés in Banjul and in all of the resorts. Rates are around US\$1 per hour. Upcountry, access is harder to find.

MONEY

The local currency dalasi (D) has for years suffered a dramatic decrease in value, and inflation continues, though it's at 8% less dramatic than in the early noughties.

There are no restrictions on its import or export, but the money's useless outside The Gambia.

It's best to change money at banks or exchange bureaus. Both offer about the same rate. Avoid changing on the black market. A serious government crackdown on illegal moneychangers means that you don't only risk getting ripped off, but might also get into trouble with the police.

If you've come in from Senegal and have no dalasi, CFA francs are widely accepted.

In Banjul and around the coastal resorts you can find several banks with ATMs that accept Visa cards (the withdrawal limit is usually D2000). It's best to change before heading upcountry, where exchange facilities are rare.

TELEPHONE

The telephone system is handled by Gamtel, which has offices and kiosks in Banjul, Bakau, Serekunda and most upcountry towns, where you can dial direct overseas 24 hours a day. The lines are good, and calls to Europe cost about US\$7.50 for three minutes at peak times (7am to 6pm). There are many private telecentres offering better rates. There are no area codes in The Gambia.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism** (ASSET; www.asset-gambia.com) is an umbrella organisation, trying to help small businesses in tourism, and a great source of information for those wanting to travel responsibly.

VISAS

Visas are not needed by nationals of Commonwealth countries, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) or Scandinavian countries for stays of up to 90 days. For those needing one, visas are normally valid for one month and are issued in two to three days for about US\$45; you'll need two photos.

Visa extensions are dealt with swiftly at the **Immigration Office** (Map p319; 2014) (Map p3

Visas for Onward Travel

Most embassies are open from 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm weekdays. You usually need two photos to apply for an onward visa. Contact the relevant embassy (opposite) for more information.

Guinea Three-month, single-entry visas are issued for US\$40 the same day if you come in the morning.

Guinea-Bissau One-month, single-entry visas are issued for US\$10, and two-month visas are US\$12; the process takes a few hours.

Mali The consulate here does not issue tourist visas. For visas, the closest embassy is in Dakar, Senegal.

Mauritania One-month visas are issued for about US\$7 in 24 hours.

Senegal One-month visas take 24 hours to issue and cost US\$14.

VOLUNTEERING

The biodiversity research and education centre **Makasutu Wildlife Trust** (**T**782633; www.darwin gambia.gm), based at Abuko Nature Reserve, takes on volunteers and can provide them with accommodation.

TRANSPORT IN THE GAMBIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

SN Brussels Airlines is the only scheduled airline that flies between The Gambia and Europe. Most people get here on cheap charter flights. The leading holiday operator is the British-based **Gambia Experience** ((20) 0845 330 4567; www.qambia.co.uk).

Air Sénégal International has regular flights between Dakar (Senegal) and Banjul (US\$150 one way).

Other regional airlines serving The Gambia include Air Guinée, Bellview, Slok Air and West Coast Airways. Note that these companies don't have good safety standards, and flights are not reliable.

Useful airline offices include:

Air Sénégal International (Map p319; @ 4472095; www.air-senegal-international.com; Ecowas Ave) SN Brussels Airlines (Map pp322-3; @ 4496301/2; www.flysn.com; Badala Park Way, Kololi)

Land

Minibuses and bush taxis run regularly between Barra and the border at Karang

(US\$2), where Dakar-bound bush taxis and minibuses (US\$7 to US\$10, six hours) are normally waiting.

If you're heading for southern Senegal, minibuses and bush taxis leave frequently from Serekunda garage. The five-hour trip to Ziguinchor is about US\$8 and you have to change vehicles at the border. Transport also goes from Brikama to Ziguinchor.

At the far-eastern tip of The Gambia, bush taxis run from Basse Santa Su to Vélingara (US\$2, 45 minutes, 27km), and from there bush taxis go to Tambacounda for US\$3 (three hours).

GETTING AROUND Boat

GambiaRiverExperience(Mappp322-3; 🖻 4494360;www .gambiariver.com), off Kairaba Ave, does trips from Denton Bridge near Banjul to Lamin Lodge and all the way up to Georgetown. Trips are either done by motorised *pirogue* or large boat. One of their offers includes a week-long cruise along the river. Hidden Gambia (🖻 in UK 01527-576239; www.hiddengambia.com) also has an excellent set of boat excursions, including 'Discover the River' trips that take you all the way from the coast upcountry (seven-day trip around US\$800, 14-day trip US\$1000).

Car & Motorcycle

Reliable car hire companies include: AB Rent-a-Car ((2) 4460926; abrentacar@gamtel.gm;

Kairaba Hotel, Senegambia, Kololi) Has had consistently good reviews for years.

Local Transport

Most minibuses and bush taxis upcountry go along the road following the south bank of the Gambia River. This road is in a terrible condition, so prepare for a rough ride and unpredictable delays. If possible, try to get a vehicle that goes along the north bank. Not a dream journey either, but marginally less rough. If you go to Georgetown or Basse, you usually have to change vehicles at Soma. Serekunda–Basse costs US\$11, the 360km trip takes nine to 12 hours. Serekunda–Soma is US\$5.30 (four to six hours). A private taxi from Serekunda to Basse should cost around US\$140 to US\$180. Make sure it's in a good condition. © Lonely Planet Publications 330

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Ghana

GHANA

In Ghana life is public. People evacuate their homes and apartments every day to escape the stifling heat. And much like the kente cloth worn by market women, the disparate parts and peoples somehow mix and weave together into a cohesive whole. Ghana is home to a number of diverse peoples and cultures, all finding ways to coexist in a rapidly modernising country. You'll see men and women in traditional clothes text messaging friends and suited businessmen taking offerings to tribal chiefs.

Compared to other countries in the region, Ghana is stable and prosperous, but this valuation is in part founded on hopes for the future. The country is often labelled 'Africa for beginners', and while you'll likely be welcomed by the people in a hot, sweaty clinch, the same way the sun grabs hold of you the second after you step outside, getting around is by no means easy.

Ghana has no iconic calling card like Victoria Falls or Kilimanjaro, but one look at a map reveals a geographic blessing: hundreds of kilometres of coast shared by beautiful beaches, ruined European forts, the poignant reminders of the country's importance as a way station for African slaves, and the battered shacks of lively fishing villages. Accra is the commercial and cultural motor of the country, while Kumasi is the traditional home of the Ashanti, and is famous for its crafts. In the Volta region to the east, where the geography was given a facelift by the Akosombo dam, you can still find substantial swathes of forest crawling up mountains along the Togo border. And finally the north, which offers opportunities for wildlife viewing up close and personal, stretches across the horizon like an overcooked pancake to the Burkina Faso frontier.

FAST FACTS

- Area 238,537 sq km
- ATMs Available
- Borders Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Togo
- Budget US\$30 to US\$50 per day
- Capital Accra
- Languages English, Twi, Ga and Ewe
- Money Cedi; US\$1 = C9200
- Population 21 million
- Seasons Wet (late April to October), dry (November to late March)
- **Telephone** Country code **2**33; international access code **2**00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visa US\$50 in advance or US\$100 upon arrival at airport

HIGHLIGHTS

- Beach life (p342) Soak up the rays and Rasta vibe at a beach resort in Axim, Busua, Anomabu or Kokrobite.
- Past life (p343 and p344) Tour the castles at Cape Coast and Elmina to learn about the history of slavery.
- Wildlife (p349) Engage in a staring contest with a bus-sized elephant in Mole National Park.
- Hiplife (p341) Take in Accra's club scene, the birthplace of some of the region's most popular music.
- **Village life** (p349) Rough it in one of the community tourism projects, such as the stilt village at Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Ghana has a tropical equatorial climate, which means that it's hot year-round with seasonal rains. In the humid southern coastal region, the rainy seasons are from April to June, and during September and October; the dry months, November to March or July and August, are easier for travelling. Throughout the year, maximum temperatures are around 30°C, dropping three or four degrees during the brief respite between rainy seasons. The humidity is constantly high, at about 80%.

In the central region, the rains are heavier and last longer. In the hotter and drier north, there is one rainy season, lasting from April to October. Midday temperatures rarely fall below 30°C, rising to 35°C and higher during December to March when the rasping harmattan wind blows in from the Sahara.

The tourist high season is from June to August, which coincides with the summer vacation in the US. The country sees few tourists from September to December.

ITINERARIES

Two Weeks Without private transportation two weeks is really only enough time to do the triangular route bounded by Accra, Takoradi to the west, and Kumasi at the top. Start in Accra (p335; three days), then head to the beach at Anomabu (p342; two nights), then on to Cape Coast (p342; three nights), with day trips to Kakum (p343) and Elmina (p344). If you want to mix things up take the night train from Takoradi (p344) to Kumasi (p345; three nights) to explore

HOW MUCH?

- Handkerchief US\$0.20
- Bottle of Fanta US\$0.30
- Music CD US\$10
- Inner-city taxi US\$0.90
- Coffin in the shape of a Mercedes US\$550

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.80
- 1L bottled water US\$0.70
- Bottle of Star beer US\$0.50
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10
- Beef kebab skewer US\$0.30

the surrounding area, then head back to Accra.

One Month With four weeks to spare, you can do everything in the two-week itinerary plus throw in visits to the coastal resorts at Busua (p344) and those further along the coast, and also explore some of the north. If possible fly from Accra to Tamale (p348; one night) - if not take vour time bussing it to Kumasi and then further north - and on to Mole National Park (p349) and Larabanga (p349; two nights). Continue west to the hippo sanctuary at Wechiau (p349), if time permits, and return to Kumasi. From there you can head south to Accra and then visit the east: Akosombo (p350; one night) and Wli Falls (p350) and back to Accra. Alternatively, head directly to the coastal resorts of your choice from Kumasi.

HISTORY

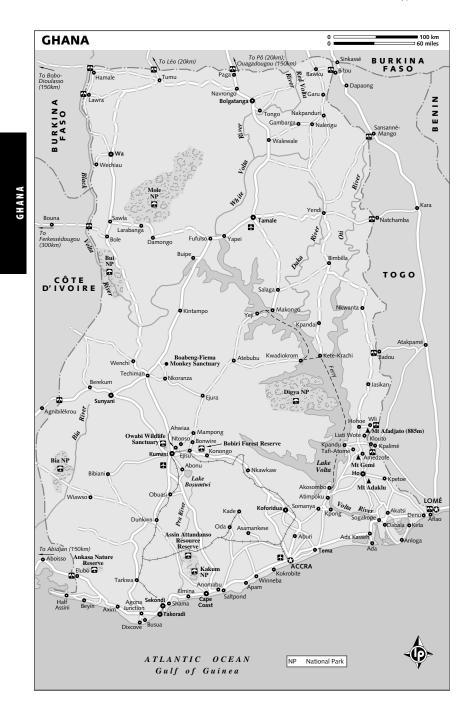
Present-day Ghana has been inhabited since 4000 BC, filled by successive waves of migrants from the north and east. By the 13th century several kingdoms had developed, growing rich from the country's massive gold deposits and gradually expanding south along the Volta River to the coast.

Power & Conflict

By the 16th century one of the kingdoms, the Ashanti, emerged as the dominant power, conquering tribes left, right and centre and



GHANA



taking control of trade routes to the coast. Its capital, Kumasi, became a sophisticated urban centre, with facilities and services equal to those in Europe at the time. And it wasn't long until the Europeans discovered this African kingdom. First the Portuguese came sniffing around the coast, and then came the British, French, Dutch, Swedes and Danes. They all built forts by the sea and traded slaves, gold and other goods with the Ashanti.

But the slave trade was abolished in the 19th century, and with it went the Ashanti's domination. By that time the British had taken over the Gold Coast, as the area had become called, and began muscling in on Ashanti turf. This sparked several wars between the two powers, which culminated in the British ransacking of Kumasi in 1874. The British then established a protectorate over Ashanti territory, which they expanded in 1901 to include areas to the north. The Gold Coast was now a British colony.

The Road to Independence

By the late 1920s the locals were itching for independence, and they set up political parties dedicated to this aim. However, parties like the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), formed in 1947, were too elitist and detached from those they were meant to represent - the ordinary workers. So the UGCC's secretarygeneral, Kwame Nkrumah, broke away in 1948 and formed the Conventional People's Party (CPP), which became an overnight success. Nkrumah was impatient for change and called for a national strike in 1949. The British, anxious about his popularity, jailed him. Despite this, the CPP won the elections of 1951, Nkrumah was released and he became prime minister. When Ghana finally won its independence in March 1957, Nkrumah became the first president of an independent African nation. His speeches, which denounced imperialism and talked about a free, united Africa, made him the darling of the Pan-African movement.

Independence & the Nkrumah Years

But back home Nkrumah was not popular among traditional chiefs and farmers, who were unimpressed with the idea of unity under his rule. Factionalism and regional interests created an opposition that Nkrumah tried to contain through repressive laws, and by turning Ghana into a one-party state. Nkrumah, however, skilfully kept himself out of the fray and concentrated on building prestige projects, such as the Akosombo Dam and several universities and hospitals.

But things started to unravel. Nkrumah expanded his personal bodyguard into an entire regiment, while corruption and reckless spending drove the country into serious debt. Nkrumah, seemingly oblivious to his growing unpopularity, made the fatal mistake of going on a state visit to China in 1966. While he was away his regime was toppled in an army coup. Nkrumah died six years later in exile in Guinea.

Dr Kofi Busia headed a civilian government in 1969, but could do nothing to overcome the corruption and debt problems. Colonel Acheampong replaced him in a 1972 coup, but few things changed under his tenure.

Jerry Rawlings' Regime

By 1979 Ghana was suffering food shortages and people were out on the streets demonstrating against the army 'fat cats'. Onto the scene came Jerry Rawlings: a good-looking, charismatic, half-Scottish air force pilot who kept cigarettes behind his ear and spoke the language of the people. Nicknamed 'Junior Jesus', Rawlings caught the public's imagination with his calls for corrupt military rulers to be confronted and held accountable for Ghana's problems. The military jailed him for his insubordination, but his fellow junior officers freed him after they staged an uprising. Rawlings' Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) then handed over power to a civilian government (after a general election) and started a major 'house-cleaning' operation that is, executing and jailing senior officers.

The new president, Hilla Limann, was uneasy with Rawlings' huge popularity, and later accused him of trying to subvert constitutional rule. The AFRC toppled him in a coup in 1981, and this time Rawlings stayed in power for the next 15 years.

Although Rawlings never delivered his promised left-wing revolution, he improved the ailing economy after following the orders of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). During part of the 1980s Ghana enjoyed Africa's highest economic growth rates.

The Democratic Era

By 1992 Rawlings was under worldwide pressure to introduce democracy, so he lifted the

10-year ban on political parties and called a general election. However, the hopelessly divided opposition couldn't get their act together, and Rawlings won the 1992 elections freely and fairly, with 60% of the vote. Still licking their wounds, the opposition withdrew from the following month's parliamentary elections, giving Rawlings' newly formed National Democratic Congress (NDC) an easy victory. In 1996 he repeated this triumph in elections that were again considered free and fair.

Ghana Today After eight yea (the constitutio

After eight years of Rawlings and the NDC (the constitution barred Rawlings from standing for a third term in the 2000 presidential elections), his nominated successor and former vice-president, Professor John Atta Mills, lost to Dr John Kufuor, leader of the well-established New Patriotic Party (NPP), which also won a slim majority in the parliamentary elections. Kufour and the NPP were victorious again in 2004, which means that each party will have had eight years in power by the time the next national elections roll around.

Kufuor and the NPP inherited some tough economic and political challenges; the party's slogan, 'So Far So Good', is perhaps an uncannily accurate reflection of the confidence they and the country hold. Even though both parties continue to be criticised for cronyism and corruption, Ghana's economy continues to grow and attract investment, and the outlook is brighter than in many other parts of Africa. That being said, in 2005 the per-capita income was an estimated US\$2500 and Ghana is classified by the UN as a low-income, food-deficit country. The majority of very poor people live in rural areas. The bulk of the country's labour force is employed in agriculture, which accounts for 37% of its GDP and 35% of its export earnings.

CULTURE

If there's one feature of Ghanaian society that sticks out more than any other, it has to be religion. The country is 15% Muslim, 70% Christian and 100% obsessed with spiritual worship. This is the land of glory, gold and God, after all, and God is *everywhere*: 'God is Love Hair Salon', 'Jesus Loves Me Forex' Bureau' and 'Forgiveness Communications' are just some of the pious names emblazoned across shop fronts in every town and city throughout the country.

But that's not to say they can't have fun. Ghanaians will find any excuse to dance, and even the most sedate boat rides can turn into a massive party as young men and old grannies gyrate their hips to the musical fusion genres of highlife and hiplife. The latter is a more recent invention that takes a page from the American hip-hop world.

Ghanaians have produced some of Africa's best and most well-known musicians, and this vibrancy is a reflection of a society that is more culturally self-confident than most. Whether it's music, or exquisite Ashanti kente cloth, stools or woodcarvings, Ghanaian products (and imitations of them) are scattered all over West Africa.

Maybe the most famous and arguably the most important Ghanaian is Otunfu Osei II, the king of the Ashanti. He's considered at least as influential as the president, in part because he rules with no term limits and because of his relative youth; he's only in his 50s. Some Ghanaians living abroad send remittances to the king, some money comes from allowances paid by the government, and some of his wealth comes from taxes or tributes given by the people themselves.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Ghana has a rich artistic heritage. Objects are created not only for their aesthetic value but as symbols of ethnic identity or to commemorate historical or legendary events, to convey cultural values or to signify membership of a group. The Akan people of the southern and central regions are famous for their cloth, goldwork, woodcarving, chiefs' insignia (such as swords, umbrella tops and linguist staffs), pottery and bead-making.

ENVIRONMENT

Ghana is about the size of Britain. Much of Ghana's terrain consists of wooded ranges, wide valleys and low-lying coastal plains. The damming of the Volta River in the mid-1960s created the world's largest artificial lake.

Logging, mining, the use of wood fuels and deforestation for agriculture have reduced Ghana's forests from over 8 million sq km in the early 20th century to less than 2 million sq km now. Marine and coastal areas are threatened by high erosion and population concentration. Population densities are highest within the Accra-Kumasi-Takoradi triangle, largely because of the timber-producing deciduous forests and cocoa-growing lands, which stimulate economic productivity.

Ghana has five national parks and nine protected areas. Mole National Park (p349), in the northwest of the country, protects savannah woodland and is the best place to see wildlife, including elephants, baboons and antelope species. Kakum National Park (p343), just inland of Cape Coast, is known for its canopy walkway and is a good place to see rainforest habitat and birdlife.

FOOD & DRINK

A typical Ghanaian meal consists of a starch staple, such as rice, fufu (mashed cassava, plantain or yam), kenkey or banku (fermented maize meal) eaten with a sauce or stew. Common sauces (called soups) include groundnut, palaver (made from greens) and light soup (egg and tomato sauce with fish or meat). Other menu regulars are fried rice with chicken or vegetables, *jollof* rice (the West African paella) and red, red, bean stew with meat or fish, often served with fried plantains. The meat used is usually chicken, goat or beef; guinea fowl replaces chicken in the north of the country. Grasscutter, a large rodent, is also popular. Fish, usually dried and smoked, is a common component of meals. Omo tuo, a special dish served only on Sunday, is mashed rice balls with a fish or meat soup.

ACCRA

🖻 021 / pop 2 million

With its back mostly turned to the Gulf of Guinea, taking little advantage of its waterfront location, Accra crawls up and over a modern landscape, gobbling up real estate and producing a chaotic low-rise skyline. Originally a scattering of villages controlled by Ga chiefs, today it's a sprawling city that extends eastwards almost 25km to the neighbouring city of Tema. Its congested and pockmarked pavements; baking streets that in the midday heat can make a block feel like a kilometre; shanty towns and genteel leafy suburbia; chop bars and gourmet restaurants; hiplife and highlife; all combine to make Accra at once exhausting and exhilarating. Books for Less (Map p336; 17th Lane, Osu) EPP Books (Map p336; Burma Camp Rd, Labadi)

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française (Map p336;) 773134; alliance@ ghana.com; Liberation Link, Airport Residential Area) Lectures and cultural events; every Tuesday is movie night. British Council (Map p338;) 244744; Liberia Rd; www.britishcouncil.org/ghana) Air-con library open to the public. English newspapers and magazines, and lectures and cultural events.

Internet Access

Busy Internet (Map p338; Ring Rd, Asylum Down; per hr US\$1.10; 2 24hr) Hi-tech, popular internet café and entertainment centre; great place to watch a movie. **Internet Café** (Map p338) Across from the White Bell restaurant, on the left.

Mega Internet (Map p338; Ring Rd, Asylum Down; per hr US\$1.10; ♥ 4.30am-1.30am) Flat-screen computers, all office-related services.

Osu Internet Café (Map p336; Mission St, Osu; per hr US\$0.75; ∑ 24hr)

Sharpnet (Map p336; Ring Rd East, Osu; per hr US\$1.10; 24hr)

Medical Services

Pharmacies are scattered around everywhere, but as an alternative you can try the supermarkets in Osu.

37 Military Hospital (Map p336; 🖻 776111; Liberation Ave)

North Ridge Clinic (Map p336; 227328, 024-355366; Ring Rd Central)

Trust Hospital (🖻 776787; Cantonments Rd, Osu)

Money

The head offices of Barclays and Standard Chartered are both on High St (Map p338) and there are several branches around town, all of which have ATMs. Forexes are scattered around the city.

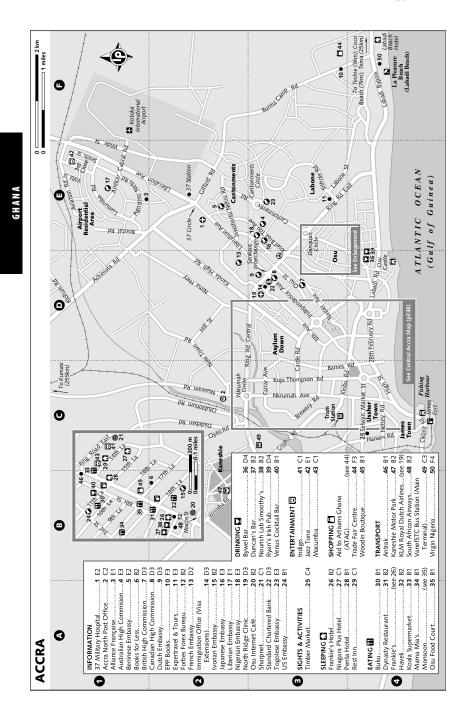
Afro Wings Ltd (Map p338; Farrar Ave) In the Trust Towers complex. Amex representative.

Forbes Forex Bureau (Map p336; Cantonment Rd, Osu) Jibrin Forex Bureau (Map p338; Kojo Thompson Rd, Adabraka)

Star Forex Bureau (Map p338; High St) In the entrance to the Centre for National Culture.

Post

Accra North post office (Map p336; Nsawam Rd) Just north of Nkrumah Circle.



Main post office (Map p338; Ussher Town) On the Lutterodt intersection.

Tourist Information

Accra Visitor's Centre (Map p338; 2252186; bentsifi@ighmail.com) Near Mega Internet on Ring Rd Central. Has maps, and is reasonably helpful. Tourist information counter (2776171, ext 1314; Airport) A small counter in the international arrivals hall at the airport.

Tourist office (Map p338; m 231817; m 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) This is 50m down Education Close, off Barnes Rd. Not a good source of practical information.

Travel Agencies

Doscar Travel & Tours (Map p338; 239229; fax 248328; Sedco House, 5 Tabon St) Next to Le Petit Paris Café.

Expertravel & Tours (Map p336; 775498; fax 773937; Ring Rd East)

WB Travel & Tours (Map p338; 245900; wbtravel@wwwplus.com; 29 Farrar Ave) Opposite Hotel President.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The gently decaying **National Museum** (Map p338; O 221633; Barnes Rd; adult/student US\$5/2.20; O 9am-6pm Iue-Sun), set in shady grounds, has interesting displays on various aspects of Ghanaian culture and history. The displays on royal stools, state umbrellas, swords and *akyeamepoma* (linguist's staffs) are enlightening.

There is no front door or welcoming sign to the **Makola Market** (Map p338). It's a gradual transition from the usual pavements clogged with vendors hawking second-hand clothes and shoes to the market itself, which only becomes obvious once you can't take a step without tripping over a pile of Chinese-made locks or tube socks and you're sucked into the vortex of the swirling crowds.

Independence (Black Štar) Square (Map p338) is a vast, baking expanse of concrete dominated by a ginormous McDonalds-like arch, beneath which the Eternal Flame of African Liberation, lit by Nkrumah, still flickers.

Because they are fairly concentrated and walkable, **James Town** and **Ussher Town** (both on Map p336), two of the oldest neighbourhoods in Accra, provide a chance to witness how ordinary Ghanaians go about their everyday lives. These aren't shantytowns like you'd find in Johannesburg or Nairobi, but the people are undoubtedly poor and you may feel uncomfortably voyeuristic just walking around on your own. Ask a local to take you around; negotiate a fee in advance.

For a great view of the city and the busy and colourful fishing harbour (haze and pollution permitting), climb to the top of the old **lighthouse** (Map p336; admission US\$0.30) near James Fort.

If you're walking back to the centre along Cleland Rd, which becomes High St, you could take a detour along Hansen Rd to see the **Timber Market** (Map p336; ask someone to show you where it is). The fetish section is fascinating, with its animal skulls, live and dead reptiles, strange powders, and juju figurines.

While most of Accra's oceanfront real estate is rocky and undeveloped, there are several sandy beaches. **La Pleasure Beach** (Map p336; admission US\$2.20), also known as Labadi Beach, is about 8km east of central Accra and easily reached by public transport. Unfortunately since the swimming area is so narrow it's a little claustrophobic on weekends.

SLEEPING

Most of the budget accommodation is generally clustered off Kwame Nkrumah and Kojo Thompson Rds in Adabraka. While Osu is the most convenient place to base yourself, rooms there are US\$40 and up and aren't especially good value. The closest you can get to beach or resort-style accommodation are the two topend hotels at La Pleasure Beach. The Novotel is the nicest place to stay in the city centre.

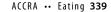
Adabraka

Date Hotel (Map p338; 🖻 228200; Adama Rd, Adabraka; r from US\$9) The concrete courtyard is a drinking spot during the day, and the fan rooms are bare-bare bones. Bring your own bath towel.

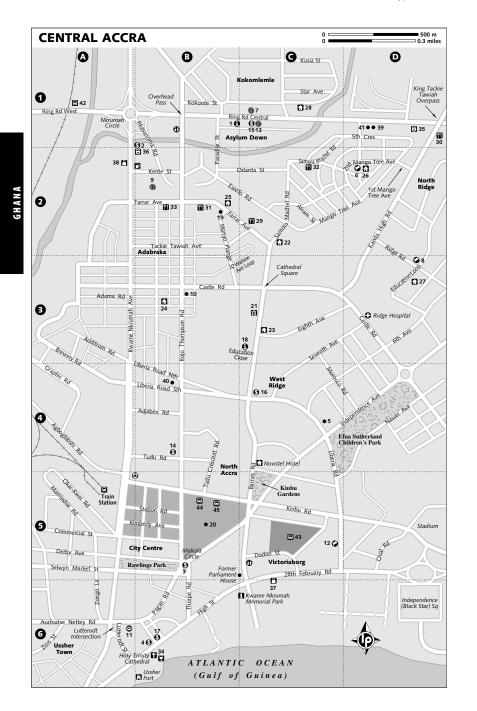
Hotel President (Map p338; 223343; Farrar Ave, Adabraka; r with fan/air-con from US\$15/20; **D**) Despite a grandiose name and a convenient location, this purple multistorey hotel is a little ratty, though the air-con rooms are quite large.

Calvary Methodist Church Guesthouse (Map p338; 234507; Barnes Rd, West Ridge; r US\$24; **P 3**) The rooms on the top floor of a building in this compound are divine for the price. Each of the six rooms are spotless and modern and have small balconies.

Beverly Hills Hotel (Map p338; ☎ 224042; Samora Machel Rd; rUS\$33; ℙ 🕄) You won't mistake this



G H A N A



INFORMATION	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	DRINKING 🗖
Accra Visitor's Centre1 B1	Makola Market20 B5	Champs Sports Bar(see 28)
Afro Wings Ltd(see 29)	National Museum21 C3	Osekan34 B6
Barclays Bank2 B1		
Barclays Bank3 B5	SLEEPING 🔂	ENTERTAINMENT 😇
Barclays Bank (Head Office)4 B6	Beverly Hills Hotel22 C2	Bass Line
British Council5 C4	Calvary Methodist Church	Vienna City Entertainment
Burkinabé Embassy6 D2	Guesthouse23 C3	Complex36 B2
Busy Internet7 C1	Date Hotel24 B3	
Doscar Travel & Tours(see 30)	Hotel President25 B2	SHOPPING 💾
German Embassy8 D3	Korkdam Hotel26 D2	Centre for National
Internet Café9 B2	North Ridge	Culture
Jibrin Forex Bureau10 B3	Hotel	Loom
Main Post Office 11 A6	Paloma Hotel28 C1	
Malian Embassy12 C5		TRANSPORT
Mega Internet13 C1	EATING 🖬	Alitalia
Standard Chartered Bank14 B4	Choos Eatery29 C2	British Airways40 B4
Standard Chartered Bank15 C1	Edvy Restaurant(see 21)	Lufthansa Airlines41 D1
Standard Chartered Bank16 C4	Le Petit Paris30 D1	Neoplan Motor
Standard Chartered Bank	Orangery31 B2	Park 42 A1
(Head Office)17 B6	Paloma	Tema Station43 C5
Star Forex Bureau(see 37)	Restaurant(see 28)	Tudu Station44 B5
Tourist Office18 C3	Spicy Chicken32 C2	VanefSTC Bus Station (to Ho,
WB Travel & Tours19 B2	White Bell33 B2	Hohoe & Aflao) 45 B5

centrally located hotel for the Four Seasons, though its rooms are large and the furnishings are comfortable.

Osu

Rest Inn (Map p336; **7**785543; www.therestinn.com; 14th Lane; r US\$45; **P 3**) As far as Osu goes, this is as good value as you'll find. Right around the corner from the Koala supermarket, and behind the art gallery, are several small, clean and modern rooms.

Frankie's Hotel (Map p336; ⓐ 773567; www.frankies ghana.com; Cantonments Rd; s/d US\$65/85; P ♀ ⓐ 〕 Above the excellent eatery of the same name, Frankie's has little atmosphere though everything is immaculate, including the basic, modern rooms.

Asylum Down & North Ridge

Korkdam Hotel (Map p338; 226797; korkdam@ africaonline; 2nd Mango Tree Ave, Asylum Down; s/d with fan US\$13/20, r with air-con US\$27; P) Only a thin wall separates your cell from your neighbour's and the water pressure is lousy. Still it's a better choice than next-door Lemon Lodge.

North Ridge Hotel (225809; nrhotel@hotmail .com.gh; 49 Examination Loop; s/d US\$50/60; **P &**) The friendly North Ridge is a large building on a quiet residential street; the tile-floored rooms have some character even though the furniture is old.

Paloma Hotel (Map p338; 228700; paloma@ africaonline.com.gh; Ring Rd Central; s/d US\$50/70; **P** (a) Part of a popular complex that includes a restaurant (see p340), courtyard café and bar (Champs Sports Bar; p340), the hotel has attractive, tastefully decorated rooms.

EATING

Accra has the best choice of restaurants in the country, and the food will seem like *haute cuisine* if you're returning to the city after time spent elsewhere in Ghana. Osu is China Town, Little Italy and your mall food court rolled into one long clogged road.

If you're self-catering, the supermarkets in Osu are best, especially **Koala Supermarket** (Map p336; Cantonments Rd), just off Danquah Circle at the top of Cantonments Rd.

Adabraka

Orangery (Map p338; Farrar Ave; mains US\$2.70-8) The Orangery is a pretty-looking place specialising in sweet and savoury pancakes, muffins, waffles and crepes. Nonbreakfast specialities include moussaka (US\$5) and seafood bouillabaisse (US\$8).

Choos Eatery (Map p338; 2nd fl, Trust Bldg, Farrar Ave; mains US\$3.30) Choos features an open-air dining area that gets a cool breeze, and a large selection of Ghanaian dishes and burgers (US\$2.20).

Edvy Restaurant (Map p338; Barnes Rd; mains US\$3.30; 9am-4pm) For a postmuseum bite, sit at one of the trellis-covered tables in the grounds of the National Museum. The menu is a small selection of Ghanaian basics.

White Bell (Map p338; Farrar Ave; mains US\$3.80) The White Bell's 2nd-floor dining area catches some cooling breezes and is deservedly popular. Serves burgers, sandwiches and chicken and rice dishes. Music and dancing in the evening.

GHANA

Osu Food Court (Map p336; Cantonments Rd; 😢) A mini mall with Nando's (a South African chain doing spicy Portuguese-style chicken), a coffee shop and bakery, a pizza joint and a couple of fried-chicken places.

Frankie's (Map p336; Cantonments Rd; mains US\$3.30-6.50; **2**) An Accra institution, the upstairs restaurant serves burgers, pizzas and fried chicken, as well as a selection of salads, baguettes and sandwiches.

Buku (Map p336; 10th Lane; mains US\$3.80-10) Ghanaian, Nigerian, Togolese and Senegalese specials are lovingly prepared at Buku, where the stylish 2nd-floor open-air dining area is reason alone for coming.

Haveli (Map p336; 18th La; mains US\$5.50-9; €) There's no bells and whistles and in fact little decoration at this friendly Indian restaurant in the heart of Osu. It has a big menu serving Indian standards.

Dynasty Restaurant (Map p336; **T75496**; Cantonments Rd; mains US\$6-12; **N** A fancy place as far as Accra restaurants go, the Dynasty specialises in Peking cuisine. Dim sum every Sunday afternoon.

Mama Mia's (Map p336; 264151; 7th Lane; pizza US\$7-10) Expats swear by the thin-crusted, wood-oven-cooked pizza here. The pleasant outdoor garden dining area makes everything taste better. Spaghetti and kid-friendly chicken fingers also served.

Monsoon (Map p336; ⓐ 782307; Oxford St; mains US\$11; ☑) Incongruously located above a fast-food court, Monsoon is Accra's most upscale restaurant. The menu includes interesting items like warthog filet (US\$13) and crocodile tail (US\$14). You may get snooty looks if you're dressed for *tro-tros* (minibuses or pick-ups). A more casual cigar lounge and sushi bar is attached.

Asylum Down & North Ridge

Le Petit Paris (Mapp338; Kanda High Rd; croissants US\$1.30; **R**) An excellent spot for a morning coffee and croissant, Le Petit Paris is a simple bakery selling excellent baked goods. Grab an espresso for a nice sit-down breakfast.

Spicy Chicken (Map p338; Samora Machel Rd, Asylum Down; mains US\$3) Fast food and fried chicken.

Paloma Restaurant (Map p338; Ring Rd Central; mains US\$5.50; **C**) Part of the hotel and bar complex, the Paloma serves a variety of food, including pizzas, Lebanese and Ghanaian food, and has a garden bar and restaurant area.

DRINKING

Most drinking spots in Accra are nothing more than a few plastic tables and a Star beer sign; Osu has the highest concentration.

Nourish Lab Smoothy's (Map p336; 3rd Lane; smoothies US\$2.20; ⓑ 8am-10pm) These refreshing drinks, a combination of fruit and soft yogurt, are practically addictive because of the oppressive heat. Also serves sandwich wraps and salads.

Osekan (Map p338; High St) Spend a sunset nursing a cold Star at one of Osekan's cliffside tables and you'll probably agree there's no better place in Accra for a drink. Walk through the large, empty lot, down the steep steps to the bar.

Champs Sports Bar (Map p338; Ring Rd Central; 😢) Part of the Paloma Hotel complex, this expatfriendly pub beams in sports from abroad. Thursday is quiz night, Friday is karaoke night, Saturday is live-music night and Sunday movie night. Also serves Mexican food.

Bywel Bar (Map p336; Cantonments Rd, Osu) Live music Thursday and Saturday nights transforms this cool hang-out at the southern end of Cantonments Rd into a fun party.

Ryan's Irish Pub (Map p336; Osu; 2) More Irish pub than an Irish pub, this large green-and-yellow colonial building in the south of Osu serves draught Guinness and hearty food. Live music on weekends.

Venus Cocktail Bar (Map p336; 11th Lane, 0su) This spot with a nice little bamboo bar, attached to the Byblos Hotel, is popular with Peace Corps types and other long-term volunteers.

Duncan's Bar (Map p336; 3rd Lane, Osu) Nothing more than a few plastic tables out on the

street, Duncan's is nevertheless a popular drinking spot with locals.

ENTERTAINMENT

Accra is Ghana's biggest city and the birthplace of highlife, hiplife and other hybrid music genres, so it's not surprising there's a lively club scene. The action rarely starts before 10pm or 11pm.

Jazz Tone (Map p336; Third Close, Airport Residential Area) A popular place with good live jazz music.

Indigo (Map p336; Ring Rd East, Osu) Near Danquah Circle, this stylish place is housed in an old embassy building and attracts Accra's trendsetters. Friday and Saturday are the best nights.

Macumba (Map p336; Ring Rd East, Osu) Ōne of Accra's nightlife institutions, Macumba is just off Danquah Circle and is popular with European discophiles.

Bass Line (Map p338; Ring Rd Central, North Ridge) Another good hip jazz club, the Bass Line, just west of Kanda High Rd, gets smoky and stays open late.

Vienna City Entertainment Complex (Map p338; Kwame Nkrumah Ave, Adabraka) A massive bar, game room and club in the heart of Adabraka near Nkrumah Circle.

SHOPPING

Centre for National Culture (Arts Centre; Map p338; 664099; 28th February Rd; 9am-5pm) A warren of stalls selling arts and crafts and known simply as the Arts Centre, this is the place to shop in Accra and the most visited site in the country. The level of aggressive hassling may make you want to keep your cedis in your pocket but if you have the patience and wherewithal, you can come away with good-quality handicrafts from all over Ghana.

Woodin Boutique (Map p336; Cantonments Rd, Osu) A chic and modern fabric shop.

Loom (Map p338; 224746; 117 Kwame Nkrumah Ave) This place, 200m south of Nkrumah Circle, sells moderately to expensively priced paintings as well as woodcarvings, fabrics and statues.

The **Trade Fair Centre** (Map p336; off Burma Camp Rd, La) has several stores selling high-quality goods at fixed prices, or try **Aid to Artisans Ghana** (ATAG; Map p336; Tilde 771325; atag@ataggh.com; Trade Fair Centre, off Burma Camp Rd, La; Stag@ataggh.com; Trade Tair Centre, Sat), an NGO that offers practical assistance to Ghanaian artisans for crafts and furniture.

Around the Tema road in Teshie are several coffin workshops, where trippy-looking coffins are fashioned in the shape of lobsters, Mercedes, guns, aeroplanes – whatever is meaningful for the client.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Kotoka international airport, 5km from the city centre, is served by a number of major airlines and several small private regional carriers.

For more information, see p353.

Bus & Tro-tro

There are two VanefSTC bus stations in Accra. The main **VanefSTC bus station** (Mapp336; **©** 227373) is just east of Lamptey Circle and serves destinations to the west and north. Buses leave hourly from early morning to early evening for both Kumasi (ordinary/luxury US\$5/7, four hours) and Takoradi (US\$4.20/5.50, four hours), and four times a day to Cape Coast (US\$2.70/4.20, three hours) and Tamale (US\$10/16, 12 hours). There are fewer trips on all routes on Sundays.

The second, smaller VanefSTC bus station (Map p338) is next to Tudu Station, at the northern end of Makola Market. From there buses head east, serving Ho (US\$4.40, four hours, 3pm), Hohoe (ordinary/luxury US\$3.30/5.50, 3½ hours) and Aflao (US\$5, 4½ hours, four times a day), on the Togo border. Buses leaving from this station are generally much more unreliable and may leave hours after their scheduled departure time or simply not at all.

Private buses and *tro-tros* leave from four main motor parks. Those for Cape Coast, Takoradi and other destinations to the west leave from Kaneshie motor park (Map p336). Neoplan motor park (Map p338), 250m west of Nkrumah Circle, has buses to north points such as Kumasi and Tamale. From Tema station (Map p338), east of Makola market, *tro-tros* leave for Tema and Aburi. From the chaotic Tudu station (Map p338), at the northeast corner of Makola Market, *tro-tros* leave for destinations to the east.

Train

For details, see p355.

GETTING AROUND

Depending on your negotiating abilities and patience, the fare from the airport into the city centre can range from US\$2.20 to US\$7.50. Anything under US\$4.40 is fair. Line taxis and *tro-tros* travel on fixed runs from major landmarks or between major circles, such as Danquah, 37 and Nkrumah (usually just called 'Circle'). Fares are fixed and are typically about US\$0.10.

Taking taxis in Accra is convenient but since there are no meters the unavoidable haggling can get tiring. Any ride within the city shouldn't cost more than US\$1.10. Rates rise at night.

THE COAST

KOKROBITE

2027 Many

GHANA

Many travellers looking for a little R&R from Accra, only 32km away, or the rigours of travel elsewhere in the country swear by the long stretch of white sand and the laid-back backpacker/Rasta vibe at Kokrobite.

The renowned Academy of African Music & Arts (AAMAL) offers courses (from two hours to three months) in traditional African music, drumming, and dance and live performances on some weekend afternoons.

It's not advisable to walk on the beach with valuables at night.

A home away from home for many volunteers and West Africa overlanders, the basic concrete cottages with shared bathrooms at Big Milly's Backyard (Wendy's; 🖻 607998; www.bigmilly .com; camping with own/rented tent US\$2.70/3.80, s/d without bathroom US\$7/11, r US\$16; **P**) are fine, though most people spend their days and nights at the 24-hour bar and restaurant or the beach. Drumming, dancing and music happen most weekend nights. Just across the dirt road from Sobamba, Andy's Akwaaba Lodge (🖻 277261; www .akwaabalodge.com; r with/without bathroom US\$14/7.50; **P**) offers five basic concrete rooms set in a pleasant, small grassy compound where you can also camp with your own tent for US\$3.30.

A beautiful 20-minute walk along the beach from Big Milly's – a road goes here as well – takes you to the seemingly abandoned **Kokrobite Beach Resort** (AAMAL; [©] 380854; s/d US\$10/12; ^(P)) famed for the attached music school. The large rooms are old but the warped wooden floors somehow make it charming. A low-key alternative to Big Milly's and just down the road, friendly **Sobamba Coastal Resort** ([©] 683084; r US\$20; ^(P)) has four basic tiled rooms with modern bathrooms. *Tro-tros* (US\$0.60, 45 minutes) to Kokrobite go from the western end of Kaneshie motor park (Donsoman Station) in Accra. Depending on your ability to negotiate, a taxi from Accra will cost from US\$5.50 to US\$11.

ANOMABU a 042

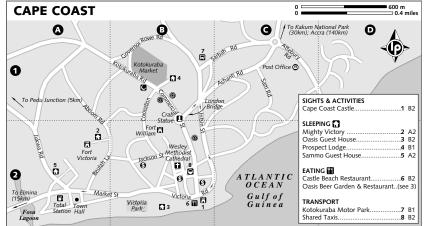
As far as tourists are concerned, Anomabu means an excellent resort on a beautiful beach. However, residents of this very unpicturesque, cramped fishing village about 18km northeast of Cape Coast live in fairly makeshift squalor. **Fort William**, on the seafront in the town centre, was built by the British in 1753 and is now an unphotographable prison.

The Anomabu Beach Resort (🖻 91562; www.an omabo.digitafrica.com; camp sites own/rented tent US\$4/13, hut with/without air-con US\$38/20; P) is the perfect weekend getaway from Accra. One of the few places in Ghana to embrace low-key native architecture rather than big concrete eyesores, it has cosy bungalows set within a sandy and shady grove of coconut palms. But you'll spend most of your time lounging on the beautiful white-sand beach or chowing down on seafood at the exquisite wood pavilion restaurant. For a bird's eve view of the ocean and town below, Weda Lodge (28 806958; r with fan/air-con US\$26/33; **P**), perched high at the top of a hill, is a nice alternative to the beach resort. There are spectacular views from some of the rooms; it's off the same road and within walking distance of the Anomabu Beach Resort.

From Cape Coast, take a *tro-tro* (US\$0.50, 15 minutes) from Kotokuraba motor park heading for Mankessim and ask to be dropped at the Ebeneezer Rest Stop for Anomabu town or at the turn-off for the beach resort, which is about 2km west of the Ebeneezer. From the turn-off, it's about 500m to the resort gates. The main *tro-tro* and shared taxi stop in Anomabu is just east of the Ebeneezer and plenty of vehicles run in both directions along the coastal road.

CAPE COAST

The centre of Cape Coast, the former British colonial capital, is lined with neglected, faded buildings. Their ages are irrelevant in this now-vibrant town, whose history – Cape Coast was the largest slave-trading centre in West Africa – only becomes apparent after a



visit to the massive **Cape Coast Castle** (adult/student US\$7/4, still/video camera fee US\$0.50/1.10; ^(C) 9am-5pm) in the heart of town, overlooking the sea. Extensively restored, the whitewashed castle now houses a superb and moving museum. A guided tour is offered with your admission and should not be missed; allow a minimum of an hour for the tour.

Sleeping & Eating

Sammo Guest House ((2) 33242; Jukwa Rd; r US\$8) Backpackers flock to Sammos, a compound within walking distance of the city centre, to the east. There are simple but clean fan rooms of various size, and a rooftop terrace restaurant popular for the sunset views and social scene.

Oasis Guest House ((a) 35958; ali_d@gmx.da; s/d without bathroom US\$9/13, bungalows US\$22; (b) The only beachfront place in Cape Coast, Oasis has several comfortable rondavels set in a grassy compound. Dancing and drumming classes are held, and the restaurant (mains US\$3.80) and bar areas are some of the best places to meet other travellers in town.

Mighty Victory (② 30135; gh72@aol.com; Aboom Cl; s/d with fan US\$18/21, r with air-con US\$24; **P**) The Mighty Victory has a tranquil garden out front and is far removed from the noise of the centre; however, the rooms aren't a big step up qualitywise from Sammo.

Prospect Lodge (ⓐ 31506; prospectlodge2005@hotmail .com; s/d US\$25/35; ▶ ③) This new hotel perched on a hill up a steep driveway off Commercial St is easily the nicest place in the city centre. Rooms here are small but modern and have cable TV. It also has a restaurant (mains US\$4.40 to US\$6.50) with good views of town.

Castle Beach Restaurant (mains US\$3.30) There's no more pleasant spot to hang out and grab some food and drinks than this wooden pavilion overlooking the beach next to the Cape Coast Castle.

Getting There & Away

The VanefSTC bus station is in the Goil petrol station at Pedu junction, about 5km northwest of the town centre. There are buses twice daily to and from Accra (ordinary/luxury US\$2.70/4.20, three hours) and Takoradi (US\$1.30, one hour), and once a day to and from Kumasi (US\$7, four hours).

The Kotokuraba motor park, near the market, has *tro-tros* serving destinations around Cape Coast, such as Anomabu (U\$\$0.50, 15 minutes), Kakum National Park (U\$\$0.70, 45 minutes) and Takoradi (U\$\$1.40, one hour). Shared taxis to Elmina (U\$\$0.40, 15 minutes) leave from the station on Commercial St, opposite the Cape Café.

KAKUM NATIONAL PARK

Gingerly sliding across a rope bridge at dizzying heights is not for the agoraphobic. But for an easily earned adrenaline rush, the canopy walkway at this **national park** (a 33278; admission US\$0.20; (adm.4pm), 33km north of Cape Coast, shouldn't be missed. The park, together with the neighbouring Assin Attandanso Resource

Reserve, protects 357 sq km of diverse and dense vegetation and is home to varied wildlife, about 300 species of birds and a staggering 600 varieties of butterfly. However, don't come expecting great wildlife viewing, since you'll almost certainly be disappointed.

The 350m rope and cable canopy walkway (adult/student US\$10/5.50) consists of seven viewing platforms linked by a circuit of narrow suspension bridges, along which you sway, 30m above the forest floor.

A guided hike in the park costs US\$4.40/ 2.20 per hour for adults/students. Guided night walks need to be arranged in advance; call 🖻 30265 or fax 33042.

Most people visit Kakum as a day trip from Cape Coast, but if you want to stay you can sleep on a tree platform at the camp site near the park headquarters for US\$9 per person; equipment hire (sleeping mat, sleeping bag, flashlight and mosquito net) costs US\$5.50.

The Kakum Rainforest Café (mains US\$4.40) serves basic continental breakfast and Ghanaian dishes for lunch.

From Cape Coast, tro-tros (US\$0.70, 45 minutes) that go past the entrance to the park leave from Kotokuraba station on Governor Rowe Rd. It's a five-minute walk from the main road to the park headquarters. Alternatively, you could charter a taxi for about US\$16 round trip.

ELMINA

🖻 042 / pop 20,000

Much more picturesque than Cape Coast, its neighbour 15km to the east, the small town of Elmina is the site of St George's Castle (adult/student US\$7/4, still/video camera fee US\$0.50/1.10; 9am-4.30pm), built by the Portuguese in 1482 and the oldest European structure still standing in sub-Saharan Africa. It was expanded when slaves replaced gold as the major object of commerce, and the storerooms were converted into dungeons. It is now a Unesco World Heritage Monument.

Facing St George's Castle across the lagoon is the much smaller Fort St Jago (admission US\$1.10; (9am-5pm), also a Unesco World Heritage Site, built by the Dutch between 1652 and 1662 to protect the castle.

Just past the Elmina beach resort, the Almond Tree Guesthouse (🗃 37365; www.almond3.com; r from US\$30; **P R**) is highly recommended and has several large rooms with wicker furniture. Another good choice found opposite St George's

Castle is the Coconut Grove Bridge House (34557; Liverpool St; d US\$30-50; 🕄). It's a converted old mansion that would blend in on a narrow London street; rooms are comfortable and modern. A good restaurant is attached.

As you'd expect, the Castle Restaurant (mains US\$3.80) is within the castle walls and serves Ghanaian dishes - slowly.

The main taxi and tro-tro station is outside the Wesley Methodist Cathedral. From here you can get tro-tros to Takoradi (US\$1.10) or shared taxis (US\$0.30, 15 minutes) to Cape Coast.

TAKORADI

a 031 While Takoradi lacks any tourist sights and the beach is narrow, rocky or nonexistent, there are several good hotels and restaurants, and it's the transport hub west of Cape Coast.

Centrally located Super Star Hotel & Restaurant (a 23105: Ashanti Rd: r with fan/air-con US\$18/24) is an oasis of air-conditioned calm amid the hot and dusty market area. It has a good modern restaurant on the ground floor. Well located at the edge of central Takoradi, the Taadi Hotel (🖻 31104; Wiawso Rd; r US\$20; 🕑 🔀) stands out because of its friendly and attentive service. The Raybow International Hotel (25438; raybowhotel@yahoo.com; r US\$50; P 🔀 🗳) has chalets with high-quality amenities and the charming restaurant serves some of the best food in town.

The Akroma Plaza Restaurant (Accra Rd; mains US\$3.80), a cross between a large banquet hall and an institutional cafeteria, has a big menu. Seafood is the speciality at Captain Hook's Bar & Restaurant (Africana Roundabout; mains US\$7.50-22), probably the best and certainly the most expensive in Takoradi.

STC buses leave for Accra several times a day (ordinary/luxury US\$4.20/5.50, four hours), and regularly go to Kumasi (US\$7, six hours). At the top of Axim Rd, near the traffic circle, is a tro-tro park serving destinations west of Takoradi; for tro-tros to the east head to the station north of Market Circle.

For information on trains between Takoradi and Accra or Kumasi, see p355.

BUSUA & DIXCOVE a 031

These two fishing villages, only 30km or so west of Takoradi and an easy drive from Accra, boast some of the nicest beaches in

Ghana. Busua, the more developed of the two villages as far as tourism goes, is blessed with a long, sandy stretch and water that is ideal for swimming and even a little surfing. There is now even more reason to head down this way thanks to the addition of two low-key bungalow hang-outs near Dixcove, also the site of the picturesque Fort Metal Cross (admission US\$1.10, camera fee US\$0.50; 🕑 9am-5pm), which overlooks the port.

If you head east along the beach from Busua, after about 2km you will reach the settlement of Butre, site of the ruined Fort Batenstein.

Sleeping & Eating

Green Turtle Lodge (🖻 893566; www.greenturtlelodge .com; camping with own tent US\$2.70, dm US\$5.50, r with with/without bathroom US\$22/11) The ecologically minded Green Turtle is on a palm-lined beach and has spacious, clean bungalows with showers open to the sun and stars. Green Turtle is 10km west of Dixcove near the village of Akwidaa.

Ellis Hideout (290456; www.ellishideout.com; camping with own tent US\$2.70, dm US\$5.50, bungalows US\$20) A few minutes from Butre, separated by a short canoe ride, this beachfront mini-village has beautifully crafted bungalows and a restaurant serving up good food.

Alaska Beach Club (rondavels with/without bathroom US\$22/9.50; P) The oddly named Alaska (considering it's on a beach and it's always hot) is the best value in Busua. Each of the simple round huts and shared bathroom facilities are kept clean.

African Rainbow Resort (🖻 32149; www.africanrain bow.net; s/d with fan US\$45/50, with air-con US\$60/65; P) Across the street from the beach, the African Rainbow has large, clean rooms with balconies, plus a rooftop bar and a nicely decorated ground-floor restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Busua and Dixcove are each about 12km from the main coastal road. There's no direct transport to and from either Busua or Dixcove; you have to get to Agona junction on the main road and then take a tro-tro or shared taxi from there. From Takoradi, regular tro-tros (US\$0.70, 45 minutes) leave for Agona junction. From Agona junction there is frequent transport (US\$0.30) to Busua and Dixcove. A private taxi between Busua and Takoradi will cost around US\$9.

THE CENTRE

KUMASI

2 051 / pop 1 million

At one time the capital of the rich and powerful Ashanti kingdom, today Kumasi is a bustling multiethnic metropolis. Unlike Accra, Kumasi, which spills over a series of hills, has a clearly demarcated centre, ground zero being an enormous throbbing daily market. The demographic complexity of the city may not be obvious at first glance but the city is a patchwork of ethnic neighbourhoods. Almost half the residents are Muslims and almost half speak Hausa, a language originating in Nigeria.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Easylink Internet (9 am-11pm) Across from the Alliance Française.

Internet Link (Prempeh II Rd) Just down the street from Vic Baboo's Café.

Shell Internet (per hr US\$1.20; Y 7am-9pm) Entrance around back of Shell petrol station.

Unic Internet (per hr US\$0.70; 27.30am-8.30pm) Next to the British Council

MEDICAL SERVICES

Pharmacies are dotted around town. Okomfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (Bantama Rd) A large complex near the National Culture Centre; Kumasi's main public hospital.

MONEY

All banks listed here change travellers cheques and have ATMs. There are also several forexes for changing cash.

Barclays Bank head office (Prempeh II Roundabout) Garden City Forex Bureau (Harper Rd) Has the best rates around

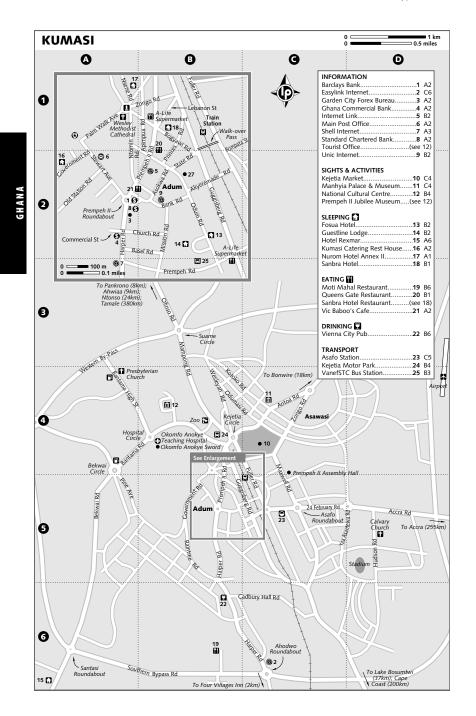
Ghana Commercial Bank (Harper Rd) Standard Chartered Bank head office (Prempeh II Roundabout)

POST

Main post office (Stewart Ave; 📎 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Opposite the Armed Forces Museum. Poste restante shuts at 4.30pm.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (🗃 26243; 🕎 7am-5pm Mon-Fri) In the National Cultural Centre complex. Staff can help arrange guided tours of the city and surrounding villages.



Sights

The rusting tin roofs of **Kejetia Market**, often cited as the largest in West Africa, look like a circular shantytown. Once you take a breath and step down into its interior, it's infinitely disorienting but also throbbing with life and commerce.

To get a feel for how a modern Ashanti ruler lives, visit **Manhyia Palace** and its **museum** (adult/student US\$2.20/1.10; 9 am-noon & 1-5pm) off Antoa Rd, up the hill north from Kejetia Circle. The palace was used by the Ashanti kings until 1974. Among the displays are unnervingly lifelike life-size wax models of the two kings and their mothers and of the most redoubtable queen mother Yaa Asantewaa, who led the 1900 revolt against the British and who died in exile in the Seychelles.

Festivals & Events

The Ashanti calendar is divided into nine cycles of 42 days called Adae, which means 'resting place'. There are two special days of worship within each Adae when a celebration is held and no work is done. The most important annual festival is the **Odwira festival**, which marks the last or ninth Adae. The festival features lots of drumming, horn-blowing, food offerings and parades of elegantly dressed chiefs. Contact the tourist office for exact dates.

Sleeping

Nurom Hotel Annex II (232324; Nsene Rd; r US\$7.50) This hotel close to the Kejetia Market and lorry station can be noisy, but it's clean and friendly.

Guestline Lodge (ⓐ 23351; mahesh161us@yahoo .com; r US\$16-30; ⓐ □) There's no better place in Kumasi for independent travellers on a budget. The VanefSTC station is a block away, there's internet access and there's a relaxing and sunny courtyard. Look first before deciding on a room since they vary in quality, size and appeal. Sanbra Hotel (중 31256; Bogyawi Rd; r US\$18-30; P ≥) Popular with Ghanaians because of its restaurant as much as for its clean but basic tiled-floor rooms; some of the more expensive rooms even have small balconies.

Kumasi Catering Rest House (C 26506; Government Rd; r with fan/air-con US\$22/49; P) This charming guesthouse set within shady grounds a short walk from the centre has huge rooms furnished with '70s style furniture. Also on site is a popular restaurant with a large menu (mains US\$3.80).

Fosua Hotel (O 37382; www.fosuahotel.com; rUS\$38; (P R O) This is the highest quality place to stay in the city centre. Occupying the top floor of the Aseda Complex a block from the VanefSTC station, the rooms here are clean and comfortable.

Four Villages Inn (22682; www.fourvillages.com; Old Bekwai Rd; s/d US\$60/70; ●) Several kilometres south of the centre is this bed and breakfast, equally popular for its four comfortable individually designed rooms as for the garden, terrace and indoor atrium.

Hotel Rexmar (29111; rexmar@idngh.com; s/dUS\$76/ 90; **P X D** Rooms at this low-rise hotel complex south of the Santassi Roundabout aren't exactly luxurious but you do get a private porch and access to one of Kumasi's nicest pools. There's a good restaurant attached.

Eating & Drinking

Queens Gate Restaurant (Prempeh II Rd; mains US\$4.40) There's no better spot for peoplewatching in Kumasi than the 3rd-floor balcony at the Queens Gate. Everything from omelettes to soups, salads, burgers and Ghanaian dishes are served.

Sanbra Hotel Restaurant (Bogyawi Rd; mains US\$5; As far as the centre of Kumasi goes, this restaurant in the hotel of the same name deserves several Michelin stars. It has a huge menu with European, Chinese, Ghanaian, seafood, pizza, lobster, sandwiches etc.

Moti Mahal Restaurant (mains US\$4.40-10; ≥) One of the most expensive restaurants in Kumasi, with a large selection of Indian cuisine, Moti Mahal is off the Southern Bypass Rd.

Vienna City Pub (Harper Rd; 🕄) Home sweet home for many expats who can wash away their nostalgia with the pool table, foosball, darts, Guinness and imported beers.

Getting There & Away

Kumasi airport is on the northeastern outskirts of town, about 5km from the centre. Citilink and Antrak have flights between Kumasi and Accra twice a day (US\$63). The huge Kejetia motor park is the city's

main transport hub, from where you can get

tro-tros to most regional destinations as well

as non-VanefSTC buses to Accra and other

points south. In addition, transport for Accra

(again), Cape Coast, Takoradi and local destinations such as Lake Bosumtwi leave from Asafo station, east of Asafo Roundabout. The VanefSTC bus station is on Prempeh Rd. Buses to Accra (ordinary/luxury US\$5/7,

four hours) leave regularly between 3.30am and 5pm. VanefSTC buses also pass through Cape Coast (US\$7, four hours) on their way to Takoradi (US\$7, five hours). There are two buses a day to Tamale (US\$10, eight hours).

For details of the train service to Takoradi and Accra, see p355.

AROUND KUMASI Craft Villages

Because of their proximity to Kumasi, the craft villages in the region offer a convenient if also touristy way to experience how some of Ghana's traditional workshops operate.

There are two villages just on the outskirts of Kumasi, on the Mampong road beyond Suame Roundabout. Pankrono, 8km away, is a major pottery centre. One kilometre further is Ahwiaa, known for its woodcarving and aggressive sales approach. Ntonso, 15km further, is the centre of adinkra cloth printing. Bonwire, 18km northeast of Kumasi, is the most famous of several nearby villages that specialise in weaving kente cloth.

The easiest way to visit these villages is probably to hire a private taxi for a half day (US\$8) or full day (US\$22). You can also arrange a tour through the Kumasi tourist office.

Lake Bosumtwi

For a break from the bustle and choking pollution of Kumasi, take a trip to tranquil Lake Bosumtwi, 38km southeast of Kumasi. A crater lake, it's ringed by lush green hills in which

you can hike, visiting some of the 20 or so small villages around its perimeter.

To spend the night at the lake, try the Lake Point Guesthouse (220054; r US\$19), set on landscaped grounds that lead down to the lakeshore a few kilometres from Abonu. The spacious and clean rooms are in freestanding bungalows.

Occasional tro-tros run direct to Abonu (US\$1.10) from Asafo motor park in Kumasi.

THE NORTH

TAMALE **a** 071

The fourth-largest city in Ghana and the major transport hub for the north, Tamale tends to be a stopover for travellers on their way to Mole National Park or overland to Burkina Faso but the presence of several goodvalue hotels makes it a good base to explore other spots in the area.

Sleepina

Catholic Guesthouse (🖻 22265; Gumbihini Rd; r US\$7.50; **P 2**) There are no top sheets, no bath towels and no luxury, but who needs it at this price? Rooms surround a leafy garden bar and lounge area. It's about 2.5km north of the centre.

TICCS Guesthouse (22914: www.ticcs.com/res.htm: Gumbihini Link Rd; r with fan US\$9, s/d with air-con US\$13/15; **P**) The concrete bungalows are clean and simple and guests have use of the living room, TV and kitchen. The recommended Jungle Bar is on the premises.

Picorna Hotel (22672; picornahotelgh@yahoo .com; r US\$16; P 🕄) The Picorna is the best value in the centre, though the competition is far from fierce. Rooms are comfortable but run-down.

Hotel Mariam (23548; www.mariamhotel.com.ph; Gumbihini Rd; r US\$50-80; P 🕄) Easily the nicest place to stay in Tamale, the Mariam has modern, clean and well-kept rooms and there's a good restaurant. Up the same street as the TICCS Guesthouse.

Eating

Jungle Bar (TICCS Guesthouse, Gumbihini Link Rd) On the grounds of the TICCS Guesthouse, the Jungle Bar is on a leafy balcony with an all-wood bar, cable TV and comfy benches. Serves kebabs, sloppy Joes and hot dogs (US\$1.60 to US\$5.50).

Swad Fast Food (23588; Gumbihini Rd; mains US\$2.20-9) Don't be fooled by the basic outdoor concrete patio; Swad is the place to eat in Tamale. The menu includes ostrich in black pepper sauce (US\$5), pizza (US\$3.80), lobster thermidor (US\$9) and takeaway lunchboxes.

Sparkles Restaurant (mains US\$2.70; 🕑 8am-8pm) This restaurant in the back of the National Cultural Centre behind the football field has a variety of Ghanaian and Chinese dishes and pizza (US\$4.40).

Getting There & Away

The airport is about 20km north of town, on the road to Bolgatanga; a private taxi there costs about US\$4.40. Antrak flies between Tamale and Accra (US\$144, 1¼ hours).

From the VanefSTC station, two buses a day go to Kumasi (US\$10, six hours) and four a day depart for Accra (ordinary/luxury US\$10/16, 12 hours). There's also a Tuesday service to Cape Coast and Takoradi (US\$11, 12 hours).

Tro-tros to Bolgatanga (US\$2.50, 2½ hours) leave frequently, and OSA buses to Mole National Park (US\$3.30, four to six hours) leave in theory at 2.30pm but in practice a lot later. Get to the bus station well before its scheduled departure time to be sure of a seat.

LARABANGA

Larabanga is more than simply the turn-off to Mole National Park. Known mostly for its unusual looking mud-and-pole mosque, originally built in the 15th century (making it the oldest of its kind in Ghana), it provides a good opportunity to see what traditional village life is like.

Look for the Salia Brothers in a small replica of the mosque doubling as a tourist office on the eastern outskirts of the village. They've established a community-based project where you can hire bicycles and stay overnight in their small but well-maintained guesthouse (US\$4.40). Or you can sleep on the roof for star viewing. Meals are available on request.

Daily buses from Tamale to Bole, Wa or Mole National Park stop at Larabanga.

MOLE NATIONAL PARK a 0717

Face-to-face encounters with bus-sized elephants, plus roving gangs of baboons, warthogs, water bucks and antelopes - 90 species of mammals in total - are possibilities at this national park (adult/student US\$4.40/2.70, still/video camera fee US\$0.50/2.20), Ghana's largest at 4660 sq km and best as far as wildlife viewing goes. It consists for the most part of flat savannah, with gallery forests along the rivers and streams. There's one main escarpment, on which the motel and park headquarters are situated. The best time for seeing wildlife is during the harmattan season from January to March, but it's worth a visit any time of the year.

The park entrance gate is about 4km north of the turn-off in Larabanga. The park headquarters and the motel are a further 2km into the park. Guided walks are offered twice daily, at 6.30am and 3.30pm, and cost US\$1.60 per person and usually last two hours. You are not permitted to walk (or drive) in the park unless you're accompanied by an armed ranger.

Mole Motel (🖻 22045; camping own/rented tent per person US\$2.20/US\$4.40, d/chalets US\$19/22; 🔊) is a strictly utilitarian boxy structure that does nothing to take advantage of its location. Rundown rooms and indifferent service aside, the views overlooking a waterhole where animals gather is worth the sacrifice. Water and electricity are sometimes in short supply. Alternatively, you can stay in Larabanga and cycle into the park for the day.

If you're hungry, you can either chance the very slow service at the motel restaurant (meals around US\$4.40) or bring your own provisions.

The reserve is 135km west of Tamale; the turn-off to the park is in Larabanga. A daily OSA bus runs from Tamale (US\$4.40, four to six hours), leaving some time after 2.30pm, and arriving at the park motel around 7pm if all goes well. You really need to get your ticket a day in advance or early the morning of the departure to be assured a seat. The same bus returns to Tamale the next day, leaving the park at around 5.30am. The alternative is to take any early-morning bus from Tamale heading to Bole or Wa and get off at Larabanga, then walk, cycle or try to hitch (very difficult). Leaving Mole, your options are to take the OSA bus from the motel to Tamale or to make your way to Larabanga, from where there is infrequent transport in either direction.

WECHIAU COMMUNITY HIPPO SANCTUARY

One of the more remote ecotourism projects in the country, this sanctuary along the Black Volta River, which marks the border with Côte d'Ivoire, is home to hippos as well as a variety

of bird species. Basic guesthouse accommodation is available and you can arrange canoe trips to see the hippos; November through June is the best time to see these prehistoriclooking beasts. Meals can be prepared if you bring your own provisions.

Wechiau village is reached by *tro-tro* (US\$0.70, one hour, 46km) from the main lorry park in Wa. The sanctuary is about 20km from Wechiau. Transport uncertainties mean you really should plan to spend one night at the sanctuary itself rather than try to do it as a day trip from Wa. From Tamale, OSA has a daily service to Wa (US\$5, eight hours), leaving at 5.30am.

BOLGATANGA © 072

To truly appreciate Bolga, as it's known to locals, you probably have to leave Bolga for the surrounding villages. It's the capital of the Upper East Region and the major town between Tamale and the border with Burkina Faso.

The **Tienyine Hotel** (22355; Starlet 91 St; rUS\$26; Dungalows are the most modern rooms in Bolga and there's a restaurant (mains US\$3.30) attached, though service is glacial. Another option nearby is the large compound of the **Sand Gardens Hotel** (23464; rwith fan US\$14, s/d with air-con US\$16/25; 2), part bar, part restaurant, and sometimes loud.

Tro-tros to Tamale (US\$2.50, 2½ hours) leave from the motor park on Zuarungu Rd. From the VanefSTC station on Tamale Rd buses go to Kumasi (US\$7.50, six hours) and Accra (US\$16, 15 hours). Minibuses and *tro-tros* to Paga (US\$0.70, 40 minutes) on the Burkina Faso border leave from a station one block east of the post office.

THE EAST

AKOSOMBO

© 0251

Once a boom town housing thousands of workers building the dam that now holds back the world's largest artificial lake, known as Lake Volta, today Akosombo deserves a visit only to take in this engineering marvel, preferably from the vantage of a canoe or ferry on the Volta River.

The Volta River Authority arranges tours of the dam or you can take a half-day booze

cruise like *Dodi Princess* out on the lake on Saturday, Sunday and holidays (adult/child US\$18/11). Contact the **Volta Hotel** ($\textcircled{\sc c}$ 251731) for reservations; look for signs to the hotel in town.

One of the least expensive though comfortable options in town is the **Adomi Hotel & Restaurant** (20095; r with fan/air-con US\$13/22), opposite the suspension bridge. **Aylo's Bay** (20901; www.aylosbay.com; r US\$30), near the Volta Bridge, has several small cottages on shady riverside frontage as well as a garden bar and restaurant. The **Akosombo Continental Hotel** (20091; r US\$60; **C (a)** has an excellent riverfront location just beyond the suspension bridge, and a swimming pool.

The main transport hub is at Kpong, on the Accra to Ho road 10km south of Atimpoku. Regular *tro-tros* travel between Kpong, Atimpoku and Akosombo. From Accra, *tro-tros* for Kpong/Akosombo (US\$3.30) leave from Tudu station.

WLI (AGUMATSA) FALLS

These spectacular falls, about 20km east of Hohoe, are within the Agumatsa Wildlife Sanctuary. At the Wildlife Office in Wli (pronounced vlee) village, you pay a fee (adult/ student US\$3.60/1.80, camera fee US\$0.30); a guide is optional but not needed since it's fairly impossible to lose your way. Wli is an easy day trip from Hohoe, but if you want to stay overnight, the German-owned **Waterfall Lodge** (10) 0935-20057; www.ghanacamping.com;rUS\$12) is only a few hundred metres from the Wildlife Office. There are only a few nice, modern rooms so do your best to make a reservation in advance.

Regular *tro-tros* (US\$0.50, 40 minutes) and shared taxis (US\$0.50, 25 minutes) make the scenic run between Wli and Hohoe throughout the day. If you're heading for Togo, the Ghanaian border post is on the eastern side of Wli.

GHANA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

In general, accommodation in Ghana is not especially good value; it's better suited to people on an expense account. In Accra especially, rooms under US\$40 are generally not well kept or maintained and bring a bit of sticker shock for those reasonably expecting more for their money. Most rates around the country already include 15% tax (12.5% VAT and 2.5% NHIL) and many midrange and top-end hotels include breakfast, though this is usually a very basic coffee, eggs and toast.

Despite the heat, fan-cooled rooms are sometimes preferable since some air-conditioners are so loud as to make sleep near impossible. Unfortunately, owners and staff are usually indifferent and aren't in the habit of going out of their way to make your stay more comfortable.

Off the tourist trail there are few hotels and guesthouses, but it's usually possible to arrange to sleep on a floor or roof somewhere. Most of the ecotourism projects offer overnight stays in simple guesthouses or homestays. Camping is a possibility at national parks and reserves. A few of the coastal forts offer extremely basic guesthouse accommodation.

ACTIVITIES

With its long coastline, one of the main things to do in Ghana is head to the beach where you can surf and boogie-board or simply do nothing at all, which should be considered an activity. However, ask before swimming since currents and undertow make conditions unsafe. Good hiking can be found in the Volta Region around Hohoe in the east of the country and in the Tongo Hills near Bolgatanga (opposite) in the north. For drumming and dancing lessons, contact Big Milly's (p342) or the Academy of African Music & Arts (AAMAL; p342) in Kokrobite, the Oasis Guest House (p343) in Cape Coast, or almost any of the community-based tourism projects around the country.

PRACTICALITIES

- The national Daily Graphic is probably the best of the English-language newspapers available, with reasonably good coverage of Ghanaian, African and international news.
- GTV is the national channel, available throughout the country. In Accra and Kumasi, you can also get TV3, which is very similar. GTV has nightly news in English at 7pm, and shows a selection of educational programmes, slapstick comedy shows (in Twi) and American soaps. On Sunday, sermons and gospel singing take centre stage. DSTV is the main satellite channel.
- Most radio programmes are at least partly in English. Talk radio rules here, and the shows make fascinating listening. The national radio (FM 95.7) has world news in English on the hour, every hour.
- Most electrical outlets are UK-style, with three square prongs, though adapters are easy to find.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most stores are open between 9am and 6pm Monday to Friday, with some from 9am to 2pm on Saturday. Very few stores are open on Sunday.

Banks are generally open daily from 8am to 3pm, and are closed on weekends. Most forex bureaus are open limited hours on Saturday. Major hotels have forex facilities open daily.

Most restaurants are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner from the early morning to around 8pm or 9pm; hotel restaurants in Accra and restaurants in Osu stay open later.

GHANA

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Ghana Embassies & Consulates

Ghana has embassies in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo. For details, see the relevant country chapter. Elsewhere, diplomatic missions include the following:

Australia (🖻 02-9283 2961; Ste 1404, Level 14, 370 Pitt St, Sydney 2000)

Canada (🖻 613-236 0871; 1 Clemow Ave, The Glebe, Ottawa, Ont KLS 2A)

France ((2) 01 71 10 14 02; 8 Villa Said, 75116 Paris) Germany (2) 0228-35 20 01; Rheinalle 58, 53173 Bonn) Japan (2) 03-409 3861; Azabu, PO Box 16, Tokyo) Netherlands (2) 70-362 5371; Molenstraat 53, 2513 The Hague)

UK (@ 020-8342 8686; 104 Highgate Hill, London N6 5HE) USA Consulate (@ 212-832 1300; 19 East 47th St, New York, NY 10017); Embassy (@ 202-686 4520; 3512 International Dr NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Ghana

All embassies and consulates listed are in Accra (area code 🖻 021). Most are open from 8.30am to 3.30pm Monday through Friday.

Australia (Map p336; 🗃 777080; www.ghana.embassy .gov.au; 2 Second Rangoon Close, Catonments) Australian High Commission.

Benin (Map p336; 🖻 774860; Switchback Lane, Cantonments)

pendence Ave, Sankara interchange)

GHANA

Côte d'Ivoire (🖻 774611; 9 18th Lane, Osu; 🕑 9am-2.30pm Mon-Thu)

Denmark ((a) 226972; 67 Isert Rd, 8th Ave Extension) Near World Bank office.

France (Map p336; 🖻 228571; www.ambafrance-gh.org; 12th Rd, Kanda) Off Liberation Ave.

Germany (Map p338; 221311; geremb@ghana .com; 6 Ridge Rd, North Ridge) Japan (Map p336; 775616; fax 775951; 8 Josef Broz

Japan (Map p336; 🗃 //5616; fax //5951; 8 Josef Broz Tito Ave, Cantonments)

Liberia (775641; Odoikwao St, Airport Residential Area) Mali (Map p338; 775160; Liberia Rd, West Ridge) Netherlands (Map p336; 231991; nlgovacc@ncs .com.gh; 89 Liberation Ave, Sankara Circle) Nigeria (Map p336; 776158; fax 774395; 5 Josef Broz Tito Ave, Cantonments)

Togo (Map p336; **T**77950; Togo House, Cantonments Circle, Cantonments)

UK (Map p336; 🖻 221665; fax 221745; 1 Osu Link, Ringway Estate) British High Commission.

USA (Map p336; 776601; www.usembassy.org.gh; cnr 10th La & 3rd St. Osu)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Ghana observes the Muslim festivals of Eid al-Fitr, at the end of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha; both are determined by the lunar calendar.

Ghana has colourful festivals and events, including Cape Coast's Fetu Afahye Festival (first Saturday of September), Elmina's Bakatue Festival (first Tuesday in July), the Fire Festival of the Dagomba people in Tamale and Yendi (dates vary according to the Muslim calendar), the Feko festival in Sandema near Navrongo (17 to 18 December) and various year-round Akan celebrations in Kumasi. Ghana's most famous festival – Aboakyer (Deer Hunt) – is celebrated in Winneba on the first weekend in May. Accra's tourist office sells an informative booklet on Ghana's festivals. Panafest is celebrated annually in Cape Coast, Accra and Kumasi.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays include the following: New Year's Day 1 January Independence Day 6 March Easter March/April Labour Day 1 May Africa Day 25 May Republic Day 1 July Farmers' Day 1st Friday in December Christmas Day 25 December Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

There are internet cafés in all major towns. Connection speeds vary but not surprisingly they tend to be slower outside the larger urban areas. Average rates per hour are US\$0.70 to US\$1.10.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the cedi (C). There are C1000, C2000, C5000, C10,000 and C20,000 notes, as well as C100, C200, C250 and C500 coins.

The best currencies to bring are US dollars, UK pounds or euros. Barclays and Standard Chartered Banks exchange cash and well-recognised brands of travellers cheques without a commission.

Foreign-exchange (forex) bureaus are dotted around most major towns, though there are fewer in the north. They usually offer a slightly better rate than the banks and stay open later. However, they don't generally change travellers cheques.

Most Barclays and Standard Chartered Banks throughout the country have ATMs where you can get a cash advance in cedis (up to about C800,000 or US\$80) with Visa or MasterCard.

Credit cards, generally only Visa and MasterCard, are accepted by major hotels and travel agencies.

TELEPHONE

Every town and city has plenty of private 'communication centres' where you can make national and international calls. Little streetside tables festooned with signs announcing which cell-phone providers they can call are everywhere. These generally cost from US\$0.20 to US\$0.30 per minute. Cell phones are becoming more and more common and are the best way to communicate within the country.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The website of the **Ghana Tourist Board** (www.ghana tourism.gov.gh) has some useful information.

Within Ghana, the tourist board has a network of offices in the major regional capitals. The amount of information available is limited. Opening hours tend to be somewhat erratic and most offices are closed on Saturday and Sunday.

The **Nature Conservation Research Centre** (NCRC; www.ncrc-ghana.org), one of the main players behind the country's burgeoning communityrun tourism efforts, has information on all of its projects.

VISAS

Everyone except nationals of Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States) countries needs a visa to enter the country, which until recently could only be obtained before arriving in Ghana. Now, however, nationals of most countries can receive a tourist visa on arrival at the Kotaka airport in Accra for US\$100, though it's not a convenient option if you're arriving late at night. Visas allow a stay of 60 days and can be single or multiple entry.

You can get visas in many countries in West Africa or elsewhere. Visa applications usually take three days to process, and four photos are required. You often also need an onward ticket. In the UK, single-/multipleentry visas cost UK£30/40. In the USA, they cost US\$50/80.

If necessary, visas can be extended at the **Immigration Office** (2021-221667 ext215) in Accra near the Sankara interchange. Applications are accepted between 8.30am and noon Monday to Friday. You need two photos, a letter stating why you need an extension and an onward ticket out of Ghana. Your passport is retained for the two weeks it takes to process the application.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following countries are available from embassies in Accra (see p351): **Benin** Visas cost US\$25/50 for one-/three-month multiple entry and are issued within 48 hours.

Burkina Faso Visas cost US\$40 (not payable in cedis) for three months and are issued within 24 hours; three photos required.

Côte d'Ivoire Month-long visas costs US\$4 (payable in cedis) for Australians and Americans or US\$10 for British nationals; issued in 48 hours; need two photos.

Togo Visas cost US\$20 cash (payable in dollars only) for multiple entry and are issued the same day if you apply in the morning; three photos required.

TRANSPORT IN GHANA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Ghana's only international airport is Kotaka international airport in Accra. At the time of research, the national carrier Ghana International Airways only had flights into London. North American Airlines has one nonstop flight a week between New York City and Accra.

Airlines servicing Ghana include the following:

Afriqiyah Airways (8U; 252465) Flights to Europe with stopover in Tripoli, Libya; office at Accra airport. Air Ivoire (VU; 2241461) Hub: Abidjan. Office at Accra airport.

Alitalia (AZ; Map p338; 🗟 239315; Ring Rd Central, Asylum Down, Accra) Hub: Rome.

American Airlines (www.aa.com)

Antrak (Map p336; 🗟 769458; Antrak House, Danquah Circle, Osu, Accra) Domestic airline that also flies to Ouagadougou, (Burkina Faso) and Lagos (Nigeria).

British Airways (BA; Map p338; 240386; Kojo Thompson Rd, Adabraka, Accra) Hub: London Heathrow. EgyptAir (MS; 2773537; Ring Rd East, Osu, Accra) Hub: Cairo.

Emirates (EK; 238921; Meridian House, Ring Rd Central, Accra) Hub: Dubai. Four flights a week connecting Accra and Dubai with a stopover in Lagos.

Ghana International Airways (GH; 221000; www .fly-ghana.com; Silver Star Tower, Airport City, PMB 78, Kotoka International Airport) Hub: Accra. At time of research Ghana International only flew to London.

Ivory Coast Airways Office at Accra airport.

Kenya Airways (KQ; 🖻 444301) Hub: Nairobi. Office at Accra airport.

KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (KL; Map p336; 🖻 224020; Ring Rd Central, Accra) Hub: Amsterdam.

Lufthansa Airlines (LH; 🖻 243893; Fidelity House, Accra) Hub: Frankfurt. Off Ring Rd Central.

Slok Air International (🗇 3166206; No 3 Aviation Rd, Accra) Flies to Monrovia (Liberia), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Banjul (The Gambia) and Dakar (Senegal); office at the airport.

South African Airways (SA; Map p338; 230722; Ring Rd Central, Asylum Down, Accra) Hub: Johannesburg. Virgin Nigeria (VK; Map p336; 771700; www.virgin nigeria.com; La Palm Royal Beach Hotel, Accra) Hub: Lagos.

Land

BURKINA FASO

Between Accra and Ouagadougou, the usual route is via Kumasi, Tamale, Bolgatanga,

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Paga and Pô. A direct VanefSTC bus runs to Ouagadougou from Accra (US\$29, 24 hours) once daily Monday to Saturday and from Kumasi (US\$21, 20 hours) every Wednesday evening; most people do the trip in stages. From Bolgatanga, there are frequent *tro-tros* to the border at Paga (US\$1.10, 40 minutes), from where you can get onward transport to Pô and Ouagadougou.

You can also enter Burkina Faso from the northwest corner of Ghana, crossing between Tumu and Léo or from Hamale or Lawra and onto Bobo-Dioulasso. You can reach Tumu most easily from Bolgatanga, Hamale from Bolgatanga or Wa, and Lawra from Wa.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

VanefSTC buses run between Accra and Abidjan (US\$12, 12 hours) via Elubo once daily Monday to Friday, leaving in the early morning. The Ecowas Express, run by STIF, a company from Côte d'Ivoire, does three runs a week between Neoplan motor park in Accra and Abidjan. From Takoradi, Peugeot bush taxis make a daily trip to Abidjan.

Another border crossing lies between Bole and Bouna, though this involves a chartered canoe trip across the Black Volta River.

TOGO

Tro-tros and buses regularly ply the coastal road between Accra and Aflao (all about US\$3.30, three hours). VanefSTC buses leave from the smaller Tudu bus station in Accra (US\$5, four times a day). The border at Aflao is open from 6am to 10pm daily but you should cross between 9am and 5pm if you need a Togolese visa at the border. Public transport from Ghana doesn't cross the border, which is only 2km from central Lomé.

GETTING AROUND

Two domestic airlines, **Citylink** (2) 312001; www .citylink.com.gh) and **Antrak** (Accra Map p336; 2) 21-765337; Antrak House, Danquah Cirde, Osu; Kumasi 2) 51-41296; Jamale 2) 71-91075) operate in Ghana. Both have two flights daily between Accra and Kumasi (US\$60 to US\$80, 45 minutes), and Antrak has flights on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday between Accra and Tamale (US\$144, 1½ hours).

Boat

A passenger boat, the *Yapei Queen*, runs along Lake Volta between Akosombo and Yeji, stop-

ping at the town of Kete-Krachi and a few villages along the way. In theory it leaves the port at Akosombo at 4pm on Monday and arrives in Yeji on Wednesday morning; in practice the departure and arrival times are more fluid. The southbound service leaves Yeji around 4pm on Wednesday and arrives in Akosombo on Friday morning. Tickets cost US\$11/5.50 in 1st/2nd class, and food and drinks are available on board. If you want one of the two 1st-class cabins (recommended), you have to reserve at least two weeks in advance; call © 0251-20686 in Akosombo to make a booking.

Bus

The best bus service in the country is provided by VanefSTC, the old State Transport Corporation now owned by Greyhound. There are two classes of bus: ordinary and luxury. The latter have air-con and are newer and more comfortable. Compared to other transport in the region it's fairly reliable, though late departures are all too common. Expect significant delays leaving from the Tudu station in Accra and on any of the less regular routes. Buses link the major centres, including Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, Cape Coast, Tamale and Bolgatanga. Other operators, which may have the only buses on some routes (such as between Tamale and Mole National Park), include OSA, Kingdom Transport Services (KTS), City Express and GPRTU. The buses tend to be older and less comfortable.

Taxis

Within towns and on some shorter routes between towns, shared taxis (called passenger or line taxis) are the usual form of transport. Line taxis run on fixed routes, along which they stop to pick up and drop off passengers.

Private or 'dropping' taxis don't have meters and rates are negotiable. It's best to ask a local in advance for the average cost between two points. Taxis can be chartered for an agreed period of time from one hour to a day for a negotiable fee.

Tro-tros

Tro-tro is a catch-all category that embraces any form of transport that's not a bus or taxi. They cover all major and many minor routes and, without them, Ghana would come to a standstill. They don't work to a set timetable, but leave when full. You can pick them up anywhere along a route and they're extremely cheap (about US\$0.01 per kilometre). Most fares are under a dollar or two but frequently change by small amounts. For long journeys, though, buses are more comfortable and safer.

Train

Ghana's railway links Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi but the trains are much slower and aren't any cheaper than motorised transport. There are daily passenger services in either direction between Accra and Kumasi (US\$4.40/2.70 in 1st/2nd class, about 12 hours) and a nightly service between Accra and Takoradi, which costs about the same and takes at least 12 hours, but these are really only for masochists and train enthusiasts. However, the line between Kumasi and Takoradi (US\$4.40/2.70 in 1st/2nd class) is worth considering. On this line, there are two trains daily, leaving at 6am and 8.30pm. The journey in theory takes eight hours but it's usually more like 12 in practice, especially on the night train.

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Guinea

Guinea's landscape is spectacular. The country has some of the world's few remaining tropical dry forests, and the rainforests that remain in the south are lush and verdant and full of wildlife. The waterfall-rich Fouta Djalon Plateau in the west has breathtaking scenery and some of the best hiking in West Africa. Guinea is not well endowed with beaches, but those it has are superb; and often empty.

Geography is a mistress both cruel and kind to Guinea. Cruel because this country is something of an overlander dead end, very tough to reach from the north and blocked by Côte d'Ivoire's civil war in the south. And kind because Guinea's landscape is naturally blessed - hence the bottomless love Guineans have for their country and their mystification and anger that it continues to be among the poorest in the world.

Matching Guinea's beauty is its vibrant culture. Across the country there's a strong tradition of music and dance, and visitors have many opportunities to see performances. Also, thanks largely to Sekou Toure's impassioned defiance of the French, most Guineans are as proud of their nationality as they are of their ethnicity. They have stood together through the difficult decades of independence instead of turning on each other.

Guinea is not as prepared for tourism as some other West African countries, and beyond the capital creature comforts are sparse. You won't always have to rough it upcountry, but as long as you're prepared for the possibility, a visit here can be very rewarding.

FAST FACTS

- Area 245,855 sq km
- **ATMs** There's one in Conakry
- Borders Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Liberia and Sierra Leone open. Côte d'Ivoire open but not advised
- Budget US\$10 to US\$20 per day
- Capital Conakry
- Languages French, Malinke, Pulaar (Fula), Susu
- Money Guinean franc; US\$1 = GFr5640
- Population 9.5 million
- Seasons Dry (November to May), wet (June to October)
- Telephone Country code 🖻 224; international access code 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visas Required for all, except residents of Economic Community of West Africa States (Ecowas) countries, Morocco and Tunisia; must be bought before arrival

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Fouta Djalon** (p364) Ramble through the rolling green landscape, one of West Africa's best trekking destinations.
- Bossou (p367) Watch chimpanzees living in the forest around this village - they're fairly easy to find.
- Forêt Classée de Ziama (p366) Track elephants through virgin rainforest.
- **Sobané & Îles de Los** (p364 & p362) Laze around plenty of palm-fringed sands, or, on weekends, live it up a little.
- **Conakry** (p360) Groove to the capital's sparkling music scene.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Guinea is one of the wettest countries in West Africa - Conakry receives over 4m of rain, half of it in July and August, while the central mountainous region receives about 2m, more evenly distributed between June and October. Temperatures average 30°C along the coast, where it is always humid, and can fall to 10°C and below at night in Mali-ville and other highland areas during winter.

The best time to visit is November and December, after the rains but before the dusty harmattan winds spoil the views. The rains sometimes make minor roads impassable, though there's something to be said for visiting the Fouta Djalon when it's wet. The rains, which generally don't last very long, make the waterfalls more explosive and the countryside more verdant, while the clouds lower the daytime temperatures.

ITINERARIES

- Three Days Either see Conakry (p360) and hit the beach at Îles de Los (p362), or head to Dalaba (p364) for a look at the Fouta Dialon.
- **One Week** Spend a day or two in Conakry (p360) and the rest of your time exploring the Fouta Djalon (p364). If beaches are more your thing, you can sample both Îles de Los (p3762) and Sobané (p364) instead of the mountains.

HISTORY

Guinea's story is tragically familiar: the postindependence promise of a socialist utopia, the slide down the slippery slope to xenophobic isolation and murderous cultural revolution. and more recently the transformation into ramshackle klepto-capitalism. As the current

HOW MUCH?

- Raffia backpack US\$0.70
- 100km taxi brousse ride US\$3
- World Cola US\$0.25
- Two pagnes (about 2m) of handwoven indigo cloth US\$7
- A night at a music show US\$1.20

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.90
- 1.5L of bottled water US\$0.40
- Bottle of Skol US\$0.50
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$6
- Bag of groundnuts US\$0.02

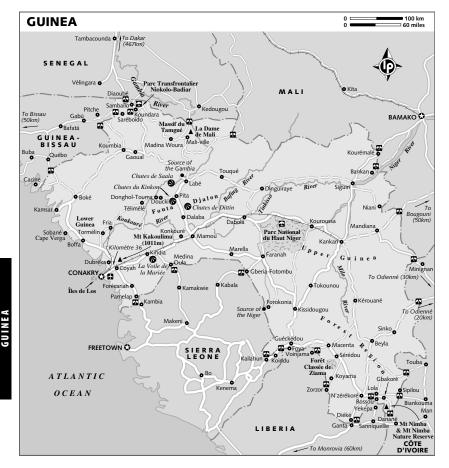
regime slips into senility, Guineans have their hearts in their mouths: is life set to improve at last, or is chaos just around the corner?

Poverty in Liberty Guinea was part of the Mali empire, which covered a large part of western Africa between the 13th and 15th centuries. From the mid-1400s Portuguese and other European traders settled Guinea's coastal region, and the country eventually became a French colony in 1891.

The end of French West Africa began with Guinea. It was granted independence in 1958 under the leadership of Sekou Touré, who rejected a French offer of membership in a commonwealth and demanded total independence, declaring 'We prefer poverty in liberty to riches in slavery'. French reaction was swift: financial and technical aid was cut off, and there was a massive flight of capital.

Sekou Touré decided to model Guinea on the revolutionary Chinese pattern, collectivising farms and industries. It was an unmitigated disaster, and his paranoia triggered a reign of terror. 'Conspiracies' were detected in one group after another, and dissidents were either imprisoned or executed. By the end of the 1960s over 250,000 Guineans lived in exile.

Towards the end of his presidency Touré changed many of his policies. A major influence was the Market Women's Revolt of 1977, in which several police stations were destroyed and some local governors were



killed, as part of the fight against state plans to discourage private trade.

Democracy's Disappointments

Touré died in March 1984. Days later a military coup was staged by a group of colonels, including Lansana Conté, who became president. He introduced austerity measures, and in 1991 bowed to pressure to introduce a multiparty political system. Presidential elections were held in late 1993 amid tight security and official secrecy. Conté won with 51% of the vote, and in the elections of December 1998 was re-elected with 56%; accusations of fraud accompanied both campaigns. Not long after, Conté's main rival was detained and imprisoned for alleged sedition. In November 2001 a nationwide constitutional referendum, also marred by irregularities, repealed the two-term limit for presidents and lengthened the term from five to seven years, effectively setting up Conté as president for life. Not surprisingly, he won the December 2003 election. Key opposition leaders, citing government obstruction, boycotted both this and the earlier parliamentary elections.

Guinea Today

Conté, a chain-smoking diabetic, has rarely appeared in public since before the 2003 election and has reportedly been on his deathbed several times. A united opposition has urged the ailing septuagenarian to resign for the sake of the nation and proposed a transitional government. Conté has ignored their advice and it appears he has not planned for his succession.

Today Guinea faces an unknown future. Despite rising mining revenue (Guinea holds over 30% of the world's bauxite), the economy is faltering and there have been some antigovernment street protests. Some observers, including the International Crisis Group, say Guinea is in danger of becoming a failed state. Others cite the Guineans' unity and abhorrence of violence and predict that whatever happens will be peaceful.

CULTURE

When Guinean women get together they complain about the rapid rise of prices in the market. With men, the conversation invariably turns to football. Both topics reflect the harsh reality of life in Guinea today. While men have always talked about football, there was once also plenty of debate about politics and corruption. It's not the fear of the police state that has silenced them, they've just grown tired of the topics.

Despite a wealth of resources, 40% of the population lives below the poverty line. Nobody expects life to change much when a new dictator (democracy is just a dream) takes over, though many figure it just has to get better. *Le Guinéen est têtu*? – the Guinean is stubborn – is a common refrain and they await their future eagerly, anxiously...but mostly silently.

PEOPLE

Guinea's population is about 9.5 million, including a large but dwindling refugee population from Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The main groups are Susu in the coastal area, and Malinke and Peul in the centre and north. About 85% of the population is Muslim, 8% Christian, with the remainder following local religions. There is little religious discord in the country and mixed families are not uncommon.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Socialism was an economic disaster, but the government's emphasis on nationalist *authenticité* in the arts, and state patronage of artistic institutions, was a boon. Notable Guinean musicians include Mory Kanté, famous for his 'kora funk' style, and the guitarist Sékou Diabaté, aka Diamond Fingers. Camara Laye, author of *L'Enfant Noir* (aka *The African Child* or *The Dark Child*) is the country's best-known export, though Le Ballets Africains and Circus Baobab have made names for themselves on international tours.

You can visit indigo and mud cloth (or forest cloth) cooperatives in many towns.

ENVIRONMENT

Visitors – and Guineans – are constantly amazed that a country so naturally well endowed can be poorer than its parched northern neighbours. Guinea has four distinct zones: a narrow coastal plain, the Fouta Djalon Plateau, northeastern dry lowlands and the Forest Region (Guinée Forestière) of the southeast. The Fouta Djalon Plateau, rising to over 1500m, is the source of the Gambia and Senegal Rivers and of much of the Niger River (although the actual source of the Niger River lies to the south, near the Sierra Leone border).

Forêt Classée de Ziama, where the rainforest remains pristine and elephants are often spotted, is the top park to visit. The nearby Mt Nimba Nature Reserve is a Unesco World Heritage Site, but this didn't stop the government from opening an iron mine on the mountainside. The two national parks, Parc Transfrontalier Niokolo-Badiar and Parc National du Haut Niger, are seldom visited and pretty poorly protected. Inquire at the **Direction Nationale des Forêts et de la Faune** (Route de Donka, Conakry) before making a trip to either.

Guinea's environmental record is atrocious. Much of the coastal mangrove forest has been cleared for rice production and deforestation is so rampant that the Forest Region really ought to adopt a new name. Large mining companies have pledged to improve their practices and there is some evidence this is happening.

FOOD & DRINK

Outside Conakry there are few proper restaurants (except those at hotels, which primarily cook European-style), though most towns have one or two basic eating houses doing cheap meals of rice and sauce, and lots of street-food vendors dishing up rice for breakfast and lunch, and grilled meat at night. The most common sauces are made of manioc leaves (*feuille de manioc*) and groundnuts (*patate*). Every cook has crushed peppers or pepper sauce for you to add to your dish.

Guinea is fortunate enough to have a real coffee tradition: *café noir* is a bit like espresso and is served in small cups with lots of sugar.

CONAKRY

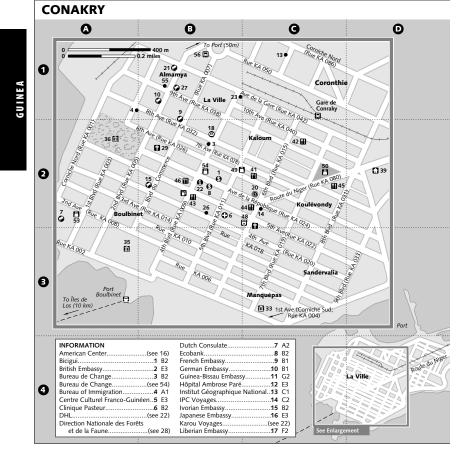
Conakry is a city with a somewhat split personality. It has an erratic infrastructure and growing crime rate so, like with many cities living under rotten regimes, a visit here can be frustrating for travellers. On the other hand, Conakry is an undeniably pulsating place: colourful, spontaneous, friendly, musical, a little wild, and always full of contrast. The city's vibrancy and openness come from a very African flavour. These more subtle charms are likely to grow on you with time and many people end up loving the city by the time they leave. It's tailor-made for a (long) weekend blast.

HISTORY

Conakry was one of colonial France's major ports in West Africa and was for a time known as the 'Paris of Africa'. Little of that glamour remains. What is now central Conakry was an island in the 19th century, until it was bridged at the site of the Palais du Peuple.

ORIENTATION

Conakry is a long, narrow city, built on the Kaloum Peninsula. In the city centre you'll find the banks, airline offices, several restaurants and some hotels. About 2km out of the city centre the peninsula narrows, and at Place du 8 Novembre the road divides: Route de Donka to the north, leading to the buzzing Camayenne neighbourhood; Corniche



Sud to the south; and the Autoroute up the middle. About 10km north of the city centre are the lively Rogbané and Taouyah quartiers (neighbourhoods). Central Conakry has two sets of street names. We've used the old names in the text, though the Conakry map shows both old and new.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Soguidip (4th Ave) Has some English-language magazines, as do street traders along Ave de la République.

Cultural Centres

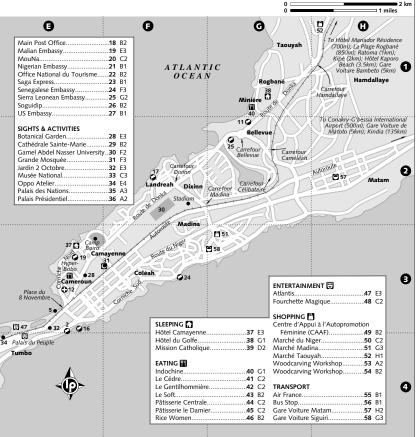
American Center (2 454486; Corniche Sud, Coléah) Shows African and Western films. Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen (🖻 013-409625; Corniche Nord) Programs French-language theatre and cinema, arranges drum and dance lessons, and houses a library and internet facility. There's free live music on Wednesday night.

Internet Access

Cybercafés with fast connections (usually about US\$1.50 per hour) are easily found. The following are large, with modern computers and air-conditioning, and are open daily. Cyber Ratoma (Route de Donka, Ratoma) MouNa (Ave de la République, La Ville)

Medical Services

Clinique Pasteur (🖻 747576; 5th Blvd) In the city centre. Hôpital Ambrose Paré (🖻 011-211320; Dixinn) Considered the best in Guinea.



Money

Men offering to change money line Ave de la République, though it's best to go to one of the bureaus de change. There are several along 4th Blvd.

Bicigui (Ave de la République) Changes travellers cheques and has an ATM (available 24 hours) that accepts Visa cards. Ecobank (Ave de la République) Just across the street from Bicigui, this bank has better hours (open Saturday) and slightly better exchange rates, but the rates still fall below what you will get from private moneychangers.

Post

DHL (4th Blvd)

Main post office (4th Blvd) To collect a letter from the disorganised poste restante you must open an account (US\$3). Saga Express (4th Blvd) The agent for FedEx.

Tourist Offices

Office National du Tourisme (🗃 455163; http://ont guinee.free.fr; 2nd fl, Karou Voyages Bldg, Ave de la République) An administrative centre rather than an information point, but staff will endeavour to assist you if asked.

Travel Agencies

GUINEA

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

As the economy disintegrates, petty and violent crime is rising. It's best to take a taxi at night and, as always, be careful around crowded public places such as the airport and the markets. Also watch out for bag snatchers reaching in to open car windows. The whole Madina *quartier* has a bad reputation for crime.

After midnight checkpoints are set up at Place du 8 Novembre and by the Japanese embassy, the two routes to and from central Conakry, and it's common for the soldiers manning them to seek bribes. As long as you have your papers in order you shouldn't have to pay anything if you're riding in a taxi. In your own car, most people simply pay US\$0.25 up front to avoid protracted discussion. If the soldiers are drunk, the going rate is US\$1.20.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **Musée National** (a 415060; 7th Blvd; admission US\$0.25; b 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) has a modest but interesting collection of masks, statues and

musical instruments. Woodworkers and drum-makers work on the museum grounds while the welders at **Oppo Atelier** (Comiche Nord) forge funky sculptures from scrap metal. Also worth taking a look at are the two large mosaics at **Gamal Abdel Nasser University** (Route de Donka).

The gigantic concrete **Grande Mosquée** in Camayenne can accommodate 10,000 worshippers; you may be able to see inside if you arrange it with the adjoining Islamic Centre. Sekou Touré's grave is in the mosque grounds. Conakry's yellow and red **Cathédrale Sainte-Marie** (Blvd du Commerce) is less impressive, but still beautiful. Behind it is the **Palais Présidentiel**. The **Palais des Nations** (2nd Ave) was going to be the venue for the Organisation of African Unity conference in 1984, which was cancelled when Sekou Touré died. It has been in ruin since the February 1996 army rebellion.

The **Botanical Garden** (Route de Donka) is the coolest place in the city, though not the cleanest. Many families gather in **Jardin 2 Octobre** (Corniche Nord) on weekends.

The **Îles de Los** (about 10km southwest of Conakry) were once used as a way station for British slave traders. The good swimming beaches fill up on weekends and there are worthy walks, especially on Île de Kassa. Several of Conakry's fanciest hotels run weekend boats; alternatively, overcrowded *pirogues* (traditional canoes; up to US\$1) leave regularly from Port Boulbinet, near Palais des Nations.

SLEEPING

Mission Catholique (343655; traore_celestine@yahoo .fr; Route du Niger; s/d with fan from US\$7/10.50, s/d with air-con US\$11.50/17.50;) Friendly, spotless, well run, and close to the city centre. Booking in advance is a near necessity.

Pension La Maison Blanche (signposted off Route de Donka, Kipé; rwith fan US\$9.50) Good value in a quiet location. The Amoussou drum and dance troupe next door welcomes visitors.

Hôtel Kaporo Beach (🗇 527978; signposted off Route de Donka, Kaporo; r US\$21; 😢 🕥) This place features bright and spotless rooms with a patio view that will make you forget you're in a city. Good restaurant, too. **Pension Les Palmiers** (21103; Route de Donka, Ratoma; s/d \$U\$23/28; 1) Known to most as Pension Ghussein, after the delightful French owner, it's very homey and has a seaside patio.

Hôtel Mariador Résidence (© 011-333535; residence@mariador.com; off Rue R0 128, Taouyah; s/d US\$28-333; R () A popular hotel with a seaside terrace, pool (US\$3.50 for nonguests) and comfortable rooms.

Hôtel Camayenne (2012-664848; Corniche Nord, Camayenne; s/d from US\$130/150; R 🔲 🕥) Right on the ocean with a pleasant pool and bar area, plus fitness centre and tennis courts.

EATING

Street food, such as grilled meat and *attiéké* (cassava couscous), is available in and around Marché du Niger, Marché Taouyah near Cinéma Rogbané and in front of Hôtel Camayenne. During lunchtime a slew of women serve bowls of rice and sauce for US\$1 or less at several spots just south of Ave de la République. Several Lebanese places on or close to Ave de la République serve *shwarma* (grilled meat in bread) for just a little more. Hôtels Kaporo Beach and Mariador Residence draw diners as much for the seaside settings as the food.

Le Soft (4th Blvd; mains US\$1.20-2.50; S lunch & dinner) A little dive that packs people in for dishes from around West Africa.

Le Waffou (Route de Donka, Kipé; mains US\$1.20-5; ^(S) lunch & dinner) A colourful spot serving Ivorian food under thatch-roofed huts. A drum and dance troupe performs on Friday nights.

La Plage Rogbané (Rue RO 128, Taouyah; mains US\$2.50-5; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This simple, hard-to-find beachfront bar is becoming a magnet for seafood lovers.

Pâtisserie le Damier (Route du Niger; mains from US\$3; 论 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Delicious French

meals, handmade baked goods (pastries from US\$0.25) and chocolate, and an all-you-caneat Saturday brunch. It successfully pulls off a Parisian vibe.

Le Gentilhommière (10th Ave; mains US\$3.50-7; Dunch & dinner) A wide variety of African dishes served in a lovely bamboo, thatch and calabash interior.

San Remo (Route de Donka, Ratoma; mains US\$3.50-7; 🕑 dinner Wed-Sun) Perhaps the best pizza in Guinea.

Le Cédre (7th Ave; mains US\$4-6.50; 🕑 lunch & dinner) The best Lebanese food in town.

Indochine (Rue DI 777, Miniére; mains US\$5.50-8; Dunch Tue-Sun, dinner daily) Serves dishes from China, Thailand and Vietnam in a classy dining room.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Conakry nightclubs, which don't rumble before 11pm, are a lot of fun. Cover charges vary between US\$2 and US\$5. Of note are **Fourchette Magique** (6th Blvd), an intimate place with live jazz; **Wakili Gunée** (off Route de Donka, Ratoma; \bigcirc Thu-Sat), which does traditional music; and **Atlants** (Comiche Nord, Tumbo), a flash expat favourite for dancing in Hôtel Riviera Royal.

SHOPPING

Marché Madina is one of West Africa's largest markets and there is little you can't find here, including some talented pickpockets. A walk through Marché du Niger is also quite an experience. The **Centre d'Appui à l'Autopromotion Féminine** (CAAF; 5th Blvd) women's cooperative outlet has a huge selection of interesting tie-dyed cloth. Woodcarving workshops are found around the city.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Conakry is served by two main gares voitures (bus and taxi-brousse park): Bambeto and Matam. In terms of destinations served, they're nearly the same (big buses to Kankan, Boké and N'zérékoré only use Matam). The biggest difference is that Bambeto is paved and more orderly while Matam is a bit busier, so taxis brousses (bush taxis) sometimes fill faster. Taxis brousses coming into Conakry drop passengers off along the main roads. For a few thousands francs (arrange this at your point of departure so everyone else in the taxi will keep the driver honest on the price), you can usually convince your driver to take you right to your hotel.

Leaving Guinea, you can get to Sierra Leone and Senegal from both Bambeto and Matam; for Mali use the Gare Voiture Siguiri in the Madina market. See p369 for further details.

GETTING AROUND

To hail a shared taxi around town just stand at the side of the road and shout your destination as the taxi passes, or ask someone to show you the appropriate hand signal. Taxis cost US\$0.15 per zone. The slightly cheaper minibuses (magbanas) work like taxis, only they're a lot slower. Buses, all of which rendezvous at the roundabout opposite the port, are very slow and infrequent.

If you want to charter a taxi (called déplacement), you'll need to find an empty one and then bargain hard: from central Conakry to the airport or Taouyah should cost around US\$3.50 during the day and US\$5.25 at night.

WESTERN GUINEA

Most travellers leaving Conakry stay on the bus as it rumbles along the main highway through Kindia, and even fewer turn north along the coast, but both have worthy natural attractions

LOWER GUINEA

GUINEA

From Dubréka you can hire a large pirogue (about US\$35) to explore some wildlife-rich mangrove swamps, and swim below impressive (except February to May, when they dry up to a trickle) Les Cascades de la Soumba (admission US\$1.70). There's a nice restaurant (mains US\$2.30-6.50) at the falls and, nearby, six fully equipped bungalows (r incl breakfast US\$42; 🕄).

In Fria, the affable staff at Hôtel Yaskadi (240984; off Route Unite; r with fan/air-con US\$3.50/7;) will give directions to or arrange guides for the many caves in the surrounding hills. Restaurant-Nightclub Le Kamsoum (mains US\$2.30; breakfast, lunch & dinner), a colourful place behind the mineworkers' apartments, is one of Fria's best restaurants. As midnight approaches, the dancing starts. Taxis brousses run frequently to the highway junction (US\$1.20, one hour) and occasionally to Télimélé (US\$3.25, four hours), from where you can reach the Fouta Djalon.

About 25km from the highway is Village Touristique Sobané (📾 011-545129; bungalows US\$18.50;

Nov-Jun), with big thatch-roofed bungalows along a gorgeous stretch of sand. The restaurant is pretty good and the nightclub has dancing on weekends. You can sleep on its beach for \$US2.40. Pick-up trucks (US\$1.20) ply this road infrequently, and you'll need to pay extra for them to take you the last 5km.

Boké is a clean and orderly town where you can catch transport to Guinea-Bissau or Senegal. The Fortin de Boké (admission negotiable) museum has a small collection of artefacts, prison cells where rebellious slaves were kept before being sent overseas and a woodworking workshop. Batafon Arts (🖻 011-291116) offers drum and dance lessons. Hôtel Filao (🖻 310202; r with fan/air-con \$5.50/8; 🕄) is the best-value lodging in town. Restaurant Bibine (meals US\$0.60-3; breakfast, lunch & dinner) is open very early until very late. Taxis brousses go direct to Conakry (US\$5.50, three hours). For Labé you'll need to go to Kamsar where a taxi departs most mornings.

KINDIA

Kindia is Guinea's most crowded and hectic town outside Conakry. La Voile de la Mariée (Bridal Veil Falls; admission US\$0.20), best seen during or just after the rainy season, are 12km beyond town and 2km from the highway; any taxi brousse in that direction will drop you at the junction. There are aging **bungalows** (US\$6) available at the falls. Buses and taxis brousses go daily to/from Mamou (US\$3, three hours) and Conakry (US\$2.40, three hours). For Kamakwie (US\$6, seven hours) in Sierra Leone there is a departure about every other day.

FOUTA DJALON

Fouta Djalon's green rolling hills are more than a come-on for restless hiking boots, they're must-see Guinea. This undulant plateau is full of interesting villages and natural sites, and it's cooler than the lowlands.

DALABA

While there's nothing special about the town, Dalaba's peaceful location, overlooking a sweeping valley, is impressive, and it's a great base for hiking and mountain biking (for those who bring their own) through this postcardperfect region. For an idea of routes, drop in at the tourist office (🖻 011-269348; Quartier des Chargeurs; (> 8.30am-6.30pm); it has detailed guidebooks in

English and French about historic and natural sites such as Case de Palabres, decorated with Fula bas-relief designs, and Chutes de Ditinn, one of Guinea's tallest waterfalls. It also arranges guides (US\$10.50 per day for up to three people), village stays (US\$8 per night for up to three people) and motorcycle rentals (US\$7 per day).

There are some good craft outlets in town, including the Association des Couturières de Tangama for tie-dyed clothes and batiks.

The three places to stay are in the west half of town. Hôtel Tangama (🖻 691109; r US\$4.60, s/d with bathroom US\$7/9.50) is the most popular pick, while Auberge Seidy II (2 691063; r US\$6) is more homey. Both serve good food, and a cool drink enjoyed with the view from the terrace behind Hôtel SIB (🖻 695036) is sublime. On the west side of the market are several simple cafés.

Taxis brousses to and from Labé (US\$3.30, two hours) and Mamou (US\$1.70, one hour) pass through a few times a day.

DOUCKI

About 45km from Pita on the Télimélé road is the village of Doucki, where the one-of-a-kind Hassan Bah (who speaks English, French and Spanish) runs a guesthouse of sorts. Twelve dollars gets you lodging in a traditional Fula hut, three meals, and guided hikes to waterfalls and otherworldly slot canyons in and around what many call Guinea's Grand Canyon. Taxis brousses from Pita to Donghol-Touma (US\$2, 1½ hours) drop you 2km from the village.

LABÉ

Guinea's third-largest town is at the northern end of the sealed road through the Fouta Djalon. It's not particularly attractive, but it's a pleasant town with plenty of restaurants and services. The Marché Central has an Arab feel and lots of indigo cloth for sale, and Le Petit Musée de Fouta (admission by donation; 🕑 8am-6pm) east of the town centre has crafts and other regional titbits. Not far from the museum you can discuss environmentalism and buy organic coffee at Alpha Bah's Garden. For good trekking you need to get pretty far out of the city. Madame Raby at Hôtel Tata has information and can arrange guides, and Fouta Trekking Ventures (
 011-231048) is building campements (camping grounds) using traditional designs in local villages.

Located near the main gare voiture, Hôtel de l'Indépendance (🕿 511000; r in annexe/main bldg

US\$2.40/\$6) has rooms in a dodgy annexe and a much better main building. Hôtel Salam (🖻 512472; r without bathroom US\$4.50, s/d with bathroom US\$7/\$8.5) is in a quiet quarter on the southeast side of town and many rooms have balconies. Chef Barry is a great cook and he takes requests. All the digs at the Italian-run Hôtel Tata (3 510540; r & huts US\$17.50) are cosy and spotless. Tata's pizza is fantastic, though the rest of the menu (pizza US\$2.50; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) is a crapshoot. Street food is plentiful and there are several cheap restaurants near the gare voiture, like the exceptional Le **Calebasse** (mains US\$0.75-3.60; Y lunch & dinner).

Most buses and taxis brousses, including Mamou (US\$4, three hours) and Conakry (US\$8.50, eight hours), leave from the main gare voiture in the town centre. Vehicles heading to Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and even direct to The Gambia (US\$22) go from Gare Voiture Daka (shared taxis depart from near the mosque), 2km north of town.

SOUTHERN GUINEA

Few travellers spend any time here, other than making a quick stop in Kankan on the way to Mali. This is a mistake. The to Mali. This is a mistake. There are some excellent wildlife-watching opportunities and several towns have their own appeal.

KANKAN

Kankan is Guinea's second city and a university town, but it's a quiet place. Set on the banks of the Milo River (a tributary of the great Niger River), the principal sights are the Grande Mosquée, which you can look around between prayer times, and Villa Syli, the old presidential palace overlooking the river. Many Malinke (Mandinka) people regard Kankan as their spiritual home as it was the site of two famous victories - one against French colonial forces - by the famed Samory Touré. Talk to Millimouno 'Robert' Saa (🖻 583128) at Makona Photocopy Centre across from Hôtel Uni if you are interested in seeing traditional dancing in surrounding villages.

Centre d'Accueil Diocesain (d US\$4.60) has some of the cleanest rooms in the city. Toilets are shared, but rooms have showers, sinks and nets, and even power most nights. Hôtel Baté (🕿 712368; annexe r with fan \$9, s/d US\$16.50/19; 🔀) is the first choice of NGO workers, but Hôtel Uni (🖻 011-580414; r US\$14; 🕄) offers better value.

lonelyplanet.com

THE LONG ROADS

The two roads into Senegal require more than the usual amount of travel stamina. The usual route goes from Labé through Koundara to Diaoubé (Senegal; US\$17), where you can connect to almost everywhere. Because the roads on the Guinean side are so bad, you rarely reach the border before it closes and end up sleeping there. Some taxis leave at night to avoid this hassle.

The road between Mali-ville and Kedougou (Senegal; US\$12, generally three trucks make the trip weekly in the dry season) is so pitiful that many people choose to walk across the border. Monsieur Souaré, who runs the **Bureau de Tourisme** ((a) 511739), has all the details on the six- to 12-hour downhill hike and can arrange boys to guide you and carry your bags. It's a beautiful trip.

Hôtel Baté ([™]) breakfast, lunch & dinner) is also popular for meals. The delightful Mme Neass will prepare just about any West African dish with advance notice at her simple **Restaurant** Sénégalais/Chez Mme Neass (mains US\$0.50-1.20; [™]) lunch & dinner). Le Baobab ([™]) lunch & dinner), in the field behind the university (look for the trees), is a popular little bar with students.

trees), is a popular little bar with students. *Taxis brousses* for most destinations, including Conakry (US\$15, 13 hours), Kissidougou (US\$6, five hours) and N'zérékoré (US\$11, 12 hours) and Bamako (Mali; US\$15, seven hours), leave from the twin *gares voitures* near the bridge. There's also a smaller taxi stand north of the city centre for Dabola (US\$6, four hours).

KISSIDOUGOU

Kissidougou (often called Kissi) sits where the main road from Conakry divides north to Kankan and south to N'zérékoré. The little **Musée Préfectoral de Kissidougou** (admission US\$0.25; 🏵 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) has some wonderful masks and other supposedly magical objects. Its staff can direct you to some fine vine bridges in area villages.

The nicest place for food and lodging is the flower-filled **Hôtel Savannah** (@981040; rwith fan/air-con & breakfast \$U\$8/10.50; **2**) along the highway. Pizza and seafood costs around U\$\$3.50. Friendly staff and a pleasant restaurant compensate for the cell-like rooms at **Hôtel de la Paix** (r U\$\$2), which is 300m east of the market.

Taxis brousses go daily to Kankan (US\$6, five hours) and Macenta (US\$5.50, five hours). For Conakry (US\$13, 12 hours), many taxis depart around 6pm.

MACENTA

The Forest Region begins in Kissidougou, but the area's beauty (what's left of it, anyway) really kicks in at Macenta. As you approach this hilltop town you expect to find a lively and interesting city, but looks can be deceiving. Many people need to change taxis here, and if that requires spending the night, **Hôtel Palm** (() 526113; rUS\$1.20-6) near the N'zérékoré gare voiture is your best bet. The cheapest rooms smell bad, but other classes are fine.

FORÊT CLASSÉE DE ZIAMA

One of Guinea's few remaining virgin rainforests blankets the mountains 40km south of Macenta. Elephants are often spotted here, and you don't need a car to enter the forest. Guides and information are available at the headquarters in Sérédou, though they request that you call the **Centre Forestier** (1910389) in N'zérékoré so the staff can prepare for your visit. Admission is US\$11.50 and the mandatory guide is another US\$3.50. Simple rooms at the office cost US\$2.50 per night. Any vehicle heading between Macenta and N'zérékoré can drop you off at the headquarters.

N′ZÉRÉKORÉ

N'zérékoré is the major city in the Forest Region. It's a lively place – a smuggling base, transport hub, refugee centre and southern Guinea's NGO central.

Hôtel Bakoly () 910734; rUS\$1.20-2.40), near the market, is as cheap as it gets. The basic rooms have a bucket shower and toilets are shared. The **Mission Catholique** () 910897; r\$4.60), on the road to the airport, has simple clean rooms with shared toilets and mosquito net. **Chez Aïda** () 910747; r\$US\$) on the north side of town has four spacious rooms with fan and an excellent

little restaurant (mains around US\$2.20; open breakfast, lunch and dinner) that draws many NGO workers. The food next door at **Hôtel Le Palmier** (mains US\$0.75-2; breakfast, lunch & dinner) is even better. There are some excellent streetfood vendors near the *gare voiture*.

N'zérékoré's gare voiture is located on the north side of town. There are taxis to/from Macenta (US\$4.20, 2½ hours), Kankan (US\$11, 12 hours) and Conakry (US\$18.50, 20 hours). Travel to Monrovia, Liberia, is a rough, allday trip with many checkpoints: seek local advice before heading there. If Côte d'Ivoire becomes safe again, you can get taxis to Man via Sipilou.

BOSSOU

Researchers at the **Bossou Environmental Research Institute** (**5**84761) track the chimpanzees living in the surrounding scenic hills, so your chances of finding them are excellent. A guide for a couple of hours in the forest costs US\$11.50, with half the money going towards the village. **Monkey Nest Guesthouse** (r US\$1.20) at the base of Mont Gban has surely the cleanest, most comfortable rooms at this price in the country. Getting here from N²zérékoré is easy; take a *taxi brousse* to Lola (US\$1.50, 30 minutes) and then another to Bossou (US\$1, 30 minutes).

GUINEA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Conakry has lots of luxury properties and even more dives, plus plenty of choices in between, though nothing truly priced in the budget category. Upcountry, most towns have at least one place to stay, often with quite basic, but cheap, facilities. On the other hand, you can often get a lovely, comfortable room with bathroom and air-con for the same price as a grubby brothel in the capital.

A tourism tax of US\$1.20 per person applies to most top-end and some midrange hotels.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Overall, Guinea is a safe country, though crime has been on the increase in Conakry and small-scale tribal brawls flare up in the Forest Region occasionally. Armed robbery of vehicles has increased in the south, so don't travel at night. Electricity, running water and phones (even mobiles) all have intermittent service. Most hotels have generators, though they usually don't run all night at cheapies.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Guinea Embassies & Consulates

Belgium ((2) 02-771 0126; 108 Auguste Reyers Blvd, 1030 Brussels)

Canada (🖻 613-789 8444; 483 Wilbrod St, K1N 6N1 Ottawa)

France (🖻 01 47 04 81 48; 51 Rue de la Faisanderie, 75116 Paris)

Germany (🖻 030-2007 4330; Jägerstrabe 67-69, 10117 Berlin)

UK (@ 020-7078 6087; 83 Victoria St, SW1H 0HW London) USA (@ 202-986 4300; 2112 Leroy Place NW, 20008 Washington, DC)

Guinea has embassies in the countries it borders. See the relevant chapters for more.

Embassies & Consulates in Guinea

The following embassies and consulates are located in Conakry.

GUINEA

Côte d'Ivoire ((2) 45¹082; Blvd du Commerce) France (2) 411655; cnr Blvd du Commerce & 8th Ave) Germany (2) 441506; www.conakry.diplo.de; 2nd Blvd) Guinea-Bissau (2) 422136; Route de Donka, Bellevue) Japan (2) 468510; Corniche Sud, Coléah) Liberia (2) 012-676526; Rue DI 258, Landreah) Mali (2) 461418; Corniche Nord, Camayenne) Netherlands (2) 415021; Rm 121, 2nd Ave, Novotel) Senegal (2) 409037; Corniche Sud, Coléah) Sierra Leone (2) 464084; Carrefour Bellevue, Dixinn) UK (2) 434715; Residence 2000, Villa 1, Corniche Sud, Coléah)

USA (a 411520; http://conakry.usembassy.gov; 2nd Blvd) A new embassy is under construction in Lambanyi.

PRACTICALITIES

- Guinea uses the metric system.
- Electricity is 220V/50Hz and plugs are of the European two-round-pin variety.
- Guinea's best-selling newspaper is the satirical weekly *Le Lynx*.
- The only TV station is the governmentowned RTG, which shows a lot of sports and speeches.
- The BBC World Service is broadcast in French on FM and English on short wave.

During May's **Fish Festival**, in the village of Baro (near Kouroussa), people try to catch (and release) sacred fish to get good luck. The **Hunting Festival** held annually in the Kankan area (time and location varies) lets Malinké men show off their shooting prowess. In September Mali-ville hosts the **Potato Festival**, a party for the farmers of the surrounding villages.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106), Guinea celebrates the following national holidays: New Year's Day 1 January Declaration of the 2nd Republic 3 April May Day 1 May Market Women's Revolt 27 August Referendum Day 28 September Independence Day 2 October

INTERNET ACCESS

Access is widely available in Conakry and larger towns. Connections are fast in the capital and generally unreliable (though improving) in the countryside.

general country MAPS

The **Insitut Géographique National** (5th Blvd) near Corniche Nord in Conakry sells maps of Guinea as well as photocopies of topographical maps (scales 1:50,000 to 1:500,000).

MONEY

US dollars, euros and West African CFA francs are easily changed; rates are usually best in Conakry. Black-market dealers, widely used throughout Guinea, give better rates, and some even take travellers cheques. They are your only option to convert francs back into hard currency. Bicigui bank branches in most cities advance cash from Visa cards; its central Conakry branch has an ATM that accepts Visa cards.

POST & TELEPHONE

Government-owned Sotelgui offices are in all large- and medium-sized towns (except Conakry), though most people use the many telecentres; shop around for the best rate. Sotelgui phone cards are another possibility, but it's not always easy to find a phone that accepts them. The quality of internet phone connections at cybercafés varies.

The postal service is unreliable.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Office National du Tourisme (p362) in Conakry can provide basic info. There are Ministére du Tourisme, de l'Hôtellerie et de l'Artisanat offices in many upcountry towns, but staff are as likely to hinder as help you.

VISAS

Visas are required by all, except members of Economic Community of West Africa States (Ecowas) countries, Morocco and Tunisia, and cost US\$25 to US\$50. You cannot get a visa upon arrival. Those issued in Africa are usually good for three months.

Visa Extensions

For an extension of up to three months (US\$40), go to the **Bureau of Immigration** (a 441339; cm 1st Blvd & 8th Ave, Conakry).

Visas for Onward Travel

Côte d'Ivoire One month single-entry visas cost US\$19 to US\$39, depending on your nationality. You need two photos and processing takes two days.

Guinea-Bissau One-month single-entry visas cost US\$16 and require two photos. Issued in three hours. Liberia Three-month single-entry/multi-entry visas cost US\$45/58 for most nationalities. US citizens must buy a

US\$100 one-year multiple-entry visa. You need two photos and a letter of request. Ready within two days. **Mali** One-month single-entry visas cost US\$4; except for Americans, who must get a one-year multiple-entry visa for US\$100. Two photos are required and the visas can be ready on the same day if you go early. Reportedly you can also get a *laissez-passer* (travel permit) valid for up to a month for US\$2.50 at the gendarmerie in Kankan. **Senegal** Most people do not need visas; those who do pay US\$3.40/7.80 for a one-month single-entry/three-month multiple-entry visa. They should be ready right away. **Sierra Leone** One-month single-entry/three-month multiple-entry visas cost up to US\$100/150. You need one photo and they are ready within 72 hours, or you can pay US\$20 for rush service.

TRANSPORT IN GUINEA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Conakry-G'bessia International Airport is one of the most chaotic and exasperating in West Africa. Direct flights from Europe are available with **Air France** (413657; www.airfrance .com) and **SN Brussels** (413610; www.flysn.com) for around US\$1200 return. lonelyplanet.com

For international flights the departure tax is US\$5, but this is usually included in the cost of the ticket.

Within Africa, Conakry is connected to Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Accra (Ghana), Bamako (Mali), Banjul (The Gambia), Bissau (Guinea-Bissau), Dakar (Senegal), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Niamey (Niger) and Praia (Cape Verde).

Land CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Transport continues to run to and from Côte d'Ivoire, but, until that country's cease fire becomes a peace deal, you shouldn't be on any of it. The primary route is between Lola and Man either via Gbakoré and Danané or via Sipilou and Biankouma. From Kankan it's easiest to go via Bamako because the road to Odienné via Mandiana is so bad. There's also a seldom-travelled route between Beyla and Odienné (via Sinko).

GUINEA-BISSAU

Horrible roads make travel between these two countries difficult. Most people using public transport get to Bissau via Labé and Gabú. You have to taxi hop beyond Koundara. With your own vehicle you can shave some distance, though not necessarily time, off this journey by going direct from Koumbia to Pitche. Minibuses go a couple of times a week (you might find a truck on other days) from Boké and Kamsar up the horrible road to Québo.

LIBERIA

Because of the large number of refugees in Guinea there is a lot of traffic to Liberia, but check the security situation before heading there. The primary route is south from N'zérékoré. *Taxis brousses* go frequently to the border town of Diéké (US\$4.50, three hours), where you can get a *taxi-moto* (motorcycle taxi) or walk the remaining 2km to Ganta to get a Monrovia-bound taxi. Plan on a full day's journey. The Macenta to Voinjama, Guéckédou to Foya, Koyama to Zorzor, and Lola to Yekepa routes are all on bad roads and have less reliable connections to Monrovia. For all of these routes you buy a single ticket, but change cars at the border.

MALI

The most frequent route to Bamako goes from Kankan (US\$15, seven hours) via Siguiri and the border at Kourémalé. The road is sealed and in excellent shape, except for a 50km stretch in Mali that is due to be upgraded soon. If you're in a hurry, *taxis brousses* also ply this route from Conakry (US\$26, 24 hours), departing from the Gare Voiture Siguiri in the Madina market. With your own 4WD you can also go from Kankan via Mandiana to Bougouni, or Mali-ville through Kita.

SENEGAL

Leaving Guinea, there are several *taxis brousses* daily for Diaoubé (US\$23, two days) from both Gare Voiture Bambeto and Gare Voiture Matam in Conakry. See also the Long Roads boxed text on p366.

SIERRA LEONE

The journey from Conakry to Freetown is pretty straightforward, and the final dirt section should be sealed soon. There are several taxis brousses daily (US\$13, seven hours) from taxis orousses daily (US\$13, seven hours) from both Gare Voiture Bambeto and Gare Voi-ture Matam in Conakry. A bus also goes to Freetown (US\$14) from Gare Voiture Matam on Tuesday and Friday. Taxis waiting at the border town of Pamelap also connect to most other large Sierra Leonean towns. All other routes - from Guéckédou to Koindu and Kailahun (for which we've heard reports of Sierra Leone border officials insisting travellers purchase visas even if they already have one), between Faranah and Kabala, and from Kindia to Medina Oula then on to Kamakwie (this route is closed when the Little Scarcies River runs high) - are on rough roads and are sparsely travelled.

River

During the rainy season barges run once a week or so between Siguiri and Bamako (Mali; US\$12). It's a one-day journey downstream and takes at least two days coming back up.

Sea

Boats go from Kamsar to Bissau (Guinea Bissau; US\$7) stopping in Cacine and Kamkhonde, where many passengers catch *taxis brousses* to complete their trip to the capital. There is no set schedule. Talk of restarting the ferry between Conakry and Freetown continues. Ask at the port.

GETTING AROUND

Taxis brousses (usually Peugeot station wagons) are the main way of getting around Guinea, which means most travellers will have to contend with two major hassles: terrible roads and severe overcrowding (10 or 11 passengers in a car made for seven, plus luggage, bananas, live goats and poultry, and a few more people on the roof). Although minibuses are cheaper than taxis, they are just as overcrowded and take far longer to fill up. They also usually travel more slowly. Private buses connect Conakry to a few other cities; though cheaper and more comfortable than *taxis brousses*, they're slow and constantly breaking down. In Guinea the term *gare voiture* is used, rather than *gare routière*, for the bus and *taxi-brousse* park.

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Guinea-Bissau

Like most sub-Saharan nations, Guinea-Bissau is an arbitrary European construct, yet it possesses two qualities that make this small country stand out from its neighbours. First and foremost are the people themselves. You'll almost never hear the disingenuous 'bonjour, mon ami' that signals the beginning of an unwelcome sales pitch. If you're arriving from, say, Dakar, you'll be relieved to find helpful gestures are almost always just that – expressions of kindness rather than a means to extract cash. The country's other big draw? The remarkable Arquipélago dos Bijagós. These delta islands are lined with powdery, white-sand beaches, washed by azure waters, and populated by a people whose matriarchal culture, long protected by hidden sandbanks and treacherous tides, is unlike any found in West Africa.

The mainland, by contrast, provides a fine recapitulation of West Africa's attractions, including mangrove-lined rivers, a gorgeous beach at Varela and rainforests in the south – home to elephants and chimpanzees.

Always poor, the country's economy and infrastructure were severely damaged by civil war in the late 1990s. Transport and communications remain trying, and hotels and food – especially in the capital – are no bargain. However, national reconciliation seems to have arrived with peaceful elections in 2005, and there's cautious optimism about the future.

FAST FACTS

- Area 36,120 sq km
- ATMs There are none; come with cash or travellers cheques
- Borders Guinea (Kandika open); Senegal (Salikénié and Pirada open, São Domingos sometimes closed – check ahead)
- Budget From US\$30 per day
- Capital Bissau
- Languages Portuguese, Crioulo
- Money West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 1.416 million
- Seasons Dry and mild (late November February), hot and humid (March – May & November), hot and rainy (June – October)
- Telephone Country code 245; international access code 00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visa Single entry valid for 45 days costs US\$60. Required for all visitors except citizens of Economic Community of West Africa States (Ecowas) nations. Available upon arrival at Bissau airport. Otherwise, arrange before arrival.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **João Vieira Poilão National Marine Park** (p377) Discover the island's powdery sand beaches and disarmingly friendly people.
- Ilha de Orango (p377) Stalk rare, salt-water hippos after visiting the tombs of Bijagós kings and queens.
- Varela (p378) Laze on the gorgeous but undeveloped beaches just over the border from Senegal's Cap Skiring.
- **Sacred Forests** (p378) Disappear into the dense jungle around Catió and Jemberem the westernmost habitat of the African chimpanzee.
- **Bissau** (p374) Sip your way through blackouts at the capital's amiable cafés.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The rainy season is from June to October. Conditions are especially humid in the months before the rains (April and May), when average maximum daytime temperatures rise to 34°C. Daily maximums rarely fall below 30°C.

The best time to visit is from late November to February, when conditions are dry and relatively cool.

ITINERARIES

 One Week Spend a day or two in the relaxing capital Bissau (p374), before heading to Ilha de Bubaque in the Arquipélago dos Bijagós (p376).

HOW MUCH?

GUINEA-BISSAU

- Small souvenir mask US\$4
- Shared taxi ride in Bissau US\$0.50
- Nescafé US\$0.20
- Woven indigo cotton cloth (40cm x 80cm) US\$6
- Main course in Western-style restaurant US\$8

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.20
- 1L bottled water US\$1
- Bottle of Portuguese beer US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$5
- Omelette sandwich from street vendor US\$1

WARNING

Peaceful presidential elections in 2005 have raised hopes of lasting stability following the 1998 civil war. However, underlying tensions remain, so be sure to check the latest situation before arrival. Note that the region around São Domingos and along the Senegalese border is particularly prone to instability.

There are still land mines in some rural and remote areas. If travelling far off-thebeaten path, research your route and consider bringing a trusted guide.

- **Two Weeks** During a second week, consider further explorations of the Bijagós. Head to Orango (p377), with its rare, saltwater hippos, and then check out one of the remoter but paradisiacal islands, like Ilha João Vieira (p377).
- Three Weeks Devote a third week to exploring the rich mainland ecosystems in-depth, such as mangrove swamps of the Parque Natural dos Tarrafes do Rio Cacheu (p377) in the north or the sacred Parque Natural de Cantanhez (p378) in the south.

HISTORY

The great Sahel Empire of Mali, which flourished between the 13th and 15th centuries AD, included parts of present-day Guinea-Bissau. For more information on the precolonial history of this part of West Africa, see p392.

European Arrival & Colonisation

Portuguese navigators first reached what is now Guinea-Bissau around 1450. They found navigable rivers that facilitated trade with the interior, and were soon extracting gold, ivory, pepper and especially slaves.

For centuries the Portuguese presence was limited to coastal trading stations, but with the end of the slave trade in the 19th century, the Portuguese had to win control of the interior to continue to extract wealth. To do so, they allied themselves with Muslim ethnicities, including the Fula and Mandinko, to subdue animist tribes. When right-wing dictator António Salazar came to power in Portugal in 1926, he imposed direct Portuguese rule, forcing peasants to plant groundnuts (peanuts) for export, like it or not.

War of Liberation

By the early 1960s African colonies were rapidly winning independence, but Salazar refused to relinquish those under his control. The result: one of Africa's longest, bloodiest wars of liberation.

The father of independence was Amilcar Cabral, who in 1956 helped found the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC). In 1961 the PAIGC started arming and mobilising peasants, and controlled half the country within five years. The PAIGC built schools, provided medical services and encouraged widespread political participation. Cabral was assassinated in 1973, but freedom was inevitable. When Salazar's regime fell in 1974, the new Portuguese government quickly recognised the fledgling nation.

Independence

Once in power, the PAIGC government faced staggering problems. Only one in 20 people could read, life expectancy was 35 years, 45% of children died before the age of five and rice production had fallen by 71%. The new socialist state made significant inroads, especially relative to other postcolonial countries. Nevertheless a coup in 1986 forced President João Vieira to abandon socialism and sell off state enterprises.

Meanwhile intractable poverty as well as growing corruption under Vieira culminated in national strikes in 1997, which quickly devolved into a civil war. Vieira was forced to flee the capital in 1999. Remarkably, military commanders handed power back to civilians. Nevertheless, several subsequent coups kept the war-weary country on edge, and separatist conflict in southern Senegal frequently spilled over Guinea-Bissau's northern border.

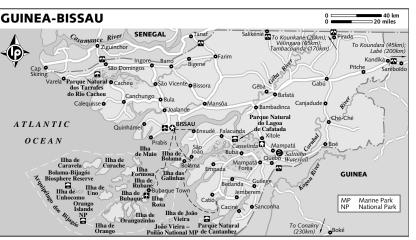
Guinea-Bissau Today

Despite fears of continued factional violence, the 2005 presidential elections were deemed largely free and fair. The winner? Deposed president João Vieira, who returned from exile to run a successful campaign based on national reconciliation. While fundamental problems of corruption and poverty could yet destabilise the current peace, Guinea-Bissau nationals geneally express cautious optimism about their country's future.

CULTURE

Despite wide religious and ethnic differences, Guinea-Bissau nationals are united by a neighbourly goodwill that is genuinely remarkable. Even in the capital city, violence and even aggressive salesmanship are rare. Mainland ethnic cultures are similar to those in neighbouring Senegal and Guinea. However, the Bijagós people have very distinct customs (see Queens of the Bijagós, p377).

While Guinea-Bissau is one of the world's poorest countries, regular rains and relatively fertile land make outright hunger rare. Most people scratch out a living from fishing and subsistence farming. Villages consist of mudbrick houses roofed with thatched grasses.



Except for a lucky few, life is hardly easier in cities and towns. In a nation with virtually no industry, most people eke out a living as small-time merchants.

PEOPLE

Current estimates put the population at about 1.4 million, divided among some 23 ethnic groups. The two largest are the Balante (30%) in the coastal and southern regions and the Fula (20%) in the north. Other groups include the Manjaco (or Manjak), Papel, Fulup and Mandingo (Mandinka). The offshore islands are mostly inhabited by the Bijagós people (see p377).

About 45% of the people (mainly Fula and Mandingo) are Muslims. Christians make up less than 10% of the population, mostly around Bissau. Animist beliefs remain strong along the coast and in the south.

ARTS

Guinea-Bissau has a modest tradition of sculpted figures and masks, similar to other countries of the region. The Bijagós people, on the other hand, have evolved a more distinctive style.

On the mainland, dance and music are largely influenced by the Mandingo and Diola people of neighbouring Senegal. The harplike kora and the xylophone-like balafon are common. The traditional Guinean beat is gumbé. Modern music shares the same roots, though the Portuguese colonial legacy has given it a Latin edge.

ENVIRONMENT

GUINEA-BISSAU Guinea-Bissau has an area of just over 36,000 sq km (about the size of Switzerland). Coastal areas are flat, and feature estuaries, mangrove swamps and patches of forest. The landscape continues to remain flat as you move inland but grows drier as it transitions into the Sahel.

Guinea-Bissau's rivers shelter fresh-water hippos, while the Bijagós have a few salt-water examples. The Bijagós are also an important nesting ground for aquatic turtles. The rainforests of the southeast are the most westerly home of Africa's chimpanzee population. The coastal wetlands harbour a stunning variety of birds, including parrots, cranes and peregrine falcons.

The natural vegetation of the inland areas is lightly wooded savanna, though much is

under cultivation. Mangrove swamps dominate the coast.

Environmental issues include rapid loss of mangroves to rice plantations. Extensive groundnut production has leeched nutrients and promoted erosion, and over-fishing in rich coastal waters is a growing concern.

Guinea-Bissau has a number of protected areas, including the Bolama-Bijagós Biosphere Reserve, which contains Orango Islands National Park (p377) and João Vieira-Poilão National Marine Park (p377). On the mainland, the Parque Natural dos Tarrafes do Rio Cacheu (p377), near the border with Senegal, encompasses impressive mangroves. Near Buba, the Parque Natural de Lagoa de Cafatada (p378) protects rich freshwater wetlands. And Parque Natural de Cantanhez (p3678) is planned to protect estuarine mangroves and several sacred forests.

For more information, contact IBAP (207106; Rua São Tomé), the institute that oversees all the parks from Bissau.

FOOD & DRINK

Seafood is the highlight of Guinean cuisine, including shrimp, oysters and meaty bica (sea bream), served grilled or sautéed with onions and limes. Rice is supplemented by yams, beans and mandioca (cassava). Vegetables generally include okra, carrots and squash. Palm oil is another key staple.

Canned soft drinks, bottled water and beer are widely available. Local brews include palm wine and *caña de cajeu* (cashew-flower rum). Beware homemade distilled products, which often contain high levels of toxins.

BISSAU

Despite ruined monuments, cavernous potholes and regular blackouts, Bissau has its charms. The sleepy, crumbling colonial heart boasts wide, mango-shaded streets, some attractive, pastel-coloured buildings, and lively cafés where the country's elite gather day after day. Best of all, there's a distinct absence of crime or hustle.

ORIENTATION

Bissau's main drag is the wide Ave Amilcar Cabral, running between the port and Praça dos Heróis Nacionais. On the northwestern edge of the town centre is the Mercado de

Bandim. From here, Ave de 14 Novembro leads northwest to the main paragem (bus and taxi park), the airport and all inland destinations.

INFORMATION **Cultural Centres**

Centre Culturel Franco-Bissao-Guinéen (🖻 206816; Praça Ché Guevera; 还 9am-10pm Mon-Sat) This newly rebuilt centre has a library, art gallery, theatre and courtyard café.

Emergency

Fire (🖻 118) Police (🕿 117)

Internet Access

Cybernet Café (Rua Vitorino Costa; per hr US\$1.40; 9am-10pm)

SITEC (Ave de 14 Novembro; per hr US\$3; 🕑 until 10pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) Located outside the city centre, it has decent internet connections and air-con.

Medical Services

Pharmacie Mocambigue (205513) Ask at this pharmacy to see Dr Kassem Dahrouge, who speaks French and some English.

Simão Mendes (🖻 212861; Ave Pansau Na Isna) Bissau's poor-quality main hospital.

Monev

Banco da Africa Ocidental (BAO) near the port is the only bank that reliably exchanges cash (US dollars or, preferably, euros). There are many moneychangers around the Mercado Central. Most are honest, but beware of scammers.

Supermercado Mavegro (🖻 201224, 201216; Rua Eduardo Mondlane; 🏵 3.30-6pm Mon, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) Exchanges travellers cheques and cash, including US dollars.

Post

Main post office (Correio; Ave Amilcar Cabral; 🕑 8am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Travel Agencies

Guinetours (🖻 214344; Rua 12) Surire Tours (🖻 214166; Rua de Angola)

SIGHTS

The former presidential palace dominates Praça dos Heróis Nacionais at the northern end of Ave Amilcar Cabral. With a bombed-out roof and shrapnel riddling its neoclassical

façade, it's a reminder of the country's fragile peace.

Off the southern end of Ave Amilcar Cabral are the narrow streets of the mango-shaded old Portuguese quarter. The neighbourhood is guarded by the Fortaleza d'Amura. Surrounded by imposing stone walls, it's still a military post and strictly off limits to visitors.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bissau's Carnival is the country's biggest party. It takes place yearly in February or early March during the week leading up to Ash Wednesday. Music, masks, drinking and dancing are the order of the day.

SLEEPING

Accommodation in Bissau is expensive and generally of poor value.

Hotel Caracol (Ave Caetano Semedo; r US\$20) This seedy place offering bucket water and a piece of foam on a cement floor is Bissau's only real budget option.

Pensão Centrale (🕿 213270; Ave Amilcar Cabral; r US\$40) Occupying a once-grand building in the town centre, Bissau's traditional backpacker choice now boasts thin mattresses and rather lax cleanliness and security.

Hotel Ta-Mar (206647; s without/with bath US\$50/70; 🕄) Located in the old Portuguese quarter, this hotel boasts rickety fixtures and crumbling plaster, though it does have newish beds and air-conditioning.

Aparthotel Jordani (201719; Ave Pansau Na Isna; s/d US\$50/70; 🔀) The friendly Jordani offers halfdecent rooms with cold running water, airconditioning, TV, small fridge and a generally dependable power supply.

are high.

Residencial Coimbra (213467; fax 201490; Ave Amilcar Cabral: s/d US\$120/158: 🕄) With comfortable, tasteful rooms, an attractive rooftop garden and a good breakfast buffet, this is Bissau's only genuinely decent choice.

EATING

For cheap eats, try the rice bars near the port (about US\$1 for a rice plate with meat or fish). Unless otherwise indicated, the following restaurants are open for lunch (around noon to 3pm) and dinner (around 7pm to 10pm) daily.

Restaurant Magui (Ave Amilcar Cabral; meals US\$5) The charming Magui serves spot-on Senegalese dishes in her simple eatery above the now-defunct cinema.

Restaurant Samaritana (off Ave Pansau Na Isna; meals US\$5) Simple but delicious Senegalese-inspired food in a humble roadside café.

Restaurant Ta-Mar (mains US\$8; 20 8am-9pm) Newly refurbished restaurant in the hotel of the same name (opposite) has a distinctly European feel, but often so-so food. Friday nights bring live music.

Restaurant Jordani (Ave Pansau Na Isna; mains US\$8-10) The largely Portuguese food can be disappointing, but it's a great spot on Thursday nights when top local musicians regularly perform.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The most popular café is **Gelataria Baiana** (Praça Ché Guevara). French speakers may prefer the café in the **Centre Culturel Franco-Bissao-Guinéen** (200816; Praça Ché Guevera; 20 9am-10pm Mon-Sat). A number of restaurants also double as barcafés, including the **Restaurant Jordani** (Ave Pansau Na Isna) on Thursday and the **Restaurant Ta-Mar** (200647) on Friday.

X Club (Rua Osualdo Vieira) caters to everyone from idealistic UN workers to shady businessmen on the prowl. The décor is Euro-trendy and there are two free snooker tables.

SHOPPING

Centro Artistico Juvenil (Ave de 14 Novembro) With marked prices and no pressure to buy, this shop provides a fine introduction to the arts and crafts of Guinea-Bissau. Proceeds directly support young artisans.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bissau has the country's only airport with regularly scheduled flights, with services by TACV Cabo Verde Airlines, Air Sénégal, TAP Air Portugal and Air Luxor. See p381 for more information.

You can get bush taxis and minibuses to just about anywhere in the country, as well as to Senegal, at the outdoor *paragem*, hidden about 500m south of Ave de 14 Novembro, about 5km outside town. It's always best to get transport by 8am. For more information, see p381.

To get to the *paragem*, take a *toca-toca* (minibus) from the Mercado de Bandim (CFA100) or a taxi (about CFA1000) from anywhere in town.

GETTING AROUND

The airport is about 9km from the town centre. Taxis into town cost around US\$4. For a minibus (US\$0.20), walk 200m to the roundabout at the start of Ave de 14 Novembro.

Shared taxis – usually Mercedes, and always painted blue and white – are plentiful and ply all main routes. Prices vary according to distance and whim, but never cost more than US\$0.80 per person for trips within the town centre.

Small *toca-toca* (minibuses) painted blue and yellow serve major city routes (around US\$0.20), including a run from Mercado de Bandim up Ave de 14 Novembro to the *paragem* and airport.

ARQUIPÉLAGO DOS Bijagós

With swaying palms, cooling breezes and powdery, white-sand beaches, the Bijagós islands exert a singular spell. Protected by swift tides and treacherous sandbanks, the island's largely matriarchal people eluded Portuguese control until the 1930s. Now the entire archipelago, including its rich marine life, has been declared a biosphere reserve, while two island groups form national parks.

Travellers should note that transport to and between the islands is difficult (see below). Also, low tides reveal kilometres-long mud flats, limiting beach going. Finally, telephone service – including mobile service – is unreliable.

Getting There & Away

Transport to the islands is difficult and/or expensive. *Canoas* – large, motorised and often leaky canoes – leave Bissau from Port Rampa, the fishermen's port near the Estádio 24 de Setembro. There are several Bissau–Bubaque *canoas* (US\$5 per person, four to six hours) that follow a regular weekly schedule, though departure times vary according to tides and winds. You can also ask around for unscheduled departures.

At the other extreme, higher-end fishing camps hire out speedboats at the cost of about US\$200 for a one-way trip from Bissau to Bubaque (up to eight people). The **Hotel Marazul** (2) 6-626277) in Quinhámel has a range of boats and is the most likely option. At the time of writing a small cruise ship called the *African Queen* was expected to return to Bissau, with regular, multiday excursions to the islands. Check with travel agencies in Bissau for the schedule and prices.

ILHA DE BUBAQUE

At the centre of the Bijagós, Bubaque is home to the archipelago's largest town, which serves as its major transport 'hub'. If you can't make it to remoter islands, Bubaque makes a comfortable place to unwind. There's a range of accommodation in and around the main town (also called Bubaque).

Sleeping & Eating

Most hotels serve meals if you order ahead. For cheap eats, head to the port area. Rooms in all of the following places have shared bathroom with bucket shower.

Chez Titi (rUS\$10) Very basic rooms, but ideally perched on a small bluff just above the water.

Campement Cadjoco (rUS\$14) This French-run *pensão* (pension) offers good value, with decent rooms at the back of a pleasant garden. The owner also has a good, fast boat and organises fishing trips and transport.

Chez Dora (r US\$24) Chez Dora offers tasteful, impeccably maintained bungalows arranged around a lush garden. Meals (US\$6) are delicious amalgams of local ingredients – including the Portuguese owner's own pigs and papayas. Highly recommended.

Kasa Afrikana (2821144; develayg@yahoo.fr; r US\$100; **2 (**) The island's cushiest option has fully equipped rooms, attractive grounds with bar and pool, and water views.

Getting There & Away

For travel to/from Bissau, see left. There is also fairly regular service to Orango (US\$4, two to four hours) and occasional services to other islands.

ORANGO ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Home to rare saltwater species of hippo and crocodile, Ilha de Orango and the surrounding islands together make up the Orango Islands National Park. The island is also the burial site of the Bijagós kings and queens.

The island's only hotel, **Orango Parque Hotel** (**a** satellite phone 00871-761-273221; per person incl 3 meals CFA\$60), offers attractive, well-maintained bungalows right on the beach. The Italian-Portuguese owners also serve excellent food.

QUEENS OF THE BIJAGÓS

The peoples of the Arquipélago dos Bijagós have, over the centuries, developed a largely matriarchal culture quite distinct from that of mainland Guinea. Islanders are ruled by a king and queen (they're neither married nor even related) who serve as coregents – the king managing men's affairs and the queen managing women's affairs. Women often serve as chiefs of individual villages, and they're also the sole homeowners – only fair since they are entirely responsible for homebuilding, from brick-making to actual construction.

See left for information about boat travel to the Bijagós.

JOÃO VIEIRA – POILÃO NATIONAL MARINE PARK

At the far, southwest end of the archipelago, João Vieira – Poilão National Marine Park consists of four islands and surrounding waters that together form a key nesting area for three species of endangered sea turtles. On idyllic Ilha João Vieira, **Chez Claude** (perpersonper nightwith full board US\$82) offers simple but spotless cabins and good Franco-African cuisine.

See left for information about boat travel to the Bijagós.

THE NORTHWEST

QUINHÁMEL

Located about 30km west of Bissau, Quinhámel serves as the capital of the Biombo region, traditional home of the Papel people. The town has a collective devoted to preserving traditional weaving techniques. There are no formal tours, but it's well worth a stop to see the men and boys at work on the traditional looms. Just outside town, **Hotel Marazu** ((2) 626277; s/d US\$61/72; (2) (2) offers attractive bungalows and rents boats for fishing trips or transfers to the Bijagós islands.

PARQUE NATURAL DOS TARRAFES DO RIO CACHEU

This national park is home to a diverse array of wildlife, including hippos, monkeys, manatees, panthers, gazelles and some 200 bird species.

The park office in the town of Cacheu offers rooms with shared bathroom with running water for US\$6 per person. Staff prepare meals and organise boat trips on the Cacheu and surrounding swamps (be prepared to bargain for both). For more information, contact the **IBAP office** (207106; Rua São Tomé) in Bissau.

SÃO DOMINGOS

São Domingos sits on the Senegalese border on the main route to/from Ziguinchor. If you get stuck here (not impossible as the border post is often closed at night), there are food stalls and several hotels around the main square. There are plenty of bush taxis to/from Bissau (US\$5.50, two to three hours).

Beware that cross-border violence regularly closes the border and makes travel unsafe. Check conditions before heading here or on to Varela.

VARELA

Varela is the favourite getaway of locals, with wide sand beaches as beautiful as those just across the border in Cap Skiring. At the time of writing the road from São Domingos was in terrible condition, though there was talk about repaving. Even with a good vehicle, the 50km drive can take several hours. Check ahead for security conditions around São Domingos.

Chez Helene (r US\$24) offers simple but wellmaintained rooms and good meals (US\$5).

There is usually at least one minibus daily to/from São Domingos (two to three hours).

THE NORTHEAST

The birthplace of Amilcar Cabral and the country's second city, Bafatá retains a small but interesting colonial centre along the Gêba River.

Hotel Maimuna Capé (r with fan/air-con US\$24/ 34; ≥) offers comfortable, spotless rooms in an attractive building in the old colonial centre. The Portuguese-run Restaurante Ponto de Encontro (meals around US\$7) serves simple but hearty Portuguese food. There are also plenty of food stalls along the main Bissau–Gabú road.

Minibuses to Bissau (US\$3.50), Gabú (US\$1.40) or Buba (US\$1.60) depart from the petrol station area.

GABÚ

Lively if unattractive, Gabú offers a range of accommodation, making it a convenient stopover on your way to/from Guinea.

Ĥotel Visiom ((2) 511/484; r with fan/air-con US\$16/30; (2) offers clean rooms with bathroom, friendly staff and a small garden in a quiet spot in the north of town. In the town centre, **Residencial Djaraama** ((2) 511302; r without bathroom US\$25) is pricey but has some colonial character, including high ceilings and a wraparound veranda.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses go to Bissau regularly (US\$5, five to six hours). If you're heading for Guinea or Senegal, see p381 for transport options from Gabú. You can easily change CFA into Guinean francs at the bush taxi and minibus park.

THE SOUTH

BUBA

Buba is a small junction town. **Pousada Bela Vista** (6-647011;rUS\$20; 2) has spotless, attractively fitted-out bungalows and lovely vistas of the river. In town, there are a number of places to get cheap bowls of fish and rice (around US\$1). A minibus from Bissau (US\$5, approximately eight hours) leaves most mornings.

About 5km before you reach the town of Buba, you'll pass **Parque Natural do Lagoa de Cafatada**. While there was no infrastructure for visitors at the time of writing, it's an important habitat for bird and aquatic life. For more information, contact the **IBAP office** (207106; Rua São Tomé) in Bissau.

CATIÓ

Catió is the most remote area in the south that still has regular transport connections with Bissau – a necessary stop on the way to Jemberem and the Parque Natural de Cantanhez. You can reach Catió by minibus (US\$6, all day) from Bissau (though you may have to switch vehicles in Buba).

JEMBEREM & PARQUE NATURAL DE CANTANHEZ

A small village 22km east of Catió, Jemberem offers a community-based conservation scheme connected with the proposed **Cantanhez Forest.** The local women's association has set up the

small, inexpensive Raça Banana guesthouse. They can also arrange a guide (essential) for the nearby sacred forest, home to chimpanzees and elephants.

There's usually a daily *kandonga* (truck or pick-up) in the morning between Catió and Jemberem. For more information about the park, contact the **IBAP office** (207106; Rua São Tomé) in Bissau.

GUINEA-BISSAU DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Bissau is expensive and offers poor value (about US\$20 for primitive doubles and US\$70 for rather decrepit 'midrange' digs). Outside the capital, the situation improves. A clean, decent room with electricity and running water might cost US\$25, or US\$35 with air-conditioning, while bucket water and a foam pad for two people costs US\$10 to \$15. Specialist hunting and fishing camps are scattered around the country, and generally cost US\$50 to US\$100 per person for room and full board.

ACTIVITIES

The Arquipélago dos Bijagós and Varela have great sandy beaches, and the waters around the Bijagós also offer some of the best deepsea fishing in the world. Cycling is good, as roads are generally quiet, safe and flat. Birdwatching is extraordinary, especially along the coast.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks and government offices are generally open 8am to noon and 3pm to 6pm Monday to Friday, or 8am to 2pm Monday to Friday. Post offices are generally open mornings only from Monday to Friday, but the main branch in Bissau is open 8am to 6pm Monday to Saturday. Shops are generally open from 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 1pm Saturday. Some close for an hour or two in the early afternoon.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Guinea-Bissau Embassies & Consulates

In West Africa, you can get visas for Guinea-Bissau in The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal. For more details, see the relevant

PRACTICALITIES

- The national radio and TV stations broadcast in Portuguese. Most interesting for travellers is Radio Mavegro FM (100.0MHz), which combines music with hourly news bulletins in English from the BBC.
- Newspapers come and go quickly in Bissau. If you sit at one of the city's cafés or restaurants, a vendor will quickly offer you the latest options.
- Electricity supply is 220V and plugs are of the European two-round-pin variety.
- Guinea-Bissau uses the metric system.

country chapter. Outside Africa, Guinea-Bissau has very few embassies or consulates. These are more or less limited to the following: **Belgium** (20 2647 08 09; 70 Ave Franklin-Roosevelt, Brussels 1000)

France (🖻 01 45 26 18 51; 94 rue Saint Lazare, 75009 Paris)

Portugal (213 030 440; Rua Alcolena, 17, Lisbon 1400) USA (2019) 301-947 3958; 15929 Yukon Lane, Rockville, MD 20855)

Embassies & Consulates in Guinea-Bissau

The following embassies are all located in Bissau. Opening hours listed are for visa applications.

France (🖻 201312; cnr Ave de 14 Novembro & Ave do Brazil)

Gambia (☎ 203928; Ave de 14 Novembro; ♈ 8.30am-3pm Sat-Thu, 8.30am-12.30pm Fri) Located 1km northwest of Mercado de Bandim.

Guinea (🖻 201231; Rua 12; 🕑 8.30am-3pm Sat-Thu, 8.30am-1pm Fri) East of the central stadium.

Mauritania (203696; Rua Eduardo Mondlane) South of the central stadium.

Senegal (🖻 212944; off Praça dos Heróis Nacionais; 🕑 8am-5pm)

The consul for the UK and the Netherlands is Jan van Maanen (201224, 211529; fax 201265; Supermercardo Mavegro, Rua Eduardo Mondlane, Bissau). Contact the French embassy for information about visas for Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Bissau's **Carnival** (p375), which takes place in Bissau yearly in February or early March, is the country's biggest party, with music, masks, dancing and parades. Small festivals are held in other towns around the country at about the same time, or after the autumn harvest (around November); check locally for dates.

HEALTH

A certificate with proof of a yellow fever-vaccination is required of all travellers.

HOLIDAYS

Guinea-Bissau celebrates the following public holidays: New Year's Day 1 January Anniversary of the Death of Amilcar Cabral 20 January Women's Day 8 March Easter March/April Labour Day 1 May Pidjiguiti Day 3 August Independence Day 24 September Christmas Day 25 December

Islamic feasts such as Eid al-Fitr (at the end of Ramadan) and Tabaski are also celebrated. For dates, see the Africa Directory (p1106).

INTERNET ACCESS

There is internet access only in Bissau. Internet cafés charge US\$2 to US\$3 per hour for slow, dial-up connections.

LANGUAGE

Portuguese is the official language, though the common tongue is Crioulo – a mix of medieval Portuguese and local words. Most ethnic groups also preserve their own language.

MONEY

GUINEA-BISSAU

At the time of writing there were no ATMs in Guinea-Bissau, and credit cards are not accepted anywhere. Euros are the easiest currency to exchange. US dollars are more difficult, especially outside Bissau.

The unit of currency is the West African CFA franc. The principal bank of Guinea-Bissau is the Banco da Africa Ocidental (BAO). For exchanging money in Bissau – the only place you can exchange travellers cheques – see p375.

Tipping is optional.

POST

The postal service is reliable but slow – you're probably better off mailing from Senegal or

Gambia. If you decide to risk it, airmail letters cost US\$0.90.

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TELEPHONE

For local calls, look for 'posto publico' signs in corner grocery stores and other shops around the country. They allow you to make local calls, and sometimes international longdistance calls, though the latter can be punishingly expensive – US\$5 to US\$10 per minute, depending on the country. There is also a call centre at the main post office (p375) in Bissau.

It is easy to buy a mobile phone with a prepaid plan. SIM cards are also readily available. At the time of writing Areeba had the best rates.

There are no telephone area codes in Guinea-Bissau. All fixed-line numbers have six digits while mobile phone numbers have seven digits.

VISAS

All visitors, except nationals of Economic Community of West Africa States (Ecowas) countries, need visas. These are normally valid for 45 days and are issued for around US\$60 at embassies. They are generally routinely issued at Bissau's airport, but not at land borders, so plan ahead. To avoid hassles, get one before you arrive.

Visa Extensions

Extensions are easy to obtain at **Serviço de Estrangeiros** (Ave 14 de Novembro, Bissau), behind the main immigration building across from the Mercado de Bandim. For virtually all nationalities, 45-day visa extensions cost around US\$8 and are ready the same day if you go early.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following neighbouring countries can be obtained at their embassies in Bissau. However, note that Gambian and Senegalese visas can generally be obtained without delay at land border crossings as well as at airports.

Gambia Three-month single-entry visas cost US\$30 and require one photo; they're ready the same day if you go early.

Guinea Two-month multiple-entry visas cost US\$40 plus two photos and take a day or two to issue.

Senegal One-month multiple-entry visas cost US\$10 plus four photos and are issued in two days.

TRANSPORT IN GUINEA-BISSAU

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Guinea-Bissau's only international airport is on the outskirts of Bissau.

TAP Air Portugal and Air Luxor are the only airlines with direct flights from Europe to Bissau. Between them, Air Sénégal and TACV Cabo Verde Airlines operate seven flights per week between Bissau and Dakar. To fly between Bissau and anywhere else in Africa, connect in Dakar (Senegal).

The following airlines service Guinea-Bissau:

Air Luxor (LK; 🖻 206422; www.airluxor.com; Ave 24 de Setembro) Hub: Lisbon.

Air Sénégal International (V7; 205211; www.air -senegal-international.com; Rua Osualdo Vieira) Hub: Dakar. TACV Cabo Verde Airlines (VR; 206087; www.tacv .com; Ave Amilcar Cabral) Hub: Praia. TAP Air Portugal (TP; 201359; www.flytap.com;

Praça dos Heróis Nacionais) Hub: Lisbon.

DEPARTURE TAX

There is a US\$20 airport departure tax for international flights, which is usually included in your ticket.

Bush taxis usually go to the border daily from Gabú and Koundara (US\$5). It can take all day to cover this 100km stretch. A lesstravelled route, open only in the dry season, links southeastern Guinea-Bissau and western Guinea via Quebo and Boké.

SENEGAL

Most overland travel between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau passes through Ziguinchor and the Guinean border town of São Domingos, though the border regularly closes due to government clashes with Cassamance separatists. Check safety conditions carefully. A bush taxi between Bissau and Ziguinchor costs US\$9.50 per person.

You can also cross the border between Farim and Tanaf by (slow-going) bush taxi. You may also be able to get transport from Gabú to Tambacounda (via Vélingara), though road conditions are poor and journeys long.

GETTING AROUND

Air

At the time of writing there was no domestic air service.

Bicycle

Largely flat and with little traffic or crime problems, biking is a great way to get around Guinea-Bissau. There are no formal bike rentals, but asking around will usually yield results quickly.

Boat

Canoas connect Bissau with the Bijagós, with regularly scheduled boats to Bubaque and Bolama and occasional boats to other islands. See p376 for more information about travel to the Bijagós.

Car & Motorcycle

Main roads between Bissau and Bafatá, Gabú and Ziguinchor are all in decent condition. However, all other roads are seriously degraded and often impassable without 4WD – especially during the rainy season.

Minibus & Bush Taxi

The main roads between Bissau and the towns of Bafatá, Gabú and São Domingos are all paved and at the time of writing in good condition. Public transport consists mainly of minibuses (almost always painted blue and yellow) and Peugeot 504 bush taxis, often called *sept-places* (seven-seaters). *Kandongas* (shared pick-up trucks) ply rural routes. Mornings (before 8am) are always the best time to get transport. Fares from Bissau to Gabú (around 200km) are US\$5.50 by Peugeot 504, US\$4 by minibus and US\$3 by *kandonga*. © Lonely Planet Publications 382

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Liberia

After almost two decades of war, Liberia – a lush, rainforested country draped across West Africa's southern flank - seems at last to have found some breathing room. With Africa's first woman president at the helm, the peace, while still fragile, is holding and Liberians have thrown themselves with gusto into the work of rebuilding their shattered land.

If Liberia does stabilise and open up for travel, it will offer intrepid adventurers a fascinating glimpse into what was previously a wonderfully hospitable and fascinatingly enigmatic society. Liberia's artistic traditions - especially carved masks, dance and storytelling - rivalled those of anywhere on the continent, and traditional culture was strong. This was especially true in the country's interior, where secret initiation societies played a central role in growing up, and today still serve as important repositories of traditional knowledge and life skills.

Liberia's natural attractions are equally impressive. The country's dense, humid rainforests some of the most extensive in West Africa - are alive with the screeching and twittering of hundreds of birds, who are kept company by forest elephants, pyqmy hippos and other wildlife padding around the forest floor. Along the coast, deserted white-sand beaches alternate with humid river deltas and tranquil tidal lagoons, while inland plateaus rise to verdant hill country on the borders of Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea.

For now though, most of this cultural and natural wealth remains inaccessible to visitors, and independent travel outside of Monrovia is not considered safe. Expect changes soon, but meanwhile get an update on local security conditions before setting your plans.

FAST FACTS

- Area 111,370 sg km
- ATMs None
- Borders Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone
- Budget From US\$50 per day
- Capital Monrovia
- Languages English and more than 20 indigenous languages
- Money Liberian dollar; US\$1 = L\$49
- Population 3.3 million
- Seasons Dry (November to April), wet (May to October)
- Telephone Country code 🖻 231; international access code 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC

LIBERIA

Visa Costs US\$50 to US\$100: must be obtained in advance

HIGHLIGHTS

- Silver Beach (p386) Relax on this surfpounded and palm-fringed stretch of sand just minutes from central Monrovia.
- Sapo National Park (p387) Wander under the lush, humid canopy of one of West Africa's last remaining rainforests.
- Monrovia (p386) Stroll through central Monrovia, seeing what street vendors have on offer and getting a feel for the beat on the street.
- **Liberians** (p385) Mingle with the locals over a plate of *fufu* and sauce and a cold Club beer, or cheering on the Lone Stars at a soccer match.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Monrovia is one of Africa's two wettest capitals (Freetown in Sierra Leone is the other), with annual rainfall averaging more than 4500mm here and along the coast. Temperatures range from 23°C to 32°C in Monrovia, and slightly higher inland, though high humidity often makes it feel much warmer.

The best time to visit is during the November to April dry season.

ITINERARIES

Three Days: Three days is just enough time to get a taste of Monrovia (p386), including relaxing at the nearby beaches. In town, don't miss strolling through Waterside Market (p386) and enjoying a sundowner at Mamba Point (p387).

HOW MUCH?

- Souvenir basket US\$2
- Kilo of bananas US\$0.40
- Fufu and soup US\$2.80
- Short taxi ride US\$0.50
- Soda US\$0.50

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- 1L petrol US\$3.20
- 1L bottled water US\$1
- Large bottle of Club beer US\$1.50
- Souvenir T-shirt You'll be lucky if you find one!
- Potato greens sauce with rice US\$0.75

WARNING

Liberia's peace is still fragile, and the country is not geared for tourism. In general, independent travel outside of Monrovia is not vet possible. Before setting off, get a briefing from people who know the situation; embassies and resident expats are the best sources.

Given the current travel restrictions, this chapter was updated as a 'desk update' from afar, with the generous assistance of various people in Liberia. We've tried to make it as accurate as possible, but the perishable information should be treated as a general guide, rather than hard facts.

One Week Security situation permitting, Sapo National Park (p387) is the obvious destination. Allow at least five days for the round trip.

HISTORY

After being populated for a mere few thousand years, Liberia struck American abolitionists as an ideal place to resettle freed slaves. In 1822, the first group stepped off the boat at Providence Island, Monrovia. They saw themselves as part of a mission to bring civilisation and Christianity to Africa, but their numbers were soon depleted by tropical diseases and hostile indigenous residents, who resented being dominated by the new arrivals.

The surviving settlers, known as Americo-Liberians, declared an independent republic in 1847. Yet, fatally for the new republic's future, citizenship excluded indigenous peoples, and every president until 1980 was of American freed-slave ancestry. For nearly a century, Liberia foundered economically and politically while the indigenous population suffered under a form of forced labour that would have been called slavery anywhere else.

During William Tubman's presidency (1944-71) the tides began to change. Thanks to the image of stability that Tubman was able to project, foreign investment flowed into the country, and for several decades Liberia sustained sub-Saharan Africa's highest growth rate. Firestone and other American companies made major investments, and Tubman earned praise as the 'maker of modern Liberia'.

Yet the influx of new money exacerbated existing social inequalities, and hostilities

between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous population worsened. While indigenous Liberians were finally granted the right to vote in 1963, the concession was too little too late. The government continued to be controlled by about a dozen inter-related Americo-Liberian families, and corruption was rampant.

Coup d'Etat & Years of Darkness

LIBERIA

Resentment began to simmer, and in April 1980 William Tolbert (who had succeeded Tubman as president) was overthrown and killed in a coup led by uneducated, mastersergeant Samuel Doe. For the very first time, Liberia had a ruler who wasn't an Americo-Liberian, giving the indigenous population a taste of political power and an opportunity

100 km LIBERIA 60 miles Macenta Guéckédou SIERRA Voinjama LEONE Koindu To Freetown Kolahun (200km GUINEA Wologizi CÔTE Rang D'IVOIRE OLola N'zérékoré Torzor Nimba Mountains Yekepa 🗙 LOFA Goodhouse Hill • Mar Bomi Hills Gbalatoah GRAND CAPE Gbarnga MOUNT BONG To Abidiar Tubmanburg (Waterside) NIMBA (485km Dueko ROM Robertsport^Q Guig Toulépleu o Toetown MONROVIA GRAND BASSA B MONTSERRADO Marshall Zwedru MARGIB RIVERCESS Buchanar SINOE GRAND GEDEH Putu Range Kahnwiekehr Gree To San Pédro ATLANTIC OCEAN Grand Ces Tabou Harpe MARYLAND

for vengeance. The 28-year-old Doe shocked the world by ordering 13 ex-ministers to be publicly executed on a beach in Monrovia.

While the coup gave power to the indigenous population, it was widely condemned regionally and internationally. Relations with neighbouring African states soon thawed. However, the post-coup flight of capital, coupled with ongoing corruption, caused Liberia's economy to plummet.

Doe struggled to maintain his grip on power, but to no avail. Opposition forces began to gain strength and intertribal fighting broke out.

Civil War

On Christmas Eve 1989, several hundred rebels led by Charles Taylor (former head of the Doe government's procurement agency) launched an invasion from Côte d'Ivoire. Doe's troops arrived shortly thereafter, indiscriminately killing hundreds of unarmed civilians, raping women and burning villages. By mid-1990, Taylor's forces controlled most of the countryside. Much of Monrovia was under the forces of rebel leader Prince Johnson, and Doe was holed up in his mansion.

Liberia lay in ruins. Refugees streamed into neighbouring countries, US warships were anchored off the coast and a West African peacekeeping force (Ecomog) was despatched in an attempt to keep the warring factions apart. Refusing to surrender, Doe and many of his supporters were finally wiped out by Johnson's forces. With both Johnson and Taylor claiming the presidency, Ecomog forces installed their own candidate, Amos Sawyer, as head of an interim government. Taylor's forces continued to occupy the countryside, while remnants of Doe's army and Johnson's followers were encamped within Monrovia.

Following a series of failed peace accords interspersed with factional fighting, 1996 elections brought Charles Taylor to the presidency with a large majority, in large part because many Liberians feared the consequences if he lost.

Yet the situation remained tenuous. By late 1998, all former faction leaders except Taylor were living in exile, and power was increasingly consolidated in the presidency. In 1999, rebel-led warfare broke out near the Guinea border, followed by devastating outbreaks of fighting in 2002 and 2003. Finally, in August 2003, with rebel groups controlling most of the country, and under heavy pressure from the international community, Charles Taylor went into exile in Nigeria. A transitional government was established, leading to elections in late 2005.

Liberia Todav

In a hotly contested run-off vote between former World Bank economist Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and international soccer star George Weah, Johnson-Sirleaf won the presidency, thereby also becoming Africa's first female president. Since then, she has been overseeing Liberia's reconstruction with aplomb. But the tasks facing the country are massive: completion of the disarmament process and refugee resettlement; solidification of the still-fragile peace and rebuilding government, economy and infrastructure. Yet most Liberians are up-

beat. While optimism for the future is tempered by the tragic realities of the country's recent past, the future, on the whole, is looking much brighter these days.

CULTURE

If there's any word that characterises Liberians, it's resilience. Here, in this war-ravaged land, almost half of the Liberians were displaced from their homes during the long years of conflict, and many witnessed unspeakable atrocities. Yet despite all the suffering, there's a remarkable air of peppiness, especially on the streets of Monrovia, and a sense of cautious hope that the time has finally come to start rebuilding.

Want to take a peek inside a typical home? It's not such an easy task these days, as most Liberians are just starting to rebuild theirs. But slowly the rhythms of daily life are returning. Produce from rural areas is making its way to Monrovia's markets, returning residents are seeking zinc to roof their newly rebuilt houses, and the hospitality for which Liberians are renowned is alive and well.

PEOPLE

The vast majority of Liberians are of indigenous origin, belonging to more than a dozen major tribal groups, including the Kpelle in the centre, the Bassa around Buchanan and the Mandingo (Mandinka) in the north. Americo-Liberians account for barely 5% of the total. There's also an economically powerful Lebanese community in Monrovia.

Close to half of the population are Christians and about 20% are Muslim, with the remainder following traditional religions.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Liberia has long been famed for its masks, especially those of the Gio in the northeast, including the gunyege mask (which shelters a power-giving spirit), and the chimpanzee-like kagle mask. The Bassa around Buchanan are renowned for their gela masks, which often have elaborately carved coiffures, always with an odd number of plaits.

ENVIRONMENT

Liberia's low-lying coastal plain is intersected by marshes, creeks and tidal lagoons, and bisected by at least nine major rivers. Inland is a densely forested plateau rising to low mountains in the northeast. The highest point is

SECRET SOCIETIES

Liberia is famous for its secret societies, called poro for men and sande for women. They each have rites of passage and other ceremonies that are used to educate young people in tribal ways, folklore and general life skills, and they have played an important role in preserving traditional culture. In the countryside you may see initiates, who are easily recognised by their white-painted faces and bodies, and their shaved heads.

Zoes (poro society leaders) also wield significant political influence, settling disputes, levying punishments and controlling the activities of traditional medicinal practitioners. A village chief who doesn't have the support of the poro on important decisions can expect trouble enforcing those decisions.

Goodhouse Hill (1362m), in the Nimba range bordering Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

Liberia's rainforests, which now cover about 40% of the country, comprise a critical part of the Guinean Forests of West Africa Hotspot - an exceptionally biodiverse area stretching across 11 countries in the region. In 2003 the Nimba Nature Reserve was declared - contiguous with the Guinean-Côte d'Ivorian Mont Nimba Strict Nature Reserve (a Unesco World Heritage Site).

FOOD & DRINK

The rice or a cassava-based staple (called *fufu*, dumboy or GB) is traditionally eaten with a soup or sauce made with greens and palm oil, and sometimes also meat or fish. Other popular dishes include palava sauce (made with plato leaf, dried fish or meat and palm oil), jollof rice and palm butter (a sauce made from palm nuts).

MONROVIA

pop 1 million

LIBERIA

Monrovia, sprawled across a narrow peninsula between the Mesurado River and the sea, has suffered badly during the past two decades. But if you can overlook the bullet-scarred building shells, the city has an unmistakable pep and an unbending determination to rebuild. As African capitals go it's also quite an approachable

place, with an amenable small-town ambience and a lively restaurant and bar scene. Pick a day when it's not raining, find some Liberian friends, and soon you'll forget you're walking around in what was only recently a war zone.

ORIENTATION

The heart of town is around Benson and Randall Sts, and along Broad St, where you'll find most shops and businesses. Southwest of here at Mamba Point is Monrovia's tiny diplomatic enclave. To the southeast is Sinkor, extending several kilometres until reaching Elwa junction and Red Light Motor Park.

INFORMATION

There are internet cafés, foreign-exchange bureaus and banks around Broad St. Charif Pharmacy (Randall St)

Gritaco Travel (🖻 06-514 009, 06-831 174; cnr Broad & Randall Sts) Regional and international flight bookings. Liberia Telecom (Lynch St; 🕅 8am-10pm) You can make international calls.

Main post office (cnr Randall & Ashmun Sts) St Joseph's Catholic Hospital (Tubman Blvd) For dire emergencies; about 7km southeast of town. United World Travel Services (UWTS: 2006-539 366. 06-531 604; Ste 1, 58b Broad St) Regional and international flight bookings.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Use caution when going out in the evening, and get an update on security from your embassy or resident expats when you arrive.

SIGHTS

The National Museum (Broad St; admission free; 🕅 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a shadow of its former self, with a handful of dusty masks and drums and a Masonic grand master's throne once used by William Tubman. The Masonic Temple (Benson St) itself (now ruined) was once Monrovia's major landmark.

Chaotic Waterside Market (Water St) offers almost everything for sale, including colourful textiles. Just opposite is Providence Island, where the first expedition of freed American slaves landed in 1822.

The beautiful beaches south of Monrovia fill up with locals on weekends. Before jumping in, get local advice, as currents can be dangerous. One of the most popular is Silver Beach, 15km southeast of town off the airport road, with a restaurant, craft vendors, showers, toilets, and umbrellas for hire.

SLEEPING & EATING

Metropolitan Hotel (🖻 06-510 853; Broad St; r US\$45-75; 🕄) One of the few low-end options, with reasonable rooms and TV.

MY Hotels Monrovia (🖻 06-454 068; monrovia@my hotelsresorts.com; cnr Carey & Randall Sts; s/d/ste US\$90/150/200; 🕄 🛄) New and centrally located, this hotel has a good restaurant and cable TV.

Mamba Point Hotel (🕿 06-544 544, 06-440 000; mambapointhotel@yahoo.com; UN Dr, Mamba Point; s/d/ste US\$120/160/175; 🔀 🛄) A favourite with journalists and business travellers, this is Monrovia's best, with satellite TV, wi-fi and sea breezes.

Krystal Oceanview Hotel (🖻 06-510 424; UN Dr, Mamba Point; s/d US\$130/180; 🔀 🔲 😰) Well located and overlooking the sea, with reasonable rooms and a waterside restaurant-bar.

Mama Sheriff (cnr Carey & Lynch Sts; meals US\$1.50-3) A popular local haunt with heaping portions of cassava leaf and other favourites at rockbottom prices.

Aunty Nana (Robert St; meals US\$7.50; 🕑 noon-7pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun) Fufu soup, jollof rice and other Liberian dishes, plus inexpensive beers.

Beirut (Center St; meze US\$3-8, meals US\$10-26; 🔀) A Monrovia institution, with meze and good Lebanese dishes.

Sale Pepe (2006-454 068; MY Hotels Monrovia, Carev St: meals US\$15-20) Fine Italian dining.

For self-catering, try Abi Jaoudi (Randall St; Sam-8pm Mon-Fri) or Stop & Shop (Randall St).

SAPO NATIONAL PARK

The 1808-sq-km Sapo - Liberia's only national park - protects some of West Africa's last remaining primary rainforest, as well as forest elephants, pygmy hippos, chimpanzees and more. After much wartime devastation, the park is finally getting a chance. Work has started on rebuilding infrastructure and on enforcing the park's protected status.

There are no commercial tours into Sapo, although this is expected to change soon. For updated information, contact the Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL; scnlib2001@yahoo.com; Monrovia Zoo, Larkpase), Conservation International (www.conservation.org) or email fpi@forestpa rtnersinternational.org.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Roberts International Airport (Robertsfield) is 60km southeast of Monrovia. Arrange a pick-up with your hotel.

Bush taxis for the Sierra Leone border leave from Duala Motor Park, 9km northeast of town. Transport for most other destinations, including the borders of Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, leaves from Red Light Motor Park, 15km northeast of the centre.

Shared taxis operate on a zone system, with prices ranging from US\$0.10 to US\$0.50. Private hire taxis around the centre cost from US\$2.

THE COAST

Once a relaxing beach town, Robertsport is now a tiny fishing community with no infrastructure, but some beautiful beaches. The access road often floods during the rains; get an update first in Monrovia.

About 125km southeast of Monrovia, Buchanan is Liberia's second port. Southeast of town past the old Lamco compound are some attractive beaches, though take care, as the fringing bush was mined. Bush taxis run daily to/from Monrovia (US\$5, three hours) and several times weekly in the dry season to/from River Cess.

Greenville (also known as Sinoe) is a logging centre, and the jumping-off point for excursions to Sapo National Park (see boxed text, left). The main route to/from Monrovia is via Buchanan along the coastal road.

Surrounded by beautiful countryside at Liberia's southeastern tip, Harper is the capital of Maryland (once a separate republic), and boasts the remains of some fine old houses, including former-President William Tubman's mansion. Nowadays it's a shell of what it once was, although the surrounding countryside is attractive. Allow three days for road access from Monrovia via Tappita and Zwedru.

THE INTERIOR

Formerly Charles Taylor's wartime centre of operations, **Gbarnga** became virtually a second capital. About 10km southwest of town along the Monrovia road is **Phebe**, the site of Cuttington College and the ruins of the oncerenowned Africana Museum. Also nearby are pretty Kpatawe Falls (30km northwest) and

Tolbert Farms, former-President William Tolbert's home (40km north). Jalk Enterprises Restaurant & Store (Josephine's; Phebe; r without bathroom US\$20) offers basic rooms and has a restaurant. Frequent bush taxis leave from Gbarnga to Monrovia (US\$10, three hours), Ganta (US\$3, 1¹/₂ hours) and Phebe Junction (US\$0.60).

Ganta (Gompa City) is a bustling town 2km from the Guinean border. There's one basic hotel, plus a few chop houses with simple meals. Bush taxis go daily to Gbarnga (US\$3, 11/2 hours), Monrovia (US\$13, five hours), Sanniquellie (US\$3, one hour) and the Guinean border (US\$0.30), and several times weekly to Tappita and Zwedru.

Tiny **Sanniquellie** was the birthplace of the Organisation of African Unity. Along the main road you can still see the building where William Tubman, Sekou Touré and Kwame Nkrumah met in 1957. Apart from a basic hotel and a few chop houses, there are no facilities. Bush taxis for the Côte d'Ivoire border (US\$4) depart from north of the market. while those for Ganta (US\$3) and Monrovia (US\$16) leave from the other end.

The now-destroyed, iron-ore mining town of Yekepa has a pleasantly cooler climate, and views of Goodhouse Hill and the surrounding Nimba Range. There are no facilities. The Guinean border is 2km away, traversed by foot or moto-taxis. To get to Côte d'Ivoire, go first to Sanniquellie.

LIBERIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Monrovia has a decent selection of hotels, most are expensive (from around US\$50 for a 'budget' double, US\$80 to US\$100 for midrange, and from US\$150 for top end). Elsewhere, there's the occasional guesthouse.

PRACTICALITIES

LIBERIA

- Plugs are US-style (two flat pins) and voltage is 110V, but this is slowly changing as 220V systems are being installed.
- Local dailies include The Inquirer, The Analyst and The News.
- Weights and measures follow the imperial system.

BOOKS

Journey Without Maps is Graham Greene's classic tale of adventuring across Liberia on foot in the 1930s.

For a gripping take on the war, look for The Final Days of Dr Doe by Lynda Schuster (published in Granta 48, 1994).

BUSINESS HOURS

See p1102 for standard business hours. Banks are open from 9.30am to noon Monday to Thursday and until 12.30pm on Friday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The security situation in Liberia is fragile and there are still weapons around. Independent travel outside of Monrovia is not yet possible. Before setting off, get a briefing from your embassy or resident expats.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Liberian Embassies & Consulates

Belaium (🖻 02-414 7317, 02-664 1653; 50 Ave du Château, 1081 Brussels)

Côte d'Ivoire (🕿 20-324636; Immeuble Taleb, Ave Delafosse)

France (2 01-47 63 58 55; libem.paris@wanadoo.fr; 12 Place du General Catroux, 75017 Paris) Germany (🖻 0228-923 9173; Mainzerstrasse 259, 53179 Bonn)

Guinea (🕿 012-676526; Rue DI 258, Landreah) Sierra Leone (230991; 2 Spur Rd, Wilberforce)

UK (🖻 020-7388 5489; 23 Fitzroy Square, London WIT 6EW) USA (202-723 0437; www.embassyofliberia.org; 5201 16th St NW, Washington, DC 20011)

Embassies & Consulates in Liberia

Diplomatic representations in Monrovia include the following. Canadians and Australians should contact their high commissions in Abidjan (p312) and Accra (p351) respectively.

Côte d'Ivoire (🖻 06-519 138; 8th St, Sinkor) Germany (🕿 06-438 365: Tubman Blvd Sinkor) Ghana (🖻 06-518 269; 15th St, Sinkor) Guinea (cnr 24th St & Tubman Blvd, Sinkor) Nigeria (🖻 06-527872; Nigeria House, Tubman Blvd, Congo Town)

Sierra Leone (🗃 06-515 061, 06-515 058; 15th St, Sinkor) UK (chalkleyroy@aol.com; Clara Town, UN Drive, Bushrod Island) Honorary consul, emergency assistance only; otherwise contact the British High Commission in Freetown (Sierra Leone: p509).

111 United Nations Dr, Mamba Point)

HEALTH

A valid vellow-fever vaccination certificate is required to enter Liberia.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January Armed Forces Day 11 February Decoration Day Second Wednesday in March JJ Roberts' Birthday 15 March Fast & Prayer Day 11 April National Unification Day 14 May Independence Day 26 July Flag Day 24 August Thanksgiving Day First Thursday in November Tubman Day 29 November Christmas Day 25 December

INTERNET ACCESS

There are internet cafés in Monrovia, but none elsewhere.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Liberian 'unity' dollar (L\$). US dollars are also widely accepted.

Money can be changed at the airport, foreign-exchange bureaus in Monrovia and banks. Avoid changing money on the street. The best rates are for the US dollar, though other major currencies are also accepted. Travellers cheques are virtually useless. Credit cards are not accepted anywhere, and there are no ATMs.

TELEPHONE

The country code is 231, and the international access code is
00. There are no area codes. Rates for intercontinental calls start at US\$3 per minute. The national telephone network is defunct, with mobile phones (prefixes 04, 05, 06 or 07) the main way to connect in Monrovia. Mobile connections are also available in most major upcountry destinations.

VISAS

Visas are required by almost everyone and cost US\$54 (ÛS\$100 for US citizens) for one month single entry. You also need two photos, a medical statement of good health and proof of financial resources.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be extended at the Bureau of Immigration (Broad St; 💬 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) in Monrovia.

Visas for Onward Travel

You can get visas for Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Guinea in Monrovia. Embassies (see opposite) are open from 9am to noon and visas are generally issued within two days.

TRANSPORT IN LIBERIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Airlines servicing Monrovia include the following. Gritaco Travel or UWTS (see p386) can assist with bookings.

Astraeus Airlines (www.flyastraeus.com) Twice weekly between London (Gatwick) and Monrovia.

Bellview Airlines (🖻 06-543-133, 06-553 928) Three flights weekly to/from Lagos (Nigeria) via Accra (Ghana) and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire).

Slok Air International (🗃 06-590 178) Three flights weekly to/from Dakar (Senegal) via Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Banjul (The Gambia); three flights weekly to/from Accra (Ghana).

SN Brussels Airline (2 06-590 991, 06-512 147; www .flvsn.com) Three flights weekly between Brussels (Belgium) and Monrovia via Freetown (Sierra Leone). Weasua Air Transport (🖻 06-556 693) Two flights weekly to/from Abidian (Côte d'Ivoire).

DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax for all flights is US\$25, payable with exact change, US dollars cash only.

Land **CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

Border crossings include those just beyond Sanniquellie, and east of Harper, towards Tabou (Côte d'Ivoire). However, overland travel, especially on the Côte d'Ivoire side of these borders, is currently not possible unless arranged through a travel agency (which requires an expensive permit on the Côte d'Ivoire side). Before making any plans get an update on the security situation on both sides of the border.

Previously, buses ran several times a week from Monrovia to Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) and on to Accra (Ghana) via Sanniquellie (US\$40 to Abidjan, US\$60 to Accra, plus approximately US\$20 for border fees). However, all cross-border bus services are currently suspended.

Daily bush taxis go from Monrovia to Ganta and Sanniquellie, from where it was possible during better times to continue in stages to Danané (Côte d'Ivoire)and Man (Côte d'Ivoire; 12 to 15 hours). Although here, too, independent travel on the Côte d'Ivoire side of the border currently isn't feasible.

In the south, a road connects Harper with Tabou, where (once the security situation settles down) you cross the Cavally River in a ferry or canoe for taxis to Tabou and onward transport to San Pédro (Côte d'Ivoire) and Abidjan.

GUINEA

The main crossing is just north of Ganta, with smaller borders also at Yekepa and Voinjama.

Bush taxis run daily from Monrovia to Ganta (US\$15), from where you'll need to walk or take a *moto-taxi* 2km to the border. Once across, there are frequent taxis to N'zérékoré (Guinea). Monrovia to Conakry (Guinea; US\$35) takes two to three days.

It's possible to go in the dry season via Voinjama to Macenta (Guinea), changing vehicles at the border. The road from Gbarnga north to Zorzor and Voinjama is under rehabilitation; allow two days.

From Yekepa it's a few kilometres to the border, from where there are Guinean vehicles to Lola (Guinea; US\$1.50, one hour).

For boats between Conakry and Monrovia (at least 36 hours), inquire at Monrovia's port. Fishing boats run sporadically between Harper and San Pédro (Côte d'Ivoire).

SIERRA LEONE

The main crossing is at Bo (Waterside). There are frequent bush taxis between Monrovia and the border (two hours), from where it's easy to find onward transport to Kenema (Sierra Leone; eight rough hours further), and on to Bo (Sierra Leone) and Freetown (Sierra Leone).

GETTING AROUND Boat

Slow fishing boats link coastal cities, though they're often overcrowded and dangerous. Charter boats from Monrovia sometimes have room for passengers; inquire at the Freeport.

Bush Taxi & Bus

The main form of public transport is bush taxis, which go daily from Monrovia to Buchanan (US\$5, three hours); Gbarnga, Ganta, Sanniquellie (US\$16, six hours) and the Sierra Leone border (US\$5, 2½ hours), and several times weekly between Monrovia and other destinations. Many routes (especially those connecting Zwedru with Greenville and Harper) are restricted during the rainy season. Minivans (called 'buses') also ply most major routes, although they're more crowded and dangerous than bush taxis, and best avoided.

Car & Motorcycle

Vehicle rental can be arranged through better hotels from about US\$100 per day for a 4WD. Expect frequent stops at security checkpoints.

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Mali

Mali is the jewel in West Africa's crown, a destination that has all the right ingredients.

The country occupies the heart of a territory that once supported Africa's greatest empires and is rich with historical resonance. This history bequeathed to Mali some of its most dramatic attractions – the legendary city of Timbuktu, whose name has never lost its allure for travellers, and the gloriously improbable mosque at Djenné are simply two among many.

Mali's history has always been a story of its deserts and rivers. The lucrative trade routes of the Sahara once made the region among the world's richest, and the Niger, one of the grand old rivers of Africa, is still the lifeblood of the country; to journey along its waters (preferably on a slow boat to Timbuktu) is one of the continent's great adventures.

Not far from the riverbank, the extraordinary Falaise de Bandiagara rises up from the plains, and shelters one of West Africa's most intriguing peoples – the Dogon, whose villages and complex cultural rituals still cling to the edge of rocky cliffs. If you can visit one place in Mali, go to the Dogon Country: it's utterly unforgettable.

But all of Mali is alive with a fascinating cultural mix of peoples, from the nomadic Tuareg people of the Sahara to the Niger fishing societies of the Bozo. As a result, everywhere you go there are fascinating ceremonies, world-famous musical traditions with strong roots in the local soil, and traditional cultures as accessible to travellers as any you'll find in Africa.

FAST FACTS

- Area 1,240,140 sq km
- ATMs None that work
- Borders Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal
- Budget US\$25 per day
- Capital Bamako
- Languages French, Bambara
- Money West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 10.6 million
- Seasons Hot (October to February), very hot (April to June), wet (July to August)
- **Telephone** Country code **2**23; international access code **2**00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visa Renewable five-day visa available at border for CFA15,000 or one-month visas at any Malian embassy

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HIGHLIGHTS

MAL

- Dogon Country (p410) Trek down the Falaise de Bandiagara and through the timeless villages.
- **Djenné** (p402) Haggle with locals on market day (Monday) beneath the shadow of the incomparable mosque – the largest mud building in the world.
- **Niger River** (p404) Take a slow boat up the river and into the culturally rich inland delta.
- **Timbuktu** (p406) Discover the legendary city, and stand amid the solitude of the Sahara watching a salt caravan arrive.
- **Bamako** (p395) Dance to the infectious rhythms of the country's world-famous musicians.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Mali is wettest between July and August, although the rainy season - when torrential downpours and thunderstorms are preceded by strong winds - runs from June to September. It's hottest between April and June, when temperatures frequently exceed 40°C. September and October are also extremely hot, and Timbuktu in particular can be unpleasant. From November through January, the best time to visit, the *alize* wind blows cooler air from the northeast, keeping daytime temperatures in the 30s - Malians refer to this period as the cold season! From January to June, the hot and dusty harmattan blows, irritating throats, and on some days reducing visibility to a few hundred metres. River trips are usually only possible until December, after which a lack of rain sees water levels drop.

ITINERARIES

Two Weeks Organise your time so that you don't miss Djenné's Monday market (p402), where the great mud-mosque is a stunning backdrop. Continue northeast to the lively port town of Mopti (p403), an excellent base for Niger River boat trips (p404), especially to the legendary city of Timbuktu (p406), and forays into Dogon Country (p410) - three days is a minimum for the latter. Try also to pass through Bamako (p395) on a Friday or Saturday, when the Malian capital rocks. • One Month A one-month itinerary could include extra days in Djenné (p402), which is lovely and quiet once the clamour of the market subsides, as well

HOW MUCH?

- Bamako-Mopti bus ride US\$1.45
- Mopti-Timbuktu on Comanav ferry (1st class) US\$89
- Sunset camel ride into the Sahara US\$18
- Internet connection US\$1.80-2.70 per hour
- Guide to Dogon Country US\$17-27

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.17
- 1L of bottled water US\$1.35
- Bottle of Castel beer small/large US\$0.90/1.80
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$15
- Portion of riz arachide (rice with peanut sauce) US\$0.90

as up to 10 days of outstanding Dogon Country trekking (p412). Your boat journey to Timbuktu could even continue beyond, to the fascinating and remote outpost of Gao (p409) – a handy staging post on the road to Niger – while a longer Saharan camel trek (p406) from Timbuktu is another option for lovers of the desert.

HISTORY

Rock paintings and carvings in the Gao and Timbuktu regions suggest that northern Mali has been inhabited since 50,000 BC, when the Sahara was fertile grassland across which roamed an abundance of wildlife. By 5000 BC farming was taking place, and the use of iron began around 500 BC. By 300 BC, large organised settlements had developed, most notably at Djenné.

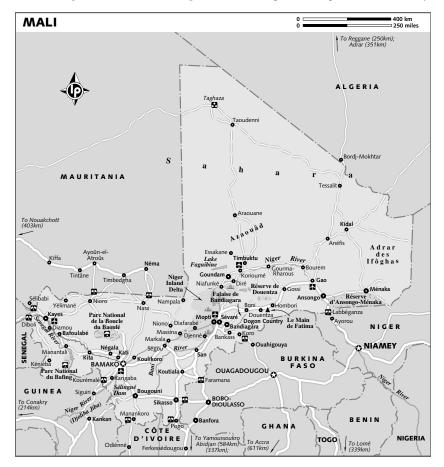
By the 6th century AD, the lucrative trans-Saharan trade in gold, salt and slaves had begun, facilitating the rise of Mali's three great empires. The Empire of Ghana covered much of what is now Mali and Senegal until the 11th century. It was followed by the great Empire of Mali, which in the 14th century stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to present-day Nigeria. During the Empire of Mali's golden age, Timbuktu was developed as a great centre of commerce and Islamic culture. The Songhaï Empire, with its capital at Gao, came next, but this empire was destroyed by a Moroccan mercenary army in the late 16th century.

By the end of the 19th century, Mali was part of French West Africa. Remnants of this colonial era that are still visible today include the huge Office du Niger irrigation scheme near Ségou, and the 1200km Dakar–Bamako train line, the longest rail span in West Africa; both were built with forced labour. Such vast infrastructure projects notwithstanding, Mali remained the poor neighbour of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. France's chief interest was in 'developing' Mali as a source of cheap labour and cash crops (rice and cotton) for export.

Independence

Mali became independent in 1960 (for a few months it was federated with Senegal). Its first president, Modibo Keita, embarked on an unsuccessful period of one-party state socialism. Ambitious planning schemes went awry, the economy wilted, and Keita was, somewhat humiliatingly, forced to ask the French to support the Malian franc. Eventually, in 1968, Keita was overthrown by a group of army officers led by Moussa Traoré.

During the Cold War, Mali was firmly in the Soviet camp. Continual food shortages were exacerbated by droughts (which did devastate the northern regions in 1968–74 and again in 1980–85), but were largely due to government mismanagement and government instability.



From 1970 to 1990 there were five coup attempts, and the early 1980s were characterised by strikes, often violently suppressed.

But it was not all bad news: thanks to market liberalisation (and adequate rainfall), in 1987 Mali produced its first grain surplus.

The Tuareg uprising began in 1990, and later that year a peaceful pro-democracy demonstration drew 30,000 people onto the streets of Bamako. Following strikes and further demonstrations, on 17 March 1991, security forces met students and other demonstrators with machine-gun fire. Three days of rioting followed, during which 150 people were killed. The army, led by General Amadou Toumani Touré (General ATT as he was known), took control. Moussa Traoré was arrested, and around 60 senior government figures were executed.

Touré established an interim transitional government and gained considerable respect from Malians and the outside world when he resigned a year later, keeping his promise to hold multiparty elections.

Alpha Oumar Konaré (a scientist and writer) was elected president in June 1992. Though a widely respected and capable leader who oversaw considerable political and economic liberalisation, Konaré had to deal with a 50% devaluation of the CFA during the 1990s (which resulted in rioting and protest) and an attempted coup. In sharp contrast to many African leaders, Konaré stood down in 2002, as the new constitution he'd helped draft dictated; he is now Chairman of the African Union. The former general, Amadou Touré, was rewarded for his patience and elected as president in April 2002.

Mali Today

On many fronts Mali is a model West African democracy, one in which the overall health of the system has proven more enduring than the ambitions of individual leaders. It has become Africa's third-largest gold producer, which offers hope for a more prosperous future and the prospect of a long-overdue diversification of the economy – agriculture currently accounts for almost half of Mali's GDP, and cotton provides 40% of exports.

Malian-style democracy may have fostered stability and peace, and received international acclaim, but Mali remains one of the poorest countries on earth – almost one-third of Malians are malnourished, 90% of the population lives on less than US\$2 a day, and adult literacy is just 19%. The locust invasion and drought of 2004 served as a reminder that Mali is still as dependent on international-aid money as it is on good rains. Widespread corruption also remains a problem and, for all the international momentum for debt relief in Africa, more government money in Mali is still spent on debt-servicing than on education.

CULTURE

Malians are open and tolerant. Ethnic identity is still important, but where once there was enmity, in most cases a *cousinage* or 'joking cousins' relationship now exists. People from different groups commonly tease and poke fun at ethnic stereotypes and past deeds, to everyone's enjoyment. The only exception is the Tuareg, who remain a people apart.

In Mali, personal relationships are important, friendships are things of great value, families are the glue that holds everything together, and hospitality and generosity seem to increase in inverse proportion to a person's means. Malians worry about the dire state of the country and a perceived loss of tradition, rail against corruption and long for a better life, but deep down they're a remarkably optimistic people who love to dance. They love it even more if you dance with them.

Malians struggle to hold fast to old ways of living, while embracing modern culture. This conflict is particularly acute because Mali is officially the fourth-poorest country in the world, and for most Malians daily life is a struggle. In this context, the role played by music in Malian life cannot be overestimated. Not only has Mali's music proven to be a reassuring bastion of traditional rhythms and a bulwark against the encroachment of the modern world, it has also provided a refuge and diversion from difficult economic circumstances, showcased the strength of traditional Malian culture, and highlighted the country's ability to take the modern world by storm. It is little wonder, therefore, that music accompanies everything in Malian life, providing the soundtrack for everything from important rites of passage to the obligatory dancing on a Saturday night.

PEOPLE

About 80% of Malians are tied to the land, directly or indirectly, so it's hardly surprising that most of the population live in Mali's fertile south. The vast northern desert and semidesert (60% of Mali) contain just 10% of the population. Concentrated in the centre and south of the country, the Bambara are Mali's largest ethnic group (33% of the population) and they hold much political power. Together with the Soninké and Malinké (who dominate western Mali) they make up 50% of Mali's population. Other groups include the Fulani (17%), Sénoufo (12%), Dogon (7%), Songhaï (6%), Tuareg (6%) and the Bozo fisher people of the Niger River.

Between 80% and 90% of Malians are Muslim, and 2% are Christian. The remainder retains animist beliefs, which often blur with Islamic and Christian practices, especially in rural areas.

ARTS

Mali's cultural diversity affords it a wealth of great music. Best known are the griots (also called *jalis*), a hereditary caste of musicians who fulfil many important functions in Malian society. After independence, Malian cultural and artistic traditions were encouraged, and several state-sponsored 'orchestras' were founded. The legendary Rail Band de Bamako was one of the greatest, and one of its ex-members, the charismatic Salif Keita, has become perhaps the brightest in Mali's pantheon of stars. Other giants of the Malian music scene include the late Ali Farka Touré. Toumani Diabaté, Ballake Sissoko, Tinariwen and Amadou, and Mariam, whose collaboration with Manu Chao was the sound of the 2005 summer across Europe. Mali's wealth of talented female singers includes the hugely popular Oumou Sangaré, whose songs deal with contemporary social issues such as polygamy and arranged marriages, Rokia Traoré and Kandia Kouyaté.

Woodcarvings made by the Bambara people are noted for their angular forms, while Bambara masks are usually bold and solid. Masks are decorated with cowrie shells, and human and animal features are incorporated into the design; they're often used in secretsociety ceremonies. The best known (and frequently used as a symbol of West Africa) is the *chiwara*, a headpiece carved in the form of an antelope, and used in ritualistic dances. The Bambara also produce striking *bogolan*, or mud cloth, and the Dogon are also renowned for their use of masks in important ceremonies.

ENVIRONMENT

Northern Mali is consumed by the Sahara, the south consists of relatively flat and wellwatered agricultural land, the west is a hilly and well-wooded extension of the Futa Djalon highlands of Guinea, the central band is semiarid scrub savannah (the Sahel), and the Niger Inland Delta is a maze of channels, swamps and lakes. The Niger River, the country's lifeline, flows 1626km through the country.

Mali has four national parks and reserves, but its wildlife has been devastated by centuries of human encroachment and the parks are not easily accessible.

Mali's most urgent environmental issues are deforestation, overgrazing and desertification, which threaten much of the country.

FOOD & DRINK

Food in Mali is generally similar to that found in Senegal, with *poulet yassa* (chicken in an onion and lemon sauce), *riz yollof* (rice with vegetables and/or meat) and *riz arachide* (rice with peanut sauce) featuring on many menus. All along the Niger River, restaurants also serve grilled or fried *capitaine* (Nile perch). Many tourist restaurants cater to more Western tastes. In Gao, look out for *wigila*, a local speciality of sun-dried dumplings dipped in a spice-laden meat sauce.

Street food is usually excellent and widely available. Look out for beef brochettes, fried fish, corn on the cob, fried bananas, egg sandwiches, sweet potato chips, and plates of rice and sauce.

Soft drinks are omnipresent, but local drinks, such as ginger juice or red *bissap* or *djablani* juice (which is brewed from hibiscus petals then chilled), and orange squash are sometimes available (but are not always sterile).

Although Mali is predominantly Muslim, most towns have at least one bar or hotel where you can buy Castel, Malian lager. Flag, from Senegal, is also available in Bamako and Mopti.

BAMAKO

pop 1.3 million

If you're looking for a tranquil stay, you should probably look elsewhere. But if you like your markets colourful, clamorous and spilling into the surrounding streets, appreciate energy that illuminates the night and

Africa's best music stars, Bamako has plenty of reasons to linger.

MAL

ORIENTATION

Bamako's city centre is on the north bank of the Niger River, focused on the triangle formed by Ave Kassa Keita, Blvd du Peuple and the train tracks. The Quinzambougou and Hippodrome districts, northeast of the centre, are great places to find hotels, restaurants and nightclubs.

hanker for the opportunity to befriend open

and friendly locals, Bamako might just get

under your skin. With great restaurants, ho-

tels and nightlife, the best museum in the

region and a soundtrack provided by some of

INFORMATION Cultural Centres

Centre Culturel Français (Map p398; ⓐ 222 4019; www.ccfbamako.org; Ave de l'Indépendance; ♀ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 1.30-5.30pm Thu) Pick up the bi-monthly programme of concerts and events.

Emergency

Ambulance (🖻 15) Police (🖻 17)

Internet Access

Medical Services

Clinique Pasteur (229 1010; 24 hr) West of town, this is Mali's best hospital for African diseases, emergencies and other consultations.

Pharmacie Officine Coura (Map p398; Ave de la Nation)

Money

Banque de Développement du Mali (BDM; Map

p398) With branches on Ave Modibo Keita and Rue de la Cathedral, BDM can exchange cash and travellers cheques, and offers cash advances on Visa card.

Post

Main post office (Map p398; Rue Karamoko Diaby)

Tourist Information

Office Malien du Tourisme et de l'Hôtellerie

(Omatho; Map p398; 🖻 223 6450; www.tourisme.gov.ml; Rue Mohammed V)

Travel Agencies

Several agencies deal with international and domestic flights; for air tickets consult the following:

ESF (Map p398; ② 222 5144; esf@cefib.com; Place du Souvenir) Long-standing and reliable. TAM Voyages (Map p398; ③ 221 9210; www.tamvoyage

.com; Sq Lumumba)

For tours around Mali and further afield, the following companies are recommended, and can arrange English-speaking guides: TAM Voyages (Map p398; 221 9210; www.tamvoyage

.com; Sq Lumumba)

Tara Africa Tours (🖻 228 7091; www.tara-africatours .com; Baco Djicoroni ACI)

Toguna Adventure Tours ((229 7853; togunaadven ture@afribone.net.ml; ACI2000)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

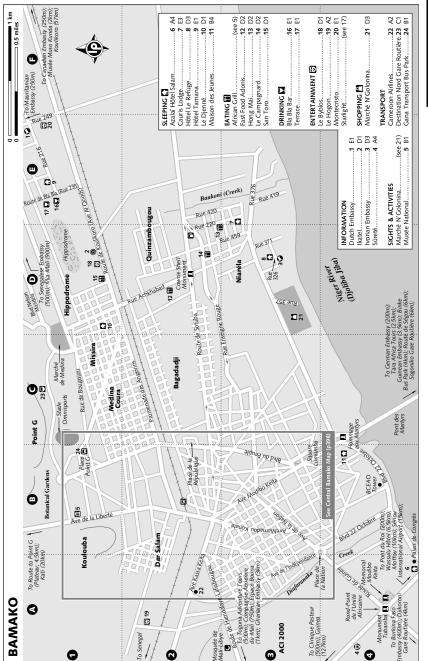
Bamako is largely safe, although, like any city, it has its share of pickpockets and bagsnatchers, so take the normal security precautions and never carry valuables. At Bamako train station, the trains themselves and Rue Baba Diarra are popular haunts for thieves, especially at night. The streets around Sq Lumumba (especially close to the river) should be avoided after dark.

SIGHTS

The **Musée National** (Map p397; Ave de la Liberté; admission US\$4.50, guide US\$5.40; Pam-6pm Tue-Sun) is an exceptionally good museum, showcasing a stunning collection of masks, statues, textiles, archaeological artefacts and a fine model of the Djenné mosque. Since the renovations in 2003, it's beautifully presented and welllabelled, and the tranquil grounds, excellent bookshop and good restaurant make it an excellent place to spend an afternoon. French- and English-speaking guides can be arranged.

East of town, the **Musée Muso Kunda** (Rue 161, Korofina Nord; admission free; \mathfrak{D} 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) is a homage to Mali's women, with displays of traditional clothing and everyday household objects.

The mother of all Bamako markets is the **Grand Marché** (Map p398), a claustrophobic



MALI

MALI

500 m CENTRAL BAMAKO ۵ Ø O 0 INFORMATION DRINKING Air France .26 D5 RDM 1 C4 Appaloosa (see 18) Air Mauritanie (see 26) BDM ..2 C5 Air Sénégal International 27 C4 0 Centre Culturel Français. .**3** B5 ENTERTAINMENT Ethiopian Airlines (see 26) ESE .4 C4 Buffet de la Gare. .24 C2 Ghana Airway (see 11) Centre Culturel Français French Embassy .5 D5 .(see 3) MAE Office. .28 B5 Main Post Office. ..6 C3 .29 C5 Point Afrique. Nigerien Consulate .7 B4 SHOPPING Roval Air Maroc. 30 D5 Sotrama to Sogoniko Gare Routière..31 C3 Office Malien du Tourisme et de Maison des Artisans 25 D3 8 D4 l'Hotellerie Sotrama to Sogoniko Gare Routière..32 D5 Pharmacie Officine Coura. ..**9** B5 TRANSPORT Station Office .33 C2 Smint Cyber Café .10 B5 Afriqiyah Airways (see 30) Taxi Rank .34 D3 TAM Voyages. 11 D5 Air Burkina .(see 30) To Hippodrome (1.8km) US Embassy. ..**12** C3 SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES Ave van Vollenhoven 0 Fetish Stalls .(see 25) Grand Marché 13 D3 Assemblé .14 B3 Nationale Musée de Bamako Ramako Train Statio SLEEPING 24 Place de la .15 B5 L'Auberge Lafia Rue Baba Dian Républiqu .16 B4 Mission Catholique. 12 hester EATING tue de Ro African Gril .17 B5 **C** Grande Appaloosa. 18 C5 25 21 Eita Café Restaurant la Casa. .19 B4 14 1 Archinat Mosquée Route de Sotuba Food Stalls .20 C3 \otimes .21 B3 Liberté Food Stalls Carrefour oko Diab To Niaréla (1km) s Jeunes Ø Pâtisserie le Rovaume des 31 Quinzambougou (1km) de la Fosse (R328) Ave de la Républic .22 C4 Gourmands. Soukhothai .23 C5 Place de Cinéma Dabanani Vox Intersection 34 🖻 Ave de l'Artois Cathedra Place du 16 Rue Gouraud 19 🛍 22 10 0 Rue Laperrive Rue Caron Bamako Coura Rue 337 0 Cit 0 27 Ave de la Mat 20 Quartier Place OMVS 15 9 00 du Fleuve 0 28 Monument de de la latior Wall Octo 23 To Pont du Roi (1.5km) To Sogoniko Gane Routière (5.5km) R306 Sénou International Airport (14km)

warren of streets overtaken by traders of food, clothing and household goods. For those who've just arrived in Africa it can be a bit overwhelming, but it's an essential part of the Bamako experience.

The **fetish stalls** (Map p398; Blvd du Peuple), near the Maison des Artisans, are also not for the faint-hearted, offering up a stomach-turning array of bones, skins, dried chameleons and rotting monkey heads.

Marché de N'Golonina (Map p397), between Niaréla and the city centre, is another fascinating local market to visit.

On the escarpment north of the city, **Point G** is great for a panoramic view of Bamako. Take a shared taxi from Place Point G (US\$0.40).

GUIDES IN MALI

No matter where you go in Mali, guides will sidle up and offer tours of the country, for which you pay a daily fee. They're persistent, regaling you with horror tales of thieves and the difficulty of travelling solo, which are simply not true.

If you don't want one, you certainly don't need a constant companion or intermediary to enjoy Mali. That said, in many places, such as Djenné or Timbuktu, a knowledgeable and informative local guide, hired on the spot for a few hours, can greatly enhance your visit. Guides are also highly recommended in the Dogon Country.

It used to be that every young Malian male could drop everything and become your guide, although would-be guides now have to take a comprehensive, one-year course organised by Mali's Ministry of Tourism, including written and oral exams. All accredited guides, who have completed the course and passed the exams, must now carry cards, which indicate whether they are accredited to guide nationally (blue) or only in their local district (yellow).

SLEEPING

Mission Catholique (Map p398; Foyer d'Accueil Bamako Coura; ☐ 222 7761; Rue Ousamane Bagayoko; per person US\$7.20; reception 7am-1pm & 4-10pm Mon-Sat, 5-10pm Sun) Nun-run and set up for visiting church people, the Mission Catholique lets out the remainder (mattresses in the courtyard, dorms or private rooms) to travellers. It's a study in simplicity, but it's also clean, calm, secure and a haven from hassles in one of Bamako's busiest areas.

Maison des Jeunes (Map p397; 222 2320; mais jeunes@yahoo.fr; off Sq Lumumba; dm with fan US\$3.60, d with air-con & shared bathroom US\$10.80; 1) The re-cently spruced-up Maison des Jeunes is fine budget value. Rooms are as simple as they come. Check the bed sheets for cleanliness in the larger dorms.

L'Auberge Lafia (Map p398; a 636 6894; bocoume@ yahoo.fr; Rue 367, Bamako Coura; dm US\$7.20, d with fan from US\$12.60) As far as Bamako cheapies go, the simple, bare and generally clean rooms with mosquito nets are pretty good value, and ranged around a bare courtyard.

Hôtel Tamana (Map p397; ② 221 3715; www.hoteltamana.com; Rue 216, Hippodrome; d with/without bathroom ind breakfast US\$45/42; № 🕥) This charming hotel out by the Hippodrome is easily our favourite in Bamako. The rooms have character, the staff are among Bamako's friendliest, the bathrooms are immaculate and the ambience of the leafy courtyard is wonderful to retreat into after a long Bamako day.

Cauris Lodge (Map p397; ⓒ 679 1438; hotelcauris lodge@yahoo.fr;Rue220, Niaréla; s/d US\$36/45; ℜ ♠) Cauris Lodge is another good deal. The seven rooms are simple and all come with mosquito nets. African art abounds in the lobby, and the *paillote* bar is one of Bamako's more intimate. Le Djenné (Map p397; ② 221 3082; djenneart@afribone .net.ml; off Route de Koulikoro; small d US\$38, larger s/d US\$54/63; ☑) Local and West African artists were given free rein to decorate this place – think masks, statues, African colour schemes and architectural flourishes that are rooted strongly in local culture. Some rooms are a bit dark, but all are highly original.

Hôtel Le Refuge (Map p397; 221 0144; lerefuge@ arc.net.ml; Rue 326, Niaréla Sud; s/d US\$50/69; 2 2 1) This tranquil Lebanese-run hotel comes warmly recommended by travellers and by us. Rooms are cool, well-equipped, modern and spotless, the bar is good, the restaurant excellent and every room has satellite TV. There's also a small swimming pool.

EATING

Café Restaurant la Casa (Map p398; Rue Ousamane Bagayoko; meals US\$1.35-1.80) In Bamako Coura, this is a fine, relaxed backpacker hang-out opposite the Mission Catholique; the spaghetti, couscous and ragout dishes contain the freshest ingredients, but if you want meat you'll need to order in advance.

Pâtisserie le Royaume des Gourmands (Map p398; Ave Modibo Keita; meals US\$1.80-5.40; 🏵 7am-11pm) This air-con haven amid busy Bamako is the best patisserie in town, with good croissants, coffee and fresh orange juice served with a smile.

MALI

San Toro (Map p397; Route de Koulikoro; mains US\$8; ⁽²⁾ lunch & dinner) The décor here is charmingly African and the specialties are quality Malian dishes, which can take a while to appear, but are always worth the wait. The *poulet au coco* (coconut chicken) is especially good. There's no alcohol, but there are tasty fruit juices. In the evenings from around 8pm, there's live *kora* music.

Appaloosa (Map p398; Rue 311, Quartier du Fleuve; mains US\$6.30-11.70; \mathfrak{D} lunch & dinner) This is where Tex Mex meets Beirut with the merest nod to Bamako. There are many highlights, including Lebanese *mezze*, steaks and pizzas.

Le Compagnard (Map p397; off Route de Sotuba, mains US\$7.55-11.25; Se 6am-11pm) Top marks for this place. High-quality French cooking, French wines and a switched-on ambience ensure plenty of regular customers among the expat community. The salad bar (US\$7) is a nice touch, and the wood-fired pizzas are as good as you'll find in Bamako.

Soukhothai (Map p398; 222 2448; Rue 311, Quartier du Fleuve; mains US\$8-13.50; Iunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Craving a *pad thai*? It's only CFA6000 away. You won't find more authentic Thai cuisine in Africa, and expats swear by this place as one of Bamako's best restaurants.

In the Niaréla district, **Fast Food Adonis** (Map p397; Rue Achkhabad; meals US\$5) offers good food, while **Hong Mai** (Map p397; Rue 220, Niaréla) does cheap and quick Vietnamese food.

Snacks like *brochettes* (grilled pieces of meat on a stick) and chips are cooked on small barbeques all around town. At the *sotrama* ranks near the Cinéma Vox, as well as west of Place de la Liberté across from Carrefour des Jeunes, there are food stalls (Map p398) serving cheap rice and sauce.

DRINKING

Bla Bla Bar (Map p397; Route de Bla Bla, Hippodrome; small beers US\$1.80) This is Mali's most sophisticated bar, and though regulars lament that it has lost

something since being glassed in and blasted with air-con, it's still filled with the bold and the beautiful at weekends.

Terrace (Map p397; Route de Bla Bla, Hippodrome; small beers US\$1.80; ☆ 8pm-late) Almost next door to Bla Bla Bar, Terrace attracts a similar clientele.

Appaloosa (Map p398; Rue 311, Quartier du Fleuve; beers US\$2.70-5.40) This place is all about an evening frisson as long-legged, blond-haired hostesses (who don't expect to pay for their drinks) rub shoulders (and other parts of the anatomy) with rich Malian men and world-weary expats. Classily seedy, Appaloosa is, for all its faults, a Bamako institution. Make of it what you will.

If Bla Bla Bar and Terrace are too highbrow for you, there are plenty of earthy bars with an exclusively African clientele and outdoor tables in the vicinity.

ENTERTAINMENT Live Music

Bamako has some of the best live music in the world. The problem is that they tend to change venues almost as soon as advertising banners go up, so either ring around, ask a savvy taxi driver, or pay a visit to check who's on the bill. **Buffet de la Gare** (Map p398; ^(a) 228 7373; off Rue Baba Diarra) This is where the legendary Super Rail Band made its name.

Centre Culturel Français (Map p398; 222 4019; www.ccfbamako.org) Big-name concerts almost monthly. Éspace Bouna (229 5468; Rue 360, ACI200) Agreeable garden venue that sometimes hosts Toumani Diabaté, Djelimady Tounkara and the Super Rail Band; admission is US\$4.50 if someone famous is playing.

Le Hogon (Map p397; off Ave Kassa Keita) Toumani Diabaté was playing here (US\$2.70) when we were in Bamako. Moffou This place is 10km southwest of Pont du Roi, and only worth visiting if the owner, Salif Keita, is playing. Wassulu Hôtel (228 7373; Route de l'Aeroport; for nonguests US\$4.50) When she's not in Paris, Oumou Sangare plays here at 9pm on Saturdays.

Nightclubs

Bamako is a city that comes into its own after dark, and on weekends it's a party town. Clubs don't get going before midnight and close around 6am. Cover charges (US\$9) usually include a drink, and after that drinks cost US\$1.80 to US\$5.40.

Le Byblos (Map p397; Route de Koulikoro, Hippodrome) Montecristo (Map p397; Rue 249, off Route de Koulikoro, Hippodrome)

Starlight (Map p397; Route de Bla Bla, Hippodrome)

SHOPPING

Mia Mali (221 2442; www.miamali.com; 1528 Blvd Nelson Mandela; 10am-6pm Tue-Sat) Far and away the most innovative and stylish boutique in Mali, Mia Mali has eminently reasonable prices, and its commitment to working with over 175 artisans deserves to be supported.

Maison des Artisans (Map p398; Blvd du Peuple) Leather goods and woodcarvings are made and sold here, and there are several jewellers offering gold and silver objects that are sold by weight (watch out for gold-plated brass).

Although you can find handicrafts in most of Bamako's markets, the Marché N'Golonina (Map p397) has the best selection.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Bamako's Sénou International Airport also serves a number of domestic routes that are shared between **MAE** (Map p398; 223 1465; Ave de la Nation) and **CAM** (229 9100; Ave Cheick Zayed, Hamdallaye).

Bamako to	Fare (US\$ one way)	Departures	Airline	
Gao	217	Saturday	CAM	
Kayes	104	4 weekly	MAE, CAM	
Mopti	105	3 weekly	MAE, CAM	
Timbuktu	163	3 weekly	MAE, CAM	

Boat

The big boats leave from Koulikoro, some 50km downstream of Bamako. For details on the Niger River boat service see p418.

Bus

Long-distance transport for destinations south of the Niger River leaves from the Sogoniko *gare routière*, 6km south of the city centre. Also handy for Koulikoro, Timbuktu and Kangaba is the **Gana Transport** (Map p397; 2210978) bus park at Place Point G.

Destinations include Bandiagara (US\$17, 11 hours), Gao (US\$29, 16 to 20 hours), Mopti (US\$14.40, 10 hours), Ségou (US\$5.40, three hours) and Timbuktu (US\$31, 24 to 30 hours).

Train

Tickets can be bought in advance from the **station office** (Map p398; 222 8110). There's a service from Bamako to Kayes (2nd/1st class US\$12.50/21, 10 to 14 hours) on Sunday,

Monday and Friday, returning the following day. There is also a Wednesday-morning service, which runs to Dakar via Kayes (2nd/1st/ couchette class US\$21/29/40).

GETTING AROUND

The official rate from the airport to the city centre by private taxi is US\$13.50, although it should cost US\$9 going the other way.

The battered green *Sotramas* run from central Bamako to the *gares routières* and the outer suburbs for between US\$0.15 and US\$0.30.

The longest journey (such as Sogoniko *gare routière* to Hippodrome) in a private taxi should never cost more than CFA2000.

NIGER RIVER ROUTE

For most visitors, a journey through Mali means following the course of the great Niger River as it winds its way through the southern skirt of the Sahara. You can go mostly by road, or sometimes by boat on the river itself, branching off at key points to see such wonders as the Dogon Country. The places in this section are listed from west to east.

SÉGOU pop 92,500

There's something about Ségou; while Mopti is an example of clamorous river-based comings and goings, Ségou, strung out lazily along the riverbank 230km east of Bamako, has a languid slow-paced charm, and there's an unmistakeable sense that it remains a village in disguise. With its wide avenues, faded colonial buildings and nearby river excursions, it's a wonderful place to slow down and rest from life on the African road.

Information

BDM (Blvd de l'Indépendance) Changes cash and travellers cheques.

Cybercafé Sotelma (Blvd de l'Indépendance; per hr US\$1.80; ♀ 8am-9pm) Quai des Arts (Quai Ousmane Djiri; ♀ 8.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-6pm Tue-Sun) A private tourist office

Sights & Activities

Ségou's tree-lined streets are home to plenty of former colonial buildings bearing traces of decaying colonial elegance. From the small but interesting **pottery market** on the riverbank, MALI

it's a pleasant stroll to the Quai Ousmane Djiri area, which is slowly being developed with replica traditional buildings.

From the waterfront, pirogues can take you on excursions to a number of nearby sites on the river. Trips cost from US\$27 per boat. The historic and beautiful mud-built village of Ségou Koro lies 9km upstream, just off the main Bamako road. Introduce yourself to the chief, who collects the US\$4.50 tourist tax. A taxi to/from Ségou costs at least US\$18.

Since 2005, Ségou has hosted the Festival Sur le Niger (232 1804; www.festivalsegou.org) in the first week of February, when the riverbank comes alive with exhibitions, dance, theatre and puppet performances, storytelling and craft displays.

Sleeping

Hôtel le Djoliba (🖻 232 1572; www.segou-hotel-djoliba .com; cnr Rue 21 & Blvd El Hadj Omar Tall; dm US\$7.30, s/d with fan & shared bathroom US\$18/31, with air-con & satellite TV US\$36/45: 🕄) This is our choice for the best hotel in town, combining a great location, just back from the riverbank, with large and pleasant rooms and great service.

Motel Savane (232 0974; savane@motelsavane.com; off Blvd de l'Indépendance; d with fan/air-con US\$18/33, bungalows US\$36-47; 🔀) A pleasant 10-minute walk from the riverbank, Motel Savanne has spacious, sparkling rooms with splashes of colour and character. It's wonderfully quiet and has a shady garden area, and it sometimes offers drumming classes.

Both L'Auberge (232 1731; www.promali.org/aub -ind; Rue 21; s/d/ste US\$42/45/63; 🕄 😰), next to the riverbank, and Hôtel de l'Indépendance (232 1733: hotelindependence@cefib.com: Route de Mopti: s/d with fan US\$22/29, with air-con US\$33/40; P 🕄 😰), on the road to Mopti south of town, have excellent rooms, swimming pools and good service.

Eating & Drinking

Soleil de Minuit (cnr Rue 21 & Blvd El Hadi Omar Tall: mains US\$3-4; 🕑 6am-midnight) Highly regarded by travellers for its fresh ingredients and laid-back atmosphere, this place is warmly recommended. The capitaine a la Bamakoise (fried Nile perch with bananas and tomato sauce; CFA4000) is a highlight.

Bar-Restaurant La Paillote (Quai Ousmane Djiri; pizza & pasta dishes from US\$8; 📎 lunch & dinner) Excellent Italian cooking by the Italian chefs right on the banks of the Niger - what more could you want? The pizzas are outstanding, but there's

also ravioli, gnocchi, canneloni and a different plat du jour daily. It also has traditional live music on Friday and Saturday nights.

There are a couple of cheap restaurants at the gare routière, and Snack Bar Golfe (Route de Mopti) is good for a quick sit-down meal.

Away from the centre, Lavazza (9pm-late Thu-Sat) is an intimate garden venue where traditional and modern live music can be heard.

Getting There & Away

Many buses leave from the gare routière, 3km east of town on Route de Mopti. Somatra has a separate bus park nearby, and Binke Transport and Bani are based along or just off Route de Mopti. Numerous buses to Bamako (US\$5.40, almost hourly), Mopti and Sévaré (US\$11), and Sikasso (US\$8) pass through Ségou daily. A few buses head up to Gao (US\$25).

Comanav (232 0204) also has an office in Ségou; see p418 for details of boat services.

DJENNÉ pop 22,382

One of the premier sites in West Africa, World Heritage-listed Djenné, which sits on an island in the Bani River, is worth as much time as you can give it. Its incomparable mosque the largest mud-built structure in the world is like a fairytale apparition. It provides Djenné with a backdrop to its huge, lively and colourful Monday market that has barely changed since the days when Saharan camel caravans brought salt across the sands to the gates of Djenné.

On a stroll through the dusty streets you'll pass a few madrassas (schools where young children learn the Qur'an); there are more madrassas in Djenné than in any other town in Mali, which serves as a reminder of its days as a renowned centre of Islamic scholarship. With the help of a guide, you can also see the beautiful house of the traditional chief.

About 3km from Djenné, the low-slung ruin of Jenné-Jeno dates back to about 300 BC and is one of the oldest archaeological sites in West Africa.

Djenné is famous for bogolan, or mudcloth. Although the cloth is on sale all across town, the most famous female artisan is Pama Sinatoa (🖻 242 0610; almamydiaka@yahoo.fr), whose workshop is near the town entrance.

Visitors to Djenné must pay a US\$1.70 tourist tax per person at the Djenné turn-off,

soon after leaving the Bamako-Mopti road. There are no banks in Djenné.

Guides (around US\$5.40 per person) are not essential in Djenné, but can add immeasurably to your experience.

Sleeping & Eating

Chez Baba (🗃 242 0598; camp sites US\$4.50, dm US\$6.30) The large, open courtyard here resembles an old caravanserai or travellers' inn, but it also has all the comings and goings (guides and salesmen especially) of a bus station. The rooms with mattresses on the floor are swept clean, but the shared toilets are dire.

Le Campement (242 0497; mattress on roof US\$7.20, s/d with fan from US\$17/23, with air-con & private bathroom US\$33/36, meals US\$3.60; 🕄) This sprawling, central place is Djenné's tourism centre, with a large and pleasant open-air restaurant, and clean and tidy rooms that have the bare essentials.

Auberge le Maafir (🖻 242 0541; sinintadiawoye@ yahoo.fr; d with fan/air-con incl breakfast US\$33/U42; 💦) More intimate than the Campement, this pleasant place has attractively furnished rooms with some traditional design work (such as terracotta basins), but maintenance is not what it could be. The courtyard is pleasant and the views from the rooftop are good.

There are a number of stalls serving food near the market in the early evening, while Restaurant le Fleuve (dishes US\$1.35-3.60) offers simple Malian dishes.

Getting There & Away

When the Bani River is high enough (usually from July to December), it's possible to arrive by public pinasse (US\$7.20) from Mopti.

Transport to Djenné is easiest from Mopti's bâché gare. Bâchés (pick-ups; US\$3.60) and

Peugeot taxis (US\$4.50) leave from here most mornings, and return in the afternoon. The journey takes about two hours.

Transport from elsewhere, such as Ségou (US\$9), arrives Monday morning and leaves in the afternoon.

MOPTI pop 109,456

In Mopti, tourism is a contact sport, with more guides, pinasse owners and touts per square metre than anywhere else in Mali. That said, clamour is central to Mopti's charm - its port is Mali's most lively and interesting - and you'll have to pass through here if you want to take a *pinasse* trip to Timbuktu. It's also a major staging post for journeys into the Dogon Country, and has reasonable transport connections to Djenné. If it all gets too much, stay in Sévaré 12km away, which has great hotels and better transport options, and just come into Mopti when you have to.

Information

Action Mopti Internet (off Ave de l'Indépendance, Old Town: per hr US\$2.70; Sam-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) Super-fast satellite connections.

AGTM (🖻 679 3916) Local guides association. Bureau Régional du Tourisme (243 0506; moptitourisme@hotmail.com; Blvd l'Indépendance) Comissariat de Police (Route de Sévaré)

Librairie & Cybercafé de la Venise (Ave de l'Indépendance; per hr US\$1.80; 🕑 8am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-sat) Central but slow.

Post office (Rue 68: Y 8am-12.30pm & 1-4pm) Poste restante.

Satimbé Travel (243 0791; www.satimbetravel.com; Ave de l'Indépendance) An excellent tour company. Sûreté (Route de Sévaré; 🕑 8.30am-2pm & 5-8pm

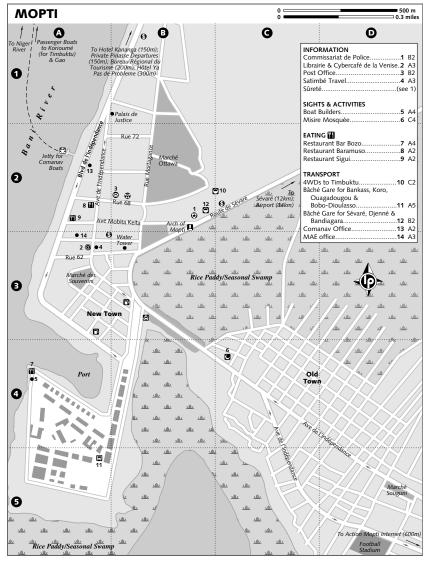
THE MOSOUE AT DJENNÉ

Djenne's elegant mosque was constructed in 1907, though it's based on the design of an older Grande Mosquée that once stood on the site. Famous throughout the world, the Grande Mosquée was first built in 1280, after Koi Konboro - the 26th king of Djenné - converted to Islam. It remained intact until the early 19th century when the fundamentalist Islamic warrior-king, Cheikou Amadou, let it fall to ruin. The modern form - a classic of Sahel-style (or Sudanese) mud-brick architecture - is faithful to the original design.

The wooden spars that jut out from the walls not only form part of the structure, but also support the ladders and planks used during the annual repairs to the mud-render. Overseen by specialist masons, this work takes place at the end of every rainy season, when up to 4000 people volunteer to help.

Excellent views of the mosque are to be had from the roofs of surrounding houses (usually for CFA500 to CFA1000) or the Petit Marché. Non-Muslim visitors cannot go inside.





Mon-Thu, 8.30am-12.30pm Fri) One-month visa extensions cost CFA5000 and take about 15 minutes to process.

Sights & Activities

Mopti's **port** is Mali's busiest and most evocative. Here you'll see slabs of salt from Timbuktu, plus dried fish, firewood, pottery, goats, chickens and a wonderful cast of characters. **Boat-building** happens next to Restaurant Bar Bozo.

The classic Sahel-style **Misire Mosquée** (Grande Mosquée; Ave de l'Independance), built in 1933, towers over the old part of town.

Boat trips on the Niger are possible between July/August and December when water levels are high. Sunset *pirogue* trips cost between

US\$27 and US\$45 depending on the type of boat and distance travelled.

A two-night/three-day journey between Mopti and Korioumé (the port for Timbuktu) by private motorised *pinasse* is the best way to appreciate the Niger, taking you slowly through the villages of the Niger's Inland Delta. To charter a boat to Timbuktu that comfortably seats 10 people, you won't get much change out of US\$800; petrol is included but food is not (count on US\$27 per person for the three days). Buy your food in advance. Arranging a trip directly through a boat owner may get you cheaper rates, but negotiations can be difficult. You could also travel in stages up the river by slower (and cheaper) public *pinasse*.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Ya Pas de Probleme (2243 0246; www ,yapasdeprobleme.com; off Blvd de l'Indépendance; mattress on roof with mosquito net US\$6.30, dm US\$8, s/d with fan from US\$18/25, with air-con & private bathroom US\$40/45; 23) A delightful French- and Dogon-run place, Ya Pas de Probleme has beautifully decorated rooms and an intimate, homely atmosphere. It also represents top value across a range of budgets. Olivier, Jean-Marie and Ousman are wonderful hosts, and the restaurant is terrific.

Hôtel Kanaga (243 0500; kanaga@bambara .com; Blvd de l'Indépendance; d US\$95; ℙ 2) This former Sofitel is the classiest place in town, with stylish rooms that come with satellite TV and superb bathrooms. The swimming pool and restaurant are both excellent.

Restaurant Baramuso (Rue 68; meals from US\$0.90) is the place for a wonderful cheap lunch in the centre of town, while **Restaurant Bar Bozo** (meals US\$3.25-5.40; 🐑 lunch & dinner) is superbly located at the mouth of Mopti harbour; service and food at the latter is average. **Restaurant Sigui** (Blvd de l'Indépendance; meals US\$4.50-5.75; 🐑 lunch & dinner) gets the thumbs-up from travellers for its hybrid of European, Asian and Malian dishes, with a few vegetarian options thrown in.

Getting There & Away AIR

CAM (243 1261) and **MAE** (679 4979; off Ave de l'Indépendance) each have at least two flights a week to Timbuktu (US\$78) and Bamako (US\$104). CAM also has one flight per week to Gao (US\$153, via Timbuktu). A private taxi from Mopti to the airport in Sévaré costs at least US\$10.80.

BOAT

For details on travelling by *pirogue*, and public or private *pinasse*, see opposite. Ferry services from Mopti are covered on p418.

BUS & BUSH TAXI

Although some buses continue as far as (and originate in) Mopti, Sévaré is now the main transport hub for the region; see below for details. *Bâchés* (US\$0.40) and Peugeot taxis (US\$0.50) cover the 12km between Mopti and Sévaré between 7am and 8pm daily.

To Timbuktu (US\$27, 12 hours on a good day), 4WDs leave most days from behind the *bâché gare*. It's a hard journey.

SÉVARÉ

This bustling little town has not a single sight worth seeing, but it's much more relaxed than neighbouring Mopti, and has terrific places to stay and ample transport connections. Bandiagara and the Dogon Country are just 63km away.

BNDA (Route de Mopti) charges 2% commission on travellers cheques and cash.

One of the best places to stay in Mali is **Mac's Refuge** (22 0621; malimacs@yahoo.com; Rue 124; camp sites from US\$8, s/d with fan from US\$22/33, with air-con US\$38/45; 22 (2). Rooms are individually styled to reflect the culture of Mali's many ethnic groups, and the food is legendary (there's a banquet meal of a different cuisine at 7pm every night for CFA5000). Add a small pool, bicycle hire (US\$1.80 per day), a small reference library and Mac's talents as a qualified masseur (US\$27 per hour) and you'll soon see why it's so popular.

Styled like a Dogon village, **Hôtel Ambedjele** (ⓐ 242 1031; www.ambedjelehotel.com; off Route de Mopti; s/d US\$61/72; mains US\$3.60-8; **№ №**) is a charming, Spanish-run place with expansive gardens, a rock pool for swimming, and bungalows shaped like a Dogon granary. The restaurant is one of the best in Mali. Buses to Bamako (US\$15.30, seven to 10 hours), Ségou (US\$9, four to six hours), Gao (US\$13, nine to 13 hours) and Hombori (US\$8, four hours) leave from the **gare routière** (Route de Bandiagara) or stop along the main Bamako-Gao highway at the main crossroads in the centre of town.

Occasional minibuses go to Bandiagara (US\$3.15) and Bankass (US\$5.40). *Bâchés* head to/from Mopti (US\$0.40) between 7am and 8pm from close to the post office.

TIMBUKTU (TOMBOUCTOU) pop 32,460

Timbuktu, that most rhythmical of African names, has for centuries been synonymous with Africa's mysterious inaccessibility, with an end-of-the-earth allure that some travellers just have to reach. It's also the name we all knew as kids, but never really knew where it was.

More than just a name, Timbuktu's fame derived from its strategic location, at once on the edge of the Sahara and at the top of the 'Niger bend', from its role as the fabulously wealthy terminus of a camel-caravan route that has linked West Africa and the Mediterranean since medieval times, and from the vast universities of Islamic scholarship that flourished under the aegis of some of Africa's richest empires.

Timbuktu is a shadow of its former self, existing as a sprawl of low, often shabby, flat-roofed buildings that only hint at former grandeur, while all the time the streets fill up with sand blown in from the desert. And yet, still the travellers come.

Information

Every visitor to Timbuktu must pay a US\$9 tourist tax; it includes entry to the Dyingerey Ber Mosque and Ethnological Museum. The fee is collected at the Bureau Régional du Tourisme (where they can also put a 'Tombouctou' stamp in your passport).

BDR (Route de Korioumé) South of town, it changes cash euros.

BDM (Route de Korioumé) Also south of town, does cash advances on Visa.

Post office (Route de Korioumé) Sells postcards and stamps – for that all-important postmark.

TCP (Route de Korioumé; per hr US\$1.80; \bigcirc 7.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-1pm Sat) Slow internet connections.

Sights

Timbuktu has three of the oldest mosques in West Africa. The oldest, dating from the early 14th century, is **Dyingerey Ber Mosque** (admission ind as part of town tourism tax US\$9), a wonderful example of the Sudanic style of mud, straw and wood architecture. The interior is a forest of 100 sturdy pillars, and there is a series of interconnecting rooms. From the separate women's section, stairs lead up onto the roof for good views over the town.

Sidi Yahiya Mosque, north of Place de l'Indépendance, is named after one of the city's saints (it's said that 333 saints have lived in Timbuktu) and was constructed in 1400.

Built (reportedly by a woman) a century later than Sidi Yahiya was the **Sankoré Mosque**, northeast of the Grand Marché. It also functioned as a university, and by the 16th century was one of the largest schools of Arabic learning in the Muslim world, with some 25,000 students.

The **Ethnological Museum** (admission incl as part of town tourism taxUS\$9; ⓑ 8am-5pm) surrounds the well of Bouctou, where Timbuktu was founded, and has a variety of clothing, photographs, musical instruments, jewellery and games.

An amazing collection of (at last count) 23,000 priceless manuscripts and books from Timbuktu's golden age are kept at the **Centre de Recherches Historiques Ahmed Baba** (Cedrhab; 292 1081; cedrhab@tombouctou.org.ml; Rue de Chemnitz; admission US\$1.80). The centre is the focus of a South African-funded project to protect, translate and catalogue the manuscripts, while a new centre is being built opposite the Sankoré Mosque to house up to 300,000 manuscripts from the surrounding area.

The crumbling **houses** of such 19th-century explorers as Gordon Laing (the first European to reach Timbuktu, but he was murdered on his journey home), René Caillié (the first to visit Timbuktu and return home in 1828) and Heinrich Barth are littered around the town.

The **Maison des Artisans**, where local artisans produce and sell their wares, is in the centre of town.

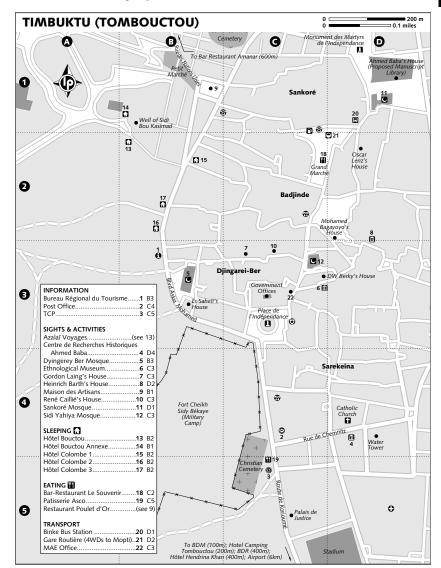
For camel treks into the Sahara, **Abderhamane Alpha Maïge** (22) 1681, 602 3406; alpha@ timbuktu-touristguide.com; Hotel Hendria Khan), **Azalaï Voyages** (22) 21199; azalaivoyages@nomade.fr; Hôtel Bouctou) and **Azima Ag Mohamed Ali** (26) 602 3547) are all recommended. A sunset camel trip to a nearby Tuareg encampment will cost US\$18 per person per camel (US\$36 if you stay overnight). For longer journeys into the Sahara, prices start at US\$36 per day by camel, or US\$170 per day in a 4WD, including guide, driver and food. Bargain hard.

Every year in early January, Essakane, 50km from Timbuktu, hosts the outstanding **Festival in the Desert**, which attracts a host of Mali's best musicians (especially Tuareg groups) and the occasional international group.

Sleeping

For a place that's so popular with tourists, Timbuktu lacks outstanding accommodation.

Hotel Camping Tombouctou (222 1433; Route de Korioumé; camp sites US\$4.50, dm US\$6.30, s/d US\$13.50/18) This place is simplicity itself, but the rooms have cool, thick walls, mosquito nets and fans, and there's a nice communal area. The



MAL

MALI

afternoon. **Hôtel Bouctou** () /fax 292 1012; dm, camp site or mattress on roof US\$11, s/d with fan from US\$23/27, with air-con US\$35/41;) Arrive here at noon when things are quiet and you might find the place deserted, save for the staff sleeping in the restaurant. By sunset, it swarms with tourists, guides and other hangers-on, but the rooms are large and spacious with tiled floors. The rooms in the annexe across the sandy road are slightly newer and quieter, although a touch more simple than those in the main

long walk into town can be punishing in the

Hôtel Colombe 1 (292 1435; Blvd Askia Mohamed; s/d from US\$35/42; 1 Jf you like to be in the centre, Hôtel Colombe 1 is an excellent choice, with enormous rooms and a terrace overlooking the street on which meals and drinks are served. Service can be woeful, however, and the bathrooms need an overhaul. The same owners also run the nearby Hôtel Colombe 2 (292 2132;) and Hôtel Colombe 3 (292 2554;).

Eating

Never just turn up in a Timbuktu restaurant hoping to be fed. Ordering in advance is almost always necessary.

Bar Restaurant Amanar (meals US\$2.70-6.50; Dunch & dinner) Our favourite restaurant in Timbuktu, Amanar has a mellow atmosphere with a soundtrack of Malian blues, chilled and friendly waiters, and a small, intimate garden. It does all the travellers' staples, but the soups are outstanding. The bar gets lively on weekends.

Other good places to eat include: **Restaurant Poulet d'Or** (Maison des Artisans; meals US\$1.80-4.50; 🕥 lunch & dinner); **Patisserie Asco** (Route de Korioumé; meals US\$5.40; 🕥 6am-midnight), where the croissants are dense and stodgy, but the local specialties (Tuareg, Songhaï and Arab) are excellent; and, on the roof of the Grand Marché, the pleasant **Bar-Restaurant Le Souvenir** (💮 7am-midnight), which does couscous for US\$3.60/2.70 with/without meat.

Getting There & Away

Leaving Timbuktu can be harder than getting here, so start planning and negotiating your departure early.

AIR

Both **CAM** (**C** 292 1345) and **MAE** (**C** 602 3929; Place de l'Indépendance) have at least two weekly flights between Timbuktu's flash new **airport** (**C** 292 1320), 6km south of town off Route de Korioumé, and Bamako (US\$163) via Mopti (US\$78). There's also one weekly flight to Gao (US\$76).

BOAT

Between late July and late November, the large Comanav passenger boats stop at Korioumé, Timbuktu's port – for details on prices, see p418. **Azalaï Voyages** (2022) 1199; azalaivoyage@nomade.fr) can reserve a ticket for a small fee.

Alternatively, you can travel between Mopti and Korioumé by public or private *pinasse*; for details see p404.

LAND

In the dry season, battered 4WDs run from Mopti to Timbuktu (US\$23 for a seat or US\$108 for the car to yourself) almost every day. Twelve hours is the minimum trip duration, but it can take double that. A few days a week, there's a Binke truck-bus (dry season only) to Douentza (US\$18, eight hours), from where a Binke bus waits to carry passengers on to Mopti and Bamako. Gana Transport also runs a weekly dry-season service between Timbuktu's gare routière and Bamako (US\$35, 24 hours).

Getting Around

A private taxi/*bâché* to Korioumé from central Timbuktu costs US\$10.80/0.90.

HOMBORI

Hombori is a large village on the main road between Mopti and Gao. The older, more picturesque quarter climbs the hill to the south. Improbably, hardy elephants pass close to Hombori in February and March.

A series of magnificent sandstone buttresses, or mesas, punctuate the semidesert landscape in this area – some people call the 80km stretch of road between Hombori and Douentza Mali's monument valley. The rock formations and sheer cliffs of the Gandamia Plateau (with great trekking potential) are especially beautiful. The huge towers of rock culminate north of town with **Hombori Tondo**, which rises from the plains to 1155m (Mali's highest point). To reach the wide summit plateau you'll need some climbing ability and equipment, but **La Clé de Hombori** (Key to Hombori), a separate jagged spire at the southwestern end of the massif, can be climbed without ropes in about four hours.

About 13km south of town is **La Main de Fatima** (The Hand of Fatima), which has narrow, finger-like towers that reach up 600m from the plains and provide world-class, technical rock climbing. A spectacular walking trail passes left (south) of Fatima's northern-most digit to a wonderful camp site, before descending to **Garmi Tondo**, a picturesque, stone-built village close to the Gao–Bamako road where all visitors to the rock should pay a US\$2.70 tourist tax.

A 45-minute walk north of Hombori is an impressive dune system, **Hondo Miyo**. It's a great place to watch the sunset.

Anyone wanting to climb here should contact a Spanish climber called **Salvador Campillo** (salva@maindefatma.com; http://empresas.iddeo.es/mascarell/ maindefatma/pag/catal.html) who lives in the area for part of the year and arranges climbing tours.

Campement Hôtel Mangou Bagni (camp sites or mattress on roof CFA3000, s/d CFA4000/6000) is a simple, but really quite nice, place to stay and eat. On the main road, Hombori has two surprisingly good Senegalese restaurants.

Hombori lies along the Sévaré–Gao road, and all transport between these two towns passes through Hombori (by bus US\$6.30 either way, up to nine hours).

GA0

pop 38,190

Gao, the former capital of the Songhaï Empire, is one of the most important towns of Mali's illustrious past. Like Timbuktu, however, Gao can feel like the end of the earth, a cluster of nomadic settlements pushed onto the Niger River's shores by the Sahara Desert that dominates to the north. Expeditions into the desert are a highlight of a visit here, as is the lively port. Apart from anything else, to say that you've been 350km past Timbuktu earns pretty big traveller-cachet points.

Information

Association Askia Guide (🖻 282 0130) Guides for exploring local sites and the Sahara. BDM (Ave des Askia) Changes euro cash and sometimes provides cash advances on Visa cards. Clic of Gao (Route de l'Aéroport; per hr US\$1.80; ♥ 8-11am & 4-9pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 6-9pm Fri, 8-11am Sun) Gao Bureau of Tourism Visitor Centre (Omatho Vistors' Centre; 282 1182, 605 1559; Place de l'Indépendence; ♥ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, by appointment Sat & Sun) The best tourist office in Mali.

Sights & Activities

Gao's premier tourist attraction is a sunset trip to **La Dune Rose** ('The Pink Dune', known locally as 'Koïma'), a wonderful sand dune on the eastern bank of the Niger, visible from town. From September to February, when water levels allow, consider hiring a *pirogue* (from US\$27 for three hours) to head upstream to **Quema** and **Hondo** where there are more stunning dunes; you're almost guaranteed **hippo sightings** at Tacharan.

Musée du Sahel (Rue 224, Sosso-Kiora; admission US\$1.80; 🏵 8am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun) is a wonderful museum that tells the story of the Songhaï and Tuareg people.

The **Tomb of the Askia** (admission US\$1.80; ^(C) Sat-Thu), north of town, was built in 1495 by Askia Muhammad Touré, ruler of the Songhaï Empire and whose remains lie within. Recognised by Unesco, its combination of mud brick, wooden struts and a tapering tower are austerely beautiful.

The **Grand Marché** and **port** are interesting and well worth checking out, especially on Sunday (market day), but it's always busy.

Five blocks east of the water tower, the **Maison des Artisans** (2 8am-dusk) has 60 artisanowned shops and is a great place to browse.

Sleeping

Camping Euro ((a) 608 7827; near Algerian Consulate, Aljanabandia; d/ste with fan US\$13.50/18) Since we were in Gao, we've learned of this new and superclean *campement*-style place, where English is spoken. It's winning good reviews from travellers.

Hôtel Atlantide ((2) 282 0130; d with fan/air-con US\$18/32) Around since the 1930s, renovations are always promised here but little seems to change each time we come. Then again, it's central, clean and the decaying elegance does have a certain ramshackle charm.

Hôtel le Bel Air (a 282 0540; mattress on roof US\$7.20, d with fan/air-con US\$23/32; 3) A relatively new place that hasn't yet begun the long descent into decline, Bel Air is busy and bustling, and the good rooms are accompanied by an African ambience in the public areas.

Sahara Passion (282 0187; spassion@malinet.ml; s/d from US\$18/23; 2) Off Rue 381 southeast of the town centre, Sahara Passion is nicely done and is Gao's most switched-on place. The courtyard is lovely, and the restaurant is one of Gao's best (meals US\$2.70 to US\$5.40). This is also one of the best places to organise your desert expedition. Book ahead.

Eating & Drinking

MAL

Around the Grand Marché you can get coffee and bread in the mornings, and street food in the evenings (check out the excellent local sausages). While in Gao, it's worth seeking out the local Songhaï specialty, *wigila*, sun-dried dumplings that you dunk in a meat sauce made with cinnamon and spices.

La Source du Nord (salads US\$0.90-1.80, mains US\$1.35-3.15; \bigcirc 7am-10pm) In central Gao, opposite the Shell petrol, you can try *wigila* and it also does a good braised *capitaine* (US\$2.70).

Restaurant de l'Âmitié (cnr Rues 234 & 213, Sosso-Kiora; meals US\$0.90-5.40; 论 8am-4am) This restaurant is another good option.

Le Petit Restaurant (3rd paved road, Sosso Koïra; meals US\$0.90; ⓑ 6am-8pm) Very popular with tourists and expats, La Petite Restaurant serves cheap and hearty lentils, liver, couscous and macaroni. Oumar, the kindly Algerian owner, is another drawcard.

Bellàh Rôtisserie (Ave des Askias; meals from US\$0.90) Rotisseries are found all over Gao, but this one in particular is worth a try.

Club Koukia (admission CFA1500; 🕑 8am-4am) Behind Hôtel Atlantide, Club Koukia is a popular bar-cum-nightclub where a Castel will set you back US\$0.90.

Getting There & Away

Apart from international flights operated by Point Afrique (see p417), **CAM** (2023) (2000); Hôtel Atlantide) offers Gao's only plane connection with the outside world, with one flight per week to Bamako (US\$217) via Mopti (US\$153) and Timbuktu (US\$76).

Apart from the **Comanav ferry** (2) 282 0466) p418, there's no regular transport upstream to Timbuktu; chartering your own private *pinasse* is possible, but expensive (from US\$540).

Binke (2820558) and **Bani** (2820424) buses leave for Bamako (US\$29, 16 to 20 hours), via Sévaré (US\$13, eight hours) and Ségou (US\$26, 12 hours), leave early in the morning (usually 5am) and mid-afternoon. There's also an occasional truck/4WD to Timbuktu (up to US\$27, 12 hours) from the *gare routière*.

DOGON COUNTRY (PAYS DOGON)

Mali's stand-out highlight is exploring the homeland of the fascinating Dogon people, arrayed above and below the huge Falaise de Bandiagara, which extends some 150km through the Sahel to the east of Mopti. The landscape is stunning, and the Dogon are noted for their complex and elaborate culture, art forms and unique houses and granaries – some clinging to the bare rock face of the escarpment.

DOGON GATEWAYS Bandiagara pop 6853

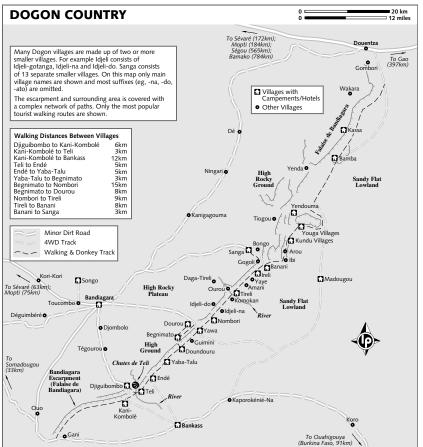
This small, dusty town lies 63km east of Sévaré, and about 20km from the edge of the Falaise de Bandiagara. Once a major administrative centre, tourism is now the main show in town, as it basks in the reflected glow of the smaller and more beautiful Dogon towns and villages closer to the escarpment. The attention of numerous would-be guides as soon as you arrive can be quite intimidating.

Cybercafé Clic (Route de Djiguibombo; per hr US\$2.70; ♀ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) gives you one last chance to check your email, while the Guide association (☎ 244 2128) and Mission Culturelle (☎ /fax 244 2263) can recommend guides.

Most transport leaves Bandiagara around 7am or 5pm. There's a lot going to Sévaré/ Mopti (around US\$2.70), but getting to Bankass (US\$1.80) or Koro (minibus/bush taxi US\$3.60/4.50) means a longer wait. You might also find the odd minibus heading to Sanga (US\$2.70).

Sanga

Sanga (also written 'Sangha'), 44km east of Bandiagara and close to the top of the escarpment, is one of the largest Dogon villages in



the region. It's a fascinating place to explore with a guide. Of particular interest is the Ogol Da section, which is full of temples, fetishes and shrines. Hoewever, it is a favourite of tour groups and has become quite touristy in recent years.

Hôtel Femme Dogon (mattress on roof US\$5.40, d US\$13.50) and **Campement-Hôtel Guinna** (s/d with bathroom & fan US\$27/32, meals US\$1.80-9) are some of the more comfortable places to stay in the Dogon Country; after a week's trekking, the garden at the latter is lovely, the food is good, and the hot showers and cold beer fantastic.

Apart from the occasional minibus to Bandiagara (US\$2.70), there's no regular public transport to Sanga. Chartering a taxi costs at least US\$27, or getting a moped to drop you off costs US\$13.50 (including petrol).

Bankass

Bankass is 64km south of Bandiagara, along the dirt road to Burkina Faso. The Falaise de Bandiagara is about 12km away, which makes it a good gateway to southern Dogon Country.

Campement & Hôtel Hogon (camp sites/mattress on roof US\$3.60, r US\$9.90, mains US\$4.50-6.30) is the best place to stay, although it's pretty run-down and basic. The best assets are the guys who run it – friendly and helpful with everything from finding guides to transport to Burkina Faso.

There are daily Peugeot taxis and minibuses to Bandiagara (US\$1.80) and Mopti (US\$4.50, two hours).

DOGON CULTURE

MALI

The Dogon believe that the earth, moon and sun were created by a divine male being called Amma. The earth was formed in the shape of a woman, and by her Amma fathered twin snakelike creatures called the Nommo, which Dogon believe are present in streams and pools. Later, Amma made two humans - a man and a woman - who were circumcised by the Nommo and then gave birth to eight children, who are regarded as the ancestors of all Dogon.

Amma is also credited with creating the stars. A major feature of Dogon cosmology is the star known in Western countries as Sirius, or the Dog Star, which was also held to be auspicious by the ancient Egyptians. The Dogon are able to predict Sirius' periodic appearance at a certain point above the skyline, and have long regarded it as three separate stars - two close together and a third invisible. The movements of these stars dictate the timing of the major Sigui festival, which takes place about every 60 years. Although modern astronomers knew Sirius to be two stars, it was only in 1995 that powerful radio telescopes detected a third body of super-dense matter in the same area.

Aspects of Dogon religion readily seen by visitors are the omolo or fetishes, sacred objects that are dotted around most villages. Most are a simple dome of hard-packed mud, and their function is to protect the village against certain eventualities. To strengthen their power, sacrifices are made to these omolo on a regular basis. This usually means pouring millet porridge over them, although sometimes the blood of a chicken is used.

Douentza

Douentza, though an unappealing town, is the launching point for treks into northern Dogon Country. Douentza's best place to stay, Campement de Douentza (245 2052, 633 0301; r per person US\$18), is run by the endearingly eccentric Frenchman Jérôme Hurpoil, and is also the first choice for arranging expeditions to the Dogon Country or elsewhere. Members of the guide association (245 2002) hang out at Auberge Gourma (🖻 245 2031; r per person US\$4.50), a basic place to stay.

TREKKING

The best way to see Dogon Country is on foot, trekking along the escarpment for anything from one day to three weeks. Four towns, Bandiagara (p410), Sanga (p410), Bankass (p411) and Douentza (above) provide gateways to Dogon Country. From these towns transport to the actual trailheads must be arranged. The most popular trailheads are Kani-Kombolé, Djiguibombo, Endé, Dourou and Sanga.

November to February is the best time to trek, with daytime temperatures close to 30°C. December and January sees the trails increasingly clogged with tourists. From March to May, it's fiercely hot, though early in the morning it's OK for walking. From June to September is the rainy season, but downpours are short, the air is clear and the waterfalls and flowers are spectacular.

Accommodation & Equipment

Almost every Dogon village has at least one *campement* – a one-storey building encircling a courtyard. Although some have rooms, sleeping on the flat roof under the stars can be a wonderful experience. Evening meals are usually rice with a sauce of vegetables or meat (usually chicken). In the morning, you'll be given tea and bread with jam or processed cheese. Small shops and restaurants catering for tourists have been set up in the most-visited Dogon villages, while beers, bottled water and soft drinks are available almost everywhere.

The general rule is to travel as lightly as possible, because paths are steep or sandy in places. Footwear should be sturdy, but boots are not essential. It's vital to have a sunhat and a water bottle, otherwise heatstroke and serious dehydration are real possibilities. You should always carry at least a litre of water. Avoid carrying 'Western' products that have layers of packaging. Nights are warm, although a lightweight sleeping bag will keep off the pre-dawn chill from November to February. Dogon villages are dark at night, so a torch (flashlight) is useful, and you'll need toilet paper. Wearing shorts for trekking is OK, as they do not offend Dogon culture.

Costs

Visitors to Dogon Country must pay for the privilege. Not only do various fees provide the local people with a much-needed source of income, they also go a small way towards compensating the Dogon people for the alienating impact of mass tourism. Standard costs include the following:

Breakfast (US\$0.90)

lonelyplanet.com

Guide (per day guiding only from US\$16.20, all-inclusive US\$27-36)

Lunch or dinner (with/without meat US\$4.50/2.70) Porter (per porter per day US\$4.50)

Sleeping in village campement (per person per night

US\$1.80-2.70) Village tourist tax (per person US\$0.90-1.80) Nothing if

you're just passing through.

The village tourist tax should allow you to take photos of houses and other buildings (but not people, unless you get their permission), and to visit nearby cliff dwellings. If possible, pay this fee directly to the village headman, not to your guide.

Your only other cost is reaching the escarpment. From Bandiagara, a local taxi to any of the local trailheads will cost US\$18 to US\$36. From Bankass to the escarpment at Endé or Kani-Kombolé (12km) by horse and cart is around US\$9 (the track is too sandy for mopeds).

Guides

Guides are not strictly necessary in a practical sense, but in a cultural sense they are vital. Ideally a guide will be your translator, fixer (for accommodation and food) and verbal guidebook, not to mention a window into

DOGON MASKS & CEREMONIES

the Dogon world. Without one, you'll undoubtedly miss many points of interest, and could genuinely offend the Dogon villagers by unwittingly stumbling across a sacred site. All guides speak French and some also speak English or other European languages.

As a general rule, it's much better to hire your guide at one of the gateway towns than in Mopti or Bamako, although more importantly, your guide to the Dogon Country should be a Dogon.

It's also worth spending an extra day or two asking around for recommendations from other travellers. Other places to ask around include good hotels in Sévaré, Bandiagara and the Bureau Regional du Tourisme in Mopti. The guide associations in Bandiagara and Mopti have lists of accredited guides, and if a guide fails to produce a yellow or blue card (see the Guides in Mali boxed text, p399), this is a warning sign to look elsewhere.

Trekking Routes ONE TO TWO DAYS

If you're very short of time there are three circular walks from Sanga, aimed at tour groups on tight schedules. The Petit Tour (7km) goes to Gogoli, the Moyen Tour (10km) goes to Gogoli and Banani, and the Grand Tour (15km) goes to Gogoli, Banani and Ireli.

However, spending a night in a Dogon village gives you a much better impression of life on the escarpment than you'll ever get on a one-day trip. From Bandiagara, with a

Masks are very important in Dogon culture, and play a significant role in religious ceremonies. The most famous ceremony is the Sigui, performed every 60 years (most recently during the 1960s), which features a large mask and headdress called the iminana. During the Sigui, the Dogon perform dances recounting the story of their origin. After the ceremony, the iminana is stored in a cave high on the cliffs.

The iminana is also used during a major 'funeral' ceremony that takes place every five or so years. According to Dogon tradition, when a person dies their spirit wanders about looking for a new residence. Fearful that the spirit might rest in another mortal, the Dogon bring out the iminana and take it to the deceased's house to entice the spirit to reside in the mask. The accompanying ceremony can last up to a week and celebrates the life of the dead person and the part they played in village life.

Other masks used by the Dogon include the bird-like kanaga, which protects against vengeance (of a killed animal), and the house-like sirige, which represents the house of the hogon, who is responsible for passing on Dogon traditions to younger generations. Most Dogon ceremonies where you may see masks take place from April to May. These include Agguet, around May in honour of the ancestors, Ondonfile and Boulo (the rain-welcoming festival), which takes place in the period leading up to the first rains.

lift to Djiguibombo, you can walk down to the plains, spend the night in either Kani-Kombolé, Teli or Endé and return by the same route. You could also do a circular route from Dourou to Nombori.

From Bankass, a short, but rewarding circuit takes you to Kani-Kombolé, through Teli to Endé (spending the night at either) and then back.

THREE TO FIVE DAYS

A good three-day trek from Bandiagara starts with a lift to Djiguibombo. You descend to Teli for the first night and trek northeast to Begnimato (second night). On the third day continue to Yawa, then up the escarpment to Dourou, where you can arrange a lift back to Bandiagara. You can add an extra day by diverting northeast to Nombori. An easier trip from Bandiagara would be Djiguibombo, Teli and Endé, returning by the same route.

An excellent four-day alternative, and one of our favourites, is to start from Bandiagara, catch a lift to Dourou, trek down the escarpment to Nombori (first night), head northeast to Ireli (second night), on to Tireli (third night), then up the escarpment to Sanga.

From Bankass, you can make your way to Teli or Endé and then walk northeast to Begnimato, Yawa or Nombori, and on to Dourou and Bandiagara.

From Sanga, a good four-day route descends first to Banani then heads north to Kundu (first night), Youga (second night) and Yendouma (third night). On the fourth day go up the cliffs to Tiogou and return over the plateau to Sanga.

SIX DAYS OR MORE

If you have plenty of time, any of the routes described above can be extended or combined, and routes from Douentza exploring the north are possible.

SOUTHERN MALI

SIKASSO pop 144,786

Agreeable, if unexciting, Sikasso stands at the heart of a relatively lush region that is known as the 'market garden of Mali'. Physical evidence of Sikasso's fascinating history has eroded over time, although the mud-brick **tata** (town wall), that fell to French cannons in 1898, is still visible in places. Sikasso was the last Malian town to resist French colonialism, and King Babemba Traore chose to kill himself rather than surrender. The beautiful **Palais du Dernier Roi** still stands on the western side of town, and in the centre is the **Mamelon**, a small hill that was sacred to the Kénédougou kings, and on which a French colonial tower now stands.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Mamelon (262 0044; Ave Mamadou Konate; d with private bathroom US\$14.40-28.80; 2) Some of the air-conditioning at this once-lovely hotel seems to date from the colonial era, but it somehow keeps working. Like most people we encountered in Sikasso, the owners are a friendly lot.

Zanga Hôtel (2 262 0431; s/d from US\$23/31; 2 2) Zanga, 100m north of the *gare routière*, is fairly flash (by Sikasso standards), has a pool and is easily the best place to stay in town. The rooms are fine, if uninspiring.

Blvd Coiffet has several cheap eateries serving good filling meals (heavy on the rice) for around US\$0.90 to US\$2.70. La Vieille Marmite (Blvd Coiffet) and **Restaurant Kenedougou** (Blvd Coiffet) provide good Malian fare, and the enormous Sunday market is a real bonus for street-food fans.

Getting There & Away

The gare routière is a 15-minute walk (US\$0.40 in a shared taxi) from the town centre. There are daily buses to Bamako (US\$8, three hours), Mopti (US\$10.80, five hours) and Ségou (US\$8, three hours).

WESTERN MALI

KAYES

You wouldn't come here just to see Kayes (pronounced 'Kai'), but as the principal settlement in the west of Mali, it can be a reasonable place to break up the long journey between Bamako and Dakar. Kayes is hot and dusty, and was the first place the French settled in Mali (several colonial buildings remain). There's a thriving, chaotic market, and the town is largely hassle-free.

The **Fort de Médine**, about 15km upstream from Kayes, was part of a chain of defence posts built along the Senegal River in French colonial times. The crumbling buildings hold a real sense of history, and the old train station is particularly beautiful.

Sleeping & Eating

Mahdi Kaama Musundo Foundation (r per person US\$10.80) This foundation for the promotion of Soninke language and culture, is not really a hotel, but it's an imaginative choice nonetheless. The rooms are simple and there's an atmosphere of quiet scholarship; not surprisingly the staff are a mine of information on local culture. It's next to the petrol station and opposite the market in the centre of town.

There are several cheap food stalls near the train station and in the market. Of the sitdown options (all open for lunch and dinner daily), **Restaurant Yankadi** (Rue 122; meals CFA250-700), near the junction with Rue Magdeburg, serves filling meals.

Getting There & Away

CAM ((6727676) and **MAE** (672521582; Rue Soundiata Keita) each have up to four flights per week between Kayes and Bamako (US\$104).

There's an unreliable rail service from Kayes to Bamako (2nd/1st class US\$12.50/21, 10 to 14 hours) on Monday, Tuesday and Saturday (it travels in the other direction on Sunday, Monday and Friday).

MALI DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Mali has some outstanding hotels, although compared to other West African countries you pay a lot more for quality. Everywhere, budget hotels (up to U\$\$15/18 for a single/ double) vary from basic and depressing to simple and tidy, but rarely have any character. The standard of midrange hotels (from U\$\$18/22 for a single/double up to U\$\$60/72) is generally quite high across the country. In Bamako there are dozens of top-end hotels (up to U\$\$135 for a double) to choose from.

ACTIVITIES

Mali is one of the most active destinations in West Africa. Possibilities include exceptional trekking in Dogon Country (p412); evocative desert expeditions by camel or 4WD in the Sahara north of Timbuktu (p406), or Gao (p409); river journeys up the Niger between Mopti and Timbuktu (p404); and world-class rock climbing near Hombori (p408).

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks 8am-noon and 3-5pm Mon-Fri, plus 8am-noon Saturday Bars noon-late

Nightclubs 10pm-late

Restaurants noon-3pm and 6.30-11pm

Shops 8am-noon and 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Saturday

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime is not a big problem in Mali, although in Bamako you should be careful walking around at night (see p396). People travelling by train should take care, as the train stations in Kayes and Bamako are targeted by thieves, and be vigilant on the trains themselves.

Always check the local security situation if you're heading out into the desert north of Gao, as banditry has been reported.

The main annoyance for visitors are the young men who lurk outside hotels in Bamako, Mopti, Djenné, Ségou, Timbuktu and the gateway towns to the Dogon Country offering their services as guides.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Mali Embassies & Consulates

Mali has embassies in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Niger. For details, see the relevant country chapters. In Paris, note that it is the consulate-general that issues visas, not the embassy.

Belgium ((2) 02-345 7432; ambassade.mali@skynet.be; 487 Ave Molière, Brussels 1060)

Germany (🖻 030-319 9883; fax 319 9884; Kurfurstendamm 72, 10709 Berlin)

Italy (🖻 06-4425 4068; amb.malirome@tiscalinet.it; Via Antonia Boston 2, Rome)

USA ((a) 202-332 2249; www.maliembassy.us; 2130 R St NW, Washington, DC 20008)

MALI

Electricity supply is 220V and plugs are of the European two-round-pin variety.

PRACTICALITIES

- Local daily French-language newspapers include Le Soir and Le Malien; Le Figaro and Le Monde are available in Bamako, and International Herald Tribune and Newsweek at just a few Bamako outlets.
- BBC World Service is broadcast on 88.9
 FM in Bamako. Elsewhere check BBC (www.bbc.co.uk/cgi-bin/worldservice).
- Mali uses the metric system.

Embassies & Consulates in Mali

The following are all embassies in Bamako: Burkina Faso (229 3171; off Route de Guinea) Canada (221 2236; www.bamako.gc.ca; Route de Koulikoro) Opposite Luna Parc; also assists Australian and UK nationals.

Côte d'Ivoire (Map p397; 🖻 221 2289; Rue 220) Near Marché N'Golonina.

France (Map p398; 221 2951, 221 3141; Sq Lumumba) Consulate; assists Austrian, Belgian, Spanish, Greek, Italian and Portuguese nationals. Germany (222 3715; Badalabougou Est) Ghana (229 6083; ACI2000) Guinea (221 0806; Rue 37, off Ave de l'OUA, Faso-Kanu) Mauritania (221 4815; Rue 213, off Route de Koulikoro, Hippodrome) Netherlands (Map p397; 221 5611; bam@minbuza .ml; Rue 437, off Route de Koulikoro, Hippodrome)

Niger (Map p398; 🗟 601 9239, 698 7828; Ave Mamadou Konaté)

Senegal (🖻 221 8273; fax 221 1780; Rue 287, off Blvd Nelson Mandela, Hippodrome)

USA (Map p398; **a** 222 5470; www.usa.org.ml; cnr Rue de Rochester & Rue Mohammed V)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

In addition to mask ceremonies in Dogon villages (see the Dogon Masks & Ceremonies boxed text, p413), Bozo fishing celebrations (February) and the great cattle crossings of the Fulani (December to January), the following festivals are worth checking out: **Festival in the Desert** (January; www.festival-au-desert .org) Held in Essakane, near Timbuktu. See p406. **Festival Sur Le Niger** (February) In Ségou, see p402 **Biennal** (September in even years) A sport and cultural

festival in Bamako, with live music groups from around Mali.

HOLIDAYS Public holidays include the following: New Year's Day 1 January Army Day 20 January For the Martyrs of the 1991 Revolution 26 March Easter March/April Labour Day 1 May African Unity Day 25 May Independence Day 22 September Christmas Day 25 December

For a table of Islamic holiday dates, turn to p1106.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is widely available in Bamako. There are fast connections in Mopti, Bandiagara and, to a lesser extent, Ségou. Elsewhere you'll find at least one internet café in most towns (including Timbuktu), although connections can be very slow. Connections usually cost US\$1.80 per hour, and can go up to US\$2.70.

MAPS

The French **IGN** (www.ign.fr) produces the excellent *Mali* (1:2,000,000), but it's not available in Mali itself. It also sells the Carte Internationale du Monde series (1:1,000,000), which is outdated for roads but is still the best in the business for physical geography. Michelin's 953 *Africa North and West* (1:4,000,000) is a large-scale map, but shows Mali's minor roads accurately.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the West African CFA franc.

Most of Mali's banks change foreign cash. Outside Bamako you may have difficulty with travellers cheques, and when banks do change them commission rates vary wildly. Bank of Africa, Ecobank and Banque Internationale du Mali (BIM) usually charge around 2%.

Euros are the best currency to carry. US dollars are OK, but commissions are quite often higher and nonbank exchange rates are grim.

At the time of writing, only Banque de Développement du Mali (BDM) was offering cash advances for Visa cards. There were also no functioning ATMs, but Visa card is accepted in a few ritzy hotels, restaurants and businesses in Bamako.

POST

Letter and parcel post from Mali's cities is reasonably reliable, but letters can still take weeks to arrive. Parcels do go missing, but usually only items sent from overseas. Anything of real value should be sent by **DHL** (222 6376; Ave Ruault, Bamako).

Poste restante is available at all major post offices. Some charge US\$0.90 per letter upon collection.

TELEPHONE

Sotelma, the national telephone company, has installed card phones, and phonecards are sold by vendors throughout Mali. Local calls cost US\$0.20 per minute, national calls US\$0.55 to US\$0.90, calls to Europe US\$3.40 and to the USA US\$5.50. Tariffs are reduced significantly after 5.30pm.

Malitel (www.malitel.com.ml) and lkatel (www.ikatel .net) are the main mobile-phone providers; both websites have maps showing each company's coverage within Mali. Local SIM cards can be a good investment if you plan on spending a prolonged period in the country.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Mali's **Office Malien du Tourisme et de Hôtellerie** (Omatho; www.omatho.com) is a mixed bag, but is improving all the time. The website is excellent, and some local offices (Gao is a stand-out example) have really got their act together in recent years. The recent Omatho-driven system of accrediting guides (see the Guides in Mali boxed text, p399) is a huge improvement, and the Omatho offices in Bamako, Timbuktu, Gao and Mopti can provide lists of accredited guides.

VISAS

Visas are required by everyone. If there's no Malian embassy in your home country, it's possible to get your visa on arrival at the border. It costs US\$27 and you'll need to bring passport photos. The visa is valid for an initial period of five days and must then be extended at a police station (no charge), whereafter it is valid for one month. However, we would still advise you to get your visa in advance, because travellers who arrive without visas routinely report hassles from border officials keen to make a little extra money on the side.

At Malian embassies in West Africa, you'll usually pay US\$36 for a one-month singleentry visa.

Visa Extensions

One-month visa extensions cost US\$9 per month, require two photos and are only available at the Sûreté buildings in Bamako and Mopti. There's a fine of US\$27 per day for every day you overstay, and border officials will delight in extracting this from you.

Visas for Onward Travel

You can get visas for the following neighbouring countries in Bamako (see opposite for address details):

Burkina Faso Three-month visa US\$45; three photos; same day.

Côte d'Ivoire One-month visas US\$54; two photos; three days.

Ghana One-month visa US\$22; four photos; 48 hours. **Guinea** One-month visa US\$84-145, depending on nationality; two photos; 24 hours.

Mauritania One-month visa US\$29; three photos; 48 hours. Niger One-month visa US\$36; three photos; two-three days. Senegal One-/three-month visas US\$5.40/12.60; two photos; two days.

TRANSPORT IN MALI

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Mali's main international airport is **Sénou International Airport** ((20) 220 4626), although Point-Afrique also flies into Mopti and Gao.

Numerous airlines fly into Bamako and those with offices there include the following: **Afriqiyah** (8U; Map p398; ⁽²⁾ 223 1497; www.afriqiyah .aero; Ave de la Marne)

Air Burkina (2J; Map p398; 221 0178; www.air-burkina .com; Ave de la Marne)

Air France (AF; Map p398; 🗃 222 2212; www.airfrance .com; Sq Lumumba)

Air Mauritanie (MR; Map p398; 223 8740; www.air mauritanie.mr; Sq Lumumba)

Air Sénégal (V7; Map p398; n Bamako 223 9811; www.air-senegal-international.com; Ave Modibo Keita) Cameroon Airlines (UY; Map p397; 222 9400;

www.cameroon-airlines.com; cnr Ave Kassa Keita & Ave de l'Indépendance)

Ethiopian Airlines (ET; Map p398; 🖻 222 2208; www .flyethiopian.com/et/; Sq Lumumba)

Ghana Airways (GH; Map p398; 🖻 221 9210; www .ghana-airways.com; Sq Lumumba)

Interair (D6; 🖻 221 9210; www.interair.co.za; cnr Ave Kassa Keita & Ave de l'Indépendance)

Point-Afrique (Map p398; 🖻 223 5470; www.point -afrique.com; Ave de la Marne)

Royal Air Maroc (AT; Map p398; 221 6105; www .royalairmaroc.com; Ave de la Marne)

Point-Afrique flies from Paris to Marseilles to Mopti, Gao and Bamako, usually for much less than longer-established airlines.

Within West Africa, expect to pay around US\$157 from Bamako to Dakar, or US\$196 to Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), for example.

Land

BURKINA FASO

Numerous buses leave Bamako's Sogoniko gare routière daily for Ouagadougou (US\$27, 20 hours) via Bobo-Dioulasso (US\$21, 15 hours). A daily bus links Koro with Ouahigouya (US\$4.50, up to four hours), from where there's onward transport to Ouagadougou.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Travel to Côte d'Ivoire was unsafe at the time of writing and the volume of cross-border transport has dropped off to a trickle. However, there are still daily buses to Abidjan (US\$41, 36 to 48 hours). Transport for Côte d'Ivoire also leaves from Sikasso.

GUINEA

Peugeot taxis or minibuses run most days from Bamako's Djikoroni *gare routière* to the border at Kourémalé (US\$6.30, three hours) and then on to Siguiri (US\$10.80). A onceweekly bus continues all the way to Conakry (US\$45).

MAURITANIA

Battered 4WDs and trucks are the usual transport. There are daily departures from Kayes to Sélibabai (US\$22, eight hours), and from Nioro to Ayoûn el-Atroûs (US\$32). The latter option gets you onto the paved road leading to Nouakchott.

NIGER

SNTV (2220395) depart for Niamey (US\$15.50, up to 30 hours) on Wednesday and Saturday at 5.30am from its office east of the centre of Gao; coming the other way costs US\$21.

SENEGAL

The train between Bamako and Dakar is one of Africa's great epics. In theory the train departs Bamako for Dakar (2nd/1st/couchette class US\$46/63/95) at 9.15am Wednesday, and from Dakar at 10am. It could take forever but, if not, around 50 hours, and could conceivably depart any day of the week.

GETTING AROUND Air

There are now two domestic carriers: **Compagnie Aerienne du Mali** (CAM; 229 9100; o.nub ukpo@cam-mali.com; Immeuble Tomota, Ave Cheick Zayed, Hamdallaye, Bamako) The newer operator, usually cheaper. **Mali Air Express** (MAE; 223 1465; sae@cefib.com; Ave de la Nation, Bamako)

Both airlines fly from Bamako to Mopti, Timbuktu and Kayes. CAM also operates a weekly flight to/from Gao that goes via Mopti and Timbuktu. Return fares are only a fraction under double one-way prices.

Boat

Most boat journeys on the Niger River are only possible from August to December when water levels are high. For detailed information on travelling by *pirogue* and public or private *pinasse*, see p404.

Three large passenger boats, operated by the Compagnie Malienne de Navigation (Comanav), ply the Niger River between Koulikoro (50km west of Bamako) and Gao, from August to November/December. In theory, one boat heads downstream from Koulikoro at 10pm Tuesday, arrives in Mopti at 3pm Thursday, in Timbuktu at 7am Saturday, and Gao at midnight Sunday. Another boat heads upstream from Gao at 8pm every Monday, reaching Timbuktu at 6pm on Wednesday, Mopti at 4pm Friday, and Koulikoro at midnight Sunday. In practice, the journey can take twice as long.

The 'luxe' cabins have a bathroom and air-con; 1st-class cabins have two bunk beds, toilet and washbasin; and 2nd-class cabins are four-berth with a washbasin and shared toilets. Third class is an eight-berth cabin and in 4th class you get to fight for a space on deck and don't get meals.

Booze, food and water are all available, but take extra supplies as you may get stranded.

PASSENGER BOAT FARES (US\$)

roule	iuxe	ISU	Zna	sra	4LN
Koulikoro to Ségou	79	47	31	19	5
Ségou to Mopti	127	66	48	28	6
Mopti to Korioumé	164	89	63	37	9
Korioumé to Gao	179	104	65	38	10

Bus

The better private bus companies are **Bani** (220 6081), **Binke** (220 5683), **Bittar** (220 1205) and **Somatra** (220 9932), all of which run regular services between the main towns south of the Niger River.

North of the Niger River the roads can be terrible, and 4WDs, fortified truck-buses and standard trucks are used for public transport.

Bush Taxi

Bush taxis and minibuses are slightly more expensive than buses (you're likely to be charged a US\$0.90 luggage fee), but they become handy on shorter, less-frequented routes, where they may be the only option anyway. These are usually either Peugeot 504s carrying nine people, or *bâchés* (pick-ups) with about 16 passengers. *Bâchés* are slower, but about 25% cheaper than 504s.

ΜA

Train

The train is the best way to travel between Bamako and Kayes, although it's never on time and is not without its insecurities (see p401 for details).

Second-class travel is cramped, chaotic and makes the journey seem eternal. For longer trips, 1st class is recommended, and taking a couchette is likewise worthwhile for overnight journeys.

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Mauritania

Wild coast meets Saharan dunes. This should be enough to lure you to Mauritania. If you're still diffident, a limited amount of hyperbole may strike a chord: think grandiose dune fields, ancient cities scoured by sandy winds, giddily deep canyons, eye-popping plateaus, sand seas larger than many a small European country and a phalanx of enchanting oases.

Sure, you may find similar landscapes in other parts of West Africa, but few are on the same scale as those in Mauritania. And few are as varied. Where else could you find such a startling interplay of dunes and ocean? If it's tranquillity you're after, fear not: unlike Senegal, the Mauritanian coastline is completely virginal – expect kilometres of sandy beaches without a resort in sight. And it will remain forever: an immense stretch of seashore is protected, with Parc National du Banc d'Arguin ranking as one of the best bird-watching spots in the world.

For outdoor-adventure types, Mauritania offers the full slate of trekking options as well as exhilarating camel trips amid surreal landscapes, not to mention hot-air ballooning.

But it's not all about nature, landscapes and adrenaline: Mauritania is also of strong historical interest, with a sprinkle of World Heritage–listed caravan towns, all testifying to ancient civilisations. Culturally, Mauritania is a place apart; the population is almost equally divided between Moors of Arab descent and black Africans. It's a Muslim country with a black African twist. This striking combination is part of its appeal.

If you're more inclined to ecotourism than mass tourism, Mauritania is your Shangri-la.

FAST FACTS

MAURITANIA

- Area 1,030,700 sq km
- ATMs None
- Borders Morocco, Mali, Senegal open; Algeria unadvisable
- Budget US\$25 per day
- Capital Nouakchott
- Languages Arabic (Hassaniya), French, Fula, Soninké and Wolof
- Money Ouguiya (UM); US\$1 = UM266
- Population 3 million
- Seasons Very hot (April to October), hot (November to March)
- Telephone Country code 222; international access code 200
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visa In advance US\$30, at Moroccan border US\$25

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Nouakchott fish market** (p424) Watch dozens of colourful fishing boats roll in with their glistening catch.
- **Chinguetti** (p428) Lose yourself in the labyrinthine lanes of the old city before experiencing the magic of the Saharan dunes.
- **Oualâta** (p430) Push the frontiers by travelling to this remote desert town, one of Mauritania's best-kept secrets.
- Iron-ore train (p433) Hop on the world's longest train, and be ready for the bumpiest journey of your life!
- **Banc d'Arguin** (p427) Pack your binoculars and observe vast flocks of birds from a traditional *pirogue* (traditional canoe).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

It's unsurprisingly dry in the Sahara region of the country, where annual rainfall doesn't exceed 100mm. In the south, rainfall increases to about 600mm per year, mostly occurring during the short rainy season from July to September.

The most pleasant time to visit Mauritania is from November to March, when daytime temperatures hover around the mid-20°C. Note that it can get quite cool at night, especially in the desert.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Head straight to Nouakchott's fish market (p424) and spend a couple of days sampling the luscious cuisine of the capital. Then push onto Atâr (p427) and take either a 4WD tour or a camel trip in the grandiose dunefields around the city.
- Two Weeks Spend a couple of days trekking in the Adrar, explore the ancient desert towns of Chinguetti (p428) and Ouadâne (p429) and revitalise yourself in an idyllic palm-filled oasis. Then forge west to the Atlantic coast and observe vast flocks of birds at Parc National du Banc d'Arguin (p427). Journey on to Nouakchott (p424) and marvel at its striking melange of chaotic markets and modern buildings.

HISTORY

From the 3rd century AD, the Berbers established trading routes all over the Western Sahara, including Mauritania. In the 11th century, the Marrakesh-based Islamic Al-

HOW MUCH?

- Cup of tea in a nomad's tent Free
- Taxi ride in Nouakchott US\$1.10
- Camel ride in the desert About US\$22 per day
- Bush taxi fare (from Nouakchott to Nouâdhibou) US\$21
- Auberge room About US\$7.50 per person

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.80
- 1L bottled water US\$0.90
- Bottled beer US\$1.50
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$2.30
- Plate of couscous US\$2.30

moravids pushed south and, with the assistance of Mauritanian Berber leaders, destroyed the Empire of Ghana, which covered much of present-day Mauritania. That victory led to the spread of Islam throughout Mauritania and the Western Sahara. The descendants of the Almoravids were finally subjugated by Arabs in 1674.

As colonialism spread throughout Africa in the 19th century, France stationed troops in Mauritania, but it was not until 1904 that, having played one Moorish faction off against another, the French finally managed to make Mauritania a colonial territory. Independence was fairly easily achieved in 1960 because the French wanted to prevent the country from being absorbed by newly independent Morocco. Mokhtar Ould Daddah became Mauritania's first president.

Ould Daddah took a hard line, especially against the (mainly black African) southerners, who were treated like second-class citizens and compelled to fit in the Moors' mould. Any opposition was brutally suppressed.

The issue of Western Sahara (Spanish Sahara) finally toppled the government. In 1975 the very sandy Spanish Sahara (a Spanish colony) was divided between Morocco and Mauritania. But the Polisario Front launched a guerrilla war to oust both beneficiaries from the area. Mauritania was incapable, militarily and economically, of fighting such a war. A



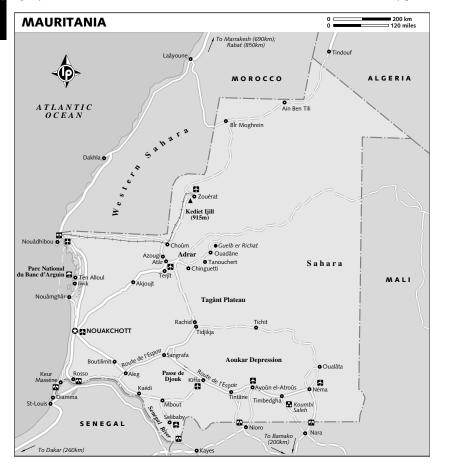
bloodless coup took place in Mauritania in 1978, bringing in a new military government that renounced all territorial claims to the Western Sahara.

A series of coups ensued. Finally, Colonel Maaouya Sid' Ahmed Ould Taya came to power in 1984. For black Africans, this was even worse than under Ould Daddah. Ethnic tensions culminated in bloody riots between the Moors and black Africans in 1989. More than 70,000 black Africans were expelled to Senegal, a country most had never known.

In the 1990s the government became increasingly extremist. In 1991 Mauritania supported Iraq during the Gulf War, and aid dried up. To counter criticism, Taya introduced multiparty elections in 1992, which he won, but electoral fraud was massive. The harassment and arrest of opposition figures continued, and black Africans still faced discrimination.

Mauritania Today

To everybody's surprise (and relief), Ould Taya's repressive regime came to an end in August 2005, when the president was toppled in a bloodless coup. This marked a symbolic turning point in the country. The new government, led by Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, is intent on putting the country back on its feet and on stamping out corruption. Mauritania seems on the way to democracy: the general elections that were held in November 2007 were fair and no incidents were reported, according to UE observers. But what could really give a



new impetus to the country is the oil boom that began in 2006 with the exploitation of offshore fields off Nouakchott.

CULTURE

Mauritanian society is changing fast. Tourism development in the heart of the desert, the internet and mobile phones have played a crucial role in the last decade. But despite the profound social changes, the extended family, clan or tribe remains the cornerstone of society, especially with the Moors.

As in many Muslim countries, religion continues to mark the important events of life. Although slavery was declared illegal in 1980, the caste system still impregnates society's mentality.

The iconic image of nomadic Moors sipping a cup of tea under a tent in the desert belongs to the past. Over the past three decades, drought has resulted in a mass exodus of traditionally nomadic Moors from the desert to Nouakchott.

Women are in a fairly disadvantaged position. Only a third as many women as men are literate and few are involved in commercial activities. Female genital mutilation and forced feeding of young brides are still practised in rural communities. However, Mauritanian women do have the right to divorce and exert it routinely.

PEOPLE

Of Mauritania's estimated three million inhabitants, about 60% are Moors of Arab and Berber descent. Moors of purely Arab descent, called 'Bidan', account for 40%. The other major group is black Africans, ethnically split into two groups. The Haratin (black Moors), the descendants of people enslaved by the Moors, have assimilated the Moorish culture and speak Hassaniya, an Arabic dialect. Black Mauritanians living in the south along the Senegal River constitute 40% of the total population and are mostly Fulani or the closely related Tukulor. These groups speak Pulaar (Fula). There are also Soninké and Wolof minorities.

More than 99% of the population are Sunni Muslims. Islamic fundamentalists are growing in number but remain a minority.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Mauritania has a strong tradition of arts and craftwork, especially silverwork. Most prized are wooden chests with silver inlay, but there are also silver daggers, silver and amber jewellery, earth-tone rugs of camel hair, and hand-dyed leatherwork, including colourful leather cushions and leather pipe pouches, camel saddles and sandals.

The traditional music of Mauritania is mostly Arabic in origin, although along its southern border there are influences from the Wolof, Tukulor and Bambara. One of the most popular Mauritanian musicians is Malouma. She has created what is called the 'Saharan blues' and is to Mauritania what Cesària Évora is to Cape Verde.

There's some superb traditional architecture in the ancient Saharan towns in the Adrar as well as in Oualâta.

ENVIRONMENT

Mauritania is about twice the size of France. About 75%, including Nouakchott, is desert, with huge expanses of flat plains broken by occasional ridges, sand dunes and rocky plateaus, including the Adrar (about 500m high).

The highest peak is Kediet Ijill (915m) near Zouérat. Mauritania has some 700km of shoreline, including the Parc National du Banc d'Arguin, one of the world's major birdbreeding grounds and a Unesco World Heritage Site. The south is mostly flat scrubland.

Major environmental issues are the usual suspects of desertification, overgrazing and pollution. Overfishing is another concern, with hundreds of tonnes of fish caught every day off the Mauritanian coastline.

FOOD & DRINK

The desert cuisine of the Moors is rather unmemorable. Dishes are limited to rice, mutton, goat, camel or dried fish. However, Mauritanian couscous, similar to the Moroccan variety, is delicious. A real treat is to attend a *méchoui* (a traditional nomad's feast), where a whole lamb is roasted over a fire and stuffed with cooked rice. *Zrig* (unsweetened, curdled goat or camel milk) often accompanies meals.

The cuisine of southern Mauritania is essentially Senegalese and you'll find the Senegalese *maffé* (a peanut-based stew) everywhere.

In Nouakchott and Nouâdhibou, seafood is widely available.

Soft drinks and bottled water are available everywhere. Alcohol is only available at certain hotels and restaurants in Nouakchott and Nouâdhibou.

NOUAKCHOTT

pop 800,000

Nouakchott won't win any prizes for urban planning. Hastily constructed in 1960, at independence, this discombobulating city sprawls 5km inland from the coast. Most travellers use it as a staging post before setting off to Senegal, the Adrar or the Banc d'Arguin.

Although it's not a highlight of the country, Nouakchott is intriguingly idiosyncratic and you could do worse than spending an afternoon at the gloriously frantic fish market (one of the busiest in West Africa), treating yourself to a comfy guesthouse or feasting on fresh seafood in a hip restaurant. It's also laid-back and amazingly safe – in all, the perfect salve after the rigours (and romance!) of the desert.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Most banks, hotels and restaurants are on or around Ave Abdel Nasser (running eastwest) and Ave du Général de Gaulle (running north-south). The ocean is 5km west along Ave Abdel Nasser, while the airport is 3km northeast of the centre.

There are heaps of private telephone offices in the centre where local and long-distance calls can be made. There's also a profusion of internet cafés in the centre. There are bureaux de change on Ave du Général de Gaulle and on Ave Abdel Nasser, as well as in the Marché Capitale. Banks are also an option but they keep shorter hours than bureaux de change. They change cash only.

Cabinet Médical Fabienne Sherif ((2) 525 15 71) Near the French embassy, north of the centre. Main post office (Ave Abdel Nasser; (2) 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, to noon Fri)

Netland ((2) 525 1314; Ave du des Congrés; per hr UM500; (2) 8am-midnight Mon-Thu, 8am-noon & 4pm midnight Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun) Has the best internet connection.

SIGHTS

Don't ever think of leaving the city without a visit to the extremely colourful **fish market** (Port de Pêche), about 5km from the centre. You'll see hundreds of teams of men dragging in heavy hand-knotted fishing nets on the beach and small boys hurrying back and forth with trays of fish. The best time is between 4pm and 6pm, when the fishing boats return – unforgettable! Culture vultures will make a beeline for the **Musée National** (Rue Mohamed el Habib; admission UM300; 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri), which is an excellent introduction to Moorish civilisation.

Unmissable landmarks in the centre include the **Mosquée Saudique** (Rue Mamadou Konaté), with its slender minarets, and the large **Mosquée Marocaine** (Moroccan Mosque; Rue de la Mosquée Marocaine), which towers over a bustling market area.

SLEEPING

Auberge du Sahara ((2) 670 4383; www.aubergesahara .com in French; tent/dm/d UM1500/2000/4000; (P) A safe bet. Dorms and rooms are ordinary but functional and shared bathrooms are kept in good nick. Other perks include the outdoor area, a kitchen for guests' use, a rooftop terrace and plenty of friendly advice. It's on the road to Nouâdhibou.

Auberge Menata ((a) 636 9450; tent/dm/d UM1500/ 2000/4000; (P) Another welcoming port of call, this *auberge* is run by friendly Olivia, who is a mine of local information. Rooms are nothing flash but well tended. Meals are available on request. It's off Ave du Général de Gaulle.

JMC (ⓐ 641 7624, 667 2832; jmc_organisation@yahoo .fr; r UM5000-10,000; ₽ ≳) A haven of peace and comfort, this mellow *maison d'hôtes* (inn) near the Novotel boasts exceedingly neat rooms arranged around a lovely courtyard, an art gallery and a cosy communal room.

Maison d'hôtes Jeloua (🖻 636 9450, 643 2730, 525 0914; maison.jeloua@voila.fr; r UM8000-10,000; P 😢) In a peaceful neighbourhood, near Ave du Général de Gaulle, this tidy villa features seven well-appointed rooms. The cheaper ones have shared bathroom.

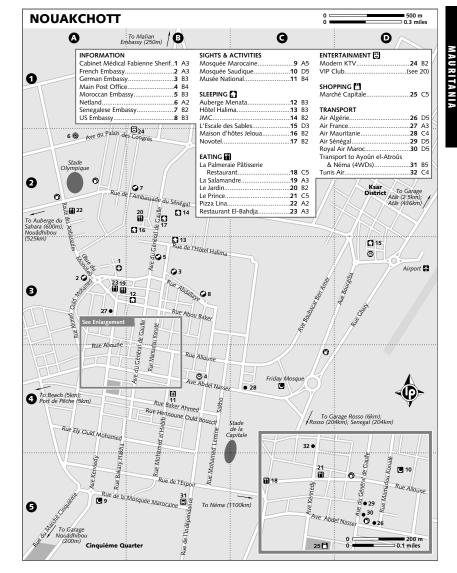
Hôtel Halima (255 7920; fax 525 7922; Rue de l'Hôtel Halima; s/d/ste UM26,500/29,500/49,000; () R () The well-run Halima is a solid choice, with wellmaintained rooms, good facilities and a handy location. Credit cards are accepted.

 hard to beat, with first-rate facilities. Credit cards are accepted.

EATING & DRINKING

Restaurant El-Bahdja (ⓐ 630 5383; mains UM1500-3000; ⓑ lunch & dinner) The El-Bahdja is justly revered for its excellent Moroccan-inspired menu at very reasonable prices. The *tajine* is palate-blowing. The restaurant is off Route des Ambassades.

La Palmeraie Pâtisserie Restaurant ($\textcircled{\baselinewidth{\mathbb{C}}$ 642 0212; Rue Alioune; mains UM1500-2500; $\textcircled{\baselinewidth{\mathbb{C}}}$ lunch & dinner) Warm yourself with a *lotte grillée* (grilled monkfish) or a *filet de dorade* (sea bream fillet) at this snazzy-but-not-snooty venue. The outdoor seating is particularly



M A U R I T A N I A

inviting. Also recommended for breakfast (about UM1800).

Pizza Lina (525 8662; Route des Ambassades; mains UM1500-3500; □ lunch & dinner) One of Nouak-chott's best choices when it comes to tasty pizzas. Also features meat and fish dishes, as well as pasta.

La Salamandre (☎ 524 2680; mains UM1600-4000; ♈ Mon-Sat) La Salamandre has garnered warm praise for lip-smacking French cooking. The sleek, colourful setting is another draw. It's off Route des Ambassades.

Le Jardin ((a) 636 7660; mains UM3000-4000; (b) lunch & dinner) This upscale venue is recommended if you want to dine in style. The mellow open-air terrace is a killer. It's off Rue de l'Ambassade du Sénégal.

There are many fast-food establishments on Rue Alioune between Ave Kennedy and Ave du Généal de Gaulle. Most have a Lebanese bent. Pick of the bunch is **Le Prince** (Rue Alioune; mains UM500-1300; 🕑 lunch & dinner), with faultlessly cooked *shwarma* (sliced meat stuffed into a pocket of bread with vegetables).

Most European-style restaurants usually serve alcohol. La Salamandre, with its spiffy setting, and Le Jardin, with its open-air terrace and cosy interior, were the flavour of the month when we visited.

ENTERTAINMENT

Don't come to Nouakchott to wallow in revelry, but if you want to tear it up beneath the strobe lights head to **Modern KTV** (Ave du Palais des Congrés) or **VIP Club** (**a** 636 7660), off Rue de l'Ambassade du Sénégal. Both places feature regular live musicians and Senegalese DJs at weekends.

SHOPPING

You'll find a bit of everything at Marché Capitale (also called Grand Marché), on Ave Kennedy, including brass teapots, silver jewellery, traditional wooden boxes and colourful fabrics.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Airlines with offices in Nouakchott: Air Algérie (☎ 525 2059; www.airalgerie.dz; cnr Ave du Général de Gaulle & Ave Abdel Nasser)

Air France (🖻 525 1808, 525 3916; www.airfrance.com; Ave Kennedy)

Air Mauritanie (🗃 525 2216, 525 8098; www.airmaurit anie.mr; Ave Abdel Nasser)

Air Senegal ((2) 525 0584; www.air-senegal-internation al.com; Ave du Général de Gaulle) Royal Air Maroc ((2) 525 3564; www.royalairmaroc.com; Ave Abdel Nasser) Tunis Air ((2) 525 8763; www.tunisair.com.tr; Ave Kennedy)

For details of international and domestic flights to/from Nouakchott, see p431 and p432.

Land

For Nouâdhibou (about UM5600, six hours), the Garage Nouâdhibou is close to Cinquiéme Marché; for Rosso (about UM2000, 3½ hours), the Garage Rosso is almost 10km south of the centre; for Atâr (UM3500, six hours), the Garage Atâr is on the road to Atâr, about 3km north of the airport; for Ayoûn el-Atroûs (UM6000, 14 hours) and Néma (UM7500, up to two days), 4WDs leave from an open area at the corner of Rues de l'Indépendance and Rue de la Mosquée Marocaine.

GETTING AROUND

It costs UM300 for a taxi ride within the centre. From the airport, the standard taxi fare to the centre is about UM1000, but it's cheaper to hail a taxi from the highway nearby (UM300).

THE ATLANTIC COAST

No tacky resorts. No pollution. This coastline is a rapturous place for tranquillity seekers and nature-lovers. It's mostly occupied by the Parc National du Banc d'Arguin, something of a pilgrimage site for bird-watchers.

NOUÂDHIBOU

pop 80,000

With the new tar road connecting the Moroccan border to Nouakchott, the fishing port of Nouâdhibou has lost much of its *raison d'être* for travellers, who prefer to dash to the capital or to the Adrar region. It's a good base, though, if you plan to visit Banc d'Arguin. The setting is also appealing: Nouâdhibou is on the Baie du Lévrier, in the middle of a narrow 35km-long peninsula.

There are several bureaux de change along the city's main drag, Blvd Médian, and most of the internet outlets along here also double as telephone offices. The 'station' is about 5km south of town. If they have not done it at the border, overland travellers with vehicles must buy insurance at any insurance company in town.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Åbba ((2) 574 9896; fax 574 9887; Blvd Médian; tent perperson UM1500, s/d UM2200/3400; **P**) A safe bet for overlanders. It has simple rooms – some with private bathrooms – and an inviting communal room with notice board.

Camping Baie du Lévrier (B 5746536,6504356; Blvd Médian; s/d UM3000/5000; P) This long-standing fave with a casual feel is excellent value and Ali, your hospitable host, is a good source of local information. Accommodation is in clean four-bed rooms, and there's a tent for relaxing and a kitchen.

Hôtel Al Jezira (중 574 5317; fax 574 5499; Blvd Maritime; s/d ind breakfast UM13,000/15,000; P ≳) A notch up the comfort scale, this dependable midrange option north of the centre offers good amenities and spruce (if a wee bit impersonal) rooms. Yes, there's air-con!

Restaurant-Pâtisserie Pleine Lune (26) 574 9860; off Blvd Médian; mains UM1000-1500) For a quick bite, nothing beats this cute eatery off the main drag. It serves grilled fish and *brochettes* (skewered meat); finish off your meal with a delectable croissant.

Le Mérou (**©** 574 5980; Blvd Médian; mains UM1500-2500) The main-drag setting of this longstander is unimpressive but the wide-ranging menu, with a Chinese bent, covers enough territory to please most palates. Think meat and fish dishes, as well as salads (the octopus salad is superb).

You'll find a slew of very cheap restaurants on or near the main drag.

Getting There & Away

Air Mauritanie has four weekly flights to/from Nouakchott. Bush taxis travel daily between Nouâdhibou and Nouakchott (UM5600, six hours).

The iron-ore train with a passenger car leaves around 2.30pm daily, arriving in Choûm (UM1000, or UM3000 for a 'berth') around 2am, where 4WDs for Atâr will be waiting. For more details, see p433.

PARC NATIONAL DU BANC D'ARGUIN

This must-see **park** (admission per person per day UM1200) is an important stopover and breeding ground for multitudes of birds migrating be-

tween Europe and southern Africa, especially in December and January. It extends 200km north from Cape Timiris (155km north of Nouakchott) and 235km south of Nouâdhibou. The ideal way to approach the birds is by traditional fishing boat, best organised from the fishing village of **lwik** (UM15,000, plus UM3000 for the guide).

Inside the park there are official camp sites that are equipped with traditional tents (UM3000 to UM6000 per tent). Meals can also be ordered.

There's no public transport to the Banc d'Arguin. Your best bet to visit the park is to hire a 4WD with a knowledgeable driver, either in Nouakchott or in Nouâdhibou. Consider taking three days.

THE ADRAR

Here is the jewel in Mauritania's crown. North of the country, the Adrar boasts exceptional natural wonders and distinctive cultural sights. There are the ancient Saharan towns of Chinguetti and Ouadâne, mighty sand dunes that look sculpted by an artist, mellow oases where you can unwind under a Moorish tent, and grandiose basaltic plateaus. Camel rides, trekking routes and even hot-air ballooning are on offer. For desert aficionados, the Adrar is simply a must.

ATÂR

pop 25,000

With the grandiose Adrar on your doorstep, this secluded town in the middle of the desert is an excellent place in which to organise camel or 4WD forays into the dunefields.

A large *rond-point* (roundabout) marks the centre of Atâr and the market is just north of it. You'll find several bureaux de change, banks (US dollars and euros) and telephone offices on or around the main drag. Atâr had only one internet café at the time of writing.

Activities

At last count, more than 20 agencies were attempting to arrange **camel rides** or **4WD tours** from Atår. Your best bet is to shop around.

The main costs are the vehicle and driver, so trips are a lot cheaper if you're in a group. Count on paying up to UM21,000 per day for a Toyota Hilux plus petrol. Add about UM3000 per day per person for food.

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

Most travel agencies also organise custom camel rides in the Adrar. Prices start at UM12,000 per day with food and lodging.

Sleeping & Eating

These days Atâr has 20-plus places to stay. Most places serve meals (about UM2000). From the roundabout head east on the Chinguetti road for a block, then turn left – most cheap restaurants are along this road.

Auberge du Bonheur (() 546 4537; fax 546 4347; tent or hut per person UM1700, r without bathroom UM6000; () ■) A sensible choice for budgeteers, a five-minute stroll from the centre. Facilities include five rooms with air-con, a large tent in the courtyard, several poky stone or palm huts and a well-scrubbed ablution block. The owners have a reputable travel agency.

Restaurant Marocain (Route de Chinguetti; mains UM500-700) Next door to de l'Amitié, this place rustles up some good couscous as well as various nibbles.

Restaurant de l'Amitié (a 610 7150; Route de Chinguetti; set menu UM2500; dosed May-Aug) If you're after a bit more sophistication, your best bet is this welcoming eatery run by a French lady, with pleasant outdoor seating at the rear.

Getting There & Away AIR

Point Afrique flies from Paris to Atâr via Marseilles. For details see p431.

BUSH TAXI

The main *gare routière*, in the heart of town, is where you can get vehicles for Choûm

(UM2000, two hours) and Nouakchott (UM3500, six hours).

Battered 4WDs headed for Chinguetti (UM2000, two hours) leave from near a shop located a block north of Auberge Monod. For Ouadâne (UM2500, four hours), they leave from a street north of the roundabout. For both towns, services are infrequent. For Terjît (UM1000, one hour), infrequent 4WDs leave from near the roundabout.

TERJÎT

If all you want is to laze a couple of days away in an enchanting palm grove, make a beeline for Terjît, about 40km south of Atâr as the crow flies. What's special here is a natural pool in which you can swim – bliss after the rigours of the desert. You pay UM1000 to enter the site.

The main spring has been taken over by **Auberge Oasis de Terjit** ((2) 644 8967, in Atår 546 5020; tents or huts per person UM1500), where a mattress in a tent by the trickling stream is on offer. A meal costs about UM1500. The only other place to stay is the **Auberge des Caravanes** (ror tikits per person UM1500; (**P**), an honest-to-goodness place at the entrance of the village.

To get here by private car, drive 40km south of Atâr on the road to Nouakchott, then turn left at the checkpoint and follow a sandy track for 11km. By public transport, take anything headed towards Nouakchott and hitch a ride from the checkpoint.

CHINGUETTI pop 4000

One of the more attractive of the ancient caravan towns in the Sahara, Chinguetti is shrouded with a palpable historic aura. Once famous for its Islamic scholars, it was the ancient capital of the Moors, and some of the buildings date from the 13th century. The heavenly backdrop, with a sea of picturepostcard sand dunes, is another draw.

Sights & Activities

The highlight of any visit is a wander through the labyrinthine lanes of **Le Ksar** (the Old Town). The principal attraction is the 16thcentury stone mosque (no entry to non-Muslims). Also of great interest are the five old libraries, which house the fragile-as-dust ancient Islamic manuscripts of Chinguetti.

The best way to see the fascinating dunes around Chinguetti is by camel. Numerous *méharéees* (camel trips) are available. Standard costs start from UM8000 per person per day for the camel, food and guide. Any reputable travel agency in Atâr or *auberge* owner can arrange **camel rides**. If you don't want to sweat it out, you can hire a 4WD and driver. They cost from UM18,000 per day, petrol not included.

The dunes from above? Yes, it's possible. Auberge Tivoujar (opposite), a reputable outfit based in Atâr, can organise **hot-air ballooning trips** from Atâr or Chinguetti (about US\$200 per person).

Sleeping & Eating

All the places listed here have shared bathroom unless stated otherwise. Breakfast and meals are available on request (about UM2000 per meal).

Auberge des Caravanes (540 0022; fax 546 4272; New Town; rper person UM1500) With its eye-catching traditional architecture, it's hard to miss this well-run place right in the centre of town. It's popular with tour groups and is thus a good place to meet other travellers, but it feels a wee bit impersonal.

Auberge Abweir ((5 540 0124; New Town; stone hut or tent per person UM2500) Next door to Auberge des Caravanes, this welcoming place features a bunch of simple yet well-organised stone huts and small tents set around a plant-filled courtyard.

Les Mille et Une Nuits (Le Ksar; stone huts UM3000) A very neat place, close to Le Maure Bleu, run by Leila, a Mauritanian lady. Impeccable bathrooms, well-designed stone huts and a manicured courtyard dappled in sunshine.

Le Maure Bleu (🖻 540 0154, 546 5130; www .maurebleu.com; Old Town; tent per person UM2500, r or stone hut s/d UM5200/8400) This French-run peach of a place features well-arranged rooms and *tikits*, as well as *khaimas* (nomad's tents) for shoestringers. The soothing courtyard is a great place to unwind.

L'Éden de Chinguetti (540 0014; New Town; r per person UM5500) In this 'Garden of Eden' you can expect tidy rooms (with proper beds) embellished with knick-knacks, as well as a clean-smelling ablution block. The owner, Mahmoud, is a mine of information.

Dar Sahra ((2) 630 1874, 540 0244; Le Ksar; dind breakfast €60; (2)) This ultracharming *maison d'hôtes* (guesthouse) smack bang in the Old Town is an excellent base if you want to kick back in style, with a cushy setting, professional service and tastefully decorated rooms.

Getting There & Away

There is at least one vehicle a day to/from Atâr (UM2000, about two hours). They leave from just behind the market. There are no bush taxis between Chinguetti and Ouadâne; you'll have to go back to Atâr.

OUADÂNE

Sitting on the edge of the Adrar plateau, 120km northeast of Chinguetti, Ouadâne is one of the most enchanting semi-ghost towns of the Sahara. As you arrive across the sands or plateau from Atâr or Chinguetti, the stone houses of **Le Ksar al Kiali** (Old Quarter) seem to tumble down the cliff. The top of the hill is dominated by the minaret of the new mosque, which is a mere 200 years old, while at the western end, at the base of the town, is the 14th-century **old mosque**. In between, the crumbling structures seem to have been piled up higgledy-piggledy by some giant child playing with building blocks. Like Chinguetti, Ouadâne was a place of scholarship and is home to over 3000 manuscripts held in private libraries. Only 20 to 30 families still live in the old town.

All places to stay can prepare meals for their guests (about UM2000 for lunch or dinner). The places listed here are down on the plateau. Mellow Auberge Vask – Chez Zaida (2 681 7669; tikits or tents per person UM1500) is run by Zaida, a congenial lady who goes out of her way to make your stay a happy one. There are five tikits and a couple of nomad's tents. Rooms at Auberge Warane I (🖻 in Atâr 546 4604; r or tents per person UM1600) are a bit bunkerlike but serviceable enough, but Auberge Agoueidir - Chez Isselmou (3 525 0791; Nouakchott; tikits or tents per person UM1700, d UM4000) is the best outfit, with orderly rooms (with proper beds), as well as a number of tents and tikits. The shared bathrooms won't make you squirm and the well-tended sand-floored courtyard is a good place to idle away.

Finding transport to Ouadâne is not easy. Atâr is a much better place to look than Chinguetti, as vehicles go between Atâr and Ouadâne every few days (every day, if you're lucky), but next to never from Chinguetti. The trip (UM2500) normally takes about four hours. If you're driving you have two alternatives: the southerly Piste du Batha, which passes through sand dunes and definitely requires a guide, and the northerly Piste du Dhar Chinguetti along the plateau, a road which is in very good condition.

THE ROAD TO MALL

Good news for overlanders: the Route de l'Espoir (Road of Hope) from Nouakchott to Néma (around 1100km) is now entirely tarred, and you can cover this monotonous stretch in two days.

The first major town on the road to the Malian border is Kiffa (population 30,000), an important regional trading centre and crossroads, where you can bunk down at Auberge Le Phare du Désert (🖻 563 28 88; tikits UM10,000; 😰), on the outskirts of Kiffa.

You could also break up your journey at lively Ayoûn el-Atroûs, which is a good place to spend your last ouguiyas before crossing into Mali. For accommodation, try the unpretentious Hôtel Ayoûn (🖻 515 1462; s/d UM5000/8000; 🕄), which is in the centre, or Auberge Saada Tenzah (🖻 515 1337, 641 1052; r UM5000-8000), about 3km east of the centre on the road to Néma.

The tarred road ends at Néma, the jumpingoff point for Oualâta. You'll find several petrol pumps here, a couple of modest stores and a police station at which you can get your passport stamped. You can base yourself at Complexe Touristique N'Gady (2 513 0900; fax 513 0970; s/d bungalows UM7000/9000, r 12,000/15,000; P 😢), a few kilometres west of the centre.

For more details on reaching this area by public transport, see p426.

OUALÂTA

Possibly one of Mauritania's best-kept secrets, Oualâta is another ancient Saharan town high on atmosphere and personality. Dating from 1224, it used to be the last resting point for caravans heading for Timbuktu. It's about 100km north of Néma, but is definitely worth the gruelling ride to get there.

Entering the town you'll be struck by the red mudbrick houses adorned with decorative paintings on the exterior and interior. There's also a small museum and a library, which houses ancient Islamic manuscripts. There are also several rock paintings and archaeological sites in the vicinity. Various camel trips can also be organised (ask your hosts).

Although you're miles from anywhere, you'll find about six guesthouses to rest your weary limbs, including Auberge Tayib/Gamni -Auberge de l'Hotel de Ville (r per person UM3000) and Auberge de l'Amitié (r per person UM1500). A notch up, Auberge Ksar Walata (r per person UM5000) features a lovely patio and attractive rooms. They all serve meals.

There are two dirt tracks between Néma and Oualâta (approximately 110km). Land Rovers ply the route between the two towns (UM2000, 2½ hours) on an infrequent basis. Ask around in Néma market.

MAURITANIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Finding cheap accommodation (in the US\$8 to US\$15 range) is easy in cities and major towns. There's also a sprinkle of more expensive, air-conditioned hotels meeting international standards in Nouakchott and, to a lesser extent, Nouâdhibou and Atâr. In the desert, the most widespread accommodation is auberges or campements (traditional huts or tents that come equipped with mattresses on the floor).

ACTIVITIES

Camel rides and 4WD expeditions in the desert are the most popular activities. For bird-watching, nothing can beat the Parc National du Banc d'Arguin, one of the world's greatest birdlife-viewing venues.

BUSINESS HOURS

Although it's a Muslim country, for business purposes Mauritania adheres to the Monday to Friday working week. However, Friday is the main prayer day, so many businesses have an extended lunch break on Friday afternoon. Many shops are open every day.

CUSTOMS

It is illegal to bring alcohol into the country.

PRACTICALITIES

- Mauritania uses the metric system for weights and measures.
- Electrical current is 220V AC, 50Hz and most electrical plugs are of the European two-pin type.
- Mauritania's only TV station is TVM, with programmes in Arabic and French.
- For the news (in French), pick up Le Calame or Horizons.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Mauritania is one of the safest countries in Africa. A word of warning though: there are thousands of land mines buried along the Mauritanian side of the border with the Western Sahara, even as close as a few kilometres from Nouâdhibou.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Mauritanian Embassies & Consulates

Mauritania has embassies in Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal, and a consulate in Niger. For more details, see the relevant country chapter.

Canada (🖻 613-237 3283; 121 Sherwood Dr, Ottawa K1Y 3V1)

France (🖻 01 45 48 23 88; 89 rue du Cherche-Midi, 75006 Paris)

Germany (🖻 030-20 65 88 30; Axel Springer Strasse 54, 10117 Berlin)

UK (🖻 020-7478 9323; 8 Carlos Palace, Mayfair, London W1K 3AS)

USA (202-232 5700; www.ambarim-dc.org; 2129 Leroy PI NW, Washington, DC, 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Mauritania

All embassies are open from Monday to Friday. Visa applications are received in the morning.

- France (2525 2337; Rue Ahmed Ould Mohamed)
- Germany (🕿 525 1729; Rue Abdallave)

Mali (🕿 525 4081, 525 4078; Tevragh Zeina) North of the centre.

Morocco (2 525 1411; Ave du Général de Gaulle) Senegal (🕿 525 7290; Rue de l'Ambassade du Sénégal)

USA (2 525 2660; Rue Abdallaye)

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays include: New Year's Day 1 January National Reunification Day 26 February Workers' Day 1 May African Liberation Day 25 May Army Day 10 July Independence Day 28 November Anniversary of the 1984 Coup 12 December

Mauritania also celebrates the usual Islamic holidays; see the Africa Directory chapter p1106.

INTERNET ACCESS

You'll find cybercafés in Nouakchott, Nouâdhibou and Atâr.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the ouguiya (UM). Euros and US dollars are the cash to carry and wads of cash it must be, because travellers cheques and credit cards are pretty useless. Credit cards are accepted only at top-end hotels in Nouakchott.

TELEPHONE

You can make international calls and send faxes at post offices. The innumerable privately run phone shops in the major cities and towns

VISAS Visas are required for all except nationals of Arab League countries and some African countries. In countries where Mauritania has no diplomatic representation, including Australia, French embassies will issue visas for around US\$30. Visas can also be issued at the Moroccan border (€20).

Visas for Onward Travel

For information on embassies and consulates, see left.

Mali Visas are issued the same day (UM6500) and are valid for one month. You need two photos and a photocopy of the information pages of your passport. Morocco Single-/double-entry visas cost UM5800/8700 and are issued in 48 hours. You need two photos and photocopies of your passport and air ticket. Senegal One-month visas (UM1500) are issued in 24 hours. You need four photos.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Mauritania is a conservative Muslim country but it is by no means the most extreme in this regard. Women might get the odd bit of sexual harassment, but it's nothing in comparison with some North African countries. It's wise to dress modestly.

TRANSPORT IN MAURITANIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Nouakchott, Nouâdhibou and Atâr have international airports. Nouakchott's airport handles most traffic.

Mauritania's national carrier, Air Mauritanie, flies to Paris, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire),

Bamako (Mali), Casablanca (Morocco), Cotonou (Benin), Dakar (Senegal), Las Palmas (Canary Islands) and Pointe-Noire (Congo).

Point Afrique (in France 00 33 4 75 97 20 40; www point-afrique.com) flies between Paris and Marseilles and Atâr from the end of October to the end of April, while Air France has flights between Paris and Nouakchott. Fares from Paris start at US\$550.

Air Senegal operates between Dakar and Nouakchott, while Royal Air Maroc has flights between Nouakchott and Casablanca. Tunis Air connects Nouakchott with Tunis (Tunisia), while Air Algérie flies to Algiers. From Casablanca, Tunis or Algiers, there are many connections to Europe and the Middle East. For flights to New Zealand, Europe and the

For flights to New Zealand, Europe and the USA see p1116.

All airlines flying to/from Nouakchott have an office in the capital (see p426).

At the time of research, the most straightforward route to Mali was from Ayoûn el-Atroûs to Nioro. You can also cross at Néma, Timbedgha (both connecting with Nara in Mali) and Kiffa (connecting with Nioro in Mali).

From Nouakchott, you can catch bush taxis to Néma and Ayoûn el-Atroûs. From these places you can catch a bush taxi to Niara or Nioro. It's also possible to travel from Sélibaby to Kayes.

If crossing into Mali, have your passport stamped by police at the first town you reach after crossing the border. You must also clear customs, which is done in Néma or Ayoûn el-Atroûs.

MOROCCO

The only border crossing between Morocco and Mauritania is north of Nouâdhibou. Crossing this border is straightforward; the road is now entirely tarred to Nouakchott, except for the 3km no-man's-land that separates the two border posts. Coming from Morocco, you can buy the Mauritanian visa at the border ($\in 20$). Expect to pay another $\in 20$ for various 'taxes' on top of the visa price. Although there are no longer any currency declaration forms, some customs officials still ask for it and, of course, if you can't present it, they will expect a small bribe.

Note that there's no public transport between Morocco and Mauritania.

HOT TIP: CROSSING INTO SENEGAL

If you want to avoid the hassles at Rosso, you can take a bush taxi from Rosso to Diamma (Keur Masséne) and cross at Diamma. The border at Diamma is open 24 hours (it's a bridge) and the hassles are reportedly less problematic (although you'll probably be asked for an 'extra hours tax' if you cross at night). This option is possible in the dry season only.

SENEGAL

The main border crossing for Senegal is at Rosso but it's also possible to cross at Diamma (Keur Masséne), west of Rosso. When crossing into Senegal at Rosso, note that immigration is only open on the Mauritanian side from 8am to noon and 3pm to 6pm. The border crossing here is notorious for its hassles.

From Dakar to Nouakchott by public transport usually takes from 11 to 13 hours depending on the wait at the border. Most minibuses and bush taxis leave Dakar before 10am to be sure of arriving in Rosso well before the border closing time (6pm). At Rosso, most travellers without vehicles cross by pirogue (UM200/CFA500, five minutes) as the ferry crosses only four times daily.

Be prepared for some confrontation with customs officials who usually ask for 'exit taxes'.

GETTING AROUND

Air Mauritanie flies from Nouakchott to Nouâdhibou, Kiffa, Ayoûn el Atroûs, Selibaby and Zouérat.

Bush Taxi

Mercedes taxis, Peugeot taxis, Land Rovers and minibuses, in descending order of cost, are the four types of public transport. Bush taxis go to all the major towns daily.

Car & Motorcycle

Consider renting a 4WD and driver if you want to reach more remote parts of the country. The standard Toyota Hilux usually costs around UM21,000 per day for the vehicle, plus petrol.

Expect police checkpoints at the entrance and exit of each town.

AN EPIC JOURNEY ON THE IRON-ORE TRAIN

We will never forget the experience – neither will you. The Zouérat to Nouâdhibou train is the longest in the world, typically 2.3km long. When it arrives at the 'station' in Nouâdhibou, a decrepit building in the open desert, a seemingly endless number of ore wagons pass by before the passenger carriage at the rear appears. Then the stampede to get on board begins. The lucky ones find a place on one of the two long benches; the rest stand or sit on the floor, or perch on the roof for free. There are also a dozen 'berths' that are so worn out that you can see the springs. The atmosphere can be quite jovial, with people playing cards on the floor. In the late afternoon, many men find space on the floor to pray and at dusk when the cabin becomes totally dark, chanting begins. On board, a man sells tea and cheap snacks. Take enough clothes to keep warm, as it can get cold at night. For more details see p427.

Tours

There are travel agencies in Nouakchott that offer tours around the country but it's not a bad idea to arrange a tour with a more regionally focused company, eg in Atâr for the Adrar. Travel is usually by 4WD but you can opt for trekking tours or camel rides. If there are at least four travellers, prices should average around UM20,000 per person per day.

Train

The Nouâdhibou to Zouérat train (see above) is an iron-ore train with no passenger terminals, however it has become a passenger train for lack of better alternatives. The entire trip takes 16 to 18 hours, but most travellers choose to get off at Choûm, 12 hours from Nouâdhibou, and continue on by bush taxi to Atâr.

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Niger

With the Ténéré Desert boasting some of the Sahara's most beautiful dunes, the stark splendour of the Air Mountains being one of West Africa's most spectacular sights, and the intriguing, ancient trans-Saharan trade-route towns of Agadez and Zinder playing home to magnificent mazes of mudbrick architecture and fascinating locals, the international appeal of Niger as a destination is undeniable.

Odd then, that friends often ask prospective travellers 'Why Niger?'. Press regarding Niger's problems with localised food shortages dominates headlines and paints the entire nation in the same poor light. Some news reports would have you believe that locusts and drought regularly destroy Niger's entire food supply. In reality, crop production rarely falls more than 10% lower than average. In one reported 'famine' food was still available in most markets; the problem was that nomadic herders lost much of their livestock (their only income) due to locusts eating their livestock's food supplies. This meant herders couldn't afford the available food, putting millions at risk of starvation. Niger is undoubtedly one of the world's poorest countries, but taking your tourist dollars elsewhere only exacerbates the problem.

The lucky ones who do visit will witness enduring physical beauty and meet a vibrant mix of people, some of the planet's most stoic and resilient citizens. Whether you squeeze into bush taxis with locals and travel between colourful villages, slide into a 4WD and tackle the Ténéré or lope into the Aïr aboard a camel, you'll never forget your time in Niger.

FAST FACTS

NIGEI

- Area 1,267,000 sq km
- ATMs Nonexistent
- Borders Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Nigeria, Chad; land crossing into Libya is forbidden, though entry from Libya is possible
- Budget US\$15 to US\$100 a day 1
- Capital Niamev
- Languages French, Hausa, Djerma, Fulfulde, Tamashek
- Money West African CFA franc; €1 = CFA656, US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 12.5 million
- Seasons Hot and dry (September-May), wet (June-August)
- Telephone Country code 227; international access code 200
- Time GMT/UTC + 1
- Visa US\$35 to €50; obtained in Algeria, Benin, Chad, Mali and Nigeria

HIGHLIGHTS

- Air Mountains (p448) Make tracks with camel companions through red sands and blue rocks in these mystical mountains.
- **Ténéré Desert** (p448) Dive into the deep end with an expedition to this sublime section of the Sahara.
- Agadez (p445) Spiral up to the spiky summit of its majestic mud mosque to dramatic desert panoramas.
- **Zinder** (p444) Backtrack through the banco (mud brick) houses of the Birni Quartier and soak up the Hausa history.
- **Kouré** (p442) Walk in sublime silence with West Africa's last wild herd of gorgeous giraffes.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

December to February, the coolest and driest period, is the best time to visit. Temperatures can soar beyond 45°C (113°F) from March through to June, making desert travel unfeasible. Rains dampen the south from late May through September.

ITINERARIES

- One Week While whistle-stop tours of Niamey, Zinder and Agadez are possible (using public transport), you're better off staying local and enjoying Niamey (p437). Possible trips include wandering with the giraffes near Kouré (p442) and exploring the renowned Parc Regional du W (p442). Alternatively, base yourself in intriguing Agadez (p445) for a taste of the astounding Air Mountains (p448).
- Two Weeks In addition to the one-week itinerary, add a day for the old quarters and Hausa architecture in Zinder (p444). If the Sahara beckons, bypass Niamey and delve deeper into the Aïr and Ténéré Desert (p448).
- One Month Toss out our advice above, join a camel caravan (p448) and see the Sahara, old school.

HISTORY

Before the Sahara started swallowing Niger around 2500 BC, it supported verdant grasslands, abundant wildlife and populations thriving on hunting and herding. Long after the desert pushed those populations south, Niger became a fixture on the trans-Saharan trade route. Between the 10th and 18th centuries, West African empires, such as the

HOW MUCH?

- Streetside yogurt US\$0.25
- Croix d'Agadez (stylised silver cross) US\$2
- Simple Tuareg grigri (amulet) US\$4
- Tuareg turban US\$3
- Moto (motorcycle-taxi) across town US\$0.30

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.20
- 1L bottled water US\$0.60
- Bottle of Bière Niger US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$3
- Grilled beef brochettes US\$0.20

Kanem-Borno, Mali and Songhaï, flourished here, trafficking gold, salt and slaves.

The French strolled in late in the 1800s, meeting stronger-than-expected resistance. Decidedly unamused, they dispatched the puni-tive Voulet-Chanoîne expedition, destroying much of southern Niger in 1898-99. Although Tuareg revolts continued, culminating in Agadez's siege in 1916-17, the French had control.

French rule wasn't kind. They cultivated traditional chiefs' power, whose abuses were encouraged as a means of control, and the enforced shift from subsistence farming to high-density cash crops compounded the Sahara's ongoing migration.

In 1958 France offered its West African colonies self-government in a French union or immediate independence. Countless votes conveniently disappeared, enabling France to claim that Niger wished to remain within its sphere of influence.

Maintaining close French ties, Niger's first president, Hamani Diori, ran a repressive oneparty state. After surviving several coups, he was overthrown by Lieutenant Colonel Seyni Kountché after food stocks were discovered in ministerial homes during the Sahel drought of 1968-74. Kountché established a military ruling council.

Kountché hit the jackpot in 1968 when uranium was discovered near Arlit. Mining incomes soon ballooned, leading to ambitious projects, including the 'uranium highway' to

Agadez and Arlit. Yet not everyone was smiling: inflation skyrocketed and the poorest suffered more than ever.

The 1980s were unkind to all: uranium prices collapsed, the great 1983 drought killed thousands, and one-party politics hindered democracy. By the 1990s, Nigerians were aware of political changes sweeping West Africa and mass demonstrations erupted, eventually forcing the government into multiparty elections in 1993. However, a military junta overthrew the elected president, Mahamane Ousmane, in 1996.

Niger Today

In 1999, during widespread strikes and economic stagnation, president Mainassara (1996 coup leader) was assassinated and democracy re-established. Peaceful elections in 1999 and 2004 witnessed victory for Mamadou Tandja.

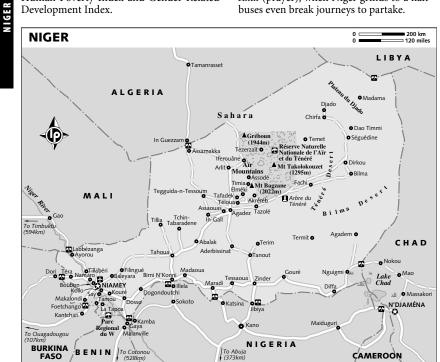
Niger is truly struggling, ranking last on the UN's Human Development Index, based on life expectancy, infant mortality and education. Sadly, Niger also ranks last on the UN's Human Poverty Index and Gender-Related Development Index.

CULTURE

Arguably the world's poorest people, Nigerians are also proud and quick with welcoming smiles and occasional spontaneous acts of generosity. Similarly refreshing is their willingness to work to improve Niger, unlike many Africans who'd admittedly jump at the chance to emigrate.

Despite most Nigerians being devoutly Muslim, the government is steadfastly secular and Islam adopts a more relaxed aura than in nations with similar demographics. Women don't cover their faces, alcohol is quietly consumed and some Tuareg, recognising desert life's harshness, ignore Ramadan's fast.

While Islam plays the greatest role in daily life, shaping beliefs and thoughts, little is visible to visitors. The biggest exceptions are *salat* (prayer), when Niger grinds to a halt – buses even break journeys to partake.



Religion aside, survival occupies most people's days. Around 90% make their tenuous living from agriculture and livestock, many surviving on US\$1 or less per day. Producing numerous children to help with burdening workloads is a necessity for many, a fact contributing to population growth. The fact of children being obliged to work has led to staggering adult illiteracy rates.

PEOPLE

Amazingly, Niger's population has almost doubled since 1985. Currently, 23% of Nigerians live in urban areas, though that figure is rising.

More than 90% of Nigerians live in the south, which is dominated by Hausa and Songhaï-Djerma, making up 56% and 22% of Niger's populace respectively. The next largest groups are nomadic Fulani (8.5%) and Tuareg (8%), both in Niger's north, and Kanuri (4.3%), located between Zinder and Chad.

Nigerians are predominantly Muslim (over 90%), with small percentages of Christian urban dwellers. Several rural populations still practise traditional animist religions. Due to the strong influence of Nigeria's Islamic community, some Muslims around Maradi call for sharia law.

ARTS & CRAFTS

The best-known artisans are Tuareg silversmiths, who produce necklaces, striking amulets, ornamental silver daggers and stylised silver crosses, each with intricate filigree designs representing areas boasting Tuareg populations. The most famous cross is the *Croix d'Agadez*. To Tuareg, crosses are powerful talismans protecting against ill fortune.

Leatherwork by *artisans du cuir* is well regarded, particularly in Zinder, where traditional items – saddlebags, cushions and tasselled pouches – rank alongside attractive modernities like sandals and briefcases.

Beautifully unique to Niger are vibrant *kountas* (Djerma blankets), produced from bright cotton strips.

ENVIRONMENT

Two-thirds of Niger is desert, with one-third being Sahel (semidesert zone south of the Sahara). Notable features include the Niger River (Africa's third-longest), which flows 300km through Niger's southwest; the Air Mountains, the dark volcanic formations of which rise over 2000m; and the Ténéré Desert's spectacularly sweeping sand dunes.

Desertification, Niger's greatest environmental problem, is primarily caused by overgrazing and deforestation. Quartz-rich soil also prevents topsoil anchoring, causing erosion.

The southwest's dry savanna woodland hosts one of West Africa's better wildlife parks, Parc Regional du W.

FOOD & DRINK

Dates, yogurt, rice and mutton are standard Tuareg fare, while *riz sauce* (rice with sauce) is omnipresent in Niger's south. Standard restaurant dishes include grilled fish, chicken, and beef brochettes. Couscous and ragout are also popular. Outside Niamey vegetarian options diminish.

Sitting for a cup of Tuareg tea is rewarding and thirst quenching. For a wobble in your step, try Bière Niger. For a serious stagger, down some palm wine.

NIAMEY

pop 795,000

On the Niger River's lush shores and home to culinary delights unparalleled elsewhere in Niger, Niamey refreshes those arriving from the Sahel's wilds. Conversely, it can be a desperate place with summer dust never settling and the pain of the world's poorest country on show.

Dive into markets, peruse the museum, take a pirogue along the river or simply enjoy a sunset riverside drink as silhouettes of loping, laden camels cross Kennedy Bridge.

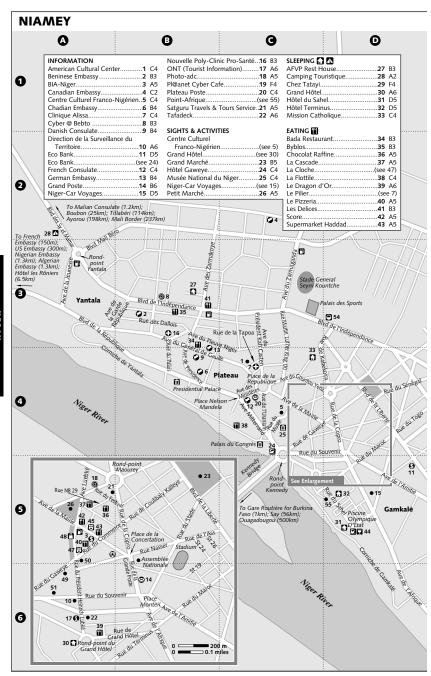
ORIENTATION

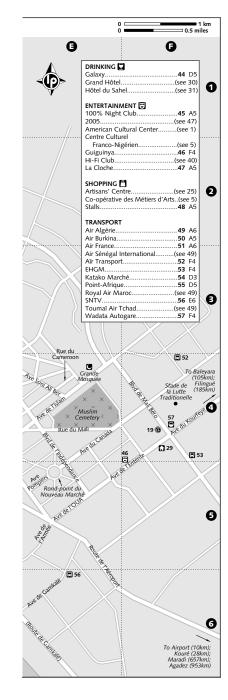
Niamey is fairly spread out, which means more walking than other Sahel capitals. The layout is rather confusing, but signs now aid navigation. Crisscrossing through the town's hub, like a wheel's spokes – hosting restaurants, bars and banking facilities – are Rue du Président Heinrich Lubké, Ave de la Mairie and Rue du Commerce.

INFORMATION Cultural Centres

American Cultural Center (73 31 79; Rue de la Tapoa; 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) US TV news and newspapers.

Centre Culturel Franco-Nigérien (🖻 73 48 34; Rue du Musée; 🕎 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Wed-Sat,





3.30-6.30pm Tue, 9am-noon Sun) Library, lectures, exhibits, dance and theatre.

Internet Access

Cyber@Bebto (Blvd de l'Indépendance; per hr CFA500; 8am-midnight)

Photo-adc (per hr CFA1000; ⓑ 8am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun; ☯)) Off Rond-point Maourey.

Pl@anet Cyber Cafe (Blvd de Mali Béro; per hr CFA500; 8am-midnight)

Medical Services

Clinique Alissa (🖻 72 57 66; Ave du Président Kalt Casten; 🕎 24hr)

Nouvelle Poly-Clinic Pro-Santé (🖻 72 26 50; Ave du Général de Gaulle; 🕅 24hr)

Tafadeck ((2) 73 20 34; Rue du Président Heinrich Lubké) Niamey's best dentist.

Money

Post

BIA-Niger (Rue du Commerce) Change travellers cheques (1.6% commission) and cash. Visa cash advances cost CFA10,000.

Eco Bank (Blvd de la Liberté) Charges extortionate commissions on travellers cheques. Branch at Hôtel Gaweye (Ave Mitterrand) offers credit card advances (2% commission).

NIGER

Grande Poste (Rue de la Grande Poste) Decent poste restante service.

Plateau Poste (Place de la République) Simply stamps and franks here.

Telephone & Fax

Private telecentres abound (CFA900 per minute for international calls).

Grande Poste (Rue de la Grande Poste) Standard rates (see p450).

Photo-adc (\mathfrak{S} 8am-9.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-7pm Sun) Fuzzy international calls (CFA200 per minute) via internet. It's off Rond-point Maourey.

Tourist Information

ONT ((2) 73 24 47; Rue de Président Heinrich Lubké; (2) 8am-noon & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri) Besides dusty brochures, you'll get little help.

Travel Agencies

Niger-Car Voyages ((2) 73 23 31; nicarvoy@intnet.ne; Ave de l'Afrique) The best, albeit most expensive, agency for local tours and car rentals.

Point-Afrique (Point-Air Niger; 🗟 73 40 26; www.point -afrique.com; Rue du Sahel) This airline offers affordable package trips to northern Niger.

Satguru Travels & Tours Service () 73 69 31; stts-nim@intenet.ne; Rue de la Copro) Need air tickets? Look no further.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

While violent incidents are generally rare in Niamey, do exercise caution along Corniche de Yantala and Corniche de Gamkalé – always take a taxi after dark. The Grand and Petit Marchés are prime pickpocket grounds.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Wade through labyrinthine lanes shaded by kaleidoscopes of tattered sheets in the **Grand Marché** (Blvd de la Liberté; 🕑 8am-6pm), inhaling spices and heady aromas all the way. Great for observing Nigerians interacting – peace amid the pandemonium. At the **Petit Marché** (Ave de la Mairie; 😒 8am-6pm), let your hands do the walking (squeeze fruit to your heart's content).

The sprawling Musée National du Niger (273

43 21; Rue du Musée; admission CFA1000, camera/video fee

CFA1000/5000; 🕑 9am-noon & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Sun) is

one of West Africa's standouts. Numerous

themed pavilions delve into Niger's present

and past. While common sense and science

dictate 2m-tall, 15m-long crocodiles no longer wander earth, one jaw-dropping glimpse of the fossilised *Sarcosuchus imperator*, 'Super Croc', and you'll second guess everything! Avoid the appalling zoo. There's no better way to experience the Niger River than from a peaceful **pirogue** skimming its surface at sunset. You can even take a day or two and orphora villaces up river. Although

its surface at sunset. You can even take a day or two and explore villages up river. Although 'guides' wandering town offer these trips, go directly to the piroguers on the riverfront

SUPERSIZE ME!

During years of bountiful harvests, Niamey's Djerma population celebrate Hangandi. Although festivities are enjoyable, it's the beauty contest's reputation that keeps on growing and growing, much like its competitors. You see, in the eye of the Djerma, the larger the better. Prior to Hangandi, Djerma women who've been chosen to compete (some plucked off buses!) train by ingesting as much as possible. Everything culminates with the most gorgeous (read massive) woman being crowned at the Palais du Congrès. Her reward? More food! near La Flottile restaurant. Four-passenger pirogues should cost CFA2000 per person per hour – triple that for a motor. **Niger-Car Voyages** (73 23 31; nicarvoy@intnet.ne; Ave de l'Afrique) also arranges trips.

Beat the heat with some underwater action at **Hôtel Gaweye** (Ave Mitterrand; admission CFA2500) or **Grand Hôtel** (Rond-point du Grand Hôtel; admission CFA2000).

COURSES

Centre Culturel Franco-Nigérien (73 48 34; Rue du Musée) occasionally offers language courses. Otherwise, enquire about tutors for your burgeoning French and Hausa skills.

SLEEPING

Vacancies are rare, so book ahead.

Budget

Camping Touristique (**C** 75 44 89; Blvd des Sy et Mamar; camping per person CFA2500, plus per vehicle CFA1000) This dusty site in western Niamey is a campers-only option.

Chez Tatayi (ⓐ 74 12 81; www.tatayi.com; Ave de l'Entente; dm CFA5000, s/d without bathroom from CFA12,000/15,000; ඞ) This pleasant, peaceful haven near Wadata Autogare has a shady garden veranda, spotless rooms, stashes of books, board games and free drinking water. Shared bathrooms and mosquitos (nets are provided) are the only downsides. Air-con adds CFA4000.

The following options are only for NGO employees/volunteers:

AFVP Rest House (75 30 69; off Ave des Zarmakoye; dm (FA4000)

Mission Catholique (73 32 03; Ave du Gountou Yena; d with fan/air-con CFA7000/10,000;)

Midrange & Top End

Hôtel les Rôniers (272 31 38; Rue Tondibia; s/tw CFA22,500/25,500; 2) Bright rooms, cool tile floors and contemporary bathrooms are found beneath the cottages' thatched roofs. The garden's lovely, the restaurant's great and the pool's rather hip. It's 7km west of town (CFA1000 by taxi).

Hôtel du Sahel (73 24 31; fax 73 20 98; Rue du Sahel; s/d CFA25,550/28,500;) Rooms are comfortable and clean, though some toilets lack seats. Odd-numbered rooms boast river views. Renovations were underway when we visited (new toilet seats?!). Don't walk here from town after dark.

Hôtel Terminus (73 26 92; hotermi@intnet.ne; Rue du Sahel; r/ste CFA32,000/45,000; 🕃 🔊) Clean, comfy bungalows host large sunny rooms, with TVs and gargantuan bathrooms. There's a pleasant restaurant and a footy-trained TV.

Grand Hôtel (73 26 41; www.grandhotelniger.com; Rond-point du Grand Hôtel; s/d/ste from CFA49,500/59,500/ 60,000; **2 (a)** Attentive service, value for money and top-notch rooms with satellite TVs and lovely river views.

EATING

Until 9am street stalls near Petit Marché serve fried-egg sandwiches. After that, it's *riz sauce*. Late-night *suya* stalls on Rue du Commerce's hawk braised brochettes (CFA100; *suya* is Hausa for brochette).

Les Delices (Blvd de l'Indépendance; pastries from CFA350; Definition of the service of the ser

La Cloche (Ave Luebké; meals CFA1000-3000; 🕑 noonmidnight) When taste is secondary to late-night hunger, the *shwarmas* work nicely.

Le Dragon d'Or (Rue de Grand Hôtel; meals CFA1700-5400; Dunch & dinner) Slurp delicious Vietnamese soups, sharpen your teeth on frog legs, or work chopstick magic on tasty chicken with cashew nuts and fresh ginger.

La Flottile (Comiche de Yantala; meals CFA2500-3800; Dunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Indulge in fresh fish in this shady garden restaurant. The *capitaine* (Nile perch) is excellent. For safety, organise a taxi after sunset.

Byblos (Blvd de l'Indépendance; meals CFA2500-5000; Dunch & dinner) This open-air Lebanese restaurant serves Niger's best tabouleh and hummus.

Le Pilier (Rue de la Tapoa; meals CFA3000-6500; ♥ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon; ♥) Hands down, *the* place for Italian. Enjoy plentiful pastas, from ravioli to gnocchi dripping in Gorgonzola.

Bada Restaurant (Ave du Général de Gaulle; meals CFA3000-15,000; [⊙] lunch & dinner) Put chopsticks in the kung-fu position and battle *tempura* vegetables, roasted eel, fresh sashimi and sushi.

Other enticing options:

Chocolat Raffine (Rue NB 29; meals CFA1200-3000; S breakfast, lunch & dinner)

La Cascade (Rue NB 29; meals CFA1800-4500; 🐑 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner daily; 🕄)

Le Pizzeria (Rue du Commerce; pizzas from CFA3000; dinner; 2) **Score** (Ave Luebké) and **Supermarket Haddad** ((2) 73 61 60; Rue de Commerce) are well-stocked supermarkets. You may spot our nose-prints on the cheese displays.

DRINKING

Grand Hôtel (Rond-point du Grand Hôtel) Few places in town can beat the Grand Hotel's poolside terrace for a sunset beer – the river views are tremendous.

Hôtel du Sahel (Rue du Sahel) While lacking the posh feel of the Grand Hôtel, this hotel's riverside terrace is another great spot for a wobbly pop (beer).

Galaxy (Rue du Sahel) For a more African experience, head to this bar perched on the river behind the Piscine Olympique D'Etat (Olympic swimming pool).

ENTERTAINMENT

2005 (Ave Luebké; cover Wed CFA1500, Fri & Sat CFA2500) Reverberating with Western and African tunes, this was *it* when we visited.

Nearby La Cloche (Ave Luebké; no cover), 100% Night Club (Ave de la Mairie; cover CFA1000) and Hi-Fi Club (Rue du Commerce; cover weekends CFA3000) heave on weekends. Another great option, further east, is Guiguinya (Ave de l'Entente; no cover).

Centre Culturel Franco-Nigérien (Rue du Musée; admission CFA500; ⓑ 8.30pm, days vary) and the **American Cultural Center** (Rue de la Tapoa; admission free; ⓑ 4.30pm Wed & Fri) offer cinematic distraction.

SHOPPING

Peruse the nether regions of the Grand Marché (opposite) for leatherwork, silver jewellery and *les couvertures Djerma* (also known locally as *kountas*). *Kountas* are large, bright strips of cotton sewn together into a large blanket, which are truly spectacular and unique to Niger. The museum's **artisans' centre** (Rue du Musée; ☆ dosed Mon) and **Co-opérative des Métiers d'Arts** (Rue du Musée) are also good.

You'll find local music CDs at stalls on Ave Luebké, near the Petit Marché.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

For airlines operating from Niamey, see p451.

Bus

The government-run **SNTV** (Avede Gamkalé) is most reliable, though **EHGM** (Blvd de Mali Béro) and **Aïr Transport** (off Ave du Canada), serving similar routes, aren't bad. All buses leave between 4am and 6am. One-way SNTV fares include:

Destination	Fare (CFA)	Duration (hr)	Frequency
Agadez	14,310	12	Tue, Thu-Sun
Arlit	17,500	15	Tue, Thu-Sun
Dosso	2440	2	daily
Maradi	9565	9	daily
Tahoua	8750	8	Tue, Thu-Sun
Zinder	12,650	12	daily

Bush Taxi

The following is a list of one-way fares for Peugeots from **Wadata Autogare** (Ave du Kourfeye), their estimated durations and level of patience required.

Destination	Fare (CFA)	Duration (hr)	Patience of
Agadez	15,100	16½	Mahatma Gandhi
Birni N'Konni	5500	7½	David Blaine
Dosso	2100	21/2	John McEnroe
Gaya	5000	5	Michael Palin
Maradi	9000	11	Mother Teresa
Tahoua	8000	10	The Pope
Zinder	12,400	14	Shackleton's men

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The airport is about 13km southeast of the city. A taxi from the airport costs CFA5000 to CFA10,000; coming from town costs about CFA2500.

Taxi

NIGER

Abundant until 10pm, most taxis are shared. Shared taxis head towards the first passenger's destination trolling for subsequent passengers. To catch one, hold out your arm and blurt your destination when it slows. Going your way? *Voilà!* You're there for CFA200. If not? Expect a face full of dust. Yes, their theme song is 'Are You Gonna Go My Way?' by Lenny Kravitz.

A *déplacement* (private hire) costs CFA1000 for a cross-town trip.

AROUND NIAMEY

About 60km east, West Africa's last remaining **giraffe herd** quietly munch acacia trees, patrolling the baking soils around **Kouré**. The elegant long-necked beasts are rather relaxed and we spent 30 magical minutes walking in their midst.

Without a vehicle, it's an easy half-day trip by taxi (around CFA30,000). You'll need CFA4000 for admission and compulsory guide (available at the booth near the highway).

SOUTHWEST NIGER

PARC REGIONAL DU W

What this excellent **park** (adult/child CFA3500/2000; Dec – late-May) lacks in animal numbers, it compensates with its wildlife diversity. Antelopes, buffalos, elephants, hippos, lions, crocodiles, hyenas, warthogs and over 300 species of migratory bird call this dry savanna woodland home. The 9120-sq-km park rests on the Niger River's banks, straddling Niger, Benin and Burkina Faso.

The best wildlife viewing is March to May, when migratory birds arrive and animals congregate around shrinking water supplies. The park's entrance at La Tapoa has park maps, guidebooks (CFA5000) and obligatory guides (CFA5000 per day).

Campers, hope the unreliable **camp site** (camping CFA2500) near the Relais de la Tapoa lodge is open, as camping inside the park is prohibited.

From Niamey, it is about a three-hour conversation-stopping washboard drive (145km) via Say and Tamou. Niger-Car Voyages (p439) runs two-day tours (CFA70,000 to CFA140,000 per person depending on numbers). It's pointless coming independently without a vehicle.

DOSSO

pop 50,000

Once home to Djermakoye, Djerma's most important religious leader, Dosso is now merely a staging post for those heading south to Benin and southwest to Nigeria.

If stuck, **Auberge Au Zenith** (**b** 50 38 80; Route de Niamey; d with shared toilet CFA6300-12,600; **c**) has Dosso's tidiest rooms. Although all have private showers, the cement-floored rooms are dark and the shared squat toilets are smelly.

Plentiful bush taxis head to Niamey (CFA2100, 2¹/₂ hours), Dogondoutchi (CFA2000, 2¹/₂ hours) and Gaya (CFA2000, three hours).

BIRNI N'KONNI

pop 50,000

About 420km east of Niamey, Birni N'Konni (or 'Konni') sits at the junction for Zinder and Agadez. It's also an important border town with Nigeria. There's little to see, but it's a convenient place to break your journey.

At **Relais-Camping Touristique** ((a) 64 06 00; Route de Niamey; camping per person CFA1500, plus per vehicle CFA1000, d CFA10,000-12,500; (c) 1 arge, Spartan rondavels dwarf their sizable beds. It's clean, friendly and has a decent restaurant.

East of town and the cream of Konni's crop, the bright rooms at **Le Motel** ((a) 6406 50; Route de Niamey; d CFA22,500-37,500; (2) sport TVs, modern bathrooms and comfortable beds. Its restaurant is also tops.

Between SNTV, EHGM, RTV and Aïr Transport (all on Route de Niamey), there are daily buses to Maradi (CFA4500, three hours), Zinder (CFA6300, six hours), Niamey (CFA6600, six hours), Tahoua (CFA2000, 1½ hours) and Agadez (CFA7750, 5½ hours). Northbound and eastbound buses depart around 10am; westbound around 1pm.

Bush taxis leave the *autogare* (bus or transport station) for Dogondoutchi (CFA1600, two hours), Maradi (CFA2600, four hours) and Tahoua (CFA1300, 1½ hours).

TAHOUA

pop 82,600

This friendly Hausa town, about 130km north of Konni, is Niger's fifth-largest city. If you're riding bush taxis you'll stop here. Besides the vibrant Sunday market at the **Grand Marché** (Route de Maternite; 论 sunrise to sunset), peruse the **Centre Artisanal** (Route de l'Artisanal; 🏵 9am-6pm) for leather products.

Near Centre Artisanal, **Restaurant Milana** (Route d'Arène; meals CFA800-3500;) breakfast, lunch & dinner) outshines all. Italian cravings are seriously satisfied here. There are also **food stalls** (sandwiches CFA250) opposite the SNTV office.

Between SNTV, EHGM, RTV and Aïr Transport, daily midday buses serve Agadez (CFA6845, 4½ hours) and Niamey (CFA8880, 7½ hours). Frequent minibuses serve Konni (CFA1300, 1½ hours).

SOUTHEAST NIGER

MARADI pop 179,000

Maradi, Niger's third-largest city, remains the administrative capital and commercial centre for agriculture. The proximity to Nigeria means staunchly conservative Islam reigns. Although not the most engaging place, it warrants a day stop.

As you might imagine, sinking into Maradi's **Grande Marché** (BRJ Rue 1; 💬 sunrise to sunset) on market days (Monday and Friday) is a pleasurable assault on the senses. Vending of an entirely different variety goes on at the **Centre Artisanal de Maradi** (🗟 41 01 02; BRJ Rue 1; 💬 8am-10pm), 2km north of town. It's worth a stop – wander the workshops, witness the workmanship and wonder where to start the negotiations.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Larewa ($\textcircled{\sc opt}$ 53 01 44; d with fan/air-con from (FA5500/10,600; $\textcircled{\sc opt}$) Maradi's best budget value is north of town, east of EHGM. The western complex's rooms, with showers and shared toilets, outshine the eastern complex's more expensive options.

Boulangerie Pâtisserie Mai-Rey (BRJ Rue 1; pastries CFA250; [™] from 5.30am) A scant yet good snacking selection.

Restaurant Marthaba (43 SGI Rue 10; meals CFA500-1000; 𝔅 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A sleepy outdoor place for local dishes like *riz sauce*.

At night there's delicious grilled chicken at **street stalls** (BRJ Rue 13) around Jardin Publique.

Getting There & Around

SNTV (81 BRJ Rue 1) has daily buses to Zinder (CFA4500, three hours) and Niamey

(CFA9565, nine hours). **RTV** (BRJ Rue 8) and **EHGM** (Route de Niamey) have similar services. EHGM serves Diffa (CFA9700, 11 hours, Wednesday

and Saturday). All eastbound buses depart around 4pm; westbound around 9am. Bush taxis depart the gare routière (bus

station) for Zinder (CFA2750, four hours) and Konni (CFA2800, 4½ hours).

ZINDER

pop 205,500

With celebrated traditional Hausa houses, labyrinthine old-quarter alleys, an infamous prison within the Palais du Sultan, and classic French fort, Zinder wears its history on its sleeve. What a history it is, growing from a small resting spot for camels on the old trans-Saharan route to a refuge for the Hausa and Kanouri people, fleeing bloody 17th-century conflicts with the Fulani and Tuareg, before becoming the capital of the mighty Damagaram state, which thrived on everything from agriculture to the slave trade. The late 1890s brought the French, much blood-letting and Zinder's quarter-century reign as Niger's capital.

Information

BIA-Niger (Ave des Banques) Changes travellers cheques (1.6% commission) and cash.

lonelyplanet.com

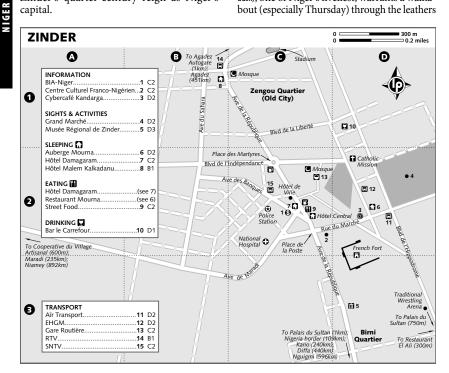
Centre Culturel Franco-Nigérien (🗟 51 05 26; Rue du Marché) French-language library and art gallery. Cybercafé Kandarga (Rue du Marché; per hr CFA1500)

Sights

Few things beat losing your bearings (and a few hours) within the Birni Quartier's innumerable crooked alleys. The old *banco* (mudbrick) houses actually represent some of Africa's best Hausa architecture. Linger outside the 19th-century **Palais du Sultan** (Place de la Grande Mosquée, Birni Quartier) to score a guide; ask about the infamous *chambre des scorpions* (a tip of CFA2000 should suffice).

The jaded **Musée Régional de Zinder** (Ave de la République; admission CFA1000, camera CFA1000; ⊗ 8amnoon & 3-6pm) has, nevertheless, a lively Englishspeaking (ahem!) curator who adds to the experience, like telling you the dusty sword actually lopped off someone's head!

The **Grand Marché** (Blvd de l'Hippodrome; 论 dawn to dusk), one of Niger's liveliest, warrants a walkabout (especially Thursday) through the leathers



of Niger's best *artisans du cuir*. More leatherwork resides at **Cooperative du Village Artisanal** (Ave de Maradi; (\heartsuit) 8am-6.30pm), 2km west of town.

Sleeping

Hôtel Malem Kalkadanu (a 50 07 74; Ave de la République; s without bathroom (FA3100-6100) This rambling place has crude but clean rooms, ranging from dark cells to larger options with fans, windows and private showers. It's decent value.

Auberge Mourna (ⓐ 99 03 06; s/d/tw from CFA14,500/18,500/18,500; ♥) Leaps and bounds ahead, this place off Rue du Marché has smart, spotless, bright rooms boasting TVs, air-con and modern bathrooms. Book ahead!

Hôtel Damagaram (51 00 69; Ave des Banques; s/d/tw CFA16,500/20,000/20,000; 3) A long drop in quality, Damagaram's teeny-weeny (useless) mosquito nets would be funny if mossies weren't living in the loos.

Eating & Drinking

Restaurant El Ali (meals CFA500-2000; ^(C) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Devour African favourites beneath the *paillotes* (thatched shelters). It's east of Birni Quartier and lacks signs; ask for directions.

Hôtel Damagaram (Ave des Banques; meals CFA1000-3000; Desakfast, lunch & dinner) An atmospheric courtyard for an evening meal or beverage. There's couscous, brochettes and Chinese dishes such as ginger chicken.

Restaurant Mourna (meals CFA2000-3200; ^(C) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This tiny terrace off Rue du Marché serves up delicious meals, such as *fillet de capitaine à la Basquaise* (Basque-style Nile perch), Cantonese rice and beef curry. Delay salivating over the crepes and chocolate mousse until assured they have some.

The best **street food** (Ave de la République; brochettes CFA100, roast pigeons/chickens CFA900/1500; 🖄 dinner) is in front of Hôtel Central.

For a local night out, hit the rough-andready Bar le Carrefour (known as L'Escalier), north of the Catholic Mission.

Getting There & Away

SNTV (Ave des Banques) serves Niamey (CFA12,650, 12 hours, daily), Agadez (CFA7700, 7½ hours, Monday and Thursday) and Nguigmi (CFA7900, 10 hours, Monday and Friday) via Diffa (CFA6200, seven hours). EHGM, found north of Auberge Mourna, also serves Niamey, Agadez and Diffa. Air Transport (Blvd del'Hippodrome) and RTV (off Ave de la République) serve Niamey daily. Minibuses/Peugeots depart the *gare routière* in the centre of town for Diffa (CFA6000/6500, nine/eight hours) and Maradi (CFA2500/3000, 4½/3½ hours).

Minibuses/Peugeots depart for Agadez (CFA7000/8000, nine/eight hours) from **Agadez autogare** (Ave de la République), 1km northeast of town.

DIFFA

pop 30,600

This diminutive, dusty stop for overlanders visiting Chad has a BIA-Niger (euros only), petrol station and market to stockpile essentials (prices soar further east).

Hôtel le Tal (窗 56 39 57; d with fan/air-con CFA7500/13,500; ♥), off Route de Nguigmi behind the petrol station, is overpriced, but friendly and cleanish.

SNTV serves Nguigmi (CFA1800, four hours, Monday and Friday) and Zinder (CFA6200, seven hours, Wednesday and Sunday). EHGM serves Zinder (Saturday). Bush taxis access Nguigmi (CFA2500, four hours).

NORTHERN NIGER

AGADEZ

AGADEZ pop 95,100

While some great ancient trading Sahara towns, like Timbuktu, try to survive on international mystique, Agadez thrives as the gateway to truly spectacular desert and mountain scenery.

Nonetheless, Agadez itself is Niger's most fascinating city and deserves your attention. When standing in the famous Grand Mosquée's porcupine shadow, or weaving through the sandy streets and distinctive mudbrick architecture, it's easy to imagine Agadez at its zenith four centuries ago.

Information

Agadez.com (Route de l'Aéroport; per hr CFA2000)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital (🖻 44 00 84, 44 01 42; 🕑 24hr) Off Route de l'Aéroport.

Medical Clinic (☎ 96 34 74; Route de l'Aéroport; ⑦ 7.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm)

MONEY

BIA-Niger (Route de Bilma) Changes travellers cheques (1.6% commission) and cash.

VIP Bureau de Change (Route de Bilma; N 8am-11.30pm) Changes cash.

TELEPHONE

GER

Numerous private offices along Route de l'Aeroport offer international calls (CFA900 per minute).

TOURIST INFORMATION

Centre d'Information Touristique (🕿 98 78 81; Vieux Quartier; 🕑 8am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Fri-Tue) A mixture of helpful information and pressure sales for guides/desert trips.

Centre National pour la Promotion Tourisme

(🖻 44 00 36; Route de l'Aéroport; 🎦 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri) Much like Centre d'Information Touristique.

200 m AGADEZ 0.1 miles To Campinġ Escale (4km); Arlit (238km) To Aïr Mountains (12km); Timia (220km); Ténéré A A G O To Algerian Consulate (600m) Desert (500km) 21 20 Place de la To Aïr Transport (50m) La Tende (100m): R République EHGM (300m); RTV (300m) • Commissariat 🟵 INFORMATION Agadez.com 1 D4 BIA-Niger. 2 (3 70 Caravane Voyages. 3 D3 Centre National pour la Promotion Tourisme 4 D' Dunes Voyages .5 A4 Expéditions Ténéré Voyages. .6 D3 Hospital. .7 C2 13 16 Ô 12 Ø Medical Clinic (see 3) Vienx Moussa Touboulou (see 12) **11**8 Quartier Termit Vovages. 8 C3 VIP Bureau de Change. .9 C3 SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES 11 Grand Marché. 10 C3 ö Grande Mosquée .11 C2 Place de la Grande Mosquee 17 SLEEPING 14 Hôtel Agrebou .12 C2 To Centre d'Information Hôtel Tidene .13 D2 To Tuareg Camel Market (750m .8 Touristique (50m) Pension Tellit .14 C3 cross country) € EATING I e Pilier 15 D3 Le V8 16 D2 •10 Night Market 17 D2 30 8 (ff) .**18** D3 Restaurant le Palmier.. 20 SHOPPING Route de Bilma Village Artisanal D'Agadez.. ..**19** B4 19 TRANSPORT 1@ Gare Routière 20 C1 To Agadez Expeditions (1km); Auberge D'Azel (1km); Pleiades Voyages (1.1km); Hôtel de la Paix (1.3km); SNTV .21 C1 0 Restaurant Tamgak (1.4km); Bilma (609km) 5 • 20 To Best Sahara Tours (1.5km); & Police Tahoua (270km); Zinder (451km); Control Post To Airport (300m) Niamev (953km)

TRAVEL AGENCIES Recommended agents specialising in Aïr Mountains and Ténéré tours include: Agadez Expéditions (🗃 /fax 44 01 70; www.agadez -tourisme.com; Route de Bilma) Best Sahara Tours (🛱 97 86 66; www.best-sahara -tours.com; Route de Niamey)

lonelyplanet.com

Caravane Voyages (🕿 44 04 59; caravanevoyages@ hotmail.com; Route de l'Aéroport) Dunes Voyages (2 44 05 83; www.dunes-voyages

.com; Route de Niamey)

Expéditions Ténéré Voyages (🖻 98 32 60; www .expeditionstenere.com; Place de la Grande Mosquée) Moussa Touboulou (🕿 28 86 93) Inquire at Hôtel Aareboun.

Pleiades Voyages (2 44 05 41; www.pleiades-agadez .com; Route de Bilma)

Termit Voyages (2 42 02 47; http://niger.tribu.ch) Off Place de la Grande Mosquée.

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

Sights & Activities

With a slim figure that makes Egyptian pyramids green with envy, the ochre Grande Mosquée (Place de la Grande Mosquée) climbs spectacularly into the skies. Dating back to 1515, it was rebuilt in 1844. Squeezing out of the ever-narrowing staircase to astounding views will take your breath away - well, what's remaining after the climb! A smile and CFA1000 cadeau (literally 'gift') to the guard will see you up.

The Grand Marché (Route de Bilma; 🕑 dawn to dusk) is Agadez's hub, with the traditionally dressed locals as interesting as what's for sale. The Tuareg camel market (🕑 dawn to dusk) on Agadez's western outskirts is equally colourful, if more odoriferous. Visit at sunrise or sunset.

The enchanting maze of small crooked alleys and fascinating mudbrick architecture of Tuareg and Hausa inspiration in the Vieux Ouartier is a bona fide time machine - hours happily disappear here.

Festivals & Events

The Muslim holiday of Tabaski is an event indeed, with the 'cavalcade' camel race passing through the town's streets. See Holidays on p1106 for more on this.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Camping Escale (🖻 89 67 06; Route de Arlit; camping per person CFA2000, plus vehicle CFA1500) This sleepy campground 4km west of town has fresh wellwater, simple bathrooms and leafy shade.

Hôtel Agreboun (2 98 63 32; s/tw/tr with shared bathroom CFA5000/7000/12,000) While rudimentary and bunkerlike, it's cheap, clean and has pleasant courtyards. It's hidden up some alleys northwest of the Grande Mosquée and west of Hôtel Tidene.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

The following hotels levy a tax of CFA300 to CFA500 per person per night (not included in the prices given here).

Hôtel Tidene (🗃 44 04 06: off Route de l'Aéroport: s/tw CFA9500/15,000, tw with air-con CFA20,300; 🕄) Good choice, with tidy traditional rooms spread around courtvards.

La Tende (🖻 44 00 75; s/tw CFA21,000/25,000, without bathroom CFA10,000/12,500; 🕄) Though lacking character, there are small, bright, clean rooms with fans, or larger air-con ones with bathrooms. Camping costs CFA2000 per person. It's off Route de Niamey.

Pension Tellit (🖻 44 02 31; Place de la Grande Mosquée; tw CFA18,000-32,000, ste CFA36,000; 🕄) Take in the Grande Mosquée from the terrace, or snooze on your oh-so-comfortable bed. Add charming traditional décor and remote controlled air-con and you're laughing. Book ahead.

Auberge D'Azel (2 44 01 70; www.agadez-tour isme.com; Route de Bilma; tw/d CFA33,000/44,000; 🔀) Niger's best accommodation can be found at Auberge D'Azel. Striking domed brick ceilings, massive rod-iron canopy beds, comfortable sitting areas, sparkling modern bathrooms and first-class service.

Eating & Drinking

Le V8 (Route de l'Aéroport; meals CFA800-4000; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Although an atmospheric bar, it prepares lovely local dishes and pizzas too. The riz sauce satisfyingly shuts your hungry tummv's cakehole.

Restaurant le Palmier (Route de l'Aéroport; meals CFA1500-3800; 论 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A perfect place to start the day with an omelette and coffee.

Restaurant Tamgak (Route de Bilma; meals CFA2000-2700: 🕅 lunch & dinner) Tamgak serves more local clientele. Snack on popcorn while waiting for tasty Tuareg dishes.

Le Pilier (Route de l'Aéroport; meals CFA2000-4000; Savour côtelettes d'agneaux panées (lamb chops fried in breadcrumbs) and fine Italian selections within superb surroundings.

Auberge D'Azel (Route de Bilma; meals CFA3500-5500; Sunch & dinner) Pricey, but fantastic - the mouton targui (Tuareg mutton) is divine.

The night market (Route de l'Aéroport; 🕑 dinner) boasts hearty local selections. The daring can try goat's head.

Shopping

For silver items, visit Village Artisanal D'Agadez (🕅 8am-6pm), off Route de Niamey.

Vieux Quartier houses leatherworkers producing Tuareg samaras (sandals), coussins (cushions) and magnificent selles de chameau (camel saddles).

Want a turban? Expect to pay CFA500 per metre in the market (indigo costs more); 3m should suffice.

Getting There & Away AIR

The airport sits a few hundred metres south of town and is easily accessed on foot or by *moto* (motorcyle-taxi; CFA150). See p451 for flight details.

BUS

SNTV ((2) 29 61 80), found on the north edge of town near the *gare routière*, serves Arlit (CFA3400, three hours, Thursday to Tuesday), Niamey (CFA15,100, 12 hours, Wednesday, Friday to Monday) and Zinder (CFA7700, 7½ hours, Tuesday and Saturday). **EHGM** (Route de Niamey), **Aïr Transport** (off Route de Niamey) and **RTV** (Route de Niamey) also serve Niamey and Arlit. EHGM also serves Zinder (Saturday).

BUSH TAXI

Minibuses/Peugeots leave the *gare routière*, on the north edge of town, for Arlit (CFA2600/3000, four/3½ hours) and Zinder (CFA7000/8000, nine/eight hours).

AÏR MOUNTAINS & TÉNÉRÉ DESERT

Among West Africa's most spectacular sights, the Aïr Mountains' dark volcanic masses dramatically rise from their Saharan surrounds and culminate in grand 2000m peaks. In some areas marvellous deep-blue marble pokes from rich red sands – amazing. Discover fascinating examples of Neolithic rock art, visit thermal hot springs at Tafadek or delve into the stunning oasis towns of Timia and Iferouâne. The Festival de l'Aïr, held in Iferouâne each December, was started in 2000 to celebrate and preserve traditional Tuareg culture. The sublime sand dunes at Temet, northeast of Iferouâne, are also unforgettable.

If dunes delight, the Ténéré, which sits east of the Aïr, must be embraced. It is one of the world's most legendary deserts, laden with the Sahara's most extraordinarily beautiful sand dunes. The Ténéré holds its fair share of sublime secrets too – massive dinosaur graveyards and evocative, deserted medieval settlements like that of Djado.

Getting There & Away

With or without your own 4WD, exploring the Aïr or Ténéré without a licensed travel agency and *feuille de route* (official itinerary) is illegal. For Agadez and Niamey travel agencies, see p446 and p439 respectively. A 4WD and three days will provide a sniff of the Aïr. To taste the Ténéré takes at least a week. While they cover less distance and involve a lot of walking, a **camel caravan** (from CFA30,000 per day) is amazing. 4WD expeditions start at CEA80,000 per day.

Though significantly decreased, banditry still exists (see opposite).

ARLIT pop 90,700

Few travellers would bother passing through this uranium town were it not Niger's first sizable settlement after crossing the Sahara from Tamanrasset (Algeria).

Hôtel l'Auberge la Caravane ($\textcircled{\sc triangle}$ 89 29 49; d with fan/air-con CFA5000/12,000; $\textcircled{\sc triangle}$) is located west of the town centre, a short walk from SNTV. The rooms are spartan and all but six share smelly toilets.

Restaurant Le Train (meals CFA1000-2000; 论 breakfast, lunch & dinner), on the road entering town from Agadez, serves the usuals.

SNTV buses serve Agadez (CFA3000, three hours) and Niamey (CFA17,500, 15 hours, daily except Tuesday and Thursday). RTV, Aïr Transport and EHGM have similar services.

NIGER DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Cheap single rooms range from CFA3000 (cockroach sighting: unsurprising) to CFA8000 (cockroach sighting: mildly surprising) – quality is low! Camping (typically CFA2000 per person) is possible in Niamey, Birni N'Konni and Agadez.

Midrange hotels offer more cleanliness and private bathrooms. Prices start from CFA11,000 with fan (air-con adds CFA5000), though prices double in Agadez and Niamey.

Upmarket hotels in Niamey and Agadez cost CFA30,000 to CFA95,000.

ACTIVITIES

Whether coasting in a pirogue past hippos and through the Niger River's moist environments or lumbering through the Sahara's beautifully barren expanse with a camel train, Niger's activities are richly rewarding.

BUSINESS HOURS

Typical business hours are 8am to noon and 3pm to 6pm weekdays, and 8am to noon

PRACTICALITIES

- Niger's only local newssheet, available in Niamey, is the anaemic Frenchlanguage *Le Sahel*.
- Besides Niamey's music stations, the government-run La Voix du Sahel is the only national radio station.
- Télé-Sahel, which broadcasts news and French-language films, is the only nonsatellite programme available. Some TVs in hotels pick up French-based programmes.
- Electricity supply is 220V. Plugs are European two-round-pin variety.
- Niger uses the metric system.

Saturday. Government hours are 8.30am to 12.15pm and 3.30pm to 6pm weekdays. Banking hours are 8am to 11.30am and 3.45pm to 5pm weekdays, and 8.30am to noon Saturday. Simple local eateries open around 6am and don't shut the doors until 10pm, while fancier options serve breakfast from 7am to 10am, lunch from noon to 2pm and dinner between 6pm and 11pm.

CUSTOMS

The thoroughness of customs officials' searches varies, though travellers rarely receive painstaking searches. Ignore requests for 'special taxes'. There's no limit on movement of foreign currencies.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

While travel in Niger's far north is strictly regulated these days, banditry is still a problem. In 2005 a French tourist was killed 60km north of Agadez having failed to stop for bandits. Always check the latest before leaving.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Nigerian Embassies

Benin ((2) 21 31 56 65; Rue 651A, Cotonou) Canada ((2) 613-232 4291; 38 Blackburn Ave, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8A3)

Chad ((518813; off Av Gourang, N'Djaména) France ((10 01 45 04 80 60; www.ambassadeniger.org; 154 Rue de Longchamp, 75016 Paris) Mali (@ 601 9239, 698 7828; Ave Mamadou Konaté, Bamako) Nigeria Abuja (@ 413 6206; Pope John Paul II St); Kano (@ 080 6548 1152; Airport Roundabout); Lagos (@ 261 2300; 15 Adeola Odeku St, VI) USA (@ 227-483 4224; www.nigerembassyusa.org; 2204

R St NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Niger

All embassies and consulates are in Niamey unless stated.

Benin (🖻 72 28 60; Rue des Dallois; 论 9am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Canada (🖻 75 36 86; niamy@international.gc.ca) Off Blvd Mali Bero.

Chad (☎ 75 34 64; Ave de Presidence; Ŷ 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Fri)

Denmark (72 39 48; Ave du Général de Gaulle) France (72 27 22; Place Nelson Mandela; 8am-12.30pm Mon-Fri) This is the consulate. There's also an embassy at Rue des Ambassades (75 27 86).

Germany (72 35 10; Ave du Général de Gaulle) Mali (75 42 90; consmali@intnet.ne; 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Fri) Off Blvd des Sy et Mamar.

Nigeria (🖻 73 24 10; Rue des Ambassades; 🏵 10am-1pm Mon-Fri).

USA (72 26 61; usemb@intent.ne; Rue des Ambassades)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Niger's largest festival is the annual Cure Salée (see above). July and August abound with Saharan festivities, with different villages holding a feast almost weekly.

HOLIDAYS

Islamic holidays dominate (see p1106 for dates and details). Other public holidays: New Year's Day 1 January Easter March/April Labour Day 1 May Independence Day 3 August Settlers' Day 5 September Republic Day 18 December Christmas Day 25 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet is readily available in Niamey, but rare in Maradi, Zinder and Agadez. Hourly prices range from CFA500 (Niamey) to CFA6000 (Maradi).

lonelyplanet.com

LA CURE SALÉE

One of West Africa's most famous festivals is the Cure Salée (Salt Cure). Each August or September, the Wodaabé people gather west of Agadez to allow herds to graze in salt-rich pastures and to celebrate Cure Salée. Most enthralling is the Gerewol, where single men participate in a 'beauty contest' to attract eligible women. Beauty is paramount to Wodaabé - some men even share their wives with more handsome men for more attractive children! Participants spend long hours decorating themselves with make-up (blackened lips make their teeth seem whiter). Suitor rivalries are fierce, with some partaking in Soro, an event where they must smile while being beaten with sticks.

MAPS

The best map of Niger remains Michelin's No 741 Africa North & West.

NIGER MONEY

The unit of currency is the West African CFA franc.

Carrying cash or travellers cheques in euros is best, though US dollar equivalents suffice. The best bank for transactions is BIA-Niger.

There are no ATMs in Niger and creditcard advances are only a costly possibility in Niamey.

POST

Postal services outside Niamey are unreliable, so send everything from the capital. Postcards to Europe/North America cost CFA525/550.

SHOPPING

Have a look at the Arts & Crafts section (p437) to see what will be dotting Niger's markets. Speaking of an Art, bargaining is always called for in Niger.

TELEPHONE

Private telecentres abound, offering international calls for CFA900 per minute. Post offices offer better quality, with three-minute (the minimum) calls costing CFA5000. Subsequent minutes cost CFA1600.

Niger's mobile-phone network covers most major cities, but using foreign phones is problematic.

VISAS

Visas are required by non-West African citizens. Acquiring visas outside Africa is generally straightforward, although you'll need three photos, proof of yellow-fever vaccination, recent bank statements and proof of onward travel. Passports must be valid for six months after your Niger exit date. Visa costs US\$35 to €50.

There's less hassle obtaining visas in Africa. Information for Niger visas in the following countries is found on the following pages: Algeria (p79), Benin (p258), Chad (p549) Mali (p417) and Nigeria (p470).

Some visitors entering from a country without Nigerian diplomatic representation (eg Burkina Faso) have been discretionally issued visas at the border.

Visa Extensions

For a visa extension, take two photos, your passport and CFA20,000 to Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (🖻 73 37 43, ext 249; Rue du Président Heinrich Lubké, Niamey; 🏵 8am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri). They're typically processed the same day.

Visas for Onward Travel ALGERIA

Niamey's Algerian embassy only issues visas to Niger residents. However, Agadez's consulate issues visas if you have an invitation letter from an Algerian travel agency, your vehicle's carte grise (green card) and three colour photos.

BENIN

Transit/three-month single-entry/threemonth multiple-entry visas cost CFA10,000/ CFA15,000/CFA20,000. Two photos are required; the process takes two days. Fortyeight hour transit visas (CFA4000) are available at Malanville, with extensions available in Cotonou.

BURKINA FASO, CÔTE D'IVOIRE, GABON, **SENEGAL & TOGO**

The French Consulate grants three-month visas for these nations. Each visa costs CFA23,000 and requires one photo and a photocopy of your passport. Service takes 24 hours.

CHAD

For a one-month visa you'll need two photos, CFA15,000 and a pleasant demeanour (trust us!). Service takes 24 hours.

MALI

One-month single-entry visas cost CFA20,000, require one photo and are issued in 24 hours.

NIGERIA

Two photos and CFA21,000 to CFA27,400 should land you a visa (though they're fickle). Applications accepted Tuesday and Thursday (10am to 1pm).

TRANSPORT IN NIGER

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Niamey airport is the international hub, though Point-Afrique and Go-Voyages flights now connect Paris/Marseilles to Agadez (October to April). Airlines serving Niger:

Afrigiyah Airways (8U; www.afrigiyah.aero) Hub: Tripoli. Air Algérie (AH; 🖻 73 32 14; www.airalgerie.dz; Rue du Gaweye) Hub: Algiers.

Air Burkina (2J; 27 73 70 67; www.air-burkina.com; Rue du Commerce) Hub: Ougadougou.

Air France (AF: 73 31 21; www.airfrance.com; Rue du Souvenir) Hub: Charles de Gaulle, Paris.

Air lvoire (VU; www.airivoire.com) Hub: Abidjan.

Air Sénégal International (V7; www.air-senegal-inter national.com; Rue du Gaweye) Hub: Dakar.

Go-Voyages (www.govoyges.com) Hub: Paris.

Point-Afrique (**7** 73 40 26; www.point afrique.com; Rue du Sahel) Hub: Paris.

Royal Air Maroc (AT; 🖻 73 28 85; www.royalairmaroc .com; Rue du Gaweye) Hub: Casablanca.

Toumaï Air Tchad (🕿 73 04 05; Rue du Gaweye) Hub: N'Diaména.

Land

ALGERIA

The crossing between Arlit and Tamanrasset at Assamakka/In Guezzam is open, though you must travel with licensed travel agencies on both sides (even with private 4WDs).

BENIN

Bush taxis don't cross the Gaya/Malanville border, so use a moto (CFA500) or walk between the towns. Once across, local transport abounds.

Easier still, SNTV and EHGM buses connect Niamey and Cotonou (CFA20,000, 14 hours).

BURKINA FASO

The main crossing is Foetchango, southwest of Niamey. Minibuses (CFA8100, 11 hours)

leaving Niamey's gare routière, 1km west of Kennedy Bridge, and SNTV buses connect Niamey and Ouagadougou (CFA10,000, nine to 11 hours, Tuesday to Sunday).

Those with vehicles can also cross via Téra, northwest of Niamey.

CHAD

Some landcruisers make weekly journeys from Nguigmi to Mao (CFA15,000). From Mao, daily landcruisers serve N'Djaména.

Get your passport stamped in Nguigmi and Mao (expect an unofficial US\$6 'fee').

LIBYA

This border is only open to traffic entering Niger, though you must be in the company of a licensed Nigerien travel agency.

MALI

SNTV runs a truck between Niamey and Gao Mondays and Thursdays (CFA11,500, up to 30 hours). The Mali road isn't sealed, so conditions can be horrifically muddy from July through September.

A slow boat connects Ayorou to Gao (CFA14,000, two days) on Monday. A hat and plentiful water are crucial. Minibuses to Avorou from Niamey (CFA3000, four hours) leave from Katako Marché (Blvd de l'Indépendance).

NIGERIA

There are four border crossings to Nigeria: Gaya/Kamba, Birni N'Konni/Illela (which leads south to Sokoto), Maradi/Katsina and Zinder/Iibiva.

From Niamey the Gaya/Kamba crossing is quickest. Minibuses/Peugeots run from Niamey to Gaya (CFA4100/4500, 41/2/51/2 hours), where motos and taxis access the border (CFA100). From there take a *moto* to Kamba (200N).

Motos (CFA100) connect Birni N'Konni to the border, where minibuses/Peugeots run to Sokoto (300N/350N, 11/2 hours).

Peugeots link Maradi with Katsina (CFA1200, 1½ hours) and Kano (CFA3000, four hours).

Peugeots (CFA3000, 3¹/₂ hours) connect Zinder to Kano via Jibya.

GETTING AROUND Bus

With decent sealed roads stretching the breadth of the country, bus transport is comprehensive, reliable and efficient. Seating is reserved, so book early. Buses depart their company offices, not from *autogares*.

Bush Taxi

Bush taxis (Peugeot 504s and minibuses) are cheaper and more frequent than buses, though they're crowded and take much longer.

Car & Motorcycle

There are few car-hire agencies in Niamey, the most reliable being Niger-Car Voyages (p439). For your vehicle, you'll need third-party insurance (maximum CFA2500 per day), which can be purchased in Niamey, Diffa, Maradi, Zinder and Birni N'Konni.

The Zinder–Agadez road and getting off the beaten path demand 4WDs. Tolls (*péage*) are collected on major routes.

Tours

To dive into the desert areas around Agadez, you must be accompanied by a Niger travel/ tour agency (see p446 for Agadez agency details). Niger-Car Voyages (p439) operates Parc Regional du W tours.

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Nigeria

We shouldn't beat about the bush: Nigeria has an image problem. It dominates West Africa economically and politically, and has produced music and literature whose influence spreads far beyond the continent. But for all this clout, mention the country's name to the person on the street and they're more likely to come up with a litany of woe: corruption, ethnic violence and email scams. As a travel destination, Nigeria seems more a place to avoid than to book a flight to.

And yet, Nigeria is a country we're coming to love. Getting around can sometimes be a little tough, and it's certainly a challenging destination for first-timers to Africa, but you shouldn't believe all the scare stories. In Lagos, Nigeria has one of the most exuberant cities in Africa. Along the south, old kingdoms carry on their customs, from creating elaborate brass sculptures to venerating the ancient gods. More modern traditions include one of the world's pioneering primate conservation organisations. In the north, where the land dries out as it stretches towards the desert, Muslim Nigeria thrives in dusty trade cities where memories of the Saharan trade routes still linger.

Nigeria is a country of extremes. Great wealth and great poverty sit cheek by jowl, and tensions between different communities can boil over into civil strife. While a few parts of the country remain problematic, the vast majority is as warm and welcoming to visitors as anywhere in Africa. Challenging yet exuberant, this is Africa in the raw – there's nowhere quite like it on the continent.

FAST FACTS

- Area 924,000 sq km
- ATMs None
- Borders Benin, Niger, Chad, Cameroon
- Budget US\$25 to US\$50 per day
- Capital Abuja
- Languages English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, Efik
- Money Naira (N); US\$1 = N128
- Population 140 million
- Seasons Wet (April–October in north; March–November in south); dry (November–March in north; December–February in south)
- Telephone Country code 234; international access code 200
- Time GMT/UTC +1
- Visa US\$60 to US\$100 for one month; best obtained in country of residence

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lagos** (p458) Dive in to taste the nightclubs and go-slows of Nigeria's wild and exuberant metropolis.
- **Calabar** (p464) Learn about primate conservation with the rescued chimpanzees of the southeast's old colonial port.
- **Kano** (p466) Follow traces of the old Saharan trade routes in the dusty desert capital of northern Nigeria.
- **Osun Sacred Forest** (p463) Look for the old Yoruba gods in the tranquil green of Oshogbo's World Heritage-listed holy sculpture park.
- Yankari National Park (p468) Search for wildlife and finish your day with a soak in the delightful Wikki Warm Spring.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

For travel to the south, March to August are the wettest months to visit Nigeria, and best avoided if possible. Temperatures are hot yearround, peaking in the spring; the humidity is constant. Late spring to summer is the hottest part of the year in the north, with the mercury dropping slightly from October to January at the onset of the dusty harmattan winds.

As well as the weather, take note of political developments when planning your trip. Although the country is generally calm, local trouble can quickly flare up, so once you're in Nigeria keep an eye on the news and be prepared to change your plans at short notice if necessary.

ITINERARIES

NIGERIA

One to Two Weeks No-one should go to Nigeria without visiting Lagos (p458) and trying to navigate the city's night-clubs and traffic jams. From there, head east to Benin City (p463) to see the ancient craft of brass sculpture, before carrying on to the old port city of Calabar (p464), where you can check out some pioneering primate conservation work and the country's best museum.

One Month A longer trip allows you to further explore the south, but also to take in northern Nigeria. From Lagos, fly to Abuja (p465), and then continue by road to the old trading city of Kano (p466). An interesting detour would be via the cool plateau city of Jos (p465), with a side-trip to Yankari National Park (p468) and the delightful Wikki Warm Spring.

HOW MUCH?

- Okada ride across town US\$0.50
- Replica Benin brass sculpture US\$94

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- Afro-beat CD US\$4
- Bribe at police roadblock US\$0.20
- One-minute local phone call US\$0.20

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.60
- 1L bottled water US\$0.70
- Bottle of Star US\$1.20
- Souvenir football shirt US\$6.50
- Stick of suya US\$0.80

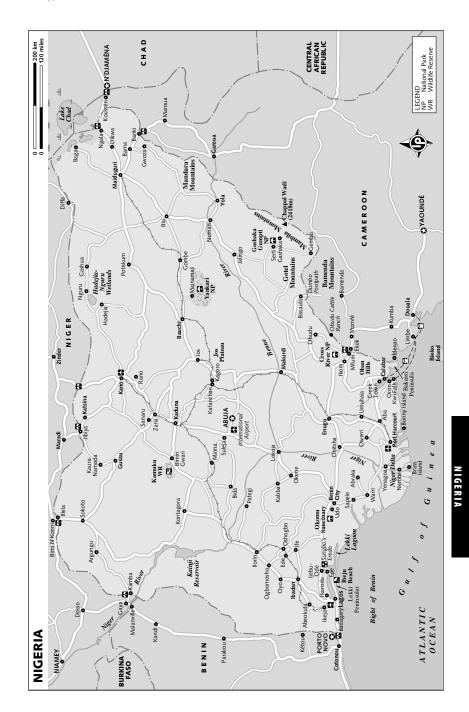
HISTORY Early Nigeria

Northern and southern Nigeria are essentially two different countries, and their histories reflect this disparity. The first recorded empire to flourish in this part of West Africa was Kanem-Borno around Lake Chad, which grew rich from the trans-Saharan trade routes. Its adoption of Islam in the 12th century helped. Islamic states based in the Hausa cities of Kano, Zaria and Nupe also flourished at this time.

Meanwhile, the southwest developed into a patchwork of small states, often dominated by the Yoruba. The Ijebu kingdom rose in the 10th century and constructed the mysterious earthworks at Sungbo's Eredo. Most famously, the Benin Kingdom, became an important centre of trade and produced some of the finest metal artwork in Africa. The political systems of these states rested largely on a sacred monarchy with a strong court bureaucracy. In the southeast, the Igbo and other agrarian peoples never developed any centralised empires, instead forming loose confederations.

Colonial Era

The first contact between the Yoruba empires and the Europeans was made in the 15th century, when the Portuguese began trading in pepper, which was later supplanted by the more lucrative slave trade. In contrast, the northern Islamic states remained untouched by European influence until well into the 19th century.



As the slavery abolition movement grew in the early 19th century, the British took a lead in suppressing it along the Niger Delta, where conflicts with Yoruba slavers led to the annexation of Lagos port - a first colonial toehold. This led to further annexation to thwart the French, who were advancing their territory along the Niger River. By the turn of the 20th century, British soldiers had advanced as far north as Kano and Sokoto, where Islamic revivalism had created a rapidly expanding caliphate. From the clash, colonial Nigeria was born.

Nigeria was divided in two - the southern, mainly Christian, colony and the northern Islamic protectorate. The British chose to rule indirectly through local kings and chiefs, exacerbating ethnic divisions for political expediency.

Military Misrule

These divisions came back to haunt Nigeria as soon as independence came in October 1960. Politics immediately split along ethnic lines, destabilising the country. In early 1966 a group of Igbo army officers staged a coup. General Johnson Ironsi took over as head of state. Another coup, led by Yakubu Gowon, quickly followed on its heels, along with large-scale massacres of Igbos. In 1967 this provoked Igbo secession from Nigeria, the declaration of independent Biafra and civil war. Biafra was recognised by only a handful of

African countries, and the civil war dragged

on for three years. By early 1970, as a result of

the blockade imposed by the federal govern-

ment, Biafra faced famine and its forces were

compelled to capitulate. Up to a million Igbos

died, mainly from starvation. The 1970s oil boom smoothed Nigeria's path to national reconciliation, however the rush of money proved too tempting for the self-serving elite. Gowon was overthrown by General Murtala Mohammed in a bloodless coup in 1975, while Mohammed himself was assassinated in an attempted coup in early 1976 and succeeded by Lieutenant-General Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian Yoruba, who did the unthinkable for an African military leader and actually stood down, retiring to his farm after paving the way for a civilian regime.

Democracy proved the briefest of interludes. Shegu Shagari's civilian government

lasted just four inept years before falling to the General Mohammed Buhari in 1983. Two years later he was for the chop too, with General Ibrahim Babangida taking the reins and promising another return to democracy. A presidential election finally went ahead in June 1993 with Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba from the south, claiming victory. Yet Babangida was unhappy with the results and annulled them within a fortnight, announcing another poll.

He never got to oversee it. Vice-president General Sani Abacha seized control instead, and he had no pretensions of giving up the military's privileges. A grotesque caricature of an African dictator, he purged the army of potential coup plotters, abolished many institutions and locked up intellectuals, unionists and pro-democracy activists. His rule reached a nadir in 1995 with the judicial murder of the Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa - an act that led to Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth. Abacha didn't care - he was getting rich stealing oil money from the government's coffers.

Salvation finally came in June 1998, in what Nigerians called the 'coup from heaven'. Aged 54, and worth about US\$10 billion in stolen money, Abacha died of a heart attack in the arms of two prostitutes. His successor immediately announced elections and in February 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo, the former military leader and southern Yoruba Christian, was returned as president.

Nigeria Today

Obasanjo inherited a country in tatters. Free from the military yoke, the deep political and cultural differences between the north and south of the country began to play themselves out in an unruly manner. A major test came in 2000 when several northern states introduced sharia (Islamic law). Tensions between communities became inflamed, resulting in mass riots and bloodshed. The flames were fanned again in 2002 when Nigeria was due to hold the Miss World contest, an event that caused fresh outbreaks of fighting. During Obasanjo's first term as president, over 10,000 people were killed in communal violence.

One area where Obasanjo has had success was in returning Nigeria as a player on the international stage. Nigeria now plays a lead role in the Commonwealth and as a regional peace-

DASH

Used freely as both a noun and verb, 'dash' is a word you'll hear a lot of in Nigeria. It can mean either a bribe or a tip. The most frequent form of dash you're likely to encounter is at roadblocks, which the driver pays. Although you're actually unlikely to be asked for dash as a bribe, dashing someone who performs a service for you, such as a guide, is often appropriate.

maker. Obasanjo's re-election in 2003 was generally regarded as consolidating civilian rule. Despite this, domestic critics have claimed his high international profile is a distraction from tackling Nigeria's myriad problems.

Nigeria's economy has not prospered. A much-publicised anti-corruption drive has had mixed results, claiming back some of Abacha's stolen millions but netting few high-profile officials on the make. A major achievement was the cancelling of Nigeria's debts in 2005, but attempts to revamp the neglected oil industry have been less successful. Repeated governments neglected the oil infrastructure to the point where Nigeria was left needing to import refined fuel at a higher price than it sold its crude for, resulting in frequent petrol shortages. Government plans to remove fuel subsidies in 2004 were met with a crippling general strike by Nigerians seeing cheap fuel as a birthright, having seen many of the other benefits of statehood pass them by. This sense of alienation is particularly acute in the oil-producing delta. In 2005, local militias put their case against marginalisation by launching guerrilla attacks on oil installations.

Elections are next due in 2007. With Obasanjo constitutionally barred from standing for a third term, Babangida fancies another attempt at running the country, this time as a civilian. As Nigeria continues to lurch from crisis to crisis, whoever takes on the challenge will have a lot on their plate.

PEOPLE

Nigeria's already swollen population is estimated to be rising by about 3% a year, and it's thought that by the middle of the 21st century every third African will be Nigerian. About half the people are Muslim, 35% are Christian

and the rest follow traditional religions. Juju, the native magic that was the original basis for Caribbean voodoo, is still an important element in many tribal cultures, and you'll find fascinating charms and potions in the markets in most towns. Ordinary Nigerians struggle on against systematic corruption with the natural entrepreneurship of one of Africa's best-educated populations.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Nigeria's rich art heritage is unequalled anywhere in West Africa. The oldest discovered sub-Saharan Africa sculptures are the 2000year-old terracottas found near Nok village. In music and literature, Nigeria is a leader, with Fela Kuti, Chinau Achebe and Wole Soyinka all world-beaters in their fields.

ENVIRONMENT

Nigeria's topography is relatively unvaried. The north touches on the Sahel and is mostly savannah with low hills. Mountains are found only along the Cameroon border in the east, although there is a 1500m-high plateau around Jos in the centre of the country. The coast is an almost unbroken line of sandy beaches and lagoons running back to creeks and mangrove swamps and is very humid most of the year.

An underfunded national parks service does exist, but in practice very little land in Nigeria is effectively protected. The expanding population has contributed to widespread deforestation - 95% of the original forests have been logged. However, the oil industry has caused the greatest number of environmental problems: oil spills and gas flaring have damaged the fishing industry, with little of the industry's wealth trickling down to the local level.

 \sim

FOOD & DRINK

For a Nigerian, food is 'chop'. Dishes are hot and peppery, usually consisting of a meat sauce mopped up with a hearty portion of starch such as cassava or pounded yam. Isiewu (goat's head soup) is the closest thing to a national dish, with cow leg soup or *jollof* (peppery) rice with chicken almost as popular. Look for signs saying 'food is ready' when you're hungry. Vegetarians will have a hard time in Nigeria. Drinking water is sold on the streets in plastic bags as 'pure water'.

LAGOS

🕿 01 / pop 15 million

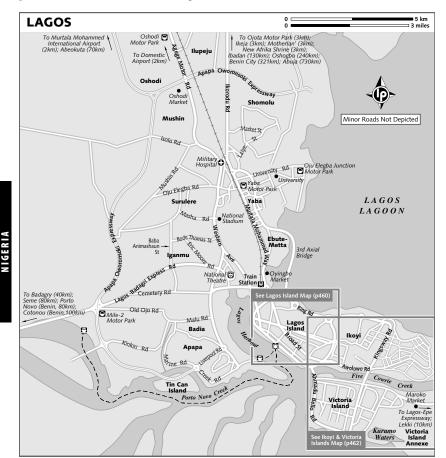
Lagos is chaos theory made flesh and concrete. It's the largest city in Africa, with wallto-wall people, bumper-to-bumper cars, noise and pollution beyond belief, a crime rate out of control, and public utilities that are simply incapable of coping with the demands of the huge population. Elevated motorways ring the city, jammed with speed freaks and traffic jams ('go-slows') on top, and tin-andcardboard shacks underneath.

The city takes its name from the Portuguese for lagoon, and has been a Yoruba port, a British political centre and until 1991, Nigeria's

capital. It remains the economic and cultural powerhouse of the country, and has a superb live music scene and West Africa's most inimitable street life. It won't be to everyone's taste, but if you're up for an urban adventure then you might find Lagos truly compelling. A true megacity and the face of modern Africa as much as any picture postcard national park jump right in.

ORIENTATION

For the traveller, there are four main areas of Lagos: Yaba on the mainland, south of the international and domestic airports; Lagos Island, the heart of the city; Ikoyi Island, a smart suburb with some embassies and topend hotels; and Victoria Island (VI), an even



smarter suburb facing the Atlantic Ocean with the bulk of the embassies and a number of top-end hotels. The islands are connected by elevated expressways and bridges.

It's a 30-minute to one-hour ride from Murtala Mohammed International Airport to Lagos Island; head for the yellow taxis outside the departure lounge upstairs. Know your destination and expect to pay about N3000. There's no public transport. Domestic flights leave from a separate terminal a couple of kilometres away.

INFORMATION Internet Access

Internet places open and close on a weekly basis, usually charging N100 per hour for internet access. Two of the best:

Cybercafé (Map p462; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi) Opposite the YMCA.

Internet Planet (Map p462; Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave, VI) In Mr Biggs Bldg.

Medical Services

Chvzob Pharmacy (Map p462; 269 4545; Awolowo Rd, Ikovi: 🕅 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) St Nicholas Hospital (Map p460; 263 1739; 57 Campbell

St. Lagos Island) Has a 24-hour emergency clinic.

Monev

Lagos' banks are as useless as anywhere in Nigeria for changing money. There is no foreign exchange at the airport, but convenient moneychangers for travellers include the following:

Eko Hotel (Map p462; Adetokumbo Ademola St, VI) Hausa moneychangers at the craft shops by the gatehouse. Ikovi Hotel (Map p462; Kingsway Rd, Ikovi) There's both a bureau de change office and Hausa moneychangers outside the (closed) hotel.

Post

Main post office (Map p460; Marina St, Lagos Island; Mon-Fri)

Post office (Map p462; Bourdillon Rd, Ikoyi) Post office (Map p462; Adeola Odeku St, VI)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Contrary to popular perception, violent crime has decreased in Lagos in recent years. Most crime against foreigners targets expats in expensive cars, and travellers are unlikely to encounter any serious problems. That said, it always pays to take sensible precautions. Never carry any more money than is

necessary and avoid flaunting valuables. Avoid walking at night where possible, particularly around hotels and restaurants frequented by foreigners, including on VI. Crowded areas carry a risk of pickpocketing.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

In Lagos Island the many markets are by far the best attractions. They're safe enough to get lost in during the day, but photography isn't usually appreciated. Jankara Market (Map p460; off Adeyinka Oyekan Ave) sells fabric and a witches' brew of juju ingredients. Balogun Market (Map p460; off Breadfruit St) sells fabric from across West Africa. Finally, Sandgrouse Market (Map p460; off Lewis St) slightly further east is the place for interesting food, as much of it is sold live.

In Lagos Island also look out for examples of old Brazilian architecture in the distinctive houses built by former slaves and descendants who returned from Brazil.

The National Museum (Awolowo Rd; admission N100; (9am-5pm) has some interesting displays and exhibits, including many fine works of ancient sculpture. It also has a nonprofit craft centre. No cameras allowed.

SLEEPING

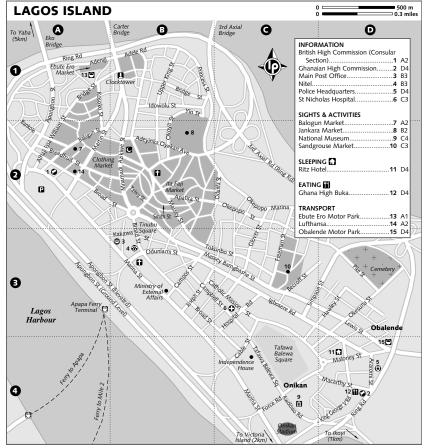
Lagos has both some of the best hotels in Nigeria - and the worst. There's very little in the midrange bracket. Hotels either tend to top of the range or at the grubbier end of the budget spectrum.

YMCA (Map p462; 🖻 773 3599; 77 Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi; dm N500, r N1700-2700; 🕄 🕑) Very simple fare, this hostel is frequently full with West Africans. It's decent if not inspirational. Dorms have four beds and all share communal bathroom hostel is frequently full with West Africans. facilities. Men only.

Ritz Hotel (Map p460; 🖻 263 0481; King George V Rd, Lagos Island; r with/without air-con N2300/1400; 🕃) The name's a bit of a misnomer, but this hotel is still a decent budget option. Rooms are grubby, but they're secure and come with friendly management.

Hotel Victoria Palace (Map p462; 262 5901; hotelvp@ alphalinkserve.com; 1623 Sake Jojo St, VI; s/d N9660/12,075; 🔀 (P) A genuine midrange hotel on VI is a rarity indeed, and this place is good value. There's a great Indian restaurant attached.

Michael's (Map p462; 🖻 461 6802; michael@hyperia .com; Plot 411 Adetokumbo Ademola St, VI; r N13,800-17,250; 🔀 (P) 😰) Pleasant compact rooms in this small guesthouse cluster around a pool,



overlooked by a mural of generously proportioned mermaids.

B-Jays Hotel (ⓐ 262 2902; bjayshotel24@yahoo.com; 24 Samuel Manuwa St, VI; r from N32,500; ⓐ ⓐ ⓐ) A plush guesthouse, this place was undergoing a refit when we visited. Rooms have flat-screen TV and internet connections, and there's a very stylish bar.

EATING

Broad St and Campbell St in Lagos Island are good for chophouses and *suya* (kebabs served with pepe spice); the better restaurants are in Ikoyi and VI.

Ikoyi Hotel Suya (Map p462; Ikoyi Hotel, Kingsway Rd, Ikoyi; suya from N100; ∑ 10am-10pm) Lagosians claim the best *suya* in town can be found at the stall outside the Ikoyi Hotel. Not just beef and goat, but chicken, liver and kidney, plus some great fiery *pepe* (pepper) to spice it all up.

Sherlaton Restaurant (Map p462; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi; mains from N600; 12-3pm & 7-10pm) Vegetarians suffer a lot in Nigeria, but this Indian restaurant really comes to the rescue. With tasty, filling portions at good prices, this is the city's best curry option.

Ghana High Buka (Map p460; King George V Rd, Lagos Island; mains from N300; 10 am-9.30pm) Just outside the Ghanaian High Commission, this 'food-isready' place serves up great Nigerian dishes. It's always busy; you'll likely come back for more yourself.

Bangkok Restaurant (Map p462; Muri Okunola St, VI; mains from N1100; 🕑 11am-11pm) With the best Thai

419

If you're online, the chances are that at some point you've received a 419. These spam emails offer the recipient a cut of an implausibly huge sum of money in return for help getting it out of Nigeria. All you have to do is send your own bank details – together with a handling fee – and the money is yours. The name 419 comes from the section of the Nigerian criminal code that covers fraud – a crime rife in Nigeria. Scammers even have their own anthem – the single 'I Chop Your Dollars' was hugely popular in 2005.

Foreigners aren't the only victims of fraud. Inside Nigeria, a popular scam is to break into an empty property and then sell it on to an unsuspecting buyer – watch out for painted signs everywhere announcing 'This house is not for sale: beware 419'.

food in Lagos, Bangkok is a treat. The cooks and waitresses are all Thai, offering you a broad menu of fragrantly spiced dishes.

Cactus (Map p462; Ozumba Mbadiwe St, VI; mains from N1200; 🕑 8am-10pm) At this patisserie-cumrestaurant breakfasts of pancakes or bacon are good and the club sandwiches with salad and chips are simply huge – excellent value at N1500.

DRINKING

Nimbus (Map p462; Maitama Sule St, Ikoyi; 论 8am-11pm) Part of an art gallery, this is a lovely place for a drink – mellow in the day and happening at night. At weekends there's usually live music, so there's a cover charge of around N1000 to get in.

ENTERTAINMENT

Lagos' nightlife is legendary, with the happening nightclubs in Ikeja (13km north of Lagos Island) and Yaba. Clubs usually have a mix of live music and DJs, but don't even think of turning up before 11pm.

New Afrika Shrine (Pepple St, Ikeja; cover charge N500; ⁽¹⁾ Thu-Sun) Fela Kuti's original Shrine was burned down, but this replacement is run by his son Femi, who plays on Fridays and Sundays when he's in town (N1000). It's a huge shed, but the music blows the roof off.

Motherlan' (Opebi Rd, Ikeja; cover charge N1000; ^(C) Thu-Sun) Owned by musician Lagbaja, who mixes groovy jazz with African drums while always remaining hidden under a traditional Yoruba mask (his name simultaneously means anybody and nobody). Lagbaja himself plays the last Friday of the month (N1500).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Murtala Mohammed International Airport is the main gateway to Nigeria and is roughly 10km north of Lagos Island.

Airline offices based in Lagos include the following:

Aero (a 496 1340; www.flyaero.com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport)

Air France (Map p462; 🖻 461 0461; www.airfrance.com; Idejo Danmole St, VI)

Bellview (Map p462; 🖻 791 9215; www.flybellviewair .com; Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave, VI)

British Airways (Map p462; 2225; www.british airways.com; 1st fl, C&C Tower, Sanusi Fafunwa St, VI) Cameroon Airlines (Map p462; 261 6270; Oko Awo Close, VI)

Chanchangi Airlines (2493 9744; www.chanchangi -airlines.com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport) Ethiopian Airlines (Map p462; 263 1125; www.fly ethiopian.com; Idowu Taylor St, VI)

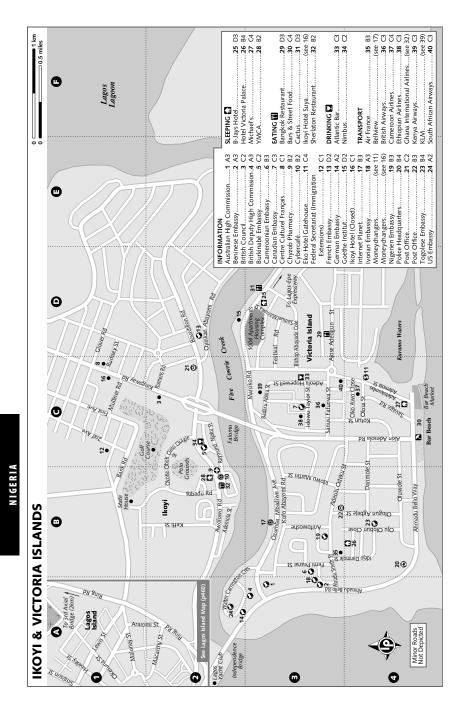
Ghana International Airlines (Map p462; 2026) 1808; www.fly-ghana.com; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi) Kenya Airways (Map p462; 2026) airways.com; Churchgate Tower, Afribank St, VI) KLM (Map p462; 2026) 461 2501; www.klm.com; Churchgate Tower, Afribank St, VI)

Lufthansa (Map p460; 🖻 266 4227; www.lufthansa .com; Broad St, Lagos Island)

South African Airlines (Map p462; 262 0607; www.flysaa.com; Adetokumbo Ademola St, VI) Sosoliso Airlines (2497 1492; www.sosolisoairline.com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport)

Virgin Nigeria (🖻 461 2747; www.virginnigeria.com; Sheraton Hotel, Ikeja)

Lagos' motor parks are pictures of anarchy. Ojota Motor Park (with Ojota New Motor Park next door), 13km north of Lagos Island, is the city's main transport hub. Minibuses and bush taxis leave to just about everywhere in the country from here. Sample fares are Benin City (N800, four hours), Ibadan (N250,



90 minutes), Oshogbo (N450, three hours) and Abuja (N1600, 10 hours).

Mile-2 Motor Park serves destinations east of Lagos, including the Benin border at Seme (N250, 90 minutes). You'll also find a few minibuses going as far north as Ibadan from here.

GETTING AROUND

Arriving in Lagos can be complicated and you may be dropped at one of several motor parks – Oshodi, Yaba and Oju Elegba Junction are the likeliest candidates. Minibuses run from these to more central points, such as Obalende Motor Park on Lagos Island.

Minibuses (fares N30 to N200 according to distance) serve points all over Lagos – prices increase when you cross a bridge from one part of Lagos to another, but you'll have a job working out the routes unless you stay here for some time. Yellow private taxis start from N200. For short distances, *okadas* (motorcycle taxis) are a better bet; a medium-length trip shouldn't top N100. If you're in a go-slow, an *okada* may be the only way out.

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

IBADAN

2 02 / pop 1.4 million

The word sprawling could have been invented to describe Ibadan. You're likely to pass through this major transport junction, but there's little to amuse yourself with here before pushing on to more exciting destinations.

If you're looking for a bed, try **Lizzy Guesthouse** (2) 241 3350; off Easy Life Rd; r N2875; 2). At the top of a hill, the Lizzy has smallish but tidy rooms with cold showers and satellite TV. Staff are helpful, and there's a bar and a restaurant rustling up breakfast and a few Nigerian standards.

Another option is **D'Rovans Hotel** (2312907; drovans@skanet.com.ng; Ring Rd; s/d N6325/7475; **2 (P) (e)**), which has rooms that are well turned out (although try to avoid those next to the generator shed). It also has a couple of shops, a restaurant and a nightclub where the owner's highlife band plays every weekend.

There are plenty of 'food-is-ready' places around Dugbe Market. For restaurants, try **Kokodome** (by Cocoa House; dishes from N400; \Im 9am-11pm), which is set around a pool. The menu has a definite Lebanese theme, but there's *jollof* on offer too. Upstairs, you can dine in slightly plusher surroundings.

Iwo Rd is Ibadan's major motor park; minibuses run to all points from here, including Lagos (N250, 90 minutes), Abuja (N1200, eight hours) and points north. For Oshogbo (N250, 90 minutes), go to Gate Motor Park in the east of the city.

OSHOGBO

This quiet Yoruba city has been a centre for contemporary Nigerian art since the 1950s. It's worth a visit to see the Osun Sacred Forest, a shrine to Yoruba religion that's a real Nigerian highlight. While here, also wander through the Oja Oba Market across from the Oba's Palace – it's packed with stalls selling juju material.

The delightful **Osun Sacred Forest** (Osun Shrine Rd; admission N200, camera N500; 💮 10am-6pm) is a cool, green oasis. An ancient centre for Yoruba goddess Osun, its groves are filled with sculptures and shrines revering the traditional deities. The forest is a lovely place to walk in, and was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2006.

Several contemporary art galleries are also worth checking out, including the **Nike Centre for Arts & Culture** (Old Ede Rd; 论 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri), **Jimoh Buraimoh's African Heritage Gallery** (1 Buraimoh St; 论 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) and the **New Sacred Art Shop** (41A Ibokun Rd; $\ree 8.30am-5pm$ Mon-Fri).

Rooms at the **Heritage Hotel** (241881; hotelher itage@yahoo.com; Gbongan Rd; r N1265-2875; 2 p) are fair-sized with huge beds, although the mustard walls make them seem gloomier than they should be. There's also a restaurant-bar, and a pretty anaemic generator.

Old Ede Rd is the main drag for chophouses serving 'food-is-ready'.

Okefia Rd is the main motor park. Minibuses leave pretty regularly for Ibadan (N250, 90 minutes) and Lagos (N450, three hours).

BENIN CITY

Benin City is one of the old Yoruba capitals. The kingdom, which flourished here in the medieval period, gave rise to one of the first African art forms to be accepted internationally –

the 15th-century Benin Brasses. The art of the brass statuary has recently been revived, and you can see craftsmen at work near the museum.

The **National Museum** (King's Sq; admission N100; O 9am-6pm) is primarily dedicated to the Benin Kingdom, with a display of beautiful brasses. The upstairs galleries are more ethnological in nature, providing a survey of traditional cultures from across Nigeria.

Brass Casters St nearby has been given over to reviving the 'lost wax' sculpture technique. The brassmakers are happy to show you their works in progress, usually copies of the most famous Benin sculptures, and sell you one of your own.

For a friendly budget sleeping option, try Edo Delta Hotel (252722; Akpakpava Rd; s N1500-2500, d from N3500; R). It has a jumble of chalets and a hotel block proper. The cheapest rooms feel a little cramped and have fans only; other rooms are better value.

Formerly the Genesis Hotel, the **Lixborr Hotel** (256699; Sakowpba Rd; s N2875, d 3450-4025;) is a great, well-run place with comfortable, tastefully decorated rooms. Look for the giant statue of the Benin woman outside; it's opposite the brass caster's street.

[^]The restaurant at the **Saidi Hotel** (Murtala Mohammed Way; mains from N800) has a good Chinese lunch buffet (N1200) every Sunday from 12pm to 3pm.

Mr Biggs (Akpakpava Rd, 🕑 8am-10pm) and **Sizzlers** (Sakopba Rd; 🕑 8am-10pm) both offer Nigerian fast food with bright lights and clean toilets. The southern end of Akpakpava Rd has plenty of chophouses serving 'food-is-ready'.

chophouses serving 'food-is-ready'. **Aero** (☎ 2711512) have a daily flight to Lagos (N8000, 40 minutes). Yaro motor park is the main place for Lagos transport, with minibuses leaving throughout the day (N800, four hours), with more minibuses to Port Harcourt (N850, five hours) and Calabar (N1200, eight hours). Transport north leaves from Usela Rd motor park.

CALABAR

🖻 087 / pop 500,000

Tucked into Nigeria's southeastern corner, the capital of Cross River state is one of the most likeable cities in Nigeria for visitors. Its port has historically made the town a prosperous place – Calabar was once one of Nigeria's biggest slave ports and later a major exporter of palm oil. A popular stopover for travellers heading to Cameroon, Calabar has a great museum and two excellent primate conservation centres.

Sights

Calabar Museum (Court Rd; admission N100; 🕑 9am-6pm) is housed in the beautiful old British governor's building overlooking the river. It has a fascinating collection covering Calabar's days as the Efik kingdom, the slave and palm-oil trade, and the colonial period.

Home to a colony of rescued drill monkeys and chimpanzees, the **Drill Ranch** (234310; drill@infoweb.abs.net; Nsefik Eyo Layout, off Atekong Rd; donations appreciated; 99m-5pm) is home to Pandrillus, one of Africa's most progressive primate conservation bodies. Placing great emphasis on local education to combat poaching and the bushmeat trade, it can arrange trips to its excellent **Afi Mountain Drill Ranch** (community charge N200, cars/motorbikes N500/250, camping N1000, huts N2000) near Cross River National Park.

On the other side of town in the Botanic Gardens, **Cercopan** (www.cercopan.org; Mary Slessor Ave; donations appreciated; 🏵 9am-5pm) works with smaller monkeys such as guenons and mangabeys. The **gardens** (www.irokofoundation.org) are worth visiting to learn about the amazing biodiversity of the area.

Sleeping

Nelbee Executive Guesthouse (232684; Dan Achibong St; s/dN2300/2530; ●) Close to Watt Market is this handy budget option. Rooms are comfortable, the management friendly, and there's a terrifically formal dining room.

Jahas Guesthouse (Marian Rd; r N3500; ≥) This clean and tidy budget option offers a warm welcome, and is a pleasantly quiet option. For those weary of Nigeria's bustle, the health centre in the same compound offers restorative 'blood massages'.

Eating

Cosy Garden Restaurant (Nsefik Eyo Layout, off Atekong Rd; mains from N300; 🕑 9am-8pm) If your mama was Nigerian, she'd cook like this. Choose hot and tasty pepper soup or delicately flavoured *egusi* (meat, vegetable and smoked fish stew) with a mountain of pounded yam. It's poorly signed; look for the lime green building near the Drill Ranch.

Freddy's Restaurant (Atekong Dr; mains from N1200; № 11.30am-3pm & 6.30-11pm Mon-Sat, 6.30-11pm Sun) Something of an institution, Freddy's serves Lebanese and Continental dishes in wellpresented surroundings – the *shwarmas* (kebabs; N1400) are ever-popular. It also has a large bar.

There are some good *suya* stands near the central mosque, and chophouses around the main motor park.

Getting There & Away

ADC Airlines (a 234477) flies daily to Lagos (N12,000, one hour). A taxi to the airport is N250.

Destiny ((2) 085 514475) sails every Tuesday and Friday to Limbe, Cameroon (N5000, 10 hours) from Calabar dock. For more information see p471.

The main motor park is tucked between Mary Slessor Ave and Goldie St. Sample minibus fares include Port Harcourt (N900, four hours) and Lagos (N3000, 10 hours).

NORTHERN NIGERIA

ABUJA

pop 1.3 million

Nigeria's made-to-measure capital, Abuja was founded during the boom years of the 1970s. After the divisive Biafran war the decision was made to move the capital from Lagos to the ethnically neutral centre of the country. Clean, quiet and with a good electricity supply, sometimes Abuja hardly feels like Nigeria at all. There's not much to do, but it's a good place to catch your breath and do some visa shopping.

Abuja tends to empty at weekends with people leaving for more exciting destinations, so many hotels offer discounts for Friday and Saturday nights.

For a nice quiet budget option, try **African Safari Hotel** (234 1881; Plot 11 Benue Cres; r from N2300; (2) (2) It has a range of rooms increasing in size and price. Nearby, Area 1 Shopping Centre is good for street food.

The **Valley Pride Hotel** (ⓐ 2342401; Plot 1373 Borno St; r from N4500-7500; ⓒ) is a well-located hotel with cosy rooms and friendly management, close to the eating places on Moshood Abiola. If you want the cheapest rooms you'll have to argue your case, as the management only considers them suitable for your driver.

The main draw at **Smi Msira Restaurant** (Moshood Abiola Way; dishes from N700) is being able to sit out in the pleasant leafy surroundings – something of a genuine beer garden. Claims to never close are exaggerated, but the Nigerian food is still good.

Tantalisers (Moshood Abiola Way; dishes from N200; Sam-10pm) is a standard Nigerian fast-food chain; clean and bright with good chips and handy toilets. For a splurge, hit the restaurants at the Hilton and Sheraton Hotels. In Maitama, Yedseram Cres has several decent 'food-is-ready' places.

The airport is 40km west of Abuja – N3000 in a taxi. Flights depart hourly for Lagos with several airlines (N9000, one hour). There are also daily flights to Kano and Port Harcourt, as well as flights several times a week to Ibadan, Calabar and Maiduguri.

Jobi Motor Park (also called Utoka) is the main terminus for Abuja. Transport goes to all points from here; sample minibus fares include Kano (N1000, four hours), Jos (N700, three hours), Ibadan (N1200, eight hours) and Lagos (N1600, 10 hours).

JOS බ 073

The temperate climes of the Jos Plateau are one of the older inhabited parts of Nigeria; the ancient Nok Terracottas originated in the area. At 1200m above sea level, it's noticeably cooler than most other parts of the country. Modern Jos is a British creation, with popular tradition claiming its name is an abbreviation of 'Jesus Our Saviour' from the first missionaries.

The Jos National Museum (admission N10; ⓑ 8.30am-5.30pm) has a superb collection of pottery, including several Nok Terracotta sculptures – at over 2500 years old they're Africa's oldest figurative sculptures. On the same site, the Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture (admission free; ⓑ 8.30am-5.30pm) has full-scale reproductions of buildings from each of Nigeria's major regions. You can see a reconstruction of the Kano wall, traditional mosques and village architecture. The museum also has an excellent restaurant.

Actually a church mission, **Ecwa Guesthouse** ((2) 454482; off Noad Ave; dm/r N450/1000; (2) (2) (2) is a tranquil spot to rest your head. The facilities are of a Spartan nature that you feel must be good for the soul. No alcohol is allowed.

Cedar Tree Restaurant (Yakubu Gowan Way, dishes from N500, 🏵 12-3pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sun) is a Lebanese restaurant some way out of town. There's a good meat grill, while cheaper mezze such as falafel and hummus are great for jaded palates.

There are several chophouses dishing out 'food-is-ready' on Bank Rd south of ATTN, and more near the stadium.

There's a daily flight to Lagos with Slok Air ($\textcircled{\textbf{G}}$ 455300). The airport is 30km south of Jos – N2800 by taxi.

Head for Bauchi Motor Park if you're going north or east. Minibuses run to Kaduna (N600, four hours) and Kano (N600, five hours). From Plateau Express Motor Park, minibuses leave for Abuja (N700, three hours) and points further south.

KANO

🕿 064 / pop 3.8 million

Kano is the oldest city in West Africa (it was founded around 1400 years ago) and Nigeria's third largest. It was a major crossroads in the trans-Saharan trade routes and, from the Middle Ages, an important centre for Islamic scholarship. A favoured traveller destination, Kano has terrible air pollution, with traffic fumes mixed with the dusty harmattan wind. As capital of a sharia state, alcohol was tech-

nically banned in 2004, although you can still get a drink in upmarket restaurants or in the bars of the Christian Sabon Gari district.

Information

Try the moneychangers at the craft stalls outside the Central Hotel; they'll also exchange West African CFA. The tourist office has a bureau de change.

Friends Internet (Murtala Mohammed Way; per hr N200) Possibly Nigeria's nicest internet café.

Sasilnet Cybercafé (per hr N150) Inside the Daula Hotel compound.

Sights

With thousands of stalls in a 16-hectare area, **Kurmi Market** is one of the largest markets in Africa, and is the city's main attraction. It's a centre for African crafts, including gold, bronze and silver work, and all types of fabrics. Away from the throng are the **Kofar Dye Pits** (Kofar Mata Gate; ??) 7am-7pm), where indigo cloth has been dyed for hundreds of years. Finished cloth is for sale, starting from around N1200 according to the design. A dash of around N100 is appropriate for a guided tour.

The **Gidan Makama Museum** (Emirs Palace Rd; admission N100; ∑ 8am-6pm) stands on the site of the original Emir's Palace (the modern one sits opposite), and is a wonderful example of traditional Hausa architecture. The museum has a fascinating photographic history of Kano, and displays on Nigerian Islam and traditional culture. The **Gidan Dan Hausa** (Dan Hausa Rd; admission N50; ∑ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu, 8am Jpm Fri) is another museum in a beautifully restored traditional house showcasing regional crafts and ceremonial costumes.

Festivals & Events

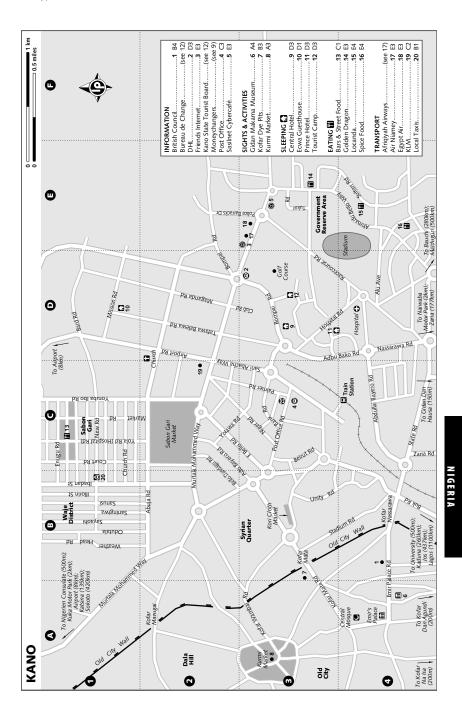
The **Kano Durbar**, the biggest festival of its kind in Nigeria, is held annually just after the end of Ramadan. Exact dates are variable, so check in advance if possible (see also Holidays, p1106). There is a cavalry procession featuring ornately dressed men mounted on colourfully bedecked horses. Kano's emir rides in the middle of the cavalry. The procession finishes outside the Emir's Palace, where there is drumming, singing, and massed cavalry charges.

Sleeping

Ecwa Guesthouse (() 631410; 1 Mission Rd; r N1500-2500; () This church mission has Spartan but spotlessly clean rooms – it's a good budget choice. There's a restaurant, but alcohol is forbidden.

Tourist Camp ((a) 642017; 11 Bompai Rd; r N2000) This state-run enterprise has a soporific air, and if you stay for too long you might end up as dusty and sleepy as the rooms and staff. Rooms are small and hot, but handy and cheap.

Central Hotel (ⓐ 630002; Bompai Rd; r N3250-6960; **№ ●**) A huge concrete confection in pink and blue, the Central's rooms are more staid than the exterior would have you believe. Accommodation is fair to good as the tariff rises.



Prince Hotel ((2) 639402; Tamandu Rd; r N11,600-16,240, ste N24,360; (2) (2) This hotel offers modern and exceedingly comfortable rooms, with gleaming bathrooms in a quiet close. It's often fully booked, but even nonguests should enjoy visiting the posh restaurant and bar.

Eating & Drinking

Spice Food (Magasin Rumfa Rd; dishes from N450; № 12-3.30pm & 6-11pm) If you've been craving some vegetarian food in Nigeria, this excellent Indian restaurant will answer all your prayers (meat dishes also served). The N750 buffet every Sunday at 7.30pm is not to be missed.

Locanda (Sultan Rd; pasta from N750; 🛞 10.30am-10.30pm Tue-Sun) Step inside and you could be forgiven for thinking yourself transported to an old Italian bistro. The menu is stuffed with tasty pasta, pizza and meat options, and doesn't neglect the vegetarians either.

Golden Dragon (Ahmadu Bello Way; mains N900-1200; 10.30am-11pm) Liveried waiters and traditional Chinese decorations give this place a great ambience; try not to fill up on the delicious spring rolls before your main course arrives.

The best 'food-is-ready' is found in Sabon Gari, with plenty of *egusi* and pepper soup always on offer. Most of these places double up as bars. Upscale restaurants also serve alcohol.

Getting There & Away

The airport is 8km northwest of Sabon Gari – N150 by *achaba*, three times that in a taxi.

There are daily flights to Lagos (N14,000, 90 minutes) and Abuja (N12,000, one hour). Kano also has a few international connections to Niamey (Niger), Cairo (Egypt), Tripoli (Libya) and N'djaména (Chad).

Kuka Motor Park is the motor park for the north and the Niger–Nigerian border. Naiwaba Motor Park serves points south and west. Sample fares and travel times include the following: Zaria (N300, two hours), Kaduna (N400, three hours), Maiduguri (N1000, six hours), Sokoto (N700, six hours) and Jos (N600, four hours).

YANKARI NATIONAL PARK

Yankari, 225km east of Jos, is Nigeria's best **national park** (admission N300, camera permit N100-1000) for observing wildlife. The park still holds reasonable numbers of buffalo, waterbuck, bushbuck and plenty of baboons. The biggest draw is the 500-strong population of elephant and it's possible that lion may also survive. The bird-watching is excellent.

The best time to see animals is from late December to late April, before the rains, when the thirsty animals congregate at the Gaji River. You're permitted to drive your own vehicle if you take a guide, otherwise the park has a safari truck that takes two-hour tours (N300) at 7.30am and 3.30pm daily.

Yankari's other attraction is the **Wikki Warm Spring** (admission N200), near the park camp site. The crystal-clear water is a constant 31°C, forming a lake 200m long and 10m wide. Bring your swimming gear – the spring is a real highlight and shouldn't be missed.

The **Wikki Warm Springs Hotel** (ⓐ 077 542174; camping per person N500, bungalows N1730-3450; €) is set high above the spring and has a serene view over the lush area. There's a decent restaurant and bar.

You can get to the park gate at Mainamaji by minibus from Bauchi (N600, five hours). After paying the entrance fee, you'll need to arrange transport to the camp – around N2800 in a taxi or N1000 by *okada*.

NIGERIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels are of a fair standard throughout Nigeria, although poor value compared to neighbouring countries. Most towns and cities have something to suit all pockets; the big exception to this is Lagos, where rooms are either very cheap and not particularly wonderful or very expensive – there's not much middle ground.

Rooms come with air conditioning and attached bathroom as standard, but take promises of hot water with a pinch of salt. You'll also be asked to pay a deposit, which is usually somewhere between one and two night's room rate. This is refundable against your final bill.

BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Government offices are open from 7.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday and 7.30am to 1pm Saturday. Banking hours are from 8am to 3pm Monday to Thursday and 8.30am to 1pm Friday. Sanitation days are held on the last Saturday of the month – traffic isn't allowed before 10.30am to allow the streets to be cleaned.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Nigeria has a poor reputation for safety and civil unrest and yet, for the traveller, it can seem like the friendliest and most welcoming country in western Africa. Navigating these apparently contradictory states is the key to getting the most out of your visit.

Consistently the most troubled region of the country is the Niger Delta, due to the long-running grievances between the local population and the big oil companies, where the kidnapping of Western oil employees is a continued threat. In the north, communal disturbances between Muslims and Christians periodically spill over into bloody violence. Stay clear of demonstrations and areas where you suddenly see large numbers of police or army troops. Lagos has a terrible reputation for violent crime, not always undeserved.

As a traveller you're unlikely to have trouble with corruption and bribery. Police roadblocks are common, but fines and bribes are paid by the driver. Some caution should be exercised on the major highways into Lagos, where armed robbery is a problem, although almost always at night.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Nigerian Embassies & High Commissions

PRACTICALITIES

- English-language newspapers available in Nigeria include the Guardian, Daily News, Daily Times and Vanguard.
- There are over 30 national and state TV stations in English and major local languages. South African DSTV is hugely popular.
- Electricity supply is 220V, with both round European two-pin and square British three-pin plugs.

Cameroon Yaoundé (☎ 221 3509; Rue Joseph Mballa Eloumden, Bastos; ♈ 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri); Douala (☎ 343 2168; Blvd de la Liberté); Buea (☎ 332 2528; Nigeria Consulate Rd; ♈ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Visas not issued in Douala.

Canada (🖻 613 236 0521; www.nigeriahcottawa.com; 95 Metcalfe St, Ottawa K2P 1R9)

Chad ((a) 522498; Av Charles de Gaulle, N'Djaména) **France** ((a) 01 47 04 68 65; 173 Ave Victor Hugo, 75016 Paris)

Germany (ⓐ 30-477 2555; www.nigeria-online.de; Platanen Strasse 98a, 13156 Berlin) Ireland (ⓐ 01-660 4366; 56 Leeson Park, Dublin 6) The Netherlands (ⓐ 070-350 1703; www.nigembassy .nl; Wagenaarweg 5, 2597 LL, The Hague) Niger (ⓐ 73 24 10; Rue des Ambassades, Niamey; ⓒ 10am-1pm Mon-Fri) Switzerland (ⓐ 022-7342140; 1 Rue Richard Wagner, 1211 Geneva) UK (ⓐ 020-7839 1244; www.nigeriahighcommissionuk .com; 9 Northumberland Ave, London WC2N 5BX)

US (a 202-986 8400; www.nigeriaembassyusa.org; 3519 International Court, Washington, DC, 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Nigeria

Many embassies have yet to relocate from Lagos to Abuja. Opening hours listed are for visa applications.

Australiā (Map p462; 🖻 261 8875; 2 Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave, VI, Lagos)

Burkina Faso (Map p462; 🖻 268 1001; 15 Norman Williams St, Ikoyi, Lagos)

Cameroon Calabar (222782; 21 Ndidan Usang Iso Rd; 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri); Lagos (Map p462; 261 2226; 5 Femi Pearse St, VI; 8am-11am Mon-Fri) Canada (Map p462; 262 2516; 4 Idowu Taylor St, VI,

NIGERIA

Lagos)

Chad (🖻 413 0751; 53 Mississippi St, Abuja; 🕑 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Côte d'Ivoire (Map p462; 261 0963; 5 Abudu Smith St, VI, Lagos)

European Union ((2) 523 3144; 63 Usuma St, Abuja) Represents EU countries that don't have embassies in Nigeria, or those with representation in Lagos only. France (Map p462; (2) 200 3300; 1 Oyinkan Abayomi Rd,

rrance (Map p462; 🖻 260 3300; T Oyinkan Abayomi Rd, Ikoyi, Lagos)

Germany (Map p462; 🖻 261 1011; 15 Walter Carrington Cres, VI, Lagos)

Ghana (Map p460; 🖻 263 0015; 23 King George V Rd, Lagos Island, Lagos)

Niger Abuja (🗟 413 6206; Pope John Paul II St; 🕑 9am-3pm Mon-Fri); Kano (🗟 080 6548 1152; Airport Roundabout;

lonelyplanet.com

9am-3pm Mon-Fri); Lagos (Map p462; 2026) 261 2300; 15
 Adeola Odeku St, VI; 9am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)
 Togo (Map p462; 2026) 261 1762; Plot 976 Oju Olobun
 Close, VI, Lagos)
 UK Abuja (2024) 261 2010; Aguyi Ironsi St); Lagos (Map p462; 2026) 261 9541; 11 Walter Carrington Cres, VI)
 US Abuja (2025) 2916; 9 Mambila St); Lagos (Map p462; 2026) 261 253 0916; 9 Mambila St); Lagos (Map p462; 2026) 261 253 0916; 9 Mambila St); Lagos (Map p462; 2026) 261 252 0916; 9 Mambila St); 261 252 0916; 9 Mambila St)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The most elaborate festivals are the celebrations in northern Nigeria – particularly in Kano, Zaria and Katsina – for the two most important Islamic holidays: the end of Ramadan (sometime during September or October; dates vary), and Tabaski, 69 days later, which feature colourful processions of cavalry. Ramadan can be a tiring time to travel in the north – head for the Sabon Gari (Christian quarter) in each town, where food is served throughout the day.

The Igue (Ewere) Festival, held in Benin City, usually in the first half of December, has traditional dances, a mock battle and a procession to the palace to reaffirm loyalty to the oba. It marks the harvest of the first new yams of the season.

HOLIDAYS

Principal public holidays in Nigeria: New Year's Day 1 January Labour Day 1 May National Day 1 October Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Good, cheap connections are widespread in major towns, for around N100 to N150 per hour. Never use internet banking in a Nigerian cybercafé.

MONEY

NIGERIA

The unit of currency is the naira. Bring only US dollars cash to Nigeria – travellers cheques are useless, although ATMs are likely to become widespread in cities during the life of this book. Avoid using a credit card in Nigeria because of fraud.

There are banks aplenty, but virtually none offer currency exchange – you'll have to change on the street. Moneychangers are almost always Hausa, so it's usually a safe bet to ask around at the town's mosque. In our experience, the moneychangers are among the most honest in Africa. Western Union branches are everywhere if you need to get money wired to you.

POST

Mail sent to or from Nigeria is notoriously slow. Worldwide postcards cost about N80. For parcels, use an international courier like DHL or FedEx, who have offices in most towns.

TELEPHONE

Nigeria is in love with the mobile phone, and networks are more reliable than the creaky Nitel fixed-line company. Calls at roadside phone stands are quick and easy to make, costing N15 to N30 per minute inside Nigeria, and around N60 for an international call. Most mobile phone numbers start with 080.

VISAS

Visas are required for all except nationals of most West African countries. Most Nigerian embassies (including the high commissions in the UK and Australia, and the embassy in Benin) issue visas only to residents and nationals of the country in which the embassy is located. Exact requirements vary, but as a rule of thumb, forms are required in triplicate, along with proof of funds to cover your stay, a round-trip airline ticket, and possibly confirmed hotel reservations.

You also need a letter of invitation from a resident of Nigeria or a business in the country. This must explain the purpose of your visit and, preferably, take immigration and financial responsibility for you during your trip. The cost of a 30-day visa is from US\$60 to US\$100 according to nationality.

If you're travelling overland to Nigeria, the embassy in Accra (Ghana) is consistently rated as the best place in West Africa to apply for a visa, as no letter of introduction is required. The embassy in Niamey (Niger) also claims to issue visas the same way.

Visa Extensions

Visas can reportedly be extended at the Federal Secretariat in Lagos, but it's a byzantine process of endless forms, frustration and dash, with no clear sense of success.

Visas for Onward Travel

One month visas for Chad (N5500), Cameroon (N10,000), Niger (N5300) and Benin (N3000) can be obtained in Abuja or Lagos.

Other convenient consulates for visas are Calabar (Cameroon) and Kano (Niger). **Benin** One-month visas cost CFA15,000, with one photo, and take 24 hours to issue. You can't pay in naira – although, as the embassy in Lagos carries a bad reputation for asking for dash, don't be surprised if greasing palms miraculously solves this 'problem'.

Cameroon A one-month single-entry visa costs CFA50,000, with one photo, and is issued in a day. **Chad** Two photos and N5500 will get you a one-month single-entry visa, which you can pick up the next day. **Niger** Best obtained in Abuja, a one-month single-entry visa costs N5300 with two photos, and is issued in 48 hours.

TRANSPORT IN NIGERIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Lagos is Nigeria's air hub, and is served by all the major African airways and international carriers (although the are no direct flights to the USA). Virgin Nigeria is the closest thing to a national carrier, with good regional connections and flights to the UK.

Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos has traditionally been the nightmarish entry point into the country, but has raised its game in recent years and shouldn't present travellers with any undue horror (although there is no currency exchange at the airport – only black-market touts). Abuja and Port Harcourt are alternative entry points with connections to Europe.

Land

BENIN

The main border crossing is on the Lagos (Nigeria) to Cotonou (Benin) highway. Expect requests for bribes. An alternative border crossing is further north at Kétou, but there's not so much public transport that way.

CAMEROON

There are two main border crossings. The northern border post is at Bama, 2½ hours from Maiduguri, across to Banki in Cameroon. A remote alternative crossing is at Ngala (Nigeria), which is used mainly for transiting to Chad.

The southern border crossing is at Mfum (Nigeria), near Ikom. The road infrastructure collapses pretty much as soon as you cross to Ekok (Cameroon), making this border problematic during the rainy season, so consider taking the Calabar–Limbe ferry instead during the wettest months (see below).

CHAD

Although there are no official border crossings between the two countries, it's possible to make a quick transit across Cameroon. In Nigeria, the border crossing into Cameroon is at Ngala. On the Cameroon side ask for a *laissez-passer* to allow you to make the twohour traverse to the Chad border point at Kousseri.

NIGER

There are four main entry points into Niger. The busiest is the Sokoto route, which crosses at Ilela (Nigeria). Minibuses and bush taxis run daily to the border, just past Ilela. Crossing to Birni N'Konni you can get on a bus straight for Niamey. Travelling between Kano (Nigeria) and Zinder (Niger) is equally straightforward. The final option is between Katsina and Maradi.

From Niger, it's easiest to cross at Gaya. You'll probably have to hire a bush taxi to take you from the Nigerian side at Kamba on to Sokoto. Beware the potholes.

Sea

A ferry sails from Calabar to Limbe every Tuesday and Friday evening (N5000, 10 hours), returning on Monday and Thursday. It's an overnight trip in each direction. Your passport is collected on boarding and returned at immigration. Try to keep hold of your luggage – if it gets stowed in the hold you'll be waiting hours to get it back.

GETTING AROUND Air

Internal flights are a quick and relatively cheap way of getting around Nigeria. Flights range between N8000 and N14,000. Most cities are linked by air to Lagos; you'll usually have to change planes here if you want to fly between two smaller cities. Airlines include the following:

Aero ((a) 496 1340; www.flyaero.com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport)

Bellview (Map p462; 🖻 791 9215; www.flybellviewair .com; Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave, VI)

Sosoliso Airlines (🗟 497 1492; www.sosolisoairline .com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport)

Virgin Nigeria (🖻 461 2747; www.virginnigeria.com; Sheraton Hotel, Ikeja)

Car & Motorcycle

Nigeria's road system is good, although for drivers this can bring problems in itself, as smooth sealed road allows Nigerians to exercise their latent talents as rally drivers. The accident rate is frighteningly high, and the only real road rule is survival of the fittest. Avoid driving at night at all costs.

Foreigners driving in Nigeria shouldn't get much hassle at roadblocks, particularly if your vehicle has foreign plates. If you get asked for a dash, a smile and some patience will often diffuse the request. Note, however, that it's a legal requirement to wear a seatbelt; not doing so leaves you open to both official and 'unofficial' fines. Petrol stations are everywhere, but keep your ear out for strikes than can cause fuel shortages. Diesel can sometimes be hard to come by, so keep your tank topped up.

Local Transport

Each town has at least one motor park full of minibuses and bush taxis that serves as

the main transport depot. They're Nigeria in microcosm – sprawling, chaotic and noisy. Vehicles have wooden signs on their roofs showing their destination, while touts shout out those that need filling. Minibuses don't run to any schedule, but depart when full.

Bush taxis – big old Peugeots – cost about 25% more. All travel at horrendous speeds, slowing only for potholes and to pay bribes at police checkpoints.

Motorcycle-Taxi

The quickest way to get around town is on the back of a motorcycle-taxi called an *okada* (*achaba* in the north), although many drivers seem to have a fatalist's view of their own mortality. Fares shouldn't top N50 for a short trip; sling your backpack over the handlebars.

Train

Maps show a Nigerian train line, but barely any services run these days. The main lines are Lagos-Kano (via Ibadan and Kaduna) and Port Harcourt-Maiduguri (via Jos).

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Senegal

Couched between the arid desert lands of the north and lush tropical forests in the south, Senegal boasts a stunning array of sights, sounds and flavours. The capital Dakar alone hands you the country in a capsule. Perched on the tip of a beach-lined peninsula, this dizzying city is composed elegance and street hustle all rolled into one. The busy streets, vibrant markets and glittering nightlife will easily draw you into their relentless rhythm, but the escape route is always open – be it to the meditative calm of the historical Île de Gorée or the golden sands of Yoff and N'Gor. And if Dakar's sensory overload really gets too much, architecturally beautiful Saint-Louis, the first French settlement in West Africa, boasts a vibrant urban culture without the inner-city bustle.

Most visitors head to Senegal for its beaches, and for good reason. North and south of Dakar, wide strips of white sand invite swimming and sunbathing, whether in the built-up resort zones, where a lazy day at the beach can be followed by a cocktail trail at night, or in one of the coast's charming fishing villages, the beaches of which are dotted with hundreds of colourful wooden pirogues. At the deltas of the Casamance and Saloum Rivers, the coastline is broken up into a maze of thick mangroves, tiny creeks, wide lagoons and shimmering plains. A pirogue trip through these striking zones reveals hundreds of bird species, from the gleaming wings of tiny kingfishers to the proud poise of pink flamingos. Whether you want to mingle with the trendsetters of urban Africa, or be alone with your thoughts and the sounds of nature – Senegal is the place to be.

FAST FACTS

- Area 197,000 sq km
- ATMs In all major towns
- Borders Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Mauritania; all borders open from dawn to dusk
- Budget US\$40 to US\$60 a day
- Capital Dakar
- Languages French, Wolof, Malinké, Pulaar, Diola
- Money West African CFA; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 11.1 million
- Seasons Dry (December-March), hot (March-May), rainy season (June-November)
- **Telephone** Country code 221; international access code 00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visa Required by all except nationals of Canada, the EU, Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States), Israel, Japan, Norway, South Africa and the USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Dakar's markets** (p483) Soak up the colour, culture and chaos of Dakar's bustling markets.
- **Saint-Louis** (p484) Take a stroll through the historical city, accompanied by the sounds of live jazz.
- ile de Gorée (p484) Contemplate history and breathe in the atmosphere of this ancient slaving station and peaceful island.
- Parc National du Niokolo-Kôba (p488) Try your luck at lion-spotting in Senegal's biggest national park.
- **Casamance** (p490) Lounge at Senegal's best beaches or hike through lush landscapes in Senegal's most beautiful region.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Senegal's main tourist season is from November to February, mostly during the dry, 'cool' season, when Dakar's average daytime maximums are around 24°C (75°F). Most music festivals take place in December and between March and June.

During the wet months from July to late September some national parks are inaccessible or even closed, but it's also the time everything is green and beautiful, and many hotels reduce their prices by up to 50%.

ITINERARIES

- One Week Spend a couple of days tasting the urban life of Dakar (p477), and take a day trip to Île de Gorée (p484). Head north to visit the historical town of Saint-Louis (p484), the Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj (p487) and Parc National de la Langue de Barbarie (p487).
- Two Weeks Start as for the one-week itinerary, then head from Dakar south to the Petite Côte. Visit the fishing village of Mbour (p489) and, if you like your beach life local, the seashell town Joal-Fadiout (p489), or try Saly (p489) if you're more at home in a holiday resort zone. Trace the coastal road beyond to Palmarin (p489), the stunning entry port to the region of the Siné-Saloum Delta, then head via Ndangane (p489) and Mar Lodj (p489) for Toubakouta (p490), one of the prettiest spots in the Delta.

HISTORY

Senegal was part of the Ghana Empire in the 8th century and the Djolof kingdom, in the

HOW MUCH?

- Soft drink US\$0.60
- Newspaper US\$0.40
- Sandwich US\$2
- French bread US\$0.30
- One hour internet US\$0.60

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.10 (and rising)
- 1L bottled water US\$1
- Bottle of Flag/Julbrew US\$0.60
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$9
- Shwarma US\$1.50

area between the Senegal River and modernday Dakar, during the 13th and 14th centuries. In the early 16th century, Portuguese traders made contact with coastal kingdoms, and became the first in a long line of 'interested' foreigners: the British, French and Dutch soon followed, jostling for control of strategic points where slaves bound for the Americas could be collected. Saint-Louis was secured by the French in 1659, and the whole of Senegal by the end of the 19th century. Dakar was built as the administrative centre. and as early as 1848 Senegal had a (French) deputy in the French parliament. It wasn't until 1914 that the first African deputy, Blaise Diagne, was elected.

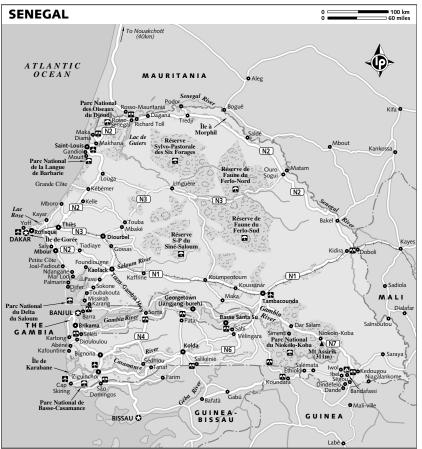
In the run-up to independence in 1960, Senegal joined French Sudan to form the Federation of Mali. The federation lasted all of two months, and Senegal subsequently became a republic under the presidency of Léopold Sédar Senghor, a socialist and poet of international stature who commanded respect domestically and abroad. His economic management, however, didn't match his way with words. At the end of 1980, he voluntarily stepped down and was replaced by Abdou Diouf, who soon faced a string of mounting crises.

The early 1980s saw the start of an ongoing separatist rebellion in the southern region of Casamance. Seven years later a minor incident on the Mauritanian border led to riots and deportations in both countries, the three-year suspension of diplomatic relations, and hundreds of casualties.

In 1993 more violence, in Casamance and elsewhere, followed Diouf's election to a third term. Negotiations with rebel separatists resulted in a ceasefire in July that collapsed three years later. Tensions mounted in other parts of the country as a result of austerity measures introduced by the government, such as utilities privatisations and the halving of the value of the CFA franc, designed to put an end to the long-term shrinking of the economy. In February 1994 the government, made increasingly paranoid by civil unrest, arrested opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade on charges of sedition; however, it could barely contain the reaction to his incarceration and he was released three months later.

In the presidential elections of March 2000, Abdoulaye Wade, after 25 years as opposition leader, was finally given his chance in a free and fair election, having gathered large parts of the population behind his hope-giving *sopi* (change) campaign. Diouf respected the will of the people and peacefully relinquished power. Senegalese democracy was further strengthened the following year, when a new constitution was approved, allowing the formation of opposition parties and consolidating the prime minister's role.

In 2002 the country was shaken by a huge tragedy when the MS *Joola*, the ferry connecting Dakar and the Casamance capital Ziguinchor, capsized due to dangerous overloading, leaving almost 2000 people dead.



lonelyplanet.com

Senegal Today

Despite Wade's efforts in stabilising the economy, and his (so far) successful appeasement of the Casamance rebellion through a 2004 peace deal, most people's lives haven't particularly improved. Wade's controversial decision to arrest former prime minister Idrissa Seck in 2005 on accusations of undermining state security and embezzling funds sent the country into a flurry of political debate. In February 2006 Seck was released and all charges were dropped, but the political debates have remained heated ever since. For the vast majority of Senegalese, life is still a struggle, and though there's a feeling that the current government has failed its people, there seem few real alternatives.

CULTURE

'A man with a mouth is never lost,' goes a popular Wolof saying, and the Senegalese are indeed rarely lost, at least not for words. Conversation is the key to local culture, and the key to conversation is a great sense of humour and a quick-witted tongue. The Senegalese love talking, teasing and testing you out, and the better you slide into the conversational game, the easier you'll get around. The words flow endlessly, the storytellers are always a step ahead of their audience, and the truth is rarely allowed to get in the way of a good story.

Personal life-stories in Senegal tend to be brewed from a mix of traditional values, global influences, Muslim faith and family integration. More than 90% of the population is Muslim, and many of them belong to one of the Sufi brotherhoods that dominate religious life in Senegal. The most important brotherhood is that of the Mourides, founded by Cheikh Amadou Bamba. The marabouts who lead these brotherhoods play a central role in social life and wield enormous political and economic power (possibly the power to make or break the country's leaders). They are also called on as healers, advisers and casters of spells to help people in their struggle ahead.

PEOPLE

The dominant ethnic group is the Wolof (about 43% of the population), whose language is also the country's lingua franca. Smaller groups include the Fula (around 24%), the Tukulor, a sub-branch of the Fula, who make up 10%, the Serer (14%) and the Diola (5%). Senegal's population is young: around 42% people are under 14 years old. The greatest population density is around the urban areas of Dakar.

ARTS

The doyen of Senegalese cinema is Ousmane Sembène. Other famous directors include the illustrious Djibril Diop Mambety and the younger Joseph Kamaka Gaye, whose acclaimed work *Karmen Gei* sets the classic story of Carmen in a Senegalese context.

Senegal is one of Africa's most musical nations, and names such as Youssou N'Dour and Baaba Maal are famous worldwide. The beat that moves the nation is *mbalax*. Created from a mixture of Cuban music (hugely popular in the 1960s) and traditional, fiery *sabar* drumming in the late 1970s, *mbalax* was made famous by Youssou N'Dour, still the unrivalled leader of the scene.

Senegal also has one of the most exciting hip-hop scenes in Africa, with leading names being Positive Black Soul, Daara J, and Pee Froiss.

Senegal has a vibrant contemporary arts scene and is particularly renowned for the unique art of *sous-verre* (reverse-glass painting). Outstanding artisans include Moussa Sakho, Babacar Lô, Mbida and Gora Mbengue.

ENVIRONMENT

Senegal consists mainly of flat plains, cut by three major rivers: the Senegal River in the north, which forms the border with Mauritania; the Gambia River in the middle, which is surrounded by the small country of The Gambia; and the Casamance River in the south, which gives its name to the surrounding Casamance area, a fertile zone of forest and farmland.

The best place to see large animals in Senegal is in Parc National du Niokolo-Koba.

The national parks of the coastal regions, including the Siné-Saloum Delta, the Parc National de la Langue de Barbarie and the Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj, are noted for their spectacular birdlife.

Overfishing, deforestation and coastal erosion, caused by uncontrolled illegal sand mining, are the main environmental issues the country faces.

Throughout the north of the country, deforestation has greatly contributed to increasing desertification. In the fight against overfishing, the community-run Aire Marine Protégée de Bamboung is a notable project. It is showing an impressive rate of success in replenishing the species, but only covers a small area off the coast.

FOOD & DRINK

Senegal's national dish is the *tiéboudienne* (rice cooked in a thick tomato sauce and served with fried fish and vegetables). Also typical are *yassa poulet* or *poisson yassa* (marinated and grilled chicken or fish) and *mafé* (peanut-based stew).

Local drinks include *bissap*, made from sorrel flowers, and *bouyi*, made from the fruits of the baobab. The best local beer is Flag.

DAKAR

pop 2 million

If Dakar only could, it would burst its beaches and lead its cacophonic parade of furious drumbeats, screeching traffic, exuberant nightlife, market shouting, street hustling and boundless creativity in ever-wider circles across the country. This is a feverish city that brims with life. It's got some of the best nightclubs, live venues, and film, music and arts festivals in the whole of West Africa. You'll rarely have a boring day in Dakar, and the city charges only an occasional fee in unwanted hassle and sly con-jobs – easily negotiated once you've learnt a few tricks.

ORIENTATION

The expansive Place de l'Indépendance is the city's heart. From here, major streets lead in all directions, including Ave Leopold Senghor and Ave Pompidou, which leads west to Marché Sandaga. From here, Ave du President Lamine Guéye goes north to Gare Routière Pompiers. To the north of the city centre lie the suburbs Point E, Fann, Mermoz and Ouakam, all of which have good bars and restaurants. The airport is 19km north of the town centre, and north of there are Yoff and N'Gor, with Dakar's best beaches.

Maps

By far the best city map is the colourful, detailed one by **Editions Laure Kane** (www.editionslaure kane.com; US\$7), available in most souvenir shops and hotels. INFORMATION Bookshops

Librairie Aux Quatre Vents (Map p482; 🗟 821 8083; Rue Félix Faure) Librairie Clairafrique (Map p478; 🗟 864 4429; University Campus, Ave Cheikh Anta Diop)

Cultural Centres

British Council (Map p478; ⓐ 869 2700; Rue AAB-68, Amitié Zone A&B) Has a good library and cute café. I'Institut Français Lépold Sédar Senghor (Map p482; ⓐ 823 0320; 89 Rue Gomis) A vital inner-city stop with a leafy café and lively cultural programme.

Internet Access

There are many internet cafés and wi-fi is spreading fast; the network at Novotel (p481) is free (purchase something at the bar). **Espace Sentoo** (Map p482; Place de l'Indépendance; per hr US\$0.60; 🏵 9.30am-8pm) One of the best internet cafés.

Media

Free listings magazines such *Dakar Tam Tam* containing details of restaurants and travel agencies are available at most hotels, travel agencies and restaurants. The cultural magazine *221* (CFA500) has the best entertainment listings and information on music, sports and other events around the country.

Medical Services

Hôpital Principal (Map p480; 839 5050; Ave Léopold Senghor) Has the best emergency service.

Pharmacies are plentiful in Dakar; 24-hour openings rotate.

Pharmacie Guigon (Map p482; 🗟 823 0333; Ave du President Lamine Guéye; 🏠 9am-11pm) One of the best-stocked options.

Money

An ATM-equipped bank is never far in Dakar. Place de l'Indépendance has the best choice. Visa is the most widely accepted card. BICIS (Map p482; 🗃 839 0390; Place de l'Indépendance) CBAO (Map p482; 🗃 839 9696; Place de l'Indépendance) SGBS (Map p482; 🗃 839 5500; 19 Ave Léopold Senghor)

Post & Telephone

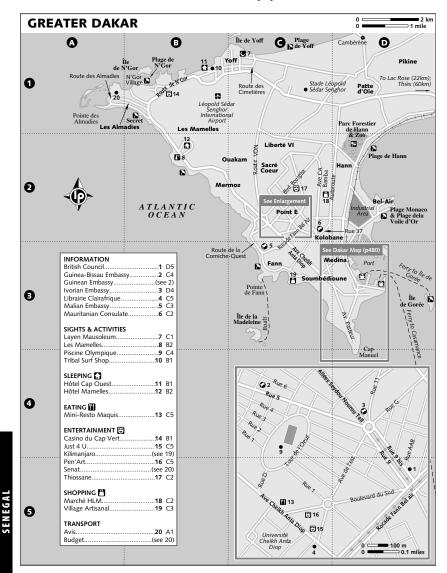
Espace Sentoo (Map p482; Place de l'Indépendance; ♀ 9.30am-8pm) Has good telephone facilities. Main post office (Map p482; Blvd el Haji Djily Mbaye; ♀ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat) Post office (Map p482; Ave Pompidou) Has telephone facilities

Travel Agencies

Dakar has plenty of travel agencies. Good ones include:

Dakar Voyages (Map p482; 2 2 3704; dakarvoyages@ sentoo.sn; 28 Rue Assane Ndoye) Tends to have the best ticket deals.

Pain de Singe (Map p480; 🙃 824 2484; paindesinge@ arc.sn; l'Océanium, Route de la Corniche-Est) Unbeatable for ecotourism and off-the-beaten-track circuits.



DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Dakar's notorious street hustlers and hardto-shake-off traders do a pretty good job at turning any walk around town into mild punishment, particularly for women. Stride purposefully on, and throw in a brief 'bakhna' ('it's OK') and they'll eventually leave you alone. Violent crime is rare, but pickpocketing and muggings are favourite inner-city sports. Keep your wits about you at the beaches, in the town centre and any deserted spot. Oh, and don't fall for the cheap scams. The 'remember me?' scam involves someone calling out 'my friend, long time no seel', pretending they know you, then cheating you out of money. The remedy: don't respond to random calls.

SIGHTS

Central Dakar has a few impressive colonial buildings. There's the **Gouvernance** (Map p482) and the **Chambre de Commerce** (Map p482), both on Place de l'Indépendance. The stately **Hôtel de Ville** (Town Hall; Map p482) sits right behind, and a short walk north takes you to the elegant building of the **train station**.

South of Place de l'Indépendance, the 1907 **Palais Présidentiel** (Map p482; Ave Léopold Senghor) is surrounded by sumptuous gardens. The nearby **IFAN Museum** (Map p482; Place de Soweto; adult/child US\$3.50/0.35; % 8am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm) has good, though slightly dusty, displays of masks and other items from across West Africa.

The impressive **Grande Mosquée** (Map p480), built in 1964, sits in the heart of **Médina** (Map p478), a lively neighbourhood where tiny tailor shops fight for space with improvised market stalls, and creative ideas brew between street cafés and makeshift football grounds. The 1864 lighthouse **Les Mamelles** (Map p478) sits further north on a small volcanic hill, a peaceful spot great for views across the peninsula.

Dakar's best beaches are found in the north of the peninsula. **Plage de N'Gor** (Map p478; admission US\$1) isn't bad, but the beaches on **Île de N'Gor** (Map p478), reached by pirogue (US\$1) from there, are much nicer. Slightly eastwards, there's a fantastically wide beach near the fishing village of **Yoff** (Map p478). The stretch of beach closest to the village is quite polluted, however, with a fish market dominating most of the scene. The traditional Yoff village and its majestic **Layen Mausoleum** (Map p480), however, are well worth a visit. The residents there are noted for the strong Islamic culture. Smoking and drinking are not allowed and visitors should be appropriately dressed (meaning long skirts for women, long trousers for men).

ACTIVITIES

Sports-lovers are well catered for by the sublime **Piscine Olympique** (Map p478; 🗟 869 0606; piscineolymp@sentoo.sn; Tour de l'Oeuf) in Point E, which is part of a huge sports complex. The environmental-protection agency **l'Océanium** (Map p480; 🗟 822 2441; www.oceanium.org; Route de la Comiche-Est; 🏵 Mon-Sat) runs excellent diving excursions. Surfers can hire boards (US\$18 per day), get advice on good spots, and even take courses at the **Tribal Surf Shop** (Map p480; 🗟 820 5400; tribal@arc.sn; Yoff Village).

SLEEPING

Dakar has a range of accommodation, from filthy dosshouses to palatial hotels – although everything is expensive and the steadily increasing prices are only justified in a few places.

Budget

Hôtel Continental (Map p482; 🗟 822 1083; 10 Rue Galandou Diouf; s/d from US\$25/30; 😢) With decent rooms and friendly staff, this is the best of the Dakar cheapies.

Hôtel Mamelles (Map p478; **2** 860 0000; www.les mamelles.com; 36 cité des Magistrats Ouakam; s/d US\$28/ 38, without bathroom US\$20/30) Tucked away in a side street in the suburb Les Mamelles, this tranquil place has colourfully decorated rooms set around a leafy patio.

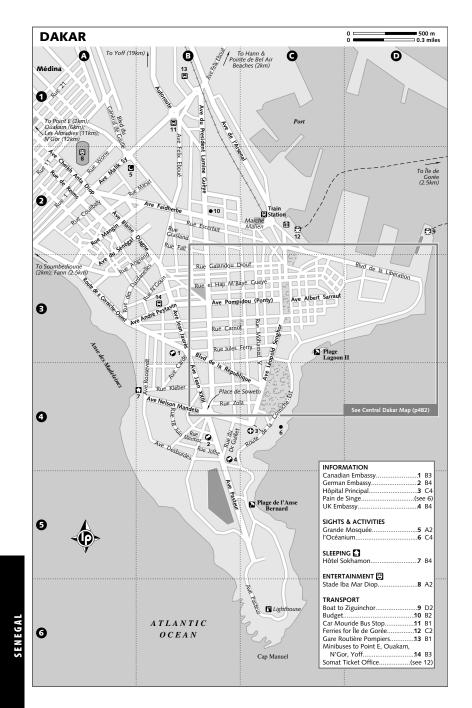
Hôtel Cap Ouest (Map p478; 🖻 820 2469; capouest@arc .sn; s/d US\$31/37) With forthcoming management, cute sea-view rooms and a private beach thrown in, the Cap Ouest is a strong contender for best-value place on the peninsula.

Midrange

Hôtel Océanic (Map p482; 2044; www.hoteloceanic dakar.com; 9 Rue de Thann; s/d/tr US\$42/50/64; 2) With spotless rooms and a relaxed courtyard restaurant, this pleasant old-style place is fair value.

Hôtel Saint-Louis Sun (Map p482; @ 822 2570; fax 822 4651; Rue Félix Faure; s/d/tr US\$45/56/67; P €) Rooms are pretty and open onto a peaceful, leafy courtyard. An oasis of peace.

Hôtel Ganalé (Map p482; 🗟 889 4444; hganale@sentoo .sn; 38 Rue Assane Ndoye; s/d US\$54/68) Never mind the gloomy lobby – rooms are bright and tastefully decorated and the bar almost funky.



Top End

Hôtel Sôkhamon (Map p480; 🖻 8897100; www.hotelsokha mon.com; cnr Blvd Roosevelt & Av Nelson Mandela; s/d US\$90/105) Dakar's most beautiful place, with stunning seaview rooms in imaginative Arab-African design. A bargain for the quality you get.

Novotel (Map p422; 28 849 6161; novotel@sentoo .sn; Ave Abdoulaye Fadiga; r US\$165; 28 (a) Smooth standards, good service, bland in character – it's a Novotel alright. Big plus: it's a free wi-fi space.

EATING

Dakar's restaurant scene unites the scents and flavours of the world, though you need a healthy budget to enter the city's places of culinary delight. If you're getting by on a few crumpled CFA notes a day, stop at the makeshift street stalls selling rice and sauce or one of the many *shwarma* (grilled meat served in bread) places feeding the capital's snackhungry. The best-stocked supermarket is **Score** (Map p482; Ave Albert Sarraut).

Adonis (Map p482; Ave Pompidou; snacks around US\$2; 9 9am-midnight) Masses of students, workers and travellers pass through this spacious, though invariably packed fast-food place. Why? The *shwarmas* are excellent.

Keur N'deye (Map p482; a 821 4973; 68 Rue Vincens; meals US\$5-8; b lunch & dinner) This one's great for Senegalese food, plus there's occasionally live kora music.

La Casa Créole (Map p482; 🖻 823 4081; 21 Blvd el Haji Djily Mbaye; meals around US\$8-12; 🟵 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) On a marvellous garden terrace, French and Creole food are served with a sprinkling of live jazz.

Mini Resto Maquis (Map p478; **2**825 5573; Ave Cheikh Anta Diop; meals around US\$10-14; 11am-midnight) This Cameroonian place serves the best *atièke* (similar to couscous) with grilled fish in town. Waiting times can be painfully long, though.

Le Sarraut (Map p482; 🖻 822 5523; Ave Albert Sarraut; meals around US\$10-15; 🕑 8am-midnight Mon-Sat) This is a Dakar classic: the tasty French and international cuisine in this calm, central place is hard to beat.

La Fourchette (Map p482; ☎ 821 8887; 4 Rue Parent; meals around US\$12-20; ♡ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This polished food temple serves impeccable sushi and scrumptious dishes from around the world. Pricey – yes, but sinfully good.

DRINKING

Le Mex (Map p482; 2 823 6717; 91 Rue Moussé Diop; noon-2am) This colourful Mexican restaurant transforms into a lively bar at night. It's popular with the French military and their obligatory female following.

Le Seven (Map p482; **(2)** 842 6911; 25 Rue Mohamed V) The glittering queen of Dakar's bars. So plugged-in, you risk electrocution.

Iguane Café (Map p482; 26 Rue Jules Ferry) The mockmilitary décor may be aggressive to the eye, but the atmosphere is decidedly relaxed.

Hôtel de l'Indépendance (Map p482; Place de l'Indépendance) The décor might be lousy, but the views from this rooftop bar in the town centre are unbeatable.

ENTERTAINMENT Live Music & Nightclubs

Live-music places spring up almost daily in Dakar, and acoustic sounds are the latest trend on Dakar's restaurant scene. Nights on the dance floor start late – don't even get your kit on before 1am. And always, always overdress.

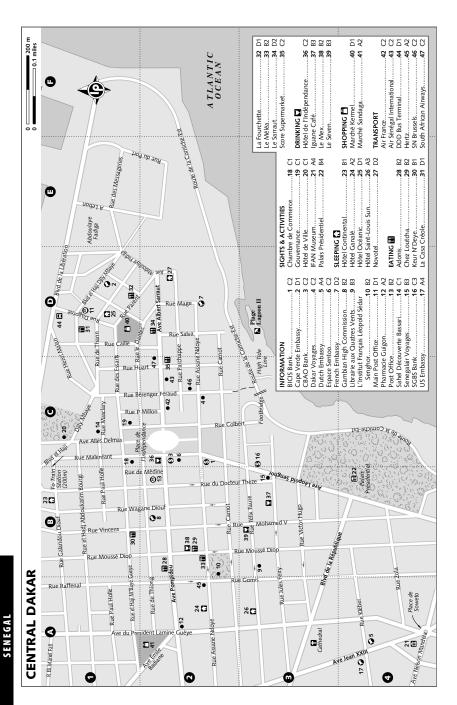
Just 4 U (Map p478; ⓐ 824 3250; Ave Cheikh Anta Diop; ⓑ 11am-3am) This spacious bar-restaurant is Dakar's best address for live music. There's a concert every night, often by one of Senegal's greatest artists.

Pen'Art (Map p478; \bigcirc 864 5131; Blvd du Sud; \square) Around the corner from Just 4 U, this is a cosy jazz club with good bands in a relaxed atmosphere.

Kilimanjaro (Map p478; **B** 822 6991; Soumbédioune) The mighty Thione Seck plays here, at his personal club, every Friday. A fabulous place with a friendly ambiance. Dress smart.

Thiossane (Map p478; \bigcirc 824 6046; Sicap Rue 10) Whenever Youssou N'Dour is in town, his famous nightclub turns on the lights and becomes the hub of the hip-swaying, high-heeled *mbalax* scene.

heeled *mbalax* scene. **Casino du Cap Vert** (Map p478; **a** 820 0974) Utterly popular, this stylish place is on the route to the airport, and a good place to spot famous singers and footballers.



Senat (Map p478; 🕿 869 6969; Hotel Meridien President, Pointe des Almadies) Favourite hang-out and hunting ground of the Dakarois jet set and the French 'upper class'.

Spectator Sports

Stade Iba Mar Diop (Map p480; Ave Cheikh Anta Diop, Médina) Traditional Senegalese wrestling matches (les luttes) are held most weekends during the dry season at this stadium. The ambiance of sweaty excitement, shrill singing and furious drumming is electrifying.

SHOPPING

Dakar's markets are among the city's biggest attractions. Come with plenty of time, patience to deal with the hustlers, and your bargaining spirits switched on. The cute, covered Marché Kermel (Map p482) has a good selection of souvenirs, as does the Village Artisanal (Map p478), Dakar's classic place for masks and wooden statues. If it's African cloth you're after, Marché HLM (Map p478) is your address.

Marché Sandaga (Map p482; cnr Ave Pompidou & Ave du President Lamine Guèye) In the endless sprawl of street stalls here you can buy about anything, as long as no one steals your purse.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Dakar's Léopold Sédar Senghor International Airport is likely to be moved to a new location near Thies in the coming years. Until then, all international flights will still arrive here, a mere 30-minute drive from the centre of Dakar (see p496 for details on flight connections).

Most airline offices and travel agencies are near the Place de l'Indépendance. For a full list see www.ausenegal.com. Important ones include the following:

Air France (Map p482; 🖻 829 7777; 47 Av Albert Sarraut)

Air Sénégal International (Map p482; 🕿 804 0404; 45 Av Albert Sarraut)

SN Brussels (Map p482; 🖻 823 0460; Immeuble Fayçal, Rue Parchappe)

South African Airways (Map p482; 🖻 823 0151; 12 Av Albert Sarraut)

Boat

The excellent ferry Wilis (brand new in 2005) travels between Dakar and Ziguinchor twice weekly in each direction. See p492.

Local Transport

Road transport for long-distance destinations leaves from Gare Routière Pompiers off Ave Malik Sy (a taxi from Place de l'Indépendance should cost around US\$3). To Ziguinchor costs about US\$15 by sept-place (Peugeot 504 with 'seven seats') taxi (six to 10 hours, depending on the speed of the Gambia crossing). Sept-place taxis/minibuses go to Mbour (US\$3), Kaolack (US\$5), Saint-Louis (US\$7), Tambacounda (US\$15), and Karang (US\$9) at the Gambian border.

Train

Dakar's train station is 500m north of Place de l'Indépendance. For more information on Senegal's main train service – the connection between Dakar and Bamako (Mali) - see the Transport section on p496.

GETTING AROUND Bus

Dakar's **Dakar Dem Dikk** (DDD; www.dakardemdikk .com) bus network is a fabulous thing. Buses are modern, reliable and regular; tickets cost between US\$0.30 and US\$0.40. Check the website for a detailed list of DDD routes.

More frequent but less user-friendly are the white Ndiaga Ndiaye minivans and the blueyellow cars rapides, Dakar's battered, crammed and dangerously driven symbols of identity. They are eventually supposed to be replaced by the pretty, blue-white Senbuses. These are reliable, clean and display their destinations clearly, but still only cover a few routes.

Car

Car rental is only an option if you're in a spending mood, and if you feel brave enough to plunge into the chaotic Dakar traffic.

The major self-drive car-hire agencies in Dakar include the following:

Avis (Map p478; 🖻 849 7757; www.cfaogroup.com) At the airport and the Hôtel Meridien President.

Budget (Map p480; 🖻 822 2513; cnr Ave du President Lamine Guèye & Ave Faidherbe) Also at the airport and the Hôtel Meridien President.

Hertz (Map p482; 🖻 820 1174; www.hertz.sn; Rue Gomis) Also at the airport.

Taxi Taxis are by far the easiest way of getting around town. Rates need to be fiercely negotiated before stepping into the cab. A short trip around the town centre should cost around

US\$1.50. From the centre of Dakar to the suburbs of Point E and Mermoz, you're likely to pay around US\$3, and up to US\$5.50 if travelling to Yoff and N'Gor.

The official taxi rate for trips from Léopold Sédar Senghor International Airport into the city centre is US\$6, though you're unlikely to get there for under US\$8 to US\$10. If you haul your luggage to the main road outside the airport and stop a passing cab, you can save a couple of CFA.

AROUND DAKAR

ÎLE DE GORÉE

The historical Île de Gorée is enveloped by an almost eerie calm. There are no sealed roads and no cars on this island, just narrow alleyways with trailing bougainvillea and colonial brick buildings with wrought-iron balconies. But Gorée's calm is not so much romantic as meditative, as the ancient buildings bear witness to the island's role in the Atlantic slave trade.

Gorée is tiny, and can easily be explored independently, though the **Syndicat d'Initiative** (☎ 823 9177; Rue du Port; ※ 9am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Tue-Sun) can arrange guides. For some quick, onthe-spot information, try the small tourist booth near the police station. This is also where you'll have to pay your US\$1 tourist tax, an obligatory payment for all non-Senegalese visitors. Gorée has a post office and an internet café, **Espace Multimedia** (per hr US\$1; ※ 10am-1pm & 3-10pm).

Sights & Activities

Gorée is sadly famous for its role in the Atlantic slave trade. Though the number of slaves shipped from here was relatively small, it was a place where much of the trade was orchestrated. The **Maison des Esclaves** (Slave House; admission US\$0.60; 🏵 10.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm Tue-Sat) with its famous doorway is an important monument to the inhumanity of the slave trade. The excellent **IFAN Historical Museum** (admission US\$0.40; 🏵 10am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Tue-Sat), in the Fort d'Estrées at the north end of the island, and the **Musée de la Femme** (admission US\$0.60; 🏵 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) are also excellent historical museums.

Sleeping & Eating

As you come off the ferry you'll see several small bars and restaurants around the small port. These all serve meals for around US\$7. Auberge Keur Beer (() /fax 821 3801; keurbeergie@ yahoo.fr; s/d US\$40/50) This welcoming place has comfortable double rooms complemented by helpful management.

Ĥostellerie du Chevalier de Boufflers (☎ 822 5364; goreeboufflers@arc.sn; www.boufflers.com; r from US\$35) This classic place is best known for its sea-view restaurant, but has also good accommodation. Best are the tastefully decorated rooms upstairs that sleep up to five.

Getting There & Away

The Dakar–Gorée ferry (US\$10 return ticket, 20 minutes) leaves every one to two hours from the dock area between 6am and 11pm.

LAC ROSE

This lake on the Cap Vert Peninsula owes its name to its pink colouring caused by its high mineral and salt content. It's popular with tour groups, their faithful souvenir sellers and Dakarois weekenders, and has achieved notoriety in modern times as the terminus of the annual Dakar Rally.

The **Bonaba Café** (a 638 7538; r per person US\$10; a n enduring favourite with independent travellers. Hidden away on the far side of the lake, it has simple rooms with shared bathrooms. You get here either by walking 2km from the main hotel cluster through the dunes, or by taking a pirogue from the salt village (US\$6 to US\$10).

Ma Petite Camargue ((a) 511 2745; s/d US\$30/40) is a basic *campement* (guesthouse) on the road to Bombilor, at a relaxing distance from the tourist hub. Its enterprising managers also have several houses for hire.

Trying to get here by public transport involves a journey by minibus, *car rapide* (minibuses; US\$0.40) or DDD bus 11 to Keur Massar; from there it's a 5km walk to the lake. It's much easier to hire a taxi (round trip with an afternoon waiting time around US\$40) or join an organised excursion from Dakar.

NORTHERN SENEGAL

SAINT-LOUIS pop 148,000

With its crumbling colonial architecture, horse-drawn carts and peaceful ambiance, West Africa's first French settlement has a unique historical charm. The old town centre sits on an island in the Senegal River, but the city sprawls onto the mainland of Sor and the Langue de Barbarie, where you find the lively fishing community of Guet N'Dar.

The island is reached via the 500m-long Pont Faidherbe, originally built to cross the Danube (as legend has it) but shipped here in 1897.

Information

5.15pm Mon-Fri) For cash withdrawals and changing money. Espace Sentoo (Blvd Abdoulaye Mar Diop; per hr US\$0.80) One of several internet cafés.

Syndicat d'Initiative (**@** 961 2455; Rue Milles Lacroix) The tourist office here is fantastically helpful and great for arranging tours.

Sights & Activities

In the centre of the Saint-Louis island is **Place Faidherbe** and the **Governor's Palace**. It's flanked north and south by the 1837 **Rognât Casernes** as well as by other essentially intact 19thcentury houses.

At the southern tip of the island is a **museum** (**^(©)** 961 1050; admission US\$1; ^(©) 9am-noon & 3-6pm), which contains some fascinating old photos of Saint-Louis and other exhibits relating to the northern region. **Galerie Mame Thiouth** (**^(©)** 961 3611; ^(©) 8am-7pm) usually has excellent contemporary exhibitions, beautifully displayed under the arched ceilings of a classic Saint-Louis house.

The mainland parts of Saint-Louis have less to offer in historical architecture, but more in contemporary life. **Guet N'Dar** is a fantastically busy fishing town, where you can watch some 200 pirogues being launched into the sea every morning and returning at night.

Festivals & Events

Saint-Louis hosts a famous **jazz festival** in May. **Les Fanals**, a historic festival of decorated lanterns, is celebrated around Christmas.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse (🖻 961 2409; pisdiallo@yahoo.fr; Rue Abdoulaye Seck; dm/d US\$10/20) Yes it's possible: a spotless, mosquito-netted, ventilated place that doesn't break the bank.

Sunu Keur (**@** 961 8800; chaffoisjeanjacques@yahoo .fr; s/d from US\$30/40) This calm guesthouse has beautifully decorated rooms overlooking the river in a restored colonial building.

La Louisiane ((2) 961 4221; www.aubergelalouisiane .com; Point Nord; d/tr US\$36/50) Excellent value for money, this peaceful little place has spacious, ventilated rooms right on the river.

Hôtel Sindone ((a) 961 4244; www.hotelsindone.com; Quai Henri Jay; s/d from US\$52/60; (2) A faint pink 'n' fluffy honeymoon feel scents the air of this stylish and airy hotel on the south side of the island. River views cost US\$6 extra.

La Maison Rose ((2) 938 2222; www.lamaisonrose .net; Ave Blaise Diagne; s/d/ste from US\$90/110/150) Every room in this beautifully restored and exquisitely furnished house is unique, though they all exude a spirit of old-time comfort.

Eating

Aux Délices du Fleuve ((2) 961 4251; Quai Roume; snacks around US\$2; (2) lunch & dinner) Saint-Louis' famous patisserie lives up to its reputation, serving delicious pastries, ice creams and rich, milky coffees.

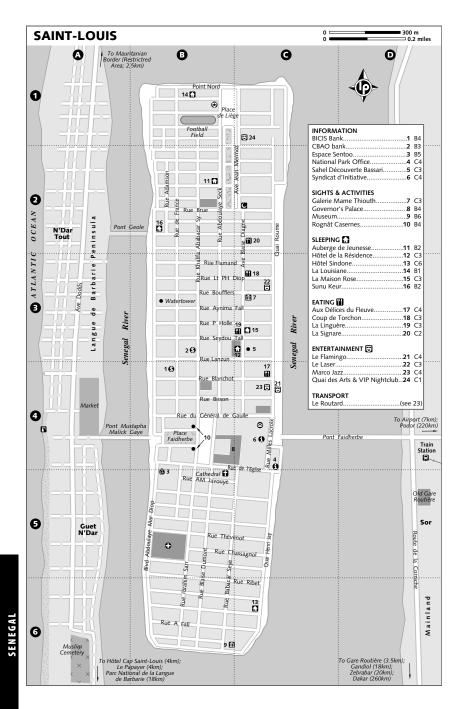
La Linguère (B 961 3949; Av Blaise Diagne; meals US\$4; S lunch & dinner) Never mind the shoddy interior, the *yassa poulet* of this place is almost unbeatable.

Coup de Torchon ($\textcircled{\sc opt}$ 518 5408; Ave Blaise Diagne; meals US\$7-10; $\textcircled{\sc opt}$ lunch & dinner) This friendly restaurant is the perfect place to spend long evenings chatting over huge plates of food. There's live music on Thursdays.

La Signare (@ 961 1932; Av Blaise Diagne; meals CFA7000; ♥ lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) La Signare offers a truly top-notch *menu du jour* in a restored old-style building.

Entertainment

Saint-Louis has a fine selection of nightclubs and live-music bars.



Le Laser ((2) 961 5398; www.casinolaser.com; Quai Roume; admission US\$4; (2) 7pm-3am Wed-Sun) Part of the Saint-Louis Casino complex. Popular.

Le Papayer () 961 8687; Carrefour de l'Hydrobase;) noon-midnight) Has the best dance floor on the Langue de Barbarie. It's to the south, near Hôtel Cap Saint-Louis.

Marco Jazz ((2) 654 2442; benedettoma@yahoo.fr; Quai Roume) For live concerts, try this intimate venue where the big jazz names often give impromptu concerts during the jazz festival.

Le Flamingo (2) 961 1118; Quai Roume; meals US\$10; (C) This classy restaurant turns into an upmarket bar at night, and often has quality concerts.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent *sept-place* taxis between Dakar and Saint-Louis (US\$7, five hours, 264km). You'll be dropped off at the *gare routière* (bus station), 4.5km south of Saint-Louis. A taxi to the island costs US\$1.

PARC NATIONAL DE LA LANGUE DE BARBARIE

This **national park** (admission US\$4; pirogue for 1 or 2 people US\$15, each extra person US\$5; \bigcirc 7am-7pm), 20km south of Saint-Louis, covers the southern tip of the Langue de Barbarie Peninsula and a section of the mainland on the other side of the river's mouth. It's a great place for pirogue tours, and a bird-watcher's paradise.

There are three *campements* that provide meals, transfers and offer a range of activities, including sailboarding, kayaking and bird-watching. On the mainland, the brilliant *campement* Zebrabar (☎ 638 1862; www.come.to/zebrabar; camping per person US\$5, s/d US\$14/30; ♥ ♠) has simple huts and spacious bungalows spread over a huge terrain. At the ultrarelaxed Campement Océan et Savane (☎ 637 4790; r with half/fullboard US\$30/42) you can stay in Mauritanian-style bungalows or rustic log cabins that house one to five people (US\$60). Campement Langue de Barbarie (☎ 961 1118; s/dwith half board US\$52) has pretty cottages at the southern end of the peninsula.

To get here, take a taxi from Saint-Louis to Gandiol lighthouse (US\$6). From there, you cross with a pirogue. Organised tours from Saint-Louis are another option. If you're staying at any of the *campements*, phone them, and they'll arrange pick-up in Saint-Louis.

PARC NATIONAL DES OISEAUX DU DJOUDJ

With almost 300 species, this 16,000-hectare **park** (@ 968 8708; admission US\$4, plus pirogue US\$7; ? Tam-dusk Nov-May) is one of the most important bird sanctuaries in the world. Flamingos, pelicans and waders are most plentiful, as well as large numbers of migrating birds that travel here every November to escape the European winter months. The park is best explored by pirogue. Boats trips can be arranged at the park entrance or at the hotels.

The park is 25km off the main road, and there's no public transport. You can either negotiate a private taxi from Saint-Louis (around US\$40), or join an organised tour (around US\$50 per person). See p485 for tour operators.

CENTRAL SENEGAL

KAOLACK

Kaolack is a bustling market town and transport hub. This is a city that walks with the shrewd confidence of a street kid. A city that's not eager to please anyone, but that's welcoming all the same – in a hot and dusty sort of way.

The CBAO and SGBS banks have ATMs, and there's a fairly well-equipped hospital.

Worth a visit are the beautiful Moroccan-style **mosque** and the **covered market** (one of the largest of its kind on the continent). You should also stop in at the **Alliance Franco-Senegalaise** (**2** 941 1061; Rue Galliene) to admire its fantastic décor or just have a tranquil cup of coffee.

where bright rooms come with TV and internet connection.

For cheap shwarmas, snacks and local meals, Chez Maty (a 941 9000; Rue Cheikh Tidiane Cherif; mains US\$5; 🕑 Mon-Sat), is a good address. Le Brasero Chez Anouar (2 941 1608; Av Valdiodio Ndiaye; meals US\$6; Yam-11pm) is a bustling oasis in an urban desert, a place where the latest travel information is thrown in free with hearty meals.

Transport towards Dakar (US\$5, three hours, 192km) and other western and northern destinations leaves from the Gare Routière de Dakar on the northwestern end of town. Septplace taxis to Tambacounda (US\$10, 5 hours, 275km), Karang (US\$4.50, two hours) and other southern destinations leave from Garage Nioro (Sud), on the southeastern side of town.

TAMBACOUNDA

The junction town Tambacounda is all about dust, sand, sizzling temperatures and lines of traffic heading in any direction of the country. It's a jumping-off point for Mali, Guinea, Gambia and, closer to home, the Parc National du Niokolo-Koba.

Bloc Gadec (🖻 531 8931; r per person US\$6) is a friendly hostel in the centre of town with clean rooms and shared toilets. The simple but charming Hôtel Keur Khoudia (🖻 /fax 981 1102; Blvd Demba Diop; s/d US\$23/32; 🔀) has spotless bungalows at decent prices, and helpful management. The Hotel Simenti in Niokolo-Koba is run by the same family, so you're in perfect hands if you're intending to visit the park. Le Relais de Tamba (2 981 1000; www.relaishorizons.net; s/d/tr US\$42/52/71; 🕑 🔀 😰) is the best choice in the midrange bracket: comfortable, friendly and almost luxurious.

For a good local meal, try Le Relais du Rais (Vunch & dinner), near the train station, where excellent local dishes cost only US\$1. Bar-Restaurant Chez Francis (26 643 1231; Av Senghor; meals US\$8; 🕑 11am-midnight) is popular with tourists and expats thanks to hearty meals and a lively ambiance. For gigantic burgers and fries try Best Burger (🖻 981 3203; Blv Demba Diop; 🕑 11am-1am).

If you're travelling on to Mali, you get your sept-place taxi to Kidira at the gare routière on the eastern side of town (US\$10, three hours). Vehicles to most other destinations go from the larger gare routière on the southern side of town.

By train, there is a twice-weekly service to/ from Dakar and to/from Bamako in Mali. The fare to Dakar is US\$25/20 in 1st/2nd class.

PARC NATIONAL DU NIOKOLO-KOBA

Niokolo-Koba, at 900 sq km, is Senegal's largest national park, a World Heritage Site and an international biosphere reserve. The park's most impressive inhabitants - elephants, lions and leopards - usually remain hidden from sight. You're more likely to spot hippos, crocodiles, waterbuck, buffaloes, monkeys, warthogs, and hartebeest. And of course many of the hundreds of bird species that live here.

The best place to observe animals is the area around Simenti. This is fairly easy to reach. For all other areas, you need to hire a 4WD.

The park is officially open from 15 December to 30 April, as most areas are inaccessible during the wet months. The entrance fee (adults/children US\$4/free, vehicle US\$10) gives you access for 24 hours. Trained and approved guides can be hired at the gate or Simenti (US\$12 per day).

The basic Dar Salam Campement (2 981 2575; camping per tent US\$7, d/tr US\$27/31) at the park entrance has clean bungalows with bathrooms and a restaurant (dishes US\$7). Most people stay at Hôtel de Simenti (🖻 982 3650; s/d US\$30/40; (2) inside the park. It's a concrete monstrosity, but one that sits in a prime spot in the park overlooking the river. The busiest animal sites are close to here. There's a transfer between Hôtel Keur Khoudia (see left) in Tambacounda and Hôtel de Simenti (US\$115).

You need a vehicle to enter the park. It's best to hire a taxi (around US\$70 to US\$80) or 4WD (US\$115 to US\$130) in Tamba. Enquire at the gare routière, at Hôtel Keur Khoudia or at the park headquarters (🖻 981 1097; 🕎 7.30am-5pm) in Tambacounda about car hire.

If you rely on public transport, take a Kedougou minibus from Tamba (US\$9) and get off at the Dar Salam park entrance. From there, you can call Hôtel de Simenti, who'll have someone pick you up (US\$50).

PETITE CÔTE & SINÉ-SALOUM DELTA

The 150km Petite Côte stretches south from Dakar and is one of Senegal's best beach areas. Where the Siné and Saloum Rivers meet the tidal waters of the Atlantic Ocean, the coast is broken into a stunning area of mangrove

swamps, lagoons, forests and sand islands. It forms part of the magnificent 180-sq-km Siné-Saloum Delta.

MBOUR & SALY

Eighty kilometres south of Dakar, Mbour is the main town on the Petite Côte, though the nearby Saly, a strip of big ocean-front hotels, is the heavier weight when it comes to tourism.

Mbour has a vibrant fishing industry, and the busy fish market on the beach is a sight to behold. The hotel Village Petit Eden (2957 4477; www.petit-eden.de; d US\$34) has clean, pretty bungalows in a leafy garden setting. To stay in style, try the luxurious Tama Lodge (🗟 /fax 957 0040; www.tamalodge.com; s/d from US\$60/120), where giant wooden sculptures watch over modern mud huts.

If it's a beach holiday you're after, then Saly is the perfect corner for soaking up the sun and sipping cocktails. For a pampered holiday, the Espadon (2 957 1949; half board per person US\$70; 🔀 🛄 😰) is almost unbeatable: a smoothly decorated place that provides luxury with an African flavour. Much calmer are the places in the less touristy part of town (Saly-Niakhniakhale). The Mediterranean-style La Medina (2 957 4993; lamedina@sentoo.sn; s/d US\$26/35; 🔀) stretches over three floors, surrounding a lush courtyard. Au Petit Jura (🖻 957 3767; www .aupetitjura.ch; d US\$40; 🔀 💷 🔊) is a pretty retreat with spotless huts set around a swimming pool.

To take a bush taxi from Mbour to Dakar will cost you US\$3.50, and from Mbour further down the Petite Côte, to Joal-Fadiout, it's US\$2.

JOAL-FADIOUT

The twin villages of Joal and Fadiout are located south of Mbour at the end of the tar road. Joal sits on the mainland, while Fadiout is on a small island made of oyster- and clamshells, reached by an impressive wooden bridge.

The relaxed auberge Le Thiouraye (🖻 515 6064; s/dUS\$20/24) sits right on the riverside, and has a brilliant terrace restaurant from where you can leap straight into a pirogue to Fadiout - a useful way to avoid the hustlers that hover around near the bridge. The fairly new Hôtel de la Plage (🖻 957 6677; hakim@yahoo.fr; d/tr US\$50/55; (P) (c) has bright, large rooms at reasonable rates and a good restaurant.

PALMARIN & DJIFER

Palmarin, with its soft lagoons, tall palm groves and labyrinthine creeks is one of Senegal's secretly most beautiful spots. It's much better than the rubbish-ridden Djifer slightly further south. However, Djifer is the place to catch your pirogue for a trip around the mangroves of Siné-Saloum (around US\$50 per half-day).

Palmarin has a seductively good choice of campements. The Yokam (2 936 3974; yokam@ teranga-horizon.com; r per person US\$14) is run by a young and enthusiastic bunch and has accommodation in comfy straw huts. The red-mud structure of Lodge de Diakhamor (🖻 644 9491, 957 1256; www.lesenegal.info; s/d with half board US\$46/82) is a stylish place where pirogue excursions, horse riding, bicycle and fishing trips are all included in the price. At Lodge des Collines de Niassam (🖻 669 6343; www.niassam.com; half board per person from US\$72; 🔀 😰) you can sleep in classy tree houses that cling to the mighty branches of baobabs, or sit on stilts in the river.

Palmarin is most easily reached from Mbour, via Joal-Fadiout and Sambadia (where you may have to change). The fare from Joal to Sambadia is US\$1 in a minibus, and from Sambadia to Palmarin it's US\$0.70.

NDANGANE & MAR LODJ

Ndangane is a thriving traveller centre from where you can take a pirogue to almost any point in the delta.

Le Barracuda (Chez Mbacke; 2 658 5794; s/d US\$18/24) is not only conveniently located near the beach where you get your pirogue to Mar Lodj, it's also a cheap and very cheerful family-run place. Another good choice is the welcoming La Palangrotte (2 949 9321; lapalang@sentoo. sn; s/d incl breakfast US\$19/24), at the exit of town, where 10% of all profits are invested in localdevelopment projects.

Mar Lodj has a range of good-value campements. Le Limboko (641 2253) has a few sparkling rooms, an excellent restaurant and a multilingual manager who's full of useful advice. Inquire for rates. Essamaye (www.seneg alia.com; r with full board US\$33) is equally friendly, though slightly more basic.

To get to Ndangane, take any bus between Kaolack and Mbour and alight at Ndiosomone, where minibuses shuttle to Ndangane (US\$3). The pirogue across to Mar Lodj costs about US0.60, but you may have to charter a boat (US\$20 to US\$60).

TOUBAKOUTA & MISSIRAH

Toubakouta is a fantastically calm and pretty spot in the south of the Siné-Saloum Delta, and one of the country's best places for birdwatching. In town, **Keur Youssou** (@/fax 948 7728; d/tr US524/30; ?) has beautifully furnished rooms and a relaxed ambiance. The most fascinating place, however, is a pirogue and donkey-cart ride away: **Keur Bamboung** (@ 510 8013; www.oceanium.org; r with half/full board US34/44) is a beautiful, village-run ecolodge on the edge of a mangrove-lined island. Transport and all activities (mangrove walks, pirogue trips, canoeing, bird-watching) are included in the price.

South of Toubakouta, Missirah is the point of entry to the **Parc National du Delta du Saloum**, which encompasses woodlands, mangrove swamps and a large maritime section. You pay your admission charge of US\$4 at the office of the **eco guards** () 9363431;) 9am-4pm) in Missirah. The peaceful **Gite de Bandiala** () 948 7735; www.gite.bandiala.com; rper person with half/full board US\$30/42) is the place to stay, and makes a great base for exploring the park. It's located 2km east of Missirah, down a sand path that turns off the main road just before you get to the village.

Kaolack to Toubakouta is US\$6 by *sept-place* taxi. From Toubakouta, a minibus to Missirah is US\$0.80, but it's easier to hire a taxi for US\$10.

CASAMANCE

The Casamance is one of Senegal's most beautiful regions, with lush tropical landscapes, myriad waterways and the unique culture of the Diola, the largest ethnic group of the region. On the western coast, Senegal's finest beaches spread in a wide strip of white sand from Cap Skiring north towards the 'hip' villages of Kafountine and Abéné, only broken by a mangrove-lined delta where the Casamance River spills into the Atlantic.

Over the last decades, the region has unfortunately become better known for an ongoing separatist rebellion than its attractive landscape. At the time of writing, a peace deal signed between the Senegalese government and insurgents had calmed things down, and tourists had started returning to the region. Still – always check the latest situation before setting out.

ZIGUINCHOR tty pop 217,000

Ziguinchor is the largest town in southern Senegal, as well as the main access point for travel in the Casamance region. With its majestic houses, tree-lined streets and busy markets, this former colonial centre exudes

Information

real atmosphere.

CBAO (Rue de France) Try here to change or withdraw money.

Diatta Tour International (20 991 2781; aessibye@ yahoo.fr; Rue du Général de Gaulle) This excellent travel agency can arrange air tickets, tours and hotel reservations.

Hospital ((2) 991 1154) Ziguinchor's regional hospital has an emergency department. It's south of the centre. SGBS (Rue du Général de Gaulle) Change or withdraw money here.

Sights

Central Ziguinchor has some colourful historical buildings, including the **Gouvernance** (Ruedu Général de Gaulle) and the **Cathedral**. The huge *case* à *impluvium* of the **Alliance Franco-Sénégalaise**, with its stunning South African-Casamancais décor is a beauty worth admiring.

Heading 5km west out of town, you can walk through the vast greenness of the **Ferme de Djibelor** (🖻 991 1701; admission US\$4; 🏵 9am-6pm), which has a tropical fruit and flower garden and a crocodile farm.

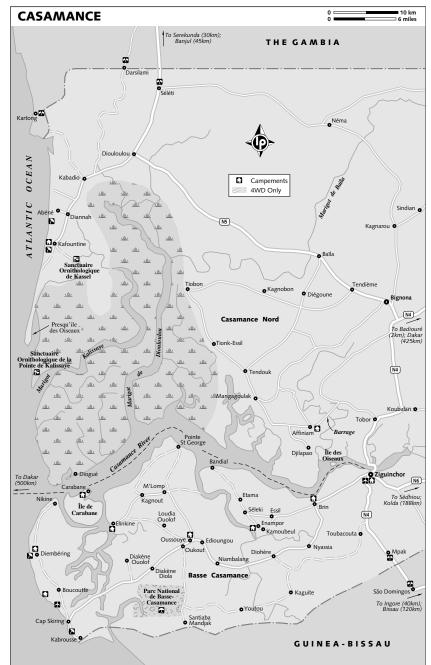
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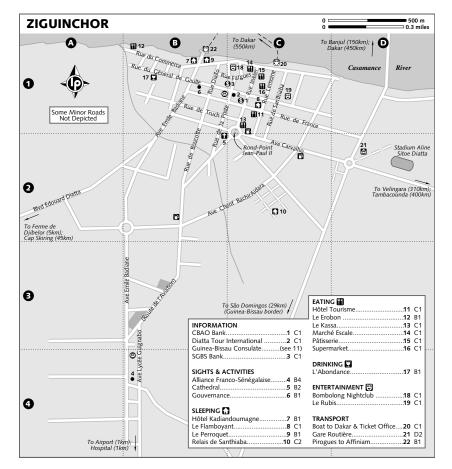
Relais de Santhiaba ((2) 991 1199; s/d from US\$10/16; (2) This place looks drab from the outside, but rooms are surprisingly welcoming and facilities are clean. It's off Ave Cherif Bachir Aidara.

Le Perroquet ((2) 991 2329; perroquet@sentoo.sn; Rue du Commerce; s/d US\$20/24) This simple place right on the river is excellent value. Views from the 1st floor are fantastic.

Le Flamboyant (2 991 2223; flamboyant@casamance .net; Rue de France; s/d US\$30/34; R I R) This classy, garden-set place has beautiful, fully equipped rooms and, in owner Véronique Chiché, a wonderfully helpful manager.

Hôtel Kadiandoumagne (2938 8000; www.hotel -kadiandoumagne.com; Rue du Commerce; s/d US\$44/50; () Stunningly located right on the river, this top-quality, wheelchair-accessible place has spacious rooms and dazzling views from the large terrace.





Eating & Drinking

SENEGAI

Hôtel Tourisme (O 991 2223; Rue de France; mains around US\$6; O noon-2.30pm & 7-10pm) This simple place is great for seafood dishes and al dente spaghetti. There are also a few good, basic rooms on the first floor (s/d US\$12/16).

Le Kassa (936 8300; Rond-Point Jean-Paul II; dishes US\$7; 8am-2am) The most inviting of the localstyle places, Le Kassa has a wide menu, a lively bar and occasional live shows on weekends.

L'Abondance (Rue du Général de Gaulle; 🏵 5pm-2am) Like any *dibiterie* (roast-meat stall) worth its meat, this is the popular final stop after a night out dancing. Self-caterers can buy all the fresh fruit and vegetables they can carry at the **Marché Escale** (Rue Javelier). There's a small **supermarket** (Rue Lemoine) and a good **patisserie** (Rue Javelier).

Entertainment

Le Rubis (Rue de Santhiaba; admission US\$2-4) A heaving club with salsa on Fridays and hip-hop vibes on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Bombolong Nightclub (Rue du Commerce; admission US\$2-4) Another popular choice.

Getting There & Around

Air Sénégal International flies regularly between Dakar and Ziguinchor (US\$100). Twice a week, there's also a safe, reliable and comfortable boat service run by the company **Somat** (**a** 889 8009/60; seat/bed/cabin US\$30/46/55). You buy your ticket at the port.

The gare routière is 1km east of the city centre. To Dakar, there are frequent *sept-place* taxis (US\$15, nine hours, 454km) and minibuses (US\$10, 11 hours). A *sept-place* taxi to Cap Skiring is US\$3, a minibus US\$2.

To get anywhere around town by private taxi costs US\$0.80.

AFFINIAM

On the north bank of the Casamance River, Affiniam is stunningly located between forest and river. The **campement villageois** (25 508 8025, télécentre 936 9619) is in a beautiful *case à impluvium* (large round hut with a hole in the roof to collect rainwater) on the edge of the village, watched over by giant fromager trees.

From Ziguinchor, Affiniam is best reached by pirogue (US\$0.80, 1½ hours, daily except Thursday and Sunday). Hiring a boat will cost around US\$50, hiring a taxi from Ziguinchor US\$30 (one hour, 30km).

OUSSOUYE

Roughly halfway between Ziguinchor and Cap Skiring, relaxed Oussouye is the main town in the Basse Casamance. For the local Diola population this town is of significance, as it's home to an animist king who is often sought for advice.

Bikes can be hired at **Casamance VTT** ((a) /fax 993 1004; http://casavtt.free.fr; half-day US\$8).

The **Campement Villageois d'Oussouye** (993 0015; http://campement.oussouye.org; s/d US\$9/12) is entirely constructed in the mud-architecture once typical of the region. Rooms here are excellent, and the resident guide Jean Baptiste is deeply familiar with the region. At **Campement Emanaye** (993 1004; emanaye@yahoo.fr; s/d US\$9/12) you'll find another striking two-storey mud dwelling that features great views over the local rice fields.

All bush taxis between Ziguinchor and Cap Skiring pass through Oussouye (US\$2).

AROUND OUSSOUYE Enampor

In theory, there are two minibuses per day running from Ziguinchor to Enampor (US\$1). Hiring a taxi will set you back around US\$18.

Elinkine & Île de Karabane

Elinkine is a busy fishing village and a jumpingoff point to the peaceful Île de Karabane, a former French trading station (1836–1900). On the island, you can still see the Bretonstyle church, with dusty pews and crumbling statues.

In Elinkine, the simple but charming **Campement le Fromager** (525 6401; s/d U\$\$6/12) offers good, basic accommodation and has in Mamadou Ndiaye a fantastically knowledge-able manager.

On Karabane, **Campement le Barracuda** ((2) 659 6001; rUS\$6, with halfboard US\$14) has spotless rooms and a good restaurant. **Chez Helena** (2) 654 1772; s/dUS\$8/12) is a slightly more run-down, though equally friendly option. **Hôtel Carabane** (2) 569 0284; hotelcarabane@yahoo.fr; s/d US\$26/36), in the former Catholic mission, is the most upmarket option on the isle.

Elinkine can be reached by minibus from Ziguinchor (US\$2, two hours) or Oussouye (US\$0.60, one hour). For Karabane, take the pirogue from Elinkine (US\$2, 5 minutes, twice daily). Hiring a pirogue costs around US\$20 one way.

CAP SKIRING

The beaches at Cap Skiring are some of the finest in Africa. Fortunately, the tourist industry that has inevitably sprung up here remains quite low-key, with a strong focus on small *campements*. Most of those are on the beach, 1km from the village, at the end of a dirt track off the Zinguinchor road.

Cap Skiring has plenty of good restaurants. In the village, **Le Carpe Rouge** (@ 993 5250; meals US\$2) has tasty Senegalese meals and **Le Djembe** (@ 533 7692; dishes US\$8) serves mouth-watering French and Italian dishes with a dash of live

jazz. The lively *dibiterie* Le Kassala ((a) 653 0382; (b) 8pm-4am) is the place danced-out clubbers head to for delicious roast meat (US\$10 per kilo). Combine a visit here with a night out at the stylish disco Case Bambou ((a) 993 5178; admission US\$2) or the more down-to-earth Kassoumaye (admission US\$1.50).

From December to April, Air Sénégal International flies to Cap Skiring from Dakar for US\$120 one way. *Sept-place* taxis and minibuses (US\$3) regularly ply the route between Ziguinchor and Cap Skiring.

AROUND CAP SKIRING Boucotte

A brief and bumpy taxi ride from Cap Skiring, Boucotte has a much more local feel, a seemingly endless stretch of white beach, and excellent accommodation in the pretty blue bungalows of **Oudja Hôtel** (991 2781, 517 5895; s/d/tr US\$20/24/30), right on the shoreline.

Hiring a taxi from Cap Skiring to Boucotte should cost you around US\$6, though the hotel can arrange pick-up.

KAFOUNTINE & ABÉNÉ

Favourites with dreadlock-sporting *djembe* (drum) players and reclusive bird-watchers, these two villages feature highly among the most laid-back places on the planet.

Sleeping & Eating

Most of Kafountine's places are a couple of kilometres from the village, near the beach. Best is **Esperanto** ((2) 635 6280; esperanto@arc.sn; d US\$20), beautifully located between the beach and a creek. A little to the south, set in wood-land, is the ecofriendly **Le Kelediang** ((2) 542 5385; www.senegambia.net; rper person US\$7), where the ambiance is peaceful and the food is a wonder. For real Kafountinesque reggae-vibes, head for **Á la Nature** ((2) 994 8524; alanature@arc.sn; r per person US\$9). Hammock-lounging obligatory.

In Abéné village is the **Campement la Belle Danielle** (@ 936 9542; r per person US\$5), where the friendly Konté brothers also hire bikes (US\$4 per day). Abéné beach begins 2km from the village, where the lush gardens of **Le Kossey** (@ 994 8609; r per person US\$10) begin. The place is famous for its festive New Year's drumming parties.

Getting There & Away

SENEGAL

From Ziguinchor, *sept-place* taxis (US\$5, three hours) run directly to Kafountine. Abéné can be

reached by any transport going to Kafountine, although the village is 2km off the main road, and the beach a further 2km walk. A private taxi from Kafountine will set you back US\$6.

SENEGAL DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Senegal has a very wide range of places to stay, from top-class hotels to dirty dosshouses. Dakar has the biggest choice, though you're hard-pushed to find a budget place there. Many rural areas, particularly the Casamance, have pleasant *campements* (guesthouses). All hotels and *campements* charge a tourist tax of US\$1.20 per person per night.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most business and government offices are open 8.30am to noon and 2.30pm to 5pm Monday to Friday. Banks usually close around four in the afternoon, and only a few open Saturday mornings. Most restaurants offer lunch from noon to 2.30pm and dinner from 7pm onwards, and many are closed on Sundays.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There are two main dangers you may encounter: civil unrest in Casamance (see p490) and Dakar street crime (see p479).

At night, exercise common sense: stay away from dark alleys and the beaches. Rely on taxis and avoid wearing expensive jewellery or 'bum bags'. Women in particular should be careful if alone on the beach. Inventing a husband and wearing a wedding ring goes far in keeping unwanted attention away.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Senegal Embassies & Consulates

Canada (🖻 613-0238 6392; www.ambassenecanada.org; 57 Marlborough Ave, Ottawa ON K1N)

France (🖻 01 44 05 38 69; www.ambassenparis.com; 22 Rue Hamelin, 75016 Paris)

Germany (🖻 022-821 80 08; Argelanderstrasse 3, 53115 Bonn)

Guinea (224-409037; Corniche Sud, Coléah, Conakry; 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Guinea-Bissau (245-212944; 43 Rue Omar Torrijhos,

Mali (@ 223-221 8273; fax 221 1780; off Blvd Nelson Mali (@ 223-221 8273; fax 221 1780; off Blvd Nelson Mandela, Bamako; 🏵 7.30am-1pm & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri)

Mandela, Bamako; 论 7.30am-1pm & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri) **Mauritania** (🗃 222-525 72 90; Rue de l'Ambassade du Sénégal, Nouakchott) **Morocco** (**@** 077 54171; 17 Cadi Ben Hamadi Benhadj, BP 365 Rabat)

UK (🖻 020-7938 4048; www.senegalembassy.co.uk; 39 Marloes Rd, London W8 6LA)

USA (a) 202-234 0540; 2112 Wyoming Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Senegal

If you need to find an embassy that is not listed here, check www.ausenegal.com/pract ique_en/ambassad.htm. Most embassies close late morning or early afternoon Monday to Friday, so set off early.

Canada (Map p480; 🖻 889 4700; Immeuble Sorano, 4th fl, 45-47 Blvd de la République)

Cape Verde (Map p482; 🖻 821 1873; 3 Blvd el Haji Djily Mbaye; 🕑 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Côte d'Ivoire (Map p478; 🗟 869 02 70; Rue 7 X G, Point E; 🏵 9am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) France (Map p482; 🗟 839 5100; 1 Rue Assane Ndoye) The Gambia (Map p482; 🗟 821 7230; 11 Rue de

Thiong; ∑ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu, to 1pm Fri) Germany (Map p480; ☎ 889 4884; 20 Ave Pasteur) Guinea (Map p478; ☎ 824 8606; Rue 7, Point E; ∑ 9.30am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Mauritania (Map p478; **a** 822 6238; Rue 37, Kolobane; Sam-2pm Mon-Fri)

Netherlands (Map p482; 🖻 849 0360; 37 Rue Kléber) UK (Map p480; 🖻 823 7392; 20 Rue du Dr Guillet) USA (Map p482; 🖻 823 4296; Ave Jean XXIII)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

December, May and June are the best times to stumble across music and arts festivals, including the Saint-Louis jazz festival, the

PRACTICALITIES

- Focus on Africa (BBC) often has excellent news stories on Senegal, and is sold in the country.
- If you read French, Jeune Afrique and l'Intelligent are good sources of political and cultural news.
- The electricity supply in Senegal is 220V. Plugs have two round pins, as in France and continental Europe.
- Senegal uses the metric system.

Dak'Art Biennale (visual arts festival) and Kay Fecc (famous dance festival).

Paris–Dakar car rally Traditionally ends at Lac Rose in the middle of January.

Grand Magal pilgrimage & festival Held annually 48 days after the Islamic New Year in Touba to celebrate the return from exile of the founder of the Mouride Islamic brotherhood.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106) the principal public holidays in Senegal are the following: New Year's Day 1 January Independence Day 4 April Workers Day 1 May

Assumption 15 August

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés are plentiful, and wi-fi spaces are increasing almost daily (particularly in Dakar and Ziguinchor). Surfing costs about US\$1 per hour; wi-fi in hotel lobbies and bars is usually free (just purchase a drink).

MAPS

The locally produced *Carte du Senegal* (1:912,000) is the most widely available, though it's a bit old.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the West African CFA franc. Banks with ATMs are found in all larger towns across the country. Banks and exchange bureaux tend to offer similar rates; the currency most easily changed is the euro.

POST & TELEPHONE

Senegal's postal service is reliable and inexpensive for letters.

Calls from public Sonatel offices cost about US\$1 per minute to Europe and slightly more to the USA and Australia. Rates are cheaper late at night and on the weekend. Dakar has private *télécentres*, usually open until late evening, for phone calls, telexes and faxes.

Mobile phones are easily connected to one of two local GSM networks (Alizé and Tigo) with the purchase of a SIM card. There are no area codes in Senegal.

TIME

Senegal is at GMT/UTC, which for most European visitors means there is no or very little time difference. There is no daylight savings time.

VISAS

Visas are required by all except nationals of the EU, USA, Canada, Norway, South Africa, Israel, Japan and Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States) countries. Australians and New Zealanders require visas. Tourist visas for one to three months cost US\$15 to US\$20.

Visas for Onward Travel

You can get visas for other African countries in Dakar. Each requires two photos. For contact details, see p495.

The Gambia Three-month visas cost US\$40 and take 24 hours.

Guinea One-month visas cost US\$40 and are normally issued in 24 hours.

Guinea-Bissau One-month visas cost US\$18 and are issued in 24 hours in Dakar. At the consulate in Ziguinchor they are issued on the spot for US\$10.

Mali One-month visas cost US\$20 and take 48 hours to issue. Mauritania Three-month visas cost US\$70 and are issued the same day.

TRANSPORT IN SENEGAL

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Dakar is well connected to other African capitals. Air Sénégal International has good, regular connections to Praia in Cape Verde (US\$300), Banjul (US\$300), Bissau (US\$200), Abidjan, (US\$350), Accra (US\$380) and Bamako (US\$290). Lagos is best reached by Virgin Nigeria (around US\$380). There are also good connections to Morocco (Royal Air Maroc), Algeria (Air Algérie) and Tunisia (Air Tunisia). For trips to East Africa, Kenya Airways is your best option. Trips to Nairobi cost around US\$1600, and there are good connections to Uganda and Tanzania. Ethiopian Airways has an excellent link to Addis Ababa (US\$800), and South African Airways flies to Johannesburg (US\$1300).

The tour operator **Nouvelles Frontières** (a in France 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) usually has cheap charter flights between Paris and Dakar.

Land THE G

SENEGAL

THE GAMBIA

From Dakar there are minibuses (US\$7) and *sept-place* taxis (US\$10, six hours) south to

Karang at the Gambian border (see opposite for an explanation of these transport options.) From Karang, there's frequent transport to Barra, where you take the ferry to Banjul (see p320).

From southern Senegal, *sept-place* taxis (US\$8, five hours) run regularly between Ziguinchor and Serekunda (The Gambia), and *sept-place* taxis run between Kafountine and Brikama (US\$4, two hours).

In eastern Senegal, *sept-place* taxis go from Tambacounda to Vélingara (US\$3, three hours), and then from Vélingara to Basse Santa Su (US\$2, 45 minutes, 27km).

GUINEA

The best place to pick up transport to Guinea is Tambacounda in eastern Senegal, where *sept-place* taxis ply the route to Labé (US\$30, 24 hours). Most traffic passes via Diaoubé (Senegal) and Koundara (Guinea), where you may have to change, and some goes via Kedougou (Senegal).

GUINEA-BISSAU

Sept-place taxis leave every morning from Ziguinchor for Bissau via the main border post at São Domingos and Ingore (US\$8, six hours). The road is paved but crosses two rivers, which can cause delays; start early. Fights briefly flared up around the border crossing in early 2006; always check the latest situation before setting out.

MALI

A popular, though tedious, way to travel from Senegal to Mali is on the Dakar–Bamako 'express' train, which normally departs from Dakar at around 10am Saturday, and takes 48 hours to reach Bamako. From Dakar to Bamako, it's US\$68/50 in 1st/2nd class, and *couchettes* cost US\$100 per person (reserve in advance). Note that this once classic train journey has drastically deteriorated. Trains are often cancelled, or leave with a delay of several days, and derailments are frequent. Check the latest situation at the Dakar train station before setting off. Watch out for thieves on the train, especially at night.

You can also take *sept-place* taxis from Tambacounda and travel along the 180km highway to Kidira (US\$6, three hours). Crossing the bridge at Kidira leads you to Doboli, in Mali, from where bush taxis to Kayes cost from US\$4.

MAURITANIA

Sept-place taxis run regularly from Dakar to the main border point at Rosso (US\$9, from Saint-Louis US\$2), a crowded, hassle-some place. If waiting for one of the four daily ferries seems too painful, travellers without vehicles can also jump onto one of the many pirogues that do the crossing. From immigration it's 500m to the *gare routière*, where bush taxis run to Nouakchott.

GETTING AROUND Air

Air Sénégal International offers daily flights from Dakar to Ziguinchor (US\$71). During the high season, there are also twice-weekly flights to Cap Skiring (US\$100) and, theoretically, once-weekly flights to Tambacounda and Saint-Louis, though these services can be irregular.

Local Transport

By far the quickest and safest way of getting around the country is by *sept-place* taxi – battered Peugeots that negotiate even the most ragged routes of the country. Slightly cheaper, but infinitely less reliable are the minibuses (Ndiaga Ndiaye or *grand car*), carrying around 30 to 40 people. Vehicles leave from the *gare routière* when they're full, and they fill up quickest in the morning, before 8am.

Taxi prices are theoretically fixed, though they're steadily increasing as petrol prices rise, and there's usually an extra, negotiable charge for luggage (about 10% of the bill).

The *car mouride* bus service (financed by the Mouride brotherhood) offers a fairly reliable, though slow, uncomfortable connection between major towns in Senegal. Book ahead of travel. In Dakar, go to the **Gare Routière Pompiers** (Map p480; 🕲 821 8585; off cnr Ave Malick Sy).

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Sierra Leone has largely stayed out of the news lately, which, considering how it earned most of its press in the 1990s, is a good thing. The decade-long civil war garnered regular headlines thanks to widespread atrocities committed by rebel soldiers; many of them not yet in their teens.

But oh how things have changed. Peace was declared in 2002 and Sierra Leone has blossomed. Life has largely returned to normal and today it is one of West Africa's safest destinations. Reconstruction continues apace, investors are arriving in droves and travellers are trickling in.

With some of the most perfect palm-lined sands on the continent, it won't be long before Sierra Leone takes its place in Europe's packaged beach-holiday scene; but for now, visitors can have the surf outside the capital pretty much to themselves. And after a day in the sun, Freetown offers everything you need for a night out. Travel to the provinces, where roads are often abysmal and facilities usually basic, remains in the realm of the adventurous, but with vibrant culture and wonderful parks, the rewards are many.

To be sure, Sierra Leone still has problems. It ranked second-last in the UN's most recent Human Development Index, unemployment remains high and the education system hasn't met expectations, but most locals hang on to their optimism.

FAST FACTS

- Area 72,325 sq km
- **ATMs** Only work with local bankcards
- Borders Liberia and Guinea open
- Budget US\$15 to US\$25 per day
- Capital Freetown
- Languages English, Krio, Mende, Temne
- Money Leone; US\$1 = Le2940
- Population 6 million
- Seasons Dry (mid-November to mid-May); wet (mid-May to mid-November)
- Telephone Country code 232; international access code 00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visas Required by everyone except most West African citizens

SIERRA LEONE

HIGHLIGHTS

- Beach bumming (p506) Tread Freetown peninsula's sandy shores, which have few peers in Africa.
- Tiwai Island (p508) Venture into one of the best places on the continent to see primates.
- **Outamba-Kilimi National Park** (p507) Track big mammals on foot or by canoe.
- Freetown (p502) Experience the variety of this frenetic city, which has several historic sites, interesting markets and anything-goes nightlife.
- Mount Bintumani (p507) Dare a remote and rewarding journey to the summit.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Sierra Leone is hot and very humid. The coast gets up to 3250mm precipitation per year and the wet season stretches from mid-May to mid-November – July and August are the wettest months, except in the far south, which gets a bit of a break then.

The best time to visit is November, after the rains and before the dusty harmattan winds blow in. During the rainy season, washed out roads make travel to some destinations difficult or impossible, though there are some sunny days at the beginning and end. The further you go into the dry season the more heat you'll have to endure and the less green you'll see in the countryside.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Look around Freetown (p502) and get in some quality beach time further south.
- One Week Many people spend their whole week at the beaches. Although it might be hard to pull yourself off the sand, it's worth taking a few days upcountry to visit Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary (p508) and a town or two. If you're here for the wildlife you can get to both Tiwai and Outamba-Kilimi National Park (p507) and still have a day at the beach.
- **Two Weeks** You can see most of the country without travelling too fast. It also gives you enough time to add scaling Mt Bintumani (p507) to your itinerary.

HISTORY

Sierra Leone has had an eventful 500 years. The country was a major player in the beginning and end of the slave trade, but in-

HOW MUCH?

- Small Temne basket US\$2.50
- 100km bush taxi ride US\$7.50
- Bottle of palm wine US\$0.30
- Two lapa (about 4 sq yards) of gara cloth US\$12.50
- A night at a music show Free

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.25
- 1.5L of bottled water US\$1.25
- Bottle of Star beer US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$7.50
- Fry fry with egg US\$0.40

equalities between the Krio freed slaves who developed the modern nation and indigenous peoples caused bitterness and conflict. Krios have long ceased to rule the roost in Sierra Leone, but the same old inequalities between the Freetown elite and the poor of the interior remain alive.

The American slave trade was effectively launched from Freetown in 1560, and by the 18th century Portuguese and British trading and slaving settlements lined the coast. In the late 1700s, freed slaves from places such as North America were brought to the new settlement of Freetown. Soon after, Britain abolished slavery and Sierra Leone became a British colony. Many subsequent settlers were liberated from slaving ships intercepted by the British navy. These people became known as Krios and assumed an English lifestyle together with an air of superiority.

But things didn't all run smoothly in this brave new world. Black and white settlers dabbling in the slave trade, disease, rebellion and attacks by the French were all characteristics of 19th-century Sierra Leone. Most importantly, indigenous people were discriminated against and in 1898 a ferocious uprising by the Mende began, ostensibly in opposition to a hut tax.

Diamonds Are Forever

Independence came in 1961, but the 1960s and 1970s were characterised by coups (once there were three in one year, an all-African record), a shift of power to the indigenous



Mende and Temne peoples, and the establishment of a one-party state (which lasted into the 1980s). By the early 1990s the country was saddled with a shambolic economy and rampant corruption. Then the civil war began.

500 SIERRA LEONE •• History

It's entirely possible that buried in the depths of Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was a desire to end the corruption and abuses of power committed by ruling military-backed elites in Freetown, who had turned the country into a basket case. Many RUF founding members were also involved with Charles Taylor's conquest of neighbouring Liberia and had his support. But any high ideals were quickly forgotten, replaced by a ferocious desire for Sierra Leone's diamond and gold fields, with looting, robbery, rape, mutilation and summary execution all tools of the RUF's trade. While their troops plundered to make ends meet, Charles Taylor and the RUF's leaders enriched themselves from diamonds smuggled into Liberia.

The Sierra Leone government was pretty ineffective and tried using South African mercenaries against the RUF who, bolstered by disaffected army elements and Liberian irregulars, were making gains across the country. In 1996, elections were held and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was declared president, but a year later, after peace talks had brought hope then despair, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) grabbed control of government and decided to share power with the RUF. By this time factionalisation and



desertion on all sides had led to an utter freefor-all, with the civilian population suffering atrocities at every turn.

Hopes & Fears

In March 1998 Ecomog, a Nigerian-led peacekeeping force, retook Freetown and reinstated Kabbah. Some sort of peace held until January 1999, when the RUF and AFRC launched 'Operation No Living Thing'. The ensuing carnage in and around Freetown killed 6000 people, mutilated many more (lopping a limb off was a RUF calling card) and prompted the government to sign the Lomé Peace Agreement. A massive UN peacekeeping mission (Unamsil) was deployed, but 10 months later it came under attack from the RUF. Three hundred UN troops were abducted, but as the RUF closed in on Freetown in mid-2000 the British government deployed 1000 paratroopers and an aircraft carrier, ostensibly to allow for UN reinforcements. In effect this was to prevent a massacre and shift the balance of power to Kabbah's government and UN forces. By February 2002 the RUF was disarmed and its leaders captured. Free and fair elections were held a few months later; Kabbah was re-elected and the RUF's political wing soundly defeated.

Sierra Leone Today

Unamsil became the largest and most expensive peacekeeping mission in UN history, and also one of its most effective. Peace has blossomed and nowhere is out of bounds these days. In 2002 an independent war-crimes court and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission opened shop, and Unamsil began the withdrawal of its 17,500 personnel. The last soldiers departed at the end of 2005 and were replaced by Uniosl, the UN Integrated Office for Sierra Leone, which will promote government accountability, reinforce human rights, oversee development, and prepare the nation for 2007 elections. Sankoh died of natural causes before the courts could weigh in on his fate, but Charles Taylor was arrested in 2006 and now sits in a cell in The Hague awaiting trail for war crimes and crimes against humanity. He is the first African president to face this fate.

Sierra Leone faces huge social and economic problems, and the slow progress on these has frustrated people, but there remains abundant hope.

CULTURE

When Sierra Leoneans get together, talk always seems to turn to politics, development and corruption – the three largely being one and the same in Sierra Leone. The war did a lot to foster nationalism: everyone knows they are in the same boat, and politicians of all stripes get chastised for the sluggish progress. But a line is being drawn between those who only see rough seas ahead and others who fear a sinking ship. Those who subscribe to the latter constitute a small, but growing, percentage.

The Mendes and Temnes operate a system of secret societies responsible for maintaining culture and tradition. If you see young children with their faces painted white, you'll know that they're in the process of being initiated.

PEOPLE

The two largest of the 18 tribal groups, the Temnes of the north and Mendes of the south, each compose about one-third of the population. Krios, most living in Freetown, constitute less than 2% of the population, but a large percentage of the professional class.

About 60% of Sierra Leoneans are Muslim, although there have been many converts to Christianity in recent years. Most of the 30% who are Christian live in the south. Traditional beliefs remain close to the heart of most Sierra Leoneans.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Sierra Leone is known for its fabrics, especially country cloth, a coarse, naturally dyed cotton material, and *gara*, a thin tie-dyed or batikprinted sheet. Distinctive Temne basketry is made in the north but sold throughout the country.

Sierra Leone's principal contribution to the world of music is palm-wine music, known locally as *maringa*, but it has been on the decline since its best-known exponent, SE Rogie, passed away in 1994. Sierra Leone's traditional dances are some of the most animated in West Africa, though opportunities for watching them are rare. Independence Day is your best bet. Mende society is one of the few where women do masked dances.

The war spawned many harrowing books, fiction and nonfiction, and Graham Greene's colonial-era classic *The Heart of the Matter* is set in Freetown. Dozens of poets share their work online at www.sierra-leone.org/poetry .html. LEON

SIERRA

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ENVIRONMENT

Sierra Leone's coast is lined with cracking beaches, mangrove swamps and islands. Coastal plains, the mountainous Freetown peninsula being the exception, lead inland for considerable distance. Central Sierra Leone has sweeping plains, while in the northeast are the Loma Mountains, which have Mt Bintumani (1945m) at the heart. About 30% of the country is forest and much primary rainforest has gone, though large patches remain in the south and east.

Outamba-Kilimi National Park (which still has elephants) in the north and Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary (incredible for primates) in the south are worth a visit, but don't expect eco-lodges and ice-cold beers – get the latest on these and other less-developed reserves from the **Conservation Society of Sierra Leone** (© 022-229716; cssc_03@yahoo.com; 2 Pyke St, Freetown).

FOOD & DRINK

Sierra Leone is known for its cuisine, and every town has at least one *cookery* (basic eating house) serving tasty, filling *chop* (meals). Rice is the staple and *plasas* (pounded potato or cassava leaves, cooked with palm oil and fish or beef) is the most common sauce. Seafood is a real treat in the capital.

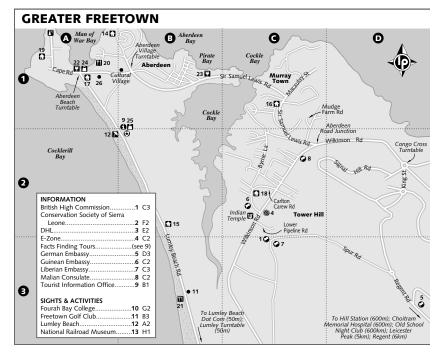
Other typical Sierra Leonean dishes include okra sauce, groundnut stew and pepper soup. Street food, such as fried chicken, roasted corn, beef sticks, and fry fry (simple sandwiches), is also good and easy to find.

The top-selling beer, Star, is reasonable. *Poyo* (palm wine) is light and fruity, but getting used to the smell and the wildlife floating in your cup takes a while. The spicy ginger beer sold on the streets is a nonalcoholic alternative, but be leery because the water is rarely boiled.

FREETOWN

🖻 022 / pop 1 million

Reminders of the recent violence are fading in Sierra Leone's capital, but evidence of its growing-pains is never far away. Traffic jams last from morning until night, the local government seems to have largely given up on rubbish collection, and there hasn't been reliable power since the 1980s.



But, despite the difficulties, Freetown feels less threatening than other large West African cities, and the beautiful setting compensates for the chaos. Besides, if you spend all your time in the tourist-focused Lumley and Aberdeen areas you'll rarely encounter these problems. But if you do head into the heart of town to explore the vibrant markets and varied historical sights, you'll soon find there's more to the city than initially meets the eye. Freetown is filthy and frantic, but you can't help loving it.

ORIENTATION

Central Freetown, where most services are still found, is set out on a grid pattern with Siaka Stevens St as the main thoroughfare. Away from the central area, winding streets climb the surrounding hills. The main route east is Kissy Rd. Going west, the main route follows Sanders St and Main Motor Rd toward Aberdeen and Lumley, where most visitors spend their time. Note that Sir Samuel Lewis Rd is often called Aberdeen Rd because that is where it ends. Wilkinson Rd goes south all the way to Lumley Village.

INFORMATION Cultural Centres

British Council (Map p504; C 222223; www.british council.org/sierraleone; Tower Hill; 论 10am-6pm Mon, 9am-7pm Tue & Thu, 9am-6pm Wed & Fri, 10am-4pm Sat)

Internet Access

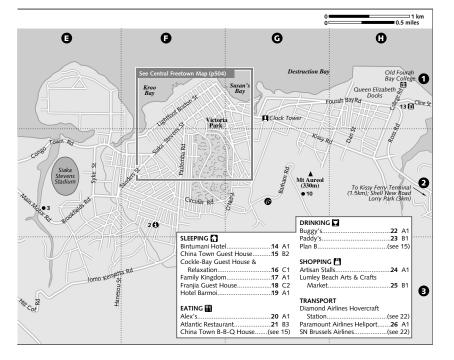
E-Zone (Map pp502-3; 70D Wilkinson Rd; № 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 4-9pm Sun) Fidelity Globalcom (Map p504; 19 Pultney St; № 8.30am-10.30pm Mon-Thu, 24hr Fri & Sat) Lumley Beach Dot Com (Lumley Turntable; № 24hr)

Medical Services

Choitram Memorial Hospital (232598; Hill Station) is Freetown's best medical facility. **Central Pharmacy** (Map p504; 221735; 30 Wallace Johnson St) is reliable.

Money

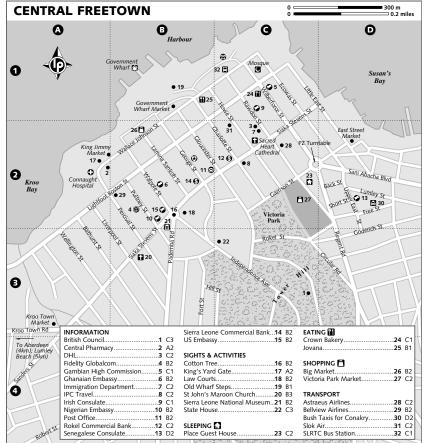
Rokel Commercial Bank (Map p504; 25/27 Siaka Stevens St) and **Sierra Leone Commercial Bank** (Map p504; 29/31 Siaka Stevens St) have full-service financial facilities, but the foreign-exchange bureaus (there are many on Rawdon and Wilberforce Sts) give better exchange rates. Rates at the



SIERRA

LEONE





airport's exchange bureau are better than the banks, but a little below those in town.

Post & Telephone

The main post office is on the corner of Siaka Stevens and Gloucester Sts. **DHL** (Map p504; 225215; 15 Rawdon St) has an office in the centre and another **branch** (Map pp502-3; 236156; 30 Main Motor Rd) near the stadium.

The Sierratel office, where you can buy phonecards, is hidden away behind the bus station; but don't expect the phones in front of it to work.

Tourist Information

Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (Map pp502-3; 229716; cssc_03@yahoo.com; 2 Pyke St; S 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Very helpful for nature-related questions.

Tourist Information Office (Map pp502-3;

☎ 236620; Lumley Beach Rd; ∑ 10am-7pm) Run by the National Tourist Board.

Travel Agencies

Facts Finding Tours (Map pp502-3; [®] 076-903675, factsfinding@yahoo.com) Kenneth Gbengba leads personalised bird- and wildlife-watching tours. He works out of the Tourist Information Office at Lumley Beach. IPC Travel (Map p504; [®] 221481; www.ipctravel.net; 22 Siaka Stevens St) Reliable for plane tickets and vehicle hire, IPC also offers tours.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Freetown has less of a crime problem than most other African capitals, but beware that petty thieves work the markets downtown, especially Victoria Park, and Lumley Beach. The East End is rough as a badger, so watch your back in the light and stay out at night.

Beach boys and would-be gigolos are becoming more common on Lumley Beach, but they are tame compared to those in the Gambia.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The city's historic sites are modest, but interesting. The 500-year-old **Cotton Tree** (Map p504), under which slaves were sold and the first emancipated slaves gathered in 1787, casts its shadow on the **Sierra Leone National Museum** (Map p504; 223555; Siaka Stevens St; 🐑 10am-4pm Mon-Fri), which has a small collection of juju trinkets and historical artefacts, and the ornate **Law Courts** (Map p504). The **State House** (Map p504) is just up the hill, and the 1820 **St John's Maroon Church** (Map p504; Siaka Stevens St) is two blocks southwest.

The ancestors of nearly all present-day Krios passed through **King's Yard Gate** (Map p504; Wallace Johnson St), awaiting resettlement by the British. Many of these new arrivals climbed the nearby **Old Wharf Steps** (Map p504), sometimes erroneously called the Portuguese Steps. The area west of Tower Hill is a good place to gawp at interesting 19th-century, wood-framed **Krio houses**.

You need not be a rail fan to enjoy the **National Railroad Museum** (Map pp502-3; Cline St; admission free; \mathfrak{D} 10am-5pm Tue-Sat), east of the centre in Clinetown, but it helps.

Freetown's beauty and potential show clearly when seen from above. The views are especially good from **Hill Station** and **Leicester Peak. Fourah Bay College** (Map pp502–3), one of the first universities in sub-Saharan Africa, sits atop Mt Aureol. You can follow the walking path through its forested botanical garden down to the waterfall you passed on the drive up.

Lumley Beach (Map pp502–3) on the edge of town is the busiest beach on the peninsula, but not the best. Development is coming fast, but for now it's mostly bamboo and thatch beer-shacks. The modest **Freetown Golf Club** (Map p504; **2**72956; Lumley Beach Rd; 18 holes US\$10) at the south end rents clubs.

SLEEPING

Place Guest House (Map p504; ☐ 222608; 42 Rawdon St; s/d with bathroom US\$12/13.50, without bathroom US\$10/12, r with air-con US\$16; €) Perhaps the best budget hotel in Sierra Leone, the Place is spotlessly clean and has power all night.

Cockle-Bay Guest House & Relaxation (Map pp502-3; 272789; 36 Sir Samuel Lewis Rd; r without bathroom US\$16, s/d with fan US\$23/28, d with air-con US\$32-37; 2) A little noisy, but a good choice for beach-goers on a budget. Breakfast is included and prices are discounted midweek.

Franjia Guest House (Map pp502-3; ⓓ 030-240426; 9K Carlton Carew Rd; r with fan & shared bathroom US\$20, s/d with air-con & bathroom US\$26/40; ເ⊇) This very homey has eager-to-please staff. Breakfast is included.

China Town Guest House (Map pp502-3; ⁽²⁾ 236664; 84 Lumley Beach Rd; s/d US\$65/85; ⁽²⁾) These eight well-appointed, oriental-themed rooms lie just across the road from a quiet stretch of Lumley Beach.

Hotel Barmoi (Map pp502-3; 234933; 75C Cape Rd; s/d from US\$75/106; **2 (**) This small lodge has fine rooms and a great seaside location near the lighthouse. The restaurant is also good.

Family Kingdom (Map pp502-3; ☐ 236133; Aberdeen Beach Turntable; s US\$60, d US\$80-90, 2-room ste US\$120; ☑ ☑) The rooms are ordinary, but the real attractions are inside the compound, which has duikers roaming the grounds, and several schools-worth of playground equipment.

Bintumani Hotel (Map pp502-3; ⁽²⁾ 233996; 11 Man of War Bay; r US\$138, ste US\$187-260; **(2) (2) (2) (2) (2) (3) (2) (3)**

EATING

Jovana (Map p504; 16 Wallace Johnson St; mains US\$1.30-7.50; lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Attracts locals for tasty African and European food.

Alex's (64 Cape Rd; mains US\$3.30-8.50; Solunch Fri-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) Freetown's loveliest dining spot looks west over Man of War Bay, from under the palm trees. Seafood is the speciality, but the large menu is global.

Crown Bakery (Map p504; 5 Wilberforce St; mains US\$4.30-15; 🟵 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This pricey expat favourite has a full menu spanning pancakes to *fajitas*.

Atlantic Restaurant (Map pp502-3; 30 Lumley Beach Rd; mains around US\$10; 🕑 lunch Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) Good

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SIERRA LEONE

fish dishes and a popular terrace at the southern end of Lumley Beach.

Street-food vendors work their candlelit stalls around PZ Turntable late into the night. **Paddy's** (Map pp502-3; 63 Sir Samuel Lewis Rd) serves good Indian food.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Paddy's (Map pp502-3; 63 Sir Samuel Lewis Rd) and Buggy's (Map pp502-3; 74 Cape Rd) are Freetown's most popular bars. Unusually tranquil for Freetown, Plan B (Map pp502-3; 84 Lumley Beach Rd) is a jazz-infused wine bar. Old School Night Club (Hill Station; admission US\$3.50-5) has Freetown's hottest dance floor. No place really gets hopping until midnight.

SHOPPING

The best place you'll find for souvenir shopping is the **Big Market** (Basket Market; Map p504; Wallace Johnson St) downtown. It has all the usual textiles and woodcarvings you'll find in Lumley and Aberdeen, but also offers many traditional household goods. **Victoria Park Market** (Map p504; Garrison St), where you can find just about anything, is the best place for *gara* cloth, and the **Lumley Beach Arts & Crafts Market** (Map p502-3; Lumley Beach Rd), behind the Tourist Information Office, has the widest selection of country cloth.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses leave around 7.30am from the **SLRTC bus station** (Map p504; Wallace Johnson St), though not necessarily every day for every town. They always depart full, so arrive around 6am to get a seat. Cities served are Bo, Kenema, Makeni, Kabala, Kono and Conakry (Guinea).

Bush taxis and *poda-podas* (minibuses) leave throughout the day from Shell New Rd Lorry Park on the far east side of town (from downtown catch a taxi on Goderich St), except those going to Conakry, which park along Free St near Victoria Park Market.

GETTING AROUND

Shared taxis and *poda-podas* cost US\$0.25 per ride. Taxis generally make short hops, while *poda-podas* run long distance, including downtown to Lumley and Aberdeen. Pay no attention to the route numbers painted on the side of the cars, just shout out your destination to each passing vehicle. Taxis don't have meters, so for private hire, bargain hard. A trip from downtown to Aberdeen should cost about US\$5.

AROUND FREETOWN

BEACHES

Some of the best beaches in Africa are found south of Freetown. The ocean is calm and warm, and most of the beaches are rip-tide free. Deep-sea fishing is superb and can easily be arranged in Freetown, as can whalewatching trips in October and November. *Poda-podas* run to all points except Kent, albeit infrequently.

One of the first really good stretches of sand is **Sussex Beach**, where you'll find the cosy **Franco's Dive Centre** ((2) 076-744406; r US\$60; (2)). Have a meal (excellent Italian and seafood around US\$5) here and you can sleep on the beach for US\$0.70.

Halfway down the peninsula, at **River No 2 Beach** (probably the choicest beach of them all, featuring brilliant white sands backed by thickly forested, wildlife-filled hills), you'll find the community-run **River No 2 Development Association** (**©** 033-365934; camp sites US\$1.70, rind breakfast US\$40, seafood US\$6.50) has large rooms right on the beach and will arrange scenic boat trips. Entry for the day (US\$1.70)

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

The easiest way to town from Lungi Airport is with **Paramount Airlines helicopters** (Map pp502-3; **©** 076-621041; one way US\$40) and **Diamond Airlines Hovercraft** (Map pp502-3; **©** 076-624786; one way US\$30). Both drop you off in Aberdeen, and time their trips to coincide with flight arrivals and departures, though check a day in advance because they don't connect with every flight.

The other way from the airport is to take a shared taxi (US\$0.70) to the ferry terminal at Tagrin. A car ferry (US\$0.50 for passengers) crosses the river five or six times a day, but if you don't want to wait you can take one of the *pam-pams* (big boats) for US\$0.70, or the less-crowded speedboats for US\$1.70. These are wet landings, but men wait to carry passengers to the boats for a small tip. Chartering a taxi all the way to Aberdeen costs about US\$17.

includes the use of umbrellas, thatch huts and showers.

Just down the shore is **Tokeh Beach** where you'll find **Baam Tokeh** (bungalows US\$20), a small, laid-back hang-out with nightly bonfires. You can pitch a tent on the beach for a song.

Ask someone in **York**, an interesting Krio village, to show you the caves where slaves stayed before being loaded onto ships. From nearby **York Beach** you can walk around the rocky bay to **Black Johnson Beach**. At the end of the peninsula is **Kent**, with its little horseshoe beach and ruined fort, and around the bend, at the ramshackle fishing town of **Tombo**, you can catch boats across the bay to rarely visited **Shenge** (US\$2.70) and **Bonthe** (US\$3.30), where you can have miles of white sand all to yourself.

BANANA ISLANDS

Diving and snorkelling are good near these islands off the peninsula's southern tip. The best way to get to the Bananas is to hire a local fishing boat at Tokeh Village (expect to pay around US\$60, which includes a lavish seafood meal). Kent is closer, but you probably won't save money leaving from here because the fishermen aren't used to taking travellers out there. Near **Dublin** village are some interesting ruins of an 1881 church and slave centre.

BUNCE ISLAND

This intriguing destination is on the Sierra Leone River, some 15km from Freetown. A British fort was established here in 1663, but the atmospheric ruins are of a second fort from where various European powers traded in camwood (used to make dye), ivory and slaves. Before it was shut down in 1808, some 50,000 men, women and children were shipped off into exile, including the Gullah people of South Carolina.

TACUGAMA CHIMPANZEE RESERVE

Near Sugar Loaf Mountain you can watch rescued and rehabilitated chimps in this great little **private reserve** (224098; admission US\$5; 10am-5.30pm). A couple of waterfalls are within walking distance. Shared taxis (US\$5) run from Freetown to **Regent**, an interesting little village with many old Krio houses and churches, and from there it's a 3km uphill walk. Chartering a car round trip from Regent will cost around US\$5.

NORTHERN SIERRA LEONE

MAKENI© 052 / pop 85,000

Makeni, the quiet capital of Northern Province and a former RUF headquarters, is a market town for the surrounding villages. Women sell the region's distinctive coiled *blai* baskets in the shade of the cotton tree in Independence Sq and across from Makeni Central Mosque, one of the most beautiful in the country. Any boy can show you the path up the back of **Wusum Hill**, which can be climbed in about an hour. Other peaks north of town, along the road to Kabala, are just begging for rock hounds to break out the ropes.

Bush taxis run to many destination including Freetown (US\$4.60, three hours), Kamakwie (US\$4, four hours) and Bo (US\$5, four hours), plus the SLRTC buses to Kono and Kabala will drop passengers here.

OUTAMBA-KILIMI NATIONAL PARK

Sierra Leone's only **national park** (admission US\$2.50) is a beautiful, peaceful place. The main Outamba section consists of rolling hills, grasslands, flood plains, rainforests and rivers, which you explore by canoe and footpath since there are no roads. You can track elephants on their own trails and paddle past hippos (sightings almost guaranteed in the dry season), and no matter where you go you'll see many of the 260 bird species. These excursions cost (US\$3.30) per person plus (US\$1.70) for the guide.

Cosy thatch **huts** (US\$3.30) sit right on the riverbank, and someone will cook food if you bring it. Without your own transport you'll need to hire a motorcycle (about US\$15 return) in Kamakwie, the nearest sizable town, for the 32km trip, as the final stretch of entrance road is too rough for cars.

MOUNT BINTUMANI

Loma Mansa, as Sierra Leone's highest peak is also known, rises 1945m. In clear weather, views from the summit are excellent. The **Loma** Mountains Forest Reserve protects the highland rainforest covering the lower slopes. There are chimpanzees and several species of monkey here, and you have a fair chance of seeing elephants and bongos as you approach the mountain. In the rivers, you may be lucky enough to see pygmy hippopotami, dwarf crocodiles and rufous fishing-owls; they are all endangered species. Above 1500m the forest gives way to grassland where you can spot baboons, duikers, and even buffaloes.

The most scenic and wildlife-rich approach to the summit is from the west, either from Firawa or, more commonly, **Yifin** (from where it's at least a four-day walk). The route from **Kurubonla** can be done in two days if you move fast. Pay your respects to the chief in any of these villages and he'll help you find a guide, which is necessary because many paths are overgrown. The climb isn't technical, but you need to be self-sufficient.

SOUTHERN SIERRA LEONE

BO

🖻 032 / pop 167,000

Sierra Leone's second-largest city, Bo is a lively town in the heart of Mende country, but there isn't really much to see or do.

Bush taxis to Freetown (US\$5.50, six hours) depart frequently each morning from Maxwell Khobe Park near the centre, as does the daily SLRTC bus. This is also the spot to catch taxis to Potoru (US\$5, three hours). To reach Freetown in the afternoon you'll probably need to use New London Park on the highway. Kenema (US\$2, one hour) and Makeni (US\$5, four hours) bush taxis use the market.

KENEMA

🖻 042 / pop 138,000

Kenema, the provinces' most prosperous town, is a busy trade centre for coffee, cacao, timber and, most visibly, diamonds. The main artery, Hangha Rd, is a crush of Lebanese diamond merchants. Befriend one and they may let you eyeball raw stones or connect you with someone who will show you a mine. The **Kambui Hills Forest Reserve**, just outside town, is a good place for hiking and bird-watching. Get information at the **District Forestry Office** (2) 420059) at the end of Maxwell Khobe St.

It's overpriced, but the **Sinava Guest House** (☎ 076-770270; 9 Blama Rd; s/d US\$33/40; ≳) is the best hotel in town; competition is coming, however. The very friendly **Ruby Motel** (☎ 076-784638; 20 Mambu St; r with/without bathroom US\$15/5) is out of the centre and hard to find, so hop on a *moto-taxi* to get there the first time. Convivial owners and tasty food, a mix of Lebanese and African, make the **Capitol Restaurant** (51 Hangha Rd; mains from US\$1.60; ⓒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) popular.

Bush taxis to Bo (US\$2, one hour), Potoru (US\$2.70, four hours), Freetown (US\$7, seven hours) and the Liberian border (US\$13.50, nine hours) depart from the taxi park on Maxwell Khobe St. The road south toward Monrovia is extraordinarily bad. SLRTC buses to Freetown depart every morning from the bus station in the centre.

TIWAI ISLAND WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Set on a small island in the Moa River, Tiwai has one of the highest concentrations of primates on the continent and they are often seen on the trails. And, many animals that are rare elsewhere thrive here, including chimpanzees, pygmy hippopotamis, river otters and whitebreasted guinea fowl. If you don't have a car, the friendly staff in the **park office** (10 076-922792) in Potoru, a nearby town, will get you to the island for a fair price. Park entrance is US\$5 (US\$10 to stay the night in their tents) and the various guided tours range from US\$3.30 to US\$6.60.

SIERRA LEONE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Freetown is full of classy, comfortable and costly hotels, and more will open soon on the peninsular beaches. There are also many budget choices in the capital, but few good ones. Upcountry, most large towns have several hotels, though few that will satisfy those needing plenty of creature comforts.

PRACTICALITIES

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- Sierra Leone uses British weights and measures.
- Electricity is 230V/50Hz and plugs have three large pins, like the UK, or sometimes three round pins.
- Awoko and Concord Times are two of the most respected newspapers, though the humorous Peep is more popular.
- Magazines like Newsweek and Africa Week are sold at supermarkets.
- Hardly anyone watches the government-owned SLBS TV station except when they show music videos: the American dramas and Nigerian soap operas on the privately owned ABC are far more popular.
- The BBC World Service is heard on 94.3FM, while Democracy (98.1FM) and SKYY (106FM) play the hits.

The cheapest are usually grubby and cater to short-term guests.

Always request discounts for stays of more than one night, as you'll often get them. Also note that same-sex couples, regardless of whether they are a 'couple', usually cannot share a room. Westerners are sometimes exempted from this rule, but don't count on it.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Sierra Leone is one of the safest destinations in West Africa, though it pays to remain vigilant with your valuables.

Except for in Bo and Kenema, electricity is either sporadic or nonexistent, and even these towns suffer occasional shut-offs at the end of the dry season. Just about all hotels have generators, though most budget places only run them from around 7pm to 1am.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Sierra Leone Embassies & Consulates

Sierra Leone has embassies in both bordering countries; see the relevant chapters for details.

UK ((a) 020-7287 9884; www.slhc-uk.org.uk; 245 0xford St, W1D 2LX London)

USA (🖻 202-939-9261; www.embassyofsierraleone.org; 1701 19th St NW, 20009 Washington, DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Sierra Leone

All of the following are in Freetown: Gambia (Map p504; a 225191; 6 Wilberforce St; 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri) Germany (Map pp502-3; 🖻 231350; germemb@sierratel.sl; 3 Middle Hill Station, Wilberforce) Ghana (Map p504; 223461; 13 Walpole St) Guinea (Map pp502-3; 🖻 232496; 6 Carlton Carew Rd) Ireland (Map p504; 222017; 8 Rawdon St) Liberia (Map pp502-3; 🕿 230991; 2 Spur Rd, Wilberforce) Mali (Map pp502-3; 🗃 230284; 40 Wilkinson Rd; 🕥 9am-3.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-3.30pm Fri) Nigeria (Map p504; 🕿 224229; 37 Siaka Stevens St; 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) Senegal (Map p504; 🖻 222948; Upper East St; 🕑 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) UK (Map pp502-3; 🖻 232961; bhc@sierratel.sl; 6 Spur Rd) Assists French nationals. USA (Map p504; 226481; http://freetown.usembassy .gov; cnr Walpole & Siaka Stevens Sts) Soon moving to Hill Station

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The country goes kite-crazy on Easter Monday, and Lumley Beach is packed with freeflying families. Independence Day's Lantern Parade, an evening procession of illuminated floats, has recently been revived.

HOLIDAYS

As well as holidays listed on p1106, these are the public holidays in Sierra Leone: **1 January** New Year's Day **March/April** Easter **27 April** Independence Day **25 December** Christmas Day **26 December** Boxing Day

INTERNET ACCESS

Freetown has plenty of internet cafés with good high-speed connections; most charge US\$1.70 per hour. Access in the provinces is rare and painfully slow.

MAPS

Street vendors around Crown Bakery in Freetown sell *The Road Map of Sierra Leone and Freetown* by Oxford Cartographers for around US\$4. Outside Africa you can buy the International Travel Map series, which is better for country coverage, but doesn't have Freetown. Both are outdated.

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MONEY

SIERRA LEONE

The most easily exchangeable currencies in Sierra Leone are US dollars, UK pounds and euros. Large denominations will get the best rates. You can't pay with a credit card anywhere, but some Sierra Leone Commercial Bank and Rokel Bank branches will give cash advances on Visa cards. ATMs only work if you have a local bank account. Foreignexchange bureaus (and street traders, though avoid them unless a friend makes the introduction) offer better rates than the banks for cash and travellers cheques. There are banks and foreign-exchange bureaus in some upcountry towns, but you'll get better rates at places in Freetown.

POST & TELEPHONE

Sierra Leone's regular post, including poste restante, is unreliable, though the separate express service seems to work. DHL is a safer option.

The easiest way to make a phone call is at the countless small telecentres. Calls to the USA, UK or Australia cost US\$0.80 per minute. It's cheaper by about half to use the Sierratel phonecards, but finding a phone to use them on can be a chore.

Mobile phones are common and the service is good. If you have a GSM phone you can buy a SIM card for US\$3.30 to US\$5 from one of the five service providers, and then use prepaid top-up cards.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The National Tourist Board (www.welcometosierra leone.org) can be helpful, but the best source of pre-departure information is www.visitsierra leone.org.

VISAS

Everyone from outside Ecowas countries requires a visa. Tourist visas cost between US\$40 and US\$100 depending on your nationality. Download application forms at www.slhc -uk.org.uk. Visas are available at the airport and land borders, but it is recommended you get one before arrival to avoid any hassles, as this is a new policy.

Visa Extensions

Visas for Sierra Leone can be easily extended at the Immigration Department (🖻 223034; cnr Rawdon St & Siaka Stevens St; 🕎 10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) in Freetown.

Visas for Onward Travel

One-month, single-entry visas for Guinea cost around US\$35 and three-month, multipleentry visas cost double. Most nationalities can get a three-month, single-entry visa to Liberia for US\$75. For both you need one photo, and the visa should be ready in 15 minutes.

VOLUNTEERING

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (227076; www.fawe.org), which aims to reduce gender inequalities in education, has earned respect among locals, and volunteers have reported wonderful experiences. Volunteers looking for other opportunities can email jobsearchsl@visitsierraleone.org.

TRANSPORT IN SIERRA LEONE

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Air connections to Freetown continue to expand. SN Brussels (236445; www.flysn.com) has two flights a week from Brussels. Astraeus (228405; www.flvastraeus.com) flies twice a week from London Gatwick, and Bellview (227311; www .flybellviewair.com) thrice from Heathrow. Return flights from London with Astraeus and Bellview usually cost about US\$900, while SN Brussels charges more for better service.

Bellview connects Freetown to Accra (Ghana), Dakar (Senegal), Douala (Cameroon), Banjul (Gambia), and Lagos (Nigeria); Slok Air (20076-770702: www.slokairinternational.com) to Accra, Baniul and Monrovia (Liberia); Gambia International (221481; www.gia.gn) to Banjul and Dakar; and GR-AVIA (221481) to Conakry. Kenya Airways (221481; www.kenya-airways.com) connects to Nairobi (Kenya) twice a week.

DEPARTURE TAX

The airport departure tax is US\$40. Some airlines include it in the price of the ticket, but most do not.

Land **GUINEA**

The main overland route to Guinea is via Pamelap. Bush taxis to Conakry (US\$10, seven hours) run regularly, and there is an SLRTC bus (US\$13, seven hours) on Monday and Thursday. Roads on the Kamakwie-Kindia and Kabala-Faranah routes are in bad shape and taxis only run a couple of times a week. Get local advice before using either crossing between Kailahun and Guéckédou as we've heard reports of hassles from Sierra Leone border officials.

LIBERIA

The only practical route to Liberia is at the Mano River Bridge by Bo (Waterside). From Freetown to Monrovia takes about two days in the dry season, and you'll need to change taxis in Kenema and at the border. The crossings from Zimmi, Koindu and Buedu are also via horrible roads and have very little traffic. Check the security situation before using any of these crossings.

Sea

There is talk of restarting the ferry between Freetown and Conakry. Inquire at Government Wharf.

GETTING AROUND Air

From little Hastings airport just outside Freetown, Eagle Air (228405) flies to Yengema

(US\$100, two hours and 10 minutes), stopping in Bo (US\$70, 50 minutes) and Kenema (US\$80, one hour and 20 minutes) on both the outbound and return trip. The 17-seat plane departs from Freetown at 8.30am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Baggage allowance is just 10kg; it's US\$1.50 per subsequent kilogram.

Car

Car hire is expensive (starting at around US\$75; much more if you're heading upcountry), but don't choose a company only on the price; ask about the terms too. Kilometres will always be unlimited and a driver included, but fuel costs and after-hours charges vary. Reliable businesses include Dial A Ride (a 241934) and IPC Travel (🛱 221481).

Local Transport

Bush taxis and *poda-podas* link all major and many minor towns, though, except for departures to and from Freetown (and between Bo and Kenema), traffic is usually pretty sparse, especially on Sunday. Government-run Sierra Leone Road Transport Corporation (SLRTC) buses charge the same as taxis and are more comfortable, but they are slower and at best have just one departure a day.

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Central African Republic

If it's the 'real' Africa you're looking for, Central African Republic (CAR) may be it. A country of staggering rare natural beauty, with some of the world's most amazing wildlife, it nonetheless remains underdeveloped, fragmented and poverty-stricken. It's a country, like so many in Africa, that could and should be very prosperous; it's just that pesky 'government-thatdoesn't-care-about-its-people' factor that gets in the way. The country has important mineral deposits and great natural resources, yet precious little of the wealth generated seeps down to the population. For centuries CAR has endured rapacity from invaders and then its own leaders. Sadly this is ongoing. So, why would the people of such a historically plundered nation be open, friendly and generous? As we said, that's the real Africa for you.

Travelling here is a backpacking bungee jump. At the time of writing most of the country was not considered stable or safe enough to travel through. Look at the neighbours: to the east CAR borders on the troubled Darfur region of Sudan, to the north Chad is often in turmoil, to the south things are far from placid in Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Only to the west is Cameroon a region of relative stability. Apart from business and government callers to the capital, a handful of lucky visitors search for gorillas and elephants in the Dzanga-Sangha National Park, in the little finger of land in the southeast corner of the CAR. Whatever you do check the situation with your embassy before attempting to visit.

FAST FACTS

CENTRAL AFRICAN Republic

- Area 624,980 sq km
- ATMs None
- Borders Cameroon, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Chad
- Budget US\$15 to US\$50 per day
- Capital Bangui 10
- Languages French (official) plus Sango (national), Arabic and tribal languages
- Money Central African franc (CFA); US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 4.3 million
- Seasons Wet (May to November; dry (November to April, a bit longer in the south)
- Telephone Country code 236; international access code 200
- Time GMT/UTC +1
- Visa US\$65 for 30 days; required by most and must be obtained in advance

HISTORY

CAR was home to one of humanity's earliest civilisations. Thousands of years ago there was an advanced culture whose artisans and work found a ready market from nations far afield. They were extensively settled and relatively sophisticated even before ancient Egypt's time in the sun. However, beginning in the middle of the last millennium the slave trade gradually decimated this well-organised society. Tens of thousands were dragged westward to the Americas, while Arab conquerors from the north completed the devastation. As recently as the 19th century, 20,000 slaves were sold each year on the Egyptian market.

Colonial Days

France launched into CAR in the 1880s, finding a shattered society rich in agricultural potential. It divided the country into 17 parts and offered them to European companies in exchange for a fixed annual payment plus 15% of agricultural profits. Vast cotton, coffee and tobacco plantations were established and worked by an often brutally conscripted local population. Resistance to the French was there from the outset and continued until the late 1920s. This resistance was finally broken as a combined result of French military action, famine and severe epidemics of smallpox.

The first signs of nationalism began to spring up after WWII via Barthleméy Boganda's Mouvement d'Evolution Sociale de l'Afrique Noire. In 1960, one year after Boganda was killed in a mysterious plane crash, his party forced the French to grant independence. CAR has been an unhappy mess ever since.

Forty Years of Chaos

The leadership was taken over by David Dacko, who became the country's first president. Dacko's rule quickly became repressive and dictatorial and in 1966 he was overthrown by an army commander and close relative, Jean-Bédel Bokassa, kicking off 13 years of one of the most sordid, brutal and notorious regimes Africa has ever experienced. All opposition was soon snuffed out and offenders were publicly clubbed to death - often with Bokassa's personal involvement.

France, wanting the uranium deposits at Bakouma and the abundant big-game hunting grounds near the Sudan border (personally sponsored by the former French president,

WARNING

While things have improved in Bangui (although care should still be taken), the situation in other parts of the country, particularly in the north, continues to be unpredictable and potentially very dangerous. Hold-ups and robberies on the roads are common. Our on-the-ground research in this country has been very limited, so information in this chapter may not be reliable. Check the situation before travelling to CAR.

Giscard d'Estaing), supported Bokassa and bailed out his floundering economy.

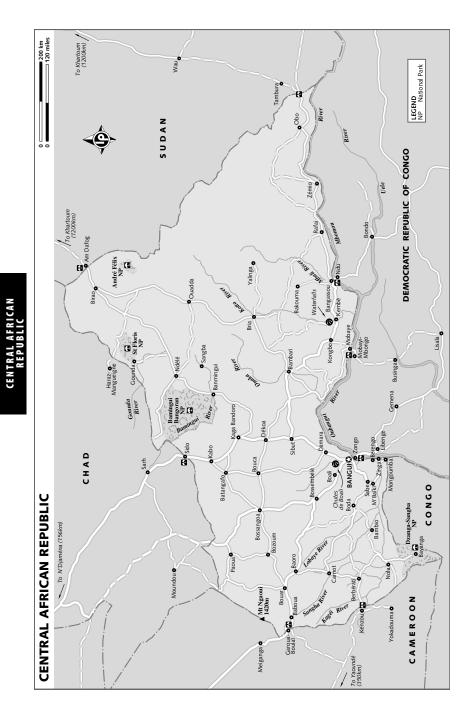
Using the country's mineral resources as carrots, Bokassa also negotiated loans from South Africa and private US banks. He then squandered virtually all this money on prestigious projects, many of them never completed. His final and most foolish fantasy was to have himself crowned 'emperor' of a renamed Central African Empire. Despite the worldwide derision provoked by the 1977 coronation, France picked up most of the tab of more than US\$20 million – equivalent to CAR's annual earnings. Such excess, together with a massacre of exbealbildram in Bangui mede Bolyace an pleted. His final and most foolish fantasy

schoolchildren in Bangui, made Bokassa an embarrassment to his backers. In 1979, France abruptly cut off aid to the 'empire' and, while Bokassa was in Libya seeking still more funds, flew in former president David Dacko together with loads of French paratroopers.

Despite Bokassa's reputation, Dacko proved equally unpopular and was overthrown in 1981 and replaced by André Kolingba, who in 1986 created a one-party state. All opposition groups were banned and their supporters jailed, harassed or forced to flee the country. At this point the unstoppable Bokassa popped up again but was promptly convicted of treason, murder and, for good measure, cannibalism, and sentenced to death. This was changed to life imprisonment and he was confined to a folly he had constructed at Berengo.

Kolingba's 12 years of absolute rule ended when he was defeated in presidential elections in 1993 and Ange-Félix Patassé became the country's leader of the first real civilian government. Patassé immediately stacked the government with fellow tribesmen, which prompted a 1996 army mutiny, led by officers





from a southern tribe. The capital became a war zone although the Bangui Accords, a regionally brokered peace deal between Patassé and the rebels, was signed in 1997 and backed up by an 800-strong African peacekeeping force. Elections were held in 1998 and won by Patassé, who was then re-elected in 1999 amid claims of vote rigging.

CAR Today

In late 2002, the former army chief-of-staff, General François Bozizé, led ex-soldiers in an unsuccessful coup attempt. Civil war resumed and Bozizé soon gained control of areas in the north and south and even, at times, part of the capital. People were forced to flee their homes, villages and even the country. Tens of thousands fled over CAR's five borders as life became unbearable: women and young girls were raped by fighters allied to the government from the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and towns held captive by government or rebel forces were cut off from outside supplies. Less than six months later Patassé made the familiar African mistake of popping out of the shop, on this occasion on a state visit to Niger. Bozizé promptly marched into Bangui and Patassé, having survived seven previous coup attempts, scooted off to exile in Cameroon.

Patassé was deservedly hated: soldiers and government workers had not been paid for months and the Congolese rebel group employed as enforcers had spent most of their time raping and looting. The euphoria was short lived as Bozizé's men also seemed to enjoy a little looting and the new ruler had imported his own unpopular support team, in this case Arabic-speakers from neighbouring Chad. The French backing Patassé once enjoyed had been replaced by Libyan backing, in exchange for a lucrative monopoly on the country's diamond and gold production, but in turn that was replaced by the support of Central African Economic & Monetary Community (CEMAC) peacekeepers who quickly departed

Bozizé made the familiar promise to hold elections but the second part of his promise, not to stand himself, was conveniently forgotten. Despite opposition from another former coup leader, André Kolbinga, the election in 2005 was won by Bozizé with, it appears, only a moderate amount of vote fixing and intimidation. Since then the safety situation in Bangui has improved (it's now merely bad, not awful), but the government still does not control all of the country and the economy remains close to bankrupt. Relations with neighbouring Chad may mean that the CAR is used by the Sudanese government to attack rebels in Darfur.

CULTURE

CAR's 4.3 million people comprise many tribes, ethnic groups and languages. Subsistence agriculture and forestry are the backbone of CAR and more than 70% of the population lives a rural existence. The main agricultural products are cotton, coffee, tobacco, tapioca, yams, millet, corn, bananas and timber. The average worker's annual income is US\$310.

The national psyche has taken a battering due to ongoing political instability in the countryside and protracted moves by governments and rebels to force people from their homes (an act that perpetuates the poverty). Life is tough and so, like all humans, the people of CAR are glad for a release. They like to drink banana and palm wine or beer and dance the mambo, *gbadoumba* and *lououdou*. Understandably, they also look to the afterlife – religion is paramount here, being evenly split between Catholic, Protestant, Muslim and indigenous beliefs. Ancient animistic convictions strongly influence Christianity here.

ENVIRONMENT

CAR, roughly the same size as France, is landlocked and almost smack bang in the middle of Africa. It has virgin rainforests and some of the most pristine national parks in the world. The Dzanga-Sangha National Park is home to the Aka people (Pygmies; singular is MoAka, plural is BaAka), flowering tropical plants, beautiful butterflies, and some of the highest densities of lowland gorillas and forest elephants in Africa.

The country is one immense plateau varying in height between 600m and 700m, with scattered hills in the northeast and southwest. The closest thing to a real mountain is Mt Ngaoui, which at 1420m is the highest point in the country. Otherwise, the sweeping savannah grasslands are interspersed with lots of rivers. CAR has long had a reputation as one of the last great wildlife refuges, but increased poaching has diminished this standing in recent years. Logging forests has also threatened animals and BaAka, and opened the forests to even more poaching.

Despite the enormous tourism potential and ample natural resources, CAR is one of the least developed countries on the continent.

The climate is tropical with hot, dry winters and mild to hot, wet summers. Natural hazards to the environment include hot, dry dusty winds affecting the northern areas, and flooding in the rainy season.

BANGUI

pop 670,000

Bangui, the capital of CAR, is set beside the Oubangui River – the most important river in the country. It therefore follows that the city is the biggest trading port. Although petty thievery remains a problem, the situation is not as bad as it used to be except, perhaps, at Kilomètre 5, the transport hub.

Kilomètre 5, the transport hub. The French founded Bangui in 1880 (naming it after the nearby rapids) and then constructed the city – à la France – with wide, shaded boulevards and a central market area from where everything radiated. These days, this area is considered the old town, but all public transport and activity still converges here.

ORIENTATION

You can take a public or private taxi from the airport – both are more expensive at night. All major avenues radiate from the Pl de la République, the centre of the capital. It's a desolate urban space as many of the buildings were shelled or torched during the long civil war.

The heart of the African quarter is the unmarked K-Cinq intersection (Kilomètre 5) west of town (known variously and confusingly as Km 5, Kilo 5, Kam Cinq, or PK5 – pronounced 'payka sink'). It has the largest market and lots of bars and nightclubs. K-Cinq and Ave du Lt Koudoukou, which leads off it, are the city's liveliest areas for locals but also the most dangerous. Muggers (sometimes drunk) are on the streets here day and night so don't venture out alone.

INFORMATION

Check commissions before changing money. The UBAC bank used to be better than the BIAO bank.

Hospita Caumuomiter ((a) 61 0600) The main hospital. Maison de la Presse ((a) 61 4284) A good stock of French books and magazines and a small range of international media.

Post office (Ave des Martyrs) Near the Socatel building. The mail service is very slow, although poste restante is efficient (the post office charges a small fee per letter but only keeps them for a limited period). You can send faxes and telexes from here.

Socatel ((a) 61 4268; BP 939 Ave des Martyrs, Bangui) You can make phone calls from here.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **Musée de Boganda** (Rue de l'Industrie) is well organised with helpful guides. There's an interesting collection of local musical instruments that you can try out, and good displays on the BaAka and their culture.

Bangui has many markets. **Marché Central** in the centre of town is normally bustling, but is open mornings only. Avoid the market at K-Cinq; there are more thieves here than goods for sale. For artisan goods, head for the **Centre Artisanal**. You'll find ebony carvings, porcupinequill bracelets, leather goods, batiks, appliqué, African costumes, malachite, grass dolls, woodcarvings and masks. Many of the artefacts are common to the whole Congo basin.

If it's still open, the **Perroni Gallery** is beside the port. Cyr Perroni came to CAR from Martinique over 40 years ago and has trained many of the artisans whose works are sold at the Centre Artisanal. Perroni's paintings are, however, very expensive.

SLEEPING

There are no inexpensive hotels in Bangui, but there's a camp site near the centre of the African quarter (ie the unmarked K-Cinq intersection west of town). It's a rough part of town, with the largest (and most threatening) market and lots of bars. Ave du Lt Koudoukou is also pretty action-filled and both these areas have the cheapest accommodation. But be on your guard because as with all 'lively' traveller-magnets, these areas also attract the dodgiest of locals. So don't venture out on your own – particularly at night.

EATING & DRINKING

For cheap but tasty food, check out the stalls along the river southwest of the port for fish or beef brochettes, and the stalls beside the taxi rank at the K-Cinq intersection – just don't risk the latter after dark. Other areas worth a look include Ave des Martyrs and Ave de la France.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bangui M'Poko International Airport is located 7km southeast of Bangui; for information on flights, see p536.

Transport for all towns except M'Baïki sets out from the *gare routière* (bus station) around 6am. M'Baïki services depart from a lane beside Le Punch Coco. All vehicles then cruise up and down Ave de l'Indépendance looking for passengers. Once a vehicle has picked up as many passengers as possible, it heads for the control post at Kilomètre 12, which is the best place for catching a ride given all transport must wait there to complete formalities. Destinations from here include M'Baïki, Bossembélé, Sibut, Bossangoa, Bambari, Bouar, Berbérati, Sido, Bangassou and Garoua-Boulaï.

GETTING AROUND

There are cheap shared taxis and minibuses along all the main arteries. A private taxi costs US\$2, even to the airport. It costs more after dark.

AROUND BANGUI

CHUTES DE BOALI

These waterfalls are 70km northwest of Bangui and tumble 50m – 1m higher than Niagara! They're spectacular in the rainy season (summer), but no more than a trickle when it's dry. There is a small entry fee.

To get here, from Bangui take a minibus or shared taxi to Kilomètre 12, then a taxi or pick-up to the turn-off to the falls. From here it's a 5km walk to the chutes.

M′BAÏKI

Some 105km southwest of Bangui and surrounded by rainforest, M'Baïki is in a timber-, coffee- and tobacco-growing area. It's also the stopping-off point for visiting nearby BaAka encampments.

One bus and several pick-ups leave Bangui each day from K-Cinq. At **Berengo** you'll pass another folly that Bokassa built on his tribal lands. This now functions as a rural development centre and chicken farm. About 10km northeast of M'Baïki you'll find the village of **Sabe**, which is famous for its ebony sculptures.

AROUND CAR

The following towns are all regular stops on the routes from Bangui to either Yaoundé (Cameroon) or N'Djaména (Chad). They are reasonably set up for transit travellers, with basic accommodation options and a few eateries.

Bossembélé is the second-largest town on the route between Cameroon and Bangui, but there isn't much to do here. Further northwest, **Bouar** is a more frequent stopping place for travellers. The area is dotted with megalithic stone monuments and was also the site of a large French military base. Theft is a problem here.

Going north towards N'Djaména, **Sibut** marks the end of the sealed road and straggles around the junction where roads lead towards the Chad border and east to Bambari and Bangassou. **Kaga Bandoro**, about 120km further north, is also a regular stopover town for bus travellers.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

DZANGA-SANGHA NATIONAL PARK

This national park, in the triangle of southwestern CAR separating Cameroon from Congo, is probably the one corner of the country still attracting visitors. Bayanga is the main village near the park, on the banks of the Sangha River, and although a handful of intrepid visitors may come to Bayanga by road, negotiating countless checkpoints along the way, or even by river, most visitors probably arrive in chartered aircraft. Gorillas, elephants and Aka people are all found in this remote corner of Africa.

Bayanga has a number of small guesthouses offering simple accommodation, but the fly-in groups will probably stay at the riverside Doli Lodge (*doli* means elephant), which has rooms with luxuries such as private bathrooms and running water. The lodge is only open when a group, usually bringing their own supplies with them, turns up. Two Americans have been living in Bayanga for many years: Louis Sarno has spent 20 years with the BaAka while Andrea Turkalo has spent 15 years tracking a herd of elephants in the park.

VISITING DZANGA-SANGHA Tony Wheeler

I flew to Bayanga in a Dash 8 chartered by a South African company for a predominantly American tour group. Although we'd flown out of Port Gentil in Gabon, we had to stop at Yaoundé in Cameroon to refuel as no fuel was available in Bayanga for our return flight. From Yaoundé all the way to Bayanga the view below was of continuous jungle. Half the village seemed to have turned out to greet us when we landed on a very primitive-looking grass airstrip. Aircraft only turn up about once a month, so having our Dash 8 sitting there for a few days was quite an event.

To transport our party from the village into the national park required a small fleet of 4WDs, which had been driven here from the coast of Cameroon, 1500km away. One of the drivers told me that after they'd crossed the border into CAR they'd had to negotiate their way through 27 police checkpoints along the road to Bayanga. The last group through had been three months earlier.

'We're walking though the jungle in the Congo River basin, following a Pygmy tracker, looking for gorillas,' Maureen said to me the next day. 'How good is that?'

Only two or three visitors a day get to join the trackers following a troop of lowland gorillas from the Bai Hokou gorilla camp. We'd drawn the short straws and spent an amazing day, kicking off with a 28km (1½-hour) drive in one of the world's most beat-up Land Rovers. It wasn't that old and it may not have driven to the moon, but it clearly had been to hell and back again, and the trip to Bai Hokou was definitely on that route. We bounced through water-filled potholes, angled off deep ridges and for most of the distance virtually pushed through the encroaching jungle, occasionally snagging vines and trailing them behind us.

From the camp it was a couple of hours' walk to where the gorilla trackers had traced the troop and settled down to observe them. Our first sighting was of four gorillas perched high up in what looked like far too small a tree. Occasionally they'd nonchalantly swing out to what looked like much too flimsy a branch to support a hulking primate's weight.

Descending from the tree they then sat at ground level, observing us while we observed them. They moved off and we followed, leading to our encounter with the troop's leader, the impressive silverback Makumba. Lowland gorillas are smaller than the mountain variety more regularly encountered by visitors to East Africa, but when Makumba, the leader of a troop of 13 lowland gorillas, sat impassively, just across a small clearing from our group, he looked quite big enough. There were more sightings in the forest before we moved back to the camp and then set out again

CAR DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Bangui doesn't have any cheap hotel rooms, but does have cheap dorm-style accommodation and a camping ground in the centre of the city. Hotels outside the capital are cheap.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Thieves, armed rebels and the police are sinister enough to their own people, but particularly target foreigners. And if they don't get you, the chloroquine-resistant malaria might. AIDS is a serious problem, with at least 14% of the population afflicted. Oh, and swimming is not safe anywhere because of bilharzia.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES CAR Embassies & Consulates

CAR has diplomatic representation in the following countries, among others:

Cameroon (220 5155; Rue 1863, Bastos, Yaoundé) Chad (523206; Rue 1036, N'Djaména) Congo (81 4721; Rue Fourneau, Brazzaville) Democratic Republic of Congo (33 571; Ave Pumbu 11, Gombé, Kinshasa) Germany (49-228 23 35 64; Botschaftskanzlei, Johannitersträxe 19, D-53113 Bonn) France (10 14 2 24 42 56; 30, Rue des Perchamps, 75116, Paris)

Sudan (@ 0922815860; off Medani Rd, El-Maamoura) USA (@ 202-483-7800; 1618 22nd St NW, Washington, DC, 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in CAR

to visit with a troop of mangabey monkeys. As it turned out we had been very lucky, the next day's visitors spent the whole day trekking through the jungle without ever seeing a gorilla.

The next day we drove out of Bayanga to a series of Aka villages to collect a group to go hunting. There were far more would-be-hunters than we could accommodate. I rode in the back of one of the pick-ups with a bunch of the hunters and Louis Sarno, an American and author of *Song from the Forest: My Life Among the Ba-Benjelle Pygmies*, who came to the area 20 years ago to study the music and stayed. It was a very noisy ride into the jungle, songs ricocheting back and forth between the pick-ups.

'They're belittling the men's genitals,' translated Louis as the women in our truck belted out a hunting song.

'And they're replying in kind,' he continued as another chorus sailed back from the truck ahead. At our hunting spot the BaAka strung out their hunting nets within minutes. A series of 20mlong nets encircled an area where they thought there might be an animal and then the Pygmies shouted and yelled to drive their prey into the net. Soon a 'woo-ah' announced a blue duiker sighting and a rising chorus of 'woo-ahs' peaked as the tiny antelope was entangled in a net and despatched with a whack to the head. The nets were quickly moved to another location and a second blue duiker was caught with equal speed, but a third one escaped and that was it for the morning; nothing else turned up.

In the afternoon we drove to Bai Dzanga, an hour's drive and a half-hour's walk. Bai Dzanga is a clearing in the jungle with waterholes and mineral deposits, which elephants love. There were more than 50 elephants there, doing all the usual elephant things. From an observation stand to one side of the clearing they're watched over by Andrea Turkalo, an elephant observer who has been keeping watch over this herd for 15 years.

Their interactions quickly convince you that elephants are far more than big grey creatures. A very small baby elephant was frightened by a bull trumpeting and immediately its mother stood beside it, draping a comforting trunk over the baby. Two adolescents got into some sort of dispute and older elephants came over to sort things out and offer advice. A big bull marched over to the prime mineral deposit and other elephants quickly vacated the depression, deferring to the boss pachyderm.

France (☎ 61 3005; BP 884, Blvd Général de Gaulle) Nigeria (☎ 61 0744; BP 1010, Ave des Martyrs) Sudan (☎ 61 4097; BP 1351, Ave de la France) USA (☎ 61 0200; BP 924, Ave David Dacko)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed on p1106, public holidays in CAR are: New Year's Day 1 January Anniversary of the Death of Barthélemy Boganda 29 March Labour Day 1 May National Day for Prayer 30 June Independence Day 13 August Assumption 15 August All Saints Day 1 November National Day 1 December

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Central African franc (CFA), made up of 100 centimes (these notes are also legal tender in Chad and Cam-

eroon). The import and export of local currency is limited to US\$125. There are no restrictions on the import of foreign currencies.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

There are no ATMs in CAR and credit cards are generally not accepted. You can only exchange money in Bangui and Berbérati (banking hours are 7am to 11.30am Monday to Friday). Take travellers cheques in euros to avoid additional exchange-rate charges. Even so, commission charges can be very high and the exchange rates very low – up to 25% below the current internationally accepted rate.

TELEPHONE

There are no area codes in CAR. Telephone numbers were supposed to change from sixdigit numbers to seven-digit numbers in 2005, but it didn't happen.

VISAS

Visas are required by most visitors and cost around US\$65 for 30 days. Where there is no

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CAR embassy, visas can generally be obtained from the French embassy, but for certain nationalities (including Australians, New Zealanders and the Irish) the embassy may have no authority to issue visas, or may first have to radio Bangui for approval. This takes time.

Visa Extensions

Because you pay the full price of a new visa, getting a visa extension is an expensive hassle. The immigration office is about 1km up the hill to the north of the Presidential Palace in Bangui. Ask for directions at the army post behind the palace.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for some neighbouring countries might be obtained in Bangui. See p534 for embassy and consulate information.

Cameroon Visas are required by all and must be bought prior to arrival in the country. Visas are issued at the Cameroonian embassy in Bangui and cost around US\$60. **Chad** Everybody except nationals of some central and west

African countries needs a visa to visit Chad. Visas are not

available at the airport or borders, and must be arranged in advance. Costs for 30-day visas can be as high as US\$100

for some nationalities. **Congo** All visitors to Congo need a visa. You can buy a 15-day, multiple-entry visa on arrival for approximately US\$70, but you must have your yellow fever certificate with you. A one-month visa costs US\$120 if bought at an embassy; visa applications in Bangui can be issued the same day or by the next day.

Democratic Republic of Congo All visitors to the DRC need a visa. If flying into Kinshasa it is essential to get a visa beforehand. These cost approximately US\$75 for a one-month, single-entry visa, or US\$135 for a 60-day, multiple-entry tourist visa. If crossing by land you can often get a visa at the border within 24 hours.

Sudan Everyone except Egyptians need a visa (most people pay US\$160, and if there is evidence of travel to Israel you will be denied). See p211 for more detail.

TRANSPORT IN CAR

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

There are weekly flights to Bangui from Paris with Air France and from Khartoum with Sudan Airways. There may also be connections from Cameroon, Benin, Gabon or Nigeria.

DEPARTURE TAX

Airport departure tax is US\$19.

Land

The usual routes across the borders with CAR's neighbours are well-worn paths, but check with embassies and other reliable sources about the status of the crossings before you go, as the borders are all very prone to opening and closing. At the time of research the borders with Cameroon and the DRC were likely to be open but the border with Congo (Brazzaville) was closed. The borders with Sudan and Chad were no-go zones.

CAMEROON

The most popular crossing point is just east of the town of Garoua-Boulaï. Trucks and buses run from Bangui to Garoua-Boulaï, overnighting in Bouar. From Garoua-Boulaï, minibuses go to N'Gaoundal, and trains go from there to Yaoundé.

CHAD

Instability in Chad makes these border crossings particularly questionable. The main crossing is found at Sido, on the route to Sarh. Trucks may trundle from Bangui to Kaga Bandoro, but from there only occasional trucks and minibuses go to Kabo (where there's a checkpoint) and on to the border. Once over the border, pick-ups go from Sido and Maro to Sarh.

CONGO

A riverboat managed by **Socatraf** (**[®]** 61 4315; Rue Parent Bangui, Bangui) steams between Bangui and Brazzaville every two or three weeks from late May to early December. The cabins are basic and the journey takes about seven days. Alternatively, you can jump aboard one of the barges serving this route. They take twice as long, but are far less crowded; they depart every week, and the fare is around US\$25.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The main border crossing between CAR and the DRC is over the Oubangui River from Bangui to Zongo. This (and the other border crossing at Mobaye) is usually closed to foreigners.

SUDAN

Routes into Sudan were only ever an option for hardy travellers (or is that foolhardy?), however the turmoil in Sudan's western Darfur region has firmly closed the door for everyone. The usual route ran from Bangui to Juba, via Obo, while the tough route from Bangui to Nyala via Birao in the northeastern corner of CAR used to take at least two weeks travel as traffic was rare and the roads appalling.

GETTING AROUND

Overcrowded 24-seater minibuses connect Bangui with all major towns. Trucks and pickups are also a popular way to travel; their prices are similar to minibus fares. Some main roads are sealed, but pockmarked with wheelswallowing holes. During the dry season, the dirt roads to major towns and the Cameroon and Chad borders are OK, but when the rains begin they become very muddy and can be closed for days.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

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Chad

Long seen by travellers as a place to get through rather than visit, few visitors in Chad do more than spend a couple of days in N'Djaména, the busy, broken-down capital, on their way between Niger and Cameroon. And as the government increasingly loses its grip on the nation, travellers are getting fewer and further between. Even many NGO workers dread drawing this assignment.

Travelling here certainly poses many problems: few roads are paved, it gets hot as hell in summer, the costs are among the continent's highest, and the police and soldiers are quite nervous these days. But, of course, there are rewards in this struggling but interesting country for those who take the Chadian challenge and you will soon discover a wealth of warmth and culture beneath the rough exterior.

Known for its endless Sahelien expanses, Chad has a few surprises up its sleeve, too, like boat rides on Lake Chad or strolling the shady streets of southern towns where the dusty landscape, fed by small rivers, is interspersed with incongruously green scenes providing a quasi-tropical break from the rigours of the road. The best destinations – the otherworldly desert landscapes of Ennedi and the teeming wildlife of Zakouma National Park – lie way beyond backpacker budgets but are both world class.

FAST FACTS

- Area 1,284,000 sq km
- ATMs Should work with Visa cards soon
- Borders Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, Niger and Nigeria all open; Sudan closed; Libya and CAR not recommended
- Budget From US\$40 per day in N'Djaména, US\$20 to US\$30 per day in other towns
- Capital N'Djaména
- Languages French, Arabic and more than 120 local languages
- Money Central African CFA; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 9 million
- Seasons Dry (October to May), wet (June to September)
- Telephone Country code 235; international access code 00
- Time GMT/UTC + 1
- Visas Must be obtained before arrival

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Zakouma National Park** (p546) Keep an eye out, this is one of the best places to see wildlife in Central Africa.
- **Gaoui** (p544) Explore this fascinating village just minutes from N'Djaména.
- **Sarh** (p546) Chill out along the Chari River.
- **Bol** (p547) Get out on Lake Chad from this frontier market town.
- **Ennedi** (p547) Marvel at dramatic desert scenery and rock formations.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Chad has three distinct climatic zones. In the tropical south, temperatures usually range from 20°C to 25°C, but can rise to 40°C before the rains. The centre, where N'Djaména and Lake Chad are located, often exceeds 45°C before the rains, and temperatures can get even higher in the north.

November to January is the coolest and thus best time for general travel, unless you are here for Zakouma National Park, then it's March and April (the hottest months). It is fascinating to see the Sahel turn green in July, but travel in the rainy season is not pleasant. You can't believe how waterlogged the capital becomes during July and August and road travel elsewhere slows dramatically.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Visit N'Djaména (p542) and Gaoui (p544).
- **One Week** Visit N'Djaména and Gaoui while you get your permits in order, then

HOW MUCH?

- Small calabash bowl US\$1
- 100km Land Cruiser ride US\$10
- Coke US\$0.50
- 30 minutes of internet use US\$1
- Handmade leather sandals US\$4

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.20
- 1.5L bottled water US\$1.20
- Bottle of Gala beer US\$1.20
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10
- Small bag of peanuts US\$0.05

WARNING

At the time of publication rebel activity was intensifying and Chad appeared to be heading into all-out civil war, though fighting had so far been largely limited to the east. Check the situation very carefully before travelling here.

head north to Mao (p547) and Bol (p547), taking a boat trip out on Lake Chad if you can, or south to Moundou (p546) and Sarh (p546).

Two Weeks Add Zakouma National Park (p546) to the one-week itinerary, or visit towns both north and south of N'Djaména. Two weeks is the minimum time needed to properly explore Ennedi (p547).

HISTORY

Dominated historically by slave-trading Arab Muslims from the northern regions, Chad is primarily an agricultural nation with over 80% of the population living at subsistence level. Its recent history was shaped when the French began taking an interest in central and western Africa in the 1900s. By 1913 the country was fully colonised: sadly the new rulers didn't really know what to do with their conquest, and investment all but dried up after a few years, leaving much of the territory almost entirely undeveloped.

When independence was granted in 1960, a southerner became Chad's first head of state. Unfortunately, President François Tombalbaye was not the best choice. By arresting opposition leaders and banning political parties, he provoked a series of conspiracies in the Muslim north, the violent repression of which quickly escalated into full-blown guerrilla war. For the next quarter of a century, Chadian politics was defined by armed struggles, shifting alliances, coups and private armies, overseen and often exacerbated by France and Libya, who took a keen interest in the area. In addition, the Sahel drought of the 1970s and early 1980s destroyed centuries-old patterns of existence and cultivation, causing large-scale migration to urban centres.

In 1975 Tombalbaye was assassinated, and succeeded by General Malloum, a fellow southerner. Over US\$1 million in cash was found in Tombalbaye's residence, along with plans to proclaim himself emperor.

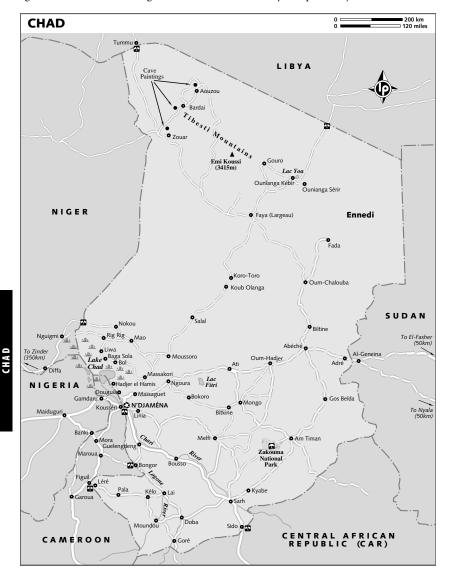


Modern Politics

The Government of National Unity was then formed by Malloum and Hissène Habré (a former northern rebel commander); it was a tenuous alliance between two men who shared little more than mutual distrust. The resulting internal power struggle in 1979 pitted north against south, and Muslim against Christian

or animist, all colliding with destructive force in the capital, where thousands of civilians were massacred. Eventually Malloum fled the country, and Goukouni Oueddei - the son of a tribal chieftain from northwestern Chad and an arch-enemy of Habré - took over.

In 1980 Libyan forces supporting Oueddei briefly occupied N'Djaména. The French



army drove them northwards, leaving Habré as the nominal ruler of Chad. A stalemate ensued with the country divided in half, with neither France nor Libya willing to risk an all-out confrontation.

In 1987, both foreign powers agreed to withdraw their forces; however, Libva, whose forces had occupied northern Chad and the uranium-rich Aouzou Strip since 1977, reneged and attacked Habré's army. Armed with little more than swords and machine guns, the Chadian forces pushed the better-equipped Libvans across the border.

In 1990 Idriss Deby, a northern Muslim warlord in self-imposed exile in Sudan, swept back into Chad with a private army of 2000 soldiers and Libyan backing. Habré fled to Senegal (The 'African Pinochet', as Human Rights Watch calls him, is currently facing trial in Dakar to answer for his widespread use of torture and political murder), leaving Deby with a clear run to N'Djaména and the presidency of his war-ravaged country, which Deby consolidated by winning the first-ever presidential elections in 1996. While this ballot was widely regarded as rigged, the parliamentary elections a year later were considered much fairer. In 1998 a new rebellion broke out in the north, led by the Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJT) under Deby's former minister Youssouf Togoimi.

Although Chad has enjoyed relative peace and close relations with Libya over the past few years (despite regular guerrilla raids in the Tibesti region of northern Chad), politically, little has changed. To nobody's surprise, Deby won the May 2001 presidential elections by a comfortable margin, although results from a quarter of the polling stations had to be cancelled because of 'irregularities'.

Chad Todav

In 2004 Chad became an oil exporter. The World Bank helped fund the 1000km-long pipeline crossing Cameroon to the coast only after Chad agreed to dedicate 80% of oil income to reducing poverty. Even before Deby broke this agreement at the start of 2006, there was virtually no change for average citizens in what Transparency International ranks as the world's most corrupt country.

But the World Bank is not Deby's biggest worry. Several rebel groups based in and surely supported by Sudan, and some led by members of Deby's family and former senior

army officers, have their eyes on N'Djaména. They almost got it in April 2006 after launching an unsuccessful attack on the capital. The government was helped by the incompetence of the rebels, who had to ask directions when they arrived and ended up at the empty Palais du Peuple (the parliament) instead of the Palais du President.

Three weeks after the failed coup and one year after the constitutional two-term presidential limit was overturned, Deby won a presidential election boycotted by the opposition and most citizens. Power in Chad has always changed hands by the bullet, not the ballot, and most observers expect a rebel takeover sooner rather than later. While most Chadians would welcome this, there is concern that the rebel alliance will falter after taking control, bringing 1979-style anarchy, or perhaps worse. Already-emerging coordination between Chadian rebels and Sudan's Janjaweed, the militia behind the genocide in Darfur, have created 50,000 Chadian refugees in their own country.

CULTURE

'Chadians are traumatised', one young man told us when we asked why people so rarely complain about the country's sorry state of affairs. Chad's history of war, corruption and oppression is appalling, even by African standards, and it has drained most people of hope. 'How can you have hope if you can't trust anybody?' he added. Even those who, a few years back, believed the flow of oil would bring change have humbly accepted their friends' and families' I-told-you-so's.

Surprisingly, for such a subsistence economy, education is looked upon favourably, and literacy stands at 48% (it's 18% in neighbouring Niger). Many wealthy Cameroonians send their children to N'Djaména to complete their baccalaureate. Freedom of speech is also fiercely, if somewhat vainly, defended by various private newspapers and journals in N'Djaména. The arrest of the editors of Notre Temps in 2003 inspired vigorous protests.

PEOPLE

The north is populated by people of Arab descent, as well as nomadic Peul-Fulani and Toubou. The black Africans are in the majority in the south, and have traditionally dominated business and the civil service. The difference between these two broad

groups is profound – the Christian (35% of the population) or animist southerners are mostly peasant farmers, tilling fertile land, while the northern Muslims (51%) are desert-dwelling pastoralists. Still, there is virtually no discord between them.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Most of the crafts you'll see are imported from Nigeria and Cameroon, though the leather work and pottery is usually made locally, and many of the large wool rugs come from Abéché and other desert towns. The embroidered wall hangings and decorated calabash bowls make good souvenirs.

ENVIRONMENT

Physically you couldn't mistake landlocked Chad for anything except a Sahel country, though the far south turns a little tropical. The northern deserts include the Tibesti Mountains, which rise to the peak of Emi Koussi (3415m), the highest point in the Sahara.

FOOD & DRINK

The food in Chad is typical of the region: tiny street stalls dish up cheap meals of rice, beans and soup or stew, while indoor restaurants offer omelettes, liver, salads, brochettes, fish and *nachif* (minced meat in sauce). To drink you have the usual range of *sucreries* (soft drinks), including the local Top brand, and fresh *jus*, fruit concoctions with more resemblance to smoothies than normal juice; bear in mind they're usually made with local water and ice. Beer is the favoured poison in bars, with a choice of local brews, Gala and Chari, or Cameroonian Castel. Also popular is *bilibili*, a millet beer; *cochette* is a low-alcohol version.

N'DJAMÉNA

pop 721,000

You'll face stark contrasts between modern and traditional at every step in N'Djaména. Thanks to Chad's rural exodus the capital is growing fast – from a population of 37,000 in 1950 it is expected to be home to nearly two million within a decade – but it still often feels more like a village than a city with mud houses remaining the norm and farmers working the banks of the Chari River. The country's only large city buzzes at night, both literally and figuratively, as hundreds of generators take the strain off the city's beleaguered power grid and feed the sound systems of some of Central Africa's most vibrant bars.

ORIENTATION

The airport is under a kilometre from downtown; despite the small distance involved, you'll have to bargain hard to get a taxi there or back for less than US\$10, particularly at night.

The city's two distinct sectors highlight its colonial roots. To the west of the Marché Central is the commercial district sheltering well-to-do Chadians and a small expat community in its wide, leafy streets. The western end of Ave Charles de Gaulle is a 1km strip boasting banks, airline offices, and similar services. On the other side, the main residential areas consist mostly of mud-brick houses with little in the way of modern amenities but plenty of character.

INFORMATION Bookshop

Librairie Al Akhbaar (Ave Charles de Gaulle) Sells a good selection of books and journals in French, plus a handful of English-language newspapers and magazines.

Internet Access

Internet access is widely available, with most places charging US\$2 per hour. The following are reliably fast.

Cyber-Poste (main post office, Blvd de Paris; per hr US\$2; 8am-3pm Mon-Sat)

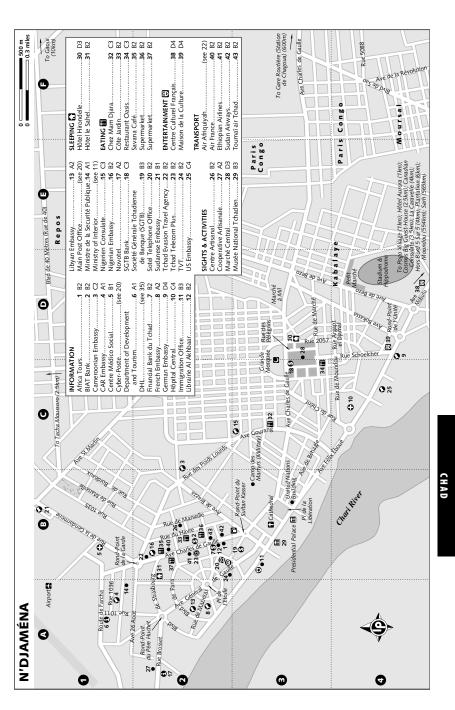
Tchad Telecom Plus (Ave Charles de Gaulle; per hr US\$3; 8am-9pm)

Medical Services

The **Hôpital Central** (516168) is the largest medical facility in Chad, though conditions are not ideal. First try the French embassy-affiliated **Centre Médico Social** (522837). For anything serious, you'll need to be evacuated. The pharmacies on Ave Charles de Gaulle are generally reliable.

Money

The best bank for travellers is the **Société Géné**rale Tchadienne de Banque (SGTB; main branch just off Ave (harles de Gaulle), which changes cash and travellers cheques, and doles out cash to those with Visa cards. **BIAT** (Ave Charles de Gaulle) and **Financia**



Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

Bank du Tchad (Ave Charles de Gaulle) both change cash at about 5% better rates than SGTB; rates are 5% better still from the money changers on the north side of the Marché Central.

Post & Telephone

The **main post office** (Blvd de Paris;) 7am-noon Mon-Sat & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) shares digs with the Sotel telephone office.

Tourist Information

Chad's tourist office is the under-resourced **Department of Development and Tourism** () 524416; Rue 1011). The Novotel gives a big fold out N'Djaména map to anyone who asks.

Travel Agencies

Tchad Evasion Travel Agency (526532; www .tchadevasion.com; Ave Charles de Gaulle) The first name in Chad travel offers many tours and expeditions, including to Lake Chad and the Ennedi region, and hires out cars for Zakouma National Park.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There is considerable pickpocketing and petty street crime in N'Djaména, especially at night. It's best to avoid the western end of Ave Charles de Gaulle all day Sunday, and the whole area around it on Saturday and Sunday, since there are few people around and muggings are common. Also watch your wallet around the Marché Central, no matter what hour. It is generally safe to walk along the busy streets in Moursal into the early evening, but be vigilant. You are meant to apply for a photo permit, but few people bother. If you want to be official, bring a letter requesting permission to take tourism photos, US\$40 and two passport photos to the Service de Controle de Films at TVT.

SIGHTS

The **Musée National Tchadien** (**The Musée National Tchadien** (**The Musée National Tchadien** (**The Mon-The State Second Second**

The **Cooperative Artisanale** (Rue Brosset; S 8am-6pm) has the best selection of crafts for sale, but you can see some being made at the **Centre Artisanal** (Rue de Marseille; S 7am-3pm Mon-Thu, 7amnoon Fri). Some of these same items can be found in the lively **Marché Central**, which has a great atmosphere during the day.

The best thing to do in N'Djaména is get out to the pottery-making village of **Gaoui**, just 10km away. Many of the mud-brick houses are brightly painted, and a **museum** (admission US\$2; O by request) discusses the culture of the ancient Sao people. Minibuses (US\$0.10) from Char Gaoui (Gaoui Rd), by the Kempinski Hotel, will drop you nearby: either walk the last 2km or hop on a motorcycle.

SLEEPING

There is little accommodation in N'Djaména, and nothing that costs even remotely close to what it should.

NAME & NUMBER

CHAD

Within 72 hours of arriving in N'Djaména you must register at the *sûreté* (Ave Félix Éboué); it's a relatively hassle-free process (except for returning to your hotel to get the forms stamped), requiring two photos. The **immigration office** (N 7am-3pm Mon-Thu, 7am-noon Fri) is on the right side of the compound at the back.

An *Autorisation de Circuler* (travel permit) is only required for travel to the far north and far east (though inquire whether this has changed when you get there), but you may want to get one if you are going anywhere outside N'Djaména because it can help get you past suspicious soldiers at highway checkpoints; this is particularly helpful in the south. First visit the Department of Development and Tourism, which will type up a letter with your itinerary. Then deliver this letter to the nearby Ministre de la Securité Publique and wait about three days for approval.

Finally, in each town you visit, you should register with both *securité* (Agence National de Securité), which needs a long form filled out and one photo, and the police, who just record your details in their book. You can try to avoid this, but it won't be long before they find you and escort you to their offices to register.

Hôtel Hirondelle (**To** 515470; adjacent to Rue 2057; rUS\$16) Not quite the cheapest lodging in town, but the cheapest we can recommend (though really, we don't). Insist on a terrace room rather than the grotty downstairs ones.

Hors Bord 5 Sur 5 (777413; off Rue de Chagua; rUS\$24) You can't hear the adjacent nightclub from the east facing rooms, but you will hear many of its patrons popping over for an hour. Still, it's safe and clean.

Cosmos Big Guest-House (B 533521; Ave Bealoum Kondol; r with fan/air-con US\$34/54; S) On a busy (ie safe) street in Moursal, this is the best deal in town by Chadian standards. It surrounds a popular restaurant, and the screen doors are a nice touch.

Hôtel Aurora (**©** 535551; Ave Mobutu; r US\$36) Aurora is closer to downtown in an area with many nightclubs and services, including an internet café. It's older than Cosmos and it shows, but it's still a good choice.

Hôtel le Sahel (520333; Blvd de Strasbourg; s/d US\$100/120; **S (a)** Set in a leafy compound, Hôtel le Sahel lacks the four-star facilities of its internationally affiliated neighbours, but then it's only half the price. The pool is at an annex.

EATING

At lunchtime there's plenty of basic street food (around US\$0.50) next to the cathedral, and you can get camel meat two blocks over. At night you'll find many similarly cheap unlit stalls in Moursal and Paris Congo. Downtown you'll find a Lebanese, two Chinese, and several French restaurants, plus some decadent patisseries and fairly well-stocked supermarkets.

Restaurant Oasis (Rue de Marché; mains US\$1.40-4; ⁽¹⁾ lunch & dinner) One of many simple sit-down restaurants knocking out the standards around the market.

Chez Mam Djara (off Ave Gourang; plat d'jour \$1.50; Sunch) A little hard to find (just ask around; everybody knows it) but worth it for the fantastic plates of Senegalese rice.

Savana Café (Ave Charles de Gaulle; crepes US\$1-2, mains US\$4-7; 论 lunch & dinner) A French café and snack shop with really good food.

Pogo Village (Åve Mobutu; mains US\$2-10; ∑ lunch & dinner) One of many relaxing open-air affairs in Moursal, Pogo serves a mix of African and European food at somewhat high prices.

Côte Jardin (Rue du Havre; mains US\$8-18; 🕑 dinner Tue-Sun) French, Italian and African meals, including pizza and camel, are served up in a leafy courtyard. Sometimes there is live music.

ENTERTAINMENT

Moursal has many simple bars and nightclubs that are popular with locals, but are also welcoming of outsiders; though get local advice before you head out as a few are pretty rough. Those downtown on Ave Charles de Gaulle are more exclusive, but have just as many prostitutes. One out-of-the-ordinary club experience can be found on a Sunday afternoon (don't get stuck out in this part of town in the evening) at Plantation, a relaxed place across the river (about a US\$10 taxi ride), playing a good mix of African and Western music for a throng of middle-class Chadians and a few expats.

The **Centre Culturel Français** (517705; Ave Felix Éboué; Oct-Jun) hosts cultural events and exhibitions, as well as regularly screening African and French films. The **Maison de la Culture** (Ave Felix Éboué) has a more limited schedule. **La Caravelle** (Rue de Chagua) restaurant features free traditional drum and dance performances on Friday evenings from 7.30pm until 10.30pm.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

All of the following have offices on the west end of Ave Charles de Gaulle. Air Afriquiyah (🖻 526532) Air France (🗃 523932) Ethiopian Airlines (🗃 523027) Sudan Airways (🗃 525148) Currently closed, but should reopen when relations between the two countries thaw.

Toumaï air Tchad (🖻 524104)

Land transport for southern destinations depart the chaotic Gare Routière Dembé east of the centre. For points north, head to Tacha Moussoro.

GETTING AROUND

Shared taxis and minibuses around town should cost about US\$0.25 per seat: the price depends on how far the vehicle, not you, is going. They run all night, but start getting scarce after 10pm. To get to downtown from Moursal, first get a taxi to the Marché Central and then hop in one heading *en ville*. A taxi course (private hire) is negotiable, but the minimum is US\$2.

SOUTH OF N'DJAMÉNA

The south, where the soils turn red, is more developed than the north, but the soldiers are much more suspicious.

MOUNDOU

Set on the north bank of the Logone River, Chad's second-largest town is best known for the Gala brewery, which famously stayed open throughout the civil war. It's not a bad place to spend a day. The little, privately owned Premier Musee du Logone Géographique (🖻 6-375533; admission is negotiable; 🕑 8am-noon & 4-5pm Mon-Sat) has some examples of Chadian crafts and a few animal skins. Nearby you can watch wood-carvers and painters work at the **Centre Artisanal.**

Sleeping & Eating

Centrally located Auberge Fraternité (@ 691578; r with/without bathroom US\$13/10) is a bit noisy, but clean. Right by the gare routière, Residence de Palmiers (🖻 6-263757; r US\$30; 🕄) is a new construction so the rooms, which come with TV, are in excellent shape.

A crush of women serving street food line Moundou's main road in Quartier Geuldjeme near the centre, as do many bars and a nightclub. Also here is the immaculate and friendly Sympathique Café (mains US\$1.50-4.50; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner), which does omelettes, pigeon and sometimes takes requests. Further south you'll find many open-air restaurants, the fanciest of which is Club du Logone (mains US\$4-16; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner) with a big French menu spanning crepes to steak to pizza. It also serves wine and whiskey.

Getting There & Away

Frequent transport leaves for N'Djaména (US\$18, six hours) and Sarh (US\$15, six hours) from scattered locations around what passes as the gare routière. Many pick-ups to Sarh also depart from across the river. Minibuses go to Léré (US\$15, four hours) on the Cameroon border, but it's usually quicker to go to Kélo and change there.

SARH

An agreeably sleepy town shaded by enormous trees, Sarh was constantly raided by Arabs from the north looking for slaves. These days it's not so well frequented. Despite its

status as Chad's cotton and sugarcane capital, the oil money transforming the local economy in Doba, just 200km away, means that Sarh looks destined to remain little more than a provincial backwater.

The recently spruced up Museé Regional de Sarh (🖻 681394; admission free; 🕥 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) has old weapons, musical instruments and masks. Just down the road, the Centre Artisanal (🖻 681478; 🕑 7.30am-12.30pm Mon-Fri & 4-6pm Mon-Thu) has a good selection of crafts for sale, and the friendly women who work here might take you to see some of the items being made. Most nights at dusk, hippos feed on the banks of the Chari River below the Hôtel de Chasses.

Sleeping & Eating

Even in its fading glory, Hôtel de Chasses (@ 6-429575; s/d US\$21/29; 😧) is one of the best places to sleep in Chad. A plant-filled, screened dining room overlooks the river, and all rooms have balconies. A meal will cost under US\$5. Auberge Berceaupo Populaire (3 681619; r US\$8) near the Grand Marché in the centre of town has dirty rooms with even dirtier toilets.

For cheap food, head over to the Grand Marché or Ave Cascani near the central truck park.

Getting There & Away

Most vehicles depart for Moundou (US\$15, six hours) and N'Djaména (US\$25, 12 hours) from near the market, but pick-ups have their own park north of town.

ZAKOUMA NATIONAL PARK

This 305,000-hectare park, 800km southeast of N'Djaména, is a major Chadian success story. After poaching and civil war ravaged local wildlife, the Chadian government and the European Union restocked the park with an eye on the affluent European tourist market. Consequently, Zakouma is once again one of the best places in Central Africa to see large herds of elephants, as well as giraffes, wildebeests, lions and a wide variety of antelopes, primates and birdlife. The best time to come is March and April when the animals congregate around watering holes. It is not possible to visit from June to October because of the rains.

Visiting the park costs US\$15 per person, plus US\$7 per vehicle. Public transport, even from Sahr, is practically nonexistent and it would take you many days to get there, so the most realistic option is to organise a trip through one of N'Djaména's travel agencies. Tchad Evasion Travel Agency (p544) charges US\$150 per day for a 4WD and driver, plus petrol (around US\$50 per day). Expect a sixday round trip since it takes two just to reach the park (you'll overnight in Mongo).

Inside Zakouma, Le Campement Hôtelier Tinga (🖻 524412; www.zakouma.com; s/d US\$30/40; 💦) has comfortable rooms and a good restaurant (breakfast US\$5, dinner US\$15). Guided safaris cost US\$90 per day, and a horse ride is US\$16.

NORTH OF N'DJAMÉNA

Travelling through the Sahel to these near northern towns is generally more interesting than time spent in them. If you have time to visit Ennedi, you'll never regret or forget it.

MAO

Perched high above a long oasis, Mao is the capital of the once-powerful Kanem Empire. The Sultan still lives here, and if you so much as ask about him someone will probably offer to arrange a meeting. A few of his effects, along with regional crafts, are on display in the tiny Museé du Kanem (admission free; 🕑 Mon-Sat), which the caretaker will open by request - if he can find the key. Wednesday is market day, and the thriving traditional donkey and camel market draws people from far and wide.

The Maison de Culture (🖻 503082; r US\$8), home of the museum, has dusty cell-like rooms with no electricity, but plenty of roaches for company. It's the only hotel in town. They might cook something for you if you ask in advance, otherwise you can get simple meals near the gare routière.

There are a couple of Land Cruisers to/ from N'Djaména (ÚS\$25, seven hours) every morning, and on Wednesday (also sometimes on Tuesday) you can get one direct to Bol (US\$20, four hours).

BOL

Lake Chad was once one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world. Its dry-season area of under 10,000 sq km can rise to 25,000 sq km at the height of the rains; however, it is slowly drying up and even vanished during the worst of the Sahel drought in 1984.

Its slow disappearance is creating problems for, and conflicts between, fishermen and farmers.

A finger of the lake reaches Bol year-round, and trade with Nigeria has made this small town relatively prosperous. To get out on the lake (best done November to February) and see floating islands, massive numbers of birds and maybe hippos, hire a boat down at the port. The price depends on how far you want to go, but you can do a nice trip through the grassy channels for about US\$50. Expect to pay double that to reach inhabited islands like Fitiné, home to fishermen from many countries, and Tchongolet with many big trees.

The Société de Développement du Lac (SODE-LAC; 🖻 6-252911; villa US\$20; 🕄) has large villas. Cleaning, maintenance and the water supply are spotty, but there's usually air-con until around midnight. The only other choice is **Chez Mado** (**a** 6-783871; r US\$6), a bar-auberge with three very basic rooms with mattresses and fans. There is one shared toilet for the whole place. Restaurant la Tchadien (mains US\$1.20; breakfast, lunch & dinner) near the market gets the nod as the best in town, though you'll find broader menus at the simple joints surrounding it.

There are a couple of Land Cruisers to/ from N'Djaména (ÚS\$25, eight hours) every morning and on Wednesday (also sometimes on Tuesday) you can get one direct to Mao (US\$20, four hours). You can also check at the port to see if any of the cars regularly imported from Cotonou (Benin) are headed to N'Djaména: you may or may not save money, but it will probably be a more comfortable ride.

ENNEDI

The Tibesti Mountains remain off-limits (this could change in a year or two), but the lessfamous Ennedi desert is just as weird and wonderful. Attractions include prehistoric cave paintings, slot canyons, desert lakes and some unbelievably bizarre rock formations. There are even ancient sea arches, formed when Lake Chad stretched out here, now swimming in sand dunes.

You need to be a Saharan expedition expert to try the trip yourself, but Tchad Evasion Travel Agency (p544) leads 15-day trips (with five in Ennedi) for US\$125 per day (six person minimum).

CHAD DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Outside the capital, most hotels are very basic and overpriced. In N'Djaména all hotels are grossly overpriced, but there are many good ones. Singles can usually be shared by two people for no extra cost.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Simmering rebel activity and unexploded mines mean that travel to far northern Chad, including the Tibesti region, is impossible, and the growing rebellion rules out most of the east.

The various police forces outside the capital can be a nuisance, but requests for bribes are rare. They're just not used to seeing travellers and so are unsure how to ensure your papers are in order; expect lots of questions.

Even in N'Djaména electricity and running water are intermittent, and many towns are completely off the grid. All but the cheapest hotels have generators, but low-end places usually turn it off by midnight.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Chad Embassies & Consulates

Chad maintains diplomatic representation in all neighbouring countries (Sudan, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and CAR). See the appropriate chapter for details. France (2 0145 53 36 75; Rue de Belles Fenilles, Paris)

Germany (228-356026; Botschaftskanzlei, Basteistrasse 83, Bonn)

PRACTICALITIES

CHAD

- The metric system is used.
- Electricity voltage is 220V/50Hz and most plugs have two round pins.
- Of the dozen small newspapers, all in French or Arabic, only Le Progrès, the voice of the president, is daily.
- Most people prefer the programming (in English and French) on Cameroon's CRTV to the state-owned TVT.
- RNT (94FM) is the voice of the government, FM Liberte (105.3FM) is run by a group of human rights organisations and BBC Africa broadcasts some English programs on 90.2FM.

USA (202-462-4009; www.chadembassy-usa.org; 2002 R St NW, Washington, DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Chad

All of these are in N'Djaména. Cameroon (2 523473; Rue des Poids Lourds) Canada (🗃 534280; signposted 1km from Rond-point de Chagua) CAR (🕿 523206; Rue 1036) France (🗃 522576; off Ave Félix Éboué) Germany (🕿 516202; Ave Félix Éboué) Libya (🕿 519289; Rue de Mazieras) Niger (🕿 518813; off Ave Gourang) Nigeria (🗃 522498; Ave Charles de Gaulle) Sudan (🗃 525010; off Rue de la Gendarmerie) If closed, try the Libyan embassy. USA (🖻 517009; Ave Félix Éboué)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Fest Africa is a two-week celebration of the arts, mostly music, near the end of odd years.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106), these are the principal public holidays in Chad: 1 January New Year's Day 1 May Labour Dav 25 May Africa Freedom Day 11 August Independence Day 1 November All Saints' Dav 28 November Republic Day 1 December Day of Liberty and Democracy

INTERNET ACCESS

Reliable, though only moderately fast connections, are widely available in N'Djaména. You'll find cybercafés in Moundou and Sarh and other southern towns, but good luck actually getting online.

MAPS

The outdated country map published by IGN is the best available: buy it before you come.

MONEY

SGTB's ATMs in N'Djaména, Moundou, Sarh and Abéché plan to work with Visa cards any time now. Until then, the main bank in N'Djaména will give you a cash advance against your card for US\$20. Cash (Euros get a better return than dollars, but both are widely accepted) and travellers cheques can be changed easily enough, particularly in N'Djaména.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Strictly speaking you should apply for a photo permit, but few people bother. If you want to be official, bring a letter requesting permission to take tourism photos, US\$40 and two passport photos to the Service de Controle de Films at TVT in N'Djaména. Then you'll fill out a three-page form and all this will be taken to the police for approval, which takes several days. If you decide to skip it, be very discreet: the police do check, particularly in N'Djaména.

POST & TELEPHONE

The postal service is reliable, but can be slow outside N'Djaména. DHL and EMS rapid-parcel services are available in major towns.

Sotel, the national telecom company, has phone offices in most towns, charging US\$1.65 per minute for calls to Europe and about US\$0.50 for local calls. Private telephone offices, usually just a guy with a mobile and a sign, are common everywhere and charge the same, though late-night rates on international calls drop. Buying a SIM card for your own mobile costs about US\$5. There are no local telephone area codes in Chad, but mobile provider Celtel uses 6 and Tigo uses 9.

VISAS

Everybody except nationals of some Central and West African countries needs a visa to visit Chad. As visas are not available at the airport or borders, travellers should obtain one before they arrive or in their home country. Costs for 30-day visas can be as high as US\$100 for some nationalities. The application form can be downloaded at www .chadembassy-usa.org.

Visa Extensions

The sûreté office (Ave Félix Éboué) in N'Djaména issues visa extensions, usually on the same day. Generally it just reissues a visa at the same price as the first one.

Visas for Onward Travel

Cameroon One-month visas cost around US\$100; vou'll need one photo and have to wait one day. If you're just passing through, transit visas, available immediately, are free.

CAR One-month visas cost US\$70. You need two photos and they are issued on the same day.

Libya The friendly staff will give you visa advice, but all requests must go through a Libyan travel agency, which

arranges your invitation. This might take two weeks, but plan on several more.

Niger The consulate issues three-month visas right away for US\$40; you need two photos.

Nigeria One-month visas cost between US\$60 or US\$110, depending on your nationality. They require two photos and are usually issued within two days. No letter of invitation is needed.

Sudan The embassy was closed at the time of research. Chad used to be an easy place to get a Sudanese visa, but that has probably changed.

TRANSPORT IN CHAD

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Air connections (see p545 for a list of airlines) between N'Djaména and other African cities including Addis Ababa (Ethiopia; US\$820 one way), Bamako (Mali; US\$680), Kano (Nigeria; US\$365), Khartoum (Sudan; US\$850) and Niamey (Niger; US\$620) - continue to grow. Air France flies direct to Paris five times weekly for around US\$1000 return.

DEPARTURE TAX

The airport departure tax is included in the price of all tickets.

Land

Chad's borders with Libya and CAR are not currently safe for travellers, and Sudan is closed.

CAMEROON Minibuses (US\$0.40, 15 minutes) and *clandos* (motorcycle taxis, the only ones allowed to operate legally in the city; US\$2) run from Rond-point de Chagua in N'Djaména out to the border town of Nguelé. From there you can catch a motorcycle taxi over the bridge into Kousséri where there are regular minibuses to Maroua. You may have to pay 'taxes' on both sides of the border. You can also enter Cameroon further south, via Léré or Bongor.

NIGER

The main route between Chad and Niger is a sandy track looping round to the north of Lake Chad from N'Djaména to Nguigmi, via Mao. There are Land Cruisers daily to Mao and then one on Wednesday to Nguigmi (US\$25, six hours). Cheaper pick-ups and big lorries go other days, but you'll probably have to do the journey in stages via Massakori and Nokou, which can take several days. Get your passport stamped in Mao (you'll be asked for US\$6, but resist paying as best as you can: this money is not going into the treasury) and Nguigmi.

Once in Niger, from Nguigmi take a pickup or bush taxi to Diffa (US\$5), from where there is plenty of public transport to Zinder; there are also two weekly SNTV buses between Nguigmi and Zinder (US\$16, 10 hours) going on to Niamey.

NIGERIA

The easiest way to Nigeria is through Cameroon. Follow the directions above to reach Maroua, from where you can take a bush taxi straight to Maiduguri or a minibus to the border at Banki. You could also hop a boat across Lake Chad from Bol, though seek local advice first.

GETTING AROUND

In Chad, Land Cruisers, pick-ups and minibuses are your main choices for cross-Chad travel. Buses, which depart at set times, are rare. Land Cruisers are the fastest choice because, unlike the others, they rarely stop to drop off or pick up passengers en route.

Travel times given in this chapter are not the absolute fastest you might make it, but they are in best-case-scenario territory. In the rainy season the combination of washed-out roads and rain barriers can triple travel times. Prices are for sitting in the cab of a Land Cruiser or pick-up, you'll save about 20% riding in the back of these or taking buses and minibuses.

Air Tchad currently flies to Abéché and Faya; flights to Moundou and Sarh are planned. Prices should be around US\$100 one way for the these.

Outside N'Djaména you'll find fleets of *clandos* (motorcycle taxis) charging a fixed fee (unless you are going very far) of about US\$0.50 per trip. A 4WD rental (driver included, but not petrol) can be as high as US\$160 per day.

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Congo

Often confused with the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaïre), on the opposite side of the Congo River, Congo (which is officially known as the Republic of Congo and also sometimes called Congo-Brazzaville) offers a friendlier and altogether less threatening version of its sprawling neighbour.

Noted for its lowland gorillas and wild chimpanzees (the country contains over 80% of the world's population), Congo is characterised by dense rainforest and impenetrable jungle juxtaposed against a narrow 169km coastal strip that plays host to a nascent oil industry. Outside the French-flavoured capital of Brazzaville, attractions include the surf beaches of Pointe-Noire, the white-water Congo River rapids and – in 13,600-sq-km Odzala National Park – one of the Africa's largest and least known tropical ecosystems.

Wildlife aside, Congo remains a largely unknown quantity to most outsiders, with little tourist infrastructure and a recent six-year civil conflict scaring off all but the most intrepid travellers. But with a pathway to peace in progress and old feuds and disagreements temporarily – or permanently – forgotten, change flickers tantalisingly on the horizon.

Congo's greatest asset is the Congolese. Musicians, cooks, philosophers and table-football enthusiasts, the people of this ex-French colony are undoubtedly one of its most engaging national exports. Ignoring adversity and ever curious of visitors, this is a nation of people eager for a good laugh. Be open and respectful and you could be invited to share the joke.

FAST FACTS

- Area 342,000 sq km
- ATMs None
- Borders Angola, Cameroon (closed), Central African Republic (closed), Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon
- Budget US\$30 to US\$60 a day
- Capital Brazzaville
- Languages French, Lingala, Munukutuba, Lari
- Money Central African CFA; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 3.7 million
- Seasons Wet (October to May), dry (June to September)
- Telephone Country code 🖻 242; international access code 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC + 1
- Visa US\$70 for a 15-day, multiple-entry visa, which can be bought at border; US\$120 for a one-month visa if bought at embassy

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

In the south of the country near the capital, daily temperatures fluctuate between 20°C and 30°C, being slightly cooler in the drier middle of the year. Further north the seasons are reversed with the wetter months falling between April and October.

The best time to go is May to September in Brazzaville, December to February further north.

HISTORY French Rule

Long before the French or Portuguese arrived on the banks of the Congo River, the region was part of a complex trading kingdom comprising the Kongo, Lari, Mbochi, Teke and Vili peoples of Bantu origin. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to make contact, establishing a slave system that traded commercial goods for a human cargo extracted from the continent's dark interior. In 1880 the area finally came under French sovereignty when Franco-Italian empire builder Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza used his dashing European charm to con the local Onkoo rulers into signing away their historic land rights. Predictably, the French government made quick work of gaining free use of Congo's considerable natural resources such as ivory, tropical hardwood and rubber, as well as raising hell with the local population who were used as forced labour. By 1908 Congo had been formally streamlined into French Equatorial Africa along with Chad,

HOW MUCH?

- Internet per hour US\$3
- Cup of coffee US\$1.50
- Car hire per day US\$120
- Bottle of wine US\$20
- Average main course US\$7

LONELY PLANET INDEX

1L petrol US\$1

CONGO

- 1L bottled water US\$1.50
- 500ml bottle of Ngok beer US\$2
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10
- Street treat US\$1

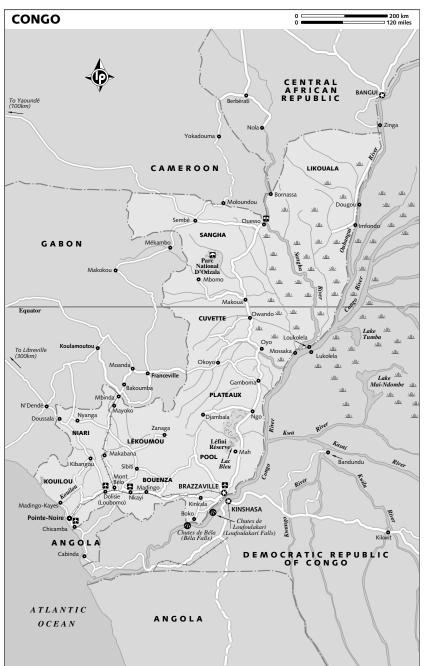
WARNING

Since a 2003 ceasefire, the political situation is slowly improving in the Congo, though much of the country continues to experience uncertainty, with sporadic violence a regular occurrence. Consular advice suggests that central Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire are relatively secure, but travel outside these areas should be taken with extreme care. We were unable to do onthe-ground research, so some information in this chapter may be unreliable. Check the situation before considering travel to Congo.

Gabon and the Central African Republic. But ethnic integration wasn't exactly a colonial priority. Despite extracting copious natural resources and opening up the coast at Point Noire by building the Congo-Ocean railway from 1924–34, the French consistently chose to ignore festering tribal differences and with independence in 1960 the bubbling pot finally boiled over.

Africa's First Marxist State

Although the initial transition was relatively peaceful, tensions quickly came to a head. Congo's first president, Fulbert Youlou, seen by many as a puppet of the French, lasted just three years before being deposed in a popular uprising in 1963 that installed Chairman of the National Council of the Revolution Alphonse Massamba-Débat in power. Introducing a one-party state with his National Council of the Revolution as the only legal political party, Massamba-Débat quickly proved to be equally unpopular and was ousted in turn by Captain Marien-Ngouabi in a military coup in 1968. Ngouabi was one of a new generation of northern Congolese political activists and in 1969 he announced the formation of the People's Republic of Congo, ushering in Africa's first Marxist-Leninist state (Angola and Ethiopia would follow). But by transferring control away from the once-powerful south, Ngouabi made many enemies and in 1977 he was assassinated, allegedly by a suicide commando. The army chief of staff, Yhombi-Opango, stepped into the breach and ruled by means of a military commission but, charged with corruption, he was ousted by the Congolese



Worker's Party (PCT) in 1979, with Denis Sassou Nguesso, a rising star in the army and one-time Marxist, taking the helm. Sassou's political survivalism proved to be superior to many of his rivals (he is still in power today) and his pragmatism got results. Despite initially pursuing a pro-Soviet line in common with his predecessor, Saaaou adopted a more liberal bent post 1989 with the fall of the Berlin wall in Europe, and opened the way for multiparty elections.

Civil War

Eliminated in the first round of the 1992 elections, Sassou sat out a first run-off that was won resoundingly by former university professor Pascal Lissouba. A southerner, Lissouba promised to redress southern Congo's years spent exiled from development and from access to the country's top jobs. But once in office he continued to fleece the country of millions - or possibly even billions - while using his personal militia (known as the Cocoyes) to antagonise inhabitants of the capital who rallied around the ousted Sassou. In 1993 the situation erupted into full-blown civil war with Sassou's Cobra militia on one side, and the Cocoyes, together with the militia of Prime Minister Bernard Kolelas (the so-called Ninjas) on the other. Lissouba clung on to power until another - and this time decisive - civil war all but obliterated Brazzaville in 1997. In amongst the chaos Sassou took charge for the second time and Lissouba fled. But the real losers of the war were Congo's civilians, who spent months hiding in the forests. Many children died - if not from bullets then from malnutrition. In 1999 the war started again on a smaller scale, this time fought predominantly between the Cocoyes and the Ninjas.

Bowing to international pressure in 2002, Sassou decided to legitimise his presidency with multiparty elections. Winning 90% of the vote, he was aided by the fact that his two main rivals – Lissouba and Bernard Kolelas – were barred from standing and a third belatedly withdrew from the race. Not surprisingly a resurgence of fighting between the Ninjas and government forces in the Malebo Pool region dogged Sassou's first year as president, but a peace agreement between the president and the leader of the Pool insurgency, Pasteur Ntoumi, signed in March 2003 has maintained a shaky standoff.

CONGO

Congo Today

A recent new constitution granted the president an array of new powers and extended his term from five to seven years. In an attempt to legitimize itself as one of sub-Saharan Africa's main oil producers the Congo has tried to increase financial transparency in the petroleum sector as well as initiate a freer press. However, for the vast majority of Congolese it remains to be seen if President Sassou – who in January 2006 was elected as Chairman of the 53-nation African Union – can deliver the goods.

CULTURE

Dress and manners are a sacred cow in the Congolese psyche and you will be judged on what you wear. A Congolese man will sleep on the floor rather than buy a mattress if it means he can save enough for a three-piece suit with hand stitching on the lapels.

If you are lucky enough to be invited into a Congolese home, take a carton of Spanish table wine (US\$3). It's champagne to the Congolese and will be seen as properly respectful in a country obsessed with manners.

PEOPLE

Of the Congo's diverse collection of ethnic groups, the Kongo people predominate, making up over 48% of the population. Other key groups include the Sangha (20%), the Teke (17%) and the M'Bochi (12%). Fifty percent of the country's population is nominally Christian.

ENVIRONMENT

The plateau area around Brazzaville, the capital, bears a remarkable resemblance to Wales, with rolling hills, long grass and lush green trees. Further north, towards the equator, the scenery gives way to bright orange earth and dense tropical rainforest bristling with gorillas, chimps and monkeys of all kinds. Timber companies have long been busy making inroads into the rainforest around the northernmost town of Ouesso. and it has not been made public just how much of this unspoilt forest has already been sold. To the southwest is where Congo meets the sea and the Atlantic Ocean crashes onto some respectable pale yellow beaches. But be prepared; those aren't bright stars hovering low over the horizon, but the lights of offshore oil rigs.

BRAZZAVILLE

pop 1,174,000

Founded in 1880 by the Malebo Pool area of the Congo River, Brazzaville was named after Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, a Franco-Italian explorer who charmed the local natives into placing their kingdom under the protection of the French flag. Ever the lesser partner in the close geographic relationship with Kinshasa across the river, Brazzaville's moment in history came in 1944 when it hosted a conference of Free French forces that set out to redefine the way that France handled its African colonies post 1945.

Low-key, somnolent and unassuming, with its back turned to the mighty Congo River, Brazzaville retains a palpable French air with its tree-lined boulevards and streetside cafés serving fresh croissants. Frenetic Kinshasa this is not; though the city gained a certain amount of notoriety in 1997 when militia men descended on the capital en masse and drove most of the inhabitants into the surrounding forest.

With relative political stability now restored, Brazzaville's era of bloodshed seems to be behind it. Indeed, these days hassle from overzealous street salesmen is likely to be your primary preoccupation, and with a little caution and some friendly African entreaties, you can venture out into the rowdy suburbs of an evening to sample Brazzaville's pumping nightlife.

ORIENTATION

Brazzaville's MayaMaya Airport is just north of the city, a US\$5 taxi ride to the centre. The 'Beach' – the river port where the ferry arrives from Kinshasa – is on the easterly edge of the town centre. The area between Ave Marechal Foch (which leads down to the town hall and the river) and the Elf Oil tower near the Beach is considered the city centre, with banks, ministries and international airline offices located here. But the beating heart of Brazzaville (and the markets) lies in the suburbs that splay off to the east and west.

INFORMATION Cultural Centres

Centre Culturel Français (al 1705; Rond Point de Bakongo) Hosts exhibitions and performances of Congolese dancing and theatre through the year. On Sunday it turns

into a cinema showing French films. Prices and opening times vary.

Internet Access

Brazzaville has a reasonable selection of internet cafés, though don't expect Western standards of speed and efficiency. You'll pay in the vicinity of US\$2 per hour.

Medical Services

Late-night pharmacies are located at Rond Point du City Centre.

Clinic ((a) 64 9979; Ave Patrice Lumumba) The French government operates this free drop-in clinic for foreigners, located next to the Belgian embassy.

Military Hospital (🖻 66 3363; Rue Ecole Militaire) For more serious cases.

Money

As in many African countries, you can use US dollars, but take large denominations (US\$20 and up) and make sure the notes are in good condition. US dollars can be exchanged with moneychangers on the main road leading out of the Beach, or from any of the Lebanese-owned cafés and internet places on Ave Marechal Foch (at a slightly higher rate).

Post & Telephone

The cheapest option for local calls is the street stalls with mobile phones. Basilio.com (Ave Marechal Foch) For international calls. CongoPhone (Rond Point du City Centre) For international calls. Neither of these places are cheap. DHL (O 81 0103; Ave Marechal Foch; O 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) Reliable and fast. Post office (Rond Point de la Poste; O 8am-2pm Mon-Sat) Slow and also prone to theft.

Travel Agencies

Achilles Service Tour Agency (282 4553; achilles_ser vices@voila.fr) Can organise tours in Brazzaville and around.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Brazzaville requires plenty of street savvy. Avoid the Corniche (the road running between the city and the river) after dark, as it's a favourite hang-out for soldiers (ie muggers with guns), and be extremely careful when taking photos around public buildings.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Brazzaville's markets are its main attraction and provide an assault of local colour. At **Marche Total** (Ave de Loua, Bakongo; 🟵 8am-5pm)

hawkers display popular foods such as fresh peanut butter, caterpillars, guinea pigs, bats and the ubiquitous manioc or cassava. You can trawl the stalls for everything from palm wine to Congolese fabrics and aphrodisiac charms.

Marche de Moungali (Blvd de Marechal Lyautey; 论 8am-5pm) is the home of Congo's West African community and is a great place for clothes and shoes, not to mention barbecued goat. The Marche Touristique (Plateaux; 论 8am-2pm) sells traditional weavings, carvings and masks from both Congos.

While not exactly heaving with historic monuments, Brazzaville has a couple of notable constructions designed by French architect Roger Erell, who was well known for fusing Western architectural ideas with local building techniques. These include the modernist **Basilique Sainte-Anne** and the **Casa de Gaulle**, residence of the French ambassador. The **Cathédrale de Sacré Coeur** is Brazzaville's oldest surviving building, dating from 1894. It was modified by Erell in the 1950s and has been visited by both De Gaulle (1944) and Pope John Paul II (1980).

The rapids that separate Kinshasa and Brazzaville can be easily accessed for a swim, or appreciated over a local Ngok beer.

Table football, or *babyfoot* as it's known here, is very popular. While the tables might not be in mint condition, local players are always enthusiastic and it's a great chance to make Congolese friends. Football tables are scattered liberally around all the neighbourhoods, but a favourite is located in the **Jane Vial market** (Ave de Trois Martyrs; 🏵 5-8pm Mon-Sat) in PotoPoto. It's best to go in the early evening, when the market turns into a rabbit warren of stalls selling barbecued chicken and salted fish by candlelight.

SLEEPING

CONGO

Budget hotels, often frequented by wealthy Congolese men and their mistresses in the afternoons, have sprung up in the lively Poto-Poto district. Water supply is irregular here but the hotels are well placed to enjoy Brazzaville's bustle by day and bars by night.

At the other end of the scale Brazzaville has a couple of swankier piles:

Le Meridien (☎ 81-0302; Blvd Marechal Lyauty; r US\$160; P 🖹 🔲 🐑) An international class hotel set in a peaceful residential area near the city centre.

EATING

For cheap eats it's best to head into the suburbs. Here you can buy delicious *maboke* (river fish cooked with chilli and wrapped in manioc leaves) or barbecued goat for under US\$1.50 from the street sellers. All over the city centre you can buy baguette sandwiches for under US\$1 from stalls, but you might want to ask them to go easy on the dodgy margarine.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights from Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Libreville (Gabon) and Paris go direct to Brazzaville, and ferries cross from Kinshasa to Brazzaville and vice versa. For more details, see p558.

GETTING AROUND

There is no public transport in Brazzaville, but privately owned buses spewing choking black smoke lurch around the capital regularly and are relatively safe and cheap (approximately US\$0.50).

Taxis are found everywhere in Brazzaville and they are a real bargain. For a flat rate of under US\$2 you can go anywhere in town (or as little as US\$1 if you can negotiate in French). You can also hire a taxi for US\$6 an hour.

Note that even most Brazzavillois don't know the street names of their city and everyone makes reference to landmarks instead. When asking for directions, always first ask for the name of the place you're going, before the street name.

AROUND CONGO

DOLISIE (LOUBOMO)

This dusty red town used to be the weekend resort favoured by Brazzaville and Gabon's moneyed classes. Then it was destroyed in the 1997 war and now only chickens inhabit the wreckage of the once-plush Intercontinental Hotel, but the town's eerie charm remains. It is possible to cross into Gabon from here via a combination of bush taxis, bureaucracy and bribes. The journey to Libreville takes about two days. The one-hour flight from Brazzaville to Dolisie via Nkayi is well worth it, if only for the scenery.

POINTE-NOIRE

Pointe-Noire is Congo's outlet to the sea and the closest the country gets to a fully fledged tourist resort. There are yellow sandy beaches here, stretches of bars, and seafood restaurants that hum with life. But behind the outer mask, Pointe-Noire is a tale of two cities. Existing alongside the settlement's potholed roads and down-at-heel townships, rich foreign oil company workers live in fancy complexes completely apart from the Congolese population.

The seafood is excellent here and the restaurants come alive in the evening. Highly recommended is Gaspers, a pavement restaurant in La Citée district.

PARC NATIONAL D'ODZALA

Week-long trips to this haven of wildlife in the north cost approximately US\$600, including flights and accommodation, and can be booked at the offices of **Ecofac** (Brazzaville 🗟 83 17 18; Av Marechal Foch; www.ecofac.org/Ecotourisme/indexEN .htm; Libreville (🖻 in Gabon 73 2343; Batterie 4 Face Group Scolaire, Gros Bouquet).

Visitors have reported seeing hundreds of lowland gorillas, monkeys and even elephants. The park has five camps with eating facilities, and trips can be arranged for a maximum of four people. With long days and plenty of hiking, you will need to be in good physical shape. Due to the security situation in Congo access is often made through Gabon. Check the situation at Ecofac before booking.

CONGO DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

For the time being cheap accommodation in the Congo is limited. If you are new to the country and are not travelling with a group or official organisation, it is probably better – and safer – to start off staying in one of the handful of international hotels (where you can pre-book a room) and take it from there.

BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are 8am to noon and 2pm to 3pm Monday to Friday, and 8am to noon Saturday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Scamming has become an art form in Congo. The bald-faced cheek of those on the make can be matched only by the elaborate manners and geniune hospitality of the majority of citizens.

Don't give bribes at roadblocks just because you're asked; most soldiers are just trying it on. Instead say that you will buy them *un jus* (a juice) on the way back; this way they have more of a vested interest in letting you through.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Congolese Embassies & Consulates

In Central and West Africa, Congo has diplomatic representation in the following countries:

Embassies & Consulates in Congo

The following countries all have diplomatic representation in Brazzaville: Angola (🕿 81 1471) Belgium (🕿 81 3712; Ave Patrice Lumumba, west of Pl de la Poste) Cameroon (28 81 1008; Rue Général Bayardelle) Central African Republic (🖻 81 4721; Rue Fourneau) DRC (281 3052; Ave de l'Indépendance) France (🕿 81 5541; Rue Alfassa) Gabon (🖻 81 5620; Ave Monseigneur Augouard) Germany (🖻 83 2990; Villa Marina, cnr Rue de Reims & Rue de Pavie) Nigeria (🖻 81 1022; 11 Blvd du Maréchal Lyautey) UK (🖻 62 08 93; Ave Fosch) Next to DHL. Honorary consul only.

USA (🖻 81 3982; Rue Leon Jacob 70)

PRACTICALITIES

- Congo's newspapers are Les Depeches de Brazzaville and Congoportal News.
- *Radio Congo* is the national station.
- Electricity is 230V 50Hz.
- Congo uses the metric system.

MONEY

CFA can be used in all countries within the Central African franc zone. These include Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Mali and Senegal. There are no ATMs in the country, and few places accept credit cards or travellers cheques, so hard cash it is. If you need some money wired in, **Western Union** (ⓐ 81 4293; Rue FelixEboue; ⓑ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) is reliable but takes a whopping percentage and uses ridiculous exchange rates. When shopping, always bargain – it's Congolese theatre.

POST & TELEPHONE

The postal system is unreliable throughout the country.

Landline's are appalling in Congo and most businesses use mobile phones, which are often stolen so numbers regularly change. Phone coverage is limited to Brazzaville, Oyo, Owando and Pointe-Noire.

VISAS

All visitors to Congo need a visa. You can buy a 15-day, multiple-entry visa to Brazzaville on arrival for approximately U\$\$70, but you must have your yellow fever certificate with you. Visa applications from embassies abroad can be issued the same day or by the next day. You can also get a visa on arrival in Brazzaville if you come by boat from Kinshasa.

Visas for Onward Travel

If at all possible, procure your onward travel African visas from your home country before departure. This is especially true for Angolan visas which require a letter of introduction from a person in-country first. The easiest visa to get in Congo is for the Democratic Republic of Congo a short hop across the Congo River. You should also be able to pick up a visa for Gabon here.

TRANSPORT IN CONGO

GETTING THERE & AWAY

CONGO

International airlines flying to and from Brazzaville include **Ethiopian Airlines** (a 81 2646; Ave Marechal Foch), which flies from Addis Ababa to Brazzaville twice a week; **Air France** (a 81 2719; Amilcar Cabral), which flies direct from Paris to Brazzaville twice a week; and Air Gabon, which flies from Libreville to Brazzaville a few times a week. However, flying into Brazzaville is very pricey. A far cheaper, though hassleloaded, option is to fly into Kinshasa and cross the Congo River by ferry to Brazzaville.

The ferry service between Kinshasa and Brazzaville is US\$25 one way, and small fast boats cross from Ngobila Beach in Kinshasa to the Beach in Brazzaville and vice versa. With overcomplicated bureaucracy involved at either end allow a total of two hours for this journey. Boats leave regularly and you can just turn up, although the last boat leaves at 4pm (noon on Sunday).

From Ouesso you can catch a ferry (large enough for 4WDs) or *pirogue* across the Ngoko river to Sokamba, Cameroon.

GETTING AROUND

From Brazzaville's MayaMaya airport, **Trans Air Congo** (2018) 1046) runs four flights a day to the coastal town of Pointe-Noire and two flights a day to the towns of Dolisie (Loubomo) and Nkayi, while flights to Imfondo leave once a week.

Passenger trains from Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire via Dolisie (Loubomo) aren't operating due to unrest in the Malebo Pool region. If stability returns, so might this service.

A good sealed road goes north from the capital as far as President Denis Sassou Nguesso's home town of Oyo. Beyond that the roads are increasingly bumpy until they disintegrate into sloshing mud lakes in the rain, and hardset ridges with potholes of several feet after the rain. From Owando onwards the journey north can only be made in a convoy of 4WDs, stopping every 20 minutes for one vehicle to pull the other out of a hole. The coast also has a new road that reaches right down the coast to the Angolan enclave of Cabinda.

Shared taxis and minibuses run on an ad hoc basis between towns and villages. They are ridiculously cheap, great fun and crammed with Congolese villagers taking chickens and even goats to the capital. Car hire is available in Brazzaville with **Europcar** (a) 81 33 38; Av du Camp) from US\$120 per day.

Alternatively, barges follow the Oubangui and Congo Rivers from the Central African Republic all the way to Brazzaville. However, they leave irregularly, and the journey can take anything from 10 days to three weeks depending on the vessel and whether the rains have come. Most barges are operated by the logging companies, so ask around at the Beach – Brazzaville's river port.

CONGO

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Democratic Republic of Congo

More a geographical concept than a fully fledged nation, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaïre) is a bubbling cauldron of untamed wilderness carpeted by swathes of rainforest and punctuated by gushing rivers and smoking volcanoes. Rendered almost ungovernable by the central administration in Kinshasa, the country remains closed to all but the most brave-hearted travellers. The nation's history reads like something out of Dante's *Inferno* – from the brazen political folly of King Leopold of Belgium to the hideously corrupt 'kleptocracy' of maverick megalomaniac Mobutu Sese Seko, and the blood-stained battlegrounds of Africa's first 'world war'.

The DRC isn't all failed politics and wasted natural resources, however. Somewhere in the midst of this proverbial heart of darkness lies a lumbering African giant. With ground-breaking national elections in July 2006 giving voice to 60 million shell-shocked inhabitants, a corner may have been turned. Despite early post-election violence in Kinshasa, incumbent president Joseph Kabila took office in October 2006 under the watchful eye of the world's largest UN peacekeeping force. In some senses, the future can only get better. With five Unesco biospheres, whole ecosystems of teeming wildlife and an estimated US\$24 trillion of untapped mineral capacity lying underneath the ground, it goes without saying that the country's potential is breathtaking.

FAST FACTS

- Area 2,345,410 sq km
- ATMs none
- Borders Congo is open as are borders with Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. The Angolan border is also open. Tanzania, Sudan and CAR are closed. Zambia is normally open.
- Budget US\$80 to US\$100 a day
- Capital Kinshasa
- Languages French, Lingala, Kiswahili, Kikongo, Tshiluba
- Money Congolese franc; US\$1 = CDF432
- Population 62.6 million
- Seasons North of equator: wet (April to October), dry (Decemberto February); south of equator: wet (Novemebr to March), dry (April to Octover)
- Telephone Country code 243; international access code 00
- Time GMT/UTC + 1 (west); GMT/UTC + 2 (east)
- Visa US\$75 for a single-entry, one-month visa; US\$140 for a 60-day, multiple-entry tourist visa

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Apart from high-altitude areas, most of the country is hot and humid year-round, with daytime temperatures lingering around 30°C. Rainfall is scant near the coast, but increases significantly as you move inland.

The best time to go depends largely upon which area of the country you will be visiting. The dry season (and the best time to visit) in the north is from December and February while in the south it runs between April and October

HISTORY A Tragic Story

Packed with possibilities, but blighted by over 100 years of war, despotism and horror, the country now known as the DRC has suffered more than any other country on earth. The first stories to emerge from the steaming river basin that straddles the equator in this mysterious part of central Africa were brought home by Portuguese explorers in the 15th century. Trading goods such as ivory, cloth, pottery and ironware, they made contact with a highly developed kingdom known as the Kongo that was ruled over by a patriarchal monarch and stretched as far south as the Kwanza River in Angola.

Little more was heard of the Kongo until the 1860s, when Dr David Livingstone began opening up the African interior to European exploration. After the learned Scot went missing for more than five years in 1866, a New York newspaper sent out a precocious Welshman, Henry Morton Stanley, to track

HOW MUCH?

- Internet per hour US\$2 to US\$3
- Cup of coffee US\$1.50
- Car hire per day US\$39
- Bottle of wine US\$15 to US\$20
- Average main meal US\$12 to US\$15

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.75
- 1L bottled water US\$1.50
- 500ml bottle of Primus beer US\$2 1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10 to US\$15
- Breakfast US\$5

WARNING!

The Democratic Republic of Congo is still prone to sporadic civil unrest and safety in many areas is not guaranteed. We were unable to do on-the-ground research, so some information in this chapter may not be reliable. Check the situation before travelling.

him down. The two expat Britons met on 10 November 10 1871 near modern-day Kigoma in Tanzania, but it was Stanley's subsequent African sojourns, under the sponsorship of the British *Daily Telegraph* newspaper to trace the course of the Congo River, that marked his own place in history.

Reported enthusiastically in The Times, Stanley's Congolese exploits were quickly seized upon by the most unlikely of colonial adventurers, King Leopold II of Belgium. Devious, greedy and wholly ignorant of African affairs, Leopold had been eyeing the unclaimed African gâteau for some time, but he was having some trouble persuading the Belgian government to go along with him. To solve the problem the arrogant monarch decided to acquire a colony in his own right. The resulting European furore became known as the 'Scramble for Africa'.

In 1878 Leopold summoned Stanley and commissioned him to go back to the Congo under the smoke screen of the International African Society - a supposed philanthropic organisation. Over the ensuing five years Stanley signed more than 400 treaties with Congo chiefs on Leopold's behalf, tricking them to hand over their land rights in return for paltry gifts. At the Berlin conference called by Bismarck in 1884 to carve up Africa, Leopold aware of a German desire to offset French and British colonial interests - managed to convince the famous Iron Chancellor to declare the Congo a free trade area and cede it to him as his own personal fiefdom.

Leopold inherited a country 75 times the size of Belgium, and philanthropy was the last thing on his mind as he set about fleecing the Congo of its ivory, copper and – in the wake of the invention of the pneumatic tyre - rubber. Hideous crimes were committed against the Congolese by Leopold's rubber traders. These included raiding villages and taking women and children captive as an incentive for the men to bring back ever-greater sup-

plies of rubber from the forest. Those who did not return their quota had their hands chopped off. And all the while, in one of the earliest examples of cynical political spin doctoring, Leopold passed off his Congo venture as a shining example of fine governorship and benevolence, aimed at 'civilising the Negroes' and keeping the 'cruel Arab slave-traders' at bay.

Independence

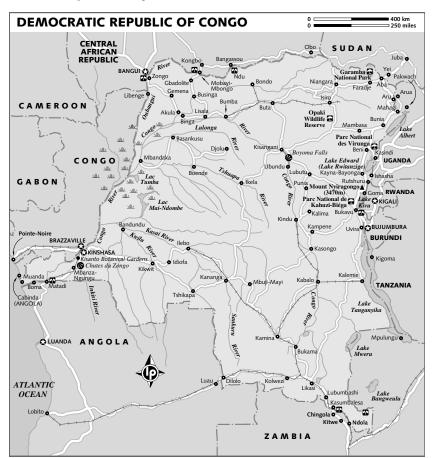
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As Leopold's crimes gradually became public knowledge, the Belgian government realised enough was enough, and paid the unscrupulous king US\$4 million in compensation to annex the land mass now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo themselves.

Thereafter, things took a turn for the better. The new Belgian administration built clinics, schools and roads, and eradicated sleeping sickness. By the 1940s the Congo was Africa's richest country, though the local people still had few political rights and the Belgian government proved consistently negligent in preparing the Congolese for a smooth handover at independence.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Gathering pace in the 1950s under charismatic revolutionary Patrice Lumumba, the independence movement finally wrested control from the colonisers in 1960. As the Congolese struggled to form a coherent government, the Belgians - who had left the country with only 16 qualified university graduates - quickly realised their mistake and, with covert US



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

support, re-intervened in the Congo in order to stem the mounting chaos, backing a plot by army chief Joseph Désiré Mobutu to oust (and assassinate) Lumumba, who was moving suspiciously towards the Soviet Union.

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Renaming himself Mobutu Sese Seko, and the country Zaïre, the new leader embarked on a campaign of 'Africanisation', with people dropping their Christian names, and suits giving way to the *abacost* (a Congolese version of the Mao jacket); though Mobutu himself was far from being a communist, allying the country firmly in the US camp.

Proving himself to be even more incompetent than Leopold, Mobutu duly turned corruption and the squandering of state resources into an art form. Toting up more than US\$2 billion in US loans over a 30-year period and printing money as if it was going out of fashion, he became legendary for his Marquis de Sade–style extravagance, stuffing more than US\$5 billion into Swiss bank accounts and hiring Concorde to take him on shopping trips to the Champs Elysées. Indeed, so rife was his administration with conniving and nepotism that writer Michela Wrong invented a new word to describe his spectacular style of state mismanagement: kleptocracy

Civil War

With a sea of political change rippling across the world in the early 1990s, Mobutu finally got his comeuppance. Backing the Hutu perpetuators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, he enraged Zairan Tutsis, who, supported enthusiastically by Rwandan and Ugandan troops, marched on Kinshasa in May 1996. Mobutu narrowly escaped capture by hitching a lift on a cargo plane to Togo and died four months later of cancer in Morocco.

The new leader, Laurent Kabila – a onetime confidante of Che Guevara – dashed any hopes early on by outlawing political opposition and renaming the country (with no apparent irony) the Democratic Republic of Congo. Proving himself every bit as corrupt as Mobutu, Kabila took the madness a stage further by plunging the country into civil war, setting his government against the very Tutsis he had once claimed to represent. The conflict broadened when Rwanda and Uganda entered on the side of the Tutsi rebels and Kabila was only saved when Angola and Zimbabwe waded in with military support for the Congolese government.

The DRC's second war started in 1998 and culminated with the assassination of Laurent Kabila in January 2001 by one of his own bodyguards. Succeeded by his son Joseph, Kabila the younger couldn't have been more different than his incompetent father. Englishspeaking, Western-educated and only 29 years old when he took power, Kabila II quickly set about presiding over a peace treaty between the warring African factions that in 2002 paved the way for an all-party transitional government. Notwithstanding, the challenges facing the country are still huge. By 2003 the war had claimed more than 3.8 million lives and displaced another 3.4 million people, but with the establishment of the DRC's second ever multiparty elections in July 2006 many hoped that a corner had been turned.

DRC Today

Or had it? The 2006 elections caused a stalemate between incumbent Joseph Kabila and opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba, with sporadic violence breaking out, particularly in Kinshasa. Kabila won the second round of the election in October 2006 with a landslide in the Swahili-speaking east. Meanwhile, cocooned in-country, 17,000 UN soldiers (the world's largest peacekeeping force) continue to oversee a shaky and volatile security situation. For experienced Africa-watchers, the DRC's future looks as uncertain as ever.

PEOPLE

As complex racially as it is politically, the DRC plays host to more than 250 individual ethnic groups and more than 700 different languages and dialects. Not surprisingly it is the Kongo tribe that dominates, closely followed by the Luba and Mongo groupings that collectively make up more than 40% of the population.

Despite widespread animist beliefs approximately 80% of the population are either Protestants or Roman Catholics. A popular minority sect is manifested in Kimbanguism, a Christian cult that developed around the mysterious figure of Simon Kimbangu in the 1920s and '30s. Kimbanguism remains Africa's most popular form of 'indigenous' Christianity.

ENVIRONMENT

The DRC is the third-largest country in Africa, much of which is covered by impenetrable rainforest, and crisscrossed by huge

rivers such as the Congo, Kasai and Oubangui, which flow into the Atlantic Ocean. The forests are home to all manner of primates, including bonobo (or pygmy chimps - humans' closest relatives). The country includes the greater part of the Congo River basin, which covers almost one million sq km. To the east, the DRC's borders run the length of the Rift Valley, opening up to the spectacular lakes of Albert (Mobutu), Edward (Rwitanzige), Kivu, Tanganyika and Mweru, while mountains such as the Ruwensori range on the country's eastern border approach the 5000m mark. The DRC is also home to volcanoes; Mt Nyiragongo near Goma caused devastation when it erupted in 2002, covering much of the town in molten rock. There are vast, beautiful nature reserves in the DRC, although most of them (including Kahuzi-Biéga and Virunga) are in the east, still patrolled by warring militias.

KINSHASA

pop 6.7 million

Once touted as Kin la belle (beautiful Kinshasa), the 21st-century incarnation of the chaotic capital of the DRC is regrettably anything but. Huge, sprawling, grimy and confusing, the city – which, with over six million inhabitants, is Africa's third largest (after Lagos and Cairo) – is a long way from being a traveller's haven, though with multiparty elections ushering in a new era of hope and reintegration this situation could soon change.

Built up on the banks of the Congo River and infested with shabby shantytowns and myriad opportunist con merchants masquerading as street salesmen, this polluted megalopolis couldn't be called pretty by anyone. That said, there are a number of surprisingly deserted areas where exhausted visitors can escape from the traditional mayhem, such as the once-grand (and now run-down) colonial neighbourhood, or the city centre on a Sunday.

Kinshasa's general decrepitude and abundance of buildings in eternal stages of halfcompletion are as much to do with incapable government as they are to do with the ravages of war – the DRC's various administrations have generally been too preoccupied in trying to keep control of the country to actually develop it. But Kinshasa could be worth a brief if tentative visit by the brave and welltravelled explorer armed with a close eye on security and a true sense of African adventure. Think less of historic monuments and broad tree-lined avenues and more of traditional handicrafts, bustling markets and a vibrant nightlife that pulsates to the unique rhythms of soukous.

ORIENTATION

N'djili international airport is 25km southeast of the city. Minibuses run to the city centre, but they are overcrowded, badly maintained and downright unsafe on the lawless, potholed roads. Opt instead for an unmarked taxi (US\$10) or arrange for someone to pick you up. The city centre branches off from the banks of the Congo River, looking directly across at Brazzaville on the other side. The diplomatic district of Gombé lines the riverbank with great views of floating water hyacinths and the skyline of Brazzaville.

INFORMATION

Cash is king in Kinshasa, with travellers cheques and credit cards virtually useless. US dollars are invariably preferred over Congolese francs, but they'll only be accepted if they're in good (or even mint) condition. You can change money at one of Kinshasa's banks or with black marketeers along the waterfront.

Public phones consist of street hawkers who will let you use their mobile phones for a fee. Best stick to the top-end hotels where international calls are easy to arrange. **Centre Privé d'Urgences** (20 875; Ave du Commerce) The best equipped of the emergency health centres in Kinshasa.

Cybergd ((a) 9903313; Ave Mobutu 18b, Masina; per hr US\$3) Internet access.

Cyberlogic ((a) 12 205 20; A11 Av Presse, Immeuble Moanda; per hr US\$3) Internet access.

ICARE (2807608; Rwindi Bldg, Blvd 30 Juin) This travel agency has extremely helpful staff. Maison de France (Hal de la Gombé) There are several 24-hour pharmacies; this is the most central.

Ministry of Tourism (Ave Batetela, Gombé)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

If you are prepared to withstand lots of hassle and calls of '*mondele*' ('white person'), head to the **Central Market of Matongé** for lots of local

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

colour. Alternatively, the tourist market at **Marché de Valeur** (Pl de la Gare, Blvd 30 Juin) is great for everything from Congolese fabrics and masks to drums. Pay a third of the asking price tops, and keep an eye on your cash; it's locally known as Marché du Voleur (Thief's Market). **Academy des Beaux-Arts** (Blvd 24 Novembre, Gombé) has beautiful gardens to stroll around and souvenirs of genuinely fine craftsmanship to buy in a more relaxed setting.

Also worth seeing is the tomb of former president Laurent Kabila, the statue of national icon Patrice Lumumba, and the Gare Central.

SLEEPING

Kinshasa is expensive, and real budget accommodation is hard to come by, though there are a few central and secure options.

Hotel Pyramide (281-508 95 56; Av Nguma No 35; r US\$125; P & D P This is a small luxury hotel located about 5km from the centre of Kinshasa. All rooms here have bathrooms with a Jacuzzi and hot water. There is a swimming pool, internet facility and a restaurant selling main meals from between US\$7 and US\$10.

Hotel Memling (ⓐ 81-700 63 64, 81-700 11 11; Av De la Republique du Tchad No 5; r US\$130; **(P) (2)**) Kinshasa's flagship hotel was once owned by former Belgian national airline company Sabena, and though some of the fittings are showing signs of age, the setting is generally safe, and the surroundings relatively salubrious. There are also good reports on the food.

EATING

Streetside vendors selling barbecued goat and manioc abound in Kinshasa and are your best bet for cheap eating.

La Chaumiere () 99 99 33 721; Av Ngongo Lutete; mains US\$20;) 8:30am-11pm) This place serves Western and Congolese dishes.

Pili Burger ((2) 982 802 70; Blvd du 30 Juin No 120a) This place offers 10 different varieties of burger/sandwich.

ENTERTAINMENT

Dancing and drinking beer pretty well cover the entertainment options in Kinshasa, although jazz and rumba can be found at some venues.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are flights to Kinshasa direct from France (Paris) and a huge array of African cities (see p566), and you can cross by ferry between Kinshasa and Brazzaville (Congo), across the Congo River (see p558). Travelling overland, particularly from Uganda or Rwanda, is volatile. Check with your embassy first.

GETTING AROUND

There are no official taxis in Kinshasa, but you can hire unmarked taxis, known as 'taxi express', which tout for business outside the **Gallerie Presidentielle** (Blvd 30 Juin, Gombé). They cost from US\$30 per day with driver. Alternatively, at much higher rates (from US\$75 per day), you can hire cars from **Avis** (🗟 81-81 0111; Ave Batetela, Gombé; 🟵 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) at the Intercontinental Hotel.

AROUND KINSHASA

A must-see while in Kinshasa is the **Chutes de Lukia**, 40 minutes by car or taxi from the centre of town, along the Matadi road. There is a decent restaurant, natural lakes to swim in and a bonobo orphanage, where you can play with the younger chimps. Beware if you are allergic to white 4WDs and walkie-talkies – it's a favourite haunt of resident UN and aid worker staff at weekends.

The fish market at **Kinkole**, 32km out of Kinshasa along the road to the airport, is worth a visit. The market was constructed by Mobutu to honour the country's fishermen as part of his 'authenticity' campaign. You can hire a pirogue for US\$10 an hour and be paddled down the Congo River, drink intoxicating palm wine on the riverbank and try some of the country's best *liboke* (fish stewed in manioc leaves).

The **botanical gardens** of Kisanto are a 50km drive south of Kinshasa along the Matadi road, or you can take the train. With a collection of 100-year-old trees from all over the world, and gentle rivers in which to swim, Kisanto is definitely worth a visit.

For an overnight stay, press on another two hours to the **Chutes du Zongo**, a nature reserve with waterfalls for swimming, and basic chalets with attached bucket-and-drain bathrooms. Take your own food to barbecue. Book via the **Ministry of Tourism** (Ave Batetela, Gombé).

AROUND DRC

GOMA

A one-time stopover for overlanders to and from Rwanda, Goma is now a base camp for UN aid agencies trying to deal with the dual catastrophes of the 2002 Mt Nyiragongo volcanic eruption and the ongoing Rwandan refugee crisis. The one reason to visit Goma these days (and you would be wise to check up-to-date travel warnings first) is as a transit town on the way to Parc National Des Virungas, home of the famous mountain gorillas and the world's second-oldest national park (after Yellowstone).

KISANGANI

A major city on the middle reaches of the Congo River, Kisangani was known in colonial times as Stanleyville and was immortalised as the unnamed city in VS Naipul's classic novel *A Bend in the River*. Once a fairly pleasant place and a major hub for travellers, the decaying Belgian colonial buildings have seen far better days. Attractions in the area include Boyoma Falls (the world's highest volume waterfall), and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, a Unesco World Heritage Site.

LUBUMBASHI

In the heart of the copper belt, and largely detached from the rest of the DRC, Lubumbashi is a compact city of one million inhabitants that boasts pleasant gardens, well-kept homes and a reasonable network of dirt roads. The local mines are worth a fleeting visit.

DRC DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

For the time being cheap accommodation in the DRC is limited. If you are new to the country and are not travelling with a group or official organisation, it is probably better – and safer – to start off staying in one of the handful of international hotels (where you can pre-book a room) and take it from there.

BUSINESS HOURS

Businesses are usually open 8.30am to 3pm Monday to Friday and 8.30am to noon on Saturday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Avoid taking photos in public, especially of the river, government buildings and the airport, which are viewed as places of national security. Taking unsanctioned photos can lead to arrest.

Do not walk around at night and think twice about walking around in the daytime unless you are sure of the route. Take the advice of the locals in matters of personal security wherever possible. If you are involved in a car accident do not hang around as mobs can gather quickly. Always carry a copy of your passport.

Malaria remains rife throughout DRC. Check with your GP before leaving home and take all the necessary precautions (see p1134 for further information).

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES DRC Embassies & Consulates

Many of the country's embassies were closed down during 2003, but are likely to reopen. DRC has diplomatic representation in the following countries:

Angola (a 222-310293; Rua Fernando Pessoa, Vila Alice, Luanda)

Congo (🖻 81 3052; Ave de l'Indépendance, Brazzaville) France (🖻 01 42 42 25 57 50; 32 Cours Albert 1er,

75008, Paris)

USA (202-234 7690/1; 1726 M St, Suite 601, NW Washington, DC 20036)

PRACTICALITIES

- The Democratic Republic of Congo's newspapers are the dailies Debout Congolais and La Reference.
- Radio Okapi is the national station. The main TV channel is Radio-Television Nationale Congolaise (RTNC) – statecontrolled terrestrial and satellite TV.
- Electricity is 220V 50Hz. There are two plug shapes: a European plug with two circular metal pins; and a South African/Indian-style plug with two circular metal pins above a large circular grounding pin.
- The DRC uses the metric system.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO Embassies & Consulates in DRC

The following countries have diplomatic representation in Kinshasa. Belgium (🕿 89 24 233; Pl du 27 Octobre) Canada (🖻 895 0310; Ave Pumbu 17, Gombé) Central African Republic (🗃 33 571; Ave Pumbu 11, Gombé)

Congo (🖻 34 028; Blvd du 30 Juin 179, Brazzaville) France (🕿 81 700 7213; Ave Républic du Tchad 97) Germany (🕿 894 8201; Ave de Roi Baudouin 82) Kenya (🖻 37 23 641; Ave de Louganda 4002) UK (🕿 98 169 100; Ave de Roi Baudouin 83, Gombé) **USA** (**a** 81 225 5872; 310 Ave des Aviateurs) Zambia (21 802; Ave de L'Ecole 54)

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays are as follows: New Year's Day 1 January Martyrs of Independence Day 4 January National Heroes Day 17 January Easter Monday March/April (dates vary) Labour Day 1 May National Liberation Day 17 May Independence Day 30 June All Saints Day 1 November Army Day 17 November New Regime Anniversary 24 November Christmas Day 25 December

MONEY

The local currency is the Congolese franc (CDF); it cannot be converted and cannot be taken out of the country. With individual note denominations nearly worthless it is often easier to use US dollars, though you should be careful not to use old dollar bills or small denominations (anything below a US\$20 note).

Travellers cheques and credit cards are rarely accepted here; credit cards are only accepted in one or two upmarket hotels in Kinshasa. Your best bet is to travel with a carefully concealed money belt containing US dollars.

You can change money around the port, but it's better to find a reliable contact (ask around where you are staying).

POST & TELEPHONE

The postal system ranges from unreliable to nonexistent.

Make calls from internet centres or hotels. This is expensive, but land lines are rare. For local calls you might be able to borrow someone's mobile.

TOURS

Go Congo (298 36 82 00; www.gocongo.com) is second to none when it comes to arranging trips incountry. The Kinshasa-based operation offers a selection of tailored trips as well as services for individual travellers such as hotel reservations, transfers and guides. Another option is the British-based Undiscovered Destinations (a in the UK 191 2064038: www.undiscovered-destinations.com).

VISAS

All visitors need a visa. If flying into Kinshasa it is essential to get a visa beforehand. These cost approximately US\$75 for a one-month, single-entry visa, or US\$135 for a 60-day, multiple-entry tourist visa. If crossing by land you can often get a visa at the border within 24 hours.

Visas for Onward Travel

If at all possible, procure your onward travel African visas from your home country before departure. This is especially true for Angolan visas which require a letter of introduction from a person in-country first. The easiest visa to get in the DRC is for Congo (Brazzaville) a short hop across the Congo River.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Exercise extreme caution if you are a female traveller. Do not drive alone after dark; instead drive in a convoy, if you can. Be very wary of the armed forces: rape has been used extensively as a weapon of war.

TRANSPORT IN DRC

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air France is the only airline with direct flights into Kinshasa (it flies from Paris to Kinshasa once or twice a week). KLM flies from Amsterdam to Kinshasa via Nairobi once or twice a week, and SN Brussels Airlines flies from Brussels to Kinshasa, usually via Douala, three times a week. Bravo Air Congo flies out of Kinshasa three times a week to Brussels and Paris, with one of the weekly Paris flights connecting to Madrid.

From within Africa, South African Airways flies between Kinshasa and Johannesburg about three times a week, and Ethiopian Airlines flies between Kinshasa and Addis Ababa around three times a week; you can also fly in from Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Bujumbura

(Burundi), Douala (Cameroon), Lagos (Nigeria), Luanda (Angola), Libreville (Gabon) and Nairobi (Kenya). Although planes now fly from Kinshasa to the east of DRC, the east is more easily accessed via Kigali in Rwanda.

Most airlines have offices at Kinshasa's N'djili Airport. Carriers include Kenya Airways (🖻 1221465; Hotel Memling, Ave Tchad, Gombé) and SN Brussels Airlines (🗃 081-897 5003; Blvd 30 Juin, Gombé). In Gombé, Kinshasa, you can contact Air France (🖻 081-884 5548; Hotel Memling, Ave Tchad, Gombé; Sam-3.30pm Mon-Sat) and South African Airways (🖻 081-700 5908; 6147, Blvd 30 Juin, Gombé).

A regular ferry links Kinshasa with Brazzaville in Congo. It costs US\$25 (see page p558).

Technically, you can catch a train from Lubumbashi to Johannesburg or Dar es Salaam but, due to railway underinvestment, schedules aren't reliable. Entry by plane is invariably a better bet.

The land border with Angola is open via the town of Matadi but crossing here is rarely attempted by foreigners and you could be faced with reams of bureaucracy and a whole lot of hassle (make sure you have pre-arranged your Angolan visa). Unless you're a truly intrepid overlander avoid at all costs.

GETTING AROUND With only 480km of paved roads, flying is the best (and often the only) way of getting around the DRC, although the poor safety record of Congolese air traffic has led all but one (Bravo Air Congo) of its airlines to be banned from operating in Europe. Domestic airlines include Hewa Bora Airways Congo airlines include Hewa Bora Airways, Congo Airlines and Lignes Aeriennes Congolaises, all with offices at the airport or you can book through travel agents.

Train travel is possible from Kinshasa to Matadi, Lumbumbashi to Ilebo and Kalemie via Kabalo. There is an isolated branch of the Great Lakes railway line that runs between Kisangani and Ubundu in order to bypass the Boyoma (Stanley) Falls on the Congo River, but trains here are sporadic and there are no connections through to Kindu.

If you have enough time and aren't fussy about privacy there are possibilities to travel by barge along the Congo River from Kinshasa to Kisangani. This is the real highway of Central Africa and a wonderful way to see the country. However, there is no fixed timetable for the departure of barges and they often break down or get stuck on sandbanks along the way.

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EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Equatorial Guinea

With the difficulties of getting a visa and the shakedown you receive as you walk in the door of this tiny tropical former Spanish colony, you might think that Equatorial Guinea would rather just not have you. The government collects plenty of American oil money, and the leaders fear foreign mercenaries plotting coups, so what, really, do they need with travellers?

But for those who live on the edge, Equatorial Guinea offers true adventure. On Bioko Island, beyond the startling build up of the oil-soaked capital, Malabo, are volcanic views, rainforests full of endangered primates and shores of nesting sea turtles. On the mainland, Bata is a pleasant colonial town undergoing an oil-fuelled face-lift, the wildlife-filled rainforest of Monte Alen National Park is a hidden treasure, and the remote island of Corisco offers truly deserted white-sand beaches and small communities of traditional cultures. But be prepared to hack and bribe and hold tight to bush taxis – and don't forget to pack all the patience you can fit in your bag – you'll be stopped often by the military and government officials wanting something.

Note that all travellers need both a travel and photography permit, available in Malabo and Bata. Your papers will be scrutinised often, so make sure you have them in order.

FAST FACTS

- Area 28,050 sq km
- ATMs None
- Borders Cameroon and Gabon
- Budget US\$90 per day in town, US\$40 per day in the interior
- Capital Malabo
- Languages Spanish, French, Fang, 'Pichie'
- Money Central African CFA; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 540,200
- Seasons Bioko: dry (December to February), rainy rest of the year; Rio Muni: dry (May to September)
- **Telephone** Country code 240; international access code 200
- Time GMT/UTC +1
- Visa Required by all except Americans; must be acquired before arrival



- Malabo (p572) Gasp at the unnatural wonder of the oil tankers and platforms as you touch down.
- **Cogo** (p575) Pierce the border by *pirogue* at this southern frontier village.
- Monte Alen National Park (p576) Whisper during forest walks in search of gorillas, elephants, and chimps.
- Isla Corisco (p576) Delight in the glory of the island's deserted white beaches.
- **Bata** (p574) Watch the city grow vertically with new-found oil money.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Equatorial Guinea is hot, humid and tropical. The mainland, Rio Muni, has a dry season from May to September while Bioko is dry from December to February. The dry season is the best time to go.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Spend a few days in Malabo (p572), take a day trip to Luba (p574), and then fly to the mainland to see Bata (p574). Take an overnight trip to trek in Monte Alen National Park (p576).
- Two Weeks Spend a few days in Bata (p574), then head down to Acalayong (p576) to catch the boat to Isla Corisco (p576) for a few days relaxation on the beach. On the way back stop in Cogo (p575) for the afternoon. Wind your way back up to Monte Alen National Park (p576) to trek through the forest, and then head back to Bata. Finish up with a few days on Bioko Island (p574), exploring Malabo and Luba.

WARNING:

Equatorial Guinea is barely ready for travellers. Tourist permits are mandatory for moving around the country, and even if you have the proper paperwork, police and military harassment is the norm. While violence is not likely, taking money off you is. Speaking out against the leadership can lead straight to jail. Be very careful taking photographs: a permit is necessary for cameras. Always travel with your passport and a copy of your passport and visa. Have the number of the nearest embassy handy.

HOW MUCH?

- Overloaded pirogue to Corisco US\$20
- Traditional dress US\$10
- Boxed red wine US\$1
- Trek in the jungle US\$10
- Meal in the jungle US\$15

LONELY PLANET INDEX

1L petrol US\$0.60

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

- 1L bottled water US\$1
- '33' beer US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$7
- Chicken and rice US\$2

HISTORY

The discovery of large oil reserves in the mid-1990s has brought about dramatic change to Equatorial Guinea. One of the world's poorest countries quickly became one of the richest; its per capita income is now second only to Luxembourg's. But government corruption has kept most of this wealth from the people, who still live as they did hundreds of years ago, more often than not on the edge of poverty if not right in it. The government's human-rights record is abysmal, with little hope of reform.

Rule by force is nothing new in Equatorial Guinea. The Pygmies who originally inhabited the mainland now occupy only small pockets in the north. Starting in the 12th century, Bantu tribes, including the Bubi, came to the mainland. It's believed that somewhere around the 17th century the Fang, a branch of the Beti, moved in and quickly became dominant through war and intermarriage. The Bubi are said to have fled to Bioko to escape the Fang (though other legends have it that the Bubi were indigenous to the island). The Fang still dominate, now institutionalised through military force.

The Big Trade-Off

Europeans made their first contact on the island of Anobón, which was visited by the Portuguese in 1470. Portugal subsequently settled Anobóón and the other islands in the Gulf of Guinea (Bioko, São Tomé and Príncipe). In the 18th century Bioko, Anobón and



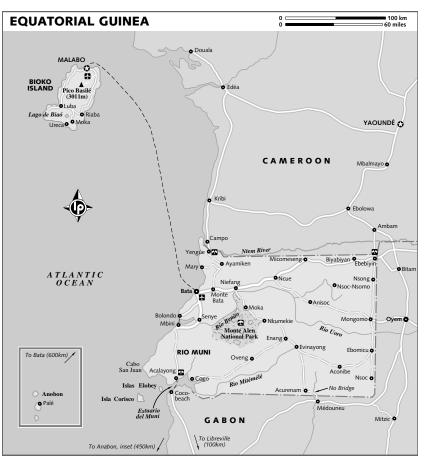
parts of the mainland were traded to Spain in exchange for regions in Latin America. Bioko subsequently became an important base for slave-trading for several European nations during the early 19th century, and later a naval base for England, which by then was trying to stop the slave trade. Cocoa plantations were started on the island in the late 19th century, making Malabo Spain's most important possession in equatorial Africa.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

On the mainland, the Fang made foreign occupation attempts a dangerous venture, but they were forced to retreat from the coastal region during the centuries of slave trading by the British, Dutch and French. With the abolition of slavery they once again reoccupied the coast.

Independence

It wasn't until 1959 that Spain granted Africans full citizenship. By that time, a nationalist movement was already well underway. Equatorial Guinea attained independence in October 1968 under the presidency of Macias Nguema. Several months after independence, relations with Spain deteriorated rapidly when it was discovered that Equatorial Guinea had almost no foreign currency reserves. The new government declared a state of emergency, setting the stage for a brutal, 10-year dictatorship. Thousands of people were tortured and executed, or beaten to death in the forced-labour camps of the mainland. Much of the violence was tribally motivated, and Bubis were particularly



targeted. By the time Nguema's regime was finally toppled in 1979, only a third of the 300,000 Guineans who lived there at independence still remained.

With the country in a mess and bankrupt, even Nguema's closest colleagues began to suspect that he was insane. In August 1979, Nguema was toppled by his nephew, Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who had his uncle executed a month later. Obiang continues to rule to this day, and has carried on humanrights abuses.

In 2004 Sir Mark Thatcher, former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher's son, was arrested for helping to plan an alleged plot to overthrow Obiang and take over the oil-rich nation. Though he got off with a fine, South African mercenaries accused of taking part in the conspiracy have been imprisoned in the country ever since.

Equatorial Guinea Today

Oil is still the name of the game in Equatorial Guinea. And with the US relying increasingly on sources outside the Middle East for fuel, the country is bound to be crawling with Americans and cash for some time. Perversely, Equatorial Guinea still ranks near the bottom on the most recent UN Human Development Index. The US government's 2006 Human Rights Report reported torture, arbitrary arrest, judicial corruption, child labour, forced labour, and severe restrictions on freedoms of speech and press, and while Obiang stores up tens of millions of dollars in US bank accounts, most of his citizens still live below the poverty rate (most of the 500,000 subjects subsist on less than a dollar a day).

CULTURE

You'll often be told to be careful whom you speak to while in Equatorial Guinea, and this fear is pervasive. With shifting laws and rules, the population is continuously kept offbalance and nervous.

Daily life revolves around the oil industry in Bata and Malabo. Otherwise people live a very traditional African lifestyle, in small villages of mud-wattle houses, with agriculture the main occupation. People work sunrise to sunset, drinking starts early, and talking continues until sleep comes. In many rural villages there's a noticeable absence of males aged 12 to 30, who go to the city for school and work. On the mainland 80% of the population is Fang, while on Bioko the Bubis are the most numerous group, making up about 15% of the total population. Smaller tribes, including the Benga, inhabit the other islands. Oil has brought many Americans, and many Chinese have started to set up shop in Bata and Malabo.

The majority of the population is Roman Catholic, owing to 400 years of Spanish occupation, but traditional animist beliefs are still strong and often intermixed with Catholicism. Witchcraft is still practised but is stigmatised, and kept under wraps.

ARTS & CRAFTS

In small villages traditional Fang crafts including masks are still kept and collected. However, most crafts in the cities are imports. Traditional rituals including dance are still performed, including the *balélé*, which is accompanied by drums, wooden xylophones, *sanzas*, and bow harps.

The culture has a strong oral tradition, with stories passed down through the generations, often involving the same cast of famous characters such as the grumpy tortoise and the wily monkey.

ENVIRONMENT

Equatorial Guinea is composed of two separate landmasses – the main land of Rio Muni and the island of Bioko which contains Malabo, the capital city – plus a series of even smaller islands off the coast.

Rio Muni is a roughly rectangular area of Central African rainforest with abundant wildlife, including gorillas, chimpanzees and forest elephants. Large sections of the interior have been set aside as protected areas, including Monte Alen National Park, which covers much of the centre of Rio Muni and offers some amazing treks. Logging is being more carefully controlled than in the past, but deforestation and the bushmeat trade that follows logging operations are still problems.

The island of Bioko, which is formed from three extinct volcanoes, has a steep rocky coast and a mountainous, wooded interior notable for high biodiversity. It contains over 65 known mammals, many of which are endangered. Much of Bioko was previously more than huge plantation; thus cacao now grows wildly throughout the island.

MALABO

pop 100,000

GUINEA

As you fly in to Malabo you will see oil platforms scattered around the harbour, tankers steaming and coastal refineries shooting off flames night and day. Malabo is an oil town and, in many ways, it's a cosmopolitan place where expatriates kick back at the end of the day before heading back to work on the platforms.

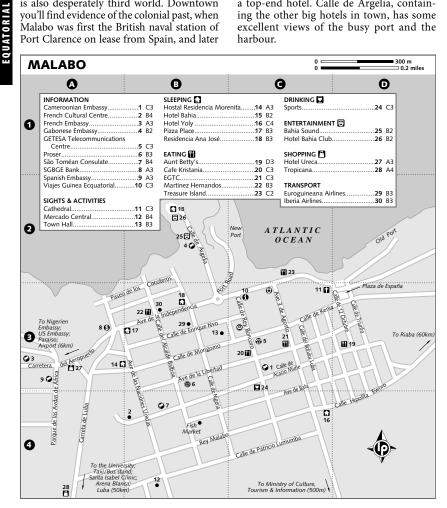
Like many African city-towns, Malabo is also desperately third world. Downtown you'll find evidence of the colonial past, when Malabo was first the British naval station of Port Clarence on lease from Spain, and later

renamed Santa Isabel when it was returned to Madrid.

ORIENTATION

Malabo is a small city on the northern side of Bioko Island, and is centred on the new port. The airport is located about 6km west of Malabo.

The heart of town is situated along Ave de la Independencia, where you'll find the main bank, shops, hotels, restaurants and, further east, the main square, which is undergoing major renovation including the building of a top-end hotel. Calle de Argelia, containing the other big hotels in town, has some excellent views of the busy port and the harbour.



INFORMATION

Bioko Biodiversity Protection Program (BBPP; 267876, 267112; contact@bioko.org) Might be able to offer you some information.

GETESA (cnr Calle de Rey Boncoro & Calle de Mongomo) Those travelling with a SIM-technology mobile phone, you can pick up a SIM card here.

Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Information (Ave 3 de Agosto) Doesn't have much info, but it's a mandatory stop for tourists because of the travel and photography permits (US\$40) that you'll need to show at the many roadblocks. Proser (2003163; www.proser-guinea.com; 85 Ave de la Libertad) The best Internet connection in town. Santa Isabel Clinic (Carreta de Luba) Most foreigners who need medical attention head to this clinic on the way out of town past the university.

SGBGE Bank (Carretera del Aeropuerto)

Spanish Cultural Centre (🖻 092489) Has decent info. Viajes Guinea Ecquatorial (🖻 092074, 270303; Ave de la Independencia) Try this travel agency for travelspecific information.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Be careful of roadblocks with corrupt officers. Taking photos in downtown Malabo is an easy way to get your camera confiscated, but you can always ask a nearby police officer for permission. Maps are theoretically illegal so don't carry one in an obvious way.

Crime rates aren't huge, but take all the precautions you would in a big city.

SIGHTS

Many colonial buildings remain, including the Cathedral (Ave de la Independencia) and Town Hall. The gorgeous Plaza de Españña (Calle de 12 Octubre) is a great place for a stroll.

Two markets are worth a visit, Mercado Central (Calle de Patricio Lumumba) and, a 10-minute walk outside of town, the bustling Mercado Semu.

ACTIVITIES

Bioko Biodiversity Protection Program (🖻 267876, 267112: www.bioko.org) is a conservation and ecotourism organisation run jointly by Universidad Nacional de Guinea Ecuatoria (UNGE), the local university and an American university. It runs guided trips to Moka and Crater Lake among other destinations, and has a yearly expedition to Grande Caldera, which has the highest concentration of primates in the area, including many endangered species.

Arena Blanca, an hour south of town on the way to Luba, is the only white-sand beach. It's packed on weekends.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The Spanish Cultural Centre and the French Cultural Centre both have lectures, movies, bands performing and other events. Check at the centres for the schedule.

In Moka there is a yearly festival celebrating the royal family held during the first week of November.

SLEEPING

Hotel rates have skyrocketed since the oil boom, and cheap rooms are nearly impos-sible to find. Check with the BBPP for open rooms in their house. **Residencia Ana Jose** (20286; Ave de la Independ-encia: rwith/without bathroom US\$30/20) This place of-

encia; r with/without bathroom US\$30/20) This place offers budget accommodation in the centre of town in an old house with a lot of character. Ana speaks little English, but she will be very excited to have you as a guest.

Pizza Place (a 093450; Ave de la Independencia; r US\$50) Offering comfortable rooms, Pizza Place is over a popular restaurant. Ask for Ali.

Hostal Residencia Morenita (🖻 091026; r US\$70) This hostel has nice rooms with good views.

Hotel Yoly (2 091895; Calle Hipolita Eworo; r US\$80; Contraction (Contraction)) Featuring clean rooms with tvs and balconies overlooking the ministry buildings in the town centre, this hotel also has a restaurant, internet access and a defunct pool.

Hotel Bahia (🖻 090649; Calle de Argelia; r US\$100) This is the best high-end choice in town with a lovely view and a good restaurant overlooking the harbour.

Paraiso (🖻 254033; Carretera del Aeropuerto; r US\$180) On the road to the airport, Paraiso is popular and often full of expats and oil men.

EATING

Martinez Hernandos (Ave de la Independencia) This is a Western-style grocery.

Aunt Betty's (🖻 511519; Calle de Acacio Muñe) Aunt Betty will cook for you in front of her home. Call ahead to tell her what you want.

Caféé Kristania (Calle de Ray Boncoro) In the centre of town, this upscale bakery café is great for breakfast.

Treasure Island (Ave de la Independencia; meals US\$10-14) Possibly the most Westernised of all the restaurants with prices to match and a tremendous view of the new harbour and a casino below.

In the centre of town, EGTC is a Lebanese food market with a good liquor selection. Bantu serves Chinese food with an African twist while the Spanish Cultural Centre has a lovely restaurant with reasonable prices and Spanish dishes.

Other small restaurants with good food include Cookies Restaurant near the Santuario Claret church, and the 4 Ases Restaurant. Top-end restaurants will be found at the big hotels; Hotel Bahia has one of the nicest.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Bahia Sound (Calle de Argelia) The nicest bar in town with live musicians dropping in on the weekends, an art gallery showing local artists, and a lovely back garden area. Alberto, the proprietor, is a fountain of information for the area and can point you towards anything you might need.

Hotel Bahia Club (Calle de Argelia) Swanky and popular with expats.

Sports (Calle de Ácacio Muñe) Late-nighters head here to dance until sunrise.

SHOPPING

GUINEA

EQUATORIAL

Hotel Ureca (Carretera del Aeropuerto) and Tropicana (Carreta de Luba), two top end hotels, have souvenir stands with imported goods for fair prices. Some bargaining is expected, and they will change dollars at good rates.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Flights to/from Bata take about 30 minutes on either Euroguineana Airlines (🖻 099336; Calle de Enrique Nvo) or General Work (20 084096) and cost around US\$90.

Many international flights from Europe now do weekly trips to Malabo. See p578.

Share taxis leave from a small market about 4km past the university where you can get rides to Luba (US\$4, one hour) and Moka (US\$7, two hours), or hire one from town.

Taxis around town cost about US\$1 for most locations around town during the day, and US\$2 at night.

BIOKO ISLAND

LUBA

Luba is a small town with yellow colonial buildings, gorgeous views and a sweeping coast. But with the new construction of the Luba Freeport, a deep-water port used by giant oil companies to bring large cargo ashore and to refuel, this formerly sleepy town is changing overnight.

A few hotels are popping up. Hotel Jones is on the main drag. Next door is the restaurant 4 Ases de Luba (meals US\$6-10), popular with the construction workers. Nearby is Isla Mujeres with a nice outdoor dining area.

South of Luba is the lovely town of Batété, well worth a visit to see the wooden church and to pick the old cocoa pods off the roadside trees from the forgotten plantations. It's one of the only towns still untouched by the oil boom, and is quite beautiful.

MOKA

A small town in the southern highlands nestled between volcanic peaks, Moka is a jumpoff point for a variety of great treks to tree-fern forests, spectacular waterfalls and crater lakes. You can stay at the Moka House (the first house when you come into the village), run by the BBPP, or the South African House, further along. You must be introduced to the president of Moka upon arrival. A trip to Moka is best arranged through BBPP in Malabo, which can also coordinate a trip to **Ureka**, a tiny beach town on Bioko's southern coast where nesting sea turtles are protected.

Moka can be most easily reached through the BBPP but can also be attempted (with some bribing at the checkpoints) via taxi from the taxi stand outside of Malabo for about US\$7.

RIO MUNI

BATA

Bata is a town under construction. The influx of American oil money has finally reached Rio Muni's shores, and electricity, new roads, streetlights, a manicured (and somewhat sanitised) waterfront, and plenty of American oilmen are there to prove it. Dozens of new buildings are going up in expectation of a richer, more Westernised future.

There's still plenty of traditional Africa to be seen in Bata, including many small markets selling the usual second-hand clothes, African dresses, fruits and vegetables, fish, and, of course, plastics.

Still at times the place can feel a bit like a ghost town - years of a low birth rate in Equatorial Guinea has kept the population small - but at night the streets come alive. Take a disco nap if you're planning on hitting the nightspots, as they don't start jumping until late.

Don't forget a stop at the snail-paced Ministro de Turismo for your requisite tourist papers (around US\$50).

Bomé is a popular beach, full on Sundays with oilmen and other Westerners.

Orientation & Information

The airport is a few kilometres north of town (taxi US\$1 to US\$2). New street and landmark signs make it easier to navigate this sprawling African city. Bar Centrale is a good, central place to orient yourself around. Proser has the best internet in town. Both BGFI and CCEI banks are just up the road from Bar Centrale on Calle Patricio Lumumba.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Yessica (🖻 083974; r US\$26/40; 🕄) Near the hospital. This was once an upscale place for African politicians and businessmen but has slid into decline. Still, it's a decent deal in a lively neighbourhood. It has televisions and at night the streets teem with people frequenting food stalls and hole-in-the-wall bars including Roca, next door.

Bar Centrale (r US\$60) This place offers comfortable, midrange rooms with many amenities above this popular and central restaurant. It caters to an upscale local clientele and the food is tasty.

Crysta (rUS\$60) Offers accommodation similar to Bar Centrale. Both places have good food and comfortable surroundings with upmarket prices catering to local businessmen, politicians and the elite.

High-end hotels include the weathered, waterfront Pan African ((2) 083240; r from US\$85), the new, upscale Plaza (r from US\$140), and the Hotel Carmen (r from US\$112) on the way to the airport.

For a cheap breakfast, grab a zatar - a Middle Eastern spice mixture served (in this case) on baked doughlike pizza - from the little bakery next door to Bar Centrale (US\$3).

Local eateries like La Ferme, next to the Ministry of Tourism, Express, near Proser, and La Cubana all are bustling and serve decent food. Akena serves good pizza on the waterfront next to the lovely Spanish Cultural Centre, which has lectures and movie offerings.

Housed in a traditional building right by the seaside, the Miramar serves up fresh fish. This is arguably the best meal to be had in Bata.

Drinking & Entertainment

Small neighbourhood bars are everywhere. Popular late-night clubs include Discoteca La Salsa (aka Beirut) and Araita.

Getting There & Away

Thirty-minute flights to/from Malabo leave daily with either General Work or Euroguineana (around US\$95); tickets can be bought at the airport or in town at the office near the radio station.

radio station. Catch share taxis to Mbini (US\$4, one hour) and areas south at the Mercado Grande. For Rio Campo, Monte Alen (US\$6, 1½ hours), Ebebeyin (US\$10, four hours) catch a taxi to Ngolo, and then ask the driver to point you Ngolo, and then ask the driver to point you in the right direction of the proper taxi to our destination. Taxis around town cost 300CFA (around your destination.

US\$0.60).

MBINI

About 50km south of Bata along the coast on the road towards Acalayong, a quick ferry ride brings you to Mbini. It's a nice little town on the river with a couple of cheap hotels, restaurants, a nightclub and lots of deserted beaches, but there's not much to do or see. There's a colourful old round market in the centre of town, and a few other architectural gems including the Ayuntimiento building. It's possible to rent a *pirogue* near the ferry and take a ride up the Mbini River.

There are a few basic hotels in town that cost around US\$10 a room. Hotel Pastura is near the ferry, and El Parador has cheap food. You can grab a drink at Club Sorrisa (rooms may be available) but many youths hang out at the foosball table at Mama Esperanza.

Minibuses from Bata to Mbini (US\$4, one hour, including a ferry from Bolondo to Mbini), and areas south, run from the Mercado Grande in the mornings.

COGO

Cogo is a surprisingly picturesque colonial town on the Equatorial Guinean side of the river that separates the country from Gabon. Daily life centres around the main street, where you'll find the basic but charming Hotel Estuario (r with toilet & bucket US\$10/12), which has electricity at night; look for the bright blue doors. There are a few eateries and bars that can offer food and drink, and some beautiful old churches and cathedrals. Check in with

the Commissar (and pay the requisite fee) before poking around town.

A *pirogue* across the estuary to much smaller **Acalayong** runs all day (US\$1 to US\$4), after which you can get a car or truck to Mbini and Bata (US\$6 to US\$8). The full journey takes about 2½ hours on a decent road through quaint villages. **Hotel Acalayong** (rUS\$10) is right next to the estuary if you get stuck overnight. Meals can be arranged for US\$2. *Pirogues* also leave for Isla Corisco from

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

not have life jackets for the two- to four-hour trip. At Cogo you can cross to Gabon by *pirogue* (around US\$10). You'll need a visa in hand

Cogo once or twice a week for about US\$10

to US\$20. They will be overloaded and will

and an exit stamp. Ask at the port for daily departures.

MONTE ALEN NATIONAL PARK

Monte Alen National Park is one of the hidden gems of Central Africa. A protected area covering 1400 sq km, the tropical forests are home to gorillas, chimpanzees, forest elephants, crocodiles and many other species of wildlife.

The excellent **Hotel Monte Alen** (r from US\$35) offers an affordable way to spend a few days seeing the rainforest up close. Situated on a jungle ridge with a sweeping view of the valley below, the rooms are beautiful and clean with running water and private baths. Meals are good but expensive, as supplies are hard to come by; it's worthwhile bringing some food and water to avoid the high costs.

Excellent guided day treks by trained villagers cost US\$10. You'll see monkeys, a host of birdlife and butterflies, and, if you're lucky, some larger mammals.

To get here, take a route taxi in Bata headed for **Evinayong** (US\$6; two to three hours). They'll drop you at the entrance to 'EcoFac'.

EBEBIYIN

Ebebiyin is the first village of any size in northeastern Rio Muni as you come across the border from Cameroon, 2km away. There are minibuses (US\$8) to/from Bata that take about four hours on the new roads, depending on the number of checkpoints.

Some claim **Hotel Immaculata** (r US\$100; **R**) is the nicest hotel in Equatorial Guinea, and a pool is under construction. A few smaller

hotels can be found around town for about US\$20.

Outside Ebebyin are many small traditional villages including **Alen Angsok** and **Ngon Eseng** that have rarely-visited falls, lakes, caves and colonial ruins. Check with police before heading out to visit.

MONGOMO

Because Mongomo is the president's home town it has had a recent facelift. **Hotel Ovon-Nfa** (r with fan/air-con from US30/60) is the nicest place in town. Other small hotels are popping up. A share taxi to Bata costs from US\$8. Daily taxis are available to Oyem (Gabon), across the border.

ISLA CORISCO

About 29km off the coast of Equatorial Guinea is the island of Corisco – kilometres of stunning white-sand beaches dotted with palm trees, including the long sand bar of **Hâkâ** that stretches out deep into the ocean. If you've ever been looking for a nearly undiscovered, deserted tropical island to beach yourself on, you've found it.

Most of the island's few visitors make arrangements before travelling and stay at the **Hostal Corisco** (a 212630; rUS\$20), a lovely house on the water, run by Pa Santiago Hinestrosa and family.

Activities here include boating around the island, going to see the crocodiles and sea turtles (which, unfortunately, are usually caught and eaten despite a ban), and trekking through the tiny village and old, burnt out cathedrals. Flag down a fisherman with a boat to get an inexpensive and lively tour of the island.

Check in Bata and Malabo for flights to an airport under construction.

Ŝantiago Hinestrosa can arrange boat transfers to/from Acalayong and Cogo (from US\$200 return).

A village *pirogue* leaves for Corisco from Cogo a few times a week as well (US\$10 to US\$20). Be prepared for overcrowding and a jostling passage *sans* lifejackets.

It is necessary to declare yourself to the *commandante* of the island soon after arrival (women travelling alone should go accompanied by a Hinestrosa family member); having your papers in order is imperative.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels in the cities cost from US\$40. In small towns lodging starts at US\$10.

BOOKS

The Wonga Coup: Guns, Thugs and a Ruthless Determination to Create Mayhem in an Oil-Rich Corner of Africa by Adam Roberts will give you a rich history of the failed coup plot and the politics of oil in the Gulf of Guinea.

Tropical Gangsters: One Man's Experience With Development and Decadence in Deepest Africa by Robert Klitgaard is a highly entertaining account of the World Bank's attempt at developing Equatorial Guinea before the oil boom.

BUSINESS HOURS

Daily siesta is from 1pm to 4pm when everything closes down. Normal business hours are Monday to Saturday 8am to 1pm and 4pm to 7pm.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

While violence is not likely, taking money off you is. Speaking out against the leadership can lead straight to jail. Be very careful taking photographs: a permit is necessary for cameras. See p569 for more.

CUSTOMS

Travellers leaving Equatorial Guinea on international flights can expect an extremely thorough search at customs. One of the things

POLICE & THIEVES & VINO

Pretty much all the readers' letters Lonely Planet gets about Equatorial Guinea say exactly the same things: the jungle is beautiful, the people are friendly, and yet the experience is ruined by corrupt officials demanding money at checkpoints every few miles. No matter how good you think you are at avoiding bribes, there will be times when you either pay up or turn around and go back where you came from.

If you have the patience and *cojones*, you can try a few things: hand the officers a copy of your passport first, not letting them have the real thing. If they issue a fine, ask why, and ask for a receipt. Or, wait it out – they may eventually get bored or pressured by the local in the taxi to let you go. If things get tense, a call by mobile phone to your embassy or consulate might be wise. Violence is not the norm at these checkpoints, but it has been reported. Approaching the situation as an adventure, with patience and smiles, will make your journey less frustrating. If all else fails, humility and a few boxes of vino are likely to get you anywhere.

PRACTICALITIES

- Weights, measures and road distances use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220-240V AC, 50Hz (European plug with two circular metal pins).
- Most media is state controlled and in Spanish. There are a few private newspapers and underground pamphlets which publish irregularly. Radio Asonga in Bata is privately owned (by the president's son) and a favourite.

officials will look for is currency, and if they find any you'll face a hefty fine (of course) for not filling out the 'currency declaration form'.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Equatorial Guinea Embassies & Consulates

 Belgium (23223462509; 295 1180 Uccle 7, Brussels)

 Cameroon Douala (23433435); Yaoundé

 (237210804)

 France (2313147664433; 6 Rue Alfred de Vieny, Paris)

 Gabon (241751056; Haut Gue-Gue, Libreville)

 Nigeria (23412691211; Lagos)

 Spain (234914352215; Coello No 91, Madrid)

 USA(21205185700; info@equatorialguinea.com; 2020

 16th St, NW, Washington, DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Equatorial Guinea

Gabon (293180; Calle de Argelia) Nigeria (292487; Paseo de los Cocoteros) São Tomé & Príncipe (Calle de Acacio Muñe) Spain (292020; Parque de las Avdas de África) USA (2098895; usembassymalabo@yahoo.com; Carretera del Aeropuerto)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

On August 3 the Liberation Day festival is celebrated in a different town.

HOLIDAYS

GUINEA

EQUATORIAL

As well as those listed in the Africa Directory (p1106) the principal public holidays in Equatorial Guinea are the following: **1 January** New Year's Day **1 May** Labour Day **25 May** Organization of African Unity (OAU) Day **5 June** President's Birthday **3 August** Liberation Day **12 October** Independence Day **10 December** Human Rights Day

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is available in Bata (p575) and Malabo (p573).

MAPS

Maps are currently illegal; be careful carrying one around in public.

MONEY

The local currency is the Central African CFA franc. There are no ATMs in Equatorial Guinea and credit cards are not accepted. Travellers cheques and cash can be changed at the banks in Malabo and Bata, but this is time-consuming and the rates and commissions are steep, so it's best to bring the cash you'll need in CFA.

Bargaining is expected at the markets but won't get you much in hotels or shops.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Equipment and developing are available in Malabo and Bata. A permit is needed to take photos; don't photograph anything connected with the military or government buildings.

VISAS

Visas are required for all with the exception of Americans, though many embassies outside the country are not always aware of this exemption, and officers on the ground will be suspicious. Visas can be purchased in neighbouring countries (see p577 for embassies) for up to US\$70. Obtaining a visa can be a long process and may require having an invitation from an organisation in the country. Expect many trips and long waits.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for Cameroon and Gabon are available from embassies in Malabo (see p577 for addresses). Equatorial Guinea is one of the best places to get a Gabonese visa: 30-day visas cost US\$60 and take about three days to process. Three-month visas for Cameroon cost US\$50 and are generally issued the same day. Visas to Cameroon are available at all border crossings.

VOLUNTEERING

Check with the Bioko Biodiversity Protection Program in Malabo (see p573).

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Travellers of any kind are rare in this country, and women travellers in particular will attract a lot of attention, especially in Malabo, which is teeming with (male) oil workers.

TRANSPORT IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Air France (www.airfrance.com) Flies from Paris to Malabo three times a week.

Iberia Airlines (www.iberia.com) Flies from Madrid to Malabo three times weekly.

KLM (www.klm.com) Flies from Amsterdam to Malabo a few times a week.

Swissair (www.swiss.com) Flies once a week to Malabo from Zurich.

When it does fly, **Euroguineana Airlines** flies to/from Douala (Cameroon) and Libreville (Gabon). Inquire at embassies for tickets.

DEPARTURE TAX

You may be asked on departure to leave a small amount of money. Be wary of carrying too much currency out of the airport as it could be confiscated.

A rotating cast of airlines fly to/from regional capitals. See p1121 for more information.

Land GABON

Crossing to Gabon can be done from Cogo/ Acalayong to Cocobeach by *pirogue* (p575), and via Mongomo (p576) or Ebebiyin (p576) to Oyem and Bitam. Visas for Gabon must be purchased in advance, and be sure to get an exit stamp.

CAMEROON

Travellers can always cross to Cameroon at Ebebeyin; the border at Rio Campo (two to

three hours from Bata) isn't always open, so check before you head there. The rules change all the time so you need to be careful.

GETTING AROUND

General Work (**(()** 084095; info@generalwork.net) flies between Bata and Malabo. A cargo ship heads weekly to Anobóón. Ask around at the port for details. It's possible to get a *pirogue* to some of the smaller islands, including Corisco.

Share taxis and over-packed minibuses are the only way to get around outside of Bata and Malabo. Rental cars may be available in Bata at Segani on the road to the airport.

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Gabon

In Gabon, you might just find yourself landing on an airstrip full of goats, dodging forest elephants on the stroll home from the bar, or wandering into a celebration of starkly painted dancers that harkens back hundreds of years. Outside Westernised Libreville, just about everything in Gabon is so newly accessible that just by being there you're already off the beaten path and in the middle of a whole new world.

And if you happen to be travelling with a 4WD, mechanic, cash to burn and a French dictionary, you're bound to have the adventure of a lifetime. Exploring this land ain't no walk in a national park. Lack of infrastructure and transportation will lead you on long, bumpy journeys, and it practically costs 20 bucks just to breathe the air in the glitzy capital city.

But you'll be stunned by what is shaping up to be Africa's next best ecotourism destination. Thanks to President El Hadj Omar Bongo's designation of a whopping 10% of the country's land as national parks - closing it down to loggers and miners and opening it up to travellers, conservationists and ecotourists - it's now possible to explore endless white-sand beaches, primate-filled tropical rainforests, rolling savannahs and estuaries.

Nature and wildlife fanatics will not be disappointed: long days of trekking will be rewarded with seeing wild creatures in their own pristine environment. The experience will transport you back to a time when Mother Earth - not humans - ruled the land.

FAST FACTS

GABON

- Area 257,670 sg km
- ATMs Only in Libreville; Visa-card linked only
- Borders Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Congo
- Budget US\$100 per day in Libreville; US\$60 per day in the interior
- **Capital** Libreville
- Languages French, Fang
- Money Central African CFA; US\$1 = CFA498
- Population 1.42 million
- Seasons Wet (September to November and February to May), dry (May to September and December to January)
- **Telephone** Country code **2**(41; international access code **a** 00
- Time GMT/UTC +1
- Visas Required by all; must be acquired before arrival

HIGHLIGHTS

- Langoué Bai (p593) Lounge on the observation platform above the forest elephants, gorillas and antelopes.
- **Réserve de la Lopé** (p592) Track vibrant mandrill troupes.
- **Mayumba** (p592) Body-surf the waves while watching humpback whales breach in the distance.
- Loango National Park (p591) Gape at beaches full of elephants, buffalos and surfing hippos.
- Makoghe (p593) Trip out on ancient ceremonies at a Bwiti initiation.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Hot, tropical Gabon has a rainy season from September to May, broken up by a short dry period from December to January, and a longer dry season from May to September. The temperature is 25°C on average, with about 80% humidity so it feels much hotter.

Whale season is from July to September and turtles come ashore to lay eggs from November to January. Mammals wander from forest to savannah depending on the temperatures - check with the national parks for seasonal wildlife migration.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Start in Libreville (p584), head to Réserve de la Lopé (p592) for some forest treks, take a night in Mikongo (p593), continue by train to Franceville (p593) and do a few day trips in the area, and then fly back to Libreville.
- **Two Weeks** Start in Libreville (p584) and head to Lambaréné (p591) for a few days, taking in a lake tour. Then head onto Mayumba (p592) where you can enjoy the beaches, the whales (if they're in season), and some forest walks. Then fly back up to Libreville and spend some time exploring the city.
- **One Month** Follow the one-week itinerary but add in a week for a stay in Ivindo National Park (p593) before heading to Franceville (p593). When you return to Libreville, take a few days in town before heading off to Lambaréné (p591) for a few nights. Take the boat from Lambaréné to Port-Gentil, and then head south via plane or boat to either Loango National Park (p591), or, if you're on a budget, Mayumba (p592).

- HOW MUCH?
- Share taxi around town US\$0.20
- Croissant US\$0.60
- Train from Libreville to Franceville US\$55
- Plane back to Libreville US\$110
- A weekend trekking in the forest US\$400

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1
- 1L bottled water US\$1.50
- Bottle of Régab US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10
- Grilled brochettes US\$3

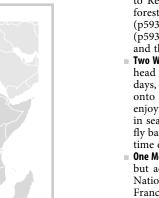
HISTORY

Avoiding the coups, wars and poverty that have plagued the rest of the continent, Gabon has been an oasis of stability and prosperity in a very troubled region for more than 40 years. Its president, El Hadj Omar Bongo, has held power since 1967 and ranks as Africa's longest-serving head of state. He has presided over an economy bolstered by income from oil, which has made Gabon one of the richest in sub-Saharan Africa - though dwindling reserves have forced planners to seek out other sources of revenue, and ecotourism has become the buzz word of the day.

Of Petroglyphs & Pygmies

Gabon has been inhabited for at least 400,000 years. Some 1200 rock paintings have been found in the area around Réserve de la Lopé. They were made by iron-working cultures that razed the forest for agriculture, creating today's savannah. The earliest modern society, the Pygmies, were displaced between the 16th and 18th centuries by migrating peoples from the north, principally the Fang, who came after settling in what is now Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea.

Contact with Europeans, starting with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1472, had a profound effect on tribal structures. British, Dutch and French ships traded for slaves, ivory and tropical woods. The coastal tribes established strong ties with these foreign



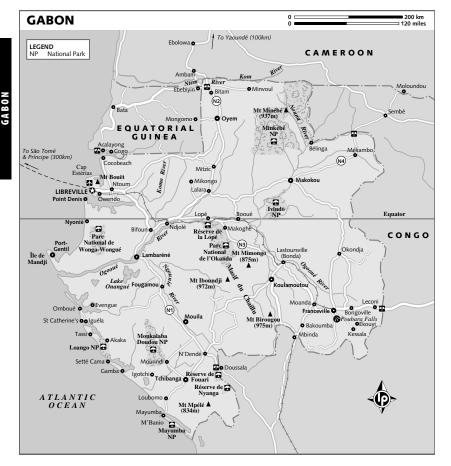
powers, but the interior tribes defended their lands against European encroachment. Animosity still lingers between the coastal tribes and the rest of the country.

The capital, Libreville, was established in 1849 for freed slaves on an estuary popular with traders. In 1885, the Berlin Conference of European powers recognised French rights in Gabon, which became part of the French Congo and later French Equatorial Africa. The country became self-governing in 1958, and won independence in 1960 under President Léon M'Ba. After M'Ba died in a French hospital in 1967, his vice president, Albert Bernard Bongo, took power of the nation (changing his name when he adopted Islam in 1974).

Independence Daze

The newly independent nation got off to an extravagant start. As money rolled in from the sale of timber, manganese ore, iron ore, chrome, gold, diamonds and finally oil, Gabon's per capita income soared higher than South Africa's.

In 1976, Bongo's government announced a four-year, US\$32 billion plan to create a modern transport system, encourage local industry and develop mineral deposits. Few of these projects ever took shape. The government did, however, spend vast sums hosting a summit of the Organization of African Unity in 1977 and is still doing construction on the (conservatively estimated) US\$250 million presidential palace.



After four decades of dominance by President Bongo, his rule is evident everywhere, from the women's clothing that bears his image to the ubiquitous portraits and huge billboards glorifying the leader. A bevy of French political and military advisers serve him, as does a personal bodyguard composed of European mercenaries, Moroccan soldiers and 400 top-notch French airborne troops.

In 1990, after the country's first real political unrest, Bongo ended more than two decades of one-party rule by legalising the opposition (though subsequent elections were marred by fraud).

Gabon Today

Today, the National Assembly remains dominated by Bongo's ruling party, the Democratic Party of Gabon (PDG), though his opponents hold a few seats. Allegations of massive government corruption persist, and Bongo's power is nearly absolute.

As Bongo ages gracefully, the question looms large in the populace's mind: when his tenure finally comes to an end, will Gabon go the volatile way of Cote d'Ivoire, or will Bongo manage to control from beyond the grave?

CULTURE

Someone once said that the Gabonese like to act more French than the French themselves, and this certainly could hold true in Westernised, glitzy Libreville, despite the remaining resentment of the old colonial masters who are also still Gabon's biggest trading and investment partners. But beyond the big city (and oil-soaked Port-Gentil), most Gabonese are still living simply, sometimes in the same conditions and traditions as hundreds of years ago.

Yet even in tiny remote villages you won't find the kind of poverty seen in other parts of Africa. Everyone in Gabon has enough money for beer, and that's just what they spend it on. Women are allowed to join in, but only after the wood is gathered, the food is prepared and the rest of the work is done. On Sundays everyone dresses in their best and heads off to church where spirited dancing and singing ensues.

If you're in a hurry to go somewhere or get anything done Gabon's can be a frustratingly slow country, both because of the Frenchinherited bureaucracy as well as the rejection of Westernised work hours.

PEOPLE

Of the peoples living in Gabon today, the original forest-dwelling tribes (often referred to as Pygmies) survive only in the remote north of the country, barely keeping their fascinating culture intact. Most other people are descendents of the Bantu peoples, and the Fang are still the most numerous. There is also a sizable French expat community.

Missionary influence is palpable; over 50% of the country counts itself as Christian, though traditional animist beliefs are still strong. Beliefs in superstition and witchcraft hold great power over much of the Gabonese population. Stay in the country long enough, and you will soon notice yourself referring to the 'spirits' and 'ancestors'.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Traditional masks, carvings and bieri (ancestral sculpture) using natural materials such as wood, raffia and feathers are found throughout Gabon, but are rarely sold in the markets as they are still religiously utilised. (Though you will find these kinds of items from neighbouring countries in the markets.) Fang masks are prized throughout the world and sold for big bucks at art auctions.

Dancing is a national pastime, and recent dance crazes include the Ivorian Coupé Decalé and the L'Oriengo, which originated as a dance for people handicapped by polio. Traditional tribal dance is still widely practised and can be seen at cultural villages.

Hip-hop is big in Gabon, and there are plenty of home-grown groups playing on the radios. You'll also find recordings of the sacred music of the Bwiti, which uses, among other extraordinary instruments, harps played with the mouth, as well as brilliant, inspiring Pygmy recordings.

ENVIRONMENT

Gabon is a country of astonishing landscapes and almost insane biodiversity, much of which is still undiscovered and unexploited. Though almost 75% of the country is covered in dense tropical rainforest, this equatorial country is also full of endless white-sand beaches, savannahs, rushing rivers, hidden lagoons, rocky plateaus and canyons, cloud-tipped mountains and inselbergs (isolated rock domes overlooking the surrounding forest canopy), all of which are home to an amazing array of flora and fauna.

THE 'CONSERVATION COUP'

In 1999, Mike Fay of National Geographic and the Wildlife Conservation Society walked more than 3200km through the heart of Africa, documenting the stunning natural environment he passed through. President Bongo, after seeing the photos of what became known as the 'Megatransect', did the unthinkable: in 2002 he created a 13-park network of protected lands that covers 10% of the country. Overnight Gabon leapt from last to first in land conservation. Hailed as a 'conservation coup', it was a wise move for Bongo, who was looking for new sources of revenue. Wildlife organisations and ecotourist outfits subsequently rushed in to set up camps in the parks to support the fledging conservation economy.

Not that all is rosy for Gabon and its environment: each day hundreds of trucks and trains carry loads of old-growth trees and manganese into Libreville for shipment to Europe and Asia, and early efforts to set up ecotourism camps may get trampled by the quick money that comes from new oil exploration rights.

You're likely to come across (and perhaps have to flee from) gorillas, chimpanzees, mandrills, forest elephants, buffalos, crocodiles, antelopes, hippos, humpback and killer whales, monkeys of all shapes and sizes, leopards, red river hogs, sea turtles and a rainbow of rare birds - to name just a few. New conservation efforts to save endangered species are now underway (see The Conservation Coup, above).

FOOD & DRINK

GABON

Gabonese cuisine has a strong French and West African influence, especially in the cities. Traditional meals are more likely to be found in the village, and they include staples of rice and manioc, fish and bushmeat.

LIBREVILLE

pop 557,000

Glitzy in some spots, ramshackle and anarchic in others, Libreville is very likely to give you culture shock, especially if you've been slogging your way through the jungles of Central Africa. High-rise hotels line the beaches, European expats fill the shops and restaurants, and flashy cars speed down the wide boulevards. Libreville has everything you could ask for, at a price you probably can't afford.

While Libreville is a necessary stop for transit and for making arrangements, the rest of Gabon is endlessly more interesting, so git on out there!

ORIENTATION

The airport is about 4km north of town. Travelling south, all quartiers shoot off the large

main roadway along the ocean, referred to as Au Bord de Mer.

Street names are never used; landmarks are. Some useful ones are M'bolo, the Intercontinental, Le Meridien, the main post office (La Grand Poste), Port Môle, the casino, Mont Bouet and the major embassies.

Distant areas are referred to in kilometres from a specific point in the city centre on Blvd Bessieux (called PK), so PK8, for example, designates the exchange that is 8km from PK

INFORMATION Bookshops

Maison De La Presse (2 772695) At this Frenchlanguage bookshop you can get Le Pratique Du Gabon (US\$12; www.lepratiquedugabon.com in French), which has great city listings. English-language books are not easy to come by

Cultural Centres

Centre Culturel Francais (CCF; 27761120) This beautiful, air-conditioned centre has cultural events, films and concerts.

Internet Access

Most big hotels offer wi-fi at exorbitant rates. Centre Culturel Francais (CCF; 27 761120; per 45 min US\$1) A good option with air-conditioning and helpful staff. Cybercafé Planet (🕿 06033333; per 45 min US\$1) The fastest connection in town. Located in the strip of shops iust across from M'bolo.

Medical Services

Fondation Jeanne Ebori (🗃 732771) Across from Port Môle in Ouartier Louis. Polyclinique El Rapha (🗃 447000) The best hospital in Libreville.

Money

Banks in Libreville will change cash and travellers checks. Hotels also change at good rates, as do local merchants. There are ATMs (accepting Visa cards only) in town at some banks, M'bolo and top-end hotels.

Post

Main post office (La Grand Poste; Au Bord de Mer) Located in the heart of the city. Western Union is directly behind it.

Telephone

Telephones are all over town in small shops. Celtel (2 740000; US\$6) Getting a SIM card for your mobile phone is cheap and easy here.

Tourist Information

Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS; 2 444039) Has a good grasp of everything going on in the national parks. World Wildlife Fund (WWF; 🛱 730028) Ditto.

Travel Agents

Mistral Voyages (2 761222, 747779; mistral.lbv@ internetgabon.com; www.ecotourisme-gabon.com) Of the many travel agencies, this is the most utilised. Owner Patrice knows everything about the country (though front office staff can be cranky) and most tour packages can be booked there.

SCD (3 564100, 885666; scd-aviation@inet.ga, reserva tion-iguela@inet.ga) Another important agency, which books Operation Loango and is rumoured to soon take over Lopé and other national parks. It also has its own aircraft, which makes things run smoother.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Libreville is not a particularly safe city and theft is on the rise. Be careful in the back of share taxis and getting out of taxis at night. Don't wander onto the beach after dark. Take all the precautions you would in any big city.

BUSHMEAT

Always bring either your passport or a copy of it (and your visa) with you. Police will often attempt extortion for some infraction.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

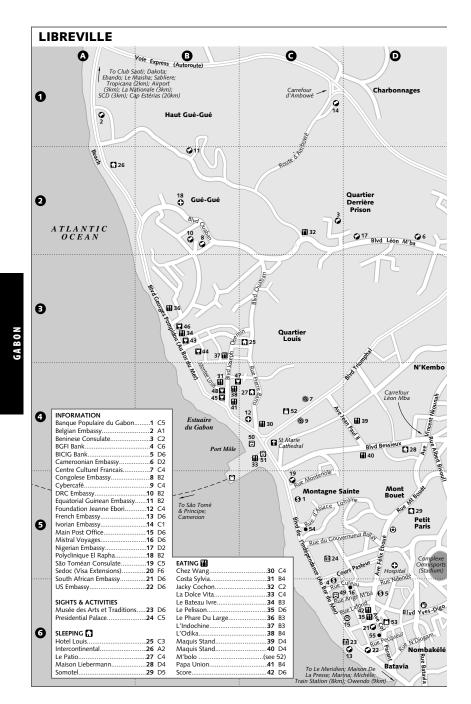
The Musée des Arts et Traditions (🖻 761456; musee gabon@numibia.net; Au Bord de Mer; donation of around US\$6; (8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm) has exhibitions on tribal crafts and culture, and a great collection of masks. Just as interesting are the folk-art sculptures on the waterfront across from the Intercontinental and, a nice walk south along the water, across from the casino.

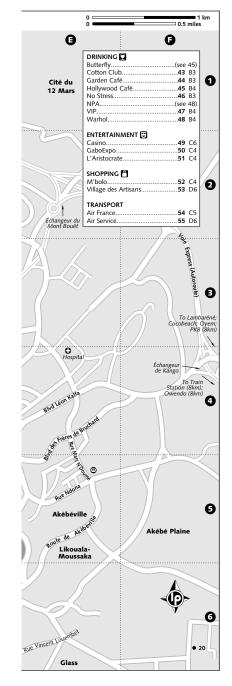
The row of ministry buildings with wacky, Soviet-inspired architecture on Blvd Triomphal is worth a drive-by, as is the northern suburb of Sabliere, where ministers, ambassadors, the rich and the president reside.

On weekends most of Libreville heads to the beach; young people congregate in front of the Tropicana. There are pools at the Meridian, Intercontinental and Atlantique that can be used for a fee ranging from US\$5 to US\$15, or the price of a meal. Club Saoti (2 06685020) offers squash, tennis courts, bowling and other sporting activities and lessons. There are two cultural associations that

organise traditional dance performances and ceremonies. Ebando Association (🖻 06250917; ibogabon@yahoo.fr; www.bwiti.com) is headed up by the wacky, wonderful shaman Tatayo, a French man who has lived in Gabon forever. On site is a Bwiti temple and many young Gabonese learning and practicing the traditional arts. Costs are variable (if you want to do an initiation, for example), but if you want to go and hang out with Tatayo and chat about Bwiti culture it's free. It's located north of Libreville in the neighbourhood of La Sabliere. The other cultural association, Mbehg-Ntame,

Crocodiles, porcupines, chimps, snakes, antelopes and gorillas: they're all wanted for dinner. Bushmeat - meat that comes from wild animals - is a longstanding West and Central African tradition, especially in areas where domestic animals (and thus protein) are scarce. But in recent years, eating bushmeat has changed from a necessity to a citified luxury, and new logging roads into previously inaccessible territory have made the commercial sales of endangered animal meat easier. And while conservationists are fighting to protect endangered wildlife, villagers defend their traditional lifestyles and the ability to feed their family. New laws now make a distinction, outlawing the commercial selling of endangered and protected animals while allowing traditional hunting practices to continue. Despite this, restaurants throughout Gabon still serve illegal meat at high prices.





also run by a French man (named Cristophe) is located outside of town at PK12, and there are various dances and shows performed, as well as traditional meals served. Cristophe can be reached at \bigcirc 270990.

SLEEPING

Maison Liebermann (761955; r US\$14) The cheapest option in the city, with clean, fan-cooled rooms and a calm atmosphere – but beware the occasional morality lecture.

Somotel ((2) 765846/47, s/d US\$26/36) Smack in the middle of a bustling downtown neighbourhood is this popular choice with well-organised, 24-hour services. Point confused taxi drivers towards 'en face de la Maison du Combattent'.

Tropicana (⑦ 731531/32; tropicana@inet.ga; s/d US\$32/52) Just across from the airport, this is an old favourite and possibly the best setting to relax in Libreville. Staff might seem aloof and the services wanting, but all of Libreville is likely to pass through while you eat brochettes or French cuisine and sip sundown drinks. The manager Eric is constantly aflutter but he knows everyone and everything. On Sundays the beach gets slamming and the little bar next door is the centre of youthful activity. Be careful on the road outside after dark as there have been some thefts recently. Reservations are necessary. Note: the singles are dingy and the breakfast is a joke for US\$5.

Le Patio (2734716; d US\$54) This Spanishowned hotel in nightlife-packed Quartier Louis features a nice lobby with pool table and bar, and a good restaurant with local and Spanish specials. Rooms are all off of a cute patio; the ones on the brighter 2nd floor are nicer.

Hotel Louis (732569) This hotel is an old standard in the Quartier Louis, where you'll find plenty of decent midrange options for around the same prices as those at Le Patio.

Le Maisha ((2) 730333) Beachfront Le Maisha is the epitome of luxury in the presidential suburb of Sabliere, with each room decorated with its own opulent theme. It was closed for renovation at the time of research, but may be functional again soon. There's no word on opening/new pricing but before renovations began, rooms started at US\$150 and went beyond US\$500.

popular full-service option featuring a health club and business services (including wi-fi access).

Le Meridien (2 766161; reservation@lemeridien.ga; www.lemeridien-rendama.com; d from US\$190; 🔀 🔲 🔊) Another full-service hotel with health club and business services (including wi-fi). Further downtown than the Intercontinental, it has a beautiful pool area with an ocean view.

EATING

There are plenty of places to grab in bite in Libreville and you can't throw a banana in the Quartier Louis without hitting a restaurant. Not surprisingly, cheap grub is hard to come by, though there are dozens of places to grab a croissant for around US\$1 and plenty of street stands selling coupé-coupé (chopped meat wrapped in paper). At night the street maquis (street stalls/vendors selling brochettes and fish; US\$4) come out - the best ones are around Blvd Bessieux and Ave John Paul II. For self-caterers, M'bolo and Score are big Western-style markets.

is always a good spot to take a load off and munch on a pastry or an omelette. La Dolce Vita (🖻 724238; mains US\$7-15) On Port Môle, this place is situated right above the ocean and serves great Italian food in a fan-

Le Pelisson (765258: snacks & mains US\$5-10) Centrally located, this upscale balconied place

tastic setting. Costa Sylvia (2 06256308; mains from US\$8) This restaurant serves Gabonese and European cuisine with some Romanian specialties in a tranquil, homey environment frequented by regulars - often businessmen, ministers and families.

Jacky Cochon (2731848; jackycochon@ hotmail.com; mains from US\$12) The most interesting eating establishment in all of Gabon, this place in the Quartier Derriére Prison is decked out in red, green and gold, and hung with portraits of reggae legend Bob Marley. Excellent meals (grilled meat and veggies) served by long-dredded Jacky himself, a pig farmer and musician. Ask for a tour of his sawdustfloor butcher shop next door and his astral wine cellar. .

L'Odika (🖻 736920; mains from US\$12) A popular choice with a gorgeous open dining area. It serves a mixture of French and African cuisine including good seafood - as well as bushmeat (see p585).

Le Bateau lvre (a 443487; mains from US\$17) Gastronomes may prefer this subtler but equally superb restaurant, known for European cuisine.

Le Phare Du Large (🖻 730273; Au Bor du Mer; mains from US\$18) If you want to eat like a king - or maybe a president (Bongo has been a frequent client) - this restaurant is the epitome of fine dining. Though the plush boat-and-sea décor is a little much, the food is top-notch. The proprietor himself catches fish daily, often serving rare varieties.

For Asian cuisine, both Chez Wang (buffets from US\$20) and L'Indochine (buffets from US\$20) are decent choices, often serving buffets to crowds on weekends.

The Papa Union (pizzas from US\$7) chain has decently priced pizza. Another popular choice for pizzas is Dakota (pizzas from US\$6), near the Tropicana.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

If you wanna get out and get down, hit the Quartier Louis. Clubs get going at midnight, but you can start off a bit earlier at No Stress (fun young crowd, crappy management) or the Garden Café (expats, billiards, food until 11.30pm). Once the clock strikes 12, shake vour bootie on Montée Louis (the ascent of the hill into the Quartier Louis) at new-kidon-the-block Warhol (the most Westernised and ritzy with an occasional US\$10 cover) or NPA (often packed with French militaries and their petites (young prostitutes). Then, climb into the red truck, literally, at Hollywood Café, and sashay through Butterfly, a Moroccan-owned restaurant-disco with a fantastic sculpture garden and creative ambience. Butterfly is welcoming to the small gay and lesbian scene, and its dinner buffet and hookahs are popular.

Down the road you'll find red velvet Cotton Club, which starts out the night with karaoke before the people hit the dance floor, and VIP, which plays more of an African line-up. Find a Gabonese escort to take you to Africando across town in Charbonanages, and watch those bodies move it, move it.

The impeccably decorated Lokua Bar has amazing cocktails and a live band on Thursdays with a Louis Armstrong-esque lead singer. At Port Môle, L'Aristocrate (open Fridays and Saturdays) has Semba bands.

The GaboExpo next to Port Môle hosts large-scale concerts of big Gabonese and African acts.

IN THE LAND OF BWITI

Ancestral forest spirits, sorcerers, vampires and mermaids all play a big role in the traditions of Bwiti, one of three official religions in Gabon. It is said to have two to three million African followers and more than a few in Western societies, due in part to the increasing popularity of the sacred iboga plant used in ancient coming of age ceremonies and other initiation rites. The hallucinogenic rootbark of iboga is said to induce a spiritual enlightenment; those who eat it are able to commune with the ancestors, gain protection from malignant spirits, and have complex visual insights into the world. Ibogaine, a chemical compound found in iboga, is now being tested in Western societies for the treatment of drug addicts.

There are already quite a few hallucinogenically-inspired travellers seeking out Bwiti initiation experiences in Gabon. But ingesting iboga is risky: there have been thefts and sexual assaults while people are under the influence, and deaths have been reported as a result of overdoses. If you do decide to undertake the throw-up-for-hours-stay-up-for-three-days extravaganza, make sure to find a trustworthy shaman. And be prepared for a two-week comedown.

SHOPPING

The M'bolo compound is Libreville's answer to a strip mall, with lots of small shops and one Walmart-esque hypermarket (M'bolo itself) selling food and most anything else you might need. There's also a well-organised pharmacy in the compound. Another small strip mall is across the road.

At the Village des Artisans (Ave Col Parant) most of the goods (and the merchants) are imports. If you're going to be travelling in other African countries you'll find much better prices for the same stuff.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Air Service (2 747118, 747119) and La Nationale (2 06669077, 031903) fly within Gabon to Port-Gentil, Koulamoutou, Franceville, Mouila, Oyem, Gamba and Makokou. SCD Aviation (a 564100, 885666; scd-aviation@inet.ga) also does some of these routes and includes a few more like Ombouye. Flights to cities in nearby countries include: Douala (Cameroon), Pointe-Noire (Congo), Brazzaville (Congo) and São Tomé (São Tomé & Príncipe).

A taxi to or from the airport costs US\$4/8 during the day/night, even if your hotel is just across the road.

Local Transport

All taxis-brousses (bush taxis) leave from PK8 (pronounced peek-a-weet), 8km out of Libreville. Overpacked minibuses, 4WDs, pickups and *clandos* (cars that act as long-distance taxis) can be found daily for most destinations; early morning is the best time to show up. You can pay double to secure yourself a seat in the

front alone (otherwise two share it). A gazillion stops to pick up fruit or say hi to a cousin will be made along the way. From Libreville, you can catch local transport to Lambaréné (US\$10, four hours), Cocobeach (US\$10, two to three hours), Tchibanga (US\$30, eight hours) and Oyem (US\$20, 11 hours).

Train Many eastern destinations are best reached by the Transgabonaise train that leaves 8km south of the city in Owendo. It's a comfortable ride; 1st class costs not much more than 2nd. Reservations are made through travel agents or at the station. Expect delays and breakdowns; overpriced food is available. Trains run to Lopé (the town at the entrance to the reserve; 1st class US\$40) and Franceville (1st class US\$88).

GETTING AROUND

Share taxis on pre-determined routes cost CFA100 (US\$0.20). An un course (hire-taxi) is US\$1 to US\$4 (US\$6 per hour), though rates and service differ depending on the mood of the driver. Prices go up at night.

AROUND LIBREVILLE

POINT DENIS

Point Denis is a nice, easy weekend getaway where most of the French expats go each weekend to lounge on the beach and enjoy their water toys. The 30-minute boat shuttles leave each Saturday and Sunday in the morning, from Port Môle (US\$16 return) and Michéle Marina (US\$20 return).

Favourites for eating and sleeping are Assala Lodge (r US\$90) and La Maringa (r US\$70).

If you walk to the Atlantic side of the point and keep going, you'll hit endless miles of uninhabited beach. During sea-turtle season (November to January) you can help local NGOs protect the eggs and reroute confused turtles.

Further down the coast is the isolated and beautiful Phare de Ngombé (200629999), a lodge situated at the old lighthouse on the coast in front of Pongara forest. A Saturday to Sunday visit, including forest excursions, turtle-watching and fishing, costs US\$200 per person (all-inclusive).

NYONIÉ

Relaxing beachside bungalows (with electricity but no hot water), forest excursions in search of buffalo and elephants, and all the food and drink you want await you in Nyonié (a camp situated south of Point Denis), just an hour boat ride from Michéle Marina in Libreville. The first night is US\$200 (all-inclusive with drinks) and each successive night is US\$80. For arrangements contact Beti (2 06033636).

GABON

Two to three hours north of Libreville down a dusty road is the small coastal town of Cocobeach. There's not much to do in this tiny town, but you can cross over on a pirogue to Cogo in Equatorial Guinea (US\$10; baggage extra) after getting an exit stamp from the local Sedoc branch, just past the Motel Esperance. Note that you cannot get a visa for Equatorial Guinea while in Cocobeach and those arriving in Cogo without a visa will be heavily fined and terribly hassled.

For sleeping options in Cocobeach try either the Motel Esperance (rUS\$22) or, just up the road, the cheaper Motel Iboga (rUS\$11). You can get some grub across the street from the Iboga for about US\$3.

Taxis leave from PK8 in Libreville and cost US\$10 for a packed vehicle or US\$50 to take a car on your own. Taxis leave early in the day for most destinations.

NORTHERN GABON

In the past there's been no reason to go to northern Gabon unless you're in transit to or from Cameroon or Équatorial Guinea. But once you get out of Oyem, the main

centre, the area is unchartered territory and ripe for exploring off-off-off the beaten path. Some remaining Pygmy tribes are rumoured to live in the northern forests, and Minkébé National Park is in the northeast corner, studded with rock-dome inselbergs and filled with rare mammals. Ecocamps are being developed in the area around Minvoul; check with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF; **730028**) in Libreville to organise trips to the national park.

OYEM pop 30,000

Oyem, the largest city in the north, is the centre of Gabon's Fang community. People go to Oyem to cross over to Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon. There may soon be some national parks in the area, but nothing yet. It's a relatively untravelled area, and there are still forest-dwelling pygmy tribes that can be visited. It's an area of strong traditional cultures, mostly Fang. There is also a big market right over the border in Cameroon on Saturdays called Mondial, and many locals go to get fresh produce. It's two to three hours by car and anyone can tell you where to find the packed taxis.

Hotel Mvet Palace (2 986172; r from US\$30) is an upmarket accommodation option, or you can stay cheaply at one of the missions in town.

There are special buses from Libreville (in addition to the *taxis-brousses*) that leave from PK8 (US\$24, around 11 hours) with a stop at Ndjolé. By plane from Libreville to Ovem costs US\$90 one way and takes about 45 minutes.

Taxis-brousses leave from Oyem to Mongomo in Equatorial Guinea daily; you must already have a visa in hand. It takes about 30 minutes to the border and it costs around US\$8. Then you switch taxis on the EG side to your various destinations.

BITAM pop 10,000

Bitam has an excellent market with fresh fruits and vegetables at low prices where you can find shared taxi rides to the Cameroon border (US\$5 to river border, US\$5 for the pirogue across; visas US\$60). Don't forget to stop at immigration and get an exit stamp (no charge if your papers are in order) or you'll be turned back at the border checkpoint.

From Bitam you can take a short taxi ride to Ebebiyin in Equatorial Guinea, and catch a four hour ride to Bata.

SOUTHERN GABON

LAMBARÉNÉ pop 20,000

Lambaréné is somehow kinder and gentler than the rest of Gabon, as if the humanitarian efforts of Nobel Peace Prize winner Albert Schweitzer changed the character of the land. And Albert Schweitzer's legacy is indeed felt everywhere, from the still-operational free hospital (founded in 1924 to treat lepers) to the volunteer-staffed lab that researches malaria and other tropical diseases. The hospital museum (admission US\$6) is well worth a visit to see photos of the original hospital and the impeccably arranged house and artefacts from Schweitzer and his wife.

The town is divided into three areas spanning the river quite close to each other. The near bank has the Schweitzer hospital grounds; across the bridge is the island with the main markets and town; across another bridge is the far bank of Isaac where you'll find nightlife and action. Short taxi rides around town vary from CFA300 (US\$0.60) to CFA600 (US\$1.20) depending on how many bridge crossings you make. Prices go up at night.

Explore the many lakes by pirogue, arranged at the port in town, through the Ogooué Palace, or by contacting **Cedric** (**a** 07646364). A long boat trip will cost around US\$100, but can be split with many people. There are different sites in the various lakes (as well as birdlife and hippos) including the old Mission Ngomo with its aging wooden cathedral, the Lake Evaro luxury tourist camp and gorilla sanctuary (stays can be arranged through travel agents in Libreville), and many traditional villages.

At the Mission Souers de l'mmaculée Conception (3 581073; r US\$12) the adorable nuns make you feel as if you've been spirited into the Sound of Music. The grounds are gorgeous, there's a kitchen available for use, and the fan-cooled rooms are clean. It's best to call ahead to ensure a room - there's no real set system to the room prices, you'll pay US\$12 if you have a room to yourself or if you come with friends (per person) - though they also have a 20-bed dorm.

For comfort, the lovely, up-market Hotel Ogooué Palace (🖻 581864, 07162802; reservation@

ogoouepalace.com; www.ogoouepalace.com in French; d from US\$56) is a great choice with a waterfront location, excellent meals, and some (caged) animals on the grounds.

The reconstructed Hotel Schweitzer (3 581033, 07949053; r US\$30) has nice views and beautiful local art, but the expat owners display some eccentric behaviour.

The best food in town is across the far bridge in Isaac. At night fish and brochette stands line the streets (La Terrace is the local favourite), or try the simple restaurants La Pleide or La Referance. If you're looking for something more substantial try the French cuisine of Petit Detour.

Late at night everyone hits Padouk to dance. Sunday night out is a favourite of the many young researchers stationed at the Schweitzer lab.

LOANGO NATIONAL PARK

Loango National Park very well may be the most varied and visually stunning of all of Gabon's national parks. It's known for its mythically surfing hippos, but you'll also find the largest concentration and variety of whales and dolphins, elephants wandering white-sand beaches and an assortment of rare land mammals cavorting in the savannah.

Operation Loango (🖻 564100, 07399618; reserva tion-iguela@inet.ga; www.operation-loango.com), the only show in town to visit the northern end of the park, is Gabon's premiere high-end ecotourist destination using tourist dollars to support conservation efforts. Whale, crocodile, and turtle studies and a gorilla habituation project are in progress, while the luxury ecolodge and satellite camps hosts tourists.

At Iguéla, the base camp, everything is regally appointed and finely delivered, with a grand price tag to match (prices start at US\$375 per person without drinks). There are several equally stunning satellite camps in the varied environments: St Catherine's on the beach: Akaka, where animals roam about; Evengue ('gorilla island'), where gorilla rehabilitation is underway; and Tassi in the savannah and coastal grasslands. Activities include whalewatching trips, savannah and lagoon tours, some of the best sport-fishing in the world and visits to Mission Sainte Anne where Gustave Eiffel's pre-fab iron church is still in use.

All logistics and travel arrangements are made through SCD (a 564100, 885666; scd-aviation@inet .ga, reservation-iguela@inet.ga) in Libreville.

SETTÉ CAMA

This lagoonside village set at the southern entrance to Loango National Park is a beloved, though often empty, traveller respite. The varied ecosystems of the national park – coastal equatorial forest, savannah and the deserted beaches of the Atlantic coast – offer a grand setting to explore nature, immerse in local culture and chill out. Villagers organise dance ceremonies, traditional pirogue fishing trips and forays to search the Ndougou Lagoon for hippos and crocodiles. During turtle season it's possible to spend a night in the sea-turtle research camp.

The EU-funded Case Abietu (2007141718; gambareservations@yahoo.fr; www.gamba-tourism.com) is a successful pilot project in community-based ecotourism. The village cooperative runs this simple guesthouse with six fan-cooled bedrooms, a lounge, a small library, and a delightful terrace overlooking the lagoon. Villagers prepare traditional meals and act as ecoguides. The elders of the 'Mama Mafubu' weave traditional mats, which are sold at the tourist information centre at Gamba airport. The profits of the all-inclusive tariff minus drinks (around US\$120 per person per night) goes to set up community projects. The Case Abietu model is in the process of being replicated in two villages, Mourindi and Igotchi, in the Moukalaba Doudou National Park. Check with Gamba Reservations for details on opening dates.

Reservations for details on opening dates. Also in Setté Cama are the more pricey and luxurious bungalows of **Setté Cama Safaris** (20262309; www.settecama.net, in French). You can either contact them direct or through **Mistral Voyages** (2027, 747779; mistral.lbw@internetgabon .com; www.ecotourisme-gabon.com) in Libreville.

From Libreville to Gamba by road is a long, bumpy haul in a pick-up, often broken into two days by a stay in lovely Tchibanga at the wonderful **Hotel Modibotie** ((2000)

Air Service flies to Gamba six times a week, and clients of Case Abietu get a 15% reduction, making the cost around US\$260 return.

MAYUMBA

When you mention Mayumba to someone who has travelled there, you're often met with a dreamy, faraway look. It's no wonder – with the nicest beaches in all of Gabon (endless and uninhabited), whales spouting in the distance, trees full of magical spirits and nesting sea turtles on the beach, it's not too far from a slice of ecotraveller heaven.

You can stay simply and cheaply at **Bissa Na Bissa** (US\$10). More comfort can be found at the central **Motel Mayeye Foutou** ((2) 07283538;rUS\$25), which is owned by the mayor.

There are many routes to Mayumba by land and air, though all take some time. The simplest way is to fly with Air National direct.

People travelling by *taxi-brousse* from Libreville often break up the long travel with a stopover in Tchibanga.

There are also flights to Tchinbanga and Gamba where you can then hop on a *taxibrousse* to Mayumba. The park has an excellent website with many details to navigate the long journey there at www.mayumba nationalpark.com.

EASTERN GABON

RÉSERVE DE LA LOPÉ

Gabon's most popular national park is known for its patchwork of rolling hills, savannah and dense rainforest where you'll likely see elephants, monkeys, buffalo, a host of bird species and, if you're lucky, some of the biggest mandrill troupes in the world.

Lopé Hotel (778561; bungalows from US\$6; **E**), a full service and well-appointed lodge situated on the bank of the Ogooué, is the main operation in town. Bungalows of varying sizes offer astounding views of the surrounding hills and savannah. You'll often have the grounds, including the bar, restaurant and pool, to yourself. Restaurant meals are expensive (US\$30), but the staff is exceedingly friendly.

Budget travellers can do excursions into the park through the Lopé Hotel (from US\$30) but skip out on high costs by staying at **Chez Jules** (**1** 07871827; rwith fan US\$20) in the village. Rooms are basic, but waking up in the centre of rural daily life is well worth it. Brochettes and beer are found across the road at the evening hangout of El Dorado. Other meals can be had at the cafeteria just across the from the train station, where late-night dancing ensues. Don't walk around at night though; you're likely to get charged by a herd of buffalo.

You can also arrange an ecoguide for some tours of the national park through Jules, who is also the village pastor, or visit the new ecoguide centre down the road where local guides will be easily found and drinks had for all.

The train from Libreville takes about four hours. Lopé Hotel vehicles meet the train. Otherwise, walk to Chez Jules down the road.

AROUND RÉSERVE DE LA LOPÉ

At **Mikongo**, a forest camp set up by the Zoological Society of London, you can track animals with local Pygmy trackers and bathe in the 'pool' under cascades. Gorilla habituation is in process and at nightly family-style dinners you can sit with researchers and learn about various conservation projects.

Package prices per person (US\$350 for one night and two days; US\$550 for two nights and three days) include all trekking excursions (cultural visits to local villages can be arranged), comfortable sleeping huts, meals and transport to and from the camp. Arrange through the Lopé Hotel (opposite) or travel agents in Libreville (p585).

On the way to Mikongo is the bwiti village of **Makoghe**.

IVINDO NATIONAL PARK

Langoué Bai in the dense, tropical Ivindo National Park is perhaps the *pièce de résistance* of all the Gabonese ecodestinations, presenting the rare opportunity to view forest animals undisturbed in their own environment. The Bai, a Pygmy word for a marshy clearing in the forest, serves as a source of minerals for the animals and acts as a magnet for large numbers of forest elephants, western lowland gorillas, sitatunga, buffalo, monkeys and rare bird species. A WCS-built research station and ecocamp near the clearing allow visitors to easily view the wildlife.

All-inclusive stays at the stunning, ecologically friendly base camp, designed to reduce human impact on the environment (composting toilets, solar energy, no chemicals), are pricey at US\$315 per night, but worth it.

Arrangements to get to the Bai must be made well in advance through travel agents in Libreville (p585). An intensive two- to threehour hike with pack into the campsite is required. Prepare to sweat. And then prepare to be amazed.

MAKOKOU

pop 13,100

Makokou, the small capital of the Ogooué-Ivindo region, is visited mostly for its dramatic falls, but in the next few years it may become a central access point for many new ecotourism sites. Things are changing rapidly so check with organisations for new camps in the region.

To arrange a stay at the Kongou's falls, contact Joseph Okouy at the Gabonese NGO, Fondation Internationale Gabon Eco-tourisme (Figet; © 07905513; figet.gabon@inet.ga). It's also possible to visit the Institut de Recherche en Ecologie Tropicale (IRET) station in the mall town of Mékambo 170km east, which has Pygmy communities.

Hotel Belinga Palace (r US\$34) offers tourist discounts, or you can try **Auberge Mendongha** (r US\$16).

From Libreville, take the train to Booué and then a *taxi-brousse* to Makokou. Flights to the small airport go a few times a week.

It's possible to go on to Congo from Mékambo, but the road is terrible. Ask around about a *taxi-brousse*.

FRANCEVILLE

pop 41,350

Franceville may be the third most populated centre in Gabon, but spread over rolling green hills cut with laterite roads it feels more like a lovely little town than anything else. It's well worth a few days stay, especially as the jump-ing-off point for the amazing sights around the stunning Batéké Plateau.

The main drag, Carrefour Poto-Poto, named after the bustling central market, is happening, and the **Cristal Motel** (**6** 670488; dU\$\$36) is a good option for sleeping, as it manages to be both right in the middle of everything and quiet enough to get some rest (it's also attached to the hottest nightclub in town). Other good options are the cosy **Auberge Apilly** (**6** 677284, 06056297; r with fan/air-con U\$\$20/30; **8**) and, if you want luxury, the top-notch **Poubara Hotel** (**6** 671374, 07849172; hotel_poubara@hotmail.com; r U\$\$50-200 **(c)**), which has a beautiful pool and a popular Sunday brunch.

Also along the main drag are some great places to eat, namely 5ieme Dimension and Bord de Mer, as well as a few good bakeries: Patisserie Poto-Poto (more bustling) and Salon De Thé (cuter).

Off the main drag is Afrikando, with occasional live music, and down by the river is Buké-Buké, a favourite with young researchers from the primate research station of Centre International de Recherches Medicales de Franceville (CIRMF).

Shake it at the Cristal or the upscale disco at the Poubara. Great all-night-long action can also be found in back of Poto-Poto. The New Garage is a nice place to have a cold drink and chat with Adjo, who is a fountain of information on the region.

Stop in at the newly-minted **Maison du Tourisme et de la Nature** (**©** 07398429, 06279683; mtm@tiscali.fr; www.masuku.org in French), near the Cristal, for advice on sights and guides, or get a hold of the charming but inconsistent **Franklin** (**©** 06234818), a one-man-band of regional tourism who can arrange various trips. His prices vary, but all-inclusive trips start at US\$130 per person.

AROUND FRANCEVILLE

The region around Franceville is full of mostly unexplored treasures, though travel infrastructure is almost nonexistent. Once you get off the paved roads, a 4WD and a guide are necessary. Rental vehicles at Mvengue Airport, just out of town, start at US\$180. Otherwise they might be scrounged up in the various towns.

On the road to Kessala you can stop at the tiny town of **0ssele** to trek for animals with Hilaire, who is often referred to as a forest magician – an ex-hunter with astounding knowledge of plants and animals. To arrange a meeting with him, find his sister Romaine in Franceville at the Musuku Hotel.

Poubara Falls & Pont de Liane

About a half-hour south of the city, the Poubara Falls and Pont de Liane (vine bridge) are popular tourist spots in a rainforest setting on the Ogooué River. Shared taxis to these spots leave from the *gare routière* (bus or transport station) in Franceville.

Bateke Plateau & Cirque de Léconi

East of Franceville the savannah rises up into the Batéké Plateau, a dry, cool and flat stretch of land that extends south and east into Congo. About 70km past Bongoville, birthplace of the president, you reach **Léconi**, a small, quiet town with a couple of bars, a **hotel** (r US\$32) and a cheap *case de passage* (a cheap and simple guest house with few amenities).

A few kilometres out of town is the spectacular Cirque de Léconi, a deep, circular, redrock canyon of loose sand. Locals say spirits await within. Also in the area (but harder to find) are the spectacular green and white canyons. After trips into the canyons, you can bathe in the endlessly clear L'Eau Claire at Abouyi village, just five minutes from Léconi towards Franceville.

Infrequent *taxis-brousses* go to Léconi from Franceville, but a 4WD is necessary to get to the cirque. It's possible to camp overnight if you can find equipment.

Ekouyi

Two bumpy hours from Léconi, the small village of Ekouyi has set up some lovely but basic huts where you can spend a few days enjoying village culture and canoeing in the clear river. Arrangements can be made in Franceville through Franklin or you can wing it via Léconi.

GABON DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Catholic missions are often the cheapest option. Small towns sometimes have a *case de passage* (a cheap and simple guest house with few amenities) to be found. In remote villages, if you greet the chief and bring a small gift you'll likely be welcome to stay in a hut.

ACTIVITIES

Almost all organised ventures into the wilderness are best arranged in Libreville through travel agents or conservation societies. Waiting can be involved, so start early in making plans.

BUSINESS HOURS

Nearly everything will close down starting around noon (when everyone goes home for lunch and a siesta) and will open up somewhere between 2pm and 3pm, with the exception of Sunday, when most shops are closed.

PRACTICALITIES

- Weights, measures and road distances use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220v AC, 50Hz (uses European-style two-round-pin plugs).
- For English-language news see www.all africa.com/gabon.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Treat Libreville like any big city with its fair share of crime. Police will hassle you, so always carry your passport or a copy (and a copy of your visa).

The dreaded *fourous* (tiny insects) will leave red splotches, but won't hurt until a few days into the forest when infernal itchiness ensues.

The terrible roads, crazy drunk drivers and huge trucks carrying unsecured loads of oldgrowth forest are possibly the biggest danger in country.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Gabonese Embassies & Consulates

Gabonese embassies and consulates include the following:

Cameroon (🖻 220 2966; Rue 1816, Bastos, Yaoundé)

Canada (🖻 613-232 5301; 4 Range Rd, Ottawa, KIN 8J5)

Congo (🖻 81 56 20; Ave Monseigneur Augouard, Brazzaville)

Equatorial Guinea (🖻 240-93 180; Calle de Bata, Bata)

France (🖻 01 42 24 79 60; 26 Bis Ave Raphaël, 75116, Paris)

Germany (🖻 30-8973 3440; www.botschaft-gabun.de; Hohensteiner Str 16, D-14197 Berlin)

Nigeria (🖻 684673; 8 Norman William St, Lagos)

São Tomé & Príncipe (🖻 224434/6; Rua Damão, São Tomé)

UK (🖻 020-7823 9986; 27 Elvaston PI, London, SW7 5NL)

USA ((a) 202-797-1000; 2034 20th St NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC, 20009)

Embassies & Consulates in Gabon

Most embassies are open from 8am to noon and 2.30pm to 5pm, but call before showing up as some are often unstaffed. Countries with diplomatic representation in Libreville include the following:

Cameroon ((2) 732800; Face Université) Congo (2) 730062; Batterie IV) Equatorial Guinea (2) 732523; Hauts de Gué-Gué) France (2) 761056; Au Bord de Mer) Germany (2) 760188; Immeuble 'Les Frangipaniers') Nigeria (2) 732203; Blvd Léon M'ba) São Tomé & Príncipe (2) 721527; Au Bord de Mer) South Africa (2) 774530; Immeuble des Arcades) USA (2) 762003; Au Bord de Mer)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106), these are the principal public holidays in Gabon:

New Year's Day 1 January Renovation Day 12 March Labour Day 1 May Independence Day 17 August All Saints' Day 1 November

MAPS

There is an old but detailed road map of Gabon available at **Maison de la Presse** () 772695), in Libreville, for an astonishing US\$22.

MONEY

Gabon is expensive and finding cash is hard. ATMs in Libreville will only work with Visa cards, and credit cards are only accepted at top-end hotels. Bringing all the cash you need into the country in euros is the best option. Euros trade higher than dollars.

Travellers cheques work in only a few places in Libreville, but Western Unions are plentiful. Don't leave Central Africa with CFA, as they're nearly impossible to change.

GABON

SHOPPING

For the most part the price you're told is very near to the real price. Bargaining is expected in the artisanal markets, but discounts in other places are negligible.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Major travel agents and conservation organisations will have information on the various sights in country. See p585 for contact details of some organisations in Libreville.

VISAS

Visas are required by all travellers and must be obtained before arrival; they are not available at the airport or at border crossings. Getting a visa to Gabon is notoriously difficult and expensive. From countries outside Africa it can cost more than US\$100. Unless you're flying straight to Libreville from Europe, it is best to apply for one at the Gabonese embassy in a nearby African country, where it only takes a couple days and costs around US\$50.

Gabon is one of the few countries that may insist on seeing an outgoing plane ticket or other proof of onward travel before issuing a visa, as well as an invitation from a hotel or company in Gabon.

At Sedoc in Libreville you can obtain visa extensions.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following countries are available from embassies in Libreville (see p595): **Cameroon** Visas are required by all travellers to Cameroon; they're available (usually quickly) for around US\$60. Visas for Cameroon are also available at the various borders. Congo All visitors to Congo need a visa. A one-month visa (US\$120) can be issued by the embassy the same day or the next day. You can also buy a 15-day, multiple-entry visa on arrival at the border for approximately US\$70, but you must have your yellow fever certificate with you. Equatorial Guinea Visas are required for all except Americans, though many embassies outside the country are not always aware of this exemption, and officers on the ground will be suspect. Visas can be purchased at the embassy for up to US\$70. Obtaining a visa can be a long process and may require having an invitation from an organisation in the country. Expect many trips and long waits. São Tomé & Príncipe Visas are required by everyone and cost in the range of US\$30 to US\$60. One-day express visas can be purchased for US\$60.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

GABON

Women can expect unwanted attention from men, marriage proposals and, in share-taxis, the occasional groping. Women can feel free to stand their ground or involve other, local women in the ordeal.

TRANSPORT IN GABON

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Royal Air Maroc (www.royalairmaroc.com) flies from Paris (France) to Libreville with a stop in Casablanca (Morocco). **Air France** (www.airfrance .com) flies straight from Paris to Libreville. Libreville is also linked to most major cities in West and Central Africa by a rotating cast of regional airlines. Libreville's Léon M'Ba Airport has flights to and from Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Brazzaville (Congo), Douala (Cameroon), Lagos (Nigeria), São Tomé town (São Tomé & Príncipe), Johannesburg (South Africa) and sometimes Malabo (Equatorial Guinea), among others.

Land

CAMEROON

Travellers to and from Cameroon cross at the Ntem River between Bitam (Gabon) and Ambam (Cameroon). From the town of Ebolowa in Cameroon there's a regular bus service to Yaoundé and Douala. Visas can be purchased at the border.

CONGO

Before heading out to any Congo crossing ask locally about the conditions and reliability of cross points and transport beyond the Gabonese border.

The main crossing to Congo is between N'Dendé (Gabon) and Doussala (Congo), from where you head to Loubomo to connect with the Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville railway.

The border with Congo in eastern Gabon is easily crossable; you can sometimes cross without having papers checked. But don't get caught on the other side sans visa! Crossings in the east include Léconi (near Franceville) and Mékambo (past Makokou; visas might be purchased there). Keep in mind that the areas in western Congo can often be a no-man'sland.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Crossings can be done at Cocobeach (Gabon) by pirogue to Cogo and Acalyong (Equatorial Guinea), and via Oyem and Bitam (Gabon) to either Mongomo or Ebebiyin (Equatorial Guinea). Taxis leave daily from all towns and the ride to Bata is around four hours with the new roads.

Be prepared for corrupt and suspicious officials. Secure a visa before attempting to cross or beware!

Sea

There are occasional boats to and from Cotonou (Benin), São Tomé & Príncipe and Cameroon. Expect long, uncomfortable journeys. Ask for details at the Maritime Express office on Port Môle in Libreville.

GETTING AROUND

Regional flight operators include: Air Service ((2) 747092) La Nationale (2) 06669077, 031903) SCD Aviation (2) 564100, 885666; scd-aviation@inet.ga)

Boat

There are passenger boats between Lambaréné and Port-Gentil (US\$20, about five hours) and between Port-Gentil and Libreville (US\$40, about three hours). Inquire at the Maritime Express office on Port Môle.

Car & Motorcycle

Cars are available for hire within the city, but not for trips on the dirt roads that lead to destinations outside of the city. Renting a 4WD is difficult without also renting a driver.

Europcar (**@** 745845), **Hertz** (**@** 732011) and **Avis** (**@** 724251) have offices in Libreville.

Local Transport

Comically over-packed *taxis-brousses*, minibuses and pick-up trucks are options for travelling outside Libreville.

Train

Taking the Transgabonaise train line that crosses the country is a cheaper, faster and far more comfortable option than taking a *taxi-brousse*.

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São Tomé & Príncipe

It won't be too long before you come on and feel the *leve-leve* in these two tiny islands that comprise Africa's second smallest nation. As soon as you touch down amid the palmfringed beaches, crystal-clear water and barely explored jungles, you'll become infected with the pervasive national mood that translates to 'slowly, slowly' and loosely means 'it's all good, take it easy'.

And because you'll have this Portuguese-Creole flavoured tropical paradise almost to yourself (only about 20 tourists per week venture here), you can sip some of the world's best coffee, eat fresh fruits and seafood, delight on gourmet chocolate, stay in the crumbling roças (houses) of the old colonial plantations, dive and snorkel in uncharted waters, trek the endlessly biodiverse jungles and explore sleepy fishermen's villages at your own, leisurely pace, away from anything that resembles hustle and bustle. And in Príncipe, with one town and a total population of under 5000, you might be tempted to check your own pulse every few hours.

On these shores, the only way to raise your heart rate is to participate in the astoundingly sensual pelvis-mashing moves danced nightly in bars across the islands. São Tomé is the kind of place you may never have heard about, but once you visit, you just might never leave.

FAST FACTS

- Area 1000 sq km
- **ATMs** There are no ATMS: come with cash
- Borders Gabon lies 300km to the east
- Budget US\$85 per day
- Capital São Tomé
- Language Portuguese
- Money Dobra; US\$1 = 6740Db
- Population 193,000
- Seasons Dry (June to September), wet (October to May)
- **Telephone** Country code **2**39; international access code **a** 00
- Time GMT/UTC
- Visas Required by all; costs around US\$50



HIGHLIGHTS

- **São Tomé town** (p601) Wander amid the faded colonial buildings of this charming, sleepy capital town.
- **Roça São João** (p605) Dine on gourmet feasts and stay the night in this ethereal, rejuvenated plantation estate.
- **Banana Beach** (p606) Dive into the warm, crystal-clear waters of this deserted beach, one of many ringing the island of Príncipe.
- Praia Jalé (p605) Witness nesting sea turtles in this ecotourist haven at the southern-most point of São Tomé.
- **Ilhéu das Rolas** (p605) Straddle the equator and sun yourself on the divine whitesand beaches of this tiny islet off the south of São Tomé.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

São Tomé is an island of microclimates; at any time of year you're likely to find areas of cloudy and rainy skies and areas of sun. From March to May, though, the daily rains generally yield to blue skies and hot temperatures for beach goers, while trekkers might prefer the cool, dry air and cloudy skies from June to September.

ITINERARIES

- One Week You can explore much of São Tomé in one week. Heading south, eat well and spend the night at Roça São João (p605), camp for a night at Praia Jalé (p605), take in a mangrove tour and then jump on the boat to Ilhéu das Rolas (p605) for a night or two. Head back to São Tomé town (p601) and day trek in the forest, stay the night at Bombaim (p606), and then head north to hit Neves (p605) for crabs and a night at Monteforte (p605).
- Two Weeks Follow the above itinerary and then fly on to Príncipe (p606) and chill out for at least a week in a deserted island paradise.

HISTORY

Before being 'discovered' and colonised by the Portuguese in the late 15th century, the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe were comprised of rainforests dense with vegetation and birdlife, but, most likely, no people (though there is a legend that present-day Angolares were really the first inhabitants of the land). The islands'

HOW MUCH?

- A day's jungle trek US\$50
- Cup of good coffee US\$0.80
- Seed necklace US\$1
- Mangrove tour US\$7
- Fresh grilled con-con fish US\$3

LP INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.20
- 1L bottled water US\$1.20
- Bottle of Creoula beer US\$0.80
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$15
- Grilled corn US\$1

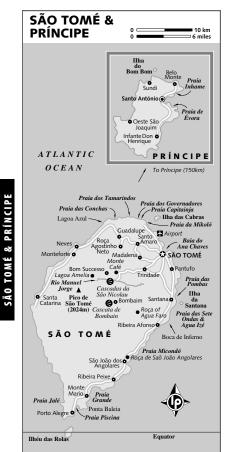
volcanic soil proved good for cultivation, and, under Portuguese rule, by the mid-16th century the islands were the foremost exporter of sugar, though the labour-intensive process required increasing amounts of slaves from Africa. When the price of sugar fell and slave labour proved difficult to control, the islands increasingly looked towards the slave trade to bolster the economy, becoming an important weigh station for slave ships heading from Africa to Brazil. In the 19th century two new cash crops, coffee and cocoa, overtook the old sugar plantations. By the early 20th century São Tomé was one of the world's largest producers of cocoa.

In 1876 slavery was outlawed, but was simply replaced with a similar system of forced labour for low wages. Contract workers came in from Mozambique, Cape Verde and other parts of the Portuguese empire. During these volts, often brutally put down by the Por-tuguese. In 1953 the Massacre of Batepá, in which many Africans were killed by P guese troops, sparked a full-fledged independence movement. Portugal held on, however, until the fall of the fascist government in 1974, after which it got out of its colonies in a hurry. São Tomé & Príncipe achieved independence on 12 July 1975.

The Portuguese exodus left the country with virtually no skilled labour, an illiteracy rate of 90%, only one doctor and many abandoned cocoa plantations. An economic crisis was inevitable. Manual Pinto da Costa, who

was the first president and, until then, a moderate, was forced to concede to many of the demands of the more radical members of his government. The majority of the plantations were nationalised four months after independence, legislation were passed prohibiting any one person from owning more than 100 hectares of land, and a people's militia was set up to operate within workplaces and villages.

The country remained closely aligned with Angola, Cuba and communist Eastern Europe until the demise of the Soviet Union, when Santoméans began to demand multiparty democracy. The first multiparty elections were held in early 1991 and led to the inauguration of the previously exiled



Miguel Trovoada as the new president in April of that year.

São Tomé & Príncipe Today

Elections in 2001 brought Fradique de Menezes to power. De Menezes pledged to use revenues from increased tourism and exploitation of the country's newly discovered offshore oilfields to improve the standard of living and modernise the islands' infrastructure. Grand changes seemed imminent. But complications with extracting the oil in addition to possible overestimations of the oil deposits have delayed economic progress, and there is a palpable growing restlessness in the deeply indebted and impoverished nation. A brief and bloodless coup attempt was peacefully resolved in 2003 while the president was out of the country. De Menezes was re-elected in 2006 in internationally observed, peaceful elections.

São Tomé presently scrapes by on US\$25 million a year of foreign aid and US\$5 million in cocoa exports.

CULTURE

Leve leve is the name of the game in São Tomé. Island life is slow and there's no use in getting all fussed up about anything. This is as evident in daily life as it is in the islands' politics. During the 2006 elections disruptions were rare. The very few villages that protested did so by politely turning vote staff away from their polling stations, saying essentially 'no water, no electricity, no votes, thank you'. It was done very cordially.

A recent influx of young repatriates from Portugal determined to make something good happen here has brought a new energy to the islands.

Outside the capital most Santoméans still live very simple island lives, with agriculture and fishing being the main occupations. In the morning the boats come in and fish are distributed, the market bustles late morning, a siesta is taken to avoid the afternoon heat and then it's time to drink some imported boxes of vinho. In the evening people gather wherever there's a TV set and a generator, or a full deck of cards.

PEOPLE

Santoméans are a mixed bunch, consisting of Mestiços, mixed-blood descendants of Portuguese colonists and African slaves; Angolares, reputedly descendants of Angolan slaves who survived a 1540 shipwreck and now earn their livelihood fishing; Forros, descendants of freed slaves; Tongas, the children of Serviçais (contract labourers from Angola, Mozambique and Cape Verde when slavery was 'abolished'); and Europeans, primarily Portuguese.

About 80% of Santoméans belong to the Roman Catholic Church, though traditional animist beliefs are still strong.

ARTS & CRAFTS

In addition to the traditional crafts of the island (including intricately carved wooden boxes, masks, and seed and shell jewellery) there is a budding arts scene drawing international attention revolving around the Teia D'Arte gallery, which has held several Biennials and holds arts workshops for the local population. Famed São Tomé artist (and gourmet chef/TV host) João Carlos Silva heads up the gallery; his work can be seen at the Roça São João (p605).

Auto de Floripes (performed once a year, by the entire population of Príncipe) and Tchiloli are famous day-long pieces of musical theatre, that have been performed since the 16th century, and can now be seen as distinctly anticolonial stories.

Much of the music and dance of São Tomé is shared or influenced by other Portuguesespeaking nations, including Cape Verde, Brazil and Angola. Abandon preconceived notions of propriety as dancers pair off and dance the sensual kizomba, the kadence and kuduru nightly in bars.

ENVIRONMENT

The islands are of volcanic origin and almost 30% of the land is covered by high-altitude, virgin rainforest, referred to as the Obo, and filled with over 700 species of flora and a stunning array of bird species, some of which exist nowhere else in the world. In the interior are lakes, waterfalls and volcanic craters. Since São Tomé's forests were classified as biologically the second most important in Africa, they have received much attention, and conservation groups have started to set up protection programs and ecotourism outfits.

Outside the jungle the island is comprised of varying beaches, some of which are grounds for nesting sea turtles from October to December. Whales and dolphins can be observed from July to September.

FOOD & DRINK

Don't miss out on the con-con, an ugly, prehistoric-looking fish grilled and served with baked breadfruit. Traditional stews made with more than 20 different plants can take hours to prepare. Other traditional dishes include fish or meat with beans, rice or plantains, and omelettes cooked with endemic spices, some said to be aphrodisiacs. Palm wine, freshly gathered from the trees, is a local favourite.

SÃO TOMÉ TOWN

Once you get the hang of leve-leve, you'll delight in this mellow capital town of fading pastel colonial buildings along the seashore. São Tomé town has charm, a budding arts scene, and plenty of activities of its own and nearby, making it an ideal base from which to make day and overnight trips.

ORIENTATION

São Tomé town sits on Baia de Ana Chaves (Ana Chaves Bay). Most of the action takes place in one centralised area a few blocks in from the water, starting at the markets and spreading south to shops, banks and restaurants. The town is easily walkable, and even destinations further out take no longer than 15 minutes by foot. The airport is 4km north destinations further out take no longer than of town.

INFORMATION

There are many banks in town that exchange US dollars or euros in cash and travellers sometimes be found at the Mercado Municipal or in merchant shops. Big bills get better rates than smaller ones. There are but there are many Western Unions.

Café & Companhia (226622; mjpombo@hotmail .com; Praça da Amizade; per day US\$4) For great local information, where the foxy and friendly English-speaking MJ can point you in the right direction for anything you may need. The café acts as the centre of the expat community, and in addition to wi-fi, great food and good coffee, there are often flyers for upcoming cultural events and tourist attractions. Hospital Ayres Menezes (🕿 221222, 221233) Located up the hill towards the airport. Serious cases will be flown out on the next plane to Gabon or Portugal.

Kia Web (227013; Rua Patrice Lumumba; per hr US\$1) If you're not travelling with a laptop, the next best place to check your email is this centrally located centre, which has well-appointed computers.

Mistral Voyages (a 23344; Rua Padre Pinto da Rocha) Has English-speaking staff and arranges car rentals and tours, including flights to Príncipe.

Navetur-Equator (222122; www.navetur-equatour .st; Rua Viriato da Cruz) Locally owned and has a comprehensive list of services (flights, cars, tours, hotels) with an emphasis on responsible tourism. The friendly staff speaks some English and can help with a personalised itinerary.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

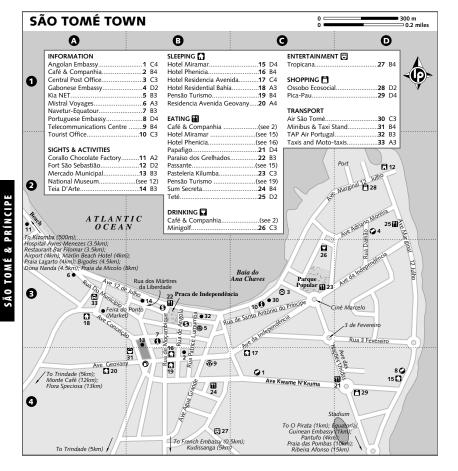
Beware of normal petty crimes, though the town is pretty safe. Roads and sidewalks can be riddled with holes.

SIGHTS

The **National Museum** (admission US\$3) in the old Fort São Sebastião has artefacts from all stages of the islands' colonial history, and makes shockingly explicit the contrast of the opulent lifestyles of the plantation owners and the squalor of their African workers. It's well worth the admission price just to walk on the ramparts of the old fort and catch views of the town.

The **Mercado Municipal** is a crowded, noisy, smelly adventure where you can have a great time without buying anything. It's a big change of pace from the islands' usual laidback tranquillity.

Teia D'Arte (Rua dos Mártires da Liberdade), a gallery of contemporary painting and sculpture, is in the centre of town.



Just a few minutes' drive outside of town, watch the exotic flowers of the **Flora Speciosa** (2) 908847; www.floraspeciosa.com) plantation get cut for worldwide shipping (on Friday), or just romp along the overgrown garden trails.

A short drive into the mountains is **Monte Café**, where you can observe the traditional coffee process at what once was the biggest coffee plantation, and which still makes some of the best coffee in the world.

There are beautiful beaches within a short walk of town but no good swimming ones. The best close swimming beach is **Praia Lagarto**.

ACTIVITIES

Trekking, snorkelling and dive trips leaving from town can be arranged through **Navetur-Equator** (222122; www.navetur-equatour.st) or one of the dive centres: **Gandu Professional Diving** (www.divingafricagandu.com), **Club Maxel** (www.club maxel.st) or **Floga Excursions** (224394).

For early birds, Capoeira is practiced each morning starting at 6am on the beach near the old fort.

SLEEPING

Pensão Tourismo (222340; Rua de Angola; r from US\$35) A small family-run *pensão* with a wonderful stained-glass dining area above a central street. Its five clean rooms share two bathrooms. Traditional meals (US\$7) are served daily.

Residencia Avenida Geovany (223929, 903570; Ave Geovany; s/d with air-con US\$35/40; 2) Just up the street from the Mercado Municipal, this hotel has decent rooms upstairs and friendly staff that speak some English. There are cheaper rooms downstairs but they are less attractive and comfortable.

Hotel Phenicia (224203/224204; Rua de Angola; r US\$65; 🕄) Smack in the centre of town, the Phenicia has bright rooms, some with balconies. The restaurant downstairs, decorated with local paintings and African objects, serves good pizza and Lebanese fare (mains from US\$10), and has wi-fi.

Hotel Residencial Bahía () 222921; Ave Conceição 4; s/d US\$70/80; ⊇) The Bahía has a central location just behind the Mercado Municipal. Air-con rooms come with TV, bathroom and balconies, and there's a popular lunchtime restaurant and bar (meals from US\$7). Hotel Residencial Avenida (241700; ravenida@ cstome.net; Ave da Independência; s/d US\$70/90; ↓ Has bright blue walls, a nice breakfast area and a bamboo bar.

Marlin Beach Hotel (222350; www.marlinbeach .com; r from US\$80) A bit north of town towards the airport and right across from the ocean, Marlin Beach has nice rooms and a gorgeous pool area. It's sister hotel is Bom-Bom Island Resort on Príncipe (see p606).

Hotel Miramar (22258), 222511; www.miramar.st; Ave Marginal 12 Julho; r from US\$145) One of the more popular top-end hotels, the Miramar has nicely decorated rooms with all the amenities, and a view of either the ocean or the beautiful pool and gardens. In the lobby, there is wi-fi access and an international restaurant, and just outside, an ocean-side café (below).

Cheap lodging is getting increasingly harder to come by in town, but there are some locals willing to host you in their homes for less than most of the *pensãos* (guesthouses). It might be worth asking around at some of the travel agencies in town, or at **Café & Companhia** (<a>226622; Praça da Amizade). Nora Rizzo (ciacna@cstome .net), a local architect, rents out Casa Amarela, a house with a few bedrooms on the water that offers a great bargain for a group.

EATING

Teté (222355, 904353; Ave Marginal 12 Julho) From her lovely ocean-side home, Teté cooks and serves dinner. The simple meals of *con-con* or grilled squid with baked breadfruit are some of the best. Call ahead for special orders. The house is difficult to spot, but look for the collection of cars around a white gate.

0 Pirata (**2** 907400; mains from US\$8) On the water south of town, this restaurant and cultural space rolled into one serves great meals in a wonderful atmosphere – local paintings cover the walls, and brush-wood sculptures and cool chill-out spaces abound.

Café & Companhia (226622; Praça da Amizade) For breakfast, this place has great omelettes and phenomenal homemade yogurt served with fruit or granola.

Sit across from an old airplane turned jungle-gym at **Pasteleria Kilumba** (Parque Popular) and munch on tasty pastries and snacks from US\$2. **Passante** (Ave Marginal 12 Julho), the Hotel Miramar's café across from the beach, is also a good choice.

Lunchtime favourites include **Pensão Tourismo** (**a** 222340; Rua de Angola; meals US\$6), with traditional meals, Hotel Phenicia (Ave Geovany), Sum Secreta (Ave Kwame N'Kruma), and Papafigo (Ave Kwame N'Kruma), which serves cheap pizza, burgers and shwarma (kebabs). Further north on the water, the Restaurant Bar Filomar and Bigodes are also good choices.

Next to the dock where the fishermen bring in the day's catch, Paraíso dos Grelhados (The Blue Container; Ave Marginal) serves great, cheap con-con. Further north on the road to the airport is Nanda, another hole-in-the-wall container reputedly serving the best and cheapest grilled fish in town. Both serve dinner daily; lunch only on weekends.

At the top end you'll find the hotel restaurants; Hotel Miramar (🖻 222588/222511; www .miramar.st; Ave Marginal 12 Julho) and Marlin Beach Hotel (p603) both serve good international cuisines.

DRINKING

Minigolf (Parque Popular) Has good drinks, minigolf, of course, and outdoor movies at 8pm nightly.

Happening happy hours include Café & Companhia (🖻 226622; Praça da Amizade) on Thursday at 6pm and Marlin Beach Hotel (p603) on Friday.

ENTERTAINMENT

Everyone heads to the clubs at night. The Tropicana, next to the power station, is popular with ministers, expats and the elite crowd. Across the street from the club is the attached bar where you can sing your heart out karaoke-ing.

SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE

Other popular clubs with the locals include Kizomba, Kudissanga and, just up the road in the town of Trinidad, the jumping '35.'

SHOPPING

Ossobo Ecosocial (227933; ossoboecosocial@cstome.net; Praca da Juventude), run by a local NGO, is a great place to get ecofriendly handicrafts, arts and local food products.

Other artisanal shops include Pica-Pau (Ave Kwame N'Kruma), in front of Papafigo, and Grupo X in the District Madredeus.

Be aware that many craft shops sell souvenirs made of shells, coral and sometimes turtle shell. However, if you buy them you will be contributing to the harvesting of these resources, and you theoretically could be arrested if you try to bring them into your country.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights between São Tomé and Príncipe on Air São Tomé (221160) run three times weekly and cost around US\$180; it's necessary to reserve early. Be sure to check ahead of time that domestic flights are currently operating.

A cargo ship makes the trip every few days, but it is not recommended. If you're intent on doing the hot, day-long journey, head to the port for current times and cost.

GETTING AROUND

The airport is 4km north of the town centre; a taxi costs US\$4.

Ask around the Mercado Municipal in São Tomé town for bike rentals.

You can rent reasonably priced 4WD vehicles at Navetur-Equator (222122; www.navetur -equatour.st), Mistral Voyages (23344; Rua Padre Pinto da Rocha) and the Marlin Beach Hotel (p603). Also check with the reception staff at some of the top-end hotels as they may rent out their private vehicles for cheaper rates.

Minibuses can be found at the Mercado Municipal in town. They leave for destinations north and south several times daily (from US\$2).

Taxis around town cost US\$2 to US\$7 depending on the distance and the mood of the driver.

AROUND SÃO TOMÉ

NORTH OF SÃO TOMÉ

The 50km road that leads north from São Tomé town is a dramatic, beautiful drive ending just past Santa Catarina on the northwest coast. There are deserted beaches all along the way, best found by 4WD, though it's possible to take public transport and hike in. Minibuses from São Tomé town will take you from US\$2, depending on where you get off.

Travelling north, the old Roco Augostinho Neto has sprawling grounds, stunning colonial architecture and botanical gardens.

Further north, down a dirt road is Praia Mikoló, where on weekends barbecues abound. Just past Mikoló village along the beach road is **Petisqueria Tartaruga**, a little spot with picnic tables under thatch roofs where fish, chicken and drinks are available.

Other good beaches north are Praia Capitainja, a whiter beach with clear water and seasonal nesting turtles, and Praia dos Governadores, a small bay with clear water.

Past the small town of Guadalupe and a short walk off the road, Praia das Conchas and Praia dos Tamarindos are both considered the nicest beaches in the north. Nearby is Lagoa Azul, where there is excellent snorkelling but only a rocky beach.

At Neves village the charming Santola Restaurant serving enormous crabs (US\$6) is a weekend favourite.

Continue on to the old crumbling roça of Monteforte (s/d US\$40/50), which has gorgeous views of the mountains and seas. It's still a working farm on which guava, oranges and cacao is grown by the descendents of the old contract workers.

Beyond Monteforte you'll find more small towns and beaches.

SOUTH OF SÃO TOMÉ

The entire southern route takes about four hours' drive, and costs up to US\$5 on a minibus, depending on where you get off.

Heading south of São Tomé town you'll first hit Pantufo, where across from the Town Sq and charming colonial cathedral you can drink seaside on the hull of the Navio Imperial, a ginormous faux boat that opens only at night. There's a pensão Estalgem Pantufo (221941; conceicaolvalerio@gmail.com; s/d US\$57/65) across the street that serves tasty Portuguese meals and is a good alternative to staying in São Tomé town.

Santana village is known mostly for Club Santana (242400; sreservas@cstome.net; bungalows from US\$120), a luxury resort with a lovely, calm beach and a Brazilian-influenced restaurant with a popular Saturday night buffet (US\$45). Boat trips can be arranged here or in town for the tiny Ilha da Santana, which has great waters for snorkelling.

Further south off the main road you can spend a few minutes tripping out on the mesmerising aqua blowhole of Boca de Inferno.

In this area, almost any side road towards the ocean will bring you to a scenic and secluded beach, including Praia das Sete Ondas and Praia Micondó. Ask locals how to get to both.

Just before the small village of São João dos Angolares, the colonial-era Roça San João (a 225135/221333; www.ecocultura.st; s/d incl breakfast US\$40/50) has recently become a cultural and ecotourism centre-inn serving traditional feasts by master chef and artist João Carlos Silva. From the roça you can explore the stunning natural landscape by bike, canoe or on foot (picnics and guides available). The few bedrooms are furnished with objects recovered from the destroyed estate and are candlelit at night, making the place stunningly romantic. A nice beach nearby is Praia Grande.

Past yet more lovely deserted beaches shaded by palm and coconut trees, and through more small villages, you eventually hit Porto Alegre, a small fishing village where the paved road ends. Praia Piscina, just past the village, is one of the nicest beaches on the island.

A fair walk from **Porto Alegre** (or a short 4WD drive) is Jale Ecolodge (222792; http:// praiajale.free.fr/; s/d US\$32/40), which has three lovely coco-palm huts and communal dining, all managed by the villagers. Jale sits on a lovely beach, Praia Jalé, where many sea turtles nest during the season. Tour the mangroves nearby, take locally guided treks into the forest, learn to fish traditionally or wander the beach trails. Proceeds support a local NGO and the nearby villages.

About 20 minutes by boat off the coast of Porto Alegre is Ilhéu das Rolas, which, in addition to having some of the nicest beaches (including the wonderful Praia Café), is cut in two by the equator line, which you can literally stand on. Pestana Equador Island Resort (261106; s/d US\$172/240) is a top-end resort specialising in solitude, diving and deep-sea fishing trips. It's possible to arrange a day trip for US\$35, including lunch and boat transfer. Boats leave from Ponta Baleia, a point a bit north of Porto Alegre and cost US\$13 each way without lunch. PRÍNCIP

WEST OF SÃO TOMÉ

There are many treks in and around the dramatic interior landscapes of the island. Many treks start at **Bom Successo**, an ecotourism camp with large maps of the park and a botanic garden. One of the most popular routes is the four-hour trek to Lagoa Amelia, from where you can overlook swampy mangroves replete with bird and plant life.

If you're up for a challenge, the two-day trip up and down the highest point on the island, **Pico de São Tomé** (2024m), will take you through four different forest belts.

A short detour from Bom Successo is the gorgeous Cascades da São Nicolau.

A stay at the old cacao plantation of Bombaim (s/d US\$48/64) is another great way to see the interior and tropical forests. At the crumbling roça you can see the old bullfighting ring, the decrepit hospital and the old plantation slave quarters. Miguel, a contract worker here for over 47 years, can give you great history lessons. Several hikes ranging from 31/2 to seven hours can be trekked with a guide leading to Monte Café, Lagoa Amelia, the roça of Agua Ize/Bernardo Faro and Roça de Saő João Angolares. Just down the road is the Cascata de Bombain, a wonderful place for a refreshing swim.

PRÍNCIPE

Little Príncipe has a dramatic landscape of jutting volcanic mountains covered mostly by dense, virgin forest, dotted with old plantation estates from colonial times and ringed by perfect beaches with astonishingly clear water, including the picture-perfect Banana Beach, made famous by a Bacardi ad. Most of the action (and that term is used loosely around here) is either in Santo António, the tiny town, or the very upscale Bom Bom Island Resort off the northern end of the island, which has brought improved infrastructure and attracted some very well-off tourists. There is excellent snorkelling and some of the best deep-sea fishing waters in the world, and locals will negotiate renting boats or bikes with you or guiding you on treks. Príncipe is a practically undiscovered tropical paradise, and you're likely to be the only traveller on the island.

SANTO ANTÓNIO

This colonial town of faded, cracked, pastel buildings and charming gardens can be seen in just a few minutes. Sleepy doesn't even begin to describe it.

There are a few very basic pensãos in town with no-frills rooms for around US\$15, including the Romar, with five rooms, and a bit further back amid some buildings being burst open by rooting trees, the bright blue Arca de Noé.

The **Palhota** (251060; pensaopalhota@cstome.net; r from US\$65; 🕄), a delightful little house with veranda and sitting room, manned by lovely Alex Metzger, is a step up, with 10 rooms all with TV, air-conditioning, hot water, shared bathroom and breakfast. Internet access and

international phone calls can be accessed here. Meals of grilled fish and banana or meat and rice cost about US\$15.

In the evening you can go out on the town (sort of) at one of the bars/discos on a little side street past the market that get going early and close before 1am.

Head to the port to hire local fishermen to take you to various beaches, including the pristine Banana Beach.

BOM BOM ISLAND RESORT

Walk into a postcard at Bom Bom Island Resort (🕿 251141, 251114; www.bom-bom.com; r incl board per person per night US\$225) situated on a deserted beach on Ilha do Bom Bom, surrounded by lush vegetation and emerald waters. Activities include treks, plantation tours, snorkelling, diving and the speciality, deep-sea fishing, but most people come to just relax. The little islet of Bom Bom is connected via a long walkway to Principe. Very cool.

SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Prices for pensãos and hotels in São Tomé town start around US\$35 and go up to more than US\$200. Roças outside of town are cheaper, rustic and more interesting.

ACTIVITIES

The islands have great snorkelling, diving and some of the best deep-sea fishing in the world. Interior treks in the forest require a guide and can be arranged through local travel agencies.

BUSINESS HOURS

Businesses and small shops generally close around 12.30pm for long siestas and re-open around 3pm.

PRACTICALITIES

- Weights, measures and road distances use the metric system.
- Electricity supply is 220-240V AC (50Hz) and plugs are of the European tworound-pin variety.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

São Tomé is for the most part an exceedingly safe country. The influx of oil interests and tourism has increased some petty crime (like pick-pocketing). On deserted beaches keep an eye on your bags.

The roads and sidewalks also provide a myriad of opportunities to trip you up; watch out for potholes and open sewers.

The incidence of malaria, which has been a concern in the past, has been greatly reduced thanks to a Taiwanese spraying program.

As one of the few tourists, you can have an inordinate impact on this tiny country. A few years ago some tourists decided to show up like the Sugar Plum Fairy and throw candy out of their car window as they passed through villages. As a result, in some villages you will be bombarded by children - and adults - screaming at you for a *doce* (sweet) and it can get a bit hectic.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Santoméan Embassies & Consulates

Santoméan diplomatic representations abroad include the following:

Angola (244-2345677; Rua Eng Armindo Andrade, 173, Mira-Mar, Luanda)

Belgium (🖻 322-734 8966; Ambassade.Sao.tome@ skynet.com; 175 Av De Tervuren, Brussels)

Gabon (🕿 241-721527; Bord de Mer, Libreville) Portugal (🖻 351-218 461 917; Ave Almirante Gago

Coutinho 26, Lisbon)

USA (212-317 0533; 400 Park Ave, 7th fl, New York)

Embassies & Consulates in São Tomé & Príncipe

The following countries have embassies or consulates in São Tomé:

Angola (222376; embrang@cstome.net; Ave Kwame N'kruma)

Equatorial Guinea (🖻 225427; Vila Maria, Estrada Nova)

France (222266, 221353; Bairro de Santo António) Gabon (🖻 224434, 224436; Rua Damão) Portugal (222470, 221130; eporstp@cstome.net; Ave Marginal 12 de Julho)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Independence Day is celebrated across the islands on 12 July. Mardi Gras, held on the Tuesday before Lent, is also a big party.

Several times during the year various saints are honoured in Saint Festivals in different villages around the island. Villagers celebrate

with traditional ceremonies, food, music and dance. For a complete listing of festival days, see Navetur-Equator (www.navetur-equatour.st).

FOOD

Meals will cost about US\$5 on the cheap side, US\$7 to US\$15 midrange, and US\$15 and up at the top end.

HOLIDAYS

The following public holidays are observed in São Tomé and Príncipe: New Year's Day 1 January Good Friday March/April Holy Saturday March/April Easter Monday March/April International Workers' Day 1 May Independence Day 12 July Christmas Day 25 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is available in São Tomé town and in Santo Antonio on Príncipe, and is reasonably priced.

MONEY

All purchases can be made in the local currency dobras, but often you can also pay in euros or US dollars or both, especially at tourist outlets and for big purchases. West or Central African CFA are generally not accepted.

There are no ATMs on the islands. Credit cards (MasterCard and Visa) are accepted cards (MasterCard and Visa) are accepted only at the top-end hotels. Euros and US dolonly at the top-end notels. Euros and US dol-lars, in cash or travellers cheques, are widely accepted at hotels, shops and restaurants, and can be changed at banks and at moneychang-ers at and around São Tomé town's Mercado Municipal. **POST & TELEPHONE** The central post office in São Tomé town

is open during business hours unless staff decide to go home early. Letters to the USA or Europe cost about US\$1.

Public telephones are available at the telecommunications centre in São Tomé and in some larger towns.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Travel agencies in São Tomé town are the best resource for information, but a small government-run tourist office next to the post office can offer some information and sells maps.

VISAS

Visas are required by everyone, and can no longer be purchased on arrival at the airport unless you have pre-arranged permission from Migrations Services. Visas cost US\$30 to US\$60. One-day express visas can be purchased in Gabon for US\$60 (normally US\$30).

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for Gabon can be purchased at its embassy in São Tomé town (see p607) and cost around US\$50.

TRANSPORT IN SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Almost all travellers arrive by air via Gabon or Portugal. Flights leave a few times weekly from Libreville (Gabon) with either **Air São Tomé** (^(a) in São Tomé town 221160) or Air Service Gabon, costing around US\$350 to US\$450. Direct flights from Lisbon (Portugal) leave a few times weekly with TAP Air Portugal (flights from US\$1000). There are also now

DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax hovers around US\$21, and is payable in euros, US dollars and dobras.

direct weekly flights to Angola, Ghana and Cape Verde with TAAG Angolan Airlines.

FROM PORTUGAL

TAP Air Portugal (🖻 351-707 205 700; www.flytap .com)

Sea

There is a cargo ship that leaves for São Tomé from Port Mole in Libreville (Gabon), though the journey is not recommended or safe, and won't save you that much cash.

GETTING AROUND

Air São Tomé ((239221160) has flights from São Tomé to Príncipe three times weekly.

Cargo ships to Príncip e leave every few days; ask around at the port. For more details, see Getting There & Away (p604).

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Burundi

Beautiful Burundi has been blighted by a generation of ethnic conflict, but with the advent of peace, this charming country may at long last be able to put its dark past to rest. A tiny little nation of soaring mountains and languid lakeside communities. Burundi is sandwiched between the African giants of Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Tanzania. The scenery is stunning and the welcome warm, and it may once again begin to receive a trickle of travellers as the word gets out that the war is over.

The steamy capital Bujumbura has a lovely location on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and just outside the city are some of the finest inland beaches on the continent. Ask the old Africa hands about Burundi before the war, and it is the sort of place they go misty-eyed about and hark back to the life of the lotus-eaters. Sadly there has been no lotus-eating for most Burundians during more than a decade of violence.

Many of the upcountry attractions have been off limits for years, but the stunning scenery and warmth of the Burundians more than compensates. Choose from the southernmost source of the Nile, the ancient forest of Parc National de la Kibira or the spot where Stanley was reputed to have uttered those timeless words 'Dr Livingstone I presume?'.

Intertribal tensions have devastated the country since independence in 1962 and there is always a chance things could kick off again. It is a young peace, so make sure you do your homework before embarking on an adventure in Burundi.

FAST FACTS

- Area 27,830 sg km
- ATMs There are no ATMS: come with cash
- Borders DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania
- Budget US\$20 a day
- Capital Bujumbura
- Languages Kirundi, French
- Money Burundi franc; US\$1= BFr1040
- Population 8 million
- Seasons Wet (mid-March to mid-May, October-January); dry (mid-May to mid-October, mid-December to mid-March)
- Telephone Country code 257; international access code **a** 00
- Time GMT/UTC +2

BURUNDI

Visas Required by all; US\$40 for one month

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bujumbura** (p613) Dine out in style before dancing the night away in this city where people love to live it up.
- **Saga Beach** (p614) Hit the best inland beaches in East Africa for some fun in the sun.
- **Source Du Nil** (p616) Journey to Burundi's very own pyramid, marking the southernmost source of the Nile at Kasumo.
- Being in Burundi (opposite) Enjoy the novelty of being pretty much the only tourist in the country.
- La Pierre de Livingstone et Stanley (p616) Visit the rock where those fateful words 'Dr Livingstone I presume?' were uttered.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The climate in Burundi varies widely depending on whether you are in the hot and steamy lowlands around Lake Tanganvika, where temperatures average 30°C, or the more mountainous north, where the usual temperature is a much milder 20°C.

ITINERARIES

Two Weeks It is hard to talk of itineraries in such a small country with a long history of civil war. Most people do a hit and run on Bujumbura (p613), entering via Rwanda. Assuming peace holds, it is likely travellers will continue south along the shores of Lake Tanganyika to link up with Gombe Stream National Park (p781) in western Tanzania.

TRAVEL IN BURUNDI

Burundi was engulfed in civil war for more than a decade and although progress towards peace has been steady, it remains a potentially unstable country in an unstable region. Travel to the capital Bujumbura was safe at the time of research, as was the main road north to Rwanda. Assuming things continue to stabilise, Burundi may once again find itself on the overland map of Africa, as it is a great way to link Uganda and Rwanda with western Tanzania. Check, double check and triple check the latest security situation before heading into the country or travelling anywhere beyond Bujumbura.

HOW MUCH?

- Cheap hotel room US\$20 to US\$40
- Plate of garnished brochettes US\$2
- Internet access per hour US\$1 to US\$2
- Local newspaper US\$0.50
- 100km bus ride US\$2

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1
- 1L bottled water US\$0.50
- Primus beer US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt There aren't any!
- Grilled goat brochettes US\$0.50

HISTORY

The original Burundians were the Twa Pygmies, but they were soon squeezed out by bigger groups. First came the Hutu, mostly farmers of Bantu stock, from about 1000 AD. Later, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the tall, pastoral Tutsi from Ethiopia and Uganda arrived. Relations were cordial, but the Tutsi gradually subjugated the Hutu in a feudal system similar to that of medieval Europe.

At the end of the 19th century Burundi and Rwanda were colonised by Germany, but after WWI the League of Nations mandated Rwanda-Urundi to Belgium. Taking advantage of the status quo, the Belgians ruled through the Tutsi chiefs and princes. The establishment of coffee plantations, and the resulting concentration of wealth in the hands of the Tutsi elite, provoked tensions between the two tribal groups.

Independence Days

In the 1950s a nationalist organisation based on unity between the tribes was founded under the leadership of the mwami's eldest son, Prince Rwagasore. But in the lead up to independence he was assassinated with the connivance of the colonial authorities, who feared their commercial interests would be threatened if he took power.

Despite this setback, it appeared that Burundi was headed for a majority government following independence in 1962. But in the 1964 elections, Mwami Mwambutsa refused to appoint a Hutu prime minister, even though Hutu candidates were the clear winners. Hutu



frustration boiled over, and Hutu military officers and political figures staged an attempted coup. A wholesale purge of Hutu from the army and bureaucracy followed.

In 1972 another large-scale revolt resulted in more than 1000 Tutsi killed. The Tutsi military junta responded with selective genocide: any Hutu with wealth, a formal education or a government job was rooted out and murdered, often in the most horrifying way. After three months, 200,000 Hutu had been killed and another 100,000 had fled the country.

Stalemate

In 1976 Jean-Baptiste Bagaza came to power in a bloodless coup. During the Bagaza years, there were some half-hearted attempts by the Tutsi government to remove some of the main causes of intertribal conflict, but these were mostly cosmetic.

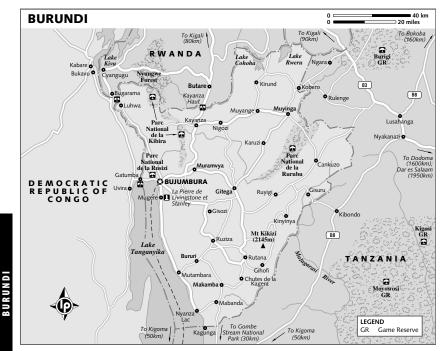
Bagaza was toppled in September 1987 in a coup led by his cousin Major Pierre Buyoya. The new regime attempted to address the causes of intertribal tensions yet again by gradually bringing Hutu representatives back into positions of power in the government.

Civil War Breaks Out

Buyoya eventually bowed to international pressure and allowed multiparty elections in June 1993. These brought a Hutu-dominated government to power, led by Melchior Ndadaye. But he was assassinated by a dissident army faction in October. The coup failed, but in the chaos that followed the assassination, thousands were massacred in intertribal fighting.

In April 1994 the new president, Cyprien Ntaryamira (a Hutu), died in the infamous plane crash that killed Rwanda's President Habyarimana and sparked the planned genocide there. Back in Burundi, both Hutu militias and the Tutsi-dominated army went on the offensive. No war was actually declared, but at least 100,000 people were killed in clashes between mid-1994 and mid-1996. In July 1996 the former president, Pierre Buyoya, again carried out a successful coup and took over as the country's president with the support of the army.

Peace talks staggered on during the conflict, mediated first by former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere and later the revered Nelson



Mandela. A breakthrough came in April 2003, when President Buyoya handed over power to Hutu leader Domitien Ndayizeye and both sides promised to work towards elections. Tragically, the conflict had already claimed the lives of about 300,000 Burundians.

Burundi Today

In 2004 the UN began operations in Burundi, sending more than 5000 troops to enforce the peace. Parliamentary elections were successfully held in June 2005 and the former rebels, the Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD), emerged victorious. FDD leader Pierre Nkurunziza was sworn in as president in August. One rebel group, the Forces for National Liberation (FNL), remains active in the country, but they are now fighting their former allies and a Hutu majority government. The country is finally on the road to stability and all sides need to embrace the spirit of national unity to bring Burundi back from the brink.

CULTURE

Like Rwanda to the north, Burundi has been torn apart by tribal animosities. However, like most conflicts, it is more about politics than people, and it is the people that end up the victims of political manipulation. The Belgians masterminded the art of divide and rule, using the minority Tutsis to control the majority Hutus. The population was forced into choosing sides, Hutu or Tutsi.

Unlike Rwanda, Burundi debates its divisions. In Rwanda, there are only Rwandans, and the history is being reinterpreted in the spirit of unity. In Burundi, there are Hutus and Tutsis, and they work together in political parties and drink together in bars and discuss their differences. With two very different approaches to the same problem of ethnic division, both countries could learn a little from each other.

Burundi is more Francophone than any other country in the region, and city dwellers take their siesta seriously. Shops and businesses shut down from noon to 3pm. Do as the locals do and save some energy for the evening.

Out in the countryside, most of the people are engaged in farming, at least when they have not been fleeing the civil war as refugees in neighbouring countries. Coffee and tea are the main export crops.

PEOPLE

Burundi's population comprises 84% Hutu, 15% Tutsi and 1% Twa Pygmies. Although the stormy relations between Hutu and Tutsi dominate the headlines, it is the Twa who have had the roughest deal, their forests stripped by successive outsiders.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Burundi is famous for its athletic and acrobatic dances. Les Tambourinaires is the country's most famous troupe and they perform all over the world. Their performances are a high-adrenaline mix of drumming and dancing that drowns the audience in a wave of sound and movement.

ENVIRONMENT

Rwanda may be the 'land of a thousand hills', but Burundi isn't far behind. The north is a stunning landscape of dramatic peaks and deep valleys, best experienced on the bus between Bujumbura and Kigali. Many of the mountains are carved with gravity-defying terraces that plunge into deep valleys below and farmers somehow eke a living out of the land. To the southwest, it levels out along the shores of lovely Lake Tanganyika and the capital, Bujumbura, is on the northern tip of this vast lake.

FOOD & DRINK

Bujumbura is a contender for gastronomic capital of East Africa. Brochettes (kebabs) and frites (hot potato chips or french fries) are a legacy of the Belgian colonial period, but there is also succulent fish from Lake Tanganyika. When it comes to drink, Burundi is blessed with a national brewery churning out huge bottles of Primus and a very drinkable version of Amstel.

BUJUMBURA

Bujumbura...the name is so exotic it just rumbas off the tongue. 'Buj', as many foreign residents refer to it, has a striking location on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and many of the shores of Lake langanyika and many of its suburbs sprawl up the looming mountains that ring the city to the north and east. Comatose during the long civil war, the

Burundian capital is a mixture of grandiose colonial town planning, with wide boulevards and imposing public buildings, and the dusty,

crowded streets that characterise the capitals in much of Africa. It is also one of the most important ports on Lake Tanganyika.

Bujumbura has a freewheelin' reputation and the dining, drinking and dancing scene can compete with the best in the region. That said, it's not the safest city by night, so it is important to take taxis after dark. Security has improved with the influx of UN peacekeepers, but robberies are still common.

A short way out of the city are some of Africa's best inland beaches. White sand, turquoise waters and beachside bars. Pinch yourself. This is Burundi, not the Caribbean.

INFORMATION

Banque du Crédit de Bujumbura (Rue Science) and **Interbank Burundi** (Blvd de la Liberté) both offer credit-card cash advances but commissions are high. Both charge 2.5% plus a flat fee of $\in 10$. There's an open black market in Buj and dealers hang out on Chaussée Prince Rwagasore. Rates vary according to the official exchange rates and the amount to be changed.

There are internet cafés throughout the city centre.

Face à Face (Blvd de l'Uprona; ⓒ 8am-10pm) A stylish internet café with fast connections and tasty snacks. Main post office (cnr Blvd Lumumba & Ave du Commerce; ⓒ 8am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) Phonecards and stamps.

Office National du Tourisme (🖻 222202; Ave des Euphorbes; 🏵 7.30am-noon & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Not much in the way of handouts.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Bujumbura is a more dangerous city than Kampala (Uganda) or Kigali (Rwanda), but is not quite in the league of Nairobbery. It is generally safe to wander about on foot during the day. The character of the city changes around 8pm, as 'les petits bandits' move in. Take particular care near popular nightspots, as you never know who is lurking in the dark.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

BURUNDI

Sights? That's a tough call. The biggest hitters are the beaches on Lake Tanganyika, by far the best in the region. The sand is white and powdery, and the waves should keep the bilharzia at bay. **Saga Beach** (pronounced Sagga) is the place to be, named in honour of the most popular bar here. long neglected. Opening times are as erratic as the collections. The **Musée Vivant** (Ave du 13 Octobre; admission BFr2000) is a reconstructed traditional Burundian village with some exhibits of baskets, pottery and drums, but it's also a part-time zoo and the animals aren't kept in impressive conditions.

SLEEPING

Hotel prices in Bujumbura shot up when the UN came to town. This is a good city to indulge in something a bit nicer.

HôtelLeDoyen (224378; AveduStade; rBFr20,000, with air-con BFr35,000;) This rambling old colonialera building, set amid verdant grounds, has the cheapest rooms in the city, as its rates are in local currency rather than US dollars. Rooms have high ceilings and big bathrooms at the top end.

Hotel Amahoro (ⓐ 247550; Rue de l'Industrie; rUS\$30-70; ⓐ) One of the newer hotels in Buj, the Amahoro has established a name for itself as a comfortable, centrally located place to stay with a good range of amenities. All rooms have satellite TV, fridge and hot water.

Hotel Botanika (226792; hotel botanika@hotmail.com; Blvd de l'Uprona; s/d US\$60/70; 2) Bujumbura's boutique hotel, the Botanika is a charming retreat from the rigours of life in Burundi. There are only seven rooms, and all come equipped with satellite TV, minibar and beautiful bathroom. It also has an excellent European restaurant.

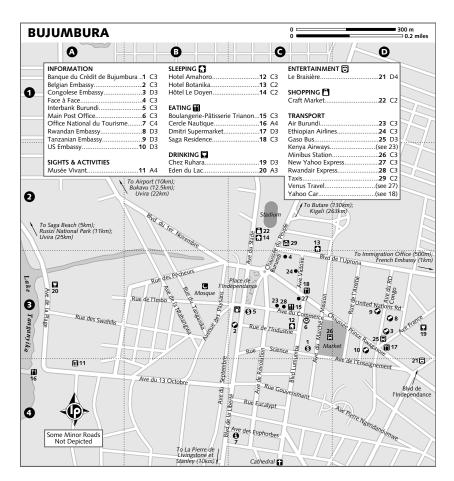
EATING & DRINKING

One of the best things about Bujumbura is the food. There are great bakeries, lively cafés and some of the finest restaurants in the region.

Dmitri Supermarket (Chaussée Prince Rwagasore) One of Buj's unexpected treats, this supermarket is the best stocked in town, selling Swiss chocolate, superb salami and European cheeses.

Boulangerie-Pâtisserie Trianon (Ave du Commerce; BFr500-2000) Always packed out for breakfast thanks to a great combination of fresh croissants and local coffee. Strangely, it's closed at lunchtime.

Cercle Nautique (222056; Ave de la Plage; mains BFr3000-10,000) The most famous spot in Bujumbura, the Cercle is one of those colonialera clubs that remains resolutely popular thanks to good food and drinks aplenty. Set on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, this is a must when passing through Buj.



Saga Residence (242225; Chaussée Prince Rwagasore; mains BFr4000-7000) This impressive place, also a small hotel, has a large menu of steaks and fresh lake fish, and is exquisitely decorated with Congolese crafts and local textiles.

On weekends a lot of the action moves out to the beach bars on Lake Tanganyika, particularly Saga Beach.

Eden du Lac (Ave de la Plage) Near the Cercle Nautique, this garden bar is a local institution. Drinking with a view and discerning dining.

Chez Ruhara (Ave France) The ultimate club in Buj, Chez Ruhara is a cross between an underground rave and a scene from *Mad Max*, as it's set in the basement of an unfinished tenement block. It's nicknamed 'Jazz Club' and rumbles on all night on weekends. **Le Braisière** (Blvd de l'Indépendance) For live music, try Le Braisière at Hôtel Cyrano, which usually has a local band playing on Saturday night from 7pm.

SHOPPING

Burundi is hardly famous for its handicrafts, but a lot of excellent work makes its way across the border from DRC. The best place to browse is the small **craft market** (Ave du Stade). Haggle hard to get a good price.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For contact details of the international airlines serving Burundi, see p617.

Minibuses ply the major routes around the country, and leave from the minibus station near the market area. They usually dry up after lunchtime due to lingering security concerns.

GETTING AROUND

To get to central Bujumbura from the airport costs about US\$10. On the return trip, you could take a taxi-motor (motorbike taxi) for about BFr2500.

After 8pm always take a taxi in the city, no matter how short the distance, as robberies are common.

AROUND BUJUMBURA

LA PIERRE DE LIVINGSTONE ET Stanley

'Dr Livingstone, I presume?' The Burundians presume so. The Tanzanians presume not. This large rock at Mugere, about 10km south of the capital, is alleged to mark the spot where the infamous encounter between Livingstone and Stanley took place. Some graffiti marks the date as 25 November 1871. Ujiji in Tanzania is the other contender.

AROUND BURUNDI

GITEGA

Gitega, the second-largest town in Burundi, is home to the **National Museum** and a limited number of accommodation and restaurant options.

A good day trip from Gitega is to the **Chutes de la Kagera**, near Rutana. These waterfalls are spectacular in the wet season (October to January), but there's no public transport there, so charter a taxi.

Double check the latest security situation before undertaking a road trip from Bujumbura to Gitega. Minibuses run throughout the day (US\$2, one hour).

SOURCE DU NIL

BURUNDI

This insignificant-looking little spring, southeast of Bujumbura, high up on the slopes of Mt Kikizi (2145m), is supposedly the southernmost source of the Nile. Naturally, the Ugandans dispute this, claiming the source as Jinja – where the Nile flows out of Lake Victoria. In Burundi 'le source' is no more than a trickle – not exactly a riveting sight – and access is impossible without a private or chartered vehicle. Ask around at hotels in Bujumbura about vehicle rental, road conditions and the latest security situation.

NATIONAL PARKS

The long civil war wiped the national parks off the map. However, they may begin to open up once again if peace holds.

Parc National de la Kibira is the largest rainforest in Burundi, part of the Parc National Nyungwe Forest in Rwanda, and home to hundreds of colobus monkeys and chimpanzees. **Parc National de la Rurubu** is the largest park in the country, with wonderful hiking and expansive views.

The most accessible national park is **Parc National de la Rusizi** (admission US\$1.50), 15km from Bujumbura. It's a wetland environment, and provides a habitat for hippos, sitatungas (aquatic antelopes) and a wide variety of birds.

BURUNDI DIRECTORY

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Burundi's long civil war appears to be coming to an end. However, it is a young peace and things could kick off again, so don't do too much exploring unless you are 101% certain things are safe. It's currently considered safe to travel by land to and from Rwanda. Travelling south along the shores of Lake Tanganyika to Tanzania may emerge as a popular way to link the mountain gorillas of Rwanda with the chimps of Gombe Stream.

Kigali (Rwanda) and Kigoma (Tanzania) are probably the best places to pick up reliable information about current events in Burundi.

PRACTICALITIES

- Burundi uses the metric system and distances are in kilometres.
- Electricity in Burundi is 240V, 50 cycles, and plugs are mainly of the European two-round-pin variety.
- The local press includes Frenchlanguage *Le Renouveau*.
- Government-controlled Radio Burundi broadcasts in Kirundi, French, Swahili and English.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Burundian Embassies & Consulates

Belgium (🖻 02-23 045 35; 46 Place Marie-Louise, Brussels)

UK (🗟 020-8381 4092; 26 Armitage Rd, London) USA (🗟 202-342 2574; 2233 Wisconsin Ave, Washington DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Burundi

Foreign embassies in Bujumbura include the following: Belgium (@ 233641; Blvd de la Liberté) DRC (Ave du RD Congo) France (@ 251484; 60 Blvd de l'Uprona) Rwanda (@ 226865; Ave du RD Congo) Tanzania (@ 248636; 4 United Nations Rd) USA (@ 223454; Chaussée Prince Rwagasore)

HOLIDAYS

Some of these holidays may change as the new government of national unity grows in confidence. New Year's Day 1 January

Labour Day 1 May Independence Day 1 July Assumption Day 5 August Anniversary of Rwagasore's Assassination 13 October All Saints' Day 1 November

MONEY

There are no ATMs in Burundi. It's a cash economy and the US dollar is king. Come with cash unless you like giving lots of money in commissions to banks, particularly for travellers cheques – some charge up to 7%. There are no ATMs in Burundi. For banks in Bujumbura, see p614.

POST & TELEPHONE

The postal service is reasonably efficient. There are no telephone area codes within the country.

VISAS

Visas are required by all, and are best obtained from a Burundian embassy before arrival. Two photographs are required and visas are often available in the afternoon if you apply early in the morning. One-month tourist visas cost US\$40.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for DRC, Rwanda and Tanzania are available from respective embassies in Bujumbura (see left for contact details).

TRANSPORT IN BURUNDI

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Located about 12km north of the city centre, **Bujumbura International Airport** (BJM) has flights connecting Bujumbura with Kigali (Rwanda), Kampala (Uganda), Nairobi (Kenya) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia).

Air Burundi (🖻 223460; airbdi@cbinf.com; Ave du Commerce)

Ethiopian Airlines (🖻 226820; www.flyethiopian.com; Ave Victoire)

Kenya Airways (🖻 223542; www.kenya-airways.com; Place de l'Independance)

Rwandair Express (🖻 251850; www.rwandair.com; Ave du Commerce)

Land RWANDA

The main crossing point is between Kayanza and Butare on the main road linking Bujumbura and Kigali. The border is at Kayanza Haut.

The safest and quickest option for travel between Bujumbura and Kigali is to use one of the scheduled bus services that depart daily. Yahoo Car, New Yahoo Express, Venus Travel and Gaso Bus all run buses in both directions. Most companies offer the choice of a big bus or a minibus, the latter costing less as it is more crowded and considered less secure.

CROSSING BY LAND INTO BURUNDI?

Burundi was long wiped off the overland map due to the intractable civil war in the country. Check the security situation very carefully from the safety of Rwanda before venturing down here. Crossing into Tanzania, the safest bet is to follow the road south along the Tanganyika lakeshore, as the flat landscape and lack of forest cover isn't suitable for staging ambushes.

CROSSING INTO DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO?

Think twice, maybe three times, before crossing into DRC. Things have been very volatile there during the terrible years of civil war, so it is extremely important to do your own homework before visiting.

Prices cost BFr9000 to BFr12,000 and departures are all around 8am.

There is also a direct road from Bujumbura to Cyangugu at the southern tip of Lake Kivu in Rwanda, but this is not in good condition.

TANZANIA

There are several border crossings between Burundi and Tanzania, including one near Kobero in the north of the country and one near Nyanza Lac in the south of the country, which connects with Gombe Stream National Park and Kigoma in western Tanzania. However, due to the uncertain security situation in the east of the country during research, we were unable to travel to these areas. Ask around in Bujumbura for more details.

The lake steamers that used to connect Bujumbura with Kigoma and Mpulungu (Zambia) are not currently operating, but ask around in the capital in case the situation changes.

GETTING AROUND

The national airline, **Air Burundi** (223460; airbdi@cbinf.com; Ave du Commerce, Bujumbura), does not operate internal flights.

Most major roads in Burundi are sealed and public transport is mainly by minibus. Destinations are displayed in the front window and they depart when full. They depart throughout the day from the *gare routière* (bus station) in any town.

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Djibouti

Small in size, big in ambitions. Djibouti may be one of the tiniest, youngest and least-known nations in Africa, but it could also well be the most talented or, depending on your perspective, the most opportunistic. While its larger, more powerful neighbours are embroiled in a never-ending border dispute, Djibouti stands out as a haven of stability and neutrality.

Sadly, for the few travellers who venture here (except, maybe, for the French, who colonised the country and are more acquainted with its assets), Djibouti is usually nothing more than a transit point on the road to Eritrea or Ethiopia. But, you would miss out if you limited your experience of Djibouti to a few hours waiting for a connecting plane, train or bus. Why not settle in for a while and enjoy its dishevelled nightlife, luscious cuisine and well-organised infrastructure? Or immerse yourself in its eerie lunar landscapes, such as the other-worldly Lac Abbé or the vast salt lake, Lac Assal. Djibouti is also a great place for a few days' strenuous activity, with hiking, diving, snorkelling with whale sharks (whisper it softly) and even wind-surfing on wheels (yes!) readily available. For such a tiny speck of land, there's a startling variety of adventure options. But if you need to recharge the batteries, you could simply laze on a pale-sand beach in the Gulf of Tadjoura. True, Djibouti will put a dent in your wallet, but if you have a penchant for bizarre or secretive places, be sure to squeeze it into your African odyssey. It could hold you captive longer than expected.

FAST FACTS

- Area 23,000 sq km
- ATMs Two in Djibouti City (but they were not functioning at the time of research)
- Borders Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somaliland open
- Budget US\$50 to US\$100 a day
- Capital Djibouti City
- Languages Arabic, French, Afar, Somali
- Money Djibouti Franc (DFr); US\$1 = DFr176
- Population Approximately 704,000
- Seasons Hot (May-September), cool (mid-October to mid-April), wet (October–April)
- Telephone Country code 253; international access code
 00
- Time GMT/UTC +3
- Visa US\$35 to US\$60 for 30 days; obtainable at the airport for most Western nationals



HIGHLIGHTS DJIBOUTI

- **Djibouti City** (p623) Explore the alleyways of the Marché Central, full of pungent odours and bright colours, and test-drive the dance floors.
- Moucha Island (p627) Forget the hardships and take some time out on a white-sand beach.
- Bay of Ghoubbet (p625) Impress your firends left back home: 'What did you do in Djibouti?' 'I snorkelled with a whale shark!'
- Lac Assal (p627) Descend to the lowest point on the African continent at 150m below sea level.
- **Lac Abbé** (p629) Question reality while wandering flabbergasted in a Martian landscape, where Planet of the Apes was filmed.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The climate is hot, and from May until September you'll swelter under average daily temperatures of about 40°C. At the peak of the hot season, the thermometer can hit 45°C and the humidity is correspondingly high. The cooler season (including occasional rain) runs from mid-October to mid-April, when temperatures average 25°C. This is the ideal time to visit Djibouti, when the stifling heat is over. It's appreciably milder in the Goda Mountains year round.

HOW MUCH?

- Internet connection US\$1.75 per hour
- One night with full board in a campement US\$46
- Djibouti City-Tadjoura by dhow US\$2.90
- Full diving package to Les Sept Frères islands US\$460
- Bunch of gat Depends on guality!

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.90
- 1L bottled water US\$0.85
- Bottle of Heineken US\$5.20
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$5.75
- Fruit juice US\$1.70

ITINERARIES

- One week Base yourself in Djibouti City (p623) and take a two- to three-day tour to explore Lac Assal (p627) and Lac Abbé (p629). Back in the capital, enjoy its culinary delights and spend late nights in the bars and clubs. Be sure to take a snorkelling trip to the Bay of Ghoubbet (p625) or a diving trip to the Gulf of Tadjoura (p625).
- **Two weeks** Decompress after all that sightseeing with a few days of lounging on the beaches at Tadjoura (p628) or Moucha Island (p627). It's also worth taking a few days upcountry to explore the Goda Mountains (p628). Then head east to charmingly lethargic Obock (p629) before dhowing it back to Djibouti City.
- One month One month? The chances are that you've become gat-addicted!

HISTORY From Aksum to Islam

Around the 1st century AD, Djibouti made up part of the powerful Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum, which included modern-day Eritrea and even stretched across the Red Sea to parts of southern Arabia. It was during the Aksumite era, in the 4th century AD, that Christianity first appeared in the region.

As the empire of Aksum gradually fell into decline, a new influence arose that would forever supersede the Christian religion in Djibouti: Islam. It was introduced to the region around AD 825 by Arab traders from Southern Arabia.

European Ambitions

In the second half of the 19th century, European powers competed to grab new colonies in Africa. The French, seeking to counter the British presence in Yemen on the other side of the Bab al-Mandab Strait, made agreements with the Afar sultans of Obock and Tadjoura that gave them the right to settle. In 1888, construction of Djibouti City began on the southern shore of the Gulf of Tadjoura. French Somaliland (present-day Djibouti) began to take shape.

France and the emperor of Ethiopia then signed a pact designating Djibouti as the 'official outlet of Ethiopian commerce'. This led to the construction of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti City railway, which was of vital commercial importance until recently.

Throwing Off the French Yoke

As early as 1949 there were a number of anticolonial demonstrations that were led by the Issa Somalis, who were in favour of the reunification of the territories of Italian, British and French Somaliland. Meanwhile, the Afars were in favour of continued French rule.

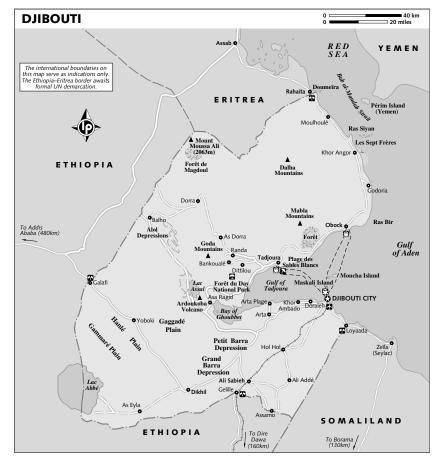
Major riots ensued, especially after the 1967 referendum, which produced a vote in favour of continued French rule - a vote achieved partly as a result of the arrest of opposition leaders and the massive expulsion of ethnic Somalis. After the referendum, the colony's name was changed from French Somaliland to the French Territory of the Afars and Issas.

On June 1977, the colony finally won its sovereignty from France. The country became the Republic of Djibouti.

Small Country, Adroit Leaders

Despite continuous clan rivalries between the two main ethnic groups, Afars and Issas, who have been jostling for power since the 1970s, Djibouti has learnt to exploit its strategic position.

When the Gulf War broke out in 1990, the country's president, Hassan Gouled Aptidon, while appearing to oppose the military build-up in the Gulf, simultaneously allowed France to increase its military presence in the country, as well as granting the Americans and Italians access to the naval port. And he



skilfully managed to retain the support of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for the modernisation of Djibouti port. During the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in the 1990s, Djibouti port proved to be strategic when Ethiopia diverted its foreign trade through it (which it still does).

During the Second Gulf War in 2003, Djibouti continued to play an ambivalent role, allowing a US presence in the country – to the great displeasure of France.

Djibouti Today

The geographical position of the country, sandwiched between three stronger nations, and its strategic value as a port, is as important as ever. Djibouti continues to play the French and the American cards simultaneously, while maintaining good relations with Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somaliland, which are all considered as 'partners'.

In 2006, the first phase of the Doraleh Project, which consists of a large-capacity oil terminal about 8km east of the current seaport, was completed. Next stages include the creation of a container terminal and a large free zone. Thanks to this megaproject, partly financed by Dubai Port International, Djibouti aims to be the 'Dubai of East Africa'.

The year 2007 marked a symbolic turning point in the history of Djibouti as the country celebrated its 30th year as an independent nation.

CULTURE

Djiboutians are charming, respectful and very hospitable people. This has its origins in the traditionally nomadic culture of the two main ethnic groups, the Afars and Issas. Despite an increasing tendency towards a more sedentary lifestyle, most Djiboutians living in towns retain strong links with their nomadic past.

One of the most striking features in Djibouti is the overwhelming presence of *qat*. The life of most Djiboutian males seems to revolve entirely around the consumption of this mild narcotic. Every day, *qat* consumers meet their circle of friends in the *mabraz* (*qat* den) to *brouter* (graze). Here, a minimum of five hours is spent reclining on cushions, smoking cigarettes and sipping tea, while 'grazing' on the leaves. *Qat* is said to be the reason behind numerous divorces. Only 10% of women are thought to consume the plant regularly.

PEOPLE

Of Djibouti's estimated 704,000 inhabitants, about 46% are Afars and 45% are Issas. Both groups are Muslims. The rest of the population is divided between Arabs and Europeans. The south is predominantly Issa, while the north is mostly Afar. Ethnic tensions between Afars and Issas have always dogged Djibouti. These tensions came to a head in 1991, when Afar rebels launched a civil war in the north. A peace accord was brokered in 1994, but ethnic hostility has not completely waned.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Dance is arguably the highest form of culture in Djibouti, along with oral literature and poetry. Some dances celebrate major life events, such as birth, marriage or circumcision.

If you are looking for handicrafts, the traditional Afar and Somali knife and the very attractive Afar woven straw mats (known in Afar as *fiddima*) are among the finest products.

ENVIRONMENT

Djibouti's 23,000 sq km can be divided into three geographic regions: the coastal plains which feature white, sandy beaches; the volcanic plateaus in the southern and central parts of the country; and the mountain ranges in the north, where the altitude reaches over 2000m above sea level. Essentially the country is a vast wasteland, with the exception of pockets of forest and dense vegetation to the north.

Livestock rearing is the most important type of agriculture. As demand for scarce grazing land mounts, the forests of the north are increasingly coming under threat, including the fragile Forêt du Day National Park, the country's only national park.

FOOD & DRINK

For sheer choice and quality of food, Djibouti ranks among the best places in Africa. Djibouti City is endowed with a plethora of tasty restaurants that will please most palates – a testimony to French presence. You'll find excellent seafood, rice, pasta, local meat dishes, such as stuffed kid or lamb, and other treats imported from France. In the countryside, choice is obviously more limited, with goat meat and rice as the main staples. Alcohol is widely available.

DJIBOUTI CITY

pop 400,000

Arriving from Eritrea, Ethiopia or the Middle East, it usually comes as a surprise to many travellers to discover that Djibouti City is an active and fairly cosmopolitan city that tries hard to be recognised as the little Dubai on the Red Sea. Traditionally robed Afar tribesmen, unashamed *qat*-chewing men, stalwart French legionnaires (and the odd GI), sensuous Somali glamour kittens and frazzled businessmen with the latest mobile phones stuck to their ear all jostle side by side. This boisterous, sweltering cocktail of African, Arab and European influences is simply mind-boggling.

Djibouti City boasts good infrastructure but can be shockingly expensive – be warned.

ORIENTATION

Djibouti City is small enough to explore on foot. The centre comprises the European Quarter to the north and the African Quarter to the south. There are no street numbers and not all streets have names.

Northwest of town, a causeway known as L'Escale leads to a small marina, which is the point of departure for trips to Tadjoura and Obock. Northeast of town is the Plateau du Serpent, where many of the foreign embassies can be found.

The train station is about 1km north of the centre, while Djibouti-Ambouli Airport is 5km south of town.

INFORMATION Internet Access

Cyber Cafe Filga Informatique (Rue de Paris; per hr DFr300; [™] 7am-12.30pm & 4-10pm Sat-Thu, 4-10pm Fri) Easy Internet (Rue de Londres; per hr DFr400; [™] 7.30am-1pm & 4-11pm Sat-Thu, 4-11pm Fri)

Medical Services

CHA Bouffard (**C** 351351; Boulaos district) The bestequipped hospital.

Pôle Médical (ⓐ 352724; ⓑ Sat-Thu) Two European doctors keep this surgery off Pl du 27 Juin 1977. They can speak English.

Money

There are only two ATMs in Djibouti City (both at the BCIMR branches listed following), but they were not functioning at the time of research. BCIMR PI Lagarde ((2) 358885; Rue Marchard; (2) 7.30-11.45am Sun-Thu); Plateau du Serpent ((2) 353143; Ave F d'Esperey; (2) 7.45-11.45am & 4-5.30pm Sun-Thu) Doesn't accept travellers cheques but can do cash advances on credit cards (Visa only). For cash transactions, a flat fee of FD500 is charged.

Bureaux de Change ((a) 821970; (b) 7.30am-1pm & 4pm until last departure Sat-Thu, 4pm until last departure Fri) At the international airport; cash only, but the rates are slightly inferior to those offered in the centre.

Dilip Corporation (a 352857; Pl du 27 Juin 1977; Bam-noon & 4-7.30pm Sat-Thu) Authorised bureaux de change. Changes cash (no commission) and does cash advances on Visa and MasterCard, but doesn't accept travellers cheques.

Post

Main post office (Blvd de la République; 🏵 7am-1pm & 4-7pm Sat-Thu)

Telephone

The most convenient places to make international or local calls are the various telephone outlets scattered around the city centre.

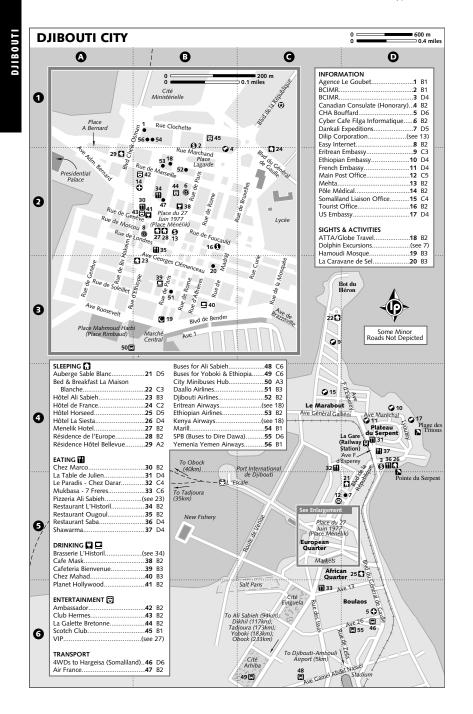
Tourist Information

Tourist office ((2) 352800; www.office-tourisme.dj in French; Rue de Foucauld; (2) 7am-1pm Sat-Thu, 4-6pm Sat, Mon & Wed)

SIGHTS

Start your visit with an early morning walk around the European Quarter. With its whitewashed houses and Moorish arcades sheltering Parisian-style cafés and shops, it is a strange mix of the Arab and the European. To the south lies the shambolic Pl Mahmoud Harbi, dominated by the minaret of the great **Hamoudi mosque**. The chaotic **Marché Central** (Central Market), which extends from Pl Mahmoud Harbi eastward along and below Blvd de Bender, is a must. It's a criss-cross of alleyways where stalls and shops are lined cheek by jowl.

If you want a guided tour, contact **Daoud Aboubaker** ($\textcircled{\baselinethinstyle}{3}$ 830804, 870935; daoudaboubaker@yahoo .ft). He's very competent and his English is OK. It costs DFr2500 for a two- to threehour walk.



ACTIVITIES

There is excellent **diving** in the Gulf of Tadjoura, including the Moucha and Maskali Islands. It costs about DFr15,000 for two dives at Moucha Island, including boat transfer. Longer diving trips to Les Sept Frères Archipelago are also available from DFr80,000 for three days/two nights.

A once-in-a-lifetime experience **snorkelling** with whale sharks is possible in the Bay of Ghoubbet from October to January. This spot is one of only a few places in the world where these giant yet gentle creatures appear regularly in near-shore waters, easily accessible to observers.

Reliable operators include **Dolphin Excur**sions ((2) 350313; dolphinexcursions@hotmail.com; Blvd de la République) and Centre de Plongée du Lagon Bleu on Moucha Island, which is represented through **ATTA/Globe Travel** ((2) 353036, 250297; atta@ intnet.dj; off Place Lagarde).

SLEEPING

If you're coming from, say, Ethiopia or Eritrea, be prepared to grit your teeth. A decent single for less than US\$30? Dream on, darlings.

Budget

Hôtel Horseed (ⓐ 352316; Blvd du Général de Gaulle; s/d with shared bathroom DFr5000/7500; ③) Its location is not the most prepossessing, but the rooms are presentable, if a bit ragged around the edges, and the shared bathrooms seem to see the occasional mop. Air-con is extra (DFr500).

Auberge Sable Blanc (ⓐ 351163; s/d DFr6000/7000; ☑) Another acceptable haunt for the impecunious. Not far from Blvd de la République, this converted villa boasts a mixed bag of rooms, so ask to see a few before committing. There's a mosque nearby – earplug alert!

Hôtel de France ((2) 813781; Blvd du Général de Gaulle; r DFr6500-8500; (2)) The Hôtel de France is good budget-hotel fodder; rooms come with stout bedding, TV, fan and air-con. It's a stone's throw from the European Quarter – handy if you want to spend your nights carousing at the nearby clubs.

Midrange & Top End

Hotel Ali Sabieh (☐ 353264; Ave Georges Clémenceau; s DFr9500-10,500, d DFr12,700; ☑) A major player in the centre, the Ali Sabieh earns its stripes with clinically clean, if a bit small, rooms, well-sprung mattresses and salubrious bathrooms. Another plus is its position,

QAT, ANYONE?

Around 1pm, don't miss the arrival of *qat*, a fascinating slice of local life. Suddenly, a cacophony of car horns and shouting breaks out, heralding the marvellous news: *qat*, the nation's daily 'hit', has arrived, fresh from Ethiopia. After which a heavy torpor descends on the town and all activity ceases for the afternoon.

During your stay in Djibouti, it's not a bad idea to give it a go. Don't expect to be stoned, however, and take antidiarrheal tablets, just in case. Frankly said, if you just want to get tipsy, believe us: nothing beats a fresh beer in a bar on Pl du 27 Juin 1977.

right in the thick of things. If hunger beckons, there's a pizza outlet on the ground floor.

Bed & Breakfast La Maison Blanche (ⓐ 869935, 352176; Le Heron district; r ind breakfast DFr12,000-15,000; இ இ இ) No more agonising plumbing, no more saggy mattresses, no more dated furniture. After weeks of overland travel, this scintillating white villa that used to be an ambassador's residence is all the therapy you need. There are two generously sized rooms with sleek furnishings, bathrooms so scrupulously clean you could eat off the floor, a secluded garden and a nifty pool. It's a bit of a trek from the centre but minibuses are within easy reach. The only downside is the resident dog, which will stick to you like a leech. It's closed in August.

Résidence Hôtel Bellevue (☎ 358088; belle vue@intnet.dj; Blvd Cheikh Osman; s DFr15,000-17,000, d DFr17,000-19,000; 😢) A reliable place to hunker down in if your wallet is bulging. What it lacks in style is made up for by an ace location and sparklingly clean self-contained rooms with the usual mod-cons. Prices are negotiable at weekends.

Résidence de l'Europe (() 355080; fax 356108; Pl du 27 Juin 1977; s/d DFr17,500/19,500; () Despite its Moorish-esque façade, this joint rates zero on our charm meter (which is a shame at this price), but gets high marks for cleanliness

and general agreeability. Some rooms have plenty of space to really strew your stuff around. Visa cards are accepted but there's a small commission.

Hotel La Siesta (🖻 350666; Plateau du Serpent; r incl breakfast DFr18,000; 🕄 🔲 😰) The layout of this ambitious newcomer is drably institutional, but the hotel scores high on amenities and there's not a speck of dirt to be found. The atmosphere is relaxing, whether you potter about the pool or grab an oh-so-refreshing beer in the bar.

EATING

This is your chance to relish French cuisine in polished surrounds, scoff really fresh local seafood, savour tasty meat dishes and treat yourself to French wines or baguettes. OK, it doesn't come cheap, especially if you've come from Ethiopia, but at least it's worth every mouthful.

Budaet

For those on a rock-bottom budget, the stalls and shops around Pl Mahmoud Harbi are groaning with colourful vegetables, fruits and spices at unbeatable prices.

Shawarma (Ave F d'Esperey; shwarma DFr300-500; 🕑 dinner) If money really matters, this cheap and cheerful eatery (no sign), a mere skip from the railway station, is the ideal pit stop. Fork out DFr500 for a shwarma (kebablike dish) and you'll leave patting your tummy contentedly.

Le Paradis - Chez Darar (🖻 842303; mains DFr800-1200; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A good place to line the stomach without breaking the bank, this eatery serves simple fish and meat dishes. It has a large outdoor seating area, midway between the post office and the railway station, near a mosque. No alcohol is served.

Pizzeria Ali Sabieh (🖻 353264; Ave Georges Clémenceau; mains DFr1000-2000; 🕑 evenings) Feast on palate-blowing Italian specialities in this cheery trattoria-like venue. The menu roves from faultlessly cooked pizzas to spaghetti and penne. Yum.

Restaurant Saba (🕿 354244; Ave Maréchal Lyautey; mains DFr1000-2500; 🕑 lunch Sat-Thu, dinner daily) Close to the railway station, this unpretentious joint gets kudos for its wide-ranging menu and mouth-watering fruit juices. Try shark fillet, crab or shrimps. Despite the simplicity of the setting, this place feels surprisingly cosy.

Midrange

Chez Marco (🖻 828087; mains DFr1600-2600; 🕅 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Hmm, will it be filet de boeuf sauce roquefort (fillet of beef with roquefort cheese sauce) or escalope de poulet au citron vert (chicken breast in lime sauce)? This French outpost serves delectable fare with a Mediterranean twist in a welcoming, lighttoned interior. It's off Pl du 27 Juin 1977.

Restaurant Ougoul (2 353652; Ave Georges Clémenceau; mains DFr1600-3200; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Nosh on freshly prepared fish and seafood dishes in this Djibouti classic, slap bang in the centre of town.

La Table de Julien (🖻 357355; Ave F d'Esperey; mains DFr1900-2500; 🕥 lunch Sat-Thu, dinner Mon-Sat) Ooh la la, this terribly French venue opposite the railway station was the flavour of the month when we visited. Creative dishes such as filet de daurade au sel du lac Assal (sea bream cooked with salt from Lac Assal) will have you gushing superlatives. Bon appétit!

Restaurant L'Historil (🖻 354767; Pl du 27 Juin 1977; mains DFr1900-2500; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Subdued lighting, sleek surrounds, a soothing blue colour scheme and a tantalising array of fish dishes have made this restaurant one of the most popular in town for a fancy meal.

Mukbasa – 7 Freres (🕿 351188; Ave 13; fish dishes DFr2000; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This popular joint in the African Quarter is famous for one thing and one thing only: poisson yemenite (oven-baked fish). It's served with a chapati-like bread and a devilish mokbasa (purée of honey and either dates or banana).

DRINKING

In the mood for a bibulous evening? Pl du 27 Juin 1977 is the main hot spot, with a smattering of pleasant bars, including the relaxed Brasserie L'Historil (🕿 354767; PI du 27 Juin 1977; Tam-11pm). A beer will set you back about DFr900 (ouch!). Try also Cafe Mask (Pl du 27 Juin 1977; 🕑 8am-11pm) or the very Western Planet Hollywood (🕿 358014; Pl du 27 Juin 1977; 🏵 8am-11pm).

If all you want is an energy bolt, Cafeteria Bienvenue (Rue de Paris; 🕑 6am-9pm) and Chez Mahad (Rue de Madrid; 🕑 7.30am-noon Sat-Thu, 7.30-11am & 4-9pm Fri) serve ultrafresh fruit juices (from DFr150).

ENTERTAINMENT

If you want to tear it up on the dance floor amid stalwart legionnaires in their kneelength shorts and Somali or Ethiopian cuties, this is your chance! It's more sleazy disco than übertrendy lounges, but it can be lots of fun.

Most clubs are on and around Rue d'Ethiopie, in the European Quarter. They are at their liveliest on Thursday and Friday nights. Entrance is free, but a beer costs a whopping DFr1000. Check out the following places:

Ambassador (Rue de Marseille) Club Hermes (Rue de Foucauld) La Galette Bretonne (Rue d'Ethiopie) Scotch Club (Rue Clochette) **VIP** (PI du 27 Juin 1977)

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Airlines with offices in Djibouti City: Air France (🗃 351010; www.airfrance.com; Pl du 27 Juin 1977)

Daallo Airlines (🖻 353401; www.daallo.com; Rue de Paris)

Djibouti Airlines (🖻 351006; www.djiboutiairlines .com: PI Lagarde)

Eritrean Airlines (www.ertra.com) The agent for Eritrean Airlines is ATTA/Globe Travel (p631).

Ethiopian Airlines (🖻 351007; www.flyethiopian.com; Rue de Marseille)

Kenya Airways (www.kenya-airways.com) The agent for Kenya Airways is ATTA/Globe Travel (p631).

Yemenia Yemen Airways (🖻 356579; www.yemenia .com: Rue Marchand)

For details of international flights to and from Djibouti City, see p632.

Boat

A ferry did ply the Djibouti-Tadjoura and Djibouti-Obock routes three times a week, but services were indefinitely suspended at the time of research.

Your best bet is to rely on the speedboats and dhows that carry the precious qat and other commodities to Tadjoura and Obock. All boats leave from L'Escale. See p629 and p629 for more information.

Car

Vehicle rental is extortionate in Djibouti, but you can reduce the costs by joining up with other travellers to hire a car. For most off-road areas you will need to have a 4WD. For rentals, try Marill (351150; Rue Marchand). Expect to pay up to DFr21,000 per day for a 4WD.

Local Transport

Minibuses leave from various departure points south of town. They connect Djibouti City to Ali Sabieh, Dikhil, Tadjoura, Yoboki and the Ethiopian border. There is no fixed schedule. Most buses leave early in the morning and only when they are full. Most journeys cost from DFr500 to DFr1000, depending on distance.

Train

The Djibouti-Ethiopia train departs three times a week and runs as far as Dire Dawa (DFr3900 in 1st class). You can take it and get off at Ali Sabieh (about DFr1500). Tickets can be bought 24 hours in advance at the railway station (morning only).

GETTING AROUND

The central hub for city minibuses (DFr50) is on Pl Mahmoud Harbi. Taxis aren't metered; DFr500 is a fair price for a journey within the town.

A taxi ride to or from the airport costs about DFr1000 (after bargaining).

AROUND DJIBOUTI

MOUCHA & MASKALI ISLANDS

It ain't the Bahamas, but these two islands close to Djibouti City are a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of the capital, with good, uncrowded beaches and warm waters. The Lagon Bleu Village (🖻 816177, 353036; Moucha Island; 🕄) is a good place to take up a Robinson Crusoe lifestyle without sacrificing comfort, with 10 well-equipped bungalows, a good restaurant and a diving centre. As an indication of prices, a two-day/one-night full-board package, including transfers to and from Djibouti City, costs DFr18,000/7000 per adult/child. Day trips are also possible from DFr7500/4000 (including lunch). For bookings, contact ATTA/Globe Travel (2 353036, 250297; atta@intnet.dj; off Place Lagarde) in Djibouti City.

LAC ASSAL

Wow! Just over 100km west of the capital lies one of the most spectacular natural phenomena in Africa: Lac Assal. Situated 150m below sea level, this crater lake is encircled by dark, dormant volcanoes. It represents the lowest point on the African continent. The aquamarine water is ringed by a huge salt field, 60m

in depth. The salt field has been mined by the Afar nomads for centuries, and they can still be seen loading up their camels for the long trek south to Ethiopia.

There's no public transport to Lac Assal. Most visitors come with tours (see p631) or hire their own vehicles from the capital. A tour should set you back about DFr13,000.

GODA MOUNTAINS

If you need an escape hatch, look no further. Northwest of the Gulf of Tadjoura, the Goda Mountains rise to a height of 1750m and are a spectacular natural oddity. This area shelters one of the rare speckles of green on Djibouti's parched map, like a giant oasis – a real relief after the scorched desert landscapes. It sometimes rains here and it's often misty. A real shock for some visitors, who find it inconceivable that the tiny settlements of **Dittilou**, **Bankoualé** or **Randa** belong to the same country as the one they left on the burning plain just one hour before.

The Goda Mountains shelter Djibouti's only national park, **Forêt du Day National Park**, which boasts good potential for hiking.

Sleeping & Eating

This area is favoured by expats in search of cool air, and there's no shortage of traditional accommodation. Showers and toilets are communal. The prices quoted here include guided walks.

Campement Touristique de Dittilou (a 810488, 361071; Dittilou; full board DFr8000) If you want to get away from it all, this is the place. The *das* (traditional huts) are set against a lush and totally quiet landscape, at the edge of Forêt du Day National Park. It's a good base for hiking – don't miss the waterfall of Toha (a three to four hour return visit).

Campement Touristique de Bankoualé (2) 814115; Bankoualé; full board DFr8000) Another ideal camp in a scenic location – it overlooks a lush valley and there's an Afar village nearby, where you can stock up on local handicrafts. Huts 5 and 6 boast the best views. The ablution block is well scrubbed. Good hiking possibilities, too.

Campement Touristique Le Goda ((2) 830804; Randa; full board DFr8000) Nestled on the flank of a valley, about 1.5km from Randa town, at an altitude of 1000m, the Goda is a good spot to decompress. There are traditional huts, a clean-smelling ablution block and a restaurant. It's run by the affable Ermano.

Getting There & Away

The most convenient way to visit the area is on a tour (see p631) or with a rental 4WD. Transport can also be organised by the *campements* if there's a group.

TADJOURA pop 25,000

If you've found Ali Sabieh very Somali, you'll find Tadjoura very Afar. Originally a small Afar village trading in slaves, the whitewashed town is now a quiet backwater. Poor and rundown, its setting is nevertheless attractive, nestled in the shadow of the green Goda Mountains with the bright blue sea lapping at its doorstep.

Plage des Sables Blancs, 7km east of Tadjoura, with a good string of white sand, is tranquillity incarnate and a lovely place to sun yourself.

Sleeping & Eating

Koko Beach Club (**a** 810834, 357817; Ambabo; full board DFr10,000; **b**) A brave attempt at creating a resort, about 10km west of Tadjoura, on the main road. The pros of staying here include a lovely mountainous backdrop, a pool and well-equipped bungalows. The cons include a far-from-idyllic beach and an overall lack of atmosphere.

Plage des Sables Blancs Campement (354520; Plage des Sables Blancs; full board DFr10,000) Right on the beach, this is a good place to chill out for a couple of days. Accommodation is simple (beds and mattresses only), but several comfortable bungalows were being constructed when we visited. Transfer can be organised from Djibouti City at weekends (DFr14,000 flat fee, including full board). Contact Agence Le Goubet (see p631).

There's a smattering of cheap and cheerful eateries right by the seafront; a tasty grilled

fish costs a pittance. Our favourites include the following: Mukbaza La Palmeraie Chez Abdou (2424196; mains DFr500) Mini-Cafe de Tadjoura (mains DFr500-700) Restaurant Istanbul (mains DFr500-700) On the jetty.

A new upscale resort, Corto Maltese, about 300m from Le Golfe, was under construction at the time of research.

Getting There & Away

There is a good sealed road from the capital. Regular morning buses ply the route between Djibouti City and Tadjoura (about DFr1500, three hours).

You can also take one of the dhows or speedboats that leave every day sometime between noon and 2pm from L'Escale in Djibouti City (DFr500 to DFr1000, one way).

OBOCK & LES SEPT FRÈRES

The last significant town before the border with Eritrea, Obock exudes a kind of 'last frontier' feel. There is nothing of tangible interest here, but it's an obvious staging post for those who want to travel to Eritrea or for those coming from Assab, in Eritrea's south.

You'll find several basic eateries in the centre.

Just off the coast, at **Les Sept Frères Archipelago**, the Bab al-Mandab Strait separates two worlds, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The archipelago offers superb diving (see p625).

The most convenient way to travel to or from Djibouti City is by speedboat or by dhow. They leave every day to L'Escale early in the morning (DFr1500 by speedboat, about 1½ hours; DFr600 by dhow, about three hours). From L'Escale, they leave sometime between noon and 2pm to bring the much-awaited *qat*. If travelling by road, there are irregular bush taxis that trundle along the dirt road between Tadjoura and Obock (about DFr2000, three hours). There's also a small plane that flies on a twice-weekly basis between Obock and Djibouti City (DFr3000, 30 minutes). For transport to Eritrea, see p632.

PETIT BARRA & GRAND BARRA

The 95km road from Djibouti City crosses two spectacular desert plains: the Petit Barra and Grand Barra, the latter being 27km long and 12km wide. Believe it or not, at the eastern end there's a centre where you can **windsurf on wheels** on the great salty plain! Contact **AE-CVETA** ((a) 354695, 810225; www.aecveta.comin French) in Djibouti City. It costs DFr13,000 for a full day, including one night's accommodation, food and transport from Djibouti City (Fridays only; minimum four people).

ALI SABIEH

Ali Sabieh is an active yet intimate town with a distinct Somali flavour. If coming from Djibouti City, you'll find it pretty relaxing and, to a certain extent, photogenic and full of attitude.

There are daily bus services (DFr700) to Djibouti City, mostly in the morning. You can also hop on the train (DFr1500) that runs three times a week from Dire Dawa to Djibouti City via Ali Sabieh.

To Dire Dawa in Ethiopia, you can also take a bus to Gelille at the Ethiopian border (DFr600) then change to another bus heading to Dire Dawa. For more information on transport to Ethiopia, see p632).

LAC ABBÉ

Don't know what the word 'epiphany' means? Well, this is best defined by the feeling you'll get when Lac Abbé comes into view – a revelation. The scenery is sensational: the plain is dotted with hundreds of limestone chimneys, some standing as high as 50m, belching out

puffs of steam. It is often described as 'a slice of moon on the crust of earth', and for good reason. *Planet of the Apes* was filmed here, and it's no wonder.

Though desolate, it is not uninhabited. Numerous mineral-rich hot springs feed the farms of local nomads who graze their camels and goats here. The banks of the lake are also where flamingos gather at dawn.

The **Campement Touristique d'Asbole** (357244, 822291; full board DFr8000) is set in the most surreal landscape you've ever imagined. It is on a plateau near Lac Abbé and overlooks the big chimneys. As in all *campements*, accommodation is rudimentary, but who cares? You'll be hypnotised by the scenery anyway. Prices include a guided walk to the chimneys.

To get there, you'll need to rent a 4WD with driver or take a tour from the capital (see opposite). The Campement Touristique d'Asbole can organise transfers if you can find a group of people.

DJIBOUTI DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Djibouti's accommodation is limited: there are no formal camping grounds or hostels, and most hotels are in the capital, with few options outside. Hotel categories are limited in range; most of them fit into the upper echelon and are expensive.

A rather popular option that is developing around the major attractions in the hinterland is the *campements touristiques*. These are privately owned traditional huts with shared showers and toilets. It's a good budget option, but there's no public transport to get there.

ACTIVITIES

The most prominent activities in Djibouti are diving and snorkelling (see p625). Most snorkelling and diving takes place off the islands of Maskali and Moucha in the Gulf of Tadjoura, the Bay of Ghoubbet and Les Sept Frères islands. Trips to Les Sept Frères islands are expensive because of the distance and are usually organised in the way of live-aboards.

Hiking is also popular in the Forêt du Day National Park. La Caravane de Sel ((2000) 810488; caravane@intnet.dj; Rue de Londres, Djibouti (ity) also organises treks along the ancient salt route, led by the Afar nomads – recommended. ATTA/Globe Travel ((2000) 23036, 250297; atta@intnet.dj;

PRACTICALITIES

- Djibouti uses the metric system for weights, measures and road distances.
- Djibouti uses the 220V system, with two round-pin plugs.
- Local newspapers include La Nation and Le Renouveau, all published weekly in French.
- TV programmes are in Somali, Afar, Arab and French.
- The main national radio station is Radio Djibouti.

off Place Lagarde, Djibouti City) has treks in southern Djibouti, led by Somali nomads.

In the windy plain of Grand Barra you can windsurf on wheels (see p629).

BUSINESS HOURS

Most government offices, shops and institutions are open from 7.30am to 1.30pm Sunday to Thursday. Private businesses reopen from 4pm to 6pm. Friday is the weekly holiday for offices and most shops, and Saturday and Sunday are normal working days.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Djibouti is a relatively safe country, and serious crime or hostility aimed specifically at travellers is very rare. However, the usual bigcity precautions apply.

Djibouti's security services are known for being sensitive and active. There is no reason why travellers should attract the attention of the police, but if it happens, remain polite and calm, it's usually pretty harmless.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Djiboutian Embassies & Consulates

Djiboutian diplomatic representation abroad is scarce, but there are embassies in the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia (see p673) and Eritrea (see p648). In countries without representation, travellers should head for the French embassy, which acts for Djibouti in the issuing of visas. Elsewhere, Djiboutian embassies and consulates include the following: **Egypt** (a 333 6435; 15 Dr Muhammad Abdel Said St, Dokki, Cairo)

France (🖻 01 47 27 49 22; rue Emile Menier, 75016 Paris)

USA ((202-331 0270; Ste 515, 1156 15th St NW, Washington DC, 2005) Yemen (215 985; 84Amman St, 06 As-Safiya al-Gharbiya)

Embassies & Consulates in Djibouti

Countries with diplomatic representation in Djibouti City include the following. All embassies are closed on Friday. Canada () fax 355950; Pl Lagarde) Eritrea () 354961; fax 250212; Plateau du Serpent) Ethiopia () 350718; fax 354803; Ave F d'Esperey)

Somaliland ((2) 355526; Plateau du Serpent) USA ((2) 353995; http://djibouti.usembassy.gov; Plateau du Serpent)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106), these are the principal public holidays in Djibouti: New Year's Day 1 January Labour Day 1 May Independence Day 27 June

Christmas Day 25 December

MAPS

The best map is the 1:200,000 map published in 1992 by the French Institut Géographique National (IGN).

MONEY

There are several banks and a couple of authorised bureaux de change in the capital. Outside the capital, banking facilities are scarce.

There are only two ATMs in Djibouti City but they were not functioning at the time of writing. Cash advances on credit cards are possible.

TELEPHONE

There are no area codes in Djibouti. International and local calls are best made from the post office or from one of the phone shops in the city centre. Mobile phones are also widespread.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The only tourist office in the country is to be found in Djibouti City. Travel agencies are also reliable sources of travel information (see Tours following).

Information for travellers is hard to come by outside the country. In Europe, the most

knowledgeable organisation is the **Association Djibouti Espace Nomade** (ADEN; ^(C)/fax 01 48 51 71 56; aden@club-internet.fr; 64 Rue des Meuniers, 93100 Montreuilsous-Bois, France).

TOURS

Note that Djibouti is not properly geared up for independent tourism. The only way of getting to some of the country's principal attractions is by taking a tour. They're expensive (from DFr12,000 per person), but the price includes food and accommodation. Besides, when there's no public transport, taking a tour is usually cheaper than hiring a 4WD. Try to be part of an existing group – the more people, the less you pay. The following companies, all based in Djibouti City, organise tours: **AECVETA** (a 354695, 810225; www.aecveta.com in

AECVE IA (🖻 354695, 810225; www.aecveta.com II French)

hotmail.com; Blvd de la République)

VISAS

All visitors, including French nationals, need visas. Tourist visas cost from US\$35 to US\$60 and are usually valid for one month. Visas can be obtained at the nearest Djibouti embassy (including Addis Ababa and Asmara if you're in the Horn) or, when there is none, from the French embassy. Note that travellers from most Western countries can also obtain tourist visas on arrival at the airport: leave your passport with the immigration officer and you get it stamped the next day or, if you're really lucky, within a couple of hours. It costs DFr3000 for 10 days and DFr5000 for one month.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following are available from embassies in Djibouti City (see opposite): **Eritrea** Visas are valid for one month and cost DFr7200 (US\$40). You need one photo. Visa applications can be received at the embassy every morning from 8.30am to 10.30am except Friday, but visas are delivered on Wednesday and Sunday mornings only. A same-day service is also possible if you apply early morning; it costs DFr9000 (US\$50).

Ethiopia Visas are valid for three months and cost DFr3600 (US\$20) or DFr12,600 (US\$70) for US nationals. You need to supply one photo. The embassy is open from 7.30am to 1.30pm Sunday to Thursday and 9am to 1pm Saturday. Visas are issued within 24 hours.

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Somaliland The first pages of your passport are faxed to Hargeisa from the Somaliland Liaison Office. Once the answer is favourable, you get a visa, which you will pay for when entering the country at Hargeisa airport (no visas were granted for overland travel at the time of research); it costs Dfr5200 (US\$30). The whole process takes about three days.

TRANSPORT IN DJIBOUTI

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Djibouti has one international gateway for arrival by air, **Djibouti-Ambouli Airport** ((a) 341646), about 5km south of Djibouti City.

Air France flies to Paris (France). Djibouti Airlines has flights to Dire Dawa (Ethiopia), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Hargeisa (Somaliland). Yemenia Yemen Airways flies to Sana'a (Yemen) and Paris (via Sana'a). Eritrean Airlines operates flights to Asmara (Eritrea) and Dubai. Daallo Airlines flies to Dubai, Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), Nairobi (Kenya), Paris and London, and has flights to Hargeisa (Somaliland), Burcao (Somaliland), Bossasso (Puntland) and Mogadishu (Somalia). Kenya Airways flies to Nairobi (Kenya).

All airlines flying to and from Djibouti have an office or a representative in Djibouti City (see p627).

Land

ERITREA

Overland travel to Eritrea is possible but there's no reliable transportation scheduled between Assab and Obock. Traffic is limited to shared taxis (usually 4WD Land Cruisers) from Obock to Moulhoulé, the last town before the border. Then other taxis ply the route from Moulhoulé to Assab in Eritrea. It's about four hours from Obock to the border (DFr2000) and from the border to Assab another 3¹/₂ hours (Nfa300). At the time of research there were about two weekly services, but there's no fixed schedule and taxis leave only when they have enough customers.

Note that there's no formal immigration office on the Djiboutian side (but there is talk of setting one up). If you can't get your passport stamped at the border, don't forget to do it either at the police office in Obock or at the office of the **Police de l'Air et des Frontières**

DEPARTURE TAX

The airport departure tax is DFr3000 for neighbouring countries and DFr5000 for further-flung destinations. In some cases it's included in the cost of your ticket; check with your airline while in Djibouti.

(o 350289; o 24hr) inside the port area in Djibouti City. When leaving Djibouti City for Eritrea, it's also best to go first to the Police de l'Air et des Frontières and ask for an exit stamp – unless they send you to the police office in Obock.

ETHIOPIA

There is a daily service between Djibouti City and Dire Dawa – an arduous 10- to 12hour ride on a gravel road. You'll take your first bus to the border town of Gelille, then another bus to Dire Dawa. Buses leave at dawn from Ave 26. The company is called **SPB** (282673, 828838).

If you want to enter Djibouti from Ethiopia via the border town of Galafi, the only option is to hitch a lift with one of the legions of trucks that ply the route between Addis Ababa and Djibouti City via Awash, Gewane, Logiya and Dikhil (about three days). Prices are negotiable. This option is best avoided by women, but it's the best option for those driving, as it's entirely sealed.

Passengers can hop on the old Djibouti City-Addis Ababa train and get off at Dire Dawa. The train leaves three times a week. From Djibouti City to Dire Dawa (via Ali Sabieh), the minimum journey duration is 13 hours. Buy your ticket one day in advance at the **railway station** (🖻 358070; AveF d'Esperey; 💬 7amnoon Iue, Thu & Sat). Take note that this train is notoriously dilapidated and unreliable.

SOMALILAND

Battered 4WD Land Cruisers headed for Hargeisa leave from Ave 26. In principle, there are daily services, all leaving in the afternoon (DFr5000, front seat). It's a gruelling ride that can take up to 20 hours. Good luck!

Sea YEMEN

Yes, it's possible to cross the Red Sea to Mokha (Yemen)! Rudimentary dhows leave from Djibouti City port but there's no fixed schedule – they usually run on a twice-weekly basis, more if there's enough demand. It costs DFr5000 and the crossing takes about 20 hours. Don't forget to get your passport stamped at the **Police de l'Air et des Frontières Office** (<a>50289; <a>24hr), inside the port area in Djibouti City.

GETTING AROUND

The road network links all major villages in the country with the capital. The Route de l'Unité, a good sealed road, covers the 174km from the capital around the Gulf de Tadjoura. From Tadjoura to Obock and on to Moulhoulé at the Eritrean border, there's a gravel road only passable by 4WDs. There is public transport but it's pretty limited. By bus you can go to Ali Sabieh and

There is public transport but it's pretty limited. By bus you can go to Ali Sabieh and Dikhil in the south, Tadjoura in the north, and to Galafi at the Ethiopian border.

Obock and Tadjoura are accessible by speedboat or dhow from Djibouti City. The train linking Djibouti City to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia makes several stops en route. Ali Sabieh is of most interest to travellers.

There's also a small plane that flies on a twice-weekly basis between Obock and Djibouti City.

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Eritrea

Eritrea is a heartbreaker. It was once heralded as a good place for travelling and, with a bit of luck, it could soon be so again. But as long as the country is at odds with its neighbour Ethiopia, its sworn enemy, tourism development won't be a priority. One of the most secretive countries in Africa, Eritrea seems doomed to remain a hidden gem. Unsurprisingly, it falls below many travellers' radars.

On the bright side, unlimited opportunities for off-the-beaten-track exploration abound. Who knew that Asmara, the capital, boasts the most shining collection of colonial architectural wonders in Africa? It is like a film set from an early Italian movie, with vintage Italian coffee machines and outstanding examples of Art Deco architecture. On the Red Sea Coast, the sultry town of Massawa is redolent with Islamic influence. It is also the starting point for visits to the Dahlak Islands, one of the least spoilt and least known reefs in the Red Sea. Southern Eritrea features a superb array of archaeological sites that recount volumes of history. The apocalyptic wasteland of Dankalia, stretching to the south, is considered one of the most arresting places on earth and has a desolate magnetism. Eritrea's nine colourful ethnic groups are diverse and individual, and are a major highlight.

Isn't that enough? Although the country faces numerous hardships, it paradoxically remains one of Africa's most peaceful, secure and welcoming destinations. Come and see for yourself!

FAST FACTS

- Area 124,320 sg km
- ATMs None
- Borders Djibouti, Sudan; Ethiopia border crossings closed
- Budget US\$20 to US\$25 a day
- Capital Asmara
- Languages Tigrinya, Arabic and other regional languages
- Money Nakfa; US\$1 = Nfa15
- Population 4.6 million
- Seasons Cool (October-May), hot (June-September), wet (July-September)
- **Telephone** Country code 291; international access code 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC + 3
- Visa From US\$40 to US\$50 for 30 days

HIGHLIGHTS

- Asmara (p639) Nab a seat at a snazzy café on Harnet Ave and watch the world strut by during *passeggiata*.
- Massawa (p645) Get lost in Massawa Island's maze of narrow streets and feast on Yemeni fish.
- Dahlak Islands (p646) Relish the pristine beauty of this wild archipelago, then comb the beach of Dissei Island.
- **Qohaito** (p644) Soak up the former glory of this archaeological site shrouded in peaceful solitude amid a barren plateau.
- Dankalia (p646) Psyche yourself up and explore one of the most inhospitable territories on earth.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

In the eastern lowlands, temperatures range from a torrid 30°C to 39°C during the hot season (June to September) and from 25°C to 32°C during the cooler season (October to May). In the Dankalia region, temperatures can reach 50°C in the shade and rainfall is practically zero.

In the highland zone, the average annual temperature is 18°C. May is the hottest month, when daily temperatures can reach around 30°C. The coldest months are from December to February, when lows can approach freezing point. In the western zone, December is the coolest month (13°C to 25°C).

Although it's possible to visit Eritrea any time of year, the ideal time climatewise is September to October and March to April. Avoid travelling during June to August, when it's the rainy season in the highlands and western lowlands and hot and torrid in the eastern lowlands.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Spend two full days in Asmara (p639), visiting its gob-smacking portfolio of architectural wonders, lapping up squidgy cakes and sipping up frothy macchiatos. Push onto Keren (p644), which deserves a day or two for its attractive architecture and active markets. Back to Asmara, it's time to roll down to Massawa (p645), on the Red Sea Coast.
- Two Weeks Follow the one-week agenda then explore the pristine Dahlak Islands (p646), which are blessed with good diving and snorkelling opportunities. Back to Asmara, forge due south to explore

HOW MUCH?

- Internet connection US\$0.70 per hour
- Asmara-Massawa bus ride US\$1.90
- One night in a guesthouse in the capital US\$5.30
- Travel permit Free
- 4WD hire US\$100

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- 1L petrol US\$2.50
- 1L bottled water US\$0.30
- Bottle of Asmara beer US\$0.60
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$4.70
- Pastry US\$0.20

the poignant ruins of Qohaito (p644) and Metera (p644).

One Month In addition to the two-week itinerary, haul west to Barentu (p647) in the heart of the Nara country for a glimpse of rural Eritrea. Then barrel back to Asmara. At this stage you'll probably want to spice up your journey with a trip to Dankalia (p646). You could either take the rickety old bus that trundles between the capital and Assab or hire a 4WD with a driver. Then decide whether Assab is your final destination or just another staging post on the way to Obock (Djibouti)...

HISTORY

During the 1st millennium BC, tribes from present-day Yemen migrated to the southern highlands of Eritrea, settling on both sides of today's Eritrea-Ethiopia border. The contemporary Tigrinya and Amharic languages derive from their language, Ge'ez.

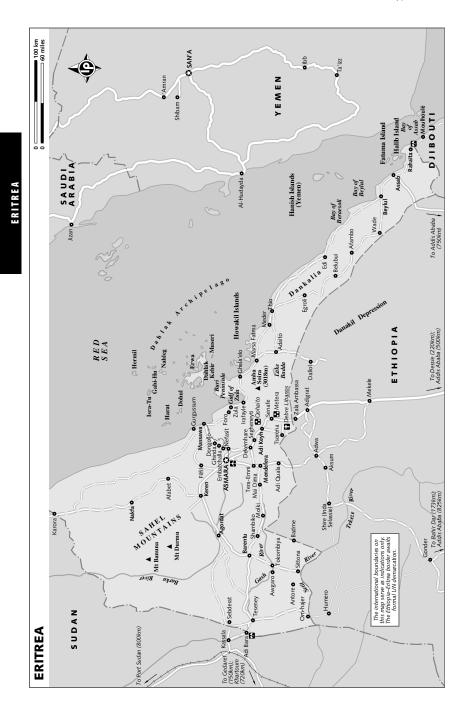
The powerful Aksumite kingdom flourished in Eritrea from the 4th century BC to the 9th century AD. While the kingdom's capital city, Aksum, was in today's Ethiopia, important Aksumite towns were built in Eritrea. Much foreign trade - on which Aksum's prosperity depended - was seaborne, and came to be handled by the ancient port of Adulis, to the south of today's Massawa.

Christianity is supposed to have been brought here by Christian Syrian merchants who were shipwrecked on the Red Sea Coast.



ERITREA

ERITREA



By the 4th century AD Christianity had become the Aksumite state religion.

Islam, the arrival of which coincided with Christian Aksum's decline in the 7th century, was the other great influence on the region. For centuries the dividing line between the Muslim Red Sea Coast and the Christian Ethiopian highlands moved back and forth over what is now Eritrea.

From the early 16th century to the late 19th century, the Ottoman Turks and the Egyptians fought each other for control of the Eritrean coast and its ports, but they left few imprints. Not like the Europeans powers, who undertook a massive colonisation process in Africa in the second half of the 19th century. The Italians managed to grab a slice of North and East Africa, and Eritrea became a full-blown Italian colony in 1896. By the end of the 1930s, Eritrea was one of the most highly industrialised colonies in Africa. All the architectural treasures in Asmara date from this period.

The Italians' golden era ceased in 1941, when the Allied forces defeated the Italian army in Europe. Italy was forced to give up its African possessions, including Eritrea. The colony became an administration of the British until 1950, when a contentious UN resolution granted Eritrea self-government within a federal union with Ethiopia. Eritrea disappeared from the map of Africa.

Little by little, Ethiopia began to exert an ever-tighter hold over Eritrea and formally annexed it in violation of international law in the early 1960s. This was unbearable for the Eritrean people, who started their struggle for independence in 1961. This was the beginning of Africa's longest conflict of the 20th century. After numerous harsh guerrilla attacks, fierce fights and major offensives, the Eritrean People's Liberation Forces (EPLF) finally won the war in 1991 and the Ethiopian troops left the country. Following a referendum, independence was declared on 24 May 1993. Eritrea was back on the African map.

Alas, after only five years of peaceful relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, another conflict, known as the 'border dispute', reared its ugly head in 1998. What followed were two bitter years of conflict that saw tens of thousands killed. After tortuous negotiations, a ceasefire was signed on 18 June 2000. According to the peace deal that was brokered, a UN peacekeeping force was deployed in Eritrean territory pending a final demarcation of the disputed border. In April 2002 the UN Boundary Commission announced its decision on the demarcation of the border. Surveying of boundary posts began in May 2003, but Ethiopia soon began to contest the demarcation again.

Eritrea Today

The psychological war between the two countries is ongoing. The tensions peaked again in late 2005, when the two enemies were poised on the brink of a new war. Frustrated by not seeing the enforcement of the Boundary Commission ruling, Eritrea shifted troops to the border and banned the UN from overflying its territory.

As if this was not enough, Eritrea's isolation is mounting, as is internal resentment against its intransigent government. Freedom of press and speech is nonexistent. The economy is in tatters, with both food and oil shortages. Mass conscription has deprived many industries of manpower and there is no longer a private sector. In January 2005 the government introduced a currency declaration form to control all transactions, deterring foreign investments.

It has become vital to find a solution to the seemingly never-ending conflict with Ethiopia. The situation was still tense and volatile when this book went to print, despite the presence of the United Nation's Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), whose mission is to monitor the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) between the two countries.

CULTURE

Eritreans are different in temperament from Ethiopians (which partly explains the bitter relations between the two countries). Years of invasion have created a siege mentality and a sense of isolation. Though impoverished, the nation has from the outset shown selfreliance, vigour and independence.

Initially indifferent to strangers (at least by comparison with other African nations), Eritreans may appear somewhat taciturn at first meeting, but once the ice has been broken you will find intense friendships.

The contrast in lifestyle between Asmara and elsewhere is stark. No matter the state of the economy and rationing, Asmarans still take the *passeggiata* (see p643) very seriously – a legacy of the Italian era. Then there is the

rest of Eritrea, where poverty is about the only prevalent excess.

In a country where people have lost faith in their government, the family remains one pillar of society on which Eritreans continue to depend. Religious occasions and public holidays are vigorously celebrated, as are more personal, family events, such as weddings.

Women enjoy far greater equality in Eritrea than in most other African countries. Eritrea's women themselves contributed more than one-third of troops in both the recent wars against Ethiopia.

PEOPLE

With nine ethnic groups and languages as well as several religions, Eritrea is a model of cultural diversity. The most important group is the Tigrinya, who make up approximately 50% of the population, followed by the Tigré.

The population is equally divided between Christians, primarily Orthodox, and Muslims. The government ensures that each ethnic group has a voice in the decision-making process. Asmara epitomises this peaceful coexistence: it hosts a Catholic cathedral, a mosque, an Orthodox church and even an old Jewish synagogue in the same precinct!

Approximately 35% of the population are nomadic or seminomadic.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Dance plays a very important social role in Eritrea. It marks the major events of life, such as births and marriages, and is used in celebrating special occasions and religious festivals.

Iskista (traditional dancing) features a lot of shaking of body parts (some of which is hard to imagine, until you see it). It's certainly unique in style.

Traditional musical instruments of Eritrea have their roots in Ethiopia. They include the *krar* and *wata*, both string instruments; the *shambko*, a type of flute; and the *embilta*, a wind instrument.

Atewebrhan Segid is considered one of the leading traditional musicians and singers in Eritrea today. Others singers, both traditional and modern, include Faytinga, Helen Meles, Osman Abdel Rahim, Idriss Mohammed Ali, Teklé Kiflemariam, Tesfay Mehari and Samuel Berhane.

In Asmara and many of the larger towns such as Keren, Massawa and Dekemhare the

colonial heritage can be seen in the Italianstyle buildings. Many of them are remarkable historical and artistic pieces.

ENVIRONMENT

Eritrea has three main geographical zones: the eastern escarpment and coastal plains, the central highland region, and the western lowlands.

The eastern zone consists of desert or semidesert, with little arable land. The northern end of the East African Rift Valley opens into the infamous Dankalia region in the east, one of the hottest places on earth.

The central highland region is more fertile, and it is intensively cultivated by farming communities.

The western lowlands, lying between Keren and the Sudanese border, are watered by the Gash and Barka Rivers.

Several mountains exceed 2500m, with the highest peak, Amba Soira, reaching 3018m. Offshore lie 350 islands, including the Dahlak Archipelago, the largest in the Red Sea.

There are no formal national reserves or parks in Eritrea, although their establishment is expected sooner or later.

The main environmental issue is deforestation. Less than 1% of the country is covered by woodland, as against 30% a century ago – this says it all.

FOOD & DRINK

Italian dishes, including pasta, pizza and pastries, are available in most restaurants throughout Eritrea. Outside the capital, these may be limited to just one dish: lasagne or spaghetti bolognese. As for traditional Eritrean cuisine, you'll soon realise that it's almost the same as in Ethiopia. There are regional variations, though. In the far west, the food is heavily influenced by the proximity of Sudan. In Massawa, the Arabic influence is evident, with kebabs and Yemeni-style charcoal-baked fish on offer. Sadly, there were some food shortages throughout the country at the time of writing.

In Asmara and, to a lesser degree, the larger towns, innumerable little cafés and bars dot the centre. They serve *macchiato* (an espresso with a dash of milk), espresso and fragrant cappuccino, along with a selection of pastries and cakes. Tea is also widely available, as is bottled water. If you want to put some wobble in your steps, all the usual favourites are available, including whisky, gin, vodka as well as local beer and wine.

ASMARA

pop 1,062,000 / elev 2347m

Ah, Asmara. Arrive here on a clear day, and you'll fall in love with this diamond of a capital. Peaceful neighbourhoods, pavement cafés with vintage Italian coffee machines, cheery pizza parlours, tantalising pastry shops, a relaxed pace of life... You'll feel like you've been transported to a southern Italian town. And there's the fabulous architecture, with a melee of architectural wonders from the Italian era. The balmy climate is another draw: Asmara is bathed in sunshine eight months of the year.

Alas, it's too good to be true. The battered economy and the clampdown on civil liberties have taken their toll over past years, and it shows. Gone is the dolce vita (life of luxury) – belt-tightening is now the order of the day, with power cuts, queues in front of food stores, slack business, and deserted streets at night.

One thing is sure, though: Asmara remains one of the most agreeable cities in Africa and it will be one of the highlights of your African journey.

ORIENTATION

The centre encompasses the area on, and just north of, Harnet Ave (the main artery). To the south of Harnet Ave was once the Italian residential quarter.

To the southeast, Sematat Ave leads to Tiravolo District, where several midrange hotels and nightclubs are clustered. Further to the southeast you'll reach the airport, about 6km from the centre. The railway station is about 1.5km east of the centre.

INFORMATION Cultural Centres

Internet Access

Internet services have sprung up all over town in recent years, so it is not hard for webheads to get their regular hit.

CIC Central Internet Cafe (Harnet Ave; per hr Nfa10; Sam-10pm) Tekseb Internet Cafe (Adi Hawesha St; per hr Nfa10; 🕑 8am-10pm)

Medical Services

There's a profusion of pharmacies around town.

Sembel Hospital (🖻 150175; HDAY St) The most reputable hospital in town, on the road to the airport.

Money

Rates are fixed by the government and are the same everywhere in the country, whether for cash or travellers cheques. There's a foreign-exchange booth at the airport; it's open to meet all arriving flights and changes cash only. All transactions must be registered on your currency declaration form. There's a black market, but it's illegal and the risks incurred are huge (see p648).

There are currently no ATMs in Asmara. Commerce Bank of Eritrea (2 122425; Harnet Ave; 8-11am & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) Changes cash and travellers cheques. Also acts as an agent for Western Union.

Himbol Harnet Branch (2 123124; Harnet Ave;

☆ 8am-noon & 2-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 2-7pm Sat, 8am-noon & 2-6pm Sun); Main Office (☎ 120735; Bahti Meskerem Sq; ☆ 8am-8pm) Changes cash and travellers cheques, and can do cash advances on your credit card for a commission of 7%.

Post

Main post office (论 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat) Located just north of the western end of Harnet Ave.

Telephone & Fax

Telecommunications building (Harnet Ave; 论 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, to 7.30pm Sat & Sun)

Tourist Information

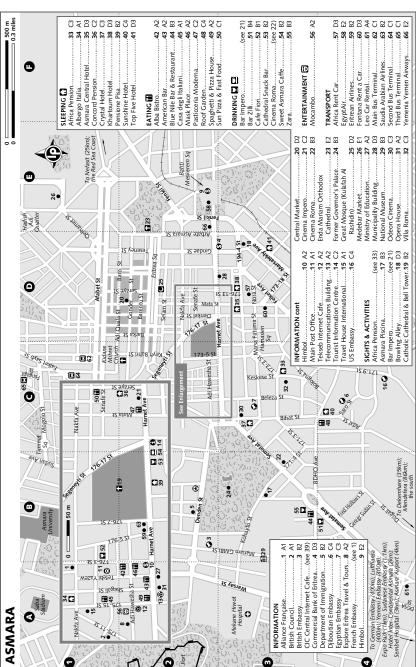
In addition to the tourist office, the most reliable sources of information are the local travel agencies.

Travel Agencies

Explore Eritrea Travel & Tours (@ 125555, 120259; www.exploreeritrea.com; Adi Hawesha St; 论 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Travel House International (201881/2; www.travel houseeritrea.com; 175-15 St; 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon & 3.30-6pm Sat)





SIGHTS

Asmara is one of the most entrancing cities in Africa, with a host of splendiferous buildings harking back to the city's heyday as the 'Piccolo Roma' (little Rome) in the 1920s and 1930s. Most sights are clustered in the centre or within easy distance from it.

Harnet Ave

The best place to start exploring is the former Governor's Palace (Harnet Ave), which stands majestically at the western end of Harnet Ave. Built in 1897 by the first Italian governor, it was used by Haile Selassie during the Ethiopian occupation. Unfortunately, it is not currently possible to visit it because it's an official building.

Within strolling distance from the Governor's Palace, the Opera House (Harnet Ave), completed around 1920, is one of Asmara's most elegant early-20th-century buildings. By contrast, the adjacent Ministry of Education (Harnet Ave), with its massive stepped tower, looks strikingly austere.

Ambling down Harnet Ave you'll soon come across Asmara's most iconic monument, the elaborate, brick-walled Catholic cathedral (Harnet Ave). Consecrated in 1923, it is thought to be one of the finest Lombard-Romanesque-style churches outside Italy. The tallest structure in Asmara, the narrow, Gothic bell tower (8-11am & 2-5pm) offers unrivalled views over the town.

Another eye-catching building, the nearby Cinema Impero (Harnet Ave) is made up of three massive windows that combine strong vertical and horizontal elements with 45 porthole lamps. Next door, you can re-energise at the Bar Impero (Harnet Ave), which is original with its 'zinc' bar, dark wood panels and old cash machine.

Other Sights

A block south of the Municipality building, the bowling alley (194-4 St; 🕑 8am-8pm) is one of the few genuine 1950s alleys left in the world. It was probably built for US servicemen when they were manning military bases in the region.

Tucked away in a residential district further west, the Africa Pension (173-3 St) is a gem of place. This huge Cubist villa was built in the 1920s by a spaghetti millionaire. The villa is now a very affordable hotel (see p642). Opposite the Africa Pension, the gleaming Villa Roma (173-3 St) is reminiscent of a Roman villa

with its marble staircases, louvred shutters, curving balustrades and shady portico.

Just off Harnet Ave, near the telecommunications building, the quirky Odeon Cinema (Bihat St), with its authentic Art Deco interior, is attractive.

North of Harnet Ave, the sprawling central market (Mon-Sat morning) is one of Asmara's major attractions. The best time to visit is early on Saturday (from 7am), when people come in from all over the country. However, it was pretty tame when we visited because of the economic downturn in the country.

Duck up northeast to soak up the atmosphere of the **Medebar Market** (Qelhamet St). No doubt you'll be awestruck the minute you enter this mind-boggling place. It is like an open-air workshop where absolutely everything is recycled: old tyres are made into sandals, corrugated iron is flattened and made into metal buckets, and olive tins from Italy are made into coffeepots and tiny scoopers.

Thread your way back to the south until you reach the Great Mosque (Kulafah Al Rashidin; Selam St). Completed in 1938, this grand complex combines rationalist, classical and Islamic styles.

Another outstanding monument, the Enda Mariam Orthodox Cathedral (Arbate Asmara St), to the east, was built in 1938 and is a curious blend of Italian and Eritrean architecture. Its central block is flanked by large square towers.

Fancy a dip? The 1930s Asmara Piscina (swimming pool; Kohayto St; admission Nfa40; 🏵 9am-8pm) will fit the bill. Even if you don't feel like splashing about, it's worth taking a peek inside this modernist building.

Back to the main thoroughfare, you can't miss the Cinema Roma (Sematat Ave), across the avenue. It's another fine example of Italian architecture.

Asmara's strong point are its buildings, rather than its museums, but it's also worth popping your head into the National Museum (Mariam GMBI St; admission free; 🕑 9-11am & 3-5pm Thu-Tue), west of the former Governor's Palace. It contains exhibits on the ethnic groups of Eritrea that give a basic introduction to traditional life in the countryside.

SLEEPING

Most of Asmara's accommodation is concentrated in and around the centre, but there are several midrange places further afield on the road to the airport.

Budget

Pensione Pisa (a 124491; Harnet Ave; swithout bathroom Nfa60, d without bathroom Nfa95-120) This welcoming pension is housed in an apartment, just opposite the Catholic Cathedral. The uncluttered rooms are kept in good nick, as are the diminutive shared bathrooms. Location is ace. Sizzling hot value for what you get.

Africa Pension (a 121436; Keskese St; s/d without

bathroom Nfa150/200) A good place to bunk down in if you're after some style without breaking the bank. This mellow pension is set in a converted villa and features generous-sized rooms overlooking a neatly manicured garden. It's in a residential neighbourhood, a jaunt from Harnet Ave. A tad overpriced, but the historic aura sweetens the deal.

Concord Pension (() 122981; Seraye St; r Nfa270) Tucked back slightly from the road, this discreet pension is a serene oasis in the heart of town. It feels like a cosy doll's house, with comfy rooms, an agreeable plant-filled courtyard and sweet-as-sugar staff.

Midrange & Top End

Some hotels in this price bracket quote their prices in US dollars but accept local currency, provided you have your currency declaration form. If you pay in hard currency, the transaction must be registered on your form.

Khartoum Hotel ((2) 128008; 176-13 St; s/d Nfa 300/350, s without bathroom Nfa200-250, d without bathroom Nfa250-300) One block south of Harnet Ave, the Khartoum offers superclean rooms and the shared bathrooms are probably the cleanestsmelling this side of the Rift Valley.

Top Five Hotel (a 124922/19; fax 124931; Marsatekly Ave; s/d Nfa200/360) A great-value option not far from the centre, with well-scrubbed rooms and an attached quality restaurant.

Crystal Hotel ((2) 120944; www.crystalhotel eritrea.com; Bihat St; s US\$42-56, d US\$56-75, all ind breakfast) This professionally run outfit is kept in top nick, featuring a fine selection of cheerful rooms with all the creature comforts. There's an on-site bar and restaurant.

Asmara Central Hotel ((a) 120041, 120446; fax 122023; Mata St; r Nfa300-370) In the heart of town. After a much-needed face-lift, the rooms and communal areas now feature modern fixtures, sleek bathrooms, new tiles and carpeting.

Albergo Italia (a 120740; fax 126993; Nakfa Ave; r ind breakfast U\$\$150-250) A lovely boutiqueish hotel housed in an old Italian villa, with cushy rooms decorated with period furniture and communal areas awash with heritage aesthetics.

Hotel Inter-Continental Asmara (**C** 150400; intercon@eol.com.er; Warsay St; s US\$160-180, d US\$180-200, all ind breakfast; **D** (**x**) Lying 4km from the town centre on the airport road, this five-star bigwig has all the bells and whistles your platinum card will allow for.

EATING

Asmara has the best selection of restaurants in the country. Most places serve both Eritrean and Italian dishes. Unless otherwise specified, most eateries are open every day for lunch and dinner. Given the food shortages, not everything was available on the menu when we visited.

American Bar (Harnet Ave; mains Nfa20-50) This snazzy fast-food joint serves up decent burgers and explosively fruity cocktails. The streetside terrace allows for a dash of people-watching panache.

Casa degli Italiani (175-15 St; mains Nfa20-60; O dosed dinner Sun) It's the setting that's the pull here, more than the food. Think atmospheric courtyard that is a perfect spot for a relaxed feed at lunchtime or a tipple any time of the day.

Mask Place (a 117530; Adi Hawesha St; mains Nfa40-80) A good-value stomach filler for those in need of some honestly prepared burgers and snacks.

Sun Pizza & Fast Food (20 07 116391; Seraye St; mains Nfa40-130) Nancy, the English-speaking owner, prepares excellent pasta dishes and scrumptious pizzas. And all this within a warm setting that wouldn't be out of place in Rome.

Alba Bistro (a 202421; Adi Hawesha St; mains Nfa45-90) Brimming with good cheer, this place is an excellent refuelling stop, with pasta, meat and fish dishes, as well as tempting ice creams.

Spaghetti & Pizza House (212112; Harnet Ave; mains Nfa50-120; Tue-Sun) This sophisticated trattoria-like venue gets top marks for its flawlessly prepared Italian specialities.

Hidmona (**©** 07 111955; Expo Park, Tiravolo District; mains Nfa70-90) An eclectic mix of restaurant, café, bar and live-music venue, Hidmona is one of the best places in town for traditional food and décor. **Blue Nile Bar & Restaurant** ((a) 117965; Sematat Ave; mains Nfa80-100) One of the best restaurants in town, with both traditional and Western-style food. The servings are voluminous, so bring an empty tum.

Roof Garden (202625; BDHO Ave; mains Nfa80-110; Mon-Sat) The only Indian restaurant in Eritrea, this upmarket joint on the 5th floor of a modernish building is praised for its lip-smacking biriyani and tandoori dishes. Recommended if you feel the time has come to give your tastebuds something new to sing about.

DRINKING

Asmara boasts a superb selection of atmospheric bars and cafés. Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between a café and a bar as you can drink just about anywhere, any time.

Many places listed in this section also serve pastries. Most are open by 7am, and close around 9pm.

Sweet Asmara Caffe (Harnet Ave) This sleek pastry shop is a treasure-trove for the sweet tooth, with a tempting array of diet-busting little treats.

Pasticceria Moderna (Harnet Ave) A humming venue on the main drag. Keep up your strength with a *macchiato* and a delectable pastry.

Zara (Sematat Ave) Ease into low gear by sinking a cocktail at this genteel lounge bar. It stays open until midnight, and is a good place to warm up before hitting the clubs.

Cinema Roma (Sematat Ave) A very inspiring place, with one of Asmara's finest historic interiors. Enjoy a beer or a coffee in the cafeteria in the lobby area.

Bar Zilli (Sematat Ave) This real earthy hang-out is a good place to revive your spirits with a *macchiato* or an Asmara gin, if you dare!

Bar Impero (Harnet Ave) Almost next door to Cinema Impero, this is another endearing café with a more traditional feel. Perfect for a coffee during *passeggiata*.

Cathedral Snack Bar (Harnet Ave) An ambient spot just opposite the Catholic cathedral.

Cafe Fiori (176-3 St) The *macchiato* kicks like a mule here. Café Fiori also features an appetizing selection of croissants.

ENTERTAINMENT

Most of the country's facilities for leisure and entertainment are in Asmara. Here, you'll find decent nightclubs. Most clubs open only on

HOT TIP: PASSEGGIATA

Don't snooze on your bed during *passeggiata*, or you'll miss out a typical Asmarean ritual. As in Italy, join the evening event (between 5pm and 6.30pm), when the whole town emerges from its torpor and promenades up and down Harnet Ave to see what's new, catch up with friends, hear the latest gossip, flirt and window shop. All terraces and cafés fill up with chattering locals sampling *macchiatos*. Lovely!

Friday and Saturday (from around midnight to 5am). Entrance costs between Nfa50 and Nfa100.

Mocambo (Adi Hawesha St) This hip nightclub exhilarates dance junkies every weekend with live music, a mix of both traditional and Western.

Green Pub (Hotel Inter-Continental Asmara, Warsay St; admission Nfa50) This pub-disco is one of the favourite haunts of expats in search of fun and company.

Hidmona (Expo Park, Warsay St) The most authentic place in town. It gets frantic at weekends, with a live band knocking out Eritrean tunes and plenty of drinks flowing.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

The following are international airlines servicing Eritrea, with offices in Asmara:

EgyptAir (🖻 127034; www.egyptair.com.eg; Marsa Fatuma St)

Eritrean Airlines ((2) 125500; www.flyeritrea.com; Harnet Ave)

Lufthansa (a 18 69 04; www.lufthansa.com; Warsay St) Saudi Arabian Airlines (a 120166; www.saudiair lines.com: Harnet Ave)

Yemenia Yemen Airways (🖻 121035; www.yemenia .com; Harnet Ave)

For details of international and domestic flights to/from Asmara airport, see p649.

Bus

The long-distance bus station is about 10 minutes' walk due north of Harnet Ave, and is split into three different terminals.

Buses to Massawa (Nfa28, 3¹/₂ hours), Assab (Nfa190, two days) and Barentu (Nfa57, six hours) leave from the **main bus terminal** (off Afabet St). There are numerous buses to Massawa until late in the afternoon. For the other destinations, buses leave early in the morning. For Assab, there are three buses per week.

Buses to Keren (Nfa22, three hours) leave every half-hour from the second bus terminal (Falket Sayb St).

Southbound buses to Adi Keyh (Nfa27, four hours) and Senafe (for Metera; Nfa32, six hours) leave from the third bus terminal (Fengaga St). Most buses leave early in the morning and only when they are full.

GETTING AROUND

ERITREA

Eritrea's one international airport lies 6km from the capital (around Nfa150 during the day in taxi). You can also take the city buses 0 or 1, which pass in front of the cathedral on Harnet Ave. A taxi ride in the centre will set vou back about Nfa40.

Asmara is the obvious base from where to rent a car. Reliable outfits include Africa Rent Car (🖻 121755; fax 202597; Nora St), Fontana Rent a Car (🖻 120052; fax 127905; Mata St) and Leo Car Rental (🖻 125859, 202307; dilorenzo@cts.com.er; Sematat Ave).

NORTHERN ERITREA

Bar the well-known town of Keren, northern Eritrea still remains terra incognita for foreigners.

KEREN

pop 75,000 / elev 1392m

Easily accessible from Asmara, this market town is perhaps the most remarkable of all of Eritrea's provincial towns. Hemmed in by a range of rugged, good-looking mountains, it boasts an attractive setting, as well as an appealing melange of architectural styles.

Several Italian Roman Catholic churches are dotted around the town, including St Antonio and St Michael. The old Italian railway station (now a bus station) also testifies to Keren's Italian heritage.

Keren's markets are some of the most interesting in the country and are great for an afternoon's exploration. Mosey around the covered market or the grain market. There's also a picturesque wood and camel market in the riverbed, usually on Monday.

Albergo Sicilia (🗃 401059; Agordat Rd; r Nfa100, without bathroom Nfa55-80) is right in the centre but its facilities are rudimentary and the ablution blocks a tad skanky. You can rest your head

in the newish Sarina Hotel (🖻 400230; fax 402685; Asmara Rd; s Nfa225-325, d Nfa325-425, all incl breakfast; D), with all mod cons and functional facilities, about 2km from the centre on the road to Asmara.

You'll also find acceptable, cheap eateries in the heart of town.

Nearly 30 buses depart daily to Asmara (Nfa22, three hours, 91km). There are also several buses in the morning for Barentu (Nfa35, four hours).

SOUTHERN ERITREA

For history and archaeology buffs, southern Eritrea offers an unparalleled chance to step back in time. It's like a vast, open-air archaeological site. Though less spectacular than the more famous ruins found to the south in Ethiopia, many of southern Eritrea's ruins are no less important.

OOHAITO

Shrouded in peaceful solitude amid a vast, barren plateau, the archaeological site of Qohaito is a must-see for anyone with an interest in Eritrea's ancient past. It lies some 121km south of Asmara. Don't expect colossal monuments, though: the scant finds of this site are spread over a large area measuring 2.5km wide and include a temple, a dam, an Egyptian tomb, a cave and a gorge. Admission is free but you'll need a permit from the National Museum office in Asmara (see p649).

Public transport being almost nonexistent, your best bet is to book a tour with one of the travel agencies in Asmara or to hire a 4WD with driver.

METERA

While it will never be mistaken for the Acropolis, the site of Metera is another worthwhile site to visit. Like Oohaito, Metera flourished around the time of the ancient civilisation of Aksum. The scattered ruins, including a stele and various excavations, testify to the existence of a once large and prosperous town. If you happen to be here late afternoon on a clear day, the truly magnificent setting adds a touch of eeriness to the site.

The site lies about 2km south of Senafe and is easily reached on foot. Admission is free but you'll need a permit from the National Museum office in Asmara (see p649). If you're stuck, Senafe has a couple of accommodation options.

See p643 for details on getting to Senafe from Asmara.

THE RED SEA COAST

Luckily, the Eritrean coast has remained wild, pristine and untouched - nothing comparable with, say, Egypt. There's a lot to love about this area: hundreds of kilometres of luscious coastline, a historic city and a fantastic archipelago. Discover this region before everyone else does.

MASSAWA

pop 35,000

Though only about 100km to the east of Asmara, Massawa could not be more different from the capital. Entering the old town, you could be forgiven for thinking you're in Zanzibar or Yemen, and it's pure joy to explore the alleyways and streets flanked by low whitewashed buildings, porticoes and arcades.

Sadly, Massawa was all but flattened during the struggle for independence, and many visitors are shocked by the derelict state of a number of historical buildings. Restoration has started but the process is slow due to lack of funds.

Sights & Activities

The most interesting part of the city is Massawa Island, where the port and old town lie. It's a fascinating blend of Egyptian, Turkish and Italo-Moorish architecture. Massawa Island is connected to Taulud Island by a causeway. From Taulud Island, a second causeway leads to the mainland.

Massawa is the starting point for trips to the Dahlak Islands, Eritrea's main diving destination. For details on boat and equipment hire, see p646.

Sleeping

All reliable options are on Taulud Island. Though not in the old town, they offer higher standards. Sadly, there's no beach where you can cool off.

Corallo Hotel (🕿 552406: Taulud Island: r with/without bathroom Nfa250/180; 🔀) The Corallo offers three kinds of rooms to suit most budgets. Though

very simple, the cheaper rooms are good value. The more expensive ones have bathroom, aircon and balcony with sea views.

Central Hotel (🖻 552002, 552218; Taulud Island; r Nfa240-485, ste Nfa485; 🔀) Soothingly positioned by the shore, the well-managed Central Hotel offers three kinds of well-kept rooms, with air-con and TV. The more expensive ones face the sea and are more spacious.

Dahlak Hotel (🖻 552818; fax 551282; Taulud Island; s/d Nfa250/325; 🕄) The Dahlak was undergoing a major revamp at the time of writing but construction works were progressing slowly construction works were progressing slowly because of the economic slump. When it's completed, it should feature excellent facili-ties, including a diving centre, a swimming pool and a marina.

Red Sea Hotel (🖻 552839; fax 552544; Taulud Island; s/d Nfa420/480; 🕄) This Italian-designed hotel is regarded as one of the best options in Massawa, with 50 tidy rooms with air-con, satellite TV, balcony and sea views.

Eating & Drinking

You'll find a handful of cheap eateries and supermarkets on and around the main street on Massawa Island. Most hotels on Taulud Island also have an on-site restaurant and welcome nonguests.

Sallam Restaurant (Massawa Island; fish dishes around Nfa80; 🕑 dinner) Though it doesn't look like much from the outside, this place has garnered high praise for its Yemeni speciality of fresh fish sprinkled with hot pepper and baked in a tandoori oven.

Beaches Bar & Restaurant (🖻 552940: Taulud Island: mains Nfa50-95) The only independent restaurant on Taulud Island. It has a seaside terrace from where you can watch the dhows sail by. Italian and Eritrean specialities feature equally on the menu.

There's a host of lively little bars on Massawa Island. They're rather boisterous, down-at-heel affairs serving only Asmara beer, Eritrean gin (good luck!), soft drinks and coffee.

Getting There & Around

There are frequent buses leaving from the bus station on the mainland for Asmara (Nfa28, 3¹/₂ to four hours). For Assab, you will have to go to Asmara and catch the bus there, as the buses pass through Massawa but don't stop.

Shared taxis and town minibuses are convenient for short hops around town (Nfa2).

DAHLAK ISLANDS

Some 350 islands lie off the Eritrean coast, the majority – 209 – of which make up the Dahlak Archipelago. It could be another tropical paradise on earth, but it's not. Largely arid, barren and flat, the islands are rather austere and desolate. Fresh water is very scarce, and very few of the islands are inhabited (only three within the Dahlak Archipelago). There's only one (basic) hotel on the islands. Another one was under construction when we visited.

This untouched world is not within everyone's reach, and independent travel is not really possible. You'll have to go through a travel agent in Asmara (see p639) or a boat-rental operation in Massawa. In Massawa, you can contact the **Eritrea Diving Centre** ([®] 552688, 07 120145; fax 551287; Taulud Island) or **Dahlak Sea Touring** ([®] /fax 552489; Massawa Island). The journey from Massawa to most of the islands takes between 1½ and two hours by motorboat. Prices depend on the number of islands visited and on the number of people. Cruises around the islands, usually lasting anything from three days to a week, can be organised. Be prepared to cough up at least US\$150 per person per day.

Green Island is 10 to 20 minutes from Massawa and is the most accessible place for decent snorkelling and tolerable beaches. Dahlak Hotel organises day trips to Green Island (Nfa600 per boat). You can also contact Dahlak Sea Touring.

There's a huge potential for **diving** in the Dahlak Islands, but facilities are sorely lacking. At the time of writing, the Eritrea Diving Centre (see earlier) was the only diving operation organising diving trips to the islands. It has a 'Scuba Diving Introduction' for US\$50.

You need a permit to visit any of the Dahlak Islands (US\$20), except Green Island. If you're joining a tour or hiring a boat, the permit should be organised for you.

DANKALIA

If there's one place in Eritrea where travel is for travel's sake, it's Dankalia. Dankalia is the name given to the narrow strip of land about 50km wide that stretches south of Massawa down to Djibouti (about 600km), along the coastline. It's reputed to be one of the hottest places on earth and home to the famously hardy and fierce Afar people. There's little to see, nothing to do, and no great destination awaiting you at the other end. But that's exactly what makes this area so fascinating, with a genuine sense of exploration, even on the rickety old bus. If you drive, the journey is likely to be one of the most memorable of your trip. The best time to go is from November to April.

Between Massawa and Assab, there's only a smattering of little fishing villages, including Irafayle, Thio, Edi and Beylul.

ASSAB

pop 75,000

Lying less than 100km from Ethiopia, at the southern extremity of the desolate and inaccessible Dankalia region, Assab has always been a bit of an outpost. Tourism facilities are almost totally lacking. For centuries, and up until recently, it was Ethiopia's principal port of access to the Red Sea. The diversion of all Ethiopian commerce via Djibouti has made Assab even more of a backwater. There's a pervasive ghosttown feel that can be captivating, and its sheer isolation is an attraction in itself.

If you come from Djibouti, you'll have to get a travel permit at the **Immigration Office** (8am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Fri) to journey on.

You'll find a bank and a post office in the centre. For a place to sleep, **Kebal International Hotel** ((a) 661700, 660229; fax 661708; r Nfa75-185; (c) is a bargain, with three types of spacious and well-kept rooms to suit most budgets. The more expensive ones are fairly bright and comfortable and come with air-con, TV and fridge. There's an attached restaurant. Or head for the **Aurora Restaurant** (mains Nfa40-80), the best place to enjoy pasta or grilled fish.

Eritrean Airlines ((a) 660028, 660665) has three flights a week to Asmara (Nfa1110). There's also a bus service between Assab and Asmara via Massawa three times a week. The journey takes approximately two days.

Assab is also a convenient stopover for travellers heading for Djibouti; the border is just 112km south. For more information on transport to Obock (Djibouti), see p649.

WESTERN ERITREA

It's here, in these often forgotten lowlands, where you can experience a slice of quintessential Eritrea. A bit like the Australian outback, Western Eritrea seduces with its wild expanses and empty spaces. Not to mention its fascinating inhabitants: some of the ethnic groups that populate the west – such as the Kunama – are among the more enigmatic in Eritrea. In climate, geography, religion, industry, people and way of life, Eritrea's Muslim lowlands could not be more different from the Christian highlands. The more you forge west, the more you can feel a Sudanese flavour.

BARENTU

pop 16,200 / elev 980m

Barentu is the heartland of the Kunama people, one of the most fascinating of Eritrea's ethnic groups. If you want to mingle with locals, delve into the colourful market on Thursday or Saturday (the market days). In the evening, the main street fills up with college students in blue shirts – a superb sight in its own right.

The most reliable place to stay is the **Unite** Family Hotel (B 731073; Teseney Rd; r without bathroom Nfa80), on the southern edge of town, just spitting distance from the bus station. There's a central compound where you might catch the breeze (if any) and a restaurant that serves cheap but filling staples.

There are about four daily buses to Asmara (Nfa57, six hours), Keren (Nfa35, four hours) and Teseney (Nfa29, three hours).

ERITREA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Only Asmara and, to a lesser extent, Massawa, offer a good range of hotels. Elsewhere the hotel scene is very modest. All the small towns have hotels, but they're often pretty basic affairs and many lack running water (you get a bucket shower instead).

Prices for budget accommodation in the capital average US\$7 to US\$10 for singles and US\$8 to US\$15 for doubles. For midrange hotels, you'll pay about US\$15 to US\$30 for singles and US\$20 to US\$60 for doubles. In the rest of the country, rates are usually cheaper.

Few hotels accept credit cards.

ACTIVITIES

Eritrea has great potential for outdoor pursuits but there are few well-organised facilities. Eritrea's best-known activity is diving in the Red Sea. The Dahlak Islands off the coast near Massawa are currently the only place where organised diving and snorkelling takes place.

PRACTICALITIES

- Eritrea uses the metric system for weights, measures and road distances.
- Eritrea predominantly uses the 220V system, with two-round-pin plugs.
- The only local publication in English is the twice-weekly *Eritrea Profile*.
- Eritrean national radio broadcasts three times a day in the nine Eritrean national languages.
- The government-controlled EriTV has two national TV channels.

ERITREA

BUSINESS HOURS

See p1102 for standard business hours. Most banks open from 8am to 11am and from 2pm to 4pm Monday to Friday, and from 8am to 11.30am on Saturday. In eastern Eritrea, government offices and private businesses are usually closed between noon and 4pm.

CUSTOMS

Since January 2005 any person entering the country must fill in a foreign currency declaration form. The declaration form is mandatory for changing money so don't lose it. You'll have to hand it in upon departure and an official will check your statement.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Eritrea is a very safe country in which to travel. The biggest threat outside the capital is the risk of land mines and unexploded munitions. Never stray off the road.

There are army checkpoints at the entrance and exit of each major town. They are pretty straightforward and foreigners never get hassled or asked for bribes; just show your passport and your travel permit (see p649).

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Eritrean Embassies & Consulates

The Eritrean embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was closed when this edition went to print. Eritrea has representation in the following countries:

Australia (🖻 02-6282 3489; fax 6282 5233; 26 Guilfoyle St, Yarralumla, ACT 2606)

Canada (🖻 613-234 3989; fax 234 6213; Ste 610, 75 Albert St, Ottawa K1P 5E7)

Djibouti (🗃 354961; fax 250212; Le Heron District, Djibouti City)

Stael, 75015 Paris)

Germany (🖻 30-446 74 60; fax 446 74621; Stavanger Str 18, 10439 Berlin)

Kenya (@ 2-443164; fax 443165; 2nd fl, New Rehema House, Raphta Rd, Westlands, PO Box 38651, Nairobi) Sudan (@ 11-483834; fax 483835; Khartoum 2-St 39,

PO Box 1618)

ERITREA

UK (207-713 0096; fax 713 0161; 96 White Lion St, London N1 9PF)

USA ((a) 202-319 1991; fax 319 1304; 1708 New Hampshire Ave, NW Washington, DC 20009)

Yemen ((a) 1-209422; fax 214088; Western Safia, Algeria St, Bldg No 68, PO Box 11040, San'a)

Embassies & Consulates in Eritrea

All embassies and consulates are based in Asmara. They are open from Monday to Friday and keep regular business hours. Djibouti ((a) 125990; Saro St) France ((a) 126599, 127615; Nakfa Ave) Germany ((a) 186670; Saba Bldg, Warsay St) Sudan ((a) 189595; Tiravolo District) UK ((a) 120145; Mariam GMBI St) USA ((a) 120044; 171-9 St) Yemen ((a) 181399; Agamet St, Tiravolo District)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106), these are the principal public holidays in Eritrea: New Year's Day 1 January Leddet (Christmas) 7 January Timkat (Epiphany) 19 January International Women's Day 8 March Tensae (Easter) March/April (variable) Workers' Day 1 May Liberation Day 24 May Martyrs' Day 20 June Start of the Armed Struggle 1 September Kiddus Yohannes (Orthodox New Year) 11 September Kiddus Yohannes (Orthodox New Year) 11 September

MAPS

The best map currently available is the one produced by ITMB Publishing in Canada (1:9,000,000). At the time of writing, no maps of the country were available in Eritrea.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Nakfa (Nfa). There are currently no ATMs in Eritrea. US dollars (cash or travellers cheques) are the

RISKY BUSINESS

It's tempting to change money on the black market because official rates massively overvalue the Nakfa (up to 30%). But if you do indulge, you're taking a very big risk. Always conduct your transaction very discreetly, with somebody you know. The introduction of a currency declaration form in 2005 makes changing money on the black market a complicated business.

best currency to carry, followed a distant second by euros. Each transaction must be registered on your currency declaration form, which is handed out at your arrival at the airport.

Changing money on the black market still exists but is no longer widespread due to the heavy penalties incurred.

The larger hotels in the capital, some airlines and some travel agents accept credit cards but they usually charge an additional 5% to 7% commission.

TELEPHONE

International calls are best made from the telecommunications offices found in all the main towns. For calls to Eritrea from abroad, phone numbers for the major towns must be prefixed by the number 1.

Mobile phones are becoming widespread. Mobile-phone numbers use eight digits: a two-digit number starting with 0, followed by six digits. To reach a mobile phone from outside Eritrea, dial the country code, then the mobile number without the initial 0.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Eritrea's tourist facilities are fairly woeful, with little literature and only one tourist office, in Asmara. But you could try one of the two privately run travel agencies in Asmara (see p639).

VISAS & DOCUMENTS

All foreign nationals require visas for entry to Eritrea. Tourist visas are for single entry only, and are valid for 30 days from the date of arrival in Eritrea. They cost between US\$40 and US\$50.

Visas should be obtained from the Eritrean embassy or consulate before you leave your home country. If this is inconvenient, you can contact one of the travel agencies in Asmara (see p639). They can help you organise a visa.

Visas can be extended at the **Department** of Immigration (200033, ext 204; Denden St; ?? 7-11.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) in Asmara.

Travel Permits

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Because of the ongoing tension with Ethiopia, travelling in Eritrea has become pretty bureaucratic these days. To travel outside Asmara, you'll need a travel permit, obtainable the same day at the Tourist Information Centre in Asmara. If you travel overland and come from Djibouti, you'll need to go to the Immigration Office in Assab to get this permit.

To visit any of the archaeological sites of Eritrea, you'll need to get a special permit from the **National Museum office** (C 112318; Mariam GMBI St, Asmara; C 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri). You'll need your passport and Nfa150 per site (or US\$10).

Visas for Onward Travel

For contact details of embassies and consulates in Eritrea, see p647.

Djibouti One-month entry visas cost US\$30 or €25, require two photos, and are issued within 24 hours. **Sudan** You will need two photos and a copy of your passport pages. Your application is then sent to Khartoum (Sudan) and you can expect a long processing time (about three weeks). If the answer is favourable, you'll pay US\$60 (US\$160 for US citizens) and you will have to take a medical examination.

Yemen One-month entry visas cost US\$55, require two photos, a valid return air ticket and a medical examination. They are processed within 24 hours.

TRANSPORT IN ERITREA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Eritrea has one international gateway for arrival by air, Asmara Airport, about 6km from town. Eritrean Airlines is the national carrier. It has flights to Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Milan and Rome with prices starting at around US\$1000 return. Lufthansa also flies to Frankfurt. Your best bet for a cheaper deal is with Egyptair and Yemenia Yemen Airways, which fly to Asmara from Europe via Cairo and Sana'a respectively.

Within Africa you can fly to Asmara from Djibouti with Eritrean Airlines. Eritrean Air-

DEPARTURE TAX

International departure tax is US\$20 or €20, paid in cash after check-in. The domestic departure tax is Nfa20.

lines also flies to Dubai. Saudi Arabian Airlines has flights to Riyadh via Jeddah.

See p643 for contact details.

Land DJIBOUTI

There's only one border crossing, at Rahaita/ Moulhoulé, about 112km south of Assab. Travel overland to/from Djibouti is possible but traffic is fairly limited. Only dirt roads lead south of Assab to Djibouti. From Assab, shared taxis sometimes go as far as Moulhoulé in Djibouti to pick up passengers coming from Obock. Check the situation while in Assab, as this service is unreliable. Another option is to hire a 4WD to the border and then try and hitch to Obock.

From Djibouti, there are infrequent pickups and landcruisers that ply the route between Obock and Moulhoulé (about four hours); from there, in theory, Eritrean bush taxis go to Assab (four hours).

ETHIOPIA

As long as the conflict with Ethiopia remains unresolved, the borders between the two countries remain closed. The most convenient way to get to Ethiopia is through Djibouti.

SUDAN

At the time of writing, it was possible to cross the border from Eritrea to Sudan but not the other way. Check the current situation when you get there.

From Teseney, there are bush taxis to Adi Bara at the Sudanese border. From there you should find transport to Kassala (Sudan).

GETTING AROUND Air

Eritrean Airlines, the national carrier, flies from Asmara to just one domestic destination: Assab.

Bus

The bus service in Eritrea is reasonably extensive, but few would call it comfortable. Coverage of Keren and Massawa is excellent. Services thin out the further away from the capital you get.

Fares used to be very cheap, but with the soaring fuel prices and fuel shortages, they're a bit less economical. Buses don't adhere to fixed timetables; they depart only when they're full. For long-distance journeys, you need to be at the bus station by 6am to buy a ticket and to be guaranteed a seat.

Car & Motorcycle

Vehicle hire is expensive in Eritrea. If you're just planning on travelling on the main routes between towns, a 2WD vehicle is sufficient. But some sights, including Qohaito, are only accessible by 4WD. A driver is usually provided for your 4WD, which is a great help. Car rental costs Nfa350 to Nfa550 per day; a 4WD costs Nfa1500 to Nfa1900 per day, including third-party insurance. The first 50km to 90km are free, and each additional kilometre costs between Nfa1.50 and Nfa3. For Assab, there is usually a surcharge. Not all rental agencies accept credit cards but, if they do, they add an extra surcharge (usually 7%).

Train

A section of the old Italian railway that stretched between Asmara and Massawa has been repaired and there's now a regular service on Sunday morning between Asmara and Nefasit, about 25km east of Asmara (US\$50 or Nfa750 return, one hour).

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Ethiopia

Testing, awe-inspiring and heartbreaking – a journey you'll never forget. You don't explore Ethiopia for a relaxing getaway, you venture here to be moved. And moved you shall be.

Wade through incense into a medieval world hewn from stone in Lalibela, and watch the line between past and present blur while taking part in striking Christian ceremonies that haven't changed in 1000 years. Ethiopia's storied and sovereign history has left its wide-ranging and fertile highlands laden with historical treasures, ranging from ancient Aksumite tombs and obelisks to 17th-century castles and burnt-out Russian tanks. Many are more than a peek into the nation's past; they are a giant two-footed leap.

Ethiopia's landscapes are no less dramatic, and range from the Simien and Bale Mountains, which proffer tremendous trekking and innumerable interactions with dozens of animals and birds seen nowhere else on earth, to the Danakil Depression, an enchanting and unforgivingly hostile environment offering extreme adventure. The remote lowlands in the sultry southwest are also home to untold adventures and house some of Africa's most fascinating tribes.

Although it's anything but desert wasteland or a perpetual home of famine and war, Ethiopia is monetarily poor and travel here is tough, both physically and mentally. However, those willing to take some doses of displeasure with Ethiopia's bounty of treasure will be pleasantly rewarded.

FAST FACTS

- Area 1,098,000 sq km
- ATMs None that accept foreign cards
- Borders Kenya, Sudan, Djibouti, Somaliland
- Budget US\$10 to US\$50 a day
- Capital Addis Ababa
- Languages Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo
- Money Birr; US\$1 = Birr8.8
- Population 74.8 million
- Seasons Wet season(mid-March to early October), very hot in lowlands (June to September)
- Telephone Country code 251; international access code 00
- Time GMT/UTC + 3
- Visa One-month visa US\$20 at airport; Ethiopian embassies charge more

HIGHLIGHTS

- Lalibela (p668) Question time, history and reality while wandering dumbfounded through the medieval rock-hewn maze of churches.
- Simien Mountains (p666) Trek to unparalleled precipices and Abyssinian abysses, and encounter bewildering 'bleeding heart' baboons.
- **Aksum** (p666) Descend into the darkness of ancient tombs or let your eyes follow 1800-year-old stelae skyward.
- Bale Mountains (p672) Register for Ethiopian Endemic Wildlife 101, start your trek and study to your heart's content.
- Lower Omo Valley (p671) Explore 'Africa's last great wilderness' and visit possibly the continent's most diverse and fascinating peoples.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Ethiopia's climate is typically very mild, with temperatures on the wide-ranging highlands averaging below 20°C. Only on the lowland fringes of western, eastern and southern Ethiopia can temperatures soar past 30°C. Rains traditionally fall mid-March to early

October, making the rest of the year prime time to visit. Directly after the rains the highlands are wonderfully green, covered with wildflowers and sublime for trekking.

ITINERARIES

- **Two Weeks** Those simply filling the gap between Sudan and Kenya could blaze through in two weeks, though you'd be missing the opportunity of a lifetime. Africa's Camelot, Gonder (p665) is first, before Bahir Dar (p664) and the island monasteries of Lake Tana (p664). Next is Addis Ababa (p656) for splendid dining and museum action. Break the long haul south to Kenya at Awasa (p671).
- **One Month** Complete the north's historical circuit: after Addis Ababa (p656), loop north through Bahir Dar (p664), Lake Tana (p664) and Gonder (p665) before trekking the glorious Simien Mountains (p666). The tombs and stelae of Aksum (p666) are next before the mesmerising rock-hewn churches of Lalibela (p668).
- **Two Months** Mix Harar (p669) in eastern Ethiopia and the wildlife and tribes of Lower Omo Valley (p671) with the onemonth itinerary above.

HOW MUCH?

- Steaming macchiato US\$0.13
- 100km by bus US\$1.50 to US\$3
- Minibus across town US\$0.13
- Internet per hour US\$2.50 to US\$3.50

lonelyplanet.com

lonelyplanet.com

Tip for helpful priest US\$0.60 to US1.15

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.65
- 1L bottled water US\$0.45
- Bottle of Bedele beer US\$0.45
- Souvenir T-Shirt US\$3 to US\$6
- Roasted barley US\$0.13

HISTORY

Ethiopia's human history dates back at least 4.4 million years, landing it squarely in East Africa's heralded Cradle of Humanity. Recorded history dates to 1500 BC, when a civilisation with Sabaean influences briefly blossomed at Yeha.

Kingdom of Aksum

This kingdom, ranking among the ancient world's most powerful, rose shortly after 400 BC. Its capital, Aksum, sat in a fertile area lying at an important commercial crossroads between Egypt, Sudan's gold fields and the Red Sea. At its height the kingdom extended well into Arabia.

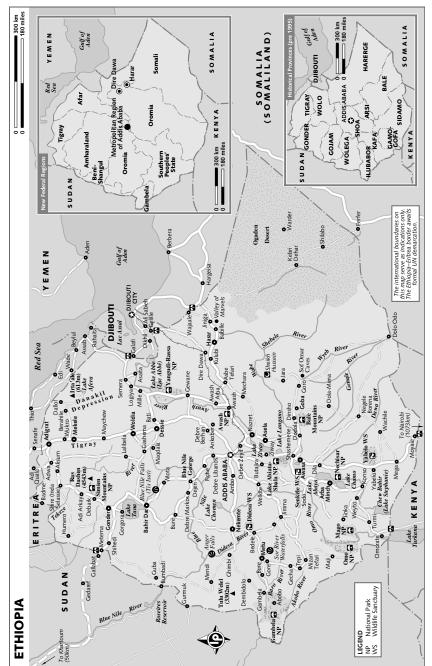
Aksum flourished on trade, exporting frankincense, grain, skins, apes and, particularly, ivory. In turn, exotic imports returned from Egypt, Arabia and India. Aksumite architecture was incredible, and Aksum's impressive monuments still stand today (p666).

The 4th century brought Christianity, which enveloped Aksum and would shape Ethiopia's future spiritual, cultural and intellectual life.

Aksum flourished until the 7th century, when its trading empire was fatally isolated by the rise of Arabs and Islam in Arabia. Ethiopia soon sank into its 'dark ages', a period that has left little evidence.

Early Dynasties

The Zagwe dynasty eventually rose around Lalibela in 1137. Although only lasting until



1270, it produced arguably Ethiopia's greatest treasures: the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela (p668). Despite the architectural wonders, this period remains shrouded in mystery as stones weren't inscribed, and no chronicles were written. The dynasty was overthrown by Yekuno Amlak, self-professed descendant of King Solomon and Queen Sheba. His 'Solomonic dynasty' would reign for 500 years.

Although Islam expanded into eastern Ethiopia during the 12th and 14th centuries, it wasn't until the late 15th century, when Ottoman Turks intervened, that hostilities erupted. After jihad was declared on the Christian highlands, Ethiopia experienced some of the worst bloodshed in its history. Only Portuguese intervention helped saved the Christian empire.

Towards a United Empire

Filling the power vacuum created by the weakened Muslims, Oromo pastoralists and warriors migrated from what is now Kenya. For 200 years intermittent conflict raged. Two 17thcentury emperors, Za-Dengel and Susenvos, even went as far as conversion to Catholicism to gain the military support of Portuguese Jesuits. The Muslim state wasn't immune to Oromo might either; Harar's old city walls were built in response to their conflicts.

In 1636 Emperor Fasiladas founded Ethiopia's first permanent capital since Lalibela. By the close of the 17th century, Gonder boasted magnificent palaces, beautiful gardens and extensive plantations. However, during the 18th century, assassination and intrigue became the order of the day, the ensuing chaos reading like Shakespeare's Macbeth. Gonder collapsed in the mid-19th century and Ethiopia disintegrated into a cluster of feuding fiefdoms.

The shattered empire was eventually reunified by Kassa Haylu, who crowned himself Emperor Tewodros. However, his lofty ambitions and pride led him to cross the British, resulting in his death. His successor, Yohannes IV, fought to the throne with weapons gained by aiding the British during their Tewodros campaign. Later, Menelik II continued acquiring weaponry, using it to thrash the advancing Italians in 1896, saving Ethiopia from colonialism.

In 1936 Mussolini gained revenge as Italian troops overran Ethiopia. They occupied it until capitulating to British forces in 1941.

The Derg to Democracy

By 1973 a radical military group, known as the Derg, had emerged. They used the media with consummate skill to undermine and eventually depose Emperor Haile Selassie, before their leader, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, declared Ethiopia a socialist state in 1974.

Despite internal tensions, external threats initially posed the Derg's biggest problem. Only state-of-the-art weaponry, gifted by the Soviet Union, allowed them to beat back Somalia's 1977 invasion. In Eritrea, however, the secessionists continued to thwart Ethiopian offensives.

The Ethiopia-Eritrea War

During the 1980s, numerous Ethiopian armed liberation movements arose. For years, with limited weaponry, they fought the Sovietbacked Derg's military might.

When Mengistu lost Soviet backing after the Cold War, his days were numbered and the rebel Ethiopian and Eritrean coalition forces finally claimed victory in 1991.

After the smoke cleared, Eritrea was immediately granted independence, Mengistu's failed socialist policies were abandoned, and in 1995 the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was proclaimed. Elections followed, and the second republic's constitution was inaugurated. Meles Zenawi, as prime minister, formed a new government.

Despite being friends who fought together against the Derg for over a decade, Meles Zenawi and Eritrea's President Isaias soon clashed. Bickering over Eritrea's exchangerate system for their new currency led to Eritrea occupying the border town of Badme in 1998. Soon full-scale military conflict broke out, leaving tens of thousands dead on both sides before ceasing in mid-2000. The settlement included the installation of an OAU-UN buffer zone on Eritrean soil.

Ethiopia Today

Ethiopia is again at a poignant period in its history. Controversial 2005 elections and the government's heavy-handed reprisals have cast doubts on democracy, and everyone's hoping another democratic freedom fighter hasn't turned dictator.

Despite many opposition members being unjustly jailed, their parties continue to rally, and in mid-2006 Ethiopia's largest opposition party formed a new political alliance with Ethiopia's four largest rebel groups.

If internal political turmoil wasn't enough, relations with Eritrea heated up again in late 2005. Things are still tense as Ethiopia occupies Badme (awarded to Eritrea by the UN) and Eritrea refuses to allow UN helicopters to monitor troop movements along the border.

The southern front took an interesting turn in August 2006, when Ethiopian troops entered Somalia in support of the Somali government's fight against the Islamic militia who control Mogadishu. Things escalated in December 2006, when Ethiopia officially declared war against the Somali Islamic militia and launched air attacks on several Somalia border towns.

CULTURE

Religion, and intense pride in Ethiopia's past, resonate loudly within most people. To them, Ethiopia has stood out from all African nations and proved itself utterly unique - home to its own culture, language, script, calendar and history. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and Muslims alike celebrate that Ethiopia was the only African nation to thwart European colonial aspirations.

Ethiopians have a strong sense of formality and attach great importance to etiquette, especially greetings and dress. However, some younger Ethiopians who've grown up with high-profile international aid efforts lack the patriotism seen in older generations. Their Ethiopian pride and self-reliance has been undermined, albeit unintentionally.

Other than religion, it's agriculture and pastoralism that fill the days of over 80% of Ethiopians. Everyone is involved, right down to stick- and stone-wielding four-year-old children, who are handed the responsibility of herding their families' livestock.

With most toiling in the fields, it's not surprising that only 38.5% of Ethiopians are literate. Only 52% of children attend primary school; a mere 12% attend secondary school. If all children under 16 attended school, Ethiopia's workforce would be ravaged, as almost half of Ethiopia's population would be attending classes.

Families are incredibly close, and most children live with their parents until marriage. After marriage, couples usually join the husband's parents' household. Eventually, they'll request land for a house.

PEOPLE

Ethiopia's population is about to exceed 75 million, astounding considering 1935's population was just 15 million. If this growth continues, Ethiopia will have 120 million citizens in 2025. Though a trend of urbanisation is emerging, 84% live in rural areas.

Although 83 languages and 200 dialects are spoken, the population can be divided into eight broad groups: Oromo (40%), Amhara (21%), Tigrayan (11%), Sidama (9%), Somali (6%), Afar (4%), Gurage (2%) and Harari (less than 2%). Under 'ethnic federalism', the modern federal regions are demarcated largely along these ethnic-linguistic lines.

Faith is paramount to most Ethiopians. Although Christians only slightly outnumber Muslims (45% to 35%), Christianity has dominated history. Most Highlanders are Orthodox, and Christianity heavily influences the highlands' political, social and cultural ne. Most Musin... t significant populations live in _____ edominantly Christian highland cities. Numerous traditional African beliefs are "mactised by 11% of Ethiopians, particu-"mand western lowlands. scene. Most Muslims inhabit the lowlands, but significant populations live in Ethiopia's predominantly Christian highland cities.

still practised by 11% of Ethiopians, particularly in the southern and western lowlands.

ARTS

The church, traditionally enjoying almost as much authority as the state, is responsible for both inspiring Ethiopia's art forms and stifling them with its great conservatism. Long neglected and ignored, the cultural contributions of other ethnic groups are finally receiving credit and attention.

Today, music is an extremely important part of most Ethiopians' lives. Whether it's the solemn sounds of drums resonating from a church, the hilarious ad-libbing of azmaris (see boxed text, p662) or Ethiopian pop blaring in a bus, Ethiopian music is as interesting as it is unavoidable.

Dance is equally significant, playing parts in religious festivities and social occasions, such as weddings and funerals. In the past, dancing motivated warriors before battle.

ENVIRONMENT

Ethiopia's topography is remarkably diverse, ranging from the vast central plateau (Ethiopian highlands), with elevations between 1800m and 4543m, to one of the earth's lowest points: the infamous Danakil Depression, sinking 120m below sea level. The highlands

supply four large river systems, the most famous being the Blue Nile.

Southern Ethiopia is bisected by the Rift Valley. Averaging 50km wide, it stretches to Mozambique. The valley hosts several lakes; most are havens for birdlife, while others are homes for crocodiles. The Rift Valley's northern end opens into the Danakil Depression.

Ethiopia's flora and fauna reflect the diverse topography and host numerous species seen nowhere else on earth. Unfortunately, demographic pressures are putting the environment under extreme pressure, and 95% of Ethiopia's original forest has been lost.

There are three wildlife sanctuaries and nine national parks, including the justifiably honoured Simien and Bale Mountains National Parks.

FOOD & DRINK

Ethiopia's food is much like Ethiopia, completely different from the rest of Africa. Plates, bowls and utensils are replaced by *injera*, a unique pancake of countrywide proportions. Atop its rubbery confines sits anything from *kai wat* (spicy meat stew) to colourful dollops of *gomen* (minced spinach) and *tere sega* (cubes of raw beef).

Whether it's *bebere* (famous Ethiopian spice) joyfully bringing tears to your eyes, or clammy *injera*'s slightly sour taste sending your tongue into convulsions, one thing's certain: Ethiopian fare provokes strong reactions. It's quite varied and complex, so experiment to find something that pleasantly tickles your tongue – it's so cheap, mistakes aren't costly.

Ethiopia is the original home of coffee, which is still ubiquitous. Sip a *macchiato* made from a vintage Italian espresso machine, or sit for a traditional coffee ceremony. Another beverage you must savour is *tej* (honey wine).

ADDIS ABABA

pop 2.8 million

On first observing Addis Ababa ('New Flower' in Amharic) a little over a century ago, one foreigner called it 'noisy, dusty, sprawling and shambolic'. Over the next century this tented camp has morphed into a modern business centre and Africa's fourth-largest city, yet travellers still turn up and utter the same phrase. If that isn't reason enough to discount first impressions, we don't know what is!

Give 'Addis', as it's commonly known, a few days and you'll appreciate its bizarre blend of past and present: the coexistence of old imperial statues alongside hammer-and-sickle placards of the former Marxist regime, and the juxtaposition of wattle-and-daub huts with austere Italian Fascist buildings and luxurious hotels. Lift the city's skin and the same contrasts apply: tej beats still serve traditional honey wine and azmaris sing centuries-old songs, while a few blocks on, martinis glow and modern beats rain down in hip bars. On wide boulevards, priests in medieval-looking robes mix with African bureaucrats, Western aid workers, young Ethiopian women with mobile phones and the odd herd of goats.

It won't be long until you say 'Addis' like you were talking about an old friend.

ORIENTATION

Massive and incoherent, Addis has been likened to a sprawling 250-sq-km *injera* adorned with piles of *tibs*, spaghetti, *mahabaroui* and Szechwan noodles. To navigate, break Addis down into these distinct dishes/districts. The smoking *tibs*, representing the city centre (or meaty part), is found at Churchill Ave's southern end (now Gambia St). Here you'll find government and commercial buildings.

The steaming spaghetti symbolizes Piazza, a district atop the hill at Churchill Ave's north end, whose legacy is owed to Italian occupation. It houses budget hotels, cafés and bars.

East of Piazza is Addis Ababa University, several museums and the landmark roundabouts of Arat Kilo and Siddist Kilo. South from there is Menelik II Ave, which boasts the UN's Africa Hall and the ugly Meskal Sq. This melange of attributes is likened to a meal of this, that and everything (mahabaroui).

Thanks to the new Chinese-built ring road, Addis' southeast, around Bole Rd, is thriving with exciting development that contrasts sharply with the rest of the city. You guessed it – the Szechwan noodles!

INFORMATION Bookshops

Africans Bookshop (Hailesilase St) Second-hand books on Ethiopia.

Bookworld Friendship City Center (**Bole Rd**); Haile Gebreselassie Rd (**Haile Gebreselassie Rd**); Lime Tree Restaurant (**Bole Rd**); Piazza (Wavel St) Perfect for books and magazines.

Cultural Centres

Alliance-Ethio Français (☎ 0111 550213; www.alli anceaddis.org; ※ 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri) Internet, library, pleasant gardens and a café. Check website for cultural events. It's off Dejazmach Ummar Semeter St. British Council (☎ 0111 115496; bc.addisababa@et .britishcouncil.org; Hailesilase St; ※ 2-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat) Newspapers and internet. Goethe Institut (☎ 0111 242345; www.goethe .de/af/add; ※ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri) Library, internet café and exhibition hall. It's off Algeria St. Instituto Italiano di Cultura (☎ 0111 553427; icc .addisababa@ethionet.et; Dejazmach Belay Zeleke St; ※ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Fri & 3.30-6.30pm Tue & Thu) Cultural events.

Emergency

Internet Access

Although internet abounds, fast connections are rare. Some convenient outlets are listed here.

Cyber Easy Internet Cafe (Bole Rd; per hr Birr21) Internet Cafe (Bole Rd; per hr Birr15) Open Sundays from 8.30am to 9pm. Kibsol (Adwa Ave; per hr Birr12) Megel Internet Service (Ras Desta Damtew St; per

hr Birr15)

Nina Internet Service (Mundy St; per hr Birr15) CD burning costs Birr4.

Internet Resources

WhatsUp! Addis (www.whatsupaddis.com) A great site highlighting cultural and entertainment events.

Media

Look out for the monthly *What's Up!*, listing restaurants, shopping venues, nightclubs and events.

Medical Services

Bethzatha Hospital ((2) 0115 514141; off Ras Mekonen Ave; (2) 24hr) Private hospital recommended by embassies.

Hayat Hospital (☐ 0116 624488; Ring Rd; 24hr) Respected and reliable. Consultations cost Birr40. St Gabriel Hospital (☐ 0116 613622; Djibouti St;

(24hr) Private hospital with X-ray, dental, surgery and laboratory facilities. Consultations cost Birr50.

Money

Numerous Commercial Bank branches and copious private banks, like Dashen, United and Wegagen, will change cash and travellers cheques. Branches in hotels keep longer hours.

Only Dashen offer Visa and MasterCard cash advances (up to US\$500). Commission is 5.5% (minimum US\$12.50).

Post

Junior post offices Meskal Sq (cm Menelik II Ave & Meskal Sq); Mexico (Ras Abebe Aregay St); Piazza (Cunningham St) Postal services for postcards and letters only. Main post office (Ras Desta Damtew St) Poste-restante and international-parcel services.

Telephone & Fax

The numerous yellow phone boxes take 10¢ coins; many accept phonecards. Air's Business Center (Democratic Republic Congo St) Cheap international calls via internet. Telecommunications office (💿 0115 514977; Gam-

bia St) International calls at standard rates (p674).

Tourist Information

Tourist Information Centre (☎ 0115 512310; Meskal Sq; 𝔅 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30pm-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-11.30am & 1.30pm-5.30pm Fri) Helpful, providing Addis information and tips for elsewhere.

ETHIOPIA

Travel Agencies

These are some recommended agencies in Addis, but it is far from exhaustive. Bahir Dar Tour & Travel Agency (@ 0111 550546; bdtta@ethionet.et; Churchill Ave) Green Land Tours & Travels (@ 0116 185875; www .greenlandethiopia.com; Cameroon St) Hess Travel Ethiopia (@ 0115 520955; www.hess travel.com; Bole Rd) NTO (www.nto.com) Hilton Hotel (@ 0115 151722; Menelik II Ave); Ras Desta Damtew St (@ 0115 514838; Ras Desta Damtew St) Travel Ethiopia (www.travelethiopia.com) National Hotel (@ 0115 525478; Menelik II Ave); Ghion Hotel (@ 0911 206976)

Village Ethiopia (🗃 0115 523497; www.village-ethiop ia.net; National Hotel, Menelik II Ave)

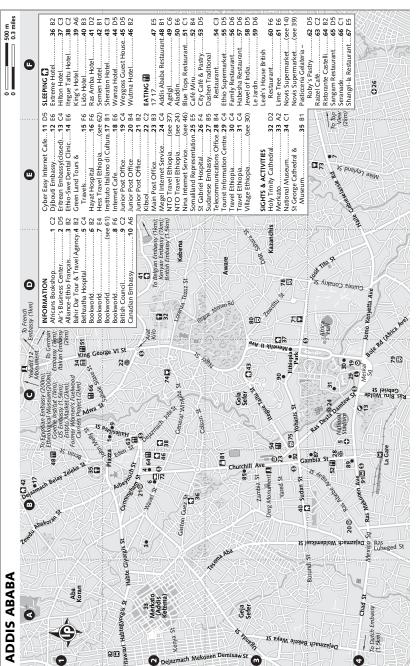
DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

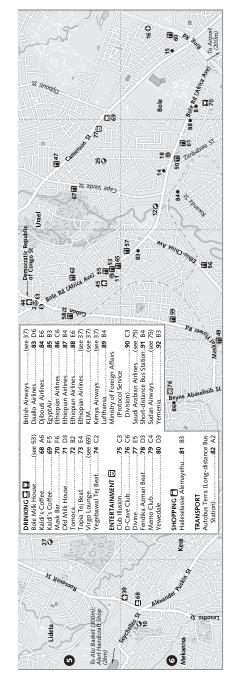
Violent crime is, fortunately, rare, particularly where visitors are concerned. However, petty theft and confidence tricks are problematic.

The Merkato is worst, as pickpockets abound – targeting *faranjis* (foreigners) and

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Ethiopians. Other spots requiring vigilance include Piazza, Meskal Sq, minibus stands, and Churchill Ave.

Beware of distraction tactics (some involving someone enthusiastically grabbing your ankles, while others pilfer pockets!).

SIGHTS

Set within Haile Selassie's former palace and surrounded by Addis Ababa University's beautiful gardens and fountains is the enthralling Ethnological Museum (Algeria St; adult/student Birr20/10; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun). The vibrant exhibition gives great insights into Ethiopia's rich cultures.

Although less visually stimulating than the Ethnological Museum, the national museum (🖻 0111 117150; King George VI St; admission Birr10; Standam-5pm) is no less thought-provoking. Its collection ranks among sub-Saharan Africa's most important. The palaeontology exhibit contains two remarkable casts of 3.2-millionyear-old Lucy, a famously fossilised upright hominid discovered in 1974. Upstairs are some celebrated Ethiopian artworks.

Off Niger St, the massive, ornate **Holy Trinity thedral** (admission Birr25; 37am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-m Sat & Sun) is Ethiopia's second-most imporcathedral (admission Birr25; 🕑 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun) is Ethiopia's second-most important place of worship. It's also the final resting place of Emperor Haile Selassie and his wife. Their massive Aksumite-style granite tombs, complete with lions' feet, are a sight indeed.

Commissioned by Emperor Menelik commemorating his stunning 1896 defeat of the Italians in Adwa, the Piazza St George Cathedral (Fitawrari Gebeyehu St) was completed in 1911. The Holy of Holies' outer walls are covered in paintings and mosaics by renowned artists, like Afewerk Tekle.

Just outside the cathedral is the museum (admission Birr20; 🕑 9am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sun), which contains Ethiopia's best collection of ecclesiastical paraphernalia outside St Mary of Zion in Aksum.

Wading into the market chaos known as Merkato (🕑 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat), west of the centre, can be as rewarding as it is exasperating. You may find the most evocative aroma wafting from precious incense. You may find your wallet stolen and stinky shit on your shoe.

Some people say it's Africa's largest market, but as its exact boundaries are as shady as some of its characters, we'll refrain from adding our name to that list - let's just say it's mighty, mighty huge.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Although Addis doesn't boast any major festivals of its own, it's a great place to catch the national festivals of Leddet, Timkat and Meskel. For festival dates see p673.

SLEEPING

Accommodation runs the gamut in Addis – brandish flip flops and battle with omnipotent insects, or sink into your sumptuous Sheraton suite. It's all up to you, your budget and the might of your flip flops.

Budget

Congo St; d Birr70) Despite sporadic hot water and

the continued presence of occasional insects

behind the boilers (they're getting smaller

though!), this Bole option, with cosy rooms,

comfortable beds, clean bathrooms and a help-

ful owner, is one of the best budget options. **Itegue Taitu Hotel** (© 0111560787; exod2005@yahoo .com; tw with bathroom Birr115-167, without Birr46-115) Just south of De Gaulle Sq in Piazza, this charming but well-worn hotel was built by Empress Taitu in 1907. Rooms range from small, stark and skanky in the rear annex, to large and historic in the original building.

Lido Hotel ((2011) 533247; lido@ethionet.et; Sudan St; s Birr144-213, d Birr161) Set behind doum palms and cactus plants, this central, pleasant and clean hotel has 11 reasonably priced rooms. Rooms 8 and 9 (Birr161) are the brightest.

Midrange

Extreme Hotel (**©** 0111 553777; epistouch@ethionet .et; Gaston Guez St; s US\$20-29, tw US\$28-35) Extreme it is. Great 1st-floor rooms have shiny tile floors, contemporary furnishings, satellite TVs, and free breakfasts, and are utterly spotless. The cheaper 2nd- and 3rd-floor rooms host stained carpets and lack charm (and free breakfast).

Weygoss Guest House ((2) 0115 512205; www.wey goss.com; s/d/twind breakfast US\$26/35/43) Hidden up an alley just north of Bole Rd's Ethio Supermarket, Weygoss represents great value and is perfect for families. Bright doubles have parquet floors, balconies, satellite TVs and separate kitchens.

King's Hotel ((1) 0113 711300; kingshotel@ethionet.et; Roosevelt St; d ind breakfast US\$37) With great service and large, bright rooms hosting vibrant walls, balconies and satellite TVs, this hotel in Addis' southwest is ideal. The furniture, like the bathrooms, are not new but are perfectly preserved.

Semien Hotel (© 0111 550067; semienhotel@ethionet .et; Dejazmach Belay Zeleke St; s/d/tw ind breakfast U\$\$32/38/43, ste U\$\$54-60) With a lofty location above Piazza, this hotel offers sweet vistas. The cosy, compact and clean rooms lack character, but host balconies and satellite TVs. Add a 7th-floor panoramic lounge and it's one of the best-value midrange options.

Ras Amba Hotel (@ 0111 228088; rahot@ethionet .et; Queen Elizabeth II St; s/d/ste US\$36/48/60; D) East of Piazza and affording superb city views is this charming (albeit pink) choice. There's a gorgeous rooftop terrace, and rooms are relatively modern and comfortable. Most have balconies and satellite TVs.

Top End

The following hotels tack on a 15% VAT and 10% service charge to the bill.

Hilton Hotel (© 0115 518400; hilton.addis@ethionet .et; Menelik II Ave; s/d from US\$130/145; **E ()** Although lacking the Sheraton's panache, and showing its age in areas, the high-rise Hilton still makes for a splendid stay. It's laden with facilities.

Sheraton Hotel ((20) 0115 171717; www.sheraton .com/addis; Itegue Taitu St; s/d from US\$265/313, deluxe ste US\$3817, villa US\$8081; (20) One of Africa's most elite hotels, it's astounding and the epitome of class. No expense has been spared: from Persian carpets and original Ethiopian paintings to furnishings plated with 24-carat Ethiopian gold. DVD players, satellite TVs, personal safes and three phones (at desk, bed and toilet!) are found in each room.

EATING

Many restaurants, particularly the smarter ones, add 15% tax and 10% service charge to their bills; check before you order.

Ethiopian

Many restaurants offer a 'traditional experience': traditional food (called 'national food') in traditional surroundings with traditional music in the evening. **17 17** (Cameroon St; mains Birr8-12; 论 lunch & dinner) This local, atmospheric option is usually alive with action. The food isn't the best, but it's filling and cheap. Look for lights in a tree next to a well-lit butcher.

Addis Ababa Restaurant (mains Birr11-22; \mathfrak{D} lunch & dinner) Feeling like a neglected museum, this long-standing Piazza favourite continues to churn out great Ethiopian dishes and pure *tej* (it has its own brewery). It's off Benin St.

Habesha Restaurant (Bole Rd; mains Birr20-27;) lunch & dinner) For a meal that looks as good as it tastes, come to this fashionable Bole eatery where serving is an art form. There's also live music and traditional dancing every night at 8pm.

Shangri-la Restaurant (Cape Verde St; mains Birr17-50; Dunch & dinner) This is an atmospheric place to head for *tere sega*, which is available on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. There's an outdoor dining area and a cosy bar serving quality *tej*.

Agelgil (mains Birr22-55; 论 lunch & dinner) Off Meskal Flower Rd, tucked down a dirt track next to the railway tracks, is this great option. There's live dancing and music every night, except Wednesday, at 7pm.

European

Leah's House British Restaurant (Ring Rd; mains Birr15-20; 论 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Wield your fork like a Brit possessed and massacre Cornish pasties, full English breakfasts or a steakand-kidney pies. It's the real deal – enjoy!

Lime Tree (Bole Rd; mains Birr17-34; breakfast, lunch & dinner) Tuck into a pita stuffed with *tabouleh* or falafel, or savour a chicken coconut curry. Its creative juices are thirst slayers.

Blue Tops Restaurant (King George VI St; mains Birr24-50; ^(C) breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Opposite the National Museum, and the haunt of expats, this airy restaurant serves flavourful pastas (some vegetarian options), calzones and heavenly ice-cream sundaes. Pizzas join the parade evenings and at lunch Sunday.

Top View (mains Birr24-52; 论 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) We could talk about the cannelloni, Parma ham and fresh seafood, but we're still thinking of its gorgeous view.

Ristorante Castelli (☎ 0111571757; Mahatma-Gandhi St; mains Birr50-80; 沙 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Famous clientele and fabulous Italian fare. We joyfully devoured the *fettuccine al tartufo* (fettuccini in truffle sauce) at this Piazza palace. Other filling stations:

Family Restaurant (Ethio-China Ave; mains Birr18-45; Diunch & dinner) Size large servings of Tex-Mex fare. Le Jardin (Meskal Flower Rd; mains Birr25-43; Diunch & dinner) Mmm...pizza.

Asian

Sangam Restaurant (Bole Rd; mains Birr20-40; 论 lunch & dinner) If you've got a craving for a cracking curry, try this atmospheric option.

Aladdin (Zimbabwe St, mains Birri 8-42; 论 lunch & dinner) An Armenian restaurant serving mouthwatering hummus, *tabouleh* and *kuefteh* (spicy meatballs).

Jewel of India (Gabon St; mains Birr25-72; 论 lunch & dinner) Another great Indian eatery, with more than 150 dishes.

Cafés

Cafés and pastry shops are omnipresent and they are perfect for early-morning and afternoon pick-me-ups.

City Café & Pastry (Bole Rd; pastries Birr2-4) Educated in the art of apple strudel and other delicious delicacies while in the States, the owner produces some of Addis' best pastries.

Pasticceria Gelateria – Roby's Pastry (Bole Rd; desserts Birr4-7) Doles out refreshing homemade ice cream and mouth-watering cakes.

Raizel Café (Hailesilase St; meals Birr9-18) This slick modern café speedily serves tasty cheese burgers, tuna melts, French fries and breakfast omelettes.

Café Miru (Gambia St; meals Birr11-17) Besides great pastries, cakes and coffee, the upper section serves some decent meals.

Self-Catering

Novis Supermarket Bole Rd Area (Bole Rd); Southwest (Roosevelt St) Boasting the likes of brie, taleggio, gorgonzola and gouda, it's heaven for

lonelyplanet.com

cheese-lovers. You'll find Italian prosciutto, wine and chocolate too.

Ethio Supermarket (Bole Rd) It never closes and is well stocked - enough said.

DRINKING Cafés

There are hundreds of good cafés, though the following stand out.

Tomoca (Wavel St; coffees Birr2) Coffee is serious business at this old Italian Piazza café, where beans are roasted on-site.

Kaldi's Coffee (coffees Birr3-14) Southwest (Roosevelt St); East (Cameroon St) While lawyers may eventually kibosh Kaldi's Starbucks-like sign, logo, interior, uniforms and menu, thirsty expats dropping Birr14 for fabulous frappuccinos will ensure Kaldi's contagious coffee lives on.

Pubs & Bars

With the recent addition of several chic bars in the Bole area, Addis' bar scene is more diverse than ever. Piazza continues to ooze with smaller unnamed places catering to locals wanting to let loose. Virgo Lounge (Cameroon St; 🕑 closed Mon) This

southeastern Addis. It's an ideal place to kick back and chill out. Top View (🕑 closed Monday) A sunset drink on this remarkable restaurant's panoramic deck in eastern Addis is escapism at its best.

hip drinking den sits above Kaldi's Coffee in

Old Milk House (Josif Tito St) A popular place, though laden with expats chatting up local ladies.

Mask Bar is as gaudy as it is cool. The crowd ranges from expats to well-heeled locals. It's well signposted off Bole Rd.

Off Bole Rd, behind City Café & Pastry, Bole Milk House is a perfect place to warm up for an evening on the town. There's a camp fire by the outdoor bar and Western music that you don't have to scream over.

Tei Beats

If authentic experiences are what you're after, then there's no better place than a tej beat (pronounced 'tedj bet') to down the famed golden elixir (honey wine). Traditionally for men, women should keep low profiles. They lack signs, so ask locals for directions.

Topia Tej Beat (💬 10am-10pm) Off Haile Gebreselassie Rd, tucked up an alley behind the Axum Hotel, this is Addis' top tej beat and the only one to serve pure honey tej. A small

flask (Birr3.50) on an empty stomach had our heads spinning.

Yegebawal Tej Beat (🕑 10am-10pm) For a more rough-and-ready experience, head for Yegebawal Tej Beat off Lorenzo Tezaz St. The tej is dirt cheap, but it's not pure as sugar has been added.

ENTERTAINMENT Niahtclubs

Addis' nightlife is slowly maturing, with modern clubs joining the circuit, and music almost gaining prominence over prostitution. Cover charges vary between Birr15 and Birr30. You'll drop Birr15 to Birr20 per drink.

Male travellers beware, most single Ethiopian women encountered are still prostitutes.

Divine (2nd fl, Sheger Bldg, Cameroon St) Slip into a sleek leather lounger, sip a cocktail and groove to heavy hip-hop and rap in this slick new nightclub.

Club Illusion (cnr Ras Desta Damtew & Itegue Taitu St; M Thu-Sat) This is Addis' most raucous club. It's below the Ambassador Theatre.

D-Cave Club (Bevene Abasebsib St: Y Thu-Sat) Lurking in southwest Addis Ababa, D-Cave hosts well-known DJs most weekends. Music ranges from Ethiopian to hip-hop and drum and base.

Off Bole Rd, Memo Club is another of Addis' hot spots. Sadly, it's also popular with expats shopping for prostitutes.

Azmari Beats

Yewedale (Zewditu St) Thanks to some of the city's best azmaris (see below) performing here, this place is resoundingly popular and you may have trouble finding a seat. There's no sign, so just look for the thatched twin-peaked roof above its entrance.

AZMARI ACTION

An ancient entertainment that continues today is that provided by the azmari (wandering minstrel) and his masenko (singlestringed fiddle). Within azmari beats, azmaris prance around grass-covered floors and sing about everything from history and sex, to your funny haircut. Although you won't understand a word (it's all in Amharic), you'll end up laughing. And remember two things: it's all in good fun and hair always grows back!

Fendika Azmari Beat (Zewditu St) This azmari beat rivals Yewedale and is only a few minutes' walk down the street.

SHOPPING

Most cheap souvenir stalls sit around Churchill Ave and the Piazza – haggling is always the way of the day!

Haileselassie Alemayehu (Churchill Ave) This shop sells a wide array of items, like paintings, baskets, icons, woodcarvings and traditional clothing. Thanks to fixed (and fair) prices, there's no hassle here.

Entoto Market (Entoto Ave) Interested in picking up some blankets or traditional clothing like a shamma (toga)? Head to these street stalls a few hundred metres north of Botswana St and the Spanish embassy. Unlike Churchill Ave or the Piazza, this is where the locals do their shopping.

Ato Basket shop (Mauritania St) Southwest of the centre, on the roadside, is Addis' best place for baskets.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Ethiopian Airlines (www.flyethiopian.com) is the only domestic carrier, regularly serving over a dozen Ethiopian destinations. They have numerous offices around Addis Ababa. See relevant cities. Getting There & Away sections for fares from Addis.

For information regarding international carriers serving Addis, see p675.

Bus

Journeys less than 150km are served from the central short-distance bus station (Ras Mekonen Ave), while longer journeys depart from Auto**bus Terra** (Central African Republic St), northwest of Merkato. Buses for the following destinations leave officially at 6.30am:

Destination	Fare (Birr)	Duration
Aksum	109.70	2½ days
Arba Minch	51.50	12 hours
Awasa	28.75	6 hours
Bahir Dar via Dangala	60.75	1½ days
Bahir Dar via Mota	56.35	12 hours
Dire Dawa	52.65	11 hours
Gonder	82.50	2 days
Jinka	84.35	2 days
Lalibela	75	2 days
Moyale	79	1½ days

SHOPPING FOR A CAUSE

There are shops that are a great way to support the city's hard-working less fortunate. At Alert Handicraft Shop (20113 211518; 🕑 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat), the Berhan Taye Leprosy Disabled Persons Work Group produce and sell beautiful items emblazoned with vibrant embroidery. Former Women's Fuelwood Carriers Project (9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat), a modest little shop tucked about 300m west of Entoto Market, sells colourful hand-woven shawls.

Minibus

Speedy minibuses serving Bahir Dar and Gonder are cropping up more and more. There's no station per se, but commission ere of a gents patrol for cusca Aotel in Piazza. Prices are negotiate that locals usually pay from Birr120 to Birr150 for Bahir Dar and Birr150 to Birr180 for Conder.

Trains used to be scheduled to depart for Dire Dawa (Birr75/55/41 in 1st/2nd/3rd class) at 3pm Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, though they rarely ever left on time now they're not leaving at all. Currently only the Dire Dawa-Djibouti City section is operating.

GETTING AROUND

There's an extensive network of blue-andwhite minibuses servicing Addis that is efficient and cheap. Stopping at most major intersections, journeys cost from Birr0.55 to Birr1.25.

Taxis are also everywhere. Journeys up to 3km usually cost Birr20 (more at night), while medium/long journeys cost Birr30/50. If you share, the normal fare is split between passengers.

Bole International Airport, located just 5km southeast of the city centre, is regularly served by both taxis (Birr25 to Birr50) and minibuses.

NTO (a 0115 151722; Hilton Hotel, Menelik II Ave) offers airport pick-ups and drop-offs in a Mercedes-Benz for a reasonable Birr44 (Birr55 after midnight).

NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

BAHIR DAR

pop 166,900

Although this is one of Ethiopia's most attractive towns, you'll have trouble not turning your back on it. Just like us, you'll helplessly gravitate down wide palm-lined boulevards to Lake Tana's gorgeous shore and once there, you'll nary a look over your shoulder.

It's a great place to spend some days. Besides sights around town, you're on the doorstep of Lake Tana's mystical monasteries.

Information

Sights & Activities

Though lounging lakeside and watching pelicans skirting the surface might be a relaxing pastime, a more rewarding day is spent exploring Lake Tana's famous **monasteries** (admission to each Birr20 to Birr50) lurking on 20 of its islands. Many date from the late 16th or early 17th century, though some may have been the site of pre-Christian shrines.

Boat operators abound and shifty commission agents lurk everywhere. Negotiated prices (for one to five people) range from Birr120 for a 90-minute trip to Birr1000 for 11 hours in a 40HP speedboat. Ensure your boat has life jackets and spare fuel.

The Blue Nile snakes out of Lake Tana's southern end, plummeting 30km later over the **Blue Nile Falls** (admission Birr15, personal video cameras Birr100; ⁽¹⁾ 7am-5.30pm). Named by locals *Tis Isat* (water that smokes), the once-mighty falls have now withered like an aged chain smoker, thanks to a hydroelectric project. Can you say 'Water with emphysema' in Amharic? Still, it's a pretty picnic spot with many parrots, touracos, white-throated seedeaters and vervet monkeys. Buses (Birr4.20, one bumpy hour) access Tis Abay, a nearby village. The Ghion Hotel arranges tours.

Other interests include Bahir Dar's **market** and a massive new **war memorial**, near the Blue Nile bridge a few kilometres northeast, dedicated to those who died fighting the Derg.

Sleeping

Enkutatash Hotel (**c** 0582 204435; d/tw Birr40/50) Just west of town, this hotel has rooms that sport rugs, mosquito nets, cold-water showers and tiny 'verandas'.

Bahir Dar Hotel (**b** 0582 200788; d with/without bathroom Birr50/40) Behind the telecommunications office, offering simple and clean rooms. Only private showers are hot, and noise rises on weekends.

Ghion Hotel ((2) 0582 200111; ghionbd@ethionet.et; camp site Bir33, d & tw Bir75-125; (1)) Though tired and worn like your favourite travel socks, there's no denying Ghion's lakeside setting is beautiful. Room sizes vary and prices are negotiable. Mosquitos are problematic – bring mozzie nets. It's perfect for campers.

Tana Hotel ((20) 0582 200554; ghion@ethionet.et; s/tw/ ste US\$38/50/75; (20) Lakeside, just north of town, Tana's rooms offer sunset lake views. Rooms are somewhat stylish, with embroidered bedding and satellite TVs.

Summerland Hotel (© 0582 206566; www.enjoy bahirdar.com; s/d/tw Bir238/361/375) What it lacks in character, Summerland makes up for in comfort and cleanliness. Sparkling tile floors, gleaming bathrooms, satellite TVs, mosquito nets, the odd bit of marble and balconies are all up for grabs.

Eating

Tana Pastry (mains Birr4-12) Good for a pastry or omelette. Locals rate the cheap fresh fish.

Bahir Dar Hotel (mains Birr7-12) For local atmosphere and great Ethiopian fare, nowhere beats this hotel's courtyard. Sit under the stars, enjoy the music (and bonfires on weekends) and dine for pennies.

Dib Anbessa Restaurant (mains Birr13-24) A wideranging menu, with everything from *minchet abesh* (a thick minced-meat stew) to Hungarian goulash and American meatloaf. The Indian curry was pleasantly surprising.

Drinking & Entertainment

A lakeside drink is as mandatory as it is enjoyable. The garden at **Tana Hotel** (beer Birr10) is tops for sunset views, while **Mango Park** (beer Birr5) is best for local atmosphere. For something to knock you off your feet, visit the hole-in-the-wall *araki* (grain spirit) bars near the bus station.

If you'd like an entertaining cultural experience with *azmaris* (see boxed text, p662) and a good laugh, visit **Balageru Cultural Club** (admission free, beer Birr6). Brave the dance floor and you'll win lots of friends.

Getting There & Around

Ethiopian Airlines (**C** 0582 200020) has daily flights to Addis Ababa (US\$78, 30 minutes), Gonder (US\$37, 17 minutes), Lalibela (US\$61, 1¼ hours) and Aksum (US\$86, two to three hours).

Two daily buses serve Addis Ababa (via Debre Markos Birr61, 1½ days; via Mota Birr57, 12 hours). There are morning buses to Gonder (Birr23, four hours). Minibuses serve Addis Ababa (Birr120 to Birr150, six hours) and Gonder (Birr30, three hours); ask your hotel.

A ferry sails Sunday for Gorgora (Birr105, 1½ days), on Lake Tana's northern shore. The **Marine Authority office** ((2) 0582 200730; (2) dosed Sun) sells tickets.

Bikes are perfect for exploring; hire one just south of Tana Pastry (Birr3 per hour). An airport taxi costs Birr40.

GONDER

pop 158,000

Friends may not believe that beneath the shadows of 17th-century African castles you slipped into a classic Italian Art Deco café for a *macchiato*. But savouring the surreal experience is what's important. Laden with classical centuries-old stone castles and palaces, it's easy to see how Gonder rightfully earned the moniker 'Africa's Camelot'. It's a great place to spend a few days, and makes a convenient base from which to leap into the Simien Mountains.

Information

Fairly spread out, Gonder is still a great place to navigate on foot. Piazza marks the town centre and it hosts banks, internet cafés, the post office and **Birhan Tesfa Clini**c (☎ 0581115943; 24hr), Gonder's best medical facility. Just east of Piazza is the **Tourist information cen**tre (☎ 0581110022; amhtour@ethionet.et; № 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat), with information and city guides (Birr150 per day).

Sights

It's hard not to notice Gonder's impressive **Royal Enclosure** (admission Birr50, personal video cameras Birr75; 🕑 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30pm-5.30pm), with its castles and high stone walls sitting streetside. Constructed piecemeal by successive emperors between the mid-17th and mid-18th centuries, Unesco declared the entire 70,000-sq-metre site a World Heritage site in 1979.

Free 90-minute guided tours (tips are expected) are worthwhile and available weekdays. On weekends, local licensed guides loiter near the gate and charge about Birr30 (post negotiations).

Around 2km northwest lies **Fasiladas' Bath** (admission ind in Royal Enclosure ticket; 💬 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm), a shady, beautiful and historic spot attributed to Emperors Fasiladas (r 1632–67) and Iyasu I (r 1682–1706). Until fully restored (a five-year project financed by Norway for Birr6.4 million) in 2008, we won't call it peaceful, though it's worth visiting.

Head 1.5km further west and explore the underrated **Empress Mentewab's Kuskuam Complex** (admission Birr25, personal video cameras Birr75; 💮 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm). It was built in 1730 for the redoubtable Empress Mentewab, upon her husband's death. Although less preserved than the Royal Enclosure, the complex offers an impressive mix of countryside views, each dramatically framed by its crumbling remnants.

Another great sight is the church of **Debre Berhan Selassie** (admission Birr25; 🏵 6am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm), an easy stroll 2km northeast of town. Despite its walls hosting the nation's most vibrant ecclesiastical artwork, it's the ceiling that captures most visitors' imaginations. Think of Mona Lisa's smile and multiply it 104 times!

Sleeping

Fasil Hotel ((2) 0581 110221; d/tw without bathroom Birr50/60) The Italian-feeling, top-floor rooms are huge, bright and airy. The shared showers are hot and usually clean. It's occasionally a little noisy.

Belegez Pension (**b** 0581 114356; s/d Birr70/80, d without bathroom Birr60) Simple smallish rooms surround a paved private courtyard that's perfect for parking your tired truck. Bright, clean rooms with toilets and hot showers offer Ethiopia's best budget-hotel towels – huge and soft! Too bad the pillows are exactly the opposite! Reservations are wise.

Misrak Pension (a 0581 110069; d Birr100) Prices here are entirely faranji-fied however the rooms are spotless and all have comfortable mattresses.

Fogera Hotel (🕿 0581 110405; s/tw/tr US\$20/25/35) While the rooms in the old Italian building beg for renovations, the comfortable garden tukuls (conical thatched huts) have aged well. Each has high ceilings and hot-water showers.

Goha Hotel (200581 110634; ghion@ethionet.et; s/tw/ste US\$38/50/75) While wall-hangings and embroidered bedding are nice, views from rooms 201 to 209 steal the show. Unquestionably Gonder's top hotel.

Eating

Mini Fogera (mains Birr8-12; 🕑 lunch & dinner) The cement stalls won't win your bottom's approval, but the Ethiopian fare may win your stomach's.

Goha Hotel (mains Birr16-23; N breakfast, lunch & dinner) Dine on roast lamb, fish cutlet, lentil soup or other Western favourites in Goha's massive, bright dining room. Habesha Kitfo (mains Birr17-35; 🏵 lunch & dinner) A

great place for great Ethiopian food, lovingly

and traditionally decked out with woven mat floor, cowhide stools and leather chairs. Vegetarian fasting food is available daily. There are plenty of cafés for quick eats, and the Ras Dashen Supermarket (💬 8am-9pm) is perfect for stocking up on Simien Mountain

supplies. Drinking

To unwind with a drink, nowhere is better than the terrace at Goha Hotel (beer Birr7). For cheaper beer and perfectly frothed cappuccinos, slide into the classic Italian Abyssinia Café (drinks Birr1.50-4.50). For more action, wade into the well-known Abkeilish Tej Beat (bottles of tej Birr5) for some *tej*.

Getting There & Away

Ethiopian Airlines (2 0581 110129) flies once or twice daily to Addis Ababa (US\$102, 11/2 to two hours), Bahir Dar (US\$37, 17 minutes), Lalibela (US\$51, 30 minutes) and Aksum (US\$73, 1³/₄ hours). Taxis to/from the airport cost between Birr30 and Birr40.

Buses serve Addis Ababa (Birr83, two days' duration) and Bahir Dar (Birr22, four hours, three daily); for Aksum, go to Shire first (Birr40.60, 11 hours) on the 6am bus.

SIMIEN MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

No matter how you look at them, the Simien Mountains will leave you speechless. For trekkers, silence is the result of their lungs screaming after slogging up a scree slope for 4200m. For animal-lovers, it's the trepidation of sitting among 100 gelada baboons that zaps their vocabulary. For everyone with a heartbeat, it's simply standing atop a panoramic precipice and overlooking the Abyssinian abyss that takes the breath away.

Be it a two-day stroll to Sankaber, a fiveday jaunt to Chenek or ten-day trek to Ras Dashen (4543m), these mountains make a terrific break from the historical-circuit's constant monument-bashing. Besides baboons, the park also hosts a variety of endemic mammals, birds and plants, including the beautiful, massively horned walia ibex. Unsurprisingly, the park is a World Heritage Site.

Camping equipment, guides, mandatory scouts, cooks, mules and mule-handlers are all easily arranged at park headquarters (🖻 0581 113482; admission Birr50, camp site Birr20, 5-seat vehicle Birr10; 1 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri. 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Sat & Sun) in Debark. Note that all park fees cover 48 hours. All in, including food and rented camping and cooking equipment, Birr170 per person per day (in a group of two) should suffice.

While in Debark, sleep and eat at the Simien Park Hotel (🖻 0581 113481; tw Birr70, s/d/tw without bathroom Birr30/40/50). For a treat on the mountains, try the new luxury ecofriendly Simien Lodge (🖻 0116 189398, 0911 203937; www.simiens.com; dm US\$15-20, d US\$95-105, 4-person VIP tukul US\$135-150) at Buyit Ras.

Two morning buses run between Debark and Gonder (Birr14, 31/2 hours). For Shire (and Aksum) head to Gonder and hope the Gonder-Shire bus has an empty seat (Birr35, 7½ hours).

If you have limited time, 4WDs can be arranged in Gonder to drop you off at Debark (Birr450, two hours), Sankaber (Birr850, 31/2 hours) or Chenek (Birr1000, five hours).

AKSUM pop 41,500

Sprawling, dusty, and rural - Aksum is modest almost to a fault. Initially, it's hard to imagine that it was ever the site of a great civilisation. Yet Aksum is one of Ethiopia's stars. Littered with massive teetering stelae, ruined palaces, underground tombs (most

undiscovered) and inscriptions rivalling the Rosetta Stone itself, the town once formed part of the Aksumite kingdom described as the last of the great civilisations of Antiquity to be revealed to modern knowledge'. It's undoubtedly one of sub-Saharan Africa's most important and spectacular ancient sites, and Unesco lists Aksum as a World Heritage site.

Aksum has a vibrancy, life and continuing national importance very rarely found at ancient sites. Pilgrims still journey to Aksum, and most Ethiopians believe passionately that the Ark of the Covenant resides here.

To do Aksum justice, schedule a bare minimum of two days, or one full day with a vehicle.

Information

Along the two main streets you'll find several banks, health clinics and internet cafés, along with a post office, telecommunications office and the very helpful Tigrai Tourism Commission (🖻 0347 753924; 🕑 8am-noon & 1-5pm).

Siahts

One admission ticket (adult/student Birr50/25) lasts the duration of your stay, covering all sights within Aksum's immediate vicinity, except the St Mary of Zion church compound. Tickets and guides are available at the Tigrai Tourism Commission.

Ancient Aksum obelisks (stelae) pepper the area, and looking down on a small specimen or staring up at a grand tower, you'll be bowled over. The Northern stelae field is grandest, with over 120 stelae ranging from 1m to 33m. Beneath the rising monoliths are a series of tombs; 98% remain undiscovered. A new museum is planned here.

Immediately southwest are the St Mary of Zion Churches (admission Birr60, personal video cameras Birr100; 🕑 8am-noon & 2-6pm), Ethiopia's holiest shrine. The rectangular old church was built on the site of a 4th-century Aksumite church by Emperor Fasiladas, Gonder's founder, in 1665. A carefully guarded chapel nearby reportedly contains the Ark of the Covenant. Don't try to peek, many unfortunate onlookers have 'burst into fire' upon approach!

On a small hill 1.8km northeast of the Northern stelae field, offering views of Adwa's distant jagged mountains, are the monumental 6th-century Tombs of Kings Kaleb and Gebre Meskel. En route, you will pass by King Ezana's

Inscription, hiding in a timber shack. Dating to the 4th century, it's the Ethiopian equivilent of the Rosetta Stone, a pillar inscribed in Sabaean, Greek and Ge'ez (the ancestor of Amharic).

Other important sites roundabout include King Bazen's Tomb and the remains of a 6thor 7th-century palace, wrongly attributed to Queen Sheba. Rewarding side trips include the ruins of Yeha, Debre Damo monastery and the rock-hewn churches of Tigray - enquire at Tigrai Tourism.

Festivals & Events

On 30 November thousands of pilgrims flood into Aksum to celebrate Mary during the Festival of Maryam Zion. Expect a cornucopia of music and dance.

Sleeping

Africa Hotel (🖻 0347 753700; africaho@ethionet.et; d/tw Birr50/70, d without bathroom Birr30; 🛄) Rooms are simple and bright enough, with soft beds and very clean private bathrooms.

Kaleb Hotel (@ 0347752222; d/tw Birr50/70, s without bathroom Birr30) Flanking a quiet garden court-yard, rooms here are large and quite pleasant, though the bathrooms are aging.

Yeha Hotel (🖻 0347 752378; ghion@ethionet.et; s/d/ste US\$38/50/75) The comfortable rooms are cosy, containing satellite TVs. Rooms 127 to 133 and 226 and suites 228, 230 and 232 offer sunset views over town.

Remhai Hotel (🖻 0347 751501; www.remhai-hotel .com; s Birr128-305, d Birr170-395, ste Birr475; 🔲 😰) Zero character, though squeaky clean and full of extras. Nonguests can patrol the pool for Birr15.

Other options:

Abinet Hotel (🖻 0357 753857; d/tw Birr50/100, d without bathroom Birr30)

Lalibela Hotel (🖻 0347 753541; d without bathroom Birr20)

Eating

Ask locals for the best place to eat, and they'll say the **Remhai Hotel** (mains Birr13-28; 🕅 breakfast, lunch & dinner). Ask them where they like to eat, and they'll say the Abinet Hotel (mains Birr12-17; 🕅 breakfast, lunch & dinner). Both do decent faranji and Ethiopian fare. Another favourite for local meals is **Tsega Cafe & Restaurant** (mains Birr3-10; breakfast, lunch & dinner). For après-meal coffee or pastry, visit Axumawit Pastery (cakes Birr2) below Abinet.

Getting There & Away

Ethiopian Airlines (20 0347 752300) flies daily to Addis Ababa (US\$131, three hours) via Lalibela (US\$72, 40 minutes), Gonder (US\$73, two hours) and Bahir Dar (US\$86, 2½ hours). Airport taxis cost Birr40; Birr10 if 'shared'.

Go to Shire (Birr10, 1½ hours), for buses to Gonder and Debark (Simien Mountains). Regular buses cover Adwa (Birr5, 45 minutes), Adigrat (Birr20 to Birr25, five hours) and Mekele (Birr35, 8½ hours).

DANAKIL DEPRESSION

Farwell earth, hello to Venus! With several points 100m below sea level, the Danakil Depression has a reputation as one of earth's most inhospitable places. Temperatures can hit 50°C, and with its underlying continental crust pulled thin (as part of the rift system), it's peppered with countless colourful sulphurous springs and an astonishing 25% of Africa's active volcanoes.

Irta'ale (613m), the most famous volcano, has been continuously erupting since 1967. Its small southerly crater holds the planet's only permanent lava lake.

An excursion into this harsh and astounding world isn't something everyone can handle. It is, however, something nobody will ever forget. It's best at its coolest (December to February).

Organise trips through travel agents in Addis Ababa (p657) or through G.K. Ahadu Tours & Travel Agency (2 0344 406466; gkahadu@ethionet .et) in Mekele. Treat journeys here as serious expeditions: the unprepared have perished in hours.

LALIBELA

pop 8500

ETHIOPIA

An ancient world, including 11 magnificent, medieval, rock-hewn churches, dimly lit passageways, hidden crypts and grottoes, was carved into the red volcanic rock underlying this remote Ethiopian town almost a millennia ago by the Zagwe dynasty. Today that world remains, frozen in stone.

Lalibela, a World Heritage site, undoubtedly ranks among the greatest religioushistorical sites in the Christian world.

Information

Facilities are limited to a post office, telecommunications office, health centre (🖻 0333 360416; 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm), helpful tourism office

(🕿 0333 360167; 🕑 8am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) and a few internet cafés. There are no banks.

Sights

Lalibela's rock-hewn churches (admission Birr100, personal video cameras Birr150; 🕑 8am-5.30pm) astound for three main reasons: many are not carved into the rock, but freed entirely from it (unlike most of Petra); the buildings are so refined; and so many exist within such a small area. Descend into tunnels, and pass traditional priests and monks floating through the confines like clouds of incense, smell beeswax candles and hear chanting within the deep, cool recesses, only to find yourself standing in the sunlight, slack-jawed staring up at a structure that defies reason.

Although visiting without a guide is possible - getting lost in the warren of tunnels is quite memorable and usually not permanent you'll miss many of the amazing subtleties each church has to offer. The tourism office has licensed guides (Birr150 per day).

For insight into Highlander life, contact the local charity Tourism in Ethiopia for Sustainable Future Alternatives (TESFA; 🖻 0111 140583; www.com munity-tourism-ethiopia.com), which offers rewarding treks south of Lalibela.

Sleeping

Asheton Hotel (🖻 0333 360030; tw Birr100, s without bathroom Birr50) Though aging, the clean twin rooms, with whitewashed walls, local art and embroidered bedding, have more character than any other budget option.

Heaven Guest House (🖻 0333 360075; s/tw US\$10/15, tw without bathroom US\$10) This new place is very clean, and the friendly owner is keen to keep it that way. Wood ceilings overlook shiny linoleum 'wood' floors and sturdy, comfortable beds.

Seven Olives Hotel (🖻 0333 360020; s/d US\$15/27.50) Now privately run, prices have dropped US\$10 despite quality improving. The oldish, large rooms and bathrooms have comfy new beds.

Roha Hotel (🖻 0333 360009; ghion@ethionet.et; camp site per 2-person tent US\$12.50, s/d/ste US\$38/50/75) A hike in the architectural beauty department, it's a lovely option with great facilities. Rooms 220 to 229 have sunset views. Campers can access hot showers.

Other options:

Lalibela Hotel (🕿 0333 360036; s/tw Birr50/100) Blue Lal Hotel (🕿 0333 360380; d & tw Birr120-150) Tukol Village (🗃 0333 360564; camp site per tent US\$4, s/d US\$20/30) Lal Hotel (🖻 0333 360008; laltour@ethionet.et; camp

site Birr60, s/d US\$30/36)

Eating & Drinking

Unique Restaurant (mains Birr4-10; 🕥 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Opposite the Asheton Hotel, this dark, understated little restaurant, serving cheap tasty Ethiopian dishes, has rave reviews from several readers.

John Cafeteria & Lalibela Restaurant (mains Birr7-16; Y breakfast, lunch & dinner) These neighbours share a kitchen and menu. Birr10 lands you an omelette with toast, local honey and a steaming macchiato.

Seven Olives Hotel (mains Birr16-32; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner) An Ethiopian chef with American experience was training staff to go beyond usual faranji fare when we stayed here. The terrace makes a good spot for a cold sunset drink.

Askalech Tej House (flask of tej Birr5) 'Torpedo' serves tej of varying potency. There's usually traditional music after 7pm.

Getting There & Away

Ethiopian Airlines (2 0333 360046) flies daily to Addis Ababa (US\$102, 21/2 hours), Gonder (US\$51, 30 minutes), Bahir Dar (US\$61, 1¼ hours) and Aksum (US\$72, 40 minutes). Most midrange hotels offer airport transfers (Birr25 to Birr30 one way).

Overland, the best approach is currently from Woldia via Gashema. Two buses depart Lalibela daily at 6am heading for Woldia (Birr25, five to seven hours), with one continuing to Addis Ababa (Birr75, two days) after overnighting in Dessie (Birr39, 81/2 to 10 hours).

EASTERN ETHIOPIA

DIRE DAWA

pop 260,000

Ethiopia's second-most populous town, Dire Dawa always elicits strong reactions. Some travellers rave about its remarkably spacious and orderly layout (a rarity in Ethiopia), its tree-lined streets, neat squares and colonial buildings, while others think it's utilitarian and self-contained.

Sure, Dire Dawa lacks Harar's charisma, but if you don't dismiss it you'll discover it has its fair share of beguiling sights and some inviting quarters.

With Babel-like ambience, the enormous Kafira Market, in Megala, is the town's most striking sight. Attracting Afar herders, Somali pastoralists, Oromo farmers and, sometimes around dawn, large camel caravans from the Somali desert.

If you are staying on, Mekonen Hotel (🖻 0251 113348; Kezira; r without bathroom Birr40), housed in an old Italian colonial building opposite the train station, features some rooms with plenty of space and some with balconies overlooking the square. The shared bathrooms (with cold showers) can be slightly on the scummy side. A minor trek from the town centre, Tsehay Hotel & Restaurant (🗃 0251 110023; Kezira; r Birr60) features cleanish rooms around pleasant, hedged gardens. When we stayed, the plumbing seemed to be on agony's brink but was still functioning. Its best asset is the onsite restaurant.

Paradiso Restaurant (🖻 0251 113780: Kezira: mains Birr15-20; Y breakfast, lunch & dinner) is the town's most respected restaurant. Its menu roves from palatable Italian to traditional gut-busters, such as *kitfo* (uncooked minced beef or lamb in butter, *berbere* and sometimes thyme).

Getting There & Away

Ethiopian Airlines (🖻 0251 113069: Kezira) flies daily between Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa (US\$99, one hour). Four flights per week serve Jijiga (US\$55, 15 minutes).

Daily buses serve Addis Ababa (Birr54, 12 hours) via Awash (Birr43, nine hours), while copious minibuses go to Harar (Birr10, one hour).

HARAR

pop 91,000

Harar is a place apart. Located south of the Chercher Mountains, this sensational city will blast your senses. The old walled city, with 368 alleyways squeezed into just 1 sq km, 87 mosques and shrines, coffee scents wafting through the streets, animated markets, superb architecture, charming people and unique ambience, will make you feel like you're floating through another time and space. As if that's not enough, an otherworldly ritual takes place nightly outside the walls: men feeding hyenas. Don't be confused: it's not a touristy show, it's a tradition.

A bit like Zanzibar, Harar appeals to spiritual seekers and hedonists. Despite shortcomings (read: poverty and minor hassles), you'll fall in love with this gem of a city – at least we did.

Information

There are several internet cafés and a Commercial Bank near Harar Gate. The **tourist office** (C 0256661763; new town; S 8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri) sits within the Harari People National Regional State Trade & Industry building in the new town.

Sleeping

Most commendable places are outside the old town.

Tewodros Hotel ((2000) 0256 660217; new town; d Birr50-70) Room with a hyena view... No joke! At night, from rooms 15, 16, 117 and 18, you'll watch hyenas rummaging behind the hotel. Oh, rooms are tidy and some have hot showers. Avoid the grotty rooms downstairs. It's a wee walk from Harar Gate. **Belayneh Hotel** (20056 662030; fax 0256 666222;

new town; s/d Birr115/138) A popular place near the bus station. A little mundane, it nonetheless offers sizable rooms with bathrooms that won't have you squirming. If you snaffle a room with a Christian market view, how can you complain? **Rewda Guesthouse** (20256 662211: old town: r with

Rewda Guesthouse (20256662211; old town; r with shared bathroom ind breakfast Bin200-300) Enter at your own risk: you may never leave again! This cocoonlike guesthouse occupies an old Harari house in the absolute heart of the old town (ask somebody to guide you). Rest your head in one of the two well-kept rooms, and marvel at the thoughtfully decorated common areas. Throw in Rewda's warm welcome and you have a winner. Reservations are crucial.

Eating

Rose Cafe & Restaurant (new town; mains Birr10-15; Direakfast, lunch & dinner) The closest thing Harar has to a hip café. Munch on various snacks, including pasta and burgers, or start the day with an omelette or scrambled eggs. There's also bait for the sweet-toothed. Pretty-in-pink waitresses complete this very rosy picture.

Hirut Restaurant ((2) 2256 660419; new town; mains Birr15-25; (2) breakfast, lunch & dinner) A cheery, authentic place to savour Ethiopian dishes, pasta and various grills. Sink into a super-filling *kwanta firfir* (dried strips of beef in chilli and *berbere*) and knock it down with some Gouder wine, if you're game. Service was a tad amateurish the day we ate.

Rewda Café (new town) Drool over the devilish display of cakes and pastries in this sleek venture. It's also good for breakfast, with good choices of eggs and sandwiches.

Ice Cream Mermaid (old town) A peaceful refuge from the crowded strip nearby, this holein-the-wall joint concocts flavoursome ice creams and filling cakes. If you need a vitamin fix, it prepares refreshing fruit juices.

Drinking

If you're pining for a good, fresh beer, Harar is seventh heaven. There's a smattering of buzzing watering holes, like **Samsun Hotel** (old town) and **GC Pub** (old town), which both sit near Harar Gate. If you feel like everlasting memories of Harari coffee – hailed as one of the world's best – try **Ali Bal Cafe** (Feres Magala) in old town's core.

Entertainment

National Hotel (new town) Hallelujah! Live music Thursday to Sunday from 9.30pm to 2am or 3am. It's a mixture of Ethiopian/Middle Eastern pop, with traditional tunes thrown in. When not playing, there's soccer on a bigscreen TV – much less exotic.

Shopping

Nure Roasted Harar Coffee (20256 663136; S Mon-Sat) Just thinking about the scents wafting from this place makes us swoon. One step inside, and you're hooked forever (1kg packets cost Birr45).

In some of the old town's Adare houses, souvenir shops display beautifully made baskets, and silver and amber jewellery. Remember to bargain!

Getting There & Around

All transport leaves from the bus station near Harar Gate. Bountiful minibuses link to Dire Dawa (Birr10, one hour). Seven daily buses serve Jijiga (Birr13, 2½ to three hours) via Babille (Birr8, 45 minutes), while two access Addis Ababa (Birr55, one day). Buy tickets a day early. Several minibuses also serve Addis Ababa (Birr100, nine to 10 hours) – ask at vour hotel.

Shared/contract taxis cost Birr1/5 for short hops.

SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

RIFT VALLEY LAKES

Africa's renowned Rift Valley cuts through the south, and hosts lakes, astounding birdlife and national parks.

Less than 180km from Addis Ababa is a cluster of four Rift Valley lakes: **Lake Ziway**, **Lake Abiata**, **Lake Shala** and **Lake Langano**. While they're all known as havens for bird-watching, only Lake Langano has the double benefit of being safe for swimming (bilharzia and crocodile free). The volcanic Lake Shala, part of **Lake Abiata-Shala National Park** (admission per 48hr Birr50), is easily the most attractive, with trails leading to lookouts.

Awasa, southern Ethiopia's largest city, is 100km further south and sits on the shores of attractive Lake Awasa. With plenty of facilities, a great fish market and row boats to boot, Awasa is a great place to stop.

The wildest and most attractive of southern Ethiopia's lakes must be **Lake Abaya** and **Lake Chamo**. They are ringed by savannah plains, loaded with crocodiles and divided by the 'Bridge of God', which hosts Ethiopia's best safari opportunity, **Nechisar National Park** (admission Birr70, vehide Birr20), as well as the infamous **crocodile market**.

Sleeping & Eating LAKE LANGANO

Bekele Mola Hotel ((2) 0981 190011, 0911 486014; camp site Birr33, 1-/2-/3-bedroom bungalows Birr208/276/346) Unlike Bishangari's secludedness, accommodation is densely packed along the lake's southwestern shore. Rooms at Bekele Mola are old and simple, yet clean and sport mosquito nets. The restaurant (mains Birr33 to Birr45) serves up delicious tilapia (a freshwater fish).

Bishangari Lodge ((2) 0115 517533, 0911 201317; www.bishangari.com; s/tw US\$52/92, s/tw without bathroom US\$32/57, ste US\$63-109) Hyped as Ethiopia's first ecolodge, Bishangari is an amazing and comfortable place to stay. Rates listed include breakfast (an extra US\$20 per person will include a lovely lunch and dinner).

AWASA

Adenium Campsite ((a) 0462 212787; kuratujana@yahoo.de; camp site Birr20, tw with shared bathroom Birr60) Adenium is potentially Ethiopia's best budget accommodation and camp site. Although there are currently only two rooms, they're a haven of simplicity and artsy elegance. Cheaper huts in the flowering garden are coming soon. Meals are insanely delicious.

Gebrekiristos Hotel ((200780; d Birr63-76, tw Birr79) The Birr76 doubles are big, bright and boast balconies, satellite TVs, telephones, fridges and mozzie nets – angle for rooms 317 or 217.

ARBA MINCH

Arba Minch Tourist Hotel (© 0468 812171; fax 0468 813661; 5 Birr150, d Birr170-200) Lacking views and charging *faranjis* double, they distract you with spotless, modern rooms boasting satellite TVs, bright windows and quality furnishings. Facilities, including a pizza restaurant and juice bar, are everywhere.

Swayne's Hotel ((2006) 0468 811895; www.swayneshotel .com; camp site Birr50, s/tw Birr200/250) Woven Dorze huts envelop half the bungalows and give it a quirky, yet traditional feel. Colourful local artwork hangs from the modern rooms' walls, hand-carved wooden furniture sits on spotless floors and colourful lamps shine light on it all. Rooms 4 to 22 boast stunning lake views. The restaurant prepares the best Western fare in town.

Lemlem Hotel (mains Birr7-16) Sit under the trees and devour the best Ethiopian food in Arba Minch.

Getting There & Away

Ethiopian Airlines links Addis Ababa and Arba Minch (US\$81, 2¹/₂ hours).

Buses connect Addis Ababa with Lake Ziway (Birr17, three hours, three daily), Awasa (Birr28, 5½ hours, five daily), Lake Langano (jump off the Awasa-bound bus) and Arba Minch (Birr52, 12 hours).

LOWER OMO VALLEY

Hosting some of Africa's most fascinating and colourful ethnic groups, along with Ethiopia's worst roads, a trip to the country's remote southwest corner is as captivating as it is uncomfortable.

The landscape is diverse, ranging from dry, open savannah plains to riverine forests bordering the Omo and Mago Rivers. The vast Omo River meanders for nearly 1000km, eventually bisecting Ethiopia's largest, wildest and most inaccessible national parks: **Omo** and **Mago**.

It's here that ancient customs and traditions have remained almost entirely intact. Animism is still the religion, and some still practise a purely pastoral economy. Whether it's watching the Hamer people's Jumping of the Bulls ceremony or witnessing the Mursi's mystical stick fights and mind-blowing lip plates, your visit here will stick with you for a lifetime.

A good itinerary begins in Konso and takes you through the villages of Weyto, Arbore, Turmi, Omorate, Dimeka and Key Afar, before finishing at Iinka.

Jinka has decent facilities and most villages have some basic accommodation.

Ethiopian Airlines has flights linking Addis Ababa with Jinka (US\$94, 2¼ hours). Buses also run between the two cities (Birr85, two days). To get around, you'll have to hitch on local trucks or hire a 4WD.

BALE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

More than any other park, Bale Mountains National Park is known for wildlife. Over 60 mammal species and 260 bird species have been recorded here, including dozens of endemic species.

As you approach from Shashemene, eastern ridges are punctuated with fortresslike escarpments, while northern ones are gentler; their rounded rock pinnacles dotting the ridges like worn teeth protruding from an old man's gums. Within the park, rivers cut deep gorges, alpine lakes feed streams, and water accepts gravity's fate at several waterfalls. In the lower hills, Highlanders canter along century-old paths on their richly caparisoned horses, and the noise of shepherds cracking their whips echoes around the valley.

You can arrange one- to six-day treks at park headquarters in Dinsho, though you'll need your own equipment. Park fees are similar to Simien Mountains (p666).

From Addis Ababa, catch a bus to Robe (Birr48, 12 hours) and leap off in Dinsho.

ETHIOPIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Finding accommodation in Ethiopia is easy. Finding accommodation that won't curl your toes is tiring work - thankfully we've done most of that!

Budget options (US\$1 to US\$20 per night), with spartan rooms and shared toilets, domi-

PRACTICALITIES

- The best-known English-language newspapers are the Ethiopian Herald and the privately-owned Monitor.
- Radio Ethiopia broadcasts in English weekday afternoons and evenings.
- Ethiopia's ETV1 channel broadcasts in English from 10.30pm to midnight. Many hotels' and restaurants' satellite TVs receive BBC or CNN.
- Electricity supply is 220V. Sockets vary from European continental two-pin to South African/Indian-style with two circular metal pins above a large circular grounding pin.
- Ethiopia uses the metric system.

nate. Only major cities provide midrange options (US\$20 to US\$50), which are usually clean and quiet, but run-down. True top-end picks (US\$50 and up) are limited to Addis Ababa. Ethiopians call rooms with a double bed 'singles' and rooms with twin beds 'doubles'. We use typical Western interpretations in our reviews.

Outside of national parks there are few camp sites. Some hotels allow camping, though it's not much cheaper than decent rooms.

ACTIVITIES

With two gorgeous 4000m mountain ranges and countless other peaks hosting unique wildlife, it's little wonder that trekking is a major activity. There's also plenty of rockclimbing potential. The waterways churning through Ethiopia's topographic delights host fine rafting and fishing. Lastly, Ethiopia's plethora of endemic and migratory birds makes it a world-class birding destination.

BOOKS

Donald N Levine's imaginative Wax & Gold provides outstanding insight into Amharic culture, though chapter six is rather farfetched!

Graham Hancock's The Sign and the Seal delves into one of the greatest mysteries of all time: the bizarre 'disappearance' of the Ark of the Covenant.

In Prester Quest, Nicholas Jubber entertainingly voyages from Venice to Ethiopia on his quest to deliver - albeit 824 years late - Pope Alexander III's famed letter to Prester John, the mythical Christian king of the East.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks, post offices and telecommunications offices are open at least 8.30am to 11am and 1.30pm to 3.30pm weekdays and 8.30am to 11am Saturday. Government offices' hours are 8.30am to 12.30pm (to 11.30am Friday) and 1.30pm to 5.30pm Monday to Friday. Shop hours are 8.30am to 1.30pm and 2.30pm to 5.30pm weekdays.

CUSTOMS

There's no limit on foreign currency entering Ethiopia, but no more than Birr100 can be exported and imported. If you're bringing valuable items, like video cameras or laptop computers, you may have to register it on your passport at immigration.

Leaving with anything deemed historical is illegal.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Compared with many African countries, violent crime is rare; against travellers it's extremely rare. Petty theft is common in Addis Ababa, but is less common elsewhere.

Since the controversial 2005 elections, there have been isolated occasions of violent clashes and minor bombings in Addis Ababa. Check your government's travel advisories for upto-date security reports. Due to continued security issues around Gambella in western Ethiopia, the area should be avoided by tourists. The same can be said for Ethiopia's border areas with Somalia.

In the annovances department, Ethiopia has oodles of beggars, and travellers often resent being 'targeted' - follow locals' lead and give coins to disabled, ill, elderly and blind persons. If not, say igzabier yisteh/yistesh (m/f; God bless you) with a slight bow of the head. Never give to children, whether it be money, sweets, pens, empty water bottles or food.

Self-appointed guides can be annoying. Be polite but firm.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Ethiopian Embassies & Consulates

In Africa, Ethiopia has embassies in Djibouti (p630), Egypt (p121), Kenya (p710), Sudan (p210) and Uganda (p819).

Embassies elsewhere include the following: Australia (🖻 03-9417 3419; www.consul.com.au/index .html; 38 Johnston Street, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065) Canada (🗃 613-235 6637; Suite 210, 151 Slater St, Ottawa, K1P 5H3) France (🖻 01 47 83 83 95; embeth@starnet.fr; 35 Ave Charles Floquet, 75007, Paris) Germany (🖻 030-772 060; Boothstr 20a, 12207, Berlin) Ireland (201-677 7062; info@ethiopianembassy.ie; 1-3 Merrion House, Fitzwilliam St Lower, Dublin 2) Italy (🖻 06 440 36 53; embethrm@rdn.it; 16-18 Via Andrea Vesalio, 00161, Rome) UK (🖻 020-7589 7212; 17 Prince's Gate, London, SW7 IPZ) USA (202-364 1200; info@ethiopianembassy.org; 3506 International Drive, NW Washington DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Ethiopia

Embassies and consulates in Addis Ababa include the following: Belgium (🖻 0116 611643; embel.et@ethionet.et; Fikremaryam Abatechan St) Canada (🖻 0113 713022; addis@dfait-maeci.gc.ca; Seychelles St) Also represents Australia. Djibouti (🖻 0116 613006; 🕑 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Off Bole Rd. Egypt (2 0111 553077; egyptian.emb@ethionet.et; Madagascar St) Eritrea (🖻 0115 512844: Ras Mekonen Ave) Currently closed. France (2 0111 550066; amba.france@ethionet.et) Germany (🕿 0111 550433; german.emb.addis@ ethionet.et) Italy (2 0111 553042; italembadd@ethionet.et) Kenya (🖻 0116 610033; kenigad@ethionet.et; Fikremaryam Abatechan St; 🕑 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Netherlands (🖻 0113 711100; netherlands.emb@

ETHIOPIA

ethionet.et) It's off Ring Rd. Somaliland (🖻 0116 635921; btwn Bole Rd & Cam-

eroon St; 🕑 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-3.30pm Mon-Fri) Sudan (2 0115 516477; sudan.embassy@ethionet.et; Ras Lulseged St; 🕑 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

UK (🖻 0116 612354; britishembassy.addisababa@fco .gov.uk: Fikremarvam Abatechan St)

USA (🖻 0115 174000; http://addisababa.usembassy.gov; Algeria St)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Religious festivals, particularly Orthodox, are colourful events with pageantry, music and dancing. The most outstanding include the following:

Leddet (also known as Genna or Christmas) 6–7 January Timkat (Epiphany, celebrating Christ's baptism) 19 Januarv

lonelyplanet.com

Kiddus Yohannes (New Year's Day) 11 September Meskel (Finding of the True Cross) 27 September

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays can be divided into three categories: national secular holidays, Christian Orthodox festivals (p673) and Islamic holidays (p1106).

National secular holidays include: Victory of Adwa Commemoration Day 2 March International Labour Day 1 May Ethiopian Patriots' Victory Day (also known as 'Liberation Day') 5 May Downfall of the Derg 28 May

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet in Ethiopia is like a pimple on your wedding day - it's always found where everyone looks and never where nobody can see. In English? Internet is everywhere in Addis, pretty easy to spot in major towns and nonexistent in places that see few tourists.

Connections are slow and usually cost Birr0.20 to Birr0.30 per minute.

The most up-to-date Ethiopia map is produced by International Travel Maps (1998; 1:2,000,000).

MONEY

Ethiopia's currency is the birr.

US dollars are the best currency to carry, both in cash and travellers cheques, though euros are gaining popularity. You'll have no trouble exchanging cash or travellers cheques in most cities. There are no ATMs that accept foreign cards, and credit-card advances are only a costly possibility in Addis Ababa. Credit cards are accepted (with hefty commissions) at a few hotels in Addis Ababa, and airline offices.

Converting birr to US dollars or euros can only be done for people holding exchange receipts and onward air tickets from Ethiopia overlanders need to budget accordingly.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Many Ethiopians feel seriously threatened or compromised when cameras are pointed at them. Always ask permission, even if it's only using basic sign language. In other areas, like the Lower Omo Valley, you'll be chased by people demanding to have their photo taken! However, this eagerness relates to the fee they'll claim for each photo (Birr1 to Birr2 per person per picture). Always agree to an amount first.

POST

Ethiopia's postal system is reliable and reasonably efficient. Airmail costs Birr2 for postcards; Birr2 for a letter up to 20g to Africa, Birr2.45 to Europe and the Middle East, and Birr3.45 to the Americas, Australia and Asia. International parcels can only be sent from

the Addis Ababa's main post office.

SHOPPING

Addis Ababa is the shopping haven, though most villages' markets possess latent treasures. Traditional arts and crafts include basketware, paintings, musical instruments, pottery, hornwork, leatherwork and woodcarving.

Other crafts include metalwork (materials range from gold to iron) as well as weaving. Remember, exporting anything deemed historical is illegal.

TELEPHONE

Telecommunications offices, located in almost every town, charge Birr50.50 for the first three minutes of international calls and Birr10 for each minute after (plus 15% tax). Countless shops also operate as 'telecentres', quickly connecting you anywhere worldwide for Birr15 to Birr25 per minute.

TIME

Time is expressed so insanely in Ethiopia that it blows travellers' minds! At sunrise it's 12 o'clock (6am our time) and after one hour of sunshine it's 1 o'clock. After two hours of sunshine? Yes, 2 o'clock. The sun sets at 12 o'clock (6pm our time) and after one hour of darkness it's...1 o'clock! When being quoted a time, always ask, Be habesha/faranji akotater no? - Is that Ethiopian/foreigner's time?

TOURIST INFORMATION

There's a helpful government tourist information office in Addis Ababa. Independent offices can be found in regional capitals. No national tourist office exists abroad.

VISAS

Nationals of 33 countries receive one-month visas (US\$20) at Bole International Airport. These include USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and most of Europe.

Ethiopian embassies abroad charge up to US\$63 for visas, and usually require an onward air ticket (or a visa for the next country you're visiting), a yellow-fever vaccination certificate and proof of sufficient funds. African Ethiopian embassies are less strict.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be extended to a maximum of three months in Addis Ababa at the Department of Immigration (20111 553899). It takes 24 hours and costs US\$20.

Visas for Onward Travel DJIBOUTI

The embassy requires US\$30 and two photos. It's usually a same day service.

KENYA

Three-month visas cost US\$50 (or Birr438) and require one photo. Apply in the morning and pick up the following afternoon. Visas are also easily obtained at the Moyale crossing and Nairobi's airport.

SOMALILAND

Visas require US\$40 and one passport photo. It takes 24 hours to process. You must call ahead. While Somaliland is proving accessible to intrepid travellers, the recent outbreak of war between Ethiopia and the Islamic militia in Somalia makes Somalia a strict no-go area.

SUDAN

Obtaining a visa can take ages (or simply prove impossible). A letter of introduction from your embassy may help. Visas cost US\$61 and require one photo.

TRANSPORT IN **ETHIOPIA**

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Addis Ababa's Bole International Airport (code ADD) is the only international airport in Ethiopia. Airline offices in Addis Ababa include the following:

British Airways (BA; 🗃 0115 505913; www.ba.com; Hilton Hotel, Menelik II Ave) Hub: London. Daallo Airlines (D3: 🕿 0115 534688; www.daallo.com: Bole Rd) Hub: Djibouti City.

Djibouti Airlines (D8; 🖻 0116 633702; fax 0116 614769; Rwanda St) Hub: Djibouti City. EgyptAir (MS; a 0111 564493; www.egyptair.com.eg; Churchill Ave) Hub: Cairo.

Kenya Airways (KQ; 🖻 0115 525548; www.kenyaairways.com; Hilton Hotel, Menelik II Ave) Hub: Nairobi. KLM (KL; 🖻 0115 525541; www.klm.com; Hilton Hotel, Menelik II Ave;) Hub: Amsterdam.

Lufthansa (LH; 🗃 0111 551666; www.lufthansa.com; Gambia St) Hub: Frankfurt.

Saudi Arabian Airlines (SV; 🖻 0115 512637; www .saudiairlines.com; Ras Desta Damtew St) Hub: Jeddah. Sudan Airways (SD; 🖻 0115 504724; www.sudanair .com; sudanair@ethionet.et; Ras Desta Damtew St) Hub: Khartoum.

Yemenia (IY; 🖻 0115 526441; www.yememia.com; Ras Desta Damtew St) Hub: Sanaa.

Land

DJIBOUTI

Border formalities are usually pretty painless. There are two current land routes: one via Dire Dawa and Gelille, and one via Awash and Galafi.

Shirkada Gaadidka Dadweynaha Ee Yaryar Dhexe Iyo Xamuulkaa (@ 0251118455) buses depart Dire Dawa daily for Djibouti City (Birr120, 11 hours). An unreliable, dilapidated old train is supposed to run this route every second day (Birr80).

Although further, the Awash/Galafi crossing is best for those driving, as it's entirely sealed.

ERITREA

The Eritrea-Ethiopia border remains closed. Detour through Djibouti.

KENYA

The most-used crossing is at Moyale, 772km south of Addis Ababa. Daily Ethiopian buses link Addis and Moyale (Birr79, 11/2 days), while Kenyan versions connect the border to Marsabit (KSh600, 81/2 hours) and Isiolo (KSh1200, 17 hours) along a bone-jarring dirt road. Trucks also serve the Kenyan side. Banditry has been reduced significantly in northern Kenya, though always check the latest.

With a serious 4WD and Kenyan visas acquired in Addis, there's an adventurous crossing accessing Lake Turkana via the Lower Omo Valley. Get stamped out in Omorate, before attempting the day-long drive to Koobi Fora research base at Kenya's Sibiloi National Park. There's no Kenyan border post, so you must

wait to get stamped in at Nairobi. Since getting stamped out of Kenya isn't an option here, this route is only for those travelling south.

SOMALILAND

Daily buses run between Jijiga and Wajaale at the border (Birr15, 1½ to two hours). After immigration procedures, you'll find contract taxis (Birr300) and minibuses (Birr40) to Hargeisa, Somaliland's capital.

SUDAN

The only open Sudan crossing is Metema/Gallabat, 180km west of Gonder. To reach Metema from Gonder, take a new direct bus (Birr31, seven hours) or take the one to Shihedi (Birr23, five to six hours), where pick-up trucks (Birr8) cover the last 40km to Metema. Cross on foot before hopping on a truck in Gallabat to Gedaref (Dinar1500, five to six hours).

Ethiopian Airlines (www.flyethiopian.com) is the domestic carrier, regularly serving all major cities (see relevant cities for details). These reasonably priced (and scenic!) flights are worth considering, some cutting days on the road.

In Ethiopia standard rates always apply, whether buying tickets months or hours in advance. It's absolutely essential to reconfirm all flights.

Bus

HIOPIA

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A good network of buses slowly connects most towns. Unlike most African countries, seated passengers in the aisles of long-distance buses are illegal, making them more comfortable (we said more comfortable, not comfortable!) and safer. They're cheap, 100km costing Birr12 to Birr25. Distances are the biggest problem. Northern Ethiopia's historical circuit requires around 10 days of bus time to cover the 2500km. Long-distance buses typically leave at 6am or earlier.

Car & Motorcycle

If you're bringing a 4WD or motorcycle, you'll need a *carnet de passage*, the vehicle's registration papers and proof of third-party insurance covering Ethiopia.

Ethiopia doesn't recognise international driving licences for more than seven days, so you're supposed to acquire an Ethiopianendorsed licence at the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (o 0115 506561; Yohanis St) in Addis Ababa. This is rarely enforced and most travellers take the chance.

Hiring 4WDs (with mandatory driver) is costly (US\$90 to US\$180 per day) and primarily done through travel agencies (p657).

Tours

For independent travellers, organising a private tour (kitschy packaged tours don't exist) is useful for four things: specialised activities like white-water rafting; access to remote regions like the Lower Omo Valley or the Danakil Depression; 'themed trips' (eg bird-watching) with expert guides; and to help those with more money than time. See p657 for a recommended list of agencies based in Addis Ababa.

Trucks

In remote regions, like the Lower Omo Valley, trucks running between villages are the only way to travel. Seats in the cabin cost twice as much as riding in the back (always negotiate). Petrol stations and markets are typical collection points.

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Kenya

For a country of its size, Kenya sure packs a lot in: mountains and deserts, colourful tribal culture, beaches and coral reefs, and some of Africa's best wildlife attractions. In fact, to say Kenya is Africa in microcosm would not be stretching the point. There are a million different reasons to come here, and picking just one is nigh impossible. Stunning landscapes set the scene, from Kakamega's rainforests to Indian Ocean beaches by way of towering Mt Kenya; the rolling grasslands of the Masai Mara to searing deserts on the shores of the Jade Sea; and the Great Rift Valley cleaving a massive gash through it all.

Wildlife safaris have been the mainstay of Kenya's tourism for decades, and several Kenyan parks are among the best places in Africa to see lions, elephants, leopards and the famous wildebeest migration. Kenya rates as one of the top five bird-watching destinations in the world, and other activities for outdoor enthusiasts include trekking the glacial ridges of Mt Kenya, ballooning over the Masai Mara, snorkelling at Malindi Marine National Park on the Indian Ocean coast, and much more besides.

The people, too, represent a wide cross-section of everything that is contemporary Africa, and everyday life brings together traditional tribes and urban families; ancient customs and modern sensibilities. Swapping the latest political gossip with the switched-on locals is just one more small pleasure that comes with the culture.

FAST FACTS

- Area 583,000 sq km
- Budget About US\$75 a day, although one quality safari could blow it sky-high.
- Borders Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda
- Capital Nairobi
- Languages Kiswahili, English, tribal languages
- Money Kenya Shilling (KSh); US\$1 = KSh70
- Population 31.6 million
- Seasons Rainy (March to May, October to December), dry (January to February, June to September)
- Telephone Country code 254; international code 200
- Time GMT/UTC +3
- Visa All visitors need a visa

HIGHLIGHTS

- Masai Mara National Reserve (p700) Traverse expansive savannah for unmatched wildlife and the world's biggest traffic jam – the wildebeest migration.
- Mount Kenya National Park (p694) Trek to jagged peaks and equatorial glaciers that would make Kilimanjaro green with envy.
- **Lamu** (p705) Immerse yourself in Swahili culture, from Lamu's winding coral streets to the empty beaches of Kiwayu.
- Kakamega Forest Reserve (p699) Watch out for amazing birdlife and primates in Kenya's largest remaining tract of Congo rainforest.
- **Loyangalani** (p698) Cool off in the sublime jade waters of Lake Turkana among unforgettable, colourful tribespeople.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The weather is generally considered to be best in January and February, when it's hot and dry, with high concentrations of wildlife. However, the parks get crowded and rates for accommodation go through the roof. Avoid Christmas and Easter unless you want to pay a fortune.

June to October is generally still dry and during this period the annual wildebeest migration takes place.

During the long rains (from March to the end of May, the low season) things are much quieter, and you can get some good deals; this is also true during the short rains from October to December.

ITINERARIES

K E N Y A

- **One Week** Arrange things in advance so you can head out on safari straight after landing in Nairobi. Take in the Masai Mara National Reserve (p700) for at least three days; most trips also include Lake Nakuru National Park (p693) en route. Spend half a day back in Nairobi (p684) then fly down to the coast. Spend the rest of the week soaking up the atmosphere in the crumbling Swahili ruins of Mombasa (p700), lying on tropical beaches and/or snorkelling at Watamu (p704) or Malindi (p703).
- Two Weeks To make the most of the beach and the bush, extend your stay in the southern parks – spend a few extra days to really enjoy the Masai Mara National Re-

HOW MUCH?

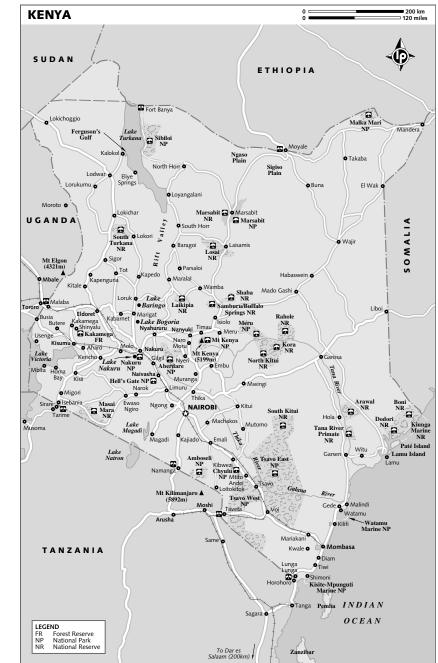
- Local matatu (minibus transport) ride US\$0.40
- Plate of stew/biryani/pilau US\$1.80
- Large juice US\$0.90
- Pair of kangas US\$5
- Taxi home US\$6

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- 1L petrol US\$1
- 1L bottled water US\$0.80
- Bottle of Tusker US\$1.20
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$12
 Sambusa US\$0.15
- serve (p700) and Lake Nakuru National Park (p693), head up to Lake Baringo (p694) then spend a few days trekking on mighty Mt Kenya (p694). Spend the last few days relaxing on Tiwi Beach (p703) or working your way up the coast from Mombasa (p700) to Malindi (p703). Alternatively, spend the second week heading overland to the searing desert and colourful tribespeople at Lake Turkana (p698).
- **One Month** Any or all of the above trips can be combined in a month, allowing a bit of time to linger among, say, the Turkana people around Loyangalani (p698), the Samburu at Isiolo (p697) and, of course, the Maasai (p700). Other possibilities include Kakamega (p699) for a taste of Kenya's rainforests as they once were; Lake Baringo (p694) for exceptional birding; Tsavo National Park (p707) for a real offthe-beaten-track safari; and scenic Amboseli (p708) for dreamy sundowners under Mt Kilimanjaro.

HISTORY

The patchwork of ethnic groups, each with their own culture and language, which today exist side by side in modern Kenya are the result of the waves of migration, some from as early as 2000 BC, from every corner of Africa – Turkanas from Ethiopia; Kikuyu, Akamba and Meru from West Africa; and the Maasai, Luo and Samburu from the southern part of Sudan. Kenya, however, was occupied long



before this: archaeological excavations around Lake Turkana in the 1970s revealed skulls thought to be around two million years old and those of the earliest human beings ever discovered.

By around the 8th century Arabic, Indian, Persian and even Chinese merchants were arriving on the Kenyan coast, intent on trading skins, ivory, gold and spices. These new arrivals helped set up a string of commercial cities along the whole of the East African coast, intermarrying with local dynasties to found a prosperous new civilisation, part African, part Arabic, known as the Swahili.

By the 16th century, Europeans too had cottoned on to the potential of the East African coast, and most of the Swahili trading towns, including Mombasa and Lamu, were either sacked or occupied by the Portuguese. Two centuries of harsh military rule followed, punctuated by regular battles for control of the former Swahili empire. The Omani Arabs finally ousted the Portuguese in 1720, but it wasn't long before the coast came into the control of more European colonisers - the British, who used their battleships to protect their lucrative route to India and to suppress the hated slave trade.

Mau Mau Rebellion

Despite plenty of overt pressure on Kenya's colonial authorities, the real independence movement was underground. Groups from the Kikuyu, Maasai and Luo tribes vowed to kill Europeans and their African collaborators. The most famous of these movements was Mau Mau, formed in 1952 by the Kikuyu people, which aimed to drive the white settlers from Kenya forever. In true African fashion, the Mau Mau rebellion was a brutal war of attrition on white people, property and 'collaborators'. The various Mau Mau sects came together under the umbrella of the Kenya Land Freedom Army, led by Dedan Kimathi, and staged frequent attacks against white farms and government outposts. By the time the rebels were defeated in 1956. the death toll stood at over 13,500 Africans (guerrillas, civilians and troops) and just over 100 Europeans.

In 1960 the British government officially announced their plan to transfer power to a democratically elected African government. Independence was scheduled for December 1963, accompanied by grants and loans of

US\$100 million to enable the Kenyan assembly to buy out European farmers in the highlands and restore the land to the tribes.

The run-up to independence, scheduled for 1963, was surprisingly smooth, although the redistribution of land wasn't a great success. The immediate effect was to cause a significant decline in agricultural production, from which Kenya has never quite recovered.

Jomo Kenyatta became Kenya's first president on 12 December, ruling until his death in 1978. Under Kenyatta's presidency, Kenya developed into one of Africa's most stable and prosperous nations. But while Kenyatta is still seen as a success story, he was excessively biased in favour of his own tribe and became paranoid about dissent. Opponents of his regime who became too vocal for comfort frequently 'disappeared', and corruption soon became endemic at all levels of the power structure.

The 1980s & '90s

Kenyatta was succeeded in 1978 by his vice president, Daniel arap Moi, a Kalenjin who became one of the most enduring 'Big Men' in Africa, ruling in virtual autocracy for nearly 25 years. In the process, he accrued an incredible personal fortune; today many believe him to be the richest man in Africa. Moi's regime was also characterised by nepotism, corruption, arrests of dissidents, censorship, the disbanding of tribal societies and the closure of universities.

Faced with a foreign debt of nearly US\$9 billion and blanket suspension of foreign aid, Moi was pressured into holding multiparty elections in early 1992. Independent observers reported a litany of electoral inconsistencies; and about 2000 people were killed during ethnic clashes, widely believed to have been triggered by KANU agitation. Nonetheless, Moi was overwhelmingly re-elected.

Preoccupied with internal problems, Kenya was quite unprepared for the events of 7 August 1998. Early in the morning massive blasts simultaneously ripped apart the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, killing more than 200 people. The effect on Kenyan tourism, and the economy as a whole, was devastating.

Further terrorist activity shook the country on 28 November 2002, when suicide bombers slammed an explosives-laden car into the lobby of the Paradise Hotel at Kikambala,

near Mombasa. Moments before, missiles were fired at an Israeli passenger plane taking off from Mombasa's airport. Al-Qaeda subsequently claimed responsibility for both acts.

Kenya Today

To the relief of many, in 2002 Moi announced his intention to retire. He put his weight firmly behind Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Jomo Kenyatta, as his successor. Meanwhile, 12 opposition parties and several religious groups united under the umbrella of the National Alliance Party of Kenya (NAK), later known as the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). Presidential candidate Mwai Kibaki was the former head of the Democratic party.

Although initially dogged by infighting, within weeks the opposition transformed itself into a dynamic and unified political party. When the election came on 27 December 2002 it was peaceful and fair and the result was dramatic - a landslide two-thirds majority for Mwai Kibaki and NARC. Kibaki was inaugurated as Kenya's third president on 30 December 2002.

The new regime has been plagued by a constant stream of party infighting, corruption and economic problems. The path to reform has been slower and more tortuous than many people had hoped, although some progress has been made, such as new matatu (minibus transport) regulations. However, security and corruption remain worrying issues, locals complain that the cost of living has virtually doubled, and Kenya has fallen 20 places on the UN Human Development Index since 2002.

With elections due once again in 2007, an energetic Uhuru Kenyatta at the head of the newly regrouped KANU, and an ambitious bid for the 2016 Olympic Games attracting international attention, the next few years will be an interesting time in Kenyan politics, and Kibaki certainly has plenty of challenges still to come.

CULTURE

Many residents of Kenya are more aware of their tribal affiliation than of being 'Kenyan'; this lack of national cohesion undoubtedly holds the country back, but is generally accompanied by an admirable live-and-let-live attitude. In fact, Kenyans generally approach life with great exuberance: on a crowded

matatu, in a buzzing marketplace, or enjoying a drink in a bar, they are quick to laugh and are never reluctant to offer a smile.

Education is of primary concern to Kenyans. Literacy rates are around 85% and are considerably higher than in any of the neighbouring countries. Although education isn't compulsory, the motivation to learn is huge, particularly now that it's free, and you'll see children in school uniform everywhere in Kenya, even in the most impoverished rural communities.

Kenyans are generally quite conservative, and are particularly concerned with modesty in dress. T-shirts and shorts are almost unheard of, and shirts are an obsession for Kenyan men and almost everyone wears one, often with a sweater or blazer.

Tribe may be important in Kenya, but family is paramount. Particularly as the pace and demands of modern life grow, the role of the extended family has become even more important. It is not unusual to encounter Kenyan children who are living with aunts, uncles or grandparents in a regional town, while their parents are working in Nairobi or at a resort in Watamu. The separation that brings about such circumstances in the first place is, without exception, a result of parents' desires to further opportunities for their families and their children.

Life is generally played out in the streets and communal places. And even as urbanisation happens and traditional community structures are fractured, street life remains lively.

For all this, as Kenya gains a foothold in the 21st century it is grappling with ever-increasing poverty. Once categorised as a middle-income country, Kenya has fallen to a low-income country, with the standard of living dropping drastically from 2002 to 2005.

PEOPLE

Kenya's population in 2001 was estimated at 30,765,900. The population-growth rate, currently at around 2.6%, has slowed in the last few years due to the soaring incidence of HIV/ AIDS, which now infects 15% of adults.

According to 2001 UN figures, life expectancy in Kenya is 52 years, although some sources place it as low as 47, due to the effects of HIV/AIDS. Only 42% of the population has access to clean drinking water, but 87% are now thought to have access to adequate

sanitation. The infant-mortality rate is 65 per 1000 births (a marked increase on the 1997 figure) and 51% of the population is aged under 18. A sign of growing poverty in rural regions is migration to urban areas, where 33% of all Kenyans now live, many of them in squalid shanty towns.

Most Kenyans outside the coastal and eastern provinces are Christians of one sort or another, while most of those on the coast and in the eastern part of the country are Muslim. Muslims make up some 30% of the population. In the more remote tribal areas you'll find a mixture of Muslims, Christians and those who follow their ancestral tribal beliefs, though this last group is definitely a minority.

ARTS

Benga is the country's contemporary dance music, characterised by electric-guitar licks and bounding bass rhythms. Well-known exponents include DO Misiani and his group Shirati Jazz, and you should also look out for Globestyle, Victoria Kings and Ambira Boys.

Popular bands today are heavily influenced by *benga, soukous* and Western music, with lyrics often in Swahili. These include bands such as Them Mushrooms (now reinvented as Uyoya) and Safari Sound. For upbeat dance tunes, Nameless, Ogopa DJs and Deux Vultures are recommended acts.

Local stars of American-influenced hip-hop include Necessary Noize, Nonini, Emmanuel Jal, the Homeboyz DJs and the Nairobi Yetu collective.

Two of Kenya's best authors are Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Meja Mwangi. Ngugi's harrowing criticism of the Kenyan establishment landed him in jail for a year (described in his *Detained – A Prison Writer's Diary*). Meja Mwangi sticks more to social issues, but has a brilliant sense of humour that threads its way right through his books, including his latest, *The Mzungu Boy*.

Kenya's rising star is Binyavanga Wainaina, currently a writer for the South African *Sunday Times* newspaper, who won the Caine Prize for African Writing in July 2002. Marjorie Oludhe Magoye's *The Present Moment* follows the life stories of a group of elderly women in a Christian refuge. For more writing by women in Africa, try *Unwinding Threads*, a collection of short stories by many authors from all over the continent.

ENVIRONMENT

Kenya straddles the equator and covers an area of some 583,000 sq km, including around 13,600 sq km of Lake Victoria. The modern landscape was shaped by the Rift Valley, a gigantic crack in the earth's crust that runs from Lake Turkana to the Tanzania border; and the activity of titanic (but now extinct) volcanoes such as Mts Kenya, Elgon and Kilimanjaro (across the border in Tanzania). The Rift Valley floor features numerous 'soda' lakes, rich in sodium bicarbonate, created by the filtering of water through mineral-rich volcanic rock and subsequent evaporation. Volcanic activity can still be seen in places like Hell's Gate National Park (p693) and Mt Kenya (p694), once Africa's highest mountain at 5199m. The Rift Valley divides the flat plains of the coast from the hills along Lake Victoria's shore.

Around 10% of Kenya's land area is protected by law, and the national parks and reserves here rate among the best in Africa. More popular parks, such as the Masai Mara National Reserve (p700) and Amboseli National Park (p708), can become overcrowded in the high season (January to February). A number of marine national parks have also been established, providing excellent diving and snorkelling.

No trip to Kenya would be complete without going on safari, and Kenya is a virtual microcosm of African environments and its biodiversity is extraordinary for the country's size. Iconic species such as lions, elephants, leopards and buffaloes are generally easy to see, but the biggest spectacle is the annual wildebeest migration that spills over from Tanzania's Serengeti Plains each year. Rhinos are very rare in Kenya, owing to a massive poaching problem.

The variety of birds is extraordinary – some 1200 species – and a trip to Kenya has turned many a casual observer into a dedicated birder. Major reserves often support hundreds of bird species; interesting species include ostriches, vultures, colourful starlings and marabou storks. Wetlands support abundant flamingos, herons and pelicans, while the forests are home to hornbills, touracos, sunbirds, weavers and a host more.

Forest destruction continues on a large scale in Kenya – less than 3% of the country's original forest remains. Land grabbing, illegal logging, charcoal burning and agricultural encroachment all take their toll. The degazetting of protected forests is another contentious issue, sparking widespread protests and preservation campaigns.

The main cause of this is untrammelled population growth; Kenya's population has doubled in the past 20 years and, not surprisingly, the land area hasn't. The not unexpected corollaries are a vicious cycle of deforestation, land degradation and erosion, causing people to open up and destroy still more land.

Renewed poaching raids on elephants and rhinos have led to talk of abandoning some of the more remote parks and concentrating resources where they can achieve the best results. At the same time, community conservation projects are being encouraged, and many community-owned ranches are now being opened up as private wildlife reserves.

An increasing number of important wildlife conservation areas now exist on private land. Supporting these projects is a great way for travellers to directly contribute to local communities as well as assist Kenyan wildlife preservation.

FOOD & DRINK

Food isn't one of Kenya's highlights, and the best dining is usually in upmarket hotels or safari lodges. The one local speciality is *nyama choma*, which is technically barbecued meat. You buy the meat (usually goat) by the kilogram; it's cooked over a charcoal pit and served in bite-sized pieces with a vegetable side dish.

Kenya grows some of the finest tea and coffee in the world, but getting a decent cup of either can be difficult. Chai is drunk in large quantities, but the tea, milk and sugar are usually boiled together and stewed for ages. In Nairobi there are a handful of excellent coffeehouses, and you can usually get good filter coffee at any of the big hotels. Soft drinks are available everywhere under the generic term of sodas.

NATIONAL PARK FEES

Park entry fees in Kenya are being converted to 'smartcard', which must be charged with credit in advance and can only be topped up at certain locations; they remain the property of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and must be surrendered once they run out of credit. Any credit left once you finish your trip cannot be refunded.

At the time of research the smartcard system was in use at Nairobi, Lake Nakuru, Aberdare, Amboseli, Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks. Other parks still work on a cash system. You can purchase and charge smartcards at the KWS headquarters in Nairobi and Mombasa, at Aberdare headquarters, at Lake Nakuru main gate, at Voi gate in Tsavo East, and at the Malindi Marine National Park office.

Entry fees to the parks per person are as follows:

Parks (category)	Entry adult/child US\$	Camping adult/child US\$
Aberdare, Amboseli, Lake Nakuru (A)	30/10	10/5
Tsavo East & West (B)	27/10	10/5
Nairobi (C)	23/10	10/5
all other parks (D)	15/5	8/5
marine parks	5/2	-

The land-based parks and reserves charge KSh200 for vehicles with fewer than six seats and KSh500 for vehicles seating six to 12. In addition to the public camping areas, special camp sites cost US\$10 to US\$15 per adult nonresident, plus a KSh5000 weekly reservation fee. Guides are available in most parks for KSh500 per day.

The Masai Mara National Reserve has the same entry fees as category A national parks; entry to Mt Kenya National Park is US\$15/8 per adult/child. Kakamega Forest Reserves is a joint KWS and Forestry Department project and charges US\$10/5 for an adult/child.

All fees cover visitors for a 24-hour period, but you can't leave and re-enter without paying twice.

The local beers are Tusker, White Cap and Pilsner (all manufactured by Kenya Breweries). Castle (a South African beer) is also made under license by Kenya Breweries. Beers are cheapest from supermarkets (KSh45 for 500ml); bars charge KSh80 to KSh200. Imported wines are available in Nairobi restaurants and in big supermarkets. Pombe is the local beer, usually a fermented brew made with bananas or millet and sugar. It shouldn't do you any harm.

NAIROBI

2020 / pop 2.5 million

Nairobi is Kenya's biggest and baddest city, or so the rumour goes. Most visitors dive in and out in the shortest time possible, but it's easy enough to sidestep the worst of the city's dangers and, as Kenyan cities go, this one has plenty going for it: café culture and unbridled nightlife, for example; and it's virtually the only place in the country where you can get a truly varied diet.

HISTORY

When the East Africa railway arrived in the 1890s, a depot was established on the edge of a small stream known to the Maasai as uaso nairobi (cold water). Nairobi quickly developed into the administrative nerve centre of the Uganda Railway, and in 1901 the capital of the British Protectorate was moved here from Mombasa.

ORIENTATION

The compact city centre is in the area bounded by Uhuru Hwy, Haile Selassie Ave, Tom Mboya St and University Way. Kenyatta Ave divides this area in two; most of the important offices lie to the south, while there are hotels, the city market and more offices to the north. Most budget accommodation is northeast of the city centre, on the far side of Tom Mboya St and around Latema, Accra and River Rds. This area has a bad reputation for robbery.

North of the city centre are the University of Nairobi, the National Museum and the expat-dominated suburb of Westlands. Jomo Kenyatta International Airport is southeast of the central Nairobi; also south are Langata and Karen suburbs and Wilson airport.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Book Villa (Map pp688-9; 🗃 337890; Standard St) New, discounted and second-hand books. Text Book Centre Kijabe St (Map pp686-7; 🕿 330340; Kijabe St); Westlands (Map pp686-7; 2 3747405; Sarit Centre, Westlands) One of the best bookshops. Westland Sundries Bookshop (Map pp688-9; 212776; New Stanley Hotel, Kenyatta Ave)

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française (Map pp686-7; 🗃 340054; www.alliancefrnairobi.org; cnr Monrovia & Loita Sts; 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat) An events program that showcases Kenyan and African performing arts.

British Council (Map pp686-7; 🖻 334855; www.bri tishcouncil.org/kenya; Upper Hill Rd; 🕑 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat)

Nairobi Cultural Institute (Map pp686-7; 2 569205; Ngong Rd) Holds lectures and other functions of local cultural interest.

Emergency

Emergency services (2 999) Fire, police and ambulance. Don't rely on their prompt arrival. Police (240000) For less-urgent police business.

Internet Access

AGX (Map pp686-7; Barclays Plaza, Loita St; per min KSh1; 8am-8pm Mon-Sat)

Capital Realtime (Map pp688-9; 🖻 247900; Lonhro House, Standard St; per min KSh2; 🕑 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat)

EasySurf (Map pp686-7; 2745418; Sarit Centre, Westlands; per min KSh4; 🕑 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun)

Medical Services

Avoid the Kenyatta National Hospital. AAR Health Services Nairobi (Map pp686-7:

2 715319; Williamson House, Fourth Ngong Ave); Westlands (Map pp686-7; 2 446201; Sarit Centre, Westlands) Aga Khan Hospital (Map pp686-7; 🗃 740000; Third Parklands Ave: No 24hr)

KAM Pharmacy (Map pp688-9; 🖻 251700; Executive Tower, IPS Bldg, Kimathi St) Pharmacy, doctor's surgery and laboratory.

Medical Services Surgery (Map pp688-9; 🗃 317625; Bruce House, Standard St; 🕑 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Nairobi Hospital (Map pp686-7; 🗃 722160) Off Argwings Khodek Rd.

Money

Barclays branches with guarded ATMs include those on Muindi Mbingu St (Map pp688-9), Mama Ngina St (Map pp688-9), and on the corner of Kenyatta and Moi Aves (Map pp688-9). There are branches in Westlands. Foreign-exchange bureaus offer slightly

better rates for cash.

American Express (Map pp688-9; 🖻 222906; Hilton Hotel, Mama Ngina St; (8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Handles travellers cheques and looks after mail for clients. Cosmos Forex (Map pp688-9; 🖻 250582; Rehema House, Standard St)

Goldfield Forex (Map pp688-9; 🖻 244554; Fedha Towers, Kaunda St)

Mayfair Forex (Map pp688-9; 🕿 226212; Uganda House, Standard St)

Postbank (Map pp688-9; 13 Kenyatta Ave) For Western Union money transfers.

Travellers Forex Bureau (Map pp686-7; 🗃 447204; The Mall, Westlands)

Post

The main post office (Map pp688-9; 243434; Kenvatta Ave: 🕅 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) also has branches on Moi Ave (Map pp688-9) and Tom Mboya St (Map pp688-9) if you just want stamps.

Telephone

Telkom Kenya (Map pp688-9; 232000; Haile Selassie Ave: Y 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Has dozens of payphones and you can buy phonecards. There's also a branch at the main post office.

Travel Agencies

Bunson Travel (Map pp688-9; 221992; www .bunsonkenya.com; Pan-African Insurance Bldg, Standard St) A good upmarket operator with offices around Africa. Flight Centres (Map pp688-9; 🖻 210024; Lakhamshi House, Biashara St) Discounted air tickets, camping safaris and overland trips.

Let's Go Travel (www.lets-go-travel.net) Central Nairobi (Map pp688-9; 🕿 340331; Caxton House, Standard St); Westlands 247151; ABC PI, Waiyaki Way, Westlands) Flights, safaris, car hire and pretty much anything else you miaht need.

Tropical Winds (Map pp686-7; 🖻 341939; www .tropical-winds.com; Barclays Plaza, Loita St) Nairobi's STA Travel representative.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

'Nairobbery', as it is often called by residents, has its share of crime and violence, but the majority of problems happen in the slums, far from the main tourist zones. The city centre is comparatively trouble-free as long as you use a bit of common sense, and there are plenty of askaris (security guards) around at night. Stay alert and you should encounter nothing worse than a few persistent safari touts and the odd con artist. The area around Latema and River Rds is a hotspot for petty theft, and Uhuru Park attracts all kinds of dodgy characters. The streets empty rapidly after dark - take a taxi, even if you're only going a few blocks.

SIGHTS

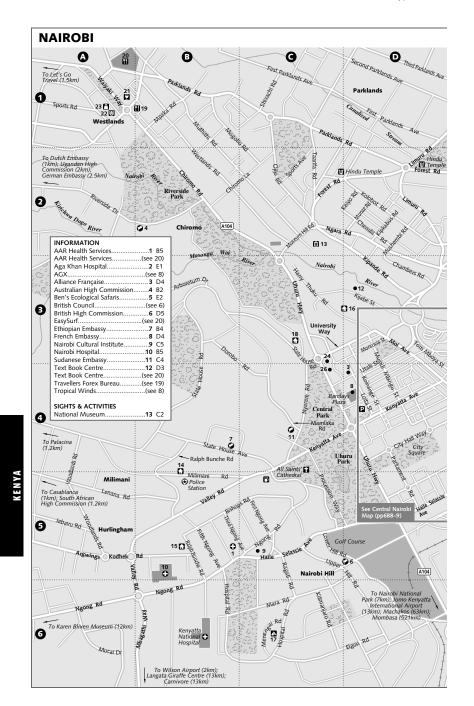
Kenva's grand National Museum (Map pp686-7; 742131; www.museums.or.ke; Museum Hill Rd; adult/ child KSh200/100; 🕑 9.30am-6pm) has a good range of cultural, geological and natural-history exhibits. Volunteer guides offer tours in English, Dutch and French; a donation is appropriate. The 1st floor also hosts the excellent Gallery of Contemporary East African Art.

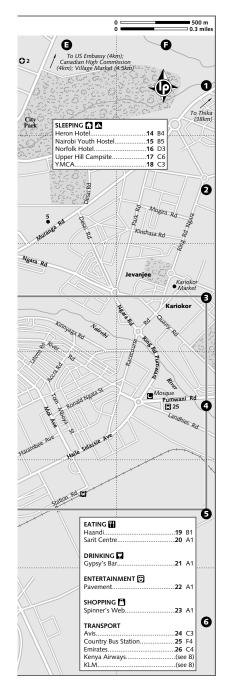
The ground-floor atrium and gallery of the National Archives (Map pp688-9; 2749341; Moi Ave; admission free; 🕑 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) display an eclectic selection of contemporary art, historical photos of Nairobi, cultural artefacts, furniture and tribal objects.

A visit to Nairobi National Park (nonresident adult/ child US\$23/10, smartcard required), a few kilometres from the city centre, is a great way to fill in a few hours before you catch a plane. There's plentiful wildlife, including most of the plains animals (except elephants), against the bizarre backdrop of Nairobi's skyscrapers. The headquarters of the KWS ((a) 600800; www.kws.org) are at the main gate. The 'Park Shuttle' is a KWS bus that leaves the main gate at 3pm Sunday for a 2¹/₂-hour tour of the park. The cost is US\$20/5 per adult/child and you'll need to book in person at the main gate by 2.30pm. Matatus 125 and 126 pass the park entrance (KSh40, 45 minutes).

The Karen Blixen Museum (🖻 882779; www .blixencoffeegarden.co.ke; Karen Rd; nonresident adult/child KSh200/100; 🕑 9.30am-6pm) is the farmhouse where Karen Blixen, author of Out of Africa, lived between 1914 and 1931. It's set in lovely gardens, and there's accommodation and a restaurant on site. The easiest way to get here is via the Karen Metro Shuttle bus from City Hall Way (KSh20, 40 minutes). A taxi will cost about KSh900 one way.

At the Langata Giraffe Centre (🖻 890952: Koitobos Rd; nonresident adult/child KSh500/250; (Y) 9am-5.30pm), run by the African Fund for Endangered





Wildlife (AFEW), you can observe and handfeed Rothschild's giraffes. It's about 18km from central Nairobi; take matatu 24 to the Hardy shops in Langata and walk from there, or take matatu 126 to Magadi Rd and walk through from Mukoma Rd.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Kenya Fashion Week (🖻 0733-636300; Sarit Centre, Westlands) An expo-style fashion event held in June. Tusker Safari Sevens (www.safarisevens.com; Impala Club, Ngong Rd, Karen) International seven-a-side rugby tournament held every June.

Kenya Music Festival (🗃 2712964; Kenyatta Conference Centre) Held over 10 days in August and features predominantly African music.

SLEEPING Budget

Iqbal Hotel (Map pp688-9; 🖻 220914; Latema Rd; dm/ s/d/tr KSh350/450/600/1000) The Iqbal has been a popular budget travellers' haunt for years. It's secure and the askari can arrange taxis at reasonable prices.

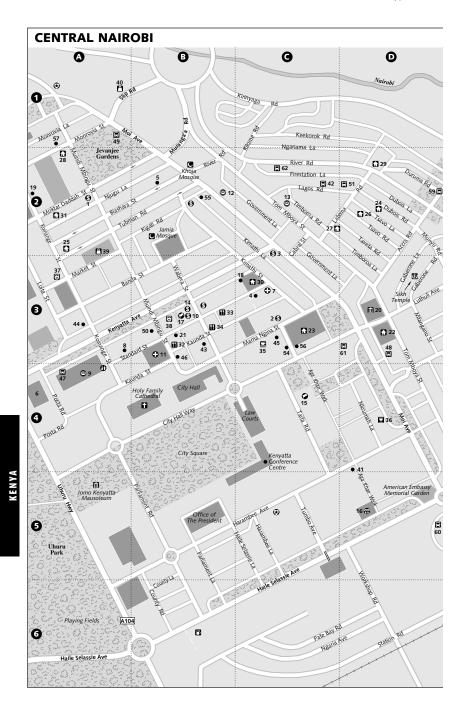
New Kenya Lodge (Map pp688-9; 🖻 222202; www .nksafaris.com; River Rd; dm KSh350, s/d KSh650/800, without bathroom KSh450/700) Another good budget option, with friendly staff, and hot water in the evenings.

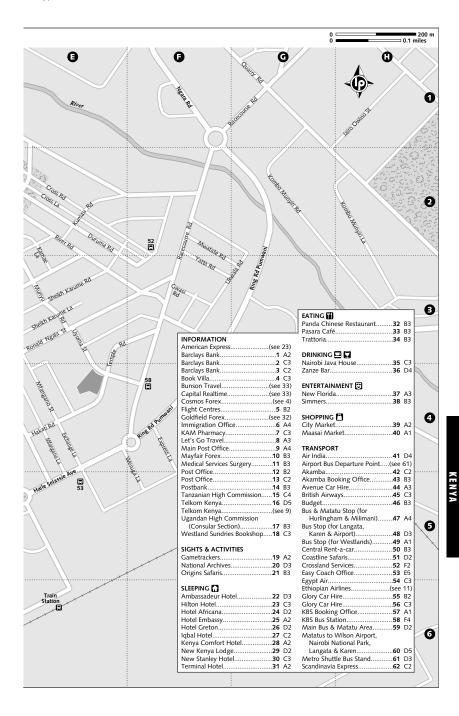
Nairobi Youth Hostel (Map pp686-7; 2723012; kyha@africaonline.co.ke; Ralph Bunche Rd, Milimani; dm KSh600-700, d without bathroom KSh800, apt KSh2000; 🛄) A well looked-after budget option, Nairobi's Hostelling International (HI) branch is still usually a good place to meet other travellers. A year's HI membership costs KSh400, or you can pay a KSh100 surcharge per day. Many people have been robbed returning to the youth hostel by foot after dark; always take a matatu or taxi at night.

Hotel Africana (Map pp688-9; 🖻 220654; Dubois Rd; s/d/tr incl breakfast KSh650/1000/1500) The Africana has clean, bright rooms and is better looked after than many places in its class.

Upper Hill Campsite (Map pp686-7; 🖻 6750202; www .upperhillcampsite.com; Menengai Rd, Nairobi Hill; camp sites KSh300, tents KSh500-1100, dm/r KSh450/1100; 🛄) Upper Hill offers a range of accommodation in a pleasant and secure compound, plus a wellused little restaurant and bar. Facilities include hot showers and a cosy fireplace.

YMCA (Map pp686-7; 🖻 2724116; kenyaymca@wananchi .com; State House Rd; s/d KSh940/1480, without bathroom KSh690/1180) An OK place with a range of passable rooms. Rates include the YMCA fee.





Midrange

Hotel Greton (Map pp688-9; 2242891; greton@wananchi .com; Tsavo Rd; s/d/tr ind breakfast KSh1000/1300/1800) A big block hotel in the heart of the budget district, with a great balcony restaurant overlooking the street. Rooms are spacious and comfortable, and there's a gym.

Hotel Embassy (Map pp688-9; 224087; hotel embassy@yahoo.com;Tubman Rd; s/d KSh1200/1800) Round the corner from the Terminal Hotel and offering a similar standard, with an in-house restaurant and TV lounge.

Kenya Comfort Hotel (Map pp688-9; **3**17606; www.kenyacomfort.com; cnr Muindi Mbingu & Monrovia Sts; s/d/tr/q US\$30/40/50/60) Modern, clean rooms and a cheery décor make this an attractive option, even if it's a bit of a walk to the city centre.

Ambassadeur Hotel (Map pp688-9; 246615; Tom Mboya St; s/d/tr US\$40/50/70) This big hotel, opposite the National Archives, once belonged to the Sarova chain, but although still large, the once-posh rooms are definitely showing signs of wear and tear.

Top End

New Stanley Hotel (Map pp688-9; 🖻 316377; www sarovahotels.com; cnr Kimathi St & Kenyatta Ave; s/d from US\$225/250; 🕄 🔲 🕥) A Nairobi classic that retains the colonial look: good service, green leather, chandeliers and old-fashioned fans. Worth a price, and the various house eateries are all well regarded.

Norfolk Hotel (Map pp686-7; ⓐ 216940; www.fair mont.com; Harry Thuku Rd; s/d US\$281/337, ste US\$361-557; ☑ ⓐ) Built in 1904, Nairobi's oldest hotel was *the* place to stay during colonial days, and still attracts plenty of guests who at least look like old-school settlers.

EATING

Nairobi is the food capital of Kenya and the city centre is full of places to eat; for dinner it's worth heading out to Westlands, which offers more good cuisine from all over the world. **Pasara Café** (Map pp688-9; ☎ 338247; Lonrho Bldg, Standard St; dishes KSh120-350; ↔ from 7am Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat) A stylish, modern bar-brasserie with good snacks, sandwiches, grills and breakfasts. After 5pm it turns into a popular upscale bar.

Haandi (Map pp686-7; ☐ 4448294; The Mall Shopping Centre, Ring Rd Westlands, Westlands; mains KSh600-1100; ⊙ noon-2.30pm & 7-10.30pm; ≥) Widely regarded as the best Indian restaurant in Kenya.

Panda Chinese Restaurant (Map pp688-9; 213018; Fedha Towers, Kaunda St; mains KSh400-1500; \mathfrak{S} noon-2.30pm & 6-10pm) With the best Chinese food in Nairobi, this very classy restaurant is hidden away on Kaunda St.

Trattoria (Map pp688-9; 340855; cnr Wabera & Kaunda Sts; mains KSh550-1800; 7.30am-midnight) This long-running and very popular Italian joint could hold its head up in Melbourne or San Francisco, offering excellent pizza, pasta dishes, varied mains and a whole page of desserts.

Carnivore ((2) 605933; set meals KSh1325) Kenya's most famous *nyama choma* restaurant, this place has been frequented by tourists, expats and wealthy locals alike for 25 years. The huge barbecue pit is laden with real swords of beef, pork, lamb, chicken and farmed game meats. It's out in Langata but 'tours' are organised from hotels all over town.

There are Nakumatt and Uchumi supermarkets all over, and the **Sarit Centre** (Map pp686-7; **3**747408; www.saritcentre.com; Parklands Rd, Westlands) has a huge food court on the 2nd floor.

DRINKING

There are some friendly watering holes around Tom Mboya St and Moi Ave, and the Westlands drinking scene attracts a lot of expats.

Zanze Bar (Map pp688-9; 222532; Kenya Činema Plaza, Moi Ave) A lively and friendly top-floor bar with pool tables, a dance floor, and cheap beer, so that from Friday to Sunday it rocks until the early hours.

Gypsy's Bar (Map pp686-7; **(**) **(**4440836; Woodvale Grove, Westlands) This is probably the most popular bar in Westlands, pulling in Kenyans, expats and prostitutes. It's as close as you'll get to a gayfriendly venue in Kenya.

Western café culture has hit Nairobi at last and **Nairobi Java House** (Map pp688-9; 🗃 313565; www nairobijava.com; Mama Ngina St; snacks KSh80-200; 🕑 7am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) offers that elusive decent coffee plus many other tasty treats; thankfully, there's also a branch at Jomo Kenyatta airport.

ENTERTAINMENT

There's a good selection of dance clubs in the centre of Nairobi, but men will generally get hassled by female prostitutes in all of them. **Pavement** (Map pp686-7; 🗃 4441711; Waiyaki Way, Westlands; admission KSh500) is the dance floor of choice for most resident expats, while you might try **Simmers** (Map pp688-9; 🖻 217659; cm Kenyatta Ave & Muindi Mbingu St; admission free) for a bit of true African rhythm.

New Florida (Map pp688-9; 215014; Koinange St; men/women KSh200/100; Ye to 6am, later Sat & Sun) is the 'Mad House', a big, rowdy club that's usually crammed with bruisers, cruisers, hookers, hustlers and curious tourists. Entry is usually free before 9pm.

SHOPPING

Souvenir prices are typically higher in Nairobi than elsewhere in the country.

City Market (Map pp688-9; Muindi Mbingu St) Has dozens of stalls open daily, selling woodcarvings, drums, spears, shields, soapstone, Maasai jewellery and clothing.

Spinners Web (Map pp686-7; **C** 4440882; Viking House, Waiyaki Way, Westlands) Works with workshops and self-help groups around the country. It's a bit like a handicrafts version of Ikea, with goods displayed the way they might look in Western living rooms, but there's some classy stuff on offer including carpets, wall hangings, ceramics, wooden bowls, baskets and clothing.

Maasai Market (Map pp688-9; ^(S) Tue) Busy, popular Maasai markets are held every Tuesday on the waste ground near Slip Rd in town.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

The national carrier **Kenya Airways** (Map pp686-7; 3274000; Bardays Plaza, Loita St) operates international and domestic services out of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport.

Airkenya (501601; Wilson Airport, Langata Rd) and Safarilink (600777; Wilson Airport, Langata Rd) offer domestic services to many smaller destinations at competitive prices.

Bus

Most long-distance bus-company offices are based in Nairobi's River Rd area. Numerous companies do the run to Mombasa, leaving in the early morning or late in the evening; the trip takes eight to 10 hours. Buses leave from outside each company's office, and fares cost KSh400 to KSh700. **Coastline Safaris** (Map pp688-9; 217592; cnrLatema & Lagos Rds) buses are the most comfortable.

Akamba (Map pp688-9; 340430; akamba_prs@ skyweb.co.ke; Lagos Rd) buses serve Eldoret, Kakamega, Kisumu, Kitale, Mombasa, Uganda and Tanzania, leaving from Lagos Rd; there's a **booking office** (Map pp688-9; 222027; Wabera St) near City Hall.

The government-owned **Kenya Bus Service** (KBS; 229707) is another large operator. It's cheaper than Akamba, but the buses are much slower. The main depot is located on Uyoma St, and there's a **KBS booking office** (Map pp688-9; 341250; cnr Muindi Mbingu & Monrovia Sts) in the city centre.

The **Country Bus Station** (Map pp686-7; Landhies Rd) is a hectic, disorganised place that has buses running to Busia, Eldoret, Kakamega, Kisumu, Malaba, Meru, Nakuru, Nanyuki and Nyeri.

Typical fares:

Destination	Fare (KSh)	Duration (hr)
Eldoret	350-500	3
Kakamega	400-500	5
Kisumu	400-550	4
Kitale	400-600	5
Malindi	800	9-10
Mombasa	500-1000	6-10
Naivasha	130	1-1½
Nakuru	200-300	2
Nanyuki	200	2

Matatu

Most *matatus* leave from Latema, Accra, River and Cross Rds, and fares are similar to the buses. The biggest operator is **Crossland Services** (Map pp688-9; 245377; Cross Rd).

Train

Nairobi train station has a **booking office** (2)21211; Station Rd; 9 9am-noon & 2-6.30pm). Trains for Mombasa (1st/2nd class KSh3160/2275, 14 to 16 hours) leave at 7pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The return services depart at 7pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

For Kisumu (1st/2nd class KSh1415/720, 13 hours), trains depart at 6.30pm on the same

days as the Mombasa services. It's advisable to book a few days in advance for either of these routes.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Kenya's principal international airport, Jomo Kenyatta Înternational Airport (🖻 825400), is 15km out of the city centre. There's now a dedicated airport bus run by Metro Shuttle (US\$8, 40 minutes) that can drop you off at hotels in the city centre. Going the other way, the main departure point is across from the Hilton Hotel (Map pp688–9).

Your only option at night is to take a taxi. The asking price is usually about KSh1200 in either direction.

Bus

Most of the city bus services run by KBS (229707) pass through central Nairobi, but the main KBS terminus is on Uyoma St, east of the centre. Useful services include bus 23 from Jevanjee Gardens for Westlands (KSh10).

Matatu

Nairobi's horde of *matatus* follow the same routes as buses and display the same route numbers. For Westlands, you can pick up matatu 23 on Moi Ave or Latema Rd. Matatus 125 and 126 to Langata leave from in front of the train station. You should keep an eye on your valuables on all matatus.

Taxi

KENYA

Nairobi's taxis are overpriced rust-buckets that leak choking fumes, but you've little choice but to use them, particularly at night. Fares are negotiable, but any journey within the central Nairobi area costs KSh250 and you can expect to pay up to KSh500 to get to Westlands.

THE RIFT VALLEY

LAKE NAIVASHA **a** 0311

The area around Naivasha was one of the first settled by wazungu (whites), and is now one of the largest remaining expat communities in Kenya. The freshwater lake itself is home to an incredible variety of birds, including the African fish eagle. The surrounding countryside is a major agricultural area.

Sights & Activities

On the eastern side of Lake Naivasha is Crescent Island (adult/child nonresident US\$14/7), a wildlife sanctuary you can visit by boat or car.

A couple of kilometres past Fisherman's Camp on Moi South Lake Rd you'll find Elsamere Conservation Centre (@ 2021055; elsa@africaonline.co.ke; admission KSh500; (Sam-6.30pm), the former home of Joy Adamson of Born Free fame. Entry includes afternoon tea (with a chance to see black-and-white colobus monkeys), and accommodation is available.

Sleeping

All sites listed are on or near Moi South Lake Rd.

Fisherman's Camp (2030088; camp sites KSh200, dm KSh600, s/tw with shared bathrooms from KSh850/1700) Spread along the grassy southern shore, this is a perennial favourite of campers, overland companies and hungry hippos. There's a popular bar and restaurant, but with overpriced, basic rooms and bandas, camping is the best option.

Top Camp (2030276; camp sites KSh200, s/tw bandas from KSh500/1000, 5-person cottages KSh5000) Boasting crazy lake views from a hill-top perch, Top Camp is a quiet place with various tin-roofed, bamboo-walled bandas (almost all have private bathrooms).

Crayfish Camp (2020239; craycamp@africaonline .co.ke; camp sites KSh250, s without bathroom KSh750, s/d with bathroom KSh2500/3000; 💷) Another popular spot that at times can seem more like a beer garden than a camp site. All rooms, including the pricier ones, are simple but fine, and there's a restaurant, two bars, kitchen facilities, and tent, bicycle and boat hire.

Burch's Marina (🖻 0733-660372; camp sites KSh200, 2-person rondavels KSh600, cottages d/tr/g KSh2200/2600/3000) One of the long-standing Naivasha options, this one does it well with a pleasant, well-shaded site, hot showers and a communal cooking area. Advance booking is mandatory.

Kongoni Game Valley (🖻 2021070; www.kgvalley .com; full board per person US\$150; 😰) A grand colonial farmhouse offering the best of African safari charm. Rooms surround the house's lovely courtyard, and boast rich rugs, comfortable beds and bear-claw bathtubs.

Lake Naivasha Sopa Resort (🖻 2050358, Nairobi 020-3750235; full board s/d US\$190/250; 😰) A newish resort with huge luxury cottages plus a pool, gym, sauna, and lovely bar and restaurant set-up.

Getting There & Away

Frequent matatus (KSh80, one hour) run along Moi South Lake Rd from Naivasha town, passing the turn-offs to Hell's Gate National Park and Fisherman's Camp.

HELL'S GATE NATIONAL PARK

Hell's Gate (2000-2020284; adult/child US\$15/5) is unique among Kenya's parks, as you are allowed to walk or cycle unguided across its breadth. There's dramatic scenery, with looming cliffs, gorges and basalt columns. Lurking lions and leopards add to the excitement! Marking the eastern entrance to Hell's Gate Gorge is Fischer's Tower, one of the park's many popular rock-climbing sites.

Lake Naivasha (opposite) makes a convenient base for exploring the park, but camping here is recommended and Ol Dubai and Naiberta camp sites are probably the best. Access is by private vehicle or by hiring a bike from Lake Naivasha (opposite).

NAKURU

2 051 / pop 163.000

Although Nakuru is Kenya's fourth-largest town, it still has a relaxed atmosphere and is on the doorstep of the delightful Lake Nakuru National Park - you can see flamingos on the lake from high spots in town.

There are numerous banks and foreignexchange bureaus for changing cash and travellers cheques; Barclays ATMs are the most reliable. Dreams Cyber World (Kenyatta Lane; per hr KSh120; 🕑 8am-8pm, closed 1-2pm Fri) has fast connections.

Sleeping & Eating

Crater View Lodge (🖻 2216352; Mburu Gichua Rd; s/tw KSh300/350) All rooms face a bright inner courtyard and the twins are great value, even if the bathrooms are a bit rough.

Mount Sinai Hotel (2211779; Bazaar Rd; s/tw/tr KSh400/600/700) A big, clean place; try to get a room on the scenic roof terrace.

Midland Hotel (2212125; Geoffrey Kamau Rd; s/d from KSh2500/4000) This popular place in the town centre has a wide range of rooms with wall-to-wall carpets and varying levels of comfort.

America Hotel (2216013; merica@kenyaweb .com; Kenyatta Ave; half-board s/d US\$65/110; 🔀 😰) A contemporary tower hosting Nakuru's only top-end rooms and best swimming pool (nonguests KSh200).

Highly recommended by Nakuru's expat community, the Bamboo Hut Chinese Restaurant (Giddy Plaza, George Moraga Rd; meals KSh300-700) serves great Chinese fare, while one of the best places for cheap Kenyan dishes is Ribbons Restaurant (Guise Rd; meals KSh50-200). Tipsy Restaurant (Gusii Rd; mains KSh100-250) offers reasonable value for Indian and Western-style food.

Getting There & Away

Buses, matatus and occasional Peugeots leave for Naivasha (KSh120, 1¼ hours), Nyahururu (KSh100, 1¼ hours), Eldoret (KSh200, 2¾ hours), Nairobi (KSh200, three hours), Kitale (KSh350, 3½ hours) and Kisumu (KSh350, 3½ hours).

LAKE NAKURU NATIONAL PARK

Lake Nakuru National Park (🖻 051-2217151; adult/ child US\$30/10, smartcard required) rivals Amboseli as Kenya's second-most-visited park. This is one of the best places in Kenya to see leopards, and white rhinos are commonly seen at the lake's southern end, but the park's most famous attraction is the flamingos that ring the lake in thousands.

The main gate is 2km south of the centre of Nakuru. KWS smartcards are available here. Backpackers' Campsite (adult/child US\$10/5) is a large public camp site just inside the main gate with the park's best camping facilities.

A nice, friendly camp site with clean dorms, simple singles and two-bed bandas, Wildlife Club of Kenya Youth Hostel (🖻 051-850929; dm KSh150, s without bathroom KSh300, s/tw with bathroom KSh500/1000) comes complete with cooking areas. Wildlife Club of Kenya Guesthouse (🖻 051-851559; PO Box 33, Nakuru; s/tw without bathroom KSh800/1600) is great: facilities include hot showers, TV lounge, and use of a fridge, gas cooker and microwave. Rooms are clean and comfortable.

Sarova Lion Hill Lodge (🖻 020-2713333; www.sarova hotels.com; full board s/d from US\$210/280; 🕥) is an upmarket lodge that offers 1st-class service and comfort from high up the lake's eastern slopes. There are great views from the restaurant-bar and most rooms.

A taxi from Nakuru for a few hours should cost KSh2000, though you'll have to bargain hard.

LAKE BOGORIA NATIONAL RESERVE

In the late 1990s this reserve's shallow soda lake achieved fame as 'the new home of the flamingo', with a population peaking at

two million birds. Flamingo numbers have dropped significantly since then, but this reserve (🖻 0722-377252; adult/child KSh1500/200) is still a fascinating place to visit, with hot springs and geysers along the shore.

Camping is the only sleeping option within the reserve, either at the fantastic Fig Tree Camp (camp sites KSh500) beneath a stand of massive fig trees, or Acacia Camp (camp sites KSh500), a shady lakeside site with some soft grass for pitching tents. Bring your own water.

Set in lovely grounds 2km before the Loboi gate, Lake Bogoria Hotel (@ 051-2216441; lakebogoria@wanachi.com; s/d incl breakfast US\$70/90; 😰) is a quality option: hotel rooms are large and bright, while those in the new cottages (for the same price) are modern and much more comfortable.

The best way to reach and explore the reserve is with a private vehicle, although matatus from Marigat (KSh50, 30 minutes) go to the main park gate, from where you can walk.

LAKE BARINGO a 051

This freshwater Rift Valley lake is encircled by mountains and dotted with picturesque islands. Bird-watchers come here from all over the world, and talented local bird guides can be hired at Roberts Camp and Lake Baringo Club. Habituated fish eagles dive for fish on popular boat rides, making for great (if contrived) photo opportunities. Roberts' Camp (🖻 851879; camp sites KSh350, ban-

das s/tw without bathroom KSh1000/2000, 4-person cottages

KSh5000) is a fantastic camp site right on the

lake, with tents, comfortable cottages, cooking facilities and an open-air restaurant-bar. The

local hippos can add a frisson of excitement

to any stay here. Set within sprawling lakeside gardens, Lake Baringo Club (🖻 850880, Nairobi 020-650500; block baringo@africaonline.co.ke; Kampi ya Samaki; full board s/d US\$150/180; 😰) is a grand old place with pleasant rooms featuring four-poster beds and a terrace. Facilities include a swimming pool, games room, badminton court and library, all open to nonguests for KSh200. A bus leaves Kampi ya Samaki for Nakuru (KSh 200, 21/2 hours) every morning between 6.30am and 9.30am.

A bus leaves Kampi ya Samaki (Baringo's main village) for Nakuru each morning (KSh 200, 2½ hours).

CENTRAL KENYA

MOUNT KENYA NATIONAL PARK

After seeing the 5199m worth of dramatic remnants that today comprise Mt Kenya (Africa's second-highest mountain), it's easy to understand why the Kikuyu people deified it and still believe it's the seat of their supreme god Ngai. Mt Kenya also has the rare honour of being both a Unesco World Heritage site and a Unesco Biosphere Reserve.

Mt Kenya's highest peaks, Batian (5199m) and Nelion (5188m), can only be reached by mountaineers with technical skills. However, Point Lenana (4985m), the third-highest peak, can be reached by trekkers and is the usual goal for most mortals, offering a fantastic experience and superb views over the surrounding country.

Information

The daily fees for the **national park** (🖻 061-55645; adult/child US\$15/8) are charged upon entry, so you must estimate the length of your stay. If you overstay, you must pay the difference when leaving. You'll have to pay an additional KSh50 per day for each guide and porter you take with you. Always ask for a receipt.

Before you leave Nairobi, buy a copy of Mt Kenya 1:50,000 Map & Guide (1993) by Mark Savage and Andrew Wielochowski. Lonely Planet's Trekking in East Africa has more information, details on wilder routes and some of the more esoteric variations that are possible on Mt Kenya.

You can camp (adult/child US\$10/5) anywhere on the mountain; the nightly fee is payable to KWS at any gate. Most people camp near the huts or bunkhouses, as there are often toilets and water nearby. There are several huts on the mountain owned by MCK, but the only one that's in reasonable shape nowadays sits 5188m up on Nelion's summit - not for the typical punter!

Safetv

Mt Kenya's accessibility and the technical ease with which Point Lenana is reached create their own problems for enthusiastic trekkers. Many people ascend much too quickly and end up suffering from altitude sickness. By spending at least three nights on the ascent, you'll enjoy yourself much more; with proper clothes and equipment, you stand a much better chance of making it back down as well.

Weather can be unpredictable, harsh, cold, wet and windy. The trek to Point Lenana isn't easy and people die on the mountain every year. The best time to trek is from mid-January to late February or from late August to September.

You'd be flirting with death by not taking a guide or qualified companion. Even those with ample experience should take a guide if attempting the Summit Circuit.

To avoid severe headaches caused by dehydration or altitude sickness, drink at least 3L of fluid per day and bring rehydration sachets.

Equipment Hire

Well-maintained hire gear is available at the Naro Moru River Lodge (p696). Most guiding companies will have cheaper equipment for hire, although you'll have less choice and lower standards.

Guides, Cooks & Porters

The KWS issues vouchers to all registered guides and porters, who should also hold identity cards; they won't be allowed into the park without them.

Basic qualified guides and cooks will cost you about US\$10 to US\$12 per day, while more knowledgeable guides will set you back about US\$15 per day. These fees don't include park entry fees and tips (budget around a day's wages per person as a tip, but make it clear it is only for good service).

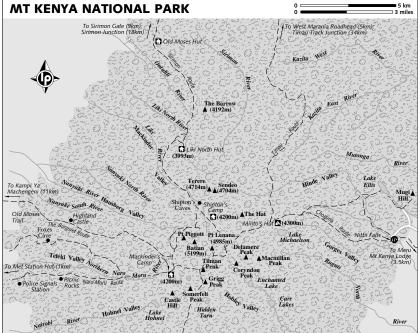
Porters will carry up to 18kg for three-day trips or 16kg for longer trips, excluding the weight of their own food and equipment. If you want them to carry more, you'll have to negotiate an added cost.

Organised Treks

All-inclusive packages – which include park entry and camping fees, food, huts, a guide, cook and porters, and transfers to and from the mountain - can be a good deal, particularly if you don't have any equipment.

Picking the right company is extremely important, as an unqualified or inexperienced guide could put you in real danger as well as spoil your trip.

Mountain Rock Safaris Resorts & Trekking Services (🖻 020-242133; www.mountainrockkenya.com) is a real specialist at Mt Kenya climbs and runs



KENYA

the Mountain Rock Lodge (right) near Naro Moru. Its day rates for all-inclusive trips start at US\$135 per person per day.

All-inclusive trips from Naro Moru River Lodge (right) are more expensive than most (US\$135 to US\$220 per person per day), but you're guaranteed beds in the Met Station Hut and Mackinder's Camp.

The following local companies organise their own treks:

KG Mountain Expeditions (🖻 062-62403; www .kenyaexpeditions.com) Offers all-inclusive packages from US\$265 per day (depending on group size), as well as budget options for around US\$80.

Mountain View Tours & Trekking Safaris (🕿 062-62088) Recommended by readers as being cheap and reliable. Prices are negotiable, but expect to pay around US\$60 to US\$70 per day.

Trek Routes NARO MORU ROUTE

Although the least scenic, this is the most straightforward, popular route, and still a spectacular and very enjoyable trail. Allow a minimum of four days for the trek; it's possible in three if you arrange transport between Naro Moru and the Met Station, but doing it this quickly risks serious altitude sickness.

SIRIMON ROUTE

A popular alternative to Naro Moru, this route has more spectacular scenery, greater flexibility and a gentler rate of ascent, although it is still easy to climb too fast, so allow at least five days for the trek. It's well worth considering combining it with the Chogoria route for a six- to seven-day traverse that will really bring out the best of Mt Kenya.

CHOGORIA ROUTE

This route is justly famous for crossing some of the most spectacular and varied scenery on Mt Kenya, and is often combined with the Sirimon route (usually as the descent). The only disadvantage is the long distance between Chogoria village and the park gate. Allow at least five days for a trek here.

NARO MORU

a 062

The dusty little village of Naro Moru, on the western side of the mountain, is the most popular starting point for treks up Mt Kenya. There's a post office with internet access, but no banks.

The best accommodation options are a few kilometres out of town. The two lodges have great camp sites. Naro Moru River Lodge (@ 62212, Nairobi 020-4443357; mt.kenya@africaonline.co.ke; dm US\$8, camp sites US\$10, half board s/tw from US\$90/120; (a) is a relaxing lodge about 1.5km north of town with beautifully landscaped gardens. There's a well-equipped camp site and dormitory block, and campers can use all the hotel facilities. Mountain Rock Lodge (262625; info@mountainrockkenya.com; camp sites US\$5, standard s/tw US\$24/32, superior s/tw & tr US\$32/48) is 6km north of Naro Moru, tucked away in the woods less than 1km from the Nanyuki road. It is friendly and reliable, with a spacious dining room, two bars and a lounge.

About 8.5km from town and 7.5km from the park gate, Mt Kenya Hostel & Campsite (a 62412; mtkenyahostel@wananchi.com; camp sites KSh250, dm KSh400) offers simple accommodation, a large camp site, kitchen facilities, and a restaurant and bar. Mt Kenya treks can be arranged and it hires limited mountain gear.

There are plenty of buses and matatus heading to Nanyuki (KSh60, 30 minutes), Nyeri (KSh80, 45 minutes) and Nairobi (KSh300, three hours).

NANYUKI **a** 062

Founded by white settlers in 1907, Nanyuki is a popular and friendly place to base Mt Kenya treks, especially if taking on the Sirimon and Burguret routes. Watch out for touts, hawkers and cheeky street kids.

Nanyuki River Camel Camp (200722-361642; camellot@wananchi.com; camp sites US\$6, half-board huts with shared bathroom US\$22) The town's only camping is at this fabulous place about 4km west of town. There are decent facilities, free firewood and excellent food. Set on the Nanyuki River, Mt Kenya Paradise Hotel (2 0722-899950; s/tw KSh400/600) is a little tired, but has large clean rooms and is a good place to meet other travellers. There's a loud disco at weekends. Joskaki Hotel (2 31473; Lumumba Rd; s/tw/d KSh300/400/450) is the best of the budget establishments and some lucky punters even get a room with a toilet seat.

Equator Chalet (🕿 31480; Kenyatta Ave; s/tw/d incl breakfast KSh850/1300/1500) is a newish place in the centre of town that gives substantial comfort bang for minimal buck. Rooms surround a breezy internal courtyard that opens onto two balcony areas and a roof terrace. Mt Kenya Safari Club (a in Nairobi 020-216940; www.fairmont.com; full

board s/d US\$270/390, 4-person cottages US\$995; 🛄 🕵) is one of Kenva's flashiest resorts, offering golf, tennis, croquet, snooker, fishing, bowls, and a private wildlife sanctuary with a herd of rare bongo antelopes.

There are daily buses and matatus to Nyeri (KSh100, one hour), Isiolo (KSh150, 1¹/₂ hours), Meru (KSh120, 1¹/₂ hours) and Nairobi (KSh350, three hours).

ABERDARE NATIONAL PARK

This park (@ 061-2055024; adult/child US\$30/10, smartcard required) protects a striking stretch of moorland, peaks and forest atop the western Kinangop Plateau, and the eastern outcrop of dense rainforest, known as the Salient. Wildlife sightings are dominated by elephants and buffaloes, but black rhinos, giant forest hogs, black servals and rare black leopards are also sometimes seen.

Public camp sites and the following accommodation options must be booked through park headquarters. One of the most famous hotels in Kenya, Treetops (20-4452095; www .aberdaresafarihotels.com; s/d US\$198/250) has long been trading on its reputation, although its weathered exterior belies a certain charm. Ark (200-216940; www.fairmont.com; full board s/tw US\$210/300) is a modern, upscale version of Treetops, with a fantastic floodlit waterhole that attracts a wider array of animals.

NYAHURURU & THOMSON'S FALLS a 065

Nyahururu is Kenya's highest major town and has a cool, invigorating climate. Besides Thomson's Falls, one of Kenya's most impressive waterfalls, and some nice walks, most travellers find little reason to linger more than a dav or two.

Safari Lodge (Go Down Rd; s/tw KSh350/600) is clean, bright and very affordable, with hot water on demand and even sockets to charge your mobile. Nyaki Hotel (22313; s/tw KSh350/800) has small but comfy singles and large clean twins, all with hot showers. It's a relatively modern building off Kenyatta Rd.

With character to spare, Thomson's Falls Lodge (22006; tfalls@africaonline.co.ke; camp sites KSh300, s/tw incl breakfast KSh2500/3200) has fireplaces and decent facilities. The grassy camping ground is a bargain, with free firewood and hot showers.

Matatus run to Nakuru (KSh100, 11/4 hours), Naivasha (KSh200, 1¹/₂ hours), Nanyuki (KSh250, three hours) and Nairobi (KSh250, three hours).

NORTHERN KENYA

ISIOLO **a** 064

Isiolo is the gateway to northeastern Kenya and a vital pit-stop on the long road north. The region is populated by Samburu, Rendille, Boran and Turkana people.

Consolidated Bank of Kenya (A2 Hwy) changes cash and Amex travellers cheques, but has no ATM.

Popular with budget travellers in the past, Jamhuri Guest House (s/tw without bathroom KSh120/200, s with bathroom KSh250) is simple, clean enough and has secure parking. About 6km south of town, Range Land Hotel (🖻 0721-434353; A2 Hwy; camp sites KSh200, tw cottage per person KSh1000) is a nice option, with grass to plant your tent, and the stone cottages have nice bathrooms. The Bomen Hotel (3 52389; s/tw/ste KSh900/1500/2500) has the town's brightest and most comfortable rooms. Prices are steep, but some rooms have TV and shared terraces with views.

Nairobi Express operates daily buses (KSh500, 4¹/₂ hours) at 6.45am. The bus north to Marsabit (KSh600, 81/2 hours) and Moyale (KSh1200, 17 hours) picks up passengers at Nairobi Express between 11pm and midnight.

MARALAL

a 065

Maralal's charm lies in its frontier, roughand-ready atmosphere, and it has gained an international reputation for its frenetic International Camel Derby, held between June and October.

The Kenya Commercial Bank, behind the market, changes cash and travellers cheques, but has no ATM.

Easily the best budget option in town, Sunbird Guest House (🖻 62015; s/tw/d KSh350/450/600) is a friendly place with clean and comfortable rooms, mosquito nets and sparkling bathrooms.

Justifiably popular with campers, Yare Camel Club & Camp (🖻 62295; yare@africaonline.co.ke; camp sites KSh200, s/tw/tr US\$20/28/35), 3km south of town, also has cosy wooden bandas with bathrooms. There's a bar and restaurant with nyama choma on Wednesday and Saturday. Yare also organises independent camel safaris; self-catered day/overnight trips cost US\$20/35 per person.

Matatus serve Nyahururu (KSh300, three hours) on a daily basis, usually in the mornings and early afternoons. There are no direct services to Nairobi; take a matatu or bus (KSh300, three hours) to Nyahururu and transfer there.

MARSABIT **a** 069

The area surrounding Marsabit is actually a giant shield volcano, whose surface is peppered with hundreds of cinder cones and volcanic craters, many flooded. Mt Marsabit's highest peak, Karantin (1707m), is a rewarding 5km hike from town through lush vegetation and moss-covered trees. The town has an interesting mixture of local tribespeople.

Kenya Commercial Bank, off Post Office Rd, has no ATM but changes cash and travellers cheques. JeyJey Centre (🖻 2296; A2 Hwy; s/tw/tr without bathroom KSh300/500/700, s with bathroom KSh500) is the best lodge in town. Clean rooms around a colourful courtyard have mosquito nets, and bathrooms have reliable hot water. There's also a TV room, a decent restaurant and an unattractive camp site (per person KSh150).

With security on the mend, a bus now connects Marsabit to Moyale (KSh600, 81/2 hours). There's no designated stop; simply flag it down on the A2 Hwy as it comes through town around 5pm each day (en route from Nairobi!). The same service heads south to Isiolo (KSh600, 81/2 hours) at 9am. Check the latest security and Ethiopian border information from locals and the police station before leaving town.

KENYA LOYANGALANI

An oasis of doum palms and natural springs populated by vivid Turkana tribespeople, Loyangalani is one of northern Kenya's most fascinating places. It overlooks Lake Turkana and is surrounded by small ridges of pillowlava dotted with traditional Turkana stick and palm dwellings. There's little in the way of services.

Palm Shade Camp (camp sites KSh350, s/tw rondavel with shared bathroom KSh500/1000) is easily the best choice in town, with grassy camp sites under the acacias or simple rondavels, plus Loyangalani's best toilets and showers, a cooking shelter and electricity until 10pm. Oasis Lodge (🖻 020-503267; willtravel@swiftkenya.com; full board s/tw US\$150/200; 🔊) is an overpriced lodge offering simple bungalows with dated bathrooms. On the positive side, there's good food and a great view from the open-air bar.

One or two trucks a week stop in Loyangalani en route to Maralal (KSh1000, 10 to 12 hours) from Marsabit.

LAKE TURKANA

If you go to Loyangalani you can't help but visit Lake Turkana. Formerly known as Lake Rudolf, and nowadays often evocatively called the 'Jade Sea', vast Lake Turkana stretches all the way to Ethiopia. High salt levels render the sandy, volcanic area around the lake almost entirely barren, but its desolation and stark, surreal beauty contrast with the colourful tribespeople that inhabit the lake's shore.

Made a World Heritage Site by Unesco in 1997, South Island National Park (adult/child US\$15/5) is uninhabited apart from a large croc population, poisonous snakes and feral goats. To get there, you can hire a boat from Oasis Lodge (per hour KSh2500).

WESTERN KENYA

KISUMU **a** 057

Set on the sloping shore of Lake Victoria's Winam Gulf, Kisumu is the third-largest town in Kenya. It receives relatively few travellers, but it has a relaxed atmosphere.

Information

Abacus Cyber Cafe (Al-Imran Plaza, Oginga Odinga Rd; per hr KSh60; 🕑 8am-8pm) Internet access. Barclavs Bank (Kampala St) Crystal Communications (Mega Plaza, Oginga Odinga Rd; per hr KSh60; 🕑 8am-6pm) Internet access. Kenya Commercial Bank (Jomo Kenyatta Hwy)

Sanhedrin Cyber Joint (Swan Centre, Accra St; per hr KSh60; 🕑 8am-10pm) Internet access. Standard Chartered Bank (Oginga Odinga Rd)

Sleeping

YWCA (🖻 0733-992982; dm KSh300, full board KSh500) Dirt-cheap but very basic bunks in airy rooms and clean shared bathrooms. It's off Anaawa Ave, near the market and bus station.

Razbi Guest House (🕿 2025488; Kendu Lane; s/tw without bathroom KSh400/500, s with bathroom KSh600) Small but secure rooms, with nets and passable shared toilets. There's a private TV lounge/restaurant upstairs.

Hotel Palmers (🖻 2024867; Omolo Agar Rd; s/tw KSh1000/1400) Rooms are on the small side but have decent bathrooms and fans. The hotel also has a comfortable lounge and an outdoor restaurant.

Imperial Hotel (2022211; www.imperialkisumu .com; Jomo Kenyatta Hwy; s/d incl breakfast from KSh3600/4950; 🔀 🔲 🗭) Kisumu's most luxurious hotel, offering 1st-class service and the best restaurant in town; rates drop at weekends.

Eating & Drinking

For an authentic local fish fry, check out the tin-shack restaurants on the lake's shore at the end of Oginga Odinga Rd; a 1.5kg fish should set vou back KSh150.

Hussein Pan House (Swan Centre, Accra St; meals KSh150-300; 🕑 6-11pm) pumps out amazing Asian selections, or head to Mon Ami (Mega Plaza, Oginga Odinga Rd; meals KSh150-350) for hamburgers, pasta and pizza.

Congolese bands play at various venues, such as the Kimwa Grand (Jomo Kenyatta Hwy), along the roads out of town; check flyers and ask locals who are plugged into the scene.

Getting There & Away

Matatus offer direct services to Kakamega (KSh120, one hour) and Eldoret (KSh250, $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours).

Akamba has four daily buses to Nairobi (KSh500, seven hours) via Nakuru (KSh300, 41/2 hours), and there's a daily service to Kampala (KSh750, seven hours).

The train service to Nairobi (1st/2nd class KSh1415/720, 13 hours) is scheduled to depart on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday at 6.30pm.

ELDORET

a 053

This large service town offers little to travellers apart from banks and a good night's sleep. The post office and most banks are on the main drag (Uganda Rd). Safari Forex Bureau (KVDA Plaza, Oloo Rd) exchanges cash and travellers cheques with no commission and, does Western Union transfers. For internet, try Cyber Hawk Internet Café (Nandi Arcade, Nandi Rd; per hr KSh60)

Sleeping & Eating

New Lincoln Hotel (🕿 0723-676699; Oloo Rd; s/d KSh700/900) The most comfortable of the budget options, this pleasant place has decent rooms spread around a courtyard.

Naiberi River Campsite (2063047; campsite@ africaonline.co.ke; camp sites KSh250, dm KSh800, cabins KSh2000; 🔲) This place, 22km southeast of town, is the best option for camping, and is very popular with overland companies. Phone for directions.

Sirikwa Hotel (2063614; hotelsirikwa@multitech web.com; Elgeyo Rd; s/tw incl breakfast KSh4000/5000, ste from KSh8500; 😰) Eldoret's only top-end hotel boasts a long list of facilities, including a lovely swimming pool and beautiful terrace.

Will's Pub & Restaurant (Uganda Rd; meals KSh200-450) A popular spot for burgers and grills with fries.

Getting There & Away

The main bus and matatu stand is in the centre of town, by the market. Regular matatus/ Peugeots serve Kisumu (matatus/Peugeots KSh250/300, 21/2 hours), Nakuru (KSh200/400, 2³/₄ hours) and Nairobi (KSh400/700, six hours). Buses duplicate these routes.

Lakamba (Moi St) buses to Nairobi (KSh500) deaprt at 10.30am and 9pm, via Nakuru (KSh250). There are also services to Kampala at noon (KSh1000, six hours) and midnight (KSh1150).

KAKAMEGA FOREST RESERVE a 056

This small slab of virgin tropical rainforest is all that's left in Kenya of the once-mighty Guineo-Congolian rainforest. It boasts an extraordinary biodiversity, including 330 species of bird, seven different primate species and around 400 species of butterfly. Excellent official **guides** (per person for short/long walk KSh200/600), trained by the Kakamega Biodiversity Conservation and Tour Operators Association, can help you find birds and monkeys.

Udo's Bandas & Campsite (🖻 30603; PO Box 879, Kakamega; camp sites adult/child US\$8/5, bandas per person US\$10) is a tidy, well-maintained KWSrun camp site with simple thatched bandas. Mosquito nets are provided, but bring your own sleeping bag and supplies. Rondo Retreat (a 30268; tfrondo@multitechweb.com; full board s/tw KSh9000/11,600) has an idyllic setting in a former 1920s saw miller's residence, about 3km east of Isecheno. Seven cottages, each with striking traditional fittings and large verandas, sit in gorgeous gardens through which plenty of wildlife passes.

Matatus heading north towards Kitale can drop you at the access road for the main

Buyangu area of the reserve, about 18km north of Kakamega town (KSh50).

MASAI MARA NATIONAL RESERVE

Populated with an astonishing amount of wildlife, this world-renowned **reserve** (adult/ child US\$30/10) is a 1510-sq-km continuation of the equally famous Serengeti Plains over the border in Tanzania. Lions are found in large prides everywhere, and there are also cheetahs, leopards, and large numbers of elephants, buffaloes, zebras and hippos. But the ultimate attraction is undoubtedly the annual wildebeest migration in July and August, when millions of these bleating, cavorting animals move north from the Serengeti, seeking fresh pasture, before turning south again around October.

Most visitors take in 'the Mara' on an organised safari (see p685 for companies in Nairobi) and there's little benefit in self-driving. Expensive but unforgettable **balloon safaris** (per person US\$390) can be arranged through top-end lodges.

Maasai people live in villages bordering the national reserve, and there's a rather overtouristed village between the Mara's Oloolaimutiek and Sekenani gates where you can take photos for a negotiable entry fee (usually around US\$20).

Sleeping

Acacia Camp ((2) 020-210024; camp sites US\$5, s/tw with shared bathroom US\$35/40) A quaint camp with sheltered semi-permanent tents, although there is little shade for campers. Bathrooms are clean with hot water in the evening, and there are cooking areas and a bar.

Fig Tree Camp (© 020-605328; sales@madahotels.com; full board s/d US\$185/230;) Comfortable safari tents overlook the Talek River, and there's a small pool and a treetop bar.

Kichwa Tembo Camp (2020-3740920; alice@conscorp .co.ke; full board s/d US\$185/370; 2) Just outside the northern boundary, Kichwa has permanent tents with stone bathrooms, tasteful furnishings and spectacular savannah views.

Keekorok Lodge (bookings 020-4447151; full board s/d US\$200/250;) This has always been a great option, with bungalows, cabins and cottages to choose from. It has the usual topend facilities, with the added attraction of a hippo pool.

Mara Intrepids (🗟 020-4446651; maraintrepids@heri tagehotels.co.ke; full board ind wildlife drives s/d US\$450/615; () The 30 permanent tents have canopied four-posters and stone bathrooms; there's a lovely riverside pool.

THE COAST

MOMBASA a 041 / pop 653,000

Mombasa is the largest city on the Kenyan coast and also the largest coastal port in East Africa. Traders have been coming here since at least the 12th century, and during its bloody history Mombasa changed hands dozens of times between the Arab-Swahilis, Portuguese, Omanis and finally the British.

Orientation

The main thoroughfare, Digo Rd and its southern extension Nyerere Ave, run north– south through the city. The Likoni ferry leaves from the southern end of Nyerere Ave.

Running west from the junction between Nyerere Ave and Digo Rd is Moi Ave, where you'll find the tourist office and a useful landmark – huge aluminium elephant tusks forming an M over the road. Heading east from the junction, Nkrumah Rd provides the easiest access to the Old Town and Fort Jesus.

North of the city centre, Digo Rd becomes Abdel Nasser Rd, where you'll find many of the bus stands for Nairobi and destinations north along the coast. There's another big group of bus offices west of here at the intersection of Jomo Kenyatta Ave and Mwembe Tayari Rd. The train station is at the intersection of Mwembe Tayari and Haile Selassie Rds.

Information

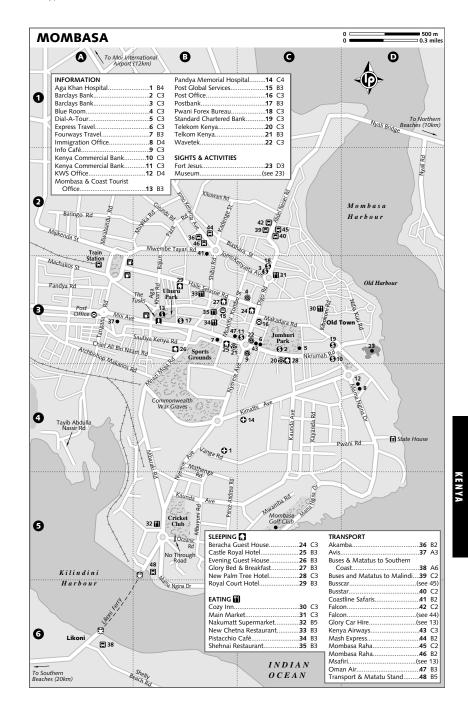
EMERGENCY AAR Health Services ((2) 312409; (2) 24hr) Police ((2) 222121, 999)

INTERNET ACCESS

Blue Room (224021; www.blueroomonline.com; Haile Selassie Rd; per min KSh2; 3 9am-10pm) Info Café (227621; infomombasa@yahoo.com; Ambalal House, Nkrumah Rd; per min KSh1) Wavetek (7 0735-295007; TSS Towers, Nkrumah Rd; per min KSh1) Also offers international calls from KSh15 per minute.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Aga Khan Hospital (🗃 312953; akhm@mba.akhm kenya.org; Vanga Rd) Pandya Memorial Hospital (🛱 229252; Kimathi Ave)



MONEY

Barclays Bank Nkrumah Rd (224573); Digo Rd (🕿 311660) Barclays has an ATM. Kenya Commercial Bank Moi Ave (🖻 220978); Nkrumah Rd (🕿 312523) Has an ATM. Postbank (🕿 3434077; Moi Ave) Western Union money transfers.

Pwani Forex Bureau (🕿 221727; Digo Rd) Standard Chartered Bank (🖻 224614; Treasury Sq, Nkrumah Rd) Has an ATM.

POST

Post office (227705; Digo Rd)

TELEPHONE

Post Global Services (230581;

inglobal@africaonline.co.ke; Maungano Rd; 1 7.30am-8pm) International calls cost around KSh85 per minute. Telkom Kenya (🗃 312811) Locations on Nkrumah Rd and Moi Ave.

TOURIST INFORMATION

KWS office (🖻 312744, 312745; Nguua Court, Mama Ngina Dr; 🕑 6am-6pm) Sells and recharges smartcards. Mombasa & Coast Tourist Office (225428: mcta@ikenva.com; Moi Ave; 🕅 8am- 4.30pm) Provides information and can organise accommodation, tours, guides and transport.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Dial-A-Tour (🕿 221411: dialatour@ikenva.com: Oriental Bldg, Nkrumah Rd)

Express Travel (🖻 315405; PO Box 90631, Nkrumah Rd) American Express agent. Mail can be held here for Amex cardholders.

Fourways Travel (223344; Moi Ave)

KENYA Siahts

Mombasa's biggest tourist attraction is partially ruined Fort Jesus, which was built by the Portuguese in 1593 and dominates the harbour entrance. These days it houses a museum (222425; nmkfortj@swiftmombasa.com; nonresident adult/child KSh200/100; (*) 8am-6pm), which exhibits mostly ceramics, but also finds from the Portuguese frigate Santo António de Tanná, and the fascinating culture and traditions of the nine coastal Mijikenda tribes.

Mombasa's **Old Town** doesn't have the medieval charm of Lamu or Zanzibar, but it's still an interesting area to wander around. The houses here are characteristic of coastal East African architecture, with ornately carved doors and window frames and fretwork balconies.

Sleeping

All the places listed in this section have fans and mosquito nets (essential during the hot season).

Beracha Guest House (🖻 0722-673798; Haile Selassie Rd; s/d KSh500/750) A popular central choice with clean rooms of varying shapes; there's a cheap restaurant on the premises.

Evening Guest House (🖻 221380; Mnazi Moja Rd; s/d KSh800/11,000, without bathroom KSh700/900) Set in a thatched courtyard behind its own large restaurant area. Most rooms are good value though some are a bit small.

Glory Bed & Breakfast (228282; Haile Selassie Rd; s/d/trincl breakfast KSh750/1100/1450) Adequate if a little cramped: rooms have fans but no mosquito nets. Cheaper rooms with shared bathroom are available.

New Palm Tree Hotel (🗃 312623; Nkrumah Rd; s/d KSh1160/1740) Character and charm in spades, with all the rooms set around a fantastic roof terrace.

Castle Royal Hotel (220373; info@680hotel.co.ke; Moi Ave; s/d/tr KSh2500/3500/4500; 🕄 🛄) The best hotel in town and one of the best deals in the whole of Kenya, the newly renovated Castle Royal has TV, phone, fridge and safe in every room, plus an excellent breakfast in the cool terrace restaurant at the front.

Royal Court Hotel (223379; royalcourt@swift mombasa; Haile Selassie Rd; s US\$60-70, d US\$75-95, ste US\$130; 🕄) Stylish business hotel with good service and facilities, disabled access, and excellent food at the rooftop Tawa Terrace restaurant

Eating

Explore the Old Town for cheap, authentic Swahili cuisine; most places are Muslim-run, so no alcoholic drinks are sold and they're closed until after sunset during Ramadan.

New Chetna Restaurant (224477; Haile Selassie Rd; mains KSh200-300) A very popular South Indian canteen with a long list of vegetarian goodies and great-value thalis.

Shehnai Restaurant (224801; Fatemi House, Maungano Rd; mains from KSh290; 🕎 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Mombasa's classiest curry house specialises in tandoori and *mughlai* (north Indian) cuisine, and has a huge menu.

Two recommended places among Mombasa's limited café scene are Cozy Inn (🖻 0733-925707: Kibokoni Rd: mains KSh80-195: 🛄) a relatively new addition to the Old Town scene; and Pistacchio Café (221989; cnr Meru Rd & Mwindani Rd;

buffet lunch KSh450; (Y) Mon-Sat), which has excellent ice cream and popular lunchtime buffets, usually consisting of a mixture of Indian and Western dishes.

Self-caterers should head to Nakumatt supermarket (Nyerere Ave) or Main market (Digo Rd) Mombasa's dilapidated 'covered' market building.

Getting There & Away AIR

Kenya Airways (🖻 221251; www.kenya-airways.com; TSS Towers, Nkrumah Rd) flies to Nairobi at least six times daily (KSh6835, one hour).

Mombasa Air Safari (🗃 433061; www.mombasaair safari.com; Moi International Airport) flies to Malindi (US\$21, 25 minutes) and Lamu (US\$90, 11/4 hours).

BUS & MATATU

There are dozens of daily trips to and from Nairobi (mostly in the early morning and late evening). Daytime services take at least six hours, while the overnight trip takes anywhere from eight to 10 hours. Fares vary from KSh500 to KSh1000. Most companies have at least four departures daily. Recommended companies include the following:

Akamba (🕿 490269; Jomo Kenyatta Ave) Busscar (222854; Abdel Nasser Rd) Busstar (🖻 Nairobi 02-219525; Abdel Nasser Rd) Coastline Safaris (2 312083: Mwembe Tavari St) Falcon (R Nairobi 02-229662) Offices on Abdel Nasser Rd and Jomo Kenvatta Ave. Mash Express (2 491955; Jomo Kenyatta Ave)

Mombasa Raha (225716) Offices on Abdel Nasser Rd and Jomo Kenvatta Ave. Msafiri (🕿 314691; Aga Khan Rd)

Numerous daily matatus and small minibuses to Malindi leave from in front of the Noor Mosque. Buses take up to 2½ hours (KSh100), matatus about two hours (KSh120).

Tawakal, Falcon, Mombasa Raha and TSS Express have buses to Lamu, most leaving at around 7am (report 30 minutes early) from their offices on Abdel Nasser Rd. Buses take around seven hours to reach the Lamu ferry at Mokoke (KSh400 to 500), stopping in Malindi (KSh150, two hours).

For buses and *matatus* to the beaches south of Mombasa you first need to get off the island via the Likoni ferry (see right). Very frequent buses and *matatus* leave from the mainland ferry terminal and travel down the southern coast.

TRAIN

The popular overnight train to/from Nairobi leaves Mombasa at 7pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. The fares are KSh3160/2275 in 1st/2nd class with dinner, breakfast and bedding; reserve as far in advance as possible. The booking office (🖻 312220; 🕑 8am-5pm) is at the station in Mombasa.

Getting Around

The two Likoni ferries connect Mombasa Island with the southern mainland, running at frequent intervals throughout the day and night. It's free to pedestrians and KSh35 for a car. To get to the jetty from the city centre, take a Likoni matatu from Digo Rd (KSh10).

There is currently no public transport to/from the airport, so you're best taking a taxi: the fare to central Mombasa is around KSh650.

TIWI BEACH a 040

Book well ahead if you intend to visit this wonderfully undeveloped beach during the high season. Beach boys and souvenir sellers are fairly prevalent at the southern end of Tiwi.

Twiga Lodge (2 3205126; camp sites KSh200, s/d KSh800/1500, cottages KSh1500) is the only really backpacker-oriented place in Tiwi, with a choice of a beachfront camp site, basic cottages or superior 'show rooms' (B&B KSh3000 to KSh4500). Maweni Beach Cottages (🖻 3300012; www.mawenibeach.com; cottages KSh3000-5500) has good facilities and attractive makuti-roofed cottages overlooking a peaceful cove. Coral Cove Cottages (2 3205195; coralcove.tiwibeach.com; cottages K5h3500-5200) is a fantastically friendly place, with a wide variety of comfy, nicely decorated cottages sleeping one to five people.

Tiwi is 3.5km from the Likoni-Ukunda road; buses and matatus can drop you at the turn-off (KSh30), from where you should take a taxi (KSh300) to avoid a mugging.

MALINDI <u>ନ</u>୍ଦ 042

Malindi is all about the beach, and the coral reefs of the nearby Malindi Marine National Park offer good snorkelling and diving.

Information **INTERNET ACCESS** Bling Net (🗃 30041; Lamu Rd; per min KSh2) Also serves food.

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

Inter-Communications (a 31310; Lamu Rd; per min KSh1; & 8am-11pm) Y-Net (a 30171; y-netinternational@yahoo.com; Stanchart Arcade, Lamu Rd; per min KSh2)

MONEY

Barclays Bank ((20056; Lamu Rd) Has an ATM. Dollar Forex Bureau ((2003) 30602; Lamu Rd) Rates may be slightly better here than at the banks. Kenya Commercial Bank ((2003) 20148; Lamu Rd) Has an ATM.

Postbank (Malindi Complex, Lamu Rd) Standard Chartered Bank (Stanchart Arcade, Lamu Rd) Has an ATM.

Sights & Activities

Immediately offshore from Malindi, the important **Malindi Marine National Park** (adult/child US\$5/2; ^(b) 7am-7pm) protects some impressive coral reefs, and there's a chance you'll see whale sharks.

Snorkelling or glass-bottomed-boat trips can be arranged at the **KWS office** (**a** 31554; malindimnp@kws.org) on the coast road south of town. The going rate is around KSh3500 per boat (five to 10 people) for a two-hour trip, and masks and snorkels are provided.

All the big hotels have dive centres, usually run in conjunction with local companies. Single dives cost \notin 40 plus the park entry fee, while a PADI open-water diver course will cost around \notin 330.

Sleeping

Silversands Campsite (20412; camp sites adult/child KSh200/100, bandas KSh500-600) On the southern beach strip, this is a much-loved site for travellers and there are good facilities. The simple tented *bandas* have recently been fully refurbished.

Tana Guest House (a 30940; Jamhuri St; s & d/tr with bathroom KSh550/650, s/d without bathroom KSh350/450) Rooms are decent for the price, with fans, mosquito nets and squat toilets. It's in a handy location for buses and cheap food.

African Pearl Hotel ((20133-966167; www.african pearl.com; Lamu Rd; s/d from KSh2000/2500, cottages KSh2400-4900; (2010) (2010) (2010) (2010) (2010) range option, features a decent pool, outdoor bar and eating area and nice gardens. Rooms are large with netted four-posters and their own balcony.

 market option right on the beach. Tastefully decorated rooms all have a veranda with sea views.

Eating

Palentine Tea Room ((2) 31412; Uhuru Rd; mains KSh60-140; (2) A recommended all-hours Muslim canteen opposite the old market, serving stews, curries, pilau and soups in tiled surroundings.

Old Man & the Sea (a 31106; Mama Ngina Rd; mains KSh380-600, seafood KSh500-1900) Hands down the best grub in town, with superb fresh seafood and attentive service in an atmospheric old Moorish house on the seafront.

I Love Pizza (20672; nwright@africaonline.co.ke; Mama Ngina Rd; pizza KSh300-550, mains from KSh600) A very popular Italian restaurant on the seafront with excellent pizzas.

Getting There & Away

Airkenya (2) 30646; Malindi Airport) and Kenya Airways (2) 20237; Lamu Rd) fly daily to Nairobi (about US\$85). Mombasa Air Safari (2) 041-433061) has daily flights to Mombasa (US\$21, 25 minutes) and Lamu (US\$62, 30 minutes).

Mombasa Raha has numerous daily buses to Mombasa (KSh150, two hours). Tawakal, Falcon and Zam Zam buses all leave daily for Lamu (KSh300 to Kh400, four hours).

Watamu is another popular village with sandy beaches and plenty of hotels. Offshore is the southern part of the Malindi Marine Reserve Park, and the Swahili ruins of **Gede** are a short distance away.

There are no banks here, but you can change money at foreign-exchange bureaus at the big hotels and **Tunda Tours** (a 32079; Beach Way Rd), which also has internet connection (per minute KSh5).

Malindi Marine Reserve Park (adult/child US\$5/2) lies around 2km offshore. Glass-bottomed boats can be hired from the KWS office (232393), at the end of the coast road, where you also pay the park fees. Boat operators ask from KSh1800 to KSh3500 per person. All the big hotels offer 'goggling' (snorkelling) trips to nonguests for around KSh1500.

Sleeping

Marijani Holiday Resort (a 32448; marijani@swiftmalindi .com; s/d €19/21, cottages €39-52) Easily the best place to stay in the village, with traditional furnish-

ings and breezy verandas. To get here, take the path beside the Mama Lucy supermarket and turn left at the Beach Way Shop.

Ascot Residence Hotel ((2) 22326; info@ascot residence.com; Beach Way Rd; s/d KSh1600/2800, apt KSh3500-7000; (2)) A very comfortable complex of tidy rooms and apartments set in a garden with a dolphin-shaped pool (no, really). Security is good and there's a fine pizza restaurant.

Turtle Bay Beach Club (@ 32003; www.turtlebay .co.ke; r per person €100-130; 🏽 🔲 😰 🕭) One of the best resorts of its kind in the area, with excellent facilities excellent and even entertainment for the kiddies.

Getting There & Around

There are *matatus* between Malindi and Watamu throughout the day (KSh50, one hour). All *matatus* pass the turn-off to the Gede ruins (KSh10). For Mombasa, the easiest option is to take a *matatu* to the highway (KSh10) and flag down a bus or *matatu* from there.

Taxis charge KSh800 to the Gede ruins and KSh1800 to Malindi.

LAMU

a 042

Lamu town is a living throwback to the Swahili culture that once dominated the entire Indian Ocean coast. The winding streets, carved woods and traditional houses evoke the everyday sights and sounds of another age, and Lamu's World Heritage listing is entirely justified.

Orientation

Lamu's main thoroughfare is Kenyatta Rd, a long winding alley known popularly as 'Main St', which runs from the northern end of town past the fort and then south to the Muslim cemetery and the inland track to Shela. Most of the guesthouses are tucked away in the confusing maze of alleys located behind.

Information

The best internet connections are at the **post** office (Kenyatta Rd) and Lynx Infosystems (B 833134; per min KSh2; S 8am-10pm) near the fort.

The **Tourist information office** ((a) 633449; (b) 9am-1pm & 2-4pm) is a commercial tour-andaccommodation agency that also provides tourist information.

Sights

All of Lamu's museums are open from 8am to 6pm daily. Admission to each is KSh200/100 for a nonresident adult/child.

The **Lamu Museum** is an excellent introduction to the culture and history of Lamu Island. It has displays on Swahili culture, the famous coastal carved doors, Lamu's nautical history and the tribes that used to occupy this part of the coast in pre-Muslim days.

A beautifully restored traditional **Swahili house** tucked away off to the side of Yumbe House hotel will put you firmly back in the past. Inside you'll find a re-creation of a working Swahili home, with cookware, beds and other furniture.

The bulky, atmospheric **Lamu Fort** squats on Lamu's main square among the airy Swahili roofs. The highlight is scaling the ramparts for some sweeping town views.

Festivals & Events

The **Maulid Festival** celebrates the birth of the Prophet Mohammed with much singing, dancing and other events.

The **Lamu Cultural Festival** is another colourful cultural event, held in the last week of August, though it's aimed more at tourists than local people.

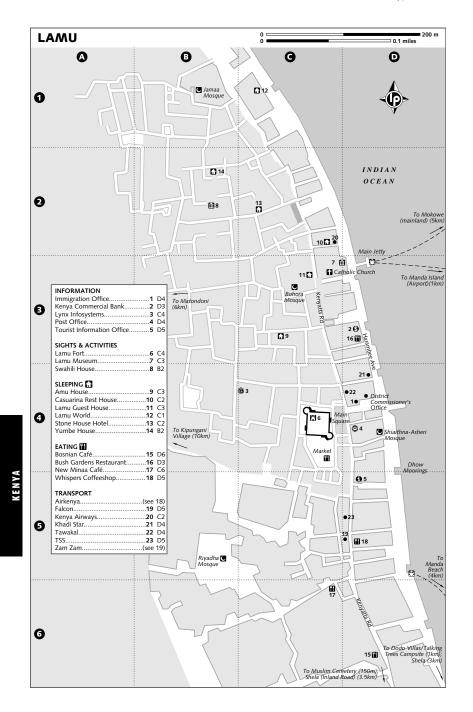
Sleeping

Casuarina Rest House ((a) 633123; s/d with bathroom KSh400/800, s/d/tr without bathroom KSh300/500/700) A friendly, personal vibe ensures that this place is often full. The roof terrace acts as a social lounge, the staff are great fun and the breezy top-floor balcony double is fantastic.

Lamu Guest House ((a) 633338; Kenyatta Rd; s/d with bathroom KSh500/1000, s/d/tr without bathroom KSh450/900/1000) The basic rooms are plain, but the upper-floor ones catch the sea breeze.

Amu House ((a) 633420; amuhouse@aol.com; s/d/tr KSh1700/2300/2700) Rates at this beautiful 16thcentury house include breakfast, transfers from the airstrip and a free water-skiing lesson at Shela Beach.

Yumbe House ((2) 633101; lamuoldtown@africaonline .co.ke; s/d/tr KSh1300/2800/3900) A tall, traditional house set around a leafy courtyard. The pleasant rooms have fridges and are spotlessly clean, decked out with woven rugs and Lamu furniture.



Stone House Hotel (🖻 633544; half-board s/d US\$45/66) Another wonderful old Swahili place with excellent views over the town and waterfront from its superb rooftop restaurant (no alcohol). Rooms can be booked with Kisiwani Ltd (🖻 020-4446384) in Nairobi.

Lamu World (🖻 633491; www.lamuworld.com; Harambee Ave; s/d/ste US\$150/200/250; 🔲 😰) An almost perfect modern interpretation of Swahili style. Its 10 rooms are shared between two houses, all with immaculate fittings.

Eating

All the cheap places and many of the more expensive restaurants are closed all day until after sunset during the month of Ramadan.

New Minaa Café (meals under KSh120; 1 6.30ammidnight) This busy rooftop café serves Swahili favourites, like kebabs, maharagwe (beans in coconut milk) and samaki (fried fish).

Bush Gardens Restaurant (🖻 633285; Harambee Ave; mains KSh180-800) The template for a whole set of restaurants along the waterfront, offering breakfasts, excellent seafood, lobster in Swahili sauce, and superb juices and shakes.

Whispers Coffeeshop (Kenyatta Rd; mains KSh240-550; (>9am-9pm) This is a great place for an upmarket meal, a freshly baked cake or a real cappuccino, even during Ramadan (although it closes in the low season).

Bosnian Café (Kenvatta Rd) One of several dirtcheap local canteens at the far end of the main street that set up takeaway stalls in the evening, selling samosas, chapatis, mishkaki (kebabs), chips and the like.

Getting There & Away AIR

Airkenya (🖻 633445; Baraka House, Kenyatta Rd) and Safarilink (The Nairobi 020-600777) fly between Lamu and Nairobi's Wilson Airport daily (US\$145, 1³/₄ hours). Kenya Airways (a 633155; Casuarina House, Harambee Ave) has daily afternoon flights between Lamu and Nairobi's Kenyatta International Airport (KSh10,860, 2¼ hours). Mombasa Air Safari (Mombasa 041-433061) flies to Mombasa (US\$90, 1¹/₄ hours) via Malindi (US\$21, 30 minutes).

Lamu's airport is on Manda Island and the ferry across the channel to Lamu costs KSh100.

BUS

The main bus companies operating between Mombasa, Malindi and Lamu are TSS, Falcon, Zam Zam, Khadi Star and Tawakal.

There are booking offices for all these companies on Kenyatta Rd, apart from Khadi Star, which has its office on the waterfront. The going rate to Mombasa is KSh400 to KSh500; most buses leave between 7am and 8am, so you'll need to be at the jetty at 6.30am for the boat to the mainland. Book early as demand is heavy.

Getting Around

There are ferries (KSh40) between Lamu and the bus station on the mainland (near Mokowe). Ferries between the airstrip on Manda Island and Lamu cost KSh100 and leave about half an hour before the flights leave.

SHELA

This ancient Swahili village on Lamu island is an atmospheric place to wander around, although most people come here for the spectacular dune-backed beach.

Dodo Villas/Talking Trees Campsite (2 633500; camp sites per tent KSh400, r KSh600-1200, apt per person KSh200) is Lamu's only budget beach option, 50m back from the seafront on the Shela-Lamu track. The Stopover Guest House (🖻 633459; mtendeni@ikenya.com; d incl breakfast KSh3000) is the first place you come to on the waterfront and has nice rooms with big beds.

Island Hotel (2 633290; half-board s/d US\$37/52) is a superb Lamu-style house in the centre of Shela with a romantic rooftop restaurant. It's five minutes' walk from the waterfront, along the alley beside Kijani House. Peponi Hotel (🖻 633421; www.peponi-lamu.com; s/d US\$220/300; 🕑 closed May & Jun; 🕥), at the east end of Shela, is the top resort hotel on the island. It overlooks the Lamu Channel and there are just 24 individually styled rooms.

To get to Shela, you can take a motorised dhow from the moorings in Lamu for KSh100 per person (or KSh250 to KSh300 for a solo ride). Walking takes about 40 minutes.

SOUTHERN KENYA

TSAVO NATIONAL PARK

At nearly 22,000 sq km, Tsavo is the largest national park in Kenya and divided into Tsavo West National Park (9000 sq km) and Tsavo East National Park (11,747 sq km). Its landscapes are some of the most dramatic in Kenya, the animals are that bit wilder and the parks receive comparatively few visitors.

Entry is US\$27/10 per adult/child per day, vehicles cost KSh200 and camping is US\$10 per adult; you have to pay separately for each park. Both use the smartcard system; you'll need enough credit for your vehicle, entry fee and any camping charges for as long as you're staying. Smartcards can be bought and recharged at the Voi Gate to Tsavo East or in Mombasa (p702).

Campers in Tsavo West National Park can use the **public camp sites** (camp sites adult/child US\$10/5) at Komboyo and Chyulu, or a choice of **special camp sites** (camp sites adult/child US\$15/5).

Ngulia Safari Camp (ⓒ Voi 043-30050; tsavoh@ africaonline.co.ke; r KSh3500-6000) has new management and a complete renovation has turned this hillside camp into Tsavo's best luxury bargain. Thatched tent-fronted stone cottages come with or without kitchen, and there's a small bar-restaurant.

At Tsavo East, Ndololo Camp ((2) 043-30050; tsavoh@africaonline.co.ke; full board s/d/tr US\$40/70/90) is a great-value tented camp with mosquito nets, and canvas toilet and shower cubicles. There's a single KWS camp site (2) 043-30049; tenp@africaonline.co.ke; camp sites adult/child US\$10/5) with basic toilets, and a few special camp sites (adult/child US\$15/5) that move from year to year.

Just 4km from Voi Gate, **Voi Safari Lodge** (
Mombasa 041-471861; voilodge@kenya-safari.co.ke; s/d US\$105/150;
) overlooks an incredible sweep of savannah, and has a rock-cut swimming pool and a natural waterhole.

Access to either part of Tsavo National Park is by private vehicle (preferably 4WD) or organised safari from Nairobi or Mombasa.

AMBOSELI NATIONAL PARK

KENYA

Tortilis Camp (2020-604053; www.chelipeacock .com; full board s/d US\$400/640) is a wonderfully conceived site, and one of the most exclusive ecolodges in Kenya, commanding a superb spot with perfect Kilimanjaro vistas. Prices include transfers, guided walks, cultural visits, laundry and most drinks, but not park fees or fancy wine. **OI Tukai Lodge** (2020-4445514; oltukai@mitsuminet.com; full board s/d US\$200/280; **Q**) is a splendid lodge with soaring *makuti* (thatched palm leaf) roofs and tranquil shaded gardens. The split-level bar has wonderful views, and the overall atmosphere is of peace and luxury. Two of the cottages have wheelchair access.

The only way to see Amboseli is by private vehicle (preferably 4WD) or on an organised safari.

KENYA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

In the national parks, high-season prices are normally from July to March; on the coast, peak times tend to be July to August and December to March. High-season prices are quoted here.

Bandas are basic huts and cottages, usually with some kind of kitchen and bathroom, that offer excellent value for budget travellers. Camping gear can be hired in Nairobi and around Mt Kenya, and there are basic KWS camp sites in just about every national park or reserve. The KWS 'special' camp sites are temporary sites with few facilities that cost more because of their wilder locations.

Budget hotels are often known as 'board and lodgings' and tend to be very run-down, with almost nonexistent security. 'Proper' hotels and guesthouses come in all shapes and sizes, from Kenyan, African and Western chains through boutique hotels to little family-run concerns. Standards of rooms, food and service are generally very good, especially at high-end establishments. Midrange self-catering options are available at some coastal resorts, but probably nowhere else in the country.

Most national parks have some fantastic safari lodges. The best places feature five-star rooms, *makuti*-roofed bars and restaurants overlooking waterholes full of wildlife. Rates tend to come down a lot in the low season.

For a real taste of East Africa, you must treat yourself to a couple of nights in a luxury tented camp. These places tend to occupy wonderfully remote settings, and feature large, comfortable, semi-permanent safari tents with beds, furniture and bathrooms.

ACTIVITIES Ballooning

It's definitely worth saving up your shillings for the incomparable experience of watching wildlife while floating silently above the savannah plains in a hot-air balloon. Flights

PRACTICALITIES

- Major newspapers and magazines in Kenya include the Daily Nation, the East African Standard, the East African, the Weekly Review and the New African.
- KBC Radio broadcasts throughout the country on various FM frequencies. Most major towns also have their own local music and talkback stations, and the BBC World Service is easily accessible.
- KBC and NTV are the main national TV stations; the CNN, Sky and BBC networks are also widely available on satellite or cable (DSTV).
- Kenyan televisual equipment uses the standard European NSTC video system.
- Kenya uses the 240V system, with square three-pin sockets as used in the UK. Bring a universal adaptor if you need to charge your phone or run other appliances.
- Kenya uses the metric system; distances are in kilometres and most weights are in kilograms.

are currently available in the Masai Mara for around US\$390, and typically set off at dawn and end with a champagne breakfast.

Diving & Snorkelling

The Malindi Marine National Park (p704) offers opportunities for snorkelling and scuba diving. October to March is the best time; silt affects visibility during June, July and August. Almost every hotel and resort on the coast can arrange an open-water diving course. A five-day PADI certification course will cost US\$450. Trips for certified divers, including two dives, go for around US\$90.

Trekking & Climbing

For proper mountain trekking, Mt Kenya (p694) is the obvious choice, but there are plenty of other options, such as Mt Elgon, the Cherangani Hills, the upper reaches of the Aberdares (p697) and even the Ngong Hills, close to Nairobi.

For more trekking information, get hold of a copy of Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa* or contact the **Mountain Club of Kenya** (MCK; **©** 020-602330; www.mck.or.ke).

Savage Wilderness Safaris ((2) 020-521590; www .whitewaterkenya.com; Sarit Centre, PO Box 1000, Westlands, Nairobi) offers mountaineering trips to Mt Kenya and rock climbing at sites around the country, as well as some more unusual options, like caving.

Wildlife Safaris

Kenya is one of the greatest wildlife-watching destinations on earth and virtually every visitor to Kenya goes on safari at least once. There are dozens of safari operators to choose from and it's worth spending some time to select a reliable one that matches your budget and itinerary. Beware that fly-by-night operations exist and several 'budget' companies promise less than they deliver for your money. It's worth checking with the **Kenyan Association of Tour Operators** (KAIO; ^(C) 020-713348; www.katokenya .org) before making a booking; KATO membership is at least some indicator of reliability and using a KATO member will give you some recourse if things go awry. We can personally recommend the following companies, but this list is by no means exhaustive.

Ben's Ecological Safaris (Map pp686–7; [®] 020-3755290; www.bensecologicalsafaris.com; Aqua Plaza, Muranga Rd, Nairobi) A professionally run local outfit that puts together excellent wildlife- and bird-watching itineraries.

Bike Treks (2020-446371; www.biketreks.co.ke; Kabete Gardens, Westlands, Nairobi) Walking and cycling safaris to major sites such as the Masai Mara, Mt Kenya etc. Gametrackers (Map pp688–9; 2020-338927; www .gametrackersafaris.com; Nginyo Towers, cnr Koinange & Moktar Daddah Sts, Nairobi) Offers competitively priced safaris to Lake Turkana as well as less far-flung destinations. Origins Safaris (Map pp688–9; 2020-312137; www .originsafaris.info; Fedha Towers, Standard St, Nairobi) Tailor-made wildlife, birding and cultural safaris for medium- to top-end customers.

Sirikwa Safaris ((2) 0733-793524; Kitale) Can organise treks in little-visited parts of western Kenya, as well as expert local wildlife knowledge.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most government offices are open Monday to Friday from 8am or 8.30am to 1pm and from 2pm to 5pm. Post offices, shops and services open roughly from 8am to 5pm Monday to

Friday and 9am to noon on Saturday. Internet cafés generally keep longer evening hours and may open on Sunday. Banking hours are from 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday and from 9am to 11am Saturday.

As a rule cafés will open at around 6am or 7am and close in the early evening, while more expensive ethnic restaurants will be open from 11am to 10pm daily, sometimes with a break between lunch and dinner.

CUSTOMS

There are strict laws about taking wildlife products out of Kenya. The export of products made from elephant, rhino and sea turtle are prohibited. The collection of coral is also not allowed. Ostrich eggs will be confiscated unless you can prove you bought them from a certified ostrich farm. Always check to see what permits are required, especially for the export of any plants, insects and shells.

The usual regulations apply to items you can bring into the country: 50 cigars, 200 cigarettes, 250g of pipe tobacco, 1L of alcohol, 250ml of perfume, and other personal items, such as cameras, laptop computers and binoculars. Obscene publications are banned, which may extend to some lads' magazines.

You are allowed to take up to KSh100,000 out of the country.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

A little street sense goes a long way here, and getting the latest local information is essential wherever you intend to travel.

Banditry

K E N Y A Wars in Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia have all affected stability and safety in northern and northeastern Kenya. However, tourists are rarely targeted and security has also improved considerably in previously high-risk areas, such as the Isiolo-Marsabit, Marsabit-Moyale and Malindi-Lamu routes. You should always check the situation locally before taking these roads, or travelling between Garsen and Garissa or Thika.

Crime

The country's biggest problem is crime, ranging from petty snatch theft and mugging to violent armed robbery, carjacking and corruption. As a visitor you needn't feel paranoid, but you should always keep your wits about you, particularly at night.

Perhaps the best advice for when you're walking around cities and towns is not to carry anything valuable with you. Most hotels provide a safe or secure place for valuables, although you should be cautious of the security at some budget places.

Always take taxis after dark or along lonely dirt roads. In the event of a crime, you'll need to get a police report if you intend to make an insurance claim.

Scams

At some point in Kenya you'll almost certainly come across people who play on the emotions and gullibility of foreigners. Nairobi is a particular hot spot, with 'friendly' approaches a daily, if not hourly, occurrence. You should always ignore any requests for money. Be sceptical of strangers who claim to recognise you in the street, and anyone who makes a big show of inviting you into the hospitality of their home probably has ulterior motives. The usual trick is to bestow some kind of gift upon the delighted traveller, who is then emotionally blackmailed into reciprocating to the order of several hundred shillings.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Kenyan Embassies & Consulates

Australia (🖻 02-6247 4788; kenrep@dynamite.com.au; QBE Bldg, 33-35 Ainslie Ave, Canberra, ACT 2601) Canada (🖻 613-563 1773; www.kenyahighcommission .ca; 415 Laurier Ave, East Ottawa, Ontario, KIN 6R4) South Africa (2012-362 2249; kenp@pta.lia.net; 302 Brooks St, Menlo Park, 0081 Pretoria) Tanzania (🖻 022-2112955; khc@raha.com; NIC Investment House, Samora Ave, Dar es Salaam) Uganda (🕿 041-258235: Plot No 41, Nakasero Rd, Kampala) UK (🖻 020-7636 2371; www.kenyahighcommission.com;

45 Portland Pl, London W1N 4AS) USA (🖻 202-387-6101; www.kenyaembassy.com; 2249 R Street NW, Washington DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Kenya

A selection of countries that maintain diplomatic missions in Kenya are listed below. Australia (Map pp686-7; 🗟 020-445034; www.embas sy.gov.au/ke.html; ICIPE House, Riverside Dr, Nairobi) Canada (🖻 020-3663000; www.nairobi.gc.ca; Limuru Rd, Nairobi)

Ethiopia (Map pp686-7; 🗃 020-2732050; State House Ave, Nairobi)

French (Map pp686-7; 🖻 020-316363; www.amba france-ke.org; Barclays Plaza, Loita St, Nairobi)

Germany (🖻 020-4262100; www.nairobi.diplo.de; 113 Riverside Dr, Nairobi)

Netherlands (🕿 020-444 7412; Riverside La, Nairobi) South Africa (🖻 020-282 7100; Roshanmaer PI, Lenana Rd, Nairobi)

Sudan (Map pp686-7; 🖻 020-2720883;

sudanemb@wananchi.com; AON-Minet Bldg, Mamlaka Rd, Nairobi) At the time of research, this embassy did not issue visas.

Tanzania (Map pp688-9; 🖻 020-311948; Reinsurance Plaza, Aga Khan Walk, Nairobi)

Uganda Kenyatta Ave (Map pp688-9; 🖻 020-311814; Uganda House, Kenyatta Ave, Nairobi); Riverside Paddocks (a 020-4445420; www.ugandahighcommission.co.ke; Riverside Paddocks, Nairobi)

UK (Map pp686-7; **a** 020-2844000; www.britishhigh commission.gov.uk/kenya; Upper Hill Rd, Nairobi) USA (200-3636000; http://nairobi.usembassy.gov; United Nations Ave, Nairobi)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The major events around Kenya include the following:

Maulid Festival Falling in March or April for the next few years, this annual celebration of the prophet Mohammed's birthday is a huge event in Lamu town.

Tusker Safari Sevens (www.safarisevens.com) International rugby tournament held every June near Nairobi.

Kenya Music Festival (2 020-2712964) The country's longest-running music festival, held over 10 days in August in Nairobi.

Mombasa Carnival (zainab@africaonline.co.ke) November street festival, with music, dance and other events. East Africa Safari Rally (www.eastafricansafarirally .com) Classic car rally now in its 50th year, covering Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda using only pre-1971 vehicles. Held in December.

FOOD

You can eat well in Kenya, though outside the major towns variety isn't always a priority. In general you should be able to snack for under KSh100 on the street and fill up for under KSh200 in any cheap Kenyan cafeteria; an Indian or standard Western meal will cost around KSh500, a Chinese meal anything up to KSh1000, and a top-flight meal in a classy restaurant with wine and all the trimmings can easily exceed KSh2000 per person.

HOLIDAYS

Muslim festivals are significant events along the coast. Many places to eat in the region close until after sundown during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, which will run

from 13 September 2007 and 2 September 2008. The Maulid Festival, marking the birth of the Prophet Mohammed, is also widely celebrated, especially on Lamu. This will take place on 20 March 2007 and 20 March 2008.

Other public holidays in Kenya include the following:

New Year's Day 1 January

Good Friday and Easter Monday March/April Labour Day 1 May Madaraka (Self-Rule) Day 1 June Moi Day 10 October

Kenyatta Day 20 October Independence Day 12 December Christmas Day 25 December Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Most towns have at least one internet café (and Nairobi has lots) where you can surf and access webmail accounts or instant-messenger programs. Rates are cheapest in Nairobi and Mombasa (as little as KSh1 per minute), rising to up to KSh20 per minute in rural areas and top-end hotels.

The national Posta network offers internet access at almost every main post office in the country, charging the same fixed rate of KSh1.16 per minute.

MAPS

Bookshops, especially the larger ones in Nairobi, are the best places to look for maps in Kenya. The Tourist Map of Kenya gives good detail, as does the Kenya Route Map; both cost around KSh250.

The most detailed and thorough maps are published by the Survey of Kenya; many are out of print, but the better bookshops in Nairobi usually have copies of Amboseli National Park (SK 87), Masai Mara Game Reserve (SK 86), Tsavo East National Park (SK 82) and Tsavo West National Park (SK 78).

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Kenyan shilling (KSh), which is made up of 100 cents. Notes in circulation are KSh1000, 500, 200, 100, 50 and 20, and there are also new coins of KSh40, 20, 10, 5 and 1 in circulation.

The euro, US dollar and British pound are all easy to change throughout the country. Cash is easy and quick to exchange at banks and foreign-exchange bureaus; travellers

cheques are not as widely accepted and often carry high commission charges.

ATMs

Virtually all banks in Kenya have ATMs at most branches. Barclays Bank has the most reliable ATMs for international withdrawals, with ATMs in most major Kenyan towns supporting MasterCard, Visa, Plus and Cirrus international networks.

Standard Chartered and Kenya Commercial Bank ATMs also accept Visa but not the other major providers, and are more likely to decline transactions.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are becoming increasingly popular, although connections fail with tedious regularity. Visa and MasterCard are now widely accepted, but it would be prudent to stick to upmarket hotels, restaurants and shopping centres to use them.

Moneychangers

The best places to change money are foreignexchange bureaus, which can be found everywhere and usually don't charge commission. Watch out for differing small bill (US\$10) and large bill (US\$100) rates; the larger bills usually get the better rates.

Banks also change money, but they charge large commissions and there's a fee per travellers cheque, so you're better off carrying larger denominations. Amex has offices in Mombasa and Nairobi, where you can buy and sell Amex travellers cheques.

K E N Y A Tipping

Tipping is not common practice among Kenyans, but there's no harm in rounding up the bill by a few shillings if you're pleased with the service in a cheap restaurant. In touristoriented businesses a service charge of 10% is often added to the bill, along with the 16% VAT and 2% catering levy. Most tourist guides and all safari drivers and cooks will expect some kind of gratuity at the end of your tour or trip. As fares are negotiated in advance, taxi drivers do not need to be tipped unless they provide exceptional service.

POST

The Kenvan postal system is run by the government Postal Corporation of Kenya, now rebranded as the dynamic-sounding Posta. Letters sent from Kenya rarely go astray, but can take up to two weeks to reach Australia or the USA. Incoming letters to Kenya can be sent care of poste restante to any town. Make sure your correspondents write your name in block capitals and also underline the surname. They take anywhere from four days to a week to reach the poste-restante service in Nairobi.

TELEPHONE

The Kenyan fixed-line phone system, run by Telkom Kenya (www.telkom.co.ke), is more or less functional, but has been overtaken by the massive popularity of prepaid mobile phones.

International call rates from Kenya are relatively expensive, charged at a flat rate of US\$0.90 per minute during peak periods and US\$0.64 per minute off-peak to any destination. Operator-assisted calls are charged at the standard peak rate but are subject to a three-minute minimum. You can always dial direct using a phonecards.

Reverse-charge (collect) calls are possible, but only to countries that have set up free direct-dial numbers allowing you to reach the international operator in the country you are calling. Currently these include: the UK (**2** 0800-220441), the USA (**2** 0800-111, 0800-1112), Canada (🖻 0800-220114, 0800-220115), New Zealand (2000-220641) and Switzerland (🖻 0800-220411).

The minimum charge for a local call from a payphone is KSh5 for 97 seconds, while long-distance rates vary depending on the distance.

Mobile Phones

An estimated 80% of all calls here are now made on mobile phones, and coverage is good in all but the most rural areas. Kenya uses the GSM 900 system, which is compatible with Europe and Australia but not with the North American GSM 1900 system.

If your phone isn't locked into a network, you can pick up a prepaid starter pack from one of the Kenyan mobile-phone companies; the main players are Safaricom (www.safaricom .co.ke) and Celtel (www.ke.celtel.com). A SIM card will cost about KSh100, and you can then buy top-up 'scratchcards' from shops and booths across the country. An international SMS costs around KSh10, and voice charges vary according to tariff, time and destination of call.

Mobile-phone numbers have a four-digit prefix beginning with 07.

Phonecards

With the new Telkom Kenya phonecards, any phone can now be used for prepaid calls - you just have to dial the access number (🖻 0844), and enter in the number and passcode on the card. There are booths selling the cards all over the country. Cards come in denominations of KSh200, KSh500, KSh1000 and KSh2000, and call charges are slightly more expensive than for standard lines (peak/offpeak US\$1/0.70).

TIME

Time in Kenya is GMT/UTC plus three hours year-round. You should also be aware of the concept of 'Swahili time', which perversely is six hours out of kilter with the rest of the world. Noon and midnight are 6 o'clock (saa sitta) Swahili time, and 7am and 7pm are 1 o'clock (saa moja). Just add or subtract six hours from whatever time you are told; Swahili doesn't distinguish between am and pm.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Considering the extent to which the country relies on tourism, it's incredible that there is no tourist office in Nairobi. There are a handful of information offices elsewhere in the country, ranging from helpful private concerns to under-funded government offices; most can at least provide basic maps of the town, and brochures on local businesses and attractions.

VISAS

Visas are now required by almost all visitors to Kenya, including Europeans, Australians, New Zealanders, Americans and Canadians, although citizens from a few smaller Commonwealth countries are exempt. Visas are valid for three months from the date of entry and can be obtained on arrival at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. The visa fee is UK£35 or US\$50 for a single-entry visa, and UK£70 or US\$100 for multiple entries. If you have any other currencies, you'll have to change them into Kenyan shillings.

Applications for Kenyan visas are simple and straightforward in Tanzania and Uganda, and payment is accepted in local currency. Visas can also be issued on arrival at the land borders with Uganda and Tanzania.

Visa Extensions

Tourist visas can be extended for a further three-month period, but seven-day transit visas (US\$20) cannot. You can extend your visa at the immigration office (🖻 311745; Uhuru ni Kari Bldg, Mama Ngina Dr) in Mombasa.

Visas for Onward Travel

Since Nairobi is a common gateway city to East Africa and the city centre is easy to get around, many travellers spend some time here picking up visas for other countries that they intend to visit. If you are going to do this, you need to plan ahead of time and call the embassy to confirm the hours that visa applications are received (these change frequently in Nairobi). Most embassies will want you to pay visa fees in US dollars (see p710 for contact details).

Just because a country has an embassy or consulate here, it doesn't necessarily mean you can get that country's visa. The borders with Somalia and Sudan are both closed, so you'll have to go to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia if you want a Sudanese visa, and Somali visas are unlikely to be available for the foreseeable future.

For Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda, threemonth visas are readily available in Nairobi and cost US\$50 for most nationalities. Two passport photos are required for applications and visas can usually be issued the same day.

TRANSPORT IN KENYA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Most international flights to/from Nairobi are handled by Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (NBO; 200-825400; www.kenyaairports.co.ke), 15km southeast of the city. It's a well-organised place, with two international terminals, a smaller domestic terminal, plenty of dutyfree and souvenir shops, internet access and a branch of Java Coffee.

Some flights between Nairobi and Kilimanjaro International Airport or Mwanza in Tanzania, as well as many domestic flights, use Wilson Airport (WIL; a 020-501941), which is about 6km south of the city centre on Langata Rd. Mombasa's Moi International Airport (MBA; ☎ 041-433211) handles flights to Zanzibar, but otherwise is mainly used by charter airlines and domestic flights.

Kenya Airways is the main national and regional carrier, and has a generally good safety record. There are good connections from Nairobi to most regions of Africa.

The following airlines fly to and from Kenya, and have offices in Nairobi except where otherwise indicated:

Air India (airline code AI; Map pp688-9; 🖻 020-340925; www.airindia.com) Hub: Mumbai.

Air Malawi (airline code QM; 🖻 020-240965; www.air malawi.net) Hub: Lilongwe.

Air Zimbabwe (airline code UM; 🖻 020-339522; www .airzim.co.zw) Hub: Harare.

Airkenya (airline code QP; 🖻 020-605745; www.air kenya.com) Hub: Wilson Airport, Nairobi. Kilimanjaro only. British Airways (airline code BA; Map pp688-9; 🖻 020-244430; www.british-airways.com) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

Daallo Airlines (airline code D3; 🖻 020-317318; www .daallo.com) Hub: Hargeisa.

Egypt Air (airline code MS; Map pp688-9; 🖻 020-226821; www.egyptair.com.eg) Hub: Cairo.

Emirates (airline code EK; Map pp686-7; 🖻 020-211187; www.emirates.com) Hub: Dubai.

Ethiopian Airlines (airline code ET: Map pp688-9: O20-330837; www.ethiopianairlines.com) Hub: Addis Ababa.

Gulf Air (airline code GF: 20020-241123; www.gulfairco. com) Hub: Abu Dhabi.

Kenya Airways (airline code KQ; Map pp686-7;

 O20-32074100; www.kenya-airways.com) Hub: Jomo Kenvatta International Airport, Nairobi, Also has an office in Mombasa.

KLM (airline code KL; Map pp686-7; 20 020-32074100; www.klm.com) Hub: Amsterdam.

Oman Air (airline code WY; Map p701; 20 041-221444; www.oman-air.com) Hub: Muscat. Office in Mombasa. Precision Air (airline code PW: 🕿 020-602561; www

.precisionairtz.com) Hub: Dar es Salaam. Rwandair (airline code WB; 🖻 0733-740703; www .rwandair.com) Hub: Kigali.

Safarilink Aviation (2 020-600777; www.safarilink.co .ke) Hub: Wilson Airport, Nairobi. Kilimanjaro only.

SN Brussels Airlines (airline code SN: 2020-4443070: www.flvsn.com) Hub: Brussels.

South African Airways (airline code SA; 🖻 020-229663; www.saakenya.com) Hub: Johannesburg. Swiss International Airlines (airline code SR: 2020-3744045; www.swiss.com) Hub: Zurich.

Land

KENYA

ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia currently offers the only viable overland route into Kenya from the north, but owing to security concerns, check the latest

situation carefully before attempting this crossing.

From immigration on the Ethiopian side of town it's a 2km walk to the Ethiopian and Kenyan customs posts. Be aware that a yellowfever vaccination is required to cross either border at Moyale. A cholera vaccination may also be required.

Buses or trucks connect the border to Marsabit (KSh600, 81/2 hours) and Isiolo (KSh1200, 17 hours) along a bone-jarring dirt road.

TANZANIA

The main land borders between Kenya and Tanzania are at Namanga, Taveta, Isebania and Lunga Lunga, and can be reached by public transport.

Main bus companies serving Tanzania include the following:

Akamba (🖻 020-340430; akamba prs@skyweb.co.ke; Nairobi) Daily buses between Mwanza and Nairobi (12 to 14 hours).

Davanu Shuttle (🖻 057-8142: Arusha) Arusha/Moshi shuttle buses.

Easy Coach (20-210711; easycoach@wananchi .com: Nairobi)

Riverside Shuttle Nairobi (🕿 020-229618); Arusha (🕿 057-2639) Arusha/Moshi shuttle buses.

Scandinavia Express (🖻 020-247131; Nairobi) Daily buses between Dar es Salaam and Mombasa (10 hours), between Dar es Salaam and Nairobi via Arusha (13 hours). between Mwanza and Nairobi (12 to 14 hours) and between Tanga and Mombasa (four to five hours).

UGANDA

Numerous bus companies run between Nairobi and Kampala, or you can do the journey in stages via Malaba, or Busia if you are travelling via Kisumu.

Main bus companies serving Uganda include the following: Akamba (200-340430; akamba_prs@skyweb.co.ke)

Falcon (🕿 020-229692)

Scandinavia Express (20 020-247131)

GETTING AROUND Air

Four domestic operators, including the national carrier Kenya Airways, run scheduled flights within Kenya. Destinations served are predominantly around the coast and the popular southern national parks.

Book well in advance (essential during the tourist high season) with all these airlines. You should also remember to reconfirm return

flights 72 hours before departure, especially when connecting with an international flight. Airlines flying domestically:

Air Kenya (20-605745; www.airkenya.com) Amboseli, Lamu, Masai Mara, Malindi, Nanyuki. Kenya Airways (2 020-3274100; www.kenya-airways

.com) Kisumu, Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa. Mombasa Air Safari (🖻 041-433061; www.mombasa airsafari.com) Amboseli, Lamu, Malindi, Masai Mara, Mombasa, Tsavo.

Safarilink (20-600777; www.safarilink.co.ke) Amboseli, Lamu, Masai Mara, Naivasha, Nanyuki, Tsavo West.

Bus

Kenya has an extensive network of long- and short-haul bus routes, with good coverage of the areas around Nairobi, the coast and the western regions. Buses offer varying levels of comfort, convenience and roadworthiness, but as a rule services are frequent, fast and often quite comfortable. The downside is the often diabolical condition of Kenya's road.

Car & Motorcycle

There are numerous car-hire companies who can hire you anything from a small hatchback to Toyota Land Cruiser 4WDs, although hire rates are some of the highest in the world.

An International Driving Permit (IDP) is not necessary in Kenya, but can be useful.

HIRE

Hiring a vehicle to tour Kenya (or at least the national parks) is an expensive way of seeing the country, but it does give you freedom of movement and is sometimes the only way of getting to remote areas.

A minimum age of between 23 and 25 years usually applies for hirers. Some companies prefer a licence with no endorsements or criminal convictions, and most require you to have been driving for at least two years. You will also need acceptable ID, such as a passport.

All the international companies have airport and/or town offices in Nairobi and Mombasa. Most safari companies will also hire out their vehicles, though you have few of the guarantees that you would with the companies listed here. Let's Go Travel (🖻 020-340331; www.letsqosafari.com) organises reliable car hire at favourable rates through partner firms.

Local and international hire companies: Avenue Car Hire (🖻 020-313207; www.avenuecarhire .com) Nairobi.

Avis (🕿 020-316061; www.avis.co.ke) Mombasa and Nairobi.

Budget (20-223581; www.budget-kenya.com) Nairobi.

Central Rent-a-Car (2 020-222888; www.carhire kenva.com) Nairobi.

Glory Car Hire (a 020-225024; www.glorycarhire.com) Mombasa and Nairobi.

ROAD RULES

Driving practices in Kenya are some of the worst in the world and all are carried out at break-neck speed. Kenvans habitually drive on the wrong side of the road in order to avoid potholes or animals - flashing your lights at these vehicles should be enough to persuade the driver to get back into their own lanes. Never drive at night unless you absolutely have to, as very few cars have adequate headlights and the roads are full of pedestrians and cyclists.

Hitchina

Hitchhiking is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk; it's safer to travel in pairs and let someone know where you are planning to go.

Local Transport MATATU

Local *matatus* are the main means of getting around for local people, and any reasonably sized city or town will have plenty of services covering every major road and suburb. Fares start at KSh10 and may reach KSh40 for longer routes in Nairobi.

Matatus now comply with new safety laws, and must be fitted with seatbelts and 80kph speed governors; conductors and drivers must wear clearly identifiable red shirts, route numbers must be displayed and a 14person capacity applies to vehicles that used to cram in as many as 30 people. Frequent police checks have also been brought in to enforce the rules.

Matatus leave when full and the fares are fixed. Wherever you're going, remember that most matatu crashes are head-on collisions under no circumstances should you sit in the 'death seat' next to the *matatu* driver. Play it safe and sit in the middle seats away from the window.

Shared Peugeot taxis make a good alternative to *matatus*, though they're not subject to the same regulations. Peugeots are quicker than *matatus* and so are slightly more expensive, but they also are commonly involved in horrific smashes. Many companies have offices around the Accra, Cross and River Rds area in Nairobi.

TAXI

You'll find taxis on virtually every corner in the larger cities, especially in Nairobi and Mombasa, where taking a taxi at night is virtually mandatory. Fares are invariably negotiable and start at around KSh200 for short journeys.

Train

The Uganda Railway services two main routes, Nairobi-Kisumu and Nairobi-Mombasa. Both are night services of around 13 hours, but considerably more comfortable and significantly safer than travelling by road.

CLASSES

There are three classes on Kenyan trains, but only 1st and 2nd class can be recommended. Note that passengers are divided up by gender. No compartment can be locked from the outside, so remember not to leave any valuables lying around if you leave it for any reason. You might want to padlock your rucksack to something during dinner and breakfast. Always lock your compartment from the inside before you go to sleep. Third class has seats only, and security can be a real problem.

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COSTS

The downside to train travel is the price, over KSh3000 for 1st class on the Nairobi-Mombasa route, including meals (dinner and breakfast) and bedding. The Kisumu route is much less fancy, and 1st-class tickets cost around KSh1500.

RESERVATIONS

You must book in advance for both 1st and 2nd class, otherwise you'll probably find there are no berths available; two to three days is usually sufficient. Visa credit cards are accepted for railway bookings. Compartment and berth numbers are posted up about 30 minutes prior to departure.

There are **booking offices** (Mombasa 20041-312220; Nairobi 2020-221211) in major cities and at Kisumu train station.

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Rwanda

Welcome to Le Pays des Milles Collines (Land of a Thousand Hills). Rwanda is a lush country of endless mountains and stunning scenery, and nowhere are the mountains more majestic than the peaks of the Virunga volcanoes in the far northwest of the country. The volcanoes form a natural frontier with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda, and hidden among the bamboo and dense jungle of their forbidding slopes are some of the world's last remaining mountain gorillas. It is the opportunity to encounter these contemplative creatures at close quarters that continues to draw visitors to Rwanda.

There's more to Rwanda than magical mountain gorillas, however. The shores of Lake Kivu conceal some of the best inland beaches on the continent. Deep in the southwest, Parc National Nyungwe Forest is the most extensive montane rainforest in the region, and home to many primates. But it's not all monkey business – Kigali is safe and sophisticated.

Rwanda is all too often associated with the horrific events that unfolded in 1994. It has been etched into the world's consciousness as one of the most savage genocides in history. What happened is beyond belief, but the country has taken giant strides towards recovery.

Many visitors are unsure about travelling to Rwanda given its history. However, as long as security and stability persist, Rwanda is a refreshing country in which to travel, where tourists remain a relative novelty and the rewards of the present outweigh the risks of the past.

FAST FACTS

- Area 26,338 sq km
- **ATMs** None that accept international cards
- Borders Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tanzania, Uganda
- Budget US\$25 per day
- Capital Kigali
- Languages French, English, Kinyarwanda
- Money Rwanda franc (RFr); US\$1 = RFr545
- Population 8.7 million
- Seasons Wet (mid-March to mid-May, mid-October to mid-December); dry (mid-May to mid-October, mid-December to mid-March)
- Telephone Country code 250; international access code 00
- Time GMT/UTC +2
- Visa US\$60 for three months from embassy; US\$60 for two-week extendible visas at major land border crossings and Kigali airport

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Parc National des Volcans (p726) Scale the slopes of the Virunga volcanoes to encounter gorillas in the mist.
- **Kigali Memorial Centre** (p724 Come faceto-face with the horrors of the past at this haunting genocide museum in the capital.
- Gisenyi (p728) Check out Rwanda's very own Costa del Kivu at Gisenyi, home to unspoilt beaches and clear waters.
- Parc National Nyungwe Forest (p729) Penetrate the lush canopy of this forest, home to chimpanzees and huge troops of colobus monkeys.
- **Kigali by night** (p725) Settle into a garden bar in Kigali, order a large bottle of Primus beer and take in a sunset over Rwanda's other 999 hills.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The average daytime temperature is around 24°C, except in the higher mountains, which take up a lot of the country, where the range is 10°C to 15°C. Rwanda can be visited at any time of year. The dry season from mid-May to mid-October is easier for tracking mountain gorillas, but the endless hills are barren, a contrast to the verdant greens of the wet season. Peak season for gorilla tracking is July and August; travelling outside this time means it is easier to arrange a permit.

It rains more frequently and heavily in the northeast, where the volcanoes are covered by rainforest. The summit of Karisimbi (4507m), the highest peak in Rwanda, is often covered with sleet or snow.

ITINERARIES

One week Concentrate on the north of the country. Pay your respects at the Kigali Memorial Centre (p724) before heading for the brooding volcanoes that form the border between Rwanda, Uganda and the DR Congo. Track the gorillas at Parc National des Volcans (p726), one of life's ultimate experiences. Head west to Gisenyi (p728), the Costa del Kivu, and kick back on the sands.

Two weeks Kick off from the capital Kigali (p722) and head south to the intellectual heartland of Butare (p728) and its magnificent National Museum. Stop at Parc National Nyungwe Forest (p729) to see the huge troupes of Angolan colobus

HOW MUCH?

- Tracking mountain gorillas US\$375
- Fresh fish at a decent restaurant US\$5 to US\$10
- Internet access US\$1 to US\$2 per hour
- New Times newspaper US\$0.50
- 100km bus ride US\$2

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- 1L petrol US\$1
- 1L bottled water US\$0.50
- Bottle of Primus (720ml) US\$1.50
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10
- Beef brochette US\$0.50

monkeys before continuing to Cyangugu (p729) and up Lake Kivu to Kibuye (p729). Continue the beach fix at Gisenyi (p728) before heading east to Parc National des Volcans (p726) to meet the majestic mountain gorillas.

HISTORY Early Days

The original Rwandans, the Twa Pygmies, were gradually displaced by bigger groups of migrating Hutu tribespeople from 1000. Later came the Tutsi from the north, arriving from the 16th century onwards. The authority of the Rwandan *mwami* (king) was far greater than that of his opposite number in Burundi, and the system of feudalism that developed here was unsurpassed in Africa outside Ethiopia. Tutsi overlordship was reinforced by ceremonial and religious observance.

European Meddling

The Germans took the country in 1890 and held it until 1916, when their garrisons surrendered to Belgian forces during WWI. During Belgian rule, the power and privileges of the Tutsi increased, as the new masters found it convenient to rule indirectly through the *mwami* and his princes.

However, in 1956, Mwami Rudahigwa called for independence from Belgium and the Belgians began to switch allegiance to the Hutu majority. The Tutsi favoured fast-track independence, while the Hutus wanted the introduction of democracy first. Following the

death of the *mwami* in 1959, armed clashes began between the two tribes, marking the start of an ethnic conflict that was to culminate in the 1994 genocide. Tutsi fled the country in numbers, resettling in neighbouring Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

Following independence in 1962, the Hutu majority came to power under Prime Minister Gregoire Kayibanda. The new government introduced quotas for Tutsis, limiting opportunities for education and work, and small groups of Tutsi exiles began to launch guerrilla raids from neighbouring Uganda. In the round of bloodshed that followed, thousands more Tutsis were killed and tens of thousands fled to neighbouring countries.

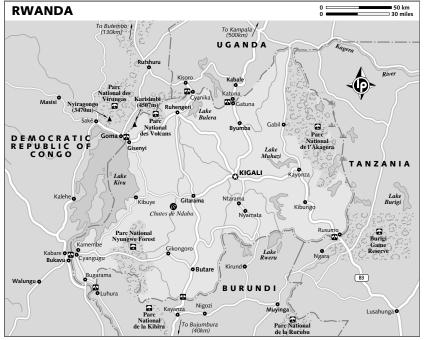
A Simmering Conflict

The massacre of Hutus in Burundi in 1972 reignited the old hatreds in Rwanda and prompted the army commander, Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, to oust Kayibanda in 1973. Habyarimana made some progress towards healing the ethnic divisions during the early years of his regime, but before long it was business as usual. In October 1990, the entire intertribal issue was savagely reopened when 5000 well-armed rebels of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi military front, invaded Rwanda from their bases in western Uganda. Two days later, at Habyarimana's request, France, Belgium and Zaïre (as the DRC was then known) flew in troops to assist the Rwandan army to repulse the rebels.

The RPF invaded again in 1991, this time better armed and prepared. By early 1992 the RPF was within 25km of Kigali. A cease-fire was cobbled together and the warring parties brought to the negotiating table. A peace accord between the government and the RPF was finally signed in August 1993.

The Genocide

In 1994, the conflict erupted again on an incomprehensible scale. An estimated 800,000 Rwandans were killed in just three months, mostly by Interahamwe militias – gangs of youths armed with machetes, guns and other weapons supplied by officials close to Habyarimana. Three million people fled the country to refugee camps in Tanzania, the



RWANDA

DRC and Uganda, and an estimated seven million of the country's nine million people were displaced.

The spark for the carnage was the death of Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart, Cyprien Ntaryamira, on 6 April as their plane was shot down attempting to land in Kigali on their return from peace talks in Tanzania. It will probably never be known who fired the missile, but most observers believe it was Hutu extremists. Whoever was responsible, the event unleashed one of the 20th century's worst explosions of blood-letting. The massacres that followed were no spontaneous outburst of violence but a calculated 'final solution' by extremist elements of Habyarimana's government to rid the country of all Tutsi and the Hutu reformists. Rwandan army and Interahamwe death squads ranged at will over the countryside killing, looting and burning, and roadblocks were set up in every town and city.

The UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) was in Rwanda throughout the genocide, but was powerless to prevent the killing due to an ineffective mandate. The international community left Rwanda to face its fate. By the time UNAMIR was finally reinforced in July, it was too late. The genocide was already over and the RPF had taken power in Kigali.

The Aftermath

Hutu extremists and their allies fled into eastern DRC to regroup and launched crossborder raids into both Rwanda and Burundi from the refugee camps in the Goma and Uvira regions. Rwanda responded with raids into eastern DRC and support for Tutsi rebels north of Goma.

The Hutu fought alongside the Congolese army, and the entire situation turned ugly, as one million or so refugees were caught in the middle. But the RPF and their allies soon

THINK BEFORE YOU ASK

RWANDA

Many Rwandans experienced hell on earth in the genocide of 1994 and its aftermath. Don't reopen old wounds by bringing up the genocide with virtual strangers, particularly away from the cities. If you meet Rwandans who want to discuss it, as many do in Kigali, then that is another story.

swept across the DRC, installing Laurent Kabila in power and breaking the grip of the extremists on the camps. However, they soon decided Kabila was not such a reliable ally and became embroiled in Africa's biggest war to date, fighting over the DRC's mineral wealth with nine other African states.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (www.ictr.org) was established in Arusha (Tanzania) in November 1994 to bring to justice former government and military officials for acts of genocide. Several big fish have been sentenced in the past decade, but in Rwanda the prisons are still overflowing with smaller fish. Most important was Prime Minister Jean Kambanda, who filed a guilty plea and provided the trial with much inside information on other architects of the genocide. His was the first-ever conviction of a head of state for the crime of genocide.

Rwanda Today

Rwanda has done a remarkable job of getting back on its feet. It has achieved an impressive degree of stability and security in a remarkably short time, albeit with considerable help from a guilty international community that ignored the country in its darkest hour. Rwanda has done an excellent job of exporting its problem to the DRC in the past decade, but as long as rebels remain at large in the DRC, Rwanda has cause for concern. The only way peace and prosperity will finally come to Rwanda is with a solution to the wider regional problems and stability in its giant neighbour.

The RPF government has made an impressive effort to promote reconciliation and restore trust between the two communities. This is no small achievement after the horrors that were inflicted on the Tutsi during the genocide of 1994. It would have been easy for the RPF to embark on a campaign of revenge and reprisal, but instead the government is attempting to build a society with a place for everyone, regardless of tribe. There are no more Tutsis, no more Hutus, only Rwandans. Idealistic perhaps, but it is also the only hope for the future.

CULTURE

Tribal conflict has torn Rwanda apart during much of the independence period, culminating in the horrific genocide that unfolded in 1994. There are two schools of thought when it comes to looking at Rwandan identity.

The colonial approach employed by the Belgians was to divide and conquer, issuing ID cards that divvied up the population along strict ethnic lines. They tapped up the Tutsis as leaders to help control the Hutu majority. Later, as independence approached, they switched sides, pitting Hutu against Tutsi in a new conflict, which crackled away until the 1990s when it exploded onto the world stage.

In the new Rwanda, the opposite is true. Ethnic identities are out, everyone is Rwandan. The government is at pains to present a Rwandan identity and blames the Belgians for categorising the country along tribal lines that set the stage for the savagery that followed. Rwanda was a peaceful place before: Hutu and Tutsi lived side by side for generations and intermarriage was common, or so the story goes.

The truth, as always, is probably somewhere in between. President Paul Kagame is trying to put the past behind and create a new Rwanda. It will take time, maybe a generation or more, but what has been achieved in just over a decade is astonishing. However, to avoid the divisions of the past once again surfacing in the new Rwanda, democratic development is required that favours all - urban and rural, rich and poor - and is blind to tribe.

Urban Rwanda is a sophisticated place and people follow a Mediterranean pattern of starting early before breaking for a siesta. The rhythm of rural life is very different and follows the sun. People work long hours from dawn until dusk, but also take a break during the hottest part of the day.

Rwanda's economy was decimated during the genocide, as production ground to a halt and foreign investment was scared away. However, the current government has done an impressive job of turning things around and the economy is growing fast.

PEOPLE

Tiny as it is, Rwanda is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa, with more than 300 people per square kilometre. The majority of Rwandans - at more than 80% of the population - are Hutu. Tutsis make up more than 15% of the population and fewer than 1% of the population are Twa Pygmy. Most Rwandans speak at least some French, but increasing numbers of returning exiles speak English.

Faith is an important rock in the lives of many Rwandans, and Christianity remains the predominant religion. The church in Rwanda was tainted by its association with the genocide in 1994, but that doesn't seem to have dampened the devotion to the word of God.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Rwanda's most famous dancers are the Intore troupe. Their warrior-like displays are accompanied by a trancelike drumbeat similar to that of the famous Les Tambourinaires in Burundi.

Hotel Rwanda has put Rwanda back on the map for moviegoers. Although it was shot in South Africa, it tells the story of Hotel des Milles Collines manager Paul Rusesabagina, played by Don Cheadle, turning his luxury hotel into a temporary haven for thousands fleeing the erupting genocide.

Gorillas in the Mist, starring Sigourney Weaver, is based on the autobiography of Dian Fossey and her work with the rare mountain gorillas in Parc National des Volcans. It's essential viewing for anyone tracking the gorillas.

ENVIRONMENT

Rwanda is not known as 'the land of a thousand hills' for nothing. The hills stretch into the infinite horizon in every direction, making bus travel akin to a dose of the bends. To the west is the stunning shoreline of Lake Kivu, with its hidden bays, plunging cliffs and secret beaches. In the east, the hills finally trail off towards Tanzania and the land turns to the grassy plains and acacia of Parc National de l'Akagera.

Like Uganda, Rwanda is primate-tastic. Wildlife in Rwanda for most visitors comes down to the mountain gorillas, the residents of Parc National des Volcans in the northwest. but there are also masses of monkeys in Parc National Nyungwe Forest and chimp tracking is possible.

Due to its tiny size, Rwanda only has a small network of national parks. The most popular protected area is Parc National des Volcans, a string of brooding volcanoes that provides a home for the rare mountain goril-las. Nyungwe Forest, a tropical montane forest that is one of the richest primate destinations in the region, is the newest national park. Parc National de l'Akagera is home to large mammals such as elephants and hippos.

Population density has had a detrimental effect on the country's national park system, reducing Parc National des Volcans by half in 1969 and Parc National de l'Akagera by two-thirds in 1998.

FOOD & DRINK

African fare in Rwanda is the same as in the rest of the region, but a wide variety of excellent Continental cuisine is available in urban areas. Local beers include the nearlegendary Primus, in almighty 720ml bottles, and Mulzig, both of which are available all over the country.

KIGALI

pop 600,000

Rwanda was once the 'Land of Eternal Spring' and its capital Kigali still fits the bill. Sprawled over ridges, hills and valleys, it is a small, attractive city offering superb views over the intensively cultivated and terraced countryside beyond. It was quite badly trashed during the civil war in 1994, but following a long rehabilitation, one gets the sense that Kigali is a city looking ahead to the future, not back to the past.

There aren't many sights in the city, but the Kigali Memorial Centre, documenting the Rwandan genocide, is a must for all visitors to Rwanda. The city has a reasonable range of hotels and restaurants, and while nightlife is not quite as pumping as it is in Kampala (Uganda) or Nairobi (Kenya), it is worth a whiff at the weekend.

ORIENTATION

The commercial centre of Kigali is located on a hill to the southwest of Pl de l'Unité Nationale and is focused on Ave du Commerce and the network of streets that bisect it. To the south there are several grandes artères (major roads) leading into the diplomatic quarter where embassies and expensive restaurants are located. Quite a lot of night-time action can be found east of the centre in the suburb of Kacyiru.

RWANDA

For the latest information on Kigali, pick up a copy of The Eye: Rwanda, a free listings guide to the capital available in restaurants, bars, hotels etc.

Bookshops

Kigali's bookshops stock mostly Frenchlanguage publications.

Librairie Ikirezi (🖻 571314; Ave de la Paix; 🕅 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat & Sun) A wide range of English and French books on Rwanda and the world beyond.

Emergency

Police (🖻 083 11170) A 24-hour emergency number.

Internet Access

Internet access is widespread and very cheap in Kigali.

Iposita Cybercafé (per hr RFr400) Part of the post office complex.

Okapi Hotel (Blvd de Nyabugogo; per hr RFr500) There is a 24-hour internet café in the lobby.

Medical Services

Kigali Hospital (🕿 571786; Ave de la Paix) State hospital.

Netcare King Faycal Hospital (🕿 582421) Sophisticated medical treatment in suburban Kacyiru, 5km northeast of the city centre.

Monev

There are several banks around the city centre, but the best places to change money are the handful of bureaux de change near the main post office. There are ATMs, but they are not yet wired to an international network.

Banque de Kigali (Ave du Commerce) When it comes to travellers cheques or credit-card cash advances, this is the only option. Hefty commissions of US\$15 and up!

Post

Main post office (Ave de la Paix; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Poste restante services available.

Telephone

For international calls, there are plenty of kiosks opposite the post office. There are also public phone booths throughout the city.

Tourist Information

Office Rwandais du Tourisme et des Parcs Nationaux (ORTPN: 3 576514; www.rwandatourism.com; BP 905, 1 Blvd de la Revolution; 🏹 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat & Sun) Staff here speak French and English and are pretty helpful in assisting with enquiries. This is the place for independent travellers to make reservations to track the mountain gorillas in Parc National des Volcans (see p726 for more details).

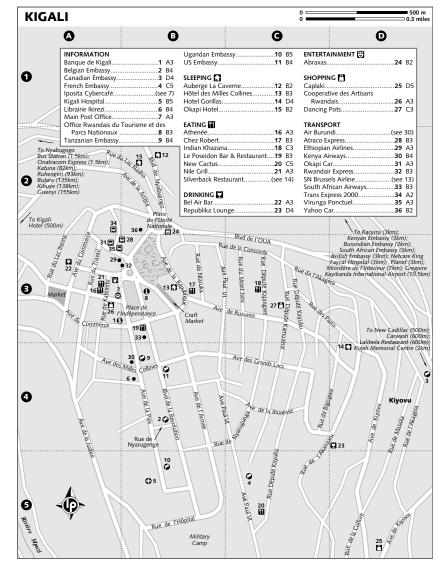
SLEEPING

The choice of budget accommodation is pretty poor, making this a good city to upgrade to something smarter.

Kigali Hotel (🖻 /fax 571384; s/d RFr5000/7000) Hidden behind the mosque on the road to Nyamirambo, this is good value. It has large, clean rooms equipped with TV and bathroom.

Great, if you can live with the early-morning call to prayer.

Auberge La Caverne (🗃 574549; Blvd de Nyabugogo; r RFr5000-15,000) A cut above the competition at the cheaper end, this little auberge is tucked away beneath the main road. The cheapest rooms are pretty small, but the more francs you spend the more they begin to expand.



THE GENOCIDE REMEMBERED...

The Kigali Memorial Centre (www.kigalimemorialcentre.org; admission free, donations appreciated; 论 10am-5pm) is a must for all visitors in Rwanda wanting to learn more about how it was that the world watched as a genocide unfolded in this tiny landlocked country.

Downstairs is dedicated to the Rwandan genocide. The sections on the cold and calculated planning of the genocide and its bloody execution are particularly disturbing and include moving video testimony from survivors. Finally you are confronted with a room full of photographs of Rwandan victims of the genocide. You feel yourself suffocating under the weight of sadness and despair, the wasted lives and loves of the nameless people surrounding you. Apollon Katahizi's words are particularly resonant as killings continue across the world today: "When they said 'never again' after the holocaust, was it meant for some people and not for others?"

Upstairs is a moving section dedicated to informing visitors about other genocides that have taken place around the world to set Rwanda's nightmare in its historical context. 'Wasted Lives' is a section on Rwandan children who fell victim to the killers' machetes. Why? Why? The Kigali Memorial Centre explains it as best it can, but no-one can answer the fundamental question of what it takes to turn man into beast.

Buried in the memorial gardens here are the remains of 250,000 victims of the genocide, gathered here as a final resting place.

Set up with assistance from the Aegis Trust (www.aegistrust.org), the Kigali Memorial Centre is located in the Kisozi district of town. Arrange a taxi (RFr2000) or a taxi-motor (RFr1000) for the 3km journey from the city centre.

Okapi Hotel (🕿 576765; www.okapi.co.rw; Blvd de Nyabugogo; s/d incl breakfast US\$40/50; 🛄) This centrally located business hotel offers smart rooms with satellite TV, a hot-water bathtub and a balcony. There are also a few cheapies with hot showers at US\$20. There's a fantastic restaurant here with dishes from around the world.

Hotel Gorillas (🖻 501717; www.hotelgor illas.com; Rue des Parcs; s/d US\$50/70, large s/d with bathtub US\$60/80) A slick little hotel in the upmarket Kiyovu area of the city, this place is winning over a lot of customers thanks to its spacious rooms with a touch of decorative flair. One of the best deals in town, it is also home to the outstanding Silverback Restaurant.

Hôtel des Milles Collines (2 576530; www.milles collines.net; Ave de la République; r US\$88/103; 💷 😰) Welcome to the Hotel Rwanda! The hotel used in the movie was actually in South Africa. but the original hotel where horror and hope collided was right here, the Milles Collines. Rooms are a four-star standard, and the poolside bar is very popular at weekends.

RWANDA EATING

Nile Grill (Rue de Kalisimbi; vegetarian/meat buffet RFr1500/2000; (Y) 7.30am-8pm) There are several local joints in the city centre doing a roaring trade in lunchtime buffets and cheap eats -Nile is one of the best known.

Le Poseidon Bar & Restaurant (Blvd de la République: mains RFr1500-3000) This lively bar and local restaurant offering sandwiches, burgers, pizzas and pastas is Kigali's answer to fast food. Le Poseidon draws a healthy work crowd around lunchtime

New Cactus (🖻 572572; Rue Député Kavuku; mains RFr2000-5000) Set on a commanding ridge up in Kiyovu, this restaurant has the ultimate views of Kigali by night. Outrageously popular, it's always buzzing thanks to a good menu of French favourites and authentic pizzas and a generous wine list. Plan to spend liberally and live well.

Chez Robert (2 501305; Ave de la République; meals RFr2000-5000) The menu here is great value for money for those that want a sophisticated meal without the sophisticated bill. The steaks are particularly good and the blue-cheese sauce the perfect complement.

Lalibela Restaurant (🖻 575412; Ave des Poids Lourds; mains RFr3000) Set in the grounds of the One Love Club, this is Kigali's only Ethiopian restaurant. It has a laid-back atmosphere in keeping with the Rasta owner and serves big portions of spicy chicken.

Silverback Restaurant (🖻 501717; Rue des Parcs; mains RFr4000-10.000) One of the best restaurants in Kigali, the accent here is most definitely French. Foie gras, duck à l'orange and even rabbit are available for the discerning diner.

The wine list is impressive, but so are the prices at around US\$40 a bottle.

Indian Khazana (Rue Député Kajangwe; full meal RFr7500) Kampala's most celebrated Indian restaurant comes south to Kigali. Khana Khazana has been spicing up people's lives for years in the Ugandan capital and now Rwanda can enjoy the subtle flavours of the subcontinent. At the time of research it was one of the hottest places in town.

Travellers looking to self-cater or planning some time in Nyungwe Forest will find a wide selection of imports at Athenée (Rue de Kalisimbi), just west of the main post office.

DRINKING

The night scene in Kigali constantly evolves, with places going in and out of fashion like Beckham's haircuts. Ask around to see what's hot and what's not.

Republika Lounge (Rue de l'Akanyaru) Republika, in the Kiyovu area, is definitely the place to be in Kigali. There are huge views from the large terrace, and lush furnishings, a well-stocked bar and a small menu pull the punters.

Carwash (Ave des Poids Lourds) This place is quite literally a carwash, but don't worry, we are not going mad. It also has a brilliant garden bar. It's cheaper to drink here than in the New Cadillac nightclub, so drop by on your wav out.

Bel Air Bar (Ave de Commerce) A popular local haunt with great views over the centre of town. Beers are cheap, but watch the stairs carefully on the way home after a few Primuses, as they are seriously steep!

ENTERTAINMENT

Abraxas (Ave de la République; admission RFr2000) At weekends, the Centre D'Echanges Culturels Franco-Rwandais plays host to leading local bands. The music is an eclectic mix of Rwandan, reggae and international covers, and after a few beers everyone finds their feet.

New Cadillac (admission RFr2000; 🕑 Wed-Sun) This long-running club is still just about holding off all-comers to remain the most popular place in town. It doesn't pick up until after midnight, but once it does, it really does rock.

Planet (Kigali Business Centre, Ave du Lac Muhazi; admission RFr3000) This trendy nightclub is often called KBC by locals because of its location. The most popular place in town with the beautiful people, it really goes off at weekends.

SHOPPING

Kigali isn't exactly the shopping capital of Africa. The old street market has been moved to a new home funded by the French called Caplaki (Ave de Kiyovu). Sellers are now organised in fixed stalls and popular items include carvings and masks from the DRC.

There are some good craft shops selling locally produced carvings, cards and paintings. Cooperative des Artisans Rwandais (Rue de Kalisimbi) is one of the best. Prices are generally fixed, but small discounts may be offered.

Dancing Pots (Rue Député Kamuzinzi) A fair-trade project established to assist the Batwa pygmies; it's possible to buy terracotta pieces here.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Gregoire Kayibanda International Airport is located at Kanombe, 10km east of Kigali centre. For contact details of the international airlines serving Rwanda, see p732.

Bus

Several bus companies operate services to major towns; they are generally less crowded and safer than local minibuses. Okapi Car runs to Butare, Gisenyi, Kibuye and Ruhengeri; Atraco Express to Butare, Ruhengeri and Gisenvi, including a through service to Goma; Trans Express 2000 to Butare; and Virunga Ponctuel to Ruhengeri. See the individual town entries for more details on journey times and road conditions. All buses depart from company bus offices in the city centre. Onatracom Express have larger 45-seat buses and these serve Ruhengeri and Gisenyi (three daily), plus Butare and Cyangugu (two daily). These services depart from the Nyabugogo bus station.

Local minibuses depart from the Nyabugogo bus station for towns all over Rwanda, including Butare (RFr1200, two hours), Katuna (RFr1500, 11/2 hours), Kibuye (RFr1300, two hours), Ruhengeri (RFr1100, two hours) and Gisenyi (RFr1600, four hours). These minibuses leave when full throughout the day. See the respective town entries for further

details. Nyabugogo bus station is in the valley about 2km north of the city centre and minibuses (RFr200) cruise the central streets looking for passengers. There is no longer a local bus station in the centre.

GETTING AROUND

A taxi from the airport to the town centre costs about RFr5000 (US\$10). A taxi within the city centre starts at RFr1000 or so, more to Kacyiru or at night. A *taxi-motor* (motorbike taxi) is cheaper, but can involve scary speeds at night.

AROUND KIGALI

NYAMATA & NTARAMA GENOCIDE MEMORIALS

During the genocide, many horrific massacres around the country took place in churches to which victims had fled in the hope of refuge. Nyatama, about 30km south of Kigali, is a deeply disturbing memorial where skulls and bones of the many victims are on display. The church at Ntarama is more understated but no less powerful. The church has not been touched since the bodies were removed more than a decade ago. This church is about 25km from Kigali and both memorials can be visited in one day trip. To rent a vehicle in Kigali talk to hotels or travel agents. The more adventurous could take a *taxi-motor*.

NORTHWESTERN RWANDA

The northwest of Rwanda is where the country really earns its nickname as the Land of a Thousand Hills. It's a beautiful region and the peaks culminate in the stunning Virunga volcanoes, forming a formidable natural border between Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC.

RUHENGERI

Many travellers stay in Ruhengeri when visiting the gorillas in Parc National des Volcans, although smarter accommodation is available near the park itself (see opposite). Ruhengeri is a small, dusty town with magnificent views of the volcanoes to the north and west.

BCDR (Rue Muhabura) represents Western Union if you need money for a gorilla visit fast; there is nowhere to change travellers cheques or arrange credit-card cash advances in town. Several small shops along Ave du 5 Juillet offer internet access. Office Rwandais du Tourisme et des Parcs Nationaux (ORTPN; (20) 546645; Ave du 5 Juillet) is the park office where it is also possible to arrange a permit to track the gorillas.

Part of the popular Skyblue hotels group in Uganda, **Tourist Rest House** (**Tourist Rest House** (**Tourist Rest House** (**Tourist Rest House**) (**Tourist Rest House**) (**Tourist Rest House**) (**Tourist Rest House**) (**Tourist House**) (**Tour**

For those wanting a bathroom on tap, so to speak, **Hôtel Urumuri** (**©** 546820; r RFr3500) is the best deal in town. Tucked away on a side street off Rue du Marché, it is a friendly spot and the restaurant (meals RFr1000) serves tasty *brochettes*.

Ruhengeri's leading hotel is **Hôtel Muhabura** (**②** 546296; Ave du 5 Juillet; r/apt RFr15000/20,000), close to the ORTPN office. It has large, airy rooms with bathrooms, and several apartments that are verging on minisuites, but the lack of competition in town has seen prices double in the last few years. The restaurant-bar here is the best in town, with mains from RFr2000.

Okapi Car (Ave du 5 Juillet), Virunga Express (Ave du 5 Juillet) and Atraco Express (Ave du 5 Juillet) all offer regular minibuses to Kigali for RFr1300 (two hours). Onatracom Express (Ave du 5 Juillet) has three large buses per day passing through, connecting Kigali and Gisenyi; tickets are available at the petrol station.

There are normal minibuses from Ruhengeri to Kigali (RFr1100, two hours) on a breathtaking mountain road, as well as to Cyanika (RFr400, 45 minutes) and Gisenyi (RFr800, 1¹/₂ hours).

PARC NATIONAL DES VOLCANS

A dramatic chain of seven volcanoes, this park is the definitive place to track the rare and captivating mountain gorillas. Forming a natural border with the DRC and Uganda, the area is one of the most beautiful in Africa. Dian Fossey's account of her years with the gorillas and her battle with poachers and government officials, is detailed in Gorillas in the Mist, a must-read before coming here. There is no habitat more evocative of the gorillas than the densely forested slopes of the Virunga volcanoes. Coming upon the Susa family of 35 on the slopes of Karisimbi is one of life's unforgettable moments - no bars, no windows, three silverbacks eye the proceedings as infants and juveniles frolic on every side.

The park is the most reliable option for tracking gorillas in the region, as there are

five habituated gorilla families and 40 permits available daily. (Uganda has fewer permits and the DRC has potential security questions.)

Activities GORILLA TRACKING

Advance reservations should be made through the ORTPN office in Kigali (p722), but it is possible to turn up in Ruhengeri without a booking. If there are no permits available in Kigali, contact a travel agent through ORTPN or continue to Ruhengeri where a standby permit might be available at short notice.

Park visits must be arranged the day before at the ORTPN office in Ruhengeri (opposite). Visitors are restricted to one hour with the gorillas, and only one group of up to eight people is allowed to visit each group of gorillas per day. Permits cost US\$375 per person, including compulsory guides and guards, plus US\$2 for porters and extra for tips. Rangers can generally find the gorillas within one to four hours of starting, but conditions can be tough. Stinging nettles, biting ants and the cool, wet weather make long trousers, sturdy footwear and wet-weather gear essential. For more on tracking rules, see p805.

GOLDEN MONKEY TRACKING

This is a great way to pass some time while waiting for a gorilla permit, as these beautiful monkeys bound about the branches of bigger trees. It costs US\$75 to track the golden monkeys, but only US\$20 across the other side of the Virungas at Mgahinga in Uganda. Factoring in the park fees, that adds up to US\$100 in Rwanda, only US\$40 in Uganda.

TREKKING THE VOLCANOES

The stunning volcanoes are once again open to visitors for guided treks, ranging from sev-

eral hours to two days. A guide is compulsory but porters are optional.

The ascents pass through some remarkable changes of vegetation, ranging from thick forests of bamboo, giant lobelia or hagenia, to alpine meadows. If the weather is favourable, the reward is some spectacular views over the mountain chain. It is possible to trek to the top of Bisoke (3711m; US\$50) in one day or Karisimbi (4507m; US\$150) in two days. It is also possible to visit the grave of Dian Fossey (US\$50), part of the gorilla graveyard where many of her subjects were buried, including the famous Digit.

Sleeping

Kinigi Guesthouse (**Total State S**

Gorilla's Nest Camp (546331; gorillanest@yahoo .fr; s/d ind breakfast US\$80/100) Also in the Kinigi area, this lodge has wonderful views up to the volcanoes. Rooms are smart and include hot-water showers.

Virunga Lodge (**b** 502452; www.volcanoessafaris.com; s/dUS\$265/400) One of the most stunningly situated camps in the region, the new Volcanoes Safaris-run Virunga Lodge is nestled on a ridge above Lake Bulera and offers incredible views across to the Virunga volcanoes. Accommodation is housed in luxury stone chalets.

Getting There & Away

To get to the park from Ruhengeri, arrange a vehicle through the ORTPN office in Ruhengeri (about US\$50), or try hitching a ride with fellow trackers. Otherwise, charter a *taxi-motor* for about RFr2500 or so.

GORILLAS & GUERRILLAS

Hunting, poaching, disease and human encroachment into the forests have always been a threat to the mountain gorillas of East Africa. For a while during the 1970s and 1980s the gorillas were, to some degree, protected from poaching because of the large influx of tourist dollars that encouraged local people living adjacent to their habitats to protect them.

However, during the civil war in Rwanda in the mid-1990s, and the later war in the DRC, a number of gorillas disappeared as poachers captured them for sale or soldiers lived off the land.

For more information about current threats to the gorillas, check out the websites of the **International Gorilla Conservation Programme** (www.mountaingorillas.org) and the **Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International** (www.qorillafund.org).

Welcome to the Costa del Kivu! Gisenvi is a ritzy resort town for rich Rwandans and resident foreigners. The views over Lake Kivu and Nyiragongo (3470m) to the northwest are magnificent, but the volcano blew its top in early 2002, consuming much of neighbouring Goma in the DRC.

Banks in Gisenyi can only exchange cash, not travellers cheques, and do not offer creditcard cash advances. Modern Internet (Rue de Ruhengeri) offers the best internet connection in town, sometimes the only connection.

Gisenvi is home to the Primus Brewery, about 7km out of town along a lovely lakeshore road. Free tours can be arranged. Swimming and sunbathing on the beaches are free, but ask locals before plunging in - it's very dangerous to swim in certain parts of Lake Kivu because of volcanic gases and bilharzia, and you need to be very careful around Gisenvi.

The leader of the pack among the cheaper guesthouses, Auberge de Gisenyi (🖻 540385; Ave de l'Umuganda; s/d RFr5000/6000) has rooms that face onto an attractive courtyard garden. The doubles are almost suites, making them a good deal, and the restaurant is popular at night for both food and beer.

Housed in a rambling old colonial-era house, the Hôtel Palm Beach (🖻 085 59551; uwinya@ vahoo.fr: Ave de la Coopération: r RFr15.000-30.000) has rooms that are spacious and comfortable. It has its own stretch of private beachfront, a beach bar and a popular restaurant-bar downstairs.

The owners of the Stipp Hotel (2 540540; www .stippag.co.rw; Ave de la Révolution; s/d US\$60/70; 🔊) have done a number on an old property, creating Gisenvi's, surely Rwanda's, first boutique hotel. The lush grounds include a swimming pool and sauna. The restaurant here is considered one of the best in town.

For something completely different, head to Texas (Rue de Ruhengeri; snacks RFr1000-3000), a sophisticated coffee shop in the upper part of town. The menu includes fresh breads, pastries and even pizzas, plus creative coffees and juices.

Boasting a beautiful beachfront location, Bikini Tam-Tam Bar & Restaurant (Ave de la Production; mains US\$4) sets up tables on the sand. Boulangerie de Gisenyi (Rue des Poissons) is the place for cheese, meats and fresh bread for self-caterers.

RWANDA

Okapi Car (Ave du Marché) and Atraco Express (Ave du Marché) operate minibuses between Gisenvi and Kigali (RFr1800, three hours). There are also

regular minibuses to Ruhengeri (RFr700, two hours). Onatracom Express (Ave de l'Umuganda) runs big buses to Kigali (RFr1600, four hours) passing through Ruhengeri (RFr800, two hours). All buses terminate on Ave de l'Umuganda.

SOUTHWESTERN RWANDA

The endless mountains don't stop as you head south towards Burundi. Highlights here include the intellectual capital of Butare and the magnificent forest of Parc National Nyungwe Forest, not forgetting of course the beautiful blue waters of Lake Kivu.

BUTARE

The centre of intellectual inspiration in Rwanda, Butare is home to the National University. It's tiny after Kigali, but the large student population brings a certain buzz to the place.

There are branches of BCR, BCDI and Banque de Kigali on the main Rue de Kigali, but they can only deal with cash. Computer Link @ Butare (Rue de Kigali; per hr RFr500) is the best place for internet access. Expo Vente (Rue de Kigali) is a handicrafts shop exhibiting local products and a great-value place to buy some Rwandan work.

Butare's trump card is the Musée National du Rwanda (admission RFr1000; 🕑 9-11.30am & 2.30-4.30pm Tue-Sun, 2.30-4.30pm Mon), which is definitely worth visiting for its ethnological and archaeological displays, all housed in a memorable structure. It is on the road to Kigali, a 15-minute walk north of the town centre.

Set just off Ave du Commerce, Hôtel des Beaux-Arts (🖻 530032; Ave du Commerce; r RFr4000-6000) has real character for a cheapie. The hotel is decorated with local products and all rooms include hot-water bathrooms, making for a good deal.

Hôtel Faucon (🖻 086 17657; Rue de Kigali; s/apt RFr5000/10,000) is a tempting offer, as it has huge rooms at rock-bottom prices. Apartments come with a bathroom, satellite TV and a seating area, and breakfast is included.

Probably the best hotel in town is Hôtel lbis (🖻 530335; campionibis@hotmail.com; Rue de Kigali; s/d RFr15,000/18,000, apt RFr20,000-23,000), thanks to its central location and comfortable rooms. There is an excellent terrace bar-restaurant here that serves great meals and doubles as a bar by night.

lonelyplanet.com

Chez Venant (🖻 085 04115; Rue Rwamamba; mains RFr1000-5000) brings the taste of China to Butare surprising given the name. There are also a few local dishes for good measure.

Atraco Express, Okapi Car, Trans Express 2000 and Volcano Express have hourly services to and from Kigali, departing from offices on Rue de Kigali and costing RFr1300 (two hours). Atraco Express and Onatracom Express have daily departures to Cyangugu (RFr1700).

The minibus station is 1km north of the town centre. Regular minibuses go to Kigali (RFr1100, two hours), and to Kamembe (RFr1600, three hours), near Cyangugu, passing through the stunning Nyungwe Forest.

PARC NATIONAL NYUNGWE FOREST

The spectacular 970-sq-km Nyungwe Forest is one of the largest protected montane rainforests in Africa, easily the equal of Kibale Forest in Uganda. It offers superb scenery and views of the volcanoes of the Parc National des Virunga in the DRC to the north.

The forest is home to huge groups of blackand-white Angola colobus monkeys, several groups of chimpanzees, 50 species of other mammals, 270 species of tree, 275 species of bird, and an astonishing variety of orchids and butterflies.

It costs US\$20 per day to visit Nyungwe Forest, but this includes guided or unguided walks on any of the colour-coded forest trails and camping at Uwinka. Chimpanzee tracking (US\$50) starts at 6am, and colobus walks (US\$30) leave at 9am and 3pm from park headquarters; talk to rangers. There is no law against spotting primates on an ordinary walk, but there is a better chance of sightings on a primate walk.

There is an overpriced camp site (US\$20) at the Uwinka park headquarters; bring everything you need (including warm clothes), except drinks.

Anyone without a tent can make for the homely ORTPN Resthouse (r per person US\$20), but it is 18km west of Uwinka and pretty isolated for those without transport.

Nyungwe Forest is bisected by the road between Butare and Kamembe (near Cyangugu), and is accessible by minibus from either town. You may get charged full fare (RFr1600) in either direction, but you may be able to bargain down to RFr1000. It takes two hours from Butare and one hour from Cyangugu. There are regular buses. From Butare, the Uwinka headquarters is just past the 90km post.

CYANGUGU

In a lovely location at the southern end of Lake Kivu, Cyangugu looks across to Bukavu in the DRC. A few kilometres north of Cyangugu is Kamembe, the region's trade and transport centre.

Right by the border, Hôme St François (🖻 537915; s/d/tr RFr1500/2500/3500) is a friendly place that's spotlessly clean and excellent value for money. Couples might be separated unless obviously married; bring a ring.

Set back on the hill just above the lake, Hotel des Chutes (🖻 537405; r RFr8000-10,000) offers fine views. It is worth spending a little extra for satellite TV and a balcony. There is also a great little restaurant here with a range of European cuisine (mains from RFr2000).

Minibuses for the short hop between Cyangugu and Kamembe cost RFr100. Atraco Express and Onatracom Express have four daily departures between them to Butare (RFr1700, three hours). From Kamembe to Butare local minibuses cost RFr1600. There is also a daily bus at 8am from Cyangugu to Kibuye, which traverses an incredible road of plunging cliffs and tight hairpins.

KIBUYE

Kibuye has got the location, spread across several irregular bays on Lake Kivu. It's the only real beach and water sports alternative to Gisenvi, but note that it's very dangerous to swim in certain parts of Lake Kivu because of volcanic gases and bilharzia. Kibuye is usually fine, but be very careful around Gisenvi.

Occupying a peaceful location on a wooded peninsula in the lake, Bethanie Guesthouse (🕿 568509; bethanie@epr.org.rw; dm US\$4, s/d from US\$14/18; 🛄) has rooms of all shapes and sizes. It has a small restaurant, but is often booked up with conferences.

In the centre of town, Restaurant Nouveauté (mains US\$1-2) has a basic menu of brochettes and beans.

and beans. The road linking Kibuye to Kigali is excel-lent and passes the 100m-high **Chutes de Ndaba** (Ndaba Waterfall) after about 20km. Okapi Car run several buses to Kigali (RFr1400, two hours). Local minibuses (RFr1200) are more

crowded. There is usually also one bus a day to both Cyangugu and Gisenyi.

RWANDA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Camping options are pretty limited in Rwanda, but dorm accommodation at mission hostels is cheap at US\$1 to US\$3 per night. The catch is that doors close at 10pm or earlier.

Cheaper hotels are generally on the grungy side in Rwanda, but there is usually a good selection of midrange hotels available in most towns. International standard hotels are available in Kigali and Gisenyi, while Parc National des Volcans offers several atmospheric lodges.

ACTIVITIES

It's all about the gorillas here in Rwanda, and the tracking at Parc National des Volcans ranks up there with any activity on earth – don't forget US\$375 cash, however. Other monkey business includes primate tracking at Parc National Nyungwe Forest. For a change of scenery, there are water sports at Gisenyi or Kibuye.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices and businesses are generally open between 8.30am and 4.30pm or 5.30pm, with a short break for lunch sometime between noon and 2pm. Most shops and banks do not break for lunch, but some banks close early at 3.30pm.

Local restaurant hours are 7am to 9pm, and international-type restaurants are open 11.30am to 2.30pm and 5.30pm to 10.30pm.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

It is always worth checking on current security conditions before entering Rwanda. At the time of research, the country was very safe, but there is always the outside chance of problems spilling over from the DRC or Burundi. Urban Rwanda is now one of the safer places to be in Africa, but in Kigali, like any capital, take care at night.

Out in the countryside, do not walk along anything other than a well-used track; there might still be landmines around. The potential risk is highest anywhere near the borders with the DRC and Burundi.

PRACTICALITIES

- Rwanda uses the metric system and distances are in kilometres.
- Electricity in Rwanda is 240V, 50 cycles, and plugs are mainly two-pin.
- The English-language New Times is published several times a week, plus the New Vision and Monitor are available from Uganda. French magazines and international titles are available in Kigali.
- Radio Rwanda, a government-controlled station, broadcasts in Kinyarwanda, French, Swahili and English.
- Television Rwandaise (TVR) is the stateowned broadcaster.

There are a number of roadblocks along all main roads to ensure security, but foreigners are never hassled.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Rwandan Embassies & Consulates

Rwanda has diplomatic representation in the following countries, among others: Belgium ((2) 02-771 2127; 1 Ave de Fleurs, Brussels) Burundi (2) 226865; Ave du RD Congo, Bujumbura)

Canada (C 613-722 5835; 121 Sherwood Dr, Ottowa, ON K1Y 3V1)

France (a) 142 27 36 31; 12 Rue Jadin, 75017 Paris) Germany (a) 030-2091 6590; Jagerstrase 67 10117 Berlin)

South Africa (ⓐ 012-460 0709; 35 Marais St, Pretoria) Tanzania (ⓐ 211 5889; 32 Ali Hassan Mwinyi Rd, Upanga; ⓑ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) Uganda (ⓐ 041-344045; 2 Nakayima Rd, Kampala) UK (ⓐ 020-7224 9832; 120-122 Seymour Pl, London) UKA (ⓐ 020-7224 9832; 120-122 Seymour Pl, London)

USA (🖻 202-232 2882; 1724 New Hampshire Ave, Washington DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Rwanda

Countries with diplomatic representation in Kigali (Map p723) include the following: Belgium (🖻 575551; Rue de Nyarugenge) Burundi (🗃 517529; Kacyiru) Canada (🗃 571762; Rue de l'Akagera) France (🗟 575206; Ave Paul VI) Kenya (🗟 583332; Blvd de l'Umuganda) Tanzania (🗟 505400; Ave de la Paix) Uganda (🗟 572117; Ave de la Paix) Uganda (🗟 572117; Ave de la Paix) UK (🕲 585280; Blvd de l'Umuganda, Kacyiru) USA (🖨 505601; Blvd de la Revolution)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106) the principal public holidays in Rwanda are as follows: New Year's Day 1 January Democracy Day 8 January Genocide Memorial Day 7 April Labour Day 1 May National Day 1 July Peace & National Unity Day 5 July Harvest Festival Day 1 August Culture Day 8 September Kamarampaka Day 25 September (anniversary of the referendum in 1961) Liberation Day 1 October Armed Forces Day 26 October

INTERNET ACCESS

Email and internet access in Rwanda has improved fast and is now widely available in Kigali, as well as on a more limited basis in Butare, Cyangugu, Kibuye and Ruhengeri, all at around RFr500 per hour.

MAPS

At the time of research the best map of Rwanda was *Rwanda Burundi: International Travel Map* published by ITMB Publishing at a scale of 1:400,000.

MONEY

Rwanda's unit of currency is the Rwandan franc (RFr), which is sometimes also abbreviated to 'Frw'. It's best to come to Rwanda with US dollars or euros in cash. The only useful bank branch in the country is Banque de Kigali in the capital, which offers cash advances on credit card and can change travellers cheques, neither of which is possible in the provinces. There are ATMs in Kigali, but they are not yet wired to an international network. Credit cards can be used in some upmarket hotels and restaurants in Kigali.

Bureaux de change – which are mostly in Kigali – offer slightly better exchange rates than banks. Moneychangers hang around central Kigali and usually give a slightly better rate, but count your money carefully. All banks, and most bureaux de change, are closed on Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Be extremely careful wherever taking photos in Rwanda, as the authorities are very sensitive. Always ask before you take a photograph of anybody or anything other than landscapes.

POST

Postal services from Rwanda are reasonably reliable. The main post office in Kigali has a poste restante and an attached internet café.

TELEPHONE

Telephone calls can be made at the post offices (abbreviated to PTT) or any of the private MTN or Rwandatel card phones or booths found in major towns.

There are no area codes in Rwanda. Mobile telephone numbers start with the prefixes (2085, (2006) 0083. Visit www .rwandaphonebook.com when looking for telephone numbers in Rwanda.

VISAS

Visas are required by everyone except nationals of Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Kenya, South Africa, Sweden, the UK and the USA.

From a Rwandan embassy or consulate, tourist visas are valid for three months, cost US\$60 and can be extended in Kigali. Two photos are required, and visas can usually be collected within 24 hours.

Two-week extendible tourist visas are available at the Kigali airport and at the major land borders with Burundi, the DRC, Tanzania and Uganda, for US\$60.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be extended at the **Ministère de l'Intérieur** (255856) in Kigali, in the Kacyiru district, about 7km northeast of the city centre. It takes about one week and costs US\$30 per month.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for Burundi, the DRC, Tanzania and Uganda are available from embassies in Kigali (see opposite for contact details).

Burundi Visas cost US\$40 for one month single entry, although check on the security situation very carefully before visiting. Also available on the border.

Democratic Republic of Congo For land crossings to eastern DR Congo eight-day visas are available at Bukavu or Goma for US\$35.

Kenya Visas cost US\$50 or the equivalent in local currency, require two photographs and are issued the same day if you apply before 11.30am. However, visas are also available on arrival.

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Tanzania Visas require two photos and generally take 24 hours to issue. The cost depends on nationality. **Uganda** Visas cost US\$30, require two photos and are issued in 24 hours. However, it is far easier to get them at the border on arrival.

TRANSPORT IN RWANDA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Gregoire Kayibanda International Airport is located at Kanombe, 10km east of Kigali centre. Airlines connect Kigali with Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Bujumbura (Burundi), Entebbe (Uganda), Nairobi (Kenya), Johannesburg (South Africa) and Brussels (Belgium).

The following airlines have offices in Kigali (Map p723):

Air Burundi (572113; Ave des Milles Collines) Ethiopian Airlines (575045; www.flyethiopian.com) Kenya Airways (577972; www.kenya-airways.com; Ave des Milles Collines)

Rwandair Express (503687; www.rwandair.com) SN Brussels Airline (575290; www.brusselsairlines .com: Ave de la République)

South African Airways (577777; www.flysaa.com; Blvd de la Revolution)

Land

RWANDA

BURUNDI

Make sure you check the latest security situation carefully before crossing by land into Burundi. The main crossing point between Rwanda and Burundi is via Butare (Rwanda) and Kayanza (Burundi), on the very wellmaintained Kigali–Bujumbura road. The border post is called Kayanza Haut. Yahoo Car, New Yahoo Coach and Gaso Bus run daily buses between Kigali and Bujumbura (RFr4000/5000 for a small/big bus, about six hours), departing about 7am.

There is also a direct road from Cyangugu to Bujumbura, but this is not in such good shape.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Do as much homework as possible before crossing by land into the DRC, as the security situation remains potentially volatile after almost a decade of civil war. There are two main crossings between Rwanda and the DRC, both on the shores of Lake Kivu. Cross-

DEPARTURE TAX

International departure tax is US\$20, but is included in the ticket price at the time of purchase.

ing between Gisenyi (Rwanda) and Goma (DRC) was considered safe at the time of research, although only for day trips to Goma, climbing Nyiragongo volcano or visiting the mountain gorillas. Longer trips into the DRC or overland trips through the country were inadvisable at the time of research. The southern border between Cyangugu (Rwanda) and Bukavu (DRC) is also open, but the security situation around Bukavu is a little more volatile than it is around Goma.

TANZANIA

From Kigali, take a minibus to the border town of Rusumo (RFr1500, three hours). Once across the border, jump on any form of public transport – often a pick-up – to Ngara. From Ngara, catch a bus (US\$10, 12 hours) to Mwanza. The road to Mwanza is mostly good but has some rough sections. Hitching is sometimes possible along this way, as plenty of aid vehicles use the road.

UGANDA

The main border crossing is located between Kigali and Kabale, via Gatuna (Rwanda) and Katuna (Uganda). Those travelling direct between Kigali and Kampala can travel with **Jaguar Executive Coaches** ((2008) 0086 14838), which has a VIP bus (RFr7000) and a standard service (RFr5000), both departing at 5.45am, 6.15am and 9am from Kigali's Nyabugogo Bus Station and taking nine hours.

Between Kigali and Kabale there are lots of minibuses, but a change of vehicle at the border is involved. There are regular minibuses from Kigali to Gatuna (RFr1500, 1½ hours). Across the border in Katuna there are minibuses (US\$0.50) and special hire taxis (US\$8 for the car) to Kabale.

There is also a second crossing between Ruhengeri (Rwanda) and Kisoro (Uganda), via Cyanika. The road is in excellent shape on the Rwandan side however, it's in poor condition on the Ugandan side. Frequent minibuses link either side of the border with Ruhengeri (RFr500, 25km) and Kisoro (US\$0.60, 12km). GETTING AROUND Air

Rwandair Express (Map p723; **[®]** 503687; www.rwandair .com) offers four flights a week from Kigali to Cyangugu.

Boat

There used to be ferries on Lake Kivu that connected the Rwandan ports of Cyangugu, Kibuye and Gisenyi, but these services were suspended at the time of research. Speedboat charters are currently the only option between these ports, but they are very expensive.

Bus

Rwanda has a good road system, and plenty of modern, well-maintained minibuses serve all the main routes from dawn 'til dusk. Minibuses leave when officially full – which means when all the seats are occupied, unlike neighbouring countries where many more are squeezed in.

The best minibuses are privately run, scheduled services operated by Okapi Car, Trans Express 2000, Atraco Express and Virunga Ponctuel. Destinations covered include Butare, Gisenyi, Kibuye and Ruhengeri, and departures are guaranteed to leave – hourly in many cases. They are less crowded and drive more carefully than the usual minibuses, but cost a little more.

Car & Motorcycle

Cars are suitable for most of the country's main roads, but those planning to explore Akagera or follow the shores of Lake Kivu might be better off with a 4WD.

Čar hire isn't well established in Rwanda, but most travel agents and tour operators in Kigali can organise something from RFr25,000 per day for a small car and up.

Local Transport

Taxis are necessary only in Kigali, but it is possible to find the occasional taxi in most other major towns. In Kigali and other larger towns, you can use a *taxi-motor* – a motorcycle that doubles as a two-wheeled taxi.

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Somaliland, Puntland & Somalia

Somalia has been a horror show for more than a decade. The law of the gun, kidnapping of aid workers, fighting among rival factions and a host of humanitarian crises have created a post-apocalyptic feel in this part of the Horn.

In fact, it's a bit more nuanced than that. Somalia is a patchwork state. Since 1991 the country that is still known internationally as Somalia has effectively been three countries in one: Somalia in the south, Somaliland in the northwest on the Gulf of Aden, and Puntland perched in the northeast corner. The situation in each zone is radically different. The south, and Puntland (while a little more stable), have long been riddled with clan clashes.

Amid chaos, there is a success story: Somaliland, which, like a phoenix, has risen from ashes. Discreetly. So discreetly that nobody knows that it has a parliament, a capital, a flag, a currency, a university and multiparty elections! But Somaliland remains in limbo, with very few diplomatic supporters and little media coverage to voice its achievements.

Even in Somalia, the situation may be not insurmountable. There were a few glimmers of hope at the time of writing. The Islamists that seized power in 2006 had restored relative peace and order, and humanitarian agencies may step in and help the impoverished Somalis.

Hopefully a safe and stable Somalia will emerge one day. And travellers will start trickling in again. In the meantime, all you can do is cross fingers or play it safe in Somaliland.

FAST FACTS

- Area 637,657 sq km
- ATMs None
- Borders Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti (only the Djiboutian and Ethiopian borders with Somaliland are open to travellers)
- Budget US\$25 to US\$100 per day
- Capital Mogadishu (Somalia), Hargeisa (Somaliland), Bosasso (Puntland)
- Languages Somali
- Money Somaliland shilling; US\$1 = SISh1350
- Population 10 million (including 3.5 million in Somaliland)
- Seasons Wet (March to June & September to December), dry (July to August & January to February)
- Telephone Country code 252; international access code 216
- Time GMT/UTC + 3
- Visa Somaliland US\$30, Somalia US\$25 (if you can get one)

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

There are regional variations but generally it goes like this: Somalia has two rainy seasons (April to June and October to November) and two dry seasons (July to September and December to March). From July to September temperatures are unbearable, reaching 40°C. In the south, near the border with Kenya, the climate is tropical.

Travel is much easier during the winter dry season, from December to March, when daily temperatures do not exceed 30°C.

HISTORY

Originally, Somalis probably hail from the southern Ethiopian highlands, and have been subject to a strong Arabic influence ever since the 7th century, when the Somali coast formed part of the extensive Arab-controlled trans-Indian Ocean trading network.

In the 19th century much of the Ogaden Desert – ethnically a part of Somalia – was annexed by Ethiopia (an invasion that has been a source of bad blood ever since) and then in 1888 the country was divided by European powers. The French got the area around Djibouti, Britain much of the north, while Italy got Puntland and the south. Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan (known affectionately as 'the Mad Mullah') fought the British for two decades, but it wasn't until 1960 that Somaliland, Puntland and southern Somalia were united, which wasn't altogether a good idea.

HOW MUCH?

- Cost of an armed bodyguard (per day) US\$15
- Entrance fee to Las Geel site US\$10
- Internet connection US\$1 per hour
- Airfare Djibouti-Hargeisa US\$85 (one way)
- 1g of gold (21 carats) US\$16

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.50
- 1L bottled water US\$0.30
- Bottled beer No alcohol is available
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$3
- Plate of meat and rice US\$2

WARNING

All parts of Somalia and Puntland were an absolute no-go zone at the time of writing. We were unable to do on-the-ground research in Somalia and Puntland, so some information may be unreliable. SOMALILAND, PUNTLAND & SOMALIA

However, we could cover some parts of Somaliland, entering the country overland from Jijiga (Ethiopia) and using local transportation. Then, our on-the-ground coverage included Hargeisa, Las Geel, Berbera, Sheekh and Burcao, accompanied by an armed soldier (mandatory at the time of writing). That said, keep your ears to the ground and seek local advice before setting off.

Sadly, interclan tensions, radical socialism, rearmament by the USSR and the occasional (often disastrous) war with Ethiopia helped tear the country apart. Mohammed Siad Barre, Somalia's last recognised leader, fled to Nigeria in 1991 after the forces of General Aideed took Mogadishu. At the same time the Somali National Movement (SNM) moved quickly and declared independence for Somaliland. Puntland also broke away.

Restoration of Hope?

Fierce battles between warring factions throughout southern Somalia took place throughout the 1990s, but in 1992 the US led a UN mission (Operation Restore Hope) to distribute food aid to the southern population. Without much ado a nasty little conflict between the US-UN and warlord General Aideed began, during which it's estimated that thousands of Somalis died. The last UN troops pulled out in 1995, having alleviated the famine to some extent, but the nation was still a disaster area.

Utter Failure

Designed to establish control across the whole of the country, Somalia's lame-duck Transitional National Government (TNG) was set up in 2000. Alas, it didn't manage to gain recognition from its own people in Somalia, who keep regarding it as a creature in the hands of international interests. Although it's the only internationally recognised body, it has proved too weak to impose its rule and has failed in promoting reconciliation or curbing the power of militias. It has had to cower in



the west in the town of Baidoa, its redoubt, leaving the rest of the country in the hands of feuding warlords.

The Case of Somaliland & Puntland

The self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland was formed in 1991 after the collapse of unitary Somalia. Thanks mainly to the predominance of a single clan (the Isaq), it has remained largely peaceful and stable since 1991. It has great oil and gas potential and voted for complete independence in 1997 before holding free presidential elections in 2003 (although opposition parties don't recognise the victory of President Dahir Riyale Kahin). Although its leaders desperately struggle to gain formal international recognition, Somaliland is still treated as a pariah by the international community and is not recognised as a separate state by the outside world. The main reason why the world is reluctant to accept Somaliland's independence is that the UN still hopes for a peace agreement covering all of Somalia, and its other neighbours are wary of an independent Somaliland, fearing a potential 'Balkanisation' of the Horn. For



Somalilanders, this sounds profoundly unfair. Unlike the rest of Somalia, they have managed to establish law and order in their country. Expat Somalilanders have kept doing their best to influence diplomatic corps in Europe, in East Africa and in North America – in vain, so far. But there are some signs of hope: Somaliland's leaders have nurtured good relations with Kenya, Ethiopia, the UK, Germany and Norway, and seem to be backed by the African Union.

In 2003 their efforts were partly ruined by a sad story: 'terrorists' from Mogadishu illegally entered Somaliland and shot several aid workers with the aim of destabilising the fledgling country and making it lose its credibility on the international scene. This explains why the local authorities tend to be overprotective of foreigners once they venture outside the capital.

Puntland is a different kettle of fish. It too did reasonably well up until 2001, when President Colonel Yusuf refused to stand down after losing an election, a point he reinforced by waging a little war. Puntland is at odds with neighbouring Somaliland: there's a territory dispute over several border provinces.

Somalia Today

June and July 2006 marked an important turning point: Islamist militias, operating under an umbrella calling itself the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC), ousted US-backed, secular warlords from Mogadishu and took control of the ravaged capital. Then they took swathes of southern Somalia. The CIC made it clear that the Ouran was the constitution and there was no room for Western-style democracy, but ordinary Somalis, exhausted by years of chaos, seemed to prefer the harsh rule of Islamic hardliners over the deadly tyranny of the warlords. This hard line has raised fear outside, especially in the USA, which suspects that the CIC could become a terrorist safe haven and a Taliban-esque state.

Ethiopia, fiercely opposed to any kind of Islamist ideology at its doorstep, sent troops near Baidoa to support the transitional government, which at first opposed any power sharing with the new leaders. Finally, under international pressure, the transitional government started negotiations with the CIC. At the time of writing, the Islamic courts were on the verge of conquering the whole of Somalia, something which no other group has managed since 1991.

As if this wasn't enough, southern Somalia was affected by the worst drought in a decade in 2006, creating the bleakest malnutrition situation in years.

There is some hope that a comprehensive victory in the south may at least restore order and perhaps bring some relief to Somalis for the first time since Siad Barre was toppled in 1991. So far, the CIC has restored law and order, as testified by the reopening of Mogadishu's port and airport in August 2006. Whether they'll manage to forge a more enduring peace remains to be seen, and their ability to establish national unity and gain international recognition has yet to be tested.

At the time of publication there was a threat of conflict with neighbouring Ethiopia – Ethiopia does not seem to accept an Islamic state at its doorstep.

CULTURE

The clan structure is the main pillar of Somali culture, which partly explains why the ideal of a modern 'state' is hard to implement here. Somalis all hail from the same tribe, which is divided into six main clans and loads of subclans. Somalis are more likely to ask a stranger 'Whom are you from?' than 'Where are you from?' This interclan rivalry has fuelled two decades of conflict.

The nomadic lifestyle also exerts a major influence on Somali culture.

PEOPLE

Somalis can be quiet and dignified, with a tendency to ignore strangers, but have a tremendous oral (often poetic) tradition. Written Somali is a very young language (the Somali Latin script was established in 1973) and spelling variation, especially place names, is very common. English is widely used in the north, but Italian dominates in the south.

Well over a million Somalis are scattered across Europe, North America and the Middle East; together they send hundreds of millions of dollars back to Somalia each year.

All Somalis are Sunni Muslims and Islam is extremely important to the Somali sense of national identity. Most women wear headscarves, and arranged marriage is still the norm in rural areas.

ENVIRONMENT

Characterised by desert or semidesert terrain, Somalia is distinguished by three main topographical features: the Oogo, a mountainous highland region in the north dominated by the Gollis Mountains; the Guban, a relatively barren, hot and humid coastal region (dominating southern Somalia), and the Hawd, a sweeping area of rich, rainy-season pasture prone to overgrazing and desertification. Serious drought continues to plague the south of the country.

Unsurprisingly, Somalia has some of the longest beaches in the world. Coral reefs and the relatively pristine Seylac Islands lie in the Red Sea off the coast of Somaliland.

FOOD & DRINK

Goat and camel meat are popular dishes in Somalia. The standard breakfast throughout Somalia is fried liver with onions and *anjeero*, a flat bread similar to the Ethiopian *injera*. Rice and noodles are also common staples. Camel is the preferred source of meat.

Tea is the favourite drink. Sheep, goat or camel's milk are also widespread. Alcohol is strictly prohibited and not available.

SOMALILAND

Tell friends that you're going to Somaliland, and the reaction is quite likely to be one of condescending incredulity ('You're going *where*?'), at the very best, or of serious warning ('you are suicidal!').

Whatever, Somaliland currently represents the Shangri-la for those who dare to break the mould of conventional travel. This is the road less travelled, and virgin territory for travelati. The country's big draws? Las Geel, about 50km from Hargeisa; pristine beaches - if all you want is to laze on immense, unspoiled stretches of white sand, Berbera will take your breath away; and divers in the know swear that the islands off Zeila, to the north, will one day be a mecca for divers. Sure, the landscape is far less arresting than in neighbouring Djibouti, but the terrain is torturous enough to warrant a couple of decent hikes and a hatful of excellent views. Good news: for now, most of this cultural and natural wealth is accessible to independent travellers. Go on, don't be afraid – discover!

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His name was Saheed. He was my escort boy during my stay in Somaliland. Don't be confused, Saheed was technically and literally my escort boy: he was an armed soldier whose mission was to accompany and protect me during my trip outside Hargeisa. 'For safety reasons', I was told at my hotel. Since the murder of three aid workers by Somalians in 2003, local authorities take very seriously the safety of Westerners, and for good reason. If other foreigners encounter a 'problem', the whole diplomatic efforts of the country to gain international recognition are ruined. To be honest, I don't think Saheed would have been of any help if we had fallen in an ambush led by terrorists armed to the teeth on the road to Berbera. By 2pm, my guardian angel started chewing *qat* (leaf chewed as a stimulant) and was completely stoned until 7pm at least, when he started to resurrect again, only to ask for dinner. So I decided to take his presence not too seriously. After all, at that time I was the only traveller in this country and I had never experienced such a VIP treatment – and at US\$15 per day, it is a pittance! This slightly restrictive rule is said to be lifted in a few years, when the situation will be considered perfectly safe for foreigners.

If you're worried about security issues (and we're guessing you are), rest easy: Somaliland has nothing to do with Somalia. Here travellers are welcome. The safety of Westerners is taken very seriously in Somaliland, and Hargeisa was one of the safest cities in Africa when we visited.

That said, Somaliland is not Disneyland. The country is poor, its infrastructure is crumbling and it desperately lacks foreign investments to rebuild the economy. For all their friendliness and self-reliant nature, the Somalilandese life is as tough as it gets. A compounding issue is the bitter relations with neighbouring Puntland and the rest of Somalia.

Highlights

- **Hargeisa** (below) Wander dumbfounded throughout the capital and explore its lively markets.
- **Berbera** (p741) Scoff a plate of grilled fish and take a soothing dip at Baathela Beach.
- **Las Geel** (p740) Feel like a *National Geographic* explorer and speculate on Somalia's mysterious past at this exceptional archaeological site.
- Enjoy the smug feeling of impressing your fellow travellers: 'Yes, I've been to Somaliland!'.

HARGEISA

pop 1 million

No guns. No roadblocks. No fear. No oppression. Relax: Hargeisa is not Mogadishu. The image of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon may be too poetic for a capital that still bears the scars of the civil war that destroyed the country in the past decades, but Hargeisa is an energising city with lots of good vibes.

Although tourist sights are as scarce as hen's teeth, it feels so exotic to be the only foreigner wandering in the streets. People are genuinely surprised to see a real 'tourist', so be prepared to be the focus of attention. Fear not, it's hassle-free. And it's so astonishing to see that Hargeisa has all the conveniences a traveller could hope for: decent hotels with English-speaking staff, a couple of restaurants with tasty food, internet cafés, electronics stores, bureaux de change, teashops, markets, bus stations, taxis...but no alcohol (it was too good to be true!). It's a free economy, and it shows. The streets are alive, the roads are busy and the air thick with a very bearable cacophony of mobile-phone ring tones, vehicle horns and calls to prayers. Throw in the mandatory dust and you'll have an idea of present-day Hargeisa's attire. Now it's your turn to delve in.

Orientation & Information

You can't really get lost in Hargeisa. Most places of interest to travellers are on or around the main drag, Independence Rd. Most streets don't have names; the MiG jet is a good landmark. The airport is about 5km from the centre.

For tourist information, ask at your hotel or contact the **Director of Tourism** (2424561; shabeelle7@yahoo.com; S 8am-1pm Sat-Thu), inside the Ministry of Tourism (same building as the Ministry of Fisheries), who can also help with visa matters, an armed bodyguard and car hire. There's a profusion of internet cafés on the main strip (about US\$1 per hour), as well as numerous bureaux de change, including **Dahabshill** (B 521152; www.dahabshiil.cm; Independence Rd; W 7am-noon & 1-5.30pm Sat-Thu), where you can change cash (and only cash). Money transfers from a number of countries (see p742) are also possible.

Sights

Let's be frank: you're not here for museums or historic buildings. It's the ambience and the sense of exploration that are the pull here. Visually, Hargeisa has nothing much of interest except perhaps the war memorial – a Somali Airforce **MiG jet** – and a couple of markets, including the **gold market**, a short stagger from Oriental Hotel, and the **camel and goat market**, on the outskirts of town. In the centre, the imposing **Jama Mosque** is worth a peek. There's a flurry of **goldsmiths** on the main street, too. If you want to buy a necklace or a bracelet for your beloved, just know that gold costs about US\$16 per gram (21 carats).

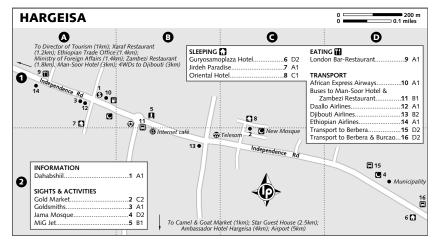
Sleeping

Surprise: Hargeisa has a smattering of goodvalue options to suit all budgets, scattered in the centre or on the outskirts of town. All were safe and secure at the time of research. The overall quality of the lodgings we visited is much higher than in Eritrea or in Ethiopia, and much better value than in neighbouring Djibouti. What's more, staff usually speak very good English. Yes! A hint: get your bearings by spending your first night at the Ambassador, then hunker down in one of the more central places, which will give you a more 'real' feel for the town. Women travellers should stick with the Ambassador.

Guryosamoplaza Hotel (2521399; Independence Rd; r US\$5-25) About 300m from Jama Mosque, this quirky pile with a pinkish façade has rooms of all shapes and sizes, from family apartments with balconies to windowless singles with shared bathrooms. Rooms are a trifle spare and some bathrooms could use a touch up but overall this place is well maintained. Aim for the doubles with private bathrooms. Meals are available on request.

Jirdeh Paradise (22528792, s/dUS\$10/15) Frankly, if this place is considered paradise, we'll be happy to end up in hell! That said, it's an OK runner-up if the others are full. It offers spacious rooms, tiled bathrooms (hot shower) and a central location. Pictures dating from the time of the British Protectorate greet you up in the lobby. It's one block behind Daallo Airlines office; you can't miss the incongruously blueish façade.

Óriental Hótel (☎ 2514999, 8289296; orientalhotelhga@hotmail.com; s/d US\$15/30; □) Our second favourite in Hargeisa. The location, near the gold market, is ideal if you want to immerse yourself in this quirky city – it's right in the centre. Ignore the fairly decrepit façade; inside, it's much more agreeable, with a vast, sun-filled patio, well-furnished rooms, salubrious bathrooms, working fans (but no



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air-con) and good service. There's an excellent restaurant (mains US\$2 to US\$4) where you can tuck into tasty lamb and beef dishes, soups, salads, kebabs and pasta. Abdi Abdi, the well-travelled, English-speaking owner, will go the extra mile to help foreigners with their logistics (read: a security soldier to chaperone you, and a hire car).

Star Guest House (🖻 2526699; deeqadheeg@hotmail .com; Airport Rd; s/d incl breakfast US\$20/25) These typical midrange digs won't feature in the pages of Condé Nast Traveler but it's hard to argue with the prices. Although none too inspiring in terms of charm or location - it's on the road to the airport, about 2km from the centre - it features tiled rooms with fans, satellite TVs, firm bedding, frilly curtains and sparkling bathrooms. There's a food store and a restaurant on the premises.

Maan-Soor Hotel (🕿 8283638; www.maansoor.com; r US\$25-80; P 🔀 🛄) On the far edge of town, the Maan-Soor is another sound option, with sprawling gardens, clean rooms that vary in size and appeal, and good services. It's perfectly OK, but it lacks the charisma of the Ambassador.

Ambassador Hotel Hargeisa (🕿 2138895, 2526666; www.ambassadorhotelhargeisa.com; Airport Rd; s/d US\$35/55; P 🔀 💷) Quick, tell your mum you've survived Hargeisa and that you're comfortably curled up in the ultrasecure Ambassador... This is where foreign bigwigs bunk down when in town, which is enough to recommend this place. It scores high on facilities and services, with 45 diaphanous doubles and 11 self-contained villas, virginal white walls, white-glove-test-clean bathrooms, satellite TVs, two restaurants, a fitness centre, speedy internet access and, should you feel the urge to ask for any deity's protection, a mosque. There's a bar too - coool! Sadly, it's not licensed - boo! English-speaking management does an excellent job with logistics, car hire, tour guides, police escort and visa matters. It's a 4km minibus or taxi ride to the centre, near the airport.

Eating & Drinking

Not only will you find secure places here to rest your head, but you'll also find a string of decent eateries.

Zambezi Restaurant (mains US\$2; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Hmm, the rice is truly finger-licking here (and you'll eat it with your fingers, anyway), as are the goat meat and fish dishes. Sit under a

gazebo in the plant-filled garden and put some bounce in your step with a glass of mango juice. It's on the road to Borama.

London Bar-Restaurant (off Independence Rd; mains US\$2; 🕑 lunch & dinner) The closest thing Hargeisa has to a groovy café. It's a good place to recharge the batteries and meet young holidaying expat Somalilanders.

Xaraf Restaurant (🗃 2523866; mains US\$4; 🕑 lunch & dinner) This eatery is held in high esteem by locals, and it's easy to see why. It trots out excellent Somali food, with an emphasis on fish dishes, pasta and chicken. It's in the same street as the Ministry of Tourism, and is popular with local office workers.

Getting There & Away AIR

Airlines with offices in Hargeisa: African Express Airways (2134636; Independence Rd)

Daallo Airlines (🗃 523003; www.daallo.com; Independence Rd)

Djibouti Airlines (21523555; www.djiboutiairlines .com; Independence Rd)

Ethiopian Airlines (21528444; www.flyethiopian .com; Independence Rd)

Turn to p743 for details on flights to/from Somaliland

LAND

Regular buses and 4WDs travel between Hargeisa, Berbera, Sheekh, Burcao and the Ethiopian border. It costs from US\$5 to US\$10 depending on the destination.

Getting Around

A taxi ride in the centre from Independence Rd should cost no more than US\$3, and about US\$10 to the airport. The Ambassador has a free pick-up service. Man-Soor Hotel and Zambezi Restaurant can be reached by minibus from the centre.

LAS GEEL

Here's a secret: were it not in Somaliland, this fantastic site (admission US\$20) would immediately be declared a World Heritage Site and would be swamped with masses of tourists. Sadly (well, not quite), as long as Somaliland is not recognised by the international community, all attempts at protecting the site will remain unsuccessful and it will remain a hidden gem.

Las Geel is undisputably Somaliland's pièce de résistance. Hundreds of magnificent Neolithic rock-art paintings in perfect condition, representing humans and animals, adorn the walls of several interconnected caves and shelters. Some paintings exceed 1m in length and their state of preservation is exceptional nothing can convey the sort of response you're likely to have the minute you see them. There are even some very risqué scenes... This archaeological wonder was only brought to light in 2003, following research conducted by a team of French archaeologists.

It's about 50km from Hargeisa, off the road to Berbera. You'll need a guide and a private vehicle to get there, both easily arranged in Hargeisa.

BERBERA

The name alone sounds impossibly exotic, conjuring images of tropical ports, spices and palm oil. If the reality is a little more prosaic, it's nonetheless a great place to chill for a while. It's hard to believe when you see it, but Berbera was once an active port town. Today this shady town consists mostly of crumbling buildings and mud-and-thatch houses.

Berbera's potential is immense, though. It's a nice little earner for Somaliland thanks to land-locked Ethiopia's need for a cheap, friendly port.

The journey from Hargeisa to here is beautiful and there are some majestic sea cliffs along the coast. Berbera is also bounded by blissful beaches, about 4km from the centre, including Baathela Beach. It also has a huge runway, built in the early 1980s as an emergency landing strip for the NASA space shuttle!

Sleeping & Eating

Al Madiina Hotel (2720254; r US\$5-20, without bathroom US\$3; 🔀) Centrally located and economical, Dahabshiil is a good place to drop anchor in Berbera, with a mixed bag of rooms to suit all budgets. The better rooms have air-con. There's a small store across the street. It's a one-storey yellow and green building.

Dahabshiil Hotel (🖻 2447845; r US\$5, with air-con US\$20, r without bathroom US\$3; 🕄) Stumbling distance from the Al Madiina, this is another acceptable option, with luminous rooms and well-scrubbed bathrooms.

Maan-Soor Hotel (🖻 2447975; s/d US\$40/50; 💦) The Maan-Soor has a resort-style feel, with a series of well-furnished 'cottages' scattered around a large property spitting distance from the beach. It scores high on facilities, with satellite TV, laundry service, excellent bedding, air-con and an attached restaurant. Its drawback is that it's a fair way out of town. Oh, and the loos and the sinks, sporting blueish friezes, are the tackiest we've ever seen this side of the Gulf of Aden. Prices are negotiable if it's slack.

Al Xayaat Restaurant & Fish House (@ 2740224; mains US\$3; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Lap up a reviving fruit juice and scoff a grilled fish at this unpretentious eatery overlooking the bay, and you'll leave with a smile on your face. The amiable owner, Ali, speaks a little French. While eating you'll be surrounded by plenty of cats, crows and seagulls expecting a tidbit.

Getting There & Away

Regular buses and 4WDs travel between Hargeisa and Berbera (US\$5, 150km).

SHEEKH

From Berbera and the coastal plain, it's a beautiful journey along the switchback ascent to the central plateau on the Berbera-Burcao road and stop at the hill town of Sheekh, which is a welcome refuge from the heat of lowland areas. Sheekh boasts a small necropolis, called Ferdusa, which dates from the 13th century. There's not much to be seen, as the site has not been excavated yet.

Sheekh is approximately halfway between Berbera and Burcao (bus US\$2), so you can break up your odyssey at Mashaallah Hotel (2730164; s/d incl breakfast US\$10/20), which has ordinary rooms set around a courtyard.

BURCAO (BURAO)

The second-largest city in the country and the capital of Todgheer province, Burcao feels a bit rougher around the edges than Berbera or Hargeisa, but that's part of its appeal. There's nothing of tangible interest here, but you can soak up the atmosphere at the livestock market and enjoy being the focus of attention you'll be somewhat of a novelty here!

You'll find internet and telephone outlets, as well as bureaux de change in the centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Gabay-Xaddi Hotel (a 224400; r US\$10, without bathroom US\$5) A bit nibbled around the edges, with bare-bones rooms and slightly musty bathrooms, but tolerable if the City Plaza is full.

Burao City Plaza Hotel (2) 2710658; r US\$17, ste US\$33, all ind breakfast; 2: (2) Ignore the intimidating sign at the entrance of the property ('all kind of weapons and all kind of knives are forbidden inside of the hotel'); the City Plaza is perfectly secure and comfortable, with well-appointed rooms arrayed around a leafy compound, stout bedding, salubrious bathrooms, good services and internet access (US\$2 per hour). Treat yourself to a suite if you want to strew your stuff around. There's also an on-site restaurant. It's on the road to Las Anod, past the airport.

Shamaxle Restaurant (mains US\$3; 🐑 lunch & dinner) The best option in town, right by the Todgheer River, off the main road, at the foot of a bridge (ask for directions). Just thinking about the ultratender kid meat served with basmati rice sends our tastebuds on a tailspin. And the papaya juice is victory for humanity, too.

Getting There & Away

Bus and 4WD transport leaves for Hargeisa (US\$5 to US\$10) via Berbera.

SOMALILAND DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

In Somaliland there's a fairly good range of options, at very affordable prices. There are two hotels meeting international standards in Hargeisa, and a smattering of budget and midrange options in the capital and main cities. They are generally better value than in Djibouti and better equipped than Ethiopia.

BUSINESS HOURS

All shops, offices and businesses are closed on Friday, but most restaurants are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner daily.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Follow what hotel staff will tell you – an armed soldier (at your own expense) and a tour guide might be compulsory outside Hargeisa. If you venture out without a guard, you might be turned back at checkpoints. Check the situation while in Hargeisa. All travel in the Sool and Sanaag regions of Somaliland is currently unsafe due to conflict in Puntland, which claims those provinces.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

The only official foreign representation in Somaliland is the **Ethiopian Trade Office** (252 2421214; Hargeisa), which serves as a de facto embassy.

Somaliland Liaison Offices abroad include the following:

Djibouti (🖻 355526; Plateau du Serpent)

Ethiopia (🖻 11-635921; fax 11-627847; Bole Rd District, Addis Ababa)

UK (🖻 020-7961 9098; slrmission@btinternet.com; 102 Cavel St; London E1 2JA)

USA ((a) 202-467 0602; 3705 South George Mansion, Falls Church, VA 22041)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106), these are the principal public holidays:

1 January Independence Day in Somalia **26 June** Independence Day in Somaliland

MONEY

There are no ATMs anywhere in Somaliland, so you'll need to carry considerable amounts of US dollars (vastly preferable to euros) that can be exchanged for shillings in hotels, shops and bureaux de change. Most hotels and shops also accept payment in US dollars. There's no chance of changing your travellers cheques. If you need to wire money, try **Dahabshil** (www.dahabshiil.com); transfers can be made at the various Dahabshiil offices in Hargeisa. Dahabshiil has offices in Australia, Canada, Holland, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK and the USA, among others.

TELEPHONE

There are numerous private telephone companies in Somaliland, including Telesom and Telecom. International telephone calls made from Somaliland are the cheapest in Africa (less than US\$0.50 per minute).

VISAS

You will need a visa to enter Somaliland. The most convenient place to get a visa is Addis Ababa. Visas are issued the same day through the Somaliland Liaison Office (see above) and cost US\$30. You'll need a photo. In Djibouti, you'll need a copy of your passport, which will be faxed to Hargeisa. Once the approval is faxed back, you get a visa, which you will pay at the airport in Hargeisa. The whole process takes about three days. In the UK or the USA, you can contact the Somaliland Liaison Office. Another straightforward option is to go through a local sponsor, such as the Oriental Hotel, the Ambassador (see p739) or the Director of Tourism (see p738). You'll need to fax them details of your passport pages and give them at least a week to organise the visa. They will fax the details back to you and you'll then be issued with the visa upon arrival at the airport (US\$30).

Visas for Onward Travel

The Ethiopian Trade Office (opposite) can issue Ethiopian visas. You'll need two photos, US\$20 and a letter from the Somaliland **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (22253871; Independence Rd, Hargeisa). The whole process is pretty straightforward and takes less than a day.

TRANSPORT IN SOMALILAND

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Daallo Airlines, the national carrier, operates weekly services from Jeddah, London and Paris to Djibouti, from where there are connections to Hargeisa (Somaliland) and Mogadishu (southern Somalia). It also has flights from Djibouti to other smaller Somali destinations, including Bosasso (Puntland; US\$192, two hours). Ethiopian Airlines offers flights from Addis Ababa to Hargeisa (US\$285 return, two hours), while Djibouti Airlines flies from Djibouti to Hargeisa (US\$100, 45 minutes) and from Hargeisa to Aden (Yemen) and Dubai.

From Nairobi, African Express Airways flies to Mogadishu, Berbera and on to Dubai.

Land

DJIBOUTI

The land border between Somaliland and Djibouti is open, but it's a gruelling two-day truck journey between Djibouti and Hargeisa (about US\$25). The border crossing is at Loyaada.

ETHIOPIA

From Jijiga in eastern Ethiopia there's regular bus traffic to the border town of Wajaale. It takes about 1½ to two hours, depending on

DEPARTURE & ARRIVAL TAX

International departure tax is US\$30, payable in cash. Arrival tax is US\$20. You're also obliged to change US\$50 at the airport. SOMALILAND, PUNTLAND & SOMALIA

the number of punctures, and costs Birr15. Get stamped out at the Ethiopian immigration office (look for the MAO building on the main street), cross no-man's-land to Somaliland's immigration shack, where your passport will be stamped and your visa checked. Then take a taxi (about US\$30) or a minibus (about US\$4) to Hargeisa (two hours, 88km). Expect a couple of checkpoints, but no hassles.

KENYA

There's no way you can get overland from Somalia to Kenya or Ethiopia at present.

GETTING AROUND

In Somaliland there are a few sealed roads (such as from Hargeisa to Berbera and from Berbera to Burcao). Medium-sized buses and crowded 4WDs service routes between major Somaliland settlements.

You can hire a taxi for US\$60 per day (fuel is extra). A police escort costs about US\$15.

PUNTLAND

Forming the tip of the Horn of Africa, Puntland is the easternmost region of the continent. Raas Xaafuun should occupy a top spot but, alas, is fraught with danger. Not only is the political situation pretty fluid, the coast is renowned for piracy and kidnapping. There are also flashpoints in the Sool, southern and eastern Sanaag regions and Buhoodle district that currently lie in Somaliland, but are claimed by Puntland. The 'capital' is Bosasso.

Daallo Airlines has flights to Bosasso from Djibouti.

SOMALIA

If you're looking for good news, you've opened this guide on the wrong page. At the time of writing, Somalia was considered the most dangerous place in the world. There are some signs of hope, though. In July 2006 the Islamic Courts replaced the US-backed warlords in Mogadishu and restored a semblance of unity and order in southern Somalia. But it doesn't seem that foreigners are made more welcome, and it is hardly likely to be on travellers' itineraries any time soon.

At the time of writing, the ravaged capital of **Mogadishu** was possibly the most perilous city in the world and a definite no-go zone for foreigners. Should you be forced to get there, a reader has recommended the Hotel Shamo and the Hotel Sahafi, which rent rooms for about US\$60 (full board). Add an extra daily US\$120 for a police escort. What's left of this city that was founded in the 10th century AD by Arab merchants and ruled by sultans until the 20th century? It's probably now about as far from the glories of its 13th-century heyday as it's possible to get. Before the war, a number of isolated coves along the coast and pristine beaches were popular with expats. The **Bakara Market** is the infamous location where US Rangers and special forces units were pinned down for over 15 hours (as documented in the Hollywood kill-fest *Black Hawk Down*).

Daallo Airlines and African Express Airways have flights to Mogadishu.

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Tanzania

FAST FACTS

Mwanza

kind

When many people think of Africa, they are actually thinking of Tanzania. It is here that some of the continent's most vivid images come to life: snow-capped Kilimanjaro, rhinos standing proud in Ngorongoro Crater and wildebeests' hooves thundering over the Serengeti Plains. If for you Africa means hot, dusty afternoons ending in star-studded skies, or Indian Ocean breezes caressing white sands and Swahili ruins, then head straight for Tanzania.

The most popular areas have sealed main roads, and hotels and restaurants to suit every budget. But it's also easy to leave the beaten track by heading south to a Tanzania that is far removed from Western development and amenities. Here you can have one of Africa's greatest wildernesses more or less to yourself, travel by boat on some of the world's largest lakes and track chimpanzees in the country's most secluded areas.

Despite its obvious appeal, Tanzania remains remarkably untouched by the tribal rivalries and political upheavals that plague many of its neighbours. It's large enough to travel for hours without seeing another traveller, it's ideal for exploring in combination with other African countries, and yet it has more than enough attractions to be a journey on its own.

Area 943,000 sq km **ATMs** Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Moshi and Birthplace of Freddie Mercury; human-Borders Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambigue, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Budget US\$50 to US\$75 per day (midrange) Capital Dodoma Country code 255 Languages Swahili and English Money Tanzanian Shilling (TSh); US\$1 = TSh1247 Population 34.5 million Seasons dry June to August; rainy mid-March to May and November to December Telephone Country code 255; international access code 2000 ■ Time GMT/UTC + 3 Visa US\$50 for three months, available at most border crossings

HIGHLIGHTS

- Serengeti National Park (p770) Immerse yourself in the sounds and sights of the world's greatest wildlife spectacle.
- **Zanzibar** (p757) Follow the lure of the Spice Islands back through the centuries on Unguja and little-visited Pemba.
- Mount Kilimanjaro (p774) Admire it from afar or climb its mighty shoulders, but do it before its icecap melts.
- **Picture-perfect beaches** (p757) Take your pick of beach, from idyllic offshore islands, the palm-fringed mainland coast or serene inland lakes.

Mahale Mountains National Park (p781) Spend time with our closest relatives – wild chimpanzees – in one of the country's most idyllic and least-visited corners.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The coolest months are from June to October and the warmest from December to March. Along the coast, there's high humidity and temperatures averaging between 25°C and 29°C. On the central plateau, temperatures range from 20°C to 27°C between June and August. Between December and March they can soar above 30°C.

There are two rainy seasons, with the *masika* (long rains) from mid-March to May, and the *mvuli* (short rains) during November, December and into January. The best time to travel is between late June and October, when the rains have finished and the air is coolest. However, this is also when hotels and park lodges are full and airfares most expensive. From late December to February temperatures are higher, but many hotels charge high-season surpluses around the holidays. During the March through May rainy season, you can often save substantially on accommodation costs and have things to yourself.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Arriving in Dar es Salaam (p751), spend a day there getting oriented, fly to Ruaha National Park (p779) or Selous Game Reserve (p780) for a couple of nights then spend the remainder of the week on Zanzibar (p757).
- **Two Weeks** For the classic bush-and-beach itinerary, spend a week on the northern safari circuit or climbing Kilimanjaro (p774), followed by a week chilling out on Zanzibar.

HOW MUCH?

- Midrange safari US\$200 per person per day
- Plate of ugali US\$0.40
- Serengeti National Park entry US\$50 per person per entry
- Papaya US\$0.25
- Short taxi ride US\$1.20

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.80
- 1L bottled water US\$0.40
- Bottle of Safari Lager US\$0.40
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$7.80
- Mishikaki US\$0.20
- One Month With a month, combine any of the earlier itineraries; travel between Lake Victoria (p789) and northern or northeastern Tanzania via the western Serengeti (p770); make your way southwest via Mbeya (p779), with stops en route at Mikumi (p780) and Ruaha National Parks (p779); or follow the coast south to Mtwara (p780).

HISTORY

The history of Tanzania is also quite literally the history of humankind. Hominid (humanlike) footprints unearthed near Olduvai Gorge show that our earliest ancestors were roaming the Tanzanian plains and surrounding areas over three million years ago.

Seafaring merchants from the Mediterranean and Asia, who came looking for gold, spices and ivory, intermarried with the families of their local trading contacts. They formed a civilization known as the Swahili, with a common language (Kiswahili), and a chain of prosperous cities stretching from Mozambique to Somalia. The Arabic kingdom of Oman eventually gained control of the Swahili coast, installing its sultan on Zanzibar and growing rich on the profits of slaving expeditions that penetrated far inland in search of booty.

Dr Livingstone, I Presume?

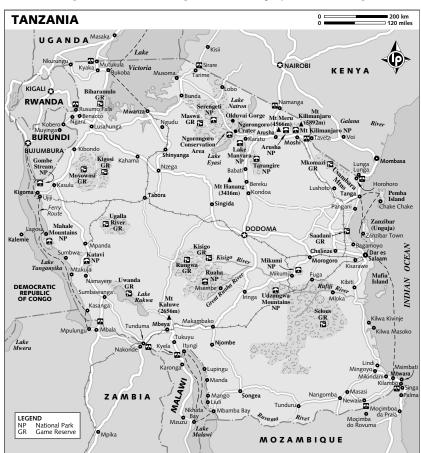
The first Europeans to arrive in East Africa were the Portuguese, who clashed with the

Omanis for control of the lucrative trade routes to India. Later came British, Dutch and American merchant adventurers. By the 19th century, European explorers were setting out from Zanzibar into the unknown African interior. While searching for the source of the Nile, Dr David Livingstone became so famously lost that a special expedition headed by Henry Stanley was sent out to find him. Stanley caught up with Livingstone near modern-day Kigoma after a journey of more than a year, whereupon he uttered the famous inanity 'Dr Livingstone, I presume?'

The suppression of the slave trade became the obsession of the Victorian British public and led to the downfall of the Omani Empire. British battleships blockaded the coast to prevent the slave ships escaping with their cargo, and the Omani sultan was reduced to no more than a puppet of the British Empire. But it was Germany that first colonised what was then known as Tanganyika, and during WWI German forces under Von Lettow Vorbeck waged a highly successful guerrilla-style campaign against the British in the thick bush of the modern-day Selous Game Reserve. When the war finally ended, the League of Nations mandated Tanganyika to Britain.

Independence

In 1959 Britain agreed to the establishment of internal self-government, requesting Julius Nyerere to be chief minister. On 9 December 1961 Tanganyika became independent and



on 9 December 1962 it was established as a republic, with Nyerere as president.

On the Zanzibar Archipelago, which had been a British protectorate since 1890, the main push for independence came from the radical Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), but when independence was granted in December 1963, two British-favoured minority parties formed the first government. Within a month, a Ugandan immigrant named John Okello initiated a violent revolution that toppled the government and the sultan, and led to the massacre or expulsion of most of the islands' Arab population. The sultan was replaced by the Zanzibar Revolutionary Council, headed by Abeid Karume.

On 26 April 1964 Nyerere signed an act of union with Karume, creating the United Republic of Tanganyika (renamed the United Republic of Tanzania the following October). The union was resented by many Zanzibaris from the outset (Zanzibar is a Swahili, Islamic enclave that was previously independent from African Tanzania) and Karume was assassinated in 1972. In an effort to subdue the ongoing unrest, Nyerere authorised the formation of a one-party state and combined his ruling Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) party and the ASP into Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM; Party of the Revolution). CCM's dominance of Tanzanian politics endures to this day.

The Socialist Experiment

The Arusha Declaration of 1967 committed Tanzania to a policy of socialism and selfreliance. The policy's cornerstone was the *ujamaa* (familyhood) village: an agricultural collective run along traditional African lines, whereby basic goods and tools were to be held in common and shared among members, while each individual was obligated to work on the land.

In the early days of the *ujamaa* system, progressive farmers were encouraged to expand in the hope that other peasants would follow their example. This approach proved unrealistic, and was abandoned in favour of direct state control. Between 1973 and 1978, 85% of Tanzania's rural population was resettled, often forcibly, into more than 7000 planned villages in an effort to modernise the agricultural sector and improve access to social services. This approach was also unsuccessful and resentment was widespread. Tanzania's socialist experiment was a failure: per capita income plummeted, agricultural production stagnated and industry limped along at less than 50% capacity. The decline was precipitated by a combination of factors, including steeply rising oil prices and sharp drops in the value of coffee and sisal exports.

Democracy at Last

In 1985 Nyere resigned, handing over power to Zanzibari Ali Hassan Mwinyi. Mwinyi tried to distance himself from Nyerere and his policies, and instituted an economic recovery program. The fall of European communism in the early 1990s and pressure from Western donor nations accelerated the move towards multiparty politics, and in 1992 the constitution was amended to legalise opposition parties.

The first elections were held in 1995 in an atmosphere of chaos, and the voting for the Zanzibari presidency was universally denounced for its dishonesty. In the ensuing uproar, foreign development assistance was suspended and most expatriates working on the islands left.

Similar problems plagued the 2000 election, and several dozen people were killed by government security units on Pemba during the ensuing protests. Despite attempts to negotiate an end to the strife, progress has been only modest at best, and tensions have continued to simmer, reaching another critical point on Zanzibar following balloting in late 2005.

Tanzania Today

One of the effects that the introduction of multiparty politics had on Tanzanian life was the unmasking of underlying political, economic and religious frictions, both on the mainland and between the mainland and the Zanzibar Archipelago. Yet - the Zanzibar situation notwithstanding - Tanzania as a whole remains reasonably well integrated, with comparatively high levels of religious and ethnic tolerance, particularly on the mainland. Tanzanians have earned a name for themselves in the region for their moderation and balance, and most observers consider it highly unlikely that the country would disintegrate into the tribal conflicts that have plagued some of its neighbours.

The 2005 presidential elections were won in a landslide by CCM's Jakaya Kikwete, the former foreign minister. Multiparty politics in Tanzania seem to have taken several steps backwards in recent years with entrenchment of the CCM and splintering of the opposition. However, chances are high that Tanzania will continue to move forward, maintaining the stable and moderate outlook that has characterised its development since independence.

CULTURE

It takes a lot to ruffle a Tanzanian, and it's largely to this fact that the country's remarkably harmonious and understated demeanour can be attributed. Tribal rivalries are almost nonexistent, and a Tanzanian's primary identification is almost always as a Tanzanian. Tribal structures range from weak to nonexistent – a legacy of the abolishment of local chieftaincies following independence – and political differences rarely come to the forefront in interpersonal dealings.

The workings of society are oiled by a subtle but strong social code. Tanzanians place a premium on politeness and courtesy. Greetings are essential, and you'll probably be given a gentle reminder should you forget this and launch straight into a question without first enquiring as to the wellbeing of your listener and his or her family. Tanzanian children are trained to greet their elders with a respectful *shikamoo* (literally, 'I hold your feet'), often accompanied in rural areas by a slight curtsey, and strangers are frequently addressed as *dada* (sister); *mama*, in the case of an older woman; *kaka* (brother); or *ndugu* (relative or comrade).

Want to take a peek inside a Tanzanian home? First call out 'hodi', then wait for the inevitable 'karibu' (welcome), and step inside. Home for most Tanzanians is of cinderblock or mudbrick, with roofing of corrugated tin or thatch, a latrine outside and water drawn from a nearby pump or river. Mealtimes typically centre around a pot of *ugali* (the stiff and doughy maize- and/or cassava-based national dish) or a similar staple served with sauce, and rural rhythms set the beat, with women and children spending much of their day working a small *shamba* (farm plot).

As elsewhere in the region, family life plays a central role, although it's sometimes hard to know where the family ends and the community begins. Doors are always open, helping out others in the *jamaa* (clan, community) is assumed, and celebrations involve everyone. Child-raising is the expected occupation for women, and breadwinning for men. Village administrators (known as *shehe* on Zanzibar) oversee things, and make important decisions in consultation with other senior community members.

PEOPLE

The vast majority of Tanzanians are of Bantu origin, with the largest groups including the Sukuma (who live around Mwanza and southern Lake Victoria), the Makonde (southeastern Tanzania), the Haya (around Bukoba) and the Chagga (around Mt Kilimanjaro). The Maasai and several smaller groups (all in northern Tanzania) are of Nilo-Hamitic or Nilotic origin.

About 3% of Tanzania's total population, or about one million people, live on the Zanzibar Archipelago, with about one-third of these on Pemba. Small but economically significant Asian (primarily from the subcontinent) and Arabic populations are concentrated in major cities and along the coast.

About 35% to 40% of Tanzanians are Muslim and between 40% and 45% are Christian. The remainder follow traditional religions. There are also small communities of Hindus, Sikhs and Ismailis. Muslims traditionally settled in coastal and inland towns along the old caravan routes.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Shaaban Robert (1909–62) is considered to be the country's national poet, and was almost single-handedly responsible for the development of a modern Swahili prose style.

Almost as well-known is Zanzibari Muhammed Said Abdulla, who gained fame with his *Mzimu wa watu wa kale* (Graveyard of the Ancestors), and is considered the founder of Swahili popular literature.

One of Tanzania's most widely acclaimed contemporary writers is Abdulrazak Gurnah, whose novel *Paradise* is set in East Africa during WWI and made the Booker Prize short list in 1994.

Other contemporary Tanzanian authors of English-language works include Peter Palangyo, who wrote the novel *Dying in the Sun*; William Kamera (known for his poetry and for *Tales of the Wairaqw of Tanzania*); and Tolowa Marti Mollel, author of many short stories, including *The Orphan Boy*, a retelling

TANZANI

of a local Maasai legend. May Balisidya, who authored the novel *Shida* (Hardships) as well as several plays and children's books, was one of the few first-generation women writers of Swahili literature.

Tanzania's music scene has traditionally been one of the most dynamic in the region. Famous musicians include Remmy Ongala ('Dr Remmy'), the group Mlimani Park and its offshoot International Orchestra Safari Sound (IOSS). A popular figure from the 1970s was Patrick Balisidya. In addition to his Afro 70 band, Balisidya, who died in 2004, was known for his song 'Harusi', which is still a staple at Tanzanian weddings.

Tanzania's best-known school of painting is Tingatinga, which takes its name from the self-taught artist Edward Saidi Tingatinga, who began producing it in the 1960s in response to demand from the European market. Tingatinga paintings are traditionally composed in a square format, and feature brightly coloured animal motifs set against a monochrome background. The use of undiluted and often unmixed enamel and high-gloss paints give the paintings their characteristic shiny appearance.

Tanzania's Makonde are known throughout East Africa for their beautiful and highly stylised ebony woodcarvings. The country's major centres of Makonde carving are in the southeast on the Makonde Plateau and in Dar es Salaam.

ENVIRONMENT

Tanzania covers over 943,000 sq km, bordered to the east by the Indian Ocean and to the west by the deep lakes of the Western Rift Valley, including Lakes Tanganiyka and Nyasa (Malawi). A central highland plateau culminates in the north at Mt Meru, 5895m Mt Kilimanjaro – Africa's highest mountain – and a chain of active volcanoes known as the Crater Highlands. In the northwest is the enormous, shallow Lake Victoria basin. Off the northeast coast lies the Zanzibar Archipelago, comprised of Unguja (Zanzibar) and Pemba.

Among Tanzania's wild mammals are all the 'classic' African mammals. Particularly notable are its large elephant population; big cats, especially lions, which are routinely seen in Ngorongoro Crater; and the annual wildebeest migration in the Serengeti National Park. Tanzania also boasts over 1000 bird species, including 33 that are endemic to the country. For more on endangered species, see p56.

Few places on the continent surpass Tanzania's Eastern Arc range for endemic plants. There are impressive stands of baobab in parks such as Tarangire. Away from the mountain ranges, much of the country is covered by *miombo* or 'moist' woodland, where the main vegetation is various types of *Brachystegia* tree.

Although Tanzania has one of the highest proportions of protected land of any African country (about 39% is protected in some form), limited resources hamper conservation efforts, and erosion, soil degradation, desertification and deforestation continue to whittle away at the natural wealth. In the national parks, poaching and inappropriate visitor use – specially in the northern circuit – threaten wildlife and ecosystems. Dynamite fishing has also been a serious threat in the Zanzibar Archipelago and in mainland coastal areas, although significant progress has been made in halting this practice.

On the positive side, great progress has been made in recent years to involve communities directly in conservation, and local communities are now stakeholders in several lodges and other tourist developments.

National Parks & Reserves

Tanzania's unrivalled collection of protected areas includes 14 national parks, 13 wildlife reserves, the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA), two marine parks and several protected marine reserves.

The 'northern circuit' parks (Serengeti, Lake Manyara, Tarangire, Arusha and Kilimanjaro National Parks and the NCA) are easily accessible, well equipped with facilities and heavily visited. In addition to the natural beauty, the northern circuit's main attractions are the high concentration, diversity and accessibility of its wildlife.

The 'southern circuit' parks – including Ruaha and Mikumi National Parks and the Selous Game Reserve – tend to have more of a wilderness feel, although the wildlife is just as impressive. All parks are managed by the **Tanzania National Parks Authority** (Tanapa; 2007-250 3471, 027-250 4082; www.tanzaniaparks.com). Entry fees – see individual park listings for details – must be paid in hard currency, preferably US dollars cash.

Other costs at most parks include guide fees of US\$10 per day (US\$15 for overnight and US\$20 for walking safaris) and vehicle fees of US\$40 per day for a foreign-registered car (TSh10,000 for a Tanzania-registered car). Guide and vehicle fees for Ngorongoro Crater and Selous Game Reserves are given in those sections.

Wildlife reserves are administered by the Wildlife Division of the Ministry of Natural Resources & Tourism (© 022-286 6376, 022-286 6064; cnr Nyerere & Changombe Rds, Dar es Salaam). Fees – see individual listings for details – should be paid in US dollars cash. Saadani and Selous are the only reserves with tourist infrastructure. Large areas of many others have been leased as hunting concessions.

FOOD & DRINK

Tanzania's unofficial national dish is *ugali*. Other favourites include *mishikaki* (marinated meat kebabs, often grilled over the coals at street stalls), and refreshing *mtindi* and *mgando*, cultured milk products similar to yogurt and usually drunk with a straw out of plastic bags. Many Tanzanians start their day with *uji*, a thin, sweet porridge made from bean, millet or other flour. *Vitambua* – small rice cakes vaguely resembling tiny thick pancakes – are another morning treat, especially in the southeast. On Zanzibar, look for *mkate wa kumimina*, a bread made from a batter similar to that used for making *vitambua*.

In major towns, there's a good selection of places to eat, ranging from local food stalls to Western-style restaurants. In smaller towns you're likely to just find *hoteli* (small, informal restaurants) serving chicken, beef or fish with rice or another staple. The main meal is at noon; in rural areas, many places are closed in the evening, and often the only option is street food.

Bottled water and soft drinks are widely sold; tap water should be avoided. Tanzania's array of beers includes the local Safari and Kilimanjaro labels, plus Castle Lager and various Kenyan and German beers. Finding a cold beer can be a challenge.

DAR ES SALAAM

@ 022 / pop 2.5 million

Dar es Salaam is Tanzania's major city and its capital in everything but name. 'Dar' is a down-to-earth place, with a picturesque seaport and enough historic buildings, shops and good restaurants to keep you busy for a few days. The city has a mix of African, Arabic and Indian influences yet keeps close ties to its Swahili roots.

HISTORY

In the 1860s Sultan Sayyid Majid of Zanzibar developed a humble East African fishing village into a port and trading centre, and named the site Dar es Salaam (Haven of Peace). When the sultan died the town sunk again into anonymity until the 1880s, when Dar es Salaam resurfaced as a station for Christian missionaries, then as a seat for the German colonial government. Since then the city has remained Tanzania's undisputed political and economic capital, although the legislature was transferred to Dodoma in 1973

ORIENTATION

The congested centre, with banks, forex bureaus, shops and street vendors, runs along Samora Ave from the clock tower to the Askari monument. The area northwest of Samora Ave, around India and Jamhuri Sts, is chock-a-block with Indian traders. Northeast of the Askari monument there are shady tree-lined streets with the National Museum, Botanic Gardens and State House. North from here along the coast you first reach the uppermiddle class section of Upanga and then, after crossing Selander Bridge, the diplomatic and upmarket residential areas of Oyster Bay and Msasani.

INFORMATION Bookshops

A Novel Idea (cnr Ohio St & Samora Ave; 论 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sun) A great range of fiction, wildlife guides, Africa titles, maps and more.

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française ((213 1406; afdar@africaonline .co.tz; Ali Hassan Mwinyi Rd) British Council ((211 6574; www.britishcouncil.org/tan zania; cnr Ohio St & Samora Ave)

Emergency

Central police station (211 5507; Sokoine Dr) Near the Central Line Railway Station. Traffic police (211 1747; Sokoine Dr) Near the Central Line Railway Station.

Immigration Office

Wizara ya mambo ya ndani (a 211 8640/3; cnr Ghana Ave & Ohio St; S & Bam-1pm Mon-Fri for visa applications, until 3pm for visa collection)

Internet Access

TANZANIA

Alpha Internet Café (Garden Ave; per hr TSh500; ⓑ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Hotspot Internet Café (Ground fl, JM Mall, Samora Ave; per hr TSh1000; 论 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat, 9.30am-2pm Sun)

Kool Surfing (per hr TSh500; 论 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10pm Sun) Just off Jamhuri St.

Mealz Internet Café (cnr Pamba Rd & Sokoine Dr; per hr TSh1000; 论 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun)

Medical Services

Regency Medical Centre (215 0500, 215 2966; Allykhan St) In Upanga, just off Bibi Titi Mohammed Rd. Twenty-four hour emergency service.

Money

American Express (211 0960, 211 4094; amex@intafrica.com; Upanga Rd) No cash advances and no replacement of stolen checks, but issues US-dollar travellers cheques up to US\$1500 against an Amex card. It's at Rickshaw Travels. next to Citibank.

Coastal Travels' Local Currency Outlet (Upanga Rd;

• 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Withdraw Tanzanian shillings (or dollars, for an additional 6% commission) using Visa or MasterCard.

National Bank of Commerce (NBC; cnr Azikiwe St & Sokoine Dr) Has an ATM.

Royal Palm Forex Bureau (Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel, Ohio St; 🟵 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun & holidays) Cash and travellers cheques.

ATMS

Barclays Bank Opposite Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel and at Msasani Slipway.

NBC ATMs at all branches, including at headquarters (cnr Azikiwe St & Sokoine Dr) and next to Ubungo Bus Terminal. Standard Chartered bank At NIC Life House (cnr Ohio St & Sokoine Dr), Shoppers' Plaza, JM Mall (Samora Ave) and next to Holiday Inn (Garden Ave).

Post

Main post office (Maktaba St; 🕑 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

Telephone

Card phones are everywhere, including in front of Extelecoms House and the main post office. Cards are sold during business hours at nearby shops.

Extelecoms House (cnr Bridge St & Samora Ave; 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) Operatorplaced calls from US\$2.50 per minute to USA, Europe and Australia.

Tourist Information

What's Happening in Dar es Salaam is a free monthly with tide tables, airline schedules etc; available from travel agencies and the tourist information centre. The Dar es Salaam Guide has more of the same.

Tanzania Tourist Board Information Centre

Travel Agencies

For safari and trek operators, see p791. **Coastal Travels** (2117959, 2117960; safari@coastal.cc; Upanga Rd) Handles internal flights, travel to Zanzibar, and northern and southern safari circuit destinations.

Kearsley Travel (213 1652; www.kearsleys.com; Garden Ave) In the Holiday Inn business centre. Rickshaw Travels Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel (Ohio St); Upanga St (211 0960, 211 4094; ricksales@intafrica .com) Amex agent.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Dar es Salaam is considered to be safer than many other big cities in the region, though it has its share of muggings and thefts. During the day, watch out for pickpocketing, particularly at crowded markets and bus and train stations, and for bag snatching through vehicle windows. At night take a taxi, rather than taking a *daladala* (minibus) or walking.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **National Museum** (2 211 7508; www.national museum.or.tz; Shaaban Robert St; adult/child/student US\$3/1.50/2; 9 9.30am-6pm) is home to the famous fossil discoveries from Olduvai Gorge; other displays include the German and British colonial periods.

The open-air **Village Museum** (270 0437; www .homestead.com/villagemuseum/; cnr New Bagamoyo Rd & Makaburi St; adult/child/student US\$3/1.50/2, camera/video US\$3/20; S 9.30am-6pm) features authentic dwellings showing traditional life in various parts of Tanzania. Traditional music and dance performances are held in the afternoon. The museum is 10km north of the city centre; take the Mwenge *daladala* from New Posta transport stand (TSh200, 30 minutes) or take a taxi (TSh5000).

For the colour and bustle of a Tanzanian market, get a reliable taxi driver to take you to the huge, sprawling **Kariakoo Market** (cnr Msimbazi & Mkunguni Sts), the country's largest market, but watch out for pickpockets.

SLEEPING

It's cheaper to stay in the city centre and more convenient if you're relying on public transport. There's also a good range of pricier hotels on Msasani Peninsula.

Budget

YWCA (**C** 212 2439; Maktaba St; s/d without bathroom TSh10,000/15,000) A good budget deal near the post office, with clean rooms and net, fan and sink. Rooms around the inner courtyard are quieter. Both men and women are accepted.

YMCA (2) 213 5457; Upanga Rd; s/d without bathroom US\$10/13) Around the corner from the YWCA and marginally quieter. Rooms have mosquito nets and there's a canteen. Men and women are accepted.

Safari lnn ($\textcircled{\sc c}$ 211 9104; safari-inn@lycos.com; s/d TSh10,000/16,500, d with air-con TSh26,500; $\vcenter{\sc c}$ $\textcircled{\sc c}$) A popular travellers' haunt off Libya St, on the western edge of the city centre. Rooms have fans but no nets.

Jambo Inn (☐ 211 4293, 211 0686; jamboinnhotel@ yahoo.com; Libya St; s/d TSh12,000/16,000, d with air-con TSh24,000; ☑) Another popular hang-out, where rooms have fans and fly screens but unreliable hot water.

Kibodya Hotel (2117856; Nkrumah St; dTSh12,000) Basic but large no-frills rooms with fans in a busy part of town but handy for the Scandinavian bus terminal.

Econolodge ((2) 211 6050; econolodge@raha.com; s/d with fan TSh15,000/20,000, with air con TSh25,000/30,000) The best, but most expensive, option in the popular west end of town. Rooms are large and clean, though a bit worn, with balconies and hot water. It's on an alley off Libya St.

Midrange & Top End

rooms all have TV and a safe, and there's free wireless internet access and a restaurant.

Holiday Inn (213 7575; www.holiday-inn.com; Garden Ave; s/d US\$144/160; 😢 💷) A popular place in a leafy local, with modern rooms and standard amenities, including a business centre.

Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel (211 2416; www .movenpick-hotels.com; Ohio St; s/d from US\$185/210; (20) The poshest hotel in central Dar, with plush rooms and service you'd expect for the price. There's a large pool (TSh10,000 for nonguests) plus fitness and business centres, several restaurants and a café-patisserie.

EATING

There's a good selection of moderately priced restaurants scattered around the city centre, al-though most of them are closed on Sunday.

For inexpensive Indian food and lots of local atmosphere, head to the area around Zanaki and Jamhuri Sts, where there are numerous informal restaurants selling samosas and other favourites.

Épi d'Or (☐ 213 6006; Samora Ave; light meals from ISh2000; ∑ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat; ≩) A French-style bakery-café with air-con where you can get delicious breads, pastries and light lunches, including Middle Eastern dishes.

Chef's Pride (Chagga St; meals from TSh2000; ♥ lunch & dinner, closed during Ramadan) A long-standing and very popular local eatery within easy walking distance of the Kisutu budget hotels. The large menu features standard fare, plus pizzas, Indian and veg dishes, and Chinese cuisine.

Steers (cmr Samora Ave & Ohio St; meals from TSh2000; S 8am-late) A handy place to pop in for a burger while sightseeing in the eastern end of town.

Dar Shanghai Restaurant (a) 213 4397; Luther House Centre Hostel, Sokoine Dr; meals from TSh4000; \bigcirc breakfast, lunch & dinner, closed Sun lunch) The best bet for Chinese food, with a wide menu selection, reasonable prices and friendly staff.

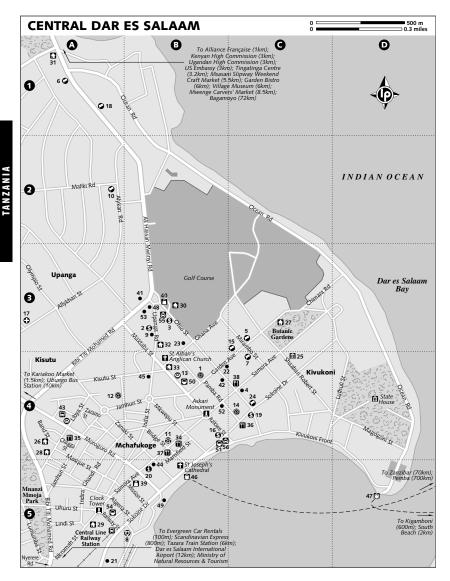
Alcove (213 7444; Samora Ave; meals from TSh6000; Sunch & dinner, closed Sun lunch) Dark, heavy décor and tasty Indian and Chinese cuisine, including a decent selection of vegetarian dishes.

For self-catering, try **Shoprite** (JM Mall, Samora Ave & Mission St).

DRINKING

Neither the café nor the pub scene have made their way into local Dar es Salaam life, but there are nevertheless a few good spots to quench your thirst.

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Cynics Café & Wine Bar (🗃 213 8422; 🕎 10am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 9pm Fri) Featuring live music on some Friday evenings, Cynics Cafe & Wine Bar is next to Barclay's Bank, between Ohio St and Upanga Rd.

Garden Bistro (🖻 260 0800; Haile Selassie Rd, Oyster Bay) A popular spot for a drink, with live music on weekends.

Mawazo Art Gallery & Café (🖻 0748 782770; Upanga Rd; (> 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8.30pm Wed) Mawazo Art Gallery & Café is small, bright art gallery-café situated within the YMCA grounds.

Kibo Bar (Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel, Ohio St) Upmarket sports bar at the Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel

INFORMATION	Tanzania Tourist Board	SHOPPING 🗂
A Novel Idea(see 38)		JM Mall
Alpha Internet Café1 B4	Traffic Police	Mawazo Art Gallery & Café(see 32)
American Express	Wildlife Conservation Society of	Nyumba ya Sanaa40 B3
Barclays Bank ATM3 B3	Tanzania22 B4	
British Council4 C4	Wizara ya mambo ya ndani23 B3	TRANSPORT
British High Commission5 C3	Zambian High Commission 24 C4	Air India41 B3
Burundian Embassy6 A1		Air Tanzania42 B4
Canadian High Commission7 C4		Avis(see 3)
Central Police Station8 B5	National Museum25 C4	
Coastal Travels9 B3		Coastal Aviation(see 9)
Coastal Travels' Local Currency		Dar Express43 A4
	Econolodge26 A4	EgyptAir44 B5
Democratic Republic of Congo	Holiday Inn27 C3	Emirates Airlines45 B4
	Jambo Inn 28 A4	Ethiopian Airlines(see 3)
Extelecoms House11 B4		Ferries to Zanzibar Archipelago46 B5
Hotspot Internet Café(see 39)		Ferry to Kigamboni & Southern
	Palm Hotel 30 B3	Beaches
	Palm Beach Hotel31 A1	Hertz(see 30)
	Safari Inn(see 28)	Kenya Airways(see 48)
	YMCA32 B3	KLM
	YWCA33 B4	Linhas Aéreas de
Mozambique		Moçambique(see 39)
High Commission15 C3		MV Safari Office49 B5
National Bank of Commerce &	Alcove	New Posta Transport Stand50 B4
	Chef's Pride35 A4	Old Posta Transport Stand51 B4
	Dar Shanghai Restaurant 36 C4	Oman Air(see 39)
	Épi d'Or 37 B4	Precision Air52 B4
	Shoprite(see 39)	Royal Coach(see 43)
	Steers	South African Airways53 B3
Rwandan Embassy18 A1		Stesheni Transport Stand54 A5
Standard Chartered Bank ATM 19 C4		Swiss International Airlines(see 36)
Standard Chartered Bank	Cynics Café & Wine Bar(see 3)	Tawfiq(see 43)
ATM(see 27)	Kibo Bar(see 30)	Taxi Stand55 B3
Standard Chartered Bank	Mawazo Art Gallery & Café(see 32)	Taxi Stand56 B4
AIM(see 39)	& Café(see 32)	Yemenia Yemen Airways(see 3)

SHOPPING

For high-quality paintings, woodcarvings and more, a good place to start your shopping is at the Mawazo Art Gallery & Café (opposite) in the YMCA.

Msasani Slipway Weekend Craft Market (Msasani Slipway, Msasani Peninsula; 🕑 Sat & Sun) For souvenirs, try this weekend market located on the western side of Msasani Peninsula, just off Chole Rd.

Tingatinga Centre (Morogoro Stores, Haile Selassie Rd, Oyster Bay; 🕑 8.30am-5pm) The best place for Tingatinga paintings is this bustling centre, where you can also watch the artists at work.

Mwenge Carvers' Market (Sam Nujoma Rd; 🕑 8am-6pm), For woodcarvings, head to this market near the Village Museum off New Bagamoyo Rd.

Nyumba ya Sanaa (Ohio St; 🕅 daily) A little closer to town (next to Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel), Nyumba ya Sanaa is a local artists' cooperative that sells textiles and crafts from various parts of the country. You also have the opportunity to watch some of the artists at work.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Dar es Salaam International Airport is Tanzania's international and domestic flight hub. Most domestic flights and all international flights depart from Terminal Two (the 'new' terminal). Many flights on small planes (including most Zanzibar flights) and most charters depart from Terminal One ('old' terminal), about 700m further down the road.

For a list of airline offices in Dar es Salaam, see p786.

Boat

The main passenger routes are between Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Pemba; and Dar es Salaam and Mtwara.

MTWARA

The only connection is the MV Safari, which departs at 8am Saturday from Dar es Salaam, and at 2pm Tuesday from Mtwara (US\$25 including port tax, 25 to 30 hours). Tickets are sold at the MV Safari office (a 212 4504/6; Sokoine Dr) at the port.

ZANZIBAR & PEMBA

There are four 'fast' ferry trips daily from Dar es Salaam to Zanzibar, departing at 7.30am (Sea Express), 10.30am (Sea Star), 2pm (Sea Bus) and 4pm (Sea Bus). All take 1¹/₂ hours and cost US\$35/40 regular/VIP. There's also one slow ferry called the Flying Horse, which takes almost four hours. It departs daily at 12.30pm and costs US\$20 one way. The ticket windows are opposite St Joseph's Cathedral. Travelling in the other direction, depar-

tures from Zanzibar are daily at 7am (Sea

Star), 10am (Sea Bus), 1pm (Sea Bus), 4pm

(Sea Express) and 10pm (Flying Horse, arriv-

For information on ferry connections to

Pemba, see p762 and p765.

ing before dawn the next day).

Bus

All buses except Scandinavian Express depart from and arrive at the main bus station at Ubungo, about 8km west of town on Morogoro Rd. It's a sprawling place with the usual bus-station hustle, so keep an eye on your luggage and your wallet, and try to avoid arriving at night. Daladalas to Ubungo (TSh200) leave from New Posta and Old Posta local transport stands. Taxis from the city centre cost TSh8000 to TSh10,000. For departures, book tickets at the bus-line offices (listed following) and only buy tickets inside the bus office itself.

Dar Express (Libya St) and Royal Coach (🖻 212 4073; Libya St) run daily buses to Arusha departing between 6am and 9am (TSh12,000 to TSh14,000, approximately 10 hours).

Scandinavian Express (2184833/4; www.scandinavia group.com; cnr Msimbazi St & Nyerere Rd) has its own terminal for arrivals, departures and ticket bookings close to the city centre. All Scandinavian buses also pass by Ubungo.

Destination	Price (TSh)	Duration	Frequency
Arusha	15,000-24,000	10hr	2 per day
Iringa	8500-10,000	7½hr	3 per day
Kampala	50,000	25hr	1 per day
Mbeya	18,000-20,000	12hr	3 per day
Mombasa	19,000	10hr	1 per day
Mwanza	44,000	30hr	1 per day
Nairobi	38,000	13hr	1 per day
Tanga	7500	4hr	1 per day

For information about buses between Dar es Salaam and Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi, see p786.

Train

For information about the Tazara line between Dar es Salaam, Mbeya and Kapiri Mposhi (Zambia), see p788. For more on Central Line trains between Dar es Salaam, Kigoma and Mwanza, see p791.

The Tazara station (🖻 286 5187; www.tazara.co.tz; cnr Nyerere & Nelson Mandela Rds) is about 6km southwest from the city centre (TSh5000 in a taxi). Daladalas depart from the New and Old Posta transport stands, and are marked Vigunguti, U/Ndege or Buguruni.

Tanzanian Railways Corporation (Central Line) station (a 211 7833; www.trctz.com; cnr Railway St & Sokoine Dr) is in the city centre just southwest of the ferry terminal.

GETTING AROUND

Dar es Salaam International Airport is located 12km from the city centre. Daladalas (marked U/Ndege) depart from New Posta transport stand. Taxis will cost from TSh8000 to TSh10,000, depending on your bargaining abilities.

Daladalas are invariably packed to overflowing and are difficult to board with luggage. First and last stops are shown in the front window, but routes vary, so confirm that the driver is really going to your destination. Rides cost TSh100 to TSh200. Main stops include the following:

New Posta (Maktaba St) In front of the main post office. **Old Posta** (Sokoine Dr) Just down from the Azania Front Lutheran Church

Stesheni (Algeria St) Off Samora Ave near the Central Line Railway Station. Daladalas to Temeke bus stand also leave from here; ask for 'Temeke mwisho'.

Taxis charge TSh1000 to TSh2000 per short trip within the centre. Fares to Msasani Peninsula start at TSh2500.

AROUND DAR ES SALAAM

DAR BEACHES

The coastline south of Dar es Salaam gets more attractive the further south you go, and makes an easy getaway if you want to laze on a white-sand beach for a while. The budget places begin just south of Kigamboni, which is opposite Kivukoni Front and reached in a few minutes by ferry.

At Kipepeo Village & Campsite (🖻 022-282 0877, 0744 276 178; www.kipepeovillage.com, www.kipepeocamp .com; camp sites US\$4, s/d banda US\$50/65, without bathroom US\$13/20) Something for every budget, from simple beachside bandas (thatched-roof huts) with nets and shared facilities to thatched cottages on stilts, all with balconies and mosquito nets. There's also a restaurant-bar and grill. Kipepeo is 8km south of the Kigamboni ferry dock.

Gendayeka Beach Village (camp sites TSh5000, r per person without bathroom TSh12,000) is a simple place with beachside camping and no-frills bungalows with shared facilities, about 700m south of Kipepeo Campsite. Bookings and transport can be arranged through Chef's Pride restaurant (p753).

The Kigamboni ferry (per person/vehicle TSh100/800, five minutes) runs throughout the day between the eastern end of Kivukoni Front and Kigamboni village. Once on the other side, daladalas head south from Kigamboni; ask the driver to drop you off. Taxis from Kigamboni charge about TSh2000 to Kipepeo and Gendayeka.

BAGAMOYO **a** 023

From 1887 Bagamoyo was the capital of German East Africa, but when the capital was transferred to Dar es Salaam in 1891, Bagamoyo went into a slow decline. Bagamoyo's sleepy charm and nearby beaches make it an agreeable day or weekend excursion from Dar es Salaam.

Information

The National Microfinance Bank changes cash. For internet, try 4MSK (per hr TSh2000; 9am-6pm) at the Catholic mission. The small tourist information office at the main junction at the entrance to town can help with guides and excursions.

Sights & Activities

With its crumbling German-era colonial buildings and narrow streets dotted with Zanzibar-style carved doors, central Bagamoyo is well worth a leisurely stroll, especially the area along Ocean Rd. Nearby on the beach is the colourful port, where you can watch boat builders at work, or visit the fish market.

About 2km north of town is Holv Ghost Catholic Mission, with an excellent museum (244 0010; admission free, donations appreciated; 🕥 10am-5pm). Nearby is the chapel where Livingstone's body was laid before being taken to Zanzibar Town en route to Westminster Abbey.

Further south along the beach are the overgrown Kaole ruins (admission TSh2000), which include the remains of a 13th-century mosque and some 15th-century gravestones.

Sleeping & Eating

Mary Nice Place (2 0744 024015; maryniceplace@yahoo .co.uk; r from TSh10,000-20,000) Bagamoyo's best budget option, this place is simple and homey,

budget option, this place is simple and noney, with clean, no-frills rooms with fan and the possibility of meals. Bagamoyo Beach Resort (244 0083; bbr@baganet .com; bandas per person without bathroom TSh12,000, s/d with fan TSh30,000/35,000, with air-con TSh40,000/45,000; 🔀) A friendly, French-run resort-style place offering water sports, a good restaurant and a pool. There a few no-frills beach bandas.

Lazy Lagoon (info@tanzaniasafaris.info; s/d with full board & boat transfers US\$160/240; 🔊) A secluded, upmarket place about 10km south of Bagamoyo on Lazy Lagoon Island. The airy rooms all have private verandas, nets and a loft where you can park the kids.

Getting There & Away

Buses and minibuses ply between Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam (TSh1000, 11/2 hours) throughout the day.

ZANZIBAR ARCHIPELAGO

The 'spice islands' - Unguja and Pemba - have an exotic, almost legendary allure and offer a complete change of pace from the Tanzanian mainland. Unguja, the larger of the two main islands, is more commonly known simply as Zanzibar. Apart from historic Stone Town, with its fascinating labyrinth of narrow streets, there are beautiful palm-fringed beaches and pristine coral reefs. Pemba, in contrast, is seldom visited and very laid-back, but offers a largely undiscovered culture and challenging diving.

History

From around the 8th century Shirazi traders from Persia established settlements in the archipelago; and between the 12th and 15th centuries, Zanzibar became a powerful city-state,

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exporting slaves, gold, ivory and wood, and importing spices, glassware and textiles. In the early 16th century Zanzibar came under Portuguese control. Omani Arabs in the mid-16th century routed the Portuguese and by the early 19th century had become so prosperous that in the 1840s the Sultan of Oman relocated his court here from the Persian Gulf.

In 1862 Zanzibar became independent from Oman, although Omani sultans continued to rule under a British protectorate. On 10 December 1963 Zanzibar gained independence and in 1964 Abeid Karume signed a declaration of unity with Tanganyika (mainland Tanzania), forming a fragile union with the new United Republic of Tanzania.

Dangers & Annoyances

There are occasional robberies and muggings in Zanzibar Town and along the beaches. *Papasi* (street touts) are persistent and can be irksome; see p783. Take the normal precautions: avoid isolated areas, especially isolated stretches of beach, and keep your valuables out of view. If you go out at night in Zanzibar Town, take a taxi or walk in a group. Also avoid walking alone in Stone Town during the pre-dawn and dawn hours.

ZANZIBAR (UNGUJA)

Almost every visitor arrives first at Zanzibar Town, the island's main population centre and commercial hub. At the heart of Zanzibar Town is the old Stone Town, with its labyrinthine alleyways and fascinating architecture. Just beyond here, and within easy reach, is an unsurpassed collection of beaches where the sand is powdery white and the sea ethereal shades of turquoise.

Zanzibar Town ORIENTATION

Zanzibar Town, on the western side of the island, is the heart of the archipelago, and the first stop for most travellers. The best-known section is the old Stone Town, surrounded on three sides by the sea and bordered to the east by Creek Rd.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Zanzibar Gallery (223 2721; gallery@swahilicoast .com; Gizenga St; 9 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun) An excellent bookshop with a large selection, including travel guides, Africa titles, children's books and maps.

Internet Access

There are dozens of internet cafés in Stone Town, including the following, all charging TSh500 per half-hour.

Hasina Soft Telecentre (Kenyatta Rd; ⅔ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-10pm Sat & Sun) At Shangani post office. Shangani Internet Café (Kenyatta Rd; ⅔ 8.30am-10pm) Just down from Shangani post office.

Medical Services

Shamshu & Sons Pharmacy (223 1262, 223 3814; Market St; 🏵 9am-8.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon & 3-8.30pm Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sun) Just behind (west of) the market.

Zanzibar Medical Group (223 3134, 223 2200; cnr Kaunda & Vuga Rds; 🏵 9am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-11am Sun)

Money

There are many forex bureaus – most open until about 8pm Monday through Saturday, and often also on Sunday – where you can change cash and travellers cheques. Commissions can be exorbitant, so shop around, but they are better in Stone Town than elsewhere on the island.

Coastal Travels' Local Currency Outlet (Shangani St) NBC (Shangani St) Just before the tunnel; changes cash and travellers cheques, and has an ATM. Queens Bureau de Change (Kenyatta Rd) Shangani Forex Bureau (Kenyatta Rd)

Post & Telephone

Shangani post office (Kenyatta Rd, Shangani; ↔ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-9pm Sat & Sun) Poste restante, operator-assisted calls from TSh1800 per minute plus card phones.

Tourist Information

The free mags *Recommended in Zanzibar* and *Swahili Coast* have information on cultural events, transport schedules etc.

Zanzibar Tourist Corporation (223 8630; ztc@zanzinet.com; Bububu Rd) Headquarters in Livingstone House.

Travel Agencies

For excursions around the island, and plane and ferry tickets, agencies to try include the following. (Only make bookings and payments inside the offices, and not with anyone outside claiming to be staff.)

Eco + Culture Tours (223 0366; www.ecoculture -zanzibar.org; Hurumzi St)

Fernandes Tours & Safaris (🖻 223 0666; fts@zanlink .com; Vuga Rd)

Madeira Tours & Safaris (223 0406; madeira@zanzinet.com) Just off Kenyatta Rd, opposite Baghani House Hotel; all price ranges.

Maya Tours (223 3108; www.mayatours.net) Opposite the market.

Sama Tours (🖻 223 3543; samatours@zitec.org; Hurumzi St)

Tropical Tours (223 0868, 0777 413454; tropicalts@hotmail.com; Kenyatta Rd) A good budget operator opposite Mazsons Hotel.

Zan Tours (a 223 3042, 223 3116; www.zantours .com; Malawi Rd) Upmarket tours on the archipelago and beyond.

SIGHTS

Stone Town is a historic wonder in itself that amply repays a few days of wandering through its narrow streets and alleys. The town is a photographer's dream, where Arabic-style houses rub shoulders with Indian-influenced ornate balconies and latticework, and bustling Oriental bazaars alternate with lively street stalls. Zanzibar National Museum of History & Culture

(a 223 0873; Mizingani Rd; admission US\$3; 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun), housed in the Beit el-Ajaib (House of Wonders), has exhibits on Swahili civilisation, the history of Stone Town and a *mtepe* (a traditional Swahili sailing vessel made without nails).

Beit el-Sahel (Mizingani Rd; admission US\$3; 💬 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun), a former sultan's palace, is now a museum devoted to the era of the Zanzibar sultanate. Outside is the Makusurani graveyard, where some of the sultans are buried.

Built by Sultan Barghash in the late 19th century, the now-defunct **Hamamni Persian baths** (Hamamni St; admission TSh500) were the first public baths on Zanzibar. To get in, ask the caretaker across the alley to unlock the gate.

The chaotic **Darajani market** (Creek Rd; Predawn-mid-afternoon) is at its best in the morning, before the heat and the crowds, and when everything is still fresh.

ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

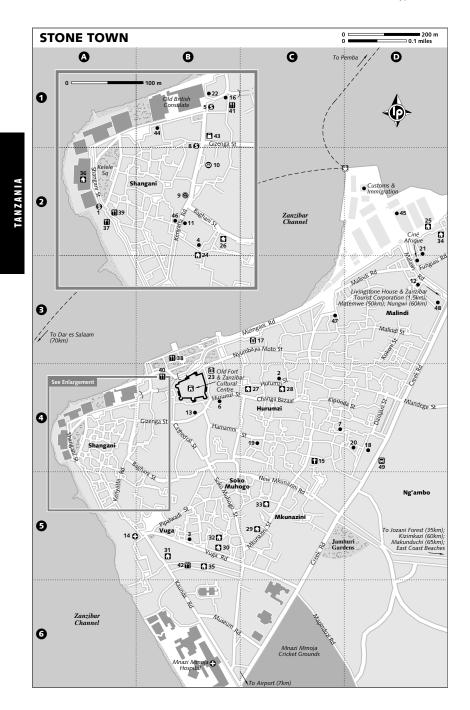
Zanzibar offers excellent diving and most dive operators also offer snorkelling. Trips average US\$30 to US\$50 per half day, often including lunch. Recommended operators include **Bahari Divers** (@ 0748 245786, 0777 415011; www.zanzibar -diving.com); and **One Ocean/The Zanzibar Dive Centre** (@ 223 8374, 0748 750161; www.zanzibaroneocean.com), a Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) five-star centre.

Spice Tours

Half-day excursions are available that take in some spice plantations, as well as ruins and other sights of historical interest. Most tour operators around Stone Town can organise trips, or try **Mr Mitu's office** (223 4636), signposted off Malawi Rd near Ciné Afrique. Tours cost US\$10 per person in a group of about 15, and include a lunch of local food seasoned with some of the spices you've just seen.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Muslim holidays are celebrated in a big way on Zanzibar. Other festivals include Mwaka Kogwa, the ZIFF and Sauti za Busara (a music festival in February); for more info see p784.



INFORMATION	Hamamni Persian	EATING 🖬
Coastal Travels' Local	Baths 19 C4	
Currency Outlet1 A2	Maya Tours	
Eco + Culture Tours	Mr Mitu's Office	Restaurant
Fernandes Tours & Safaris	(Spice Tours)21 D2	Forodhani Gardens
Hasina Soft Telecentre(see 10)	Old Slave Market(see 15)	La Fenice
Madeira Tours & Safaris4 B2	One Ocean/The Zanzibar Dive	Monsoon Restaurant
NBC Bank & ATM5 B1	Centre	
Queens Bureau de Change(see 9)	Zanzibar National Museum of History	Sambusa Two Tables
Sama Tours6 B4	& Culture & Beit el-Ajaib (House	Restaurant
Shamshu & Sons	of Wonders)23 B4	
Pharmacy7 C4		SHOPPING 🖪
Shangani Forex Bureau	SLEEPING 🔂	Memories of Zanzibar
Shangani Internet Café9 B2	Baghani House Hotel24 B2	Zanzibar Gallery
Shangani Post Office10 B2	Bandari Lodge25 D2	-
Tropical Tours11 B2	Chavda Hotel	TRANSPORT
Zan Tours12 D3	Clove Hotel27 C4	Air Tanzania
Zanzibar Gallery13 B4	Emerson & Green28 C4	Asko Tours & Travel
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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Garden Lodge31 B5	Kenya Airways
Anglican Cathedral 15 C4	Haven Guest House32 B5	Oman Air
Bahari Divers16 B1	Jambo Guest House 33 C5	Precision Air
Beit el-Sahel (Palace Museum) &	Malindi Guest House 34 D2	Traffic Police
Makusurani Graveyard17 C3	Victoria House35 B5	Transport Stand
Darajani Market 18 D4	Zanzibar Serena Inn36 A2	ZanAir

SLEEPING Budaet

A spate of renovations has seen many erstwhile budget places creep up the price scale, although they still offer good value in pricey Stone Town.

Flamingo Guest House (223 2850; flamingoguest house@hotmail.com; Mkunazini St; s/d US\$10/20, without bathroom US\$8/16) Straightforward but perfectly acceptable rooms.

Bandari Lodge (🖻 223 7969, 0777 423638; bandari lodge@hotmail.com; r per person US\$12) Simple rooms, plus a common kitchen and fridge. Turn right as you exit the port and it's a short walk straight ahead.

Jambo Guest House (223 3779; jamboquest@hotmail .com; s/d/tr without bathroom incl breakfast US\$15/20/30; 🔀) Just around the corner from Flamingo Guest House; there's an internet café opposite. The typical Zanzibari wood-appointed rooms are a bit dark, but offer cool respite in the heat of the day. English breakfast is served.

Malindi Guest House (🕿 223 0165; malindi@zanzinet .com; s/d US\$20/30, without bathroom US\$15/20, all incl breakfast; 🕄) Whitewashed walls and atmospheric, well-maintained rooms.

Haven Guest House (2235677; the haven guesthouse@ hotmail.com; s/d incl breakfast US\$15/25) Clean rooms, a travellers' bulletin board, free coffee and tea and a small kitchenette.

Garden Lodge (🕿 223 3298; gardenlodge@zanlink .com; Kaunda Rd; s/d/tr downstairs US\$20/30/45, upstairs US\$30/40/60) The spacious upstairs rooms and

excellent location make up for the price at this friendly family-run place.

Florida Guest House (🕿 0777 421421, 0777 411335: floridaznz@yahoo.com; Vuga Rd; s/d/tr US\$30/50/60; 🔀) Recently upgraded rooms are still small, but all are spotless with bathroom, air-con and hot water.

Victoria House (223 2861; www.myvictoriahotel .com; s/d/tr US\$35/50/60) Promoting its 'expat management', this place has spacious, recently revamped rooms with hot showers, and is in a leafy spot just off Kaunda Rd.

Midrange & Top End

Clove Hotel (2 0777 484567; www.zanzibarhotel.nl; Hurumzi St: s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$35/50/70) Painted in pleasing pastel shades, the Clove is stylish and very good value in this price range. Rooms all have nets and fan, and family rooms also have small balconies. Breakfast is in the rooftop restaurant.

Baghani House Hotel (🕿 223 5654; baghani@zanzinet .com; s US\$40, d US\$60-90) A small hotel with atmospheric rooms - most reached via a steep staircase - that are all dark wood and Zanzibari furnishings. Advance bookings and reconfirmations are recommended.

Chavda Hotel (223 2115; chavda@zanzinet.com; Baghani St; s/d incl breakfast US\$85/110) Quiet and full of character, Chavda Hotel has an internal courtyard and rooftop restaurant. Rooms all have four-posters with net, TV, telephone and minibar.

37 A2

(see 28)

38 B3

.39 A2

.40 B4

41 B1

.42 B5

(see 9)

.43 B1

.44 B1

(see 10)

.(see 1) .45 D2

.46 B2 .47 C3

(see 46)

.48 D3

.49 D4

(see 12)

Emerson & Green (🖻 0777 423266; www.emersongreen.com; Hurumzi St; r US\$185-220) Tucked in among the alleyways, divine Emerson & Green - in two completely restored historic buildings is definitely worth a splurge. Each room is unique and all are decadently decorated to give you an idea of what Zanzibar must have been like in its heyday.

Zanzibar Serena Inn (223 3587; zserena@zanzinet .com; Kelele Sq; s/d from US\$260/390; 🔀 🔊) Zanzibar Town's most upmarket accommodation, with a beautiful setting on the water, plush rooms with all the amenities and a business centre.

TANZANIA EATING

Note that during the low season and Ramadan many restaurants close or operate for reduced hours.

The grassy plaza of Forodhani Gardens (Jamituri Gardens) comes alive in the evening, with dozens of vendors serving up such delicacies as grilled pweza (octopus), plates of goat meat, Zanzibari pizza (omelette or other filling cooked in a rolled up circle of dough), a thick, delicious local version of naan, samosas and more. The gardens are along the seafront opposite the Old Fort.

Radha Food House (🗃 223 4808; thalis TSh4500) A great little vegetarian hang-out on the small side street just before the Shangani tunnel. The menu features thalis, lassis and other dishes from the subcontinent.

Monsoon Restaurant (2 0777 411362; meals TSh5000-12,000; 🕑 noon-midnight) Traditional dining on floor cushions, and Swahili cuisine served to a backdrop of taarab or kidumbak music, or ngoma (drums).

Amore Mio (Shangani St; pastas/pizzas /TSh6000/7500; Shigh season) Across the road from La Fenice and less formal, serving delectable ice cream as well as light meals, cappuccino and other coffees.

La Fenice (🖻 0777 411868; Shangani St; meals about TSh8000; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A breezy little Italian place on the waterfront, with outdoor tables and thin-crust pizzas. Enjoy homemade ice cream while gazing out at the turquoise sea.

Sambusa Two Tables Restaurant (223 1979; meals TSh10,000; 🕑 dinner) For sampling authentic Zanzibari dishes, it's hard to beat this small, family-run restaurant off Kaunda Rd, where the proprietors bring out course after course of delicious local delicacies. Advance reservations are required.

Emerson & Green Tower Top Restaurant (🕿 0777

423266; www.emerson-green.com; Hurumzi St; meals US\$30-35; 🕑 dinner) The rooftop at Emerson & Green's is a great spot for a romantic evening, with impeccable food and service to a backdrop of traditional music and dance on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The menu is fixed and reservations are essential.

SHOPPING

Stone Town offers wonderfully atmospheric craft shopping, and there are some excellent buys to be found among the kitsch. The best places are Gizenga St, which is lined with small shops and craft dealers, and Kenyatta Rd.

Zanzibar Gallery (223 2721; gallery@swahilicoast .com; cnr Kenyatta Rd & Gizenga St; 🕑 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun) Has a large collection of souvenirs, textiles, woodcarvings, antiques and more, in addition to its books.

Memories of Zanzibar (223 9376; memories@ zanzinet.com; Kenyatta Rd) Just down the road from Zanzibar Gallery, with a great selection of jewellery, textiles and curios.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Daily flights with Coastal Aviation and Zan-Air connect Zanzibar with Dar es Salaam (US\$55), Arusha (US\$140 to US\$175), Pemba (US\$70), Selous Game Reserve (US\$130) and the northern parks. Coastal Aviation also goes daily to/from Tanga via Pemba (US\$80). See p786 for international connections.

Airline offices in Zanzibar Town include the following:

Air Tanzania (🖻 223 0213; Shangani St) Diagonally across from Tembo Hotel.

Coastal Aviation (223 3112, 0777 334582) Next to Zanzibar Serena Inn, and at the airport.

Kenya Airways (🖻 223 4521; Kenyatta Rd) Together with Precision Air.

Oman Air (🖻 223 8308; Mizingani Rd) Just southeast of the Big Tree.

Precision Air (223 4521; Kenyatta Rd) Next to Mazsons Hotel.

ZanAir (🖻 223 3670) Just off Malindi Rd, opposite Ciné Afrique.

Boat

For ferry connections between Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam, see p756. For ferry connections between Zanzibar and Pemba, see p765. You can get tickets at the port or through a travel agent.

Foreigners are not permitted on dhows between Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar.

GETTING AROUND To/from the Airport

The airport is about 7km southeast of Zanzibar Town and costs TSh6000 to TSh10,000 to get there, depending on your negotiating skills. The 505 bus line also does this route, departing from the corner opposite Mnazi Mmoja hospital.

Car & Motorcycle

It's easy to arrange car, moped or motorcycle hire. Prices are reasonable, although breakdowns and moped accidents are fairly common.

You'll need either an international driving licence, a licence from Kenya, Uganda or South Africa, or a Zanzibar permit. Zanzibar permits can be obtained on the spot at the traffic police office (Malindi, cnr Malawi & Creek Rds) for TSh6000, or through any tour company.

Daily hire rates average about US\$25 for a moped, US\$30 for a motorcycle, and from US\$50 to US\$70 for a Suzuki 4WD. You can hire through any of the tour companies; through Asko Tours & Travel (🖻 0777 422841; askotour@hotmail.com; Kenyatta Rd), next to Shangani post office; or by asking around in front of the market, near the bus stand. Full payment is usually required at the time of delivery, but don't pay any advance deposits.

Daladalas

Open-sided pick-ups (daladalas) link all major towns on the island, leaving from Creek Rd opposite Darajani market. For most destinations, including all the main beaches, there are several vehicles daily, with the last ones back to Stone Town departing by about 3pm or 4pm. None of the routes cost more than TSh1000, and all take plenty of time (eg about three hours from Zanzibar Town to Jambiani). See relevant sections for route numbers.

Private Minivan

Private minivans run daily to Nungwi and to Paje, Bwejuu and Jambiani on the east coast. Book through any travel agency the day before you want to travel, and the vans will pick you up at your hotel in Stone Town between 8am and 9am. Travel takes 11/2 to two hours to any of the destinations, and costs a negotiable TSh3000 per person. Don't believe anything

about a hotel's status until you see it yourself, and insist on being taken to the destination you'd originally agreed on. Also, don't pay for the return trip in advance, as you may see neither the driver nor your money again.

Taxi

Taxis don't have meters, so agree on a price with the driver before getting into the car. Town trips cost about TSh2000.

Beaches

Beaches Zanzibar has superb beaches, with the best along the island's east coast and to the north. The east coast beaches are protected by coral reefs offshore and have fine, white coral sand. Note that at low tide the sea recedes a long Note that at low tide the sea recedes a long way and swimming is possible only at certain times of day.

NUNGWI

The traditional and modern collide at Nungwi, a large dhow-building centre that has become one of Zanzibar's major tourist destinations.

There's internet access at Amaan Bungalows and at Nungwi Inn Hotel, and a forex bureau at Amaan Bungalows that changes cash and travellers cheques at bad rates.

Locally based dive operators include Ras Nungwi Beach Hotel (223 3767; www.rasnungwi.com), a PADI five-star centre based at Ras Nungwi Beach Hotel.

Sleeping & Eating

All the beach places are within a few minutes' walk of each other. Most of the more expensive places are on Nungwi's eastern side.

Cholo's (camp sites US\$5, bandas per person without bathroom US\$10) The only spot to pitch a tent, this relaxed place has some basic bandas, plus Nungwi's best bar.

Jambo Brothers (s/d without bathroom US\$15/25) Clean, no-frills rooms on the sand, and meals if vou order early.

Amaan Bungalows (🖻 224 0026; www.amaanbun galows.com; standard s US\$25-40, d US\$30-60, s/d with sea views US\$50/75; 🔀 🛄) Various levels of accommodation, some rooms offering garden or sea-view rooms, and all with fan or air-con, private bathroom and nets. There are several restaurants and a coffee lounge.

Baobab Beach Bungalows (223 6315; www .baobabbeachbungalows.com; s US\$60-110, d US\$70-140) Away from the cheek-by-jowl budget places and a bit quieter, with standard bungalows

plus some nice 'deluxe' rooms that are closer to the beach.

Mnarani Beach Cottages (a 224 0494; www Lighthousezanzibar.com; s/d US\$70/104, d/q family cottage US\$148/255) This small lodge on a small outcrop overlooking the sea features a dozen pleasant cottages with Swahili décor, all with nets and some with sea views, plus a good seafood restaurant.

Flame Tree Cottages (ⓐ 224 0100; www.flametree cottages.com; s/d/tr inc breakfast \$US80/105/125; ⓒ Jun-Mar; ⓒ) A good, quiet choice, with sparkling white, comfortable bungalows, all with nets, small porch, and kitchenette use for self-catering (US\$10 per day extra). It's on the eastern edge of central Nungwi.

Getting There & Away

Bus 116 (1000TSh, up to three hours) runs daily between Nungwi and Zanzibar Town, but most travellers go via private minivan (p763).

PAJE

TANZANIA

Paje is a wide, white beach with a cluster of places to stay and a party atmosphere, though it's quieter than in Nungwi.

Kinazi Upepo (**©** 0777 497495; www.kinaziupepo.com; banda without bathroom US\$28-38, bungalow US\$45-60) Has good vibes and good value among the palms on a nice section of beach. You can sleep in simple *makuti bandas* on low stilts, or in large en suite bungalows with Zanzibari beds; all rooms have fans and mosquito nets.

Paje by Night (**©** 0777 460710; www.pajebynight .net; standard s/d US\$35/40, large d with hot water US\$70, 2-/4-person 'jungle bungalow' US\$75/100) Tastefully decorated rooms surrounding a courtyard just back from the beach and include *makuti*roofed 'jungle bungalows'. There's a popular bar, restaurant with pizza oven, free internet use and moped hire.

Bus 324 (1000TSh, about two hours) runs several times daily between Paje and Stone Town en route to/from Bwejuu, with the last departure from Paje about 3pm.

BWEJUU

The large village of Bwejuu lies about 3km north of Paje on a long, palm-shaded beach. It's very spread out, and quieter than both Paje and Nungwi.

Simple, appealing rooms, some with their own bathroom and all with their own theme, make **Mustapha's Nest** (224 0069; www.fatflatfish .co.uk/mustaphas/; r per person US\$20-25, without bathroom US\$10-15) an attractive choice. Meals at Mustapha's are taken family style. It's south of Bwejuu village, just across the road from the beach.

Robinson's Place ((a) 0777 413479; www.robinsons place.net; s/d from US\$25/40) A small getaway at the northern end of the village, with individually styled rooms nestled amid palm trees directly on the beach.

Bus 324 (1000TSh, about two hours) goes daily between Stone Town and Bwejuu village, and private minivans come here as well.

JAMBIANI

You could do worse than spend a few days at Jambiani Beach, gazing out at turquoise seas, and there's a good selection of budget accommodation.

Sleeping & Eating

Kimte Beach Inn (277-430 992; www.kimte.com; dm US\$10, d US\$30, without bathroom US\$25) At the southern end of Jambiani, this is a friendly and laid-back Rasta-run place where rooms all have fans, nets and hot water.

Blue Oyster Hotel (2240163; www.zanzibar.de; s/d US\$45/50, without bathroom US\$20/30) A pleasant place run with German efficiency, the rooms here are spotless, the terrace restaurant breezy and the setting convenient and peaceful.

Shehe Bungalows (a 224 0149; s/d/tr US\$20/35/45) Clean, straightforward rooms, in a nice setting at the southern end of Jambiani, with nets, fans and private bathrooms. There's also a seaside restaurant.

Mt Zion Long Beach () 0777 439 001, 439034; www .mountzion-zanzibar.com; s/d/tr US\$30/50/65) Another Rasta-run place, Mt Zion offers nicely decorated, spotless stone-and-thatch bungalows set around large, lush gardens. It's just up from the beach and there's also a bar and tasty food.

Getting There & Away

Jambiani Beach is reached by bus 309 from Stone Town (1000TSh, 1½ hours).

Jozani Forest

Cool and lush **Jozani Forest** (adult/child US\$8/4; 7.30am-5.30pm) is the island's largest area of mature forest and protects the rare Zanzibar red colobus monkey. The best times to see the colobuses are in the early morning and late evening.

Jozani can be reached via bus 9 or 10, by chartered taxi (about US\$40) or with an organised tour from Zanzibar Town.

About 50km north of Unguja lies hilly, verdant Pemba – Zanzibar's 'other' island, seldom visited by tourists but with some idyllic offshore islets and rewarding diving in the surrounding waters.

Information

Chake Chake is the only place to change money, and even here facilities are limited, so come prepared and bring enough cash. **Adult Computer Centre** (connection fee TSh1000, plus per min TSh300; 𝔅 8am-8pm) Opposite the telecom building; you can also place/receive international calls here.

People's Bank of Zanzibar Changes cash and travellers cheques to a daily limit of US\$200. At the main junction. **Zanzibar Tourist Corporation** Come here for tourist information. It's at the main junction, on the 2nd floor of the building with the flag.

Activities

Most travellers come here for the diving, but strong currents and challenging conditions mean it's best suited for experienced divers. Dive operators include the following: **Manta Reef Lodge** (a 423930, 0777 424637; www .mantareeflodge.com) Offers diving at a range of sites around the island and live-aboard arrangements on the schooner SV Jambo.

Swahili Divers (🖻 245 2786; www.swahilidivers.com) Based at Old Mission Lodge.

Sleeping & Eating

Pemba Island Hotel (ⓐ 245 2215, 0777 435266; reason abletourspemba@hotmail.com; s/d/tw US\$20/35/50; ₴) Good value, with small, spotless rooms with nets, TV, minifridge and hot water. Meals are available on the rooftop restaurant. It's on the Wesha road, about 100m downhill from the bank.

Le Tavern ((2) 245 2660; s/d with air-con US\$25/30; (2) A reliable but slightly tatty establishment on

the main road north of the town centre. Nofrills rooms are clean with nets, and included in the price is an early morning wake-up call from the mosque next door. Meals (TSh5000) can be arranged.

Old Mission Lodge (245 2786; www.swahili divers.com; dm/d US\$25/70, r without bathroom US\$53-82;) Primarily a dive centre, this lodge is in a restored Quaker mission house on Chake Chake's main street. Rooms are overpriced and there are tiny shared bathrooms, but the food's good.

Getting There & Away AIR

ZanAir (245 2990) and Coastal Aviation (245 2162, 0777 418343), opposite ZanAir, fly daily between Chake Chake and Zanzibar Town (US\$70), with connections on to Dar es Salaam (US\$85). Coastal also goes daily between Pemba and Tanga (US\$55).

BOAT

The MS Sepideh (🖻 0741 414343, 0777 420243) sails in both directions between Dar es Salaam and Mkoani via Zanzibar on Monday, Thursday and Saturday, departing Dar es Salaam at 7.30am and Zanzibar by 10am. In the other direction, it departs Mkoani at 12.30pm, reaching Zanzibar at 3pm, and then on to Dar es Salaam at 4pm. The fare is US\$45 in economy class between Pemba and Zanzibar/ Dar es Salaam. The Serengeti departs Mkoani at 10am Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, reaching Zanzibar between 4pm and 5pm (US\$25, six to seven hours). Departures from Zanzibar are at 10pm, reaching Pemba the next morning at about 6am. Both boats have their main booking offices at the port in Mkoani, although you can arrange tickets through travel agencies in Chake Chake and with Sharouk Guest House in Wete.

NORTHERN TANZANIA

The fast-growing town of Arusha is the gateway to Tanzania's northern safari circuit. Towering Mt Meru forms Arusha's impressive backdrop, and the surrounding lush countryside supports coffee, wheat and maize estates tended by the Arusha and Meru people.

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

Orientation

Arusha is divided into two sections by the Naura River valley. To the east of the valley are most hotels, the post office, immigration, government buildings, safari companies, airline offices and craft shops. To the west are the commercial and industrial areas, the market, some budget hotels and the bus stations.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

KamNet (per hr TSh1000; 🏵 8am-7pm) Just off Boma Rd, opposite Coastal Aviation. New Safari Hotel (🗟 250 3261; www.newsafarihotel .co.tz; Boma Rd; per hr TSh1000; 🏵 24hr)_

Patisserie (Sokoine Rd; per hr TSh1000; 🏠 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2pm Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Accident Air Rescue (AAR; 250 8020; Haile Selassie Rd, Plot 54) Just off Old Moshi Rd; lab tests and a doctor on call 24 hours.

Moona's Pharmacy (250 9800, 0741 510590; Sokoine Rd; 🕑 8.45am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat)

MONEY

TA N Z A N I A

Barclays Bank (Sopa Lodges Bldg, Serengeti Rd) Has an ATM that takes Visa and MasterCard.

TELEPHONE

TTCL (Boma Rd; 🕑 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun & holidays) International calls and card phones.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There are travellers bulletin boards at the Patisserie (above) and the Tourist Information Centre, which are also good spots to look for safari companions.

Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority (NCAA) Information Office (@ 254 4625; www.ngornogoro -crater-africa.org; Boma Rd; ⁽¹⁾ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Just down from the TIB tourist office. Tanzania Tourist Board (TTB) Tourist Information Centre (@ 250 3843; ttb-info@habari.co.tz; Boma Rd; ⁽²⁾ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) For information on Arusha, the northern parks and local Cultural Tourism Programs. There are also copies of a 'blacklist' of tour operators as well as a list of registered tour companies.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Coastal Aviation (a 250 0087; Boma Rd) For northern and southern circuit itineraries, Zanzibar trips and flight charters.

James Wolstencroft () 784 596 209, 0752 771 347; www.birds.intanzania.com; guiding per person per day from US\$125) This local naturalist knows the birds and other wildlife of the northern safari circuit intimately and is a great guide for independent safaris. **Rickshaw Travels** () 250 6655;

reservation2@rickshaw.africaonline.co.tz; Sokoine Rd) For domestic and international flight bookings. **Roika Tours & Safaris** ((2) 250 9994; www.roikatours

.com; Sokoine Rd) A new but professionally run company that can organise safaris, guides, flights and vehicle hire.

Dangers & Annoyances

Arusha is the worst place in Tanzania for street touts and slick tour operators who offer safaris and treks to newly arrived travellers at ridiculously low prices. They try to get gullible travellers signed up for a safari by undercutting rivals, but these cut-price safaris are often bogus or fail to deliver the itineraries, transport and services promised. See the Travel Agencies section (above) for reputable tour operators. Their main haunts include along Boma and Goliondoi Rds, at the bus station and near the budget hotels. Make sure any tour company you sign up with is properly registered by checking the current blacklist' at the TTB Tourist Information Centre on Boma Rd.

At night, take a taxi if you go out. It's not safe to walk, especially over the bridge on Old Moshi Rd near the clock tower, and in the area between the Mt Meru Hotel and the Arusha International Conference Centre (AICC) building.

Sleeping BUDGET

Masai Camp ((2) 0744 507131; www.masaicamp.com; camp sites US\$3, banda per person without bathroom US\$5, r per person without bathroom US\$7; (2) (Cheap as chips, with no-frills rooms and a dorm-style *banda*, but hot showers, pool tables, satellite TV, internet, bar and restaurant. It's about 3km southeast of the town centre off Old Moshi Rd.

Meserani Snake Park (a 253 8282; www.meserani snakepark.com; camp sites 1st night incl admission to snake park TSh3000, per night thereafter TSh2000) Another great place, about 25km west of Arusha, just off the Dodoma road, combining a fascinating snake park, Maasai museum and popular bar. There are also hot showers, a restaurant and a couple of emergency rooms if you're ill.

Minja's Guesthouse' (© 0784 707851; s/d/tr without bathroom TSh4000/5000/6000) Similar to Monjes, but with shared facilities. This and the following two places are very basic concrete guesthouses down a muddy road off Colonel Middleton Rd.'

Monjes Guesthouse (s/d without bathroom TSh6000/8000) A friendly and family-run establishment, with basic rooms and hot water.

Kitunda Guesthouse (r TSh12,000, s/d without bathroom TSh6000/8000) One of a brace of dirt-cheap places in the north of town, this one offers hot water and clean rooms.

Hotel Flamingo (2548812; flamingoarusha@yahoo .com; Kikuyu St; s/d ind breakfast TSh12,000/15,000) Excellent value for its location close to the town centre. Good clean rooms that come with hot water.

William's Inn (**C** 250 3578; s/d TSh12,000/17,000) Moving upmarket, this place is quieter and the rooms (the doubles have one large bed) are clean and reasonable value.

Hotel 7-11 (250 1261;Zaramo St; s/d/tr US\$20/25/30) Spotlessly clean but overpriced rooms on a busy street; the chief reason to stay here is because it's opposite the central bus station.

Hotel Fort de Moines ((2) 254 8523; www.bimel.co.tz; Pangani St; s/d US\$30/35) A few rungs up in comfort and security, although the rooms are somewhat bland and have fans but no nets.

Arusha Naaz Hotel (C 257 2087; arushanaaz@yahoo .com; Sokoine Rd; s/d/tr US\$30/45/60;) Superclean rooms with TV, fan and hot water plus a great location make up for what Naaz lacks in atmosphere.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Le Jacaranda (2544624; jacaranda@tz2000.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$45/50/65) This large house in a leafy garden visited by monkeys has spacious, old-style rooms with four-posters, nets and full-sized bath. It's on Sabasaba Rd, about 100m north of Old Moshi Rd.

Impala Hotel (ⓐ 250 2398, 250 8448; www.impala hotel.com; cnr Moshi & Old Moshi Rds; s/d US\$72/83; ⓐ ⓐ) Large and somewhat impersonal, but reliable and central, with efficient staff, a forex bureau and several restaurants.

Ngare Sero Mountain Lodge ((255 3638; www.ngare-sero-lodge.com; r US\$120) This 100-year-old

German colonial farmhouse on the slopes of Mt Meru has been converted into stylish accommodation in verdant grounds. Perfect for a splurge, each guest room has a fullsized bath, veranda (some with Kili views) and four-poster. Guests can take part in yoga camps held on the grounds; see the website for details.

New Arusha Hotel (250 7777, 250 8870; reser vations@newarusha.com; s/d from US\$140/160;) Right on the clock tower roundabout, this is the most upmarket option in the town centre. Rooms are of a high standard and there's a restaurant and expansive gardens out back.

Eating

Via Via (Boma Rd; meals from TSh4000; 🐑 10am-10pm Mon-Sat) Good food and an agreeable atmosphere make this a winner. The cuisine is a mixture of local and European, and it's a good spot to meet people.

Jambo Coffee House (Boma Rd; meals TSh4500-7000; To 10pm) European café chic right in the middle of town. There's an à la carte menu and a good-value plate of the day for about TSh5000.

Lounge (a 250 7089; meals TSh6000-7500;) 10amlate) Arusha's best dining is at this place at L'Oasis Lodge on the northern edge of town. There's a good selection of fresh pastas, salads and grills served in generous portions.

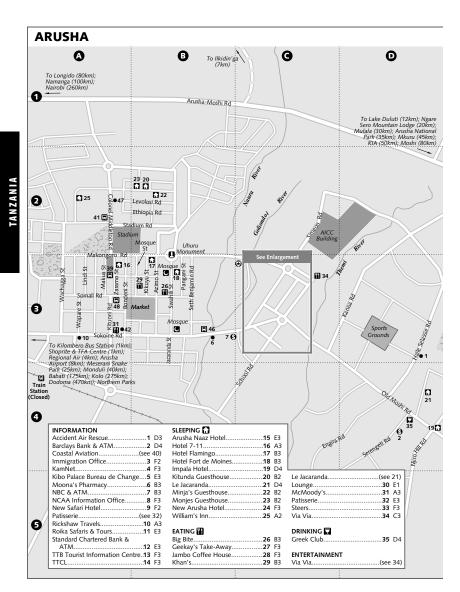
Big Bite (cnr Somali Rd & Swahili St; meals from TSh6500; Sc closed Tue) A long-running favourite for delicious Indian food, including numerous vegetarian dishes, in a no-frills setting.

Le Jacaranda (254 4624; mains TSh8000) Under new management, the restaurant in this hotel is quickly getting a name for innovative European and local dishes.

There are plenty of Western-style food joints in town. Popular ones include **Patisserie** (Sokoine Rd; snacks & meals from TSh1000; 🏵 7am-6pm), which also has light meals, baked goods and an internet café; **McMoody's** (Sokoine Rd; 🏵 11am-10pm Tue-Sun), with mostly burgers; and a branch of the South African chain **Steers** (Joel Maeda St).

For local flavour, try **Geekay's Take-Away** (India St; meals from TSh1000; 7.30am-6pm Mon-Sat), with plates of rice, *ugali* and sauce; or **Khan's** (Mosque St; mixed grill TSh4500; rms 5.30pm), a popular night barbecue with a huge spread of grilled, skewered meat, and salads.

Self-caterers should head to **Shoprite** (Dodoma Rd; 论 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), about 2km west of town at TFA Centre.

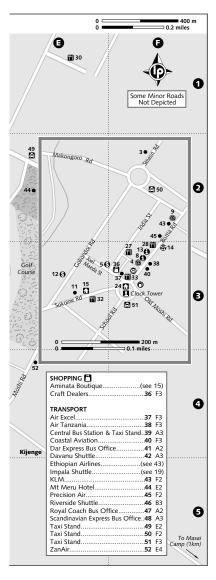


Drinking

Via Via (Boma Rd) One of the best spots in town to go for a drink, Via Via is also a great place to find out about upcoming music and traditional dance events. Via Via is located in the grounds of the Natural History Museum, where it also stages cultural events and openair movies. **Greek Club** (cnr Old Moshi & Serengeti Rds; 论 dosed Mon & Thu) A popular expat hang-out, especially on weekend evenings.

Shopping

The small alley just off Joel Maeda St is full of craft dealers. Hard bargaining is required. There are several large craft stores west of



town, signposted along the Dodoma road. Aminata Boutique (Sokoine Rd), in the entryway to Arusha Naaz Hotel, has textiles.

Getting There & Away

There are daily flights to Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar (ZanAir, Coastal Aviation, Preci-

sion Air, Air Tanzania), Nairobi (Precision Air), Seronera and other airstrips in Serengeti National Park (Coastal Aviation, Air Excel, Regional Air). There are also daily flights to Mwanza (Precision Air), and Lake Manyara and Tarangire National Parks (Coastal Aviation, Air Excel, Regional Air). Verify whether departure is from Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA) or Arusha airport when buying your ticket. International airlines flying into KIA include KLM and Ethiopian Air.

Airline offices include the following: Air Excel ((2) 254 8429, 250 1597; reservations@airexcel online.com; Goliondoi Rd)

Air Tanzania (🖻 250 3201/3; www.airtanzania.com; Boma Rd)

Coastal Aviation (🖻 250 0087; arusha@coastal.cc; Boma Rd)

Ethiopian Airlines (🖻 250 6167, 250 7512; tsm-a@ ethair.co.tz; Boma Rd)

KLM (🖻 250 8062/3; reservations.arusha@klm.com; Boma Rd)

Precision Air (250 2818, 250 2836; www.precision airtz.com; Boma Rd) Also handles Kenya Airways bookings. Regional Air (250 4477, 250 2541; www.airkenya .com; Nairobi Rd) West of the centre.

ZanAir (🖻 024-223 3670; www.zanair.com; Moshi Rd) In Bushbuck Safaris building.

BUS

The central bus station near the market is for buses to Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Nairobi, Mombasa and other points north and east. The Kilombero bus station, about 2km west of town along the Dodoma road, opposite Shoprite, has buses to Mwanza and other points west and south. Both, especially the central bus station, are chaotic and popular haunts for flycatchers (a local name for con artists that prey on gullible or newly arrived travellers looking for a cheap deal) and touts. Watch your luggage and don't negotiate any safari deals at the stations.

Comfortable (but pricier) coaches to/from Dar es Salaam have their own offices. The main lines include the following: **Dar Express** (() 0744 946155; Colonel Middleton Rd) Buses depart Arusha at 6am (luxury TSh14,000) and 7.30am, 8.15am and 9am (ordinary TSh12,000).

Royal Coach (© 250 7959, 0744 366121; Colonel Middleton Rd) Departures at 9am (TSh17,000). Scandinavian Express (© 250 0153; cnr Somali & Kituoni Rds) Departures at 7am (luxury TSh24,000), 8.30am (ordinary/luxury TSh15,000/24,000) and 11am (luxury TSh24,000). Scandinavian Express also goes to

Mwanza via Nairobi and Musoma (TSh32,000 plus US\$20 for a Kenyan transit visa, 20 hours), departing Arusha about 3.30pm.

There are other lines serving Lushoto (Fasaha; TSh8000, six hours, daily at 6.30am); Mbeya (Hood; TSh27,500, 16 hours, daily at 5.30am); and Tanga (Tashriff; TSh9000, seven hours, daily at 8.30 and 11.30am).

Buses and minibuses run throughout the day between Arusha and Moshi (about TSh1500, one hour). It's more comfortable and safer to take one of the Arusha-Nairobi shuttles (p787, TSh4000 between Moshi and Arusha).

See p786 for details of buses to Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique and Zambia.

Although it's one of Tanzania's smallest national parks, Arusha is one of its most beautiful and topographically varied. Its main features are Ngurdoto Crater, the Momela Lakes and towering Mt Meru.

Information

<u>TANZANIA</u>

Entry fees are US\$35/10 per adult/child per day. For camping fees see p750. Armed rangers (required for all walks) cost US\$15 per day and the huts on Mt Meru cost US\$20.

The main park entrance is at Ngongongare Gate, about 10km from the main road. Park headquarters (🖻 255 3995; 🏵 6.30am-6.30pm) – the main contact for making camp-site or resthouse reservations, and for arranging guides and porters to climb Mt Meru - is about 14km further in near Momela Gate.

Sleeping

The park has four ordinary camp sites - three near Momela Gate and one near Ngurdoto Gate. There are also two rest houses with kitchen facilities near park headquarters.

Colobus Mountain Lodge (255 3632; camp sites US\$5, s/d US\$35/50) A two-minute walk from Ngongongare Gate, with bougainvillea-dotted grounds, a camping area, reasonable budgetstyle rooms and a restaurant.

Momella Wildlife Lodge (🗃 250 6423/6; www .lions-safari-intl.com/momella.html; s/d/tr with half board US\$68/98/128) This long-standing establishment has small, serviceable cottages set around modest gardens.

Ngurdoto Lodge (🖻 255 3701; ngurdoto-lodge@habari .co.tz; r per person with full board US\$150) An upmarket lodge with attentive hosts and five spacious double bungalows set on a large lawn with views of Kilimanjaro and Meru.

Hatari Lodge (🖻 255 3456/7; www.hatarilodge.com; r per person with full board plus safaris US\$295) Hatari has an upscale ambience, creative 'modern retro' room décor, a wonderful location on large lawns frequented by giraffes, and views that take in both Meru and Kilimanjaro on clear days.

Getting There & Away

There's a daily bus between Arusha and Ngare Nanyuki (10km north of Momela Gate) that can drop you at the park gate (TSh2000, 11/2 hours from Arusha to Ngongongare Gate).

SERENGETI NATIONAL PARK

Tanzania's largest and most famous national park, the Serengeti is a 14,763-sq-km wilderness that offers unparalleled safari opportunities. The annual wildebeest migration is the biggest wildlife spectacle on earth and the Serengeti's biggest draw. Try to set aside as much time as possible to explore the park and appreciate its vastness.

Information

Park entry fees are US\$50/10 per adult/child per day. Bookings for camp sites, rest houses and the hostel should be made through the Tourism Warden (20 028-262 0091, 028-262 1515/04; www.serengeti.org). There's an excellent Visitors Information Centre at Seronera.

The Serengeti's greatest concentration of wildlife is generally between December and June. For the wildebeest migration, it's best to be based near Seronera or in the southeastern part of the park from about December to April. The famous crossing of the Grumeti River, in the park's Western Corridor, usually takes place between May and July. The northern Serengeti is a good base between about August and October.

Sleeping

There are nine ordinary camp sites and at least two dozen special camp sites in the park. The main lodge area is at Seronera, in the centre of the park, where there are also several comfortable rest houses and a large hostel. The following are recommended lodges.

Serengeti Tented Camp (2007-255 3242; www .moivaro.com; tents per person with full board US\$160/213) This small camp just outside the park's western boundary has just 12 simple tents with bathrooms and hot water, but the chance for night drives and guided walks.

Seronera Wildlife Lodge (🖻 027-254 4595, 027-254 4795; www.hotelsandlodges-tanzania.com; r per person with full board US\$180) Offers the best overall value, with a good location convenient to prime wildlife-viewing areas, modest but pleasant rooms and a lively evening buffet.

Lobo Wildlife Lodge (🖻 027-254 4595, 027-254 4795; www.hotelsandlodges-tanzania.com; r per person with full board US\$180) Similar in standard to the Seronera Wildlife Lodge, this offers the best value in the northern part of the park.

Migration Camp (🖻 027-250 0630/39; www.elewana .com; s/d with full board incl wildlife drives US\$385/770; 🔊) A luxurious camp with an intimate bush atmosphere, and views over the Grumeti River in a good wildlife-watching area.

Getting There & Away

Coastal Aviation, Air Excel and Regional Air all have daily flights from Arusha.

Most travellers visit the Serengeti with an organised safari or with their own vehicle. Driving is not permitted in the park after 7pm.

NGORONGORO CONSERVATION AREA a 027

The world-renowned Ngorongoro Crater is just one part of a much larger area of interrelated ecosystems, including Olduvai (Oldupai) Gorge, alkaline lakes and the Crater Highlands – a string of volcanoes and volcanic craters (calderas).

Information

The Naorongoro Conservation Area Authority (NCAA; 253 9108, 253 7019, 253 7060; ncaa_hg@habari.co.tz) has its headquarters at Park Village at Ngorongoro Crater, and there's a tourist information office in Arusha.

Entry fees are US\$30 per person per day. Guides cost US\$15 per day, and US\$20 for walking safaris. To drive into Ngorongoro Crater, there's an additional US\$100 vehicle fee per car, valid for six hours. Camp fees are US\$20/40 per person in an ordinary/special camp site.

Ngorongoro Crater

With high concentrations of wildlife offering close-range viewing opportunities, Ngorongoro is one of East Africa's most visited destinations. At about 20km wide it's

also one of the largest calderas in the world. Within its walls you are likely to see lions, elephants, buffaloes and flamingos; and there's also a chance of seeing black rhinos. Local Maasai have grazing rights and you may come across them tending their cattle.

The gates down to the crater floor open at 7am, and close (for descent) at 4pm; all vehicles must be out of the crater area before 6pm.

SLEEPING

There is one ordinary camp site and numer-There is one ordinary camp site and numer-ous special camp sites. Bring all supplies from Arusha.

Lodges on or near the crater rim are positioned to minimise travel time down to the crater floor, and include the following:

Ngorongoro Wildlife Lodge (🖻 254 4595, 254 4795, or direct 253 7058/73; www.hotelsandlodges-tanzania.com; r per person with full board US\$180) Straightforward rooms but a beautiful setting on the crater's southern rim.

Ngorongoro Serena Safari Lodge (250 4158/3; www.serenahotels.com; s/d with full board US\$285/420) The attractive and perennially popular Serena is in a good location on the southwestern rim of the crater, near the main descent route.

Ngorongoro Crater Lodge (www.ccafrica.com; r per person all-inclusive US\$630) Service and amenities are ultra-top-end, and prices include your own butler. It's on the southwestern rim of the crater.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The Ngorongoro Crater bus departs Arusha's central bus station daily at 10am (TSh4000, seven hours), and Park Village (where vehicles can be hired) at 7am.

You can arrange guides and vehicle hire at NCAA headquarters in Arusha for US\$100/140 for a half-/full day; book vehicles in advance. Only 4WDs are normally allowed down into the crater.

TARANGIRE NATIONAL PARK **a** 027

Between August and October, the baobabstudded Tarangire National Park has one of the highest concentrations of wildlife of any Tanzanian park.

Entry fees are US\$35/10 per adult/child per day. For bookings, contact the senior park warden (253 1280/1, 250 8642). The entry gate is at the northwestern tip of the park.

There's an ordinary camp site near park headquarters and about 12 special camp sites. Bring supplies from Arusha.

Tarangire Safari Lodge (2544752; www.tarangire safarilodge.com; s/d with full board US\$125/200;) This large lodge is excellent value, with a prime location on a bluff overlooking the Tarangire River; accommodation in safari tents or thatched bungalows.

Tamarind Camp Tarangire (250 7011, 250 7541; www.kirurumu.com; s/d with full board US\$165/250;) Jun-Mar) Intimate and rustic, this comfortable camp makes a good base if you are interested in taking part in nature or wildlife walks together with your safari. Night drives are also possible.

TANZANIA

Tarangire is an easy two-hour drive from Arusha.

Among the attractions of the often underrated Lake Manyara National Park are superb birdlife, elusive tree-climbing lions and abundant hippos.

Entry fees are US\$35/10 per adult/child per day. For camping fees see p750. The park gate and **park headquarters** (2025) 9112/45) are at the northern tip of the park near Mto Wa Mbu village.

The park has two ordinary camp sites, about 10 double *bandas* with bathroom (US\$20 per person), and a student hostel, all near the main gate. There are three special camp sites in the park along the river.

Kirurumu Luxury Tented Camp (**b** 250 7011, 250 7541; www.kirurumu.com; s/d with full board US\$165/250) This highly regarded camp offers good food, and its 20 double tents are well hidden in the vegetation, and well spaced for privacy.

Lake Manyara Tree Lodge (www.ccafrica.com; per person all-inclusive US\$490-630; 🛞 Jun-Mar; 🕥) Lake Manyara's most exclusive lodge, and the only one within the park boundaries, with 10 intimate 'tree house suites' set in the forest at the southern end of the park.

Most people visit Lake Manyara as part of a longer safari and independent travellers will need private transport inside the park. The best public transport option is the Ngorongoro crater bus (TSh2000 one way) from Arusha to Mto Wa Mbu. From there you should be able to hire a vehicle and driver from one of the lodges inside the park for about US\$140 a day.

Mwanza is the economic centre of the Lake Victoria region and the surrounding area is home to the Sukuma, Tanzania's largest tribe. It's the place to organise trips to the western part of Serengeti National Park during the dry season.

Orientation

To the west of the town centre, just a short walk from the clock tower, are the passengerferry docks and several banks and shops. East of the clock tower area are more shops, guesthouses and mosques; further east are the market and bus stand. The train station is about five minutes' walk southwest of the clock tower. Just beyond here is Capri Point.

Information

Barmedas.com (Nkrumah St; per hr TSh1000; 🏵 8am-8.30pm) Internet access. One block north of Nyerere Rd. DBK Bureau de Change (Post St) At Serengeti Services & Tours, and the easiest place to change cash or travellers cheques.

Fourways Travel Service ((250 250 2273; www.fourwaystravel.net; Station Rd) Long-established agency offering Serengeti safaris and vehicle hire. Karibu Internet Café (cnr Post St & Kenyatta Rd; per hr TSh1000; (Car Bam-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat, 9am-5om Sun) Internet access.

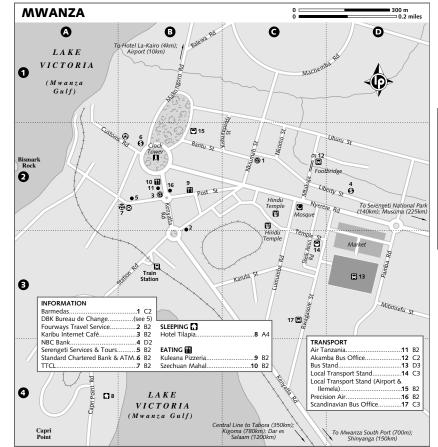
Standard Chartered bank (Makongoro Rd) This bank is near the clock tower, and has ATMs.

Sleeping

There are several dirt-cheap guesthouses in the town centre with serviceable singles/ doubles for about TSh3000/5000 with shared facilities.

Hotel La-Kairo (a 2500343/5; s/d TSh24,000/30,000) This friendly, family-run place has a restaurant and spotless rooms with fan. It's about 4km out of town, just off the airport road and signposted.

Serengeti Stopover (262 2273; serengetiso@yahoo .com; s/d US\$30/40) Pricey but lovely *bandas*, a restaurant and bar make this great place to stop en route to the Serengeti. It's two hours east of Mwanza and only 1km from the park gate. Staff can help with safari arrangements.



Eating

Kuleana Pizzeria (a 256 0566; Post St; meals TSh2000; b 9am-9pm) Good pizzas, sandwiches, fresh-squeezed juices and vibes are the features here.

Szechuan Mahal ((☎ 40339; Kenyatta Rd; meals from TSh6000; 𝔥 dinner) The delicately seasoned Chinese food here is some of Mwanza's best cuisine.

Getting There & Away AIR

BOAT

Cargo boats to Port Bell (Uganda) and Kenya depart from Mwanza South Port, about 1.5km southeast of the centre; see p788.

BUS

The **Scandinavian office** ((2) 250 3315; Rwagasore St) is just south of the market, and Akamba buses depart from the **Akamba office** ((2) 250 0272), off Mtakuja St near Majukano Hotel. All other departures are from the main bus stand near the market.

To Arusha and Moshi (TSh32,000 plus US\$20 for a Kenyan transit visa) and Dar es Salaam (TSh44,000 to TSh58,000 plus Kenyan transit visa costs, about 30 hours), the best route is via Nairobi (TSh23,000 to TSh28,000 plus Kenyan visa costs), and the best line is Scandinavian. Akamba also does the route. There are several buses weekly to Kigoma (TSh15,000), departing at about 5am and arriving the next day if you're lucky.

See p787 and p788 for buses to Kenya and Uganda.

TRAIN

TANZANIA

Mwanza is the terminus of a branch of the Central Line from Dar es Salaam. See p791.

MOUNT KILIMANJARO

TREKKING ON MOUNT KILIMANJARO

At 5896m, Mt Kilimanjaro is the highest peak in Africa and one of the continent's most magnificent sights. From cultivated farmlands on the lower levels, the mountain rises through lush rainforest, alpine meadows and a barren lunar landscape to the twin summits of Kibo and Mawenzi.

A trek up 'Kili' lures hundreds of trekkers each year, and is even more attractive because, with the right preparation, you can walk all the way to the summit without ropes or technical climbing experience. However, the climb is a serious undertaking and only worth doing with the right preparation.

Information

Park entry fees are US\$60/10 per adult/child per day, and must be paid in US dollars, cash or travellers cheques. Huts (Marangu route) cost US\$50 per person per night, and there is a US\$20 rescue fee per person per trip for treks on the mountain. Camping costs US\$50 per person per night on the Marangu route (but you still need to pay the hut fees), and US\$40 per person per night for all other camping. Guide and porter fees (but not tips) are handled directly by the trekking companies.

Kilimanjaro National Park Headquarters (275 6605/2) is located at the park gate (8 8 am-6 pm) in Marangu.

It's not permitted to climb Kilimanjaro independently, and you'll need a guide and at least one porter (for the guide). Most trekking companies allow two to three porters per trekker, depending on the length of the trek. Trek operators:

Key's Hotel (275 2250; www.keys-hotels.com; Uru Rd, Moshi) Long-established and reliable budget Kili trek operator.

Moshi Expeditions & Mountaineering (🗟 027-275 4234; www.metours.com; Kaunda St, Moshi) Budget to midrange Kili treks.

Shah Tours (🗃 027-275 2370, 275 2998; www.kiliman jaro-shah.com; Mawenzi Rd, Moshi) Quality midpriced treks.

Tropical Trails ((2) 27-250 0358, 254 8299; www .tropicaltrails.com; Masai Camp, Old Moshi Rd, Arusha) Upper midrange quality treks; a percentage of the company's profits goes towards Maasai education projects.

Weather conditions on the mountain are frequently very cold and wet, no matter what the time of year, so bring a full range of waterproof cold-weather clothing and gear. While you can hire sleeping bags and some coldweather gear at the Marangu park gate, quality and availability can't be counted on.

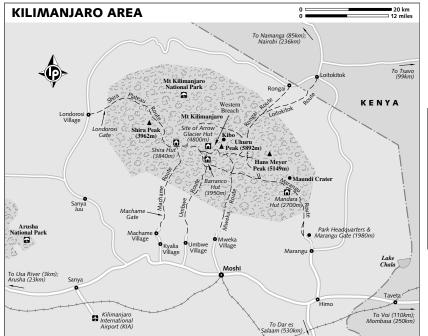
Routes

There are at least 10 trekking routes that begin on the lower slopes, but only three continue to the summit. You'll need to camp on all except the Marangu route, which has a series of three 'huts' (bunkhouses) spaced a day's walk apart.

The Marangu route, which is the most popular, is usually sold as a five-day, four-night return package, although at least one extra night is highly recommended to help acclimatisation. Other routes usually take six or seven days. The increasingly popular and challenging Machame route has a gradual ascent before approaching the summit. The Umbwe route is much steeper, with a more direct way to the summit. The top, very steep section (up the Western Breach) is often covered in ice or snow, and the route should only be considered if you are experienced and properly equipped, and going with a reputable operator. Beware of operators who try to sell an 'economy' version of the Machame route, which switches near the top to the final section of the Umbwe route and summits via the Western Breach.

Costs

Standard five-day four-night treks up the Marangu route start at about US\$750 including



park fees. For budget treks of six to seven days on the Machame route expect to pay from around US\$800. Better-quality trips on the Marangu/Machame routes start at about US\$950. The Umbwe route is often sold by budget operators for about the same price as Marangu, and billed as a quick and comparatively inexpensive way to reach the top. Don't fall for this – the route should only be done by experienced trekkers, and should have an extra day for acclimatisation built in.

Whatever you pay for your trek, remember that at least US\$520 goes to park fees for a five-day Marangu route climb, more for longer treks. If you cut things too close, expect barely adequate meals, mediocre guides and problems with hut bookings and park fees.

Guides & Porters

Guides and at least one porter (for the guide) are compulsory and are provided by the trekking company. Guides are required to be registered with the national park authorities, and should have permits showing this, though 'sharing' of permits among guides working for some of the less reputable companies is fairly common. Porters will carry bags weighing up to 15kg (not including their own food and clothing); your bags will be weighed before you set off.

Most guides and porters receive only minimal wages from the trekking companies, and depend on tips as their major source of income. As a guideline, plan on tipping about 10% of the total amount you've paid for the trek, divided among the guides and porters. For the Marangu route, tips are commonly from US\$40 to US\$60 for the guide, and US\$15 each for the porters. Plan on more for the longer routes, or if the guide and porters have been particularly good.

MOSHI

201 144,300

Moshi, a bustling town at the foot of Mt Kilimanjaro, is home of the Chagga people and the centre of one of Tanzania's major coffeegrowing regions. Most visitors use the town as a starting point for climbing Mt Kilimanjaro and it's generally a less expensive place to stay than Arusha.

Information

Executive Bureau de Change (Boma Rd) Cash and travellers cheques.

Fahari Cyber Café (Hill St; per hr TSh800; 论 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-8pm Sun) Also does CD burning for digital photos.

NBC (clock tower roundabout) Changes cash and travellers cheques and has an ATM.

Standard Chartered bank (Rindi Lane) Has an ATM.

Sleeping

TANZANIA

Buffalo Hotel (**C** 275 2775; buffalocompany2000@yahoo .com; New St; s/d/tr TSh10,000/15,000/20,000) A longstanding and popular place where the basic rooms have fan, net and hot water; cheaper rooms are also available. There's also a good restaurant.

Da' Costa Hotel ((275 5159; www.dacostahotel.com; Mawenzi Rd; s/d without bathroom incl breakfast US\$4/8) Small, clean rooms, hot water in the shared bathrooms, plus a bar, restaurant and a central location.

Kindoroko Hotel (275 4054; kindoroko@yahoo.com; Mawenzi Rd; s/d from US\$15/30; () Spotless, goodvalue rooms, a rooftop bar and central location make this a justifiably popular choice.

Lutheran Uhuru Hostel (275 4084; www.uhuru hostel.org; Sekou Toure Rd; s/d US\$16/22, newer wing US\$35/45, annexe without bathroom US\$14/19; 21) This place has spotless, good-value rooms in leafy grounds and a good restaurant. Budget rooms with shared facilities are in an annexe across the street. It's about 3km northwest of the town centre on the Arusha road.

Impala Hotel (275 3443; impala@kilinet.co.tz; Lema Rd; s/d US\$72/83; R) Central Moshi's only upmarket option offers well-appointed rooms in prim and tranquil grounds, plus a good restaurant. It's about 4km from the clock tower roundabout in Shantytown.

Eating & Drinking

Coffee Shop (275 2707; Hill St; snacks & meals from ISh1000; Seam-8pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat) Good coffee, plus an assortment of homemade breads, cakes, yogurt, breakfast and light meals. Proceeds go to a church project.

Indotaliano Restaurant (275 2195; New St; meals about TSh3000; 10am-11pm) This homey restaurant, opposite Buffalo Hotel, has chequered tablecloths and a good mix of Indian and Italian cuisine.

Salzburger Café (275 0681; Kenyatta St; meals ISh3000-6000; Y 7am-midnight) The Alps meet Africa at this classic place, which comes complete with waitresses sporting faux-leopard-skin vests, Austrian bar décor on the walls and a selection of good, cheap dishes.

Chrisburger (☎ 275 0419; Kibo Rd; burgers US\$2; ⓑ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) For good burgers and snacks.

Getting There & Away

Almost all flights to Moshi land at Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA). There are daily flights connecting KIA with Dar es Salaam (US\$130), Zanzibar (US\$135) and Entebbe (Uganda) on Air Tanzania (20275 5205; Rengua Rd). Precision Air (20275 3495; Old Moshi Rd) has daily flights connecting KIA with Dar es Salaam, Mwanza (via Shinyanga, US\$140 to Mwanza) and Nairobi (Kenya; US\$209).

BUS

Buses and minibuses run throughout the day to Arusha (TSh1000, one to 1½ hours) and Marangu (TSh700, one hour).

To Dar es Salaam, the best lines are Royal Coach (TSh17,000) and Scandinavian Express (ordinary/luxury TSh17,000/24,000), both with daily mid-morning departures. The 6.30am Dar Express (TSh12,000) usually arrives in time for the afternoon ferry to Zanzibar; there are also two later morning departures (TSh14,000).

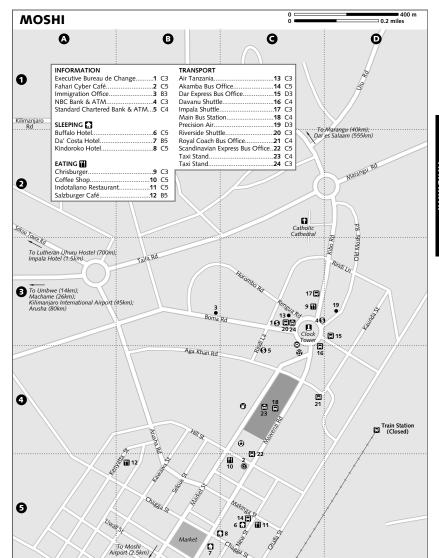
To Nairobi (TSh8000 to TSh17,000, five hours) and Mwanza (TSh22,000 to TSh32,000, about 20 hours), the best lines are Scandinavian and Akamba, both of which go daily, and should be booked in advance. The other option to Nairobi is one of the shuttle buses run by **Davanu shuttle** (nr Old Moshi & Mawenzi Rds), **Riverside shuttle** (Boma Rd) and **Impala shuttle** (275 1786; Kibo Rd). Departures from Moshi are at 6.30am and 11.30am, though you'll need to wait an hour in Arusha in transit.

Except for the lines listed following, all transport leaves from the main bus station in the town centre between Market St and Mawenzi Rd. The station is chaotic and full of touts and disreputable types – it's worth paying the TSh1000 for a taxi just to get away from the station.

Akamba (🖻 275 3908; cnr New & Makinga Sts) Just around the corner from Buffalo Hotel.

Dar Express (Old Moshi Rd) Opposite KCNU Hotel, off the clock tower roundabout.

Royal Coach (cnr Aga Khan Rd & Kaunda St) Opposite the bus stand and just down from the mosque.



Scandinavian Express (275 1387; Mawenzi Rd) South of the bus stand, opposite the Hindu temple.

MARANGU

a 027

This small town on the slopes of Kilimanjaro makes a convenient overnight stop if you're trekking the Marangu route. It's also a pleasant place in its own right, with an agreeable highland atmosphere, and cool, leafy surroundings.

Most Marangu hotels organise Kilimanjaro treks.

Marangu Hotel (🕿 275 6594; www.maranguhotel .com; camp sites with hot showers US\$3, s/d with half board US\$70/100; 🕥) is a long-standing place with expansive grounds and inviting rooms. Accommodation discounts are available if you join one of the hotel's fully equipped climbs.

Kibo Hotel (🖻 275 1308; www.kibohotel.com; camp sites US\$5, s/d US\$32/52) The rustic Kibo has wooden flooring, large old-fashioned windows, spacious rooms and a restaurant. Prices are high for camping, but the

kilimanjaro@iwayafrica.com; camp sites US\$8, rondavel per person US\$10, chalet per person US\$12) are green and well maintained, and there are hot-water showers, tents for hire, and a few four- to six-person rondavels and chalets. There's also a fireplace for use (fee per person per day TSh500).

Minibuses run throughout the day between Marangu and Moshi (TSh1000). Prices can fluctuate according to demand.

NORTHEAST TANZANIA

TANGA **a** 027

The sleepy seaport of Tanga has little to compel the visitor, although it makes a convenient stop en route to/from Mombasa in Kenya.

Information

Kaributanga.com (Sokoine St; per hr TSh500; 🏵 9am-9pm) Internet access.

NBC (cnr Bank & Sokoine Sts) Just west of the market; changes cash and travellers cheques, and has an ATM. Tourcare Tanzania (🖻 264 4111; Mkwakwani Rd; Sam-5pm Mon-Sat) Just down from Patwas restaurant; helpful with information on nearby attractions.

Sleeping & Eating

Kiboko Restaurant, Bar & Campsite (🖻 264 4929; jda-kiboko@bluemail.ch; Amboni Rd; camp sites US\$4) Good, secure camping in a large yard, spotless shared bathrooms, a well-stocked bar and a nice garden restaurant.

Ocean Breeze Hotel (🕿 264 4445; cnr Tower & Sokoine Sts; r with fan/air-con TSh7000/12,000; 🕄) Just east of the market, this is one of the better budget choices in the town centre. Tired but OK rooms, some with nets.

Patwas Restaurant (Mkwakwani Rd; meals from TSh1500; 🕅 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) Fresh juices and tasty, good-value meals make this the best choice in town. It's just south of the market.

Food Palace (264 6816; Sokoine St; 🕑 lunch Mon, breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Another good choice, with an array of tasty Indian snacks and meals, including some vegetarian selections.

Getting There & Away

The Takrima sails roughly weekly between Tanga and Wete on Pemba (US\$25, five hours).

There are daily buses to Dar es Salaam (TSh7000 to TSh10,000, four to five hours), Arusha (TSh9000, seven hours) and Lushoto (TSh4000, three to four hours). For buses to Mombasa, see p787.

LUSHOTO & USAMBARA MOUNTAINS

With their wide vistas, cool climate, winding paths and picturesque villages, the Usambaras are one of northeastern Tanzania's highlights. It's easily possible to spend at least a week here hiking from village to village, or relaxing in one spot and doing your exploring as a series of day walks.

Lushoto **a** 027

Lushoto is a leafy highland town nestled in a fertile valley at about 1200m. It's the centre of the western Usambaras and makes an excellent base for hikes into the surrounding hills.

The Tourist Information Centre (🖻 264 0132) can help with arranging hikes. If would-be guides approach you on the street, check here first to verify that they are official before starting out. Expect to pay about TSh25,000 per person per day (less in a group) on multiday hikes, including camping or accommodation, but excluding food.

SLEEPING & EATING

Karibuni Lodge (camp sites US\$3, dm US\$6, s/d from US\$12/16) A cosy backpackers' house with large rooms (some with bathroom), tasty meals and a crackling hearth. It's signposted about 1.5km south of the town centre near the district hospital.

Lawns Hotel (264 0005/66; www.lawnshotel.com; camp sites with hot shower TSh6000, s/d TSh40,000/45,000, without bathroom TSh14,000/18,000) This 100-year-old Lushoto institution at the entrance to town has faded rooms but an excellent camp site, with large lawns and hot showers.

Tumaini Hostel (🖻 264 0094; tumaini@elct.org; s/d TSh10,000/17,000) Reasonable-value rooms in a two-storey compound along the main road near the telecom building. The restaurant next door has inexpensive meals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Daily buses travel between Lushoto and Tanga (TSh4000, three to four hours), Dar es Salaam (TSh8000, seven to nine hours) and Arusha (TSh7000 to TSh8000, six hours).

SOUTHERN TANZANIA

MBEYA **a** 025

The bustling regional capital of Mbeya is the major town in southwestern Tanzania and an important transit point en route to/from Zambia and Malawi. There's not much to the town itself, but the surrounding area offers some hiking possibilities.

Information

Nane Information Centre (per hr TSh500; 19 8am-10pm) Internet access; on the western side of the market square.

NBC (cnr Karume & Kaunda Aves) Changes travellers cheques and has an ATM.

Sleeping & Eating

Karibuni Centre (250 3035; mec@atma.co.tz; camp sites per double tent TSh2000 plus per person additional TSh1000, d/tr/qTSh10,000/12,000/14,000) This clean, missionrun place is in an enclosed compound. You can pitch a tent and there's also a restaurant.

New Millennium Inn (🕿 250 0599; Mbalizi Rd; s TSh6500, without bathroom TSh5000) Directly opposite the bus station and noisy, but convenient if you have an early bus.

Holiday Lodge (🖻 250 2821; Jamatikhana Rd; s/d TSh6000/7500) A whitewashed local guesthouse with clean rooms - some with bathroom and a restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Scandinavian Express has two buses daily to Dar es Salaam (TSh15,000 to TSh17,000, 12 hours); book in advance.

Trains can be booked at the Tazara booking office (🕎 7.30am-3pm Mon-Fri) near the post office, or at the station (🕑 7.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 10.40am-12.40pm & 2-4pm Sat), 4km west of town on the main highway.

See p792 for schedules and fares between Mbeva and Dar es Salaam, and connections with Zambia.

IRINGA **a** 026

With its bluff-top setting, jacaranda-lined streets and highland feel, Íringa is one of the most agreeable stops along the Dar es Salaam-Mbeya highway.

The owner of Hasty Tasty Too (🖻 270 2061; Uhuru Ave; 🕑 7.30am-8pm), a local restaurant and one of

Iringa's highlights, is helpful with arranging hikes and budget safaris. Campers should head to **Riverside Campsite** (272 5280/2; phillips@africaonline.co.tz; camp sites TSh3000. tent rental TSh2000), 13km northeast of Ir-TSh3000, tent rental TSh2000), 13km northeast of Iringa along the main road on the banks of the Little Ruaha River. Bring your own food, but there are hot showers and cold drinks.

Iringa Lutheran Centre (🖻 270 2489; Kawawa Rd; d TSh5000, s/d without bathroom TSh2500/3500) is a good shoestring option, with clean rooms and meals on request; while the no-frills Annex of Staff Inn (270 0165: Uhuru Ave; r TSh7500-15.000) is along the main road near the bus stand.

Scandinavian Express has daily buses to Dar es Salaam (ordinary/semiluxury TSh9000/10,000, 71/2 hours). To Mbeya, there's a bus departing daily (TSh6500, four to five hours), or you can book a seat on the Scandinavian bus originating in Dar.

RUAHA NATIONAL PARK

Ruaha is Tanzania's second-largest national park and forms the core of an almost pristine extended ecosystem covering about 40.000 sa km.

Entry fees are US\$20/5 per adult/child per day. For accommodation fees, see p750.

There are two ordinary camp sites and about five special camp sites. As well as these the park maintains several bandas, about 2km from headquarters, and a rest house. Ruaha River Lodge (🖻 0748 237422, 0744 237422; www.tan zaniasafaris.info; s/d all-inclusive US\$280/470) is a classy but unpretentious lodge about 15km inside the park gate, with cosy stone bandas and river views.

Hasty Tasty Too (above) in Iringa organises transport from US\$130 per vehicle per day, five persons maximum, for two days and one night. There's no public transport to Ruaha National Park. Safaris can be organised from Dar or Zanzibar (fly/drive).

SELOUS GAME RESERVE

With an area of approximately 45,000 sq km (5% of Tanzania's total land area), the Selous Game Reserve is Africa's largest wildlife reserve and Tanzania's most extensive protected area.

Admission to the reserve costs US\$30 per person, plus US\$30 per vehicle per day.

There are two ordinary camp sites. Special camp sites can be arranged with the Wildlife Division (p750).

Selous Mbega Camp (© 022-265 0250; www.selous -mbega-camp.com; camp sites US\$10, s/d all-inclusive US\$135/190, s/d 'backpackers' special for those arriving by public bus at Mloka US\$70/100, excursions extra) is a good, laid-back budget choice, with a small camping ground for which you'll need to be selfsufficient. The long-standing **Rufiji River Camp** (© 022-212 8662/3; www.hippotous.com; s/d all-inclusive US\$310/500;) has a fine location on a wide bend in the Rufiji River and is frequented by hippos. All tents have river views.

Akida and Mwera bus lines run to Mloka village (about 10km east of the park's Mtemere gate from Dar's Temek bus stand (TSH4000, seven to nine hours). From there you can arrange a pick-up with park lodges. Note that if you're bringing your own vehicle into Selous it must be 4WD.

MIKUMI NATIONAL PARK

Mikumi National Park is easily accessible from Dar es Salaam and is a good destination if you don't have much time but want to see wildlife.

Entry fees are US\$20/5 per adult/child per day. For camping fees see p750. The park is best visited in the dry season. For camp-site bookings, contact the **senior park warden** (2020498).

The park has four ordinary camp sites, and a special camp site near Choga Wale in the north.

Fox's Safari Camp ((2) 0748 237422, 0744 237422; www.tanzaniasafaris.info; s/d all-inclusive US\$280/470; (2) is set well away from the road on a rocky outcrop in a good wildlife-viewing area in Mikumi's far north. Walks and fly camping can be arranged.

The best budget way to visit the park is on one of the frequent special deals offered by Coastal Travels (p752) and other Dar es Salaam-based tour operators. Self-drive safaris from Dar es Salaam are a good option for Mikumi, which is about four hours from the capital by road.

The sprawling town of Mtwara, a laid-back, likable place, is a good staging point on the overland journey to Mozambique.

For internet access there's **Makonde Net** (per hr TSh1000; O 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) in the town centre. **NBC** (Uhuru Rd) changes cash and travellers cheques, and has an ATM.

In town itself, there are cheap sleeping options, such as **Nandope Guest House** (2) 233 4060; r without bathroom T5h5000), with no-frills rooms and mosquito nets; or for something more upmarket, try **Southern Cross Hotel** (2) 233 3206, 0741 506047; www.msemo.com; s/d US\$30/50), a nice place at the eastern end of Shangani Beach with spotless, good-value rooms, and a good seafood restaurant.

There are daily flights between Mtwara and Dar es Salaam (TSh144,500, one hour) on **Air Tanzania** ((2) 233 3147; Tanu Rd).

To Dar es Salaam, there are buses four times weekly (TSh17,000, about 20 hours).

To Mozambique, there are several pick-ups daily to the Tanzanian immigration post at Kilambo (TSh3000).

The MV *Safari* sails weekly between Dar es Salaam and Mtwara; see p755.

LAKE TANGANYIKA

KIGOMA

2 028

The scrappy but agreeable town of Kigoma is the major Tanzanian port on Lake Tanganyika, the end of the line for the Central Line train, and the best starting point for visits to Gombe Stream and Mahale Mountains National Parks.

Information

For internet access, try **Baby Come 'n' Call Internet Café** (Lumumba St; per hr TSh3000;) Sam-8pm Mon-Sat) just up from the train station. **NBC** (Lumumba St) changes cash and travellers cheques, and has an ATM.

To arrange boat hire, or visits to Gombe Stream and Mahale Mountains National Parks, contact **Chimpanzee Safaris** (280 4435/7, 0741 620154; www.chimpanzeesafaris.com) at Kigoma Hilltop Hotel, or **Sunset Tours** (280 2408; aqua@cats-net.com) at Aqua Lodge.

The consulates for **Burundi** (Kakolwa St) and **DRC** (Kaya Rd) are both located southwest of the

roundabout near the train station. See p785 for visa details. An immigration officer is posted at the port to take care of immigration formalities for travellers departing for Zambia on the MV *Liemba*.

Sleeping & Eating

Lake Tanganyika Beach Hotel (280 4894; s/d TSh10,000/15,000) The setting is ideal but the rooms have become quite run-down. There's also a reasonable restaurant.

Ally's (Lumumba St; meals TSh1000) is a local favourite, serving piping hot *wali maharagwe* (rice and beans), or *ugali* and sauce, among other dishes.

Getting There & Away AIR

Precision Air (280 4720, 280 3166) has five flights weekly between Dar es Salaam and Kigoma.

BOAT

The venerable MV *Liemba* plies between Kigoma and Mpulungu (Zambia); see p789. The regular passenger-ferry service between Kigoma and Bujumbura is suspended; inquire at the port in Kigoma for an update.

Small, motorised lake 'taxis' for Gombe Stream National Park stop at Kibirizi village, about 2km north of Kigoma.

BUS

All long-distance buses depart from Mwembe Togwa, about 3km southeast of town. To Mwanza, there are three buses weekly (TSh15,000, at least 20 hours).

TRAIN

The classic way to reach Kigoma is with the ageing Central Line train from Dar es Salaam, Mwanza or Tabora. See p791.

MAHALE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Mahale Mountains, Tanzania's most isolated park, is primarily a chimpanzee sanctuary, but also boasts white-sand beaches backed by lushly forested mountains.

Entry fees are US\$80/30 per adult/child per day. Children under seven aren't permitted

in Mahale. Camping and park *bandas* can be booked through the **senior park warden** (PO Box 1374, Kigoma), or through Kigoma Hilltop Hotel (left). Guide fees are US\$20 per group.

There is a park **camp site** (US\$20) and a cluster of quite nice double **bandas** (US\$20) at Kasiha. Bring all supplies from Kigoma. **Mahale Camp** (www.nomad-tanzania.com; per person all-indusive US\$505; $\textcircledolimeti-May-mid-Mar)$ is an exclusive camp with thatched, tented *bandas* without electricity or running water, although solar power and bush showers mean you still have all the comforts.

Kigoma Hilltop Hotel runs twice-weekly charter flights connecting Mahale with Kigoma, Arusha and Katavi National Park. The MV *Liemba* stops at Lagosa (also

The MV *Liemba* stops at Lagosa (also called Mugambo), to the north of the park (US\$25/20/15 in 1st/2nd/3rd class, about 10 hours from Kigoma). Radio park headquarters in advance from Kigoma and arrange a pick-up.

GOMBE STREAM NATIONAL PARK

In 1960 British researcher Jane Goodall (www .janegoodall.org) arrived at Gombe Stream to begin a study of wild chimpanzees; the study is now in its fifth decade, making it the longest-ever study of a wild animal population. Gombe's approximately 150 chimps are well habituated, which means that sightings are almost guaranteed, but allow at least two days to be sure.

Entry fees are US\$100/20 per adult/child per day (children aged under seven are not permitted in the park). Guides cost US\$20 per group per day.

There is a **hostel** (perperson US\$10) and a somewhat nicer **rest house** (perperson US\$20), which has nets; bookings can be made through Kigoma travel agencies, or directly through the **senior park warden** (2 280 2586). Bring whatever you'll need from Kigoma.

Gombe Luxury Tented Camp (280 4435/6/7; www .chimpanzeesafaris.com; s/d all-inclusive US\$500/800) is a relaxing camp makes a good splurge at the end of a hard, sweaty day tracking the chimps.

The only way to reach Gombe is by charter boat or lake taxi. Lake taxis depart from Kibirizi (see left) Monday to Saturday (TSh1000, three to four hours). Faster boats can be organised through Sunset Tours (US\$200 return per boat for up to 15 passengers, plus a US\$80 per night stopover fee) and Kigoma Hilltop Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

lonelyplanet.com

Hotel (US\$400 return per boat for up to 20 passengers, plus a US\$50 per night stopover fee from the second night onwards), both in Kigoma.

TANZANIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

It's a good idea to carry a tent if you're planning to travel in off-the-beaten-track areas, and it can save you some money in and around the northern parks (though camping in the parks themselves will cost at least \$20 per person per night). Camping isn't permitted on Zanzibar.

All of the national parks have camp sites. 'Ordinary' camp sites have basic facilities; generally pit toilets and sometimes a water source. 'Special' camp sites are more remote, and have no facilities at all and must be booked in advance, but you'll usually have them to yourself. Most parks also have simple huts or *bandas*, several have basic rest houses, and many northern circuit parks have hostels.

For accommodation fees, see the following table.

Accommodation	US\$ (16 yrs +)	US\$ (5-15 yrs)
Ordinary camp site	30	5
Special camp site	50	10
Hostel	10	-
Resthouse	30 at Serengeti,	-
	Arusha, Ruaha &	
	Katavi, 20 at	
	Gombe Stream	
Banda or hut	20 (Mt Kilimanjaro 50)	-

In Tanzanian Swahili, *hotel* (or *hoteli*) refers to food and drink, rather than accommodation. The more common term if you're looking for somewhere to sleep is *guesti* or 'guesthouse' or, more formally, *nyumba ya kulala wageni*.

There's a rapidly improving selection of midrange and top-end accommodation in major towns, and Tanzania also has some of East Africa's most beautiful luxury lodges. Many lodges and luxury camps in or near national parks quote all-inclusive prices, which generally means accommodation plus excursions such as wildlife drives, short guided walks or boat safaris, and sometimes

PRACTICALITIES

- Tanzania uses the metric system for weights and measures.
- Electricity is 220-250V AC, 50Hz (use British-style three-square-pin or tworound-pin plug adaptors).
- English-language newspapers include the Guardian and Daily News, and the weeklies Business Times, Financial Times and East African.
- The government-aligned Radio Tanzania broadcasts in English and Swahili.

also park entry fees and airport transfers. Ensuite rooms (ie with private bathroom) are widely referred to as 'self-contained' or 'selfcontainer' rooms.

ACTIVITIES

The best diving and snorkelling is around the Zanzibar Archipelago (p759). There's also diving off the beaches north of Dar es Salaam.

The main trekking destinations are Mt Kilimanjaro (p774) and Mt Meru (see p770). All trekking requires local guides and (usually) porters. Be aware of the dangers of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). In extreme cases it can be fatal.

Wildlife-watching is one of the country's top attractions and Tanzania delivers in spades, from the world-famous wildlife spectacles of Serengeti (p770) and Ngorongoro Crater (p771) to remote wilderness safaris in Selous Game Reserve (p780) and chimpanzee-tracking in Mahale Mountains (p781) and Gombe Stream (p781) National Parks. See p56 for more information.

BUSINESS HOURS

In addition to regular banking hours, many forex bureaus remain open until 5pm Monday to Friday, and until noon on Saturday. Throughout the region, shops and offices often close for one to two hours between noon and 2pm, and – especially in coastal areas – on Friday afternoons for mosque services.

CHILDREN

All Tanzanian parks and reserves are free for children under five years of age, and entry and camping fees are discounted for those under 16 years of age. Children under seven years of age aren't permitted in Gombe Stream or Mahale Mountains National Parks. Hotel accommodation is usually discounted for those under 12 and free for those under two years old. Some wildlife lodges, especially those in the national parks, are restricted for children, so inquire when booking. Always specifically ask for children's discounts if booking a safari through a tour operator, as otherwise they are often overlooked. Mosquito nets are best brought from home.

CUSTOMS

Exporting seashells, coral, ivory and turtle shell is illegal. You can export up to TSh2000 without declaration. There's no limit on importation of foreign currency; amounts over US\$10,000 must be declared.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Tanzania is in general a safe, hassle-free country, but you do need to take the usual precautions. Avoid isolated areas, especially isolated stretches of beach, and in cities and tourist areas take a taxi at night. When using public transport, don't accept drinks or food from someone you don't know, and be sceptical of anyone who comes up to you on the street asking you whether you remember them from the airport, your hotel or wherever.

In tourist areas – especially Arusha, Moshi and Zanzibar – touts and flycatchers can be extremely persistent, especially around bus stations and budget tourist hotels. Be very wary of anyone who approaches you on the street, at the bus station or in your hotel offering safari deals, and never pay any money for a safari or trek in advance until you've thoroughly checked out the company.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Tanzanian Embassies & Consulates

Australia Sydney (202-9261 0911; www.tanzania consul.com; Level 3, 185 Liverpool St, Sydney, NSW 2000); Perth (208-9322 6222; legal@murcia.com.au; Level 25, QV1 Bldg, 250 St George's Tce, Perth WA 6000) The Sydney office is for NSW, VIC, ACT and Tasmania; the Perth office for Perth, SA, NT and QLD.

Canada (🖻 0613-232 1500; tzottawa@synapse.net; 50 Range Rd, Ottawa, Ontario KIN 8J4)

South Africa (🖻 012-342 4393; tanzania@cis.co.za; PO Box 56572, Arcadia 0007, Pretoria)

USA New York (212-972 9160; 205 East 42nd St, New York, NY); Washington, DC (202-939 6125; www.tan zaniaembassy-us.org; 2139 R St, NW, Washington DC) Zambia (101-253320, 01-227698; tzreplsk@zamnet .zm; Ujamaa House, 5200 United Nations Ave, Lusaka)

Tanzania also has diplomatic representation in DRC (Kinshasa), Egypt (Cairo), Ethiopia (Addis Ababa) and Zimbabwe (Harare), among others. There's no Tanzanian high commission in Malawi.

Embassies & Consulates in Tanzania

Australians can contact the Canadian embassy. Except as noted, most are open from about 8am to at least 3pm, often with a midday break. Visa information is given for Tanzania's neighbours; applications for all should be made in the morning. Diplomatic representations in Dar es Salaam (area code © 022) include the following:

Burundi (Lugalo St, Upanga; 2 Sam-5pm Mon-Fri) Onemonth single-entry visas cost US\$45 plus two photos and are issued within 24 hours. Burundi also has a consulate in Kigoma.

Canada (🖻 211 2831; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/tanzania/ menu-en.asp; 38 Mirambo St)

DRC (Maliki Rd, Upanga; ∑ 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri) Onemonth single-entry visas cost US\$50, require two photos, and are available within three days. You'll need a letter from an employer, tour operator or embassy explaining your purpose. The consulate in Kigoma issues visas within 24 hours, and without a letter, but with lots of questions. Kenya () 270 1747; 14 Ursino, cnr Rashidi Kawawa & Old Bagamoyo Rds; ∑ 8am-2.30pm Mon-Fri) One-month single-entry visas cost TSh50,000 (no photos required), and are issued within 24 hours.

Malawi (@ 0748 481740; 1st fl, Zambia House, cnr Ohio St & Sokoine Dr; 论 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Many nationalities, including the USA and UK, don't require visas. For those that do, one-month single-entry visas cost US\$70 plus two photos and are issued within 24 hours. Mozambique (@ 211 6502; 25 Garden Ave; % 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) One-month single-entry visas cost US\$40/35 for same-day/two-day service, plus two photos.

Rwanda (211 5889; 32 Ali Hassan Mwinyi Rd, Upanga; 🕅 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) One-month singleentry visas cost US\$45 plus two photos, and are ready within three days.

Uganda (🖻 266 7009; 25 Msasani Rd; 🕑 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Near Oyster Bay Primary School. Threemonth single-entry visas cost US\$30 plus two photos and are issued the same day.

UK (211 0101; bch.dar@fco.gov.uk; cnr Mirambo St & Garden Ave)

USA (266 8001; http://usembassy.state.gov/tanzania; cnr Old Bagamoyo & Rashidi Kawawa Rds)

Zambia (🖻 212 5529; Zambia House, cnr Ohio St & Sokoine Dr; N visa applications 9-11am, visa pick-ups 2-3pm Mon-Fri) Three-month single-entry visas cost TSh25,000 to TSh43,000 depending on nationality, and require two photos. They're processed the same day.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

TA N Z A N I A

Sauti za Busara (🖻 024-223 2423; www.busaramusic .com) A Swahili music and dance festival held in February on Zanzibar.

Kilimanjaro Marathon (www.kilimanjaromarathon .com) In the foothills around Moshi; held in February or March.

Festival of the Dhow Countries (www.ziff.or.tz) Two weeks of dance, music, film and literature held in early Julv.

ZIFF This film festival is the centrepiece of the Festival of the Dhow Countries; held in early July.

Mwaka Kogwa A four-day festival held in late July to mark Nairuzim (the Shirazi New Year).

Bagamoyo Arts Festival (www.college-of-arts.org /index_festival.html) Traditional music, dance, acrobatics and more, held in late September.

HEALTH

Tanzania (including Zanzibar) no longer requires you to carry a certificate of yellow-fever vaccination unless you're arriving from an infected area (which includes Kenya, although arrivals aren't always checked). It's also a requirement in some neighbouring countries, including Rwanda, and thus is a good idea to carry. For more, see p1138.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January Zanzibar Revolution Day 12 January Easter (Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Monday) March/April Union Day 26 April Labour Dav 1 Mav Saba Saba (Peasants' Day) 7 July Nane Nane (Farmers' Day) 8 August

Nyerere Day 14 October Independence Day 9 December Christmas Day 25 December Boxing Day 26 December

Major Islamic holidays are also celebrated as public holidays; see p1106.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There's lots of information on Tanzania to be found on the internet. Following are a few sites to get you started:

Government of Tanzania (www.tanzania.go.tz) The government site - dry, but with visa info. Tanzania News (www.tanzanianews.com) News clippings.

Tanzania Page (www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies /Country Specific/Tanzania.html) Good links. Tanzania Tourist Board (www.tanzaniatouristboard .com) TTB's official site.

Zanzibar Tourism (www.zanzibartourism.net) The Zanzibar Commission for Tourism's official site.

MAPS

Good country maps include those published by Nelles (1:1,500,000) and Harms-ic, both available in Tanzania. Harms-ic also publishes maps for Lake Manyara National Park and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. Colourful hand-drawn maps covering Zanzibar, Arusha and many northern Tanzania parks are available in some major centres.

MONEY

Tanzania's currency is the Tanzanian shilling (TSh). There are bills of TSh10,000, TSh5000, TSh1000 and TSh500, and coins of TSh200, TSh100, TSh50, TSh20, TSh10, TSh5 and TSh1. For information on costs, see p746.

The easiest places to reconvert currency are at the airports in Dar es Salaam and Kilimanjaro, but save your exchange receipts in case they are checked. The most useful bank for changing money is National Bank of Commerce (NBC), which has branches throughout the country. (Note that US\$50 and US\$100 bills get better rates of exchange than smaller denominations.)

Most branches of the NBC have ATMs that accept Visa, as do Standard Chartered, Barclays and CRDB ATMs in larger towns. A few ATMs also accept MasterCard.

Some top-end hotels, tour operators and a few midrange establishments accept credit cards - most with a 5% to 10% commission.

SWAHILI TIME

When asking about times - of buses, boats or anything else - in Tanzania, be aware that Swahili speakers have a different system for telling the time. Their clock begins at sunrise (6am) rather than midnight, so 7am becomes 1 o'clock, 8am becomes 2 o'clock and so on. Many Swahili speakers translate their time directly when speaking English, so always double-check when you're being given a time.

Travellers cheques can be changed in Dar es Salaam, Arusha and other major centres at slightly lower rates than for cash.

Tanzania has a 20% value-added tax (VAT) that's usually included in guoted prices.

On treks and safaris in Tanzania, it's common practice to tip drivers, guides, porters and other staff if the service has been good.

POST

Airmail postage to the USA/Australia/Europe costs from TSh600/800/500 and is reasonably reliable for letters. Package delivery is unreliable, so don't send any valuables.

There's poste restante service in all major towns, with a charge of TSh200 per received letter. Mail is held for at least one month.

TELEPHONE

Tanzania's country code is 255. To make an international call, first dial 2000. Area codes (given at the start of town entries) must be used whenever you dial long distance.

Most telephone numbers are seven digits, although there are still a few four- and fivedigit numbers around. Mobile phone numbers are six digits.

You can make domestic (from about US\$0.10 per minute) and international (from US\$2 per minute) calls from Tanzania Telecom offices in all major towns, as well as from private communications shops. Calls to mobile phones cost TSh500 per minute. There are card phones in major towns (buy cards during business hours at Tanzania Telecom or at shops near the phones).

The rapidly expanding mobile network covers major towns throughout the country, plus most of the north and northeast. In the south, west and centre, you often won't get a signal once you're away from the larger towns.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Tanzania Tourist Board (TTB; www.tanzania-web .com) has offices in Dar es Salaam and Arusha. In the UK, the Tanzania Tourist Board is represented by the Tanzania Trade Centre (2007-407 0566; director@tanzatrade.co.uk; 80 Borough High St, London, SE1 1LL). In the USA, the TTB representative is the **Bradford Group** (212-447 0027; tanzania@bradfordmarketing.org; 347 Fifth Ave, Suite 610, New York, NY 10016).

VISAS

Almost everyone needs a visa. A single-entry visa valid for up to three months costs be-tween US\$20 and US\$50, depending on na-tionality. It's best to get the visa in advance (and necessary if you want multiple entry). (and necessary if you want multiple entry), though they're currently readily issued at Dar es Salaam and Kilimanjaro airports and at most border crossings (all nationalities US\$50, US dollars cash only, single-entry only). Some embassies require you to show proof of an onward ticket before they'll issue a visa, though a flight itinerary will usually suffice. For extensions (free) within the usual three-month visa limit, there are immigration offices in all major towns. After three months, you'll usually need to leave the country and reapply for a new visa. For visas to neighbouring countries, see the following section.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for onward travel can be applied for at the relevant embassies in Dar (see p783). There are also consulates for Burundi and DRC in Kigoma (p780). Note that under the East Africa partnership system, single-entry visitors to Tanzania can enter Kenya or Uganda without invalidating their Tanzania visa, ie you won't need to pay for another visa to re-enter Tanzania from those countries. Reciprocal arrangements also exist, but it is worth getting an update on this arrangement before setting out.

TRANSPORT IN TANZANIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Tanzania is straightforward to enter, whether you arrive at airports or at overland borders. Visas are available at all major points of entry (see above) and must be paid for in US dollars cash.

Air

Tanzania's major air hub is Dar es Salaam International Airport (code DAR; 20 022-284 2461, 022-284 4371, ext 2001), but Kilimanjaro International Airport (code JRO; 🖻 027-255 4252, 027-255 4707; www .kilimanjaroairport.co.tz) is the best option if you'll be concentrating on Arusha and the northern safari circuit. There are also international flights to/from Zanzibar International Airport (code ZNZ). Mwanza Airport (code MWZ) and Mtwara Airport (code MYW) handle some regional flights.

Air Tanzania (airline code TC; 🖻 022-211 8411, 022-284 4239; www.airtanzania.com; ATC Bldg, Ohio St, Dar es Salaam, Terminal 2, Dar es Salaam International Airport) is the national airline, with its hub at Dar es Salaam International Airport. It operates in partnership with South African Airways and is generally efficient and reliable. Regional and international routes include Nairobi (Kenya) to Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar, and Dar es Salaam to Entebbe (Uganda) and Johannesburg (South Africa). Credit cards are accepted at its Dar es Salaam office only.

The other major commercial carrier is Precision Air (airline code PW: 🖻 022-212 1718, 022-284 3547, in Arusha 027-250 2818, 027-250 6903, in Zanzibar 024-223 4520; www.precisionairtz.com; hub Dar es Salaam), which, in partnership with Kenya Airways, has flights from Nairobi to Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro and Zanzibar, and between Mombasa (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam via Zanzibar, plus numerous domestic routes.

Other regional and international carriers flying to/from Tanzania include the following (with useful flights between Tanzania and elsewhere in East Africa highlighted). All airlines service Dar es Salaam, except as noted. Air Burundi (airline code 8Y; airbdi@cbinf.com) Buiumbura to Kigoma.

Air India (airline code Al; 🖻 022-215 2642; www.air india.com; cnr Ali Hassan Mwinyi & Bibi Titi Mohamed Rds, Dar es Salaam)

Air Kenya (airline code REG; 🖻 027-250 2541, in Nairobi 020-601727; www.airkenya.com). Nairobi to Kilimanjaro. British Airways (airline code BA; 🖻 022-211 3820,

022-284 4082; www.britishairways.com; Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel, Ohio St, Dar es Salaam)

Coastal Aviation Airport (284 3293; Terminal One); Dar es Salaam (211 7959/60; aviation@coastal.cc; Upanga Rd)

Egyptair (airline code MS; 🖻 022-211 0333; www.egypt air.com.eg)

Emirates Airlines (airline code EK; 🖻 022-211 6100; www.emirates.com; Haidery Plaza, cnr Kisutu & India Sts, Dar es Salaam)

Ethiopian Airlines (airline code ET; 🖻 022-211 7063; www.flyethiopian.com; Ohio St, Dar es Salaam) Opposite Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel. Also flies to Kilimanjaro International Airport (KIA).

Kenya Airways (airline code KQ; 🖻 022-211 9376/7; www.kenya-airways.com; Upanga Rd, cnr Ali Hassan Mwinyi & Bibi Titi Mohamed Rd, Dar es Salaam) Nairobi and Mombasa to Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar. KLM (airline code KL; @ 022-213 9790/1, in Arusha 027-250 8062/3; www.klm.com; Upanga Rd, Dar es Salaam)

Also serves KIA. Linhas Aéreas de Moçambique (airline code TM; a 022-213 4600; www.lam.co.mz; Ground fl, JM Mall, Samora Ave, Dar es Salaam) At Fast-Track Travel, www .fasttracktanzania.com.

Oman Air (airline code OMA; 🖻 024-223 8308; www .oman-air.com; Ground fl, JM Mall, Samora Ave, Dar es Salaam) Also serves Zanzibar International Airport. Precision Air Airport (284 3547; Terminal Two); City Centre (🕿 212 1718; cnr Samora Ave & Pamba Rd) Rwandair Express (www.rwandair.com) Kigali to KIA. South African Airways (airline code SA; 🖻 022-211 7044; www.flysaa.com; Raha Towers, cnr Bibi Titi Mohamed & Ali Hassan Mwinvi Rds, Dar es Salaam) 211 8870; www.swiss.com; Luther House, Sokoine Dr, Dar es Salaam)

Yemenia Yemen Airways (airline code IY; 🖻 022-212 6036; www.yemenairways.net; Ohio St, Dar es Salaam) Opposite Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel. ZanAir (284 3297; www.zanair.com; Terminal One,

Airport)

Chimpanzee Safaris (2 028-280 4435/7, 0741 620154; www.chimpanzeesafaris.com) runs regularly scheduled charters between Kigoma (Tanzania) and Kigali (Rwanda) - useful if you're combining gorillas and chimpanzees.

Land

Buses cross the borders between Tanzania and Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia. Apart from sometimes lengthy waits at the border for passport checks, there are usually no hassles. At the border, you'll need to disembark on each side to take care of visa formalities, then reboard your bus and continue on. Visa fees are not included in bus-ticket prices for transborder routes. Most main routes go direct, but sometimes you'll need to walk across the border and change vehicles on the other side.

If you're arriving via car or motorcycle, you'll need the vehicle's registration papers and your license (p790), plus pay for a temporary import permit at the border (TSh20,000 for one month), third-party insurance (TSh50,000 for one year) and a one-time fuel levy (TSh5000). You'll also need a carnet de passage en douane; see p1124.

Most hire companies don't permit their vehicles to cross international borders; should you find one that does, arrange the necessary paperwork with them in advance.

BURUNDI

The main border crossing is at Kobero Bridge between Ngara and Muyinga (Burundi). Although the border is officially open, the security situation ebbs and flows, so get an update from your embassy first. The road between Kigoma and Lusahunga in particular is subject to occasional banditry, and it's sometimes necessary to travel in a convoy.

KENYA

Border Crossings

The main route to/from Kenva is the sealed road connecting Arusha and Nairobi via the heavily travelled Namanga border post (open 24 hours). The other main border crossing is at Horohoro, north of Tanga.

Mombasa

Scandinavian Express goes daily between Dar es Salaam and Mombasa (TSh19,000, 10 hours). Buses between Tanga and Mombasa also depart daily (TSh5000 to TSh10,000, four to five hours).

Nairobi

Scandinavian Express goes daily between Dar es Salaam and Nairobi (TSh38,000, 13 hours) via Arusha. Scandinavian and Akamba bus lines also have daily buses between Mwanza and Nairobi (TSh23,000 to TSh28,000 plus Kenyan visa costs, 12 to 14 hours).

Between Arusha or Moshi and Nairobi, the most popular option is one of the daily shuttle buses. Main companies include the following:

Davanu (www.davanu.com) Arusha (🖻 0744 400318, 0744 846160; Hotel Pallsons, Bondeni St, Arusha); Nairobi (254-20-222002; nairobi@davanu.com; 4th fl, Windsor House, University Way) With a desk at Jomo Kenvatta International Airport (🕿 254-722-310234: davanujkia@davanu.com).

Impala Arusha (🕿 027-250 7197; impala@cybernet .co.tz; Impala Hotel, cnr Moshi & Old Moshi Rds, Arusha); Nairobi (254-20-2717373; Silver Springs Hotel, cnr Valley Rd & Argwings Kodhek Rd)

Riverside Arusha (20 027-250 2639, 027-250 3916; riverside shuttle@hotmail.com; Sokoine Rd, Arusha); Nairobi (🖻 254-20-229618; Room 1, 3rd fl, Pan African Insurance House, Kenyatta Ave) With a branch at Mt Meru Hotel, Moshi Rd, Arusha.

All charge US\$25 one way, and with a little prodding, you can sometimes get the residents' price (US\$10). In Arusha, all companies drop you at Mt Meru Hotel, as well as at their offices. In Nairobi, drop-offs are at centrally located hotels and at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. When flying into Nairobi, shuttle representatives will meet your flight if you've booked in advance.

Regular buses also link Arusha and Nairobi daily (TSh9000, six to seven hours). Departures in Arusha are from the bus station; in Nairobi most are from Accra Rd.

MALAWI

The only border crossing is at Songwe River bridge (7.30am-6pm Tanzanian time, 6.30am to 5pm Malawian time), southeast of Mbeya.

Buses go three times weekly between Dar es Salaam and Lilongwe, departing Dar es Salaam (TSh47,000, 27 hours). It's better to take Scandinavian from Dar to Mbeva, and get onward transport there. From Mbeya, buses depart several times weekly, arriving in Lilongwe the next day (TSh29,000). There are also daily minibuses connecting both Mbeya and Kyela with the border; once at the border, there's about a 300m walk to the Malawian side, from where there are minibuses to Karonga.

MOZAMBIQUE

There are no bridges over the Ruvuma River (the border). The main crossing is at Kilambo (south of Mtwara), where there is a sometimes-operational ferry. It's also possible to get your passport stamped on the crossing between Newala and Moçimboa do Rovuma (Mozambique). If you travel by boat, there are border officials at Msimbati (Tanzania), and at Palma and Moçimboa da Praia (Mozambique). It's also reportedly possible to get stamped in at the crossing between Songea and Nova Madeira (Mozambique); otherwise, there's an immigration office in Songea. Some travellers have reported being turned back (all the way to Dar) for not having a visa. To be on the safe side, get a visa in Dar before setting out for Mozambique.

Pick-ups depart Mtwara daily for the Kilambo border post (TSh3000, one hour), and on to the Ruvuma, which is crossed via dugout canoe (TSh2000, 10 minutes to over an hour, depending on water levels; dangerous during heavy rains). On the Mozambique side, there are usually two pick-ups daily to the Mozambique border post (about 4km further) and on to Moçimboa da Praia (US\$7, four hours).

RWANDA

TANZANIA

The main border crossing is at Rusumo Falls, southwest of Bukoba. There have been no problems recently, but due to a long history of instability in this region, it's worth getting an update from your embassy or resident expatriates before setting off.

Daily pick-ups go between Benako (30km southwest of the border) and Rusumu Falls border post. At the border, walk across the bridge to the Rwandan border post, from where minibuses go to Kibungo and on to Kigali (US\$5, three hours).

UGANDA

The main post is at Mutukula, northwest of Bukoba (although you actually get stamped in and out of Tanzania at Kyaka, about 30km south of the Mutukula border), with good sealed access routes on both sides.

Scandinavian goes daily between Dar es Salaam and Kampala via Nairobi (TSh50,000, 27 hours) and Arusha. Jaguar/Dolphin and Tawfiq go daily between Bukoba and Kampala (TSh11,000, five to six hours). From Kampala, Tawfiq continues on to Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (TSh40,000 plus transit visas for Uganda; US\$15) and Kenya (US\$20, 36 hours), though if you're headed to Nairobi it's better to sleep in Kampala and get another bus the next day.

From Mwanza, Akamba goes four times weekly to/from Kampala (TSh20,000, 19 hours).

ZAMBIA

The main border crossing is at Tunduma (Y 7.30am-6pm Tanzanian time, 6.30am-5pm Zambian time), southwest of Mbeva.

Scandinavian goes daily between Dar es Salaam and Lusaka via Mbeya (TSh60,000, 24 hours). Otherwise, minibuses go frequently between Mbeya and Tunduma (TSh2500, two hours), where you walk across the border for Zambian transport to Lusaka (US\$20, 18 hours).

The Tanzania-Zambia (Tazara) train line links Dar es Salaam with Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia (TSh55,000/39,100/31,500 in 1st/ 2nd/economy class, about 40 hours) twice weekly via Mbeya and Tunduma. From Kapiri Mposhi to Lusaka, you'll need to continue by bus. Tazara also has one slower 'ordinary' train weekly between Dar es Salaam and Mbeya (p792) and between Kapiri Mposhi and Nakonde (on the Zambian side of the Zambia-Tanzania border, about 20 hours).

Sea & Lake

There's a US\$5 port tax for all boats and ferries from Tanzanian ports.

BURUNDI

Regular passenger-ferry services between Kigoma and Bujumbura are currently suspended. Inquire at the port in Kigoma whether there have been any updates.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

There's currently no passenger service to/ from DRC.

KENYA

Dhows sail sporadically between Pemba, Tanga and Mombasa; the journey can be long and rough. Ask at the relevant ports for information on sailings.

There's no passenger ferry service on Lake Victoria between Tanzania and Kenya.

MALAWI

The ferry MV Songea sails between Mbamba Bay and Nkhata Bay (Malawi) on Friday (US\$10/4 in 1st/economy class, four to five hours), although the schedule is highly erratic and sometimes services are cancelled completely.

MOZAMBIQUE

The official travel route between southwestern Tanzania and Mozambique will take you via Malawi on the Songea ferry between Mbamba Bay and Nkhata Bay (see the information in the Malawi section, above), and then from Nkhata Bay on to Likoma Island (Malawi), Cóbuè and Metangula (both in Mozambique) on the Ilala ferry (a in Malawi 01-587311; ilala@malawi.net).

UGANDA

There's no passenger-ferry service, but it's relatively easy to arrange passage between Mwanza and Kampala's Port Bell on cargo ships (about 16 hours). In Mwanza you'll need to check in with the immigration officer at the South Port. Expect to pay about US\$20, including port fees. Crew are often willing to rent out their cabins for a negotiable extra fee.

ZAMBIA

The venerable MV Liemba, which has been plying the waters of Lake Tanganyika for the better part of a century, connects Kigoma with Mpulungu in Zambia weekly (US\$55/45/40 in 1st/2nd/economy class, US dollars cash only; at least 40 hours). Food is available on board, but it's best to bring some supplements and drinking water. Keep watch over your luggage, and book early if you want a cabin.

Tours

Dozens of tour and safari companies organise package tours to Tanzania. While it's generally cheaper to organise your tour with a company based in Tanzania, this may be outweighed by the convenience of organising things in advance with a company in your home country. For tour operators covering Tanzania and elsewhere in East Africa, see p1127. For safari and trekking operators, see p791.

GETTING AROUND Air

The national airline, Air Tanzania () in Dar es Salaam 022-211 8411, 022-284 4293; www.airtanzania.com) has reliable flights connecting Dar es Salaam with Mwanza, Zanzibar, Kilimaniaro and Mtwara (see the relevant sections for details). Other airlines flying domestically include the following (all also do charters).

Air Excel (a 027-254 8429, 027-250 1597; reservations@ airexcelonline.com) Arusha, Serengeti, Lake Manyara, Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar.

Coastal Aviation (2 022-284 3293, 022-284 2877, 022-211 7959; www.coastal.cc) Arusha, Dar es Salaam, Lake Manyara, Mafia, Mwanza, Pemba, Ruaha National Park, Selous Game Reserve, Serengeti National Park, Tanga, Tarangire National Park, Zanzibar.

Precision Air (🕿 022-212 1718, 022-213 0800, 027-250 2818; www.precisionairtz.com) Arusha, Dar es Salaam, Kigoma, Mwanza, Zanzibar.

Regional Air Services (🖻 027-250 4477, 027-250 2541; www.airkenya.com/docs/regair3.htm) Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Lake Manyara, Serengeti National Park.

ZanAir (🖻 024-223 3670/8; www.zanair.com) Arusha, Dar es Salaam, Lake Manyara, Pemba, Selous Game Reserve, Serengeti National Park, Tarangire National Park, Zanzibar.

Boat

Ferries operate on Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika and Lake Nyasa (Malawi), and between Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Pemba. There's a US\$5 port tax per trip on all routes. For details of ferries between Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar and Pemba, see p756 and p765. The MV Safari sails weekly between Dar es Salaam and Mtwara; see p755. LAKE NYASA In theory the MV Songea departs Itungi Port

In theory, the MV Songea departs Itungi Port about 1pm on Thursday and makes its way down the coast via Lupingu, Manda, Mango and Liuli (but not via Matema) to Mbamba Bay (TSh14,000/8000 in 1st/economy class, 18 to 24 hours). It then continues across to Nkhata Bay in Malawi, before turning around and doing the return trip. This schedule is highly unreliable and frequently interrupted.

LAKE TANGANYIKA

For the MV Liemba schedule between Kigoma and Mpulungu (Zambia), see left. The regular passenger-ferry service between Kigoma and Bujumbura is suspended; inquire at the port in Kigoma for an update.

LAKE VICTORIA

The MV Victoria departs Mwanza for Bukoba at 10pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday (TSh16,500/14,500/11,300/10,600 plus port tax in 1st class/2nd-class sleeping/2nd-class sitting/3rd class, nine hours). Food is available on board.

Bus

Major long-distance routes have a choice of express and ordinary buses. Express buses make fewer stops, are less crowded than ordinary buses and depart on schedule. Some have air-con and toilets, and the nicest ones are called 'luxury' buses. On secondary routes, the only option is ordinary buses, which are often packed to overflowing, make many stops and run to a less rigorous schedule.

For popular routes, book your seat in advance, although you can sometimes get a place by arriving at the bus station an hour prior to departure. Scandinavian and Royal Coach

fill up quickly on all routes, and should be booked at least one day in advance. Each bus line has its own booking office, usually at or near the bus station.

Prices are basically fixed, although overcharging isn't unheard of. Most bus stations are chaotic, and at the ones in Arusha and other tourist areas you'll be incessantly hounded by touts. Buy your tickets at the office, and not from the touts, and don't believe anyone who tries to tell you there's a luggage fee.

Major bus companies and a sampling of their destinations:

Dar Express Arusha, Dar es Salaam.

Royal Coach Arusha, Dar es Salaam.

TANZANIA

Scandinavian Express (www.scandinaviagroup.com) Arusha, Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Iringa, Kampala (Uganda), Mbeya, Mombasa and Nairobi (Kenya).

Other lines, none distinguished, include Takrim/Tawfiq (Arusha, Kampala, Mwanza, Nairobi), Sumry (Mbeya) and Jaguar (Bukoba, Kampala). You can book tickets online for Scandinavian Express routes, but need to collect (and pay for) your ticket at least three days prior to the journey date.

MINIBUS & SHARED TAXI

For shorter trips away from the main routes, the choice is often between 30-seater buses ('Coasters' or thelathini) and daladalas. Both options come complete with chickens on the roof, bags of produce wedged under the seats, and no leg room. Shared taxis are relatively rare, except in northern Tanzania near Arusha. Like ordinary buses, minibuses and shared taxis leave when full; they're probably the least safe of the various transport options.

Car & Motorcycle

Unless you have your own vehicle and are familiar with driving in East Africa, it's relatively unusual for travellers to tour mainland Tanzania by car. More common is to focus on one part of the country, and then arrange local transport through a tour or safari operator. On Zanzibar it's easy and economical to hire a car or motorcycle for touring. For information about bringing your own vehicle, see p786.

DRIVING LICENCE

On the mainland, you'll need your home driving licence or (preferably) an international

driving licence. On Zanzibar, you'll need an international driving licence, or a licence from Zanzibar (see p763), Kenya, Uganda or South Africa.

HIRE

Dar es Salaam has a modest array of car-hire agencies. Daily rates for 2WD start about at US\$40 excluding fuel, plus US\$20 to US\$30 for insurance and tax. Prices for 4WD range from US\$70 to US\$150 per day plus insurance (US\$30 to US\$40 per day), fuel and driver (US\$15 to US\$35 per day). There's also a 20% VAT.

For anything outside the city, most companies require 4WD. Also, most don't permit self-drive outside of Dar es Salaam, and none presently offer unlimited kilometres. Per kilometre charges average US\$0.50 to US\$1. Clarify what the company's policy is in the event of a breakdown.

Avis (🖻 022-211 5381; Skylink Travel & Tours, Ohio St, Dar es Salaam; avis@skylinktanzania.com) Opposite Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel, with a branch in Arusha. Evergreen Car Rentals (🖻 022-218 2107, 022-218 5419; evergreen@raha.com; cnr Nkrumah St & Nyerere Rd, Dar es Salaam)

Hertz (🖻 022-212 2130, 022-212 2363; hertz@cats-net .com; Mövenpick Royal Palm Hotel, Ohio St, Dar es Salaam)

Elsewhere in Tanzania, you can hire 4WD vehicles in Arusha, Mwanza and Zanzibar Town and other centres through travel agencies, tour operators and hotels. Except on Zanzibar, most come with driver. Rates average US\$70 to US\$120 per day plus fuel, and less on Zanzibar (where it's also easy to hire motorcycles and minibikes, and arrange car hire privately). Clarify before setting out who bears responsibility for repairs.

ROAD CONDITIONS & HAZARDS

About 20% of Tanzania's road network is paved, including the roads from Dar es Salaam to Arusha via Chalinze, and from Dar es Salaam to Mbeya via Morogoro and Iringa. The road from Dar es Salaam to Mtwara is being paved. Secondary roads range from good to nearly impassable, depending on the season and on when they were last maintained. For most trips outside major towns, you'll need 4WD.

Hazards include vehicles overtaking on blind curves, pedestrians and animals on the road, and children running onto the road.

ROAD RULES

In theory, driving is on the left, and traffic already in roundabouts has the right of way. Unless otherwise posted, the speed limit is 80km/h; on major routes, police have radar. Tanzania has a seatbelt law for drivers and front-seat passengers. The official traffic-fine penalty is TSh20,000.

Motorcycles aren't permitted in national parks, except for the section of the Dar es Salaam to Mbeya highway passing through Mikumi National Park.

Hitching

Hitching in Tanzania is generally slow going. It's prohibited inside national parks, and is usually fruitless around them. That said, in remote areas, hitching a lift with truck drivers may be your only transport option, for which you'll need to pay. See also p1126.

Local Transport DALADALA

Local routes are serviced by *daladalas* and, in rural areas, pick-up trucks or old LandRovers. Prices are from TSh100 for local town runs. The vehicles make many stops and are invariably crowded. Accidents are frequent, particularly in minibuses. Destinations are either posted in the front window, or called out by the driver's assistant, who collects fares.

ΤΑΧΙ

Taxis can be hired in all major towns. None have meters; the base rate for town trips is TSh1500.

Tours

For some reputable safari operators in the northern safari circuit, see the Arusha section (p766). Tour operators on Zanzibar (p759) can organise competitively priced fly/drive safaris to both the northern and southern safari circuits. For Mt Kilimanjaro trekking

operators, see p774. For local tour operators, see listings in the regional sections.

Train

Tanzania has two rail lines: Tazara (2 022-286 0340/4, 022-286 5339; www.tazara.co.tz; cnr Nyerere & Nelson Mandela Rds, Dar es Salaam) links Dar es Salaam with Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia via Mbeya and Tunduma; the Tanzanian Railway Corporation's Central Line (🖻 022-211 7833; www.trctz.com; cnr Railway St & Sokoine Dr, Dar es Salaam) links Dar es Salaam with Kigoma and Mwanza via Morogoro, Dodoma and Tabora. A branch of the Central Line links Tabora with Mpanda; there's also passenger service on the Dodoma–Singida spur. Tazara is more comfortable and efficient, but on both lines, breakdowns and long delays – and Tabora. A branch of the Central Line links

on both lines, breakdowns and long delays up to 12 hours or more - are common.

CLASSES

There are three classes: 1st class (two- or four-bed compartments), 2nd-class sleeping (six-bed compartments) and economy class (benches, usually very crowded). Some trains also have a '2nd-class sitting section', with one seat per person. Men and women can only travel together in the sleeping sections by booking the entire compartment.

RESERVATIONS

Tickets for 1st and 2nd class should be reserved at least several days in advance, although occasionally you'll be able to get a seat on the day of travel. Economy-class tickets can be bought on the spot.

SCHEDULES & COSTS

Both lines are undergoing renovations and management changes, so expect schedule and price changes. See the table below.

Central Line

Central Line trains depart Dar es Salaam three times weekly in the evening for both Kigoma

From	То	1st class	2nd-class sleeping	2nd-class sitting	Economy
Dar es Salaam	Kigoma	TSh45,200	TSh33,100	-	TSh15,000
Dar es Salaam	Mwanza	TSh44,600	TSh32,600	TSh17,700	TSh18,800
Dar es Salaam	Tabora	TSh32,700	TSh24,200	TSh13,000	TSh11,000
Mwanza	Tabora	TSh17,600	TSh13,600	TSh7200	TSh6400
Tabora	Mpanda	TSh16,300	TSh12,600	-	TSh6000

and Mwanza (splitting at Tabora). In theory, both journeys take about 40 hours, though it's often much longer. Trains from both Mwanza and Kigoma to Dar es Salaam also depart in the evenings.

Trains between Tabora and Mpanda (about 14 hours) run three times weekly, departing Tabora in the evening and Mpanda around midday.

Tazara

Tazara runs three trains weekly: two 'express' trains between Dar es Salaam and Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia via Mbeya, and an 'ordinary' train between Dar es Salaam and Mbeya. Ordinary trains take about 24 hours between Dar and Mbeya, and cost TSh24,500/18,400/12,200 in 1st/2nd/economy class).

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Uganda

Uganda is Africa condensed, with the best of everything the continent has to offer packed into one small but stunning destination. Uganda is home to the highest mountain range in Africa, the Rwenzoris or Mountains of the Moon. It is the source of the mighty Nile, offering the best white-water rafting in the world. It has the highest concentration of primates on earth, including the majestic mountain gorilla, one of the rarest animals on the planet.

On top of all this, the scenery is so striking that it looks like an oil painting, the beautiful national parks see far fewer visitors than in neighbouring Kenya and Tanzania, and the capital, Kampala, is safer and friendlier than most in Africa. In 1907 pioneering tourist Winston Churchill called it the 'Pearl of Africa'. He was right.

Mention Uganda to most people today and the first thing they'll think of is the brutality of Idi Amin. Their naivety is their loss as, thankfully for Uganda, the big man died in exile in 2003. The reality is vastly different. Stability has returned to most parts of the country and tourists are welcomed with open arms. Despite the trials and tribulations of the past, Ugandans have weathered the storm remarkably well. The people offer heart-warming hospitality up and down the country, their ever-present smile accompanied by 'Hello Mzungu!'. They are truly some of the finest folk on the continent.

Take the plunge now, before the world wakes up to this magical microcosm of Africa.

FAST FACTS

- Area 236,580 sq km
- **ATMs** Kampala, Jinja, Mbale, Mbarara
- Borders Safe and accessible land borders with Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania; risky land borders with Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- Budget US\$20 a day in town, US\$50 in parks
- Capital Kampala
- Languages English, Luganda
- Money Ugandan shilling; US\$1 = USh1760
- Population 27.6 million
- Seasons Wet (March to May, October to November), dry (December to February, June to September)
- Telephone Country code 256; international access code
 000
- Time GMT/UTC + 3
- Visa US\$30 for one month; issued at most borders



CAUTION: SECURITY IN NORTHERN UGANDA

The security situation in the north of Uganda is very bad, as rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continue their vicious attacks on villagers, refugee camps and public transport. At the time of writing it was unwise to visit Gulu and all points north and west, as rebels had been mounting attacks all over the region.

Even Murchison Falls National Park has seen occasional infiltration, and although this has been confined to remote areas, it tragically claimed the life of British resident Steve Willis in 2005. As a promoter and operator in the park, he would hate to think that his death caused visitors to desert the park he so loved. The Paraa section of the park is considered safe, although many embassies currently warn against visiting Murchison.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bwindi** (p804) Penetrate the Impenetrable Forest at Bwindi National Park to visit the mountain gorillas.
- Jinja (p813) Tame the waters at the source of the Nile, some of the world's best white-water rafting.
- Murchison Falls (p817) Check out the world's most powerful waterfall on a wildlife-watching trip up the Victoria Nile.
 Lake Bunyonyi (p810) Chill out at Uganda's

most beautiful lake, a mythical landscape of terraced hillsides and hidden bays.
Rwenzori Mountains (p808) Trek the mystical Mountains of the Moon, one of the continent's most challenging yet reward-

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Uganda can be visited at any time of year. Most of Uganda enjoys the perfect tropical climate. Temperatures average about 26°C during the day and 16°C at night. The hottest months are from December to February.

ITINERARIES

ing hikes.

- **One Week** Kick off in Kampala (p798) and then head south to track the gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest (p804). After some hard hiking, chill out at Lake Bunyoni (p810) for a few days before looping back to the capital.
- **Two Weeks** Cross over from Kenya and stop in Jinja (p813), the new adrenaline capital of East Africa. Tame the waters of the Nile (p815), bungee jump (p815) or quad bike (p815) before hitting Kampala (p798). Join the night shift in one of Africa's safest capitals. Head northeast to Murchison Falls National Park (p817), the best all-rounder in Uganda. Head

south to Fort Portal (p806), gateway to chilled-out crater lakes and the chimps of Kibale Forest (p807). Continue to Bwindi (p804) to meet the mountain gorillas and head on south to Rwanda or loop back to Kampala via the sublime Ssese Islands (p812) if time allows.

HISTORY

Uganda experienced two great waves of migration. The first brought the Bantu-speaking peoples from further west in Africa, and the second, the Nilotic people from Sudan and Ethiopia. These broad families are still geographically split today, the Bantu in the centre and south of the country and the Nilotic peoples in the north. Until the 19th century, landlocked Uganda saw few outsiders compared with its neighbours. Despite fertile lands and surplus harvests, trading links with the great Indian Ocean ports were limited. During the reign of the Bugandan kabaka (king) Mwanga in the mid-19th century, contacts were finally made with Arab traders and early European explorers. Uganda was not to escape the tide of colonialism sweeping across the continent.

The British Arrive

After the Treaty of Berlin in 1890, when Europeans carved up Africa without consulting any Africans, Uganda, Kenya and Zanzibar were declared British protectorates in 1894. The Brits ruled indirectly, giving the traditional kingdoms a considerable degree of autonomy, but favoured the recruitment of Buganda people for their civil service.

Other tribal groups, unable to make inroads into the Buganda-dominated colonial administration or commercial sector, were forced to seek other avenues for advancement. The Acholi and Lango soon became dominant in the military. Thus were planted the seeds for the intertribal conflicts that were to tear Uganda apart following independence.

Independence Time

By the mid-1950s a schoolteacher from the north, Dr Milton Obote, had cobbled together a loose coalition that led Uganda to independence in 1962, on the promise that the Buganda would have autonomy.

It wasn't the ideal time for Uganda to get to grips with independence. Civil wars were raging in neighbouring southern Sudan, Zaïre and Rwanda, and refugees poured into the country. It was soon obvious that Obote had no intention of sharing power with the *kabaka* (king). A confrontation was looming.

Obote moved fast, arresting several cabinet ministers and ordering his army chief of staff, Idi Amin, to storm the *kabaka*'s palace. Obote became president, the Bugandan monarchy was abolished and Idi Amin's star was on the rise.

Enter Idi Amin

Amin staged a coup in January 1971 and so began Uganda's first reign of terror. All political activities were suspended, and the army was empowered to shoot on sight anyone suspected of opposition to the regime.

Over the next eight years an estimated 300,000 Ugandans lost their lives, often in horrifying ways. Amin's main targets were the educated classes, the Acholi and Lango tribespeople of Obote and the 70,000-strong Asian community. In 1972, Asians were given

HOW MUCH?

- Tracking mountain gorillas US\$375
- Meal at decent restaurant US\$10
- National park entry US\$25
- New Vision newspaper US\$0.50
- White-water rafting US\$95

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1
- 1L bottled water US\$0.50
- Bottle of Bell beer US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10
- Plate of matoke (mashed plantains) and beans US\$0.40

90 days to leave the country; they departed with little more than the clothes they wore.

Meanwhile, the economy collapsed, infrastructure crumbled, prolific wildlife was slaughtered by soldiers and the tourism industry evaporated. The stream of refugees across the border became a flood, inflation hit 1000% and the treasury ran out of money to pay the soldiers.

Faced with a restless army, Amin had to seek a diversion. He chose war with Tanzania, ostensibly to teach that country a lesson for supporting anti-Amin dissidents. The Tanzanians defeated the Ugandan army and pushed on into the heart of Uganda in early 1979. Amin fled to Libya and later to Saudi Arabia, where he lived in exile until his death in 2003.

Obote Rides Again

The rejoicing in Uganda after Amin's downfall was short-lived. The 12,000 Tanzanian soldiers who remained in Uganda, supposedly to assist with the country's reconstruction and to maintain law and order, turned on the Ugandans as soon as their pay dried up.

Ugandans as soon as their pay dried up. Yusufu Lule and Godfrey Binaisa came and went as leaders, before Obote returned from exile in Tanzania to an enthusiastic welcome in many parts of the country. He swept to victory in an election that was, according to witnesses, blatantly rigged.

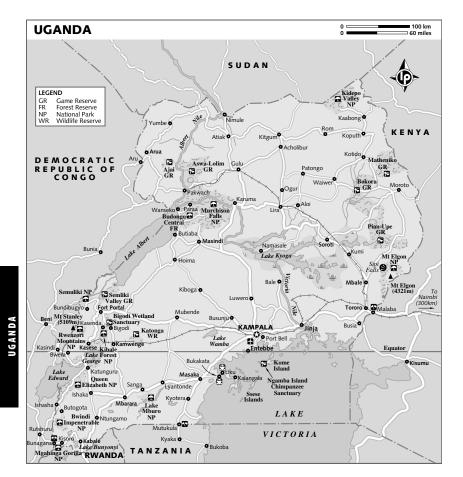
The honeymoon for Obote proved to be relatively short. Like Amin, Obote favoured certain tribes – his Lango and Acholi supporters from the north were given the top jobs – and the prisons began to fill once more.

Obote was about to complete the destruction that Amin had begun. More and more reports of atrocities leaked out of the country and several mass graves were discovered. In mid-1985 Obote was overthrown in a coup staged by the army under the leadership of Tito Okello.

A New Beginning

Shortly after Obote had become president for the second time, a guerrilla army launched a resistance struggle in western Uganda. It was led by Yoweri Museveni, who had lived in exile in Tanzania during Amin's reign.

In the early days, few gave the guerrillas, known as the National Resistance Army (NRA), much of a hope, but by the time of Okello's arrival, the NRA controlled a large slice of western Uganda. By January 1986 it



was clear that Okello's days were numbered. The NRA launched an all-out offensive and took Kampala.

Museveni proved to be a pragmatic leader, appointing a number of arch-conservatives to his cabinet, and making an effort to avoid the tribal nepotism that had divided the country. The economy took a turn for the better and aid and investment trickled into the country. Political parties were banned to avoid a polarisation along tribal lines once more, but anyone could join the National Resistance Movement (NRM).

Uganda Todav

The debate about the formation of political parties has dominated the agenda in recent

years. Museveni shifted his position on a return to multiparty politics, and in July 2005 a referendum was held that overwhelmingly endorsed democracy. The fact that voter turnout was tiny suggested no-one was really that interested in the issue.

One issue they definitely were interested in was Museveni's move to scrap constitutional limits on presidential terms. Museveni himself put in place the two-term limit and promptly changed his mind as the end of his tenure drew closer. He was re-elected in 2006, but not before he had his opponent Dr Kizza Besigye muzzled and imprisoned on charges of treason and rape. Dr Besigye still took 41% of the vote. Long a darling of the donors, President Museveni's U-turn on a third term in office

has cast a cloud over his excellent record. Unflattering comparisons are being made with the Mugabes of this world and old friends are turning their back on Museveni. The world is watching to see what happens next.

The other dominant domestic concern has been the ongoing war against insurgents within the country. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has been fighting a war in northern Uganda for two decades now and the mindless violence shows few signs of coming to an end despite ongoing peace efforts. The LRA's original aim was to establish a state based on the Ten Commandments, but given they have broken every commandment in the book, they seem to have forgotten their goal. Peace talks have been on and off again, but peace and the LRA seem a contradiction in terms.

Uganda has also been involved in conflicts beyond its borders, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This turned into Africa's first cross-continental war. Old friends Rwanda and Uganda soon became enemies and backed rival factions in the bloody civil war. Both countries were accused of shamelessly plundering the DRC's mineral wealth and their international reputations took a tumble. Uganda finally pulled its troops out in 2002, but has yet to rebuild its former friendship with Rwanda.

Genuine political stability is possible only if the government can bring to an end the insurgent campaigns within its borders. If Uganda can negotiate a lasting peace with all its neighbours, that in turn should bring a rapid end to the capacity of rebel groups to destabilise the country.

CULTURE

Despite the years of terror and bloodshed, Ugandans are a remarkably positive and spirited people. Most Ugandans are keen debaters, discussing politics and personality in equal measure. They are opinionated and eloquent during disagreements, yet unfailingly polite and engagingly warm.

Idi Amin, 'Big Daddy', the Last King of Scotland - call him what you will - casts a long shadow over Uganda both at home and abroad. Mention Uganda to the average person in the West and it's still sadly Idi Amin that is name checked first. His character has become the country's caricature, although for the majority of Ugandans he is no laughing matter.

Despite the evident progress in Uganda, it remains a country divided. Kampala and the south have experienced peace and prosperity for two decades, but Gulu and points north have been mired in an intractable cycle of violence. Kampala may have found peace, but Uganda has not, and the tribal politics of the past cannot be firmly laid to rest until the north and south experience peace and prosperity together.

Life in Uganda has been one long series of upheavals for the older generations, while the younger generations have benefited from the new-found stability. Many urban Ugandans are highly educated and informed, and love to engage visitors in conversations about impressions of Africa and the world beyond. Makarere University in Kampala remains one of the continent's great centres of learning, and its students often pack the dance floors at clubs in town.

One of the first countries to be struck by an HIV/AIDS outbreak of epidemic proportions, Uganda acted swiftly in promoting AIDS awareness nationwide and safe sex in society. This was very effective in radically reducing infection rates throughout the country.

Uganda is a spiritual society, and Catholicism and Protestantism have long been popular. However, evangelical Christianity has been making inroads. Abstinence is in, abortion out. Animism is big in rural Uganda, and often Christianity is interwoven with traditional beliefs. There is also a small minority of Muslims, including Amin, who converted to the faith to win financial support from Arab states in the 1970s.

Education has been a real priority in Uganda and President Museveni has been keen to promote free primary education for all. It's a noble goal, but to some extent Uganda lacks the resources to realise it.

Beyond the upwardly mobile urban areas, agriculture remains the single most important component of the Ugandan economy. Coffee, sugar, cotton and tea are the main export crops.

PEOPLE

Uganda might be a tiddler of a country by Africa's standards, but it's home to a kaleidoscopic range of tribes. The Buganda make up about 20% of Uganda's population and are predominant around Kampala; other tribes who have played a principal part in shaping the country include the Lango, Acholi and Teso. The Karamojong, who inhabit the northeast, are cattle herders and rustlers, and they are viewed with fear and awe by most Ugandans. Pygmies live in the forests of the west.

There is a sizable community of Asians in Uganda, who first settled here during the days of the British Empire. Expelled by Idi Amin in 1971, they were invited by President Museveni to return and reclaim their property, driving the Ugandan economy forward.

ARTS

The Last King of Scotland by Giles Foden (1998) is a must for every visitor planning a trip to Uganda. This bestseller chronicles the experience of Idi Amin's personal doctor, as he slowly finds himself becoming confidant to the dictator.

The Abyssinian Chronicles, by Ugandanborn Moses Isegawa (2001), tells the story of a young Ugandan coming of age during the turbulent years of Idi Amin and the civil war. Chameleon is one of the most popular

local artists, combining rap and traditional

chanting in a cutting-edge combination. For

more on music in Uganda, check out www

.musicuganda.com. Kampala is the best place to catch live music. Best of all is the jam session at the National Theatre every Monday – see p803 for more details.

The Ndere Troupe (p803), a group of dancers made up from a kaleidoscope of tribes in Uganda, perform traditional dances from every region of the country.

ENVIRONMENT

Uganda has everything from semidesert in the north to snow-covered mountains in the west. It has a lush landscape, thanks to Lake Victoria and the Victoria Nile River.

The tropical heat is tempered by the altitude, which averages more than 1000m. Much of Uganda is fairly flat, but there are sizeable mountains to the east (Mt Elgon) and the southwest (the Virunga volcanoes). The Rwenzori Mountains are the highest mountain range in Africa and Mt Stanley the highest peak in the country at 5109m, located in western Uganda on the border with the DRC.

Uganda is home to more than half the world's mountain gorilla population, a rich variety of other primates and a healthy population of most of the bigger African mammals. Rhinos have been reintroduced, as they were utterly wiped out during the civil war.

There are more than a thousand species of bird in a country the size of Britain, making it one of the best birding destinations in the world. Favourites include the incredible shoebill stork and the crested crane, the national bird.

Uganda's national parks and reserves are well on their way back. There's less wildlife than in parks in Kenya and Tanzania, but there are also fewer travellers and the entry fees aren't bad compared with those of the bigger neighbours. Entry to Bwindi, Mgahinga, Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth National Parks costs US\$25 per person for the first day, US\$35 for two days and US\$50 for three days or more; Lake Mburo, Mt Elgon and Semuliki National Parks cost US\$20/25/30; and for all other protected areas it is US\$10 per day. Locally registered cars are USh20,000 per visit, motorcycles USh10,000. International Student Identity Card holders get a 25% discount on the entry fees.

With its relatively low population density and lower numbers of wildlife, Uganda lacks many of the environmental pressures faced by other countries in East Africa. The ecosystems of the national parks are generally in good shape, and conditions are ideal for wildlife populations to explode – not literally, there was enough of that in the bad old days.

FOOD & DRINK

Local food is pretty basic, usually involving *matoke* (mashed plantains) or *posho* (*ugali* or maize meal), but fish fans will enjoy the tilapia and Nile perch. Indian restaurants offer the best selection of vegetarian food beyond Kampala.

Popular local beers include light Bell and stronger Nile Special, and locally brewed Tusker and Castle are also available. A 500ml bottle costs around USh2000 to USh4000 depending on where you are drinking. Waragi is the local hard stuff, a little like gin, so it's best with a splash of tonic.

KAMPALA

🕿 041 / pop 1.2 million

Kampala is a compelling and confident city, the centre of political intrigue, commercial activity and intellectual excellence in Uganda. Today's forward-looking capital is vastly different from the battered city to which it was reduced to in the 1980s. Modern buildings have sprung up all over the city, and old, dilapidated ones are slowly being renovated. But it's not only the buildings that are in better shape; there is a confidence about Kampala residents today that is infectious. Kampala cuts it.

ORIENTATION

Like Rome, Kampala is said to be built on seven hills. Nakasero Hill, encompassing the city centre, is where much of the action is. Between Nakasero and the lower part of the city is Kampala's main thoroughfare, Kampala Rd (which turns into Jinja Rd to the east and Bombo Rd to the west). Here you'll find banks, the main post office, lots of shops and a few hotels and restaurants. Below Kampala Rd are a hotchpotch of shops, markets, budget hotels and restaurants, and the bus station and taxi parks.

INFORMATION

For up-to-the-minute information on Kampala, grab a copy of the free magazine *The Eye*, which is available at hotels and restaurants around the city.

Bookshops

Aristoc (Map p802; 23 Kampala Rd) Overflowing with useful books and maps on Uganda, East Africa and beyond.

Internet Access

Email and internet services have sprung up all over town in recent years. Prices range from USh2000 to USh4000 per hour. **Web City Café** (Map p802; Kimathi Ave) The biggest operation in town, with 30 terminals and a fast connection.

Medical Services International Medical Centre (Map p802;

 G 341291, emergency 077 741291; iclark@infocom.co .ug;
 24hr) Opposite Hotel Equatoria, this clinic offers a wide range of professional medical services, including dependable malaria smears.

Surgery (Map p800; 256003, emergency 075 756003; stockley@imul.com; 2 Acacia Ave) Run by Dr Stockley, this highly reliable clinic stocks self-test malaria kits for those heading into remote areas for long periods.

Money

Kampala Rd and the streets parallel to it heading up the hill are where most of the banks and many foreign exchange bureaus are located. **Barclays Bank** (Map p802; 230972; 16 Kampala Rd) Credit card cash advances of UK£500 per day; also good for small US dollar bills.

Centenary Rural Development Bank (Map p802; 251276; 7 Entebbe Rd) The place to organise a Western Union money transfer.

Standard Chartered Bank (Map p802; 258211; 5 Speke Rd) International ATMs available here, which dispense USh400,000 per day.

Post & Telephone

Main post office (Map p802; cnr Kampala & Speke Rds; ∑ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Offers postal and telecom services.

Tourist Information

Tourism Uganda (Map p802; ⓐ 342196; www.visit uganda.com; 15 Kimathi Ave; ⓑ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) The nerve centre of tourism promotion in Uganda, staff here are quite well informed. Uganda Community Tourism Association (Ucota; ⓑ 501866; ucota@africaonline.co.ug; Kabalagala) Geared

towards independent travellers, Ucota members operate a number of community camping grounds on the periphery of Uganda's national parks. It's southeast of the centre. Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA; Map p800; U GA N D A

☎ 346287; www.uwa.or.ug; 7 Kira Rd; ♡ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Looks after the country's national parks and protected areas. Near Uganda Museum.

Travel Agencies

Let's Go Travel (Map p800; 346667; www.letsgo safari.com; 1st fl, Garden City Complex) Part of a global empire.

Speedwing Travel Bureau (Map p802; 231052; rcm@infocom.co.ug; 1 Kimathi Ave) For airline tickets, this is a reliable stop for fair fares.

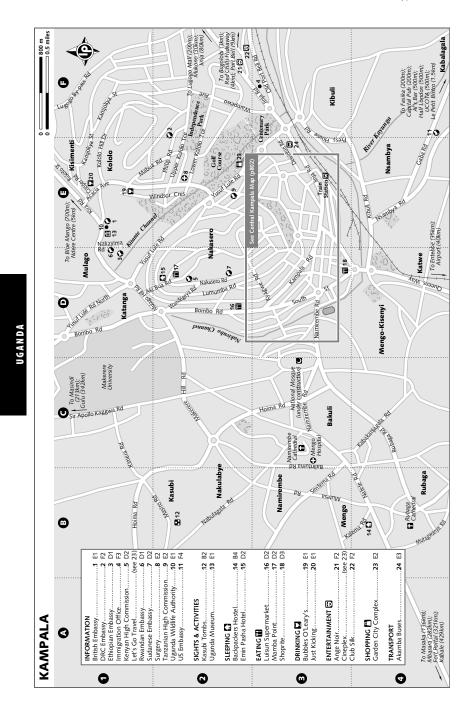
DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Kampala is a pretty safe city as far as capitals in Africa go. See p1104 for more on staying safe in Africa's biggest cities.

Beggars are a common sight in central Kampala, but they are not very persistent. However, if you do get harassed, try to be patient as there isn't much of a social security system in Uganda.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The sights in Kampala are no great shakes compared with what's on offer in the rest of Uganda.



Trumpeted as the largest thatched mausoleum in Africa, the Kasubi Tombs (Ssekabaka's Tombs; Map p800; admission USh3000; 🕑 8am-6pm) are the huge traditional reed and bark-cloth buildings of the kabakas of the Buganda people. Sacred to Bugandans, to the uninitiated they are less inspiring. The tombs are on Kasubi Hill just off Masiro Rd; take a minibus taxi from the Old Taxi Park (ask for Hoima Rd).

Uganda Museum (Map p800; Kira Rd; admission USh3000; 🕑 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun) was probably worth a visit during its early years, but three decades of neglect make it one for museum addicts only.

Entebbe Botanical Gardens (admission USh1000) is a lush escape from the bustle of Kampala. Locals claim that some of the Johnny Weismuller Tarzan films were made here, but don't expect to find Cheetah cavorting in the trees. See p804 for details on getting to Entebbe.

Located just below the Imperial Botanical Beach Hotel in Entebbe, Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (2 320520; www.ugandawildlifecentre .com; admission USh10,000; 🕑 9am-6.30pm, last admission 5.30pm) is primarily a rescue centre. Star attractions include the first rhinos in Uganda since the war, several chimpanzees and shoebill storks.

If you just can't get enough of chimps, arrange a visit to the Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary, a sanctuary located on an island in Lake Victoria. Nicknamed 'Chimp Island', it is a popular day trip from Kampala. The chimps here can be viewed during feeding times (11am and 3pm). Wild Frontiers (🖻 321479, 077-502155; www.wildfrontiers.co.uq) is the main booking agent. It costs US\$260 for the boat for up to four people and US\$65 per person for additional passengers, all including entry, and takes about one hour.

SLEEPING

Backpackers Hostel (Map p800; 20 077-430587; www .backpackers.co.ug; Natete Rd, Lunguja; camp sites USh5000, dm USh7000-10,000, d USh35,000-45,000, s/d without bathroom USh14,000/25,000; 🛄) The original budget hostel in Kampala is still going strong. Set in huge grounds, it is an escape from the bustle of the city. There are some attractive bandas (thatched-roof huts) and some self-contained doubles with hot water. Tasty, inexpensive meals are available. There's also a pool table and affordable internet access. To get here, take a Natete minibus taxi from the New Taxi Park.

Red Chilli Hideaway (223903; www.redchillihideaway.com; camp sites USh6000, dm USh9000, tw from USh22,000, d from USh35,000; 🛄) An oasis in the city, Red Chilli is a great spot that gets much of the overland truck business. It also has twobedroom cottages which are good for a group. There is decent grub throughout the day and a lively bar. Plus free internet access! To get here, take a minibus from Kampala Rd to Bugolobi and get off at the Chilli sign.

Blue Mango (🕿 543481; www.bluemango -uganda.com; Old Kira Rd; dm US\$6, r US\$45-60, s/d without bathroom US\$20/25, cottages from US\$60-70; 🛄 😰) Looking for the atmosphere of a lodge in the city? Look no further, as this place has lush gardens, soft lighting and a swimming pool. All rooms are attractively decorated, although the cheapest have shared bathroom. Book ahead, as it is popular. The restaurant and bar here always draws a crowd.

Tourist Hotel (Map p802; 251471; www.touristhotel .net; Dastur St; s US\$25-30, d US\$35-40) This place offers high standards at midrange prices, making it good value. It overlooks the lively Nakasero Market and has executive-style rooms. Breakfast is an extra US\$5.

Speke Hotel (Map p802; ☐ 259221; www.spekehotel .com; Nile Ave; s/d US\$95/100; ☑ □) One of Kampala's oldest hotels, it was recently given a major face-lift to add creature comforts to age and grace. All rooms now have air-con, wooden floors, satellite TV and minibar.

Emin Pasha Hotel (Map p800; 236977; www .eminpasha.com; 27 Aki Bua Rd; s/d from US\$220/250; 🔀 🔲 😰) Kampala's first boutique hotel is beautifully housed in an elegant old colonial property that has been thoughtfully restored. The 20 rooms are the best in the city, blending atmosphere and luxury.

EATING

Antonio's (Map p802; Kampala Rd; meals USh2000-4000) The best of the bunch, serving Indian, Mexican and Ugandan favourites at top speed. Curries and burritos are cheap, and portions are pretty large.

1000 Cups Coffee House (Map p802; 18 Buganda Rd; (8am-9pm) For a coffee kick from Brazil to Vietnam and everything in between, caffeine cravers should head here. There is also a menu of light bites and sweet pastries.

Fasika (268571; Gaba Rd; dishes USh5000-7000) One of the best Ethiopian restaurants in Kampala, it's just over the road from the crazy Capital Pub. The menu here includes

.(see 39)

.25 C1

.26 B2

.27 C2

.28 B2

.29 C2 ..30 C2

.(see 30)

..32 D2

.33 A2

.34 A2

.35 B2

.(see 7)

.36 C2

.37 C2

38 B1

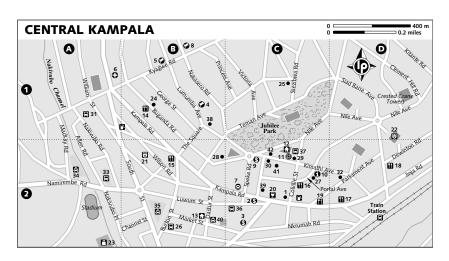
39 C2

.40 B2

.41 C2

.42 C2

(see 32



a tasty Ethiopian platter with a splatter of everything.

Masala Chaat House (Map p802; 🖻 255710; 3 Dewinton Rd) The number of Indians eating here says something about the authentic flavours. It serves a tasty *thali* (a traditional set meal) for US\$3.

this is the best Chinese restaurant, with a full selection of favourites, including fried crispy prawns with ginger and garlic. Haandi (Map p802; 🖻 346283; www.haandi -restaurants.com; 7 Kampala Rd; curries from USh7000) Home to some of the best curries in the world,

seriously, this is a classy eatery that offers North Indian frontier cuisine. The tilapia (fish) curries are divine.

Le Petit Bistro (Gaba Rd: steaks from USh8000) A must for steak-lovers, this little place that turns out mouth-watering meat at affordable prices. It can take two hours for food to arrive - be patient and let the drinks flow. It's southeast of the centre.

Mamba Point (Map p800; 🖻 077-243225; 22 Aki Bua Rd; mains USh15,000-30,000; 🕑 Mon-Sat) For the best in Italian dining, make for Mamba Point, where the pasta is home-made and the menu as close to the homeland as you might hope to find in Africa.

Some of the cheapest places to eat in Kampala are the ubiquitous takeaways that dot the city centre, offering such dishes as chicken, meat, sausages, fish and chips, as well as samosas and chapatis. Prices range from USh1500

to USh3000 for a meal, but know that grease features heavily in every dish. For a quick fix, Nando's (Map p802; Kampala Rd) and Chicken Inn (Map p802; Kampala Rd), both in the same building, turn out chicken in every size and shape at reasonable prices (USh4000 to USh8000). Vasili's Bakery (Map p802; Kampala Rd), located in the same strip, serves the best range of pies and real cakes in the city.

Many of the markets around the city have local food stalls. For USh1000, they usually offer a heaped plate of matoke, Irish potatoes, groundnut sauce, beans, greens and meat or fish.

Self-caterers should head to Shoprite (Map p800; Clocktower Roundabout), a huge supermarket with goodies galore, and Luisun Supermarket (Map p800; 11 Bombo Rd), an Italian delicatessen is crammed to the ceiling with cheeses, salamis, and home-made cakes and biscuits.

DRINKING

Kampala rocks. The nightlife is something to relish, with a host of decent bars and clubs throughout the city. Friday and Saturday are the big nights out.

All of the most popular places to stay have bars: Red Chilli is pretty busy and attracts a few regular expats, as well as travellers; the lively Backpackers has a leafy garden and a popular pool table; and Blue Mango is the place to be on weekends, when the bar steps it up a gear. The Speke Hotel has a popular terrace bar out the front, as well as the raucous Rock Garden.

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Dutch Embassy(see 38)	Vasili's Bakery(see 19)	Jaguar Executive
French Embassy5 B1		Coaches
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Centre	Rock Garden(see 12)	KLM
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		Airways
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Tourist Hotel13 B2	Air Burundi(see 37)	United Airlines

Slow Boat Pub (Map p802; 255647; Kampala Rd) This is much more of a local drinkers' bar than the location might suggest. Hang out for an afternoon session and watch Kampala life go by.

Rock Garden (Map p802; Speke Hotel) One of the definitive stops on the Kampala nightshift, this place is heaving with people from 9pm. Prostitutes hang out here in numbers and pickpocketing is not unheard of on a busy night.

Just Kicking (Map p800; Cooper Rd) The top sports bar in Kampala that helped make Kisimenti the kickin' place it is today. A sign above the front door reads: 'No hookers. Props and locks welcome.' Well, that's the idea, anvwav.

Bubbles O'Learys (Map p800; 🖻 031-263815; 30 Windsor (res) Kampala's contribution to the growing legion of Irish pubs, Bubbles O'Learys is one of the more authentic offerings. This is the 'in' place to be on a Friday and draws a big crowd.

Gaba Rd in Kabalagala, southeast of the centre, is another popular late-night scene. Al's Bar (Gaba Rd) is legendary in Kampala, although notorious might be a better word. You are guaranteed to find some people propping up the bar into the daylight hours of the next morning. Right next door is the Half London (Gaba Rd), one of the most famous addresses in Kampala for live music from Thursday to Saturday.

ENTERTAINMENT

Musicians Club 1989 (Map p802; National Theatre, Said Barre Ave; admission free; 🕑 7-10pm Mon) Kampala musicians get together every Monday at the National Theatre for informal jam sessions and live performances. This is a must if you Barre Ave; admission free; 🕑 7-10pm Mon) Kampala are in the city.

Those with their dancing shoes can head to Ange Noir (Map p800; admission USh2000-10,000; 9pm-5am) or **Club Silk** (Map p800; admission USh2000-10,000; 🕑 9pm-5am), both just off Jinja Rd in the industrial area of town. These are the spots to meet the local movers and shakers.

The Ndere Troupe is composed of members of the many ethnic groups in Uganda and has a new base in Ntinda, the Ndere Centre (288123; www.ndere.com; Kisaasi Rd). Dance performances take place every Sunday at 6pm and cost just USh3000.

The leading cinema group in Uganda is Cineplex (USh11,000; Wilson Rd Map p802; Garden City Complex Map p800).

SHOPPING

Owino Market (Map p802) is a good spot to sniff around. It has an enormous selection of second-hand clothes and a maze of stalls selling everything but the kitchen sink - not very easy to fit in a backpack anyway. Craft shopping is less of a pull than in Kenya or southern Africa, but for the best browsing, try Exposure Africa (Map p802; 13 Buganda Rd).

There are two big shopping centres in the city. **Garden City Complex** (Map p800; Yusuf Lule Rd) has several floors of shops, plus a cinema, bowling alley and food court. The newer **Lugogo Mall** (Jinja Rd), northeast of the centre, includes a Barclays Bank, and Game, a huge DIY and household shop from South Africa.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

For details of the airlines flying in and out of Entebbe International Airport, see p820.

Both **Eagle Air** (Map p802; ^(C) 344292; www.eagle uganda.com; 11 Portal Ave) and **United Airlines** (Map p802; ^(C) 349841; Kimathi Ave), no relation, offer domestic flights to far-flung towns in the north, such as Arua, Gulu and Moroto.

Boat

See p821 for information about Tanzania Railways ferry services between Port Bell, near Kampala, and Mwanza (Tanzania).

Bus

UGANDA

Well-founded rumours suggest that the bus station and taxi parks will be shifted to the outskirts of the city during the lifetime of this book. From the current chaotic bus station (Map p802) between Allen and Nakivubo Rds, buses go in all directions all over Uganda. Popular destinations include Fort Portal (USh10,000, five hours), Jinja (USh4000, 1½ hours), Kabale (USh15,000, six hours), Masaka (USSh5000, two hours), Masindi (USh9000, 3½ hours) and Mbale (USh10,000, three hours).

Post buses depart at 8am daily, except Sunday, from the **main post office** (Map p802; 236436; 35 Kampala Rd) for Kabale (USh11,000, six hours), Fort Portal (USh10,000, 10 hours), Kasese

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

There used to be regular reports of illegal gorilla tracking in Uganda. When permits are selling like hot cakes, tourists have been known to cut corners by bribing rangers into multiple visits each day. This is not only illegal but also potentially life threatening for the gorillas: it increases their stress levels, which in turn decreases their resistance to disease. Do not attempt to track illegally as you will be contributing to the demise of the highly endangered mountain gorilla. (USh11,000, eight hours) and other major destinations.

For details on international bus services to Kenya and Rwanda, see p821 and p821.

Kampala has two parks for minibus taxis: the Old Taxi Park (Map p802), on the triangle formed by Burton, Luwum and South Sts, which serves all parts of the city and country to the east; and the New Taxi Park (Map p802), on the corner of Mackay and Namirembe Rds, which serves destinations to the west and north. Prices for minibus taxis are about the same as the buses, but they tend to be a bit slower.

GETTING AROUND

Entebbe International Airport is 35km from Kampala. From the Old Taxi Park, minibus taxis travel between Kampala and Entebbe town (USh2000), connecting with minibus shuttles to the airport (USh500). A private taxi from the airport to Kampala costs about US\$20; it's a little cheaper to get out to the airport.

The ubiquitous white minibus taxis for trips around Kampala mostly leave from the Old Taxi Park. To find the minibus taxi you want, simply ask around – people are generally very helpful. However, double-decker buses will soon be introduced, and the minibuses banned from the city centre. Private taxis are unmetered and start from USh5000 for trips in the centre, more at night or into the suburbs. *Boda-bodas* (motorcycle taxis) charge USh1500 around the city centre.

WESTERN UGANDA

BWINDI IMPENETRABLE NATIONAL PARK

Bwindi National Park (331 sq km), aka the Impenetrable Forest, is home to half of the world's known mountain gorillas, about 330 of them – there's just one Bwindi gorilla for every 20 million people! Penetrating the Impenetrable Forest is no picnic, as the terrain is steep and the foliage unforgiving, but what a reward. All the hardships are forgotten in an instant with the first glimpse of the gorillas in their mountain kingdom. No bars, no cars – this is not a safari park but their world, and we are their privileged guests. Seeing the gorillas is one of Africa's most memorable experiences: don't miss it. Deep in the southwest of Uganda, the park is real rainforest and it rains a hell of a lot, so come prepared.

Activities

If US\$375 to track gorillas makes you want to cry, or you've got some extra time, try a nature walk around parts of Bwindi forest to enjoy the birdlife, flora and other wildlife (perhaps chimps – but not gorillas). These guided walks cost US\$5/10 per person for a half-/full day.

Sleeping & Eating

There are far more beds than gorilla permits available in Bwindi, but prices are higher than elsewhere in Uganda.

Buhoma Community Rest Camp (camp sites US\$3, bandas per person US\$10) In a beautiful setting right next to park headquarters, this is the most popular budget deal at Bwindi. All profits go towards funding community-development projects. *Bandas* come in a variety of shapes and sizes. There is also a small canteen and bar here.

Volcances Safaris ((2) 041-346464; www.volcances safaris.com; s/d full board US\$240/360) For a dramatic setting this camp is hard to beat, situated opposite the wall of green that is the Impenetrable Forest. Accommodation is in luxury *bandas* and rates include meals and drinks.

Gorilla Forest Camp (© 041-340290; www.sanctu arylodges.com; full board per person US\$250) Run by the bespoke travel company Abercrombie & Kent, this is the ultimate jungle camp, offering opulent tents complete with grand beds, luxury bathrooms and forest views.

Some travellers end up spending a night in nearby Butogota before walking to the park headquarters at Buhoma the next day. **Butogota Travellers Inn** (s/d USh20,000/30,000) has become a little ambitious with its pricing, so make for **Pineapple Lodge** (s/d USh6000/8000) – it's more basic, but has a *basic* grasp of room pricing.

TRACKING GORILLAS

The chances of encountering gorillas are excellent, but the time spent with them is limited to exactly one hour. Only eight people can visit each of the four habituated gorilla groups, so the demand for places often exceeds supply; head for Rwanda or the DRC if the waiting list is too long. All bookings should be made in advance through the UWA office in Kampala (see p799). There are sometimes no vacancies for months, so it might be necessary to shop around for tour operators or hostels. If you just turn up at the park headquarters at Buhoma, and you're willing to hang around a few days, there might be last-minute cancellations – but there are absolutely no guarantees.

The cost of a permit to track gorillas is US\$375 per person, including the park entry fee.

Rules of Engagement

Before meeting the mountain dwellers of East Africa, all visitors must observe the following gorilla etiquette:

- Anyone with any illness cannot track the gorillas. Shared biology means shared diseases. There's a full refund for those who are unwell.
- Eating and smoking anywhere near the gorillas is forbidden they might take up the habit.
- Flash photography is another no-no turn the autoflash off or you'll be mighty unpopular with both rangers and gorillas!

Also, remember:

- Speak quietly, and don't point at the gorillas they might become paranoid.
- Leave *nothing* in the park; take out everything you bring in.
- Stay very close together, with the guide. Keep a few metres away from the gorillas.

And finally:

As hard as it seems to stand still when faced by two tonnes of charging silverback, never ever run away...crouch down until he cools off.

Getting There & Away

A direct Silverline bus travels every day in each direction between Kampala and Butogota (USh18,000, 12 hours), usually departing very early. Check at the bus station the day before.

Irregular pick-ups and minibus taxis connect Kabale with Butogota (USh9000, about three hours) on Tuesday and Friday, but other days are a nightmare.

From Butogota to the park headquarters at Buhoma (17km), public transport is scarce, but is most likely to run in either direction on market day (Thursday). Pick-ups (USh25,000) or motorcycles (USh10,000) can be chartered, which is money well spent to avoid a night in Butogota or a 17km walk.

FORT PORTAL **a** 0493

There may be no fort, but this is definitely a portal to places that offer sublime scenery, abundant nature and genuine adventures. Explore the beautiful crater lakes in the area, track the chimpanzees in Kibale Forest National Park and drop down into the Semliki Valley, with its wildlife, hot springs and Pygmy villages.

The town of Fort Portal is lush and liveable, and one of the nicer urban centres in Uganda. Located at the northeastern end of the Rwenzori Mountains, it is the heartland of a verdant tea-growing area.

Information

Kabarole Tours (22183; ktours@infocom.co.ug; 8am-6pm) A reliable local tour operator located just off the main roundabout in town. Tour prices are high for just one or two people, so gather a group to share the cost. Nearby national parks, plus affordable minitreks into the foothills of the Rwenzoris.

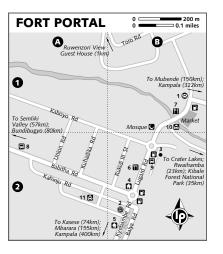
Post office (Lugard Rd)

Rafrisa Info-Services (Kyebambe Rd; per min USh50) The best internet connection in town

Sleeping & Eating

Most people only pass through Fort, heading to the crater lakes or nearby national parks where a good range of accommodation awaits.

Continental Hotel (🕿 077-484842; Lugard Rd; d USh20,000, s/d without bathroom USh8000/10,000) It is not ageing as gracefully as some, but it remains the best of the cheaper places. It offers clean rooms around a courtyard and has a small restaurant.



Rwenzori Travellers Inn (🖻 077-500273; Kyebambe Rd; s/d USh25,000/35,000) A modern hotel in the centre of town, rooms here are clean and include hot-water bathrooms. Downstairs is one of the best restaurants in town and a lively local bar.

Ruwenzori View Guest House (22102: ruwview@ africaonline.co.ug; s/d incl breakfast Sh42,000/55,000) A blissful little guesthouse on the outskirts of town, Ruwenzori View offers spectacular outlooks of the mountains. There are also some cheaper rooms available with shared bathroom.

Gardens (22925; Lugard Rd; meals US\$2-4) One of the best restaurants in town. It serves some good Indian staples, including a filling vegetable curry, and all of the mochomo (barbecued meat) you could imagine and some you perhaps couldn't.

Self-caterers heading to Kibale Forest or the crater lakes should check out Andrew Brothers Stores (Lugard Rd), a little supermarket with plenty of products for the provinces.

Getting There & Away

From the taxi park on Kahinju Rd, there are frequent departures to Kasese (USh5000, two hours), among other places. Kalita Transport (
 077-590067; 14 Lugard Rd) has regular services to Kampala (USh10,000, four hours). From the bus station on Babitha Rd, a daily bus runs to Kabale (USh15,000, eight hours) via Kasese and Mbarara. The post bus leaves for Kampala daily (except Sunday) at 6.30am from the post office on Lugard Rd.

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Kabarole Tours	3
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EATING () Andrew Brothers Stores Gardens	

B1

B2

B2

B2

B2

B2

B1

TRANSPORT

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Taxi Park11	A2

To Kamwenge (for Kibale Forest National Park) and Kasenda or Rwaihamba (for Lake Nkuruba), minibus taxis leave from near the bridge on Lugard Rd.

LAKE NKURUBA

The winner among the many contenders for title of most beautiful crater lake, this is still surrounded entirely by dense tropical forest. Lake Nkuruba, 25km south of Fort Portal, is excellent for swimming and hiking.

Lake Nkuruba Community Camp Site (🕿 077-814327; dm/lakeside cottage USh10,000/25,000, camp sites USh5000) Everyone loves this place. Facilities are basic, but the staff here are very friendly and the setting is perfect for a few days of relaxation. Filling meals (USh5000) are served and basic supplies are available in nearby Rwaihamba. Bicycles are available for USh5000.

Minibus taxis that travel from Fort Portal to Kasenda and Rwaihamba (there are plenty on Monday and Thursday) pass Lake Nkuruba (USh2000, 45 minutes). The lake is signposted on the left just before Rwaihamba.

KIBALE FOREST NATIONAL PARK

The **chimpanzees** are the stars at Kibale. There are hundreds and hundreds here, plus great hordes of monkeys, giving this small national park (admission 1/2/3 or more days US\$20/30/50) one of the highest primate population densities in the world. It's not as strenuous as tracking the gorillas, but you don't get as up close and personal either. The chimps tend to keep a safe distance in the tall trees, chomping on fruit and defecating at will, but it's still a fascinating experience for the uninitiated. An

excitable chimp makes mountain gorillas look decidedly shy.

From the park headquarters at Kanyanchu, guided walks in search of the chimps (3km to 5km, two to four hours) can be arranged along well-marked tracks. The walks start at 8am (the better time) and 3pm and cost a hefty US\$70 per person, plus park fees, making Murchison Falls National Park (p817) the better value place to track chimps these days.

BIGODI WETLAND SANCTUARY

A cheaper pursuit is the Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary, a community tourism project established to protect the Magombe Swamp, a haven for 137 bird species. Guided walks (USh10,000) depart from the visitors centre on demand and take three hours. The sanctuary is just off the road between Fort Portal and Kamwenge, about 6km southeast of Kanyanchu.

Sleeping & Eating

Safari Hotel (camp sites USh6000, bandas per person USh8000) A cheerful little spot in Nkingo village, about 6km from the park headquarters towards Bigodi village. Very basic, but a warm elcome is assured. Good food. Kanyanchu Park Headquarters (camp sites per person welcome is assured. Good food.

USh10,000, s/d banda USh20,000/30,000) In the heart of things, this place has smart bandas, a 'sky' tree house and tasty food supplied by a local women's group.

John Tinka's Homestay (🖻 077-886865; homestay USh30,000) Homestays are a new community tourism activity in Uganda. Stay with John Tinka's family in Bigodi village for the genuine Uganda experience. Rates include all meals.

Getting There & Away

Minibus taxis travelling from Fort Portal to Kamwenge pass the park headquarters at Kanvanchu (USh3000, 45 minutes) and Bigodi (USh4000, one hour)

SEMULIKI NATIONAL PARK

Semuliki is part of the vast Ituri forest, where the steaming jungle of the DRC collides with the higher plateau that is Uganda. The main attractions of Semuliki are the hot springs near Sempaya and the (commercialised) Pygmy villages near the village of Ntandi, a few kilometres before Bundibugyo. The best part of any trip around the park, however, is the magnificent views over the rainforest and savannah of the Semuliki Valley and DRC beyond.

At the park headquarters at Ntandi, there are **camp sites** (camp sites USh10,000). There are also two bandas at Mpora Rural Family (🖻 0493-22636; mmorence@yahoo.com; banda per person US\$10), a homestay near Kichwamba Technical College. The money funds a local orphanage.

Minibus taxis travel between Fort Portal and Bundibugyo and can drop passengers at Ntandi. Otherwise, charter a vehicle with a driver from Fort Portal, rent a motorcycle or take an excursion offered by Kabarole Tours (p806).

KASESE

a 0483

Kasese is the uninspiring base for an epic adventure in the Rwenzori Mountains. Otherwise forget it, as it is a hot and dusty boom-and-bust town.

Information

Centenary Rural Development Bank (Portal Rd) Represents Western Union for those that suddenly decide they must conquer the mountains but lack the US\$567 required.

Rwenzori Mountaineering Services (RMS;

a 44936, 078-325431; rwenzorims@yahoo.co.uk; PO Box 33, Kasese) Located beneath the Saad Hotel, this is the information and booking office (open daily) for trekking or climbing the Rwenzoris (right).

Rwenzori National Park Office (Rwenzori Rd) More information on climbing the mountains. Most punters pay their fees in advance at the UWA headquarters in Kampala (see p799), but it is also possible to pay here.

Sleeping & Eating

Ataco Holiday Inn (Stanley St; s/d USh7000/11,000) Clearly not part of the Holiday Inn hotel chain, but it is a clean and affordable option.

Saad Hotel (2 44139; Rwenzori Rd; r in old/new wing USh17,000/27,000; 🕄) The original travellers' hang-out for those venturing into the Rwenzoris; the new wing is worth the extra if only for the carpets. There's a good restaurant but no alcohol!

Mariana Hotel (🖻 077-493414; 17 Stanley St; s/d USh17.500/35.000) When it comes to clean and comfortable midrange hotels, the Mariana is the pick of the pack. All of the well-tended rooms here come with a bathroom and a balconv.

Cheap eats are easy to find in Kasese. Good Times Restaurant (Stanley St; meals USh2000), opposite the Saad Hotel, knocks together huge portions of cheap Ugandan standards.

Titi's Supermarket (Rwenzori Rd) is the best stocked place in Kasese for those heading into the Rwenzoris.

Getting There & Away

From the bus/taxi station, or from individual bus offices along the main streets in the town centre, buses go daily to Kampala (USh15,000, eight hours), via Masaka and Mbarara, and to Kabale (USh12,000, five hours). Minibus taxis frequently leave for Fort Portal (USh3000, two hours) and Mbarara (USh6000, three hours) from the roundabout to the southeast, near the Esso petrol station.

RWENZORI NATIONAL PARK

The fabled, mist-covered Mountains of the Moon, the Rwenzoris stretch for about 100km, and include several mountains that are permanently covered by snow and glaciers. The highest peak is Margherita (5109m) on Mt Stanley.

Trekking the Rwenzoris has never been as popular with travellers as Mt Kilimanjaro and Mt Kenya because trekking conditions are tough, and the mountains have a welldeserved reputation for being very wet at times. As it says on the wall of Bujuku hut, 'Jesus came here to learn how to walk on water. After five days, anyone could do it.' But those who take up the challenge are rewarded with magnificent scenery, including tropical vegetation that yields to other-worldly giant groundsel and glistening glaciers. And unlike Kili or Kenya, you'll probably have it all to yourself; gazing over the DRC from the heights, you'll feel like Sir Edmund Hillary.

Trekkina

Contact the UWA office in Kampala (see p799) or the RMS office in Kasese (see left): UWA administer the US\$567 charge for the seven-day climb, and RMS controls all facilities in the park and organises the treks.

A six-day trek is the absolute minimum set by park rules, but seven or eight days is better, including one or two days at the top huts. Starting in Nyakalengija, the route winds past the Guy Yeoman Hut (3450m), the Kitandara Hut (3990m), the Bujuk Hut (3900m) and John Mate Hut (3350m). The best times to trek are between late December and late February and from mid-June to mid-August. Even at these times the higher reaches are often enveloped in mist. Good

all-weather clothing is required, but RMS rent a lot of gear. Be aware of the dangers of highaltitude sickness.

Getting There & Away

The easiest way to access the Rwenzoris is to catch a minibus (USh1500) from Kasese to the park headquarters at Ibanda.

KABALE

a 0486

Dubbed the 'Switzerland of Africa' by tourist brochures and travellers alike, although there weren't many volcanoes in the Alps at last count. This southwestern corner of Uganda is a stunner, however, with intricately terraced hills and fjordlike lakes. Kabale is Uganda's highest town (about 2000m) and it gets a touch chilly at night - don't forget the winter woollies.

Information

For the fuller flavour of Kabale, pick up a copy of the Lake Bunvoni & Kabale In Your Pocket guide (USh1000), available at the Home of Edirisa (p801).

Getting cash in Kabale has traditionally been tough. Most foreign exchange bureaus and banks offer terrible rates compared with Kampala, about 15% or so lower.

Byoona Amagara (Nyerere Ave; per min USh25) The cheapest internet access in town.

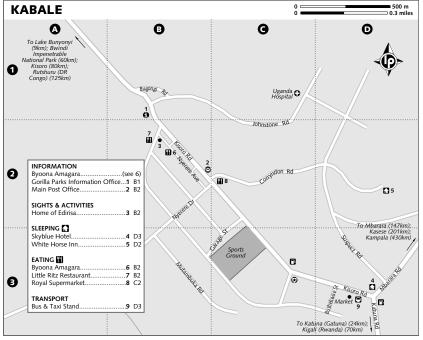
Gorilla Parks Information Office (Kisoro Rd) UWA staff here cannot book gorilla trips and are not in direct contact with either Bwindi or Mgahinga. Contact UWA in Kampala (see p799) to stay ahead. Main post office (Kisoro Rd)

Sleeping & Eating

Few travellers stay in Kabale with beautiful Lake Bunyonyi (p810) just a short hop away.

Home of Edirisa (2 077-558558; www.edirisa.org; dm/ s/d USh3000/5000/15,000; 🛄) Experience the novelty of staving in a museum, plus it's free entry for guests! The dorms are cheaper than most camping, while the bigger rooms include a aroom. Fachael. d great shakes and coffees in the s signposted all over town. Book ahead. Sky Blue Hotel (22154; Mbarara Rd; s/d Cono/12.000) This place is scrupulously clean, bathroom. Facilities include a book exchange, and great shakes and coffees in the little café. It's signposted all over town. Book ahead.

USh8000/12,000) This place is scrupulously clean,



and service includes towels and soap. All the rooms are named after the planets – if you are suffering from dodgy guts you might need to think about Uranus.

White Horse Inn (26010; fax 23717; Corryndon Rd; s/d USh68,000/85,000) Imperiously set on a hill overlooking the town, this is Kabale's most famous address. It's an attractive place with verdant gardens, but its furnishings could come straight out of a '70s porn flick.

Byoona Amagara (Nyerere Ave; meals USh3000-6000) The innovative menu here is one of the best beyond Kampala. Salad Caprese, *matokoe* with ginger and pizzas...save some space for the great desserts.

Little Ritz Restaurant (Nyerere Ave; meals from US\$2.50) The long-running Little Ritz has good service and memorable food, plus an attached bar that draws a football crowd.

Those planning to do a bit of self-catering at Bwindi or Lake Bunyonyi should make for **Royal Supermarket** (Kisoro Rd), which has a healthy stock.

Getting There & Away

Several buses go to Kampala (USh15,000, six hours) via Mbarara and Masaka early every morning from the bus and taxi stand next to the market. The post bus departs at 6.30am daily (except Sunday) for Kampala from the main post office on Kisoro Rd.

Buses to Kisoro (USh7000) depart at 10am and 4pm, passing over the Kanaba Gap with stunning views of Lake Bunyonyi and the Virunga volcanoes along the way.

For information about transport to Kigali (Rwanda), see p821.

LAKE BUNYONYI

Lake Bunyonyi looks like something straight out of *The Hobbit*, with terraced fields plunging into hidden bays and tiny islands dotted about. Guesthouses and locals have **dugout canoes** for rent, but practise before planning a *grand tour de Bunyonyi*, as many travellers end up going round and round in circles, known locally as the *muzungu* corkscrew.

Bunyonyi Overland Camp (☎ 0486-23741; highland@imul.com; camp sites USh6000, furnished tents s/d USh20,000/30,000, s/d r USh25,000/35,000, s/d cottage USh30,000/50,000; ⓐ) One of the most attractive camps in Uganda, the sculpted gardens and lakeside setting ensure this place is hugely popular. For those relying on shared facilities, the camp has the best toilets in Uganda and hot water. There is a lively restaurant and bar, although it can take an eternity for food to arrive.

Byoona Amagara ((2) 075-652788; www.lakebunyoni .net; camp sites USh3000, dm/r/geodome/cabin USh6000/ 8000/11,000/14,000) This place bills itself a backpacker's paradise, and it is hard to disagree given its blissful setting on Itambira island. All proceeds go towards supporting community projects. Inexpensive meals are available. To get here, take the Lake Bunyoni secondary school boat (USh7500, 12 minutes) or a dugout (USh2500, 50 minutes) from the Rutinda market pier.

Nature's Prime Island () 077-423215; natures primeisland@yahoo.co.uk; tents/cabins per person US\$32/37, both full board) Formerly Far Out Camp, Nature's Prime occupies a lovely little island opposite Overland. The cabins are Scandinavian-style and have lake views, while the tents are set on raised platforms. The bar-restaurant is a fine place to relax over a beer with great views across the lake.

To travel the 9km from Kabale to Lake Bunyonyi, catch a minibus taxi (best on Monday and Friday), charter a *boda-boda* or arrange a private taxi.

KISORO

Kisoro is a one-horse town at the southwestern tip of Uganda and a base for trips to Mgahinga National Park. However, on a clear day, the views of the Virunga chain of volcanoes are fantastic.

Mgahinga National Park Office ((a) 30098) is the place to inquire about visiting the gorillas.

Hotel Virunga (2) 30109; camp sites US\$3, dUSh30,000, s/d without bathroom USh8000/15,000) has really taken off with overland trucks now that the DRC is open for gorilla tracking once more. The camping area is attractive and the simple rooms are sensibly priced. Out front is a little restaurant that rocks on as a bar on busy nights.

Skyblue Hotel (a 30076; s/d USh8000/12,000) is a not-so-distant relative of the Kabale outfit of the same name. Super service for these prices and one of Kisoro's better restaurants.

Travellers Rest Hotel (Total: 30123; postmaster@ gorillatours.com; s/d US\$35/45) is a hotel with a history. Originally set up by the 'father' of gorilla tourism, Walter Baumgartel, Dian Fossey stayed here regularly. The rooms have elegant décor and hot water on tap. The restaurant has the best menu in town. **Horizon Coaches** ((2) 077 469774) has three buses a day to Kampala (USh18,000, departing between 4.30am and 9am, nine hours). There are plenty of minibus taxis to Kabale (USh7000, two hours).

To arrange transport to Mgahinga, contact the national park office or one of the hotels.

MGAHINGA GORILLA NATIONAL PARK

When it comes to beautiful backdrops and gorillas in the mist, Mgahinga leaves Bwindi trailing as the jagged Virunga volcanoes are Africa at its biggest and best. Small park (34 sq km), big personality – this is the place for fans of voluptuous vistas and brooding volcanoes. Contiguous with Parc National des Volcans in Rwanda and Parc National des Virunga in the DRC, together they form the Virunga Conservation Area (420 sq km), home to half of the world's mountain gorillas.

Activities TRACKING GORILLAS

The Mgahinga gorillas have been on an extended vacation in Rwanda and show no obvious signs of returning. You can't follow, even with a passport, so chances of seeing the gorillas here are lower than in Bwindi, the DRC or Rwanda. Should they return, reservations to visit the gorillas must be made at UWA headquarters in Kampala (see p799). The cost is US\$375, including park fees, a ranger and armed guards. Eight visitors per day leave the park headquarters at Ntebeko Camp, 12km from Kisoro, at 8am.

GOLDEN MONKEY TRACKING

If the gorillas continue to be AWOL, then golden monkeys will have to take up the challenge of luring tourists to Mgahinga. These are beautiful creatures and are quite playful. It costs US\$20 to track them.

HIKING

Mt Muhavura (4127m), Mt Sabinyo (3669m) and Mt Gahinga (3437m) can be climbed in a day for US\$40 per person, including a ranger/ guide. The 13km **nature trail** (per person half-/full day U\$\$5/10) offers the chance to spot some of the hundred or more species of bird.

Sleeping & Eating

Mgahinga Community Rest Camp (camp sites/dm/ bandas USh3000/6000/20,000) A fine little establishment near the main gate with jaw-dropping views of the volcanoes. There is a small canteen, and all proceeds are pumped back into the local community.

Mt Gahinga Rest Camp (**(()** 041-346464; www.vol canoessafaris.com; s/d US\$240/360) This upmarket camp has upped its standards and prices in the last few years. Accommodation is in smart stone *bandas* and there is a great viewing tower on the grounds.

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport between Kisoro and the park headquarters, so you'll have to hitch a ride (there is little traffic) or charter a pick-up (about USh25,000) from Kisoro.

LAKE MBURO NATIONAL PARK

This national park (260 sq km) is the zebra capital of Uganda. Midway between Masaka and Mbarara, the terrain is savannah with scattered acacia trees. There are five lakes, including Mburo, and some of the rarer mammals in Uganda, such as impalas, elands, reedbucks, klipspringers and topis. Lake Mburo is one of the few national parks in which visitors are allowed to **walk**, accompanied by a ranger.

Rwonyo Rest Camp (park headquarters; s/d/bandas USh10,000/15,000/20,000) offers some of UWA's better *bandas*. Meals are available, or you can buy fresh fish from locals. More serene for campers is the **camp site** (per person USh10,000) on the shores of Lake Mburo, just a short distance from Rwonyo.

There are three entrances to the national park from the main Masaka–Mbarara road, but for hitching into the park or chartering a vehicle, it's best to use the route from Sanga. A 4WD is recommended, but a trip around the park is possible in a 2WD car during the dry season.

MASAKA© 0481

Masaka is not a place where travellers linger; for most it's just an overnight stop en route to the Ssese Islands in Lake Victoria, or for anyone travelling overland to Tanzania.

The homely **Masaka Backpackers** (a) 077-619389; camp sites USh3500, dm/bandas USh5000/15,000) feels remote and rural, but then it is quite out of the way – 4km south of town just off the road to the Tanzanian border. Take a Kirimya taxi, get off at Kasanvu and follow the signs. The smartest rooms in town have their home at **Hotel Brovad** (**C** 21455; www.hotelbrovad .com; s/d/tr USh40,000/65,000/80,000). All have satellite TV, fridge and phone, and are superclean. The restaurant and bar are pretty busy by night.

Bananah Chick (Kampala Rd; meals USh2000-5000) is Masaka's answer to fast food; drop in for fried chicken, steaks or curries.

Buses and minibus taxis run frequently to Kampala (USh5000, two hours) and Mbarara (USh6000, 2½ hours).

MBARARA @ 0485

There's not a lot to linger for in Mbarara, but it's a useful place to stop on the way to or from southwestern Uganda. Linked to the Source Café in Jinja, **Source Internet Café** (High St; permin USh100) is a reliable place to check email. **Standard Chartered Bank** (20088; 24 High St) has an ATM, plus it can change cash and travellers cheques in most major currencies. **Mayoba Inn** (21161; 1 High St; s/d USh12,000/14,000,

without bathroom USh7500/9000) gets the vote among

the cheaper places as it is well managed and

quite clean. There's also a restaurant and bar

here. **Rwizi Arch Hotel** (20821; rwizi-arch@africaonline .co.ug; s/tw/ste USh64,000/70,000/125,000; 2) might be the smartest hotel in town. The rooms are fully equipped with all the trimmings, and facilities include a pool. Also home to the best food in town.

Drop by **Mbarara Coffee Shop** (High St; dishes US\$2-3) to sample the excellent menu of pastas and curries, and inexpensive sandwiches and cakes.

Buses and minibus taxis frequently go to Kampala (USh9000, five hours), Masaka, Kabale and Kasese.

QUEEN ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK

Home to the greatest collection of mammal species in Uganda, this park (2000 sq km) is bordered to the north by the Rwenzori Mountains and to the west by beautiful Lake Edward. It once boasted massive herds of elephants, buffalos, kobs and hippos but, like Murchison Falls, much of its wildlife was wiped out during the civil war. It's worth visiting to see the huge numbers of hippos and some of the 500 and more species of bird.

Take a boat trip (US\$15, two hours, 3pm guaranteed, 9am, 11am and 5pm US\$150 shared by all comers) up the Kazinga Channel

between Lake George and Lake Edward to see hippos and pelicans.

The stunning **Kyambura (Chambura) Gorge**, in the eastern corner of the park, is home to a variety of primates, including chimpanzees. The best way to visit this little Eden is on a **walking safari** (US\$30 per person, three to five hours), organised at the ranger post there.

Rangers are available for **wildlife drives** at US\$10/20 per vehicle per half-/full day.

Sleeping & Eating

The main places to stay are on Mweya Peninsula, overlooking Lake Edward.

Students' Camp (dm USh10,000, camp sites per person USh10,000) The cheapest place, but is often bursting at the seams with Ugandan school parties, leaving camping the only option.

Ecology Institute (dm USh10,000, r without bathroom per person USh20,000) An easier place to find a bed. Rooms are clean, if musty, but the shared bathrooms leave something to be desired.

Mweya Safari Lodge (c) lodge 0483-44266, bookings 039-260260; www.mweyalodge.com; s/d with full board US\$99/180; c) r) This sophisticated safari lodge has a stunning setting on the raised peninsula of Mweya. Sitting on the terrace with a cold drink at sunset is perfect and the swimming pool has an enviable setting. For a memorable meal, the classy restaurant here (meals USh8000 to USh15,000) is a must and that includes nonguests.

Getting There & Away

The main gate is at Katunguru, accessible on any minibus taxi travelling between Kasese (USh3000, one hour) and Mbarara (USh5000, two hours). From the gate, it's 24km to the Mweya Peninsula. Try hitching at weekends or charter a vehicle in Katunguru (around USh30,000) if traffic is light.

SSESE ISLANDS

This is Uganda's answer to the Mediterranean. A beautiful group of 84 islands lying off the northwestern shores of Lake Victoria, with beaches ringing the shores, complete with swaying palms for that tropical touch. Inland lie rolling hills coated with lush rainforest. Locals live in villages along the shoreline and launch their fishing boats each evening at sunset.

Many spots afford beautiful views over the lake and across to the other islands. Negotiat-

ing with fishermen for a **boat trip** around the islands is easy, and **swimming** is also possible off most of the islands, although avoid reedy areas – bilharzia alert (see p1136 for more on bilharzia).

There is nowhere to change money on any of the islands.

Sleeping & Eating

The accommodation options are mostly limited to Buggala Island, usually in or near Kalangala.

Panorama Camping Safaris (a 077-406371; camp sites USh3000, bandas with/without bathroom USh30,000/20,000) Located below Kalangala near the water, it is well set up with hot water on request and a generator.

Hornbill Camp Site ((© 077-729478; www.hornbill camp.com; camp sites USh4500, dm/bandas USh7500/20,000) The most popular spot in the Sseses, it is about a 15-minute walk below Kalangala. It's a fun and friendly place to stay, right on the lake-shore.

Ssese Palm Beach (**©** 077-623984; bandas US\$25-65) Boasting the best location of any of the resorts here, it is on a headland with its own private beach. The restaurant has a prime location for a sundowner and is open to all comers.

Getting There & Away

From the New Taxi Park in Kampala, catch a minibus taxi towards Masaka and get off at Nyendo (about 3km north of Masaka). Kalangala Express (USh6000, four hours, 10am and 2pm) has two big buses a day from Nyendo straight through to Kalanagala. There is a direct bus from Kampala to Kalangala (USh12,000, seven hours), which leaves the new taxi park in Kampala daily at 8.30am. There is also a regular ferry between Bukakata (a village on the mainland) and Liku (the westernmost village on Buggala). Pick-ups travel to Kalangala (USh4000) from Liku.

EASTERN UGANDA

Jinja has some of the world's best white-water rafting on its doorstep, and is emerging as the adrenaline centre of East Africa, picking up punters as fast as Zimbabwe is losing them. Check out the leafy 'suburbs' in the northwest to get an idea of how grand this town must have been in its heyday. Jinja is the source of the mighty Nile, the world's longest river, which winds its way from here through Egypt and Sudan to the Mediterranean.

Information

Main post office (cnr Main St & Bell Ave) Postal services and card phones.

Source Café (20 Main St; per min USh50) A popular place to get online.

Standard Chartered Bank ((a) 122661; Main St) Currency exchange, travellers-cheque encashment and an ATM.

Sights

The **Source of the Nile** (admission USh2000) is marked by a popular but uninspiring plaque, all finished in garish reds and yellows thanks to official sponsorship by Bell Brewery. Nearby is a bronze bust of Mahatma Gandhi, commemorating one of the spots where his ashes were scattered – was Gandhi the first to raft the Nile?

Bujagali Falls are more like a series of monstrous rapids than a waterfall, but the location is stunning. The falls are about 9km from central Jinja; find a minibus taxi or catch a *boda-boda*.

J GAN DA

Sleeping

Speke Camp (**©** 075 584171; www.bujagali.co.ug; camp sites per person US\$2, dm US\$5, d bandas US\$15) Right next to Bujagali Falls, this is an attractive site with a small restaurant and bar area that fills up on weekends.

Nile High Camp (© 077-237438; nilehigh@surfthesource .com; Kimaka Rd; camp sites US\$2, dm US\$5, r per person from US\$20) Nile High is the base of Adrift (p815) and the pretty camp includes solid dorms, camping grounds and a couple of bungalows with big river views.

Explorers Backpackers ((a) 120236; www.raftafrica .com; 41 Wilson Ave; camp sites US\$3, dm/d US\$5/15; (a)) The most popular budget crash pad in town, with a cheap bar, satellite TV and the obligatory pool table.

Nile River Explorers Camp (camp site per person US\$3, dm/bandas US\$5/20) Under the same ownership, this is a legendary camp site above Bujagali Falls with killer views.

Eden Rock Resort ((2) 077-501222; www.edenrocknile .com; Bujagali Falls; camp sites US\$3, r USh27,000) Eden Rock Resort played host to Prince William when he came rafting in Uganda a few years ago, although it's unlikely his grandmother would approve of the rooms. It offers basic *bandas* with bathrooms, set amid impressive gardens. Eden Rock is next door to ATA Café.

Nile Porch (20236; www.nileporch.com; Bujagali; s/d/tr US\$54/84/108; (2020) The Nile Porch brings the lodge experience to Bujagali. The luxurious tents are superbly set on a cliff above the river, and include hot-water bathrooms and elegant furnishings. Sipping cocktails by the pool is a fine way to pass an afternoon.

Gately on Nile (1) 122400; www.gately-on-nile.com; 34 Kisinja Rd; s/d US\$60/86) Set in a grand old colonial house with sumptuous grounds, Gately offers a selection of thoughtfully decorated rooms, some with fine views. The restaurant here is one of the best in town.

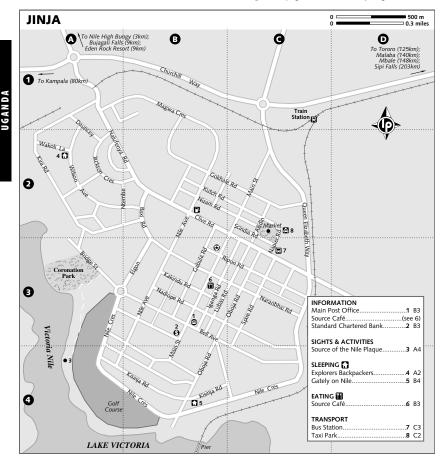
Eating & Drinking

Source Café ((a) 120911; 20 Main St; mains USh1500-4500) Hit the Source for a fair selection of light bites, salads, brownies and pastries. The place for a coffee fix, as it has a wide choice.

Black Lantern (**B** 078-321541; www.nileporch.com; mains USh5000-15,000) Bujagali's premier dining destination, this is the restaurant at the Nile Porch. Spare ribs are a speciality and the portions are enormous.

ATA Café ((2) 077-377185; mains USh2000-5000) Drop in on this friendly little café above Bujagali Falls, part of the quad-biking setup, for good company and cheap eats. The menu includes the best-value all-day breakfast in Uganda.

There is serious partying at the Nile River camp at Bujagali almost every night, as there



ADRENALINE CAPITAL OF EAST AFRICA

Welcome to the new Vic Falls! White-water rafting, kayaking, quad biking, bungee jumping, all these adventures and more are on tap around Jinja.

The source of the Nile is one of the most spectacular white-water rafting destinations in the world. There are several companies offering exhilaration without compromise: Adrift (\bigcirc 041-252720; www.surfthesource.com; 7 Kira Rd, Kampala), Nile River Explorers (NRE; \bigcirc 041-120236; www.raftafrica.com), and Nalubale Rafting (\bigcirc 078-638938; www.nalubalerafting.com). It costs US\$95 for a full day on the water. All the companies take on the monster Grade Five rapids, including Itanda (The Bad Place). All accept credit cards, and you can also book trips through guesthouses and hotels in Kampala, including pick-ups.

Other river activities include river boarding – taking on the mighty waters of the Nile armed only with a boogie board – and kayaking courses to learn how to tame the raging river with a paddle. Check out **Kayak the Nile** (www.kayakthenile.com). All in all, the Nile looks set to compete with the Zambezi for the title of Africa's favourite river for frolics in the coming years.

Want to look at the Nile from another angle? **Nile High Bungy** ((a) 043-122190; bungy@surfthesource .com) is a 44m-high drop over the river and costs US\$55. It is signposted 2km down the road to Bujagali Falls.

If that all sounds a bit wet and wild, it is also possible to do some quality quad biking with **All Terrain Adventures** ($\textcircled{\mbox{c}}$ 077 377185; www.atadventures.com), starting with a one-hour fun run for USh60,000. For a slower look at the countryside, horse riding is available with **Nile Horseback Safaris** ($\textcircled{\mbox{c}}$ 077 4101196; www.nilehorsebacksafaris.com). Two-hour rides start from US\$40.

always seem to be a queue of overland trucks in town.

Getting There & Away

Buses and minibus taxis frequently travel to Kampala (USh4000, 1½ hours), as well as Malaba (USh7000, two hours), Busia (USh6000, two hours) and Mbale (USh6000, two hours).

MBALE

a 045

Mbale is a thriving provincial city with a superb setting at the bottom of Mt Elgon (4321m). It's an excellent base for expeditions to Mt Elgon National Park and Sipi Falls.

Information

Sleeping

Apule Safari Lodge (To 77-502421; 5 Naboa Rd; s/d USh12,000/14,000, s without bathroom USh8000) This little courtyard lodge offers 'executive accommodation', although most corporations would disagree. Each room is named after one of Uganda's many lakes.

Mt Elgon View Hotel (2 34668; 1 Cathedral Ave; d USh25,000, s/d without bathroom USh12,000/15,000) This is the most popular place with travellers. Not to be confused with the more expensive Mt Elgon Hotel. On a clear day you might get a view of the looming mountain.

Mt Elgon Hotel (ⓐ 33454; 30 Masaba Rd; s USh45,000-75,000, d 55,000-85,000; ₴) Recently given a much needed makeover, this colonial-era stalwart is once again one of the best addresses in Mbale. The rooms are large and spacious with satellite TV.

Eating & Drinking

Nurali's Café (7 Cathedral Ave; mains USh3500-7000) Located beneath the Mt Elgon View Hotel, Nurali's is an inspiring Indian restaurant offering a succulent fish tikka, plus some Ugandan dishes, a bit of Italian and a smattering of Chinese – almost a UN menu.

Club Oasis (Cathedral Ave; admission US\$0.60; S Wed-Sun) This is *the* late-night spot for pool, music and a dash of dancing.

Getting There & Away

Minibus taxis run serve Tororo (USh3000, one hour), Jinja (USh6000, two hours) and Kampala (USh10,000, three hours).

For Budadiri (park headquarters for Mt Elgon National Park) and Kapchorwe (for Sipi Falls), infrequent minibus taxis leave from the taxi park on Kumi Rd.

SIPI FALLS

Sensational Sipi Falls has three tiers, but the iconic lower one drops straight over a sheer cliff. Quite a sight, Sipi is 55km northeast of Mbale.

Guides are easy to arrange (about USh5000) for short hikes around the falls, and are worthwhile because some trails are not well marked.

Moses' Camp Site (camp sites USh4000, bandas per person USh10,000) is spectacularly set near a cliff, and has flourishing flower gardens and some big vistas. The basic restaurant serves simple but effective meals.

Crow's Nest ((2) 077-800705; thecrowsnets@yahoo .com; camp sites USh6000, dm/cabins USh12,000/30,000) is *the* place for stunning views across to the falls. Cabins are sort of Swedish in style, and the restaurant turns out food with flair. Yes, someone really did make a mess of the email: crowsnets, not nest!

Lacam Lodge (© 075-292554; www.lacamlodge.co.uk; camp sites USh25,000, r per person USh35,000-66,000) is the closest to Sipi Falls, with a great view of the main drop. Accommodation is full board which includes breakfast, lunch and a slap-up dinner.

From Mbale, take a minibus taxi to Sipi or Kapchorwe (USh4000, one hour) and jump off near the falls. Start early, as transport dries up later in the day. It might be more convenient to hire a private taxi if making a day trip from Mbale.

MOUNT ELGON NATIONAL PARK

Mt Elgon is the affordable alternative to the Rwenzoris, offering challenging but accessible wilderness trekking and wild scenery. The national park encompasses much of Mt Elgon, which has one of the largest surface areas (80km by 50km) of any extinct volcano in the world, and runs right up to the Kenyan border. Wagagai is the park's highest peak at 4321m.

Trekking

Tourism on Mt Elgon is still in its infancy, so don't expect the sort of well-worn paths found on Mt Kenya or Mt Kilimanjaro. The reward is fewer folk on the trails. The best

WARNING

Don't attempt to trek without a guide as it is illegal. It could also end in tears as Elgon is a big mountain.

time to trek is between December and March, and June and August. However, the seasons are unpredictable and it can rain at any time. Altitude sickness is a possible danger for those planning to climb to Wagagai.

The three main trekking routes include the **Sasa Trail**, which starts at Budadiri (USh3000 from Mbale), the **Sipi Trail**, which begins at Sipi Falls, and the lesser-used **Piswa Trail**, which starts at Kapkwata. Allow four to five days return to complete the trek to the main peaks.

The best place to organise a trek is the UWA office in Mbale; see p815. The information centres at Budadiri, the Forest Exploration Centre (near Sipi) and Kapkwata can also help.

Trekking on Mt Elgon costs US\$30 per person per day, including park entry fees, camping and ranger guide fees. It does not include porters (USh8000 per day). These prices cover food for the guide and porters as well, but not tips, which are welcome. Fees can be paid in Mbale or at the information centres.

Sleeping

Many trekkers start or finish at Sipi Falls; see left for more details.

The park has several camp sites along the main trails. Basic tents and sleeping bags can be hired from the Forest Exploration Centre, but bring all cooking equipment, food and water.

Rose's Last Chance (Budadari; camp sites per person USh5000, r USh7000) A popular place to stay before or after scaling the heights. Fun and friendly, testing local brews is a favourite activity here.

Forest Exploration Centre (camp sites USh7500, dm USh11,000, cottage s/d USh20,000/50,000) Has solid dorms and tasteful cottages. It is 1½ hours from Sipi on foot; contact the UWA office in Mbale for bookings (see p815).

Those starting out on the less popular Piswa Trail can stay at the **Kapkwata Guesthouse** (r USh11,000), which is, unsurprisingly, in Kapkwata.

NORTHERN UGANDA

MURCHISON FALLS NATIONAL PARK

Back in the 1960s, Murchison was one of the best parks in Africa and it's steadily recovered from the bad old years to reclaim its place as Uganda's best all-rounder. The immense Victoria Nile flows through it on the way to Lake Albert. This is one of the easiest parks to access for independent travellers.

Murchison Falls is the most spectacular feature of the Nile along its 6700km length. The gorge is just 6m wide, making the falls one of the most powerful surges of water found anywhere in the world.

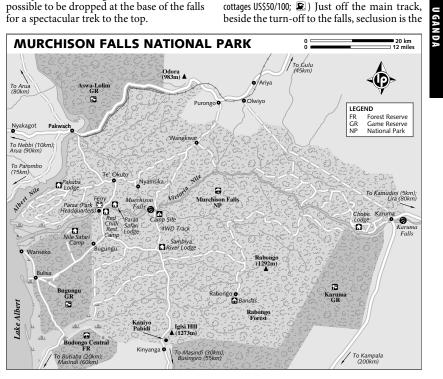
A must at Murchison is the three-hour launch trip from park headquarters at Paraa to the falls, passing hippos and crocs galore. The boat leaves (if there's enough demand) at 9am and 2pm, and the cost depends on numbers (about US\$150 per boat holding up to 10). Weekends provide the best chance of finding other punters, reducing the cost to US\$15. It is possible to be dropped at the base of the falls for a spectacular trek to the top. **Chimp tracking** in and around Murchison is much cheaper than at Kibale Forest or Queen Elizabeth National Parks. It costs just USh12,000 at either **Busingiro** or **Kaniyo Pabidi**, but the latter is inside the park boundaries, meaning a US\$25 hit on top.

Rangers are recommended for wildlife drives (available from the park headquarters); the cost is US\$10/20 per vehicle per half-/full day.

Sleeping & Eating

Red Chilli Rest Camp ((2) 077-709510; www.redchilli hideaway.com; camp sites USh10,000, safari tent USh25,000, tw banda USh45,000, without bathroom USh30,000) The popular Red Chilli team from Kampala runs this rest camp, bringing a budget option to backpackers in Murchison. Camping is on a grassy site with some Nile views, and the *bandas* are well tended. The restaurant and bar heave at weekends.

Sambiya River Lodge (041-233596; www.afri tourstravel.com; camp sites USh10,000, bandas s/d USh80,000/140,000, without bathroom USh65,000/110,000, cottages US\$50/100;) Just off the main track, beside the turn-off to the falls, seclusion is the



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name of the game and there's a small swimming pool.

Paraa Safari Lodge (bookings 078-260260; www .paraalodge.com; s/d with full board US\$99/150;) On the northern bank of the river, this hotel-style lodge has a striking location with expansive views upriver towards the falls, and excellent facilities, including a swim-up bar overlooking the Nile.

Wannabe chimp-trackers can stay at the great-value if basic **camps** (camp sites/bandas per person USh10,000/USh15,000) at Busingiro or Kaniyo Pabidi. Bring your own food, though.

At the head of Murchison Falls, there's also a **camp site** (perperson USh10,000) with a tiptop location, but you will need to be completely selfsufficient. Sleepwalkers stay away!

Getting There & Away

By road, the usual route is from Kampala via Masindi (USh9000, three hours). Getting from Masindi directly to Paraa by public transport is not possible. With a bit of bargaining, however, you can charter a minibus (USh75,000) or special-hire taxi (USh60,000) to take you all the way. From Masindi there are irregular buses and minibus taxis to Wanseko, on the western edge of the park. Otherwise try and hitch with a park vehicle. Check with the park office opposite the post office in Masindi.

Both Backpackers Hostel (p801) and Red Chilli Hideaway (p801) in Kampala organise three-day budget safaris to Murchison Falls, which are great value and good fun.

The car ferry across the river at Paraa costs USh2000/20,000 for passengers/cars, and leaves hourly in both directions (7am to 7pm).

Remember that most areas north of the park, particularly the roads to Lira and Gulu, are potentially dangerous.

UGANDA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

There are plenty of opportunities for camping in Uganda. Camping usually costs from USh3000 to USh10,000 per person, but in national parks factor in the entry fees.

There are backpacker places in Kampala and Jinja, as well as on the Ssese Islands, around Lake Bunyoni and near Fort Portal. There are plenty of forgettable cheap hotels in most of the provincial towns, but smarter hotels are only available in Kampala, Jinja

PRACTICALITIES

- Uganda uses the metric system and distances are in kilometres.
- Electricity in Uganda is 240V, 50 cycles, but is universally unreliable. British three-pin plugs are mainly used.
- Local newspapers that are available include the government-owned daily New Vision or the more independent daily Monitor. International magazines, like Time, Newsweek and the Economist, are also readily available.
- The government-run TV station is Uganda TV, but decent hotels and many bars have satellite TV for international news and sport.
- Radio Uganda broadcasts in English and local languages on AM frequencies. BBC World Service broadcasts on 101.3MHz, while the phenomenally popular Capital FM can be found at 91.3MHz.

and Mbarara. Most of the national parks have luxury tented camps, the price rising with exclusivity.

ACTIVITIES

There are stacks of activities to choose from in Uganda, most related to wildlife viewing in the national parks, but adrenaline rushes, such as white-water rafting (US\$95 per day), bungee jumping (US\$55) or quad biking at Jinja, the source of the Nile, are also mighty popular.

Gorilla tracking is one of the major drawcards in Uganda; it is possible at Bwindi (US\$375) and, sometimes, Mgahinga (US\$375) National Parks in the southwest. Almost as popular, particularly as it's much cheaper, is chimpanzee tracking, which can be done at Kibale Forest (US\$70) or Queen Elizabeth (US\$30) National Parks or at Murchison Falls National Park for just USh12,000.

Trekking the mountains of Uganda is another pull. The hard-core head for Rwenzoris (from US\$567 for seven days), one of the toughest climbs in Africa, but for something less taxing – on the pocket and legs – try Mt Elgon (US\$30 per day for four to five days).

Other popular activities include community walks around forests and areas of outstanding beauty; wildlife drives in the bigger parks; bird-watching throughout the country; and boat trips to view wildlife in Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth National Parks.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices and businesses in Uganda are generally open between 8.30am and 4.30pm or 5.30pm, with a short break for lunch some time between noon and 2pm. Most shops and banks do not break for lunch, but some banks close early at 3.30pm.

Local restaurant hours are 7am to 9pm, and international-type restaurants are open 11.30am to 2.30pm and 5.30pm to 10.30pm.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Although much of Uganda is generally safe, there are some risky areas. North of Murchison Falls National Park, and around some towns, such as Lira and Gulu, the fruitcakes of the LRA continue to wreak havoc. It is also important to take care in the far northeast due to regular clashes between armed Karamajong people and anyone they don't like. It is imperative to make inquiries with knowledgeable local authorities before setting off to these areas.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Ugandan Embassies & Consulates

Belgium (02-762 5825; Ave de Tervuren 317, 1150 Brussels)

Canada (🖻 613-613 7797; 231 Cobourg St, Ottawa, Ontario KIN 8J2)

France (🖻 01 53 70 62 70; 13 Ave Raymond Poincare, 75116 Paris)

Japan (🖻 03-3465 4552; 39-15 Oyama-chi, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 151)

South Africa (🖻 012-344 4100; Trafalgar Court, Apt 35B, 634 Park St, Arcadia 0083, Pretoria)

UK ((a) 020-7839 5783; Uganda House, 58/59 Trafalgar Sq, London WC2N 5DX)

USA ((a) 202-726 0416; 5909 16th St NW, Washington DC 20011-2896)

Embassies & Consulates in Uganda

Countries with representation in Kampala (area code @ 041) include: Belgium (Map p802; @ 041-349559; Rwenzori House, Lumumba Ave) Burundi (@ 235850; Hannington Rd) Denmark (Map p802; 350938; 3 Lumumba Ave) DRC (Map p800; 230610; 20 Philip Rd, Kololo) Ethiopia (Map p800; 341885; Nakayima Rd) France (Map p802; 342120; 16 Lumumba Ave) Italy (250450; 11 Lourdel Rd, Nakasero) Kenya (Map p800; 258235; 41 Nakasero Rd) Netherlands (Map p802; 346000; Rwenzori House, Lumumba Ave) Rwanda (Map p800; 344045; 2 Nakayima Rd) South Africa (Man p802; 320001; 15A Nakasero Rd)

South Africa (Map p802; 2 230001; 15A Nakasero Rd) Sudan (Map p800; 2 243518; 21 Nakasero Rd) Tanzania (2 256272; 6 Kagera Rd) UK (Map p800; 3 312000; Kira Rd) USA (Map p800; 2 59791; Gaba Rd)

HEALTH

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is sometimes required for entry or exit, but we have never been asked to produce one during our visits.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed on p1106, the principal public holidays in Uganda are: New Year's Day 1 January Liberation Day 26 January Women's Day 8 March Labour Day 1 May Martyrs' Day 3 June Heroes' Day 9 June Independence Day 9 October

U GAN DA

INTERNET ACCESS

Kampala has plenty of places to get an online fix for USh2000 to USh4000 per hour. More expensive access is available in Fort Portal, Jinja, Kabale, Mbale and Mbarara.

MAPS

The best available map of Uganda is the Macmillan 1:1,350,000 *Uganda Traveller's Map*, available in bookshops in Kampala.

MEDIA

The daily *New Vision* is the governmentowned newspaper. For a more independent view, try *The Monitor*, a daily with good international news.

The BBC World Service broadcasts on 103.7MHz in Kampala.

MONEY

The Ugandan shilling (USh) is a relatively stable currency. Cash can be changed easily at major banks and foreign exchange (forex) bureaus. The best banks are Standard Chartered and Barclays Banks. The forex bureaus offer slightly better exchange rates than the banks. At both banks and forex bureaus, small US dollar bills attract a much lower exchange rate than do US\$50 and US\$100 notes, and the rate for travellers cheques is about 2% lower than they are for cash. Exchange rates in Kampala are up to 15% better than is the case elsewhere in the country, so stock up on shillings in the capital.

Standard Chartered Bank has a network of ATMs that accept international credit cards, located at branches in Kampala, as well as in Jinja, Mbale and Mbarara.

For credit-card cash advances, the only realistic option is Barclays Bank in Kampala, which offers advances in US dollars or Uganda shillings. Some hotels and big expenses such as white-water rafting can go on the card.

Bargaining is necessary in informal transactions such as those at markets and roadside stalls, but not in shops that display fixed prices.

The cost of sending a postcard is USh1100 to Europe and USh1200 to the USA or Australia. There is an efficient poste restante service at the main post office in Kampala.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Local and international telephone calls can be made from UTL and MTN card phones in towns throughout the country; try outside the post office if they aren't obvious. Calls can also be made from privately operated booths, which are useful for short calls if you don't want to buy a card. International calls cost from US\$1 to US\$2 per minute. Mobile phone numbers have a three-digit prefix beginning with 07.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourism Uganda is the government-run tourist office in Kampala. The UWA promotes Uganda's national parks and, as well as its headquarters in Kampala, it has offices in major towns and national parks.

There are many excellent community tourism initiatives underway across Uganda. For more on projects that plough proceeds back into the local community, visit the Ucota office (p799) in Kampala.

VISAS

All visitors require visas. Ugandan visas are available at all major land borders and the international airport at Entebbe.

Single-/double-entry visas valid for up to three months cost US\$30/60 (US\$20/40 if you have student ID); 48-hour transit visas cost US\$15. Two photos are required and visas from Ugandan embassies or consulates are normally issued within 24 hours.

Visa Extensions

Extensions are available at the immigration office (Map p800; 🖻 244899; Jinja Rd), east of central Kampala.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following neighbouring countries are available from embassies in Kampala: Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania.

TRANSPORT IN UGANDA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Δir

Located on the shores of Lake Victoria about 40km south of the capital, Entebbe International Airport (EBB) is the international gateway to Kampala and Uganda. Entebbe International offers direct connections to Nairobi, Kigali, Dar es Salaam, Addis Ababa, Khartoum, Cairo, Johannesburg, Dubai, London, Amsterdam and Brussels.

Airlines based in Kampala (area code ☎ 041) flying to/from Uganda:

Air Burundi (airline code 8Y; Map p802; 🖻 256137) Air Tanzania (airline code TC; Map p802; 🖻 345773;

www.airtanzania.com)

British Airways (airline code BA; Map p802; 257414; www.britishairways.com)

EgyptAir (airline code MS; Map p802; 🖻 233960; www .egyptair.com.eg)

Emirates (airline code EK; Map p802; 🗃 349941; www .emirates.com)

Ethiopian Airlines (airline code ET; Map p802; 254796; www.flyethiopian.com)

DEPARTURE TAX

International departure tax from Entebbe International Airport is a whopping US\$40, but it is included in the ticket.

CROSSING INTO DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO OR SUDAN?

DRC

It is now possible to cross the border into DRC to visit the mountain gorillas at either Djomba or Bukima in Parc National des Virunga. However, much of DRC has been embroiled in a messy civil war for many years, and even with the advent of peace there are still several rival rebel factions roaming the countryside. For this reason, we cannot currently recommend crossing at any border, except the Bunagana crossing, and even in this case, check, check and check again in Kampala and Kisoro.

Sudan

The civil wars in northern Uganda and southern Sudan effectively killed off overland travel. Peace has come to southern Sudan and there is talk of land borders opening again. However, even if southern Sudan is now considered stable, travelling this way involves extensive travel through northern Uganda, the most dangerous region of the country. Do not undertake such a journey without checking the security situation every step of the way.

Gulf Air (airline code GF; Map p802; 🕿 230524; www .gulfairco.com)

Kenya Airways (airline code KQ; Map p802; 🖻 344304; www.kenya-airways.com)

KLM (airline code KL; Map p802; 🖻 344304; www.klm .com)

Rwandair Express (airline code WB: 232555; www .rwandair.com)

SN Brussels Airline (airline code SN; Map p802;

234200; www.brusselsairlines.com)

South African Airways (airline code SA; Map p802;

345772; www.flysaa.com)

Sudan Airways (airline code SD: Map p802; 230438; www.sudanair.com)

Land

KENYA

The two main border crossings that most overland travellers use are between Tororo in Uganda and Malaba in Kenya, and Busia in Uganda and Kisumu in Kenya.

Akamba (Map p800; 🖻 250412; 28 Dewinton Rd, Kampala), Busscar (Map p802; 233030; 8 Burton St, Kampala), Regional Coach (Map p802; 20 041-256862; 4 Luwum St, Kampala) and Scandinavian Express (Map p802; 🖻 348895; 8 Colville St) bus companies run direct services between Kampala and Nairobi (Kenya) every day. The cost ranges from USh23,000 to USh50,000 (depending on the level of luxury), and the trip takes from 12 to 14 hours.

To do the journey in stages, catch a minibus taxi from Kampala to Malaba (USh9000, three hours), via Jinja and close to Tororo. From Malaba, there are plenty of matatus (minibus transport) to Eldoret or Nairobi. There are moneychangers on both sides of the border.

The less frequently used entry point into Kenya is via Busia. Take a minibus taxi from Jinja to Busia (USh6000, two hours). From the Kenyan side of the border, matatus frequently travel to Kisumu

RWANDA

The main crossing point is between Kabale and Kigali (Rwanda) via Katuna (Uganda) and Gatuna (Rwanda). There's a second crossing between Kisoro (Uganda) and Ruhengeri (Rwanda) via Cyanika in Rwanda.

Those travelling direct between Kampala and Kigali can travel with Jaguar Executive Coaches (Map p802; 26 Nakivubo Rd, Kampala), Regional Coach (🖻 041-256862; 4 Luwum St, Kampala) or Gaso Bus (20041-572917: Bus Park) Prices start from USh20,000, most buses leave between 7am and 9am and the journey takes about nine hours. Gaso departs at 2am and continues to Bujumbura.

From Kabale to Kigali there are lots of minibuses, but the journey involves a change of vehicle at the border. There are minibuses (USh1000) and special hire taxis (USh15,000, 30 minutes) to Katuna. On the Rwandan side, there are regular minibuses to Kigali (RFr1500, 1½ hours).

From Kisoro to Ruhengeri via Cyanika, regular minibuses link either side of the border with Kisoro (USh1000, 12km) and Ruhengeri (RFr500, 25km).

TANZANIA

The route into Tanzania follows the western side of Lake Victoria from Masaka to Bukoba, and it's possible to travel this distance in less than one day. From Masaka, take a taxi (minibus) to Kyotera (USh3000, one hour), and then a pick-up to the border at Mutukula (USh3000, one hour). From the Tanzanian border, take a pick-up to Bukoba.

There used to be passenger services on Lake Victoria between Port Bell (near Kampala) and Mwanza (Tanzania) via Bukoba (Tanzania), but they were discontinued several years ago. Some travellers have managed to book passage to Mwanza (about USh20,000, 16 hours) on cargo ferries run by **Tanzania Railways** (20041-233384).

GETTING AROUND Air

Eagle Air and United Airlines offer a limited schedule to obscure parts of northern Uganda.

Boat

The opportunities for travel on Lake Victoria are limited and potentially dangerous because the local boats are small and overcrowded. The only regular transport on the lake is to and around the Ssese Islands.

Everywhere in Uganda is linked by minibuses, which are known as 'taxis'. Fares are fixed and often displayed, and there's usually a sign with the destination. Minibus taxis leave when full, and on major routes starting from Kampala this means the official capacity of 14 passengers. However, once beyond the scrutiny of the capital, they soon pack 'em in like sardines.

Ordinary buses also connect the major towns. They're cheaper than minibus taxis and are usually faster, as they don't continually stop to pick up and drop off passengers. Most towns and cities have a bus station/taxi park. One good way to travel around – but mostly to and from Kampala – is by the post buses run by the Ugandan Postal Service (UPS). Post buses run daily (except Sunday) from Kampala to Fort Portal, Kasese (via Mbarara), Kabale (via Masaka and Mbarara), Soroti (via Mbale) and Hoima (via Masindi).

Car

A number of companies offer vehicles but prices are quite high. Best to forget about them completely and negotiate independently with a 'special hire' taxi driver in the capital. Budget lodges can usually provide a contact.

Roads are good between most major centres in the southern part of the country. In the north, however, minor roads are usually badly potholed, and after heavy rain they become impassable in anything other than a 4WD.

Local Transport

In Kampala and most major towns, bicycles (from USh500) and motorcycles (from USh1500), collectively called *boda-bodas*, take passengers. The fares are negotiable. Nonmetered 'special hire' taxis are cars available for rent in most Ugandan towns.

Tours

A few reliable companies in Kampala offer tours and safaris to the major places of interest, but the budget safari industry in Uganda is not nearly as well established as it is in Kenya and Tanzania. Costs are generally high.

Afritours & Travel (Map p802; 🖻 041-233596; www afritourstravel.com; Buganda Rd, Kampala) offers some of the cheapest organised safaris, including Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth National Parks.

Train

Uganda's railway network is used only for cargo; there are no passenger services.

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Angola

Angola is an eye-opener – in more ways than one. Scarred painfully by years of debilitating warfare and untouched by foreign visitors since the early 1970s, the country remains remote and undiscovered, with few observers privy to the geographic highlights and vast cultural riches that lie hidden behind an ostensibly violent veneer.

But, with the recent cessation of a 40-year civil conflict ushering in a prolonged period of peace and stability, opportunities for exploration are quietly opening up. For outsiders the attractions are manifold. Despite widespread poverty, inbred corruption and an infrastructure devastated by decades of indiscriminate fighting, Angola holds a lure that few other countries can match. Here in the heady heat of equatorial Africa you'll encounter some of the continent's most gracious people and discover many of its most closely guarded secrets.

Chill out on expansive beaches, sample the solitude in virgin wildlife parks or sift through the ruins of Portuguese colonialism. From Luanda to Lubango the nuances are startling.

Despite advancements in infrastructure and a dramatically improved security situation, travel in Angola remains the preserve of adventurers, diehards or those on flexible budgets. But with the transport network gradually recovering and wildlife being shipped in to repopulate decimated national parks, the signs of recovery are more than just a mirage.

Angola is halfway along the road to political and economic atonement and it would be a shame to miss out on its dramatic rebirth.

FAST FACTS

A N G O L A

- Area 1,246,700 sg km
- ATMs They exist, but don't generally accept foreign cards
- Borders Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia and Namibia
- Budget US\$120 per day
- Capital Luanda
- Languages Portuguese and various Bantu languages
- Money Kwanza; US\$1 = 80Kz
- Population 14 million (estimated)
- Seasons Dry (June to September), wet (October to May)
- **Telephone** Country code 244; international access code **a** 00
- Time GMT/UTC + 1
- Visas US\$75 for 30 days; must be obtained in advance

HIGHLIGHTS

- Luanda (p828) Expansive beaches, expensive bars and tatty overcrowded townships, Luanda is a kaleidoscopic vision of Angola at the sharp end.
- Parque Nacional da Kissama (p832) One of Africa's largest, emptiest and most surreal wildlife parks.
- Benguela–Lobito Railway (p833) Rattling and bumping through Benguela's rural pastiche is a unique and unforgettable Angolan experience.
- Lubango (p835) Almost untouched by the war, breezy Lubango offers cascading waterfalls, spectacular volcanic fissures and a vibrant small city ambiance.
- Miradouro de Lua (p833) A spectacular lookout over a canyon of moonlike cliffs that cascade dramatically into the Atlantic Ocean.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Situated on the Atlantic littoral in a balmy subtropical setting, Angola's climate is heavily influenced by three local peculiarities; the cool Benguela sea current, the rugged interior mountains and the presence of the Namib Desert in the southeast. As a result, the country boasts a number of distinct climatic regions, including a wet, tropical northern jungle, a dryer and cooler central plateau, and an arid southern belt influenced by its proximity to the Kalahari Desert.

Although different regions vary significantly, the best time to visit Angola is during the cooler dryer months of June to September.

ITINERARIES

- One Week Visit Luanda's Fortaleza de São Miguel (p830), along with the city's selection of churches and museums before heading south to Benfica market (p831) for a spot of heated bargaining. Continue along the coast road to the Miradouro de Lua (p833) and the Kwanza River (p833), and round off the proceedings with a quick tour of Parque Nacional da Kissama (p832).
- Two Weeks to One Month Follow the Luanda itinerary before catching a bus south for the spectacular journey to Benguela (p833) and Lobito. A train ride on the famous Benguela railway (p834) between the region's two provincial coastal cities is a must. Fly on to Lubango (p835),

HOW MUCH?

- Internet per hour US\$3
- Cup of coffee US\$1.50
- Car rental per day US\$60
- Bottle of wine US\$20
- Average meal US\$10

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.50
- 1L bottled water US\$1.50
- Bottle of beer US\$2
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10
- Baguette US\$1

where you can soak up the fresh mountain air and make a nifty side trip to unhurried Namibe (p835). Backtrack to battle-scarred Huambo (p834) for a few days before returning by plane to the capital.

HISTORY

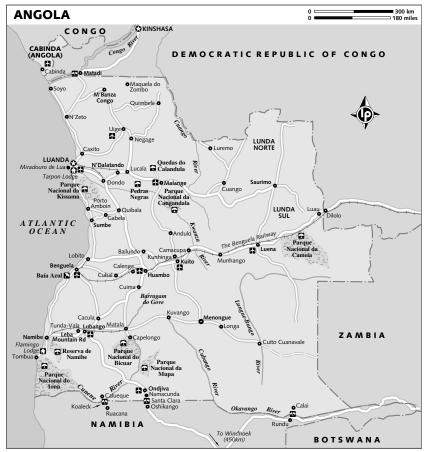
Angola's often violent and bloody history has left a country endowed with a vast expanse of natural resources and development possibilities perennially trying to stave off starvation. A terrain rich in oil, diamonds, iron ore and copper, plus a measurable hydroelectric capacity, has the potential to be one of Africa's richest states. Instead, the more common reality is of a nation of shattered infrastructure and deva nation of shattered infrastructure and dev-astated towns struggling to feed a desperately poor and eternally uprooted population.

Another Lost Empire

In 1483 Vasco da Gama first dropped anchor in Luanda Bay and unwittingly pre-empted the start of a conflict that, save for a few intermittent lulls in the fighting, went on for over half a millennium. The land now known as Angola was, at the time, inhabited by a number of small tribes living in loosely defined kingdoms that lacked the organisation and administrative cohesiveness of 15th-century Europe. But despite a natural curiosity borne out of years of seafaring exploration, the Portuguese had no real desire to settle on this malaria-ridden African shoreline. Post 1500 the more fertile and less threatening lands of Brazil held a far



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greater attraction for colonial farmers and businessmen. For the next 300 years Portugal's African colonies had only two real functions: a strategic base on the route around the Cape of Good Hope, and a collecting centre for one of the largest forced human migrations in history.

Not surprisingly, slavery did little to endear the colonials to the Angolan people. Clashes first began after WWII and were inflamed in 1961 when the colonial authorities began to crush increasingly zealous uprisings from dissidents.

The initial independence movement split into three main groups in line with the various tribal affiliations (and international interests) they claimed to represent. The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) was supported by northern tribes, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and anti-communist Western countries; the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) began with Marxist sensibilities and was supported by southern tribes, the USSR, Cuba and other Soviet allies; and the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (Unita) originally had the support of the Ovimbundu, but later formed alliances with the Portuguese right wing, the USA and apartheid South Africa.

In 1975 the Portuguese finally granted independence to Angola following the overthrow of the fascist Salazar government at home. But the colonial withdrawal – a mad scramble that involved one of the biggest airlifts in history – was legendary in its ineptitude, converting central Luanda into a ghost town and robbing the country of its qualified human resources and administrative structure.

Not surprisingly, Angola in 1975 possessed all the essential ingredients for an impending civil war. An uneven and weak infrastructure, low levels of health and education, two feuding sets of tribally based elites and the inviting prospect of a large slice of unused government-oil revenue up for grabs. As the Moscow-backed MPLA party stepped into a dangerous power vacuum, a combination of new outside factors were dutifully thrown into an already crowded arena: US communist paranoia, Cuba's ambiguous aim to promote 'world revolution', South African security obsessions and the woefully inadequate process of decolonisation. The stage was set.

Angola's second major war was a long, protracted affair dominated by foreign intervention. Indeed, for the next 15 years the wishes and desires of the Angolan people were consistently undermined as foreign meddlers and Western business interests continued to fight greedily among themselves over a damaged and increasingly beleaguered country.

War & Peace

In 1991, prompted by the end of the Cold War, a ceasefire agreement was set in place by Cuba, the USA and Angola. But the accord broke down the following year after Unita, having lost a general election (seen by the UN as largely free and fair), returned to war with a newfound ferocity, claiming the poll was rigged. Almost 200,000 people died between May and October 1993 as Unita took war to the provincial cities, destroying most of the road, rail and communications network.

A revamped 'Lusaka Accord' signed in 1994 was consistently violated by both the governing MPLA and Unita, and the discovery of new diamond areas and oilfields allowed both sides to re-arm. UN sanctions (from 1998) against Unita diamonds caused Unita's cash supply to shrivel, and its control of the countryside gradually crumbled. Increasing military defeats drove a desperate Unita deeper into the hinterland and – hunted and on the run – its leader Jonas Savimbi was finally killed in a well-planned government operation on 22 February 2002.

A new peace accord was signed on 4 April 2002.

Angola Today

Since 2002 Angola has entered a period of peace and regeneration unprecedented in its history. With the 85,000-strong Unita army, reintegrated into the national forces and old animosities ceremoniously brushed underneath the carpet, the biggest obstacles to war and instability have been temporarily neutralised.

But the country still faces massive challenges before it can right four decades of economic and political ineptitude. Corruption is the most pressing problem. In 2004 Human Rights Watch, an independent lobby group, estimated that US\$4 billion of Angola's undeclared oil revenue had gone missing since the late 1990s. Voices inside the IMF were raised and supervisors were sent to investigate. The conclusion: either the ever-elusive President Eduardo dos Santos was employing a very creative team of accountants or something, somewhere, was clearly not adding up.

It is these financial anomalies that have prevented the lion's share of Angola's new peacetime economy from trickling down to the majority of the poorest classes. While skyscrapers reach new heights in Luanda and oil-obsessed government ministries forge investment deals with China and India, poverty in the countryside remains rampant and widespread. One can only hope that the second post-independence elections (which will take place sometime before December 31, 2007, according to Angolan president, Eduardo Dos Santos) will address some of these issues.

Economically speaking, Angola's future is brighter than it has been for decades. In 2007 the country – which currently churns out 1.4 billion barrels of oil per day – is due to join the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and this empowering move towards the hub of the world economy will give Dos Santos and his government a good deal more clout on the international stage.

CULTURE

Angolans are Africa's perennial survivors, an open and gregarious populace whose spirit – once garnered – is highly infectious and whose fortitude is nothing short of remarkable. Badly damaged by the longstanding tribal conflicts that set neighbour against neighbour throughout the 1980s and '90s, Angolan culture has remained defiantly intact in a country divided by complex ethnic loyalties and 42 different indigenous languages. At the forefront of

this colourful artistic patchwork is Angolan music, a rich and varied collection of offshoots and sub-genres, with styles such as *kizombe*, samba, *zouk* and *rebita* manifesting themselves in countless dances and romantic songs.

Life in Angola is extremely hard. Many curable diseases are rife, GDP per capita is among the world's lowest and in 1999 the UN declared the country the worst on the planet for a child to grow up in. But for guarded optimists hope springs eternal. Since 2002 many émigrés have returned to reclaim their businesses and farms, and economic activity throughout the country has been kick-started. Angola's participation in the 2006 Fottball World Cup was like a lightening bolt that reawakened a tired yet ever-hopeful population.

PEOPLE

Angola's cornucopia of ethnic groups is dominated by the Ovimbundu, Kimbundu and Bakongo. Local tribal traditions remain strong, though Portuguese has evolved as the national language of choice, particularly among the young. Due in part to its volatile history, much of Angola's cultural legacy has been exported abroad through slavery and emigration where it has re-emerged in elements of modern Brazilian culture, such as the samba, carnival, Afro-American religion and a combative martial art, known as Capoeira.

ENVIRONMENT

Angola's 1650km of Atlantic coastline hosts a plethora of unspoiled beaches, and the sedimentary deposits of numerous full-flowing rivers have led to the formation of a handful of distinctive coastal sandbars, such as Mussulo and La Ilha in Luanda and Restinga in Lobito.

The country's grassy savannah provides the setting for six national parks, namely: Iona, Bicuar, Mupa, Kissama, Cameia and Cangandala. Due to the devastation wreaked by decades of civil war, the wildlife in these parks has been almost completely eradicated.

LUANDA

a 222 / pop 3.5 million

Hot, heaving, oil rich and cash poor, Luanda is a city of unfathomable contrasts and vividly shocking extremes. Perched tantalisingly on the Atlantic coastline overlooking a narrow pine-fringed sandbar known colloquially as the Ilha, the balmy ocean-side setting is as spectacular as it is exotic. The sweeping vistas would be even more stunning if it weren't for the teeming *bairros* (townships) and ramshackle makeshift dwellings that have taken root around Angola's rapidly expanding capital in the 30 years since independence.

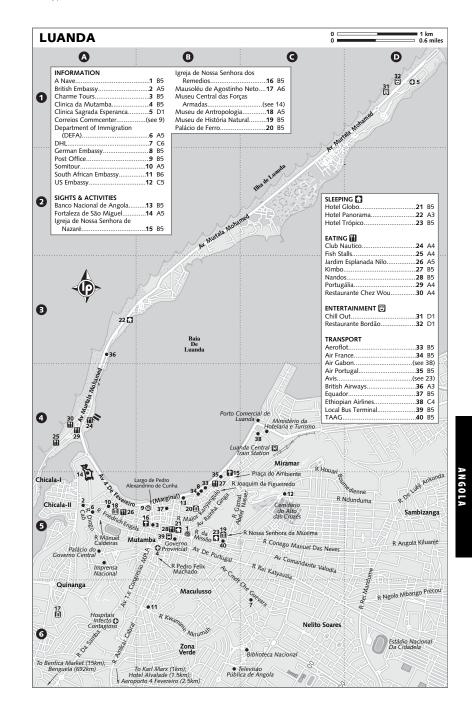
Built for a healthy half million, Luanda now bursts with 3.5 million beleaguered inhabitants and the evidence of this rampant overpopulation resonates everywhere. Whiff the stench of fetid water that intoxicates early-morning joggers on the picturesque Marginal promenade, dodge the manic lines of traffic that make hot afternoons in gridlocked central Luanda even more cauldronlike, and contemplate how running water and electricity are still comparative luxuries for all but a highly privileged (and often foreign) minority. But despite such calamitous problems, Luanda still manages to retain a dash of panache in the face of all this adversity.

HISTORY

Founded as São Paulo de Loanda on the Ilha de Cabo by 400 Portuguese soldiers and 100 families in 1575, the settlement was moved to the mainland one year later. In 1605 Luanda became a city, and two centuries later its resplendent buildings and flourishing trade earned it the title of the 'Paris of Africa'. But the Napoleonic comparisons didn't last. Despite sitting out the worst of the disastrous civil war, Luanda quickly became a refugee camp for millions of desperate internally displaced people fleeing the fighting. Packed to the rafters, it's still getting over the shock.

ORIENTATION

The airport is 4km south of Luanda. The city itself is set along a harbour overlooking the 7km-long Ilha de Luanda ('the Ilha'). The 2km promenade along the harbour, Av 4 de Fevereiro, is known as the Marginal and is the heart of the city. It hosts the reserve bank, head offices and international airlines. South along the Marginal is Mutamba, where you are most likely to stay, play and get away – second only to the Ilha (1km away), with its endless beaches, bars and restaurants. North of the city and up the hill from the Marginal is Miramar, home to the president, most of the embassies, rich oil expats and poor Angolans.



INFORMATION Internet Access

Internet access cost around US\$3 per hour. All the top hotels have internet facilities.

Good, centrally located options: **A Nave** (Rua da Missão, 55) Located at the back of a decent pizza joint.

Correios Commcenter (Largo de Pedro Alexandrino de Cunha, Mutamba) In the post office building.

Medical Services

There are many 24-hour *farmacias* (pharmacies) in the capital. Luanda's best clinics: **Clinica da Mutamba** ((2) 39 37 83, emergency 39 72 22; Rua Pedro Felix Machado, 10/12) A one-stop medical facility that includes a pharmacy.

Clinica Sagrada Esperanca (a 30 90 34; Av Murtala Mohamed, Ilha de Luanda; 2 24hr) Located near the end of the Ilha.

Money

You can change money in banks and major hotels without a passport. There are plenty of options for changing money on the street (where you may get a better rate). Since 2003 the kwanza has remained relatively stable, floating around 80Kz to 83Kz for US\$1.

Post & Telephone

The **post office** (Largo de Pedro Alexandrino de Cunha, Mutamba), just off the Marginal, is in a large, historic building dating from 1850. Unfortunately, the postal system is similarly antiquated. In case of urgency, **DHL** (39 51 80; Av Cmdt Che Guevara, 52A) is a faster and more expensive option.

The best public telephones are located at the post office.

Tour Operators

Charme Tours (222-39 64 99, 222-39 74 99; www .charmetours.com; Congresso MPLA, 33/35) Somitour (39 90 91, 33 79; 65 Rua Manuel F Caldeira 3A/3B)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Although Luanda isn't, on first impressions, as dangerous as many other African cities, it is important for visitors to keep their wits about them and abide by a few basic safety precautions. Being robbed is one of the biggest dangers you'll encounter, although strolling around the central areas during the daytime is relatively low risk. Don't walk anywhere at night. Don't wear gold or silver jewellery (even imitation), or an eye-catching watch. Keep money in a hidden money belt, and don't use a mobile phone on the street (phone robbery is one of Luanda's most common crimes). See also Dangers & Annoyances, p835.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The curvaceous sweep of the harbour-side **Marginal** (Av 4 de Fevereiro) makes an interesting stroll at any time of day. Look out for the striking domed pink façade of the **Banco Na-cional de Angola** (Av 4 de Fevereiro, 151) designed by architect Vasco Regaleira and inaugurated in 1956. Architectural buffs will also want to check the **Palácio de Ferro** (Rua Major Kanyangulo), designed by Frenchman Gustave Eiffel (of Eiffel Tower fame) in the 1890s for the Paris Universal Exhibition. The construction was dismantled and brought to Luanda in 1902

Luanda has a smattering of old colonial churches hidden among the skyscrapers. A bit of careful searching will reveal the diminutive **Igreja de Nossa Senhora de Nazaré** (Praça do Ambiente), dating from 1664, and the impressive doubledomed façade of the **Igreja de Nossa Senhora dos Remedios** (Rua Rainha Ginga), built in 1655 and restored in 1995.

The Fortaleza de São Miguel guarding the entrance to the bay was constructed by the Portuguese in 1576 and is Luanda's oldest surviving building. Altered in 1664, whereupon it took its present star shape, the fort today houses the Museu Central das Forças Armadas (admission US\$2.50; (2) 9am-6pm) and offers sweeping views of the city below. Other museums worth seeing are the Museu de Antropologia (Rua Friedrich Engels; donation accepted; 🕑 9am-6pm Mon-Fri), with its African masks, musical instruments and indigenous hunting artefacts housed in an old colonial building, and the Museu de História Natural (Rua Nossa Senhora da Múxima, 47; 🏵 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), which boasts two permanent exhibitions in its marine and mammal halls.

Unmistakable on the Luanda skyline is the thin needle-like structure of the **Mausoléu de Agostinho Neto**, Angola's first president. At the time of writing it was still unfinished and, as yet, is not open to the public.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Carnival** is held in February and is set along the Marginal. It's a jovial and open affair, most notable for its ubiquitous half-dead cats (of which Angolans are very superstitious) tied to costumes and crucifixes. **Independence Day** is held on 11 November and is also celebrated on the streets, with the added bonus of a public address and a few words from his nibs, the president.

SLEEPING

There are a handful of classy hotels in Luanda, but most rooms are grossly overpriced. Expect to pay US\$80 upwards for anything half-decent.

Hotel Globo (33 21 79; Rua Rainha Ginga, 100; s/d US\$42/63) Rock-bottom Luanda style with cleanish, moth-eaten rooms in a centrally located position. General facilities beg for a major renovation.

Hotel Panorama ((2) 30 90 74; Av Murtala Mohamed; s/d US\$66/79) This scruffy haunt has been a permanent feature on the Luanda landscape since the early 1970s, but its magnificent setting on the Ilha facing the harbour belies a spectacularly grotty interior. Prepare yourself for dank, dark bathrooms and characterless rooms, and arrive armed with a mosquito net.

Hotel Trópico ((2) 37 00 70; Rua da Missão, 103; s/d US\$250/290; (2) (P) (2) (2) An international-class hotel with rooms and facilities (including a top-notch gym and free internet) almost deserving of its astronomic price tag.

Hotel Alvalade ((2) 32 74 70; Rua Emidio Mbindi; s/d US\$250/290; (2) P □) On a par with Trópico, but in a slightly more removed location (near the airport), the Alvalade is glitzy and swanky, and spanking new.

EATING & DRINKING

With some subtle gastronomic know-how and a budget of US\$10 and upwards for an edible meal, visitors to Luanda certainly won't starve. In fact, many of the myriad eating establishments that lie dotted around the city centre are better than advance publicity would have you believe. Thanks to the legacy of the Portuguese, *pastelerias* (pastry and coffee shops) have a distinctly European flavour.

Street food is easy to procure from the *barrio* women who sell fruit and baguette-like sandwiches from washing bowls in the thoroughfares around the city centre. More established street vendors sell beer, bags of roasted nuts, and barbecued chicken and corn. The beach at Chicala at the southwest end of the Ilha has some great outdoor fish stalls.

Kimbo ((2) 923 474 841; Rua Joaquim de Figueiredo, 15) Just off the Marginal, Kimbo is great for a mid-morning coffee or a buffet-style lunch. Jardim Esplanada Nilo (Av Rainha Ginga) A salubrious tree-covered patio offering drinks and sweet tasting snacks.

Nandos (cm Rua Amilcar Cabral & Rainha Ginga) This place mixes air-conditioned comfort with convenience food, serving Portuguese-style peri-peri chicken and french fries. Next door is 'Steers', a South African burger chain.

Restaurante Chez Wou (**(a)** 30 93 94) Angola's Chinese presence can be experienced (and tasted) quite literally at this businesslike establishment at the entrance to the Ilha.

Portugália (**T** 30 % 77) Portuguese fare offered in abundance on the Ilha, with good service and pleasant surroundings.

Club Nautico (Av Murtala Mohamed) À classy restaurant in Luanda's yacht club serving everything from tasty chicken to bog-standard *funje* (ground maize).

ENTERTAINMENT

Many flock to the Ilha in the evenings to such trendy haunts as **Chill Out** ((a) 30 99 63; Av Murtala Mohamed) and **Restaurante Bordão** ((a) 30 90 28; Av Murtala Mohamed) that seem more redolent of Miami than Luanda.

Karl Marx (Rua de Oliveira Martins, 19) This poignantly named, large semi-outdoor bar-cinema screens Hollywood flicks with Portuguese subtitles. It occasionally hosts a performance group from Lisbon or Brazil. Check *Jornal de Angola* for daily listings.

SHOPPING

The best place to shop is at Benfica market, 16km south of Luanda on the Kissama road. The atmosphere is relatively hassle free, and the handicrafts deftly sculpted and authentic. Don't buy the ivory.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can fly daily between Luanda and almost every major Angolan city with one of five different airlines (see p837). Destinations include Benguela (US\$110), Cabinda (US\$95), Huambo (US\$120), Malange (US\$95), Namibe (US\$130), Ondjiva (US\$135) and Lubango (US\$125). All flights depart from the domestic terminal at Aeroporto 4 de Fevereiro.

You can hire cars from **Avis** (2) 32 15 51), which has offices at the airport and at Hotel Trópico, and **Equador** (2) 33 07 46; Largo Iristão da Cunha, 11/12). Rental prices start per day at US\$60 for a sedan or US\$120 for 4WD; car

OPERATION NOAH'S ARK

A one-time habitat for giant herds of rhino, elephant and buffalo, Parque Nacional da Kissama suffered inexorably during Angola's acrimonious civil war when wildlife numbers plummeted to little more than zero. Those animals not finished off by landmines or sporadic military crossfire, quickly fell prey to poachers or were eaten by desperate locals anxious to stave off starvation.

But in 1996, with the end of the war in sight, the newly formed Kissama Foundation in tandem with the Angolan government hatched an ingenious relief plan aimed at rehabilitating the park by importing elephants from wildlife reserves in South Africa and Botswana. Called Operation Noah's Ark, this pioneering aid project re-trained ex-soldiers as game wardens, instructed local villagers in how to manage camp sites and refurbished old buildings as tourist bungalows. After four years of painstaking preparations, Kissama received its first stock of air-lifted animals in 2000 when 16 elephants were flown in on a Russian cargo plane from South Africa. One year later and the park was topped up with a further stock of 16 elephants, 12 zebras, 12 ostriches, 14 wildebeests and four giraffes.

The ultimate aim of Operation Noah's Ark is to transport up to 500 elephants from the overpopulated Tuli Block in Eastern Botswana by road and ship in what will be one of the largest translocations of wild animals ever attempted.

Though progress has been slow, early signs suggest that the project has been a success, and in 2001 the first elephant calf was born to Kissama's newly established herd.

and driver from US\$15 an hour. The chaotic nature of Luanda traffic makes hiring a driver highly recommended.

GETTING AROUND

Luanda's airport, Aeroporto 4 de Fevereiro, is 4km south of Luanda, with the domestic terminal next to the international one.

For getting around Luanda, buses and the ubiquitous Hiaces (blue-and-white Toyota Hiaces) start from a terminus in Mutamba, in front of the pale pink Governo Provincial building. They go to most places within Luanda and nearby (US\$0.50 to US\$1). Bus stops are conspicuous by their long queues. Private taxis are 4WDs; try **Macontaxi** (2 470520), which charges approximately US\$25 an hour with driver. It has an office at the airport.

There is a daily bus service running 600km along the coast between Benguela and Luanda. Three companies make this spectacular trip (SGO, Empesco and Autoviação Fialho y Filhos), and the journey (approximately nine hours) costs US\$25 to US\$28.

COASTAL ANGOLA

Travelling outside the capital in cars or on buses is increasingly popular, and the overall security situation has improved immeasurably since lasting peace broke out in April 2002. The best road link is between Luanda and Benguela via Port Amboin, Sumbe and Lobito, closely followed by the spectacular drive in the southwest from Lubango to Namibe. Other passable routes (with a 4WD) include Benguela–Huambo, Luanda–Malange, Lubango–Santa Clara (Namibian border) and Lubango–Huambo. Join up the dots and you'll quickly find that, with a decent car, plenty of patience and a gung-ho sense of adventure, you can now get from Namibia to Luanda via 2000km of rough, bone-rattling but seriously spectacular roads.

PARQUE NACIONAL DA KISSAMA & AROUND

Kissama (also spelt Quiçama), situated 70km south of Luanda, is Angola's most accessible and well-stocked wildlife park. Inaugurated as a nature reserve in 1938 and upgraded to a national park in 1957, this 990,000-hectare swathe of coastal savannah punctuated by gnarly baobab trees is home to elephants, water buffalo, indigenous *palanca* antelopes and a precarious population of nesting sea turtles. Despite years of poaching and neglect during the civil war, Kissama remains at the forefront of Angola's wildlife regeneration efforts thanks largely to a pioneering relief project known as Operation Noah's Ark (see above).

Visitors to Kissama can stay in **bungalows** (s/dUS\$90/120), though bookings must be made in advance in Luanda through **Kurika Safari Park** (2) 222-43 20 20; Rua Cónego Manual das Neves). There is also a restaurant on site that serves meals for US\$15 to US\$18. Wildlife viewing can be organised from US\$10 per person for two hours.

Other natural attractions in the area include the **Miradouro de Lua**, a veritable moonscape of rust and silver-coloured rock formations that cascade like a mini Grand Canyon into the Atlantic just off the Luanda–Benguela coast road, approximately 30km south of the capital. Boat trips (US\$100) on the nearby **Kwanza River** reveal copious amounts of birdlife, and can also be organised through Kurika Safari Park or at the nearby **Tarpon Lodge** ((2) 88-163 151 9324).

The only practical way of getting to the park is either with an organised group (see p830) or with a hire car. It is recommended that you hire both a car and a driver who knows the route in Luanda.

BENGUELA

🖻 2722 / pop 200,000

Coastal Benguela is Angola's second most important city and the self-proclaimed cultural capital. Nestled on the shores of the Atlantic approximately 30km south of the port of Lobito, the city is surrounded by fine beaches and bisected by the lush and agriculturally important Cavaco River valley; a veritable oasis of green in an otherwise dry and arid desert. Founded by the Portuguese in 1617,

THE BENGUELA RAILWAY

Commissioned by the Portuguese in 1899 and built by the British over the ensuing 30 years, the Benguela railway comprised a feat of engineering unmatched elsewhere in Africa. During its heyday in the 1960s and '70s the track stretched 1370km (850 miles) from the Atlantic port of Lobito to Luau on the DRC border, and ran an impressive stock of 69 steam locomotives.

But Angola's bitter civil war quickly put an end to the railway's glory days. By the early 1990s this once great link in southwest Africa's burgeoning oil, diamond and copper-based economy had – by a combination of ambush, sabotage and serial mine-laying – been reduced to a 30km spur between the twin coastal cities of Benguela and Lobito.

Successive renovation schemes have come up against crushing problems. In 1997, during a brief break in Angola's ongoing domestic war, Italian company Tor di Valle secured an agreement to rebuild the Benguela railway. Short on hard cash, the Angolan government offered to pay them with thousands of acres of eucalyptus forest planted commercially during the 1920s to provide a unique form of fuel for Angola's steam engines. But the deal – thanks to a re-eruption of the war the following year – never materialised.

Fast forward to 2006, and with peace once again a lasting possibility, the negotiations clawed their way back to the table. The Chinese were the successful bidders fighting their way through an obstacle course of disincentives – minefields, blown-up bridges and collapsed ravines to name three – that stand in the way of making this dream a reality. For Angolan observers the price is high, but with 30 months of scheduled man hours and an investment of over US\$300 million, it's only a matter of time before the railway is restored once again to its former glory.

Benguela was once an important slave port and the embarkation point for shiploads of human cargo bound for Brazil. With the onset of the 20th century, it became the terminus for the Benguela railway (below), though its position as an Atlantic port was rapidly upsurged by neighbouring Lobito. Spared a direct hit in the bloody 40-year civil war, Benguela retains a laid-back ambience in a bustling big-city setting. You'll encounter little hassle here and make plenty of spontaneous friends.

Benguela's yellow-sand beaches are rightly famous, with the centrally located **Praia Morena** acting as one of the city's unofficial meeting points. Watch out for svelte-looking athletes practicing their Capoeira here early in the morning. The most popular out-oftown beach is **Baía Azul**, situated 20km to the south on the road to Baía Farta (accessible by Hiace bus).

The town's only museum is the tiny **Museu de Arqueológica**, situated on the seafront in an old warehouse that was once a holding shed for captured slaves. The church of **Nossa Senhora do Pópulo** (Av Combatentes da Grande Guerra) was built in 1748 from stone carried in ships from Brazil as ballast and is Benguela's most beguiling building. Other gems include the **Palácio das Bolas** (Av Agonstinho Neto), used as a headquarters by the provincial MPLA party, and the **Palácio do Governo** facing the beach.

A N G O L A

For Benguela's most colourful and authentic day trip, take the train to **Lobito** (US\$2.50, 1½ hours, 30km, four daily) from the central station. Transport is in shabby cattle trucks, but the journey is like something out of an Indiana Jones movie.

Benguela has a wide selection of hostels and hotels and the list is growing.

At Nancy's English School e Hospedería ((2) 923 594 093; Largo de Pioneiros, 16; r incl breakfast US\$45; (2) (2), budget travellers will enjoy the facilities and atmosphere at this secluded gem. Run by a friendly American expat.

The good-value **Hotel Luso** (ⓐ 31292; Av Aires de Almeida Santos; s/d US\$60/120; ☑) has a quiet ambience and two different room options.

A hotel that doubles as one of Benguela's best eating joints, **Pensão Contente** ((2) 33637; Rua Bemardino Correia, 81; s/d US\$66/99; (2) serves burgers, prawns and excellent desserts.

At Hotel M'ombaka ((2) 34 487; Rua do Mercado; s/d US\$120/140; (2) (P), top of the Benguela accommodation pile, the leather and wood-panelled furnishings hide slightly dustier rooms upstairs.

Other eating options include **Pastelaria Flamingo** (**C** 30 153; Rua António J Almeida), with *galãos* (white coffee) and pastries, or more substantial seafood (a Benguela speciality) at **Restaurante Escondidinho** (**C** 33 206; Rua Cándido dos Reis, 7-9), which also metamorphoses into the city's most happening nightspot/disco.

Benguela is easily accessed by a daily plane service from Luanda (US\$90 to US\$120). The city has two airports, one 3km south of the city centre and the other in Catumbela 15km to the north. Regular planes also link Benguela with Lubango, Huambo and other major cities.

There are three companies offering a daily bus service (see p832) between Benguela and Luanda (690km, nine hours). A daily train runs to Lobito (30km) and, less frequently, to Cubal 150km inland.

SOUTHERN ANGOLA

HUAMBO

🖻 2412 / pop 400,000

Known formerly as Nova Lisboa (New Lisbon), Huambo was once renowned for its expansive parks and attractive colonial buildings. Indeed, in 1928 it was briefly touted by former Angolan high commissioner António Vicente Ferreira as the country's capital-inwaiting. But then came the war and, in 1993, a gruesome 52-day siege reduced the city to little more than a pile of pock-marked rubble. Rising from the ashes, modern-day Huambo is taking its first tentative steps on the road to recovery.

While true sights are few and far between, Huambo's latent beauty can be glimpsed briefly in among the scores of bullet-strafed buildings that make up the Cidade Alta (Upper City) and the Cidade Baixa (Lower City). Take some time to check out **Parque Almirante Américo Tomás**, known locally as the *estufa*, with its eucalyptus trees and forlorn classical sculptures.

Gleaming and almost incongruous amid the ruins is the colonial **Palácio do Governo**, a pink Portuguese-inspired palace, while 3km outside of town, the **Granja Por do Sol** is a pleasantly landscaped tourist complex with caged birds, a boating lake and a rustic restaurant.

Huambo has some surprisingly good accommodation options.

Huambo's cheapest pensão, **Pensão Huambo** (20 747; Cidade Alta; s/d US\$35/45), is a basic beddown just off the roundabout near the Palácio do Governo.

A block or so from Hotel Nino, **Tchinossanda House** (a 23 422; Cidade Baixa; s/d US\$38/76) has adequate rooms and a patio restaurant at the back.

The city's most inviting café-restaurant is the Parisian-style **Novo Império** (23 176; Rua Dr Lacerda, Cidade Alta), which does great burgers, pizza, pastries and coffee. A few blocks further east is the cheaper and more traditional **Restaurante Pestico GiGi** (20 258; Rua Dr Lacerda, Cidade Alta), which has a daily set menu for US\$7.

There are daily flights to Luanda and connections to Benguela and Lubango two to three times a week. The roads between Huambo and Benguela, and Huambo and Lubango are open but are in a pretty poor condition.

LUBANGO

🖻 2612 / pop 200,000

Cool and picturesque, Lubango defies popular images of Angola's war-ravaged past and impoverished present. Relatively unscathed by the 40-year conflict that tore the heart of communities elsewhere, the order and tranquillity of Lubango's central core has more in common with Namibia than Huambo or Kuito. You'll encounter a handful of adventurous overlanders here, some quirky cafés and a half-dozen or so comfortable, if overpriced, hotels.

Surrounded by mountains and nestled in a cool central valley, one of the best ways to get a bird's-eye view of Lubango is to rent a car and driver (US\$15 per hour) from the Grande Hotel da Huíla and motor up to the **Cristo Rei**, a huge statue of Jesus (redolent of Rio's *Corcavado*) that overlooks the city. Other day or half-day excursions include the **Tunda-Vala volcanic fissure**, 20km outside town, where you can climb to 2600m above sea level for stellar views, and the famous **Leba Mountain Rd** on the way to Namibe that drops 1000m via a succession of precipitous switchbacks.

An excellent and viable side trip from Lubango is to the fishing town of **Namibe** on the Atlantic coast. Aside from boasting a number of decent sights and attractions in its own right, Namibe also provides easy access to **Flamingo Lodge**, a choice fishing and angling spot 70km south of the town professionally run by **Angolan Adventure Safaris** (288-163 151 9324; www.aasafaris.com). Prebooking is recommended.

Lubango has a selection of relatively comfortable hotels and restaurants.

Lubango's cheapest pensão, **Pensão Diocema** (a 21 788; Rua Deolinda Rodríguez, 98A; r US\$50), is scruffy, but friendly.

Situated on the edge of town, the burgeoning tourist park **Complexo Turistico Nuestra Señora do Monte** (20 183) is home to the **Wenda Ke Tai Lodge** (s/d US\$74/130), with 20 thatched units and an on-site casino, or the more modern **Casper Lodge** (s/d US\$100/125; 2) (), whose eight spanking-new rooms are kitted out in tasteful African décor.

Lubango's coolest and most popular daytime hang-out is the funky **Huíla Café** (2 24 582; Rualmão Roby), which does delicious burgers and top-notch *galãos*. Equally hip is **Mania Ba**r (2) 22 765; Rua Hoji ya Henda, 20), which boasts an internet café upstairs and a couple of billiard tables out the back.

There are daily flights from Lubango to Luanda and regular connections to Huambo and Benguela. TAAG (see p836) fly twice a week between Lubango and Windhoek, Namibia. The road between Lubango and the town of Namibe is one of the best in the country and intermittent buses (two hours) ply this route.

ANGOLA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Tourist accommodation has traditionally been scant in Angola, but the situation is changing and since 2002 a number of new hotels have opened in the major cities. Rooms, however, are not cheap. Expect to pay upwards of US\$40 for the most basic (bathroomless) room in the countryside and at least US\$80 in the cities.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses are open 8.30am to 12.30pm and 2pm to 6pm Monday to Friday, and 8.30am to 12.30pm Saturday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Contrary to popular belief, travelling in Angola is far safer than outsiders might first imagine – as long as you abide by a few basic ground rules. Luanda's street-crime aside, your biggest danger is probably health, with malaria a particular worry in the coastal areas. Consult your doctor before you leave and don't cut corners when it comes to medication, mosquito nets and other preventative measures; for more details, see Health (p1134). Crime against foreigners is low outside the

PRACTICALITIES

- Angola's newspapers and magazines include Jornal de Angola.
- The national radio station is Radio Nacional de Angola.
- Electricity in Angola is 220/240 V, 50 Hz.
- Angola uses the metric system.

capital and armed banditry in the provinces has diminished considerably since 2002. Furthermore, Angolan police - while certainly not incorruptible - are generally friendlier than many of their African counterparts. Nevertheless, ask permission before taking photos in public areas, always carry a photocopy of your passport and don't wander off the road in rural areas - the threat of unexploded landmines is still a huge problem.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Angola has diplomatic representation in Namibia, Gabon and South Africa (see the Directory section of the relevant country).

The following countries have diplomatic representation in Luanda: Canada (🖻 44 94 94; Rua Rei Katyavala, 113)

Congo (🕿 31 02 93; Rua Fernando Pessoa, Vila Alice) Democratic Republic of Congo (🕿 31 02 93; Rua Fernando Pessoa, Vila Alice)

France (🖻 33 4841; Rua Rev Agostinho Pedro Neto, 39) **Gabon** (2 44 92 89; Rua Eng Armindo Adrade, 149) **Germany** (**2** 33 45 16; Av 4 Fevereiro, 120) Namibia (🕿 39 54 83; Rua dos Coqueiros, 37) South Africa (🕿 33 41 87: Rua Kwamime Nkrumah) UK (🖻 33 45 82; Rua Diogo Cão, 4) **USA** (2 44 45 18; Av Houari Boumedienne, 132) Zambia (🖻 44 74 92; Rua Rei Katyavala, 106)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106), these are the principal public holidays in Angola: New Year's Day 1 January National Holiday 4 February Victory Day 27 March Worker's Day 1 May Armed Forces Day 1 August National Hero's Day 17 September Independence Day 11 November MPLA Foundation Day 10 December

MONEY

A N G O L A

Angola's currency is the kwanza (Kz). It is not convertible and cannot be taken out of the country. As with many third-world economies, the US dollar is also widely accepted.

You can exchange money in banks, at hotels or on the street, where the rates are sometimes marginally better.

Angola is a cash economy and local ATMs rarely accept foreign bank cards. Credit cards are accepted by major hotels and airline companies, but the bulk of business is done in US dol-

lars or kwanza. Come prepared with plenty of hard cash and invest in a decent money belt.

Bargaining is possible when buying from markets or on the street. You can generally expect to haggle down to one-half to twothirds of the initial asking price.

POST & TELEPHONE

The postal system is unreliable throughout the country. Angola Telecom often requires several attempts, but works in the main cities.

VISAS

Tourist visas cost US\$75 for 30 days. Visa applications from embassies abroad are referred to Luanda, and can take up to two weeks to come through. If you are travelling independently, you will require a letter of invitation from a person or organisation in Angola.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be renewed for 90 days in Luanda at the Department of Immigration (DEFA), adjacent to the British embassy, for US\$30.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following countries can be obtained in Angola. See opposite for embassy and consulate information.

Congo All visitors to Congo need a visa. Visa applications can be issued on the same or next day.

Democratic Republic of Congo All visitors need a visa. It is essential to get a visa before you arrive; a one-month, single-entry visa costs US\$75.

Gabon Visas cost US\$100 for 30 days and applications can be lodged from 8.30am to 12.30pm Monday to Friday (air ticket and one photo required).

Namibia Visas cost US\$50 for 30 days and applications can be lodged from 8am to 2.30pm on Friday (two days' processing time required).

Zambia Visas cost US\$100 for 30 days and applications can be lodged from 9am to noon and 2pm to 4pm Monday to Friday (ready same day; two photos and a copy of air ticket required).

TRANSPORT IN ANGOLA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Direct flights from Europe are possible from Paris (Air France), London (British Airways), Brussels (SN Brussels Airlines) and Lisbon (TAP), with prices starting at around US\$1800 return.

International flights fly into Aeroporto 4 de Fevereiro in Luanda. There are also twice weekly flights from Windhoek in Namibia into Lubango.

Your best bet for a cheaper deal is with Ethiopian Airlines, which flies to Luanda from Europe via its African hub of Addis Ababa twice weekly. Deals can be scooped for as little as US\$800. Try an online booking agent, such as Holiday Genie (www.holidaygenie.com).

From inside Africa you can fly to Luanda from Brazzaville (Congo), Harare (Zimbabwe), Johannesburg (South Africa), Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Windhoek (Namibia). There are also twice-weekly flights from Windhoek to Lubango.

The following international airlines are based in Luanda and fly to/from Angola: Aeroflot (222-33 04 26; Av 4 de Fevereiro, 114) Air France (222-33 54 16; Av 4 de Fevereiro, 123) Air Gabon (222-31 06 14; Largo 4 de Fevereiro, 8) Air Namibia (🗃 222-33 67 26; Rua Assalto Q Moncada, 12) Note that TAAG shares some routes.

Air Portugal (222-33 16 92; Av 4 Fevereiro, 80) British Airways (🕿 222-30 92 70; Av Murtala Mohamed, La Ilha)

Ethiopian Airlines (🗃 222-31 06 15; Largo 4 de Fevereiro, 10)

South African Airways (222-39 18 58; Rua Clube Maritimo Africano, 2-4)

TAAG (222-39 25 41: 5th fl. Rua Missão, 123)

Land

According to the Angolan tourist ministry, all of the country's land borders are now open, though savvy travellers should think twice before negotiating the roads and bureaucracy between Angola-Zambia and Angola-DRC. The border with Namibia, on the other hand, is a relative formality. At the time of writing you could enter at either Santa Clara (Angola) from Oshikango (Namibia) or at Calai (Angola) from Rundu (Namibia), visa permitting.

GETTING AROUND Air

Air travel is relatively easy within Angola and flights can often be booked the same day. The national carrier is TAAG (🖻 222-35 25 86; 5th fl, Rua da Missão, 123, Luanda), but there are a number of

equally good internal options, including SAL Airlines (🖻 222-35 08 69), Sonair (🖻 222-35 09 93), Air Gemini (🖻 222-351249) and Diexim Expresso (🖻 222-44 29 10). Flights between Luanda and major cities run daily and interprovincial flights are also possible. Sample prices include: Luanda-Benguela US\$110; Benguela-Lubango US\$85; and Lubango-Huambo US\$80.

Bus

Public transportation is still in the embryonic stages outside of the cities, though compared to other African buses, the vehicles are relatively comfortable. See p832 for further information.

Car

Aided by Chinese and Portuguese investment, roads are slowly opening up in Angola, though you'll still need a 4WD to get you to most places. Plenty of cars now make the journey up from Namibia, and roads are passable (if rough) between the cities of Lubango, Huambo, Benguela, Lobito, Luanda and Malange.

Tours

At the forefront of Angola's tourist renaissance, Charme Tours (222-39 64 99, 222-39 74 99; www.charmetours.com; Congresso MPLA, 33/35) can organise anything from flight bookings to specially tailored tours. Ecotur (2 923 501 387; www.eco-tur.com) is an equally professional outfit, co-run by a British expat, that specialises in adventure trips, such as big game fishing, water sports and bird-watching. Angolan Adventure Ŝafaris (🖻 163 157 4328, 27 021 462 6104; www **venture Safaris** (🖻 163 157 4328, 27 021 462 6104; www assafaris.com), which runs the Tarpon Lodge on the Kwanza River and the Flamingo Lodge south of Namibe, can also organise visas and put together tailored trips.

Train

A one-time pioneer of 20th-century rail transport, Angola's war-damaged railways are currently getting a long-awaited Chinese makeover. Limited services are now available between Luanda and Dondo (twice weekly); Lobito and Cubal via Benguela (four daily); Lubango and Namibe (once weekly); and Huambo and Calenga (four daily).

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Botswana

Botswana is an African success story. After achieving democratic rule in 1966, three of the world's richest diamond-bearing formations were discovered within its borders. Today, the country enjoys a high standard of economic stability, education and health care, which, with the exception of South Africa, is unequalled elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. However, its modern veneer belies the fact that much of it remains a country for the intrepid (not to mention relatively wealthy) traveller. This largely roadless wilderness of vast spaces requires time, effort and, above all else, lots of cash to enjoy it to its fullest.

Landlocked Botswana extends 1100km from north to south and 960km from east to west, making it about the same size as Kenya or France and somewhat smaller than Texas. Most of the country lies at an average elevation of 1000m, and consists of a vast and nearly level sand-filled basin characterised by scrub-covered savannah. The Kalahari, a semi-arid expanse of sandy valleys, covers nearly 85% of the country, including the entire central and southwestern regions. In the northwest, the Okavango River flows in from Namibia, and soaks into the sands to form the Okavango Delta.

With vast open savannas teeming with wildlife, Botswana is truly the Africa of your dreams. Because the Okavango Delta and the Chobe River provide a year-round water supply, nearly all southern African mammal species are present in the Moremi Wildlife Reserve and Chobe National Park. In the Makgadikgadi & Nxai Pans National Park herds of wildebeest, zebra and other mammals migrate annually in search of permanent water and stable food supplies.

FAST FACTS

- Area 582,000 sq km
- ATMs Found in large towns
- Borders South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe (all overland crossings)
- Budget US\$40 to US\$70 a day
- Capital Gaborone
- Language English, Setswana
- Money Pula (P); US\$1 = 6.4P
- Population 1.63 million
- Seasons Wet (November to March); dry (May to August)
- Telephone Country code 267; international access 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC +2
- Visa None required for citizens of Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Canada or the USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Okavango Delta (p848) Glide through watery expanses in a mokoro, a traditional dugout canoe.
- **Chobe National Park** (p856) Spot the Big Five at Botswana's premier wildlife park.
- Makgadikgadi & Nxai Pans National Park (p857) Follow herds of migrating zebra and wildebeest in this baobab-dotted salt-pan complex.
- **Tsodilo Hills** (p854) Wander through the 'Wilderness Louvre' of ancient San rock paintings.
- **Savuti** (p857) Test the limits of your survival instincts on an intrepid 4WD camping expedition.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Although it straddles the Tropic of Capricorn, Botswana experiences extremes in both temperature and weather. In the winter (late May through August), days are normally clear, warm and sunny, and nights are cool to cold. Wildlife never wanders far from water sources. so sightings are more predictable than in the wetter summer season. This is also the time of European, North American and - most importantly - South African school holidays, so some areas can be busy, especially between mid-July and mid-September. In summer (October to April), wildlife is harder to spot and rains can render sandy roads impassable. This is also the time of the highest humidity and the most stifling heat; daytime temperatures of over 40°C are common.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Botswana's tourist highlight is the Okavango Delta (p848), and if you have only a few days, this is where you'll want to focus. Choose Maun (p851) or the Okavango Panhandle (p851) as your base and organise a *mokoro* trip through the wetlands, followed by a wildlifeviewing trip at Moremi Wildlife Reserve (p849).
- One Week Combine your visit to the delta with a safari through Chobe National Park (p856), one of the world's top safari experiences. Either go overland through the rugged interior or cruise along the wildlife-rich waterfront.
- **One Month** With a full month (and lots of money), you can hire a 4WD or use a reputable safari company and see the best

HOW MUCH?

- Internet connection US\$3 per hour
- National park entry fee US\$22
- Decent binoculars from a shop in Maun US\$35
- Nice meal in a tourist restaurant US\$15
- 4WD rental US\$75 to US\$100 per day

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.50
- 1L bottled water US\$0.25
- Bottle of Castle beer US\$1.25
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$12
- Sugar cane US\$0.10

of the country: do a mokoro trip through the Okavango Delta (p848), safari in Moremi Wildlife Reserve (p849) and Chobe National Park (p856), camp and hike in the Tsodilo Hills (p854), cruise along the Okavango Panhandle (p851) and explore the very furthest reaches of the Savuti (p857).

HISTORY **Pre-Colonial History**

Following the fragmented trail of ancient pottery, archaeologists and anthropologists have been able to piece together the complex, crisscrossing migration of different tribal groups into southern Africa. Between AD 200 and 500 Bantu-speaking farmers started to appear on the southern landscape from the north and east. To begin with, relations between the San and Khoikhoi appear to have been cordial, and the groups mixed freely, traded and intermarried.

Perhaps the most significant development in Botswana's long history was the evolution of the three main branches of the Tswana tribe during the 14th century. It's a typical tale of family discord, where three brothers - Kwena, Ngwaketse and Ngwato – broke away from their father, Chief Malope, to establish their own tollowings in Molepolole, Kanye and Se-rowe respectively. Realistically, these fractures probably occurred in response to drought and expanding populations cannot be also be als expanding populations eager to strike out in search of new pastures and arable land.

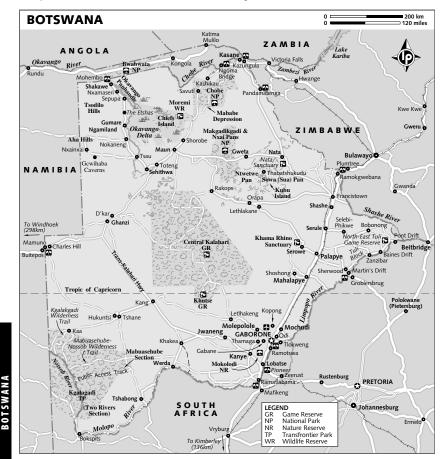
Colonial History

From the 1820s the Boers began their Great Trek across the Vaal River. Confident that they had heaven-sanctioned rights to any land they might choose to occupy in southern Africa, 20,000 Boers crossed into Tswana and Zulu territory and established themselves as though the lands were unclaimed and uninhabited. At the Sand River Convention of 1852, Britain recognised the Transvaal's independence and the Boers informed the Batswana (people of Botswana) that they were now subjects of the South African Republic.

Prominent Tswana leaders Sechele I and Mosielele refused to accept white rule and incurred the violent wrath of the Boers. After heavy losses of life and land, the Tswana sent

their leaders to petition the British for protection. Britain, however, was in no hurry to support lands of dubious profitability and offered only to act as arbitrator in the dispute. But by 1877, the worsening situation provoked the British annexation of the Transvaal and launched the first Boer War, with violence continuing until 1881. In 1882, Boers again moved into Tswana lands and subdued Mafeking, threatening the British route between the Cape and the suspected mineral wealth in Zimbabwe.

Again, the Tswana lobbied for British protection and in 1885, thanks to petitions from John Mackenzie (a friend of the Christian Chief Khama III of Shoshong), Britain resigned itself to the inevitable. Lands south of



A new threat to the Tswana chiefs' power base came in the form of Cecil Rhodes and his British South Africa Company (BSAC). By 1894, the British had all but agreed to allow him to control the country. An unhappy delegation of Tswana chiefs - Bathoen, Khama III and Sebele – accompanied by a sympathetic missionary, WC Willoughby, sailed to England to appeal directly to Colonial Minister Joseph Chamberlain for continued government control but their pleas were ignored. As a last resort, they turned to the London Missionary Society (LMS), which in turn took the matter to the British public. Fearing the BSAC would allow alcohol in Bechuanaland, the LMS and other Christian groups backed Chief Khama III. Public pressure mounted and the British government was forced to concede.

Chiefs now grudgingly accepted their rites and traditions would be affected by Christianity and Western technology. The capital of the protectorate was established at Mafeking actually in South Africa - and taxes were introduced. Chiefs were granted tribal 'reserve' (jurisdiction over all black residents and the authority to collect taxes and retain a 10% commission on all moneys collected). In addition, the local economy was bolstered by the sale of cattle, draft oxen and grain to the Europeans streaming north in search of farming land and minerals.

The honeymoon didn't last. The construction of the railway through Bechuanaland to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the 1890s destroyed the transit trade. In 1924, South Africa began pressing for Bechuanaland's amalgamation into the Union of South Africa, and when the Tswana chiefs refused, economic sanctions destroyed what remained of their beef market.

In 1923, Chief Khama III died and was succeeded by his son Sekgoma, who died after serving only two years. The heir to the throne, four-year-old Seretse Khama, wasn't ready for the job of ruling the largest of the Tswana chiefdoms, so his 21-year-old uncle Tshekedi Khama became regent of his clan.

Resident Commissioner Sir Charles Rey determined that no progress would be forth-

coming as long as the people were governed by Tswana chiefs and proclaimed all local government officials answerable to colonial magistrates. So great was the popular opposition - people feared that it would lead to their incorporation into South Africa - that Rey was ousted from his job and his proclamation annulled.

During WWII, 10,000 Tswana volunteered for the African Pioneer Corps to defend the British Empire. After the war Seretse Khama went to study in England where he met and married an Englishwoman. Tshekedi Khama was furious at this breach of tribal custom, and the South African authorities, still hoping to absorb Bechuanaland into the Union, were none too happy. The British government blocked Seretse's chieftaincy and he was exiled from the protectorate to England. Bitterness continued until 1956 when Seretse Khama renounced his right to power and returned with his wife to Botswana to serve as a minor official

Nationalism & Independence

The first signs of nationalist thinking among the Tswana occurred in the late 1940s, and in 1955 it had become apparent that Britain was preparing to release its grip on Bechuanaland. University graduates returned from South Africa with political ideas, and although the country had no real economic base, the first Batswana political parties surfaced and began thinking about independence.

Following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, South African refugees Motsamai Mpho of the African National Congress (ANC) and Philip Matante, a Johannesburg preacher affiliated with the Pan-Africanist Congress, along with KT Motsete, a teacher from Malawi, formed the Bechuanaland People's Party. Its immediate goal was independence for the protectorate.

In 1962, Seretse Khama and the Kanve farmer Ouett Masire formed the more moderate Bechuanaland Democratic Party (BDP), soon to be joined by Chief Bathoen II of the Ngwaketse. The BDP formulated a schedule for independence, drawing on support from local chiefs and traditional Batswana.

into the country (from Mafeking to Gabor-one), drafted a new nonracial constitution and set up a countdown to independent of the capital a peaceful transfer of power. General elections

were held in 1965 and Seretse Khama was elected president. On 30 September 1966, the country, now called the Republic of Botswana, gained independence.

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Sir Seretse Khama - he was knighted shortly after independence - was no revolutionary, adopting a neutral stance (at least until near the end of his presidency) towards South Africa and Rhodesia. The reason, of course, was Botswana's economic dependence on these countries. Nevertheless, Khama refused to exchange ambassadors with South Africa and officially disapproved of apartheid in international circles.

Botswana was economically transformed by the discovery of diamonds near Orapa in 1967. The mining concession was given to De Beers with Botswana taking 75% of the profits.

After the death of Khama in 1980, Dr Ketumile Masire took the helm. His popular presidency ended in March 1998, when the current president, Festus Mogae, assumed control of Botswana.

Botswana Todav

Botswana continues to be a shining light among its neighbours, with a nonracial, multiparty, democratic government that oversees the affairs of a peaceful and neutral state. Unlike in so many African countries, freedom of speech, association, press and religion, as well as equal rights, are all guaranteed under the constitution.

The greatest threat to Botswana's stability is the deadly AIDS virus. Botswana has the highest HIV infection rate in the world, and according to a UN report, 19% of all people

BATSWANA

BOTSWANA

In the predominant language, Setswana (which means 'language of the Tswana'), tribal groups are usually denoted by the prefix 'ba'. Thus, Herero people are known as Baherero, the Kgalagadi as Bakgalagadi, and so on. Collectively, all citizens of Botswana (which means 'land of the Tswana') regardless of colour, ancestry or tribal affiliation - are known as Batswana (plural) or Motswana (singular), even if they are not strictly from the Batswana tribal group. The Batswana tribal group accounts for about 60% of the people living in the country.

lonelyplanet.com

In regard to malaria, Botswana actually has one of the lowest malaria rates in southern Africa, which is predominantly do to the aridity of the country.

CULTURE

Proud, conservative, resourceful and respectful, the Batswana have an ingrained feeling of national identity and an impressive belief in their government and country.

Traditional culture acts as a sort of societal glue. Respect for one's elders, firmly held religious beliefs, traditional gender roles and the tradition of the kgotla (a specially designated meeting place in each village where grievances can be aired in an atmosphere of mutual respect) create a well-defined social structure with some stiff mores at its core. But despite some heavyweight social responsibilities the Batswana have an easygoing and unhurried approach to life, and the emotional framework of the extended family generally makes for an inclusive network.

ARTS & CRAFTS

The original Batswana artists managed to convey individuality, aesthetics and aspects of Batswana life in their utilitarian implements. Baskets, pottery, fabrics and tools were decorated with meaningful designs derived from tradition. Europeans introduced a new form of art, some of which was integrated and adapted to local interpretation, particularly in weavings and tapestries. The result is some of the finest and most meticulously executed work in southern Africa.

Botswana's most famous modern literary figure is South African-born Bessie Head (who died in 1988). Her works reflect the National park entry fees for nonresidents are US\$22 per day for individual travellers or US\$13 per day for licensed safari participants, plus US\$5.50 per person for camping. Foreign-/Botswanaregistered vehicles pay US\$10/2 per day. Children and Botswana residents and citizens get substantial discounts.

You can book accommodation in the national parks by post, phone, fax, email or in person up to one year prior to your intended visit. Contact the reservation office of the **Department** of Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP; Gaborone Map pp844-5; 🖻 318 0774; fax 318 0775; dwnp@gov.bw; PO Box 131, Government Enclave, Khama Cres; 论 7.30am-12.45pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri; Maun Map p853; 🖻 686 1265; fax 686 1264; PO Box 20364, Boseja; 🕑 7.30am-12.30pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-noon Sun). Chobe National Park bookings are also available from the Kasane office (Map p855; 🖻 625 0235; fax 625 1623; Sedudu Gate).

harshness and beauty of African village life and the Botswanan landscape. Her most widely read works include Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, When Rain Clouds Gather, Maru, The Cardinals, A Bewitched Crossroad and The Collector of Treasures (the last is an anthology of short stories). Welcome recent additions to Botswana's national literature are the works of Norman Rush. which include the novel Mating, set in a remote village, and Whites, which deals with the country's growing number of expatriates and apologists from South Africa and elsewhere.

ENVIRONMENT

With an area of 582,000 sq km, landlocked Botswana extends more than 1100km from north to south and 960km from east to west. The Kalahari (Kgalagadi) Desert covers 85% of the country in the central and southwestern areas - but despite the name it's semidesert, and can be surprisingly lush in places. The best season for wildlife viewing takes place during the dry winter months (late May to August), when animals stay close to water sources.

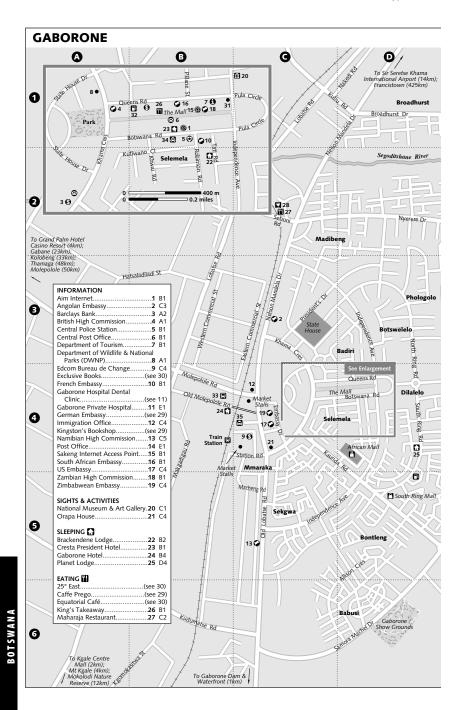
Because the Okavango Delta and the Chobe River provide an incongruous water supply, nearly all southern African mammal species, including such rarities as pukus, red lechwes, sitatungas and wild dogs, are present in Moremi Wildlife Reserve, parts of Chobe National Park and the Linvanti Marshes (at the northwestern corner of Chobe). In the Makgadikgadi & Nxai Pan National Park, herds of wildebeest, zebra and other hoofed mammals migrate between their winter range on the Makgadikgadi plains and the summer lushness of the Nxai Pan region.

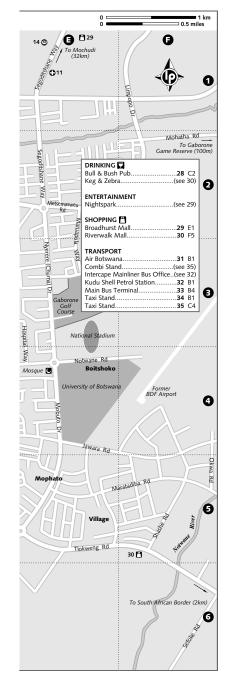
While much of Botswana is largely wide open and pristine, it does face several ecological challenges. The main one revolves around its 3000km of 1.5m-high 'buffalo fence', officially called the 'veterinary cordon fence' a series of high-tensile steel wire barriers that cross some of the country's wildest terrain. The fences were first erected in 1954 to segregate wild buffalo herds from domestic free-range cattle and thwart the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. However, it hasn't been proven that the disease is passed from species to species and the fences not only prevent contact between wild and domestic bovine species, but also prevent other wild animals from migrating to water sources along age-old seasonal routes. While Botswana has set aside large areas for wildlife protection, they don't constitute independent ecosystems, and migratory wildlife numbers (particularly of wildebeest, giraffe and zebra) continue to decline. Cattle ranching is a source of wealth and a major export industry, but all exported beef must be disease-free, so understandably ranchers have reacted positively to the fences, and the government tends to side with the ranchers

GABORONE

pop 250,000

Botswana's diminutive capital, Gaborone (normally affectionately shortened to Gabs), is little more than a rambling village suffering from growing pains, drabness and a lack of definition. However, it serves as a convenient gateway to overland travellers arriving from South Africa and is a great described to the form South Africa and is a good supply stop before heading out to the national parks.





ORIENTATION

Although it now has a distinct skyline, Gaborone lacks any real central business district – the action focuses on its shopping malls. Most government ministries and offices are concentrated around the Government Enclave along Khama Cres, at the head of the main mall. While several shopping centres serve local neighbourhoods, the enormous Kgale Centre and Riverwalk Malls provide the widest range of retail outlets and restaurants.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Exclusive Books (Riverwalk Mall) This reader-recommended bookshop has a wide range of literature, nonfiction and travel books.

Kingston's Bookshop (Broadhurst Mall) A huge array of novels, postcards, books and maps about the region.

Emergency

Ambulance (() 997) Central police station () 355 1161; Botswana Rd) Opposite the Cresta President Hotel. Fire () 998) Police () 999)

Internet Access

Aim Internet (Botswana Rd; per hr US\$3) Next to the Cresta President Hotel. Sakeng Internet Access Point (The Mall; per hr US\$3) In the Gaborone Hardware Building.

Medical Services

Gaborone Hospital Dental Clinic ((2) 395 3777) Part of the Gaborone Private Hospital. Gaborone Private Hospital ((2) 360 1999; Segoditshane Way) For anything serious, head to this considerably modern but expensive hospital opposite Broadhurst Mall.

rn but expensive hospital

Money

Barclays Bank () 355 3411; Khama Cres) Head office. Edcom Bureau de Change () 361 1123) Near the train station.

Post

Central post office (The Mall) Post office (Segoditshane Way) Across the ro

Post office (Segoditshane Way) Across the road from Broadhurst Mall.

Tourist Information

Department of Tourism (a 355 3024; www .botswana-tourism.gov.bw; 2nd fl, Standard Chartered Bank Bldg, The Mall; Y 7.30am-12.30pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Department of Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP; 318 0774; fax 318 0775; dwnp@gov.bw; P0 Box 131, Government Enclave, Khama Cres; 🎦 7.30am-12.45pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Accommodation booking office for all national parks and reserves run by the DWNP.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The National Museum & Art Gallery (🖻 397 4616; Independence Ave; admission free; 🏵 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) is a repository of stuffed wildlife and cultural artefacts. It features displays on San crafts, material culture and hunting techniques; traditional and modern African and European art; and ethnographic and cultural exhibits.

The Gaborone Game Reserve (🖻 358 4492; admission US\$0.25, plus per vehicle US\$0.50; (6.30am-6.30pm), 1km east of Broadhurst, is accessible only by private vehicle (no bikes or motorcycles), and is home to a variety of grazers and browsers.

Orapa House (🖻 395 1131; cnr Nelson Mandela Dr & Khama (res), owned by Debswana, is designed to make use of natural daylight - without direct sunlight - for the purpose of sorting and grading diamonds from the world's largest diamond mine at Jwaneng. If you have time and aren't put off by red tape, you can muster a group and arrange a tour.

SLEEPING

Brackendene Lodge (🕿 361 2886; Tati Rd; s/d from US\$24/45; P 🙁) Although there are a few recently renovated rooms located in the main building, the Brackendene is more a collection of small houses than an organised lodge. The main building is a good choice if you want to be centrally located, though the houses do feature full kitchens.

Planet Lodge (🗃 390 3295; 514 South Ring Rd; s/d from US\$36/43; P 🙁) A short walk from the city centre brings you to this relaxed lodge, which offers attractive rooms featuring TVs, stereos, air-con and fridges. Rooms are priced according to size, and kitchen facilities are available to guests.

Gaborone Hotel (🕿 362 2777; gabhot@info.bw; s/d US\$45/60; P 🕄) This large modern complex will never win any awards for beauty, but it's conveniently located next to the bus and train stations. The rooms are large, surprisingly quiet and well furnished with cable TV and air-con.

Cresta President Hotel (🖻 355 3631; www.cresta -hospitality.com; The Mall; s/d US\$107/133; (P) 🔀 🗩) The first luxury hotel in the city is located smack-dab in the middle of the Mall, which pretty much justifies the heavy price tag.

Grand Palm Hotel Casino Resort (🖻 361 2999; www .grandpalm.bw; Molepolole Rd; d from US\$120; (P) 🔀 🔊) Located 5km west of the city centre, this Las Vegas-inspired resort complex boasts a minicity complete with restaurants, bars, a casino, a cinema and a spa. You'll pay to stay, but it's the swishest accommodation in town.

EATING

Equatorial Café (Riverwalk Mall; mains from US\$2) The best espressos in town are served here, along with fruit smoothies, falafel and gourmet sandwiches. It even has real bagels!

King's Takeaway (The Mall; meals US\$2-4) This local favourite serves up inexpensive burgers, chips and snacks to hungry office workers.

Caffe Prego (Broadhurst Mall; mains US\$4-6) This charming little café specialises in healthy breakfasts and homemade pastas.

Maharaja Restaurant (🕿 393 1870; Seboni Rd; mains US\$4-8) The 'stylish' decor is a bit dated, though the large selection of Indian dishes (including vegetarian options) is perfect if you're looking for relief from pap and stew.

25º East (Riverwalk Mall; sushi US\$2-4, mains US\$5-10) If you can believe it, there is in fact a sushi restaurant on the edge of the Kalahari. Asianinspired mains are probably a safer bet, though it's hard to say no to nigiri-zushi.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The popular Bull & Bush Pub is the centre for expat nightlife. As well as being a restaurant, there's a good selection of cold beers on tap, and if the conversation is lacking, you can always turn your attention to the international sports telecasts on satellite TV.

Keg & Zebra (Riverwalk Mall) This popular bar packs in the crowds for its Sunday night singalong jam sessions, though there's fun to be had here most nights of the week.

Nightspark (Broadhurst Mall; weekend cover charge US\$2) Features all sorts of musical acts and is popular with middle-class Batswana youth.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Sir Seretse Khama International Airport (🗃 35 11 91) is located 15km from the city centre. Air Botswana (🗃 390 5500; Botswana Insurance Company House, The Mall) operates scheduled domestic flights to and from Francistown (US\$100), Maun (US\$155) and Kasane (US\$155). The office also serves as an agent for other regional airlines.

Intercity buses and minibuses to Johannesburg, South Africa (US\$12, seven hours), Francistown (US\$5, six hours), Selebi-Phikwe (US\$6, six hours), Ghanzi (US\$10, 11 hours), Lobatse (US\$1.50, 1¹/₂ hours), Mahalapye (US\$2.50, three hours), Palapye (US\$4, four hours) and Serowe (US\$4, five hours) depart from the main bus terminal. The main bus terminal also offers local services to Kanye (US\$1.50, two hours), Jwaneng (US\$4, three hours), Manyana (US\$0.80, 11/2 hours), Mochudi (US\$1, one hour), Thamaga (US\$0.80, one hour) and Molepolole (US\$1.25, one hour).

To reach Maun or Kasane, change in Francistown. Buses operate according to roughly fixed schedules and minibuses leave when full.

The Intercape Mainliner to Johannesburg (US\$25, 6½ hours) runs from the Kudu Shell petrol station beside the Mall.

The day train departs for Francistown at 10am (club/economy US\$4/8, 61/2 hours). The night train departs at 9pm (US\$25/20 in 1st-/2nd-class sleepers, US\$5 in economy, 8¼ hours).

To hitch north, catch the Broadhurst 4 minibus from any shopping centre along the main city loop and get off at the standard hitching spot at the northern end of town look for a crowd of people waiting in line to thumb a lift.

GETTING AROUND

Packed white combis, recognisable by their blue numberplates, circulate according to set routes and cost US\$0.50. They pick up and drop off only at designated lay-bys marked 'bus/taxi stop'. The main city loop passes all the main shopping centres except the new Riverwalk Mall and the Kgale Centre Mall, which are on the Tlokweng and Kgale routes, respectively.

Taxis, which can also be easily identified by their blue numberplates, are surprisingly difficult to come by in Gabs. Very few cruise the streets looking for fares, and most are parked either in front of the train station or on Botswana Rd. If you manage to get a hold of one, fares (negotiable) are generally US\$3 to US\$5 per trip around the city. Note that taxis rarely turn up at the airport, though there are courtesy minibuses operated by the top-end hotels for their guests. If there's space, nonguests may talk the driver into a lift, but you'll have to pay about US\$8.

AROUND GABORONE

MOCHUDI

Mochudi, one of Botswana's most fascinating villages, was first settled by the Kwena in the mid-1500s, as evidenced by ruined stone walls in the hills. In 1871 came the Kgatla people, who had been forced from their lands by northward-trekking Boers. The Cape Dutch-style Phuthadikobo Museum (🖻 577 7238; fax 574 8920; admission free, donations appreciated; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat & Sun), established in 1976, is one of Botswana's best, with displays on the village and its Kgatla history. After visiting the museum, it's worth spending an hour appreciating the variety of designs in the town's mud-walled architecture.

Buses to Mochudi depart from Gaborone when full. By car, head north to Pilane and turn east; after 6km, turn left at the T-junction and then right just before the hospital, into the historic village centre.

Mokolodi Nature Reserve

This 30-sq-km private reserve (2 316 1955; www.mokolodi.com; admission per person/vehicle US\$2/4; 7.30am-6pm) was established in 1991, and is home to giraffes, elephants, zebras, baboons, warthogs, hippos, kudu, impala, waterbucks and klipspringers. The reserve also protects a few retired cheetahs, leopards, honey badgers, jackals and hyenas, as well as over 300 different species of birds. If you're not selfdriving, two-hour day or night wildlife drives cost US\$28 per person. There are a number of other activities on offer including guided walks (US\$12), rhino tracking (US\$80), cheetah petting (US\$48), horse safaris (US\$24) and a visit to the popular elephant baths (US\$3).

Though pricey, the camp sites (US\$24 for two people) at Mokolodi are secluded and well groomed, and feature braai (barbecue) pits and thatched bush showers (with steaming hot water) and toilets. If you want to safari in style, there are also three-person chalets (US\$120) and eight-person A-frames (US\$198) situated in the middle of the reserve. Advanced bookings are recommended. If you don't have a vehicle, staff can drive you to the camp site and accommodation areas for a nominal charge.

The entrance to the reserve is 12km south of town, but it's 1.5km from the highway to the reserve itself. So, take a combi 12km south

of town until you see a sign for Mokolodi and then get off. Next, walk 1.5km along the dirt path until you reach the main entrance. You can also phone ahead for transfers from the city centre or airport (US\$28 or US\$44 for four people, respectively).

NORTHERN BOTSWANA

OKAVANGO DELTA

The 1430km Okavango River rises in central Angola, then flows southeast across Namibia's Caprivi Strip before entering Botswana east of Shakawe. There, 18.5 billion cu metres of water annually spread and sprawl like an open palm across the flat landscape as they're consumed by the thirsty air and swallowed by the Kalahari sands. Eventually, the river loses itself in a 16,000-sq-km maze of lagoons, channels and islands. In this desert country, the incongruous waters of the resulting wetland – best-known as the Okavango Delta – attract myriad birds and other wildlife, as well as most of Botswana's tourists. Generally, the best months to visit the delta are July to September, when the weather is dry and the water levels are high – unfortunately the prices skyrocket. Because most people visit at this time, we've quoted these prices in this book. Decent deals for delta lodges can be found during the low season (December to March), but beware that *mokoro* trips out of Maun are often impossible at this time due to low water levels. *Mokoro* safaris still operate out of Seronga, where there is a permanent source of water.

The Okavango Delta is usually subdivided into four areas: Eastern Delta, Inner Delta, Moremi Wilderness Reserve and Okavango Panhandle.

Eastern Delta

The Eastern Delta includes the wetlands between the southern boundary of Moremi Wildlife Reserve and the buffalo fence that crosses the Boro and Santandadibe Rivers, north of Matlapaneng. If you're short of time and/or money, this part of the delta remains an affordable and accessible option. *Mokoro*

MOKORO TRIPS

Most visitors to the Okavango spend at least some time travelling by *mokoro* (plural, *mekoro*), a shallow-draught dugout canoe hewn from ebony or sausage tree log (or, more recently, moulded from fibreglass). The *mekoro* are poled from a standing position and their precarious appearance belies their amazing stability. A *mokoro* normally accommodates the poler, two passengers and their food and camping equipment.

While one-day trips are possible in the Eastern Delta (with a return drive lasting several hours from Maun or a more expensive fly-in trip), most people prefer a multiday trip, where travellers ride for several days with the same poler, breaking their journey with walks on palm islands and moving between established camps or wild camping along the way. In this case, the quality of the experience depends largely upon the skill of the poler, the meshing of personalities and the passengers' enthusiasm.

The importance of finding a competent poler cannot be overstated, especially when you're expecting them to negotiate labyrinthine waterways or lead you on bushwalks through wildlife country. The keenest polers can speak at least some English; warn you about dangers (never swim without first asking the poler!); recognise and identify plants, birds and animals along the way; explain the delta cultures; and perhaps even teach clients how to fish using traditional methods.

If you're organising a budget *mokoro* trip, inquire in advance whether you're expected to provide food for your poler. Even if they do bring their own supplies, many travellers prefer to share meals. The polers may, for example, provide a sack of mealie meal (ground maize) and cooking implements while travellers supply the relishes: tins of curries, stews and vegetables. If you have arranged to provide your poler's meals, the standard daily rations are 500g of mealie meal, 250g of white sugar, six tea bags and sufficient salt and powdered milk.

Although it's still possible to negotiate with independent polers, most visitors organise *mokoro* trips through delta lodges or Maun safari companies, or through the Okavango Polers Trust in Seronga (see opposite).

THE OKAVANGO POLERS TRUST

The **Okavango Polers Trust** (**6** 687 6861) was established in 1998 by the people of Seronga to provide cheaper and more accessible *mokoro* trips and accommodation for visitors. Since the collective is run entirely by the village, all profits are shared by the workers, invested into the trust and used to provide the community with better facilities. The trust directly employs nearly 100 people, including polers, dancers, cooks, managers and drivers. Since no travel agency or safari operator has its fingers in the pie, the cooperative can afford to charge reasonable prices for *mokoro* trips. Although it's not uncommon to pay upwards of US\$100 per day for a *mokoro* trip out of Maun, the trust charges US\$30 per day for *two* people. Keep in mind, however, that you must self-cater (ie bring your own food, water and, if necessary, camping and cooking equipment).

There's no longer a daily bus from Mohembo, near the Namibian border, to Seronga, but it's almost always possible to hitch from the free Okavango River ferry in Mohembo. Plan on paying about US\$0.75 for a lift. When they're operating, water taxis run along the Okavango between Sepupa Swamp Stop (see p851) and Seronga (US\$3, two hours); transfers from the Seronga dock to Mbiroba Camp, 3km away, cost US\$9. Otherwise, Sepupa Swamp Stop charters 18-passenger boats for US\$90.

trips in the Eastern Delta are mainly organised by Maun lodges and tour companies (see p862).

Situated near the Santandadibe River along the southern edges of the Moremi Wildlife Reserve, **Chitabe Camp** (per person US\$550) is an island-oasis renowned for the presence of Cape hunting dogs and other less-common wildlife. Book with **Wilderness Safaris** (⁽²⁾) in Johannesburg 011-807 1800; www.wilderness-safaris.com).

Inner Delta

Roughly defined, the Inner Delta occupies the areas west of Chiefs Island and between Chiefs Island and the base of the Okavango Panhandle. *Mokoro* trips through the Inner Delta are almost invariably arranged with licensed polers affiliated with specific lodges, and operate roughly between June and December, depending on the water level. The following rates include lodging, meals and activities.

A comparatively affordable option is **Semetsi Camp** (s/d US\$250/350), which consists of eight dome tents attractively scattered around a palm-fringed islet that overlooks Chiefs Island. Book with **Crocodile Camp Safaris** (a 686 0265; www.botswana.com), in Maun.

Delta Camp (per person US\$450) is beautifully situated beside a flowing channel near the southern end of Chiefs Island. Book with **Okavango Tours & Safaris** ((a) 686 1154; www.okavango .bw), in Maun.

Located on the shores of the Boro River, **Nxabega Okavango Camp** (per person US\$450) is an exquisitely designed tented camp with sweeping views of the delta flood plains. Book with **CCAfrica** (**1** 011-809 4300; www.ccafrica.com), based in Johannesburg.

The only way in and out of the Inner Delta for most visitors is by air. Flights are typically arranged by lodges through local air charter companies.

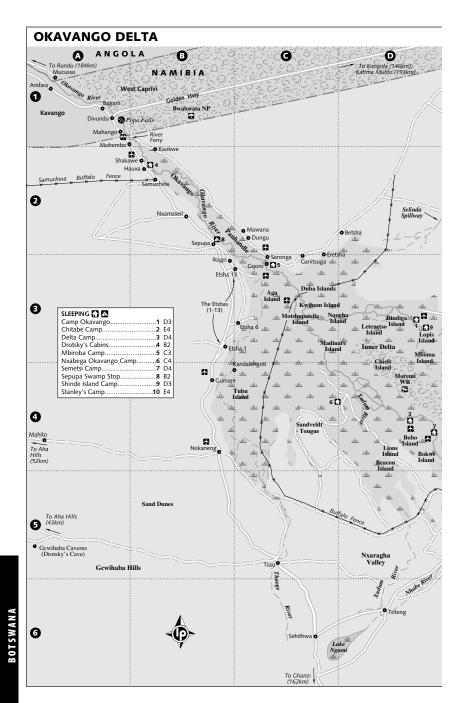
Moremi Wildlife Reserve

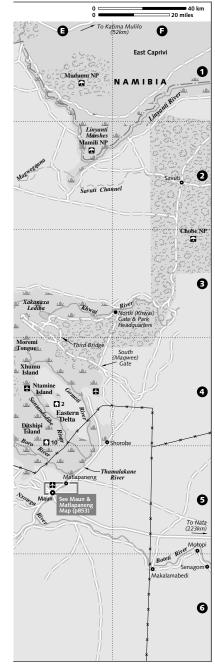
The 3000-sq-km Moremi Wildlife Reserve is the part of the Okavango Delta officially designated for wildlife protection. The park has a distinctly dual personality, with two large areas of dry land – Chiefs Island and the Moremi Tongue – rising between vast wetlands. Habitats range from mopane woodland and thorn scrub to dry savannah, riparian woodlands, grasslands, flood plains, marshes, waterways, lagoons and islands.

The entry gates at North and South Gate both have developed camping grounds. Rustically beautiful Third Bridge, 48km northwest of South Gate, is literally the third log bridge on the road and has a lovely camping ground. Be aware that swimming is extremely dangerous here due to crocodiles and hippos. At Xakanaxa Lediba, the camping ground occupies a narrow strip of land surrounded by marsh and lagoon. With one of the largest heronries in Africa, it's a bird-watcher's paradise. All camping must be booked through the Department of Wildlife & National Parks (see p843).

(see p843). Set amid sausage and jackalberry trees just outside Moremi, **Camp Okavango** (per person US\$325; **(P)** has elegant taste, and the staff are famous for their meticulous attention to detail. Book

lonelyplanet.com





with Desert & Delta Safaris (🖻 686 1234; www.desert delta.com), in Maun.

Significantly less ostentatious than other lodges in Moremi, Stanley's Camp (per person US\$450; **P**) lacks the formality and pretence commonly found in this corner of the country. You can book through any of the operators in Maun (see p862).

Shinde Island Camp (per person US\$550; P) is situated on the fringes of a lagoon between the savannah and the delta, just north of Moremi, and is one of the most established camps in delta. Book with Ker & Downey (🖻 686 0375; www .kerdowney.com), in Maun.

There's no public transport to Moremi, so vou'll need a 4WD vehicle or a drive-in or fly-in safari.

Okavango Panhandle

In northwestern Botswana, the Kalahari sands meet the Okavango Delta. In the Okavango Panhandle, the river's waters spread across the valley on either side to form vast reed beds and papyrus-choked lagoons. Here a cosmopolitan mix of people (Mbukushu, Yei, Tswana, Herero, European, San and refugee Angolans) occupy clusters of fishing villages and extract their livelihoods from the rich waters. They're also increasingly catering to the growing numbers of visitors to the region, where mokoro trips and accommodation are more affordable than in other parts of the Okavango Delta.

Sepupa Swamp Stop (26 686 7073; island@info.bw; swampstop@maun.info; camping per person US\$4, s/d tents US\$30/40; **P**) is a secluded, laid-back riverside camp site handy to Sepupa village. It's very affordable and accessible (3km) from the Maun-Shakawe road.

Run by the Okavango Polers Trust, Mbiroba Camp (🖻 687 6861; camping per person US\$5, s/d chalet US\$35/45; **P**) is the usual launch point for mokoro trips into the delta.

Drotsky's Cabins (26 687 5035; drotskys@info.bw; camping per person US\$10, s/d A-frames US\$60/110, 4-person chalets US\$120; **P**) is a lovely, welcoming lodge beside a channel of the Okavango River about 5km southeast of Shakawe and 4km east of the main road.

MAUN pop 35,000 A schizophrenic apparition of donkey-drawn carts and flash 4WDs. Mount (area carts and flash 4WDs, Maun (pronounced 'mau-oon') is the self-proclaimed gateway to

the Okavango Delta. Although it was once a rough-and-tumble outpost for graziers, hunters and poachers, the sealing of the road in from Nata lead to the burgeoning safari industry that now drives the town's economy. Although Maun is anything but inspiring, it the obvious start and/or finish for most trips into the delta, and it's by far the most touristfriendly town in Botswana.

Information

The Mall has branches of Barclays Bank and Standard Chartered Bank, which both have foreign-exchange facilities and offer better rates than the bureaux de change.

Afro-Trek I-Café (Sedia Hotel, Shorobe Rd, Matlapaneng; per hr US\$6)

Department of Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP;

☎ 686 1265; fax 686 1264; Maun; ⑦ 7.30am-12.30pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-noon Sun) Book national park camp sites at the reservations office, which is housed in a caravan behind the main building.

Post office (Maun; 🕑 8.15am-1pm & 2.15-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat) Near The Mall.

PostNet (Score Centre, Maun; per hr US\$6; S 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat)

Sights

The **Maun Environmental Education Centre** (686 1390; admission free; 7.30am-12.30pm & 1.45-4.40pm), on the eastern bank of the Thamalakane River, aims to provide school children with an appreciation of nature.

The **Nhabe Museum** (B 686 1346; Sir Sereste Khama Rd, Maun; admission free, donations appreciated; S 9am-Spm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat), housed in a historic building, features art exhibitions and outlines the natural history and cultures of the Okavango.

The community-run **Crocodile Farm** (*) 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat; admission US\$2) is basically all the encouragement you need to keep your hands and feet inside the *mokoro* while cruising through the delta.

Tours

BOTSWANA

Most delta lodges are affiliated with specific agencies and lots of safari companies run *mokoro* trips and 4WD safaris, so it's wise to check around before choosing one (see p862).

Sleeping

Okavango River Lodge ((a) 686 3707; freewind@info.bw; Matlapaneng; camping per person US\$3, s/d chalet US\$35/40; (P) This down-to-earth spot has a lovely setting on the riverbank, and it's often quiet because it's not as popular as Audi Camp.

Sitatunga Camp ((686 4539; groundhogs_@hot mail.com; delta rain@dynabyte.bw; camping per person US\$4; () () This camp enjoys a nice bush setting 14km south of Maun and boasts a serious party atmosphere.

Maun Rest Camp ((2) 686 3472; simonjoyce@info.bw; Shorobe Rd, Matlapaneng; camping per person US\$4, basic pre-erected tents per person US\$6, linen per person extra US\$7; (P) This no-frills rest camp is spotless, and boasts what justifiability may be 'the cleanest ablution blocks in Maun'.

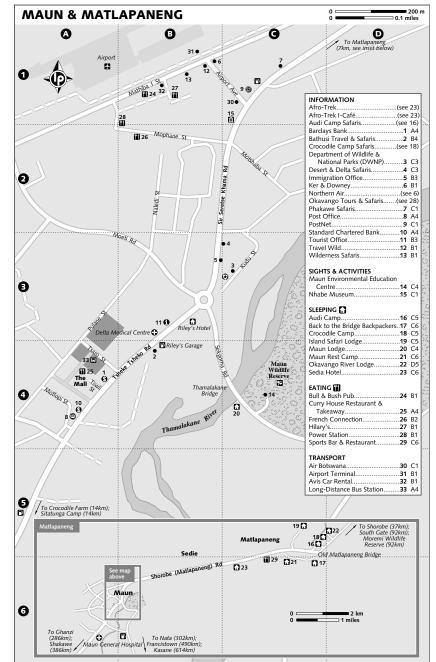
Audi Camp (ⓒ 686 0599; www.okavangocamp.com; Matlapaneng; camping per person US\$4, s/d tents from US\$20/26; P ≥) The most-established budget accommodation in Maun is always packed with backpackers. It's by far the most sociable of the lodges, and a good choice if you're feeling a bit lonely, though it lacks the personality of some of the smaller lodges.

Crocodile Camp (ⓐ 686 0265; www.crocodilecamp.com; Matlapaneng; camping per person US\$5, s/d tents US\$20/40, s/d chalet from US\$40/60; **P**) Arguably the most attractive lodge in Maun, the 'Croc Camp' occupies a superb spot right on the river and is usually packed with all sorts of interesting characters.

Back to the Bridge Backpackers ((2) 686 2037; hellish@info.bw; Hippo Pools, Old Matlapaneng Bridge, Matlapaneng; camping per person US\$5, s/d tents from US\$32/48; (P) This new and friendly option occupies a leafy spot beside the historic Old Matlap-

aneng Bridge. The atmosphere is chilled out and the riverside setting is tranquil, so there's definitely a lot of potential here. Island Safari Lodge (666 0300; island@info.bw;

(a) the use of the original lodge (a) the use of the use of the use of the original lodges in the city, Island Safari Lodge is starting to show its age, though the riverside setting is still relaxing and tranquil.



Eating & Drinking

Hilary's (Mathiba I St, Maun; meals from US\$3; Seam-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12pm Sat) This homely place offers a choice of wonderfully earthy meals, including homemade bread, baked potatoes, soups and sandwiches.

Curry House Restaurant & Takeaway (The Mall, Maun; meals US\$3-6) The smell of curry wafts across the Mall and attracts many locals to this unpretentious place. It serves cheap, delicious and authentic curries as well as other tasty Indian delicacies.

Power Station (Mophane St, Maun; meals US\$4-8) Although it's better known as a bar and nightclub, this 'industrial' Maun institution serves a good mix of pastas, burgers, salads, local specialities and vegetarian meals.

French Connection (Mopane St, Maun; meals US\$5-8) This stylish café is a good choice if you're looking to put a little flair in your day. You can get all the classic European standards here including croissants, cappuccinos and baguettes, and specialty salads.

Sports Bar & Restaurant (Shorobe Rd, Matlapaneng; meals US\$5-9) This popular watering hole also boasts a classy restaurant with a huge range of Western-style dishes, all lovingly created by a renowned chef.

Bull & Bush Pub (Mathiba I St, Maun; meals US\$5-10) The Bull & Bush pub is probably the most popular haunt amongst expats in town. The pub hosts a variety of regular events, and is your best bet if you're after a thick steak and cold beer.

Getting There & Away

Air Botswana (Airport Ave; www.airbotswana.co.bw) has daily flights between Maun and Gaborone (US\$156). Flights into the delta are typically arranged by lodges through local air-charter companies.

At the long-distance bus station northeast of the Mall you'll find buses to Nata (US\$6, three hours), with connections to Kasane (US\$12, six hours) and Francistown (US\$9, five hours); Shakawe (US\$10, five hours); Shorobe (US\$1, one hour); and Ghanzi (US\$4.50, five hours). Get to the terminal

as early as possible if you want to connect in Nata with a bus to Kasane.

Getting Around

Local minibuses between town and Matlapaneng (US\$0.30) run when full from the bus terminal and airport; taxis cost around US\$4.

TSODILO HILLS

The four Tsodilo Hills (Male, Female, Child and North Hill) rise abruptly from a rippled, oceanlike expanse of desert and are threaded with myth, legend and spiritual significance for the San people, who believe this was the site of Creation. More than 2750 ancient rock paintings have been discovered at well over 200 sites. And as in most of southern Africa, the majority of these are attributed to ancestors of today's San people.

There's now a **museum** near Main Camp extolling the undeniably spiritual nature of the hills, as well as several unmarked tracks that pass the main paintings and sacred sites. Normally, local San people will guide groups for around US\$13 per day.

Visitors can camp at either the Main (Rhino), Malatso or Makoba Woods **camping** grounds (camping per person US\$6), but there are no shops and services.

You need a 4WD to explore the hills area, though tour operators in Maun (see p862) can help arrange private tours to the area.

KASANE & KAZUNGULA

Kasane sits in a riverine woodland at the meeting of four countries – Botswana, Zambia, Namibia and Zimbabwe – and the confluence of the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers. It's also the gateway to Chobe National Park. As such, this town of just a few thousand people is a focus of activity in northern Botswana. Immediately to the east, the tiny settlement of Kazungula serves as the border crossing between Botswana and Zimbabwe, and the landing for the Kazungula ferry, which connects Botswana with Zambia.

Information

Barclays Bank (President Ave, Kasane) Offers better exchange rates than the bureaux de change. Be sure to stock up on US dollars (post-1996) if you're heading to Zimbabwe.

Chobe Private Clinic ((a) 625 1555; President Ave, Kasane) 24-hour emergency service.

Department of Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP;

☎ 625 0235; Sedudu Gate) The booking office for camp sites within Chobe National Park.

Kasane Hospital (🖻 625 0333; President Ave, Kasane) Public hospital on the main road.

Kasane Internet ((2) 625 0736; Audi Centre, Kasane; per hr US\$4; (2) 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Internet in Kasane is dead slow and unreliable. Police station (2) 625 0335; President Ave, Kasane) Along the main road.

Sights

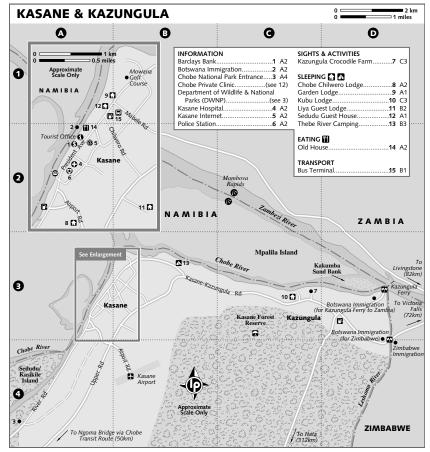
If you're unsuccessful in spotting crocs along the Chobe riverfront, you can get up close and personal with these scaly beasts at the **Kazungula Crocodile Farm** (admission US\$4), located about 1km west of Kazungula.

Sleeping & Eating

Thebe River Camping ((a) 625 0314; Kasane-Kazungula Rd; camping per person US\$8; (P) (a) Provides a green riverside setting, along with a bar, meals and Chobe wildlife drives and cruises (US\$15).

Liya Guest Lodge ((71-756903; liyaglo@botsnet.bw; 1198 Tholo Cres, Kasane; s/d from US\$38/56; P 😰) This warm and friendly family-run lodge is a very economical option on the hillside.

Garden Lodge (☎ 625 0051; www.thegardenlodge .com; President Ave, Kasane; s/d US\$70/90; P 🕥) This simple but charming lodge is built around



a tropical garden and features a number of well-furnished rooms that exude a homely atmosphere.

Kubu Lodge (🖻 625 0312; kubu@botsnet.bw; Kasane-Kazungula Rd, Kazungula; s/d/tr US\$130/170/198; P 🗈 🔀) Located 9km west of Kasane, this riverside lodge lacks the stuffiness and formality found in most other top-end lodges. Rustic wooden chalets are lovingly adorned with thick rugs and wicker furniture, and are scattered around an impeccably manicured lawn dotted with fig trees.

Chobe Chilwero Lodge (🖻 625 1362; www.sanc tuarylodges.com; Airport Rd, Kasane; per person US\$560; P 😰 😫) Chilwero means 'place of high view' in Setswana, and indeed this exclusive lodge boasts panoramic views across the Chobe River.

Old House (President Ave, Kasane; mains US\$5-10; Yue-Sun) Kasane's only true restaurant has a relaxed atmosphere and a varied menu. There are a number of excellent beef, chicken and fish dishes on order here, though there are also several vegetarian options.

Getting There & Away

Air Botswana connects Kasane's airport to Maun (US\$100) and Gaborone (US\$157).

Minibuses to Nata (US\$8, three hours), with connections to Maun and Francistown, run when full from the Shell petrol station bus terminal. Between Kasane and Victoria Falls (US\$42, two hours), UTC (in Victoria Falls 4225) operates a morning transfer service. Thebe River Camping, Mowana Lodge and Chobe Safari Lodge also run Victoria Falls transfers (US\$40, two hours). All these options usually pick up booked passengers at hotels and guest houses between 9.30am and 10am.

CHOBE NATIONAL PARK

BOTSWANA

Chobe National Park, which encompasses 11,000 sq km, is home to Botswana's most varied wildlife. The riverfront strip along the northern tier, with its perennial water supply, supports the greatest wildlife concentrations, but when they contain water, the lovely Savuti Marshes of the Mababe Depression in western Chobe also provide prime wildlife habitat and attract myriad water birds. Rarely-visited Ngwezumba, with its pans and mopane forests, is the park's third major region, and Chobe's northwestern corner just touches the beautiful Linyanti Marshes.

CHOBE RIVERFRONT

The Chobe riverfront is packed with wildlife. The most obvious feature of the landscape is the damage done by the area's massive elephant herds, but virtually every southern African mammal species, except the rhino, is represented here. You can also see puku, a rare antelope species. In addition, the abundance and variety of birdlife in this zone of permanent water is astonishing.

A great way to enjoy Chobe is on a river trip or wildlife drive. The best time to cruise is late afternoon, when hippos amble onto dry land and the riverfront fills with elephants heading down for a drink and a romp in the water. All hotels and lodges arrange 21/2- to three-hour wildlife drives and cruises in the morning and afternoon for US\$14 to US\$22 (plus safari-discounted park fees). Note that if you take a morning wildlife drive you can also do an afternoon 'booze cruise' and pay park fees for only one day.

The closest DWNP camp site to Kasane is Ihaha Camp Site (camping per person US\$5.50). It's located along the riverfront about 27km from the Sedudu Gate.

Buffalo Ridge Camping (🖻 625 0430; camping per person US\$5.50; **P**) is a basic camping area located immediately uphill from the Ngoma Bridge border crossing near the western end of the Chobe transit route. Unlike Ihaha, Buffalo Ridge is privately owned, so you do not need a reservation with the DWNP to camp here

One of Botswana's pinnacles of luxury, Chobe Game Lodge (2 625 0340; www.chobegamelodge .com; per person US\$325; P 🕥) is a highly praised safari lodge. Individually decorated rooms are elegant yet soothing, and some have views of the Chobe River and Namibian flood plains. Service is attentive and professional, and there's a good chance you'll spot herds of elephants along the riverfront as you walk around hotel grounds. The lodge is located about 9km from the Sedudu Gate.

The northern park entrance lies 5km west of Kasane and is accessible by conventional vehicle (some Chobe riverfront drives require 4WD), but to reach Savuti or other places in the interior of the park requires 4WD and high clearance. To transit between Kasane and the Namibian border at Ngoma Bridge is free of charge.

SAVUTI

Savuti's flat expanses are an obligatory stop for safaris and overland trips between Kasane and Maun. Gobabis Hill, south of the Savuti gate near the Savuti Channel, bears several sets of 4000-year-old rock art, which are thought to be of San origin. The wildlife populations, particularly the number of elephants and antelopes, can seem overwhelming, especially after heavy rains. Due to potential high water, Savuti is normally closed (and inaccessible) between January and March.

There are a number of camping grounds in Savuti. Savuti Camp Site (camping per person US\$5.50) is a brand-new DWNP camp site with sit-down flush toilets, braai pits, (hot!) showers and plenty of shade.

Beside the former site of legendary Lloyd's Camp, Savute Safari Lodge (per person US\$325; P) is a relatively new upmarket retreat. It consists of 12 contemporary thatched chalets that are simple yet functional in their design. For booking information, contact Desert & Delta Safaris (🖻 686 1243; www.desertdelta.com), based in Maun.

The premier camp in Savuti, **Savute Elephant** Camp (per person US\$575; P 🕄) comprises 12 lavishly appointed East African-style linen tents complete with antique-replica furniture. For booking information, contact Orient-Express Safaris (26 686 0153; www.gametrackers.orient-express .com), in Maun.

Under optimum conditions, it's a four- to six-hour drive from Kasane to Savuti. The road is passable by 2WD as far as Kachikau, but after it turns south into the Chobe Forest Reserve, the road deteriorates into parallel sand ruts that require high-clearance 4WD. Coming from Maun, you'll need 4WD to proceed north of Shorobe.

MAKGADIKGADI & NXAI PANS NATIONAL PARK

Botswana's great salt pans, Sua, Ntwetwe and Nxai, comprise the expansive Makgadikgadi & Nxai Pans National Park, and are like no other landscape on earth.

Especially during the sizzling heat of late winter days, the stark pans take on a disorienting and ethereal austerity. Heat mirages destroy all sense of space or direction, imaginary lakes shimmer and disappear, ostriches fly and stones turn to mountains and float in mid-air.

There is a beautiful 230-sq-km wildlife refuge at Sua Pan. The Nata Sanctuary (271-656969; admission US\$5; 🕑 7am-7pm) has a range of birdlife, as well as antelopes and other grassland animals. It's 15km southeast of Nata. In the dry season, you don't need a 4WD, but high clearance is advisable. The admission fee includes camping.

Near the southwestern corner of Sua Pan is Kubu Island, surrounded by salt and covered with ghostly baobab trees and Iron Age ruins. You can camp on the salt or at the otherworldly camp site on the island, but there's no water. Campers must register with the Game Scouts, located at the camping ground, who expect 'donations' of US\$6 per group; get a receipt. To get here, you need a 4WD. The route is signposted 'Lekhubu' from the Nata-Maun road, 24km west of Nata; after 65km, you'll reach desultory Thabatshukudu village, on a low ridge. South of here, the route skirts a salt pan and after 15km passes a veterinary checkpoint; 1.5km south of this barrier is the signposted left-turn toward the island, which is about 20km away.

To explore any parts of the pans on your own, you need a 4WD and a good map and GPS system, as well as common sense and confidence in your driving and directional skills. Drive only in the tracks of other vehicles, and keep to the edges of the pan.

GWETA

The dust bowl town of Gweta serves as another gateway to the Makgadikgadi Pans, as well as an obligatory fuel stop if you're heading to either Kasane or Maun. The name of the village is derived from the croaking sound made by large bullfrogs, which incredibly bury themselves in the sand until the rains provide sufficient water for them to emerge and mate.

About 4km east of Gweta, you'll see a huge concrete aardvark (no, you're not hallucinat-ing) that marks the turn-off for **Planet Baobab** (272-338344; camping per person US\$8, s/d grass huts with shared bathroom US\$34/52, s/d mud huts with private bathroom US\$75/100; P 🔊), one of the most bizarre

lodges in the country. Campers can pitch a tent beneath the shade of a baobab tree while others can choose between Bakalanga-style mud huts or San-style grass huts. The lodge is also a great base for organising quad bike and 4WD trips to the surrounding salt pans.

Hourly combis and buses travelling between Kasane (US\$6.50, four hours) and Francistown (US\$4, three hours), and Maun (US\$4.50, four hours) and Francistown (US\$3, three hours) pass by the Maano Restaurant.

EASTERN BOTSWANA

FRANCISTOWN pop 95,000

Although the second-largest city in Botswana is known primarily for its wholesale shopping, Francistown is a useful (and often necessary) stopover on the way to/from Kasane, Nata, Maun or Victoria Falls.

The only site of interest to travellers is the **Supa-Ngwao Cultural & Historical museum** (240 3088; New Maun Rd; admission free, donations appreciated; 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat), which displays local and regional culture and history, as well as visiting art exhibitions.

Along Blue Jacket St you'll find most of the banks, the post office, the laundrette and several shopping centres.

Superbly situated on banks of the Tati River, the **Marang Hotel** (241 3991; marang@info .bw; Matsiloje Rd; camping per person US\$5, s/d US\$80/95, 2-person rondavel US\$40; **P (**) is a long-standing favourite among travellers. The serene setting and relaxed ambience make this an excellent choice, regardless of your budget. From the Cresta Thapama roundabout, the hotel is about 3.5km along Matsiloje Rd.

If you want to stay in the city centre, the **Grand Lodge** (a 241 2300; s/d US\$35/40; **P** 2) is an excellent choice. Standard rooms become something special when you add air-con, cable TV, a fridge and a hotplate.

You'll enjoy the cosy atmosphere at the popular **Tina's Coffee Shop** (Blue Jacket St; meals US\$2-5), whether you're there for a cuppa with cake or a heavy plate of chicken and rice.

Air Botswana (a 241 2393; www.airbotswana.co.bw; Francis Ave) flies between Francistown and Gaborone (US\$100) at least once daily, except Sunday.

BOTSWANA

From the main bus terminal, between the train line and Blue Jacket Plaza, bus and

minibus services connect Francistown with Nata (US\$3, two hours), Maun (US\$9, five hours), Gaborone (US\$5, six hours), Serowe (US\$3, 2½ hours), Selebi-Phikwe (US\$2, two hours) and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (US\$2.80 to US\$3.50, two hours).

The overnight train to Gaborone (US\$25/20 in 1st-/2nd-class sleepers, US\$5 in economy, 8¹/₄ hours) leaves at 9pm and the day train (US\$4/8 in economy/club, 6¹/₂ hours) leaves at 10am.

KHAMA RHINO SANCTUARY

The main roads within the sanctuary are normally accessible by 2WD in the dry season, though 4WD vehicles are necessary in the rainy season. However, all vehicles can reach the camp site and accommodation areas in any weather. The office at the entrance sells useful maps of the sanctuary as well as basic nonperishable foods and cold drinks and firewood.

If you're not self-driving, two-hour day/ night wildlife drives cost US\$55/80, and can accommodate up to four people. Nature walks (US\$8 per person) and rhino tracking (US\$20 per adult) can also be arranged.

Shady camp sites (US\$9 per person) with *braai* pits are adjacent to clean toilets and (steaming hot) showers. If you're looking to splurge for a night or two, rustic four-person chalets (US\$50) and six-person A-frames (US\$85) have basic kitchen facilities and private bathrooms. If you don't have a vehicle, staff can drive you to the camp site and accommodation areas for a nominal charge.

The entrance gate to the sanctuary is located about 26km from Serowe along the road to Orapa (turn left at the unsigned T-junction about 5km northwest of Serowe). Khama is accessible by any bus or combi heading towards Orapa, and is not hard to reach by hitching.

BOTSWANA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation (with the exception of camp sites) is subject to a 10% accommodation bed tax. Payment by credit card normally requires an additional charge of 10% to 12%. Rates given in this chapter are for cash payments only. Note that these rates are high-season prices, and that prices for the low season are 20% to 40% cheaper.

Every town has at least one hotel, and larger towns and tourist areas offer several options in different price ranges. However, you won't find anything as cheap as in most other African countries, and the less expensive hotels in Botswana sometimes double as brothels.

Quite a few hotels and lodges along the road system have camp sites with varying amenities. Wild camping is permitted only outside national parks, private land and government freehold lands.

Safari camps and lodges range from tiny tented camps to large complexes of brick or reed chalets. While a few lodges are accessible by car or 4WD, most Okavango Delta camps are accessed only by air, which will add around US\$150 to US\$200 to your bill. All remote camps and lodges require prebooking, but some road-accessible options around Kasane and Maun may accept walk-ins. Note that lodge prices in this chapter include accommodation, meals and activities.

ACTIVITIES

Things to do in Botswana are centred on wildlife viewing, either by 4WD safari vehicle, boat or *mokoro*. There are inexpensive opportunities for quad-biking on the Makgadikgadi Pans (see p857). Hiking opportunities are limited to the Tsodilo Hills in the northwest and several small ranges in the eastern and southeastern parts of the country.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses in Botswana keep standard opening hours (p1102).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The greatest dangers in Botswana are posed by natural elements, combined with a lack of preparedness. While police and veterinary roadblocks, bureaucracy and bored officials may become tiresome, they're mostly just a harmless inconvenience. Although theft occurs, Botswana enjoys a very low crime rate compared to other African (and many Western) countries.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Botswanan Embassies & Consulates

Botswana has diplomatic representation in the following countries, among others: Australia (🖻 612-6290 7500; 5 Timbarra Cres, O'Malley, ACT 2606, Canberra) EU (🕿 32-2-732 2070; fax 735 6312; 169, Ave de Tervuren, B-1150 Brussels, Belgium) Namibia (🖻 221941; fax 236034; 101 Nelson Mandela Dr, Windhoek; (8am-12.30pm) South Africa Cape Town (🖻 021-421 1045; 4th fl, Southern Life Centre, 8 Riebeeck St, City Bowl); Johannesburg (🖻 011-5403 3748; 2nd fl, Future Bank Bldg, 122 De Korte St, Braamfontein); Pretoria (🗃 012-430 9640; 24 Amos St, Colbyn) UK (a) 020-7499 0031; fax 7495 8595; 6 Stratford Pl, London W1N 9AE) USA (202-244 4990; fax 244 4164; 1531-33 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008) Zambia (🖻 01-250 019; 5201 Pandit Nehru Rd, Diplomatic Triangle, PO Box 31910, Lusaka) Zimbabwe (3794645/7/8; 22 Phillips Ave, Harare)

Embassies & Consulates in Botswana

Countries with diplomatic representation in Gaborone (Map pp844–5) include the following:

Angola (🖻 390 0204; angolaemb@info.bw; 5131 Nelson Mandela Dr)

France () /fax 397 3863; 761 Robinson Rd, PO Box 1424)

Germany (2 395 3143; fax 395 3038; 3rd fl, Professional House, Broadhurst, PO Box 315)

PRACTICALITIES

- Weights, measures and road distances use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220-240V AC, 50Hz (use South African–style two- or threeround-pin plugs).
- For English-language news see www .gazette.bw.
- Radio Botswana broadcasts in both English and Setswana, while Botswana TV (BTV) broadcasts local, African and international news.

lonelyplanet.com

Namibia (🖻 397 2685; BCC Bldg, 1278 Old Lobatse Rd, PO Box 1586)

South Africa (2 390 4800; sahcgabs@botsnet.bw; 29 Queens Rd, PO Box 00402)

UK (🕿 395 2841; fax 395 6105; Queens Rd, The Mall, Private Bag 0023)

US (a 395 3982; pausemb3@botsnet.bw; Government Enclave, Embassy Dr, PO Box 90)

Zambia (🕿 395 1951; fax 395 3952; Zambia House, The Mall, PO Box 362)

Zimbabwe (🖻 391 4495; fax 390 5863; Embassy Dr, PO Box 1232)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106), the principal public holidays in Botswana are: New Year's Day 1 January

Day after New Year's Day 2 January Labour Day 1 May Ascension Day April or May (40 days after Easter) Sir Seretse Khama Day 1 July President's Day 3rd Friday of July Botswana/Independence Day 30 September Day after Independence Day 1 October

MAPS

The most accurate country map is the Shell Tourist Map of Botswana (US\$3), which shows major roads and includes insets of tourist areas and central Gaborone. It's sold in a packet with a small tourist guide in bookshops all over the region.

MONEY

Botswana's unit of currency is the pula (P), which is divided into 100 thebe. 'Pula' means 'rain' - a valuable commodity in this desert land.

Full banking services are available only in major towns, although ATMs are sprouting up all over the country. Most credit cards are accepted at hotels and restaurants and cash advances are available at major banks (but not through ATMs).

TELEPHONE

BOTSWANA

Botswana's country code is 267; there are no internal area codes, so when you're phoning from outside Botswana, dial 267 followed by the phone number. Calling from Botswana, the international access code is **a** 00, which should be followed by the country code, area code (if applicable) and telephone number.

Reliable coin and card telephone boxes are found at Botswana Telecom and post offices, and in shopping centres in all major towns. Phonecards in varying denominations are sold at shops, post offices and some petrol stations. Mobile phones and accessories are readily available in major cities.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The continually improving Department of **Tourism office** (**a** 395 3024; fax 390 8675; botswana tourism@gov.bw; 2nd fl, Standard Chartered Bank Bldg, The Mall, Private Bag 0047, Gaborone) dispenses tourist information and distributes brochures, maps, and the annual Botswana Focus and Discover Botswana magazines. The offices in Kasane (2 625 0357) and Maun (2 686 0492) are also becoming more useful.

VISAS

All visitors to Botswana need a valid passport, but no visas are required by citizens of most Commonwealth countries, EU countries (except Spain and Portugal), Israel, Norway, South Africa, Switzerland and the USA. On arrival you'll get a 30-day entrance stamp.

Extensions are available for up to three months. You may be asked to show an onward air ticket or proof of sufficient funds for your intended stay. For more than a three-month extension, apply to the Immigration & Passport Control Office (a 361 1300; fax 355 2996; cnr Molepole Rd & Nelson Mandela Dr, PO Box 942, Gaborone) before your trip.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following neighbouring countries can be obtained in Gaborone. See p859 for information on embassies and consulates in Botswana.

Namibia No visas are required for citizens of Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Canada and the US.

South Africa No visas are required for citizens of Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Canada and the US.

Zambia Visas are required by citizens of the US, Australia and Britain. In Gaborone, they take one day to process and cost US\$60/100 for a single-/double-entry visa, and US\$190 for a multiple-entry visa. Note that they're available at the border for considerably less.

Zimbabwe Visas are required by citizens of the US, Australia and New Zealand, and can be processed at the border (US\$30/45 for a single-/double-entry visa).

BOTSWANA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Botswana's main airport is Sir Seretse Khama International Airport (a 35 11 91) 15km north of the capital Gaborone. Although this is well served with flights from Johannesburg (South Africa) and Harare (Zimbabwe) it is seldom used by tourists as an entry point into the country. Far more popular are Maun Airport (🖻 66 02 38) and Kasane Airport (🖻 65 01 36).

Land

Overland travel to or from Botswana is usually straightforward as most travellers either arrive by private vehicle or by Intercape Mainliner (www.intercape.co.za). At border crossings, arriving travellers are often requested to clean their shoes, even those packed away in their luggage, in a disinfectant dip to prevent them carrying foot-and-mouth disease into the country. Vehicles must also pass through a pit filled with the same disinfectant.

Border opening hours change all the time, but major crossings between Botswana and Namibia or South Africa generally open sometime between 6am and 8am and close sometime between 6pm and 10pm. The main crossings between Botswana and Zimbabwe are open from 6am to 8pm, and the Kazungula ferry to Zambia runs from 6am to 6pm.

NAMIBIA

The Trans-Kalahari Hwy crosses the border at Mamuno-Buitepos (open 8am to 1am). In the Caprivi Strip, you can cross the border into Namibia at Ngoma Bridge (8am to 6pm) or between Mohembo and Mahango (6am to 6pm). The border crossing between Kasane and Mpalila Island (7am to 12.30pm and 1.45pm to 4pm) exists mainly for guests of safari lodges on the island. Note that during the winter months (late May to August), Namibia is one hour behind Botswana.

SOUTH AFRICA

Most overland traffic between Botswana and South Africa passes through the Ramatlabama, Tlokweng or Pioneer border crossings. Other border crossings serve back roads across the Limpopo River, in the Tuli Block,

DEPARTURE TAX

The international air departure tax of US\$9 is included in ticket prices.

and the Molopo River in southern Botswana; some of these are impassable to 2WD vehicles, and may be closed altogether during periods of high water.

ZAMBIA

Botswana and Zambia (along with Zimbabwe and Namibia) share what's certainly the world's shortest international border - a single point in the middle of the Zambezi River. Direct travel between the two countries is on the Kazungula ferry, which operates from 6am to 6pm daily and costs US\$0.50 per person and US\$5 for motorbikes, US\$15 for cars and US\$20 for larger vehicles. If there's a long queue or the ferry isn't operating, it's not difficult to reach Livingstone via Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

If you're hitching from Kasane-Kazangula or the Zambian shore of the Zambezi, ask truck drivers about lifts to Livingstone.

ZIMBABWE

The two most commonly used borders are at Ramokgwebana-Plumtree and at Kazungula, west of Victoria Falls. There's also a lesserused back-road crossing at Pandamatenga.

GETTING AROUND Air

The national carrier, Air Botswana (www.air botswana.co.bw), operates scheduled domestic flights between Gaborone, Francistown, Maun and Kasane.

Car & Motorcycle

The best way to travel around Botswana is to rent a vehicle. With your own car, you can avoid public transport (which is limited to routes between major towns) and organised tours. The downside is that distances are long and the cost of renting a vehicle is high in Botswana. You can expect to pay about US\$50/100 for a rental car/4WD in Botswana, though long-term rentals in South Africa can bring this figure down substantially. Plus, it's hassle free to cross the border, assuming you have a written permission from the rental agency.

When driving anywhere look out for donkeys. At times main highways will be thick with these large-eared asses standing immobile in the roadway, with a few sheep and goats thrown in for good measure. Other (larger) animals also wander onto major highways. The biggest problems are elephants and kudu (if you hit one of these you're really screwed). Drive slowly, keep calm and remember that the extra amount of time it will take you to get from point A to B is just part of the journey.

If you're determined to rent a vehicle in Botswana, the following are some reputable companies:

Avis (391 3093; fax 391 2550; www.avis.com; Sir Seretse Khama International Airport, Gaborone) Budget (302 0203; www.budget.co.za; Sir Seretse Khama International Airport, Gaborone) Holiday (368 62429; Maun, Maun Airport) Imperial (390 7333; www.imperialcarrental.co.za; Sir Seretse Khama International Airport, Gaborone) Tempest (390 0011; www.tempestcarhire.co.za; Sir Seretse Khama International Airport, Gaborone)

Hitching

Because public transport is somewhat erratic, hitching is relatively safe and fairly common although it is still always a risk (see p1126). On main routes there should be no major problems, but ascertain a price before climbing aboard. Most drivers expect the equivalent of the bus fare.

Hitching the back roads isn't as straightforward. If you're hitching along the Trans-Kalahari Highway, through the Tuli Block or from Maun to Kasane through Chobe National Park, carry camping gear and enough food and water for several days of waiting.

Local Transport

Public transport in Botswana is geared towards the needs of the local populace and is confined to main roads between major population centres. Although cheap and reliable, it is of little use to the traveller as most of Botswana's tourist attractions are off the beaten track.

From Maun (p851), which is the traditional jumping-off point for the Okavango Delta, it's also easy to book tours to other parts of Botswana, most notably to Chobe National Park and Tsodilo Hills. These excursions are

often added to the end of delta tours. Maun is also the base for overland safaris to Kasane via Chobe National Park.

A good place to start is at **Travel Wild** (Map p853; a 686 0822; travelwild@dynabyte.bw; cmr Airport Ave & Mathiba I St), opposite the airport in Maun, which serves as a central booking and information office for lodges, safaris and other adventures.

The following tour operators, all located in Maun (Map p853), are also recommended: **Afro-Trek** ($\textcircled{\mbox{$\widehat{$}$}}$ 686 0177; www.afrotrek.com; Shorobe Rd) This company specialises in mid-market safaris. It's located in the Sedia Hotel (p852).

Audi Camp Safaris (🗟 686 0500; www.okavango camp.com) This budget operator is run out of the popular Audi Camp (p852).

Back to the Bridge Backpackers (a 866 2406; hellish@info.bw; Shorobe Rd) This budget operator is run out of Back to the Bridge Backpackers (p852).

Bathusi Travel & Safaris (🗟 686 0647; www.info .bw/~bathusi; Tsheke Tsheko Rd) This company specialises in upmarket safaris. It's located next to Riley's Garage. Crocodile Camp Safaris (🗟 686 0265; www.botswa na.com; Shorobe Rd) This budget operator is located at the Crocodile Camp (0852).

Island Safari Lodge (🗃 686 0300; island@info.bw; Mathiba I St) This budget operator is run out of the Island Safari Lodge (p852).

Ker & Downey ((a) 686 0375; www.kerdowney.com; Mathiba I St) One of Botswana's most exclusive tour operators.

Maun Rest Camp (🖻 686 3472; simonjoyce@info.bw; Shorobe Rd) This budget operator specialises in mobile safaris, and is run out of the Maun Rest Camp (p852). Okavango River Lodge (🗃 686 3707; freewind@info .bw; Shorobe Rd) This budget operator is run out of the Okavango River Lodge (p852).

Okavango Tours & Safaris (🖻 686 1154; www.oka vango.bw; Mophane St) This well-established operator specialises in upmarket lodge-based tours.

Phakawe Safaris (a 686 4337; www.phakawe .demon.co.uk; Sir Seretse Khama Rd) This operator runs informal participation safaris, and is housed in a bright orange building called the Pumpkin Patch. Wilderness Safaris (in Johannesburg 011-807 1800; www.wilderness-safaris.com) This operator specialises in

upmarket safaris and is located near the airport.

Train

The Botswana Railways system is limited to one line running through eastern Botswana. It stretches from Ramokgwebana on the Zimbabwean border to Ramatlhabama on the South African border, and was once part of the glorious Johannesburg-Bulawayo service, which is now sadly defunct. Although cheap and reliable it is painfully slow and serves places of little or no interest to the tourist.

There are two different types of train – the quicker and more expensive 'day train', and the slower and cheaper 'night train'. Both travel the route between Lobatse and Fran-

cistown, via Gaborone, Pilane, Mahalapye, Palapye, Serule and other villages.

Schedules and tickets are available at all train stations, but reservations are only possible at Gaborone, Francistown and Lobatse. For 1st and 2nd class, advance bookings are essential; economy-class passengers can buy a ticket in advance or on the train.

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Lesotho

Lesotho (le-soo-too) is called Southern Africa's 'kingdom in the sky' for good reason. This stunningly beautiful, mountainous country is nestled island-like in the middle of South Africa and it is a fascinating travel detour from its larger neighbour. The country offers superb mountain scenery, a proud traditional people, endless hiking trails, and the chance to explore remote areas on Basotho ponies.

The 'lowland' areas (all of which are still above 1000m) offer some craft shopping and dinosaur footsteps, while the highlands in the northeast and centre feature towering peaks (over 3000m) and verdant valleys.

Lesotho came into being during the early 19th century, when both the *difaqane* (forced migration) and Boer incursions into the hinterlands were at their height. Under the leadership of the legendary king Moshoeshoe the Great, the Basotho people sought sanctuary and strategic advantage amid the forbidding terrain of the Drakensberg and Maluti Ranges. The small nation they forged continues to be an intriguing anomaly in a sea of modernity.

Getting around is reasonably easy – ordinary hire cars will get you most places; public transport is extensive, albeit slow. Hiking or pony trekking from village to village are the best ways of exploring.

FAST FACTS

- Area 30,350 sq km
- ATMs Only in Maseru
- Borders South Africa (Lesotho is surrounded by South Africa)
- Budget US\$25 to US\$45 a day
- Capital Maseru
- Languages South Sotho (Sesotho) & English
- Money Maloti; US\$1 = M7.4
- Population 2.1 million
- Seasons winter/dry (June-August), summer (December-February), rainy (October-April)
- Telephone Country code 266; international access code 200
- Time GMT/UTC + 2
- Visa Free two-week entry permit on arrival for most nationalities

HIGHLIGHTS

- Semonkong (p871) and Malealea (p872) Explore rugged, mountainous regions with breathtaking scenery and traditional Basotho villages.
- **Thaba-Bosiu** (p871) Discover the mountain stronghold of King Moshoeshoe the Great, where the struggle for Lesotho was won.
- **Mokhotlong** (p874) Experience remote Lesotho, where you can step back into an older, more traditional Africa.
- **Sehlabathebe National Park** (p873) Revel in the splendid isolation of this national park.
- **Sani Top** (p874) Enjoy high and stunning vistas from atop the Sani Pass.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Lesotho's climate is a mixture of temperate and sub-tropical influences, with surprising extremes of temperature ranging from January minimum temperatures, which can drop five degrees below freezing, up to July maximums of over 32°C. The best time to visit is in late April to May, when summer temperatures are yet to arrive but visibility is high after the rains. September to early October is another good time.

ITINERARIES

- One Week From Maseru (p869), head south to Morija (p872) where you'll find Morija Museum & Archives (p872), a great museum with Basotho culture displays. Continue to Malealea (p872) or Semonkong (p871) the 'gems' of Lesotho to go pony trekking. If you have time, head to Quthing (p873) to check out the 180 million-year-old dinosaur footprints.
- **Two Weeks** Visit Teyateyaneng (p875), the craft centre of Lesotho or slightly further north, Bokong Nature Reserve (p874). Get a taste of the mountainous 'lowlands' by heading to Morija (p872), Malealea (p872) (or Semonkong; p871) and Quthing (p873) and continue northeast to the remote Sehlabathebe National Park (p873).
- **One month** Take in some of the country's most impressive scenery on a clockwise circuit to Mokhotlong (p874) and up to the magnificent Sani Top (p874), visiting Leribe (p875) along the way. Re-

HOW MUCH?

- Traditional dance/cultural group US\$4.50-22
- Internet US\$0.10-0.20 per minute
- Coffee US\$0.35-1.20
- Banana US\$0.15
- Genuine (wool) Basotho blanket US\$60

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol \$0.90
- 1L bottled water US\$0.80-1
- Bottle of beer US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$4.50-9
- Bag of fried savoury donuts US\$0.30

turn to Maseru (p869) via Likalaneng and Roma (p871), before heading east to Morija (p872) and following the twoweek itinerary. Note: the road between Sehlabathebe in the east and Sehonghong in the northeast requires a 4WD.

HISTORY

Neighbouring South Africa has always cast a long shadow over Lesotho, fuelling a perpetual struggle for a separate identity on an ever-diminishing patch of territory.

The first inhabitants of the mountainous region that makes up present-day Lesotho were the hunter-gatherer people known as the Khoisan. They have left many examples of their rock art in the river valleys. Lesotho was settled by the Sotho peoples in the 16th century.

Moshoeshoe the Great

King Moshoeshoe (pronounced 'mo-shweshwe' or 'moshesh') is the father figure of Lesotho's history. He began life as a local chief of a small village. Around 1820 he led his villagers to Butha-Buthe, a mountain stronghold, where they survived the first battles of the *difaqane* (forced migration), caused by the violent expansion of the nearby Zulu state. The loosely organised southern Sotho society managed to survive due largely to the adept political and diplomatic abilities of the king. In 1824 Moshoeshoe moved his people to





50 km LESOTHO LEGEND Winburg Clarens NP National Park 0 Phuthadithaha NR National Reserve Fouriesburg FREE STATE GR FR Game Reserve (SOUTH AFRICA) Monantsa Pas Forest Reserve Caledonspoor WA Wilderness Area Marguard Joel's Drift Khatibe R709 Coxbow 'Muela To Ricemfontei Footprint Sources (3282m) (2820 (207km) Ficksburg • Allandate Khahc Ficksburg Bridge P eribe (Hlotse) Clocolar Liphofung Cave Cultural Historical 8 aka Bridge R703 Mothae Excelsi Ts'ehlanvar Champagn Castle Mafika-Lisin (age 1 (3377m Mars Motsitsen Ladybran To Bloemfontein Seshote Sefikeng (157km) MASERU Qiloane Hill inare o Dam Ha Ntsi O Giant Molumong Hatse Dam Thaba-Bosiu Dam Katse Fhabana itors Centr Itlenvana Mazenod (3482m) Hobbous A3 Thaba Tseka Ngope Ts'oeu 🔿 Makhalena Linakeng God Help Taung 🗙 Mokhoabong Pass Ramabanta Hodgson's Thaba Putsoa Sehonghon; LESOTHO Peaks (3257m) Himevill Pitseng Gorge Matebeng Botso'ela Waterfall Linderherg Mateben Ò Mala Gates of Falls (Lebehane) Falls onkoana Gate Rushman's Ne o Paradise Pass Christ the thebe NP Masemouse King Missio Mokopung C Mpharan • Kingscote Maletsunvan Mnit (Orange) Gate Mohale's Hoek KWAZULU-NATAL Qacha's Nek A4 (SOUTH AFRICA) • Mafube A2 Mt Mo Mphak EASTERN CAPE . Mekaling (SOUTH AFRICA) • Mosehle Mt Moorosi 🖾 Ongeluksnek Matatiele Tosing (2356m) • Ralebona Out Sigos Bonny Ridge R392 **Ben Macdhu** Lundean's Nek Kokstad (3001m) (2226m Lundean's Nek • Tele Fall Mount Fletcher ady Grey

Thaba-Bosiu, a mountaintop that was even easier to defend.

From Thaba-Bosiu, Moshoeshoe played a patient game of placating the stronger local rulers and granting protection, as well as land and cattle, to refugees. These people and others like them were to form Basutholand; at the time of Moshoeshoe's death in 1870, it had a population of more than 150,000.

As the *difaqane* receded a new threat arose. The Voortrekkers (Boer pioneers) had crossed the Senqu (Orange) River in the 1830s and established the Orange Free State. By 1843 Moshoeshoe was sufficiently concerned by their numbers to ally himself with the British Cape Colony government. The British Resident in Basutholand decided that Moshoeshoe was becoming too powerful and engineered an unsuccessful attack on his kingdom.

Treaties with the British helped define the borders of Basutholand but did little to stop squabbles with the Boers. The Boers pressed their claims on the land and increasing tension led to wars between the Orange Free State and the Basotho people in 1858 and 1865. Though he achieved success in the first war, Moshoeshoe was forced in the second to sign away much of his western lowlands.

The Road to Independence

The continual war between the Orange Free State and Basutholand was not good for British interests, and in 1868 the British government annexed Basutholand and handed it to the Cape Colony to run in 1871. After a period of instability, the British government again took direct control of Basutholand in 1884, although it remained easier to give effective authority to local leaders than rule through British officers.

Lesotho's existence is attributable to a quirk of history and fortuitous timing. In the 1880s, direct British rule was deeply resented by the local population as an infringement on Basutholand's freedom and sovereignty. Little were they to know that British occupation would secure the future independence of Lesotho as other kingdoms fell under the South African umbrella. All because at the precise moment when the Union of South Africa was created, Basutholand was a British Protectorate and was not included in the Union.

In 1910 the advisory Basutholand National Council was formed from members nominated by the chiefs. In the mid-1950s the council requested internal self-government from the British; by 1960 a new constitution was in place and elections were held for a legislative council. The main contenders were the Basutholand Congress Party (BCP), similar to South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), and the conservative Basutholand National Party (BNP) headed by Chief Leabua Jonathan.

The BCP won the 1960 elections and demanded full independence from Britain. This was eventually agreed to; independence came into effect in 1966. However, at the elections in 1965 the BCP lost to the BNP and Chief Jonathan became the first prime minister of the new Kingdom of Lesotho which allied itself with the apartheid regime across the border.

Big Brother

Stripping King Moshoeshoe II of the few powers that the new constitution had left him did not endear Jonathan's government to the people and the BCP won the 1970 election. After his defeat, Jonathan followed the example of many bad losers in African history by suspending the constitution, expelling the king and banning all opposition political parties. Jonathan changed tack, distancing himself from South Africa and calling for the return of land in the Orange Free State that had been stolen from the original Basutholand. He also offered refuge to ANC guerrillas and flirted with Cuba. South Africa closed Lesotho's borders, strangling the country.

Jonathan was deposed in 1986 and the king was restored as head of state. This was a popular move, but eventually agitation for democratic reform rose again. In 1990 King Moshoeshoe II was deposed by the army in favour of his son, Prince Mohato Bereng Seeisa (Letsie III). Elections in 1993 resulted in the return of the BCP.

In 1995 Letsie III abdicated in favour of his father. Five years after being deposed, Moshoeshoe II was reinstated, restoring calm to Lesotho after a year of unrest. Less than a year later he was killed when his 4WD plunged over a cliff in the Maluti Mountains. Letsie III became king for the second time.

A split in the BCP saw the breakaway Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) take power. Elections were held in 1998 amid accusations of widespread cheating by the LCD, which won by a landslide. Tensions between the public service and the government became acute, and the military was also split over the result.

Following months of protests, the government appeared to be losing control. In late September 1998 it called on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) treaty partners, Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe, to help restore order. Troops, mainly South African, invaded the kingdom. Rebel elements of the Lesotho army put up strong resistance and there was heavy fighting in Maseru.

The government agreed to call new elections, but the political situation remained tense with the spectre of South African intervention never far away. Political wrangling delayed the elections until May 2002. The LCD won again and Prime Minister Mosisili began a second – and peaceful – five-year term.

Lesotho Today

Lesotho ranks among the region's poorer countries, and has few natural resources other than water and gem diamonds. During the last century the country's main export was labour – approximately 60% of males worked, mainly in mining, in South Africa. In the late 1990s, the restructuring of the South African gold-mining industry, mechanisation and the closure of some mines resulted in huge employment losses. Meanwhile, the Lesotho

LESOTHO

economy – under transformation due to a rapid growth of the textile industry – also collapsed as a result of Chinese competition and changes to international agreements. Meanwhile, the spectre of AIDS is high – the infection rate (adult prevalence) is estimated at a massive 30%.

The elections of 2007 bring challenges of another kind – whether to back Mosisili for a third term, whether corruption is being tackled vigorously enough, and whether grassroots concerns are being neglected in favour of a more gentrified party.

CULTURE

The proud Basotho are remarkably free of the effects of apartheid. Traditional Basotho culture is central to the local people. It focuses on a belief in the power of ancestral spirits, and includes customs, rites and superstitions. The community chief is a respected and revered position, and family is an important social unit. Music plays an important part in the lives of the Basotho, but education is not compulsory.

Cattle occupy an important role in traditional culture with cattle ownership being a critical indicator of wealth and status. Shepherds, once a revered position, are today among the poorest males. The Basotho blanket, worn proudly by many in the rural areas, reflects one's status in the community, according to the quality, material and design of the blanket itself.

Most Basothos in rural communities live in *rondavels*, round huts with mud walls (often decorated) and thatched roofs.

Poverty and death are ever present in Lesotho. Life for most people is incredibly harsh, and most try to eke out a living on the land or through subsistence agriculture, especially livestock; unemployment rates currently stand at about 45%.

PEOPLE

The citizens of Lesotho are known as the Basotho people. Most are southern Sotho and most speak Sesotho (South Sotho). The melding of the Basotho nation was largely the result of Moshoeshoe the Great's 19thcentury military and diplomatic triumphs; many diverse subgroups and peoples have somehow managed to merge into a homogeneous society. Maseru, with 175,000 people, is the largest town. Around 80% of the population is believed to be Christian (mainly Roman Catholic, Anglican and Episcopal). The remaining 20% live by traditional Basotho beliefs. There are many churches throughout the country, many of which were (and continue to be) built by missionaries.

ARTS& CRAFTS

Good-quality tapestry and rug weaving is practised around the country, especially near Teyateyaneng and on the fringes of Maseru. Basotho hat baskets and grass and clay products can also be found.

ENVIRONMENT

Lesotho's western border is formed by the Mohokare (Caledon) River. The eastern border is the rugged Drakensberg Range, and high country defines much of the southern border. In fact, all of Lesotho is over 1000m in altitude, with peaks reaching 3000m in the centre and east of the country.

There are serious environmental concerns about the controversial Highlands Water Project, a series of dams on the Sengu (Orange) River in Lesotho, which provides water and electricity to South Africa and income to Lesotho. So far, two Dams - the Katse and Mohale - have been completed. Several communities have been disrupted (though compensation has been given) and some of the country's most fertile land has been flooded; it's already in short supply as only 10% is suitable for agriculture. There are also the as-yetunknown effects on the ecology of the Sengu River. Ironically, many people, especially in the drought-ridden lowlands do not have easy access to water.

Other current key environmental issues include overgrazing and soil erosion. The 19th-century agricultural practices created instability in the duplex soils. Subsequent grazing and heavy summer storms then disturbed the topsoil, resulting in dongas, massive eroded gullies, seen throughout Lesotho. Unless serious attention is paid to the problem, much of Lesotho's land will be uncultivatable.

FOOD & DRINK

You won't be writing home about the food in Lesotho. It's not notably bad, but nothing special either. The staples here include maize (often in the form of mealie pap, maize porridge), as well as some vegetables and pulses. Maseru boasts a decent selection of restaurants serving a range of local and foreign foods, but outside the capital, you'll usually have to take what you're given.

MASERU

pop 175,000

For much of its history, Maseru has been a quiet backwater, and if you're coming from Johannesburg (Jo'burg), you might think that it still is. However, over the past three decades, Maseru has rapidly expanded, and boasts a modest array of amenities. Among its attractions: a temperate climate, well-stocked shops, a decent selection of restaurants and hotels, and personable, peppy people. Kingsway, the city's main thoroughfare, was paved for the 1947 visit by the British royal family, and for many years remained the country's only nondirt road. A major rebuilding program has hidden many of the once-visible scars of the 1998 political unrest.

ORIENTATION

Most places to eat and shop are on or near Kingsway, while accommodation is slightly further out of the centre. Kingsway runs from the border post at Maseru Bridge right through the centre of town to the Circle, a traffic roundabout and landmark. At the Circle the street splits to become two important, though rather unimaginatively named, highways: Main North Rd and Main South Rd. A bypass road rims the city to the south. Moshoeshoe International Airport is 21km from town, off Main South Rd. A taxi to Maseru costs around US\$7.

INFORMATION

The top-end hotels will change currency (at poor rates). The main banks are all on Kingsway; Standard Bank has an ATM. The main post office is on Kingsway.

Department of Land, Survey's & Physical Planning (Lerotholi Rd; 论 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) Sells a good 1:250,000 topographical map of Lesotho (US\$7), plus hiking maps (US\$5) covering the country.

Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (🖻 2231 2501) On Kingsway.

Tourist Information Office (2231 2427; touristinfo@ltdc.org.ls; Kingsway; 论 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat) In the Basotho Shield building, opposite the giant Basotho Hat building. Friendly staff keep lists of everything, including accommodation options.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Maseru is fairly safe but muggings and crime are on the increase. Always take a taxi at night.

SIGHTS

Maseru is short on sights but big on personality. There is an impressive **Catholic cathedral** near the Circle at the end of Kingsway. The other main attractions are the tourist office and its shops, useful for stocking up on necessities. Many sights, such as Thaba Bosiu and craft shops, are easily accessible from the capital, however.

SLEEPING

Anglican Centre (2232 2046; dm/tw US\$6/12) Maseru's only budget option has clean, austere rooms; meals are available if you give notice. The centre is about 500m north of Kingsway on the bend where Assisi Rd becomes Lancer's Rd.

Foothills Guesthouse (**b** 5870 6566; melvin@xsinet .co.za; 121 Maluti Rd; s/d US\$41/62) This converted sandstone house has large and airy rooms with décor c 1960s, and a pleasant enclosed veranda for breakfasts.

Lancer's Inn (☐ 2231 2114; lancers-inn@ilesotho .com; cnr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd; s/d/tr US\$66/79/96; ≥) A comfortable colonial-era hotel just off Kingsway – best to book ahead.

For glitzier options try either **Maseru Sun** (☎ 2231 2434; maseru@sunint.co.za; 12 0rpen Rd; r US\$130; ℤ ℗) or **Lesotho Sun** (☎ 2231 3111; lesoresv@sunint .co.za; r US\$134; ℤ ▣ ℗).

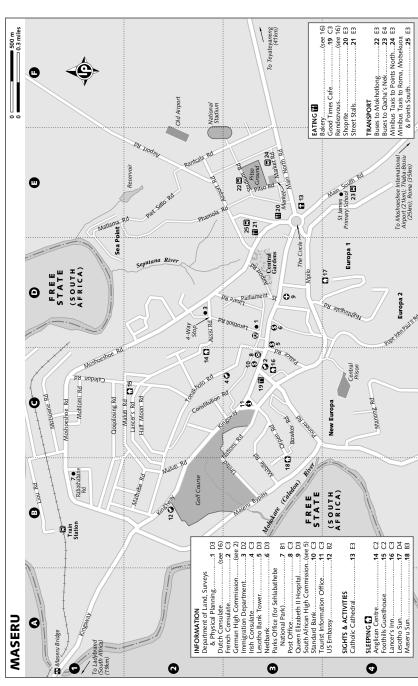
EATING & DRINKING

Good Times Cafe (2231 7705; Level 1, LNDC Mall; US\$2.50-7; Deakfast, lunch & dinner) 'It' for the 'it' crowd, with funky suede sofas, mood lighting, and oh-so-shiny chrome trimmings.

Rendezvous (2231 2114; Lancer's Inn, cmr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd; mains US\$5-10; S lunch & dinner) A fave among the expats and locals, who goss in the garden café and traditional chandeliered restaurant.

On the eastern end of Kingsway towards the minibus stations are **street stalls** (meals about US\$1.50; ♥ lunch) selling grilled snacks and curries. Shoprite is the best option for selfcaterers. Next to Lancer's Inn is a good **bakery** (♥ 7am-8.30pm).





GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus and minibuses depart from the Pitso Ground (and nearby streets) to the northeast of the Circle. From Maseru, destinations include Mafeteng (US\$2), Quthing (US\$7; change at Mafeteng), Roma (US\$1.10) and Mohale's Hoek (US\$2).

GETTING AROUND Taxi & Minibus Taxi

The standard minibus taxi fare around town is US\$0.40. Taxi companies include **Moonlite** (2231 2605), **Planet** (2231 7777) and **Luxury** (2232 26211) – also available for long-distance charter. There are taxi stands on Main North Rd and Kingsway.

AROUND MASERU

THABA-BOSIU

Moshoeshoe the Great's mountain stronghold, first occupied in July 1824, is about 25km east of Maseru. Thaba-Bosiu (Mountain at Night) played a pivotal role in the consolidation of the Basotho nation. Legend suggests that Thaba-Bosiu, a hill in daylight, grows into an unconquerable mountain at night.

The visitors' information centre (admission US\$0.70; $\textcircled{}{}$ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) can arrange official guides (make sure it's done through the centre, and pay a tip).

There are great views of the **Qiloane Hill** (inspiration for the Basotho hat), along with the remains of fortifications, Moshoeshoe's grave, and parts of the original settlement.

Mmelesi Lodge (5250 0006; s/d US\$30/34.50) offers well-organised flowery *rondavels* and a dining room; it is 2km before the visitors' information centre.

SOUTHERN LESOTHO

ROMA

Getting to Roma is half the fun, reached as it is through a spectacular gorge south of town. After that there's not a lot to do, but this relaxing place features attractive sandstone buildings and, as a university town, it's a good place to meet students.

The Ha Baroana rock paintings, which are definitely worth seeing only if you've got time, are just north of Roma. They're suffering from neglect and vandalism (including damage done by tourists who spray water on the paintings to produce brighter photos). The dinosaur footprints leave an impression; ask at the Trading Post Guest House for directions.

The **Trading Post Guest House** (2234 0202/67; www.tradingpost.co.za; camp sites per person US\$7, dm US\$11, rondavels per person US\$24, s/d without bathroom US\$21/42; 2) is a lovely, relaxing place located 2km west of Roma off the Maseru road. The owners also operate the nearby Trading Post Adventures, offering more accommodation, as well as tours, hiking trails and horse rides. There's no restaurant (try the Speakeasy or Kaycees Restaurants in Roma), but you can use the guest house kitchen or arrange meals (US\$5 to US\$9).

Minibus taxis run throughout the day between Maseru and Roma (US\$1.50, 30 minutes).

If you want to visit the rock paintings on a day-trip from Maseru, take a minibus taxi until 1.5km before Nazareth. A signpost indicates the way off to the left to the paintings. Follow the gravel track 3km to the village of Ha Khotso, then turn right at a football field. Follow this track a further 2.5km to a hilltop overlooking a gorge. A footpath zigzags down the hillside to the paintings inside a rock shelter.

To get to the paintings from Roma, head back to the Maseru road and turn right onto the road to Thaba-Tseka. After about 12km turn off to the left, just after the Ha Ntsi settlement on the Mohlaka-oa-Tuka River.

SEMONKONG

This place is as beautiful as its name. The Maletsunyane Falls are a 90-minute walk from Semonkong (Place of Smoke). They are more than 200m high and are at their most spectacular in summer. They are best appreciated from the bottom of the gorge (where there are camp sites for US\$3). For a thrilling descent, you can abseil (per person one/two/three or more people US\$63/55/50).

The remote 122m-high Ketane Falls are also worth seeing. The falls are a solid day's ride (30km) from Semonkong, or a four-day return horse ride from Malealea Lodge (see p872).

The enchanting **Semonkong Lodge** () in South Africa 051-933 3106; www.placeofsmoke.co.ls; camp sites per person US\$5.50, dm/s/d US\$11/32/59) offers hiking and pony trekking.

ESOTHO (US\$3.50) leave both places in the morning and arrive late in the afternoon.

MORIJA Morija is a tiny town with a big history. Morija Museum & Archives (a 2236 0308; www.morijafest.com; admission US\$0.80; 🕅 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), the best museum in Lesotho thanks to curator Stephen Gill, has Basotho exhibits and archives. It also hosts the Morija Arts & Cultural Festival (www.morijafest.com). Near the museum is the Mophato Oa Morija (🕿 2236 0308; camp sites per person US\$3.25, dm US\$5.20), an ecumenical centre that is sometimes willing to accommodate travellers. The comfortable Morija Guest Houses (🖻 6306 5093; mgh@leo.co.ls; r per person US\$25) have stunning views.

Buses between Maseru and Semonkong

Minibus taxis run between Maseru and Morija (US\$1.50, 45 minutes, 40km).

MALEALEA

Set in truly stunning scenery, the village of Malealea, with its mountains and valleys, is one of Lesotho's gems. The best way to experience the spectacular landscape is to take

a pony trek or wander on foot through the hills and villages - the Pitseng Plateau, the Botso'ela Waterfall, and the Pitseng Gorge (take your swimwear) - are popular destinations. Even for the less energetic, Malealea is a wonderful place to stay. Ancient San paintings hidden in rock shelters can still be seen.

Malealea Lodge (a in South Africa 051-436 6766, 082-552 4215; www.malealea.com; camp sites per person US\$7, backpacker huts without bathroom per person US\$11, r per person US\$14-28) was part of the original Malealea Trading Store established way back in 1905. It now mainly caters for visitors, and is a very friendly, well-run place. As well as comfortable rooms and a neat camp site, meals (breakfast US\$5.50, lunch US\$7 and dinner US\$10) are available, with prior notice. There are also self-catering facilities and a small village shop with basic supplies. Maps and walks of the areas are available too.

Two Sprinter minibus taxis depart Maseru at around 11.30am and 4.30pm, and Malealea at 6am and 2pm (US\$5.50, 21/2 hours, 83km). Or you can catch a minibus to Motsekuoa (US\$2, two hours), and from there another to Malealea (US\$1.50, 30 minutes).

ACTIVITIES ON HIGH

Pony Trekking

Lesotho's tough and sure-footed little Basotho ponies can take you to some remote and awesome places in the highlands. The main pony centres are Semonkong Lodge (p871), Malealea Lodge (above) and Trading Post Guest House (p871). In some cases, the villagers provide the ponies and act as guides; this provides a significant contribution to the local-village economy. At Malealea, pony trek prices start at US\$18 per day. Overnight rides start at US\$23 per person, plus US\$4.50 for each night spent in one of the Basotho village huts.

Walking

Lesotho's high country offers some of the most spectacular walking in Southern Africa. The crest of the Drakensberg Range (actually an escarpment, with the Lesotho plateau on the west, and the sheer drop down to South Africa on the east) is one of the most popular areas for serious hikers, but remote treks are also possible in many other areas. In the south and east the rugged mountains are all but deserted - this makes for long treks and a great wilderness experience in a landscape reminiscent of the Tibetan plateau. Only experienced walkers should cover this area, and in a party of at least three people. For details on walks see A Backpackers Guide to Lesotho, by Russell Suchet, available locally and in South Africa for US\$6.50.

Hikers should note the local etiquette: respect the mounds of stones (cairns) that mark graves. However, a mound of stones near a trail, especially between two hills, should be added to by passing travellers, who ensure their good luck by spitting on a stone and throwing it onto the pile. Note that a white flag waving from a village means that joala (sorghum beer) has just been brewed; a yellow flag indicates maize beer, red is for meat and green for vegetables.

For camping in or near a village, always ask permission from the village chief, and offer to pay a small fee.

OUTHING

Quthing, the southernmost town in Lesotho, is often known as Moyeni (Place of the Wind). The town was established in 1877, abandoned three years later and then rebuilt at the present site.

The town comprises Lower Quthing and Upper Quthing, the former colonial administrative centre, with good facilities and views overlooking the dramatic Senqu (Orange) River gorge. There are minibus taxis between Lower and Upper Quthing (US\$0.40).

Off the highway, about 5km west of Quthing, is the Masitise Cave House Museum (3 5879 4167; admission free, donation appreciated), a mission building built into a San rock shelter in 1866 by Reverend Ellenberger. Inquire at the house next to the small church about access to the cave house. There are San paintings nearby.

Probably the most easily located of the dinosaur footprints in Lesotho are close to Quthing and are believed to be 180 million years old. To get to them, go up the Mt Moorosi road from Quthing until you reach the pink office and prints.

Between Quthing and Masitise there is a striking twin-spired sandstone church, part of the Villa Maria Mission.

At Qomoqomong, 10km from Quthing, there's a good gallery of San paintings; ask at the General Dealers store about a guide for the 20-minute walk to the paintings.

Fuleng Guest House (2275 0260; r per person from US\$11) is the place for rondavels-with-aview and a friendly local experience. Moorosi Chalets (a in South Africa 051-436 6766, 082-552 4215; www.malealea.co.ls; per person US\$11-42) is part of a community program with awesome activities, from village stays to fishing. It is near Quthing, and 6km from Mt Moorosi village. Take the turn-off to Ha Mogalo 2km out of the village towards Qacha's Nek.

Minibus taxis run daily between Quthing and Maseru (US\$7, 31/2 hours) and Qacha's Nek (US\$6, three hours).

EASTERN LESOTHO

QACHA'S NEK

This pleasant border town was founded in 1888 near the pass (1980m) of the same name. It has an attractive church, several colonial-era sandstone buildings and California redwood trees, some over 25m high.

The best choice to stay is **Letloepe Lodge** ((22950383;www.letloepelodge.co.ls;dm/s/dUS\$10/39/55), a 'palace just below the clouds' with a peaceful outlook, or the modest **Anna's B&B** (22950374; annasb&b@leo.col.ls; s US\$14-42, d US\$25-39).

Minibus taxis go from Qacha's Nek and Maseru via Quthing (US\$13, six hours). An early morning bus runs between Maseru and Qacha's Nek (US\$9, nine hours), and the bus from Qacha's Nek to Sehlabathebe National Park departs around noon (US\$4.50, five hours).

SEHLABATHEBE NATIONAL PARK

Lesotho's first national park is remote and rugged - this sense of separation from the rest of the world is the main attraction. There are relatively few animals other than the rare Maloti minnow (thought to be extinct, but rediscovered in the Tsoelikana River), rare birds such as the bearded vulture, and the odd rhebok or baboon.

Hiking (and horse riding from Sani Top or the uKhalamba-Drakensberg) is the main way to explore the waterfalls and surrounding areas.

This is a summer rainfall area and thick mist is common. Winters are clear but cold at night, and there are sometimes light falls of snow.

For bookings contact the National Environment Secretariat (2231 1767, 2232 6075). Park management seems to change quite regularly, however.

Sleeping

You can camp in the park but there are no facilities except at Sehlabathebe Lodge (2231 1767; camp sites per person US\$4.50, r per person US\$11). You can buy firewood and coal here, but bring your own food. It's 12km to the lodge from the entrance and a 4WD is usually required; you can arrange to leave your car at the police station at Paolosi village.

Range Management Education Centre (dm US\$5), 2km down the road to the left after the Mavuka Primary School, has dorm beds, but at the time of research had no water or gas.

Getting There & Away

If you're in Lesotho, the usual way to reach the park is from Qacha's Nek, about 100km by road southwest of the park. A daily bus (US\$4.50, five hours) runs between Qacha's Nek and Sehlabathebe village; it departs

Qacha's Nek at noon and Sehlabathebe at 5.30am. If you're in South Africa, the simplest way to reach Sehlabathebe National Park is to hike

If you're in South Africa, the simplest way to reach Schlabathebe National Park is to hike the 10km up the escarpment from the settlement of Bushman's Nek, which is about 40km by road from Underberg. From Bushman's Nek to Nkonkoana Gate, the park boundary and the Lesotho border crossing, takes about six hours. Horses can also be arranged through **Khotso Trails** () in South Africa 033-701 1502; www.khotsotrails.co.za) in Underberg.

SANI TOP

Sani Top sits atop the steep Sani Pass, the only dependable road into Lesotho through the Drakensberg range in KwaZulu-Natal. This astoundingly rocky, winding and steep (with 30° gradients!) road carves its way in a truly stunning fashion, offering stupendous views on clear days and unlimited hiking possibilities. These include **Hodgson's Peaks**, 6km south, from where you get views over Sehlabathebe National Park and down to KwaZulu-Natal, and the long and strenuous hike to **Thabana-Ntlenyana** (3482m), the highest peak in Southern Africa. There's a path, but a guide is advisable. Horses can also do the trip for a small fee.

Sani Top Chalet ((a) in South Africa 033-702 1158; www.sanitopchalet.co.za; camp sites per person US\$7, dm US\$14, r without bathroom US\$42, rondavels per person US\$53) is perched dramatically at the top of the pass with a wonderful ski-chalet-type atmosphere, including a busy bar. There's less lofty praise for the backpackers' dorm; its interiors need attention, while draughts and stains detract from an otherwise high. In winter the snow is often deep enough to ski, and horse trekking is available. By the time you read this, several new rondavels should be functioning.

For details to reach Sani Top from Kwa-Zulu-Natal, see p1015. To reach the top of Sani Pass from Mokhotlong or anywhere in Lesotho by public transport takes patience. A minibus taxi runs daily from Mokhotlong via Sani Top down to Underberg (South Africa) and back (US\$9, five hours). For hitching up or down, weekends are best.

MOKHOTLONG

Remote Mokhotlong (Place of the Bald Ibis) is 270km from Maseru and the first major town north of Sani Pass. It has an appealing Wild West feel to it, with locals on their horses and wrapped in Basotho blankets, and basic shops.

A worthwhile effort is **Molumong Guesthouse & Backpackers** () in South Africa 033-394 3072; molumong@worldonline.co.za; camp sites per person M45, dm/d US\$10/25), a rustic lodge and former colonial trading post, about 15km southwest of Mokhotlong. It's a basic (electricity-free) self-catering stay; bring your own food. Pony trekking is available.

A bus goes daily to/from Maseru, departing in each direction by about 8am (M50, eight hours), except on Sunday (Mokhotlong to Maseru only) and Saturday (Maseru to Mokhotlong only). There's also a daily minibus taxi from Mokhotlong to Sani Top, which continues on to Underberg (South Africa) via the Sani Pass. Minibus taxis to Linakaneng on the Thaba-Tseka road will drop you near Molumong Lodge.

In town, there's **Senqu Hotel** (2292 0330; swith/without bathroom US\$25/28, dUS\$33/39), or nearby **Grow** (2292 0205; dm US\$7) has basic dorms.

Twelve kilometres south of Mokhotlong on the road to Thaba-Tseka you'll find the **St James Lodge** (2033-326 1601; stjamesguestlodge@yahoo .com; dm/d US\$10.50/13), located in an old stone building on a working mission. It's selfcatering and offers pony trekking and scenic walks.

BOKONG NATURE RESERVE

Bokong Nature Reserve has perhaps the most dramatic setting of the three LHDA reserves, with stunning vistas over the Lepaqoa Valley from the **visitors centre** (adult/dild US\$0.70/0.50; 🛞 8am-5pm) and various short walks. Not far from the visitors centre is an impressive waterfall, near where you can camp (per person US\$3) or overnight in a very basic four-person hut (per person US\$6) – bring your own food, sleeping bag, mattress and stove. Guides (per person US\$6) – bring your own food, sleeping bag, mattress and stove. Guides (per person US\$3) are available, and pony trekking (per half/full day US\$7/10.50) can be arranged. The reserve sits at just over 3000m and gets cold at night, so come prepared.

Bokong lies roughly midway between Katse and Hlotse at the top of Mafika-Lisiu Pass (3090m). Minibus taxis from Hlotse will drop you at the visitors centre (M15, 1½ hours); when leaving, you may need to wait for a little while before one passes by with space to fit you in.

NORTHERN LESOTHO

TEYATEYANENG

Teyateyaneng ('Place of Quick Sands', or 'TY') has been developed as the craft centre of Lesotho. Some of the best tapestries come from **Helang Basali Crafts** (2250 0382; Sam-Spm) at St Agnes Mission, 2km before TY on the Maseru road.

The Blue Mountain Inn (\fbox 2250 0362; s/d US\$32/39) has cottages and a restaurant.

LERIBE

Leribe (also known as 'Hlotse') is a busy, regional, market hub. It was an administrative centre under the British, as evidenced by a few old buildings slowly decaying in the leafy streets. The main sight is the crumbling **Major Bell's Tower** near the market, a government storehouse (1879).

The Leribe Craft Centre (2240 0323; Seam-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) sells a range of high-quality woollen goods. There is a set of dinosaur footprints a few kilometres south of Leribe at Tsikoane village. To get there, head north and take the small dirt road to the right at the Tsikoane Primary School, towards some rocky outcrops. Follow it up to the church and ask someone to direct you to the *minwane*, which are inside some caves after a 1km slog up the mountainside.

About 7km north of Leribe are the **Subeng River dinosaur footprints**. At the signpost indicating the river, walk down about 250m to a concrete causeway. The worn footprints of at least three species of dinosaur are about 15m downstream on the right bank.

Leribe Hotel (2240 0559; Main St; s/d US\$25/39; meals from US\$3.50) echoes olde-world *Fawlty Towers* style with a dining room and tea garden.

LESOTHO DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation prices and standards are on par with the country's rocky passes – high and a occasionally a little rough, although there are a range of comfort standards. The only five-star accommodation can be found in international-style hotels in Maseru. Around the rest of the country, sleeping options range from lodges (the main ones offer comfort-

PRACTICALITIES

- Several newspapers, such as Southern Star, are available in Maseru and other towns. Day-old South African newspapers are also available in Maseru.
- Thanks to a transmitter, you can pick up the BBC's World Service on short wave, medium wave (1197kHz) and FM radio.
- Lesotho's electricity is generated at 220V. Appliances have three round prongs as used in South Africa.
- Lesotho uses the metric system.

able rooms of varying standards and prices), to rough-and-tumble hotels and B&Bs. The cheapest and most basic accommodation can be found in missions and Agricultural Training Centres, which are scattered around the country.

ACTIVITIES

The main options in Lesotho are hiking (see boxed text, p872) and pony trekking (see boxed text, p872).

BOOKS

An interesting history book is A Short History of Lesotho by Stephen Gill. Poignant Basotho accounts include Singing Away the Hunger by Mpho Matsepo Nthunya et al, and Shepherd Boy of the Maloti by Thabo Makoa.

CLIMATE

Come prepared. The climate in Lesotho is very changeable: temperatures can plummet to near zero (even during summer), rivers flood, and thick fogs can also delay you. During the dry season, water can be scarce. Bring your own food, sleeping bag, rainwear, sunscreen, warm clothing, a torch and waterpurification tablets.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Keep off high ground during electrical storms and avoid camping in the open. In the highlands, school children and herd boys may request 'sweets! sweets!'; responding to this encourages begging.

On the last Friday of the month, when many people are paid and some of them get drunk, things can get boisterous and occasionally aggressive.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Embassies & Consulates in Lesotho

France (2232 7522) Inquiries handled by Alliance Française in Maseru, but all visas issued in Johannesburg. Ireland (🖻 2231 4068; Tonakholo Rd, Maseru West) Netherlands (2231 2114; Lancer's Inn) Off Kingsway. South Africa (🖻 2231 5758; 10th fl, Bank of Lesotho Towers, Kingsway)

USA (🖻 2231 2666; 254 Kingsway)

Lesotho Embassies & Consulates

Lesotho has diplomatic representation in South Africa (Pretoria and Johannesburg). Details are listed in the Directory section of those chapters.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the main Directory chapter (p1106) the principal public holidays in Lesotho are the following: 1 January New Year's Day 11 March Moshoeshoe Day

4 October Independence Day

26 December Boxing Day

INTERNET ACCESS

At the time of research internet access was available in Maseru only.

MAPS

The Department of Land, Surveys & Physical Planning (Lerotholi Rd, Maseru; 🕑 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) sells a good 1:250,000 topographical map of Lesotho (US\$7), plus hiking maps (US\$5) covering the country.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the maloti (M), which is made up of 100 liesente. The maloti is fixed at the value of the South African rand; rands are accepted everywhere but maloti are not accepted back in South Africa. The only foreignexchange banks (Bank of Lesotho, Nedbank and Standard Bank) are in Maseru.

PHOTOGRAPHY

You're better off bringing film into Lesotho and waiting until you're back home before getting it developed.

POST & TELEPHONE

Post offices are open from 8am to 4.30pm weekdays and 8am to noon Saturday. Delivery is slow and unreliable.

The telephone system works reasonably well. There are no area codes within Lesotho. Lesotho's country code is 266; to call Lesotho from South Africa dial the prefix 🖻 09 266. To call South Africa from anywhere in African area code and phone number.

VISAS

Citizens of most Western European countries, the USA and most Commonwealth countries are granted a free entry permit at the border. The standard stay permitted is two weeks, although if you ask for longer you may be lucky.

For extensions, visit the Department of Immigration & Passport Services (a 2232 3771, 2232 1110; PO Box 363, Maseru 100) in Maseru.

Citizens of other countries must pay for single-entry visa (around \$4.50) or multipleentry visa (around \$7). Pretoria is the place to obtain visas for other African countries.

TRANSPORT IN LESOTHO

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Lesotho's Moshoeshoe International Airport is 21km from Maseru. South African Airways (SAA; 🖻 27 11 978 5313) flies daily between Maseru and Johannesburg for around US\$140, one way.

Land

All Lesotho's borders are with South Africa. Crossings are at Maseru Bridge and Ficksburg Bridge (both open 24 hours); Makhaleng Bridge (open 8am to 6pm weekdays, 8am to 4pm on weekends); and Sani Pass (open 8am to 4pm), but these often have long queues; Peka Bridge (8am to 4pm) and Van Rooyen's Gate (8am to 10pm) are less crowded.

A daily minibus taxi travels between Mokhotlong (Lesotho) and Underberg (South Africa) via Sani Pass (see p874); and several taxis daily between Qacha's Nek (Lesotho) and Matatiele (South Africa; about US\$2, 45 minutes).

Big Sky Coaches (www.bigskycoaches.co.za) and Intercape (www.intercape.co.za) run daily in each

DEPARTURE TAX

The airport departure tax is US\$4.50.

direction between Bloemfontein and Maseru Bridge (US\$4.70, three hours).

At least three buses run weekly between Jo'burg and Maseru (six to seven hours), and daily minibus taxis between both Jo'burg and Ladybrand (16km from the Maseru Bridge border crossing) and Maseru. Leaving Maseru, you'll need to go to the South Africa side of Maseru Bridge.

GETTING AROUND

A good network of slow, no-frills buses and faster minibus taxis access many towns. These leave when full; no reservations are necessary. You'll be quoted long-distance fructions buses but it's best to just buy a ticket to the next major town, as you might be stuck waiting for the bus to fill up again, while other buses leave before yours.

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Madagascar

Forget Hollywood fripperies, Madagascar is like no place else on earth. In fact, all things considered, it barely qualifies as part of Africa: the two are separated by hundreds of kilometres of sea and 165 million years of evolution – long enough for Madagascar's plants and animals to evolve into some of the weirdest forms on the planet. Nowhere else can you see over 70 varieties of lemur, including one that sounds like a police siren, the world's biggest and smallest chameleons, and the last stomping ground of the elephant bird, the largest bird that ever lived. Extraordinary plants include forests of twisted, spiny 'octopus' trees, bottle-shaped baobabs and an orchid that has become a household name. Not for nothing is Madagascar regarded as the world's number one conservation priority.

And the people are no less interesting: arriving here some 2000 years ago along the Indian Ocean trade routes, they grow rice in terraced paddies, and speak a language that has more in common with their origins in Southeast Asia than with the African continent. Their culture is steeped in taboo and magic, imbuing caves, waterfalls, animals and even some material objects with supernatural attributes. Hill peoples live in traditional multistoried brick houses with carved balconies and, in some areas, dance with their dead ancestors in the 'turning of the bones' ceremony.

Throw in a soupçon of pirate history, coastlines littered with shipwrecks, great regional cooking, some of the world's longest place names, and unfailingly polite and friendly people, and you'll experience a refreshing take on the overused 'unique' tag.

FAST FACTS

- Area 587,401 sq km
- ATMs In all major towns
- Budget US\$25 to US\$30 per day
- Capital Antananarivo
- Languages French, Malagasy
- Money Ariary; US\$1 = 1983Ar
- Population 16.9 million
- Seasons Wet (November to March), dry (May to October), hot (October to April)
- **Telephone** Country code **2**61; international access code **0**0
- Time GMT/UTC + 3
- Visa One-month, single-entry visa US\$32; issued on arrival



HIGHLIGHTS

- Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia (p898) Wake to the eerie cries of indris as the sun burns the mist off the rainforestcovered hills.
- Ifaty (p896) Dive among sharks in coral canyons or laze on soft, white beaches at this west-coast beach idyll.
- Parc National de l'Isalo (p894) Cool off under a waterfall while watching the sandstone cliffs turn red at sunset.
- Antananarivo (p884) Tuck into the country's finest dining at this most un-African of cities.
- Parc National de Ranomafana (p893) Encounter lemurs, chameleons and colourful birds in primeval forest crisscrossed with tumbling steams.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Any time of year is fine for a visit except from January to March, when heavy rainfall in many areas can make some roads all but impassable, and when there's a high risk of cyclones in the east and northeast. In general, the best time to travel in most areas is April and October/November. The coolest time to travel anywhere is during the dry season (May to October), but during this time the *hauts plateaux* (central highlands; which include Antananarivo) can get cold and windy, with freezing showers.

The west and southwest get searingly hot during summer, but the winter months in these regions are pleasant, with blue skies, cooler temperatures and little rain. Most rain in the northeast falls from July to September; at this time the sea is too dangerous to travel by cargo boat.

Average maximum temperatures vary from about 30°C in coastal areas (higher in summer) to around 25°C on the *hauts plateaux*. In Antananarivo and other highland areas, temperatures during winter can drop to 10°C and even lower during the night.

Hotels and popular tourist attractions often get full, and prices go up, during the European holiday period from July to August, and during Christmas and Easter.

ITINERARIES

It's best to choose one or two regions and concentrate on exploring them well, rather than trying to fit too much into one visit. Here are a few suggestions.

HOW MUCH?

- Cup of coffee US\$0.80
- Seafood feast US\$13.50
- Shared-taxi ride US\$1
- 50km bus trip US\$2.10
- A zebu US\$210

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.35
- 1L bottled water US\$0.45
- Bottle of Three Horses Beer US\$1.20
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$3.80
- Sambos (samosas) US\$0.45
- **One Week** Spend the first day and evening enjoying the sights and sampling great cuisine in the capital, Antananarivo (p884). Then, take a two-day trip south through the hauts plateaux, taking in Ambalavao (p894), Ambositra (p892) and Antsirabe (p891), and stopping at whichever town takes your fancy. Along the way, you can admire the scenery, and do some walking and souvenir shopping at the country's finest woodcarving outlets. Head back to Tana, then wend your way east to Parc National d'Anasibe-Mantadia (p898) for a two-night stay in one of the country's most pristine rainforest national parks.
- **Two Weeks** For a taste of east and west, spend a day and night in Antananarivo (p884) and two nights at Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia (p898), then fly down to Toliara (p895) and spend a few days in Ifaty (p896) or Anakao (p895) for diving, snorkelling or just lazing on a beach. From there, take a rental car back to Tana, stopping at Parc National de l'Isalo (p894; two nights) and Parc National de Ranomafana (p893; two nights), and your pick of the hauts plateaux towns en route.
- **One Month** With a month you can indulge whatever takes your fancy by lingering in any or all of the above locations. Add on a few days to explore the Fort Dauphin hinterland (p897), and finish off with some adventuring on Canal des Pangalanes (p898) near Taomasina.



HISTORY

Archaeological evidence suggests that Madagascar was uninhabited until about 1500 or 2000 years ago, when the first Indo-Malayan settlers arrived in coast-hugging craft that skirted the Indian Ocean. They brought traditions such as planting rice in terraced paddies, Southeast Asian food crops and linguistic roots buried in the subcontinent. The migration accelerated in the 9th century, when the powerful Hindu-Sumatran empire of Srivijaya controlled much of the maritime trade in the Indian Ocean.

European Arrival & Colonisation

Portuguese sailors named the island Ilha de Sao Lourenco, but like subsequent British, Dutch and French fleets they failed to establish a base here. European and North American buccaneers had notably more success, making Madagascar (and especially Île Sainte Marie) their base in the Indian Ocean during the 17th century.

Powerful Malagasy kingdoms began to develop with the growth of trade with European merchants. Most powerful of all were the Merina of the central highlands, whose chief, Ramboasalama, acquired the weaponry to subdue neighbouring tribes. His son Radama became king in 1810 and, sniffing the winds of fortune, entered diplomatic relations with the British in 1817 and allowed hundreds of Christian missionaries to enter the Merina court. However, his widow and successor, Ranavalona I, nicknamed 'The Bloodthirsty', passionately disliked all things vahaza (white); she persecuted the missionaries and ordered the execution of tens of thousands of her Malagasy subjects using barbarous and ingenious methods.

In 1890 the British handed Madagascar over to the French in exchange for Zanzibar. The French captured Antananarivo in 1895 and turned the island into an official colony in 1897. The French suppressed the Malagasy language, however they constructed roads, expanded the education network and abolished slavery. Resentment of the French colonial presence grew in all levels of society, and Nationalist movements had developed by the 1920s. Strikes and demonstrations culminated in a revolt in 1947, which the French suppressed after killing an estimated 80,000 people and sending the rebel leaders into exile.

Nationalism & Independence

By 1958 the Malagasies had voted in a referendum to become an autonomous republic within the French community of overseas nations. Philibert Tsiranana, leader of the Parti Social Democrate (PSD), became Madagascar's first president, and allowed the French to keep control of most of Madagascar's trade and industry. Tsiranana was forced to resign in 1972 and was succeeded by army general Gabriel Ramantsoa.

The socialist Ramantsoa made friends with China and the USSR, closed down the French military bases and collectivised the farming system, which led to an exodus of French farmers. The economy took a nosedive and Ramantsoa was forced to resign. His successor, Richard Ratsimandrava, lasted just one week before being assassinated by rebel army officers. They were almost immediately routed by Ramantsoa loyalists, and a new government headed by Admiral Didier Ratsiraka came to power.

The Ratsiraka years were characterised by more socialist reforms, but a debt crisis in 1981 and 1982 forced him to abandon the reforms and obey the IMF. In 1989 Ratsiraka was dubiously 'elected' to his third seven-year term, sparking riots that left six people dead. People were still demanding his resignation by 1991, and the ensuing demonstrations brought the economy to a standstill. In 1992 Malagasies voted in a referendum to limit the presidential powers. General elections were held that year, and Professor Albert Zafy thrashed Ratsiraka, ending his 17 years in power.

Years of communist-style dictatorship and economic mismanagement made it hard for Zafy to ignite the economy and gain the trust of the people. He was eventually impeached for abuse of constitutional powers (eg sacking his prime minister). Elections were called in 1996 and Ratsiraka surprised everyone by scraping a victory.

Madagascar Today

In 2001 Madagascans went to the polls for the general elections. During the first round Marc Ravalomanana, a former yogurt seller and businessman, claimed victory, but Ratsiraka refused to accept the vote. Ravalomanana and his supporters mounted mass protests and a general strike at the beginning of 2002. A month later Ravalomanana went ahead and declared himself president anyway, sparking off clashes between rival supporters that nearly brought Madagascar to civil war. Bridges were bombed, and Ratsiraka's supporters blockaded Antananarivo, cutting off its fuel and food supply for weeks.

The Supreme Court held a recount of the votes and declared Ravalomanana the winner. When the US recognised Ravalomanana as the rightful president, Ratsiraka fled in exile to Paris. Ravalomanana's 'I Love Madagascar' party sealed its popularity at parliamentary elections in December 2002. The new president set about reforming the country's ruined economy, and announced salary increases for politicians in an effort to stamp out corruption. He generally made the right noises to the World Bank, which, along with France and the US, pledged a total of US\$2.3 billion in aid. They, like millions of Malagasies, are hoping that Ravalomanana, a self-made millionaire, can help to finally fulfil Madagascar's huge economic potential.

Ravalomanana has declared his intention of breaking French cultural influence on the country, and restoring Malagasy language and traditions. His actions to date have included the repair and maintenance of many main roads, a feat that won't be lost on visitors, and keeping armies of Malagasies employed for months.

CULTURE

Your first impression of the Malagasies is likely to be of a polite but reserved people. The concept of Fihavanana, which means 'conciliation' or 'brotherhood', is enshrined in society, meaning that confrontation is avoided and compromises are sought. Politeness in general is very important to the Malagasy, and impatience or pushy behaviour is regarded as shocking.

Regarding the Malagasy as Africans is a big no-no. As far as the citizens of 'La Grande Île' are concerned, they are just that – an island people, by implication far superior to the 'primitive' Africans.

The family is the central tenet of Malagasy life, including not only distant cousins but also departed ancestors. At Famadihana (literally, 'the turning of the bones') exhumation ceremonies, people may line up for a photograph with the shroud-wrapped bodies of dead family members laid out neatly in the foreground.

Despite independence, French culture remains influential and the French language continues to be widely spoken. The Malagasy home, as the centre of the extended family, ancestors included, is furnished with care and attention, regardless of how poor the householder may be. Custom dictates that furniture, doors and windows should all be astrologically aligned and placed in specific parts of the building.

It's still common to find sacred offerings left at the base of baobab trees, beside forest waterfalls or in front of royal tombs. Family outings, usually accompanied by a picnic, to a beautiful spot of family or tribal significance, are a popular leisure activity.

Time and dates have an influence on Malagasy lifestyle. One example of this is seen in the belief in *vintana* (destiny), which influences the dates of parties held to mark circumcisions, marriages or reburials. Friday, which is associated with nobility, is considered a good day to hold a celebration.

PEOPLE

The Malagasy people are officially divided into 18 tribes, whose boundaries are roughly based on old kingdoms. The main ethnic groups are Merina (27%), Betsimisaraka (15%), Betsileo (12%), Tsimihety (7%), Sakalava (6%), Antaisaka (5%) and Antandroy (5%), with a number of smaller groups making up the remainder. Also important is the distinction between Merina highlanders and so-called *côtiers*. Literally, *côtiers* refers to those from the coast, but really means any non-Merina groups.

Traditional Malagasy culture is rooted in reverence and respect for its ancestors. Among most tribes, this is manifested in a complex system of *fady* (taboos) and burial rites, the best known of which is the ceremonial exhumation and reburial known as Famadihana. Half of Madagascar's population still adheres to traditional beliefs, while half belong to the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. A small proportion, mainly on the west coast, is Muslim. Happy clappy–style Christianrevival meetings have become popular in recent years, but even among Christians there is generally great respect and reverence for traditional rituals.

Personal adornment and fashion are hugely important to the Malagasy, and men and women alike take great care with their appearance. Hats are the most beloved of all fashion items, and may be worn cocked jauntily over one eye or with the brims demurely turned down to shade the face.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Textiles have always played a huge part in Malagasy society, with some types of cloth even being imbued, it is believed, with supernatural powers. The Merina used cocoons collected from the wild silkworm to make highly valued textiles called lamba mena (red silk). The silks were woven in many colour and pattern combinations, and in the past had strong links with royal prestige, expressed by the colour red. Worn by the aristocracy in life and death, lamba mena were also used in burial and reburial ceremonies. These days ancestral materials such as lamba mena are combined with modern textiles such as lycra, or 'found objects', such as shells or even computer circuit boards. Ask at the Centre Culturel Albert Camus (p884) in Antananarivo for details of textile exhibitions.

ENVIRONMENT

Madagascar split from the African land mass around 165 million years ago and has been in its present position for about 100 million years. The island measures 1600km long and up to 570km wide, and the 5000km-long coastline is sprinkled with small islands, including Île Sainte Marie to the east.

Madagascar can be divided geographically into three parallel north-south zones, each with its own ecosystem: the west consists of dry spiny desert or deciduous forest; the central highlands (known as the *hauts plateaux*) have now been mostly deforested; and the eastern zone is rainforest. The coasts are marked by alternating mangrove forests and long, sweeping sandy beaches, with coral reefs offshore. The 2876m volcanic Maromokotro peak is Madagascar's highest point. All but the island's southern tip lies north of the Tropic of Capricorn.

Madagascar's unique wildlife is today among its biggest tourist draws and its imminent disappearance is one of the most pressing global conservation issues. Over the last thousand years many large animals, including giant lemurs, have been hunted to extinction.

Madagascar's best-known mammals are the lemurs, which include sifakas and the indri, mouse and ring-tailed lemurs, the incredible aye-aye and noisy black-and-white lemurs. Humpback whales migrate past Madagascar's shores from August through to October. Madagascar has 209 breeding bird species, of which 51% (120 species) are endemic – the highest proportion of any country in the world. These include the diverse vanga shrikes, couas and various species of ground roller.

Chameleons are the best known of Madagascar's reptiles, and include the world's largest and smallest species. Other reptiles include geckos, harmless snakes such as the tree boa, the potentially dangerous Nile crocodile and strikingly marked tortoises.

Nonly 10% of Madagascar's original vegetation cover remains. Madagascar's big environmental issues are deforestation and the consequent erosion caused by 'slash-andburn' farming. Today a wasteland of invasive, sun-loving grass covers more than 80% of the island. It supports very few native animals and plants, and even people have a tough time living on this fragile landscape.

Madagascar has more than 14 national parks and President Ravalomanana has promised to triple the size of protected areas. By visiting a national park, you are economically helping village residents: 50% of park admission fees are returned to villagers to build wells and small dams, buy vegetable seeds, help with tree nurseries and rebuild schools.

FOOD & DRINK

You won't go hungry in Madagascar - eating is a real joy and prices are extremely cheap by Western standards. Rice is the staple and is often accompanied by a stew made from beef, fish, chicken, duck or vegetables. Favourite dishes include romazava (beef-and-vegetable stew) and ravioto (pork stew with manioc), with *mi sao* (fried noodles with vegetables or meat) or a satisfying soupe chinoise (clear noodle soup with fish, chicken or vegetables) the most usual alternatives. Restaurants normally also serve excellent French cuisine, from simple zebu steack frîtes (steak and chips) to paté de foie gras (goose liver paté) and magret de canard (duck fillet). Western staples such as pizza and pasta are easy to find, too.

French restaurants rarely cater for vegetarians, but local *hotelys* (Malagasy eateries that serve mainly rice dishes and snacks cheaply) can usually whip up some noodles, soup or rice and greens. Seafood fans are in for a treat – every menu in coastal areas features cheap lobster, prawns or squid dishes together with a fish of the day. The most popular local-brand beers are Three Horses Beer (known as THB) and Gold, but the alcoholic speciality is *rhum arrangé* – rum flavoured with fruits and spices. A taste of Malagasy wine is something you probably won't want to repeat, but imported French and South African wines are served in better restaurants.

ANTANANARIVO

MADAGASCAR

Madagascar's seemingly unpronounceable capital (commonly shortened to 'Tana') is like few others on earth. Cobbled streets wind up steep, rocky hills past narrow, wooden houses with painted shutters to soaring church spires and grand edifices, recalling European rather than African cities.

HISTORY

Antananarivo was originally known as Analamanga (Blue Forest), and is believed to have been populated by the Vazimba people. In 1610 a Merina king, Andrianjaka, conquered the Vazimba and named his new settlement Antananarivo (Town of the Thousand) after the garrison he stationed there. Andrianjaka built his own *rova* (palace) on the highest of Antananarivo's hills and founded the Merina dynasty.

In 1895 the French captured Tana, renaming it Tananarive and using it as a seat of government. They built two great staircases, and drained swamps and paddy fields to create the present-day Analakely area. After independence the city's name reverted back to Antananarivo.

ORIENTATION

Ivato airport, which serves both domestic and international routes, lies 12km outside Antananarivo.

Central Antananarivo can be roughly divided into Haute-Ville (Upper Town) and Basse-Ville (Lower Town). The broad Ave de L'Indépendance runs from the train station towards the crowded main market area of Analakely, with a steep staircase leading to Place de L'Indépendance in the rather quieter Haute-Ville. Another staircase, directly opposite, leads to the busy district of Ambondrona. Narrow streets lead further uphill past several churches to the *rova* (queen's palace).

INFORMATION Bookshops

The best place to pick up English-language magazines is from the street vendors in Place de L'Indépendance.

Librairie de Madagascar (Map p887; 22 224 54; 38 Ave de L'Indépendance) Sells maps, guidebooks (in French), dictionaries (French-English and Malagasy-English) and a few books in English.

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française d'Antananarivo (22 208 56, 22 211 07; aftananarive@alliancefr.mg; Lalana Seimad, Andavamamba) Offers French- and Malagasy-language courses, and sponsors various cultural events. Centre Culturel Albert Camus (CCAC; Map p887; ⓐ 22 213 75, 22 236 47; ccac@wanadoo.mg; 14 Ave de L'Indépendance; ⓑ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sat) Sponsors an extensive program of concerts, dance and film; the centre has a library and exhibition hall.

Emergency

Ambulance (22 200 40) Espace Medical 24-hour clinic (22 265 66) Fire (21 18) Police (Map p887: 17: Lalana Karija)

Internet Access

All of the following places charge 30Ar per minute.

Cyber-Paositra Place de L'Indépendance (Map p887; paositra@dts.mg; 2 8am-noon & 2-6pm); Araben'ny 26 Jona 1960 (Map p887; paositra@dts.mg; 2 8am-noon & 2-6pm) Both main post offices have good internet centres.

Outcool Web Bar (Map p887; Lalana Andrianary Ratianarivo; \mathfrak{D} 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 3-9pm Sun) Discounts for longer surfing times.

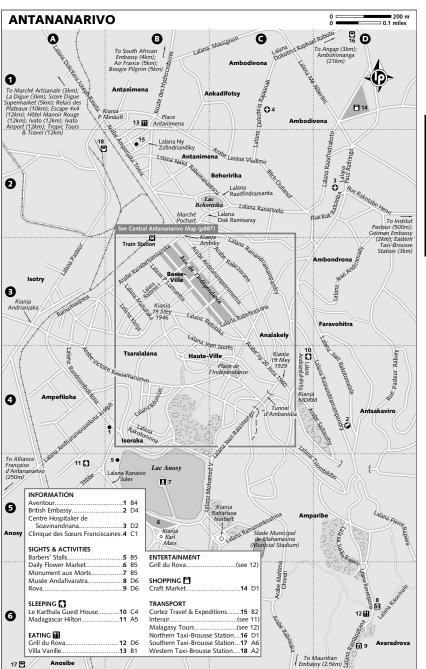
Teknet Group (Map p887; Arabe Ramanantsoa; 🟵 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 3-8pm Sun) Also has fax and printing services.

Medical Services

Centre Hospitalier de Soavinandriana (Hôpital Militaire d'Antananarivo; Map p885; a 22 397 51; 2 24hr) Has X-ray equipment and stocks most basic drugs and medicines; employs several French doctors.

Clinique des Sœurs Franciscaines (Clinique et Maternité St-Français; Map p885; 22 610 46; Lalana Dokotera Rajaonah, Ankadifotsy) Has X-ray equipment and is well run and relatively clean.

Pharmacie Metropole (Map p887; 22 200 25; Lalana Ratsimilaho; 3 8am-noon Mon-Sat) Antananarivo has many good, well-stocked pharmacies. This is one of the best and is conveniently located near Hôtel Colbert.



Money

All banks listed exchange cash and travellers cheques. ATMs work only until about 8pm Monday to Saturday, though the ATM at the Madagascar Hilton is open 24 hours. **Bank of Africa** (BOA) Place de L'Indépendance (Map p887; 💬 8am-noon & 2-3.30pm); Ave de L'Indépendance (Map p887; 💬 8am-noon & 2-3.30pm) Provides cash advances on MasterCard, but you should allow at least an hour.

do advances on Visa cards. **BMOI** (Map p887; Place de L'Indépendance; 论 8am-3.35pm) Has an ATM that accepts Visa cards.

BFV-SG Arabe Ramanantsoa (Map p887; 🕅 8-11am &

2-4pm); Ave de L'Indépendance (Map p887; 🕑 8-11am &

2-4pm) The branch on Arabe Ramanantsoa has an ATM;

both branches change travellers cheques (Amex only) and

BNI-CL Kianja 19 Mey 1946 (Map p887; ∑ 8am-4pm); Araben'ny 26 Jona 1960 (Map p887; ∑ 8am-4pm) Gives advances on Visa cards. The branch on Araben'ny 26 Jona 1960 has an ATM.

Socimad Bureau de Change (Map p887; Lalana Radama I; 🟵 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8-11.15am Sat) Changes cash and travellers cheques, and gives cash advances on Visa cards.

Post & Telephone

There are public telephones for domestic and international calls at both post offices, as well as plenty dotted around town. You can buy phonecards from any shop or kiosk. **Paositra** (main post office; Map p887; Lalana Ratsimilaho, Haute-Ville; 🏵 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) Near the Hôtel Colbert; poste restante is sent here. **Post office** (Map p887; Araben'ny 26 Jona 1960, Basse-Ville) Closed on Saturday.

Tourist Information

Maison de Tourisme de Madagascar (Map p887; ② 22 351 78; www.tourisme-madagascar.com; 3 Lalana Elysée Ravelomanantsoa; № 8.30am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Fri) Friendly but fairly clueless staff and very limited printed information; don't bother unless you have a specific question.

Travel Agencies

For listings of agencies offering trips within Madagascar, see p907. If you're travelling outside the country, the following agencies sell air tickets and package holidays: **Aventour** (Map p885; 2 21 317 61; aventours@iris .mg; Immeuble FIARO, Ampefiloha) Dodo Travel & Tours (Map p887; 22 690 36; www .dodotraveltour.com; Lalana Elysée Ravelomanantsoa) Transcontinents (Map p887; 22 223 98; transco@dts.mg; 10 Ave de L'Indépendance) This company also has a branch in the Hôtel Colbert (p888). Tropic Tours & Travel (22 580 75; tropic@tropic -tours.net; Rte de l'Aéroport, Ivato)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Tana is probably safer than most African cities of comparable size. It is not safe to take public transport at night, especially between the city centre and the airport, so take a taxi if you go out. If you do walk, go in a group, and remember that in much of the city there are no street lights.

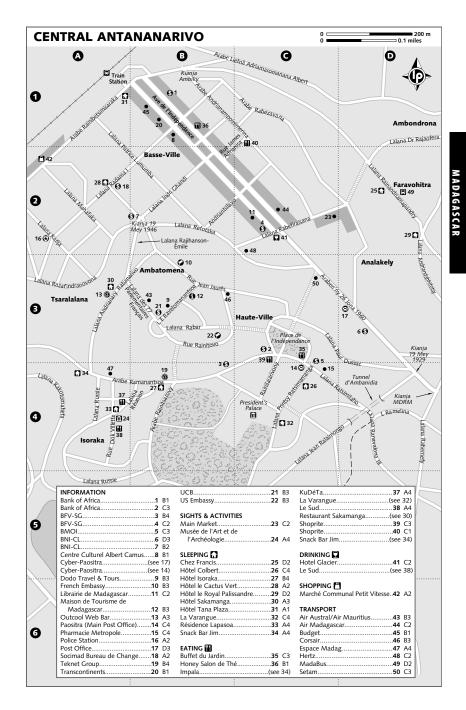
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **Rova** (Palais de la Reine; Map p885; Lalana Ramboatiana; admission 5000Ar; ⓑ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) crowns the highest hill overlooking Lac Anosy. Gutted in a fire in 1995, it has now been partially restored and is a great place to spend an hour or two. English-speaking freelance guides (about 3000Ar per person) are full of anecdotes about the bloody history of the Merina kings and queens. The Rova is a stiff 4km walk from central Antananarivo, or an easy taxi ride (5000Ar).

Housed in a magnificent pink baroque palace a few hundred metres downhill from the Rova, the **Musée Andafivaratra** (Map p885; admission with Rova ticket; \mathfrak{D} 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) is filled with furniture, portraits and memorabilia that bring the stories of the Merina monarchs to life.

The **Musée de l'Art et de l'Archéologie** (Map p887; [™] 22 210 47; Rue Dok Villette; admission by donation; [™] 2-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 1-4pm Sat) is worth popping into to see grave decorations from the south (known as *aloalo*), an extensive exhibition of musical instruments, and talismans and objects used for sorcery.

Lac Anosy (Map p885) is an easy downhill walk from Haute-Ville and is at its most beautiful in October, when the jacaranda trees are covered in purple blossom. The **Monument aux Morts** (Monument to the Dead; Map p885), a WWI memorial erected by the French, is a large white angel on an island connected to the shore by a causeway. There's a daily **flower market** (Map p885) just opposite the end of the causeway and a neat little row of **barbers' stalls** (Map p885) on the lake's western shore.



COURSES

Alliance Française d'Antananarivo (🖻 22 208 56, 22 211 07; aftananarive@alliancefr.mg; Lalana Seimad, Andavamamba) sometimes runs Malagasy-language courses, as well as providing French lessons.

The Centre Culturel Albert Camus (CCAC; Map p887; 22 213 75, 22 236 47; ccac@wanadoo.mg; 14 Ave de L'Indépendance; 🕑 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sat) offers French courses only.

SLEEPING

The capital offers most types of accommodation, or you can stay near the airport at Ivato if you have an early flight to catch. Hotel prices usually don't include breakfast.

Budget

AADAGASCAR

Hôtel Manoir Rouge (🖻 22 441 04; www.madatana.com, in French; dm/d/tr €4/6.80/12) Within walking distance of the airport, this long-running budget option is for those arriving late or departing early. Clean rooms and friendly service.

Snack Bar Jim (Map p887; 🖻 22 374 37; gusth@netclub .mg; Arabe Ramanantsoa; d 20,000Ar) This Malagasy snack bar also has a few clean rooms available several storeys up, on the rooftop. There are fantastic views and rooms have internal showers, but toilets are shared.

Hôtel Isoraka (Map p887; 🖻 22 655 81; 11 Arabe Ramanantsoa; d with/without bathroom 50,600/20,600Ar) One of the best budget places, it's up in Haute-Ville and you can splurge on good eating nearby.

Chez Francis (Map p887; 🖻 22 613 65; Lalana Rainandriamapandry; r with/without bathroom 40,000/29,000Ar) A good choice that offers clean, spacious rooms with a hot shower. The more expensive rooms have good views over Tana.

Le Karthala Guest House (Map p885: 🖻 22 248 95: fax 22 272 67; Lalana Andriandahifotsy; d incl breakfast 30,000Ar) A friendly, family-run B&B with a pretty garden courtyard. Rooms are large and very well furnished, with bathrooms. Malagasy meals (5000Ar) are available with advance notice in the evenings.

Midrange

Hôtel Sakamanga (Map p887; 🖻 22 358 09; saka@malagasy.com; Lalana Andrianary Ratianarivo; d €15-44) One of the best midrange choices, but advance bookings are advised. Airy, bright rooms with wooden floors all have TV, phone and bathroom; the pricier ones have garden views. A great place to meet travellers of every stripe.

Hôtel le Cactus Vert (Map p887; 22 624 41; lecactusvert@wanadoo.mg; 15 Lalana Radama I; d 60,000Ar)

Rooms are a bit characterless, but have a fullsized bath and a safe, and some have TV. It has a very good restaurant.

Résidence Lapasoa (Map p887; 🖻 22 611 40; corossol@malagasy.com; 15 Lalana Réunion; s/d €35/38) A fine Haute-Ville choice, with spotless, woodappointed rooms, all with TV and some with minibar, four-post bed and/or balcony. There's free internet use for guests.

Relais des Plateaux (22 441 22; relaisdesplateaux@ wanadoo.mg; d €38; 🔀 🕑) Newest and nicest of the Ivato hotels, this place offers spacious rooms with TV, minibar and safe, and tiled bathrooms with powerful hot shower. Meals are available (mains 10,000Ar). Some English is spoken and airport transfers can be arranged.

Top End

La Varangue (Map p887; 🖻 22 273 97; varangue@simicro .mg; 17 Lalana Printsy Ratsimamanga; d room/studio €50/70) This highly recommended boutique hotel is tucked down a cobbled lane near the Presidential Palace. Rooms feature minibar, coffeemaking facilities, TV and phone. It has a fine restaurant (opposite), too.

Hôtel Tana Plaza (Map p887; 🖻 22 218 65; www.siceh -hotels.com, in French: 2 Ave de L'Indépendance: r with TV, safe & phone €58; 🔀) A comfortable business hotel much favoured by tour companies. It has a rather sterile décor, but accepts credit cards, has money-changing facilities and Englishspeaking staff.

Hôtel Colbert (Map p887; 22 202 02; colbert@wanadoo.mg; Lalana Printsy Ratsimamanga; r with TV, safe, phone & minibar €89-255; 🔀 🕑) Cheaper rooms lack the luxury promised by the flashy lobby, but this standout choice offers great service and a host of facilities, including a stunning spa, bars, a patisserie, two restaurants and a business centre.

Hôtel le Royal Palissandre (Map p887; 🖻 22 605 60; HotelPalissandre@simicro.mg; 13 Lalana Andriandahifotsy; s/d with minibar, TV, phone & safe €111/119; 🔀 🕑) An elegant, quiet hotel where the spacious bedrooms all offer understated comfort. More expensive rooms overlook bustling Analakely, and hotel facilities include free internet use for guests, spa, bar and a restaurant with log fire.

EATING

Tana is well served for eateries and it's worth splurging while you're in the capital. Others will have the same idea, so book ahead on Friday and Saturday nights.

The best place to find cheap hotelys and stalls serving simple Malagasy fare is along the western end of Arabe Ramanantsoa or around the main market at Analakely.

There's a convenient Shoprite supermarket in Haute-Ville (Map p887) and another at Analakely (Map p887) in Basse-Ville. You can also buy fresh vegetables, meat and fish at the daily main market (Map p887) by the pavilions at Analakely.

Tana's many gleaming salons de thé (tea rooms) serve pastries, cakes, coffee, tea and hot chocolate, breakfasts and, in many cases, wonderful ice cream.

Honey Salon de Thé (Map p887; 🗃 22 621 67; 13 Ave de L'Indépendance; cakes 2000Ar; 🕑 Wed-Mon) Among the better places to indulge, but it isn't open in the evening or at lunchtime.

Buffet du Jardin (Map p887; 🖻 22 338 87; Place de L'Indépendance; 🖓 24hr) The only option for 24hour snacks and beer.

Snack Bar Jim (Map p887; Arabe Ramanantsoa; rice dishes 2500Ar; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A convenient hotely in the city centre serving patisserie, steak and delicious rice dishes.

Villa Vanille (Map p885; 🖻 22 205 15; Place Antanimena; mains 8000Ar; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A classy establishment, in an old colonial villa, featuring dishes from Mauritius and Réunion, as well as Madagascar, with nightly musical performances.

Impala (Map p887; Arabe Ramanantsoa; 2-course meals 8000Ar; 🕑 lunch & dinner) More fun than professional, this bright restaurant, on the 1st floor above Snack Bar Jim, has a lively bar but rather basic fare, such as grilled fish or chicken with chips.

Le Sud (Map p887; 22 310 22; 21 Rue Dok Villette; grills 8500Ar; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A new addition to the Haute-Ville bar/resto scene, with dining space centred on a courtyard planted with cactuses. The food is good without being exceptional, and there are always a few Malagasy dishes on the menu.

Restaurant Sakamanga (Map p887; 22 358 09; Lalana Andrianary Ratianarivo; mains 9000Ar; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Like its namesake hotel, this place is usually busy and reservations are advised on Friday and Saturday. Bistro-style food includes imaginative and tasty pasta dishes, and excellent grilled seafood and zebu meals. Daily Malagasy specials are chalked up on a blackboard.

Grill du Rova (Map p885; 🖻 22 627 24; Lalana Ramboatiana, Avaradrova; mains 9000Ar; 🕅 lunch & dinner

Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) A stylish restaurant-cabaret just down from the Rova that serves French and Malagasy dishes. The cabaret showcases Malagasy jazz and traditional music (see below).

La Varangue (Map p887; 22 273 97; varangue@simicro .mg; 17 Lalana Printsy Ratsimamanga; mains 10,000Ar; Nunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A very classy, if small, restaurant in the hotel of the same name. The menu mostly features French cuisine, with a few local touches, and is reputedly the best French food in Madagascar.

French food in Madagascar. KuDéTa (Map p887; 22 281 54; www.kudeta.mg; 16 Lalana Réunion; grills 11,500Ar; breakfast, lunch & dinner) A very stylish bar-restaurant next to Résidence Lapasoa, with chic décor, friendly English-speaking staff and excellent fare. Bookings escontial for Bridew and Saturdow nights essential for Friday and Saturday nights.

DRINKING

Le Sud (Map p887; 21 Rue Dok Villette) A lively Haute-Ville bar-restaurant with funky décor; bar snacks and burgers available.

Hôtel Glacier (Map p887; Araben'ny 26 Jona 1960) A popular place with cheap drinks that gets jumpin' on weekends.

ENTERTAINMENT

Grill du Rova (Map p885; 🖻 22 627 24; Lalana Ramboatiana, Avaradrova; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) A stylish restaurant-cabaret that also showcases Malagasy jazz and traditional music. There are performances every Sunday and Friday at sunset, and musical soirees on the first and third Wednesday of each month.

SHOPPING

The markets in central Tana are great places to browse and buy. The main market is found in the pavilions at Analakely (Map p887), opposite the bottom of the stairs leading up to Haute-Ville. It's a packed, teeming place, selling every fruit, vegetable, fish or meat product you could imagine, and it's held daily. The Marché Communal de Petit Vitesse (Map p887) is a similar, but smaller, market on the tracks west of the train station.

For crafts, the Marché Artisanale is Tana's best-known market. It takes place on a bend in the road about 2km south of the Score Digue supermarket in the suburb of La Digue. There's another, smaller, craft market (Map p885) at Andravoahangy, about 1.5km northeast of the northern end of Ave de L'Indépendance.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

For details of international flights from Ivato airport, see p904. See relevant city sections for details of domestic flights. The following is a list of domestic and international airline offices in Tana.

Air Austral/Air Mauritius (Map p887; 22 359 90; www.airaustral.com, in French; Lalana des 77 Parlementaires Français)

Air France (🖻 23 230 23; fax 23 230 41; Tour Zital, Rte des Hydrocarbures, Ankorondrano)

Air Madagascar (Map p887; 🖻 22 222 22; www.air madagascar.mg; 31 Ave de L'Indépendance) Corsair (Map p887; 22 633 36; www.corsair.fr; 1 Rue

Rainitovo Antsahavola)

Interair (Map p885; 🖻 22 224 06; fax 2262421; Galerie Marchande, Rue Pierre Stibbe, Anosy) In the Madagascar Hilton.

Bus

MADAGASCAR

The bus company MadaBus (Map p887; 🖻 032 04 405 11; www.madabus.com; Lalana Rainandriamapandry) is an expensive but efficient service on the Tana-Taomasina and Tana-Toliara routes, stopping at key towns along the way. Departures to both destinations are on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, returning on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. See individual destinations for fares and MadaBus' website for more information. In the capital, bookings, tickets and departures are all from the MadaBus office opposite Chez Francis hotel.

Car & Motorcycle

Car-rental agencies in Tana all handle rentals for use throughout the country; drivers are generally obligatory. Rates usually include driver, insurance and unlimited mileage, but don't include petrol.

Budget (Map p887; 22 317 08; 26 Ave de L'Indépendance)

Espace 4x4 (22 441 84; espace4x4@dts.mg; lvato) Hertz (Map p887; 22 229 61; somada@simicro.mg; 17 Lalana Rabefiraisana, Analakely)

You can also rent cars through most of the tour operators listed on p907. See also p906 for general information on car rentals and rates.

Taxi-Brousse

Taxis-brousses (bush taxisleave from Tana to almost everywhere in Madagascar, departing about every hour to Antsirabe, Fianarantsoa

and Toamasina. See the individual town entries for more details.

There are four main gares routières (bus stations), all with a chaotic selection of minibuses, cars and buses.

Eastern taxi-brousse station (Gare Routière de l'Est) At Ampasampito, about 3.5km northeast of the city centre. Taxis-brousses to Moramanga cost 5000Ar.

Northern taxi-brousse station (Gare Routière du Nord; Map p885) In Ambodivona, about 2km northeast of the city centre, this is the station for transport to Toamasina. To get here take the Malakia bus 4 or a taxi (4000Ar).

Southern taxi-brousse station (Gare Routière du Sud; Map p885; Lalana Pastora Rahajason) At Anosibe about 1.5km southwest of Lac Anosy. Provides transport to all points south, as well as to some points on the east and west coasts. There are regular departures to Antsirabe, Fianarantsoa, Toliara and Fort Dauphin. To get there take the Fima bus 10 or a taxi (4000Ar).

Western taxi-brousse station (Gare Routière de l'Ouest; Map p885) About 400m northwest of the southern taxi-brousse station. Has taxis-brousses to lvato and the airport.

GETTING AROUND

Ivato airport is 12km from the city centre. Taxis to/from Ivato airport should cost about 12,000Ar. Most tour companies and many hotels can arrange a transfer for a fee.

It's usually no problem to walk between hotels and restaurants, except at night, when it's best to take a taxi; taxis are also recommended if you are visiting places in the suburbs.

There are a few large buses and many minibuses available for getting around Antananarivo. Fares cost 100Ar to 300Ar, but it's often quicker to walk to places nearby. Otherwise, you'll never have much difficulty finding a taxi, even late at night. Taxis don't have meters, so agree on the price before you climb in. Fares around town start at 4000Ar and are more expensive at night.

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

The central highlands (hauts plateaux) are a vast area of rolling hills interspersed with terraced valleys of rice paddies, the picture of rural tranquillity. It's a very scenic region, easily reached from Antananarivo, and features some of the country's most interesting and attractive towns. The main tribes in the region are the Merina and Betsileo.

ANTSIRABE

Antsirabe (pronounced ant-sira-bay) makes an ideal day trip from Tana or a base for excursions into the surrounding countryside. Its origins as a 19th-century spa town are reflected in elegant façades and wide boulevards.

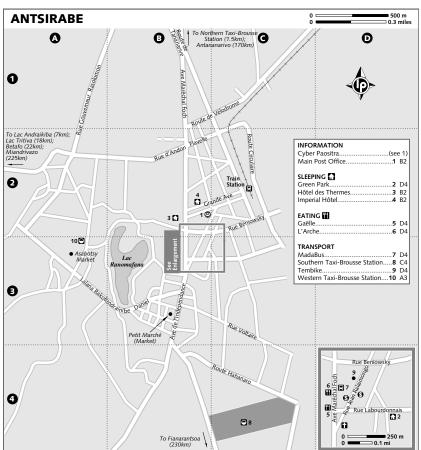
The most convenient internet access is at Cyber Paositra (cnr Ave de l'Independence & Grand Ave; per min 30Ar; 🕑 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat), in the main post office. There are banks along Rue Jean Ralaimongo that can change cash and travellers cheques.

With charming round bungalows and upstairs rooms overlooking green lawns where you can pitch a tent, it's not surprising that Green Park (🕿 44 051 90; Rue Labourdonnais; camp sites per tent 4000Ar, d/bungalow 22,000/25,000Ar) is often full.

At the Imperial Hôtel (🖻 44 483 33; imperial hotel@wanadoo.mg; Grand Ave; r from 25,000Ar), older rooms are large, though just serviceable. The more expensive new rooms are much better, but for the price you'd be better off shopping around.

Hôtel des Thermes (🖻 44 487 61; sht@wanadoo .mg; d/ste 90,000/125,000Ar; 🕄 🕑) is a sprawling 19th-century place boasting an enormous swimming pool and tennis courts. Service is attentive and efficient, and although clean and spacious, the motel-style rooms are rather dated.

There are cheap Malagasy snack bars near the western *taxi-brousse* station and several good restaurants along the main drag, Ave Maréchal Foch. **L'Arche** ((20) 032 02 479 25; mains



7500Ar) serves tasty but unadventurous French food and sometimes features live music. An alternative for more French fare is **Gaëlle** (mains 5000Ar), opposite the cathedral.

Taxis-brousses to Tana cost 6000Ar and leave from the northern *taxi-brousses* station; *taxis-brousses* to Ambositra (6000Ar) and Fianarantsoa (8000Ar) leave from the southern *taxi-brousses* station.

MadaBus (☎ 032 04 900 21) stops opposite L'Arche restaurant; the fare to Tana is €9.

Pousse-pousses (rickshaws) are the main form of local transport, but Antsirabe is ideal for bike riding. Bike rental is available at **Tembike** (**1 0** 32 04 029 27; www.tembike.new.fr), outside the Ville d'Eau hotel, for 4000/7000Ar per half-/full day. Tembike also organises sevenday river trips to the tsingy area of the west coast.

Pousse-pousse trips start at 1000Ar and a short city tour should be about 4000Ar.

AMBOSITRA

Widely touted as the arts-and-crafts capital of Madagascar, Ambositra (pronounced amboo-sh-tr) is a great place to shop for carved wooden souvenirs. Prices are cheaper than in Tana, and you can arrange to visit the woodcarvers at work, both in town and in nearby Zafimaniry villages. The best souvenir shops are in the upper (southern) part of town, near the Grand Hôtel.

Treks into the countryside are popular and can be organised through **Tsangatsanga Maison des Guides** (20) 4771448), which has an office near the Grand Hôtel, for 30,000/40,000Ar for a half-/full-day trek.

The **Prestige Hôtel** ((2) 47 711 35; r with bathroom 17,000-24,000Ar, without bathroom 8000-11,000Ar) is a rambling hotel tucked in behind the main street in the upper part of town. Staff are friendly and helpful, there's a good restaurant (menu 9000Ar) and it's possible to set up your own tent here (5000Ar).

Hôtel Sympa (a 47 713 43; d/tr 10,000/14,000Ar) has clean, basic rooms with shared facilities but no hot water, although the views upstairs may compensate. It's on the left-hand fork of the main road as you head south through town.

Rooms at the **Grand Hôtel** (a 47 712 62; Rue du Commerce; dm 6000Ar, d with/without bathroom 18,000/ 12,000Ar) are a bit dark with a medieval feel, but that's in keeping with the overall ambience. It's in a great location near the craft shops, and the large dining room has a convivial atmosphere at lunch time.

Taxis-brousses travel to Antsirabe (6000Ar) and Tana (13,000Ar), and leave from the northern *taxi-brousse* station, 2km north of the fork in the main road. *Taxis-brousses* to Fianarantsoa cost 7000Ar and leave from the southern *taxi-brousse* station.

MadaBus stops in front of the Oasis Snack Bar; the fare to Tana is $\notin 17$.

FIANARANTSOA pop 137,700

The name Fianarantsoa can be translated as 'Place Where Good is Learned', but call it Fianar and you won't be misunderstood. This sprawling, hilly town lies in the agricultural heart of the *hauts plateaux*, surrounded by wine- and tea-making villages. It ain't the most prepossessing of places, but it makes a good base for exploring the region and Parc National de Ranomafana (opposite).

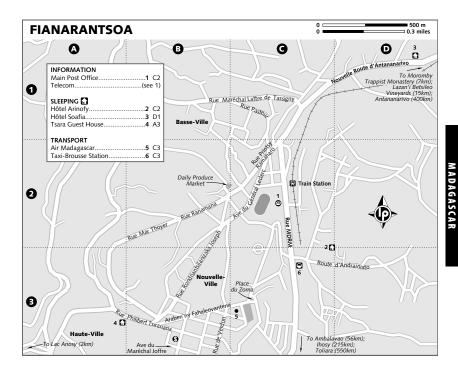
All the banks lining the main street in Nouvelle-Ville exchange money and travellers cheques. There's internet access in the **main post office** (per min 30Ar; 7am-9pm Mon-Sat), opposite the train station.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Arinofy (**©** 75 506 38; camp site 8000Ar, d with/without bathroom 19,000/17,000Ar) A stiff climb up from the *taxi-brousse* station, this is a modest but friendly and well-kept place with great views over town. Rooms on the upper floor are best, with hot water and views.

Tsara Guest House (T 550206; tsaraguest@wanadoo .mg; r €14-50) One look and you probably won't hesitate to book into this stylish place. The cheaper rooms have shared bathroom but are spotless, and there are incremental degrees of luxury as you move up the price scale, like TV, endless hot water and valley views. Relaxed and friendly.

Hôtel Soafia (⑦ 75 503 53; soafia.hot@wanadoo.mg; s/d 30,000/36,000Ar, studio 50,000-80,000Ar; № P) This mad, rambling place on the northern edge of town offers a vast swimming pool, tennis courts, disco, shops and sauna. The woodpanelled rooms are cavernous, and have baths, antique replica telephones, TV and fridge.



All hotels have restaurants of varying standard. Pick of the bunch is the resto at **Tsara Guest House** ($\textcircled{\sc optimized}$ 75 502 06; mains 9500Ar), which offers the finest dining in town and a few vegetarian choices.

Getting There & Away

Air Madagascar flies between Fianar and Tana once a week (150,000Ar, one hour).

From the **taxi-brousse station** (Rue MDRM), there are plenty of *taxis-brousses* daily between Fianar and Ambositra (7000Ar), Antsirabe, Tana, Ranohira and Toliara.

MadaBus stops in front of Mad Trekking; the fare to Tana is €23.

PARC NATIONAL DE RANOMAFANA

The 41,500-hectare park is a superb tract of rainforest that offers great lemur- and birdwatching. It was declared to protect the rare golden bamboo lemur, discovered in 1986, and 11 other lemur species call it home. The weather is best, but the park is more crowded, between July and October.

The park entrance and **Angap office** (😒 8am-4.30pm) are at Ambodiamontana village (ask to be dropped here if arriving by *taxi-brousse*). **Permits** (1/2/3/4 days 25,000/37,000/40,000/50,000Ar) are compulsory and are available at the Angap office. At the park entrance you can hire guides to explore the trails (5000Ar to 35,000Ar per person, depending on trail length and group size). Nocturnal walks (20,000Ar per person) take one to two hours and are very popular.

The most convenient accommodation option for those arriving by *taxi-brousse* is the basic **Rianala Gite** (dm 7000Ar), right by the park entrance. **Hôtel Domaine Nature** ($\overline{\mathbf{a}}$ 75 750 25; desmada@malagasy.com; d 100,000Ar; $\overline{\mathbf{c}}$), about 3km downhill towards Ranomafana village, offers roomy cabins, perched on the hillside above the roaring river, with hot shower, mosquito net and TV. There's a good restaurant here serving the local speciality, crayfish. Way down in Ranomafana village, **Ihary Hôtel** ($\overline{\mathbf{a}}$ 75 523 02; d with bathroom 33,000Ar) sits by a quieter stretch of the river and offers rather cramped bungalows with torn mosquito nets. Meals are available (mains 8000Ar).

Ranomafana is about three hours by *taxibrousse* (5000Ar) from Fianarantsoa along a newly repaired road.

AMBALAVAO

The picturesque little town of Ambalavao (New Valley) is famous for the production of *lamba arindrano*, colourful shawls woven from hand-spun wild silk. Its narrow streets are lined with Betsimileo architecture and every Wednesday the country's biggest zebu market cranks up. The town's greatest attraction is **Fabrique de Papier Antaimoro** (admission free), which makes the famous Antaimoro paper. You can take a free tour of the factory and there's a shop selling fine souvenirs.

In the grounds of the paper factory, **Hôtel aux Bougainvillées** (75 340 01; ragon@wanadoo.mg; budget r with/without bathroom 19,000/15,000Ar, d/f chalet 30,000/60,000Ar) has a choice of brightly painted two-storey chalets or clean budget rooms. The good restaurant (mains 9000Ar) is popular with tour groups.

At the new, clean **Tsienimparihy Hôtel Restaurant** (**7**5 341 28; tsienimpari@melwanadoo.mg; d 22,000Ar) rooms all have toilet and hot water, and there's a patisserie-restaurant. It's opposite the main market on the southern side of town (the zebu market is held just outside the south side of town).

Ambalavao is 56km south of Fianar, to where a *taxi-brousse* will cost 5000Ar. Connections to points further north and south can be made at Fianar.

MadaBus stops in front of Hôtel aux Bougainvillées; the fare to Tana is €29.

SOUTHERN MADAGASCAR

Apart from the newly repaired RN7, roads in the rural south can be rough and ready, but those who meet the challenge of independent travel in these parts will be amply rewarded by the world's weirdest vegetation, scenic sandstone massifs and the last stomping grounds of *Aepyornis*, the largest bird that ever lived.

RANOHIRA

The little town of Ranohira is the most convenient base for exploring Parc National de l'Isalo (right). All hotels listed here also have restaurants.

Momo Trek ((2003) 1468546; momo_trek@yahoo.fr), based at Chez Momo (right), organises one- to seven-day treks into the park, including guiding, cooking and camping equipment. Treks start at 165,000Ar per person per night.

At **Isalo Ranch** (o in Antananarivo 24 319 02; info@isalo-ranch.com; camp site per person €3, d budget bungalow/rondavel €15/25; (P) brightly painted thatched bungalows promise more than they deliver, and are a bit old and cramped inside. However, there's a good dining room serving Malagasy meals, and a superb swimming pool where you can enjoy sunsets over the Isalo Massif. It's about 5km south of town, but there are free daily transfers into Ranohira at 7.30am.

Chez Momo (o 033 14 685 46; d/tr bungalows 13,000/16,000Ar, tr with hot water 25,000Ar) is the best budget option, with thatched mud-brick bungalows with mosquito nets and shared facilities.

The eccentric stone manor **Hôtel Berny** (**2** 75 80176; d budget/main 35,000/50,000Ar) features rather cold, dungeon-like rooms on the ground floor, but airy *chambres familiales* (family rooms) with views upstairs. The budget rooms are in a converted shed and a bit dingy.

Relais de la Reine (窗 in Antananarivo 22 336 23; www.3dmadagascar.com/relaisdelareine; d €60; ☑ ▣), near the park's southern border, is carved out of the living rock and is one of the country's finest top-end hotels. It's in a brilliant setting, hidden among the sandstone, and offers fine dining, a massage centre and horse-riding.

Taxis-brousses depart daily from Ranohira for Toliar (12,000Ar) and to Ihosy (5000Ar), 91km northeast, for transfers to Fort Dauphin by road.

MadaBus stops in front of Hôtel Berny; the fare to Tana is €37.

PARC NATIONAL DE L'ISALO

The flat, grassy plains of the *hauts plateaux* near Ranohira are abruptly broken by towering sandstone massifs sculpted by wind and water into gorges and craggy bluffs. It's one of the country's most spectacular regions, perfect for overnight hikes, rock-hopping along cool canyons and spotting lemurs. It's best

to visit during the cooler months (April to October), when walking is more comfortable. The Sakalava people used to bury their dead in caves high up on cliff faces, and some areas are *fady* even today.

One-/two-day national park permits cost 25,000/38,000Ar per person per day and are available at **Angap** (7 Jam-5pm) in Ranohira (opposite). Official guides are compulsory for visits to the park and fees depend on the length of each trek. All trails start and finish in Ranohira, and range from one to seven days in length. Overnight treks can be organised through Chez Momo (opposite) and more upmarket hotels, such as Isalo Ranch (opposite) and Relais de la Reine (opposite).

Two popular short trips are a day walk to **Canyon des Singes & Piscine Naturelle**, where you can take a plunge in the cool water, and **Natural Window**, where you can watch the sun rise or set through a large, square hole in the rock.

TOLIARA (TULEAR)

Toliara is the largest town in the south and Madagascar's major west-coast port. It's a hot, languid place, where *pousse-pousses* are the main form of transport and nobody's ever in a great hurry. Many visitors use it as the hub for the seaside villages of Ifaty (p896) and Anakao (below).

Information

There are several good internet cafés around town, all offering access for 30Ar per minute. Try along Blvd Philibert Tsiranana.

All banks exchange money and travellers cheques; there's an ATM at BFV-SG. The post office is located on Blvd Gallieni.

Sights & Activities

Arboretum d'Antsokay (a) 32 02 600 15; andry.peti gnat@caramail.com; admission 7000Ar) is a botanic garden, located 12km southeast of Toliara, showcasing Madagascar's extraordinary aridcountry vegetation.

The picturesque seaside village of **Anakao** south of town can only be reached by boat and makes a popular excursion for a few days. There's windsurfing, snorkelling offshore at the little island of Nosy Ve and treks to sand dunes littered with fragments of *Aepyornis* eggs. **Safari Vezo** (2094 413 81; Ave de France) can arrange boat transfers to Anakao (return 100,000Ar, three daily), but the trip can take

several hours each way, depending on sea conditions. There's plenty of accommodation and places to eat in Anakao.

Sleeping

There's a good choice of hotels in Toliara if you're laying over between trips up or down the coast.

Hôtel Lovasoa (**@** 94 418 39; Rue de Sacré Cœur; d with/without bathroom 14,000/10,000Ar) Rooms are a bit dark and poky and don't have mosquito nets, but this is a clean, friendly budget option.

Chez Lala (@ 94 434 17; Ave de France; d with/without bathroom 15,000/13,000Ar) In a handy location for boats to Anakao, with super-clean rooms and bathrooms, and decent food in the attached resto.

L'Escapade ((2) 94 411 82; escapade@wanadoo.mg; Blvd Gallieni; d 33,000Ar) Clean cabins in a walled courtyard all have bathrooms with hot water but no mosquito nets. It's clean, friendly and well run, and the restaurant-bar is upstairs on a breezy balcony.

Hôtel le Paletuvier ((2) 94 440 39; Blvd Lyautey; bungalow with/without air-con 40,600/30,600Ar, d/tw with/without sea view 50,600/40,600Ar; (2) (P) You can't miss this snow-white confection right on the waterfront near bars and other distractions. New suites are spotless and nicely decorated, but the older-style bungalows are a bit dingy.

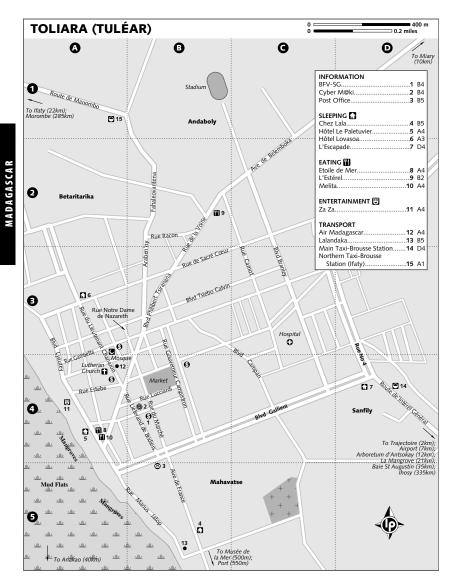
Eating & Drinking

Auberge de la Table ((2) 032 02 600 15; Arboretum d'Antsokay; mains 6000Ar) The restaurant at Arboretum d'Antsokay is recommended and specialises in delicious goat's cheese dishes (5000Ar).

Etoile de Mer (\bigcirc 94 428 07; Blvd Lyautey; mains 8000Ar) Great outdoor tables from where you can watch the passing parade and dine from a long list of Malagasy, French and Chinese staples.

Melita (Blvd Lyautey; mains 8000-9500Ar; 💮 9am-1pm) A new bar-restaurant opposite the Hôtel le Palatuvier that offers meals and snacks all day, and drinks well into the night.

Za Za (Blvd Lyautey) A Toliara institution, Za Za has been going strong for years and gets crowded with people dancing to a mixture of Euro-techno and Malagasy pop.



Getting There & Around

Air Madagascar ((2) 94 415 85) has daily flights from Toliara to Tana (193,000Ar, one hour).

The main *taxi-brousse* station is at the eastern end of town. Several *taxis-brousses* leave daily for Tana.

MadaBus (🖻 032 42 089 69) departs from Place OUA for Tana at 6.30am on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. Tickets can be bought at Lalandaka, opposite Compagnie du Sud, and cost €50.

IFATY

Most travellers visit the quiet coastal area of Ifaty (actually an area that includes the villages of Ifaty, Mangilly and Mandio Rano) to sit under a palm tree on a white sandy beach. And with coral reefs just offshore, sea breezes whispering in the casuarina trees and a relaxed tropical ambience, who can blame them? There's whale-watching in July and August, and the amazing spiny forest along the road just north of Mangilly is well worth a look.

There is nowhere to change money in Ifaty, so bring cash.

Close to the road but only a short walk to the beach, **Chez Julie** ((a) 41 822 48; bungalow with/ without bathroom 10,000/15,000Ar) is a good budget place with clean bungalows, but no hot water, and a restaurant.

Mangilly's newest beachside resort, **Ifaty Beach Club** (O 032 02 600 47; ifatybeachclub@wanadoo .mg; 2-/3-/4-person bungalow €19/30/40) is a pleasant, relaxed place with a good restaurant. Comfortable wooden bungalows have hot showers and mosquito nets and are but a few steps from the beach. Next door is **Vovotelo** (O 032 02 621 48; hotel vovotelo@simicro.mg; bungalow €20-50), where cheaper bungalows have no hot water, but there's a pool and decked restaurant-bar area.

If aty is 22km north of Toliara along a rutted, sandy road. *Taxis-brousses* leave from the northern *taxi-brousse* station in Toliara until early afternoon and cost 2000Ar. Private transfers from hotels cost about \notin 15.

TAOLAGNARO (FORT DAUPHIN)

Although it's a major regional tourist destination, Fort Dauphin (as it's usually known) amounts to much less in reality than it appears on a map. It nonetheless has a spectacular location on a headland with great beaches and makes an ideal place for a holiday in the sun or a longer exploration of the scenic hinterland.

Much of the area's tourist infrastructure is under the control of the de Heaulme family.

Information

There are several banks that can change cash and travellers cheques; BFV-SG has an ATM.

The **WWF & Angap office** (**(a)** 92 212 68) can provide information about Parc National d'Andohahela.

Safari Laka (**©** 032 02 329 96; www.safarilaka .com), based at Motal Gina (right), organises a variety of trips by foot, boat and/or 4WD into Parc National d'Andohahela and other locations in the region. **Azafady** (**©** 92 212 65; www.madagascar.co.uk) is a volunteer organisation that works on community tourism projects and can help you arrange independent trips around Fort Dauphin.

Sights & Activities

Offering fine views, **Fort Flacourt** was built by the French in 1643, but is now little more than a ruin at the northeastern tip of the cape.

There are several great beaches at Fort Dauphin itself. The long beach northeast of town features numerous **shipwrecks**, but is not a swimming beach. **Libanona** beach on the southwestern side of town is best for swimming, while the beach in **Baie des Galions** is good for surfing and windsurfing from late August to May.

MADAGASCAR

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Mahavoky Annexe ((2) 032 07 990 70; r without/ with sea view 15,000/17,000Ar) If you get an eastfacing room, this budget hotel perched above the beach with shipwrecks offers some of the best views in town. Basic but comfortable rooms all have mosquito nets and bathroom with hot water.

Hôtel le Dauphin (C 92 212 38; d €48; P) The long-standing de Heaulme flagship offers roomy bungalows from doubles to *chambres familiales*, the bigger ones with fridge. The unpretentious restaurant offers fine seafood (mains 11,000Ar), with a daily specials board. Also in the de Heaulme brace are Le Galion, opposite le Dauphin, and Hôtel Miramar, which has the best rooms and location, overlooking Libanona beach. Prices are the same for all de Heaulme facilities.

Getting There & Away

Daily flights are available with **Air Madagascar** (26) 92 211 22) to Tana (192,500Ar, two hours), often via Toliara and Morondava.

Access to Fort Dauphin by road is an adventure in itself. *Taxis-brousses* travel to Toliara several times a week via Ihosy and take at least 40 hours, more if there's been heavy rain and washouts.

EASTERN MADAGASCAR

The RN2 twists down the mountainsides between Tana and the coast to the resort town of Taomasina (Tamatave), passing one of the country's great rainforest reserves en route. Tamatave is a common starting point for trips on the Pangalanes Canal and points further north.

ANDASIBE (PERINET)

The most accessible parcel of pristine rainforest in Madagascar lies only three hours' drive from the capital. There are actually two reserves: the Reserve Special de l'Analamazaotra (often called Perinet, after the now-defunct train station) and the less accessible Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia. Both feature excellent lemur- and bird-watching. The highlight is the indris, which greet the dawn with hoots that can carry up to 3km through the forest canopy – that's even louder than a party of Italian tourists on a nature walk.

The **Angap office** (permits per person per 1/2/3/4 days 25,000/37,000/40,000/50,000Ar) is an easy 2km walk from the main Antananarivo–Taomasina road (RN2). Here you must buy permits and can arrange a professional guide; a one- to two-hour indri-watching circuit costs 10,000Ar per person.

Those without transport should stay at **Feon-ny Ala** (56 832 02; r without bathroom 18,000Ar, bungalow 46,000Ar), where thatched bungalows have toilet, hot shower and mosquito nets but no heating – snuggle up under your duvet and let the indris wake you. The good restaurant (mains 7000Ar) is open all day.

You can pitch a tent next to the Angap office for 6000Ar (be warned: it can rain at any time of year, especially in the wet season), where there's also **le Forestier** (mains 5000-7000Ar; breakfast & lunch), a resto serving breakfast and lunch (it closes at about 5pm).

Andasibe is 142km east of Tana along the RN2. *Taxis-brousses* from Tana (6000Ar, three hours) can drop you at the park turn-off, from where it's an easy walk to Feon'ny Ala and the Angap office.

TOAMASINA (TAMATAVE)

Toamasina is a great place to soak up the elegant decrepitude of a faded colonial port, and is also the jumping-off point for the Canal des Pangalanes and the remote northeast corner of the country.

Information

Banks along Blvd Joffre will change cash and travellers cheques. BNI-CL, BMOI and BFV-SG all have ATMs. The main post office can be found on Araben'ny Fahaleovantena. **CyberSky** (Blvd Joffre; per min 30Ar; 论 8am-9pm Mon-Sat) The best place for internet access.

Libraire GM Fakra (Blvd Joffre) Stocks a few magazines and newspapers in English, plus town maps.

Sights & Activities

Parc Zoologique Ivoloina (ⓐ 53 012 17; admission 10,000Ar; ⓑ 9am-5pm), a small captive-breeding facility for lemurs, is 13km north of town. It's a lovely, tranquil spot, where small bands of semi-wild lemurs roam the grounds and pose for great photo opportunities.

Touring the **Canal des Pangalanes** is high on most visitors' lists of things to do, whether for a day or longer, more adventurous trips. **Calypso Tours** (2032 40 247 78; Blvd Joffre), based in the Hôtel Eden (below), specialises in trips on the Canal, with day trips per person costing from 60,000Ar, including transfers and guides.

Sleeping

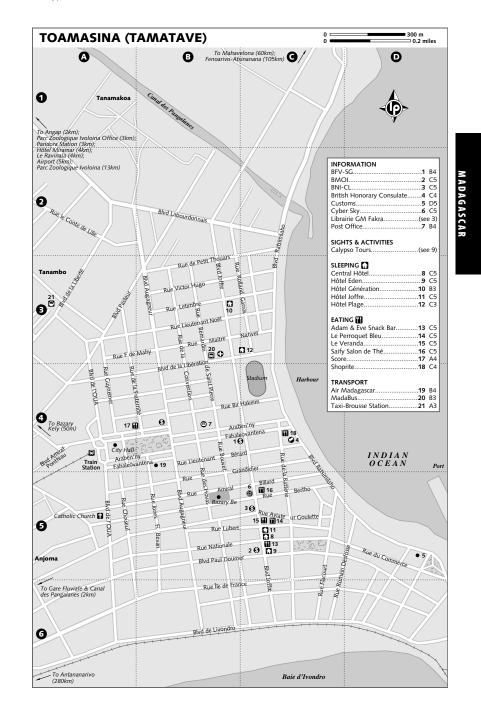
Hôtel Eden (a 53 312 90; Blvd Joffre; d with/without bathroom 15,600/13,600Ar) Offers basic rooms without mosquito nets, but it's in a handy location and is a good place for organising trips to the Canal.

Hôtel Plage (☎ 53 320 90; Blvd de la Libération; d with/ without bathroom 17,000/15,000Ar) This place will do in a pinch, but the dank, dark rooms have lumpy beds and no mosquito nets.

Hôtel Generation (🖻 53 321 05; generationhotel@ wanadoo.mg; Blvd Joffe; s/d 23,900/30,900Ar; 🕄) The spacious rooms all have hot shower, TV, fridge and mosquito nets, and get more expensive the higher up you go.

Central Hôtel (**5**3 340 86; d 35,000Ar) Not as slick as Hôtel Joffre next door but commendable. Rooms have four-poster beds, mosquito net, TV, safe and hot water. Its restaurant, Le Veranda, is up the road (see p900).

Hôtel Joffre () 53 323 90; sodefi@dts.mg; Blvd Joffre; s/d 30,000/60,000Ar; ?) A spotless, professionally managed place, with a good restaurant-bar opening onto the street.



Eating

Self-caterers have a choice of either Shoprite or Score supermarkets.

Saify Salon de Thé (🖻 53 331 81; Blvd Joffre) Serves indifferent patisserie but good coffee, plus fresh juices and ice cream.

Adam & Eve Snack Bar (🗃 53 334 56; Blvd Joffre; mains 5000Ar; 🕑 Tue-Sun) The place to enjoy a good selection of snacks, drinks and ice cream while watching the streetside goings on.

Le Perroquet Bleu (20 032 40 270 55; Rue Lubert; mains & pizza 7000Ar) An intimate place decked out in cane, offering good thin-crust pizza as well as grills.

Getting There & Away

Daily flights are available with Air Madagascar (3 53 323 56) from Toamasina to Tana (127,800Ar).

Taxis-brousses leave daily for Tana (14,000Ar).

The MadaBus (2 53 351 48; cap-sainte-marie@ wanadoo.mg; 🕑 9am-7pm) departure point is behind the Hotel Sharon; the fare to/from Tana is €25.

MADAGASCAR DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

It's usually possible to find a decent, relatively clean room (with bathroom) from about €13, less with shared facilities. Single rooms are rare and you'll often have to pay for a double. Prices are usually higher during the high season, ie between June and August and around Christmas, New Year and Easter. Prices quoted in this book are high-season prices. For anything other than budget accommodation or out-of-the-way places make advance reservations during the high season.

ACTIVITIES

Top spots for lemur- and bird-watching include Parc National Ranomafana (p893) and Parc National d'Andasibe-Mantadia (p898). Parc National de l'Isalo (p894) is excellent for hiking.

Madagascar is a good country for cycling and bicycles can be rented in many places, although for long-distance trips you'll need to bring your own bike from home. For additional information, check out Madagascar on Bike (www.madagascar-on-bike.com).

The waters around Ifaty (p896) are ideal for diving. Companies in every dive spot offer internationally recognised diving courses and many places offer a *baptême* ('try dive'). Many dive centres are closed between February and May, when diving conditions are least favourable.

BUSINESS HOURS

Offices, post offices and banks are normally open from 8am to noon and 2pm to 3.30pm or 4pm weekdays. Most shops are also open until 5.30pm or 6pm on weekdays and 8am to noon on Saturday. Most restaurants are open from noon to 2pm for lunch, and from about 6.30pm to 8pm for dinner.

CHILDREN

Madagascar is a reasonably hard place to travel with young children, so junior travellers are a fairly rare sight. Disposable nappies are available in Antananarivo's supermarkets, but are hard to find elsewhere. Many hotels provide chambres familiales (family rooms) or double rooms with an extra single bed for parents with children.

CUSTOMS

It's forbidden to take the following out of Madagascar: live plants (including vanilla), mounted insects, tortoiseshell, fragments of Aepyornis (elephant bird) eggshell, precious stones (in export quantities only), jewellery, antique coins, fossils, funerary art and antiquities.

PRACTICALITIES

- Weights, measures and road distances use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220V AC (use European two-round-pin plugs).
- Daily newspapers include Midi Madagasikara, Madagsacar Tribune and L'Express de Madagascar (all in French).
- Radio and TV programming is all in French.

Officially, you are not allowed to take any more than 5000Ar out of Madagascar. For more detailed information, check out Malagasy customs (www.madagascar-contacts.com/douanes, in French).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Travelling throughout Madagascar is not inherently dangerous. Petty theft is the main risk - do not keep your valuables in a pack or external money belt, and watch your pockets when in crowded areas. To avoid getting into trouble with the police, carry your passport with you at all times (a photocopy will not be sufficient).

Some areas along the coast are subject to danger from sharks and strong currents. Make sure to seek local advice before heading into the water. Mosquitoes are ubiquitous and malaria occurs here - wear insect repellent, especially at dawn and dusk.

A combination of packed, unroadworthy vehicles and reckless drivers makes taxibrousse (bush taxi) travel potentially hazardous. To minimise the risks, try to avoid night travel if possible.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Madagascan Embassies & Consulates

Australia (2 02-9299 2290; tonyknox@ozemail.com.au; 6th level, 100 Clarence St, Sydney, NSW 2000) Canada (2 613-744 7995; ambmgnet@inexpress.net; 649 Blair Rd, Ottawa, K1J 7M4 Ontario) France (🖻 01 45 04 62 11; ambamadparis@tiscali.fr; 4 Ave Raphael, Paris 75016) Kenya (🖻 02 218 393; mbnbo@africaonline.co.kc; BP 41723, 1st fl, Hilton Hotel, Nairobi) South Africa (🖻 011 442 33 22; P0 Box 786098, Sandton 2146) UK (200-8746 0133; 16 Lanark Mans, Pennard Rd, London W12 8DT) USA (202-265 5522; malagasy@embassy.org; 2374 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Madagascar

The UK has an honorary consulate near the port in Toamasina (Tamatave). The following embassies are all located in Antananarivo. France (Map p887; 22 214 88; 3 Rue Jean Jaurès, Ambatomena) Near the Shanghai Hotel. South Africa (🗃 22 423 03; Rte d'Ambohimanga, Ambohitrarahaba)

UK (Map p885; 22 273 70) USA (Map p887; 🕿 22 209 56, 22 212 57; 14 Rue Rainitovo, Haute-Ville) East of the UCB bank.

All inquiries for Canada should be addressed c/o Canadian High Commission, PO Box 1022, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Many of these dates change yearly, so inquire at the tourist office for exact times.

Alahamady Be The low-key Malagasy New Year in March. Santabary The first rice harvest held in April/May. Fisemana A ritual purification ceremony of the Antakàrana people in June.

Famadihana Literally the 'turning of the bones'; these reburial ceremonies are held especially from June to September.

Sambatra Circumcision festivals held by most tribes between June and September, and in November and December in the southwest.

FOOD

The budget restaurants as listed in this chapter are usually food stalls or small Malagasy hotelys that serve mainly rice dishes or snacks for under €2. Midrange restaurants generally serve plain French food, including staples such as steack frites (steak and chips), costing about 6000År to 8000År for a main course. Top-end restaurants serve French haute cuisine, which might include lobster profiteroles or goose-liver paté for around €7 per main course.

For more information, see p883.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexual practices are illegal in Madagascar for persons under 21 years of age. Homosexuality is not openly practised, and there are no organisations catering to gay and lesbian travellers. Overt displays of affection whether among couples of the same or opposite sex - are culturally inappropriate.

HEALTH

If you have just arrived from a country where vellow fever is present, you may be asked for a yellow-fever certificate upon arrival at immigration.

HOLIDAYS

Accommodation and flights are often harder to organise during French school holidays, when many expats from Mayotte and Réunion travel in the region. To find out when these holidays occur, check L'Academie de la **Reunion** (www.ac-reunion.fr/academie/calendri.htm, in French).

Government offices and private companies close on the following public holidays; banks are generally also closed the afternoon before a public holiday.

New Year's Day 1 January Insurrection Day 29 March; celebrates the rebellion against the French in 1947 Easter Monday March/April Labour Day 1 May Anniversary Day 8 May Organisation of African Unity Day 25 May Ascension Thursday (40 days after Easter) May/June Pentecost Monday (51 days after Easter) May/June National Day (Independence Day) 26 June Assumption Day 15 August All Saints' Day 1 November Christmas Day 25 December Republic Day 30 December

INTERNET ACCESS

MADAGASCAR

Fast and reliable email facilities (including some post offices) are available in most major towns. Prices start at about 30Ar per minute, but may be higher in remote areas.

LEGAL MATTERS

The use and possession of marijuana and other recreational drugs is illegal in Madagascar. If you're arrested, ask to see a representative of your country. Madagascar is strict in enforcing immigration laws, so don't overstay your visa. The legal age of consent for heterosexual sex is 15 years.

MAPS

Official maps produced by Foiben Taosarintanin'i Madagasikara (FTM) are available at bookshops in Antananarivo and major towns for about 10,000Ar. The maps are fairly dated but generally accurate, and more than adequate for visiting the country. FTM also produces street maps of the provincial capitals.

MONEY

Madagascar is currently changing its currency from the Malagasy franc (FMg) to the precolonial ariary (Ar), which is worth five Malagasy francs; the FMg will remain legal tender until 2009. Prices in most businesses are now quoted in ariary. Euros are widely accepted, and US dollars are sometimes accepted in Antananarivo, major cities and tourist areas.

There are ATMs in Antananarivo and other major towns. However, you can withdraw

only around €150 per transaction, and at the time of research ATMs only accepted Visa cards.

Credit cards are rarely accepted, except at some upmarket hotels, at Air Madagascar offices and at some larger travel agencies. The most useful card is Visa, with MasterCard also accepted in a minority of places. Visa and MasterCard can also be used at some banks to obtain cash advances (in ariary). Major banks change travellers cheques and cash in major currencies.

The foreign-exchange counter at Ivato airport has exchange rates that are just as good as those at the banks, and is usually open for international flight arrivals.

POST

There are post offices in all major towns and the postal service is generally reliable. Sending a letter to Europe costs 1500Ar, and 2100Ar to Australia and the USA. Postcards are slightly cheaper.

SHOPPING

Madagascar offers a fantastic variety of handicrafts and souvenirs. Ambositra in the central highlands (p892) is the shopping capital of Madagascar, with dozens of shops selling carvings and *marqueterie* (objects inlaid with coloured woods). Ambalavao (p894) is known for its production of silk and handmade Antaimoro paper.

If you want to leave your purchasing until you're a taxi ride away from the airport, the best place for shopping is the Marché Artisanale (p889) in Antananarivo. Bargaining hard is expected – start from 50% of the price and work upwards.

Bear in mind that embroidery and raffia do far less environmental damage than wooden products, which are often carved from endangered tropical hardwoods.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Faxes can be sent from telephone offices, post offices and from upmarket hotels. Some internet cafés also offer fax services.

The country code for Madagascar is a 261, followed by 20 if you are dialling from a land line, then the seven-digit number. To call out of Madagascar, dial a 00 before the country code.

The best way to dial internationally is with a *telecarte* (phonecard). Card phones are scat-

tered around all larger towns. Cards are sold at post offices, at Agence d'Accueil Telecom (Agate) offices, and at some shops and hotels. For international calls you will need at least 100 units. Calls can also be made from more upmarket hotels (although rates will be much higher). Rates for international calls are FMg13,500 per minute to France, FMg13,500 to the Comoros, and about FMg20,250 per minute to Europe, the USA and Canada. Calls are 30% cheaper between 10pm and 6am, all day Sunday and on holidays. The international operator can be reached by dialling **©** 10.

Numbers in Madagascar consist of a twodigit area prefix followed by a five-digit local number (usually given in the form of a threedigit then a two-digit number). The two-digit prefix must be dialled whether you are calling locally, from elsewhere in Madagascar or from abroad. These prefixes are listed throughout this book as part of each telephone number. If you are quoted a five-digit number, add the two-digit area prefix.

To reach remote areas that do not have direct-dialling facilities (all those telephone numbers that have only two digits), dial (a) 15 for the local operator, then request the number.

Mobile phones are in common usage in Madagascar. Mobile-phone prefixes are 030, 031, 032 and 033. If dialling a mobile phone number from abroad, omit the zero and the 20 prefix, but add the country code.

For calls to mobile numbers from within Madagascar, you will need to dial the zero. When calling landline numbers from a mobile phone, dial 0 020 before the seven-digit number.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist offices in Madagascar can provide lists of hotels and guesthouses. Contact **Maison de Tourisme de Madagascar** (Map p887; 22 351 78; www.madagascar-tourisme.com, in French; 3 Lalana Elysée Ravelomanantsoa, Antananarivo; 28 8.30am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Fri) in the capital.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Madagascar has few, if any, facilities for the disabled. Public transport is very crowded and unable to accommodate a wheelchair unless it is folded up. Travelling around by rental car is the best option. In Antananarivo and most of the provincial capitals you will find hotels with either lifts or ground-floor accommodation. There are very few bathrooms large enough to manoeuvre a wheelchair in, and almost none with any sort of handles or holds.

The following organisations provide information on world travel for the mobility impaired:

Mobility International USA (🖻 541-343 1284; www .miusa.org) Located in the USA.

National Information Communication Awareness Network (NICAN; ⁽²⁾ 02-6285 3713; www.nican.com.au) Located in Australia.

Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation (
© 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk) Located in the UK. Society for the Advancement of Travel for the Handicapped (SATH; © 212-447 7284; www.sath.org) Located in the USA.

VISAS

All visitors must have a visa to enter Madagascar. Visas can be arranged in advance at any Malagasy embassy or consulate for the equivalent of about €29/34 for single/multiple entry. One-month, single-entry visas are available on arrival at Ivato airport in Antananarivo (about €30) – but get an update on the situation before arriving without one. Visas are valid for up to three months from the date of entry and must be used within six months of the date of issue.

As long as you have not exceeded the normal three-month maximum, visas can be extended at the immigration office in Antananarivo or any provincial capital. You will need to supply between two to four passportsize photos as well as a copy of your return air or boat ticket. A one-month extension costs about €21 and can take several days to process.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for travel to South Africa are available from its embassy in Antananarivo (see p901).

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Most women do not feel threatened or insecure in any way when travelling in Madagascar. The most you can expect is some mild curiosity about your situation, especially if you are single and/or don't have children. Physical harassment and violent crime are very rare, and in fact male travellers face far more pestering from the hordes of prostitutes who frequent nightclubs.

lonelyplanet.com

TRANSPORT IN MADAGASCAR

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Immigration officials generally just check or issue your visa before letting you go on your way. See p903 for information about visa requirements.

Air Inte 12k With serv

Intercontinental flights arrive at Ivato airport, 12km north of Antananarivo.

Air Madagascar is the national carrier, and with recent improvements to the fleet and service, is now relatively efficient.

The following airlines fly to and from Madagascar:

Air Austral (UU; C 22 359 90; www.airaustral.com, in French) Hub Saint-Dénis, Réunion. Flies in conjunction with Air Mauritius.

Air France (AF; 23 230 23; www.airfrance.com) Hub Paris Charles de Gaulle.

Air Madagascar (MD; 🖻 22 222 22; www.airmadagas car.mg) Hub Antananarivo.

Air Mauritius (MK; 🖻 22 359 90; www.airmauritius .com) Hub St Maurice.

Corsair (SS; 22 633 36; www.corsair.fr, in French) Hub Paris Orly.

Interair (D6; 🖻 22 224 06; www.interair.co.za) Hub Johannesburg.

AFRICA & THE INDIAN OCEAN

Madagascar is well connected with the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and Réunion, and reasonably accessible from mainland Africa.

Once you're in Madagascar, **Dodo Travel & Tours** (Map p887; 22 690 36; www.dodotraveltour.com; Lalana Elysée Ravelomanantsoa), in Antananarivo, is a useful place to seek information about flights within this region.

The main hubs for flights to Madagascar are Johannesburg in South Africa and Nairobi in Kenya. There are flights several times weekly between Johannesburg and Antananarivo (about €500 return) on Interair, and twice weekly on Air Madagascar. Travel between Madagascar and Nairobi (about €500 return) generally works better if you purchase your ticket directly from Air Madagascar in Kenya or Madagascar.

Air Austral has regular flights between Réunion and Mauritius and Antananarivo (from €350 return) and Toamasina (from €350 return).

ASIA

Air Madagascar has recently commenced a direct route from Antananarivo to Bangkok, Thailand. Air Mauritius has flights several times weekly from Singapore and Hong Kong to Mauritius, and South African Airlines flies regularly to Johannesburg from both cities. There are regular connections from Mauritius on Air Austral to Antananarivo, and from Johannesburg you can also connect with an Air Madagascar or Interair flight to Antananarivo.

It's also easy to get flights on Kenya Airways from Hong Kong to Nairobi, from where you can connect to Madagascar.

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

There are no direct flights servicing Australia and Madagascar; the shortest (and often cheapest) route is to travel via Mauritius. Air Mauritius has weekly flights connecting both Melbourne and Perth with Mauritius from about A\$1500 return. From Mauritius there are regular connections on Air Austral to Antananarivo.

Alternatively, Qantas and South African Airways both have flights connecting Sydney with Johannesburg from A\$1600 return in the low season. From Johannesburg, you can connect with an Air Madagascar or Interair flight to Antananarivo. Try these agencies: **Flight Centre** Australia (a) 133 133; www.flightcentre

.com.au); New Zealand ((0800 233 544; www.flight centre.co.nz)

STA Travel Australia ((a) 1300 733 035; www.statravel .com.au); New Zealand ((a) 0508 782 872; www.statravel .co.nz)

EUROPE

The main European hub for flights to/from Madagascar is Paris. Air Madagascar and Air France fly three to four times weekly between Paris and Antananarivo. Prices from Paris on both airlines usually start from about €1400 return.

It's also possible to fly from many European capitals to Johannesburg, Nairobi, St-Denis (Réunion) or Port Louis (Mauritius), and from one of these cities to Antananarivo. The best connections are usually via Réunion or Mauritius, which are linked by Air Austral flights to Antananarivo (from €350 return), as well as by several flights weekly to other places in Madagascar. Contact one of the following agents to get you started:

Air Fare (a) 020 620 5121; www.airfair.nl, in Dutch) A well-respected Dutch travel agent.

Nouvelles Frontières ((2) 08 03 33 33 33; www.nou velles-frontieres.fr) A good French option, with group tours to Madagascar.

OTU Voyages ((a) 0825 004 027; www.otu.fr, in French) Has branches across France.

STA Travel UK (() 0870 1600 599; www.statravel.co .uk); Germany () 01805-456 422; www.statravel.de, in German) International travel agent with plenty of other offices across Europe.

Trailfinders (© 020-7938 3939; www.trailfinders.com) Excellent, reliable UK travel agent with huge amount of experience.

USA & CANADA

The cheapest way to fly from North America to Madagascar is generally via Paris. It may work out cheaper to get separate tickets – one from North America to Europe, and then a second ticket from Europe to Madagascar.

Another option is to fly from Atlanta or New York to Johannesburg, with a connection to Antananarivo. In the USA, the main travel agency specialising in Madagascar is **Cortez Travel & Expeditions** (2008):854 1029; www .air-mad.com). It has information on good-value airfares and can book Air Madagascar flights. The following companies might also be able to help:

Cheaptickets (www.cheaptickets.com) A good source of online fares.

Flight Centre Canada (a 1 888 967 5355; www.flight centre.ca); USA (a 1866 WORLD 51; www.flightcentre.us) Contact it directly for fares.

STA Travel (🖻 800 329 9537; www.statravel.com) Good deals to Paris.

Sea

It's possible to travel to and from Madagascar by boat, but you will need plenty of time and determination. Travel is likely to be on cargo ships – unless you find a ride on a yacht as a crew member – so sleeping and eating conditions, combined with sometimes turbulent seas, can make it a rough trip.

Mombasa (Kenya) and the island of Zanzibar (Tanzania) are the main places to look for cargo boats to Madagascar. It's also sometimes possible to find passage on a yacht heading from South Africa, Réunion or Mauritius to Madagascar.

Tours

For a list of organised tour companies within Madagascar, see p907. Following are a few companies operating general interest tours to, and around, Madagascar from Australia, the UK and the USA.

Adventure Associates (🗃 02-8916 3000; www.adven tureassociates.com; Australia) Runs tours to Madagascar, combined with Réunion and Mauritius.

Cortez Travel & Expeditions (🗟 800-854 1029; www.air-mad.com; USA) Well-established operator for Air Madagascar flights and tours.

Lemur Tours ((1-510-620-9708; www.lemurtours .com; USA) Focuses on lemur sightings.

Manaca (🖻 866-362 6222; www.manaca.com; USA) Specialists in ecotourism and responsible travel.

Rainbow Tours ((2) 020-7226 1004; www.rainbow tours.co.uk; UK) Specialist and general-interest guided trips to Madagascar.

GETTING AROUND Air

The national carrier, **Air Madagascar** (Map p887; 22 222 22; www.airmadagascar.mg; 31 Ave de L'Indépendance, Antananarivo), has a pretty comprehensive and efficient network of domestic routes. Tickets are relatively inexpensive, and air travel is a good way of covering large distances and avoiding long road journeys.

A handy free booklet detailing timetables and routes (but not fares) is available from Air Madagascar's head office in Antananarivo and from some travel agents.

You can pay for tickets in ariary, euros or US dollars at the head office in Antananarivo and Air Madagascar offices in larger towns, but smaller offices may only accept ariary. The office in Antananarivo also accepts travellers cheques and credit cards.

The baggage allowance for most internal flights is 20kg.

RESERVATIONS & CHECK-IN

Air Madagascar flights are frequently full, so it's always worth booking as far in advance as possible.

While it's officially unnecessary to reconfirm your Air Madagascar tickets, it's best to check with the airline a few days in advance and again on the day of departure, as there are frequent last-minute schedule changes. If you have checked in baggage, be sure to keep your baggage-claim ticket until you are reunited with your luggage at your destination.

Bicycle

It may often be just as fast to travel by bicycle as by *taxi-brousse*. A mountain bike is normally essential. Carry spare parts, although inner tubes and other basic parts are sometimes available in larger towns. The terrain varies from very sandy to muddy or rough and rocky.

Although you are able to rent mountain bikes in many larger towns, including Toamasina, Antsirabe and Ambodifotatra on Île Sainte Marie, they are not normally in good enough condition for long journeys.

Boat

MADAGASCAR

On the northeast coast, cargo boats (sometimes called *boutres*) are the primary means of transport. Overloaded cargo boats, including passenger ferries, have capsized with significant loss of life. Always check for lifejackets and don't get in if the seas are rough or if the boat is overcrowded. Boat travel on the east coast is generally unsafe during the rainy season between May and September.

Bus

Long-distance bus companies, such as **Mada-Bus** (www.madabus.com), operate on the Toliar and Tamatave routes. These mostly use the same stations as the *taxis-brousses* and offer better punctuality, comfort and, arguably, safety. However, *taxis-brousses* remain the main form of public road transport in Madagascar.

Car & Motorcycle

To drive in Madagascar you will need to have an International Driving Permit (IDP).

You'll find petrol stations of some kind in all cities and in most major towns. Spare parts and repairs of varying quality are available in most towns. Make sure to check the spare tyre of any car you rent before setting out.

To rent a car in Madagascar, you must generally be at least 23 years old and have held a driving licence for at least one year. Rental costs include insurance. Due to the often difficult driving conditions and road hazards, most rental agencies make hiring a driver obligatory with their vehicles. Prices average 100,000Ar to 140,000Ar per day for a 4WD, excluding fuel. For almost all destinations off the main routes a 4WD is advisable, and essential in the rainy season.

Motorcycles can be rented by the half day or full day at various places in Madagascar, including Toliara and Île Sainte Marie (for use on the island only). At most places, they range from a Honda or Yamaha 125cc or 250cc to a tiny Peugeot *mobylette* (moped). Some places also rent motorcycles suitable for longer, rougher journeys, and provide support vehicles as well.

ROAD CONDITIONS

Less than 15% of the country's roads are paved, and many of those that are paved are badly deteriorated. Nonpaved roads are often exceptionally muddy, sandy or rocky. The Ihosy–Fort Dauphin route is very difficult during the rainy season.

Most accidents are caused by human failing (especially drunkenness) rather than by dangerous vehicles and roads. Delays are more common than accidents, so always factor in a few extra hours to allow for breakdowns or social calls en route.

ROAD RULES

Driving in Madagascar is on the right-hand side. The police occasionally stop vehicles and carry out random checks, in the hope of detecting any of the 1001 possible (and probable) infractions of the vehicle code. Occasionally foreigners will be asked for their passport, but as long as your visa is in order there should be no problem.

If you aren't used to local driving conditions, watch out for pedestrians, animals, broken-down cars and slow-moving zebu carts on the road. It is particularly hazardous to drive at night, as there is no lighting, so try to avoid it.

Hitching

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Traffic between towns and cities is thin, and most passing vehicles are likely to be *taxis-brousses* or trucks, which are often full. If you do find a ride, you will likely have to pay about the equivalent of the *taxi-brousse* fare. Local Transport POUSSE-POUSSE

Brightly coloured *pousse-pousses* (rickshaws) throng some Malagasy towns and you'll probably be hounded by drivers looking for a fare. You may find the idea offensive, but the *pousse-pousse* men need work, not sympathy, as they rent their rickshaws and have to pay a daily amount to the owners. If you have heavy luggage, it's polite to hire two *pousse-pousse*. Tourist rates start at about 1000Ar and are always negotiable, so agree to a fare before you climb aboard. When it's raining, the price sometimes doubles.

TAXI-BROUSSE

Taxis-brousses are a part of daily life in Madagascar and you'll find it hard to travel independently around the country without wedging yourself into one at some point.

Fares for all trips are set by the government and are based on distance, duration and route conditions. Prices are the same for locals and foreigners. If you want to keep a backpack with you in the vehicle, you'll need to pay for an extra seat.

The *taxi-brousse* system is relatively well organised once you get the hang of it. Upon arrival to a town, you may well be besieged by pushy but harmless touts, tugging at your luggage and yelling in your ear to try and win your custom.

Vehicles display the destination in white paint on their windscreen and fares are pinned up in the transport company offices that line the edges of the station.

Tours

Madagascar's many tour operators and freelance guides offer mountain-bike excursions, 4WD circuits, wildlife-watching trips, walking tours, and cultural and historic tours.

An organised tour can be particularly valuable if you don't speak much French, as it can otherwise be hard to break the communication barrier with the fairly reserved Malagasy people, who rarely speak English. The rule of thumb for organised tours is to check as much as possible beforehand – including vehicles, camping equipment and even menu plans. Try to get all the details, agreed by both parties in advance, in writing.

Following is a list of some of the reliable Antananarivo-based companies that can arrange excursions throughout Madagascar. For details about foreign travel agencies, see p886.

Aventour (Map p885; **2** 217 61; aventours@iris.mg; Immeuble FIARO, Ampefiloha) A relatively new but very efficient company that can organise countrywide tours, car rental and ticketing.

Boogie Pilgrim (22 530 70; www.boogie-pilgrim .net; Île des Oiseaux, Tsarasaotra, Alarobia) Adventurous ecotours and camps in several places in Madagascar, including the Canal des Pangalanes. English speaking. Cortez Travel & Expeditions (Map p885; 22 219 74; cortez.expeditions@simicro.mg; 25 Lalana Ny Zafindriandiky, Antanimena) American-based agency offering a wide range of itineraries for individuals and groups. Espace Mada (Map p887; 22 262 97; www.madagas

car-circuits.com; 50 Arabe Ramanantsoa, Isoraka) Vehicles, guides and off-road excursions.

Mad Cameleon (🖻 22 344 20; madcam@dts.mg; Lot 11-K, Lalana Rasamoely, Ankadivato-Ambony) Tours focusing on western Madagascar, including Parc National Tsingy de Bemaraha.

Malagasy Tours (Map p885; 22 356 07; www .malagasy-tours.com; Lalana Ramboatiana, Avaradrova) Upmarket operator based at Grill du Rova restaurant, offering tours, trekking and trips along the Canal des Pangalanes.

Setam (Map p887; a 22 324 31; www.setam-mg.com; 56 Araben'ny 26 Jona 1960, Analakely) Bicycle expeditions, orchid tours and Famadihana ceremonies, as well as the usual circuits.

Train

At the time of writing the Malagasy rail system, known as the Réseau National des Chemins de Fer Malgaches (RNCFM), operated only the Fianarantsoa–Manakara line. Plans are, however, afoot to restore the Antananarivo–Toamasina and Antananarivo– Andasibe services.

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Malawi

Flick through the glossy tourist brochures and the clichés come thick and fast. Malawi is 'the warm heart of Africa', or 'Africa for beginners'; and its lake 'the lake of stars'. It all seems too good to be true, but, with stunning and varied scenery and supremely friendly locals, along with the relative ease of travel here, Malawi really does live up to the hype.

Malawi's big draw is the lake: a magnificent shard of crystal water stretching some 500km along Malawi's eastern border, separating it from the wild and mountainous coast of Mozambique and Tanzania. Isolated villages pepper the northern lakeshore and the beautiful Liwonde National Park rests at its southern tip. Around 500 species of fish inhabit the lake and the freshwater diving and snorkelling here are excellent.

Malawi's not just for water babies and sun worshippers though; there's plenty here to keep you active and Malawi's landscape is surprisingly diverse. Head for the misty heights of Mt Mulanje or to the Nyika Plateau, where you find sheer escarpments, dramatic peaks, endless rolling grassland and some of the most enjoyable hiking routes in the whole of Africa.

Many travellers only pass through the country for a couple of days, intent on racing through to Africa's 'bigger' attractions. This is a shame, as Malawi has much to offer. Take time to explore the highland wilderness, dive and swim in the lake's warm waters, or simply soak up the vibrant local flavour and you're sure to find yourself seduced.

FAST FACTS

MALAWI

- Area 118,484 sq km
- ATMs In major cities
- Borders Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia; all main border crossings are open from 6am to 6pm
- Budget US\$15 to US\$25 per day
- Capital Lilongwe
- Language(s) English, Chichewa
- Money Malawi Kwacha; US\$1 = MK140
- Population 12 million
- Seasons Cool and dry (May-Aug), hot and dry (September to mid-November), hot and wet (mid-November to April)
- **Telephone** Country code 265; international access code **a** 101
- Time GMT/UTC + 2
- Visa Free (for most nationalities) for 30 days; issued at point of entry

HIGHLIGHTS

- Lake Malawi (p927) Discover untouched islands by kayak, commune with the underwater world or kick back on a near deserted beach.
- Nyika National Park (p917) Explore sweeping, magnificent wilderness filled with antelope and zebra on foot, by bike or on horseback.
- **Mount Mulanje** (p924) Hike the majestic peaks and take in the dramatic views.
- **Liwonde National Park** (p926) Cruise past hippos and crocs on the Shire River or take a walking safari and get up close and personal with the elephants.
- Ilala ferry (p932) Enjoy Malawi's lakeshore via the ancient Ilala ferry and sleep out on deck under the stars.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit Malawi is during the dry season from May to mid-November. From May to July the landscape is attractive and vegetation green and lush, and temperatures cooler. The months of October and November, at the end of the dry season, are the best time for wildlife viewing; however, the temperatures can be uncomfortably hot.

ITINERARIES

- Three Days Explore Lilongwe (p912) before heading down to Senga Bay (p920) for a couple of days of sun worshipping.
- **One Week** Follow the three-day itinerary the head down to Blantyre (p921) though the hills and waterfalls of the Zomba Plateau (p925), then meander through Malawi's stunning tea plantations to get into some hiking on the misty peaks of Mt Mulanje (p924).
- **Two Weeks** Follow the one-week itinerary, then head north from Lilongwe to Mzuzu (p918), from where you can reach the wild open spaces of Vwaza Marsh (p917) and Nyika Plateau (p917) and the colonial hilltop town of Livingstonia (p916). Then head for Nkhata Bay (p918), before catching the Ilala ferry (p932) over to Likoma and Chizumulu Islands (p920).
- One Month With a month or longer you could encompass all of these highlights and more: check out the southern beach resorts of Cape Maclear (p927) or go hippo-spotting on a canoe in Liwonde National Park (p926).

HOW MUCH?

- 100 ml bottle of Nali (Malawi's own chilli sauce) US\$0.80
- Bottle of wine US\$10-20
- Carving US\$12
- 30 ml sachet of Malawi Gin US\$0.30
- 1 live chicken US\$2.50

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1
- 1L bottled water US\$2
- Bottle of Kuche Kuche (Malawian beer) US\$0.90
- Souvenir T-shirt US \$10
- Plate of chips US\$1

HISTORY

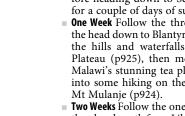
Since the first millennium, the Bantu people had been migrating from Central Africa into the area now occupied by Malawi, but migra-tion to the area stepped up with the arrival of the Tumbuka and Phoka, who settled around the highlands of Nuclear All and a statement of the set of the s the highlands of Nyika and Viphya during the 17th century, and the Maravi, who established a large and powerful kingdom in the south.

The early 19th century brought with it two significant migrations. The Yao invaded southern Malawi from western Mozambique, displacing the Maravi, while groups of Zulu migrated northward to settle in central and northern Malawi. This century also saw the escalation of the East African slave trade. Several trading centres were established in Malawi, including Karonga and Nkhotakota towns that still bear a strong Swahili-Arab influence today.

Enter the British

The most famous explorer to reach this area was David Livingstone. He reached Lake Malawi in September 1859, naming it Lake Nyasa. His death in 1873 inspired a legion of missionaries to come to Africa, bringing the more 'civilised' principles of commerce and Christianity.

The early missionaries blazed the way for various adventurers and pioneer traders and it wasn't long before European settlers began to arrive in their droves. In 1889 Britain







allowed Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company to administer the Shire Highlands, and in 1891 the British Central Africa (BCA) Protectorate was extended to include land along the western side of the lake. In 1907 the BCA Protectorate became the colony of Nyasaland.

Colonial rule brought with it an end to slave-traders and intertribal conflicts; but it also brought a whole new set of problems. As more and more European settlers arrived, more and more land was taken away from the locals and Africans were forced to pay taxes to the administration.

Transition & Independence

Not surprisingly, this created opposition to colonial rule and in the 1950s the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) party, led by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, began a serious push for independence. This came, after considerable struggle, in 1964, and Nyasaland became the independent country of Malawi. Two years later Malawi became a republic and Banda was made president, eventually declaring himself 'President for life' in 1971. He ruled for 30 years before his downfall and died three years later. Many achievements were made during his presidency but these were overshadowed by his stringent rule: banning the foreign press, imposing dress codes and waging vendettas against any group regarded as a threat.

In June 1993, however, Banda agreed to a referendum that resulted in the introduction of a multiparty political system; at Malawi's first full multiparty election in May 1994, the victor was the United Democratic Front (UDF), led by Bakili Muluzi. On becoming President, Muluzi moved quickly: political prisons were closed and freedom of speech and print was permitted. The Muluzi government also made several economic reforms with the help of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), including the withdrawal of state subsidies and the liberalisation of foreign exchange laws. By 1996 these economic reforms were hitting the average Malawian citizen hard. Food prices and unemployment soared; there were reports of increased malnutrition, and crime increased in urban areas. Nevertheless, Muluzi was reelected in May 1999 despite complaints of mismanagement and corruption at the highest government levels.

Malawi Today

In July 2002 Muluzi aired the idea of a Third Term Bill, which would have extended his presidency for one more term. When this failed, he chose Bingu wa Mutharika as his successor, who in 2004 duly won the election. Many thought he would follow in Muluzi's footsteps, but he soon declared his independence by quitting the UDF and setting up his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). His presidency seemed like a breath of fresh air and he set about stemming corruption, stepping up the fight against HIV/AIDS, attempting to attract greater foreign investment, and, more controversially, restoring Banda's reputation as a great African hero.

A massive famine in 2005 put the pressure on however, and in early 2006 the Mutharika government was rocked by scandal and political infighting which threatened to undermine its effectiveness.

CULTURE

Most Malawians live up to their reputation as some of the friendliest people in Africa. They tend to be very generous and will go out of their way to help others; unlike in some other countries, there's no sense that they're just doing so because they want something from vou.

Walking around in revealing clothing is seen as inappropriate for both men and women and public drunkenness is frowned upon, as are open displays of affection. Great respect is accorded to the older generation, who should always be treated in a courteous manner.

For the average Malawian, economic conditions are not good. Malawi remains one of the world's poorest countries and has one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in Southern Africa. The country is urbanising rapidly; natural resources struggle to support the burgeoning population and schools, hospitals and other social institutions are overflowing.

PEOPLE

Estimates put Malawi's total population at around 12 million. Because the country is small this creates one of the highest population densities in Africa. About 85% of the people live in rural areas and are engaged in subsistence farming or fishing, or working on commercial farms and plantations. Around half the population is under 15 years of age.

The main ethnic groups are: Chewa, dominant in the central and southern parts of the country; Yao in the south; and Tumbuka in the north. Other groups are: Nguni, in parts of the central and northern provinces; Chipoka, also in the central area; and Tonga, mostly along the lakeshore. The number of Malawians of European decent is less than 1%. There is also a small Indian population in Malawi, who were brought to the country by the British in the early 1900s to help construct a railway line between Malawi and Mozambique.

Christianity is the majority religion in Malawi, making up about 75% of the numbers, although for many Malawians Western beliefs are intertwined with traditional African practices.

Muslims make up almost 20% of the population. The people of the Yao tribe along the southern lakeshore are the most closely associated with Islam.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Dance is an important social element across Malawi and most dances are rooted in traditional beliefs and customs. The most famous traditional dance is known as the Gule Wam-kulu, which reflects the traditional belief in spirits.

Poetry is very popular in Malawi: leading poets include Steve Chimombo - whose most highly acclaimed work is a complex poetic drama, The Rainmaker - and Jack Mapanje, whose first poetry collection (Of Chameleons and Gods, published in 1981) led to his imprisonment by the Banda regime in 1987 and eventual release in 1991.

Most critics agree that Malawi's leading novelist is Legson Kayira, whose semiautobiographical I Will Try and The Looming Shadow earned him acclaim in the 1970s.

Home-grown contemporary music is becoming increasingly popular in Malawi, due largely to influential and popular musicians such as Lucius Banda, who plays soft 'Malawian-style' reggae with his band Zembani, and the late Evison Matafale. Other reggae names to look out for are Billy Kaunda and Nyasa Gurus. Also popular is Ethel Kamwendo, one of Malawi's leading female singers.

Malawi is especially known for skilful woodcarvers and you'll see beautifully made wood and stone carvings, including walking sticks, chairs and coffee tables, in craft shops and markets all over the country.

ENVIRONMENT

Malawi is wedged between Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique, measuring roughly 900km long and between 80km and 150km wide, with an area of 118,484 sq km.

Lake Malawi covers almost a fifth of Malawi's total area. Beyond the lake, escarpments rise to high rolling plateaus covering much of the country. Malawi's main highland areas are Nyika and Viphya in the north and Mt Mulanje in the south.

Malawi's main river is the Shire (pronounced *Shir*-ee); it flows out of the southern end of Lake Malawi, through Lake Malombe and then southward as the plateau gives way to low ground, to flow into the Zambezi River in Mozambique. In this area, the lowest point is a mere 37m above sea level. Malawi is not often thought of as a great

place to see wildlife and if you're looking for a stereotypical safari experience, you'll be disappointed. However, for those less concerned with simply ticking off the Big Five (lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant and rhino), the country has plenty to offer. There are five national parks in Malawi: Liwonde, Lengwe, Kasungu, Nyika and Lake Malawi (around Cape Maclear), and four wildlife reserves: Vwaza Marsh, Nkhotakota, Mwabvi and Majete. The main park is Liwonde, which has plenty of elephants, hippos, antelope species and birdlife. Nyika National Park is renowned for roan antelopes and reedbucks; you'll also see zebras, warthogs and jackals. Nearby Vwaza Marsh is known for its hippos and, in the dry season, is the best place in the country to get up close and personal

with elephants.

If you're self-catering, supermarkets are found all over Malawi and stock locally produced and imported goods. Markets and bus stations usually harbour a collection of food stalls, where you can get a cheap snack for around US\$0.30. There are cheap restaurants everywhere serving traditional Malawian food as well as chicken or fish (the most popular being *chambo*, a delicate white-fleshed fish found in great numbers in the lake) with rice or chips from around US\$1.50.

Most midrange hotels and restaurants serve European-style food such as steak, chicken or fish, which is served with vegetables and chips or rice – usually around the US\$5 mark. At top-end hotels and restaurants in cities and along the lakeshore you can find straightforward international standards, plus more elaborate French, British or Italian cuisine. If you're hankering for something different, in Blantyre and Lilongwe are restaurants serving Ethiopian, Indian, Korean, Chinese and Portuguese food. Main courses range from around US\$5 to US\$10.

Traditional beer of the region is made from maize; in Malawi this is commercially brewed as Chibuku. Malawi's local lager is called Kuche Kuche but most travellers (and many Malawians) prefer the beer produced by Carlsberg at its Blantyre brewery (the only one in Africa).

LILONGWE

pop 590,000

Lilongwe is hardly awash with excitement; it's a sleepy little city that while perfectly pleasant, isn't particularly interesting or memorable. The quiet buzz of the Old Town, with its craft stalls, market, a nice little cafés and drinking holes, is at its heart, and this is where you're likely to spend most of your time. The more modern city centre has little to offer – it's a soulless collection of banks, office buildings and embassies.

ORIENTATION

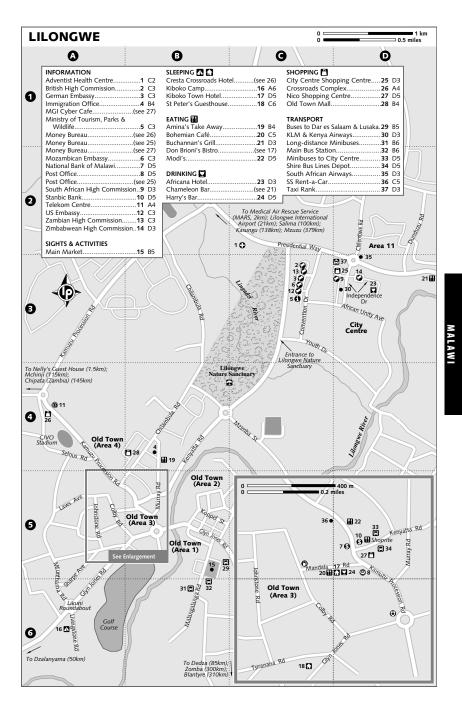
Lilongwe is unusually spread out, and rather than one central business district it has two centres: City Centre and Old Town. City Centre is rather loose and sterile with a handful of offices, banks and hotels. Three kilometres south, Old Town has a good range of places to stay, the bus station, the market and several restaurants, all in a condensed area easily covered on foot. The town is divided into Areas: the Old Town is comprised of Areas 1 to 4.

INFORMATION Internet Access

MGI Cyber Cafe (Nico Shopping Centre, Kamuzu Procession Rd, Old Town; per hr US\$2.80) Offers quick access. Telekom Centre (Kamuzu Procession Rd; per hr US\$5) Speedy internet as well as international telephone services. It's opposite the Crossroads Complex.

Medical Services

Adventist Health Centre (() 101-775456; Presidential Way, City Centre) Also good for consultations, plus eye and dental problems.



Medical Air Rescue Service Clinic (🕿 01-794036, 236644; www.mars.co.zw; Ufulu Rd, Area 43) The best place for major matters and also deals with emergency evacuations. It's northwest of City Centre.

Money

Money Bureau City Centre (🖻 01-772239; Centre House Arcade, City Centre Shopping Centre, City Centre); Crossroads Complex (201-750789); Old Town (201-750659; Nico Shopping Centre, Kamuzu Procession Rd, Old Town) Has good rates, quick service and doesn't charge commission.

National Bank of Malawi (Kamuzu Procession Rd; 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) You can change money here, get a cash advance on your Visa card, and there's a 24 hour ATM that accepts Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus and Maestro.

Stanbic Bank (Kamuzu Procession Rd) Offers the same facilities as the National Bank.

Post

Post office (Kamuzu Procession Rd, Old Town; 7.30am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) Another post office, with the same opening hours, is located next to the City Centre Shopping Centre.

Immigration office (🖻 01-754297; Murrav Rd, Old

Town) Ministry of Tourism, Parks & Wildlife (201-

771295: Tourism House: 1 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8-10am Sat) The tourist office is located here, but information and advice is minimal. It's off Convention Dr.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Tourist Information

Muggings and the occasional stabbing have become a serious problem around the Nature Sanctuary (below) over the past few years, so if you plan to visit get a taxi to inside the gate. At night, Malangalanga Rd can be dangerous, and walking to Area 3 is not recommended. The bridge between Area 2 and Area 3 is a favourite haunt for muggers. If you arrive on a bus after dark, take a minibus or taxi to your accommodation.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The main market (Malangalanga Rd, Old Town) is a pocket of frenetic activity, with traders, market stalls and food vendors packed into a swarming, small area.

For a total change of pace head for the Nature Sanctuary (Kenyatta Rd; admission US\$0.50; 🕅 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat), a peaceful wilderness area by the Lingadzi River. There is a signposted network of walking trails, and the information centre lists the birds and animals that may be seen.

TOURS

Barefoot Safaris (201-707346; www.barefoot-safaris .com) Offers budget and midrange tours, mostly geared towards wildlife-watching in Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania. Tours cost from US\$85 per person per day and include all meals and accommodation.

Kiboko Safaris (🖻 01-751226; www.kiboko-safaris .com) Specialises in budget tours; fully inclusive and fourday trips to South Luangwa cost US\$325.

SLEEPING

Kiboko Camp (🖻 01-754978; www.kiboko-safaris.com; Livingstone Rd; camp sites per person US\$3, dm US\$5, d US\$15; 🔲) The most popular place in town for those on a budget. There's plenty of space for campers, as well as dorms, and double and twin A-frame chalets. The reception doubles up as a small bar (it closes at 10.30pm) and breakfast, lunch and evening meals can be ordered.

St Peter's Guesthouse (🖻 01-752812, 08-317769; Glvn Jones Rd; r without bathroom US\$8.50, 3-bed dm US\$4) This place offers excellent, clean and safe rooms with mosquito nets, all of which open out onto a peaceful courtyard garden. It's very quiet and part of the parish so guests should be respectful.

Nellv's Guest House (🖻 01-59514; Area 9/156, Old Town; s/d US\$32/42; 🛄) This is cosy and popular, with conservatively decorated rooms, a pretty garden, and an internet café.

Kiboko Town Hotel (🖻 01-752201; imperial@eomw.net; Mandala Rd, Old Town; s/d from US\$40/45; 🛄) This is the best-value place in town. It's located bang in the centre of the Old Town action; the rooms are spacious, comfortable and stylish - all white gauze and linen topped off with bright African prints and there's a good little café downstairs. Best of all is the beautiful residents bar with its low Moroccan-style seating, twinkling fairy lights, open-air fireplace and mellow atmosphere.

Cresta Crossroads Hotel (@ 01-750333; www.cresta -hospitality.com; Crossroads Complex, Mchinji Roundabout; s/d from US\$120/140) Lilongwe's newest top-end hotel has all the facilities you'd expect and the rooms are just that little bit more swanky than those of its rivals. It also has a wonderfully cheesy drinking hole called the Cat-chy Saloon.

EATING

Modi's (🕿 01-757694; Kamuzu Procession Rd, Old Town; starters US\$2, mains US\$5-6; 🕅 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Has delicious and filling Indian food; the seafood and vegetarian options are particularly good.

Amina's Take Away (Murray Rd, Old Town; dishes US\$2-5; (*) breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Serves the usual burgers, sandwiches and curries and is popular with local office workers. Has a quirky roadside terrace complete with makeshift gazebo.

Bohemian Cafe (🖻 01-757120; Mandala Rd, Old Town; dishes US\$3; 🕑 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Serves excellent sandwiches, snacks and cakes in a plantfilled courtvard overlooking, but sheltered from, the buzz of the street.

Don Brioni's Bistro (🖻 01-756998; Mandala Rd, Old Town; mains US\$4-10; (Y) dinner) Usually buzzing with a lively infusion of locals and tourists, this place under the Kiboko Town Hotel is suitably Italian in décor and flavour and the eccentric English owner is always happy to chat. Excellent steak, fish, chicken accompany pizzas and pastas on the menu.

Buchannan's Grill (🖻 01-772846/59: Four Seasons Centre, Presidential Way; mains US\$6-14; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) One of Lilongwe's newest offerings, this place is set in the grounds of a garden centre. It's a lovely spot; if you can, eat out on the terrace, which overlooks a beautiful rockery and pond. As the name suggests, this place specialises in grilled meat and the menu is a carnivore's dream.

DRINKING

Africana Hotel (off Independence Dr, City Centre) This lively place has a large outdoor patio that is popular with nearby office workers and government types. It's easy to make friends at the Africana and you are sure to strike up a conversation with one of the locals over a few beers.

Chameleon Bar (Four Seasons Centre, Presidential Way) This swanky cocktail bar hosts regular live events, including the 'pillow talk' unplugged session on the last Thursday of every month which welcomes poets, musicians and comedians.

Harry's Bar (Mandala Rd, Old Town) Above Bookmart, this circular bar has a relaxed atmosphere with a happy, mixed crowd of expats and locals. It's a popular meeting place, although Harry's taste in music can be atrociously cheesy.

SHOPPING

There are several shopping centres in Lilongwe. Old Town Mall houses a small corridor of shops including African Habitat, selling a variety of African arts and crafts. Crossroads Complex is Lilongwe's newest shopping area and houses banks, a hotel and minigolf and City Centre Shopping Centre (off Independence Dr) is a collection of buildings containing shops, travel agents, restaurants, a bank and a post office.

Nico Shopping Centre (Kamuzu Procession Rd) has a bookshop, travel agency and pharmacy.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Airlines with offices in Lilongwe include: Air Malawi (🖻 01-700811; Lilongwe International Airport)

KLM & Kenya Airways (a) 01-774227; City Centre) South African Airways (2 01-772242; City Centre)

Bus

Coachline buses run between Lilongwe and Blantyre (US\$20, four hours, two daily). Book tickets at the Shire Bus Lines Depot (🖻 01-756226; 🖻 Kenyatta Rd, Old Town), from where the buses depart. The bright orange Sacramento Bus runs to Mzuzu daily (US\$18, four hours) from the main bus station near the market.

Express and ordinary buses operate out of the main bus station. Express buses run to: Blantyre via Zalewa (US\$6, five hours, one daily), Zomba (US\$4, six hours, one daily), Mzuzu (US\$12, seven to eight hours, two daily) and Kasungu (US\$3, four hours, two daily). All other buses are ordinary (ie slow) and travel between Lilongwe and Mchinji (US\$1.50, two to three hours, three daily), Salima (US\$1.50, two hours, two daily) and Nkhotakota (US\$2.50, 41/2 hours, two daily). Long-distance minibuses for destinations such as Salima, Mchinji and Dedza (all around US\$1.50) depart from the minibus park across the road from the main bus station on Malangalnga Rd.

GETTING AROUND

The most useful local minibus service for visitors is between Old Town and City Centre. From Old Town, local minibuses leave from either the bus park near the market, or outside Shoprite on Kenyatta Rd. From City Centre back to Old Town, the bus stop is at the northern end of Independence Dr. The best places to find taxis are the main hotels. There's also a rank on Presidential Way, just north of City Centre Shopping Centre, and outside Shoprite in Old Town.

NORTHERN MALAWI

This section covers most parts of Northern Province, from the northern tip of the country down to the Mzuzu and Nkhata Bay areas. Places are described roughly north to south.

KARONGA

In the surrounding dry and dusty country, Karonga is a relaxed little town with wide streets and wandering cattle. It's the first and last town on the road between Malawi and Tanzania and has some good facilities, including the only bank north of Mzuzu.

MALAWI

Mufwa Lakeshore Lodge & Camping (🖻 01-362390; camp sites US\$2, s/d US\$14/19, without bathroom US\$10/14, all incl breakfast) This large, quiet property can be difficult to find; it's set back from the road with the turn-off between Club Marina and the National Bank of Malawi. There's a large grassy camping ground with plenty of trees but the rooms are quite small and dark.

Zgambota Resthouse (s/d US\$2.50/3) Opposite the Mobil petrol station at the roundabout, this place has clean and basic rooms with nets.

Club Marina (2 01-362302; s/d standard chalets US\$20/30, superior chalets US\$40/55, all incl breakfast) Near Mufwa, Club Marina is an excellent, upmarket option. Classy chalets (superior ones have hot water) are set in a beautiful, leafy area and the large outdoor bar is perfect for a cold drink. Rates include breakfast.

Getting There & Away

Buses and minibuses run between Karonga nad Mzuzu (US\$4, 31/2 hours). If vou're heading north, minibuses and matolas (vehicles that provide unofficial public transport) travel to the Songwe border crossing (US\$1.30). It's 200m across the bridge to the Tanzanian border.

CHITIMBA

Chitimba is little more than a stretch of beach on Lake Malawi, a couple of places to stay and some shops straggled along the highway where you turn off the main north-south road to reach Livingstonia.

Chitimba Campsite (camp sites per person US\$3, dm US\$5, stilt chalets without bathroom US\$10, d US\$15) is right on the beach, about 1km north of the Livingstonia turn-off, and very popular with overland trucks, which makes the place rather rowdy. The shabby rooms and chalets aren't good value, but good food is available all day and there are two bars so there's plenty of space for party animals.

Sangilo Sanctuary Lodge (🖻 09 395203, 08 392611; sanctuary@sangilo.net; chalets US\$25), about 8km north of Chitimba, is the newest offering on the strip. It has a stunning setting, with cliff-top cottages, camping, an empty stretch of beach, and an open-air deck restaurant. If you call in advance you can arrange a pick up from the Livingstonia turn-off or the Ilala.

LIVINGSTONIA

Livingstonia provides a fascinating glimpse into Malawi's colonial past, and the mixture of old colonial architecture, wide, dusty treelined streets and panoramic views is quite beguiling. Relative isolation, maintained by arduous access, has kept it quiet and unspoilt, making it an ideal place to recover from hard travel in Tanzania or the rigours of beach life on the lake.

Sights & Activities

The fascinating **museum** (admission US\$2; 🕑 7.30am-5pm) in the Stone House details early European exploration and missionary work in Malawi. In many regards, the exhibits are a tribute to the efforts and achievements of Dr Robert Laws, who established the Livingstonia Mission.

Nearby is the **church**, dating from 1894, with a beautiful stained-glass window featuring David Livingstone with his sextant, medicine chest and two companions, and Lake Malawi in the background.

Manchewe Falls, about 4km from the town, is a spectacular 50m-high waterfall with a cave behind it where local people hid from slavetraders some 100 years ago. Allow an hour going down and 11/2 hours back up. Alternatively, if you're walking to/from Chitimba, you can visit on the way.

Sleeping

Mushroom Farm (mickmitchell2001@yahoo.com; camping per person US\$2, s/d \$US5/10) This place has gained quite a reputation on the backpackers' circuit. It's a sustainable bush retreat in a forest setting, with stunning views over the lake, hot solar showers, compost toilets and a range of adventure activities on offer, including waterfall abseils and rap jumping.

Stone House (a 01-368223; camp sites per person US\$3, dm incl breakfast US\$8) This was built by missionaries in the early 20th century and still has original Victorian furniture, along with a friendly caretaker, clean bathrooms and occasional hot water. Meals are available for around US\$6.

Getting There & Away

From the main north-south road between Karonga and Mzuzu, the road to Livingstonia turns off at Chitimba, forcing its way up the escarpment in a series of acute hairpin bends. Drivers should attempt this only in a 4WD, and only if there's been no rain. There's no bus, and you'll wait a very long time if you're hitching.

The alternative is to walk up: it's about 15km, and steep, so it takes around four hours from Chitimba if you follow the road.

NYIKA NATIONAL PARK

Established in 1965, Nyika National Park is the oldest and the largest in the country, covering some 3000 sq km. The main feature of the park is the Nyika Plateau, with a landscape and climate unique in Malawi, and unusual in Africa. It's a vast range of high rolling hills, sweeping wide valleys, dense pine forest and flower-studded grasslands, and the views (on clear days) are endless.

Rather than just a place to watch wildlife, what makes Nyika alluring is the chance to explore a unique and preserved patch of African wilderness in a variety of ways: on horseback, by bike, or simply on foot. Common animals here include zebras, bushbucks, reedbucks and roan antelopes, and you may also spot warthogs, klipspringers, jackals and possibly hyenas and leopards.

Entry fees of US\$5 a day are payable. All accommodation, tourist activities and charter flights are operated by the Nyika Safari Company (a small professional outfit based at Chelinda Camp, at the heart of the plateau.

Sleeping

Camping ground (camp sites per person US\$5) About 2km from the main camp, this place is set in a secluded site with vistas of the plateau's

rolling hills. The site has permanent security, clean toilets, hot showers, endless firewood and shelters for cooking and eating.

Chelinda Camp (4-bed cottages US\$120, full board per person \$150) Tucked inside a pocket of forest, it has atmospheric rooms and chalets dressed with pine and juniper furniture and stone fireplaces.

Chelinda Lodge (full-board cabins per person US\$310) About 1km from Chelinda Camp, nestled against the side of the hill in a clearing of trees, this place looks like something out of a Bavarian fairy tale. Rooms are in luxurious log cabins housing tasteful furniture, Victorian baths, roaring fireplaces and individual balconies.

Getting There & Away

The quickest way to reach Chelinda Camp is on a flight by Nyika Air Services. Flights for up to five people can be chartered from Lilongwe (US\$999), while rates from Mzuzu are US\$150 per person. There are no public buses into the park; the nearest you can get is the service from Mzuzu to Rhumpi (UŠ\$1). From there, you can get a *matola* or minibus to Chelinda Camp (US\$6.00). If coming by car, the main Thazima gate is in the southwest of the park, 54km from Rumphi; to Chelinda Camp it's another 55km. Fuel is available at Chelinda, but in limited supply so it's best to fill up before you enter the park.

VWAZA MARSH WILDLIFE RESERVE

Vwaza is an ideal destination for any budget: it's compact and accessible, the accommodation is close to the main gate, and public transport here is straightforward. Entry fees of US\$5 are payable. The main camp is conveniently located a safe but rewarding distance from the hippo-heavy Lake Kazuni, which also lures impalas, buffaloes, waterbucks, elands, roans, sables, zebras, hartebeests and pukus. The big attraction however, is the 160-plus elephants within the park. There are regular parades in front of the camps between July and September. The best time of year to visit is in the dry season; just after the rainy season, the grass is high and you might go away without seeing anything.

Sleeping

Kazuni Camp (camp sites per person US\$5, s/d chalets without bathroom US\$10/20) Has simple, rustic chalets, separated from each other by a decent stretch of bush; and they're close to the water so that elephants and hippos are frequent night-time visitors. You must bring your own food, and there are cooking stations with barbecues.

Kazuni Safari Camp (full board per person US\$190) Accommodates guests in smart and stylish chalets with thatched roofs and verandas in a prime position overlooking the lake.

Getting There & Away

The Nyika Safari Company operates flights for a minimum of two people between Vwaza Marsh and Mzuzu (US\$150 per person) or Chelinda Camp in Nyika National Park (US\$112 per person). If you're travelling by public transport, first get to Rumphi (reached from Mzuzu by minibus for US\$1.50). From there fairly frequent matolas and minibuses run to the main gate (US\$3). By car, head west from Rumphi. Turn left after 10km (Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve is signposted), and continue for about 20km. Where the road swings left over a bridge, go straight on to reach the park gate and camp after 1km.

MALAWI MZUZU

Mzuzu is the largest town north of Lilongwe and the transport hub for all north-related activities. The town is centred around a grand tree-lined avenue. It has banks, shops, a post office, supermarkets, pharmacies, petrol stations and other facilities, which are especially useful if you've come into Malawi from the north.

Information

The National Bank of Malawi, Stanbic Bank and First Merchant Bank, all on Orton Chewa Ave, exchange travellers cheques and money, and offer credit card withdrawals. National and Stanbic banks have ATMs that accept foreign cards. If you're heading to the lake, cash up here as there is no foreign exchange facility in Nkhata Bay.

Internet access is available at the Mzuzu Business Centre (St Denis Street; per hr US\$10) or at the Dot. com Internet (per hr US\$9) opposite the Peoples Supermarket.

Sleeping & Eating

Mzoozoozoo (🖻 08-864493; camp sites US\$1, dm/d US\$3/7) This is Mzuzu's only hostel and the very friendly owners make it a good one at that. Dorms are in a big timber bungalow and

a constant stream of happy activity buzzes around the funky outdoor bar.

Flame Tree Guesthouse (🖻 01-333053; r incl breakfast with/without bathroom US\$15/12) A relaxed option, with clean, cool and homely rooms, and a lovely veranda restaurant overlooking the flower-filled courtyard.

Mzuzu Hotel (🖻 01-332622; mzh@sdnp.org.mw; s/d US\$50/64) Mzuzu's plushest hotel has large rooms with all the requisite trimmings, but has a rather staid atmosphere and the rooms look old fashioned. There's a good restaurant and a quiet bar for residents. It's off Kabunduli Viphya Dr.

Ossie's (meals MK250) A lovely café, shielded by trees from the bustle of the road, and set in a little palm-filled garden squeezed in between the road and a cornfield. Food includes decent burgers and curries.

Maharaja Restaurant (@ 09-351550; St Denis St; starters US\$2, mains US\$4; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Satisfy your chilli cravings here with a wide variety of tasty curries and tandoori dishes.

Getting There & Away

Air Malawi flies between Lilongwe and Mzuzu (see p932 for details). The Sacremento bus runs between Mzuzu and Lilongwe (US\$18, four hours, Monday, Wednesday, Saturday) and express buses run to/from Lilongwe (US\$12, seven to eight hours, two daily) via Kasungu (US\$2.50, three hours). Ordinary buses go to Rumphi (US\$1, 11/2 hours, four daily), Nkhata Bay (US\$1, two hours, two daily) and Karonga (US\$3.80, seven hours, four daily) via Chitimba (US\$2, four hours). Minibuses also go to these destinations and are slightly more expensive, but also more frequent.

A bus originating in Lilongwe travels between Mzuzu and Dar es Salaam (US\$35, 17 hours, Tuesday and Saturday). Departing Mzuzu around midnight, it crosses the border at first light, goes through Mbeya in the morning and gets to Dar es Salaam late in the afternoon.

NKHATA BAY

Nkhata Bay is a lush tropical indent on the northern lakeshore that lures a constant stream of travellers with its Caribbeanesque milieu. This may be a touch fanciful, but the bay is quite picturesque at sunrise and sunset, and most recreation certainly involves a good deal of lounging by the water.

Information

There's nowhere to change money so make sure you cash up in Mzuzu, Nkhotakota or Lilongwe. Alternatively, several of the lodges accept credit cards, US currency and travellers cheques for payment. Internet access is available at Aqua Africa (below).

Activities

Monkey Business (🖻 01-252365) on Chikale Beach operates fully inclusive kayak excursions from anything between two and seven days from US\$35 per person per day. If you want to learn scuba diving, Aqua Africa (🖻 01-352284; www.aqua -africa.co.uk) has a variety of options, including five-day PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) courses for US\$260 and casual day dives for US\$20.

Sleeping & Eating

Kupenja Lodge (🗃 09-471742; camping US\$1.50; s/d US\$3.50/5.00) Is a quiet, homely place with cosy stone chalets, a relaxed lounging area and delicious food. It has a nice stretch of sandy beach, which is blissfully hassle-free and provides a great antidote to the party atmosphere of some of the Chikale Beach lodges. The owner runs the charity Africa Unplugged (volunteers get a discount at the lodge) and ploughs a lot of profits back into the local community.

Big Blue (🖻 01-352316; bigblue@sdnp.org.mw; camp sites per person US\$1.50, dm/s/d without bathroom US\$3/4/6) This large, ramshackle place has clearly seen better days. However, the staff are very friendly, it's a good deal cheaper than the options in Chikale and it frequently have special offers and discounts.

Mavoka Village (🕿 01-352421; info@ mayoka-village.com; camping US\$3, s/d chalets US\$15/20, without bathroom US\$5/8) A very popular place and deservedly so: it's a sprawling, buzzing collection of picturesque chalets with no beachfront to speak of, but plenty of 'chill out' spots near the water. What really attracts people, though, is the infectious, lively atmosphere. The energetic bar - an open, breezy spot overlooking the water - plays host to regular barbeque nights, Malawian buffets and Malawian music nights, and the friendly owners make a real effort to chat to the punters, get the party started and ensure that everyone feels right at home.

Aqua Africa (🖻 01-352284; www.aqua-africa.co.uk; tw US\$20; 🛄) Has a few secluded and comfortable rooms with balconies overlooking the private

beach. It's also home to Nkhata Bay's only internet café, with superfast connection for US\$6 an hour.

Nkhata Bay Local Restaurant (mains US\$2-3; (noon-9pm) Perched on the side of the hill on the road up to Chikale Beach, this place is a small and charming wood, reed and thatch café, complete with jaw-dropping views over the bay. Dishes from the small menu must be ordered about an hour in advance, but are well worth the wait. The owners are keen drummers and can always be persuaded to show off, or to teach you, their skills.

Getting There & Away

All buses and minibuses go from the bus stand on the main road. Ordinary buses run to Mzuzu (US\$1, two hours, two daily) and minibuses and matolas run to Nkhotakota (US\$4, six hours), Chintheche (US\$1, one hour) and Mzuzu (US\$1.30, 11/2 hours). To reach Lilongwe, go to Mzuzu and transfer. Many travellers also come or go on the Ilala ferry (see p932 and p932).

THE CHINTHECHE STRIP

THE CHINTHECHE STRIP Chintheche is an unremarkable village about 40km south of Nkhata Bay. Nearby is a long and beautiful stretch of lakeshore known as the 'Chintheche Strip'. It's lined with hotels, lodges and camping grounds, each catering for different types of travellers.

Activities

Aquanuts Dive School (🖻 01-357376; www.aquanuts.info) has an on-site training pool and offers PADI courses for US\$265, casual dives from US\$30 and PADI Scuba refresher courses for US\$45. It's well run and pays excellent attention to safety and the environment. If you've come to Malawi to find inner peace, Makuzi Beach Lodge (www.makuzibeach.com) has a variety of yoga and meditation retreats on offer. The lodge has its own qualified Sivananda yoga instructor and offers five-day courses for US\$550, including all meals and accommodation.

Sleepina

Kande Beach Camp ((C) 01-357376; www.kandebeach .com; camp sites US\$3, dm US\$5, chalets sleeping 3-4 US\$30) About 7km from the Makuzi turn-off (55km south of Nkhata Bay), it's a legendary stop for overland trucks, where beachlife, good times and late-night partying is the name of the game. All accommodation is excellent and the smorgasbord of facilities includes a large bar, games room, book exchange and the Soft Sand Cafe (dishes US\$4 to US\$6), which serves great pizzas.

Kawiya Kottages (sosmalawi@globemw.net; camp sites per person US\$5, chalets US\$10) About 3km north of Chintheche village, it has two simple cabins in a shady site on a private bit of beach. Each is fully self-contained, including an equipped kitchen.

Chintheche Beach Lodge (rUS\$5) This is nearer to town, down the track running west from the Peoples Supermarket. It has clean two-bed rooms and although you need to bring your own food the friendly caretaker will cook it for you.

Makuzi Beach (() 01-357296; www.makuzibeach .com; camp sites per person US\$10, s/d chalets US\$82/\$144) This can be found by heading south down the main road, where you'll reach the turn-off to Bandawe (also called Old Bandawe); it's another 3.5km down the track. The accommodation and facilities here are a step up in quality, and the restaurant (US\$5 to US\$7 lunch; US\$17 to US\$20 dinner) serves the best food on the strip. If you're feeling active you can hire a windglider, power boat, mountain bike or even a yacht.

LIKOMA & CHIZUMULU ISLANDS

Likoma and Chizumulu Islands are on the Mozambican side of Lake Malawi, but are part of Malawi. With their beautiful beaches, these islands are the perfect hideaway, with very friendly locals and few other tourists. If you want to visit both islands, transport links make it best to go to Chizumulu first.

Sights

On Likoma, the impressive Anglican **Cathedral** of St Peter should not be missed. You can climb the tower for spectacular views. Nearby, the neat **market place** contains a few shops and stalls, and down on the lakeshore is a beach where local boats come and go, and the people wash and sell fish.

Sleeping

Mango Drift (camp sites per person US\$1, dm US\$3, s/d chalets without bathroom US\$4/8) A short walk from Kaya Mawa, this is a series of simple stone and thatched chalets and a bright, breezy bar, spread across a beautiful beach on the western side of the island; at the time of writing, Mango Drift was about to go through a major

refurbishment, though it will remain squarely aimed at the budget traveller.

Wakwenda Retreat (camp sites US\$2, dm US\$2.50, r from US\$4) Smack bang on a postcard-perfect beach on Chizumulu, this place is utter chillout material. The sizable bar is constructed around a massive, hollow baobab tree and the shaded lounge area is often the focus of lazy activity. The restaurant (breakfasts US\$1.50, dishes US\$2.50) serves good beachy fare, including sandwiches, omelettes and burgers.

Kaya Mawa (www.kayamawa.com; full-board chalets per person from US\$180) This luxury lodge on Likoma Island is one of Africa's finest paradise retreats, and its beauty lies in the ingenuity of its design. Each chalet has been meticulously constructed around the natural landscape, using rock faces as walls or screens for openair showers and stone baths. The bar, perched on the top of a huge rock buttress, offers seamless views of mango-hued sunsets and the meals are possibly the finest in Malawi.

Getting There & Away

Several companies can arrange flights to Likoma Island, including Wilderness Safaris (201-771393/153; www.wilderness-safaris.com), and the Ulendo Air Services (201-754717/950; air -services@ulendo.malawi.net) The cost of chartering a five-seater plane from Lilongwe is US\$755, but you can purchase an empty seat (if available) in either direction for a discounted price; contact the companies directly for details.

The *Ilala* ferry (see p932) serves Likoma and Chizumulu twice a week. Heading south, the *Ilala* then sails to Cóbuè (*kob*-way) and Metangula on the Mozambican mainland.

SENGA BAY

Senga Bay is at the eastern end of a broad peninsula that juts into the lake from Salima. The water is remarkably clear here, and the beaches, while a little more crowded than those at Cape Maclear or Nkhata Bay, are also good.

Sights & Activities

As a break from lazing on the beach, you can go windsurfing or snorkelling, take a boat ride or learn to dive. You could also take a trip out to nearby **Lizard Island** to see its population of giant monitor lizards and its cormorant colony. Alternatively, you can go hiking in the nearby **Senga Hills** (although it's best to hire a local guide to show you the way).

Sleeping & Eating

There's a good choice of places to stay and a couple of eateries in Senga Bay.

Wheelhouse Marina ((2) 01-263139; wheelhouse@mw.celtelplus.com; camp sites per person US\$2, caravan \$12, 2-/10-bed house US\$30/50) A rambling, ramshackle paradise made up of the ruins of an old marina, a grassy camp site, two selfcatering cottages nestled into the hillside and a groovy old caravan for two. There's also a quirky round bar raised above the water on stills that serves great steaks and fish.

Steps Campsite (campsites per person US\$3) Beautifully situated on a wide, clean, sandy beach right by the water, with plenty of shady areas to put up your tent, a beach volleyball pitch and excellent security. The bathrooms are spotlessly clean, there's a good bar, and food can be brought to you from the restaurant at the Livingstonia Beach Hotel next door.

Cool Runnings (s/d without bathroom US\$20) An extremely homely and friendly place. It's obvious that a lot of thought has been put into its design and there are plenty of extra touches that make a stay here memorable – there's comedy reading material in the shared bathrooms, for instance. Best of all, though, is the tantalizing food: you discuss the options with the owner a couple of hours in advance, and come dinnertime, a specially tailored feast will arrive at your table.

Red Zebra Cafe (breakfast & snacks US\$1-3, dishes US\$3.50-4; ⁽⁵⁾ 6am-10.30pm) Little café in a large garden by the side of the main road, 500m from the Livingstonia Beach Hotel, with a simple menu of burgers, pizzas, *chambo* and curries.

Getting There & Away

First get to Salima (buses run there from Lilongwe; see p915). From here, local pickups run to Senga Bay (US\$1), dropping you in the main street. If you want a lift all the way to Steps Campsite, negotiate an extra fee with the driver. If you're travelling to/from Cape Maclear consider chartering a boat; it's not too expensive (around US\$100) if you get a group together, it's good fun and it saves one hell of a trip on the bus.

SOUTHERN MALAWI

All places in this section are south of Lilongwe. Except for Mulanje, towns are listed heading north from Blantyre.

BLANTYRE

pop 640,000

Blantyre – the commercial and industrial capital of Malawi – is a more happening city than Lilongwe, although that's not saying much. It stretches for about 20km, merging into Limbe, its 'sister city'. Most travellers stop only for a few days to send or receive mail, buy maps and books or pick up a visa for Mozambique. This is probably long enough to check out some interesting sights, the most global selection of cuisine in Malawi, several enjoyable bars, and a fair selection of places to stay.

Orientation

Despite the sprawling suburbs and townships surrounding Blantyre, the city centre is very compact, with most places of importance to travellers within easy walking distance. Central Blantyre's main street is Victoria Ave; along here are several large shops, the tourist office, the map sales office, banks, foreign exchange bureaus and travel agents. To the east is Haile Selassie Rd, which contains many smaller shops. At the northern end of Victoria Ave is the landmark Mount Soche Hotel.

Information INTERNET ACCESS

There are plenty of internet bureaus throughout Blantyre.

E Internet Café (cnr Victoria Ave & Independence Dr; per 30 min US\$2.20)

Celtel Cyber Cafe (Victoria Ave; per 30min US\$2) Icon Internet Café (per 30min US\$2) Off Livingstone Ave.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Mwaiwathu Private Hospital (☎ 01-622999; Chileka Rd; 24hr) For private medical consultations or blood tests, this hospital, east of the city centre, is good. A consultation is US\$10; all drugs and treatment are extra. An overnight stay in a private ward is US\$80; before any treatment, you must put down a US\$220 deposit. Seventh Day Adventist Clinic (☎ 01-620006; Robins Rd) For medical or dental problems, this clinic charges US\$6 for a doctor's consultation and US\$10 for a malaria test.

MONEY

All of the following banks are on Victoria Ave. There are branches of the National Bank of Malawi and Stanbic Bank, both of which can change cash and travellers cheques and have 24-hour ATMs that accept Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus and Maestro. Victoria Forex (2 01-621026) Usually has more competitive rates and charges no commission. You can get a speedy cash advance on your credit card here for a fee of US\$3.

POST

Main post office (Glyn Jones Rd, Blantyre; (>7.30am-5pm) Has poste restante.

TOURIST INFORMATION

French Cultural Centre (🗃 01-671250; ccfr@malawi .net; cnr Moi Rd & Kasungu Cres; 🎦 8am-noon & 2pm-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Not just for French lessons. The centre has a regular programme of concerts, plays and readings. Performances have been known to include such international luminaries as Angelique Kidjo. Immigration office (Bldg Society House, Victoria Ave) If you need to extend your visa, Blantyre has an immigration office.

Tourist office (🖻 01-620300; Victoria Ave; 🕎 7.30amnoon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) The central tourist office has a few leaflets, and the people here make guite an effort to provide information and assistance.

Sights & Activities

MALAWI Probably the most impressive building in Blantyre is the **CCAP Church** (off Chileka Rd), officially called the Church of St Michael and All Angels. This magnificent church was built in 1891 by Scottish missionaries who had no construction training, using only local handmade bricks and wood.

Paper Making Education Trust (Pamet; 20 01-623895; www.pamet.org.mw; 10 Chilembwe Rd) is an inspiring project that was set up to teach people how to recycle paper. For US\$0.80 you can take a tour of the workshop to see how it's all done and buy a lovely assortment of cards and other paper products made from a range of different material including elephant dung!

The National Museum (Kasungu Cres; admission US\$0.70, 🕑 7.30am-5pm) is midway between Blantyre and Limbe. There's a small collection of traditional weapons and artefacts, and exhibits relating to traditional dance, European exploration and slavery.

A visit to the Carlsberg Brewery (🖻 01-670022; Gomani Rd), east of the centre, may also appeal. Free tours are conducted at 2.30pm every Wednesday; you must book. The tour ends with a free tasting session.

Tours

Based at the Mount Soche Hotel in Blantvre, Jambo-Africa (🖻 01-823709; www.jambo-africa.com) offers tours to Lengwe National park for US\$385 per person and Mount Mulanje hiking packages from US\$230 for three days.

Sleeping

Doogles (a 01-621128; www.doogleslodge.com; Mulomba PI; camp sites US\$3, dm US\$5.50, chalets without bathroom US\$16, d US\$21; 🔲) Close to the main bus station. The rooms and dorms here are decent enough and there's a good bar, but some of the chalets are looking a little rough and it's not the friendliest of places. There's a limited menu of snacks and burgers at the bar (snacks US\$1 to US\$2.50, dishes US\$4), and an internet café.

Kabula Lodge (🖻 01-621216; Kabula Hill; dm/s/d incl breakfast US\$10/35/45) Northwest of the city centre off Michiru Rd, this is highly recommended. Dorms have only two or three beds and a cool veranda wraps around the back of the building, offering great views of the city. The friendly Malawian lady who runs this place can prepare meals with advance notice, or vou can self-cater.

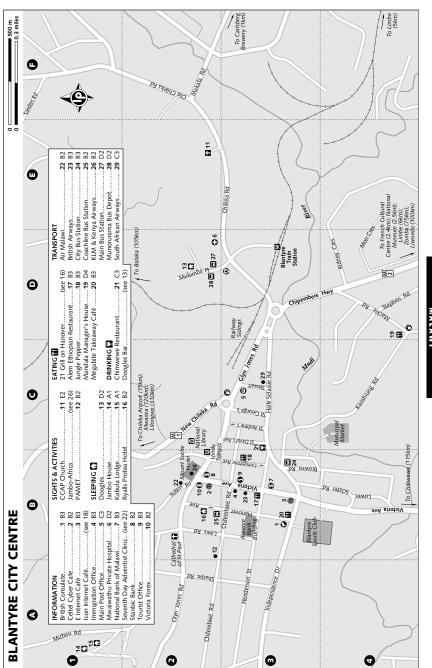
Jambo House (🖻 01-623709; jamboafrica@africa -online.net; Kabula Hill; s/d US\$40/50, without bathroom US\$30/40, all incl breakfast) A homely little place with just four bedrooms, a swimming pool and gardens with excellent views of the surrounding hills. There's also a TV lounge and a self-service 'honesty' bar. There's no restaurant as such but meals can be provided if you ask in advance. It's off Michiru Rd.

Ryalls Protea Hotel (🖻 01-620955; ryalls@ proteamalawi.com; 2 Hannover Ave; s/d US\$210/243; 😰) A very classy old-fashioned place, with a grand entrance hall and sophisticated rooms decorated with old black-and-white photos and African artefacts. It's also home to the superb 21 Grill on Hanover.

Eating

Alem Ethiopian Restaurant (🖻 01-622529; Victoria Ave; dishes US\$1-7.50; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) For some different African flavours, this place serves injera (sour millet pancake) and wat (sauce), but you can also get 'normal' meals like chicken and chips or curry.

21 Grill on Hanover (🖻 01-620955; 2 Hanover Ave; starters US\$3, mains US\$9-17; 🕅 lunch & dinner) At the Ryalls Protea Hotel, this is a highly rated eatery, with a swanky interior complete with soft lighting, mahogany bookcases, comfortable cushioned chairs and the soft tinkle of piano music in the background. It serves seriously good steaks and seafood.



Jungle Pepper (🖻 01-635135; pizzas US\$4-5; 10.30am-9pm Thu-Tue) Teems with office workers over the lunch hour, due to a tasty and diverse selection of fresh pizzas and hotdogs. It's off Livingstone Ave.

Mandala Manager's House (mains US\$5; 🕑 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) This charming little café is set in the grounds of the Mandala Manager's House and has excellent cakes, salads and good coffee. Mains include homemade lasagne and fish cakes.

Megabite Takeaway Café (Independence Dr; dishes US\$1.50-5; 🕑 11am-9pm Mon-Sat) A little courtyard café popular with the lunchtime office crowd. It serves fish and chips and Malawi curries.

Drinking

Doogles bar (🖻 01-621128; Mulomba Pl; 🕑 to late) Like a constant happy hour, where streams of travellers chill out and socialise with devoted expats and well-to-do Malawians.

Chimwewe Restaurant (cnr Henderson St & Haile Selassie Rd) Despite its name, this is more like a bar. Loud music and gaming machines mean it's low on charm but the congenial crowd and cheap drinks compensate.

Getting There & Away AIR

Blantyre's Chileka airport is about 15km north of the city centre. Airline offices in Blantvre include:

Air Malawi (🖻 01-620811; Robins Rd) British Airways (2 01-624333; Victoria Ave) KLM & Kenya Airways (🖻 01-620106; Mount Soche Hotel)

South African Airways (2 01-620627; Haile Selassie Rd)

BUS & MINIBUS

Coachline buses, operated by Shire Bus Lines, run between Blantyre and Lilongwe (US\$20, four hours, two daily), stopping at the Total petrol station near Ryalls Protea Hotel on Hanover Ave.

Blantyre's main bus station is east of the centre on Mulomba Pl. Express buses run between Blantyre and Lilongwe via Zalewa (the junction with the Mwanza road; US\$5, five hours, one daily); this route is also serviced by ordinary buses (US\$3.80, seven hours, four daily). There's an express service to Zomba (US\$2, one hour, one daily), which also continues to Lilongwe (US\$6, seven hours). Ordinary buses travel between Blantyre and Zomba (US\$1, 1½ hours, frequently), Mulanje

(US\$1.25, 1¹/₂ hours, seven daily), Mwanza (US\$1.30, one hour, two daily) and Monkey Bay (US\$3.80, eight hours, one daily) via Liwonde (US\$2, three hours) and Mangochi (US\$3, six hours).

Other buses (ie not Shire Bus Lines) and long-distance minibuses go from the bus station in Limbe; most leave on a fill-up-and-go basis. Routes include: Zomba (US\$1); Mulanje (US\$1.50); and Mangochi (US\$3).

Getting Around

Blantyre is a compact city, so it's unlikely you'll need to use public transport to get around, apart from the minibuses that shuttle along Chipembere Hwy between Blantyre city centre bus station and Limbe bus station. You can find private hire taxis at the Mount Soche Hotel or at the bus stations. A taxi across the city centre is around US\$3; between the centre and the main bus station costs from US\$3 to US\$4; and a taxi from Blantyre to Limbe costs around US\$5.

MOUNT MULANJE

Mt Mulanje rises steeply from the undulating plain of the highlands, surrounded by nearvertical cliffs of bare rock, many over 1000m high. It is often misty here and Mulanje's high peaks sometimes jut above the cloud, giving rise to the local name 'Island in the Sky'. Some people come to the base of the mountain just for a day visit, but the stunning scenery, easy access, clear paths and well-maintained huts make Mulanje a fine hiking area and many travellers spend at least a few days here.

For hikers, it's worth remembering that Mulanje is a big mountain with notoriously unpredictable weather. Even during the dry season, it's not uncommon to get rain, cold winds and thick mists, which make it easy to get lost. Between May and August, periods of low cloud and drizzle can last several days, and temperatures drop below freezing.

Information

Hiking on Mt Mulanje is controlled by the Likhubula Forestry Office (PO Box 50, Mulanje; (>) 7.30am-noon & 1-5pm), at the small village of Likhubula, about 15km from Mulanje Town; it can also arrange guides and porters if required. Another good source of information is the Mulanje Infocentre (@ 01-466466; infomulanje@malawi.net), based at Chitakale Trading Centre, on the corner of the Phalombe

road. An excellent tour company based in the area is Tiyende Pamodzi Adventures (201-467737; www.cholemalawi.com/pamodzi). It gets rave reviews from travellers and offers packages from US\$145 for two days.

Activities

There are about six main hiking routes up and down Mulanje. The three main ascent routes go from Likhubula: the Chambe Plateau Path (also called the Skyline Path), the Chapaluka Path and the Lichenya Path. Other routes, more often used for the descent, are: Thuchila Hut to Lukulezi Mission; Sombani Hut to Fort Lister Gap; and Minunu Hut to Lujeri tea estate. A guide is not mandatory, but hikers need to register with the Likhubula Forestry Office before starting out.

Sleeping

At the foot of Mt Mulanje is Mulanje Town, which has several places to stay. At the village of Likhubula, about 15km from Mulanje Town, are a couple more options.

Council Resthouse (Mulanje Town; r with/without bathroom US\$1/0.50) Close to the bus station; is bargain basement in price and quality.

CCAP Guesthouse (Likhubula; camp sites US\$1, chalets per person US\$6.50) At the CCAP Mission, it has cosy rooms, self-catering chalets and camping.

Limbani Lodge (🖻 01-466390; Mulanje Town; s/d US\$5/7.50, VIP r US\$13) Heading closer to Likhubula on the main road, near the School for the Blind; has the best beds in town. Standard rooms are comfy and the 'VIP' rooms contain TV and fully equipped kitchens.

Likhubula Forest Lodge (🖻 01-467737; likhubula@ cholemalawi.com; Likhubula; camp sites per person US\$5, s/d/tr US\$20/25/30, without bathroom US\$15/20/25) This stylish lodge has a kitchen, comfortable lounge, several bedrooms and is spotless all over. A cook will prepare your food and wash up.

On the mountain there are several Forestry **huts** (camp sites/huts per person US\$0.80/1.30). Each is equipped with benches, tables and open fires with plenty of wood. You provide your own food, cooking gear, candles, sleeping bag and stove, and a caretaker chops wood, lights fires and brings water, for which a small tip should be paid.

Getting There & Away

For information on buses between Blantyre and Mulanje Town, see opposite. The dirt road to Likhubula turns off the main sealed

Blantyre-Mulanje road at Chitikali, 2km west of the centre of Mulanje Town; follow the signpost to Phalombe. If you're coming from Blantyre on the bus, ask to be dropped at Chitikali. From here, irregular matolas run to Likhubula (US\$0.50). Alternatively, you can walk (10km, two to three hours).

ZOMBA

Zomba was the capital of Malawi until the mid-1970s and it's still a large, busy place. The town has good facilities, though, and there are Stanbic, National and First Merchant banks in the town. For supplies, there's a Shoprite and a Metro Cash and Carry.

The mist-shrouded Zomba Plateau, hovering protectively above the town, has fantastic views of the surrounding plains, hills and lakes and is a favourite with hikers. Queen's View and the Emperor's View are particularly impressive. There's no bus up here, so you'll have to hitch or take a taxi (around US\$8). You can walk, but there have been reports of occasional attacks on lone hikers.

Sleeping & Eating

Sieeping & Eating Chitinji Campsite (admission US\$0.80, camp sites per per-son US\$2.50, basic r per person US\$5) Near Malumbe Peak in the west. An excellent place to stay, although likely to be shrouded in mist.

Ndindeya Motel (🖻 08-855700, 08-385540; s/d incl breakfast US\$4/8) A good budget option. The rooms are large and the shared bathrooms are clean. The downside is that it's next door to a bar, which is very noisy even during the day.

Annie's Lodge (((01-527002; Livingstone Rd; r from US\$35) North of the town centre, it's a rambling old place made up of colonial-style buildings with wide verandas. The rooms are great value and incredibly spacious, and there's a very nice rondavel bar.

Ku Chawe Inn (🖻 01-514237; r superior/deluxe US\$80/110) Up on the Zomba Plateau is this inn. It is like a small palace, built right on the edge of the escarpment, with excellent views and spacious rooms with fireplaces to keep you warm on those chilly mountain nights. There's a good restaurant (buffet breakfast US\$6.50, dishes US\$9) and the terraced gardens are particularly pleasant.

Gulnoor Restaurant & Take Away (dishes US\$2-4; (>) breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Specialises in Pakistani curries and also does Malawian food. Dishes include chambo marinated in chillies and yoghurt, baltis, haandis, sheikh kebabs.

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

Getting There & Away

Zomba is on a main route between Lilongwe and Blantyre. Express buses run to/from Zomba and Lilongwe (US\$3.50, six hours, one daily), Blantyre (US\$1.80, one hour, one daily) and Liwonde (US\$1, 45 minutes, three daily). Minibuses go every hour or so to Limbe (US\$1).

LIWONDE

You may visit Liwonde town if you're heading for Liwonde National Park or for Mozambique by train. The Shire River divides the town; on the more pleasant eastern side are the train station, the market, a supermarket and several shops.

Waterline River Safaris (201-542552/832; colin _sue@malawi.net) operates wildlife-viewing boat trips for around US\$15 per person per hour (the price decreases with more passengers). This is also a viable way to access Mvuu camp in Liwonde National Park, with one-way/ return transfers costing from US\$32/42.

The large international-standard **Hippo View Lodge** ((a) 01-542822/255; www.hippoiewlodge .com; s/dfrom US\$35/50) has extensive flower-filled gardens that lead down to the river, a gazebo for sundowners and a kids' playground complete with bouncy castle and trampoline. Turn right down the dirt road just before the National Bank and it's about 1km down the road.

At **Sun Village Lodge** (a 01-542330; s/d bathroom US\$21/40) large rooms with fans, high ceilings and spotlessly clean shower rooms open onto a pleasant garden square. It's opposite the National Bank.

The **Town Council Resthouse** (s/d with bathroom US\$3), just down the road from the Liwonde Park Motel, is next to the Peoples Supermarket. It's very clean and simple

LIWONDE NATIONAL PARK

Liwonde National Park is the closest thing Malawi has to a traditional wildlife park. Dominating the west, the Shire River overflows with hippos and crocodiles and is a favourite stomping ground for the abundant elephants. Waterbucks are also common near the water, while beautiful sable and roan antelopes, zebras and elands populate the surreal flood plains in the east. Night drives can reveal spotted genets, bushbabies, scrub hares, side-striped jackals and even spotted hyenas. Black rhinos are protected within a separate enclosure and there's a rich and colourful array of birdlife.

Sleeping

Places to stay in Liwonde remain open all year; you can reach them by boat even if rain closes some of the park tracks.

Chinguni Hills Lodge (© 08-838159; www.chinguni .com; camp sites US\$5, dm/r per person from US\$10/15) In the south of the park, it has very accommodating rooms, the friendly host is a walking wealth of information on the park's flora and fauna, and delicious home-cooked meals are taken *en famille*. Walking and canoeing safaris are US\$12.50 per person and night drives are US\$15. It also has a camp site, a few minutes' walk away, with dorms, tented rooms and fantastic views over the park.

Mvuu Camp (camp sites per person US\$5, accommodation only/full-board chalets per person US\$35/140) Managed by Wilderness Safaris (**771393**, info@wilderness.malawi.net) in Lilongwe, this camp is deep in the northern part of the park on the banks of the river. Stone chalets have tented roofs, lavish interiors and verandas overlooking the river, and the small but accommodating camp site has spotless ablution blocks and self-catering facilities, including utensils.

Njobvu Cultural Village (full-board hut per person US\$50) This is actually 6km from the western boundary of Liwonde National Park and offers visitors a rare opportunity to stay in a traditional Malawian village. The experience includes dancing and crafts displays and allows you to participate in the daily activities of village life. All proceeds go directly to the community; you can book at Mvuu Camp or through Wilderness Safaris.

Getting There & Away

The main park gate is 6km east of Liwonde town. There's no public transport beyond here. From the gate to Mvuu Camp is 28km along the park track (closed in the wet season), and a 4WD or high-clearance vehicle is recommended for this route.

Another way in for vehicles is via the dirt road (open all year) from Ulongwe, a village between Liwonde town and Mangochi. This leads for 14km through local villages to the western boundary. A few kilometres inside the park is a car park and boat jetty, where a watchman hoists a flag to arrange a boat from Mvuu Camp to come and collect you. For those without wheels, the best option is to get any bus or minibus between Liwonde town and Mangochi and get off at Ulongwe, where local boys wait by the bus stop and will take you by bicycle to the park gate (US\$2) or all the way to the boat jetty (US\$3).

Another option is the boat transfer service along the Shire River offered by Waterline River Safaris (opposite).

MONKEY BAY

Monkey Bay is a port at the southern end of Lake Malawi, which most travellers pass through on the way to Cape Maclear. Monkey Bay also has a market and a Peoples Supermarket but no ATM or money exchange.

Sleeping

Venice Beach Backpackers (camp sites per person US\$1.30, dm US\$2, d without bathroom US\$2.50) This place is about 1.5km from the main road and offers dorms and rooms in a two story thatch building set on a beautiful stretch of beach. There's a bar with a small menu of local food; fish and *nshima* (maize porridge) is about US\$2.

Njovubu Backpackers (© 01-587214; www.monkey bay.bravehost.com/backpackers.htm; camp sites/dm/rUS\$1.50/ 1.50/3) Just off the main street is a small and friendly joint with an internet café, tidy rooms and dorms and splendid home-baked cakes. It's also home to the Back to School Foundation; volunteers get free accommodation in return for helping this scheme, which raises money to send children and young adults to secondary school.

Getting There & Away

From Lilongwe, ordinary buses go to Monkey Bay, either via Mua and the southern lakeshore (US\$3.80, seven hours, two daily) or the long way round, via Balaka, Liwonde and Mangochi (US\$4.50, 10 hours, two daily). But you're probably better off going by minibus to Salima (US\$1.50), from where you can find a minibus or *matola* going direct to Monkey Bay.

It's much easier to reach Monkey Bay from Blantyre on the ordinary bus that travels via Liwonde and Mangochi (US\$3.80, eight hours, one daily). A quicker option is to go by minibus (US\$5, four hours), but you'll need to leave in the morning and you're likely to change at Limbe, Mangochi and sometimes Zomba.

You can also get to/from Monkey Bay on the *Ilala* ferry (see p932).

CAPE MACLEAR

Cape Maclear sits on a scenic jut of land at the southern end of Lake Malawi, with the alluring Domwe and Thumbi Islands anchored offshore. It was once a travellers' byword for sun, sand, rest and recreation, but the crowds seem to have moved on elsewhere and the beach is no longer as clean as it once was. It is still a relaxing place to experience the beauty of the lake, however. There's nowhere to change money in Cape Maclear, so make sure you bring enough with you.

Sights & Activities

Much of the area around Cape Maclear, including several offshore islands, is part of Lake Malawi National Park, one of the few freshwater aquatic parks in Africa. There's a good range of hikes and walks in the hills; you can go alone or arrange a guide, either from the village or at the national park headquarters. Near the entrance gate to the Golden Sands Holiday Resort, a path leads towards the hills overlooking the bay. A few hundred metres up here is a small group of missionary graves, marking the last resting place of the missionaries who attempted to establish the first Livingsto-nia Mission here in 1875 (see p916). There's also a **museum**, which is well worth a visit to learn about the formation of the lake and the evolution of the fish.

Guides registered with the Chembe Village Tourist Association can organise day trips to nearby islands for about US\$10 to US\$40 per boat, plus around US\$15 per person. If you prefer to go snorkelling on your own, many places rent gear (rates start at about US\$2 – but check the quality of your mask). For diving, go to **Scuba Shack** (@ 09-934220; www .scubashackmalawi.com), based within Stevens Resthouse, **Kayak Africa** (@ 09-942661; www.kayakafrica .net) or **Danforth Yachting** (@ 09-960077; www.dan forthyachting.com). If you prefer to stay on top of the water, Kayak Africa has top-of-the-range kayaks (single and double) suitable for experts or beginners.

Danforth Yachting also offers sailing. A full-day island-hopping cruise costs US\$75 per person (minimum four people), including lunch.

Tours

Kayak Africa ((2) 09-942661; www.kayakafrica.net) offers guided one-, two- or three-night island-hopping kayak tours from US\$130 per person

per night. The charge includes tented accommodation, meals, snorkel gear and park fees. It also operates PADI open-water courses for US\$250.

Sleeping

MALAWI

Fat Monkeys (🖻 09-948501; camp sites per person US\$1, r with shared bathroom US\$5) Almost 1km east of the village centre and away from the crowds, this is a huge camping ground aimed primarily at overland trucks and car-campers. It also has small and comfortable rooms, good security, showers, and the ubiquitous bar and restaurant by the water.

Gaia Lodge (🖻 09-300559, 09-374631; gaiahouse@mw .celtelplus.com; camp sites/dm/s/d US\$2/2.50/3/6) The rooms are on the small side, but there's a great, shady waterfront garden, excellent food and a supremely chilled-out atmosphere.

Chembe Eagles Nest (🖻 09-960628, 09-966507; www .chembenest.com; camp sites \$6, per person half board for cottages & safari tents \$60) At the eastern end of Cape Maclear beach, this is about as far from the tourist trap as you can get. It's an idyllic spot on a beautiful and very clean, broad stretch of beach, strewn with palm trees and shaded tables. There are airy thatch and brick rooms with wooden four posters and verandas.

Eating & Drinking

Thomas's Grocery Restaurant & Bar (dishes US\$2) This is a great local eatery if you want to leave the confines of your lodge. Meals are filling, tasty and predictable (although it does serve Indian chapatis and spaghetti) and the outdoor bench seating is the perfect spot to watch the village operate around you.

Setting Sun Bar is a lively, loud, muraladorned bar on the waterfront, accessible from the beach or the main street. It's a good place to chat with the locals, although it can get a little raucous.

Getting There & Away

By public transport, first get to Monkey Bay, from where a matola ride to Cape Maclear

should cost US\$1, although some travellers have been charged much more so be assertive when negotiating. Although not far away, it can take all day to get there; you could wait anything from 30 minutes to five hours for a *matola* departure. If you're driving from Mangochi, the dirt road to Cape Maclear (signposted) turns west off the main road, about 5km before Monkey Bay. Be warned, however; it's a bumpy ride and unless you're in a 4WD or high-clearance vehicle, it'll be slow going.

MALAWI DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

In almost every town there is a council or government rest house. Prices vary from as little as US\$1 up to around US\$5 a double, but conditions are not great. Backpacker hostels are present in the main cities, and are numerous in popular lakeshore destinations. Prices range from US\$3 for a dorm up to about US\$8 per person for a double or triple. Camp sites are usually about US\$1 to US\$3.

Midrange hotels are about US\$25 to US\$75 per double, including taxes, usually with private bathroom and breakfast. The quality of service at a smaller place can be just as good as or even better than at the pricey establishments, though.

Top-end hotels or lodges generally range from US\$100 to US\$250 for a double room, including taxes and breakfast, with facilities such as private bathroom, TV, air-con and telephone.

ACTIVITIES

Lake Malawi is one of the best freshwater diving areas in the world - and one of the cheapest places to learn how to dive. Places where you can hire scuba gear and learn to dive include Nkhata Bay, Cape Maclear, Likoma Island and Senga Bay. Many of the more upmarket places along the lake have facilities for water-skiing or windsurfing. You can also go sailing, and kayaking is available at Cape Maclear and Nkhata Bay.

The main areas for hiking are Nyika and Mulanje. Other areas include Zomba, and various smaller peaks around Blantyre. Mulanje is Malawi's main rock-climbing area, with some spectacular routes (including the longest in Africa).

PRACTICALITIES

- Malawi's main newspapers are the Daily Times, Malawi News and the Nation. The Chronicle is a smaller publication with a strong independent voice (read relentless criticism of the government).
- Malawi's national radio station, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, broadcasts music, news and chat shows in English, Chichewa and some other local languages. International news is brief but wide-ranging. There are also commercial music stations in the large cities.
- Malawi's national TV station was launched in 1999 and broadcasts mostly imported programs, news, regional music videos and religious programs. International satellite channels are available in most midrange and top-end hotels.

The main area for horse riding is the Nyika Plateau, which lends itself perfectly to travel on horseback. If you prefer nonanimated transport, Nyika's hilly landscape and good network of dirt tracks are also great for mountain biking.

BOOKS

Lonely Planet's Trekking in East Africa includes a good section on Malawi and is recommended for trekkers and hikers.

Day Outings from Lilongwe and Day Outings from Blantyre, both published by the Wildlife Society of Malawi, are highly recommended. They are well written and researched, and include suggestions on places to visit, things to see and local walks in the region.

Venture to the Interior, by Laurens van der Post, describes the author's 'exploration' of Mt Mulanje and the Nyika Plateau in the 1940s, although in reality this was hardly trailblazing stuff.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Unfortunately, reports of travellers being robbed in Lilongwe and Blantyre have increased. However, incidents are still rare compared with other countries, and violence is not the norm. There have also been robberies at popular lakeshore areas such as Cape Maclear and Nkhata Bay, but here violence is very rare.

Potential dangers while at Lake Malawi include encountering a hippo or crocodile, but for travellers the chances of being attacked are extremely remote. Popular tourist beaches are generally safe, although, just to be absolutely sure, you should seek local advice before diving in.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Malawi Embassies & Consulates

Malawian embassies and consulates abroad include:

Canada (🖻 613-236 8931; 7 Clemow Ave, Ottawa, Ontario KIS 2A9)

France (🖻 01 40 70 18 46; 20 Rue Euler, 75008 Paris) Germany (🕿 030 843 15 40; Westfälische Strasse 86, 10709 Berlin)

Tanzania (🗃 255 22 113 239; 6th fl Nic Life House, Dar es Salaam)

UK (200-7491 4172; 33 Grosvenor St. London W1X ODF)

USA (202-797 1007: 2408 Massachusetts Ave NW. Although Malawi has no high commission

in Australia, it is represented by the Consular Office, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (🖻 02-6261 3305: John McEwen Cres, Barton, ACT 2600).

Embassies & Consulates in Malawi

The following countries have diplomatic representation in Malawi:

Canada (🕿 01-651450; Accord Centre, Limbe) Germany (Map p913; 🖻 01-772555; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

Mozambique Lilongwe (Map p913; 🖻 01-774100; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe); Limbe (🖻 01-643189; 1st fl Celtel Bldg, Rayner Ave, Limbe) The embassy is in Lilongwe, the consulate in Limbe.

South Africa (Map p913: 201-773722; sahe@malawi .net; Kang'ombe Bldg, City Centre, Lilongwe)

UK Lilongwe (Map p913; 2 01-772400; off Kenyatta Rd, City Centre, Lilongwe); Blantyre (Map p923; Hanover Ave, Blantyre) The high commission is in Lilongwe, the consulate in Blantvre.

USA (Map p913; 🖻 01-773166; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

Zambia (Map p913; 🗃 01-772590; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilonawe)

Zimbabwe (Map p913; 🖻 01-774997; off Independence Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in Malawi: New Year's Day 1 January John Chilembwe Day 15 January - celebrates this national hero, a Baptist minister who led an uprising against the colonial government in 1915 Martyrs' Day 3 March Easter (Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Monday) March/April Labour Day 1 May Freedom Day 14 June Republic Day 6 July Mother's Day second Monday in October National Tree Planting Day second Monday in December Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

LEGAL MATTERS

Although cannabis is widely available in Malawi, it is an offence to sell, purchase or consume it. There are severe penalties for its possession.

MEDIA

MALAWI

The Daily Times and the Nation are the main national daily newspapers. Major international papers and magazines are available in bookshops in the cities. The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (the national radio station) broadcasts news and programmes in English, Chichewa and a few other Malawian languages. The national TV station broadcasts local news.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the kwacha (MK), which is made up of 100 tambala. The best foreign currencies to carry with you are US dollars, British pounds and South African rands. You'll find a few ATMs at banks in Lilongwe, Blantyre, Karonga, Liwonde, Mzuzu, Salima and Zomba. Very few places outside main cities will accept credit cards. Most banks and bureaux de change won't charge you a commission for changing cash, but there's usually a 1% commission for changing travellers cheques.

POST

Post in and out of Malawi is a bit of a lottery. Some letters get from Lilongwe to London in three days, others take three weeks. Post offices in Blantyre and Lilongwe have poste restante services.

TELEPHONE

International calls (to destinations outside Africa) from public phone offices cost around US\$4 per minute. The international code for Malawi if you're dialling from abroad is 265. Malawi does not have area codes, but all land-line numbers begin with $\bigcirc 01$, so whatever number you dial within the country will have eight digits.

Mobile phone prefixes are 208 or 209 and the two major networks are Celtel and Telekom. SIM cards are readily available and cost around \$5. You can buy top-up cards at supermarkets, petrol stations and roadside booths.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There are tourist offices in Blantyre and Lilongwe, and an office at the Ministry of Wildlife and Tourism in Lilongwe. Outside Malawi, tourism promotion is handled by UK-based Malawi Tourism (🖻 0115-982 1903; www .malawitourism.com), which responds to inquiries from all over the world.

VISAS

Visas are not needed by citizens of Commonwealth countries, the USA and most European nations (except Switzerland). Visas are limited to 30 days, although extensions are easy to get.

Visa Extensions

You can get an visa extensions at immigration offices in Blantyre or Lilongwe (see p922 or 914 respectively) or at regional police stations. It's straightforward and free.

Visas for Onward Travel

If you need visas for neighbouring countries while in Malawi, these are the conditions: Mozambigue Visas are available in Lilongwe and Limbe; both offices are open from 8am to noon Monday to Friday. One-month single-entry visas cost US\$15 and take four working days to issue, but you can pay extra to have it issued in one day.

South Africa Visas are free and take two days to issue. The high commission in Lilongwe is open from 8am to noon Monday to Friday.

Tanzania There is no Tanzanian representation in Malawi, but visas are administered at the border, or on arrival at the airport, and cost US\$50.

Zambia The cost of a single-entry visa depends on your nationality: Brits pay US\$60, all others pay US\$30. Applications can be made between 8am and 4.30pm (closed between 12.30pm and 2pm) on Monday and Tuesday, or

Wednesday morning and passport collection is on Friday only, between 8am and noon.

TRANSPORT IN MALAWI

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Malawi's main airport for international flights is at Lilongwe. Airlines flying to and from Malawi include Air Malawi (www.airmalawi.net), which has a pretty good regional network, with three flights a week to Harare, two flights a week to both Lusaka and Johannesburg (Jo'burg). The following regional airlines also serve Malawi, usually flying on the days Air Malawi doesn't (so you get a wider choice of flights), with fares mostly on a par: South African Airways (www .flysaa.com) flies twice per week to/from Jo'burg (with connections to Durban, Cape Town etc); Kenya Airways (www.kenya-airways.com) flies four times per week to/from Nairobi.

Ulendo Air Services (2 01-754717/950; air-services @ulendo.malawi.net) has flights from Lilongwe to Mfuwe in Zambia (UŠ\$220) and to Livingstone in Zambia (US\$320).

Land MOZAMBIQUE

The quickest way to reach Mozambique south of the Zambezi is to get a minibus to the Mozambique border crossing at Zóbuè (zob-way; US\$2.50 from Mwanza) and then a minibus to Tete (US\$1.50). Otherwise, from the Dedza border crossing, 85km southeast of Lingowe, chapas run to Tete via Ulongwé.

There are three border crossings from Malawi into northern Mozambique: regular buses run from Blantyre, via Mulanje, to Muloza (US\$2). From here, you walk 1km to the Mozambique border crossing at Milange, from where it's another few kilometres into Milange vila (town) itself. From Milange there's usually a chapa (pick-up or converted minibus) or truck about every other day in the dry season to Mocuba (US\$4), where you can find transport on to Quelimane or Nampula.

You could also take a minibus from Mangochi to Namwera (US\$2), then take a bicycle taxi for the remaining 10km to the Malawian border at Chiponde (US\$3). It's then 7km to the Mozambique border crossing at Mandimba. There's at least one vehicle daily, usually a truck, between here and Cuamba (US\$4) and daily vehicles to Lichinga.

DEPARTURE TAX

For travellers flying out, the airport departure tax for international flights is US\$20, payable in US dollars in cash. No other currency is accepted.

Another option is to go by minibus from Liwonde to the border at Nayuchi (US\$3). You can walk to the Mozambique border post at Entre Lagos and possibly to hitch to Cuamba. Yet another option is to take a passenger train, which departs Limbe on Wednesdays at 7am, travelling via Balaka and Liwonde to Nayuchi. From here (where there are moneychangers) you can walk to Entre Lagos, but transport from here into Mozambique is limited.

SOUTH AFRICA

If you need to get to South Africa, City to City and Translux (a for both 09-937499) run direct luxury coaches from Blantyre to Jo'burg every day between them, for US\$40 to US\$50. Vaal when Blantyre and Jo'burg on Tuesday and Sunday for US\$80. All companies depart at 9am, arriving in Jo'burg by mid-afternoon the next day. Ingwe (2 01-622313, 01-829879) runs services to Jo'burg on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for US\$86.

TANZANIA

If you want to go the whole way between Lilongwe and Dar es Salaam, two buses a week (Tuesday and Saturday) depart from opposite the market in Lilongwe. There's a ticket office where you can book; fares are US\$33. These buses also pick up and drop off in Mzuzu and Mbeya (Tanzania) and are handy for going between northern Malawi and southern Tanzania.

If you're going in stages, buses and minibuses run between Mzuzu and Karonga (US\$4, 31/2 hours), from where minibuses and matolas travel to the Songwe border crossing (US\$1.30). It's 200m across the bridge to the Tanzanian border crossing.

ZAMBIA

There are three direct buses per week between Lilongwe and Lusaka (US\$25), also departing from Devil St. There is no specific office so ask at the Tanzanian bus ticket office for information. Regular minibuses run between Lilongwe and Mchinji (US\$2). From here, it's 12km to the border. Local shared taxis shuttle between Mchinji and the border post for around US\$1.50 per person, or US\$8 for the whole car.

ZIMBABWE

Although Zimbabwe doesn't border Malawi, many travellers go directly between the two countries. The cheapest option is the daily **Munorurama Bus** (201-6248735), between Blantyre and Harare (US\$15). The bus departs opposite the main bus station at 7.30am and arrives in Harare by late afternoon. The service is good and on Wednesday and Saturday it continues all the way to Jo'burg (US\$38).

Lake MOZA

MOZAMBIQUE

The Lake Malawi steamboat *Ilala* (see right) stops at both Cóbuè and Metangula on the Mozambican mainland. If you're planning a visit you must get your passport stamped at the immigration post in Chipyela (the main village) on Likoma Island. Another way to get to the Mozambican

lakeshore is to take a dhow (local sailing boat) from Likoma Island to Cóbuè (US\$0.80). For more information on the Mozambique side of

TANZANIA

The Songea ferry sails from Mbamba Bay (Tanzania) to Nkhata Bay on Malawi's northern lakeshore every Saturday. The journey takes around four hours and fares for 1st-/ economy-class deck are US\$11/6.50. Cabins are available and children travel for US\$3.

GETTING AROUND Air

Lake Malawi, see p948.

Air Malawi ((2) 01-772123, 01-753181, 01-788415; www.airmalawi.com) Has daily flights between Lilongwe and Blantyre, and four flights a week between Lilongwe and Mzuzu, both for US\$77 one way. You can also fly from Lilongwe or Blantyre to Lake Malawi's Club Makokola for US\$75 (you don't have to be a guest), from where you can reach other points on the lake. Domestic flights can be paid for in kwacha and there's a departure tax of US\$2. Nyika Safari Company (2) 01-330180; www.nyika .com) Mainly services Nyika National Park, but often has promotional offers to other Malawian destinations. Ulendo Air Services (2) 01-754717; air-services@ ulendo.malawi.net) Has charter and seat-only flights to major destinations around the country.

Boat

The **llala ferry** (© 01-587311; ilala@malawi.net) chugs passengers and cargo up and down Lake Malawi, once per week in each direction. Travelling between Monkey Bay in the south and Chilumba in the north, it makes 13 stops at lakeside villages and towns in between. (You can get to the Mozambique mainland via the *Ilala*; see left.)

The whole trip, from one end of the line to the other, takes about three days. The official schedules are as follows (only selected ports are shown):

Northbound port	Arrival	Departure	
Monkey Bay	-	10am (Fri)	
Chipoka	1pm	4pm (Fri)	
Nkhotakota	midnight	2am (Sat)	
Metangula	6am [°]	8am (Sat)	
Likoma Island	1.30pm	6pm (Sat)	
Nkhata Bay	1am	5am (Sun)	
Ruarwe	10.15am	11.15am (Sun)	
Chilumba	5pm (Sun)		
Southbound port	Arrival	Departure	
Chilumba	-	1am (Mon)	
emanua	- 6.45am	1am (Mon) 8am (Mon)	
Ruarwe	- 6.45am 12.45pm	. ,	
Ruarwe Nkhata Bay		8am (Mon)	
Ruarwe Nkhata Bay Likoma Island	12.45pm	8am (Mon) 8pm (Mon)	
Ruarwe Nkhata Bay Likoma Island Metangula	12.45pm 3.15am	8am (Mon) 8pm (Mon) 6.15am (Tue)	
Chilumba Ruarwe Nkhata Bay Likoma Island Metangula Nkhotakota Chipoka	12.45pm 3.15am noon	8am (Mon) 8pm (Mon) 6.15am (Tue) 2.00pm (Tue)	

The *Ilala* offers travellers three classes: Cabin Class was once luxurious and the cabins are still in reasonable condition; the spacious First Class Deck, which includes seats, a shaded area and mattresses for hire (US\$2); and, finally, economy, which covers the entire lower deck

ILALA SAMPLE ROUTES & FARES

All of the following sample fares are from Nkhata Bay.

Destination	Cabin (US\$)	1st class (US\$)	Economy (US\$)
Likoma Island	20	11	5
Metangula	33	20	6
Monkey Bay	50	35	10
Ruarwe	18	10	4

Bus & Minibus

There are three options for bus travel in Malawi. Top of the range is Coachline, operated by **Shire Bus Lines** (a) 01-756226). This luxury nonstop service travels three times a day between Blantyre and Lilongwe. There's also a daily express service operated between Lilongwe and Mzuzu by Sacremento Bus. Other buses, also operated by Shire Bus Lines, fall under the category of express – fast buses between the main towns with limited stops and no standing passengers allowed – and ordinary, which cover long-distance routes but stop everywhere, so are very slow.

In rural areas, the frequency of buses and minibuses drops dramatically – sometimes to nothing. In cases like this, the 'bus' is often a truck or pick-up, with people just piled in the back. In Malawi this is called a *matola*.

You can buy a ticket in advance for Coachline services and are allocated a reserved seat.

Car & Motorcycle

The majority of main routes are mostly goodquality sealed roads, but in recent years several stretches of road have not been repaired and potholes are opening up. Rural routes are not so good, and after heavy rain they are often impassable, sometimes for weeks. Rental companies in Malawi include:

Avis (im Blantyre 01-692368; in Lilongwe 01-756103, 01-756105) Plus offices at Blantyre and Lilongwe airports and at some large hotels.

SS rent-a-car (a in Blantyre 01-622836; in Lilongwe 01-751478)

You need a full driver's licence (international diving licence is not necessary) and companies normally require a minimum age of 23 and one year's driving experience.

Train

Trains run every Wednesday between Blantyre and Balaka (US\$1.50), but passengers rarely use them since road transport on this route is both quicker and cheaper. The service of most use to travellers is the continuation of this line from Liwonde to the Malawi-Mozambique border crossing at Nayuchi (US\$2). For details, see p931.

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Mozambique

Mozambique is one of Africa's up-and-coming hot-spots, with stunning beaches, excellent diving and magical offshore islands. Go snorkelling around the Bazaruto Archipelago, sail on a dhow through mangrove channels or laze under the palms in the Quirimbas Archipelago, take an off-beat safari in the wilds of Gorongosa National Park, wander along cobbled streets past stately colonial-era buildings on Ilha de Moçambique, sip a café espresso at one of Maputo's lively sidewalk cafés (or maybe a *caipirinha* at one of its jazz bars), watch the silversmiths at work on Ibo Island or dance to the country's trademark marrabenta music.

For almost two decades, many of these attractions were inaccessible due to a protracted guerrilla war. Now dark times are in the past, and Mozambique is one of Africa's rising stars, with an upbeat atmosphere, overflowing markets and a 2500km coastline waiting to be discovered.

If you're inclined to something tamer, stick to the south, where roads and transport links (especially with neighbouring South Africa) are good and accommodation options abound. For more adventure, head across the Zambezi into the wild north, one of Africa's last frontiers. Getting around here takes time, but the paradisiacal coastal panoramas and sense of space, the sheer adventure of travel and - for those with a healthy budget - some of the continent's most idyllic island lodges make the journey well worthwhile.

FAST FACTS

Area 800,000 sq km

ATMs In all major towns

- Borders Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe; all borders open
- Budget US\$25 to US\$100 per day
- Capital Maputo
- Language Portuguese
- Money Metical nova família; US\$1 = Mtc25
- Population 19.7 million
- Seasons Dry (May to November), wet (December to April); during the rains some roads are impassable
- Telephone Country code 258; international access code **a** 00
- Time GMT/UTC+ 2
- Visa US\$20 to US\$70 for 30 days; issued at most border posts

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Maputo** (p939) Explore lively sidewalk cafés, pumping salsa bars, flame-treelined streets, and excellent art and cultural scenes.
- Bazaruto Archipelago (p945) Swim and snorkel in a quintessential tropical paradise with turquoise and jade waters full of colourful fish.
- **Tofo** (p944) Relax against a backdrop of white sand dunes and a long, curving beach in a town with a perpetual partytime atmosphere.
- **Ilha de Moçambique** (p947) Catch up with history in the former capital of Portuguese East Africa, now a haunting town of pastel-painted mansions, whitewashed churches and waving palm trees.
- Quirimbas Archipelago (p949) Soak up Ibo's magical ambience amidst ruined colonial villas, or luxuriate in some of the continent's most exclusive island getaways.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Sunshine, blue skies and temperatures averaging between 24°C and 27°C along the coast are the norm, except during the rainy summer season from about December/January through to April when everything gets soggy and sticky, and temperatures exceed 30°C in some areas.

The best time to visit is from May/June to November, during the cooler dry season. During the Christmas/New Years holidays, around Easter and in August, the southern resorts fill up with the vacationing South African neighbours.

ITINERARIES

- One Week For a week in the south, start with a few days enjoying Maputo's (p939) vibe before heading to Inhambane (p944) and Tofo (p944), or on to Vilankulo (p945) and the Bazaruto Archipelago (p945).
- Two Weeks Follow the One Week itinerary. Continue north to Nampula (p947) if time is tight you'll need to fly - and divide your remaining time between Ilha de Moçambique (p947) and Pemba (p949) or one of the other Quirimbas Islands
- One Month Follow the previous itineraries, but now with time for all the options mentioned, plus a detour to Gorongosa

HOW MUCH?

- Plate of grilled prawns US\$12
- Single-day dive US\$40 to US\$50
- Short taxi ride US\$2
- Day dhow safari US\$45
- Maputo-Inhambane bus fare US\$9

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- 1L petrol US\$1
- 1L bottled water US\$0.70
- 2M beer US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$10
- Plate of xima and sauce US\$1

National Park enroute north. Alternatively, from Nampula head west to Cuamba (p948) and on to Lichinga (p948), Lake Niassa (p948) and into Malawi.

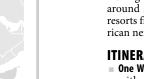
HISTORY

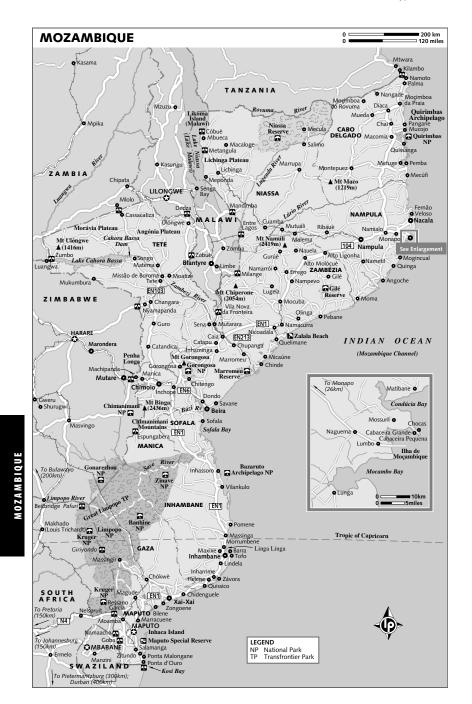
While Europeans were still struggling in the Dark Ages, the light of the ancient world had already fallen on Mozambique. From the 9th century AD, Mozambique's coast was part of a chain of civilised merchant kingdoms, visited by ships from as far afield as India, Arabia and Persia. They came sailing in on the monsoon winds to buy slaves, ivory, gold and spices. Muslim merchants intermarried

with African families, and set up trading posts along the coast. Sailing onto this scene came the first Euro-peans – Portuguese explorers such as Vasco da Gama. These 15th-century buccaneers pur-sued their trade interests with armed raids on coastal towns or cannon bombardments from their warships, and constructed forts to protect themselves from their English and Dutch rivals. In the 17th century, the Mozambican interior was divided into huge agricultural estates, nominally under the Portuguese crown but in fact run as private fiefdoms with their own slave armies.

In the late 19th century, Portugal and several other European powers began a lengthy political arm-wrestle for a chunk of Africa to call their own. British eyes began to fall on Mozambique, and Portugal reacted by strengthening its previously lax colonial







control. The country was so wild, however, that the government had to lease large areas of land to private firms, which soon became notorious for the abuses they inflicted on their workers.

Resistance

The early stirrings of resistance were kindled, and the independence movement erupted into life after the 'Mueda Massacre' in 1960, in which peacefully protesting villagers were gunned down by Portuguese troops.

In 1962 the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) was formed, led by the charismatic Eduardo Mondlane. Mondlane was assassinated in 1969 and succeeded by Frelimo's military commander, Samora Machel. Frelimo decided early on a policy of violent resistance. Finally, after bitter struggle, the independent People's Republic of Mozambique was proclaimed on 25 June 1975, with Frelimo as the ruling party and Samora Machel as president.

The Portuguese pulled out virtually overnight - after sabotaging vehicles and pouring concrete down wells - and left Mozambique in chaos with few skilled professionals and virtually no infrastructure. Mozambique's new government threw itself into a policy of radical social change. Ties were established with European communist powers, cooperative farms replaced private land, and companies were nationalised. Mass literacy programmes and health initiatives were launched. For a while, the future looked rosy, and Mozambique was fêted in left-wing Western circles as a successful communist state. Bob Dylan even wrote a song about it.

Civil War

By 1983, the country was almost bankrupt. The roots of the crisis were both economic and political. Concerned by the government's support for resistance movements such as the ANC, the white-minority-ruled countries of Rhodesia and South Africa deliberately 'destabilised' their neighbour with the creation of a manufactured guerrilla movement known as the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo).

Renamo was made up of mercenaries, coopted soldiers and disaffected Mozambicans, and funded by the South African military and a motley collection of Western interests. Renamo had no desire to govern - its only ideology was to paralyse the country. Roads,

bridges, railways, schools and clinics were destroyed. Villagers were rounded up, anyone with skills was shot, and atrocities were committed on a massive and horrific scale.

But by the late 1980s, change was sweeping through the region. The collapse of the USSR altered the political balance in the West, and new, more liberal policies in South Africa restricted Renamo support. Samora Machel died under questionable circumstances in 1986 and was succeeded by the more moderate Joaquim Chissano. Frelimo switched from a Marxist ideology to a market economy, and Renamo began a slow evolution into a genuine opposition party. A formal peace agreement was signed in October 1992.

In October 1994, Mozambique held its first democratic elections. Frelimo won, but narrowly, with Renamo netting almost half the votes. The 1999 election produced a similar result, this time followed by rioting and discord. Since then, things have settled down.

Mozambigue Today

In December 2004, long-time Frelimo insider Armando Guebuza was elected with a solid majority to succeed Chissano. While the government has certainly not acquitted itself cleanly in all areas over the past decade-plus - recent scandals include massive bank fraud and the murder of investigative journalist Carlos Cardoso - Mozambique is enjoying unprecedented peace and stability. The cornerstones have recently been laid for bridges over the Rovuma and Zambezi Rivers. Once completed, these bridges will open up the country and facilitate further devel-opment. Most observers rank Mozambique among the continent's rising stars.

You don't need to travel long in Mozambique before hearing the word paciência (patience). It's the great Mozambican virtue, and most Mozambicans have it in abundance, for each other and for outsiders. You'll be expected to display some in return, especially in dealings with officialdom, and Western-style impatience is always counterproductive. But don't let the languid, tropical pace sway you completely: underlying it is a rock-hard determination that has carried Mozambique from complete devastation following two decades of war to near the top of the list of Africa's success stories.

Most Mozambicans work at least part-time tending small plots with cassava and other crops, and you'll see these *machambas* (farm plots) wherever you travel. Along the coast, fishing is a major source of livelihood. The small ports are fascinating to watch at dawn and in the late afternoon when the boats arrive with their catches.

While tourism and the economy are booming, life continues to be a struggle for many, with an annual per capita income of about US\$300. HIV/AIDS (with infection rates at 16%) and malaria also take heavy tolls.

But despite the hardships, Mozambicans have a flair that sets them apart from their more strait-laced neighbours, and partying is a central feature. Sunday in particular is a day to gather on the beach or village square, put on smart clothes, open a bottle of wine or a cask of home-brewed beer, and dance to pop music blasting from old car stereos.

PEOPLE

There are 16 main tribes, including the Makua and Makonde in the north, and the Shangaan, who dominate the southern provinces of Gaza and Maputo. Although Mozambique is relatively free of tribal rivalries, there has long been an undercurrent of north-south differences, with geographically remote and independent-minded northerners often feeling neglected by the upwardly mobile denizens of powerhouse Maputo. Religion, once suppressed under the Marx-

ist regime, now flourishes, and most villages

have a church, a mosque, or both. About 35%

of Mozambicans are Christians, about 25% to

30% are Muslims - mostly in the north and

along old trading routes - and the remainder

follow traditional animist beliefs.

MAPUTO EXPRESS

One of Mozambique's most famous women is Maria de Lurdes Mutola, the rags-toriches sprinter known as the 'Maputo Express'. She began playing football with an all-boys team in the shanty towns around Maputo, before being discovered by national poet (and football fan) José Craveirinha, and went on to snare the country's first Olympic gold in 2000. The celebrations lasted for days, and a Maputo street was even re-named in her honour.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Mozambicans are superb dancers, and experiencing the rhythms and moves – whether in a Maputo nightclub or at a traditional dance performance in the provinces – is a chance not to be missed. In the north, especially on Ilha de Moçambique, watch for the slow-paced, Arabic-influenced *tufo*, and for the masked *mapiko* dancing of the Makonde.

Modern music flourishes in the cities, and the live-music scene in Maputo is excellent. *Marrabenta* is Mozambique's national music, and features a light, upbeat guitar-driven style and distinctive beat. New generation groups to watch out for include Kapa Dêch and Mabulu, which fuses *marrabenta* rhythms with hip-hop.

Among the most famous musical traditions are the Chopi *timbila* (marimba) orchestras, best seen around Quissico, north of Xai-Xai.

The late José Craveirinha (1922–2003) is Mozambique's greatest poet, and his work, including *Poem of the Future Citizen*, is recognised worldwide. Among the best-known contemporary authors are Mia Couto, whose works include *Voices Made Night* and *Every Man is a Race*, and Lilia Momple, known for *Neighbours – The Story of a Murder*, and *The Eyes of the Green Cobra*.

The most famous painter in the country is Malangatana, whose art is exhibited around the world, and the most famous sculptor is the late Alberto Chissano. Makonde carving traditions flourish in the north.

ENVIRONMENT

A wide coastal plain rises to mountains and plateaus on the borders with Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. Three of Africa's major rivers (the Zambezi, the Limpopo and the Rovuma) flow through Mozambique, and have played a major role in its economic history.

Mozambique has six national parks: Gorongosa, Zinave, Banhine and Limpopo (part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier park – see www.greatlimpopopark.com) in the interior; Bazaruto National Park offshore; and Quirimbas National park, encompassing northern offshore and coastal areas.

Bazaruto is the most visited, famed for its corals and dugongs. Several of the Quirimbas islands can also be easily (albeit rather expensively) visited. Gorongosa is an easy journey if you have your own vehicle, and Limpopo park can be accessed with a 4WD from South Africa's Kruger. The main wildlife reserves are Niassa Reserve on the Tanzanian border, and Maputo Special Reserve.

FOOD & DRINK

Near the coast, you won't have to go far before you're tucking into a plate of giant *camarões* (prawns) or *lagosta* (crayfish), washed down with a cold *Dois M* (2M, Mozambique's favourite lager). Elsewhere the options include *xima* (maize porridge), *frango grelhado* (grilled chicken) or *matapa* (peanut and cassava-leaf stew). Freshly-baked rolls are available everywhere.

Larger towns have restaurants, and many have sidewalk cafés where you can enjoy a light meal while watching the passing scene. For inexpensive meals, try the stalls (*barracas*) at markets, which offer plates of *xima* and sauce for about US\$1.

Maputo, Beira, Chimoio and Nampula have Shoprite branches for self-catering.

MAPUTO

pop 1.4 million

With its Mediterranean-style architecture, flame-tree-lined avenues, sidewalk cafés and waterside setting, Maputo is easily one of Africa's most attractive capitals. Jellaba-garbed men gather in doorways to chat, while colourfully clad women hawk seafood and spices at the massive Municipal Market and banana vendors loll on their carts in the shade There are museums, shops and markets galore – don't miss spending time here before heading north.

ORIENTATION

Many businesses, the train station, banks, post and some budget accommodation are in the low-lying *baixa*, on or near Ave 25 de Setembro, while embassies and most better hotels are about a 20-minute walk uphill from here in the city's more staid upper section, especially in and around the Sommerschield diplomatic and residential quarter. A good landmark is '*trinta e trés andares*' (33 Storey Building), in the *baixa* on the corner of Aves 25 de Setembro and Rua da Imprensa. At the northernmost end of the Marginal, about 7km from the centre, are Bairro Triunfo and Costa do Sol, with a small beach and several places to stay and eat.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Publicações Europa-América Livraria (Ave José Mateus) Sells English-language books and magazines.

Cultural Centres

Centro Cultural Franco-Moçambicano (🗃 21-

320787; www.ccfmoz.com; Praça da Independência; 🕥 2-6pm Mon, 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) An excellent place with art exhibitions, music and dance performances, films (some in English), theatre and more.

Internet Access

Teledata (Ave 24 de Julho; per hr US\$1.20; 论 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat)

Medical Services

Clínica 222 (☎ 82-000 2220, 21-312222, 21-313000; cnr Ave 24 de Julho & Rua Augusto Cardoso; 🏵 24hr) Similar to Clínica de Sommerschield.

Clínica de Sommerschield (82-305 6240, 21-493924, 21-493926; 52 Rua Pereira do Lago; 24hr) A lab, and a doctor on call. Advance payment required (meticais, rand, dollars or Visa card).

Money

There are 24-hour ATMs all over town. BIM Expresso (cnr Aves Mao Tse Tung & Tomás Nduda) ATM.

Cotacambios Airport (№ 6am-9.30pm Mon-Thu, 6am-10pm Fri, 7am-10pm Sat, 11.30am-10.30pm Sun); City Centre (Polana Shopping Centre, Ground fl, cnr Aves 24 de Julho & Julius Nyerere; № 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) For changing cash outside of business hours. Standard Bank Headquarters (Praça 25 de Junho); Maputo Bay (Hotel Polana) Changes travellers cheques and also has an ATM.

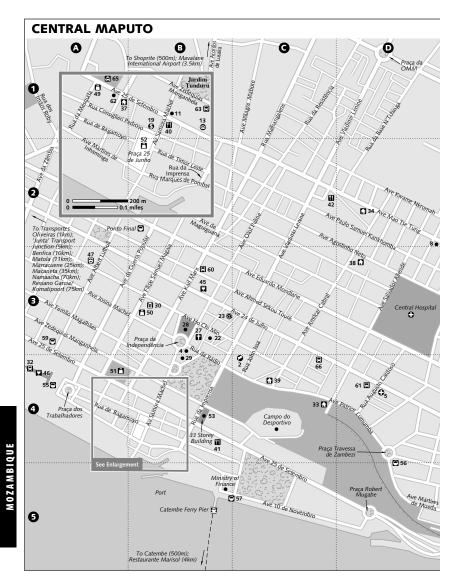
Post & Telephone

Main post office (Ave 25 de Setembro; 论 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun)

Telecomunicações de Moçambique (TDM; Ground fl, 33 Andares, Rua da Imprensa; ∑ 8am-10pm) You can make international calls. It also has a branch inside Hotel Pestana Rovuma (Rua da Sé), next to the cathedral.

Tourist Offices

Fundo Nacional de Turismo (Futur; www.futur.org .mz; 1203 Ave 25 de Setembro) Has colourful brochures covering all of Mozambique.



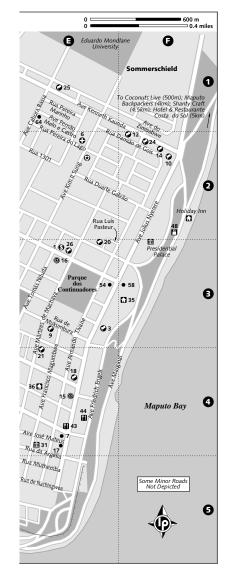
DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Walking around central Maputo during daytime hours is generally safe, and most tourists visit the city without mishap. However violent crime does occur. Be vigilant when out and about, avoid isolating situations and avoid the areas between Ave Patrice Lumumba and Ave 25 de Setembro, between Ave Friedrich Engels

and Ave Marginal, and Ave Marginal between Praça Robert Mugabe and the Holiday Inn. Always carry your passport (see p950).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The artists at Núcleo de Arte (21-492523; www .africaserver.nl/nucleo; 194 Rua da Argélia; 🕥 closed Sun) turn arms into art, as AK-47s, landmines and



other weapons are exchanged for agricultural tools, and then welded into moving sculptures. They're on display (and for sale - along with other artwork) in the gallery and the small garden.

The National Art Museum (http://musart.tvcabo .co.mz; 1233 Ave Ho Chi Min; admission free; (>) 2-6pm Tue-Sun), just west of Ave Karl Marx, showcases a wonderful collection of paintings and sculptures by Mozambique's finest contemporary artists.

The impressive domed train station on Praça dos Trabalhadores was designed by a pupil of Gustave Eiffel (of Tower fame) and has been well restored with a coat of pistachio-green paint, potted plants, and several old locomotives. Nearby at the Municipal Market (Mercado Municipal; Ave 25 de Setembro) stalls overflow with fruits, vegetables and spices. On Praça da Indepêndencia, check out the imposing City Hall, the spired Cathedral of Nossa Senhora de Conceição and the Iron House.

The beach at **Catembe** fishing village across the bay comes alive on weekends as the town's fly girls and guys crank up their stereos and flirt, drink or play football on the sand, with the Maputo skyline as a backdrop. A great place for a plate of prawns and people-watching.

SLEEPING Budaet

Maputo's backpackers have English-speaking staff and heaps of city info, and can help with airport pick-ups and bus-depot transfers.

Base Backpackers (21-302723; thebasebp@tvcabo .co.mz; 545 Ave Patrice Lumumba; dm US\$8, d US\$20) Often full, the Base has a central location, a kitchen, and a backyard bar, terrace and braai area overlooking the port in the distance.

Maputo Backpackers (🖻 21-451213; Quarta Avenida, Bairro Triunfo, dm US\$8-10, d/tw US\$32/35, tr with/without bathroom US\$55/49) A cosy place near Costa do Sol with spotless rooms with fans, and use of the

With spotless rooms with rans, and use of the kitchen if the house isn't too crowded. *Chapas* to/from town stop nearby. **Fatima's Backpackers** (© 21-302994; www.mozam biquebackpackers.com; 1317 Ave Mao Ise Tung; camp sites per person US\$5, dm US\$6-12, d with/without bathroom US\$32/24) A long-running place in the upper part of town, Fatima's has an outdoor kitchen-bar, plus rooms and dorm beds in a house next door.

Midrange & Top End

lbis (21-352200; www.accorhotels.com; 1743 Ave 25 de Setembro; r US\$49; 🕄) Centrally located and good value, Ibis has small, spiffy rooms, satellite TV and business facilities.

Residencial Palmeiras (21-300199; carlos .pereira@tvcabo.co.mz; 948 Ave Patrice Lumumba; s/d with bathroom US\$40/55, s without bathroom US\$35; 🕄) A converted residence with quiet, good-value rooms near the British high commission.

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garden and a restaurant. **Hotel Polana** (21-491001; www.polana-hotel .com; 1380 Ave Julius Nyerere; s/d from US\$150/168, ste from US\$450; **@ @**) In a prime location on the cliff top with sea views, this is a wonderful spot to relax. Rooms are in the elegant main building or in the newer 'Polana Mar' nearer the water; there's a beautiful pool, gardens and daily breakfast and weekend-dinner buffets.

EATING

The gigantic prawns that made Maputo famous in the 1970s are still jumping out of the sea and into the pan in the city's many fantastic seafood restaurants.

Restaurante Costa do Sol (☐ 21-450038; Ave Marginal, Costa do Sol; meals from US\$5; ∑ lunch & dinner) A Maputo classic, this Art Deco seafood restaurant on the beach draws the crowds on weekend afternoons.

Restaurante Marisol (2) 21-380050; www.catembe .net; meals from US\$5) In Catembe, with Mozambican cuisine, make-your-own pizzas and live music on Sundays. It's 4km from the ferry – call first and they'll collect you.

Villa Itália (@21-497298; 635 Ave Friedrich Engels; meals from US\$6; № lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) An oasis of calm in the city centre, with a plunge pool, a peaceful garden, pastas, pizzas and seafood.

Feira Popular (Ave 25 de Setembro; admission US\$0.60; ⓒ lunch & dinner) is another Maputo institution, with dozens of small bars and restaurants around sprawling fairgrounds, including O Escorpião (ⓒ 21-302180; meals from US\$6) with hearty Portuguese fare, and Coqueiro (meals from US\$3) with Zambézian cuisine.

There are dozens of sidewalk cafés (all open from about 8am to 9pm daily) where you can get scrumptious pastries and light meals, and watch the passing scene. Try **Náutilus Pastelaria** (mr Aves Julius Nyerere & 24 de Julho; 🕄) or the faded colonial-era **Café Continental** (cmr Aves 25 de Setembro & Ave Samora Machel).

For self-catering try **Shoprite** (Ave Acordos de Lusaka) or **Mercado Janeta** (cnr Aves Mao Tse Tung &

Vladimir Lenine), which has cheap plates of maize meal, cassava and peanut sauce.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT Pubs & Clubs

Thursday through Saturday are the main nights, with things getting going after 11pm.

Mfumo's (Praça dos Trabalhadores; Wed-Sat) This classic jazz café (formerly known as Chez Rangel) at the train station is one of Maputo's best night spots, especially on Saturdays when there's live music (admission US\$12). An ideal spot to sip a *caipirinha* while taking in afro-jazz beats.

África Bar (ⓐ 21-314821; 2182 Ave 24 de Julho; admission US\$2; ⓑ Wed-Sun) Hyper-trendy hangout popular with expats and local media types. Beautiful decor, and live jazz on Thursdays (admission free).

Coconuts Live (21-322217; Complexo Mini-Golfe, Ave Marginal; admission weekend disco US\$8, lounge free) This place has a sleek weekend disco on Friday and Saturday nights and a popular chill-out lounge open Wednesday to Sunday.

Traditional Music & Dance

Check with the Centro Cultural Franco-Moçambicano (p939) for upcoming music and dance performances.

Rehearsals of Mozambique's renowned **Companhia Nacional de Canto e Dança** (21-400913; www.cncd.org.mz; 1719 Ave Albert Luthuli) are often open to the public.

SHOPPING

Maputo has fantastic woodcarvings, textiles and other crafts. In addition to the **Saturday morning craft market** (Praça 25 de Junho) and the vendors at Hotel Polana, try the following (all closed Sunday):

Artedif (Ave Marginal; 🕑 9am-2.30pm Tue, 9am-

3.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat) A disabled persons' cooperative, with carvings, basketry and leatherwork.

Casa Elefante (Ave 25 de Setembro) Shelves and shelves of *capulanas* (sarongs).

MozArte (Ave Filipe Samuel Magaia) Artists' workshops around a courtyard, and a craft shop.

Shanty Craft (Segunda Avenida, Bairro Triunfo) Highquality crafts from around the country.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Airline offices include the following: Air Corridor ((2) 21-311582, 21-311585; 33 Storey Bldg, cnr Ave 25 de Setembro & Rua da Imprensa) Kenya Airways (21-320337, 21-320338; aquarium@tvcabo.co.mz; 171 Ave Karl Marx) At Aquarium Travel.

LAM Central reservations (a 21-4680000, 21-326001, 21-465801; www.lam.co.mz; cnr Aves 25 de Setembro & Karl Marx); sales office (21-490590; cnr Aves Julius Nyerere & Mao Tse Tunq)

South African Airways (21-495483, 21-495484, 21-498097; www.flysaa.com; Ave Fernão Melo e Castro, Sommerschield) Together with SAAirlink.

Swazi Express (ar in South Africa 031-408 1115; www .swaziexpress.com; Maputo airport)

TAP Air Portugal (🖻 21-303927/8, 21-431006/7; www.tap-airportugal.pt; Hotel Pestana Rovuma)

Bus

For fares and journey times, see the town headings. Buses to Beira stop overnight in Vilankulo or at the Savé River. Major stops include the following:

Fábrica de Cerveja Laurentina (cnr Aves 25 de Setembro & Albert Luthuli) Daily morning *chapas* to Swaziland, South Africa, Namaacha, Boane and Goba.

Junta (Ave de Moçambique) The city's chaotic longdistance-bus depot is located about 7km from the centre; there's no organisation – you'll have to ask where to find buses to your destination. Almost all departures are at about 5am. Coming into Maputo, some buses continue to Ponto Final (corner of Aves Eduardo Mondlane and Guerra Popular), from where it's about US\$2 in a taxi to the central area.

Panthera Azul (21-302077/83; www.pantherazul .com; 273 Ave Zedequias Manganhela) Weekly bus to Beira, departing at Sam Tuesday (US\$44, 18 hours). Transportes Oliveiras (21-405108, 21-400475; Ave 24 de Julho) About 4km from the centre, with Inhambane buses at 6am and 11am. It's just beyond Praça 16 de Junho (US\$6 in a taxi). Some buses from the north continue into town, to the intersection of Aves 24 de Julho and Amilcar Cabral.

Departure and ticketing points for express buses to Johannesburg include the following (see p952 for prices):

Greyhound (a 21-355700; www.greyhound.co.za; 1242 Ave Karl Marx) At Cotur Travel & Tours.

InterCape Mainliner ((21-431006; www.intercape .co.za; 899 Ave 24 de Julho) At Tropical Air Travel.

HOT TIP

Travelling north from Maputo, sit on the left-hand side of the bus to avoid being baked by the rising sun.

Panthera Azul ((2) 21-302077/83; www.pantherazul .com; 273 Ave Zedequias Manganhela) Behind the post office.

Translux ((a) 21-303825; 21-303829; www.translux .co.za; 1249 Ave 24 de Julho) At Simara Travel & Tours.

Boat

The **ferry** (per person US\$0.20, per vehicle US\$6) and boats to Catembe run from dawn to about 11pm from the dock near the Ministry of Finances. The trip takes about 20 minutes.

GETTING AROUND

Maputo's Mavalane International Airport is 6km northwest of the city centre (US\$8 to US\$10 in a taxi).

Chapas go everywhere (US\$0.20). Some have name boards, otherwise listen to the destination called out by the conductor. For Junta, catch a *chapa* going to 'Jardim' from the Natural History Museum ('Museu'). Coming from Junta into town, get a *chapa* heading to 'Museu'. For Costa do Sol, take bus 17 or a *chapa* from the corner of Aves Mao Tse Tung and Julius Nyerere.

Car-rental agencies include **Avis** (21-465497, 21-465498; www.avis.co.za; cnr Aves Julius Nyerere & Mao Tse Tung) and **Europcar** (21-497338; europcar@virconn .com; 1418 Ave Julius Nyerere).

There are taxi ranks at Hotel Polana and at the Municipal Market otherwise you can call the **taxi company** (2) 1-493255). Town trips start at US\$2 (US\$12 from Costa do Sol to Junta).

SOUTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

Fantastic beaches, heaped plates of prawns, good tourism infrastructure, and easy road and air access make the southern coast Mozambique's most popular destination, and an easy introduction to the country. Be prepared to share your space with hordes of vacationing South Africans at holiday time.

INHAMBANE

MOZAMBIQUE

Sleepy, charming Inhambane is one of Mozambique's oldest settlements, and well worth a stroll before heading to the beach at nearby Tofo. **Pensão Pachiça** (293-20565; farolturismo@teledata.mz; Rua 3 de Fevereiro; dm US\$11, d US\$40) is a waterfront backpackers that has been completely refurbished and is the best place to stay, with dorms, doubles, a restaurant-bar and a rooftop terrace. Go left from the ferry jetty for about 300m. **Restaurant Tic-Tic** (Ave da Revolução; meals US\$2-3), opposite the market, has cheap meals.

The ageing ferry to/from Maxixe runs from sunrise to sundown (US\$0.50, 25 minutes), alternating with small motorboats and slow dhows (US\$0.15).

Oliveiras buses to Maputo depart from behind the market (US\$9, seven hours, 6am and 11am). Faster buses depart at 5am (US\$8). For northbound transport, go to Maxixe.

TOFO

Tofo has long been legendary on the southern Africa holiday-makers' circuits, with its azure waters, sweeping white sands, rolling breakers and perpetual party-time atmosphere. There are no ATMs or banks – sort out your finances in Inhambane.

For diving (with lots of manta rays), contact Diversity Scuba (www.diversityscuba.com) or Tofo Scuba (www.tofoscuba.com). For surfing, head to Turtle Cove (www.feralsurf.com) in nearby Tofinho.

Sleeping & Eating

Bamboozi (293-29040; camp sites US\$9, dm US\$14, 2-/4-person bungalows from US\$23/46;) Budget travellers should head to Bamboozi, set among the sand dunes about 3km north of town.

Pensão Tofo (ⓐ 82-827 4590; dm US\$8, d US\$23; €) In the town centre and without the beach vibes, but nevertheless a good budget bet. The dorm and double have nets, shared bathrooms and kitchen use.

Fatima's Nest ($\textcircled{\sc s}$ 82-414 5730; www.mozambique backpackers.com; camp sites per person US\$5, tent rental US\$18, dm US\$7-9, d/tr bungalow US\$24/36) The more makeshift Fatima's is just north of town on the beach.

Nordin's Lodge (293-29009; 2-/4-person chalets U\$\$50/100) At the northern end of town on the beach and quiet, with large, thatched, faded chalets and basic self-catering facilities.

Casa Barry (293-29007; www.casabarry.com; camp sites US\$8, d reed/brick casita US\$70/86, 4-/6-person chalets US\$172/206) Well-located on the beach at the southern end of town, with closely spaced and rustic but well-equipped reed-and-thatch self-catering chalets, plus a restaurant.

Dino's Beach Bar (meals from US\$2; 🛞 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) Tofo's main hangout, with good vibes, good music and good food. It's on the beach just past Fatima's Nest. **Albatroz** (293-29005; meals from US\$5; Sunch & dinner) Head here for something fancier. It's at the top of the hill in the town centre, with seafood grills and a Sunday breakfast buffet.

If you are self catering, be sure to stock up in Inhambane.

Getting There & Away

Chapas to Tofo leave from behind Inhambane's market throughout the day (US\$0.60, 45 minutes). The first reliable departure from Tofo is about 6am.

MAXIXE

Maxixe is the place to get off the bus and onto the boat if you're heading to Inhambane, across the bay. **Stop** (23-30025; EN1; meals US52-3, rUS526;) breakfast, lunch & dinner;), at the jetty, is a good place for breakfast. It also rents clean rooms nearby. Buses to Maputo (US\$8, 6½ hours) depart from the Tribunal from 6am. *Chapas* to Vilankulo (US\$6, 3½ hours) leave from Praça 25 de Setembro.

VILANKULO

Vilankulo is Mozambique's foremost holiday destination, and the gateway for visiting the nearby Bazaruto Archipelago. During holidays it's overrun with 4WDs, but otherwise it is a very quiet town.

Sail Away ([™] 293-82385; www.sailaway.co.za), near Vilanculos Camping, offers day and overnight dhow safaris to the Bazaruto Archipelago. To arrange something locally, ask for pointers at the helpful **Tourist Services** ([™] 293-82228; margie@teledata.mz; [™] 2-5pm Mon-Sat), just off the beach road. For diving, contact Vilanculos Dive Charters ([™] 82-856 2700; bigblu@teledata.mz; Aguia Negra Lodge), which also arranges island transfers.

Sleeping & Eating

The best places to stay are along or near the beach road and its northern extension.

Zombie Cucumber (www.zombiecucumber.com; dm US\$10, d chalet US\$28;) Everything a backpackers should be, with comfy hammocks, a garden, home-cooked meals and local info from the English owners.

Vilanculos Camping (293-82043; www.vilanculos camping.co.za; camp sites per person US\$11, chalets per person US\$16-23) A large, shaded camping area with good facilities, plus no-frills rooms and bungalows with bedding.

Complexo Turístico Josef e Tina (293-82140; camp sites per site US\$10, d/q rondavel US\$24/32, d from US\$30)

Basic reed chalets in a pleasant garden, and a few rooms.

Smugglers (ⓐ 293-82253; www.smugglers.co.za; s/d US\$44/66, without bathroom US\$38/55; ⓐ ⓑ) A reliable midrange bet with rooms around lush gardens, and a restaurant serving up hearty pub fare from US\$3.

Casa Rex (293-82048; www.casa-rex.com; s/d from US\$95/150; **(a)** A small, upmarket getaway in peaceful, manicured gardens.

Other eating options include **Restaurante Monica** (meals US\$2.50-6) at Na Sombra guesthouse near BIM Expresso and **Bar Ti'Zé** (meals from US\$1) near the bus stand, both of which have good local cuisine. **Complexo Âncora Seafood Restaurant/NY Pizza** (@ 293-82444; pizzas & meals US\$4-10; @ 7am-10pm Wed-Mon) serves pizzas, apple pie and has a waterside eating area.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Maputo, Beira and Chimoio depart around 4am from the main road near Padaria Bento. Coming from Maputo, get to Junta by 4.30am to catch the first bus to Vilankulo.

BAZARUTO ARCHIPELAGO

The Bazaruto Archipelago – much of which is a **national park** (admission per adult/child US\$8/2) – is a stunningly beautiful divers' and snorkellers' paradise, with turquoise and jade waters, pristine coral reefs and white sand dunes.

The soon-to-open **Ponta Dundo Camp** (Bazaruto Island; camp sites per person US\$15) is the only option for budget travellers. It will supply the tent; you bring food and drink. If cost is not an object, try **Bazaruto Lodge** (2 21-305000; reservas@pestana .co.mz; Bazaruto Island; s/d with full board from US\$225/365; 2), an unpretentious four-star getaway, or the intimate **Benguerra Lodge** (2 in South Africa 011-452 0641; www.benguerra.co.za; Benguera Island; s/d with full board from US\$234/790; 2).

CENTRAL MOZAMBIQUE

Central Mozambique doesn't draw the tourist crowds, but it's a convenient transit zone for travel to/from Malawi and Zimbabwe. Among its attractions are wild Gorongosa National Park and beautiful, rolling hill landscapes.

BEIRA

pop 400,000

Mozambique's second-largest city is as famed for its steamed crabs and prawns as for its tawdry nightlife. A decent **beach** (at Makuti, 5km out of town) and a few wellpreserved colonial buildings are the major attractions, but it's primarily of interest as a transport hub.

Sleeping & Eating

Biques (23-313051; Makuti Beach; camp sites per person US\$3.50) A faded seaside camping ground, but the sunset views from the restaurant adequately compensate.

Pensão Moderna (☎ 23-329901; Rua Alferes da Silva; d/tr from US\$24/31; 🕄) Near the cathedral, with adequate budget rooms and a café next door.

Café Riviera (Praça do Município; snacks from US\$1.50; \mathfrak{D} breakfast, lunch & dinner) Plump, pink sofas inside, and outdoor tables overlooking the *praça* – ideal for watching the passing scene.

Clube Náutico (Ave das FPLM; meals US\$6-11; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Seafood grills by the beach.

For self-catering, there's **Shoprite** (cnr Aves Armando Tivane & Samora Machel).

Getting There & Away

MOZAMBIQUE

Buses leave from Praça do Maquinino, northwest of Praça do Município (Beira's main square) to Chimoio (US\$5, three hours), Vilankulo (US\$12, nine hours) and Maputo (US\$24 to US\$30, 18 hours). Buses to Quelimane (US\$16.50, nine hours) depart from Mar Azul in Pioneiros bairro, 1km north of the centre.

Otherwise, take a *chapa* to Inchope, 130km west of Beira at the EN6-EN1 junction, and try your luck with passing buses there. Travel north is much improved these days thanks to the excellent sealed road from Inchope to Caia, where there's a ferry over the Zambezi River.

GORONGOSA NATIONAL PARK

This **park** (www.gorongosa.net; adult/child/vehicle Mtc200/50/200, payable in meticais only; \mathfrak{D} 1 Apr-1 Dec), once one of southern Africa's premier wildlife areas, is getting a second wind thanks to assistance from the US-based Carr Foundation.

Arrange vehicle rental and wildlife guides, plus hikes on nearby Mt Gorongosa, at **park headquarters** (23-535012; travel@gorongosa.net), where there's also a **camp site** (per person US\$4), a restaurant and **rondavels** (s/d US\$26/38).

Head 43km north from Inchope to Nota village, then 17km east to the park gate, or take a *chapa* to Vila Gorongosa (25km further north) and arrange a pick-up from there in advance with park staff.

CHIMOIO pop 250,000

Low-key Chimoio sits on the edge of scenic country near the Chimanimani Mountains. Access to the foothills is time-consuming, and you'll need a guide for hiking.

Pink Papaya (**©** 82-555 7310, 82-237 2980; helenm large@hotmail.com; cnr Ruas Pigivide & 3 de Fevereiro; camp sites per person US\$4, dm US\$8, d US\$24) is the best budget accommodation option. With the bus stand to your right and train station to your left, walk straight, take the fourth right into Rua 3 de Fevereiro; continue one block to Rua Pigivide.

Hotel-Residencial Castelo Branco (☎ 251-23934; Rua Sussundenga; r US\$50-62; 🕄) is just off Praça dos Heróis, and caters mostly to business travellers. Elo 4 (Ave 25 de Setembro; meals US\$3-8) has pizzas and Italian dishes, and there's also a Shoprite (EN6).

Buses depart at 4am from the train station to Tete (US\$9, six hours) and Vilankulo (US\$14, 10 hours). *Chapas* to Beira (US\$5, three hours) and the Machipanda border (US\$1.20, 1¹/₂ hours) run throughout the day.

TETE

Tete's reputation as one of the hottest places in Mozambique discourages visitors, but it's a useful transport hub. Pass the time sipping a cold drink at a riverside bar.

Hotel Zambeze (222-23100, 252-23103; Ave Eduardo Mondlane; s/d US\$16/22; 23) is cheap and central, with a good pizzeria, but otherwise highly unappealing. It is near the Standard Bank. **Prédios Univendas** (222-23198, 252-23199, 252-22670; Ave Julius Nyerer; s/d from US\$22/31; 23) is much better, with clean, spacious rooms. On the river 20 minutes' walk from town along the Changara road, **Motel Tete** (252-22345; EN103; r US\$42; **()** has pleasant rooms and a riverside **restaurant** (meals from US\$3).

Chapas for Zóbuè (US\$2, two hours) and Nyamapanda (US\$3.50, two hours) depart from along Ave 25 de Junho. Transport to Chimoio (US\$9, six hours) departs from Prédio Emose near Univendas.

QUELIMANE pop 170,000

Friendly compact Quelimane is ideal for a few days of peace on the journey north. **Zalala beach** is an hour's drive away through the coconut plantations.

Hotel 1 de Julho (cnr Ave Samora Machel & Rua Felipe Samuel Magaia; tw US\$16-28) is near the old cathedral, with reasonable no-frills rooms, and a *pastelaria* downstairs. Hotel Rosy (@ 24-214969, 24-213825; cnr Aves 1 de Julho & Paulo Samuel Kankhomba; s/d US\$24/28; ♥), near the old mosque, is better. Hotel Flamingo (@ 24-215602; sogetra@teledata .mz; cnr Rua Kwame Nkrumah & Ave 1 de Julho; s/d US\$50/60; ♥ ♥) has newish midrange rooms with full breakfasts, and a restaurant.

Go to **Esplanada A Coquinha** (24-214019; cnr Aves Josina Machel & Julius Nyerere; meals from US\$4; lunch & dinner) for delicious Zambézian cuisine. Overlooking the river, **Bar Refeba** (Ave Marginal; meals from \$2.50) offers grilled prawns, grilled chicken and drinks.

Transport departs from the northern end of Ave Eduardo Mondlane. The Mecula bus to Nampula departs at 4.30am (US\$14, 10 hours), buses to Beira depart at 5am (US\$16.50, nine hours), and vehicles go daily to Milange (Malawi border). *Chapas* to Zalala (US\$1) leave from the *capuzinio*, 1km from town on the Zalala road.

NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

Northern Mozambique is one of the continent's last wild frontiers – rugged and challenging for travel, except for a few oases of island luxury. Yet the rewards are spectacular, including magical, time-warped Ilha de Moçambique, stunning beaches and the unspoilt Swahili culture of the Quirimbas Archipelago.

NAMPULA

pop 303,000

Bustling Nampula is the jumping off point for visiting Ilha de Moçambique (below). The **National Ethnography Museum** (Ave Eduardo Mondlane; admission free; 🕑 2-4.30pm Tue-Thu & Sat, 2-6pm Fri, 10amnoon & 2-4pm Sun) has English explanations and a mask collection.

For budget rooms, try the bleak **Hotel Lúrio** (26-218631; Ave da Independência; s/d US\$20/32, ste s/d US\$48/60), several blocks south of the train station or the somewhat better **Hotel Brasília** (26-217531; 26 Rua dos Continuadores; tw/d US\$26/30; () near Shoprite, and a 20-minute hike from the bus/train depots.

Residencial Expresso (ⓐ 26-218808/9; fax 26-218806; Ave da Independência; s/d from US\$53/67; ℝ) has six large, spotless rooms with both fridge and TV. **Hotel Girassol** (ⓐ 26-216000; www.girassolhoteis .co.mz; Ave Eduardo Mondlane; s/d US\$90/105, ste US\$130-150; ℝ) is a four-star place located in the Centro Commercial de Nampula high-rise, and boasts Nampula's best rooms. There are cafés and restaurants scattered along Ave Eduardo Mondlane between Hotel Girassol and the museum.

Mecula buses depart for Pemba (US\$7, seven hours) and Quelimane (US\$14, 11 hours) at 5am from the Mecula garage on Rua da Moma, off Ave 25 de Setembro.

To Ilha de Moçambique (US\$3.60, three to four hours), get a *tanzaniano chapa* from the Padaria Nampula transport stand east of the train station between 7am and 10am. Be sure it's going direct, otherwise you'll need to change at Monapo.

Trains to Cuamba (US\$20/10/4 for 1st/2nd/ economy class, 10 to 11 hours) leave Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 5am.

ILHA DE MOÇAMBIQUE

Tiny reed houses and pastel-coloured colonial mansions rub shoulders among the palm trees on tiny Ilha de Moçambique (Mozambique Island), the former capital of Portuguese East Africa. It's haunting, magical, and a must-see.

The 'Ilha' is attached to the mainland by a 3.5km causeway. *Chapas* and buses arrive at the southern tip of the island, from where it's a short walk north through the *makuti* (reed) town to the old colonial stone town. The **tourist office** (C 26-610081; O 9am-noon & 2-5pm) has island information and guides; it is next to the museum.

Sights

Get up early and wander through makuti town as it's waking up, with cocks crowing in the narrow streets. After a breakfast of spicy *bhajias* (fried Indian-style vegetable pancakes) from the food market, walk into the stone town as the museums open.

The bright red Palace and Chapel of São Paulo (adult/child US\$4/1; 🕑 9am-4pm) has been impeccably restored, with opulent furniture, tapestries and sinister portraits of colonial grandees. Adjoining are a Maritime Museum, the Church of the Misericórdia and the Museum of Sacred Art (closed at the time of research), all included in the entry price.

The massive Portuguese Fort of São Sebastião (admission free, guide US\$2; 🕑 8am-5pm) is best visited in the late afternoon, when it's bathed in glorious golden light.

Dominating Ilha's southern tip is the whitewashed Church of Santo António, overlooking turquoise seas and fishermen repairing their nets on the sand.

Sleeping & Eating

Casa de Luís (Travessa dos Fornos, Makuti Town; camp sites per person US\$4, s/d US\$8/14) Quite basic, but an Ilha institution, with a friendly owner and a tiny courtyard. It is near the green mosque.

Casa de Yasmin (🕿 26-610073; Rua dos Combatentes; r US\$20) Near the fort, with small rooms in an annex next to the owner-family's house.

Mooxeleliya (26-610076; iannika@teledata.mz; d US\$22, f US\$48) Good value, with large, highceilinged rooms and breakfast. Near the Church of the Misericórdia.

Casa Branca (🖻 26-610076; flora204@hotmail.com; Rua dos Combatentes; r US\$24) Excellent value, with spotless rooms (one with bathroom), sea views and breakfast. Patio dos Quintalinhos (Casa de Gabriele: 🕿 26-

610090; www.patiodosquintalinhos.com; Rua do Celeiro; s/d without bathroom US\$20/25, d/q with bathroom US\$30/35, ste US\$35) Opposite the green mosque, with Italian-Mozambican fusion design, a rooftop terrace and help with info and excursions.

0 Escondidinho (a 26-610078; ilhatur@itservices. co.mz; Ave dos Heróis; s/d US\$36/52; 🔊) About three stars, with atmospheric, spacious, highceilinged rooms, some with bathrooms, and a great restaurant.

O Paladar (market; meals from US\$3; 🕥 lunch & dinner) has local meals. O Escondidinho, Relíquias (🕿 26-610092; Ave da República; meals US\$4-10; 🕑 lunch & dinner) near the museum and Café Âncora (🖻 26-

610006; brunch US\$9; 🕑 8am-11pm), diagonally opposite the Church of the Misericórdia, have delicious seafood, curries and some veg dishes. Café Âncora also has Sunday brunch.

Getting There & Away

Transport departs from the bridge. Direct tanzaniano chapas to Nampula (US\$3.60, three hours) leave daily between 3am and 5am; ask your hotel to arrange a hotel pick-up with the driver. For travel to Pemba, take the 4am tanzaniano to Namialo, and - with a bit of luck - connect there with the Mecula bus from Nampula.

CUAMBA

A lively rail and road junction, Cuamba is a convenient stop en route to/from Malawi. Namacha (s/d US\$12/18) and Hotel Vision 2000 (271-62632; h-vision2000@teledata.mz; cnr Aves Eduardo Mondlane & 25 de Junho; r US\$50-70; 🛄) are the places to stay.

Road transport leaves from Maçaniqueira market south of the railroad tracks. Trains to Nampula (US\$20/10/4 for 1st/2nd/economy class, 10 to 11 hours) depart at 5am on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. See p952 for Malawi border info.

LICHINGA

This low-key town with jacarandas and pine groves is a hub for travel to/from Lake Niassa and Malawi.

Ponto Final (🖻 271-20912; Rua Filipe Samuel Magaia; r from US\$22) has small, low-ceilinged rooms with bathroom, plus a bar. Hotel Girassol Lichinga (271-21280; www.girassolhoteis.co.mz; Rua Filipe Samuel Magaia; s/d US\$85/92; 🔀 💷 😰) Lichinga's most upmarket option, catering primarily to business travellers.

All transport departs early from next to the market, including to Cuamba (US\$12, 61/2 hours) and Metangula (US\$5, 21/2 hours).

LAKE NIASSA

The tranquil Mozambican side of Lake Niassa (Lake Malawi) sees a small but steady stream of adventure travellers.

In Cóbuè there's Mira Lago (r US\$10), or Mchenga Wede (per person US\$5, meals US\$7-10), 20km south, with camping or budget bungalows, bush walks and canoe trips.

Nkwichi Lodge (www.mandawilderness.org; s/d full board US\$240/380) is a wonderful lakeside ecolodge 15km south of Cóbuè, with hand-crafted chalets, bush walks, boating and snorkelling. Advance bookings are essential.

The Ilala ferry connects Cóbuè with Metangula and Likoma Island; see p953. From Cóbuè, walk to Mchenga Wede, or arrange a boat transfer with Nkwichi Lodge.

PEMBA

The main draw of the sunny seaside town of Pemba is long Wimbi (also spelled Wimbe) beach, 5km down the coast. Kaskazini (🖻 272-20371; www.kaskazini.com; Pemba Beach Hotel, Ave Marginal, Wimbi Beach) has information on the town and the islands, and can organise dhow safaris on your behalf. CI Divers (272-20102; www.cidivers .com; Complexo Náutilus, Ave Marginal, Wimbi Beach) does diving.

Sleeping & Eating

Pensão Baía (cnr Rua 1 de Maio & Rua Base Beira; d with fan US\$16) Spartan budget rooms in the town centre.

Russell's Place (Cashew Camp; 28 82-686 2730; www .pembamagic.com; Wimbi Beach; camp sites per person US\$6, dm US\$4, d/tr chalet US\$35) A chilled-out backpackers 3.5km beyond Complexo Náutilus (US\$5 in a taxi from town), with travel info, a bar and pizzas.

Complexo Turístico Caraçol (🖻 272-20147; sulemane@teledata.mz; Ave Marginal; s/d US\$40/50, 1-/2room apt US\$75/85; 🕄) Just across from the beach. with no-frills rooms and apartments.

Residencial Regio Emilia (272-21297; c.forna@ teledata.mz; Ave Marginal; r from US\$50; 🕄) On the beach road extension, with nice self-catering chalets in green, quiet grounds.

Pemba Beach Hotel (272-21770; www.pemba beachresort.com; Ave Marginal; s/d from US\$160/220; 🔀 🖻 🗋) Five-star luxury overlooking the water.

Restaurante-Bar Samar (🕿 272-20415: Ave 25 de Setembro: meals US\$3-8; Setembro: https://www.setembro.com/set has good-value Portuguese cuisine, and Aquila Romana (🖻 272-21972; Ave Marginal, Wimbi Beach; meals US\$4-10; 🕑 dinner Tue-Fri, breakfast, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun) has pizzas and Italian dishes.

Getting There & Away

Mecula buses go to Nampula, Nacala, Moçimboa da Praia and Mueda (all about US\$7, seven hours), departing at 5am from the Mcel office (corner of Aves 25 de Setembro and Eduardo Mondlane). To Wimbi beach from town, hitch or take a taxi (US\$2) from near Mcel.

QUIRIMBAS ARCHIPELAGO

Ancient wooden sailing dhows take fisherman around the Quirimbas Archipelago, one of Mozambique's most remote and beautiful destinations. Ibo, with creepers growing through its crumbling colonial mansions, seems to have been untouched for centuries, while Vamizi has some of the region's most stunning beaches. Many of the islands are part of Quirimbas National Park (adult/child US\$8/2), which also includes parts of the fringing coastline.

All accommodation is moving upscale. Ibo Island Lodge (🖻 in South Africa 021-702 0643; www.ibo island.com; s/d with half board US\$360/560) is a beautifully restored boutique hotel overlooking the water near the dhow port. Vamizi Island Lodge (www.vamizi.com; r per person incl full board & activities from US\$485) is part of the Maluane project (www .maluane.com), and one of the continent's most idyllic island getaways.

Kaskazini in Pemba arranges charter flights, speedboats and dhows. Otherwise, take a chapa from Pemba's Paquitequete fish market, departing daily at 4am, to Quissanga and on to Tandanhangue village, where you can get a dhow to Ibo (one to six hours). There's parking at Casa de Isufo, 2km before Tandanhangue port.

MOCIMBOA DA PRAIA

This one-horse port town is the last major stop between Pemba and the Tanzanian border. Pensão Leeta (🖻 272-81147; Ave Samora Machel; camp sites US\$5, r US\$10), near the transport stand, has basic rooms. Hotel Chez Natalie (282-527 9094; natalie@teledata.mz; 4-person chalet US\$68) is 2km from town on the estuary, and is the best, with family-style chalets and a grill. Pickups to the border leave from opposite Pensão Leeta from 3.30am. The Mecula bus to Pemba departs at 4.30am sharp.

MOZAMBIQUE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

There are many great camp sites along the southern coast. Cheap hotels aren't as cheap here as in neighbouring countries - most pensões start at around US\$8 and are comparatively overpriced. Backpacker places, found especially in the south, are much better value; dorm beds average US\$10. Midrange options

PRACTICALITIES

- Weights, measures and road distances use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220-240V AC, 50Hz (use South African-style two- or threeround-pin plugs).
- For English-language news: www.pop tel.org.uk/mozambigue-news.
- Radio Mozambique (www.rm.co.mz) and TVM (TV) have occasional English programming.

are more limited than in South Africa, though the selection is fast increasing. For top-end travel, there are some idyllic island lodges. When quoting prices, many establishments distinguish between a duplo (twin beds) and a casal (double bed).

Around Christmas, Easter and during August, the southern coast fills up and most places raises their prices - advance bookings are highly advisable.

Except as noted, all midrange and topend listings in this chapter include private bathroom, while budget listings usually have communal facilities.

ACTIVITIES

The best places for arranging dhow safaris are Vilankulo and the Bazaruto Archipelago (contact Sail Away, p945) and Pemba (contact Kaskazini, p949).

There are diving and snorkelling operators all along the coast, with the most popular centres at Tofo, Vilankulo (for the Bazaruto Archipelago) and Pemba. Visibility is best from March/April to July. Single-day dives cost between US\$30 and US\$50, and PADI openwater courses average US\$300 to US\$450 (best booked in advance).

BOOKS

Kalashnikovs and Zombie Cucumbers: Travels in Mozambique by Nick Middleton and With Both Hands Waving - A Journey Through Mozambique by Justin Fox are highly entertaining travelogues full of historical snippets.

BUSINESS HOURS

See p1102 in the Africa Directory chapter for standard business hours. Banks are open from 8am to 3pm Monday to Friday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Mozambique is generally safe, but there are some areas and situations where caution is warranted.

Thefts and robberies are the main risks: watch your pockets in markets, avoid carrying a bag or otherwise giving a potential thief reason to think you have anything of value, and avoid isolating situations.

More likely are simple hassles, such as underpaid authorities in search of bribes. You're required to carry your passport or (better) a notarised copy at all times. If stopped by the police, remain polite, but don't surrender your documents - insist on going to the nearest police station (esquadrão) instead.

Land mines - a legacy of the war days - are still a risk. Always stick to well-used paths, and don't free-camp or wander off roadsides or into the bush anywhere, without first checking with locals.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Mozambican Embassies & Consulates

Mozambican diplomatic representations abroad include the following:

France (🖻 01 47 64 91 32; 82 Rue Laugier, Paris 75017) Germany (20030-3987 6500; emoza@aol.com; Stromstrasse 47, 10551 Berlin)

Malawi Lilongwe (🖻 01-774100; off Convention Dr); Limbe (🕿 01-643189; 1st fl, Celtel Bldg, Ravner Ave, Limbe, near Blantvre)

South Africa Pretoria (🖻 012-401 0300, 012-321 2288; 529 Edmund St, Arcadia); Johannesburg (🖻 011-484 6427; 11 Boundary Rd, cnr with Carse O'Gowrie Rd, Houghton); Cape Town (20 021-426 2944; 45 Castle St, Castle Bldg, 7th fl); Durban (🖻 031-304 0200; 320 West St, Room 520): Nelspruit (🕿 013-752 7396: 32 Bell St) Swaziland (2 404 3700; Mountain Inn Rd, Mbabane) Tanzania (🖻 022-211 6502; 25 Garden Ave, Dar es Salaam)

UK (200-7383 3800; www.mozambiguehc.org.uk; 21 Fitzroy Sq, London W1T 6EL)

USA (202-293 7146; www.embamoc-usa.org; 1990 M St, NW, Suite 570, Washington, DC 20036)

WARNING!

All travellers, but especially women, and especially at Tofo and Vilankulo, should avoid isolating situations, particularly isolated stretches of beach. Enjoy the coastline, but always stay within sight of your hotel or the crowds.

Zambia (🖻 01-239135; 9592 Kacha Rd, off Paseri Rd, Northmead, Lusaka)

Zimbabwe (2000 04-253871; 152 Herbert Chitepo Ave, Harare)

Embassies & Consulates in Mozambigue

The following are in Maputo; most are open from 8.30am to 3pm Monday to Friday. Australia (21-322780; www.embassy.gov.au/mz .html; cnr Aves Zedeguias Manganhela & Vladimir Lenine, 33 Storey Bldg, 1st fl)

Canada (🕿 21-492623; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/mozam bigue/menu-en.asp; 1128 Ave Julius Nyerere) France (21-490444, 21-492896; www.ambafrance

-mz.org; 2361 Ave Julius Nyerere) Germany (21-492714; www.maputo.diplo.de; 506

Rua Damião de Gois)

Malawi (21-492676; 75 Ave Kenneth Kaunda) Netherlands (21-490031; www.nlembassy.org.mz; 285 Rua de Mukumbura)

South Africa (🖻 21-490059, 21-491614; consular@ tropical.co.mz; 41 Ave Eduardo Mondlane) Swaziland (21-492117, 21-492451;

swazimoz@teledata.mz; Rua Luís Pasteur)

Tanzania (21-490110: 852 Ave Mártires de Machava) UK (21-320111, 21-310111; bhc.maputo@teledata

.mz; 310 Ave Vladimir Lenine)

USA (21-492797; www.usembassy-maputo.gov.mz; 193 Ave Kenneth Kaunda)

Zambia (🕿 21-492452: 1286 Ave Kenneth Kaunda) Zimbabwe (21-490404, 21-486499; 1657 Ave Mártires de Machava)

HOLIDAYS

- Public holidays include the following: 1 January New Year's Day 3 February Heroes' Day 7 April Women's Day 1 May Labour Day 25 June Independence Day 7 September Victory Day 25 September Revolution Day
- 25 December Christmas/Family Day

INTERNET ACCESS

All larger towns have internet cafés, often at the local TDM (telecom) office. Rates average US\$2 per hour.

MONEY

Mozambique's currency is the metical (plural meticais). As of mid-2006, the 'metical nova família' (new family metical) was introduced, at a rate of 1000 old meticais to one new metical.

All major towns have ATMs, often operated by Banco Internacional de Moçambique (BIM), and all accepting Visa, but not MasterCard.

You can change US dollars cash at most banks (though not at most BIM branches) without paying commission, and South African rands are widely accepted in southern Mozambique. Travellers cheques can be changed only at Standard Bank (minimum US\$35 commission per transaction, original purchase receipt required).

TELEPHONE

Provincial area codes must always be dialled. The cheapest international dialling is with TDM's pre-paid Bla-Bla Fixo card, sold at telecom branches everywhere. Mcel (the main mobile provider) has bright-yellow shops countrywide where you can buy SIM-card starter packs (US\$2) and get linked into the network.

VISAS

Visas are required by everyone except citizens of South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Botswana, and can be bought at most borders (but not the Tanzania border) for US\$25, though they're best arranged in advance. If you are travelling to Mozambique by bus from Johannesburg, it's essential to get your visa in advance; lines are long and most buses won't wait.

Visas can be extended at immigration offices in all provincial capitals.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for neighbouring countries are available at most borders except Tanzania. Tanzania visas cost US\$50 plus two photos and issued within 24 hours from the Tanzania high com-mission in Maputo (see left), which is open from 8 am to 11 am forming under the from 8am to 11am for visa applications.

TRANSPORT IN MOZAMBIQUE

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Linhas Aéreas de Moçambique (LAM; code TM; 🗃 21-4680000, 21-490590; www.lam.co.mz) links Jo'burg (South Africa) with Maputo, Vilankulo and Beira; Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) with Pemba and Maputo; and Lisbon (Portugal) with

Maputo. Other connections include the following (see p943 for further contact details): Kenya Airways Nairobi (Kenya) to Maputo. Pelican Air Services () in South Africa 011-973 3649; www.pelicanair.co.za) Jo'burg to Vilankulo via Nelspruit, with connections to the Bazaruto Archipelago. SAAirlink (www.saairlink.co.za) Jo'burg to Beira, and Durban (South Africa) to Maputo. South African Airways () 21-495483, 21-495484; www.flysaa.com) Jo'burg to Maputo. Swazi Express Durban (South Africa) and Matsapha (Swaziland) to Maputo and Vilankulo. TAP Air Portugal Lisbon to Maputo.

Land

All overland travellers must pay an immigration tax of US\$2 or the local currency equivalent. Most borders are open from 6am to 6pm.

MALAWI

There are at least eight border crossings, with only the main ones covered here.

To/From Blantyre

For the Zóbuè crossing between Blantyre and Harare (Zimbabwe), vehicles depart Blantyre for the border via Mwanza (US\$4), connecting in Mozambique with *chapas* to Tete.

The Milange crossing is convenient for Quelimane and Ilha de Moçambique, with regular buses from Blantyre via Mulanje to the border. Once across, daily vehicles service Mocuba, then Quelimane and Nampula. Mandimba is convenient for Cuamba and

northern Mozambique. There's frequent trans-

port on the Malawi side to Mangochi, where you

can get minibuses to Namwera and Chiponde.

Once in Mozambique, vehicles go daily from

Mandimba to Cuamba and Lichinga.

To/From Lilongwe

From the Dedza border post, 85km southeast of Lilongwe, *chapas* run along the sealed route to Tete via Ulongwé. Otherwise, go in stages via Moatize. Arrange your Mozambique visa in advance.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE TAXES

International arrival tax is US\$2. Intercontinental and regional departure tax is US\$20, payable in meticais, US dollars or South African rand, cash. Domestic departure tax is US\$8, payable in dollars, meticais or rand.

ol- SOUTH AFRICA

To/From Johannesburg

Large 'luxury' buses go daily between Jo'burg and Maputo (US\$30 to US\$38, eight to nine hours) via busy **Komatipoort/Ressano Garcia** (\bigcirc 6am-10pm). It is essential to organise your Mozambique visa in advance if you're travelling by bus. Companies include the following: **Greyhound** (\bigcirc in South Africa 011-276 8500; www .revhound.co.za)

lonelyplanet.com

InterCape Mainliner () in South Africa 021-380 4400; www.intercape.co.za) Panthera Azul () in South Africa 011-618 8811/3; www.pantherazul.co.za) Translux () in South Africa 011-774 3333; www.trans lux.co.za)

You can travel by train, though it's much slower. South Africa's **Komati line** (a) in South Africa 011-7744555; www.spoornet.co.za) serves Jo'burg and the Komatipoort border post daily (13 hours), from where you can continue to Maputo by rail, but it's much faster to take a *chapa*.

To/From Kruger National Park

Neither of the borders between Mozambique and South Africa's Kruger park – **Giriyondo** (🖗 8am-4pm Oct-Mar, 8am-3pm Apr-Sep), west of Massingir, and **Pafuri** (🖗 8am-4pm), in northeastern Kruger – are accessible via public transport, and both require a 4WD on the Mozambique side. You'll need to pay entry fees for Kruger and for Limpopo park (US\$8/2 per adult/child). Mozambique visas aren't issued at Pafuri.

Other Routes

There are bus connections three times weekly with **Panthera Azul** (**(a)** in Durban 031-309 7798) between Durban and Maputo via Namaacha and Big Bend in Swaziland.

The Kosi Bay border post (ℜ 8am-4pm) is 11km south of Mozambique's Ponta d'Ouro. There's no public transport on the Mozambique side, and you'll need a 4WD. Coming from South Africa you can leave your vehicle at the border and arrange a pick up in advance from Ponta d'Ouro hotels. To/from Mapute there are direct *chapas* twice weekly between Ponta d'Ouro and Maputo's Catembe ferry jetty.

SWAZILAND

There are daily minibuses to Maputo (US\$5, 3½ hours from Manzini) via Lomahasha/Namaacha (\mathfrak{D} 7am-8pm).

Bill's Bus runs between Manzini, Maputo and Tofo; contact **Grifters** (www.grifterslodge.com) in Swaziland or Diversity Scuba, Tofo (p944). **Sobantu Guest Farm** (www.swaziplace.com/sobantu) and Maputo Backpackers (p941) run similar services (US\$23/55 to Maputo/Tofo).

The quiet border at **Goba/Mhlumeni** (🖄 7am-6pm) is good for drivers.

TANZANIA

Pickups depart Mtwara (Tanzania) daily at 6.30am to the Kilambo border post, and on to the Rovuma River, crossed – adventurously or dangerously, depending on your perspective and water levels – via dugout canoe. Once across, two pick-ups daily go to the Mozambique border post (4km further) and on to Mocimboa da Praia (US\$10, four hours).

A **vehicle ferry** (US\$50 per vehicle) at Kilambo operates at high tide several times weekly.

ZAMBIA

The main crossing is at Cassacatiza, northwest of Tete. *Chapas* go daily from Tete to Matema, from where there's sporadic transport to the border, and then daily vehicles to Katete (Zambia), and on to Lusaka or Chipata.

ZIMBABWE

The main crossings are at Nyamapanda (which lies on the well-travelled route linking Harare with Blantyre via Tete), and at Machipanda on the Harare–Beira route. *Chapas* go from Tete to Changara (US\$3, 1½ hours) and on to Nyamapanda, where there are vehicles to Harare. Through buses between Blantyre (Malawi) and Harare are another option.

From Chimoio *chapas* go to Manica and the border. Take a taxi to Mutare for Zimbabwe transport or the night train to Harare.

Boat

MALAWI

The *Ilala* ferry stops at Cóbuè and Metangula weekly on its way up Lake Malawi via Likoma Island (Malawi). Contact **Malawi Lake Services** (ilala@malawi.net). Mozambique visas are issued at Cóbuè. Slow sailing boats also go between Likoma Island, Cóbuè and Metangula.

GETTING AROUND

Linhas Aéreas de Moçambique (LAM; 🖻 21-468000; www.lam.co.mz; reservaslam@lam.co.mz) links Maputo with Inhambane, Vilankulo, Beira, Chimoio,

TANZANIA BORDER CROSSING

For overland travel from Tanzania, arrange your Mozambique visa in advance, and start early from Mtwara (Tanzania) to avoid sleeping at the Rovuma. Contact Russell's Place in Pemba (p949) or the Old Boma (www.mikindani.com) in Mikindani (Tanzania) for vehicle ferry updates.

Quelimane, Tete, Nampula, Lichinga and Pemba. For discounts, ask for advance purchase '*Jacto Popular*' fares.

Air Corridor (21-311582; 26-213333; aircorridor@ teledata.mz) does a daily run along the coast, stopping at Maputo, Beira, Quelimane, Nampula and Pemba. Serviço Aéreo Regional (SAR; 26-212401; sargaw@teledata.mz) flies twice weekly between Nampula and Cuamba. TTA (21-465484) flies daily between Vilankulo and the Bazaruto Archipelago with Pelican Air Services.

Car & Motorcycle

You will need a South African or international drivers license (as well as your home country license) to drive in Mozambique, plus the vehicle-registration papers, a temporary import permit (available at most borders), and third-party insurance. Driving on the beach and driving without a seat belt are both illegal. While main roads in the south are fine with a 2WD, you will need a 4WD for most other areas. Unleaded fuel is generally available in major towns.

Hitching

Despite the potential dangers, hitching is often the only transport option in rural areas. Modest payment is expected.

Local Transport

Machibombos (buses) are the best option for getting around on main routes. Elsewhere, overcrowded, wildly-careening *chapas* (minibuses) connect smaller towns daily. Always take a bus if there's a choice.

The main companies are the ageing Transportes Oliveiras in the south, and the much better Grupo Mecula in the north. 'Express' services are slightly more expensive, but faster and more comfortable.

All transport leaves early (between 3am and 6am), and often on time.

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Namibia

Wedged between the Kalahari and the South Atlantic, Namibia enjoys vast potential as one of the youngest countries in Africa. In addition to having a striking diversity of cultures and national origins, Namibia is a photographer's dream - it boasts wild seascapes, rugged mountains, lonely deserts, stunning wildlife, colonial cities and nearly unlimited elbow room.

A predominantly arid country, Namibia can be divided into four main topographical regions: the Namib Desert and coastal plains in the west, the eastward-sloping Central Plateau, the Kalahari along the borders with South Africa and Botswana and the densely wooded bushveld of the Kavango and Caprivi regions. Despite its harsh climate, Namibia has some of the world's grandest national parks, ranging from the wildlife-rich Etosha National Park to the dune fields and desert plains of the Namib-Naukluft Park.

Namibia is one of those dreamlike places that make you question whether something so visually orgasmic could actually exist. Time and space are less defined here. Landscapes collide. Experiences pile up. Watch a lion stalking its prey on a never-ending plain in Etosha. Fly down a giant dune on a sandboard. Spend a night alone in the desert under a sky so thick with stars you can't differentiate between constellations.

FAST FACTS

- Area 825,000 sg km
- ATMs Found in most large towns around the country
- Borders Angola, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe - all accessible overland except Zimbabwe, which has no direct border crossing with Namibia
- Budget US\$20 to US\$25 per day
- Capital Windhoek
- Language English, Afrikaans, German, Owambo, Kavango, Herero, Khoikhoi (Nama/Damara), San dialects
- Money Namibian dollar (N\$); US\$1 = N\$7.5
- Population 1.83 million
- Seasons Long rainy season (January to April); dry (May to September); short rainy season (October to December)
- Telephone Country code 264; international access code 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC +2

NAMIBIA

Visa None required for citizens of Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Canada or the USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Sossusvlei** (p968) Watch the sun rise from the tops of flaming-red dunes on the edge of ephemeral salt pans.
- Etosha National Park (p972) Go on a selfdrive safari in one of the continent's premier wildlife venues.
- Swakopmund (p964) Get your adrenaline fix in the extreme-sports capital of Namibia.
- Fish River Canyon (p978) Test your endurance on the five-day hike through one of the world's largest canyons.
- **Skeleton Coast** (p970) Get off the beaten path (and the tarred road) on this desolate strip of fog-covered coastline.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Namibia's climatic variations correspond roughly to its geographical subdivisions. In the arid central Namib Desert, summer daytime temperatures may climb to over 40°C, but can fall to below freezing during the night. Rainfall is heaviest in the northeast, which enjoys a subtropical climate, and reaches over 600mm annually along the Okavango River. The northern and interior regions experience 'little rains' between October and December, while the main stormy period occurs from January to April.

ITINERARIES

- **Three days** Namibia's tourist highlight is the expansive sand sea of the Namib, and if you have only a few days, this is where you'll want to focus. From Sesriem (p968), spend a day hiking through the dunes, or from the beach town of Swakopmund (p964) arrange for a scenic flvover.
- One Week Combine your visit to the Namib with a safari through Etosha National Park (p972) for one of the continent's most unique safari experiences. Splurge on a rental car and get ready for some hair-raising, self-driven good times.
- **One Month** With a month, you can hire a 4WD or use a reputable safari company and see the best of the country: do a tour of the Namib (p985), splurge on some extreme sports in Swakopmund (p964), safari through Etosha National Park (p972), hike Fish River Canyon (p978) and go on an expedition through the northwest (p970) and the Skeleton Coast (p970).

HOW MUCH?

- Internet connection US\$3 per hour
- Campsite (for four) next to a watering hole US\$20
- GPS unit US\$100
- Traditional German meal US\$8
- 4WD rental US\$75 to US\$100 per day

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.50
- 1L bottled water US\$0.25
- Bottle of Windhoek Lager US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$12
- Meat pie US\$0.50

HISTORY **Pre-Colonial History**

The first agriculturalists and iron workers of definite Bantu-speaking origin in southern Africa belonged to the Gokomere culture. They settled the temperate savannah and cooler uplands of Zimbabwe and were the first occupants of the Great Zimbabwe site, in the southeastern part of modern-day Zimbabwe, where a well-sheltered valley presented an obvious place to settle. Cattle ranching became the mainstay of the community and earlier hunting-and-gathering San groups either retreated to the west or were enslaved and/or absorbed.

At the same time the San communities were also coming under pressure from Khoi-Khoi (the ancestors of the Nama), who probably entered the region from the south. The Khoi-Khoi were organised loosely into tribes and raised livestock. They gradually displaced the San, becoming the dominant group in the region until around 1500.

During the 16th century, the Herero arrived in Namibia from the Zambezi Valley and occupied the north and west of the country. As ambitious pastoralists they inevitably came into conflict with the Khoi-Khoi over the best grazing lands and water sources. Eventually, given their superior strength and numbers, nearly all the indigenous Namibian groups submitted to the Herero.

By the late 19th century, a new Bantu Dup, the Owambo, settled in the north al-Okavango and Vgroup, the Owambo, settled in the north along the Okavango and Kunene Rivers.



Colonial History

MIBIA

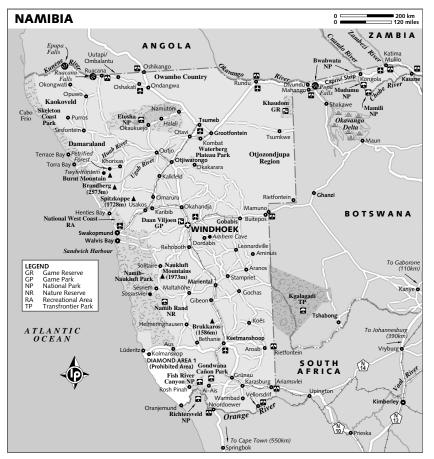
Because Namibia has one of the world's most barren and inhospitable coastlines, it was largely ignored by the European nations until relatively recently. The first European visitors were Portuguese mariners seeking a route to the Indies in the late 15th century, but they confined their activities to erecting stone crosses at certain points as navigational aids.

It wasn't until the last-minute scramble for colonies towards the end of the 19th century that Namibia was annexed by Germany (except for the enclave of Walvis Bay, which was taken in 1878 by the British for the Cape Colony). In 1904 the Herero launched a rebellion and, later that year, were joined by

the Nama, but the rebellions were brutally suppressed.

The Owambo in the north were luckier and managed to avoid conquest until after the start of WWI, when they were overrun by Portuguese forces fighting on the side of the Allies. Soon after, the German colony abruptly came to an end when its forces surrendered to a South African expeditionary army also fighting on behalf of the Allies.

At the end of WWI, South Africa was given a mandate to rule the territory (then known as South West Africa) by the League of Nations. Following WWII, the mandate was renewed by the UN, who refused to sanction the annexation of the country by South Africa.



Undeterred, the South African government tightened its grip on the territory and, in 1949, it granted parliamentary representation to the white population. The bulk of southern Namibia's viable farmland was parcelled into some 6000 farms owned by white settlers, while indigenous families were confined by law to their 'reserves' (mainly in the east and the far north) and urban workplaces.

Nationalism & the Struggle for Independence

Forced labour had been the lot of most Namibians since the German annexation. This was one of the main factors that led to mass demonstrations and the development of nationalism in the late 1950s. Around this time, a number of political parties were formed and strikes organised. By 1960 most of these parties had merged to form the South West Africa People's Organization (Swapo), which took the issue of South African occupation to the International Court of Justice.

The outcome was inconclusive, but in 1966 the UN General Assembly voted to terminate South Africa's mandate and set up a Council for South West Africa (in 1973 renamed the Commission for Namibia) to administer the territory. At the same time, Swapo launched its campaign of guerrilla warfare. The South African government reacted by firing on demonstrators and arresting thousands of activists.

In 1975 the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) was officially established. Formed from a combination of white political interests and ethnic parties, it turned out to be a toothless debating chamber, which spent much of its time in litigation with the South African government over its scope of responsibility.

The DTA was dissolved in 1983 after it had indicated it would accommodate members of Swapo. It was replaced by the Multiparty Conference, which had even less success and quickly disappeared. And so control of Namibia passed back to the South Africanappointed administrator-general.

The failure of these attempts to set up an internal government did not deter South Africa from maintaining its grip on Namibia. It refused to negotiate on a UN-supervised programme for Namibian independence until the estimated 19,000 Cuban troops were removed from neighbouring Angola. In response, Swapo intensified its guerrilla campaign.

In the end, however, it might not have been the activities of Swapo alone or international sanctions that forced the South Africans to the negotiating table. The white Namibian population itself was growing tired of the war and the economy was suffering badly.

The stage was finally set for negotiations on the country's future. Under the watch of the UN, the USA and the USSR, a deal was struck between Cuba, Angola, South Africa and Swapo, in which Cuban troops would be removed from Angola and South African troops from Namibia. This would be followed by UN-monitored elections held in November 1989 on the basis of universal suffrage. Swapo collected a clear majority of the votes but an insufficient number to give it the sole mandate to write the new constitution.

Independence

Following negotiations between the various parties, a constitution was adopted in February 1990. Independence was granted the following month under the presidency of the Swapo leader, Sam Nujoma. Initially, his policies focused on programs of reconstruction and national reconciliation to heal the wounds left by 25 years of armed struggle. In 1999, however, Nujoma had nearly served out his second (and constitutionally, his last) five-year term, and alarm bells sounded among watchdog groups when he changed the constitution to allow himself a third five-year term, which he won with nearly 77% of the vote.

In August 1999, a separatist Lozi faction in the Caprivi Strip launched a coup attempt which was summarily put down by the Namibian Defence Force. In December of the same year the Caprivi Strip also suffered a spate of violent attacks on civilians and travellers, which were rightly or wrongly blamed on Unita sympathisers from Angola (see p825 for information on this group). These attacks destroyed tourism in the Caprivi Strip, but since Angola signed a peace accord in April 2002, the region is slowly starting to come back to life.

Namibia Todav

In 2004 the world watched warily to see if Nujoma would cling to the office of power for a fourth term, and an almost audible sigh of relief could be heard in Namibia when he announced that he would finally be stepping

down in favour of his chosen successor Hifikepunye Pohamba.

Like Sam Nujoma, Pohamba is a Swapo veteran and swept to power with nearly 77% of the vote. He leaves behind the land ministry where he presided over one of Namibia's most controversial schemes - the expropriation of land from white farmers to black citizens.

This 'poverty agenda', along with Namibia's AIDS crisis and a nascent secessionist movement in the Caprivi Strip will be the defining issues of his presidency.

CULTURE

Despite Namibia only gaining independence less than 20 years ago, racism is not as blatantly obvious as it is in South Africa. Whites, on the whole, are more open-minded, do not refer to their black countrypeople in overtly negative terms and do not speak about apartheid in a positive manner. Perhaps one of the most interesting differences between the two countries can be seen in the use of Afrikaans. Blacks in South Africa will tell you it is the language of apartheid, and although many were forced to learn the tongue in school, speaking it is considered insulting. In Namibia, where intermarriage between different tribes is common. Afrikaans has become a vital form of communication. Those of diverse ethnic backgrounds will tell you it is how their parents communicate with each other, and was the first language they learned at home as children.

PEOPLE

With a population of barely 1.8 million, Namibia represents one of Africa's lowest population densities, with approximately two people per square kilometre. This number comprises 11 major ethnic groups, including Owambo, Kavango, Herero, Himba, Damara, Nama, Basters, Caprivians, German, Afrikaner and Tswana. About 75% of the population inhabits rural areas, but the uncontrolled urban drift for work or higher wages has resulted in increased homelessness, unemployment and crime in the capital and other towns.

NAMIBIA **ARTS & CRAFTS**

Although Namibia is still developing a literary tradition, its musical, visual and architectural arts are fairly well established. The country also enjoys a wealth of amateur talent in the production of material arts, including carv-

ings, basketware and tapestry, along with simple but resourcefully designed and produced toys, clothing and household implements.

ENVIRONMENT

A predominantly arid country, Namibia can be divided into four main topographical regions: the Namib Desert and coastal plains in the west; the eastward-sloping Central Plateau; the Kalahari (often mistakenly called the 'Kalahari Desert') along the Botswanan and South African borders; and the densely wooded bushveld of the Kavango and Caprivi regions.

Despite its harsh climate, Namibia has some of the world's grandest national parks, ranging from the world-famous wildlifeoriented Etosha National Park to the immense Namib-Naukluft Park, which protects vast dune fields, desert plains, wild mountains and unique flora. There are also the smaller reserves of the Caprivi region, the renowned Skeleton Coast parks and the awe-inspiring Fish River Canyon, which ranks among Africa's most spectacular sights.

In addition to the national parks, Namibia has a network of conservancies, which are usually amalgamations of private farms, and private wildlife reserves, which are individual farms supporting either tourist lodges or hunting opportunities. The latter designation includes both the 200,000-hectare Namib Rand Nature Reserve and the 102,000-hectare Gondwana Cañon Park.

Facilities in Namibian national parks are operated by the semiprivate Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR; Map p962; 🖻 061-285 7000; www.nwr.com .na; cnr John Meinert & Moltke Sts, Windhoek). Bookings may be made up to 12 months in advance, but fees must be paid by bank transfer or credit card before the bookings will be confirmed. Note that camping fees are good for up to four people; each additional person up to eight people will be charged extra. In addition, parks charge a daily admission fee per person and per vehicle, payable when you enter the park. Prebooking is always advised. While you may be able to pick up accommodation at the last minute by just turning up at the park gates, it isn't recommended (especially for Etosha and Sesriem), as you may be caught out. Note that pets aren't permitted in any wildlife-orientated park.

Namibia is home to an amazing array of wildlife. Etosha, Namibia's greatest wildlife park, contains a variety of antelope species, as well as other African ungulates, carnivores and pachyderms. Damaraland, in the northwest, is home to antelopes and other ungulates, and also harbours desert rhinos, elephants and other species that have specially adapted to the arid climate. Hikers in the Naukluft Mountains may catch sight of the elusive Hartmann's mountain zebra, and along the desert coast live jackass penguins, flamingos, Cape fur seals and the rare strandwulf (brown hyena).

With a small human population spread over a large land area, Namibia is in better environmental shape than most African countries, but challenges remain. The Ministry of Environment & Tourism (MET) is largely a holdover from pre-independence days and its policies strongly reflect those of its South African counterpart. Although changes are afoot, at the time of research the country still lacked coherent environmental guidelines.

While local people are increasingly seeing more benefits from wildlife-oriented tourism. the activities in and near protected areas continue to affect local ecosystems. Many ranchers in the south view wildlife as a nuisance, while people in the more densely populated north see wildlife reserves as potential settlement areas and wildlife itself as a food resource and a threat to crops and human life.

WINDHOEK

2 061 / pop 240,000

Namibia's Central Highlands are dominated by its small, German-influenced capital, Windhoek, which serves as the country's geographical heart and commercial nerve centre. Set among low hills at an elevation of 1660m, the capital city enjoys dry, clean air, a healthy highland climate, and an optimistic outlook that sets an example for all of Africa.

Windhoek's population reflects the country's ethnic mix: on the streets, you'll see Owambo, Kavango, Herero, Damara and Caprivian people, together with Nama, San and Europeans, all contributing to the hustle and bustle - but only during working hours. While Windhoek provides about as much action as Namibia has to offer, 'vibrant' probably isn't the best word to describe this surprisingly staid and orderly capital city.

ORIENTATION

Central Windhoek is bisected by Independence Ave, where most shopping and administrative functions are concentrated. The shopping district is focused on the Post St pedestrian mall and the nearby Gustav Voigts Centre, Wernhil Park Centre and Levinson Arcade. Zoo Park, beside the main post office, provides a green lawn and shady lunch spots.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Windhoek Book Den (Map p962; 🕿 239976; wbd@mweb.com.na) Just off Post St Mall, the best place to look for novels, European and African literature, and travel books.

Emergency

Ambulance (211111) Crime report (290 2239) 24-hour phone service. Fire brigade (211111) Local police (228328) National police (2 10111)

Internet Access

Most backpacker hostels offer internet and email services. You can also try: Club Internet (Map p962; 78 Bülow St; per hr US\$3; Sam-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Near John Meinert St.

Laundry

Tauben Glen Launderette (Map p960; 252115; wash & dry US\$2) At Village Sq.

Medical Services

Rhino Park Private Hospital (Map p960; 225434; Sauer St) Provides excellent care and service, but patients must pay up front.

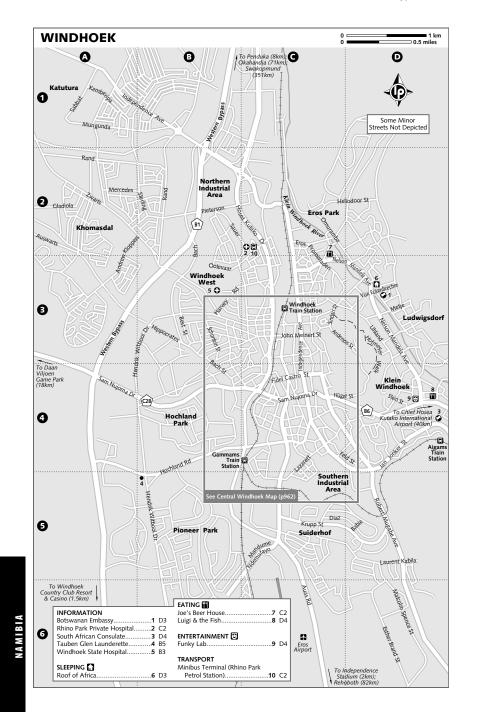
Windhoek State Hospital (Map p960; 2 303 9111) An option for those who are short of cash but have time to wait: the hospital is located off Harvey Rd.

Tourist Information

Namibia Tourism (Map p962; 🖻 220640, 284 2360; www.namibiatourism.com.na; Independence Ave, Private Bag 13346) The national tourist office; can provide information from all over the country.

Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR; Map p962; 🗃 285 7000; www.nwr.com.na; cnr John Meinert & Moltke Sts) In the Oode Voorpost. Books national-park accommodation and hikes.

Windhoek Information & Publicity Office (Map p962; 290 2058; fax 290 2050; Post St Mall) This friendly office answers questions and distributes local publications including What's On in Windhoek.



Cardboard Box Travel Shop (Map p962; 256580; www.namibian.org; 15 Johann Albrecht St) Attached to the backpacker hostel of the same name (see below), this recommended travel agency can arrange both budget and upmarket bookings all over the country.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Windhoek is generally safe by day, but avoid going out alone at night. Don't make yourself a target by walking around with a backpack or expensive camera and never leave anything of value visible in a rented vehicle. Windhoek's townships are generally safer than those in South Africa, but use caution and try to take a local guide if you visit.

SIGHTS

The whitewashed ramparts of **Alte Feste** (Map p962; 293 4437; Robert Mugabe Ave; admission by donation; 9 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat & Sun), Windhoek's oldest surviving building, date from the early 1890s. It houses the historical section of the State Museum, and exhibits focus mainly on Namibia's independence struggle.

At the affiliated **Owela Museum** (Map p962; 293 4358; 4Lüderitz St; admission by donation; 9 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat & Sun), the exhibits focus on Namibia's natural and cultural history. The most interesting part of this museum is the big AIDS-awareness display at the entrance.

The heart of the Windhoek shopping district is the bizarrely colourful **Post St Mall** (Map p962). At the eastern end is a display of Gibeon meteorites; the rest of the mall is lined with vendors selling curios, art, clothing and other tourist items, mostly from Zimbabwe.

The National Art Gallery (Map p962; ② 231160; orr Robert Mugabe Ave & John Meinert St; admission free; ③ 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) features work by local artists in various mediums, some of which is for sale. It also houses a permanent collection of works reflecting Namibia's history and nature.

SLEEPING

Cardboard Box Backpackers (Map p962; 228994; www.namibian.org; 15 Johann Albrecht St; camping per site US\$4, dm/d US\$6/18; P (2) (2) This lively, colourful and perennial shoestringers' favourite is conveniently located just 15 minutes by foot from the city centre. 'The Box' also runs an excellent travel centre that gives unbiased information about Namibian tour operators and can help sort out all your travel plans.

Chameleon City Lodge (Map p962; 224347; www .chameleonbackpackers.com; 5 Voight St; camping per site US\$4, dm US\$6, d from US\$18; 22 (22). This wellmatched rival to the Cardboard Box is also extremely convenient to the city centre, and boasts an inviting atmosphere, immaculate facilities, comfy couches for lounging and a professional and well-informed staff.

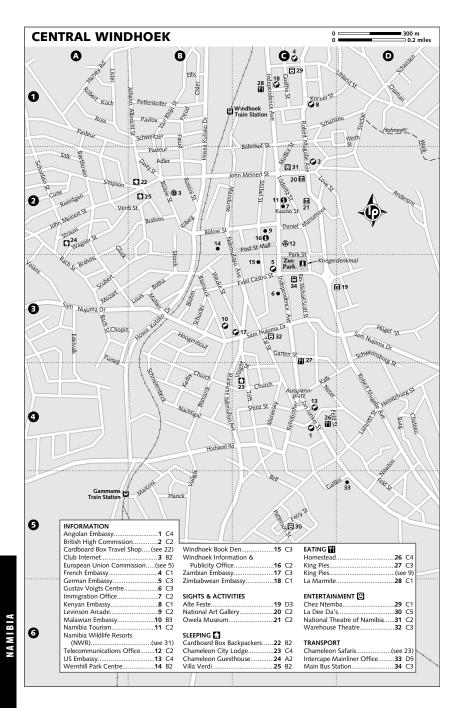
Chameleon Guesthouse (Map p962; 2747668; www .chameleonbackpackers.com; 22 Wagner St; d with/without bathroom ind breakfast US\$25/20; P (2010) (Ccupying a quiet spot in Windhoek West, the older sister to the Chameleon City Lodge is a budget-orientated guesthouse that is home to a couple of friendly meerkats.

EATING

King Pies (Map p962; ⁽²⁾ 248978; Levinson Arcade; pies US\$1-2) If you're looking for a quick bite, this popular Namibian institution serves up a variety of meat and vegetable pies.

Joe's Beer House (Map p960; 232457; Green Market Sq, 160 Nelson Mandela Ave; mains US\$4-9; \bigcirc 5pm-late) Similar to Carnivore's in Nairobi, Joe's Beer House is a popular tourist spot where you can indulge in a game-meat-oriented evening meal – with prolonged drinking until early in the morning.

Luigi & the Fish (Map p960; 256399; 320 Sam Nujoma Dr; mains US\$4-10) This famous Windhoek restaurant specialises in reasonably priced seafood (fish, shellfish, seafood paella, calamari etc) as well as steaks, game, pasta, chicken, Cajun dishes and vegetarian cuisine.



La Marmite (Map p962; 248022; 383 Independence Ave; mains US\$7-10; Septem form) Here you can sample wonderful North and West African cuisine, from Algerian, Senegalese, Ivorian, Cameroonian and Nigerian dishes.

Homestead (Map p962; 221958; 53 Feld St; mains US\$8-15) Arguably Windhoek's best restaurant, it features a range of starters, salads, pastas and fresh vegetarian, fish, beef and chicken dishes. Also on the menu is oryx, crocodile, fondue and a hunters' grill featuring zebra.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

Chez Ntemba (Map p962; 154 Uhland St; cover charge Thu & Sun US\$1.25, Wed, Fri & Sat US\$3.50; 🕑 9pm-5am Wed-Sun) Music from all across the continent is played here – you'll hear Angolan, Zambian, Congolese and South African tunes all in the same night.

Funky Lab (Map p960; Gams Centre; 🟵 4pm-late Sun-Thu, 2pm-late Fri & Sat) This very popular (and very blue) club is one Windhoek's hottest nighttime dancing spots, especially if you're craving a little disco in your life.

La Dee Da's (Map p962; 🗟 081 243 4432; Ferry St near Patterson, Southern Industrial Area; admission before/after midnight US\$2.50/3.50; 🏵 10.30pm-4am Thu-Sat) Boasts Namibia's largest national flag; here you can dance to Angolan *kizomba*, hip-hop, rave, traditional African, rock and commercial pop.

Theatre

National Theatre of Namibia (Map p962; 237966; ntn@iafrica.com.na; 12 John Meinert St) The national theatre stages infrequent theatre presentations; for information see the Friday edition of the Namibian.

Warehouse Theatre (Map p962; 225059; Old South-West Brewery Bldg, 48 Tal St; admission US\$3.50) A delightfully integrated club staging live African and European music and theatre productions, though unfortunately it's only open when there's a scheduled event.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport (299 6602; www.airports.com.na), which is located 42km east of the city centre, serves most international flights into and out of Windhoek. Air Namibia operates flights daily between Cape Town and Johannesburg, as well as twice-weekly flights to/from London and Frankfurt. Several airlines also offer international serv-

ices to/from Maun, Botswana, and Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

Eros Airport (299 6500), immediately south of the city centre, serves most domestic flights into and out of Windhoek. **Air Namibia** (www.air namibia.com.na) offers occasional flights to/from Katima Mulilo, Lüderitz, Ondangwa, Rundu, Swakopmund/Walvis Bay and Tsumeb.

Coming from Windhoek, make sure the taxi driver knows which airport you are going to (ie, in-town Eros versus the more distant international airport).

Bus & Minibus

From the **main bus station** (cnr Fidel Castro & Rev Michael Scott Sts) the Intercape Mainliner runs on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday to and from South Africa's Cape Town (US\$65, 20 hours) and Johannesburg (US\$83, 25 hours, with a change in Upington). There are also daily services to Namibia's Swakopmund (US\$14, 4¼ hours); and Monday and Friday departures to Zimbabwe's Victoria Falls (US\$52, 19¼ hours), via Okahandja, Otjiwarongo, Grootfontein, Rundu and Katima Mulilo.

Local minibuses leave when full from the Rhino Park petrol station and can get you to most urban centres in Namibia, including the following:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)
Buitepos	7	5
Divundu	12	12
Gobabis	5	21/2
Grootfontein	8	7
Katima Mulilo	14	15½
Keetmanshoop	8	6
Lüderitz	13	10
Mariental	6	3
Oshakati	9	11
Otjiwarongo	7	3
Outjo	7.50	4
Rehoboth	2.50	1½
Ruacana	15	15
Rundu	10.50	10
Swakopmund	7	4
Tsumeb	8	7
Walvis Bay	7.50	41/2

Train

The train station has a **booking office** (\mathfrak{D} 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri); note that on Monday to Thursday, fares are about 60% of those quoted here,

and that economy-class fares are around 10% lower. Overnight trains run daily except on Saturday between Windhoek and Keetmanshoop, leaving at 7.10pm/6.30pm southbound/northbound. Friday to Sunday business-class fares from Windhoek are: Rehoboth (US\$4.30, 23/4 hours), Mariental (US\$6, six hours) and Keetmanshoop (US\$7.50, 9½ hours). The Keetmanshoop run now offers sleepers on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

On Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, the northern-sector line connects Windhoek with Tsumeb (US\$7, 16 hours) via Okahandja (US\$3, 21/2 hours) and Otjiwarongo (US\$5.25, 10¹/₂ hours). Other lines connect Windhoek with Swakopmund (US\$8, 91/2 hours) and Walvis Bay (US\$8, 11 hours) daily except Saturday; and Windhoek with Gobabis (US\$4.25, 71/2 hours) on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

For train information, contact Trans-Namib (🕿 298 2032; www.transnamib.com.na).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Servicing the Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport, the Elena Airport Shuttle (244443, 0811 246286; elena@namibweb.com) provides 24-hour door-to-door airport transport for US\$17 per bus; it also meets international flights. Alternatively, you can try the Marenko Shuttle (226331) or VIP Shuttle (200812563657), which charge US\$12 per person for the trip; coming from the airport, you'll be able to choose between several shuttle services. Airport taxis on the same trip cost a maximum of US\$27.

Taxi

NAMIBIA

City buses have been phased out in favour of inexpensive shared taxis and minibuses. Collective taxis from the main ranks at Wernhill Park Centre follow set routes to Khomasdal and Katutura, and if your destination is along the way, you'll pay less than US\$1. With taxis caught from the main bus stations or ordered by radio dispatch, fares are either metered or calculated on a per-kilometre basis, but you may be able to negotiate a set fare per journey. Plan to spend between US\$3 and US\$3.50 to anywhere around the city centre. Try Crown Radio axis (🖻 211115, 0811 299116), Express Radio Taxis (🖻 239739) or Sunshine Radio Taxis (🕿 221029).

AROUND WINDHOEK

DAAN VILJOEN GAME PARK

The beautiful Daan Viljoen Game Park (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50; 🕑 day visits sunrise-6pm) sits in the Khomas Hochland, 18km west of Windhoek. As there are no dangerous animals, hikers can wander freely through desertlike hills and valleys. You'll likely see gemsboks, kudus, mountain zebras, springboks, hartebeests, elands and up to 200 bird species.

Daan Viljoen Rest Camp (camping for up to 4 people US\$15, s/d bungalows US\$25/31, 4-bed self-catering apt US\$65) sits on the shores of Augeigas Dam; there's also a restaurant (7.30am-9am & noon-2pm & 7-10pm) further along the road. Prebook at NWR in Windhoek (p959).

There's no public transport to Daan Viljoen, but taxis charge around US\$17 each way and persistent hitchers will eventually get a lift. No motorcycles are permitted.

WESTERN NAMIBIA

Western Namibia is defined by the barren and desolate landscapes of the Namib Desert. The Nama word 'Namib', which inspired the name of the entire country, rather prosaically means 'Vast Dry Plain'. Although travellers to Namibia are often surprised by the lushness of the Kalahari, the soaring sand dunes of the Namib rarely disappoint.

SWAKOPMUND

2 064 / pop 25,000

Often described as being more German than Germany, Swakopmund is Namibia's most popular holiday destination, and it attracts surfers, anglers and beach-lovers from all over southern Africa. However, the seaside resort has recently reinvented itself as the adventure-sports capital of Namibia, and now also attracts adrenaline junkies jonesing for a quick fix. Whether you race through the sand sea in a quad bike, slide down the dunes on a greased-up snowboard, jump from a Cessna with a parachute strapped to your back or live out your Lawrence of Arabia fantasies on a camel safari, there's no shortage of gut-curdling activities to choose from.

Orientation

Be advised that the streets in Swakopmund were recently renamed, which means that navigation can be extremely difficult if you're using an old street map. The map in this edition contains the new street names.

Information BOOKSHOPS

CNA Bookshop (Roon St) Sells popular paperbacks. Die Muschel Book & Art Shop (🗃 402874; 10 Roon St) More esoteric works on art and local history are available here.

Swakopmunder Büchhandlung (🖻 402613; Sam Nujoma Ave St) A wide selection of literature from various genres.

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (2 405731) Fire brigade (av 402411, after-hr pager 405544) Police (🕿 10111)

INTERNET ACCESS

Swakopmund I-café (Woermann & Brock Centre, Moltke St; per hr US\$2; (> 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun)

LAUNDRY

Swakopmund Laundrette (🕿 402135: 15 Swakop St: to wash/dry up to 6kg US\$1.30/0.80; 🏵 7.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun) Opposite the Hansa Brewery: doubles as a local bar and entertainment centre.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Bismarck Medical Centre (2 405000; Bismark St) For doctors' visits, see the recommended Drs Swiegers, Schikerling, Dantu and Biermann, all at this centre. Cottage Private Hospital (🖻 412201; Nordring) Your best option for medical care is this hospital, 1km north of town, in Tamariskia.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Namib i Information Centre () /fax 40312; swainfo@iafrica.com.na; Sam Nujoma St, PO Box 829; 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 3.30-5.30pm Sat, 9.30am-noon & 3.30-5pm Sun) Helpful centre. Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR: 2 402172; www .nwr.com.na; Woermannhaus; 🕑 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Also useful is this office, which sells Namib-Naukluft Park and Skeleton Coast permits until 3.30pm. Note that park permits are no longer available from petrol stations in Swakopmund and Walvis Bay - they must be purchased either from this NWR office or the one in Windhoek (p959).

Siahts

Beer-lovers won't want to miss a tour of Hansa Brewery (🖻 405021; 9 Rhode Allee; 🕎 10am & 2pm Tue & Thu, by appointment), brewers of Swakopmund's favourite beverage. The free tours allow ample opportunity to sample the product. Prebook at the office on Rhode Allee near the corner of Bismarck St.

The National Marine Aquarium (4 Strand St; adult/ child US\$3.50/1.75; (> 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) allows closeup views of rays and sharks. Don't miss the daily fish feeding at 3pm.

Rössing Uranium Mine (🕿 402046; admission US\$2.50), 55km east of Swakopmund, is the world's largest open-cast uranium mine and certainly merits a visit. The scale of operations is staggering and at full capacity the mine processes about one million tonnes of ore per week. It's open to the public on the first and third Friday of the month; three-hour mine tours can be booked the previous day at the Swakopmund Museum on Strand St. The tours leave from Cafe Anton (inside the Hotel Schweizerhaus at 1 Bismarck St). Transport is included in the cost.

Activities

After aspiring for years to become a dry version of Victoria Falls, Swakopmund is one of the top destinations in southern Africa for extreme-sports enthusiasts. Although filling your days with adrenaline-soaked activities is certainly not cheap, there are few places in the world where you can climb up, race down and soar over towering sand dunes.

Your one-stop booking agent for just about every breathtaking activity you'd like to pursue is the Desert Explorers Adventure Centre (🖻 406096; www.swakop.com/adv).

BALLOONING

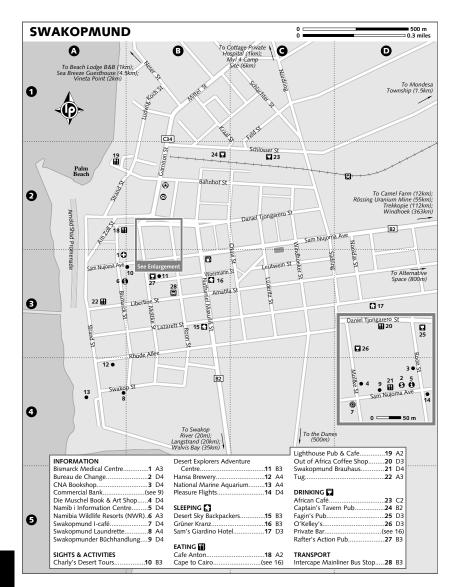
Whenever life gets you down, just hold onto the thought of hot-air balloon rides over the desert. African Adventure Balloons (2 403455; flylow@mweb.com.na) offers half-/full-hour flights for US\$140/190 per person, with a minimum of three people.

CAMEL RIDING

If you want to play Lawrence of Arabia in the Namib Desert, visit the Camel Farm (🖻 400363; (2-5pm), 12km east of Swakopmund on the D1901. Camel rides cost US\$15 for half an D1901. Camel rides cost US\$15 for half an hour. To book or arrange transport from town, phone and ask for Ms Elke Elb.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Okakambe Trails (**a** 081 124 6626) runs 1¹/₂-hour horseback rides along the Swakop River to



the Moon Landscape for US\$45. It can also organise moonlight rides and rides along the beach and dunes.

ROCK CLIMBING

BIA

NAM

If you want to climb or abseil on a 15m climbing tower, contact **Walker's Rock & Rope Adventures** ((a) 403122; walker@iafrica.com.na). Walker's was in the process of moving at the time of research, and will eventually wind up in the desert somewhere east of town.

SANDBOARDING

Sandboarding with Alter Action (a 402737; www .alter-action.com; lie-down/stand-up US\$20/30) is certain to increase your heart rate while going easy on your wallet (it's by far the cheapest trip in town).

SCENIC FLIGHTS

Pleasure Flights ((a) 404500; www.pleasureflights.com .na; Sam Nujoma Ave) offers 'flightseeing' tours over the colourful salt works, Sandwich Harbour, Welwitschia Dr, the Brandberg, the dunes, the Skeleton Coast and beyond. Rates start at US\$80 per person for a one-hour circuit, though prices vary according to the length of the flight and the number of passengers.

SKYDIVING

Ground Rush Adventures (a 402841; www.skydiveswa kop.com.na; tandem jump US\$160) provides the ultimate rush, and skydiving in Swakopmund is sweetened by the outstanding dune and ocean backdrop.

QUAD-BIKING

Outback Orange ((a) 400968; www.outback-orange.com; rides from US\$50) offers stomach-dropping tours on quad bikes (motorcycle-style 4WDs). In two hours, you'll travel over 60km, and race up and down countless dunes.

Tours

The most popular tour operators are listed following. They don't all have central offices, so it's best to make arrangements through your hostel or hotel:

Charly's Desert Tours (🖻 404341; charlydt@mweb .com.na; Sam Nujoma Av)

Namib Tours (2 404072)

Swakop Tour Company (2 404088; proverb@mweb .com.na)

Turnstone Tours (2 403123; www.turnstone-tours.com)

Hata-Angu Cultural Tours (**b** 081 251 5916; hataangu@hotmail.com) operates tours to the outlying Mondesa township, where you'll visit a shebeen, eat at a traditional restaurant and meet local people. Reactions to township tours are always mixed – some individuals walk away feeling as if they've made a strong connection, while others find the whole experience to be reminiscent of a human zoo. Your experience depends ultimately on your attitude and your expectations for the trip.

Sleeping

 packers' haunt is an excellent place to drop anchor in Swakopmund. The indoor lounge is simple and homey, while the outdoor picnic tables are a nice spot for a cold beer and hot conversation.

Alternative Space (a 402713; nam0352@mweb.com .na; 46 Dr Alfons Weber St; suggested donation ind breakfast d US\$25; P]) Located on the desert fringe, this delightfully alternative budget choice is run by Frenus and Sybille Rorich. The main attractions are the castlelike architecture, the saturation artwork and an industrial-scraprecycling theme. The catch is that only 'friends of Frenus' are welcome, but he's a great guy and makes friends easily.

Sea Breeze Guesthouse ((2) 463348; www.seabreeze .com.na; 48 Turmalin St; s/d ind breakfast US\$35/65, self-catering apt US\$60; (P) This reader-recommended guesthouse is right on the beach about 4.5km north of town – it's an excellent option if you're looking for a secluded retreat. The Italian owners have an incredible sense of design, which is evident the moment you enter.

Beach Lodge B&B (400933; www.beachlodge .com.na; 1 Stint St; s/d/tr/q US\$60/75/90/105) This boatshaped place, which sits right on the beach sand, offers some of the most unusual architecture and the best sea views in town (through your own personal porthole!). If the beach is your bag, you can't beat it.

Sam's Giardino Hotel ((a) 403210; www.giardino.com .na; 89 Lazarett St; s/d from US\$90/105, ste US\$125; (P) A slice of central Europe in the desert, Sam's Giardino Hotel mixes Swiss and Italian hospitality and architecture while emphasising fine wines, fine cigars and relaxing in the rose garden with a St Bernard called Mr Einstein.

Eating

Out of Africa Coffee Shop ((a) 404752; 13 Daniel Tjongarero St; snacks & meals US\$2-4) This place has the motto 'Life is too short to drink bad coffee', and it does something about it by welcoming you in the morning with Namibia's best coffee.

Cafe Anton ((a) 402419; Hotel Schweizerhaus, 1 Bismarck St; coffee & pastries US\$4-6) This somewhat pretentious spot serves up superb coffee, *apfelstrüdel* (apple strudel), *kugelhopf* (cake with

nuts and raisins), mohnkuchen (poppy-seed cake), linzertorte (cake flavoured with almond meal, lemon and spices and spread with jam) and other European delights.

Swakopmund Brauhaus (🖻 402214; 22 Sam Nujoma St; mains US\$5-9) This excellent restaurant and boutique brewery offers one of Swakopmund's most sought-after commodities (traditional German-style beer) as well as excellently prepared beef and seafood.

Lighthouse Pub & Cafe (🖻 400894; Palm Beach; mains US\$6-10) With a view of the beach and crashing surf, the Lighthouse is an atmospheric choice that serves up good-value seafood including kabeljou, calamari, kingclip and lobster.

Cape to Cairo (🖻 463160; 7 Nathaniel Maxuilili St; mains US\$7-12) The most popular tourist restaurant in Swakopmund serves up a variety of gourmet dishes from across the continent. The game meats are exceptional, though vegetarians will have no problem feasting on hearty chapattis and other veggie treats.

Tug (2 402356; mains US\$7-12) Housed in the beached tugboat Danie Hugo near the jetty, the Tug is an atmospheric, upmarket choice for fresh fish and seafood. It's regarded by locals as the best restaurant in town.

Drinking

NAMIBIA

African Café (3B Schlosser St) Here you can choose between live music at the jazz bar or dancing the night away at the adjacent disco.

Captain's Tavern Pub (Swakopmund Hotel & Entertainment Centre, Bahnof St) This upmarket tavern attracts highbrow clientele from the Swakopmund Hotel, and sometimes features live music.

Fagin's Pub (Roon St) This extremely popular, down-to-earth watering hole is reminiscent of a US truckies' stop, complete with jocular staff, a faithful clientele and evening videos of your day's adrenaline activities.

O'Kelley's (MoltkeSt) The emphasis at O'Kelley's is on local disco music, dancing and billiards it's the place to go when you don't want to go home and you're too drunk to care.

rapidly becoming the most popular tourist bar in Swakopmund.

Getting There & Away

From Roon St, the Intercape Mainliner bus travels to and from Walvis Bay (US\$8, 1/2 hour) and Windhoek (US\$14, 41/4 hours) on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, with connections to and from South Africa. The Friday Star Line bus between Khorixas (US\$8, 61/2 hours) and Walvis Bay (US\$2, one hour) passes through Swakopmund, and returns on Sundays. There are occasional minibuses between Swakopmund and Windhoek (US\$7, four hours) and Swakopmund and Walvis Bay (US\$2, 45 minutes), which depart from the Engen petrol station.

Overnight trains connect Windhoek with Swakopmund (US\$8, 91/2 hours) and Walvis Bay (US\$3.80, 11/2 hours) daily except Saturday. The thrice-weekly trains between Walvis Bay and Tsumeb (US\$7, 171/2 hours) also pass through Swakopmund.

For train or Star Line information, contact Trans-Namib (🕿 463538; www.transnamib.com.na).

NAMIB-NAUKLUFT PARK **a** 063

This is the Namibia of the picture books and movies, and it does not disappoint. The park is best known for Sossusvlei, a huge ephemeral pan set amid infamous towering red dunes that leave you speechless at first glance. The dunes are part of the Namib Desert, which stretches more than 2000km along the coast from Oliphants River in South Africa all the way to southern Angola. The Naukluft portion of the park is not as well known, but the craggy peaks here are almost as impressive as the dunes themselves.

Camp sites must be prebooked at the NWR office in Windhoek (p959) or Swakopmund (p965). Permits for Sesriem-Sossusvlei and Naukluft hikes must be booked in the office in Windhoek.

There is no public transport to the area; you will either need to have your own vehicle or be part of an organised tour.

Sesriem & Sossusvlei

Despite being Namibia's No 1 attraction, Sossusvlei still manages to feel isolated. Hiking through the dunes, part of the 32,000-sq-km sand sea that covers much of western Namibia, is a sombre experience. The dunes,

which reach as high as 325m, are part of one of the oldest and driest ecosystems on earth. The landscape here is constantly changing. Colours shift with the light, and wind forever alters the dunes' shape. If you can, visit Sossusvlei at sunrise when the colours are particularly breathtaking.

Sesriem is the gateway to Sossusvlei. Here you can pick up your park permit (which is needed to get to Sossusvlei). There is also a small food shop, a camp site and the Sossusvlei Lodge. If you want to view the dunes at sunrise, you must stay at either the camp site or the lodge, and drive the 65km from Sesriem to Sossusvlei (on a sealed road). The park gate opens at sunrise and closes at sunset.

On the way from Sesriem, you'll pass Dune 45, the most accessible of the red dunes along the Sossusvlei road. It's a good place to take a photo (or use up a couple of films). It is marked with a sign on the left side of the road driving towards Sossusvlei.

You will have to park at the 2WD car park before you reach Sossusvlei. At the car park either hike the last 4km into the pan or take one of the shuttles (US\$10). Unless you have plenty of water and good walking shoes, the shuttle service is worth the hefty fee; the driver will stay with you and take you on guided hikes. Ask to be taken to Dead Vlei. The walk is stupendous and you will feel as if you have reached the ends of the earth.

The Sesriem Camp Site (camp sites for 4 people US\$20) must be booked in Windhoek or Swakopmund through the NWR, but arrive before sunset or they'll reassign your site on a standby basis; those who were unable to book a site in Windhoek may get in on this nightly lottery. A small shop at the office sells snacks and cold drinks, and the camp-site bar has music at night.

Right at the Sesriem Camp Site fence, Sossusvlei Lodge (🖻 293223; www.sossusvleilodge.com; s/d US\$265/365; P 🕥) is a curious place that bears a strong resemblance to what happens when squabbling children topple a stack of coloured blocks. People either love it or hate it, but it does make a statement. Pre-dawn transfer to Sossusvlei is possible as the lodge is located within the park gate.

Naukluft Mountains

The Naukluft Massif, which rises steeply from the gravel plains of the central Namib, is mainly a high-plateau area cut around the edges by a complex of steep gorges. It is an

ideal habitat for mountain zebras, kudus, leopards, springboks and klipspringers.

Most visitors to the Naukluft come to hike one of the area's two day hikes, the Waterkloof Trail or the Olive Trail. These day hikes need not be booked, but the amazing four-day and eight-day loops have more restrictions attached. Thanks to stifling summer temperatures and potentially heavy rains, the multiday hikes are only open from 1 March to the third Friday in October on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday of the first three weeks of each month. The base price (US\$12 per person) includes accommodation at the Hikers Haven Hut on the night before and after the hike, as well as camping at trailside shelters and the Ubusis Canyon Hut. In addition, you'll have to pay US\$3.50 per person per day and another US\$2.50 per day for each vehicle you leave parked. Groups must consist of three to 12 people.

Due to the typically hot, dry conditions and lack of reliable natural water sources, you must carry at least 3L to 4L of water person per day - and use it sparingly.

The Naukluft (Koedoesrus) Camp Site (camp sites for 4 people US\$12) must be booked at the NWR office in Windhoek or Swakopmund. It is pleasantly situated in a deep valley 2km past the entrance gate to the Naukluft portion of the Namib-Naukluft Park. It has running water and ablutions blocks, and the maximum stay is three nights. The camp site is also the starting point for the Waterkloof and Olive Trails.

Solitaire

Solitaire is a lonely and aptly named settlement of just a few buildings about 80km north of Sesrium. Although the town is nothing more than an open spot in the desert, the area is home to several guest farms and lodges, which serve as an alternative base for exploring Sossusvlei.

The swish Solitaire Country Lodge (🕿 061-256598; www.namibialodges.com; camping US\$8.50, s/d incl breakfast US\$60/85; P 🔊), located next to the petrol station, offers 23 country-inspired rooms that surround a grassy courtyard with a spotless swimming pool.

The Solitaire Guest Farm (🖻 062-572024; www 🛸 .solitairequestfarm.com; camping US\$8.50, r per person incl breakfast US\$50; (P) 🔊), located 6km east of Solitaire on the C14, is a peaceful oasis situated between the Namib plains and the Naukluft Massif.

NORTHWESTERN NAMIBIA

For 4WD explorers, Namibia is synonymous with the Skeleton Coast, a formidable desert coastline engulfed by icy breakers. Here, seemingly endless stretches of foggy beach are punctuated by rusting shipwrecks and flanked by wandering dunes. As you move inland, the sinister fogs give way to the wondrous desert wildernesses of Damaraland and the Kaokoveld. The former is sparsely populated by the Damara people, and is known for its unique geological features; the latter is known as one of the last great wildernesses in southern Africa, as well as the home of the oft-photographed Himba people.

SKELETON COAST

The term 'Skeleton Coast' is derived from the treacherous nature of the coast – a foggy region with rocky and sandy coastal shallows – which has long been a graveyard for unwary ships and their crews. Early Portuguese sailors called it *As Areias do Inferno* (Sands of Hell) as once a ship washed ashore, the fate of the crew was sealed.

Although it has been extrapolated to take in the entire Namib Desert coastline, the Skeleton Coast actually refers to the coastal stretch between the mouths of the Swakop and Kunene Rivers. For our purposes, it covers the National West Coast Recreation Area and the Skeleton Coast Park (including the Skeleton Coast Wilderness). These protected areas stretch from just north of Swakopmund to the Kunene River, taking in nearly two million hectares of dunes and gravel plains to form one of the world's most inhospitable waterless areas.

National West Coast Recreation Area

This 200km-long and 25km-wide strip from Swakopmund to the Ugab River makes up the southern end of the Skeleton Coast. No permits are required to visit and the road is accessible to 2WD vehicles. The popular **Cape Cross Seal Reserve** (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50; 🐑 10am-5pm) is a breeding reserve for thousands of Cape fur seals. Be forewarned: the smell is putrid and will make even the tough nauseous.

Along the salt road up the coast from Swakopmund you'll find several bleak beach camp sites set up mainly for sea anglers. Sites at Myl 14, Jakkalsputz, Myl 72 and Myl 108 cost US\$14 for up to four people. (Myl means 'mile' – the distance from Swakop.)

Skeleton Coast Park

At Ugabmund, 110km north of Cape Cross, the road passes into the **Skeleton Coast Park** (admission per person/vehide US\$2.50/2.50). UK journalist Nigel Tisdell once wrote in the *Daily Tele*graph, 'If hell has a coat of arms, it probably looks like the entrance to Namibia's Skeleton Coast Park', and the description is fitting.

Accommodation is available at **Torra Bay** (camp sites for 4 people US\$12) and **Terrace Bay** (s/d full board US\$59/84), but the former is open only in December and January. Both resorts must be prebooked at the NWR office in Windhoek (p959) or Swakopmund (p965). If you are staying at either resort you must pass through the Ugabmund gate before 3pm or the Springbokwater gate before 5pm.

Day visits are not allowed, but transit permits (US\$2.50/2.50 per person/vehicle) for the road between Ugabmund and Springbokwater gates are available at the Ugabmund and Springbokwater checkpoints. If transiting, you must enter through one gate before 1pm and exit through the other before 3pm the same day.

Skeleton Coast Wilderness

The Skeleton Coast Wilderness makes up the northern half of the Skeleton Coast Park. Here, seemingly endless stretches of foggy beach are punctuated by rusting shipwrecks and the cries of gulls and gannets.

Concessions to the Skeleton Coast Wilderness are owned by the **Skeleton Coast Wilderness Camp** (@ 061-274500; www.wilderness-safaris.com; s/d for 4 days US\$2586/4372, for 5 days US\$2966/4932), an exclusive luxury resort located near Sarusas Springs. Activities include viewing desert elephants along the Hoarusib, ocean fishing, dune climbing, hiking through the Clay Castles and appreciating the sparse local vegetation. Rates include accommodation, air transfers from Windhoek, meals, drinks and two activities per day. Prebooking is mandatory.

DAMARALAND

The territory between the Skeleton Coast and Namibia's Central Plateau has traditionally been known as Damaraland, after the people who make up much of its population. Although it's not an officially protected area, its wild open spaces are home to many desertadapted species, including giraffes, zebras, lions, elephants and rhinos. In addition to its sense of freedom, the region is rich in both natural and cultural attractions, including Brandberg, Namibia's highest massif, and the rock engravings of Twyfelfontein.

Spitzkoppe

a 064

The 1728m **Spitzkoppe** (D3716, Groot Spitzkoppe village; admission per person/vehide US\$1.80/1; \textcircled sunrise-sunset), one of Namibia's most recognisable landmarks, rises miragelike above the dusty pro-Namib plains of southern Damaraland. Its dramatic shape has inspired its nickname, the Matterhorn of Africa, but similarities between this granite inselberg and the glaciated Swiss alp begin and end with its sharp peak. Beside the Spitzkoppe rise the equally impressive Pondoks, another inselberg formation that's comprised of enormous granite domes.

Around the massif are dotted a number of beautiful wild **camp sites** (530879; camping per person US\$4; **P**), which are maintained by the local community. Near the entrance, a small shop sells staple items and a range of local rocks and minerals. Water (US\$0.05 per litre) is scarce; it's wise to bring all you'll need.

There's no public transport here, and although Swakopmund agencies offer day tours, you'd probably regret not allowing more time to explore this incredible place.

Brandberg

The Brandberg (Fire Mountain) is named for the effect created by the setting sun on its western face, which causes the granite massif to resemble a burning slag heap. Its summit, Königstein, is Namibia's highest peak at 2573m. Its best-known attraction, the gallery of rock art in Tsisab Ravine, features the famous White Lady of the Brandberg. The figure, which isn't necessarily a lady, stands about 40cm high, and is part of a larger painting that depicts a bizarre hunting procession. In one hand, the figure is carrying what appears to be a flower or possibly a feather. In the other, the figure is carrying a bow and arrows. However, the painting is distinct because 'her' hair is straight and light-coloured - distinctly un-African - and the body is painted white from the chest down.

The locally run **Ugab Wilderness Camp** (www .nacobta.com.na; camping per person/vehicle US\$4/2.50, s/d tents US\$18/26; \bigcirc) is a member of Nacobta, a collective of various organisations that aims to foster increased community-based tourism. The turnoff is signposted from the D2359.

Petrified Forest

This site, 40km west of Khorixas, is scattered with dozens of petrified tree trunks that date back 260 million years. Admission is free, but the compulsory guides live only from tips; plan on US\$1 per person for the 500m walking tour. Note that it's forbidden to take even the smallest scrap of petrified wood.

Twyfelfontein

At the head of a grassy valley, **Twyfelfontein** (admission per person/vehide US\$1/1) is one of the most extensive galleries of rock art in Africa. The original name of this water source in the Aba-Huab Valley was /Ui-//Ais (Surrounded by Rocks), but in 1947 it was renamed Twyfelfontein, or 'doubtful spring', by European settler D Levin, who deemed its daily output of 1 cu metre of water insufficient for life in the harsh environment. The 6000-year-old petroglyphs here were executed by cutting through the hard patina covering the local sandstone. Guides are available (plan on US\$1 as a tip), but the route is easy and you can usually walk alone.

The Aba Huab Camp ((a) 697981; www.nacobta.com .na; camping per person US\$4, deluxe camp sites per person US\$6, d tents US\$7, s/d A-frame US\$27/42; (D) is an attractively perched camp site beside the Aba Huab riverbed, immediately north of the Twyfelfontein turn-off. Pricier sites have electricity. The camp is a member of Nacobta, a collective of various organisations that aims to foster increased community-based tourism.

Over the hill from Twyfelfontein, the **Twyfel**fontein Country Lodge () 374750; www.namibialodges.com; r per person incl breakfast US\$115; P R) is an architectural wonder that is embedded in the red rock. The lodge boasts stylish rooms, an immense and airy elevated dining room, and a good variety of excursions throughout Damaraland.

KAOKOLAND

The northwest corner of the country represents Namibia at its most primeval. The Kaokoveld is a vast repository of desert mountains

that is crossed only by sandy tracks laid down by the South African Defence Force (SAFDF). It is one of the least developed regions of the country, and is often described as one of the last true wildernesses in southern Africa. It is also home to the Himba, a group of nomadic pastoralists native to the Kaokoveld, who are famous for covering their skin with a traditional mixture of ochre butter and herbs to protect themselves from the sun.

There's no public transport anywhere in the region and hitching is practically impossible, so the best way to explore Kaokoveld is with a welloutfitted 4WD vehicle or an organised camping safari. In the dry season, the routes from Opuwo to Epupa Falls, Ruacana to Okongwati (via Swartbooi's Drift) and Sesfontein to Purros may be passable to high-clearance 2WD vehicles, but otherwise, you'll need a 4WD.

Opuwo **a** 065

Although it's the regional 'capital', Opuwo is little more than a dusty collection of commercial buildings ringed by traditional rondavels. You'll see lots of Himba and Herero people here; the going rate for a 'people photo' is about US\$1, but many people will ask for US\$2. Please either respect local wishes or put the camera away. To meet local artisans and purchase arts and crafts, check out the Kunene Crafts Centre (🖻 273209; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

The Opuwo (Power Safe) Guesthouse (273036; camping per person US\$4, dm US\$9; **P**) offers camping on the green lawn, pleasantly cool dorms and kitchen facilities. Coming from the south, turn left at the BP petrol station then take the next right; turn left after the hospital and it's several houses down on the right (look for the large reeds and fence).

The Kunene Village Rest Camp (🖻 273043; camping per person US\$5, s/d huts US\$16/20; P) is an amenable rest camp that has well-groomed camp sites with adequate facilities as well as basic thatched huts with shared bathrooms. Follow the signposted turn-off from the government housing project at the edge of town, en route to Sesfontein.

At this dynamic spot, whose name means 'falling waters' in Herero, the Kunene River fans out and is ushered through a 500m-wide

series of parallel channels, dropping a total of 60m over 1.5km. The greatest single drop -37m - is commonly identified as the Epupa Falls, where the river tumbles into a dark, narrow cleft. During periods of low water, the pools above the falls make fabulous natural Jacuzzis. You're safe from crocs in the eddies and rapids, but hang onto the rocks and keep away from the lip of the falls, where there's a real risk of being swept over; swimming here isn't suitable for young children.

Epupa Falls public camping ground (camping per person US\$4; **P**) is an enclosed camp located right at the falls. Although it can get very crowded, it has hot showers and flush toilets that are maintained by the local community. There's a less-crowded overflow section east of the neighbouring Omarunga Camp.

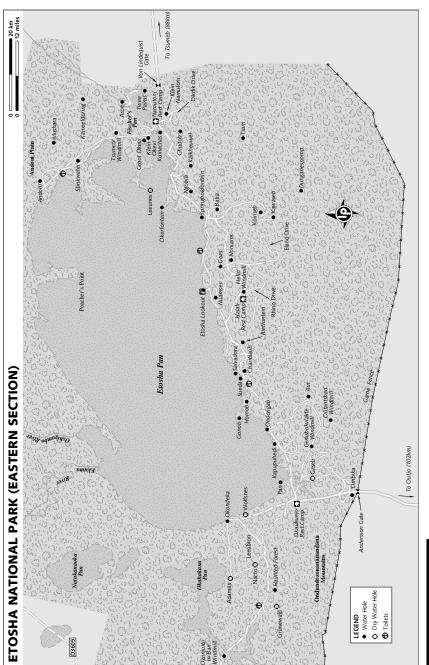
The Epupa Camp (🖻 695102, reservations 061-232740; epupa@mweb.com.na; PO Box 26078, Windhoek; s/d US\$135/205), 800m upstream from the falls, was originally used as an engineering camp for a now-shelved hydro project. It has since been converted into a beautifully situated camp where rates include tented accommodation with meals, drinks and activities such as Himba visits, bird-watching walks, sundowner hikes and trips to rock-art sites.

From Opuwo or Swartbooi's Drift, it's possible to drive to Epupa Falls via Okongwati in a high-clearance 2WD, but the route remains very rough. Via the Kunene River road, it's 93km to Epupa Falls from Swartbooi's Drift. Even with a 4WD vehicle it takes at least 12 hours, but this lovely stretch - known as the Namibian Riviera - serves as an increasingly popular hiking route.

ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

Etosha National Park, the 'Great White Place of Dry Water', takes in approximately 20,000 sq km surrounding its namesake, the vast white and greenish-coloured Etosha Pan. This vast park protects 114 mammal species, as well as 340 bird species, 16 reptiles and amphibians, one fish species and countless insects.

The first Europeans in Etosha were traders and explorers John Andersson and Francis Galton, who arrived by wagon at Namutoni in 1851, but Etosha didn't attract the interest of tourists or conservationists until after the turn of the 20th century, when the governor of German South-West Africa, Dr F von Lindequist, became concerned over diminishing



animal numbers and founded a 99,526-sqkm reserve. In subsequent years, the park boundaries were altered several times, and by 1970 Etosha had been pared down to its present 23,175 sq km.

Only the eastern two-thirds of Etosha is open to the general public; the western third is reserved exclusively for tour operators. All roads in the eastern section are passable to 2WD vehicles and it's in this area that you'll find the rest camps. Each of the three rest camps has an information centre, and the staff and shops at either of the main gates sell maps and provide basic information.

Visitors must check in at Von Lindequist or Andersson and purchase a daily permit, which costs US\$3.50/0.30 per adult/child and US\$2.50 per vehicle. The permits must then be presented at your reserved rest camp, where you pay any outstanding camping or accommodation fees, which must be prebooked through a travel agency or the NWR in Windhoek (p959).

Book well in advance for visits during Namibian or South African school holidays (normally mid-December to mid-January, around Easter, late July to early August, and for two weeks in mid-October). During this period you may be limited to three nights in each of the three camps, although exceptions can sometimes be made.

Note that pets and firearms are prohibited in the park. Those booked into the rest camps must arrive before sunset and can only leave after sunrise; the daily times are posted on the gates.

Sleeping & Eating

MIBIA

Etosha is open to day visitors, but it's impossible to see much of the park in less than two or three days. Most visitors spend a couple of nights at one of its three rest camps, Namutoni, Halali and Okaukuejo, which are spaced at 70km intervals. Each has its own character, so it's worth visiting more than one if you have the time.

Okaukuejo Rest Camp (camping for 4 people US\$20, economy r or bungalows US\$33, 2-bed r US\$41, 3-bed bungalows US\$41, 4-bed chalets US\$50, 4-bed luxury bungalows US\$58, 4-bed self-catering bungalows US\$95; P 🕥) Okaukuejo's camping ground is a bit of a dust hole, but the self-catering accommodation may be the nicest in the park. The bungalows and chalets all have a kitchen and a braai (barbecue) pit, and bathroom and toilet facilities. The floodlit water hole is probably Etosha's best rhino-viewing venue, particularly between 8pm and 10pm.

Halali Rest Camp (camping for 4 people US\$20, 2-bed r US\$37, 4-bed economy bungalow US\$42, 4-bed self-catering bungalows US\$48-81) Etosha's middle camp, Halali nestles between several incongruous dolomite outcrops. The name is derived from a German term for the ritual horn-blowing to signal the end of a hunt, and a horn now serves as Halali's motif. A floodlit water hole extends wildlife-viewing into the night and allows observation of nocturnal creatures it's arguably the best wildlife-viewing venue in the park.

Namutoni Rest Camp (camping for 4 people US\$20, 2-bed r with/without bathroom US\$41/18, 2-bed economy apt inside/outside the fort US\$38/27, 4-bed chalets US\$45, 4-bed apt US\$42/50, 4-bed luxury ste US\$87) The most popular and best kept of the camps is Namutoni, with its landmark whitewashed German fort. It originally served as an outpost for German troops, and in 1899 the German cavalry built a fort from which to control Owambo uprisings.

Getting There & Away

Etosha's three main entry gates are Von Lindequist (Namutoni), west of Tsumeb; King Nehale, southeast of Ondangwa; and Andersson (Okaukuejo), north of Outjo. There's no public transport into the park, but Tsumeb, the nearest bus and rail terminal, 110km away, has several car-hire agencies. Otherwise, plenty of safari companies run Etosha tours (see p985).

OUTJO **a** 067

Bougainvillea-decked Outjo, settled in 1880, was never a mission station, but in the mid-1890s it did a short, uneventful stint as a German garrison town. For visitors, it best serves as a staging point for trips to Okaukuejo, in Etosha National Park. The 1899 military residence, the Franke House, now houses

the Outjo Museum (admission US\$0.60; 🕑 10am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri).

Located behind the African Curios Shop, Outjo Backpackers (🖻 313470; camping US\$4, dm US\$7, d with shared bathrooms US\$15; **P**) is centrally located and has basic but clean rooms and a wellstocked communal kitchen.

The Austrian-run Etosha Garden Hotel (2 313130; www.etosha-garden-hotel.com; s/d US\$30/50; **P R**) is just a short walk from the town centre and features well-furnished rooms that surround a manicured garden and spotless swimming pool.

Minibuses connect Outjo with Otjiwarongo (US\$2.50, one hour) from the bakery and the OK supermarket, but there's currently no public transport to Etosha or Khorixas.

TSUMEB a 067

Although mineral-collectors rank Tsumeb among the world's greatest natural wonders, travellers use it as another jumping-off point for Etosha. If geology is your passion, however, you'll be happy to know that of the 184 minerals discovered here, 10 are found nowhere else. The geological history is recounted in the Tsumeb Museum (220447; admission US\$1; 🕑 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), located in the 1915 Old German Private School on the corner of Main St and 8th Rd.

Travel North Namibia (220728; travelnn@tsu .namib.com; 1551 Omeg Alee) provides nationwide tourist information, accommodation and transport bookings, as well as car hire anywhere in northern Namibia (with special rates for Etosha trips).

Tsumeb's friendliest and most economical accommodation, Mousebird Backpackers & Safaris (221777; www.mousebird.com; 533 4th St; camping per person US\$4, dm/d US\$8/16; **P**) offers comfortable rooms, excellent kitchen facilities and a nice little bar. If you don't have a car, it also runs affordable safaris to Etosha (US\$160 for three days) and the Otjozondjupa region (US\$125 for two days).

Adjacent to the tourist office, Travel North Backpackers (220728; travelnn@tsu.namib.com; Omeg Alee; camping per person US\$4, dm US\$7, s/d from US\$14/25; (P) is a no-frills lodge. It lacks the personality of Mousebird, but it's still a cheap and comfortable option if you're counting your Nam dollars.

Located in the town centre, Makalani Hotel (🕿 221051; www.makalanihotel.com; 3rd St; s/d incl breakfast US\$60/85; P 🔊 🕅 is the most established and upmarket hotel in Tsumeb. Modern rooms feature satellite TV and air-con, and surround a sparkling swimming pool and a shady lapa (large, thatched common area).

The Intercape Mainliner between Windhoek and Victoria Falls calls in at the Travel North Namibia office. Minibuses travel frequently from the Bahnhof St terminus in Tsumeb to Grootfontein, Oshakati and Windhoek.

Trains run three times weekly to and from Windhoek and Walvis Bay. For train information, contact Trans-Namib (220358; www .transnamib.com.na).

WATERBERG PLATEAU PARK

Waterberg Plateau Park (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50; Sam-1pm & 2pm-sunset year-round) is comprised of a 50km-long and 16km-wide Etjo sandstone plateau, which looms 150m above the plain. Scattered around this sheersided 'Lost World' are numerous freshwater springs, which support a lush mosaic of trees and an abundance of wildlife. The park is also well known as a repository for rare and threatened species, including sables, roans and white rhinos.

Visitors may not explore the plateau in their own vehicles, but twice daily the NWR conducts three-hour wildlife drives (US\$12/5 per adult/child).

There are nine short walking tracks around Bernabé de la Bat Rest Camp, including one up to the plateau rim at Mountain View. A four-day, 42km unguided hike around a figure-eight track (US\$12 per person) starts at 9am every Wednesday from April to November. Groups are limited to between three and 10 people. Hikers stay in basic shelters and don't need a tent, but must otherwise be self-sufficient.

The Bernabé de la Bat Rest Camp (camping for up to 4 people US\$12, d/tr bungalows US\$40/50, 5-bed bungalows/ ste US\$50/65; P) offers a range of accommodation with fans, braais and outdoor seating areas. The camp restaurant serves meals during limited hours and a shop sells staple foods in the morning and afternoon.

There's no public transportation, but taxis from Otjiwarongo will get you to the park for around US\$25 each way and quite a few budget safaris include it in their itineraries. Note that bicycles and motorcycles aren't permitted.

NORTHEASTERN NAMIBIA

This region, which includes the formerly dangerous Caprivi Strip, forms a stark contrast to the aridity of much of the rest of the country. Here water flows year-round. This is a tranquil area of stunning sunsets and lazy days. Spend some time relaxing on the banks of the mighty Okavango River, doing nothing more than listening to the hippos call. Although once an area whose name was synonymous with danger due to the intermittent civil wars in Angola, today the Caprivi Strip is perfectly safe. Angola signed a peace accord in April 2002 and problems in the area ceased.

RUNDU

a 066

Rundu, a sultry tropical outpost on the bluffs above the Okavango River, has little of specific interest for tourists, but it's great to laze at one of the lodges alongside the river, especially if you want to break up the long drive to or from the Caprivi Strip. It's also a centre of activity for Namibia's growing Angolan community. Every May at Rundu Beach, locals put on the Anything that Floats regatta, accompanied by the usual drinking, dining and socialising.

The tourism centre (256140; ngandu@mweb.com; Kakakuru St; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat), run by the same folks as Ngandu Safari Lodge, can provide basic tourist information.

The well-stocked Okavango Pharmacy (Siwaronga St) is probably the best in northern Namibia.

If you're shopping for crafts, be sure to visit the Khemo Open Market, which has a good selection of Kavango woodcarvings.

Sleeping & Eating

Ngandu Safari Lodge (🖻 256723; ngandu@mweb .com.na; Sarasungu Rd; camping per person US\$4, s/d from US\$30/40; P 🕥) With a wide range of accommodation to suit travellers of all budgets, this long-standing Rundu lodge draws a diverse mix of guests. Ngandu is conveniently situated near the centre of town, though it's about 1km from the riverfront.

Sarasungu River Lodge (🖻 255161; sarasungu@mweb .com.na; camping per person US\$4, s/d US\$30/40; (P) 🔊) This brand-new lodge is situated in a secluded riverine clearing 4km from the town centre, and features a number of attractive thatched chalets that surround a landscaped pool.

Tambuti Lodge (🗃 255711; tambuti@namibnet.com; s/d with breakfast US\$35/40, honeymoon ste US\$80; P 🔊) This small Swiss-run lodge is located at Rundu Beach, and combines the convenience of being in town with the beauty of a riverside setting. Highlights are the on-site restaurant, which features a host of traditional Swiss dishes, and the honeymoon suite, which has one of the most bizarre Jacuzzis you've ever seen.

N'Kwazi Lodge (🖻 255467; nkwazi@iafrica.com.na; camping per person US\$4, African huts with bathroom US\$25, d incl breakfast US\$55) The N'Kwazi makes a great riverside retreat with family-style meals and hospitality. In the evening you can take a sunset cruise on the Okavango; the lodge also organises cultural evenings with residents of adjacent Mayana village, and visits to Mayana School, which is supported by the lodge. Transfers from town cost US\$29 per group.

Hakusembe Lodge (257010; www.natron.net/ hakusembe; camping per person US\$4, s/d with half-board US\$140/215; 🕑 🔀 😰) This secluded hideaway sits amid lush riverside gardens and features eight luxury chalets (one of which is floating) decked out in safari prints and locally crafted furniture. It lies 17km down the Nkurenkuru road, then 2km north to the riverbank.

Antja's (256973; Main St; breakfast US\$2, meals US\$2-4) A good option for breakfast, burgers, toasted sandwiches, pies, sweets and coffee (including espresso and cappuccino).

Ozzy's Beer House (256723; meals US\$3-5) This popular restaurant serves up greasy local fare, though it's cheap and has a good number of vegetarian options as well.

Getting There & Away

Intercape Mainliner's weekly buses between Windhoek (US\$38, 9 hours) and Victoria Falls (US\$36, 11 hours) pass Rundu's Shell petrol station at 5.15am Saturday northbound and 7.15pm Sunday southbound.

Star Line's twice-weekly services between Windhoek (US\$15, 11 hours) and Katima Mulilo (US\$12, seven hours) also call in at Rundu. Star Line runs a bus from Rundu to Tsumeb (US\$9, four hours), via Grootfontein, at 8pm on Wednesday and Sunday. The bus from Grootfontein to Rundu (US\$8, three hours) leaves at 7.30pm on Tuesday and Friday.

A car ferry and border crossing are expected soon between Rundu and Calai, across the river in Angola.

KHAUDOM GAME RESERVE

If you're looking for a truly wild and untouristed wildlife venue in Namibia, head for the undeveloped Khaudom Game Reserve (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50), which takes in 384,000 hectares. Along its meandering sand tracks you'll see roan antelopes, wild dogs, elephants, zebras and most other species you'd encounter at Etosha National Park, but in a much lonelier context.

The NWR asks visitors to travel in a twovehicle convoy and be self-sufficient in food, water and spares. Caravans, trailers and motorcycles are prohibited. The two camp sites **Khaudom** (camping for 4 people US\$12, 4-bed huts US\$14) and Sikereti (camping for 4 people US\$12, 4-bed huts US\$14) won't disappoint. All visitors must prebook through the NWR office in Windhoek (p959).

BWABWATA NATIONAL PARK a 066

Bwabwata National Park includes five main zones: the 20,500-hectare West Caprivi Triangle around Kongola (also known as the Kwando Core Area), the Mahango Game Reserve, Popa Falls, the Buffalo Core Area near Divundu and the now-defunct West Caprivi Game Reserve. Bwabwata aims to rehabilitate wildlife populations that were virtually destroyed by poaching.

Prior to the 2002 Angolan cease-fire, this area saw almost no visitors. Now that peace has returned, however, tourism is slowly starting to pick up again. If you're looking to get off the beaten path, this is a great area to explore while it's still relatively undiscovered.

The 25,400-hectare Mahango Game Reserve (admission per person/vehicle US\$3.50/3.50) occupies a broad flood plain that's best known for its dry-season concentrations of thirsty elephants. This is the only national park unit in Namibia where visitors are permitted to walk at will; winter is the best time for observing the area's ample wildlife. The nearest NWR camp is Popa Falls, 15km north of Mahango.

Near Bagani, the Okavango River tumbles down a broad series of cascades known as Popa Falls (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50). They're nothing to get steamed up about, but low water does expose a 4m drop. A kiosk sells the basics: tinned food, beer, candles and mosquito coils.

Sleeping

WESTERN SECTION

Following are the accommodation options in the western section of the park.

N//goabaca Camp (www.nacobta.com.na; camping per person US\$4; **P**) This locally run camp site is a member of Nacobta, a collective of organisations that aims to foster increased community-based tourism. The camp sits beside the Okavango River opposite the Popa Falls Rest Camp and has similar facilities.

Ngepi Camp (🖻 259903; www.ngepicamp.com; camping per person US\$5, huts US\$22; P) Ngepi is Mbukushu for 'How are you?', and folks who stay here are normally just fine. Travellers rave about this place, and we agree: it's probably one of the best backpacker lodges in Namibia. Entire days can be spent sunbathing and reading on the green lawns or swimming in the Okavango River 'cage' (it keeps you and the crocs at a safe distance from one another). Entire nights can be spent boozing it up in the inviting bush bar. Crash for the night in a reed hut or pitch a tent by the river, and let the sounds of hippos splashing ease you into a restful sleep. The camp is located 4km off the main road, though the sandy access can prove difficult without a 4WD. Phone the lodge if you need a lift from Divundu.

Popa Falls Rest Camp (camping for 4 people US\$12, each additional person US\$2, standard/luxury 4-bed huts US\$26/28; **P**) Although it's getting a bit shabby, this NWR-run camp site does afford great views of the cascades. A small on-site shop sells the essentials while a field kitchen is available for self-catering. Facilities include cold showers, sit-down flush toilets and braai pits.

EASTERN SECTION

At the eastern end of the park are several accommodation options.

Nambwa Camp Site (camping per person US\$5) Nambwa, 14km south of Kongola, lacks facilities, but it's the only official camp in the eastern part of the park. Book and pick up a permit at the Susuwe ranger station, about 4km north of Kongola (4WD access only) on the west bank of the river. To reach the camp, follow the 4WD track south along the western bank of the Kwando River.

Susuwe Island Lodge (in South Africa 11-706 7207; www.islandsinafrica.com; per person low/high season US\$305/465) This chic safari lodge is located on a remote island in the Kwando River, surrounded by a wildlife-rich habitat of

savannah, woodland and wetland. Accommodation is in six stylish brick-and-thatch chalets adorned in soft earthy hues. Susuwe is accessible only by charter flight or 4WD. Prebooking is mandatory.

Getting There & Away

All buses and minibuses between Katima Mulilo and Rundu pass through Divundu. The gravel road between Divundu and Mohembo (on the Botswana border) is accessible by 2WD, and there's lots of traffic but no public transport; drivers may transit the park without charge, but incur national park entry fees to use the loop drive through the park.

KATIMA MULILO a 066

Out on a limb at the eastern end of the Caprivi Strip lies remote Katima Mulilo, which is as far from Windhoek as you can get in Namibia. This very African town features lush vegetation and enormous trees, and was once known for the elephants that marched through. Nowadays little wildlife remains, but the ambience is still pleasant.

Although it advertises itself as a 'backpackers lodge', the Caprivi Traveller Guest House (252788; dm/s/d US\$5/14/16; **P**) is actually more of a budget hotel, but it's a cheap and clean option if you're just looking to crash for the night. To get there, follow the Rundu road 1km from the centre, turn left onto the nameless gravel road and continue on for 400m; the guesthouse is on the left.

The stunning Zambezi Lodge (253149; www .namibsunhotels.com.na; camping per person US\$4, s/d incl breakfast US\$65/95; 🕑 😰) is perched on the banks of the Zambezi, and features a floating bar where you can watch the crocs and hippos below. The lodge is located 2km from town along the Ngoma Rd.

The reader-recommended Caprivi River Lodge (253300; www.capriviriverlodge.net; camping per person US\$4, budget room s/d US\$45/80, chalet incl breakfast US\$90/110; P 🕥) offers rustic chalets and modest wooden cabins with shared bathrooms, as well as a grassy camp site to suit travellers of all budgets. The lodge is located 5km from town along the Ngoma Rd.

The Intercape Mainliner passes Katima Mulilo en route between Windhoek and Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe). Minibuses run when full to and from Windhoek (US\$15, 151/2 hours) and points in between.

Drivers of foreign-registered vehicles leaving Namibia at Ngoma Bridge or Wenela need a US\$10 road tax certificate; if you didn't receive one on entry, purchase one at the road tax office in town.

SOUTHERN NAMIBIA

Southern Namibia takes in everything from Rehoboth in the north to the Orange River along the South African border, and westward from the Botswana border to the Diamond Coast. The Central Plateau is characterised by wide open country, and the area's widely spaced and largely uninspiring towns function mainly as commercial and market centres. Further south, however, the landscape opens up into seemingly endless desert plains, ranges and far horizons - and the surprising Fish River Canyon forms a spectacular gash across the landscape.

FISH RIVER CANYON NATIONAL PARK **a** 063

Nowhere else in Africa will you find anything quite like Fish River Canyon. Fish River, which joins the Orange River 70km south of the canyon, has been gouging out this gorge for aeons. The canyon measures 160km in length and up to 27km in width, and the dramatic inner canyon reaches a depth of 550m. Although these figures by themselves are impressive, it's difficult to get a sense of perspective without actually witnessing the enormous scope of the canyon.

Information

The main access points for Fish River Canyon are at Hobas, near the northern end of the park, and Ai-Ais, near the southern end. Both are administered by the NWR, and all accommodations must be booked in advance through the Windhoek office (p959). Daily park permits, which cost US\$3 per person and US\$3 per vehicle, are valid for both Hobas and Ai-Ais. The Hobas Information Centre (🕑 7.30amnoon & 2-5pm) at the northern end of the park is also the check-in point for the five-day canyon hike. Packaged snacks and cool drinks are available here, but little else.

Activities

The five-day hike (US\$11 per person) from Hobas to Ai-Ais is Namibia's most popular long-distance walk - and with good reason. The magical 85km route, which follows the sandy riverbed past a series of ephemeral pools (in May and June the river actually does flow), begins at Hikers' Viewpoint, and ends at the hot-spring resort of Ai-Ais.

Due to flash flooding and heat in the summer months, the route is open only from 1 May to 30 September. Groups of three to 40 people may begin the hike every day of the season, though you will have to book in advance as the trail is extremely popular. Reservations can be made through the NWR office in Windhoek.

Officials sometimes require a doctors' certificate of fitness, issued less than 40-days before your hike, though if you look young and fit, they might not ask. Hikers must arrange their own transport to and from the start and finish as well as accommodation in Hobas and Ai-Ais.

Thanks to the typically warm, clear weather, you probably won't need a tent, but you must carry a sleeping bag and food. In Hobas, check on water availability in the canyon. In August and September, the last 15km of the walk can be completely dry and hikers will need several 2L water bottles to manage this hot, sandy stretch. Large plastic soft-drink bottles normally work just fine.

Sleeping & Eating

Hobas Camp Site (camping for 4 people US\$15; P 😰) This pleasant and well-shaded camping ground near the park's northern end is situated about 10km from the main viewpoints. Facilities are clean, and there's also a kiosk and swimming pool, but no restaurant or petrol station.

Ai-Ais Hot Springs Resort (camping for 4 people US\$15, 4-bed bungalows US\$30, 2/4-bed apt US\$35/35; P 🕥) Amenities include washing blocks, braai pits and use of the resort facilities. All apartments have bathrooms and basic self-catering facilities. There is also an on-site restaurant and small grocery store.

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport to either Hobas or Ai-Ais, but hitching is fairly easy during the hiking season from mid-March to 31 October. Thanks to South African holiday traffic, the best-travelled route is to Ai-Ais via two turnings, one 36km north of Noordoewer and the other 30km south of Grünau. Once in Ai-Ais,

plenty of holiday-makers head for the viewpoints around Hobas, thus facilitating hitching between Ai-Ais, Hobas and the beginning of the Hikers' Viewpoint trailhead.

KEETMANSHOOP a 063

Keetmanshoop (kavt-mahns-hoo-up) sits at the main crossroads of southern Namibia and has more petrol stations per capita than any other town in the country, which may hint at its main function for travellers. However, if you're looking to break up a long drive, there are some noteworthy accommodation options in the area, especially if you've yet to photograph Namibia's most famous tree, the kokerboom (quiver tree).

Located 25km north of town, Garas Park (a 223217; morkel@namibnet.com; admission per person/vehicle US\$1/1) offers stands of kokerbooms and lots of hiking tracks and drives through a fantasy landscape of stacked boulders. It's enhanced by a series of sculptures made from spare junk. Camping is available for US\$3 per person, plus US\$1 per vehicle.

On Garaganus Farm, 14km east of town, Quivertree Rest Camp (222835; quiver@iafrica.com.na; admission per person/vehicle US\$2/2) boasts Namibia's largest stand of kokerbooms. Rates include use of the picnic facilities and entry to the Giant's Playground, a bizarre natural rock garden 5km away. Camping is available for US\$4 per person, or you can hire single/double 'igloo' bungalows for US\$20/30.

Intercape Mainliner buses between Windhoek (US\$24, 5¾ hours) and Cape Town (US\$32, 13³/₄ hours) stop at the Du Toit BP petrol station four times weekly in either direction; they also leave for Jo'burg (US\$46, 17 hours) via Upington. The Engen station, opposite, serves as the bus terminal for minibuses to and from Windhoek, Lüderitz and Noordoewer. Star Line (292202) buses to Lüderitz (US\$9, five hours) depart from the train station at 7.30am Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Overnight trains run Sunday to Friday between Windhoek (US\$9, 11 hours) and Keetmanshoop. On Wednesday and Saturday mornings at 9am, trains continue to Upington (US\$7.50, 12½ hours) in South Africa; from Upington, they run on Sunday and Thursday. For train or Star Line information, contact Trans-Namib (292202; www .transnamib.com.na).

LÜDERITZ

a 063

Lüderitz is a surreal colonial relic sandwiched between the barren Namib Desert coast and the windswept South Atlantic. Scarcely touched by the 21st century, this remote town might recall a Bavarian dorfchen (small village), with its churches, bakeries, cafés and Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) architecture. The local community is fiercely proud of their town's unique heritage, and travellers often find that they're greeted in Lüderitz with a warm smile and a cold pint.

Information

Several banks on Bismarck St change cash and travellers cheques.

Extreme Communications I-café (🕿 204256; Waterfront Complex; per hr US\$3.50; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Email and internet access.

Lüderitzbucht Tours & Safaris (🕿 202719; ludsaf@ldz.namib.com; Bismarck St; 🕑 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat, 8.30-10am Sun) Provides reliable tourist information, organises visitor permits for the Sperrgebiet, and sells curios, books, stamps and phonecards. Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR: 202752: Schinz

St; Y 7.30am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) Provides helpful national park information.

Siahts

Just about every view in Lüderitz reveals its German Imperial and Art Nouveau architectural heritage. Prominent buildings include the colonial train station (cnr Bahnhof & Bismarck St) and the Goerke Haus (Diamantberg St; admission US\$1.30; 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 4-5pm Sat & Sun).

The prominent 1912 Evangelical Lutheran church, Felsenkirche (Summer 5.30-7pm Mon-Sat, winter 4.30-6pm Mon-Sat), dominates Lüderitz from Diamond Hill. Designed by Albert Bause, who implemented the Victorian influences he'd seen in the Cape, the stained-glass panel over the altar was donated by Kaiser Wilhelm II. Go to see the late-afternoon sun shining through the extraordinary stained-glass work.

The Lüderitz Museum (202582; Diaz St; admission US\$1.30; 🕑 3.30-5pm Mon-Fri) details Lüderitz' diamond-mining heritage and other aspects of its natural and cultural history.

MIBIA Tours

ΝA

Atlantic Adventure Tours (204030; sedina@iafrica .com.na) Weather permitting, the schooner Sedina sails daily past the Cape fur-seal sanctuary at Diaz Point and the penguin colony on Halifax Island. The two- to three-hour trips cost US\$25; book at Lüderitzbucht Tours & Safaris.

Coastway Tours Lüderitz (202002; lewiscwt@iway .na) Runs day tours (US\$80) to the 55m Bogenfels sea arch, Maerchental Valley and the ghost town of Pomona in the Sperrgebiet. This tour requires at least four participants and must be booked at least one week in advance. Ghost Town Tours (a 204033: kolmans@iafrica.com .na) This company operates day trips to Elizabeth Bay (US\$30), deep in the Sperrgebiet, and a full day taking in Kolmanskop, Elizabeth Bay and the Lüderitz Peninsula (US\$55). These trips run with a minimum of four people and permits must be issued at least a week in advance.

Sleeping

Shark Island Camp Site (camping for 4 people US\$12, 5-bed bungalows US\$70; P) This is a beautifully situated but aggravatingly windy locale. It's connected to the town by a causeway, but is no longer an island thanks to the recent harbour reclamation project that attached it to the mainland. Book through the NWR in Windhoek (p959) if space is available, camp sites and bungalows can also be booked at the entrance.

Lüderitz Backpackers (🖻 202000; luderitzbackpack ers@hotmail.com; 7 Schinz St; dm/d US\$10/25; P) In a historic colonial mansion, this friendly spot is the only true backpackers in town. The vibe is congenial and low-key, and friendly management will help sort out your onward travels. Hansa Haus Guesthouse (🖻 203581; mcloud@africa

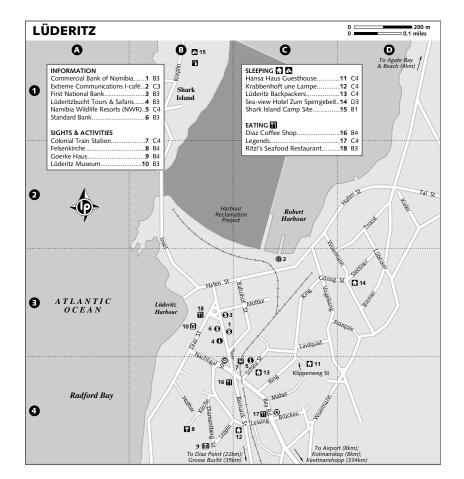
online.com.na; Klippenweg St; s/d with shared bathroom US\$30/35; P) This hilltop home boasts sea views and quiet surroundings. Rooms feature high ceilings and picture windows. Amenities include a TV lounge and communal kitchen.

Krabbenhoft une Lampe (🖻 202674; taurus@ldz .namib.com; 25 Bismarck St; s/d with shared bathroom US\$30/40, apt from US\$55; **P**) One of the more unusual accommodation options in town, the Krabbenhoft is a converted carpet factory that now offers a number of basic rooms and selfcatering apartments upstairs from a weaver.

Sea-view Hotel Zum Sperrgebiet (203411; michaels@ldz.namib.com: cnr Woermann & Stettiner Sts; s/ d/f US\$85/135/225; P 🔀 🕥) This modern hotel boasts a glassed-in indoor swimming pool, a sauna, sweeping terraces, harbour views and even an indoor banana tree - it's a natural favourite with German visitors.

Eating & Drinking

Diaz Coffee Shop (🖻 203147; cnr Bismarck & Nachtigal Sts; snacks & meals US\$1-4) This quaint and cosy coffee shop serves excellent toasties, light meals, coffee and cakes - its Sunday continental breakfast is popular amongst locals.



Legends (203110; Bay Rd; mains US\$5-10) This understated restaurant has a relaxed atmosphere and serves up a healthy mix of seafood, grilled meats, pizzas and burgers as well as the odd vegetarian option or two.

Ritzi's Seafood Restaurant (🖻 202818; Diaz St; mains US\$6-12) This long-standing waterfront institution is the top spot in town for seafood. Not surprisingly, it's always fully booked, so reservations are essential. Imaginative dishes are concocted from fish, lobster, oysters, game meats and beef, but there's usually a few vegetarian options on the menu.

Getting There & Away

Air Namibia travels four times a week between Windhoek and Lüderitz, once weekly to and from Swakopmund and twice weekly to and from Walvis Bay.

Star Line (312875) buses to Keetmanshoop (US\$9, five hours) leave from the historic train station at 12.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

NAMIBIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Namibia is well equipped for travellers of all price ranges – you can find backpacker ac-commodation in most places, camping areas throughout the country, midrange hotels and a healthy smattering of posh safari lodges. Quality is extremely high, and even budget

PRACTICALITIES

- Weights, measures and road distances use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220-240V AC, 50Hz and uses South African-style two- or threeround-pin plugs.
- For English-language news see www .namibianews.com.
- The Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) operates nine radio stations broadcasting on different wavebands in 12 languages.

lodges provide internet access, a pool, a bar and laundry facilities. Many hotels also serve meals and run travel centres.

ACTIVITIES

Namibia is an outdoor enthusiast's dream. There are endless opportunities for hiking and camping. Swakopmund (p964) is the adrenalin capital of the country with everything from skydiving to sandboarding.

BUSINESS HOURS

Normal business hours are from 8am to 1pm and 2.30pm to 5pm weekdays. In the winter, when it gets dark early, some shops open at 7.30am and close at around 4pm. Lunchtime closing is almost universal. On Saturday, most city and town shops open from 8am to 1pm.

Restaurant opening hours vary according to the type of establishment - as a rule cafés and cheap eats will be open all day long, closing in the early evening. More expensive restaurants will be open from around 10.30am to 11pm Monday to Saturday, usually with a break between lunch and dinner.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Theft isn't particularly rife, but take care walking alone at night, conceal your valuables in Windhoek or towns around the country, and don't leave anything in sight inside a vehicle. Take the same precautions at camp sites in towns - although there's no problem at camp sites in national parks (not from humans anyway; just watch out for the monkeys).

East of Lüderitz, do not enter the prohibited diamond area, mainly south of the road to Keetmanshoop; well-armed patrols can be overly zealous.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Namibian Embassies & Consulates

Namibia has diplomatic representation in the following countries, among others: Angola (🖻 39 54 83; Rua dos Coqueiros No 37, Luanda) Botswana (🗃 397 2685; BCC Bldg, 1278 Lobatse Rd, PO Box 1586, Gaborone) Canada (🕿 519-578-5932 ; 122 Avondale Av South, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 2C3) France (🖻 01 44 17 3265; 80 Ave Foch; Square de l'Avenue Foch, Paris 75016) Germany (🖻 49-30 254 0950; namibiaberlin@aol.com; Wichmannstrasse 5, Berlin 10787) South Africa (🕿 012-481 9100; secretary@namibia.org .za; 197 Blackwood St, Arcadia, Pretoria) UK (a) 020-7636 6244; http://namibia.embassyhome page.com; 6 Chandos St, London W1M 0LQ) USA (a 202-986-0540; www.namibianembassyusa.org; 1605 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington, DC 20009)

Zambia (🖻 260407/8; fax 263858; 30B Mutende Rd, Woodlands) Zimbabwe (🕿 885841; 69 Borrowdale Rd, Harare)

Embassies & Consulates in Namibia

Countries with diplomatic representation in Windhoek include the following: Angola (Map p962; 🖻 227535; fax 221498; Angola House, 3 Ausspann St. Ausspannplatz, Private Bag 12020: 🕑 9am-1pm)

Botswana (Map p960; 🕿 221941; fax 236034; 101 Nelson Mandela Dr. PO Box 20359; 🕅 8am-12.30pm) European Union (Map p962; 🖻 220099; 4th fl, Sanlam Centre, 154 Independence Ave, PO Box 231; 🕑 9am-12.30pm)

France (Map p962; 229022; fax 231436; 1 Goethe St, PO Box 20484; 🕑 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm) Germany (Map p962; 223100; fax 222981; 6th fl. Sanlam Centre, 154 Independence Ave, PO Box 231: 9am-12.30pm)

Kenya (Map p962; 🖻 226836; fax 221409; Kenya House, Robert Mugabe Ave, PO Box 2889; 🕑 9am-12.30pm & 2-5pm)

Malawi (🖻 221391; fax 227056; 56 Bismarck St, Windhoek West, PO Box 23547; Y 9am-noon & 2-5pm) South Africa (Map p960; 205 7111; fax 224140; RSA House, cnr Jan Jonker St & Nelson Mandela Dr, Klein Windhoek, PO Box 23100; (> 8.15am-12.15pm) **UK** (Map p962; 223022; fax 228895; bhc@mweb.com .na; 116A Robert Mugabe Av, PO Box 22202; (>) 9am-noon) **USA** (Map p962; 221601; fax 229792; www.usembas sy.namibnet.com; 14 Lossen St, Ausspannplatz, Private Bag 12029; 🕑 8am-noon Mon, Wed & Fri) Zambia (Map p962; 🗃 237610; fax 228162; cnr Sam Nujoma Dr & Mandume Ndemufayo Ave, PO Box 22882; 8am-1pm & 2-4pm)

Zimbabwe (Map p962; 228134; fax 226859; Gamsberg Bldg, cnr Independence Ave & Grimm St, PO Box 23056; 🕅 9am-12.30pm & 2-3pm)

HOLIDAYS

Resort areas are busiest over both Namibian and South African school holidays, which normally occur from mid-December to mid-January, around Easter, from late July to early August, and for two weeks in mid-October. New Year's Day 1 January Good Friday March or April Easter Sunday March or April Easter Monday March or April Independence Day 21 March Ascension Day April or May (40 days after Easter) Workers' Day 1 May Cassinga Day 4 May Africa Day 25 May Heroes' Day 26 August Human Rights Day 10 December Christmas Day 25 December Family/Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Both email and internet access are available at backpackers hostels, internet cafés and hotels in larger towns, and also at several tourist offices and remote lodges.

MAPS

The Shell Roadmap - Namibia is the best reference for remote routes and has an excellent Windhoek map. Shell also publishes the Kaokoland-Kunene Region Tourist Map (US\$3), depicting all routes and tracks in this area. It's available at bookshops and tourist offices.

MONEY

The Namibian dollar (N\$) equals 100 cents, and in Namibia it's pegged to the South African rand, which is also legal tender in Namibia, at a rate of 1:1. This can be confusing, given that there are three sets of coins and notes in use. all with different sizes: old South African, new South African and Namibian. Namibian dollar notes come in denominations of N\$10, N\$20, N\$50, N\$100 and N\$200, and coins in values of 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents, and N\$1 and N\$5.

POST

Overseas airmail post is normally faster than domestic post, and is limited only by the time it takes an article to reach Windhoek (which can be slow in the outer areas).

TELEPHONE

Namibian area dialling codes all have three digits that begin with '06'. When phoning from abroad, first dial the country code (264), followed by the area code without the leading zero.

Phonecards are sold at post offices and retail shops.

VISAS

No visas are required for visitors from Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Canada or the USA. Travellers receive entry for an initial 90 days (free).

Visa Extensions

Extensions on the initial 90-day visa are available from the immigration office (292 2111; mlusepani@mha.gov.na; cnr Kasino St & Independence Ave; 8am-1pm Mon-Fri) in Windhoek. It's usually free to extend your visa; however, you are at the mercy of the immigration official. Another way of extending your visa is to simply leave the country for a few days and then return.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following neighbouring countries can be obtained in Windhoek. See opposite for embassy and consulate information. **Angola** Travellers must apply for a visa in their home country (usually limited to fly-in visas for arrival in Luanda) or attempt to secure an overland visa from the Angolan consulate in Oshakati, northern Namibia. Visas cost US\$75 for 30 days. Botswana No visa is required by citizens of most Commonwealth countries (including Australia and the UK), EU countries (except Spain and Portugal), Israel, Norway, South Africa, Switzerland and the USA. On arrival you'll get a 30-day entrance stamp.

South Africa No visa is required by citizens of most Commonwealth countries (including Australia and the UK), most Western European countries, Japan and the USA; they'll be issued with a free entry permit on arrival, valid for a stay of up to 90 days. If you aren't entitled to an entry permit, vou'll need to get a visa (also free) before vou arrive. Zambia Visas take one day to process and cost US\$60/95 for a single/double-entry visa, and US\$188 for a multipleentry visa. Note that they're available at the border for considerably less (normally US\$25 for US citizens and UK£45 for British subjects).

Zimbabwe With a few exceptions, visas are required by nationals of all countries. They can be obtained at your point of entry and cost US\$30/45 for single-entry/doubleentry visas. Multiple-entry visas (valid for six months) cost US\$55, but are only issued at Zimbabwean diplomatic missions.

TRANSPORT IN NAMIBIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Most international flights into Namibia land at Windhoek's Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport (a 061-299 6602; www.airports.com.na), 42km east of the capital city. Shorter-haul international flights may also use Windhoek's in-town Eros Airport (🖻 061-299 6500), although this airport mainly serves internal flights and light aircraft.

The main carrier is Air Namibia (www.airna mibia.com.na), which flies routes within southern Africa as well as some international flights to London and Frankfurt.

Land

To bring a foreign-registered vehicle into Namibia vou must purchase a US\$10 road-use tax certificate at the border.

ANGOLA

There are three border crossings between Namibia and Angola, at Ruacana-Calueque (open 6pm to 10pm), Oshikango-Namacunda (8am to 6pm) and Nkurenkuru-Cuangar (the crossing at Rundu; open 7am to 5pm), but travellers need an Angolan visa permitting overland entry. These are best obtained at the Angolan consulate in Oshakati, as the embassy in Windhoek tends to only give visas for air travel into Luanda. At Ruacana Falls, you can briefly enter the border area without a visa; just sign in at the border post.

BOTSWANA

The Trans-Kalahari Hwy to Botswana crosses the border at Buitepos-Mamuno (open 8am to 1am). In the Caprivi Strip, you can cross the border into Botswana at Ngoma Bridge (8am to 6pm) or between Mahango and Mohembo (6am to 6pm). The border crossing between Mpalila Island and Kasane (7am to 12.30pm and 1.45pm to 4pm) exists mainly for guests of safari lodges on the island.

SOUTH AFRICA

The Intercape Mainliner (🖻 0861 287 287; www.inter cape.co.za) service from Windhoek to Cape Town runs four times weekly. Travelling between Jo'burg and Windhoek involves a connection in Upington.

If you're driving, there are border crossings at Noordoewer, Vellorsdrif, Ariamsvlei and Klein Menasse-Aroab.

ZAMBIA

The only crossing between Namibia and Zambia is at Wenela, about 5km north of Katima Mulilo. On the Zambian side you can continue along the west bank of the Zambezi towards Mongu, or cross the Zambezi on the pontoon ferry (US\$10 per car, pedestrians ride free) and head east to Sesheke.

ZIMBABWE

There's no direct overland connection between Namibia and Zimbabwe. The most straightforward route is between Victoria Falls and the Caprivi Strip (via Botswana), which entails driving or hitching from the Namibian border at Ngoma Bridge through Chobe National Park (you won't be subject to Botswana national park fees unless you turn off onto the tourist route) and then to Kasane.

GETTING AROUND Air

Air Namibia (www.airnamibia.com.na) has an extensive network of local flights operating out of Eros Airport (20 061-299 6500) in Windhoek. There are regular flights to Tsumeb, Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Lüderitz, Swakopmund and Oshakati/Ondangwa.

Car & Motorcycle

The easiest way to get around Namibia is by road, and an excellent system of sealed roads runs the length of the country from the South African border at Noordoewer to Ngoma Bridge on the Botswana border and Ruacana on the Angola border in the northwest. Similarly, sealed spur roads connect the main north-south routes to Buitepos, Lüderitz, Swakopmund and Walvis Bay. Elsewhere, towns and most sites of interest are accessible on good gravel roads. C-numbered highways are well maintained and passable to all vehicles, and D-numbered roads, although a bit rougher, are mostly (but not always) passable to 2WD vehicles. In the Kaokoveld, however, most D-numbered roads can only be negotiated with a 4WD.

For a compact car, the least-expensive hire companies charge US\$40 to US\$60 per day (the longer the hire period, the lower the daily rate) with unlimited kilometres. Hiring a 4WD vehicle opens up remote parts of the country,

but it can get expensive at an average of US\$80 per day. Most companies include insurance and unlimited kilometres in their standard rates, but some require a minimum rental period before they allow unlimited kilometres.

It's cheaper to hire a car in South Africa and drive it into Namibia, but you need permission from the rental agency and paperwork to cross the borders. Drivers entering Namibia in a foreign-registered vehicle must pay a N\$70 (US\$10) road tax at the border.

It's probably best to deal with one of the major car-rental companies following: Avis (www.avis.com) Offices in Windhoek, Swakopmund, Tsumeb and Walvis Bay as well as Hosea Kutako airport. Budget (www.budget.co.za) Another big agency with offices in Windhoek and Walvis Bay as well as Hosea Kutako airport.

Imperial (www.imperialcarrental.co.za) Offices in Windhoek, Swakopmund, Tsumeb, Lüderitz, Walvis Bay and at both Hosea Kutako and Eros airports.

Triple Three Car Hire (www.iml.com.na/333) A competitive local car-hire firm with offices in Swakopmund and Walvis Bav.

Hitchina

Hitching is possible in Namibia, but it's illegal in national parks, and main highways see relatively little traffic. It's reasonably safe and fairly common, though it's still always a risk (see p1126). Truck drivers generally expect to be paid around US\$1.50 per 100km, so agree on a price before climbing in. Your best options for lifts are Windhoek backpackers lodges, where you can post notices about rides.

Local Transport

From Windhoek, Intercape Mainliner (Map p962; 2 061-227847; www.intercape.co.za) serves Swakopmund, Walvis Bay, Grootfontein, Rundu and Katima Mulilo, and also has international services. See p963 for fares.

Trans-Namib's Star Line (🖻 061-298 2030; www .transnamib.com.na) buses travel to Bethanie, Buitepos, Gobabis, Gochas, Grootfontein, Helmeringhausen, Henties Bay, Kamanjab, Khorixas, Lüderitz, Mariental, Opuwo, Oshakati, Outjo, Rundu, Walvis Bay and other destinations.

Fares on long-distance private minibuses, which depart when full, work out to US\$0.03 per kilometre (but they also may charge US\$1.80 per piece of luggage). Fares on minibuses generally work out to be cheaper than on buses, but minibuses are not nearly as comfortable.

Tours

Cardboard Box Travel Shop (🖻 061-256580; www .namibian.org; PO Box 5142, Windhoek) This friendly agency offers bookings (including last-minute options) for all budget safaris; lodge, safari, car hire and transport bookings; national parks bookings; good advice; and other travel services.

Chameleon Safaris (Map p962; **a** /fax 061-247668; www.chameleonsafaris.com; 5-7 Voight St, PO Box 6017, Windhoek) This budget safari company is geared to backpackers and does a range of good-value safaris: six-day Damaraland/Skeleton Coast (US\$400); three-day Sossusvlei (US\$150); 18-day 4WD tour (US\$950); 14-day northern and southern highlights (US\$600); and seven-day northern or southern highlights (US\$350 each).

Crazy Kudu Safaris (🖻 061-257642; www.wilddogsafaris.com; PO Bo 26188, Windhoek) One of Namibia's friendliest and most economical safari companies, Crazy Kudu does 10-day all-inclusive Namibia Explorer adventures through northern and central highlights (US\$440); a six-day northern highlights tour (US\$275); and a three-day Sossusvlei Express tour (US\$130), which may also be joined in Swakopmund. All departures are guaranteed. Crazy Kudu will also organise custom safaris, an Okavango Delta and Victoria Falls excursion, and Fish River Canvon or Kaokovled extensions for the best possible price. Bookings for Crazy Kudu are typically made through your accommodation. Muramba Bushman Trails (🖻 067-220659; bush man@natron.net; PO Box 689, Tsumeb) Owned by Reinhard Friedrich, this company provides a unique introduction to the Heikum San people.

Namib Sky (🖻 061-293233; fax 061-293241; namibsky@mweb.com.na; PO Box 5197, Windhoek) For those who dream of looming over the dunes in a balloon, this company offers Namib Desert balloon flights for US\$246 per person. The early-morning flight departs before sunrise, when not a breath of wind is stirring. Wild Dog Safaris (🖻 061-257642; www.wilddogsafaris.com; PO Box 26188, Windhoek) This friendly operation runs seven-day northern or southern Namibia adventures (US\$340 each) and three-day Etosha or Sossusvlei circuits (US\$160 each, or US\$350 for both), as well as longer participation safaris and accommodated excursions. Bookings for Wild Dog Safaris are typically made through vour accommodation.

Train

Trans-Namib Railways (🖻 061-298 2032; www.trans namib.com.na) connects most of the major towns, but trains are extremely slow – as one reader remarked, moving 'at the pace of an energetic donkey cart'. In addition, passenger and freight cars are mixed on the same train, and trains tend to stop at every post. As a result, rail travel isn't popular and services are rarely fully booked.

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OUTH AFRICA

It's no wonder that South Africa draws more visitors than anywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa. World-class wildlife-watching, cosmopolitan cities, stunning natural panoramas and vibrant cultures make the country appealing to almost every taste and budget. Geographically, its extremes include the arid semidesert of the Karoo, the snowcapped peaks of the Drakensberg Range, the lush subtropical coast of KwaZulu-Natal and the fertile temperate valleys of Western Cape. Within the space of a day, you can journey from vineyard-clad hillsides in the Western Cape to the vast open spaces of the Kalahari; from Cape Town's waterfront chic to isolated Zulu villages; from elephant-spotting in Kruger National Park to the sublime seascapes of the coast.

While it's easy to focus on the glitz and developed infrastructure, you'll only get below the surface by seeking out the country's other face – most visible in the sprawling townships where far too many people live stalked by the shadows of hunger, poverty and one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in the world. Behind its incredible natural beauty, South Africa is the stage for the daily drama of one of the world's greatest experiments in racial harmony. The intensity of this drama surrounds you wherever you go, and is likely to be one of the most fascinating and challenging aspects of your travels.

FAST FACTS

- Area 1,233,404 sq km
- **ATMs** Found in most cities and large towns
- Borders Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho
- Budget US\$25 to US\$50 a day
- Capital Pretoria (administrative), Bloemfontein (judicial) and Cape Town (legislative)
- Languages 11 (English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Sepedi, Setswana, Sotho, Swati, Tshivenda, Xhosa, Xitsonga, and Zulu)
- Money Rand; US\$1 = R7.4
- Population 46.9 million
- Seasons Cape Town: cold & wet (May to August); sunny & warm (September to May); Durban & Johannesburg: dry (May to September); wet (October to April)
- Telephone Country code 27; international access 209
- Time GMT/UTC + 2
- Visa Free, 90-day entry permits issued on arrival to citizens of most Commonwealth countries (including Australia and the UK), most Western European countries, Japan and the USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Cape Town** (p993) Marvel at the city's majestic setting and take a tipple tour of the area's wineries.
- **Kruger National Park** (p1026) Stay in a remote bushveld camp and fall asleep to the sounds of grunting hippos.
- Drakensberg Mountains (p1013) Hike the peaks of Royal Natal National Park's magnificent Amphitheatre.
- Wild Coast (p1005) Bum around the spectacular beaches, hidden waterfalls and isolated reserves.
- **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (p1028) Become hypnotised by the vast and beautiful expanses of the Kalahari.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

South Africa has been favoured by nature with one of the most temperate climates on the African continent, and can be visited comfortably any time. Winter (June to September) is cooler and drier, and ideal for hiking and outdoor pursuits. Because vegetation is less dense, and thirsty animals congregate around water sources, winter is also the best time for wildlife-watching.

Summer (late November to March) brings rain, mists and – in the lowveld – some uncomfortably hot days. Along the Indian Ocean coast, conditions are sultry and tropical, with high humidity.

More of a consideration than weather are school holidays. From mid-December to January, waves of vacation-hungry South Africans stream out of the cities, with visitors from Europe and North America adding to the crush. The absolute peak is from Christmas to mid-January, followed by Easter. Accommodation in tourist areas and national parks is heavily booked, and prices can increase by more than double.

Spring (mid-September to November) and autumn (April and May) are ideal almost everywhere. Spring is also the best time to see vast expanses of Northern Cape carpeted with wildflowers.

ITINERARIES

Two Weeks Using Johannesburg (p1015) as a gateway, head east to Kruger National Park (p1026), South Africa's most convenient safari showpiece. The teeming wildlife here will undoubtedly hold you captivated for at least several days. From

HOW MUCH?

- Bottle of wine US\$9
- Car hire per day US\$40
- 1k of mangoes US\$0.80
- Kruger National Park entry US\$16
- Surfboard US\$200

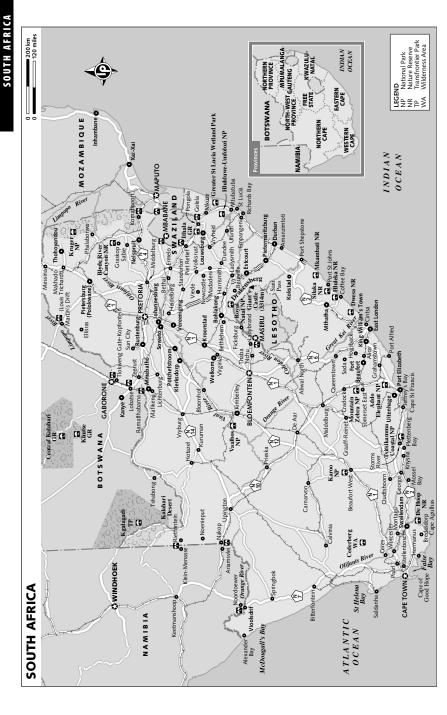
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- 1L petrol US\$0.72
- 1L water US\$0.90
- Bottle of beer US\$1
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$8
- Roasted mealie US\$0.30

Kruger, head south into KwaZulu-Natal, where the dramatic valleys and peaks of the Drakensberg Mountains and Royal Natal National Park (p1014) provide an endless array of excellent hikes. Head up Sani Pass (p1015) to the Lesotho border for breathtaking views before returning to the throbbing heart of the country to get a taste of township life in Soweto (p1018).

One Month After a few days in Cape Town (p993) and a trip to the top of Table Mountain (p996), tear yourself away from this wonderful city and head to the fertile valleys of the Winelands, with a night or two in Stellenbosch (p1001) and then via the scenic Route 62 through the Little Karoo to Oudtshoorn (p1002), South Africa's ostrich capital. Make your way south, joining the N2 along the Garden Route, near Knysna (p1002), with its sylvan setting, and Plettenberg Bay (p1003), a relaxed beachside resort town. Be sure to stop at Tsitsikamma Coastal National Park (p1003) along the coast. Move eastwards through the striking Wild Coast (p1005), before spending a day or so on the beach in Durban (p1007). Head north into the heart of Zululand (p1013) or the Drakensberg (p1013) or continue north for as much time as possible enjoying the parks, including the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park (p1012) and Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park (p1012) before returning to Durban or making your way to Johannesburg for the flight home.





HISTORY

The earliest recorded inhabitants of this area of Africa were the San (Bushmen) and the closely related Khoikhoi (Hottentots). The next arrivals were Bantu-speaking tribes who, by the 11th century, had settled the northeast and the east coast and, by the 15th century, most of the eastern half of South Africa. These tribes were pastoral but had trade links throughout the region. They were Iron Age peoples, and the smelting techniques of some tribes were not surpassed in Europe until the Industrial Revolution.

The Dutch East India Company established the first European settlement in South Africa at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. The settlers developed a close-knit community with their own dialect (Afrikaans) and Calvinist sect (the Dutch Reformed Church). Slaves were imported from other parts of Africa and Southeast Asia.

Over the next 150 years, the colonists spread east, coming into violent contact with Bantu tribes. In 1779 the eastward expansion of the Boers (Dutch-Afrikaner farmers) was temporarily halted by the Xhosa in the first Bantu War.

Further Boer expansion was hastened after the British annexed the Cape in 1806. The abolition of slavery in 1834 was regarded by the Boers as an intolerable interference in their affairs, and led to migration across the Orange River two years later. This became known as the Great Trek.

Pressure on the Bantu from both the Boers and the British caused political and social changes among the tribes of the Natal area, resulting in the rise of the Zulu king, Shaka, in the early 19th century. His policy of total war on neighbouring tribes caused immense suffering and mass migration in a period known as the *difagane* (the scattering).

The Boers came into this chaos in search of new lands, and the British were not far behind them. The Zulu were eventually defeated, but relations between the Boers and the British remained tense - particularly after the formation of the Boer republics of the Free State and the Transvaal.

Diamonds were discovered in 1867 at Kimberley, followed by the discovery of gold in 1886 on the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg (Jo'burg). The Boer republics were flooded with British capital and immigrants, which created resentment among Boer farmers.

The British imperialist Cecil Rhodes encouraged a rebellion among the heavily taxed but nonvoting – English-speaking miners in the Transvaal, with a view to destabilising the Boer republics and encouraging British intervention. The resulting to intervention. The resulting tensions led to the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War.

The war ended with the defeat of the Boer republics and the imposition of British rule over the whole country. Britain had pursued a scorched-earth policy to combat Boer guerrillas, destroying homes, crops and livestock. During this time more than 26,000 Afrikaner women and children died in the world's first concentration camps.

Independence & Apartheid

In 1910 the Union of South Africa was created, which gave political control to the whites. Inevitably, this prompted black resistance in the form of strikes, and political organisations were formed. Despite the moderate tone of these early resistance groups, the government reacted by intensifying repression.

The Afrikaner National Party won the election in 1948. It went even further in excluding nonwhites from having any political or economic power, and the security forces brutally enforced its laws. Violence was a routine method of reaction to any opposition or protest. The suppression of black resistance ranged from the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 and the shooting of school children in Soweto in 1976, to the forcible evacuation and bulldozing of squatter settlements and the systematic torture - even murder - of political activists, such as Steve Biko.

One of the most important organisations to oppose the racist legislation was the African National Congress (ANC). As it became obvious that the white rulers were unwilling to undertake even the most cosmetic reforms, guerrilla warfare became the preferred option for the ANC. In the early 1960s, many ANC leaders were arrested, charged with treason and imprisoned for long periods; the most famous of those was Nelson Mandela.

The system of apartheid was entrenched even further in the early 1970s by the creation of the so-called Black homelands of Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana and Venda. These were, in theory, 'independent' countries. By creating the homelands, all blacks within white-designated South Africa were deemed foreign guest-workers and as such were

AFRI

SOUTH

without political rights. Any black person without a residence pass could be 'deported' to a homeland.

Meanwhile, South Africa was becoming an isolated case in the face of successful liberation struggles in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, which brought Marxist-leaning governments into power. As a result, a war psychosis came to dominate government thinking, and resulted in the invasion of southern Angola by South African armed forces. The South African Government also gave encouragement to counter-revolutionary guerrilla groups in both Mozambique and Angola, and refused to enter into genuine negotiations for the independence of Namibia.

The international community finally began to oppose the apartheid regime, and the UN imposed economic and political sanctions. The government made some concessions, including the establishment of a farcical new parliament of whites, coloureds (people of mixed race) and Indians - but no blacks.

The 'reforms' did nothing to ease sanctions. After the 1989 elections the new president, FW de Klerk, instituted a program that was aimed not only at dismantling the apartheid system, but also at introducing democracy. The release of political prisoners on 11 February 1990 (including Nelson Mandela), the repeal of the Group Areas Act (which set up the homelands), and the signing of a peace accord with the ANC and other opposition groups all opened the way for hard-fought negotiations on the path to majority rule.

The Post-Apartheid Era

The country's first democratic elections took place in 1994, and across the country at midnight on 26-27 April, Die Stem (the old national anthem) was sung and the old flag was lowered. A new rainbow flag was raised and the new anthem, Nkosi Sikelele Afrika (God Bless Africa), was sung. In the past people had been jailed for singing this beautiful anthem.

In the first democratic election in the country's history, the ANC won 62.7% of the vote; 66.7% would have enabled it to overrule the interim constitution. The National Party won 20.4% of the vote, enough to guarantee it representation in cabinet. Nelson Mandela was made president of the 'new' South Africa.

In 1999, after five years of learning about democracy, the country voted in a more 'normal' election. Issues such as economics and competence were raised and debated.

There was some speculation that the ANC vote might drop with the retirement of Nelson Mandela. However, the ANC's vote increased to the point where the party came within one seat of the two-thirds majority that would allow it to alter the constitution. The National Party lost two-thirds of its seats, losing its official opposition status to the Democratic Party. Thabo Mbeki, who took over leadership of the ANC from Nelson Mandela, became president in the 1999 elections.

While Mbeki is viewed with far less affection by the ANC grass-roots than the beloved 'Madiba' (Mandela), he has proven himself a shrewd politician, maintaining his political pre-eminence by isolating or co-opting opposition parties. The 2004 national elections were won decisively by the ANC with 70% of the votes, with Mbeki at the helm, and today continues its dominance in daily political life.

Yet it has not been all clear sailing. In the early days of his presidency, Mbeki's effective denial of the AIDS crisis invited global criticism, and his conspicuous failure to condemn the forced reclamation of white-owned farms in neighbouring Zimbabwe unnerved both South African landowners and foreign investors.

South Africa Today

In the coming years - in addition to choosing a successor for Mbeki, who has announced that he will step down in 2009 – attention is likely to focus overwhelmingly on crime, economic inequality, overhauling the education system and, especially, AIDS. With an estimated 4.5 million South Africans affected - more than in any other country in the world this scourge threatens to eclipse all of South Africa's other problems.

In many ways the real work of nation building is only now beginning. While the political violence that was threatening to engulf the country in the early 1990s has for the most part disappeared, racial and cultural divisions remain entrenched. Monuments, museums and other cultural heritage sites giving tribute to black South Africans and other previously excluded groups have been springing up across the country and filling a long vacant gap. Yet many have served to re-spark old tensions, and debate continues on all sides about which version of history is the 'real' one.

Perhaps the biggest attention grabber in South Africa's ongoing struggle to define itself as a nation has been Freedom Park - a multimillion dollar venture on the outskirts of Pretoria that is intended to give a sweeping overview of South African history. When finished, it will span the millennia from humankind's earliest beginnings up to the present, including a memorial to apartheid-era freedom fighters. The park, which has been lauded by President Mbeki as the country's most important national monument, is set directly opposite the Voortrekker Monument for years an icon for most Afrikaners and a despised symbol of colonial-era injustices for many other South Africans.

What's the next step? While almost all South Africans agree that things are better than before, no-one has quite been able to agree on which way forward will best balance out the diversity that is the country's greatest asset, as well as its biggest challenge. There has been talk of building a road joining Freedom Park and the Voortrekker Monument. If this road ultimately comes to be seen by those on all sides as a symbol of a united path into the future, then it will have truly captured the emerging spirit of the new South Africa and the country will be well on its way to rebuilding itself as a 'rainbow nation'.

CULTURE

More than a decade has passed since South Africa's first democratic elections, and the country is still finding its way. While the streets pulsate with the same determination and optimism that fuelled the liberation struggle, the beat is tempered by the sobering social realities that are the legacy of apartheid's long years of oppression and bloodshed. Freedom also has brought with it a whole new set of challenges.

Unemployment, crime and HIV/AIDS the leading cause of death in South Africa are the top concerns of most South Africans today, and the nation is fast becoming a society divided by class rather than colour. The gap between rich and poor is vast - one of the highest in the world, according to World Bank statistics. Manicured suburbs rub shoulders with squalid townships where clean drinking water is a scarce commodity, and palatial residences overlook cramped tin-roofed shanties. Violent crime has stabilised at unacceptably high levels, and a generation that

saw almost daily brutality and uncertainty during its formative years is now coming of age. Although the formal racial divisions of apartheid have dissolved, shadows and old ways of interacting remain, and suspicions and distrust still run high.

Many middle-class and wealthy families live in heavily secured homes and spend their leisure time in equally fortified shopping centres. Guards patrol the walkways and shops to keep criminals at bay, there's still a lingering sense of fear and loss connected with the passing of the old regime, and conversations are peppered with gloomy predictions about the government and the future.

Life is very different for the millions of South Africans who are still living in poverty. Tiny matchbox houses are home to large extended families, clean drinking water remains a luxury in some areas, and health facilities are not uniformly available. Yet township life is vibrant and informal. People gather on street corners and in local bars known as shebeens. Weddings are big events, and frequently spill onto the streets with plenty of dancing. Unfortunately, funerals are becoming one of the most common gatherings in South Africa, and on weekends, cemeteries are routinely crowded with mourners.

While crime continues to grab headlines and undermine South Africa's reputation as a tourism destination, it's important to keep it in perspective. The slowly and often fitfully emerging new South Africa is a unique and refreshing place to visit, and one of the most inspiring and hope-filled places that you'll find anywhere on the continent.

PEOPLE

During the apartheid era, the government attempted to categorise everyone into one of four major groups - easily enough said, perhaps, but disastrous to implement. The classifications - as African (at various times also called 'native' and 'Bantu', and sometimes now also 'black'), coloured, Asian or white - were often arbitrary and highly contentious. They were used to regulate where and how people could live and work, and became the basis for institutionalised inequality and intolerance.

Today, these times are slowly fading into history, although now discrimination based on wealth is threatening to replace racial discrimination. Yet the apartheid-era classification terms continue to be used.

Most of the 'coloured' population lives in Northern and Western Cape Provinces. Cape Muslims are South Africans of long standing. Although many were brought to the early Cape Colony as slaves, others were political prisoners from the Dutch East Indies. Most South Africans of Indian descent live in KwaZulu-Natal. Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Free State are the Afrikaner heartlands. People of British descent are concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal and Western and Eastern Cape Provinces.

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The Homelands no longer have any political meaning and were never realistic indicators of the area's cultural diversity, however it's still useful to have some idea of where the Homelands were and who lived (and still live) in them. Zulus are the largest group (seven million), followed by the Xhosa (six million) and the various Northern Sotho peoples, most of whom are Tswana. The smallest group are the Venda (500,000).

ENVIRONMENT

South Africa spreads over 1,233,404 sq km five times the size of the UK - at the tip of the African continent. On three sides, it's edged by a windswept and stunningly beautiful coastline, winding down the Atlantic seaboard in the west, and up into the warmer Indian Ocean waters to the east.

Much of the country consists of a vast plateau averaging 1500m in height, and known as the highveld. To the east is a narrow coastal plain (the lowveld), while to the northwest is the low-lying Kalahari basin. The dramatic Drakensberg Escarpment marks the point where the highveld plummets down towards the eastern lowlands.

South Africa is home to one of the most magnificent groupings of wildlife anywhere on the planet. It boasts the world's largest land mammal (the African elephant), as well as the second largest (white rhino) and the third largest (hippopotamus). It's also home to the tallest (giraffe), the fastest (cheetah) and the smallest (pygmy shrew). You probably have a better chance of seeing the Big Five - the black rhino, Cape buffalo, elephant, leopard and lion - in South Africa than anywhere else. There's also the opportunity to see a lesser-known 'Little Five' - the rhinoceros beetle, buffalo weaver, elephant shrew, leopard tortoise and ant lion - if you're looking for a challenge.

The best time for wildlife-watching is the cooler, dry winter (June to September) when foliage is less dense, and animals congregate at waterholes, making spotting easier. Summer (late November to March) is rainy and hot, with the animals more widely dispersed and often difficult to see. However, the landscape turns beautiful shades of green around this time, and birdlife is abundant.

South Africa hosts over 800 bird species, including the world's largest bird (the ostrich), its heaviest flying bird (Kori bustard), and vividly coloured sunbirds and flamingos. Bird-watching is good year-round, with spring (August to November) and summer the best.

South Africa is the world's third-most biologically diverse country. It's also one of Africa's most urbanised, with approximately 60% of the population living in towns and cities. Major challenges for the government include managing increasing urbanisation and population growth, while protecting the environment. The picture is complicated by a distorted rural-urban settlement pattern a grim legacy of the apartheid era - with huge population concentrations in townships that generally lack adequate utilities and infrastructure.

Land degradation is one of the most serious problems, with about one-fourth of South Africa's land considered to be severely degraded. In former homeland areas, years of overgrazing and overcropping have resulted in massive soil depletion. This, plus poor overall conditions, is pushing people to the cities, increasing urban pressures even further.

Water is another issue. South Africa receives an average of only 500mm of rainfall annually, and droughts are common. To meet demand, all major South African rivers have been dammed or modified. While this has improved water supplies to many areas, it has also disrupted local ecosystems and caused increased silting.

National Parks & Reserves

South Africa has close to 600 national parks and reserves, collectively boasting spectacular scenery, impressive fauna and flora, excellent facilities and reasonable prices. The majority of the larger wildlife parks are under the jurisdiction of the South African National (SAN) Parks Board (🖻 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org), except for those in KwaZulu-Natal, which are run by KZN

Wildlife (2033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com). Several other provinces also have conservation bodies that oversee smaller conservation areas within their boundaries. Other useful contacts include Cape Nature Conservation (@ 021-4260723; www.capenature.org.za) and the Eastern Cape Tourism Board (🖻 043-701 9600; www.ectb.co.za).

All South African national parks charge a daily entry (conservation) fee though amounts vary. One way to save is to consider purchasing a 'Wild Card' from SAN Parks. One version of the card gives foreign tourists 10 days entry into any one park for US\$107 (US\$188 per couple, US\$241 per family). If you're planning at least five days in Kruger National Park, it's worth buying.

In addition to its national parks, South Africa is also party to several transfrontier parks joining conservation areas across international borders, and private wildlife reserves also abound. However, in total, just under 7% of South African land has been given protected status. The government has started teaming up with private landowners to bring private conservation land under government protection, with the goal of ultimately increasing the total amount of conservation land to over 10%.

CAPE TOWN

2 021 / pop 3,140,600

The Mother City occupies one of the world's most stunning locations, with an iconic mountain slap-bang in its centre. As beautiful as the surrounding beaches and vineyards can be, as cosmopolitan and lively as its cultural scene, it's the rugged wilderness of Table Mountain, coated in a unique flora, that is the focus of attention. The city's multi-ethnic population is proof of South Africa's 'rainbow nation' and a visual record of the city's tumultuous, recorded history of over 350 years.

It's a place of extremes, with the wealth of Camps Bay and Constantia side by side with the poverty of townships such as Khayelitsa. Even in the townships and the deprived areas of the city - home to the vast majority of Capetonians - there are huge differences in lifestyle, and many great examples of civic pride and optimism to balance the shocking crime and HIV/AIDS statistics. Discovering the city's true diversity and spirit is all part of getting the most out of a visit here.

ORIENTATION

Cape Town's commercial centre - known as the City Bowl – lies to the north of Table Mountain and to the east of Signal Hill. The inner-city suburbs of Gardens, Oranjezicht and Tamboerskloof are all a site in the and Tamboerskloof are all within walking distance of the City Bowl. Nearby you'll also find Signal Hill, Green Point and Sea Point, some of the other densely populated seaside suburbs.

Cape Town sprawls quite a distance to the northeast (this is where you'll find the beachside district of Bloubergstrand and the enormous Canal Walk Shopping Centre). To the south, skirting the eastern flank of the mountains and running down to Muizenberg at False Bay, are leafy and increasingly rich suburbs, including Observatory, Newlands and Constantia.

On the Atlantic Coast, exclusive Clifton and Camps Bay are accessible by coastal road from Sea Point or through Kloof Nek, the pass between Table Mountain and Lion's Head. Camps Bay is a 10-minute drive from the city centre and can easily be reached by public transport.

INFORMATION Bookshops

The main mass-market bookshop and newsagent is CNA, with numerous branches around the city.

Clarke's Bookshop (2 423 5739; www.clarkesbooks .co.za; 211 Long St, City Bowl) Exclusive Books Waterfront (2 419 0905: Victoria Wharf); Cavendish Sq Mall (Claremont) Lifestyles on Kloof (50 Kloof St Gardens)

Internet Access

Cape Town is one of the most wired cities in Africa. Most hotels and hostels have internet facilities and you'll seldom have to hunt far for an internet café. Rates are pretty uniform, at US\$1.40 per hour. A handy central one, open 24 hours, is Catwalk TV (2 423 8999; www.catwalk .co.za; 16 Burg St, City Bowl).

Medical Services

Christian Barnard Memorial Hospital (🕿 480 6111; www.netcare.co.za; 181 Longmarket St, City Bowl) Groote Schuur Hospital (🗃 404 9111; capegateway .gov.za/qsh; Main Rd, Observatory) SAA-Netcare Travel Clinic (🖻 419 3172; 11th fl, Picbal Arcade, 58 Strand St, City Bowl; (>) 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Gree

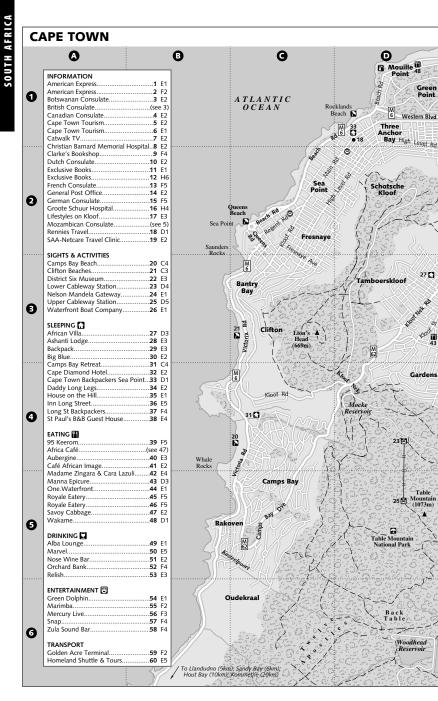
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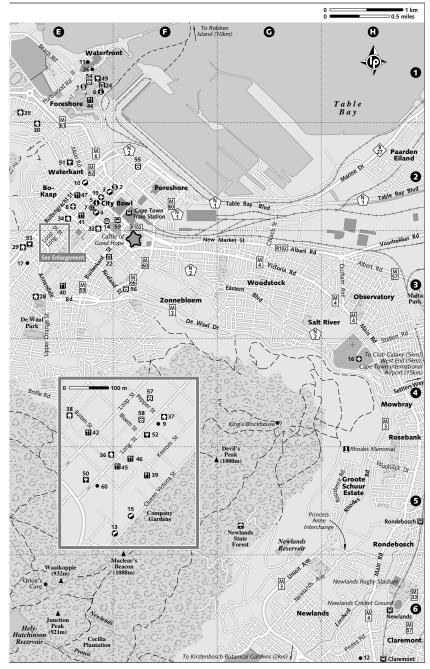
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Table

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AFRICA Money

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Money can be changed at the airport, most commercial banks and at Cape Town Tourism (below). Rennies Travel (a 021-4397529; www .renniestravel.co.za; 182 Main Rd), the local agent for Thomas Cook, has foreign-exchange offices.

There are ATMs all over town. American Express City Bowl (2 425 7991; Thibault Sq); Waterfront (2 419 3917; V&A Hotel Mall, Waterfront)

Post

General post office (🖻 464 1700; Parliament St, City Bowl; Y 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Tourist Information

The well-run Cape Town Tourism (www.tourism capetown.co.za) City Centre (2 487 6800; cnr Castle & Burg Sts, City Bowl; 🕑 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Oct-Mar, 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Apr-Sep); Waterfront (🗃 405 4500; Clock Tower Centre; (> 9am-9pm) can book accommodation, tours and rental cars. At the City Centre branch you can also get advice on Cape Nature Conservation Parks (2 426 0723) and the National Parks & Reserves (2 423 8005). There's also an internet café and a foreign-exchange booth.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Cape Town remains one of the most relaxed cities in Africa, which can instil a false sense of security. Paranoia is not required, but common sense is. There is tremendous poverty on the peninsula and the 'informal redistribution of wealth' is reasonably common. The townships on the Cape Flats have an appalling crime rate and unless you have a trustworthy guide or are on a tour they are not places for a casual stroll.

Swimming at any of the Cape beaches is potentially hazardous, especially for those inexperienced in surf. Check for warning signs about rips and rocks and only swim in patrolled areas.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES **Table Mountain National Park**

Covering some three quarters of the peninsula, Table Mountain National Park (www.tmnp.co.za) stretches from flat-topped Table Mountain to Cape Point. For the vast majority of visitors the main attraction is the 1086m-high mountain itself, the top of which can easily be accessed by the Cableway (2 424 5148; www .tablemountain.net; adult one-way/return US\$8/16, child US\$4/6; 🕅 8.30am-7pm Feb-Nov, 8am-10pm Dec & Jan),

which runs every 10/20 minutes in high/low season.

The views from the revolving cable car and on the summit are phenomenal. The Cableway doesn't operate when it's dangerously windy, and there's little point going up if you are simply going to be wrapped in the cloud known as the 'tablecloth'. The best visibility and conditions are likely to be first thing in the morning or in the evening.

Hikers can take advantage of over 300 routes up and down, but bear in mind that the mountain is over 1000m high, conditions can become treacherous quickly and it's easy to get lost. Unprepared and foolhardy hikers die here every year. In 2005 Table Mountain National Park launched the first of its planned suite of three Hoerikwaggo Trails (www.hoerikwaggo trails.co.za) designed to allow visitors, for the first time, to sleep on the mountain, and eventually to hike 80km or so from the City Bowl to Cape Point.

If you don't have your own transport, rikkis (see p1001) will drop you at the cable car from the city centre for US\$2; a nonshared taxi will cost around US\$7.

Robben Island & Nelson Mandela Gatewav

Prisoners were incarcerated on Robben Island (🕿 413 4220; www.robben-island.org.za; adult/child US\$20/10; hourly ferries 9am-3pm year-round, plus sunset tour 5pm Dec & Jan) from the early days of the VOC right up until 1996. Now a museum and Unesco World Heritage Site, it is one of the most popular destinations in all of Cape Town.

While we heartily recommend going to Robben Island, a visit here is not without its drawbacks. Most likely you will have to endure crowds and being hustled around on a guided tour that at a maximum of two hours on the island (plus a 30 minute boat ride in both directions) is woefully short.

The standard tours include a walk through the old prison, as well as a 45-minute bus ride around the island with commentary on the various places of note. If you're lucky, you'll have about 10 minutes to wander around on your own. We recommend heading straight to the prison's A-section to view the remarkable and very moving exhibition Cell Stories. In each of 40 isolation cells is an artefact and story from a former political prisoner.

Tours depart from the Nelson Mandela Gateway (admission free; 🕑 9am-8.30pm) beside the Clock Tower at the Waterfront. Even if you don't plan a visit to the island, it's worth dropping by the museum here. Make bookings at the Nelson Mandela Gateway departure point or at Cape Town Tourism (see opposite) in the city. At holiday times all tours can be booked up for days.

City Bowl

The commercial heart of Cape Town, City Bowl is squeezed between Table Mountain, Signal Hill and the harbour. Immediately to the west is the Bo-Kaap and the Waterkant, and to the east Zonnebloem (once known as District Six).

DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM

If you see only one museum in Cape Town, make it the District Six Museum (2 466 7200; www .districtsix.co.za; 25A Buitenkant St; adult/child US\$2/1.30; 9am-3pm Mon, 9am-4pm Tue-Sat). This emotionally moving museum is as much for the people of the now-vanished District Six as it is about them. Displays include a floor map of District Six on which former residents have labelled where their demolished homes and features of their neighbourhood once stood.

You can also arrange a walking tour (2 466 7208; per person US\$7, 10 people minimum) of the old District Six.

LONG ST

Whether you come to browse the antique shops, second-hand bookshops, or the streetwear boutiques, or to party at the host of bars and clubs that crank up at night, a stroll along Long St is an essential element of a Cape Town visit. The most attractive section, lined with Victorian-era buildings with lovely wroughtiron balconies, runs from the junction at Buitensingle St north to around the Strand.

Green Point & Waterfront

Cape Town's prime Atlantic Coast suburbs start at the Waterfront, from where you'll depart for Robben Island (opposite). Near here you'll also find Green Point, which has lately seen the development of a shopping and dining complex.

VICTORIA & ALBERT WATERFRONT

Commonly referred to as just the Waterfront (www.waterfront.co.za) this tourist-orientated

precinct offers masses of shops, restaurants, bars, cinemas and other attractions, including cruises of the harbour (p998). Its success is partly due to the fact that it remains a work-ing harbour still used by tugs, harbour vessels of various kinds, and fishing boats; there are always seals splashing around or lazing near the docks.

Atlantic Coast

Cape Town's Atlantic Coast is all about spectacular scenery and soft-sand beaches. Strong winds can be a downer, and although it's possible to shelter from the summer southeasterlies at some of the beaches, the water at them all - flowing straight from the Antarctic - is freezing.

CLIFTON BEACHES

Giant granite boulders split the four linked beaches at Clifton, which is accessible by steps from Victoria Rd. Almost always sheltered from the wind, these are Cape Town's top sunbathing spots. Local lore has it that No 1 and No 2 beaches are for models and confirmed narcissists, No 3 is the gay beach, and No 4 is for families.

CAMPS BAY BEACH

With the spectacular Twelve Apostles of Table Mountain as a backdrop, and soft white sand, Camps Bay is one of the city's most popular beaches. It's within a 15-minute drive of the city centre, so it can get crowded, particularly on weekends. The beach is often windy, and the water is decidedly on the cool side.

LLANDUDNO & SANDY BAY BEACHES

The surfing at Llandudno on the beach breaks (mostly rights) is best at high tide with a small swell and a southeasterly wind.

Nearby is Sandy Bay, Cape Town's nudist beach and gay stamping ground. It's a particularly beautiful stretch of sand and there's no pressure to take your clothes off if you don't want to

Southern Suburbs

Heading west around Table Mountain and Devil's Peak will bring you to the Southern Suburbs, beginning with the bohemian, edgy areas of Woodstock and Observatory, and moving through to Rondebosch, Newlands and wealthy Constantia, home to South Africa's oldest vineyards and wine estates.

KIRSTENBOSCH BOTANICAL GARDENS

Location and unique flora combine to make Cape Town's botanical gardens (2 799 8783, Sat & Sun 761 4916; www.sanbi.org; Rhodes Dr, Newlands; adult/ child US\$3.40/0.70; 🕑 8am-7pm Sep-Mar, 8am-6pm Apr-Aug) among the most beautiful in the world. The 36-hectare landscaped section seems to merge almost imperceptibly with the 492 hectares of fynbos (fine bush) vegetation cloaking the mountain slopes.

The gardens are at their best between mid-August and mid-October. The Sunday afternoon concerts are a Cape Town institution.

Cruises

AFRICA

SOUTH

If only to take in the panoramic view of Table Mountain from the water, a cruise into Table Bay should not be missed. Waterfront Boat Company (🖻 418 5806; www.waterfrontboats.co.za; Shop 7, Quay 5, Waterfront) offers a variety of cruises, including the highly recommended 11/2-hour sunset cruises (US\$24).

Surfina

The Cape Peninsula has plenty of fantastic surfing possibilities, from gentle shore breaks ideal for beginners to 3m-plus monsters for experts only. In general, the best surf is along the Atlantic side. Water temperatures as low as 8°C mean a steamer wet suit and booties are required.

Kommetjie, pronounced 'Kommi-kee', is the Cape's surf mecca, offering an assortment of reefs that hold a very big swell.

SLEEPING

Remember, location is everything here. During school holidays from mid-December to the end of January, and at Easter, prices can double and many places are fully booked. Unless otherwise mentioned, rates also include breakfast. Parking is often an extra US\$3.40 to US\$5.50 per day.

City Bowl & Around

Long St Backpackers (2 423 0615; www.longstreetback packers.co.za; 209 Long St; dm/s/d US\$11/16/22) This one remains the best of the Long St backpackers. In a block of 14 small flats, with four beds and a bathroom in each, accommodation is arranged around a leafy, quiet courtyard.

St Paul's B&B Guest House (🖻 423 4420; stpaul@ absamail.co.za; 182 Bree St; s/d US\$20/34; P) A quiet alternative to a backpackers. The simply furnished and spacious rooms have high ceilings,

and there's a vine-shaded courtyard where vou can relax.

Inn Long Street (2 424 1660; innlongstreet@ataris .co.za; 230 Long St; dm US\$10, d with/without bathroom US\$39/32) There's a calm vibe at this backpackers despite it being in the thick of Long St. There's a wrap-around balcony that all rooms access, and a recent paint job and funky lights give it some style.

Cape Diamond Hotel (🖻 461 2519; www.capediamond hotel.co.za; cnr Longmarket & Parliament Sts; s/d from US\$50/71; P 💷) A great-value new hotel that has kept features of its Art Deco building such as the wood-panelled floors. There's a rooftop Jacuzzi with a view to Table Mountain. Breakfast and parking are extra.

De Waterkant House (🖻 021-409 2500; www.de waterkant.com; cnr Napier & Waterkant Sts, Waterkant; s/d US\$63/97; 🔲 😰) A pleasant B&B in the heart of the gay village, with a plunge pool and rooms with glossy magazine-style furnishings. There's also a wide range of apartments in the area kicking off at single/double US\$90/100, as well as their popular budget-level 'crash pads' (single/double US\$38/54).

Daddy Long Legs (🖻 422 3074; www.daddylonglegs .co.za; 134 Long Street; r US\$100; 🛄) This boutique hotel/art installation is what you get when artists are given free rein to design the boudoirs of their dreams. There's nowhere to put your luggage - hey these are artists not hoteliers! but a stay here is anything but boring.

Gardens & Around

Backpack (2 423 4530; www.backpackers.co.za; 74 New Church St, Tamboerskloof; dm/s/d without bathroom US\$12/34/41, s/d with bathroom US\$40/48; P 🔲 😰) Cape Town's longest-running backpackers remains a relaxed and comfortable place with something for everyone, be it a lively time at their Thursday-night African drumming sessions or just chilling out in their chic ensuite rooms.

Ashanti Lodge (2 423 8721; www.ashanti.co.za; 11 Hof St, Gardens; camp site US\$7, dm/d with shared bathroom US\$12/34; guesthouse d US\$50; 🕑 🛄 😰) One of Cape Town's premier party hostels, with much of the action focused on its lively bar and deck overlooking Table Mountain.

African Villa (🕿 423 2164; www.capetowncity.co.za/ villa; 19 Carstens St, Tamboerskloof; s/d from US\$86/108; □ □) There's a sophisticated and colourful 'African-zen' look at this appealing guesthouse, sheltering behind the facade of three 19th-century terrace houses.

Atlantic Coast

Big Blue (🖻 439 0807; www.bigbluebackpackers.hostel .com; 7 Vesperdene Rd, Green Point; dm/s/d without bathroom US\$11/30/36, d with bathroom US\$43; 🔲 🕥) This brightly painted hostel remains a leading light of the Capetonian backpacking scene - come and enjoy its grand hallway, zen garden and friendly atmosphere.

Cape Town Backpackers Sea Point (2 426 0200; www.capetownbackpackers.com; 1 Rocklands Rd; dm/d US\$12/54; 🔲 😰) Easily the best budget option in Sea Point, steps away from the sea front. There's a six-bed dorm and three en-suite double rooms with giant rain showers, as well as a spacious communal kitchen.

House on the Hill (🕿 439 3122; www.houseonthe hillct.co.za; 25 Leinster Rd, Green Point; d/tr US\$35/52, without bathroom US\$35/42) This self-catering house is a fine alternative to the bigger hostels. Book ahead for the five rooms pleasantly furnished in African style.

Camps Bay Retreat (🕿 437 0485; www.campsbay retreat.com; 7 Chilworth Rd, The Glen; s/d from US\$160/203; **P ≥ □ ≥**) This is a splendid option with a choice of 16 rooms in either the main house or the contemporary Deck House, reached by a rope bridge over a ravine. There's also a couple of decent, self-catering rooms (US\$51 per person) next to the tennis court.

EATING Citv Bowl

Long St has many great places to eat, plus fantastic street life. Head to the Bo-Kaap to sample authentic Cape Malay dishes in unpretentious surroundings.

Café African Image (2 426 1857; 48 Church St; mains US\$4-6; 🕑 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) Easily Cape Town's most colourful café, sporting groovy African-print cushions and tablecloths. Sample Tanzanian fish curry, African village stew or a range of healthy salads.

95 Keerom (2 422 0765; 95 Keerom St; mains US\$7-13; 🎦 12.30-2pm Mon-Fri, 7pm-11pm Mon-Sat) Bookings are essential for this super-stylish Italian restaurant round the back of Rhodes House. Given the quality of food the prices are very reasonable, particularly for the handmade pastas.

Royale Eatery (🗃 422 4536; 279 Long St; mains US\$8; (>) noon-midnight Mon-Sat) Our favourite gourmetburger bar keeps growing, opening a cute satellite branch around the corner on Vredenburg Lane. For something different try the Big Bird ostrich burger.

Madame Zingara & Cara Lazuli (🕿 426 2458; 192 Loop St; mains US\$9; (7-11pm Mon-Sat) Every night is party night at this bohemian, crowd-pleasing restaurant. Unless you're a committed carni-vore we'd advise against its infamous whopper stack of beef fillets doused in chilli-chocolate sauce. Magic tricks, tarot-card readings, belly dancing and dressing up in silly hats is all part of the fun.

Savoy Cabbage (🖻 424 2626; 101 Hout St; mains US\$9.50-12) The standard bearer of the city's contemporary dining scene remains a great place for inventive cooking, including the chance to try local game meats such as zebra and wildebeest.

Africa Café (a 422 0221; www.africacafé.co.za; 108 Shortmarket St; set banquet US\$20; 🕑 6.30pm-11pm) A Cape Town institution, the Africa Café is best known for its set feast comprising some 15 dishes from across the continent. The décor and friendly staff who dance and sing through the restaurant are equally fantastic.

Gardens & Around

Kloof St offers the best dining selection in Gardens.

Aubergine (2 465 4129; www.aubergine.co.za; 39 Barnet St, Gardens; mains US\$9-17; 🕑 7pm-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Thu) It's all about the world-class food here. Innovative dishes, such as warthog confit or salmon-trout ice cream are on the à la carte menu.

Manna Epicure (2413; 151 Kloof St, Tamboerskloof; 🕑 8am-7pm Tue-Sat, 8am-3pm Sun) Join the style set for deliciously simple breakfast or lunch at this trendy café, or come for lateafternoon cocktails and tapas on their streetfront veranda.

Green Point & Waterfront

The Waterfront's plethora of restaurants and cafés have nice ocean views although it's essentially a giant tourist trap. Better value and a less touristy dining experience are available a short walk away in Green Point and Mouille Point.

Wakame (🖻 433 2377; www.wakame.co.za; cnr of Beach Rd & Surrey Place, Moullie Point; mains US\$9.50; 🕅 noon-10pm) Tucking into Wakame's salt-and-pepper squid or sushi platter, while gazing at the glorious coastal view, is a wonderful way to pass an afternoon.

One.Waterfront (🕿 418 0520; Cape Grace Hotel, West Quay, Waterfront; mains US\$9.50-13) It's the daring combinations of ingredients that catch the

SOUTH AFRICA

DRINKING

the lovely fishcakes.

Marvel (B 426 5880; 236 Long St, City Bowl; P 1pm-4am Mon-Sat) Stuffed as a sardine can, Marvel is a fantastic bar where cool kids of all colours rub shoulders (not to mention practically everything else).

eye on the menu, though some of the best

dishes are those that keep it simple, such as

Orchard Bank (www.orchardbank.co.za; 229B Long St, City Bowl) One of Long St's more interesting and laid-back venues, with a roster of events including stand-up comedy.

Nose Wine Bar (2425 2200; www.thenose.co.za; Cape Quarter, Dixon St, Waterkant) First-class wine bar where you can sip your way around 38 of the Cape's best wines. It also serves excellent food and runs wine-tasting courses.

Relish (**a** 422 3584; 70 New (hurch St, Tamboerskloof; **b** noon-2am Mon-Fri, 5pm-2am Sat & Sun) You'll get panoramic views of Table Mountain and Lion's Head from this trendy place with a wide outdoor deck. The food is good and during happy hour (6pm to 7pm) cocktails are only US\$1.60.

Alba Lounge ((2) 425 3385; 1st fl, Hildegards, Pierhead, Waterfront) Easily the most stylish place for cocktails at the Waterfront. The view across the harbour is seductive, the drinks inventive and there's a roaring fire in winter.

ENTERTAINMENT Live Music

Green Dolphin (2421 7471; www.greendolphin.co.za; Waterfront; cover US\$3.40) There's a consistently good line-up of artists at this upmarket jazz venue and restaurant (serving decent food).

Marimba ((a) 418 3366; www.marimbasa.com; Cape Town Convention Centre, City Bowl; diners US\$2.80, nondiners US\$4) Yes, they do have a marimba band playing occasionally at this slick Afro-chic venue, as well as a packed schedule of other jazz artists. The food is good and the music sets kick off at 8pm.

West End (a 37 9132; Cine 400 Bldg, College Rd, Ryelands Estate, Athlone; cover US\$4; 8 8m-late Fri & Sat) Mainstream jazz is the name of the game here. This is one of Cape Town's top venues, attracting a well-heeled clientele and top performers.

Mercury Live (465 2106; www.mercuryl.co.za; 43 De Villiers St, Zonnebloem; cover US\$2.80-5.50) Cape Town's premier rock venue plays host to top South African bands and overseas visitors. If you don't like the band, there's always the DJ-bar Mercury Lounge below and the Shack bar next door.

Nightclubs

The major nightclubs are concentrated in the City Bowl around Long St and in the Waterkant. The big nights are Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

Club Galaxy ((a) 637 9132; College Rd, Ryelands Estate, Athlone; cover US\$4) Long-time Cape Flats dance venue where you can get down to R&B, hiphop and live bands with a black and coloured crowd. The equally legendary West End jazz venue is next door.

Snap (20083-940 3983; 6 Pepper St, City Bowl; cover US\$2.80) The Cape Flats comes to the city at this urban African club with a welcoming, predominantly black audience. Dance to music from across Africa.

Zula Sound Bar (a 424 2442; 194 Long St, City Bowl; cover US\$2.80) Hosts an interesting range of events including live bands, DJs and even open-mic poetry sessions. Their long balcony is the place to watch Long St go by.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Cape Town International Airport ((2) 937 1200; www .airports.co.za) is 20km east of the city centre, approximately 20 minutes' drive depending on traffic.

Apart from **South African Airways** (SAA; [©] 0860 359722; www.flysaa.com) there are two budget airlines operating out of Cape Town: **Kulula.com** ([©] 0861585852; www.kulula.com) and **Itime** ([©] 0861 345345; www.tune.co.za). All three fly to the major South African cities. For a list of international airlines with offices serving Cape Town see p1034.

Greyhound, Intercape Mainliner, SA Roadlink and Translux bus lines operate out of Cape Town. Their booking offices and main arrival and departure points are at the Meriman Sq end of Cape Town train station (City Bowl).

All trains leave from the main Cape Town train station. It can take a long time to get to the front of the queue at the **booking office** (ⓐ 449 4596; ⓒ 7.30am-4.55pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-10.30am Sat).

GETTING AROUND

Both **Backpacker Bus** ((2) 447 4991, 82-119 9185; www .backpackerbus.co.za) and **Homeland Shuttle & Tours** ((2) 426 0294, 083-265 6661; www.homeland.co.za; 305 Long St, City Bowl) pick up from accommodation in the city and offer airport transfers for US\$12 per person. Expect to pay around US\$27 for a nonshared taxi.

For local bus services, the main station is the **Golden Acre Terminal** (Grand Parade, City Bowl). From here **Golden Arrow** (2000 6656 463; www.gabs .0.2a) buses run, with most services stopping early in the evening. Buses are most useful for getting along the Atlantic Coast from the city centre to Hout Bay. Minibus taxis cover most of the city with an informal network of routes, and are a cheap way of getting around.

A cross between a taxi and a shared taxi are the tiny minivans or **rikkis** (C 4186713; www .rikkis.co.za; C 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat). They can be booked or hailed on the street and travel within a 5km radius of the city centre. A trip from the main train station to Camps Bay is US\$2.

It's worth considering taking a nonshared taxi late at night or if you're in a group. Rates are about US\$1.40 per km. There's a taxi rank at the Adderley St end of the Grand Parade in the city.

Metro commuter trains are a handy way to get around, although there are few (or no) trains after 6pm Monday to Friday and after noon on Saturday. For information contact **Cape Metro Rail** ((2) 0800 656 463; www.capemetrorail .co.za).

AROUND CAPE TOWN

WINELANDS

The Boland, stretching inland and upwards from Cape Town, isn't the only wine-growing region in South Africa, but it's certainly the most famous. It's name means 'Upland', a reference to the dramatic mountain ranges that shoot up to over 1500m, on whose fertile slopes the vineyards form a patchwork. Lively student-town Stellenbosch offers the most activities.

Stellenbosch

🖻 021 / pop 220,000

South Africa's second-oldest European settlement, established on the banks of the Eerste River in 1679, Stellenbosch wears many faces. At times it's a rowdy joint for Stellenbosch University students, and at others it's a stately monument to colonial architectural splendour. But most times it's just plain busy, as Capetonians, wine farm workers and tourists descend on its interesting museums, buzzing markets, quality hotels and varied eating and nightlife options.

Lively and welcoming **Stumble Inn** (**B** 887 4049; 12 Market St; camp sites per person US\$5.50, dm US\$8, d without bathroom US\$20; **D C**) is split over two old houses, one with a pool and the other with a pleasant garden. They also run Easy Rider Wine Tours (above). **De Oude Meul** (**B** 887 7085; www.deoudemeul.snowball.co.za; 10A Mill St; s/d ind breakfast US\$50/74; **C**), above an antique shop in the centre of town, is very good and reasonable for the price. The **Wild Mushroom** (**B** 886 9880; 15 Ryneveld St; s/d ind breakfast US\$60/105; **C**) is slap bang in the middle of Stellenbosch's trendy restaurant zone and offers plush accommodation.

De Volkskombuis (☎ 887 2121; Aan de Wagenweg; mains US\$10; ♡ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) is a local favourite specialising in traditional Cape Malay cuisine and featuring a terrace with fine mountain views. **Moyo** (☎ 119 1100; Spier Estate, Vlottenburg; buffet US\$24; ♡ lunch & dinner) is a lot of fun, with roving musicians and dancers, and alfresco dining in tents and up in the trees in the middle of the Spier wine estate.

Long-distance bus services charge high prices for the short sector to Cape Town and do not take bookings. You're better off using **Backpacker Bus** (a 447 4991; www.backpackerbus.co.za), which charges US\$19 to US\$30 one-way and will pick you up from where you are staying.

Metro trains run the 46km between Cape Town and Stellenbosch (1st/economy class US\$1.60/\$.90, about one hour).

THE GARDEN ROUTE

The Garden Route is perhaps the most internationally renowned South African destination after Cape Town and the Kruger National Park, and with good reason. Within a few hundred kilometres, the range of topography, vegetation, wildlife and outdoor activity

is breathtaking. Roughly encompassing the coastline from Mossel Bay in the west to just beyond Plettenberg Bay in the east, it caters to all kinds of travellers and all manner of budgets.

You can hike in old-growth forests, bike through wildlife reserves, commune with monkeys, chill-out on superb white beaches and canoe in lagoons. The towns most commonly used as bases are Knysna and Plettenberg Bay.

Places are described west to east. Most travellers visit Oudtshoorn while traversing the Garden Route so, although this town is technically in the little Karoo, we've included it in this section.

OUDTSHOORN

a 044 / pop 85,000

That it bills itself as the ostrich capital of the world is no overstatement. These birds have been bred hereabouts since the 1870s, and at the turn of the 20th century fortunes were made from the fashion for ostrich feathers. Oudtshoorn boomed, and the socalled 'feather barons' built the grand houses that lend the town its distinct atmosphere today.

The town still turns a pretty penny from breeding the birds for meat and leather, and the ostriches also pay their way with tourists - you can buy ostrich eggs, feathers and biltong all over town - but more importantly Oudtshoorn is a great base for exploring the different environments of the Garden Route and the Karoo; the latter is a desolate and harsh landscape dotted with eccentric little towns.

Sights & Activities

On Grant McIlrath's (the so-called 'Meerkat Man of Oudtshoorn') meerkat experience (🖻 272 3077; www.meerkatmagic.com; minimum donation US\$40; 🕑 sunset & sunrise), at a natural burrow a few kilometres west of town, you will get to see up close how these curious, highly intelligent creatures communicate and live.

If you're going to one of the ostrich farms north of town or to the Cango Caves, carry on driving and take the Swartberg Pass all the way to Prince Albert, then return to Oudtshoorn via the Meiringspoort Pass. Both are engineering masterpieces, and halfway down the latter is a waterfall and small visitor centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Oasis Shanti (🖻 279 1163; oasis@mailbox.co.za; 3 Church St; camp site per person US\$4.70, dm US\$8, d without bathroom from US\$24; 😰) Friendly and well run, this recently refurbished hostel is in a large house with a spacious barbecue and swimming-pool area, and shady camping spots.

Backpackers Paradise (🗟 272 3436; www.backpack ersparadise.hostel.com; 148 Baron van Rheede St; camp site per person US\$5.50, dm US\$9, r from US\$24, d US\$34; 🛄 🗩) In a large old house, this excellent hostel has a separate dorm-bed annexe and free ostrichegg breakfasts. There's an adventure centre attached.

Oakdene Guesthouse (272 3018; www.oakdene .co.za; 99 Baron van Rheede St; s/d US\$53/84; 😰 🗩) Elegant cottage furniture, wooden floors, ostrich eggs, and high-quality linens make each room special. The lush gardens and excellent pool add to the charm.

Jemima's (🖻 272 0808; 94 Baron van Rheede St; mains from US\$7; (Y) dinner Mon-Sun, dinner Fri) Jemima's delights both the palate and the eyes, but it's the food that ultimately takes centre stage. The Cape Malay dishes are legendary.

De Fijne Keuken (🕿 272 6403; 114 Baron van Rheede St; mains US\$7-9.50; 🕑 lunch & dinner) There's loads of outdoor seating at this funky restaurant and the varied menu includes ostrich cooked every way imaginable, and a large selection of pastas.

Getting There & Around

Intercape (200861-287 287; www.intercape.co.za) has a service to Jo'burg (US\$43, 141/2 hours, daily). Otherwise you can take a Translux bus (201-449 3333; www.translux.co.za) to Mossel Bay (US\$7, one hour, daily) and from there you can get to multiple destinations (see opposite).

The Baz Bus stops at George, from where you can arrange a transfer to Oudtshoorn with Backpackers' Paradise (US\$4.70).

Every Saturday the Southern Cross train leaves for Cape Town at 5pm.

KNYSA

2 044 / pop 54,000

Perched on the edge of a serene lagoon and surrounded by forests, Knysna's (pronounced 'ny-znah') sylvan setting, gay-friendly vibe, good places to stay, eat and drink, and wide range of activities, mean it has plenty going for it. But if you're after something quiet and undeveloped, you should look elsewhere, particularly in high season, when the number of visitors swells.

Although regulated by SAN Parks (382 2095; www.sanparks.org; Long St, Thesen's Island), Knysna Lagoon, covering 13 sq km, is not a national park or wilderness area. Much is still privately owned, and the lagoon is used by industry and for recreation. The best way to appreciate the lagoon is to take a cruise on the MV John Benn (🗟 382 1697; www.featherbed.co.za; Waterfront; adult/child US\$11/4.70, with lunch US\$34/15; 🕑 departs 10am, 11.30am & 12.30pm) or ask at the Heads Adventure Centre (🖻 384 0831; the Heads) for water activities. Snorkelling equipment can be rented for US\$12.

You'll find mainly dorm beds at Knysna Backpackers (🗃 382 2554; knybpack@netactive.co.za; 42 Queen St; dm US\$9.50, d without bathroom from US\$24), a large and relaxing Victorian house on the hill a few blocks up from the main street. Highfield Backpackers (🖻 382 6266; www.highfieldbackpackers .co.za; 2 Graham St; dm US\$9.50, d with/without bathroom from US\$34/27) feels more like a B&B and has attractive doubles. The most imaginatively designed guesthouse in Knysa is Inyathi Guest Lodges (🖻 382 7768; www.inyathi-sa.com; 52 Main St; s/d from US\$59/77) with accommodation in uniquely decorated timber lodges - some with Victorian bathtubs, others with stained-glass windows.

Knysna Oyster Company (🖻 382 6941; www.mbendi .co.za/koyster; Thesen's Island; mains from US\$5.50; 🕑 lunch & dinner) grows its own oysters out in the lagoon; you can take a tour of the processing plant and have an oyster tasting at its restaurant afterwards. Despite its shopping-centre setting, De Oude Fabriek (🖻 382 5723; cnr Main & Gray Sts; mains US\$6-11; 🕑 lunch & dinner) is a convivial spot to sample game meat, crocodile and Knysna oysters.

PLETTENBERG BAY 2 044 / pop 34,000

Plettenberg Bay, or 'Plett' as it's more commonly known, is a resort town through and through, with mountains, white sand and crystal-blue water making it one of the country's top local tourist spots. As a result, things can get very busy and somewhat overpriced, but the town retains a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and does have good-value hostels.

Those wanting to try surfing can take a lesson through the International Surf School (20082-636 8431; for 31/2 hr US\$40), which caters to all levels of surfers. It doesn't have an office, so just phone.

Our choice for best budget option in town is the spotless and spacious Nothando Backpackers Hostel (🕿 533 0220; info@nothando.co.za; 5 Wilder St;

dm US\$10, d with/without bathroom US\$31/28). There's a happening bar area with satellite TV, yet a happening bar area with satellite TV, yet you can still find peace and quiet in the large grounds. It's just a hop to the beach at **Abalone Beach House** (@ 535 9602; beachhouse@global.co.za; 50 Ifafi Properties, Keurboomstrand; d without bathroom US\$24; □). Surf and boogie boards can be hired (US\$1.40). It's about 6km east of Plett.

Cornuti Al Mare (🖻 533 1277; 1 Perestrella St; mains US\$7-9.50; 🕅 lunch & dinner) is a stylishly deckedout Italian oyster bar with hearty pizzas and refreshing cocktails served on a sun terrace.

TSITSIKAMMA COASTAL NATIONAL PARK

This park (adult/child US\$11/6) protects 82km of coast between Plettenberg Bay and Humansdorp, including the area 5km out to sea. Located at the foot of the Tsitsikamma Range and cut by rivers that have carved deep ravines into the ancient forests, it's a spectacular area to walk through. Several short day walks give you a taste of the coastline.

The main information centre for the national park is Storms River Mouth Rest Camp, 68km from Plettenberg Bay and 8km from the N2. The park gate is 6km from the N2. It's 2km from the gate to the main camp, which is open 24 hours.

The 42km Otter Trail (per person US\$70) is one of the most acclaimed hikes in South Africa. hugging the coastline from Storms River Mouth to Nature's Valley. The walk, which lasts five days and four nights, involves fording a number of rivers, and gives access to some superb stretches of coast. Book the trail through SAN Parks (🖻 012-426 5111). The trail is usually booked up one year ahead. There are often cancellations, however, so it's always worth trying.

Storms River Mouth Rest Camp (🖻 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org; camp site/forest hut/family cottages US\$19/31/99) offers forest huts, chalets, cottages and 'oceanettes'; all except the forest huts are equipped with kitchens, bedding and bathrooms. Another good option is Tsitsikamma Falls Adventure Park (🕿 280 3770; www.tsitsikamma adventure.co.za; Witelsbos; s/d incl breakfast from US\$24/49), a family-run guesthouse about halfway between Nature's Valley and Jeffrey's Bay, and near a beautiful waterfall.

Greyhound, Intercape and Translux buses run along the N2 between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, from where it's an 8km walk to Storms River Mouth.

SOUTH AFRICA **STORM'S RIVER**

a 042

Storms River is an odd little hamlet with tree-shaded lanes, a few places to stay and an outdoor centre. From the N2 the Storms River signpost points to this village that lies outside the national park. The turn-off is 4km east of the turn-off to the national park, and is signed as Storms River Mouth (or 'Stormsriviermond' in Afrikaans).

Most activities on offer are organised by Storms River Adventures (281 1836; www.storms river.com; Darnell St, Storms River). These include a tree-canopy slide (US\$53) and an overnight bush experience (all equipment provided) at the Konga Bush Eco-Camp (US\$47). The world's highest bungee jump (216m) is at the Bloukrans River Bridge (🖻 281 1458; www.facead renalin.com; per jump US\$78), 21km west of Storms River.

If you're after a post-bungee rest try Tube 'n' Axe (281 1757; tube-n-axe@telkomsa.net; cnr Darnell & Saffron Sts; camp site US\$7, dm/d without bathroom US\$9.50/27; (I). Another option is Ploughman's Rest (🖻 281 1726; www.ploughmansrest.co.za; 31 Formosa St; s/d incl breakfast US\$28/53), a friendly B&B.

The Baz Bus (2 021-439 2323) stops at Storms River, but there's no other public transport to the village.

SUNSHINE COAST

This stretch of shoreline between the Garden Route and the Wild Coast is known as the Sunshine Coast, and is best known for the surfing mecca of Jeffrey's Bay. We have also included the mystical mountain hamlet of Hogsback in this section because, although it's not actually on the coastline, it's often visited from East London.

JEFFREY'S BAY a 042 / pop 25.000

A far cry from its origins as a sleepy seaside town frequented by young families, 'J-Bay' takes its place as one of the world's top surfing destinations. Boardies from all around the planet flock here to ride waves such as the famous Supertubes, once described as 'the most perfect wave in the world'. June to September are the best months for experienced surfers, but novices can learn year-round. Development is raging at a furious pace, with shopping in the myriad clothing stores almost

overtaking surfing as the main leisure activity, but so far the local board-waxing vibe has been retained.

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The most popular backpackers in town is Island Vibe (293 1625; ivibe@lantic.net; 10 Dageraad St; camp site/dm/d US\$5.50/9.50/24), a couple of kilometres south of the city centre. The new beautifully decorated beach house has double rooms (US\$34) only and a separate kitchen. Lazee Bay (296 2012; lazeebay@worldonline.co.za; 25 Mimosa St; d incl breakfast US\$40; 😰), one of J-Bay's best guesthouses, up on a hill above Da Gama Rd, is memorable for its funky décor and great sea views, while Supertubes Guesthouse (🗟 293 2957; supertubes@agnet.co.za; 10/1.60 Pepper St; s/d incl breakfast US\$47/67, s/d luxury rooms US\$70/108; 🔀 🔊) is right in the prime surfing spot and provides luxurious accommodation.

Die Walskipper (🖻 082-110 9478; Marina Martinique; seafood platters US\$16; 🕅 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun), specialising in seafood, and crocodile and ostrich steaks, is just metres from the lapping sea at the Marina Martinique beach. Tapas Lapa Seaside (292 0119; Marina Martinique; mains US\$7-11; In dinner) is just across the car park from the seashore, so the sand on the floor has to be shovelled in! Meals feature decent seafood, and there's a bar next door.

The Baz Bus (🖻 021-439 2323) stops daily at hostels in both directions. A fare from Jeffrey's Bay to Cape Town costs US\$51 and takes 12 hours. The Sunshine Express (293 2221) runs door-to-door between Port Elizabeth and Jeffrey's Bay (US\$1.40, one hour).

PORT ELIZABETH

2 041 / pop 1.5 million

Port Elizabeth, the Eastern Cape's biggest town and its major transport hub, is known by South Africans as 'PE' and by locals as the 'friendly city', though many consider it no more than a charmless, convenient place to stop for a rest and stock up on supplies before moving onward. It does, however, offer some of the Eastern Cape's best bathing and surfing beaches.

Lungile Backpackers (🕿 582 2042; lungile@netactive .co.za; 12 La Roche Dr, Humewood; camp site/dm/tw/d without bathroom US\$5.50/9/22/24; 🛄 😰), Port Elizabeth's most popular backpackers, is contained in an airy Swiss-style home minutes from the beachfront. The Bay Hotel (585 1558; info@bayberry.co.za; 7 Lutman St; s/d incl breakfast US\$34/51) feels more like a B&B than a hotel, with reasonable rates for elegant rooms, and

the family-run Chapman Hotel (🖻 584 0678; www .chapman.co.za; 1 Lady Bea Cres, Brookes Hill, Summerstrand; s/d incl breakfast US\$62/74; 🔣 🛄 😰) overlooking the sea south of the city centre, is an upmarket choice with great views.

Most of Port Elizabeth's best cafés are in the Boardwalk Casino Complex in Summerstrand, at the far end of Beach Rd. The atmosphere is a bit artificial, but here you can at least sip a cappuccino in peace away from the plastic fast-food joints of the beachfront, though Mauro's (🖻 582 2700; MacArthur Leisure Centre, Beach Rd; mains US\$7-11; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun), a California-style trendy bistro is something of an anomaly.

There are daily flights to Jo'burg, Durban and Cape Town on a number of airlines.

Port Elizabeth has regular bus connections to the major South African cities including Cape Town (US\$24, 12 hours), Durban (US\$38, 15 hours) and East London (US\$17, five hours). The Baz Bus (201-439 2323) runs from Port Elizabeth to Durban; it's US\$97 for a one-way, hop-on, hop-off ticket. J-Bay Sunshine Express (293 2221) minibus taxis run between Jeffrey's Bay, Port Elizabeth and other coastal areas.

HOGSBACK

2 045 / pop 1500

Located, improbably, 1300m up in the beautiful Amathole Mountains, about 100km northwest of Bhisho, the small village of Hogsback has enjoyed a recent renaissance. Its English climate (four distinctive seasons), organic food, and mind-boggling views of mountains and forested valleys in all directions, make it an eco-destination par excellence.

There are some great walks, bike rides and drives in the area. Be prepared for rain at any time, and in winter for temperatures that can drop to -1°C.

Away with the Fairies (🕿 962 1031; hogsback1@iafrica. com; Hydrangea Lane; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$5.50/9.50/23; 😰) is a majestic little getaway with a superb view of Hogsback Ridge.

Another option is the Edge (2 962 1159; info@theedge_hogsback.co.za; Bluff End; self-catering cottages from US\$47; (I), a collection of 12 stunningly decorated cottages strung out along the mountain's edge.

The easiest way to get to Hogsback without a car is by shuttle bus from the Sugarshack Backpackers (right) in East London or Buccaneer's Backpackers (p1006) in Cintsa.

EAST LONDON **a** 043 / pop 980,000

The country's only river port, with a good surf beach and a spectacular bay that curves round to huge sand hills, East London is one of the few cities in the world that is equally populous and dour. Unless you're a surfer (or a shark), there isn't really much to keep you here, though it can be a good base for moving on to holiday spots along the Sunshine or Wild Coast.

With the beach just metres away, the surf's always up at lively Sugarshack Backpackers (🖻 722 8240; www.sugarshack.co.za; Eastern Esplanade, Eastern Beach; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$4.70/9/22; (). Activities on offer include cliff-jumping (US\$3.40) and surf lessons (US\$10). Niki Nana Backpackers (2722 8509; www.nikinana.co.za; 4 Hillview Rd; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$6/9/22; 🔊) is a small but comfortable backpackers with a large swimming pool. White House (2 740 0344; www.thewhitehousebandb.co.za; 10 Whitthaus St, Gonubie; s/ d incl breakfast US\$40/53; 😰) is a stylish guesthouse with glass windows for panoramic views of cliffs and sea.

The elegant Strandloper Café (🖻 735 4570; 95 Old Transkei Rd; mains US\$8-12; 🕑 dinner Mon-Sat) specialises in seafood. A perfect cross-section of East London life frequents Smokey Swallows (🖻 727 1349; Devereux Ave; mains US\$8-13; 🕑 lunch & dinner), which has frequent live jazz acts.

South African Airways flies from East London daily to Port Elizabeth (US\$103), Durban (around US\$150) and Cape Town (around US\$250).

Translux, Greyhound and SA Connection have daily buses to Port Elizabeth (US\$25, four hours), Durban (US\$26, 10 hours), Cape Town (US\$40, 15 hours) and Jo'burg/Pretoria (US\$38, 14 hours). The Baz Bus (20021-4392323) runs through here on its way between Port Elizabeth and Durban.

TRANSKEI AND THE WILD COAST

With its green rolling hills, rugged cliffs plunging into the sea, remote coves sheltering sandy beaches, and a history of shipwrecks and stranded sailors, the aptly named Wild Coast is a place for adventure and intrigue. Stretching for 350km from East London to Port Edward, its coast is dotted with tiny

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SOUTH AFRICA

Internet café (202 7733; Musgrave Centre, Photoworld, Shop 323; per hr US\$4.50; Y 9am-6pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Entabeni Hospital (🕿 031-204 1200, 24hr trauma centre 031-204 1377; 148 South Ridge Rd, Berea) The trauma centre charges US\$80 per consultation. Travel Doctor (🖻 031-360 1122; durban@traveldoctor .co.za; International Convention Centre, 45 Ordnance Rd; 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) For travel-related advice.

MONEY

There are banks with ATMs and change facilities across the city. These include Standard Bank, FNB and Nedbank.

American Express Central Durban (🖻 301 5541; 11th fl, Nedbank Bldg, Durban Club Place; 🔀 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat); Musgrave Centre (🕿 202 8733; FNB House, 151 Musgrave Rd, Musgrave)

Rennies Bank Central Durban (🖻 305 5722; grd fl, 333 Smith St); Musgrave Centre (🖻 202 7833; Shop 311, Level 3, Musgrave Centre; 🕑 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Durban Africa Tourist Junction (2 304 4934; www .durbanexperience.co.za; 1st fl, Tourist Junction); airport (🕿 408 1000; arrivals hall; 🕑 7am-9pm); Marine Pde (🖻 332 2595; next to Joe Kool's; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat & Sun): uShaka Marine World (🖻 337 8099: 9am-6pm).

KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority Information

Office (366 7516/7; www.zulu.org.za; grd fl, Tourist Junction)

Tourist Junction (2 304 4934; 160 Pine St, cnr Soldiers Way; 🕑 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) The main tourist information centre is in the old train station.

Sights

If you dip into the city's summer surf and sun, you have a playground of more than 6km of warm-water beaches (protected by the requisite shark nets). The 'Golden Mile' Beaches run from Blue Lagoon (at the mouth of the Umgeni River) to uShaka Marine World (2368 6675; www.ushakamarineworld.co.za; Addington Beach, the Point: Wet'n'Wild adult/child/senior US\$8/6/6. Sea World US\$11/7.50/10; (>) 9am-6pm high season, 10am-5pm low season) on the Point. But Durban's beachfront ain't for everyone. To some, its smorgasbord of bars and restaurants and hectic holiday atmosphere are garish and tacky.

Out on the Victoria Embankment, the BAT Centre (Maritime PI) is a colourful, bohemian, arts

SOUTH AFRICA Xhosa settlements and the occasional holiday resort or backpacker hostel.

You may hear some people refer to the area as the 'Transkei', which was the name of the apartheid-era homeland that once covered this part of the country. The name 'Transkei', however, stills bears the stigma of an area once feared for its crime rate and its extreme poverty, so locals prefer the term Wild Coast.

CINTSA (CHINTSA)

🖻 043 / pop 2000

Heading up the N2, the sea spray starts to hit your face at an unspoilt stretch of white-sand beach called Cintsa, 38km from East London. Cintsa comprises two small, pretty villages, Cintsa East and Cintsa West. It's definitely the best place on this part of the coast to hang out for a few days (or weeks).

Something of a rarity, Buccaneer's Backpackers (2734 3012, 734 3749; www.cintsa.com; Cintsa West; camp site/dm/d US\$6/10/24; 🔲 😰) or 'Bucks' is a sort of all-inclusive holiday resort for backpackers offering every imaginable outdoor activity through the excellent African Heartland Tours based here. The dorm rooms are comfortable, and safari tents (US\$20) and cottages (US\$38) are also available.

COFFEE BAY

a 047 / pop 600

These days, this once-remote hamlet is a backpacker's mecca, with two busy hostels and a couple of more upmarket hotels in the village centre. Coffee Bay itself is a fairly scruffy place, but the surrounding scenery is dramatic, with a beautiful kilometre-long beach set in front of towering cliffs.

The more hippified of the two backpackers in Coffee Bay is Bomvu Paradise (2 575 2073; www .bomvubackpackers.com; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$4/9/22), which offers yoga instruction, organic meals and drum sessions. The dorms and rooms are comfortable and funky, and the staff efficient and friendly. Coffee Shack (2575 2048; www.coffeeshack.co.za; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$5.50/9.50/27; 🛄), just across the road from Bomvu, has a definite party vibe. Ocean View Hotel (🖻 575 2005; www.oceanview.co.za; s/d with half board and sea views US\$55/81, without sea views US\$47/70; 🖹 🔲 😰) has good-quality, bungalow-style rooms, with a deck overlooking the ocean.

A minibus taxi from Mthatha to Coffee Bay costs US\$3 and takes one hour. The backpacker hostels meet the Baz Bus (21439 2323) at the Shell Ultra City, 4km south of Mthatha.

Around Coffee Bay

There are a number of hotels and resorts along the stretch of coast from the Great Kei River to Coffee Bay including the now legendary Bulungula Backpackers (🗟 047-577 8900, 083-391 5525; www.bulungula.com; camp site per person/dm/d without bathroom US\$4/8/21; 🛄). Renowned for its stunning location, community-based activities and ecofriendly ethos, Bulungula is 40% owned by the local Xhosa community, who run all the tours including horse-riding, hiking and canoeing trips. Guests are invited to help with community activities, including farming and teaching projects. There's an overall mellow vibe about the place, but it does get raucous when a beach party is organised. Xhosa-style rondavels painted in creative, sometimes psychedelic, colour schemes - serve as guest quarters.

Reaching this little slice of paradise requires some effort. (If you can get here on local transport you get to stay the first night free - there's a challenge!). Bulungula is 4km north of the Xora river mouth and around two hours' drive from Coffee Bay. If you are coming in your own car it's essential to contact Bulungula in advance to get directions. Pick-ups can also be arranged.

PORT ST JOHNS

a 047 / pop 2100

The deliciously laid-back Port St Johns is a magnet for hippy types, both young and old. This idyllic little town on the coast at the mouth of the Umzimvubu River has tropical vegetation, dramatic cliffs, great beaches, no traffic jams and absolutely no stress. Many travellers succumb to the famous 'Pondo Fever' and stay for months.

Four kilometres from the town centre, Amapondo Backpackers (🖻 564 1344, 083-315 3103; www.amapondo.co.za; Second Beach Rd; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$6/10/24) is a beautiful and peaceful hostel with a great view of an idyllic beach. Island Backpackers Lodge (3 564 1958; www.the islandbackpackers.co.za; 4 Berea Rd; dm/d/tr without bathroom US\$9.50/24/30; 🛄 😰), which comes alive at night as a popular Israeli restaurant (dishes US\$4.70 to US\$7), also has laundry service, movies, book swap and a splash pool. Each room is beautifully decorated with scented candles and fluffy towels at Gwyneth's Barn & Ekuphumleni (🖻 /fax 564 1506; off Pussfoot Lane, First Beach; d without bathroom US\$30, 2-bedroom cottage US\$47-59).

Most backpacker places will pick you up from the Shell Ultra City, 4km south of Mth-

KWAZULU-NATAL

Rough and ready, smart and sophisticated, rural and rustic, KwaZulu-Natal is as eclectic as its cultures, people and landscapes. It has its metropolitan heart in the port of Durban and its nearby historic capital, Pietermaritzburg. The beaches along this coast attract local holiday-makers, and to the north is Zululand, home to some Africa's most evocative traditional settlements and cultural sites. The region also boasts alluring national parks and isolated, wild coastal reserves. The province's border in the far west, the heritage-listed uKhahlamba-Drakensberg mountain range, features awesome peaks, unforgettable vistas

sand, South Africa's third-largest city offers a lively, if slightly tacky, prepackaged seaside holiday. The beachfront, with its multi-km stretch of high-rise hotels and snack bars, remains a city trademark, and the city centre, ings and fascinating Art Deco architecture, throbs to a distinctly African beat. Home to the largest concentration of people of Indian descent in the country, Durban also boasts the sights, sounds and scents of the subcontinent. While the beachfront is still a favourite spot, many visitors, wary of the city's increasing reputation for crime, base themselves in the commodation, shopping malls, funky bars and stylish eateries.

Information

Most hostels offer internet access. Other options include the following: Internet café (🕿 305 6998; 1st fl, Workshop, Aliwal St; per hr US\$3.40; 🕑 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) In the city centre.

atha (where the Baz Bus stops) for around US\$6, but it's essential to book ahead. There are also regular minibus taxis to Port St Johns from there (US\$4, two hours) that drop you at the roundabout.

Stretching along a swathe of butter-yellow peppered with some grandiose colonial buildsuburbs, which are chock-a-block with ac-

INTERNET ACCESS

2 031 / pop 3.5 million

and excellent hiking opportunities. DURBAN

AFRICA

SOUTH

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centre housing upmarket art-and-craft shops, artists' studios, occasional live music, and a bar-restaurant, all cut through with a lively trans-Africa theme.

Dominating the city centre is the opulent 1910 Edwardian neo-baroque City Hall (🖻 311 2137; Smith St). In front of the hall is Francis Farewell Sq. Upstairs is the Art Gallery (2311 2264; City Hall; admission free; 🕑 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) an outstanding collection of contemporary South African works, especially Zulu arts and crafts.

The big Juma Mosque (🖻 306 0026; cnr Queen & Grey Sts; 🕑 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11am Sat) is the largest in the southern hemisphere; call ahead for a guided tour.

At the western end of Victoria St, Victoria St Market (🖻 306 4021; Victoria St; 🕑 6am-6pm Mon-Sat, 6am-4pm Sun) offers a typically rip-roaring, subcontinental shopping experience, with more than 160 stalls selling wares from across Asia. It's the main tourist attraction in the area, but watch your wallet. Most Muslim shops close between noon and 2pm on Friday.

Situated 8km west of Durban is the Temple of Understanding (2 403 3328; Bhaktieedanta Sami Rd; 🕑 10am-1pm & 4-8pm), the biggest Hare Krishna temple in the southern hemisphere. Follow the N3 towards Pietermaritzburg and then branch off to the N2 south. Take the Chatsworth turn-off and turn right towards the centre of Chatsworth.

Sleeping

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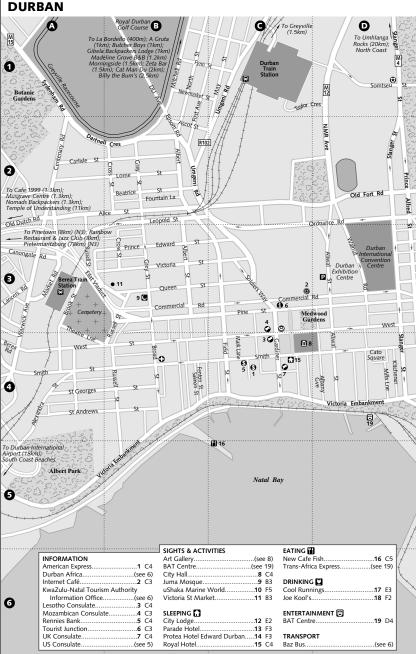
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Despite what you think when you see the hotel-lined beachfront promenade, most of Durban's good-value accommodation is in the western and northwestern suburbs.

Nomads Backpackers (202 9709; www.durban .co.za/nomads; 70 Essenwood Rd, Berea; dm US\$8, d with/ without bathroom US\$27/22; P 💷 🕥) An organised and neat, yet relaxed kind of joint, and one that likes to party. You're also only a jump away from the cinemas and cappuccino bars of the Musgrave Centre.

Gibela Backpackers Lodge (2 303 6291; www .gibela.co.za; 119 Ninth Ave, Morningside; dm/s/d with shared bathroom & breakfast US\$12/24/34; (P) 🛄) Housed in a stylish terracotta-coloured 1950s building with a Tuscan feel, this place has tasteful ethnic décor and a friendly feel in a secure location.

Parade Hotel (🕿 337 4565; www.paradehotel.co.za; 191 Marine Pde; s/d incl breakfast US\$44/59; 🔀) The Parade Hotel is a bit old, with a slightly dowdy



room resembles a 1950s ballroom. **Madeline Grove Bed & Breakfast** (2) 303 5425; www.madeline.co.za; 116 Madeline Rd, Morningside; s/d ind breakfast US\$40/61; **P (e)** This large mansion is configured into various comfortable self-contained apartments, both upstairs and down. The separate poolside room is popular among water babies.

array of 1970s salesroom furniture and saggy

mattresses, but it's charming Art Deco dining

La Bordello ((2) 309 6019; www.beanbagbohemia .co.za; 47/49 Campbell Ave, Morningside; s/d US\$54/81; (2)) A former house of ill-repute, nowadays La Bordello does good trade with the beautiful people who enjoy its plush Moroccan interiors, aroma oils and breakfast in its small fountain court.

City Lodge (ⓐ 332 1447; www.citylodge.co.za; cnr Brickhill & Old Fort Rds; s/d US\$75/93; **P ≋**) This secure place offers motel styling and slick service, though little charm.

Royal Hotel ((2) 333 6000; www.theroyal.co.za; 267 Smith St; s/d ind breakfast US\$220/292; (P) (2) This five-star institution overlooking City Hall is one of the city's most historical and swankiest offerings. It has hosted royalty and Nelson Mandela.

Eating

Takeaway places around Victoria St Market (p1009) have good Indian snacks including *bunny chow*, which is a half or quarter loaf of bread hollowed out and filled with curry stew.

While the beachfront is chock-a-block with cheap and cheerful diners, you'll be hardpressed to find much more than the usual spread of burgers, pizza and candy floss. Several of the beachfront hotels house some passable restaurants.

Trans-Africa Express ((2) 332 0804; 1st fl, BAT Centre, Victoria Embankment; mains US\$3.80-13; (2) lunch & dinner) Upstairs at the BAT Centre, with terrace views over the docks, this restaurant serves taste-tempting meals from Madagascar to Morocco.

Cat Man Du ((2) 312 7893; 411 Windermere Rd; mains US\$4-13; (2) lunch & dinner) This groovy diner-cum-cocktail-bar serves international fusion-style

tucker in bar-like surrounds. Carnivores might like the kudu fillet in red wine (US\$11).

Cafe 1999 (ⓐ 2023406; Silvervause Centre, Silverton Rd, Berea; mains US\$6-13; ⓒ lunch & dinner) This buzzing restaurant serves creative fusion food that comes in 'bitparts' – 'titbit' and 'bigbit'. Try the crispy roast duck on vanilla-seed risotto (US\$7).

Butcher Boys (ⓐ 312 8248; 170 Florida Rd; mains US\$8-12; ∑ lunch & dinner; ≳) A stylish joint serving 'steak as you like it,' Butcher Boys is popular with business people and the 'it' market.

New Cafe Fish ($\widehat{\otimes}$ 305 5062; 31 Yacht Mole, Victoria Embankment; mains US\$6-27; \bigcirc lunch & dinner) Looking like an upside-down ship, this uniquely designed restaurant serves seafood dishes as appealing as its views.

Famous Fish Co (a 368 1060; King's Battery, the Point; mains US\$10-26; Hunch & dinner; i) This reliable fish restaurant is something of a Durban institution, with a dreamy view of the sea and cargo ships.

Drinking

The best options are found in the suburbs.

Zeta Bar ((2) 312 9436; 258 Florida Rd) Voluptuous red-plush seats combined with curvy soft lines provide the backdrop for this lounge lizard's favourite.

Billy the Bum's ((2) 303 1988; 504 Windermere Rd, Morningside) Attracting a crowd of Durban's upwardly mobile, this suburban cocktail bar is reliably raucous.

Cool Runnings (2) 368 5604; 49 Milne St) This (in)famous place has a truly Rasta bohemian feel. Come late as it fills up after 11pm and catch a cab – this is *not* an area to walk around.

Joe Kool's ((2) 332 9697; Lower Marine Pde, North Beach) This venerable nightspot cooks up a cocktail of cold beer, big-screen TV, dance music and feisty crowds. Sunday night is party night.

Entertainment

BAT Centre (a 332 0451; www.batcentre.co.za; 45 Maritime PI, Victoria Embankment) One of Durban's more interesting haunts, this venue features everything from DJs on Friday and Sunday evenings, regular drum circles, and top-flight jazz musicians.

Rainbow Restaurant & Jazz Club ((2) 702 9161; 23 Stanfield Lane) In Pinetown, 8km west of the centre, Rainbow is considered the centre of the jazz scene, and is still the preferred local haunt.

Getting There & Away

Durban International Airport is off the N2, 18km south of the city. Several airlines link Durban with South Africa's main centres.

The popular and useful **Baz Bus** (a 304 9099; www.bazbus.com; 1st fl, Tourist Junction; S 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) has an office next to Durban Africa.

Long-distance buses leave from the bus stations near the Durban train station. It's safest to enter from NMR Ave, not Umgeni Rd. All of the major companies have daily departures to Jo'burg (US\$26 to US\$30, eight hours), Cape Town (US\$63, 22 to 27 hours), Port Elizabeth (US\$44, 15 hours) and Pietermaritzburg (US\$12, one hour), among other destinations. Buses also run to Gaborone (via Jo'burg; US\$47, 15½ hours) and Maputo (via Jo'burg; US\$31, 15 hours).

Some long-distance minibus taxis running mainly to the south coast and the Wild Coast region of Eastern Cape leave from around the Berea train station. To Jo'burg it costs US\$18. The areas in and around the minibus taxis' ranks are unsafe and extreme care should be taken if entering them.

Durban train station (**b** 0860-008 888) is huge. Use the NMR Ave entrance, 1st level. Even hardy travellers report feeling unsafe on the local inner-city and suburban trains. Longdistance services are another matter – they are efficient and arranged into separate male and female sleeper compartments for Jo'burg (1st/2nd class US\$34/22, 12½ hours).

Getting Around

The **Airport Shuttle Bus** (B 465 1660) departs the airport regularly to the beach and city centre's major hotels (US\$4). Some hostels run their own taxi shuttle services.

The main bus terminal and information centre for inner-city and metropolitan buses is on Commercial Rd.

Durban Transport ((2) 309 5942) runs the bus services Mynah and Aqualine. Mynah covers most of the beachfront and central residential areas. Trips cost around US\$0.40. The larger Aqualine buses run through the outer-lying Durban metropolitan area.

A taxi between the beach and Florida Rd, Morningside costs about US\$4.

AROUND DURBAN

The South Coast is a 160km-long string of seaside resorts and suburbs running from Durban to Port Edward, near the Eastern Cape border. There's a bit of a Ground Hog Day feel about the mass of shoulder-to-shoulder getaways along the N2 and Rte 102, albeit a pleasant one. The region is a surfers' and divers' delight (the latter because of the Aliwal Shoal), and in summer there ain't much room to swing a brolly. The stunning Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve (2 039-679 1644; www.kzn wildlife.com; admission US\$1.40, camp site US\$4, 2-bed hut US\$15; 🕑 6am-6pm), close to Port Shepstone, the South Coast's industrial administrative centre, provides beautiful forest walks, eating and accommodation options. Nearby Margate is the claustrophobic holiday hub.

The stretch of coast from Umhlanga Rocks north to the Tugela River is a profusion of upmarket timeshare apartments and retirement villages, with some pleasant beaches. The section from Zimbali, slightly north of Umhlanga, to the Tugela is known as the Dolphin Coast because of the bottlenose dolphins that favour the area. The North Coast is home to a fascinating mix of peoples: descendants of former colonialists, Indians, French Mauritian sugar-cane growers and indentured labourers from the Indian subcontinent, plus colourful Zulu cultures.

PIETERMARITZBURG

🖻 033 / pop 457,000

Billed as the heritage city, and KZN's administrative and legislative capital (previously shared with Ulundi), Pietermaritzburg's (usually known as 'PMB') grand historic buildings hark back to an age of pith helmets and midday martinis. By day, the city is vibrant: its large Zulu community sets a colourful flavour and the Indian community brings echoes of the subcontinent to its busy streets. A large student population adds to the city's vitality.

Pietermaritzburg is where you need to book most of the accommodation and walks for KwaZulu-Natal Parks. The **KZN Wildlife Headquarters** (**B** 845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; Queen Elizabeth Park, Duncan McKenzie Dr; **S** 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) is a long way northwest of the town centre.

Sleeping & Eating

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Umphiti Backpackers (🖻 394 3490; umphiti@mweb .co.za; 317 Bulwer St; dm US\$10, d from US\$23; 😰) The many wagging tails reflect the warm welcome at this friendly, if a little dog-eared, bohemian place. It offers a wealth of information and activities.

Prince Alfred Street Backpackers (2 345 7045; www.chauncey.co.za; 312 Prince Alfred St; s/d US\$11/23) This bright place, with multicoloured mosquitonet extravaganzas and ethnic adornments, is one of the most stylish renovated 'backpackers' around, and handy to the centre.

Duvet & Crumpets (394 4133; www.duvetandcrum pets.co.za; 1 Freelands PI; s/d US\$27/40; 🕥) Set in a quiet, leafy location, this place offers a combination of unpretentious, clean rooms and self-catering units.

Torwood Lodge (🖻 390 1072; www.torwood.co.za; tw US\$57; 😰) With a quaint rural setting and a landscaped rock pool, this excellent out-oftown option is great for those seeking city days and rustic nights.

Els Amics (2 345 6524; 380 Longmarket St; mains US\$5.50-13; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat) The city's fine-dining option is in a cosy Victorian house with a series of rooms and a classy Spanish-influenced menu. Bookings are essential.

Afro Cafe 94 (2 345 0773; 266 Prince Alfred St; mains US\$3.40-11; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Carnivores can get their mouths around 'world African cuisine': from Hluhluwe impala salad to springbok loin and Cuban oxtail.

Getting There & Away

Pietermaritzburg airport, also known as the Oribi airport, is 6km southeast of the city and private taxis are available. SAAirlink (386 92861), with an office at the airport, flies to Jo'burg daily (US\$114).

Bus companies Greyhound, Translux, SA Roadlink, Luxliner and Intercape offer similar prices depending on the level of onboard services. Destinations offered include Jo'burg (US\$17 to US\$27, six to seven hours), Cape Town (US\$54, 22 hours), Pretoria (US\$26, seven to eight hours), Port Elizabeth (US\$42, 15 hours) and Durban (US\$7 to US\$24, 11/2 hours).

Cheetah Coaches (2 342 4444) runs daily (US\$8) between Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Durban International Airport. Sani Pass Carriers (2 701 1017; spc@y.co.za) runs buses up into the southern Drakensberg. The Baz Bus

(ratio in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) travels between Durban and Pietermaritzburg twice a week.

KWAZULU-NATAL RESERVES Hluhluwe–Imfolozi Park **a** 035

These magnificent twin reserves (2 550 8476; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$9.50/4.70; 🕑 5am-7pm Nov-Feb, 6am-6pm Mar-Oct), dominated by woodland savannah and flood plains, are good places to spot 'the Big Five'. Travel to the northern reaches of the park, and forests full of mist, grassy hills and peaceful rivers will entrance you.

One of Imfolozi's main attractions is its extensive trail system in a special 24,000-hectare wilderness area (note: these are seasonal). The Base Trail (3 nights/4 days US\$363) is, as the name suggests, at a base camp. On the Primitive Trail (4 nights/5 days US\$240), you carry equipment, help prepare the food (provided), and hikers must sit up in 1¹/₂-hour watches during the night.

The signature resort on the Hluhluwe side, with stupendous views, is Hilltop Camp (2562 0848; rest hut/chalet per person US\$31/63, 2-bed unit with full board per person US\$63). Try one of the smaller and more sedate accommodation centres in Imfolozi for more peace and quiet. Morning and night wildlife drives (US\$20 per person) from here are very popular.

The main entrance to Hluhluwe, at Memorial Gate, is 15km west of the N2, about 50km northwest of Mtubatuba. Petrol is available at Mpila Camp in the park.

Greater St Lucia Wetland Park a 035

The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, a Unesco World Heritage Site, stretches for 280 glorious kilometres, from the Mozambican border near Kosi Bay in the north of Maputaland, to Mapelane (Maphelana) at the southern end of Lake St Lucia. With the Indian Ocean on one side, and a series of lakes on the other (including Lake St Lucia), the 328,000-hectare area offers everything from offshore reefs and beaches, to lakes, wetlands, woodlands and coastal forests.

Most hostels rent snorkelling equipment and can organise tours through one of the many tour operators that have offices based in St Lucia Estuary, the park's main resort town. Birding, boat tours, canoeing, hiking, horse riding, turtle tours, whale-watching, and wildlife drives can all be arranged.

In St Lucia Estuary itself, you can camp at three sites run by KZN Wildlife (🖻 033-845 1000, 590 1340; www.kznwildlife.com; Pelican St) for around US\$7 per person.

Occupying a series of sprawling buildings, the rooms at BiB's International Backpackers (🖻 590 1056; www.bibs.co.za; 310 MacKenzie St; camp site US\$6, dm/d without bathroom US\$9.50/20, d US\$27; ▶ 🔲 🔊) are tarnished, but the atmosphere makes up for it. Santa Lucia Guest House (🖻 590 1151; www.santalucia.co.za; 30 Pelican St; s/d incl breakfast US\$39/78; 🕄 😰) is a highly acclaimed B&B with friendly and hospitable owners.

The Baz Bus (🖻 in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus .com) drops backpackers several times a week.

Sodwana Bay **a** 035

Spectacular Sodwana Bay, a sheltered recess at the very northern tip of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, isn't a whole lot more than sand, sea and silence. And that's its appeal. The spread-out village of Sodwana Bay is also here, but the two nearby parks - Sodwana Bay National Park (3 571 0051; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/ child US\$2.80/2; 🕑 6am-6pm) and **Ozabeni** – provide most of the highlights. This little slice of paradise offers stunning coastal scenery, guided walking trails, serious deep-sea game fishing and scuba diving.

KZN Wildlife (🕿 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; Ozabeni camp sites per person US\$4, Sodwana Bay National Park camp sites/5-bed cabins per person US\$19/30) offers camping at Ozabeni, and hundreds of camp sites and cabins at Sodwana Bay National Park. Coral Divers (2 571 0290; coraldivers@mweb .co.za; Sodwana Bay National Park; s/d without bathroom from US\$25/40; 🔲 😰) is a factory-style operation, nevertheless it has cabins in a lovely setting, satellite TV, a pool and a bar.

Minibus taxis run from the N2 up to the small town of Jozini. From there to Sodwana Bay you shouldn't have trouble finding taxi transport.

ZULULAND

Dominated by the Zulu tribal group, the region offers a fascinating historical and contemporary insight into one of the country's most enigmatic, and best-known, cultures. Intense poverty and all the social problems that come with it are still commonplace.

Situated around a beautiful indigenous forest and surrounded by green rolling hills, the town of Eshowe (population 14,700) has a

rural, rough-and-tumble atmosphere, but the suburbs are leafy and quiet. It is well placed for exploring the wider region, and there are many decent attractions and accommodation options on offer. The **George Hotel & Zululand** Backpackers (🖻 035-474 4919; www.eshowe.com; 38 Main St; s/d incl breakfast US\$33/47; 🛄 😰) oozes colonialera pretensions. The separate backpackers (camp site US\$7, dm/s/d without bathroom US\$10/18/24) is hungover, but the George's microbrewery and 101 activities are also on tap.

Minibus taxis connect to Empangeni, (US\$4, one hour), Gingindlovu (US\$0.90) and Melmoth (US\$2.80, 45 minutes), the best place to catch taxis deeper into Zululand.

THE DRAKENSBERG

The tabletop peaks of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg range, which form the boundary between South Africa and the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, offer some of the country's most awe-inspiring landscapes. This vast 243,000-hectare sweep of basalt summits and buttresses are so recognisably South African that they've become tourist-brochure clichés. If any landscape lives up to its airbrushed, publicity-shot alter ego, it is the jagged, green sweep of the Drakensberg.

The Drakensberg (or the 'Berg', as it's often called) is usually divided into three sections, although the distinctions aren't strict.

The northern Drakensberg runs from the Golden Gate Highlands National Park to the Royal Natal National Park. Harrismith and Bergville are sizeable towns in this area.

The central Drakensberg's main feature is Giant's Castle Game Reserve, the largest national park in the area. Northwest of Giant's Castle is the Cathedral Peak wilderness area. The towns of Bergville, Estcourt and Winterton are all adjacent to the central Drakensberg.

The southern Drakensberg runs down to the Transkei. This area is less developed than the others, but is no less spectacular. There's a huge wilderness area, and the Sani Pass route into southern Lesotho.

There's no single road linking all the main areas of interest so you're better off selecting one (or a few only) places rather than spending most of your time behind a wheel in search of sights. In general, you must book all KZN Wildlife accommodation (except camping) in

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advance through either the Pietermaritzburg or Durban KZN Wildlife branches. There are also several local information offices: Central Drakensberg Information Centre (🖻 036-488 1207; www.cdic.co.za; Thokozisa; 🕑 9am-6pm) Based in the Thokozisa complex, 13km outside Winterton on Rte 600, this private enterprise is extremely helpful. Okhahlamba Drakensberg Tourism (🖻 036-448 1557; www.drakensberg.org.za; Tatham Rd, Bergville; 🕑 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Covers the northern and central Drakensberg.

Southern Drakensberg Escape Tourism Centre (🖻 033-701 1471; www.drakensberg.org; Clocktower Centre, Old Main Rd, Underberg; 🕎 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) Covers the southern region from Underberg, Himeville and Sani Pass.

ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK a 036

Spanning out from some of the range's loftiest summits, the 8000-hectare Royal Natal Park (🕿 438 6310; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$3.40/2; Sam-7pm) has a presence that far outstrips its relatively meagre size, with many of the surrounding peaks rising as high into the air as the park stretches across. With some of the Drakensberg's most dramatic and accessible scenery, the park is crowned by the sublime Amphitheatre, an 8km wall of cliff and canyon equally spectacular from below or from up on high. Looming up behind is Mont-aux-Sources (3282m), so called because the Tugela, Elands and Western Khubedu Rivers rise here; the last eventually becomes the Orange River and flows all the way to the Atlantic.

The park's visitors centre (🕑 8am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm) is about 1km in from the main gate. There's also a shop selling basic provisions. Fuel is available in the park.

Except for the Amphitheatre-to-Cathedral (62km, four to five days) and the Mont-aux-Sources (20km, 10 hours) hikes, most of the 25-odd walks in Royal Natal are day walks. The park has become a mecca for climbers. You must apply for a permit from the KZN Wildlife office.

If you plan to camp on the mountain, you should book with the QwaQwa tourist officer (🖻 058-713 4415). Otherwise there's a basic hut on the escarpment near Tugela Falls. An overnight hiking permit costs US\$4.

Thendele (2003-845 1000; chalet per person US\$43-47), the park's main camp has a variety of accommodation, including some reasonable two-bed chalets. There are also several places outside the park, including Amphitheatre Backpackers (🖻 438 6106; amphibackpackers@worldonline .co.za; camp site US\$5.50, dm/d US\$10/22), 21km north of Bergville.

CENTRAL BERG a 036

Crowned with some of the Drakensberg's most formidable peaks - Giant's Castle Peak (3312m), the Monk's Cowl (3234m) and Champagne Castle (3377m) are found here the central Berg is a big hit with climbers. But with dramatic scenery aplenty, this beautiful region is just as popular with those who prefer to admire their mountains from a safe distance.

A beautifully photogenic area in the shadow of the ramparts of Cathedral Peak, the Cathedral Peak Nature Reserve (2 488 8000; www.kznwild life.com; adult/child US\$3.40/1.80; (S) 6am-6pm) includes the Bell (2930m), the Horns (3005m) and Cleft Peak (3261m). Cathedral Peak is a long day's climb (10km, seven hours return).

The park office (🖻 488 8000; www.kznwildlife.com), in Didima Camp, sells permits for the scenic drive (4WD only) up Mike's Pass (per person/ vehicle US\$2/4.70) and arranges guides.

Monk's Cowl Nature Reserve (2 468 1103; www .kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$2.80/1.40; 🕑 6am-6pm) is another stunning slice of the Drakensberg range; within Monk's Cowl are the two peaks Monk's Cowl and Champagne Castle. The park office (2468 1103; camp site per person US\$9.50) is 3km beyond Champagne Castle Hotel. The office takes bookings for camping and overnight hiking (US\$4 per person).

The Inkosana Lodge (🖻 468 1202; www.inkosana .co.za; dm/d without bathroom US\$11/34, thatched rondavels with/without bathroom US\$25/17; 🔊), one of the best backpackers in KZN, boasts an indigenous garden and clean rooms, and heaps of activities and walks are on offer.

Rising up to Injasuti Dome (3409m), South Africa's highest peak, Giant's Castle Game Reserve (2 033-845 1000, 353 3718; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$3.40/1.80; (> 5am-7pm) is one of the Drakensberg's loftiest - even its lowest point sits at 1300m above sea level. It's a rugged, remote and popular destination, with huge forest reserves to the north and south, and Lesotho's barren plateau over the escarpment to the west.

There are several accommodation centres inside the reserve, as well as trail huts and caves for hikers.

SOUTHERN DRAKENSBERG WILDERNESS AREAS

Best accessed from the pleasant towns of Himeville and Underberg, the southern Berg boasts one of the region's highlights: the journey up to Lesotho over the Sani Pass. It is also renowned as a serious hiking area, and as well as some great walks, including the fabulous Giant's Cup Trail, the region also offers a smorgasbord of wilderness areas.

The Mkhomazi Nature Reserve (🖻 033-266 6444; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$2.80/1.40; (>) 6am-6pm) is one of the few places where you can hike for days without seeing anyone else.

The park office of Garden Castle (20 033-701 1823; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$2.80/1.40; camp site per person US\$5.50, hut per person US\$8; 🕑 6am-6pm) is 30km west of Underberg - carry along the road past Khotso Horse Trails. This reserve incorporates beautiful Bushman's Nek Valley, dominated by the 3051m Rhino Peak.

The drive up the Sani Pass is a trip to the roof of South Africa: a spectacular ride around hairpin bends into the clouds to the kingdom of Lesotho. At 2865m, this is the highest pass in the country, and the vistas (on a clear day!) are magical. There are hikes in almost every direction, and inexpensive horse rides are available. Amazingly, this is also the only road link between Lesotho and KwaZulu-Natal. You need a passport to cross into Lesotho. The border is open daily from 8am to 4pm on the South African side (until 5pm on the Lesotho side).

At the bottom of the pass you can sleep at the Sani Lodge (🖻 033-702 0330; www.sani-lodge .co.za; camp site US\$6; dm/d without bathroom US\$9/11, 2-bed rondavel US\$30), which besides accommodation offers a range of fabulous tours and activities and insider tips about the region through its tour company.

Without doubt, the Giant's Cup Trail (68km, five days and five nights), running from Sani Pass to Bushman's Nek, is one of the nation's great walks. Early booking through KZN Wildlife (a in Pietermaritzburg 033-845 1000) is advisable.

GAUTENG

Fast, bustling and a cabaret of contradictions, Gauteng (pronounced 'how-teng') covers just 1.5% of the country's land surface, yet accounts for 34% of its gross domestic product (GDP) and, perhaps more extraordinarily,

10% of the GDP of the whole of Africa. The laid-back, friendly atmosphere of Pretoria, the country's administrative capital, belies a turbulent past. Fifty or so kilometres down the M1 motorway away is Johannesburg, the provincial capital and third-largest city on the continent. Sprawling and booming, it's a strange conurbation of opulent suburbs set alongside some of the country's starkest urban poverty.

JOHANNESBURG

@ 011 / pop 5.7 million

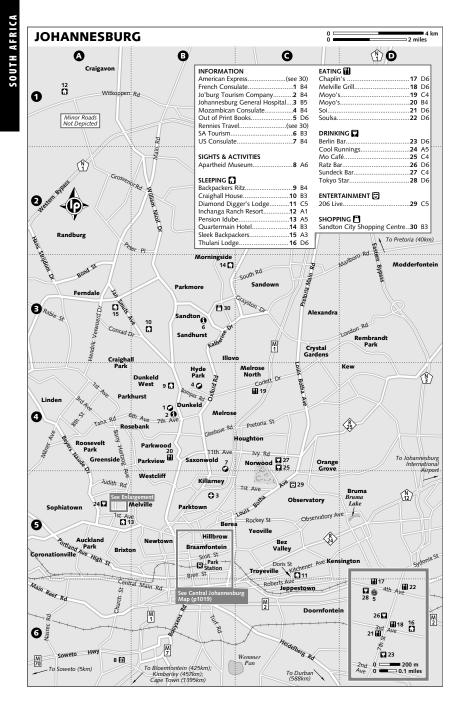
Jo'burg, or 'Jozi' as it's more commonly known, is without a doubt the great big beating heart of South Africa, and has long played a Jekyll-and-Hyde role in the global consciousness. Often the stage on which the epic of this extraordinary nation has been played out, the colossus of Jo'burg - with all its thrills and foibles - is today a fascinating, multitudinous city, where all the ups and downs of 21st-century South Africa can be witnessed in three, multicolour dimensions.

In the past, the city's darker personality proved the most enduring. The Jo'burg of the newsflash was a city where fear and loathing reigned supreme; a city where spiralling gun crime and poverty had manifested itself in a society where one half of the population stagnated, while the other looked on impassively through coils of razor wire.

As ever, there is an element of truth to the stereotypes. Jo'burg does bear scars of South Africa's turbulent 20th century, and many will take time to heal. Stark inequalities persist, but armed with a new self-confidence - ironically most pronounced in the infamous township of Soweto - Africa's giant hub is beginning to introduce itself to a healthier diet of urban renewal and social regeneration.

Orientation

Johannesburg International Airport (JIA) is 25km northeast of the city centre. The large city centre, laid out on a straightforward grid, is dominated by office blocks; after shops close, it becomes a virtual ghost town. Redevelopment of the Newtown cultural precinct at the northwestern edge of the city is at the core of an effort to clean up central Jo'burg. North of the centre, a steep ridge runs west-east from Braamfontein across to the dangerous suburb of Hillbrow. To the northeast of the centre is the equally dangerous Yeoville.



The northern suburbs of big houses and big fences are predominantly white, middle- and upper-class, and where most travellers stay. Sterile shopping malls form the centre of most social life. The inner-suburban restaurant enclaves of Melville, Greenside, Parkhurst and Norwood make a refreshing change.

The black townships ring the city and present a stark contrast to the northern suburbs. Conditions within them range from the stereotypically suburban to the appalling. The main township is Soweto (p1018), but other big townships surround the city in all directions.

Information

EMERGENCY AIDS line (@ 0800-012 322) Fire (@ 10111) Rape Crisis Line (@ 116 1888) SA Police Headquarters (Map p1019; @ 10111; Main Rd)

INTERNET ACCESS

Most hostels and hotels have internet facilities, charging anything from US\$2.80 to US\$8 per hour. Alternatively, most Jo'burg malls and suburbs have an internet café, and wi-fi hotspots are popping up everywhere. **Out of Print Books** (Map p1016; C 482 6026; 78 4th Ave, Melville; per min US\$0.10; \bigcirc 10am-9pm), in the centre of Melville, is pricey but open later than most.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Johannesburg General Hospital (Map p1016; C 011-488 4911; M1/Jubilee Rd, Parktown) Jo'burg's main public hospital.

MONEY

There are banks with ATMs and change facilities at every commercial centre. American Express and Rennies Travel (an agent for Thomas Cook) have branches at the airport and in major malls.

POST

Main Post Office (Map p1019; 🖻 0800 110 226; Jeppe St; 🕑 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Gauteng Tourism Authority (Map p1019; ⓐ 639 1600; www.gauteng.net; 1 Central Place, cnr Jeppe & Henry Nxumalo St, Newtown; ⓒ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) The tourist body's glistening new headquarters are in the middle of the Newtown Cultural Precinct. Staff members are eager but woefully undertrained. Jo'burg Tourism Company (Map p1016; 214 0700; deon@joburgtourism.com; grd fl, Grosvenor Cnr, 195 Jan Smuts Ave, Parktown North; 2 American Sam Mon-Fri) A private endeavour; covers the city of Jo'burg. SA Tourism (Map p1016; 2895 3000; fax 895 3001; 12 Protea Rd, Sandton; 2 American Sam Mon-Fri)

Dangers & Annoyances

Pay careful attention to your personal security in Jo'burg. Daylight muggings in the city centre and other inner suburbs, notably Hillbrow, are not uncommon and you must be constantly on your guard. You'd be crazy to walk around central Jo'burg at night – if you arrive after dark and don't have a car, catch a taxi to your final destination.

Crime is a big problem, but it is important to put things in perspective: remember that most travellers come and go without incident and that much of the crime afflicts parts of the city you would have little reason to stray into. It's when using ATMs that you're most vulnerable. Seek local advice, listen to it and remain aware of what's going on around you.

Sights & Activities CITY CENTRE & NEWTON

The area retains its edgy atmosphere, but regeneration projects in Newtown to the south and university-oriented Braamfontein to the north are gradually helping to boost confidence once more in the heart of the city.

To get an overview of the hub of Jo⁵burg, take the lift to the **Top of Africa** (Map p1019; a) 308 1331; 50th fl, Carlton Centre, 152 Commissioner St; adult/child US\$1.40/1; 9 9am-7pm). From the quiet remoteness of the observation deck, the sprawling city seems positively serene.

Today, Newtown is at the centre of efforts to rejuvenate the downtown area. Surrounded by museums and cafés, Newtown's cultural precinct, which occupies the newly brushedup **Mary Fitzgerald Sq** (named after South Africa's first female trade unionist; Map p1019), is a good place to start a tour.

The nearby **Market Theatre complex** (p1020), with its shows, bars and restaurants, is an excellent place to while away a few hours between museum visits.

CONSTITUTION HILL

Inspiring, impressive **Constitution Hill** (Map p1019; a 381 3100; www.constitutionhill.co.za; Kotze St; adult/child US\$2.80/1.40; 9 am-5pm Wed-Mon) is slowly becoming one of the city's – if not the country's – chief

tourist attractions. Built within the ramparts of the **Old Fort**, which dates from 1892 and was once a notorious prison, the development focuses on South Africa's new **Constitutional Court**, itself is a very real symbol of the changing South Africa, with cases heard in all 11 official languages.

SOUTHERN SUBURBS

The **Apartheid Museum** (Map p1016; 🖻 309 4700; www.apartheidmuseum.org; cnr Gold Reef Rd & Northern Parkway; adult/child US\$3.40/1.60; 🕑 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) remains one of South Africa's most evocative museums, using film, text, audio and live accounts to provide a colourful insight into the architecture, implementation and eventual unravelling of the apartheid system.

SOWETO

Home to about 3.5 million people, Soweto is one of the most infamous ghettos in the world, and a tour must not be missed. Soweto has had a face-lift in recent years, and some of its suburbs are looking downright affluent. Others remain as sad as any other ghetto in the developing world- cardboard and tin shacks with no plumbing. It might seem odd, even voyeuristic, to treat these places as a tourist attraction, but to get any kind of appreciation for South African reality, you have to visit them. It's also another way of supporting local, black-owned businesses directly. The new, impressive Soweto Tourism and Information Centre (🖻 945 3111; Walter Sisulu Sq, Kliptown; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is testament to a growing tourism policy here and a first for any township. It provides information, and an accommodation and tour booking service. Dozens of companies provide tours including Imbizo Tours (🕿 838 2667; per person R310).

Sleeping

Diamond Digger's Lodge (Map p1016; 624 1676; www .oneandonly.co.za; 36 Doris St, Kensington; dm/d without bathroom US\$9.50/24;) An excellent backpackers, with every imaginable amenity, including a Jacuzzi, sauna, a big-screen home cinema and a pub for post-tour frolics.

Sleek Backpackers ((2) 787 8070; www.sleek hostel.150m.com; 477 Jan Smuts Ave, Randburg; dm/s/d without bathroom US\$11/14/27; (2) (2) (2) This converted house is now a small hostel run with a personal touch. Dorms and doubles are basic but clean. It's in a handy location, about halfway between the city centre and Fourways. **Backpackers Ritz** (Map p1016; 23257125; www.back packers-ritz.co.za; 1A North Rd, Dunkeld West; dm/s/d without bathroom US\$11/24/35; P **Q S**) Certainly not 'The Ritz', this backpackers is in a characterful old mansion a safe hop-and-a-skip from Hyde Park Mall, and plenty of bars and restaurants.

Inchanga Ranch Resort (708 2505; www.inchanga resort.co.za; 51 Inchanga Rd, Craigavon; camp site US\$5.50, dm/s/d US\$10/27/34, cabins from US\$20; P 🗐 😰) A wonderful country retreat just minutes from the shops and casino of Montecasino. Accommodation is in cute private A-frame huts with animal-print linens.

Craighall House (Map p1016; 2326 0326; craighall house@mweb.co.za; 10 Alexandra Ave, Craighall; s/d ind break-fast US\$40/67; **P (a)** Well located, more or less halfway between Rosebank and Sandton, this guesthouse has neatly designed rooms each with private entrance and patio, a beautiful garden and swimming pool.

Thulani Lodge ((a) 482 1106; www.thulanilodge.co.za; 85 Third Ave; s/d ind breakfast US\$54/67; (P) (a) Despite its top location just metres from Melville's nightlife, Thulani manages to offer peace and quiet in a series of small, neat rooms clustered intimately around a sparkling swimming pool.

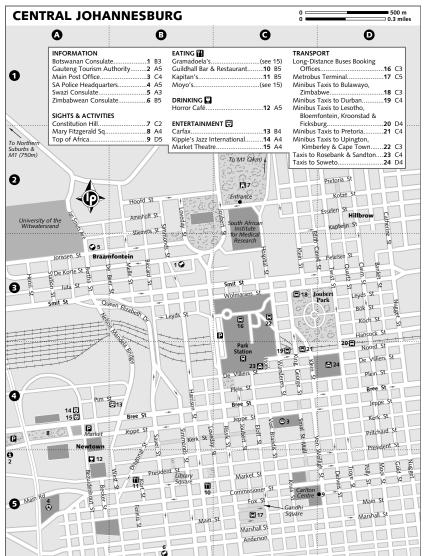
Quatermain Hotel (290 0900; www.quatermain .co.za; 137 West Rd South, Morningside; s/d incl breakfast US\$103/143; () 20 () This is one of Jo'burg's best options, with stylish fittings, excellent service and a great location near the glitz of Sandton. Its award-winning restaurant, The Courier, is another huge bonus.

Eating

Unfortunately for those without cars, most of the best places are scattered around the northern suburbs. The suburb of Norwood has an enclave of restaurants that has grown and matured into an east Jo'burg version of Melville's 7th St. There are more than 20 bars, restaurants and cafés along Grant Ave.

CITY CENTRE & NEWTOWN

Guildhall Bar & Restaurant (Map p1019; 🖻 833 1770; 88 Market St; mains US\$4.70-7; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Established in 1888, you can while away the day in the pub below, or sit on the balcony and watch the city pass you by over a pie and chips.



Kapitan's (Map p1019; **2** 834 8048; 11A Kort St; mains US\$4-8; **W** lunch & dinner) Kapitan's is one of the few places in town where you'll see young lions drinking with hepcats, and grizzly city stalwarts groaning about how it's all gone to the dogs.

Gramadoela's (Map p1019; 838 6960; Bree St, Newtown; mains US\$5.50-12; Iunch & dinner; Ⅰ) Full of curios and character, this gay-friendly Newtown classic in the Market Theatre complex whips up a mean mix of African and Asian cuisine.

Moyo's (Map p1019; **a** 838 1715; Bree St; www.moyo .co.za; mains US\$7-13; **b** lunch & dinner); Oozing chi-chi African charm, this busy chain offers an innovative menu of contemporary African eats.

MELVILLE

AFRICA

SOUTH

Soulsa (🖻 482 5572; 16 7th St; mains US\$4.70-12; 🕑 lunch & dinner; 🕄) Funky décor, differing day and night menus featuring fusion South African cooking, and outdoor sofas have made Soulsa a Melville favourite. Breakfast is served on weekends.

Soi (2726 5775; cnr 7th St & 3rd Ave; mains US\$6-12; 🕅 lunch & dinner; 🕄) The Thai and Vietnamese food is fresh and zesty, and there's a bar full of beautiful people attached.

Melville Grill (🖻 727 2812; cnr 7th St & 3rd Ave; mains US\$7-16; 🕅 lunch & dinner; 🕄) The only place for a hardcore meat feast, this upmarket steakhouse serves sublime aged cuts in modern surrounds.

Chaplin's (2 482 4657; 85 4th Ave; mains US\$11-15; 🕑 lunch & dinner; 🕄) This twee little bistro, a veteran of the neighbourhood, whips up some legendary food. European meat and fish dishes predominate.

Drinking

Much of the nightlife is in the northern suburbs, particularly around Melville, Norwood and Rosebank. The area around the cultural precinct in Newtown also has a few decent places.

CITY CENTRE & NEWTOWN

Horror Café (Map p1019; 🖻 838 6735; 5 Becker St, Newtown) The neon-green décor is indeed a horror, but this place is never short of action. Thursdays is reggae night, while Saturday is gay and lesbian night.

Guildhall Bar & Restaurant (Map p1019; 🗃 833 1770; 88 Market St) A great place to soak up some history while stoking the fires with a pint or two of lager. There's an upstairs terrace for people-watching.

MELVILLE

Berlin Bar (2 482 9345; 6 7th St) With an ultracool design, and Jo'burg's most tortured artists lounging on its retro furniture, this was definitely Melville's hippest hangout when we swung through town.

Ratz Bar (🖻 726 2019; 9B 7th St) This cosy place is only for over-24s. Try one of their tasty and well-priced cocktails (US\$2.40).

Tokyo Star (🖻 834 9187; 78 4th Ave) Anime chic and loads of plastic characterise this trendy, noisy Tokyo-style bar. Asian snacks such as tempura (US\$3) are served.

Cool Runnings (Map p1016; 🖻 482 4786; 27A 4th Ave) Reggae is a perennial favourite in Jo'burg, so it

is no surprise that this franchise of Jamaicanstyle bars is popular.

NORWOOD

Sundeck Bar (🗃 728 2279; 72 Grant Ave) The upstairs terrace bar at this place is the perfect spot to sip a cocktail and watch Norwood drift by.

Mo Café (🖻 728 8256; Grant Ave) This camp, retro-style affair offers beautiful people and lashings of orange décor. There's a full food menu for late-night munchies.

Entertainment LIVE MUSIC & NIGHTCLUBS

Carfax (Map p1019; 🖻 834 9187; 39 Pim St, Newtown; admission US\$9.50) This industrial space symbolises integrated Jo'burg and is one of the hottest club tickets in town, with weekend DJs and a house-oriented music scene.

Kippie's Jazz International (Map p1019; 🕿 833 3316; www.kippies.co.za; Bree St, Newtown; admission US\$7) Kippie's is a 'must do' in Jo'burg as it's one of the best places to see South African jazz talent. Gigs kick off on Friday and Saturday nights at around 9.30pm.

206 Live (Map p1016: 728 5333: 206 Louis Botha Ave. Orange Grove) Garage, ragga, drum 'n' bass and rock tracks keep the feet tapping here. Next door, 208 keeps the flag flying over the local hip-hop crowd.

THEATRES

Market Theatre (Map p1019; 🖻 832 1641; www.mar kettheatre.co.za; Bree St) is the most important venue for live theatre in Jo'burg. There are three live-theatre venues here - the Main, Laager and Barney Simon Theatres - as well as galleries, a café and the excellent Kippie's Jazz International (above).

Getting There & Away AIR

South Africa's major international and domestic airport is Johannesburg International Airport (JIA; 2 921 6262; www.acsa.co.za). For more information, including international flight connections, see p1034.

All regular flights to national and regional destinations can be booked through SAA, which also has offices in the domestic and international terminals of IIA.

Smaller budget airlines, including Comair, Kulula, 1Time and Nationwide, also link Jo'burg with major destinations and often have much cheaper fares.

BUS

A number of international bus services leave Jo'burg from the Park Station complex (Map p1019) for Mozambique, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

The main long-distance bus lines (national and international) also depart from and arrive at the Park Station transit centre, in the northwest corner of the site, where you will also find their respective booking offices.

Translux, City to City, Greyhound, SA Roadlink, Greyhound and Intercape service major and minor destinations. With the exception of City to City buses, which commence in Jo'burg, all services that are not heading north commence in Pretoria at the Pretoria station. Some sample fares are Cape Town (US\$51 to US\$63, 19 hours), Durban (US\$17 to US\$28, eight hours), Nelspruit (US\$11 to US\$25, five hours), East London (US\$43, 15 hours) via Bloemfontein (US\$20, seven hours), and Plettenberg Bay (US\$42, 18 hours).

Baz Bus (🖻 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com) now services backpackers from Jo'burg.

MINIBUS TAXI

The majority of minibus taxis already use the new road-transport interchange in Park Station over the train tracks between the Metro Concourse and Wanderers St. Because of the risk of mugging, it is not a good idea to go searching for a taxi while you have your luggage with you.

You can also find minibus taxis going in the direction of Kimberley, Cape Town and Upington on Wanderers St near Leyds St; Bulawayo taxis at the northern end of King George St; Pretoria taxis on Noord St; Lesotho, Bloemfontein (and other Free State destinations) on Noord St. east of Joubert Park: and Durban taxis near the corner of Wanderers and Noord Sts.

Getting Around

JIA is located about 25km east of central Johannesburg in Kempton Park. Between 5am and 10pm, buses run every half hour between JIA and Park Station (US\$11, 45 minutes). The area immediately around Park Station is confusing and known for muggings. The Airport Link (📾 884 3957) is a reputable airport shuttle. Taxis are expensive at around US\$43 one way to the northern suburbs. Most hostels will collect you from the airport.

Metropolitan Bus Services (Metrobus; Map p1019; 375 5555; www.mbus.co.za; Gandhi Sq) runs services covering 108 routes in the Greater Jo'burg area. Fares work on a zone system, rang-ing from zone one (US\$0.50) to zone eight (US\$1.40).

If you do take a minibus taxi into central Jo'burg, be sure to get off before it reaches the end of the route and avoid the taxi rank - it's a mugging zone. US\$0.70 will get you around the inner suburbs and the city centre, and US\$1.20 will get you almost anywhere.

Taxis operate meters if they work. It's wise to ask a local the likely price and agree on a fare at the outset. From the taxi rank at Park Station to Rosebank should cost around US\$10.

There has been a very serious problem with violent crime on the metro system, mostly on those lines connecting with black townships. The Jo'burg-Pretoria metro line should also be avoided.

PRETORIA

a 012 / pop 1.65 million

At once the 'Afrikaner Jerusalem', former headquarters of the apartheid state, and site of the presidential inauguration of Nelson Mandela, the pretty, laid-back city of Pretoria - the administrative capital - carries a remarkable amount of history for its age. Ironically, the city that for so long was a byword for white domination is now home to Thabo Mbeki, the liberated country's black president.

It's just 50km from Jo'burg, and is expected within 15 years to form part of a megalopolis of 20 million people. Yet Pretoria moves at a slower pace than its giant neighbour and remains Afrikaans culturally. Military and educational institutions associated with the capital remain, while the tens of thousands of university students drive Pretoria's vibrant nightlife.

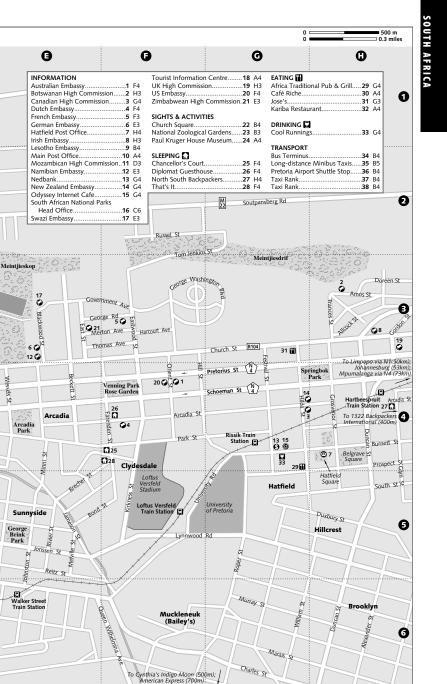
Information INTERNET ACCESS

Most hostels and hotels offer internet facilities. but cheaper alternatives are available. Odyssey Internet Cafe (🖻 362 2467; Hatfield Galleries, Burnett St; per 30 min US\$2; (>) 9am-11pm) is a good bet.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hatfield Clinic (🗃 012-362 7180; 454 Hilda St) A wellknown suburban clinic.

Pretoria Academic Hospital (🖻 011-354 1000; Dr Savage Rd) The place to head for in a medical emergency.





MONEY

AFRICA There are banks with ATMs and change facili-SOUTH ties across town: American Express (🗃 346 2599; Brooklyn Mall;

9am-5pm) Nedbank (cnr Burnett & Festival Sts) Next to Hatfield

Galleries. POST

Main Post Office (cnr Church St & Church Sg; 🕅 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Tourist Information Centre (🗃 358 1430; www .tshwane.gov.za; Old Nederlandsche Bank Bldg, Church Sq; 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) is fairly useless.

The national head office of South African National Parks (2428 9111; www.sanparks.org; 643 Leyds St, New Muckleneuk; 🕅 offices 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat, call centre 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) is the place for all your wildlife-reserve bookings and enquiries.

Dangers & Annoyances

Pretoria is certainly safer and more relaxed than Jo'burg. That said, crime is a problem, particularly in the city centre and Sunnyside, with restaurants and other businesses moving to the safer Hatfield and Brooklyn areas.

The square roughly formed by Vermeulen, Du Toit, Boom and Schubert Sts has a bad reputation.

Sights & Activities

The looming Voortrekker Monument & Museum

(2 323 0682; Eeufees Rd; adult/child US\$3.40/1.40, vehicle US\$1.40; 🕑 8am-6pm) is hallowed turf for many Afrikaners. Built between 1938 and 1949 to commemorate the Battle of Blood River on 16 December 1838, during which 470 Boers, under the command of Andries Pretorius, defeated approximately 12,000 Zulus, it remains a powerful symbol of the 'White tribe of Africa' and their historical relationship to South Africa.

The monument is 3km south of the city. It is possible to catch the Voortrekkerhoogte or Valhalla bus from Kruger St near the corner of Church Sq. Ask the driver to let you off at the entrance road to the monument, from where it's a 10-minute walk uphill.

Church Square is the heart of Pretoria and is surrounded by imposing public buildings. In the centre, a statue of Paul Kruger (president of the Boer republics during the 1899-1902

Anglo-Boer War) looks disapprovingly at office workers lounging on the grass. A short walk from Church Square on Church St, Kruger's former residence has been turned into the Paul Kruger House Museum (🖻 326 9172; 60 Church St; adult/child US\$1.40/0.70; 🕑 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri).

About 1km north of the city centre are the National Zoological Gardens (🖻 328 3265; cnr Paul Kruger & Boom Sts; adult/child US\$4.70/3; 🕑 8am-6pm). It's an impressive and pleasant enough spot to while away an afternoon, however the highlight is probably the cable car that runs up to the top of a hill that overlooks the city.

Sleepina

Hatfield has developed into something of a backpacker's ghetto, and along with Brooklyn and New Muckleneuk it is the best place to start looking for midrange B&B options.

1322 Backpackers International (a 362 3905; www.1322backpackers.com; 1322 Arcadia St, Hatfield; camp site/dm/s/d US\$6/9/13/16; P 🕥) A friendly hostel cleverly designed to mimic log-cabin accommodation despite its suburban setting. Dorm beds are made of chunky wood and have their own night lights.

North South Backpackers (🖻 362 0989; info@north southbackpackers.com; 355 Glyn St, Hatfield; camp site/dm US\$6/11, s/d without bathroom US\$18/24; P 🛄 😰) This hostel is within easy walking distance of the high life of Burnett St, but has a tirelessly convivial buzz of its own. Trimmings include tasty dinners, a savvy travel agency and a pleasant garden.

That's It (344 3404; www.thatsit.co.za; 5 Brecher St. Clydesdale: s/d incl breakfast US\$42/55: P 🕄 😰) Located near the corner of Farenden St, this pleasant guesthouse in a leafy suburb has good-sized rooms.

Chancellor's Court (2 344 1404; www.chancellors court.co.za; 797 Park St, Clydesdale; s/d US\$47/54; P 🔀 😰) A well-located, reader-recommended guesthouse with spacious (if slighty old-fashioned) rooms. This is a good option for groups or families.

Diplomat Guesthouse (🖻 344 3131; www.thediplo mat.co.za; 822 Arcadia St. Arcadia; s/d incl breakfast US\$78/103; (P) 🔀 🛄 🕥) An early-20th-century home and its beautiful garden are the setting for this immaculately designed four-star guesthouse, filled with impressive-looking furniture.

Eating

Most people head to Hatfield, Brooklyn and New Muckleneuk. There are few eating recommendations in the city centre, due to safety considerations.

Kariba Restaurant (🖻 326 5654; 1 Parliament St; mains US\$2.80-5.50; S breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Based in the beautiful former Capitol Theatre, this efficient restaurant is a lunchtime favourite with local business types, thanks largely to its selection of hearty West and South African dishes.

Café Riche (🖻 328 3173; 2 Church St; mains US\$4-8; [Y] lunch & dinner) This is one of Pretoria's more historic eateries, enjoying a choice spot right in the heart of the city's Church Sq.

Africa Traditional Pub & Grill (🖻 362 1604; cnr Prospect & Hilda Sts; mains US\$5.50; Y lunch & dinner) An outdoor deck, good food and traditional African rhythms make this one of the more upbeat, laid-back options in distinctly bourgeois Hatfield.

Jose's (🖻 430 7778; 235 Hilda St; mains US\$8; 🕑 lunch & dinner) Platters of delicious Mediterranean foods mean you'll understand why this quality eatery is a local favourite. When it's plate-breaking night (Fridays and Saturdays), you'll understand why there's so much outdoor seating.

Cynthia's Indigo Moon (🗃 346 8926; 283 Dey St; mains US\$7-20; 🕑 lunch & dinner) A lot of cows laid down their lives to make this menu possible, but the steak is fabulous, the seafood sublime and the atmosphere cosy and stylish.

Drinking

There are several bars and nightspots in trendy Hatfield, catering for all types. Burnett St offers a high density of bars, eateries and clubs, all cut through with lashings of backpacker bravado and student shenanigans. Reggae rules the roost at **Cool Runnings** (🖻 362 0100; 1075 Burnett St), a perennially popular drinking haunt. Oppikoppi Bar (🖻 082-499 7668), on Magasyn Hill (opposite the Voortrekker Monument), is one of the best-located pubs in Pretoria. The views over the city are great, particularly at sunset.

Getting There & Away

Most interprovincial and international bus services commence in Pretoria, unless they are heading north. Translux, Greyhound and Intercape fares from Pretoria are identical to those from Jo'burg (see p1021). If you only want to go between the two cities, it will cost about US\$6. Minibus taxis leave from the main terminal by the train station and travel to a host of destinations including Jo'burg (US\$4). Because of high incidents of crime, we don't recommend taking the metro between Pretoria and Jo'burg.

Baz Bus (Cape Town 🖻 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com) will pick up and drop off at Pretoria hostels.

Long-distance minibus taxis leave from near the railway and bus stations just off Scheidling St.

Getting Around

Get You There (🖻 346 3175) operates shuttle buses between JIA and Pretoria, day and night about every hour, charging US\$13 to/from hostels and hotels. If you call ahead, most hostels, and many hotels, offer free pick-up.

There's an extensive network of local buses. Fares range from US\$0.70 to US\$0.90, depending on the distance.

There are taxi ranks on the corner of Church and Van der Walt Sts, and on the corner of Pretorius and Paul Kruger Sts.

SUN CITY

a 014

Welcome to Sin City, South African style. At Sun City (2 557 1000; www.suncity.co.za; admission US\$8), the legendary creation of entrepreneur Sol Kerzer, Disneyland collides with ancient Egypt in a demented attempt to look like Vegas. Filled with gilded statues of lions and monkeys, acres of artificial beaches, exploding volcanos and hundreds upon hundreds of clinking slot machines, there's no question this gambling-centric resort is almost grotesquely gaudy, yet a visit here can also be pretty damn fun. Started as an apartheid-era haven for wealthy whites, these days one of the great things about Sun City is the large mix of people who flock here at weekends.

The best part of Sun City is undeniably Lost **City**, which is entered over a bridge flanked by life-sized fake elephants, and basically consists of Valley of the Waves, a pool with a large-scale wave-making machine, a sandy beach, numerous water slides and other amusement-park rides. It's cheesy, but fun.

Of course if you've got the cash to splash out, this place also boasts one of the world's most luxurious hotels, but if the Sun City hotels are too expensive (and you have your own transport), consider staying at Pilanesberg National Park or the town of Rustenburg and making the complex a day trip only.

Tiny Pilanesberg Airport is about 9km east of the Sun City complex. SAAirlink (@ 978 1111;

SOUTH AFRICA www.saairlink.co.za) operates flights six times a week from Jo'burg (US\$70) and three times a week from Cape Town (US\$140). From Jo'burg it's a two-hour drive.

MPUMALANGA

Unassuming Mpumalanga (Place of the Rising Sun) adheres to a quieter pace of life. This inland province, South Africa's smallest, is where the plateaus of the highveld begin their spectacular tumble onto the lowveld plains at the dramatic Drakensberg Escarpment. Many travellers zip through on their way to Kruger National Park, but it's well worth setting aside a few days to explore the historic towns, roaring waterfalls and some of the best hiking trails in South Africa.

KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Try to imagine a national park the size of Israel, with huge tracts of acacia, sycamore figs and bushwillow interrupted by open savannah, rushing rivers and the occasional rocky bluff. Now fill it with lions, leopards, elephants, Cape buffaloes and black rhinos (the Big Five), plus cheetahs, giraffes, hippos and many species of smaller animals, and you'll start to have some notion of what it's like to visit Kruger National Park.

The park has an extensive network of sealed roads and comfortable camps, but if you prefer to keep it rough, there are also 4WD tracks, and mountain bike and hiking trails. Even when you stick to the tarmac, the sounds and scents of the bush are never more than a few metres away.

Additionally, as long as you avoid weekends and school holidays, or stick to areas north of Phalaborwa Gate and along gravel roads, it's easy to travel for an hour or more without seeing another vehicle.

Southern Kruger is the most popular section of the park, with the highest animal concentrations and the easiest access. Kruger is at its best in the far north. Here, although animal concentrations are somewhat lower, the bush setting and wilderness atmosphere are all-enveloping.

Information

Accommodation can be booked through South African National (SAN) Parks central reservations office (🖻 012-428 9111; www.parks-sa.co.za; 643 Leyds St,

Muckleneuk, Pretoria) or through tourism offices in Nelspruit, Cape Town and Durban. Except in the high season and weekends, bookings are advisable but not essential.

Day or overnight entry to the park costs US\$16/8 for adults/children. Bicycles and motorcycles are not permitted to enter the park. During school holidays you can stay in the park for a maximum of 10 days, and at any one rest camp for five days (10 days if you're camping). Opening times for the ten entry gates vary slightly with the season.

Activities

Although it's possible to get a sense for Kruger in a day, the park merits at least four to five days, and ideally at least a week. There are four short drives, all averaging about four hours, and costing US\$62 per vehicle plus a US\$14 refundable deposit. Better than the drives are guided morning and afternoon bush walks (morning/afternoon per person US\$30/24), which are possible at all the larger camps. Kruger's wilderness walking trails are done in small groups (maximum eight people), and guided by highly knowledgeable, armed guides. The walks are not particularly strenuous, covering about 20km per day at a modest pace. Most wilderness trail walks last two days and three nights, and cost US\$340 per person, including food, equipment and accommodation in rustic, pleasant huts. The walks should be booked well in advance.

Sleeping & Eating

Most visitors stay in one of the park's 12 rest camps. These offer camping, plus a range of huts, bungalows and cottages and several other styles of accommodation, as well as shops, restaurants and other facilities. Several of the rest camps have set up satellite camps, which are set some distance away, and are much more rustic, without any facilities.

Huts (two people around US\$32 to US\$39) are the cheapest option, with shared ablutions and communal cooking facilities; bungalows (two people around US\$64 to US\$72) range from simple to luxurious; cottages (up to four people about US\$121) are the next step up in both comfort and price.

Some camps also offer the option of staying in safari tents (two people about US\$32), all of which are furnished, and have a refrigerator and fan.

For those with tents or caravans, camping (camp sites for one to two people US\$14) is available at many rest camps.

There are also five bushveld camps (smaller, more remote clusters of self-catering cottages without shops or restaurants) and two bush lodges, which are set in the middle of the wilderness, and must be booked in their entirety by a single group. Prices range from US\$106 to US\$120 for four people.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, there's very luxurious accommodation in many of the private reserves bordering Kruger to the west. Another possibility is to stay outside the park in Hazyview and Nelspruit.

Getting There & Around

Several domestic airlines link Jo'burg (US\$160, one hour), Cape Town (US\$300, 21/4 hours) and Durban (US\$190, 11/2 hours) with Mpumalanga Kruger International Airport (MKIA) near Nelspruit (for Numbi, Malelane and Crocodile Bridge Gates), and with Kruger Park Gateway Airport in Phalaborwa (2km from Phalaborwa Gate).

Nelspruit is the most convenient large town near Kruger, and is well served by buses and minibus taxis to and from Jo'burg. Numbi Gate is about 50km away, and Malelane Gate about 65km away. Phalaborwa, in the north on the edge of Kruger, is the gateway for northern Kruger.

Most visitors drive themselves around the park, and this is the best way to experience Kruger. Avis (2 013-735 5651; www.avis.co.za) has a branch at Skukuza, and there is car rental from the Nelspruit, Hoedspruit and Phalaborwa airports.

NELSPRUIT

2013 / pop 235,000

Nelspruit, Mpumalanga's largest town and provincial capital, sprawls along the Crocodile River Valley in the steamy, subtropical lowveld. There are some good, affordable accommodation options and plenty of restaurants, making it a good place to sort out your stuff while you consider the next direction of your plunge.

Nelspruit Backpackers (🖻 741 2237; nelback@hotmail .com; 9 Andries Pretorius St; camp site per person US\$5.50, dm US\$9.50, s/d without bathroom US\$18/24; 😰) combines service, comfort and location, and its travel wing can organise itineraries in the area. A little far from town, though nevertheless

person US\$5.50, dm US\$9.50, s/d without bathroom US\$18/24; (a) (b) is a well-run place in a spacious house. A slightly more upscale option is **Old Vic Travel** lers Inn (🖻 744 0993; www.krugerandmore.co.za; 12 Impala St; dm US\$12, d with/without bathroom US\$40/34, 4-person self-catering cottages US\$57; 🛄 😰), which has selfcatering facilities or meals on request, and tents for rent. Keg & Jock (🖻 755 4969; Ferriera St; mains from US\$4;

popular, Funky Monkey Backpackers (🖻 083-310

4755; www.funkymonkeys.co.za; 102 Van Wijk St; camp site per

🕑 lunch & dinner) is a lively place with good pub food and a streetside patio. There's live music on Wednesday and Friday nights.

Nelspruit is well served by buses and minibus taxis from Jo'burg, and even has a small international airport. City Bug (🖻 741 4114; www .citybug.co.za) operates a weekly shuttle to Durban (US\$51 one-way), and a three-times-daily shuttle between Nelspruit and Johannesburg International Airport (US\$24 per person).

BLYDE RIVER CANYON

The Blyde River's spectacular canyon is nearly 30km long and one of South Africa's most impressive natural features. Much of it is rimmed by the 26,000-hectare Blyde River Canyon Nature **Reserve** (admission per person US\$2.80), which snakes north from Graskop, following the escarpment and meeting the Blyde River as it carves its way down to the lowveld. Most visitors drive along the edge of the canyon, with stops at the many wonderful viewpoints, but if you have the time, it's well worth exploring on foot.

Heading north from Graskop, look for God's Window and Wonder View - two viewpoints with amazing vistas and batteries of souvenir sellers. At God's Window take the trail up to the rainforest (300 steps). The Blyde River Canyon starts north of here, near Bourke's Luck Potholes. These bizarre cylindrical holes were carved into the rock by whirlpools near the confluence of the Blyde and Treuer Rivers.

The Aventura Resort Swadini (2015-795 5141: www.aventura.co.za; camp site US\$8, plus per person US\$4, 6-person self-catering chalet US\$70; 🔀 😰) is located at the northern end of the reserve along the Blyde River, and can organise hiking, whitewater rafting, abseiling and more.

GRASKOP

🖻 013 / pop 2000 / elevation 1450m

A useful base to explore the dramatic Blyde River Canyon, the quiet town of Graskop is slowly emerging as a tourist destination. The

SOUTH

nearby views over the edge of the Drakensberg Escarpment are hard to beat.

Green Castle Backpackers () 767 1761; http:// home.global.co.za/~graskop; 63 Eufees St; camp site per person U\$\$5.50, dm U\$\$8, s/d U\$\$20/27, without bathroom U\$\$16/22) has a very communal feel and backpacker vibe, and can arrange great-value safaris to Kruger National Park. Another option is **Autumn Breath** () 767 1866, 082-877 2811; autumnbreath@cfmail.co.za; Louis Trichardt St; s/d ind breakfast from U\$\$28/49), a quaint B&B with a charming restaurant downstairs.

The minibus taxi stand (Main St) is at the southern end of town, with daily morning departures.

NORTHERN CAPE

Covering nearly a third of the country, the vast and sparsely populated Northern Cape surely is South Africa's last great frontier. This is a land of stark contrasts, where the red sands of the Kalahari tumble into the inky waters of the Atlantic Coast, and the Karoo's desolate landscape collides with the sun-scorched lunar landscape of Namaqualand. Lions stalk prey across crimson plains in remote Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park at dawn; in the evening, big orange-ball sunsets made for Hollywood movies steal the show.

KGALAGADI TRANSFRONTIER PARK

If you have the means (namely a vehicle), a visit to the other-worldly **Kgalagadi Transfron**tier **Park** (() 054-561 0021; www.sanparks.org; adult/child US\$16/8) is more than worth the effort it takes to get there. The scenery in this magical place is phenomenal. Proclaimed a national park in April 1999, Kgalagadi is the result of a merger between the former Kalahari-Gemsbok National Park in South Africa and the Mabuasehube-Gemsbok National Park in Botswana, making it one of the largest protected wilderness areas in Africa.

Visitors are restricted to four gravel/sand roads. Make sure to take one of the roads linking the rivers for unobstructed views of the empty expanses of the Kalahari. Visitors must remain in their cars, except at a small number of designated picnic spots.

The best time to visit is in June and July, when the days are coolest (below freezing at night) and the animals have been drawn to the bores along the dry river beds. Inside the park there are three rest camps and six luxury wilderness camps. All can be booked through the **South African National (SAN) Parks Board** (© 012-428 9111; www.sanparks .org; 643 Leyds St, Muckleneuk, Pretoria). All rest camps have **camp sites** (per 2 people US\$15, extra person US\$5) without electricity and with shared ablutions facilities. The camps also have a range of huts, bungalows and cottages. The six wilderness camps, though much more expensive, give you the opportunity to really get off the beaten path.

The drive from Upington to Twee Rivieren gate is 250km, with about 60km on dirt roads.

UPINGTON© 054 / pop 53,000

On the banks of the Senqu (Orange) River, orderly and prosperous Upington is a good place to catch your breath on either end of a long Kalahari slog. Wide boulevards slightly cluttered with supermarkets and chain stores line the centre of town, but step onto one of the side streets and you'll enter a world where lazy river views and endless rows of trees create a calm and quiet atmosphere, perfect for an afternoon stroll (if the heat is not too stifling).

Eiland Holiday Resort (a 334 0286; tourism@ kharahais.gov.za; camp site US\$8, r from US\$20;), the town's cheapest option, offers a range of huts, bungalows and shaded camping spots on tranquil grounds adjacent to the eastern bank of the river. Right on the river with small but comfortable rooms is the **Affinity Guesthouse** (o 054.331 2101; www.affinityguesthouse.co.za; 4 Budler St; s/d US\$38/51; 2).

SAAirlink (**©** 838 3337; www.saairlink.co.za) flies to/from Jo'burg (U\$\$260, daily) and to/from Cape Town (U\$\$260, Sunday to Friday). Buses run to Jo'burg and Pretoria (U\$\$35, 10 hours, daily), Windhoek (Namibia; U\$\$34, 12 hours, four times weekly) and Cape Town (U\$\$30, 10½ hours, four times weekly).

SPRINGBOK

🖻 027 / pop 10,400

Springbok lounges in a valley surrounded by harsh rocky hills that explode with colour in flower season. Outside of flower season there's little to see or do, although the town's remoteness is alluring. The air always feels fresh, the desolate landscape is endearing, and if you step outside at night it will be thoroughly still and quiet. Annie's Cottage (712 1451; annie@springbokinfo .com; 4 King St; s/d from US\$25/50;) has 10 lovely rooms and a quaint pool and garden area. Cat Nap (718 1905; Voortrekker St; dm US\$11, r from US\$40;), a spacious old home, has a good vibe, and backpackers can shack up in dorm beds in the barn.

BJ's (ⓐ 718 2270; cnr Van der Stel & Hospital Sts; mains US\$4.70-7; ∑ lunch & dinner) is a classy basement joint with a cellar vibe, serving tasty steaks.

Intercape has buses to Cape Town (US\$28, 7½ hours, twice weekly) that leave from opposite the Springbok Lodge near the kopje. Buses leave for Windhoek (Namibia; US\$44, 12 hours, four times weekly). **VIP Taxis** (111 8780) operates a taxi from Springbok to Upington (US\$11, four hours, Monday to Friday).

FREE STATE

This is a place where farmers in floppy hats and overalls drive rusty *bakkies* full of sheep over bumpy roads; where giant fields of sunflowers languish by brightly painted Sotho houses. It's true that Free State doesn't hold any trump cards when it comes to South Africa's not-tobe-missed attractions. In this staunchly Afrikaans region the line between the colours is stark, and dreams of an Afrikaner Arcadia live on. While there's no question that Free State has a long way to travel on the road to racial harmony, even in the smallest rural villages, the once-impenetrable barrier between black and white is beginning to break apart.

BLOEMFONTEIN

🖻 051 / pop 480,499

As the provincial capital of the Free State, and South Africa's judicial capital, tourism in Bloem (as the locals call it) is generally business oriented. But it's also a university town, so when school's in session, nightlife is raging. There's no real reason to go out of your way to visit Bloem, although it has a few interesting sights if you are in the neighbourhood.

Commemorating the 26,000 women and children who died in British concentration camps during the 1899–1902 Anglo-Boer War, the **National Women's Memorial** depicts a bearded Afrikaner, setting off on his pony to fight the British, bidding a last farewell to his wife and baby, who are to perish in one of the camps. It's a powerful image and one still buried in the psyche of many Afrikaners.

Sleeping & Eating

Naval Hill Backpackers ((2) 430 7266; www.navalhill backpackers.co.za; Delville St; dm/d US\$11/24; (P) (2)) This is an übercool looking hostel with funky industrial décor. Unfortunately, some travellers report less than gracious treatment by management.

Hobbit Boutique Hotel ((2) 447 0663; www.hobbit .co.za; 19 President Steyn Ave; s/d ind breakfast US\$80/108; (P) (2) (2) (2) The charming, old-world Hobbit is the winner of numerous awards; the bedrooms are cottage-style and there are great views from the outdoor patio.

Barba's Café (a 430 2542; 16 2nd Ave;) breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Barba's is recommended by locals and rightly so: the Greek specialities, including chicken souvlaki (US\$5), are delicious.

Jazz Time Café (**a** 430 5727; Waterfront; mains US\$2.80-5; **b** lunch & dinner) This hip eatery has an interesting menu, cocktails and jazz recitals in the evenings.

Drinking & Entertainment

As a university town, Bloemfontein has a good range of places to drink, party and listen to live music. The corners of 2nd Ave and Kellner St, and Zastron St and Nelson Mandela Ave bustle with revellers in the evening and compete for the nightlife scene with the Waterfront. **Mystic Boer** (2430 2206; 84 Kellner St) is Bloem's most popular pub and live-music venue. Pizza and burgers provide the fuel.

Getting There & Away

Both **SAAirlink** ((a) 433 3225) and **Nationwide Airlines** ((a) 011 344 7200; www.flynationwide.co.za) connect Bloemfontein with Cape Town (US\$160) and Jo'burg (US\$135), in addition to other destinations.

Translux and Greyhound run daily buses to Durban (US\$20 to US\$31, nine hours), Jo'burg/Pretoria (US\$20 to US\$27, five hours), East London (US\$24, seven hours), Knysna (US\$36, 12 hours) and Cape Town (US\$43 to US\$48, 10 hours).

Big Sky Buses (www.bigskycoaches.co.za) runs to Maseru in Lesotho (US\$4.70, three hours) twice daily Monday to Friday. SOUTH AFRICA

KIMBERLEY

a 053 / pop 166,000

An old diamond town with a chequered past, Kimberly is also the capital of the Northern Cape and definitely worth a few days' pause. Step inside one of the atmospheric old pubs with their dark smoky interiors and you'll feel you've been transported back to the roughand-ready diamond heyday of the late 1800s.

The Big Hole, the area surrounding the largest manually dug hole in the world, was undergoing renovations worth US\$4 million when we stopped by. When completed, the touristy complex, dubbed the Big Hole Project (🕿 833 1557; West Circular Rd), will include numerous hotels, restaurants, shops, a cinema and a giant diamond display. As for the Big Hole itself, you'll be able to view it through a glassenclosed complex with interactive displays and underground experiences. The complex will also incorporate the already excellent Kimberly Mine Museum, set up as a reconstruction of Kimberley in the 1880s.

It doesn't have much atmosphere and the rooms are tiny, but Stay-A-Day (🖻 832 7239; 72 Lawson St; s/d from US\$15/24) is sparkling clean and you'll feel good knowing profits go towards an orphaned children's home. Most rooms share bathrooms. The **Savoy Hotel** (**a** 832 6211; 15 Old De Beers Rd; r from US\$40) is an old-fashioned place with cosy well-loved rooms. Charming Edgerton House (🕿 831 1150; 5 Edgerton Rd; r US\$135; 🔀 😰) has exquisite furniture, African hospitality and a tea garden.

Step back into Kimberley's mining heyday at Star of the West Hotel (🖻 832 6463; North Circular Rd; mains US\$4.70; 🕑 breakfast, lunch & dinner), an atmospheric city staple that serves up hearty pub grub.

There are regular flights to Jo'burg and Cape Town on SA Express and SAAirlink. Translux, Greyhound and Intercape all have similar fares and routes: Jo'burg/Pretoria (US\$19, seven hours, daily) and Cape Town (US\$31, 10 hours, daily). Minibuses service these and more local destinations.

SOUTH AFRICA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Whatever your budget, you'll generally find high standards, often for significantly less than you would pay for the equivalent in Europe, Australasia or North America.

At the budget level, the main options available to travellers are camping, backpackers hostels and self-catering cottages. The main caveat with places in this price category is that there aren't enough of them; away from tourist areas, sometimes your only budget option is camping.

Midrange accommodation is particularly good value, especially for B&Bs. Expect a private or semi-private bathroom and a clean, comfortable room. Self-catering accommodation at national parks - usually priced in the budget to midrange category - also tends to be very good value.

At the top end, South Africa boasts some of the best wildlife lodges in the region, as well as classic guesthouses and several superb hotels. Places at this level offer all the amenities you would expect for prices that are similar to, or slightly less than, those you would pay in Europe or North America.

PRACTICALITIES

- South Africa uses the metric system for weights and measures.
- Access electricity (220-250V AC, 50Hz) with a three-pin adaptor (round pins, though South Africa has its own unique version); they're easy enough to find - check in camping supply stores.
- Best weekly: Mail & Guardian. Best daily: the Sowetan. Others to look for: the Sunday Independent; the Sunday Times; the Johannesburg Star; and Business Day. Check out Getaway magazine for travel news.
- Tune the TV to SABC for the news (SABC3 is mostly English). E-TV has a more independent viewpoint. M-Net has movies and sports.
- SABC radio comes in 11 languages. BBC's World Service is available on short wave, medium wave and (in and near Lesotho) FM.

There are significant seasonal price variations, with rates rising steeply during the December/January school break, and again around Easter, when room prices often double and minimum stays are imposed. Advance bookings are essential during these times. Conversely, you can get some excellent deals during the winter low season, which is also the best time for wildlife-watching.

Be aware that minimum charges apply at many of the accommodation options with the national parks and at other private parks and lodges.

ACTIVITIES

lonelyplanet.com

Thanks to South Africa's diverse terrain and favourable climate, almost anything is possible - from ostrich riding to the world's highest bungee jump, to more standard activities like canoeing, kayaking, rafting, mountain biking, rock climbing, whale-watching and wildlifeviewing. Good facilities and instruction mean that most activities are accessible for anyone, whatever their experience level.

Divina

To the west, the main dive sites are around the Cape Peninsula, known for its many wrecks and giant kelp forests. To the east, the main area is the KwaZulu-Natal north coast where particularly around Sodwana Bay - there are beautiful coral reefs and the chance to see dolphins and sometimes whale sharks. There are several sites off the Eastern Cape coast near Port Elizabeth, and many resort towns along the Garden Route have diving schools.

The best time to dive the KwaZulu-Natal shoreline is from May to September, when visibility tends to be highest. In the west, along the Atlantic seaboard, the water is cold yearround, but is at its most diveable, with many days of high visibility, between November and January/February. Strong currents and often windy conditions mean that advanced divers can find challenges all along the coast.

Hikina

South Africa is wonderful for hiking, with an excellent system of well-marked trails varied enough to suit any ability. Some trails have accommodation - from camping to simple huts with electricity and running water - and all must be booked well in advance. Many have limits as to how many hikers can be on them at any one time.

KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation (KZN Wildlife; a 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com) controls most trails in KwaZulu-Natal. Elsewhere, most trails are administered by the SAN Parks Board (🖻 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org) or the various 🗣 Forest Region authorities. To find out about local hiking clubs, contact Hiking South Africa (🖻 083-535 4538; www.hiking-south-africa.info).

Surfing

Most surfers will have heard of Jeffrey's Bay, but South Africa offers myriad alternatives, particularly along the Eastern Cape coast from Port Alfred northwards. The best time of the year for surfing the southern and eastern coasts is autumn and early winter (from about April to July).

For more information check out Wavescape (www.wavescape.co.za) and Zig Zag (www.zigzag.co.za), South Africa's main surf magazine.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime is the national obsession and, apart from car accidents, it's the major risk that you'll face in South Africa. However, try to keep things in perspective, and remember that despite the statistics and newspaper headlines, the majority of travellers visit the country without incident.

The risks are highest in Jo'burg, followed by some township areas and other urban centres. Daylight muggings are common in certain sections of Jo'burg, and the city's metro train system has had a problem with violent crime.

In Jo'burg, and to a lesser extent in the other big cities, carjacking is a problem. The carjackers are almost always armed, and people have been killed for their cars. Stay alert, keep windows wound up and doors locked at night, and keep your taste in cars modest. If you're stopped at a red light and notice anything suspicious, it's standard practice to check that the junction is clear, and run the light.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES South African Embassies & Consulates

Diplomatic representations abroad include the following. For a full listing see www.dfa .gov.za/foreign/sa_abroad/index.htm. Australia (🖻 02-6273 2424; www.sahc.org.au; Rhodes PI, Yarralumla, Canberra ACT 2600) Botswana (🕿 390 4800; sahcgabs@botsnet.bw; 29 Oueens Rd, Gaborone) Canada (🖻 613-744 0330; www.southafrica-canada .com; 15 Sussex Dr, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 1M8)

SOUTH

d'Orsay, 75343 Paris, Cedex 07) Germany (🖻 030-22 0730; www.suedafrika.org; Tiergartenstrasse 18, Berlin 10785) Ireland (201-661 5553; information@saedublin.com;

2nd fl, Alexandra House, Earlsfort Centre, Earlsfort Tce, Dublin 2)

France (🖻 01 53 59 23 23; www.afriguesud.net; 59 Quai

Israel (🖻 03-525 2566; www.safis.co.il; 16th fl, Top Tower, 50 Dizengoff St, 64332, Tel Aviv) Kenya (20-282 7100; sahc@africaonline.co.ke; Roshanmaer Place, Lenana Rd, Nairobi) Malawi (a 01-773 722; sahc@malawi.net; 3rd fl, Kang'ombe House, Robert Mugabe Cres, Lilongwe) .co.mz; Avenida Eduardo Mondlane 41, Maputo) Namibia (🖻 061-205 7111; sahcwin@iafrica.com. na; RSA House, cnr Jan Jonker St & Nelson Mandela Ave, Windhoek -1200)

Netherlands (70-392 4501; www.southafrica.nl; Wassenaarseweg 40, the Hague 2596 CJ) New Zealand Representation is accredited from Australia. UK (a 020-7451 7299; www.southafricahouse.com; South Africa House, Trafalgar Sq, London WC2N 5DP) USA (202-232 4400; www.saembassy.org; 3051 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC, 20008) Also consulates in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Zimbabwe (2 04-753147; dhacon@mweb.co.zw; 7 Elcombe St, Belgravia, Harare)

Embassies & Consulates in South Africa

Most countries have their main embassy in Pretoria, with an office or consulate in Cape Town (which becomes the official embassy during Cape Town's parliamentary sessions). Some countries also maintain consulates in Jo'burg and in Durban.

The following list includes some of the more important embassies and consulates; most are open in the mornings only for visa services, usually between 9am and noon. Australia (Map pp1022-3; 🖻 012-342 3740; www .australia.co.za; 292 Orient St, Arcadia, Pretoria) Botswana High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; © 012-430 9640; 24Amos St, Colbyn); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; 🖻 021-421 1045; 4th fl, Southern Life Centre, 8 Riebeeck St, City Bowl); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1019; 🖻 011-403 3748; 2nd fl, Future Bank Bldg, 122 De Korte St, Braamfontein)

Canada High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; © 012-422 3000; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/southafrica/; 1103 Arcadia St, Hatfield); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; 🗃 021-423 5240; 19th fl, Reserve Bank Bldg, 60 St George's Mall, City Bowl)

France Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; 🖻 012-425 1600; france@ambafrance-rsa.org; 250 Melk St, New

Muckleneuk); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; @ 021-423 1575; 2 Dean St); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1016; 🖻 011-778 5600; 3rd fl, Standard Bank Bldg, 191 Jan Smuts Ave, Rosebank)

Germany Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; 🖻 012-427 8977; 180 Blackwood St; germanembassypretoria@gonet .co.za); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; 🖻 021-405 3000; 19th fl, Safmarine House, 22 Riebeeck St) Ireland Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; 🖻 012-342 5062; 1st fl, Southern Life Plaza, 1059 Schoeman St); Consulate in Cape Town (🕿 021-423 0431; 54 Keerom St, City Bowl)

Lesotho High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; O12-460 7648; 391 Anderson St, Menlo Park) Consulate in Jo'burg (🖻 011-339 3653; 76 Juta St, Indent House, Braamfontein) Consulate in Durban (🖻 031-307 2168; 2nd fl, Westguard House, cnr West & Gardiner Sts) Mozambique High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; © 012-401 0300; 529 Edmond St, Arcadia); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1016; 🖻 011-327 2938, 327 2944; 252 Jeppe St); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; 🖻 021-426 2944; 3rd fl, Castle Bldg, 45 Castle St); Consulate in Durban (Map pp1008-9; 🖻 031-304 0200; Room 520, 320 West St); Consulate in Nelspruit (🕿 013-753 2089; 43 Brown St)

Namibia (Map pp1022-3; 🖻 012-481 9100; secretary@namibia.org.za; 197 Blackwood St, Arcadia, Pretoria)

Netherlands Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; O12-344 3910; www.dutchembassy.co.za; 825 Arcadia St): Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5: 🕿 021-421 5660: 100 Strand St. City Bowl)

New Zealand (Map pp1022-3; 🖻 012-342 8656; Block C, Hatfield Gardens, Arcadia, Pretoria)

Swaziland High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; @ 012-344 1910; 715 Government Ave, Arcadia); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1019; 2 403 7372, 403 2036; 6th fl, Braamfontein Centre, 23 Jorissen St)

UK High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; 🖻 012-421 7500; bhc@icon.co.za; 255 Hill St, Arcadia); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; 2 021-425 3670; Southern Life Centre, 8 Riebeeck St, City Bowl); Consulate in Durban (Map pp1008-9; 2 031-305 3041; 22 Gardner St)

USA Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; 🖻 012-431 4000; http://pretoria.usembassy.gov; 877 Pretorius St, Arcadia); Consulate in Cape Town (2 021-421 4280; 4th fl, Broadway Industries Centre, Foreshore); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1016; 🗃 011-646 6120; 1 River St, Killarney); Consulate in Durban (Map pp1008-9; 🗃 031-304 4737; 29th fl, Durban Bay House, 333 Smith St)

Zimbabwe High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; O12-342 5125; 798 Merton Ave, Arcadia); Consulate in Cape Town (201-461 4710; 55 Kuyper St, Zonnebloem); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1019; 🖻 011-838 2156; 17th fl, 20 Anderson St)

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January Human Rights Day 21 March Good Friday March/April Easter Sunday March/April Easter Monday March/April Family Day 17 April Constitution or Freedom Day 27 April Workers' Day 1 May Youth Day 16 June Women's Day 9 August Heritage Day 24 September Day of Reconciliation 16 December Christmas Day 25 December Day of Goodwill 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is widely available in South Africa. Many hostels offer email facilities, and there are internet cafés in every major town. Costs average US\$1.40 to US\$4 per hour. Most top hotels have wireless access and/or broadband (for which they should be able to provide the cable).

MONEY

South Africa's currency is the rand (R), which is divided into 100 cents. There is no black market. The coins are one, two, five, 10, 20 and 50 cents, and R1, R2 and R5. The notes are R10, R20, R50, R100 and R200. There have been forgeries of the R200 note, and some businesses are reluctant to accept them.

The best currencies to bring are US dollars, euros or British pounds in a mixture of travellers cheques and cash, plus a Visa or MasterCard for withdrawing money from ATMs.

There are ATMs in all cities in South Africa, most of which give cash advances against cards belonging to the Cirrus network.

Credit cards are widely accepted in South Africa, especially MasterCard and Visa. Nedbank is an official Visa agent, and Standard Bank is a MasterCard agent - both have branches across the country.

TELEPHONE

South Africa has good telephone facilities. Local calls are relatively inexpensive (about US\$0.10 for three minutes), whereas domestic long-distance calls (from about US\$0.30 per minute) and international calls (from US\$0.90 per minute to Europe) can be pricey. Phonecards are widely available. There are also pri-

vate phone centres where you can pay cash for your call, but at double the rate of public phones. International calls are cheaper after 8pm on weekdays, and between 8pm Friday and 8am Monday. For reverse-charge calls, dial 🖻 0-120.

The mobile-phone network covers most of the country, and the network operates on the GSM digital system.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The main government tourism organisation is South African Tourism (🖻 011-895 3000, 083-123 6789; www.southafrica.net), which has a helpful website with news of upcoming events and various links.

For more details on individual provinces, there are provincial tourism organisations, of varying quality. In addition to these, almost every town in the country has at least one tourist office. These are private entities, and rely on commissions for their existence.

Provincial tourist offices include: Eastern Cape Tourism Board (🖻 043-701 9600; www.ectb.co.za) Free State Tourism Board (🖻 051-447 1362; www .dteea.fs.gov.za) Gauteng Tourism Authority (🖻 011-832 2780; www.gauteng.net) KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority (🕿 031-366 7500; www.kzn.org.za) Limpopo Tourism Board (🖻 015-295 8262, 0860-730 730; www.golimpopo.com) Mpumalanga Tourism Authority (🖻 013-752 7001; www.mpumalanga.com) North-West Province Parks & Tourism Board (🖻 018-397 1500, 018-293 1611; www.tourismnorth west.co.za) Northern Cape Tourism Authority (🕿 053-832 2657; www.northerncape.org.za) Western Cape Tourism Board (2 021-426 5639; www.tourismcapetown.co.za)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

South Africa is one of the best destinations on the continent for disabled travellers, with an ever-expanding network of facilities catering to those who are mobility impaired or blind. SAN Parks (🖻 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org) has an excellent and inspirational overview of accommodation and trail accessibility for the mobility impaired at all its parks.

Another helpful initial contact is the National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa (🖻 011-726 8040; www.ncppdsa.co.za).

VISAS

AFRICA

SOUTH

Visitors on holiday from most Commonwealth countries (including Australia and the UK), most Western European countries, Japan and the USA don't require visas. Instead, you'll be issued with a free entry permit on arrival. These are valid for a stay of up to 90 days.

If you aren't entitled to an entry permit, you'll need to get a visa (also free) before you arrive. These aren't issued at the borders, and must be obtained at a South African embassy or consulate. Allow up to several weeks for processing. South Africa has consular representation in most countries, with a partial listing given on p1031. The website of the South African High Commission in London (www.southafricahouse.com) has an overview of visa requirements, and lists the nationalities that require visas.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for Namibia are not issued at the border, though many nationalities don't require one. Visas for Zimbabwe and Mozambique are available at the borders. (South African nationals don't need a visa for Mozambique.) For Mozambique it's cheaper to arrange your visa in advance at the Mozambican High Commission in Mbabane, or in Nelspruit. Both issue express visas in 24 hours.

If you'll be arranging your visa in advance: Zimbabwean visas take at least a week to issue in South Africa; those for Namibia take two to three days; and those for Botswana take between four and 14 days. Nonexpress Mozambique visas take one week.

TRANSPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA

GETTING THERE & AWAY AIR

The major air hub for South Africa, and for the entire surrounding region, is **Johannesburg International Airport** (JIA or JNB; 🗇 011-921 6262; www .worldairportguides.com/johannesburg-jnb). **Cape Town International Airport** (CPT; 🗿 021-937 1200; www .airports.co.za) receives numerous direct flights from Europe, and is becoming an increasingly important gateway. The smaller **Durban International Airport** (DUR; 🗃 031-451 6758; www .airports.co.za) handles several regional flights, as does **Mpumalanga Kruger International Airport** (MQP; (20) 013-7537500; www.kmiairport.co.za) near Nelspruit and Kruger National Park.

South African Àirways (SAA; airline code SA; (a) 0861-359 722, 011-978 5313; www.flysaa.com; hub JIA) is the national airline, with an excellent route network and safety record. In addition to its international routes, it operates regional flights together with its subsidiaries **South African Airlink** (SAAirlink; (c) 011-978 5313; www.saairlink.co.za) and **South African Express** ((c) 011-978 5577; www .saexpress.co.za).

Some other international carriers flying to/from Jo'burg (except as noted): **Air France** (AF; @ 0860-340 340; www.airfrance.fr) Hub: Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris.

Kenya Airways (KQ; 🖻 011-881 9795, 011-571 8817; www.kenya-airways.com) Hub: Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi.

KLM (KL; 🖻 0860-247 474, 011-881 9696; www.klm.com) Hub: Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam. Also serves Cape Town. Lufthansa (LH; 🖻 0861-842 538, 021-415 3506; www .lufthansa.com) Hub: Frankfurt International Airport. Also serves Cape Town.

Qantas (QF; 🖻 011-441 8550; www.qantas.com.au) Hub: Kingsford Smith Airport, Sydney.

Singapore Airlines (SQ; www.singaporeair.com) Joʻburg (
© 011-880 8560); Cape Town (
© 021-674 0601) Hub: Singapore Changi Airport. Also serves Cape Town. Virgin Atlantic (VS; © 011-340 3400; www.virgin -atlantic.com) Hub: London. Also serves Cape Town.

LAND BOTSWANA

From Jo'burg/Pretoria, **Intercape Mainliner** (**@** 0861287287,021-3804400; www.intercape.co.za) runs daily buses to Gaborone (US\$20, six hours). A cheaper, but less safe and less comfortable, alternative is one of the minibuses that run throughout the day between Jo'burg and Gaborone (about US\$1.40, six hours) via Mafikeng (North-West Province). In Jo'burg, departures are from Park Station. To do the trip in stages, take a City Link bus from Jo'burg to Mafikeng, from where there are direct minibuses over the border to Lobatse (1½ hours).

LESOTHO

Big Sky Coaches (www.bigskycoaches.co.za) runs two buses daily in each direction between Bloemfontein and Maseru Bridge (US\$4.70, three hours). Via minibus taxi, the quickest connections are from Bloemfontein to Botshabelo (US\$4, one hour), and then from there to Maseru (US\$2, 1½ hours). There are also at least three buses weekly between Jo'burg and Maseru (six to seven hours).

Other useful connections include a daily minibus taxi between Mokhotlong (Lesotho) and Underberg (South Africa) via Sani Pass; and several taxis daily between Qacha's Nek (Lesotho) and Matatiele (South Africa; about US\$2, 45 minutes).

MOZAMBIQUE

Several large 'luxury' buses run daily between Jo'burg/Pretoria and Maputo via Nelspruit and Komatipoort (US\$20 to US\$38, eight to nine hours). These include Greyhound, Intercape Mainliner, Panthera Azul and Translux. Panthera Azul connects Durban and Maputo (US\$31, 8½ hours).

Alternatively, the **Baz Bus** (201-439 2323; www.bazbus.com) links Jo'burg/Pretoria, Nelspruit and Durban with Manzini (Swaziland), from where you can get a minibus taxi to Maputo.

The daily (except Saturday) *Komati* train operated by **Shosholoza Meyl** (© 0860-008 888, 011-774 4555) links Jo'burg and Komatipoort via Pretoria and Nelspruit (1st/2nd/3rd class from US\$25/17/9, 13 to 14 hours). Once at Komatipoort, you can change to the Mozambican train to Maputo (Mtc15,000, economy class only, five hours), but it's better to take a minibus (US\$3.50, 1½ hours).

Visas for Mozambique are available at the borders. (South African nationals don't need a visa for Mozambique.) It's cheaper to arrange your visa in advance at the Mozambican High Commission in Mbabane, or in Nelspruit. Both issue express visas in 24 hours. Nonexpress Mozambique visas take one week.

NAMIBIA

Intercape Mainliner (www.intercape.co.za) runs four times weekly between Cape Town and Windhoek via Upington (US\$65, 20 hours). It's also possible to travel between Jo'burg and Windhoek with Intercape Mainliner (US\$83, 25 hours) on these same days, with a change of buses in Upington.

SWAZILAND

The best connections are on the **Baz Bus** (a) 201-439 2323; www.bazbus.com), which runs from Jo'burg/Pretoria to Manzini via Nelspruit, and between Durban and Manzini via the KwaZulu-Natal coast.

Minibus taxis run daily between Jo'burg (Park Station), Mbabane and Manzini (US\$0.90, four hours), between Manzini and Durban (US\$16, eight hours), and between Manzini and Maputo (Mozambique; US\$4.50, 2½ hours).

ZIMBABWE

At the time of research, bus services between Jo'burg and Zimbabwe were suspended, due in part to fuel shortages.

GETTING AROUND AIR

In addition to being the international flag carrier, **South African Airways** (SAA; 🖻 0861-359 722, 011-978 5313; www.flysaa.com) is the main domestic carrier, with an extensive and efficient route network to major cities. Its subsidiaries, **SAAirlink** (🖻 011-978 5313; www.saairlink.co.za) and **SA Express** (同 011-978 5577; www.saexpress.co.za), also service domestic routes.

Domestic fares aren't cheap. In addition to SAA and its affiliates, airlines flying domestically include the following:

1 time ((a) 0861-345345; www. Ttime.co.za) No-frills flights linking Jo'burg with Cape Town, Durban and East London, George and Port Elizabeth, and Cape Town and East London. Also offers car rentals.

Comair (© 0860-435 922, 011-921 0222; www.comair .co.za) Operates British Airways flights within Africa, and has flights linking Cape Town, Durban, Jo'burg and Port Elizabeth.

Kulula.com ((2) 0861-585 852; www.kulula.com) Operates no-frills flights linking Jo'burg, Cape Town, Durban, George, Port Elizabeth and Mpumalanga. Also offers airport transfer services and car rentals.

Nationwide Airlines ((2) 0861 -737 737, 011-344 7200; www.nationwideair.co.za) Operates in partnership with Virgin Atlantic, and has flights linking Jo'burg, Cape Town, Durban, George, Port Elizabeth, Sun City and Nelspruit.

BUS

Buses in South Africa aren't the deal that they are in many other countries. However, together with the less-appealing minibus taxis, they're the main form of public transport, with a reliable and reasonably comfortable

network linking all major cities. Note that many long-distance services run through the night.

A good alternative to standard bus lines is **Baz Bus** (2021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com), which caters almost exclusively to backpackers and other travellers. It offers hop-on, hop-off fares and door-to-door service between Cape Town and Jo'burg via the Northern Drakensberg, Durban and the Garden Route. It also has a loop service from Durban via Zululand and Swaziland to Jo'burg, passing close by Kruger National Park. Point-to-point fares are more expensive than on the other major bus lines, but can work out to be more economical if you take advantage of the hop-on/hop-off feature.

Along with the main long-distance bus operator **Translux** (**1** 011-774 3333, 0861-589 282; www.translux.co.za), **Greyhound** (**1** 083-915-1200; www .greyhound.co.za), **Intercape Mainliner** (**1** 0861-287 287, 021-380 4400; www.intercape.co.za) and **SA Roadlink** (**1** 011-333 2223; www.saroadlink.co.za) have services connecting most of the major cities. In partnership with Translux, **City to City** (**1** 011-774 3333, 0861-589 282; www.translux.co.za) has taken over the routes that once carried people from the homelands to and from the big cities during the apartheid regime.

Prices rise during school holidays; all lines offer student and senior-citizen discounts, and Intercape has backpacker discounts. Also inquire about travel passes if you'll be taking several bus journeys, and always check with the bus companies to see if they are running any specials, which can sometimes save you up to 40%.

For the main lines, reservations should be made at least 24 hours in advance (72 hours in advance for Intercape Mainliner, and as much in advance as possible for travel during peak periods). It's sometimes possible to get a seat at the last minute, but this shouldn't be counted on.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

South Africa is ideal for driving, and away from the main bus and train routes, having your own wheels is the best way to get around. If you're in a group, it's also often the most economical. Most major roads are in excellent condition, and off the main routes there are interesting back roads to explore. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road, as in the UK, Japan and Australia. Petrol costs around US\$0.70 per litre, and must be paid for in cash. There is no selfservice. An attendant will always fill up your tank for you, clean your windows and ask if the oil or water needs checking, and should be tipped between US\$0.30 and US\$0.70. Along main routes in South Africa there are plenty of petrol stations, many open 24 hours.

South Africa has a horrific road-accident record, with the annual death toll around 10,000 (although some estimates place it at over 15,000). The N1 between Cape Town and Beaufort West is considered to be the most dangerous stretch of road in the country. The main hazards are your fellow drivers, though animals and pedestrians on the roads are another hazard, especially in rural areas.

HIRE

Car rental is relatively inexpensive in South Africa. Rates start at about US\$40 per day, including insurance and 200km free per day. Rental of a 4WD starts at about US\$60. For cheaper rates and unlimited mileage deals, it's best to book and prepay through your agent at home before coming to South Africa.

Around About Cars ((a) 0860 422 0422; www.around aboutcars.com)

Avis (🗇 0861-113 748, 011-923 3660; www.avis.co.za) Budget (🗇 0861-016 622, 011-398 0123; www.budget .co.za)

Europcar (🖻 0800-011 344, 011-574 4457; www.europ car.co.za)

Hertz ((a) 021-935 4800, 011-312 9700; www.hertz .co.za)

Local car-rental companies are usually less expensive, though they tend to come and go. Several are listed below, all with agents in major cities. Also check with backpacker hostels; many can arrange better deals, from around US\$25 per day or less.

Imperial (🖻 0861-131 000, 011-574 1000; www.impe rialcarrental.co.za)

Tempest (**a** 0860-031 666, 011-396 1080; www.temp estcarhire.co.za)

LOCAL TRANSPORT BUS

Cape Town, Jo'burg, Pretoria and several other urban areas have city bus systems. Fares are cheap, and routes, which are signposted, are extensive. However, services usually stop running early in the evening, and there aren't many buses on weekends. MINIBUS TAXI

Minibus taxis run almost everywhere - within cities, to the suburbs and to neighbouring towns. They leave when full and, happily, 'full' in South Africa isn't as full as it is in many neighbouring countries. Most accommodate 14 to 16 people. Driving standards and vehicle conditions often leave a lot to be desired, and there are many accidents. There are also isolated outbreaks of gangster-style shoot-outs between the various companies competing for business. Although things have settled down in recent years, minibuses in some areas and on some routes are still considered highly unsafe, and reports of muggings and other incidents remain a regular feature. Always ask for local advice on lines and areas to avoid before using minibus taxis as transport.

TRAIN

South Africa's Shosholoza Meyl passenger trains are run by **Spoornet** ((2) 011-773 2944; www .spoomet.co.za), and offer regular services connecting major cities. These are a good and

safe, albeit slow, way to get around, and are more comfortable than taking the bus.

On overnight journeys, 1st- and 2nd-class fares include a sleeping berth, but there's an additional charge for bedding hire. Alternatively, you can hire a private compartment (which sleeps four in 1st class and six in 2nd class) or a coupe (which sleeps two in 1st class and three in 2nd class) – these are a good way of travelling more securely. Meals are available in the dining car.

Tickets must be booked at least 24 hours in advance (you can book up to three months in advance). Bookings for anywhere in the country can be done at any individual station, or through the **Shosholoza Meyl Reservations Centre** ((2) 0860-008 888, 011-774 4555).

Sample 1st-/2nd-/economy-class fares include: Jo'burg–Durban (US\$34/22/13), Cape Town–Pretoria (US\$70/47/31), Jo'burg–Port Elizabeth (US\$49/33/20). Return fares are double the one-way fares. It's possible to put a vehicle on board the *Trans Karoo* for an extra US\$180.

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SWAZILAND

Embedded between Mozambique and South Africa, the kingdom of Swaziland is one of the smallest countries in Africa. What the country lacks in size, it makes up for in its rich culture and heritage, and relaxed ambience. With its laid-back, warm and personable people and relative lack of racial animosities, it's a complete change of pace from its larger neighbours.

Visitors can enjoy rewarding and delightfully low-key wildlife watching, stunning mountain panoramas, adrenaline-boosting activities and lively traditions. Swaziland also boasts superb walking and high-quality handicrafts.

Overseeing the kingdom is King Mswati III, one of three remaining monarchs in Africa. The monarchy has its critics, but combined with the Swazis' distinguished history of resistance to the Boers, the British and the Zulus, it has fostered a strong sense of national pride, and local culture is flourishing. This is exemplified in its national festivals: the Incwala ceremony and the Umhlanga (Reed) dance.

The excellent road system makes Swaziland easy to access and navigate. Accommodation includes a decent network of hostels, family-friendly hotels and upscale retreats. Many travellers make a flying visit on their way to South Africa's Kruger National Park, but it's well worth lingering here if you can.

FAST FACTS

- Area 17,365 sq km
- ATMs Only in Mbabane
- Borders South Africa, Mozambique
- Budget US\$25 to US\$55 a day
- Capital Mbabane
- Languages English, Swati
- Money Lilangeni (E); US\$1 = E7.4
- Population 1.1 million
- Seasons Rainy (December to April), winter (May to August), drier and cool (September to November)
- Telephone Country code 🖻 268; international code 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC + 2
- Visa Not required for most nationalities

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Mkhaya Game Reserve** (p1046) Spot black rhinos in the wild, one of Africa's great wildlife experiences.
- **Ezulwini and Malkerns Valleys** (p1044) Revel in a royal experience in the regal heartland of Swaziland and splurge on some handicrafts.
- **Usutu River** (p1046) Shoot the rapids or drift down the river through stunning gorges on a novel white-water rafting trip.
- Malolotja Nature Reserve (p1048) Trek in this tantalising reserve, a genuine, unspoiled wilderness.
- Miliwane Wildlife Sanctuary (p1044) Wander through the peaceful wilderness and relax in its comfortable bargain lodges.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Summer sees torrential thunderstorms, especially in the western mountains, and temperatures on the lowveld are very hot, often over 40°C; in the high country the temperatures are lower and in winter it can get cool. Winter nights on the lowveld are sometimes very cold.

Try to avoid visiting rain-soaked Swaziland during the rainy season (December to April). The best time to visit is in May–June or October, but bring something warm.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** A half-day in Mbabane (p1042) is plenty to get your bearings. Spend two days poking around the pretty Ezulwini and Malkerns Valleys (p1044), including Lobamba (p1044), and make a trip into the relaxing Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary (p1044). If you have time and you want to see rare black rhinos in the wild, continue east to the stunning Mkhaya Game Reserve (p1046).
- **Two Weeks** Do the one-week itinerary, plus view wildlife at the extensive Hlane Royal National Park (p1046) and Mlawula Nature Reserve (p1046). On your circular route back to Mbabane, drop into Piggs Peak (p1047), an area known for its handicrafts, and take a detour to hike in Malolotja Nature Reserve (p1048), an unspoiled wilderness area.
- **One Month** You can absorb most of Swaziland in this time. Join the above two itineraries and take extra time out for

HOW MUCH?

- Traditional dance/cultural group U\$\$6.50
- Internet US\$4.50 per hour
- **Coffee** US\$0.80 to US\$1.70
- Batik hanging US\$8
- Basket US\$5

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$0.80
- 1L bottled water US\$0.80
- Bottle of beer US\$1.10 to US\$1.50
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$11
- Barbecued maize US\$0.40

some action: hike in the Ngwempisi Gorge (p1045) and shoot the rapids on the Usutu (p1046). If Swaziland is in your month trip through South Africa, it's well worth diverting here.

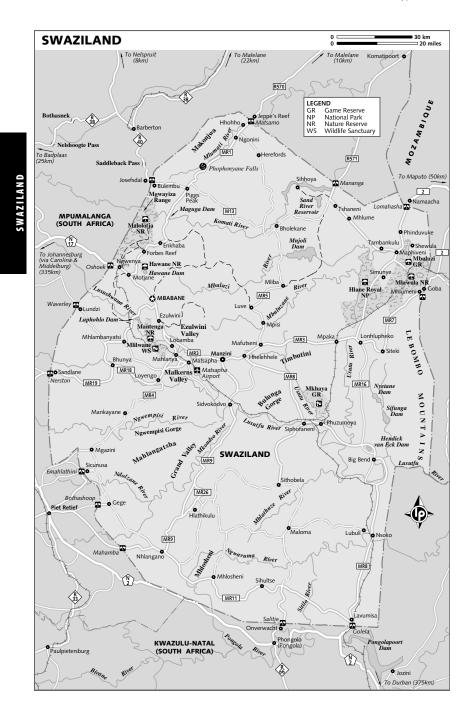
HISTORY

In eastern Swaziland archaeologists have discovered human remains dating back 110,000 years, but the ancestors of the modern Swazi people arrived relatively recently.

During the great Bantu migrations into southern Africa, one group, the Nguni, moved down the east coast. A clan settled near what is now Maputo in Mozambique, and a dynasty was founded by the Dlamini family. In the mid-18th century increasing pressure from other Nguni clans forced King Ngwane III to lead his people south to lands by the Pongola River, in what is now southern Swaziland. Today, Swazis consider Ngwane III to have been the first king of Swaziland.

The next king, Sobhuza I, withdrew under pressure from the Zulus to the Ezulwini Valley, which today remains the centre of Swazi royalty and ritual. When King Sobhuza I died in 1839, Swaziland was twice its present size. Trouble with the Zulu continued, although the next king, Mswazi (or Mswati), managed to unify the whole kingdom. By the time he died in 1868, the Swazi nation was secure. Mswazi's subjects called themselves people of Mswazi, or Swazis, and the name stuck.





European Interference

The arrival of increasing numbers of Europeans from the mid-19th century brought new problems. Mswazi's successor, Mbandzeni, inherited a kingdom rife with European carpetbaggers – hunters, traders, missionaries and farmers, many of whom leased large expanses of land.

The Pretoria Convention of 1881 guaranteed Swaziland's 'independence' but also defined its borders, and Swaziland lost large chunks of territory. 'Independence' in fact meant that both the British and the Boers had responsibility for administering their various interests in Swaziland, and the result was chaos. The Boer administration collapsed with the 1899–1902 Anglo-Boer War, and afterwards the British took control of Swaziland as a protectorate.

During this troubled time, King Sobhuza II was only a young child, but Labotsibeni, his mother, acted ably as regent until her son took over in 1921. Labotsibeni encouraged Swazis to buy back their land, and many sought work in the Witwatersrand mines (near Johannesburg) to raise money.

Independence

In 1960 King Sobhuza II proposed the creation of a legislative council, composed of elected Europeans, and a national council formed in accordance with Swazi culture. The Mbokodvo (Grindstone) National Movement, which was formed at this time, pledged to maintain traditional Swazi culture but also to eschew racial discrimination. When the British finally agreed to elections in 1964, Mbokodvo won a majority and, at the next elections in 1967, won all the seats. Swaziland became independent on 6 September 1968.

The country's constitution was largely the work of the British. In 1973 the king suspended it on the grounds that it did not accord with Swazi culture. He also dissolved all political parties. Four years later the parliament reconvened under a new constitution that vested all power in the king. Sobhuza II, at that time the world's longest-reigning monarch, died in 1982. In keeping with Swazi tradition, a strictly enforced 75-day period of mourning was announced by Dzeliwe (Great She-Elephant), the most senior of his hundred wives. Only commerce essential to the life of the nation was allowed. And that didn't include sexual intercourse, which was banned, punishable by flogging.

Choosing a successor wasn't easy – Sobhuza had fathered more than 600 children, thereby creating hundreds of potential kings. Prince Makhosetive, born in 1968, was finally chosen and crowned King Mswati III in 1986.

Swaziland Today

The king continues to represent and maintain the traditional way of life and to assert his pre-eminence, for better and often for worse, as absolute monarch. Following his predecessor's style, Mswati dissolved parliament in 1992 and Swaziland was again governed by a traditional tribal assembly, the Liqoqo. Since then, democratic reform has begun with the drafting – albeit restrictive – of a constitution. Despite the increasing agitation for faster change, even many reformers propose a constitutional king in a democratic system of government.

Currently, Swaziland's greatest challenge comes from the HIV/AIDS pandemic; the country has the world's highest HIV infection rate (almost 39% for adults between 15 and 49 years of age), and life expectancy has fallen as a result from 58 to 33 years. It's estimated that there are currently more than 70,000 AIDS orphans in the country, and by 2010 one out of six people will be a child under 15 who has lost both parents.

CULTURE

Swazis have an extremely strong sense of identity and pride. Social and cultural cohesion is maintained by a system of age-related royal regiments. Boys graduate from regiment to regiment as they grow older. This minimises the potentially divisive differences between clans while emphasising loyalty to the king and nation.

The nonconfrontational, good-humoured and religious Swazis dislike embarrassment of any kind. Although there is widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of progress in their country's current socioeconomic climate, they tend to dislike outsiders meddling in internal political and social affairs and cultural practices. Despite constant controversy around the king, he represents the symbolic head of the Swazi family and, as such, he is generally highly regarded – disrespect for the identity of the Swazi themselves.

As in other parts of Africa, the extended family is integral to a person's life. While polygamy is permitted and exists this is not always practised. Traditional marriage allows for the husband to take a number of wives, although many Swazis also follow Western marriage conventions, rejecting polygamy, but permitting divorce.

Many people in rural areas continue to live in the traditional beehive huts in the traditional homestead arrangements.

Schooling is not compulsory, with the rate of attendance decreasing due to social circumstances, particularly due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

SWAZILAND PEOPLE

Almost all people are Swazi (although there are about 70 distinct groups). The rest are Zulu, Tsonga-Shangaan and European. The dominant clan is the Dlamini – it's kind of equivalent to Smith, and you'll meet your fair share of them all over the country.

Around 70% of the population is Zionist, a mix of Christianity and traditional indigenous worship, with Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists making up the balance. Muslims, Bahai and Jewish faiths have small followings, also.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Swaziland's handicrafts include jewellery, pottery, weapons and implements. Woven grasswares such as lighaga (grassware 'bottles') and mats are popular, as are wooden items, ranging from bowls to knobkerries.

Dance and music is an integral part of Swazi cultural festivals. The Sibhaca dance is a vigorous foot-stamping dance performed by males.

ENVIRONMENT

Swaziland has a wide range of ecological zones, from rainforest in the northwest to savannah scrub in the east. Western Swaziland is highveld, consisting mainly of short, sharp mountains; the centre and east of the country are plains, where plantations of sugar cane dominate the landscape. Further east, the harsh Lebombo Mountains form the border with Mozambique.

Conservation can come from the most unlikely sources. The monarchy reserved some areas for hunting; these preserve the remnants of indigenous flora (including 14% of

the recorded plant life in southern Africa) and reintroduced animals (including elephants, warthogs, rhinos and lions) in parks such as Hlane Royal National Park, Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary and Mkhaya Game Reserve (these fall under the banner of 'Big Game Parks').

Swaziland has about a third of the nonmarine-mammal species in southern Africa.

Environmental issues include overgrazing of cattle, soil erosion, illegal hunting and the loss of certain indigenous plants sought for natural medicines.

FOOD & DRINK

Swaziland isn't a gourmet's paradise, but you won't eat badly here. Tourist areas of the Malkerns and Ezulwini Valleys feature good international dishes and seafood. In more remote areas, African staples such as stew and pap (also known as *mealie meal*) are common.

MBABANE

pop 60,000

Mbabane (mba-baa-nay) is a pretty nondescript, although relaxing place; there isn't that much to see or do here. Its setting amid the Dlangeni Hills is picturesque, and in summer Mbabane is the place to be: the hills make it cooler than Manzini, which is why the British moved their administrative centre here in 1902. The adjacent Ezulwini and Malkerns Valleys have plenty of attractions.

ORIENTATION

Mbabane is a little disjointed. The main street is Gwamile St. Swazi Plaza, a large, modern shopping centre with most services and a good range of shops, is off Western Distributor Rd. The Mall, another shopping area, is on Plaza Mall St.

INFORMATION

Internet access is available in a few places in town, including The Mall.

First National Bank (Msundusa St)

Mbabane Clinic (🕿 404 2423; St Michael's Rd) Medical services.

Nedbank (Swazi Plaza) Changes cash and travellers cheques. Post office (Msundusa St)

Standard Bank (Swazi Plaza) Has a 24-hour ATM. Tourist information office (2531; www.welcom etoswaziland.com; 🕥 9am-4.45pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri, to 1pm Sat) On the edge of Swazi Plaza. Offers a selection

of free publications and brochures including the tourist Bible What's Happening in Swaziland? Alternatively, Swazi Trails in the Ezulwini Valley (see p1044) stocks tourist paraphernalia.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Mbabane is becoming unsafe at night, so don't walk around by yourself. Take precautions in the streets even during the day - muggings are on the increase.

SLEEPING

Good-value places to crash tend to be slightly out of the downtown area.

Grifters (🗃 404 5342, 617 0218; www.grifterslodge .com; End St; camp sites per person US\$6, dm US\$10, d with shared bathroom US\$23) This laid-back and likeably scruffy house, within walking distance of the town centre is a popular hang-out. Self-catering only. It has excellent facilities and also offers a range of hiking and cultural tours, including tours of local shebeens (drinking holes).

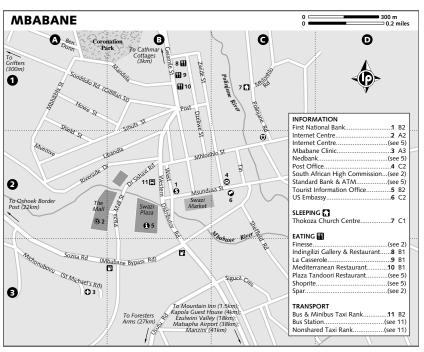
Thokoza Church Centre (2 404 6681; Polinjane Rd; s/d US\$26/29, with shared bathroom US\$17/22) These small, clean and monastic-style rooms might convert you to Mbabane. To get here from Gwamile St, turn onto Mhlonhlo St, cross the bridge, turn left at the police station and head up Polinjane Rd. Take a taxi at night (US\$3 from Swazi Plaza).

Cathmar Cottages (2 404 3387; www.swazilodgings .com/cathmar; 167 Lukhalo St; r from US\$27-44; 🔊) Offers self-catering cottages and dolls-house-style cabins, about 3.5km north of Mbabane (off Pine Valley Rd).

Kapola Guest House (🖻 404 0906; www.kapola_eden .co.sz; s/d incl breakfast US\$54/89) A comfortable abode with massive porch, busy rooms and à la carte chef (meals US\$3 to US\$5). Five kilometres from Mbabane just off the MR3; watch for the wall painted with flags.

Foresters Arms (🕿 467 4177; www.forestersarms.co .za; s & d with half board from US\$61) Offers cosy oh-so British-style rooms and attractive gardens plus a smorgasbord of activities. Situated 27km southwest of Mbabane in the hills around Mhlambanyatsi.

Mountain Inn (🖻 404 2781; www.mountaininn.sz; s/d incl breakfast from US\$72/92; 🔀 🔲 🗭) Has colonial stains and great panoramas. The restaurant is open for all meals (mains from US\$6).



EATING

SWAZILAND

Gourmands are catered for, plus there are supermarkets at Swazi Plaza and The Mall.

Indingilizi Gallery & Restaurant ((a) 404 6213; indingi@realnet.co.sz; 112 Dzeliwe St; snacks from US\$3; (2) 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) This outdoor gallery-café serves snacks.

Plaza Tandoori Restaurant ((2) 4047599; Swazi Plaza; mains US\$5-12; (2) lunch & dinner) As well as greatvalue curries, the usual grills and burgers add a touch of the international.

La Casserole Restaurant (a 404 6426; Gwamile St; mains US\$7-11;) lunch & dinner) A good stew with a mix of international tastes, vegetarian options, and wines.

Finesse (ⓐ 404 5936; The Mall; mains US\$10-14; ⊡ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This fancy French-owned place serves a good range of seafood and meat dishes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibus taxis to South Africa (mostly northbound) leave from the minibus taxi park near Swazi Plaza, where you'll also find buses and minibus taxis to destinations within Swaziland, including Manzini (US\$1), Big Bend (US\$2) and Piggs Peak (US\$2). Any vehicle heading towards Manzini or Matsapha passes through the Ezulwini Valley, although most take the main - and newer - bypass road through the valley, as opposed to the valley's minor and more scenic routes. Nonshared taxis to the Ezulwini Vallev cost at least US\$7, more to the far end of the valley (from US\$14), and still more at night. To Matsapha International Airport, expect to pay from US\$20.

GETTING AROUND

Nonshared taxis congregate near the bus rank by Swazi Plaza. At night you can usually find one near the City Inn.

AROUND SWAZILAND

EZULWINI & MALKERNS VALLEYS

The Ezulwini Valley – starting near Mbabane and extending down past Lobamba village, 18km away – is the homeland of Swazi royalty. Most of the area's attractions are near Lobamba. It's a pretty valley with lush greenery, but it's becoming less picturesque with hotels and other development. The nearby Malkerns Valley is renowned for its handicrafts and is worth visiting.

Tourist information is available from Swazi Trails ((2) 4162180; Mantenga Craft Centre) in Ezulwini Vallev.

Sights & Activities

You can see the monarchy in action at the **Royal Kraal** in Lobamba during the Incwala ceremony and the Umhlanga dance (see Festivals & Events, p1049).

Next to the museum is the **parliament**, which is sometimes open to visitors. Across the road from the museum is a memorial to King Sobhuza II, the most revered of Swazi kings, plus a small **museum** devoted to him.

MLILWANE WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

This beautiful and tranquil **private reserve** (**b** 528 3943; www.biggameparks.org; admission US\$2.50; **b** 6am-5pm) was created in the 1950s by conservationist Ted Reilly.

While it doesn't have the drama or vastness of some of the South African parks, the reserve is easily accessible and worth a visit. Its terrain is dominated by the precipitous Nyonyane (Little Bird) peak, with some fine walks in the area. Animals include zebras, giraffes, warthogs, antelope species, crocodiles, hippos and black eagles (*Aquila verreauxii*).

Activities include horse rides (ÚS\$14 per hour), mountain biking (US\$7) and wildlife walks (US\$4.50 per hour). Guides are recommended (US\$4.50 per person per hour).

The main entrance is 2km southeast of the Happy Valley Motel on the old Mbabane– Manzini road.

Sleeping WITHIN THE SANCTUARY

Book the following through the **Royal Swazi Big Game Parks office** (www.biggameparks.org; **2** 528 3943/4). Sondzela Backpackers (IYHF) Lodge (a 528 3117; camp sites per person US\$5.50, dm US\$8, s/d with shared bathroom US\$14/22, s/d rondavels US\$21/28) Idle your time away in the great setting and facilities at the self-proclaimed 'Rolls Royce of Backpacker Hostels'.

Milwane Wildlife Sanctuary Main Camp ((2) 528 3943/4; s/d2-person huts US\$33/47) This homely camp is set in a scenic wooded location about 3.5km from the entry gate. It boasts a large selection of shelters, including traditional, windowless beehive huts (s/d US\$31/44, with shared bathroom US\$21/33), camp sites for US\$6.50 per person or dorm beds in cabins for US\$11 per person.

Shonalanga Cottage (s/d US\$40/53, per additional person US\$15) A spacious self-catering cottage near the main camp. A good choice for families.

OUTSIDE THE SANCTUARY

Malandela's B&B (() 605 2598, 528 3448; rper person ind breakfast US\$25; () Along the MR27 in the Malkerns Valley, this offers stylish, ethnic African rooms, a pool and a sculpture garden.

Timbali Lodge & Country Park ((2) 416 2632; www .visitswazi.com; s/d ind breakfast from E400/500; (2) (2) A moderately upscale place, at the western end of Ezulwini Valley, with self-catering cottages in pleasant, grassy grounds.

Mantenga Nature Reserve (a 416 11/78; mantenga@ sntc.org.sz; beehive huts per person US\$9, s/d tented chalets ind breakfast US\$43/65) Soft 'safari' adventure in delightful tented style and canvas comfort. The restaurant serves good luncheon dishes.

Eating & Drinking

Malandela's Restaurant ((2528 3115; entrées from US\$2, mains US\$4-9; (2) lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Part of the Malandela complex and one of Swaziland's better restaurants.

Woodlands Restaurant (B 416 3466; mauriswazi@ realnet.co.sz; mains US\$5-17; P lunch & dinner) International options to be enjoyed on a lovely shady veranda.

Quatermain's (🗃 416 3023; mains US\$8-11; 论 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Mouth-watering culinary journey through Africa.

Bella Vista Pizzeria (a 416 1061; pizza from E32; Iunch & dinner) Bella Vista is at Happy Valley Motel and does a brisk local business.

Ezulwini Sun sometimes has music, food and drinks in the beer garden.

You'll rave about House on Fire, a fantastically decorated cultural and entertainment space at the Malandela Complex.

Getting There & Away

For the Manzini-bound bus from Mbabane, make sure the driver knows you want to get off in the valley. Even some nonexpress buses aren't keen on stopping. Nonshared taxis from Mbabane cost at least US\$7 – negotiate at night.

If you're driving from either Mbabane or Manzini, take the Ezulwini Valley/Lobamba exit off the bypass road. This puts you on the MR103, from where everything is well signposted.

NGWEMPISI GORGE

This **gorge** ((2) 625 6004), 30km south of the Malkerns Valley is one of the country's few remaining untouched environments with beautiful natural forests and the Ngwempisi River. Adventure seekers will be thrilled by the Ngwempisi Hiking Trail, a community-run 33km trail in the Ntfungula Hills on the Mankayane–Vlelzizweni road.

The atmospheric double-storey **Khopho Hut** (dmUS\$13) is built around massive boulders and Mhlabeni Hut is by a waterfall. It is compulsory to take a local guide (US\$7 per day plus an additional US\$1.50 for each hiker). You must carry in your own food and bedding, although porters are available from US\$2.50 per day.

MANZINI

pop 70,000

Manzini is the country's commercial and industrial centre. Downtown Manzini isn't large, but it feels like a different country from easy-going rural Swaziland. A hint of menace pervades; be careful at day and night as muggings are common.

The **market** (cnr Mhlakuvane & Mancishane Sts; Mon-Sat) on Thursday and Friday mornings is excellent. Get there at dawn when the rural people bring in their handicrafts. Apart from this you can happily move on.

At the time of writing, the efficient, clean **Swaziland Backpackers** (528 2038; www.swazi landbackpackers.com; camp sites per person 45R; dm 90R; d with shared bathroom 190R), one of Swaziland's best backpackers, had just moved to a new premises on the edge of Malkerns Valley on the MR103 (behind Sundowner's Bar). If their

GO WILD!

Wildlife Drives

For wildlife drives, the Big Game Parks reserves organise good-value tours. Mkhaya offers Land Rover day trips (US\$55, minimum two people, includes lunch). These trips must be prebooked through **Big Game Parks** (o 528 3943/4). Set arrival and departure times are 10am and 4pm. Hlane has a two-hour sunrise/sunset drive (US\$20, minimum two people); Mliliwane offers a shorter wildlife drive (US\$16, minimum two people). Check the website www.biggameparks.org for the latest on offer, as these do change.

White-Water Rafting

One of Swaziland's highlights is white-water rafting on the **Usutu River**. This largely sluggish river turns to rapids through the narrow Bulungu Gorge near Mkhaya Game Reserve.

At one stage you'll have to portage a 10m waterfall. The second half of the day is a sedate trip through scenic country with glimpses of the 'flat dogs' (crocodiles) sunning on the riverbanks.

Swazi Trails (🗟 416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz) offers a full-day trip (US\$84 per person, minimum two) including lunch and all equipment. Trips run from the Ezulwini Valley (see p1044).

past backpackers are anything to go by, the new site should also be one of the best options around. It offers activities, including a day tour of Swaziland (230R).

Tum's George Hotel ((2) 505 8991; www.tgh.sz; cnr Ngwane & du Toit Sts; s/d ind breakfast from US\$85/110; (2) (2) is Manzini's newest, fanciest and priciest hotel.

For food, takeaways abound in Bhunu Mall and Ngwane St or, for something more substantial and some OK coffee, try **Fontana di Trevi Pizzeria** (2505 3608; the Hub, Villiers St; breakfast/ pizza from US\$3/4; ^(S) breakfast, lunch & dinner).

A nonshared taxi to Matsapha airport costs around US\$8. The main bus and minibus taxi park is at the northern end of Louw St. Buses run up the Ezulwini Valley to Mbabane for US\$1.10 (35 minutes). Minibus taxis to Mozambique leave from the car park next to the 'old' KFC. Most long-distance minibus taxis (to South Africa, including Durban and Jo'burg, and Maputo in Mozambique) leave early in the morning.

MKHAYA GAME RESERVE

This top-notch **reserve** (528 3943; www.biggame parks.org) – off the Manzini–Big Bend road near the hamlet of Phuzumoya – was established in 1979 to save the pure Nguni breed of cattle from extinction. Its focus expanded to antelopes, tsessebe, elephants, and white and black rhinos. Mkhaya takes its name from the *mkhaya* (or knobthorn) tree – valued for their beer-brewing properties, and for the insect and birdlife they support.

You can't visit or stay in the reserve without booking in advance, and even then you can't drive in alone; you'll be met at Phuzumoya at a specified pick-up time, usually 10am or 4pm. While day tours can be arranged, it's ideal to stay for at least one night – this is possibly your best chance in Africa of meeting a black rhino in the wild.

You can bunk down at **Stone Camp** (all-inclusive s/d with full board US\$165/285), reminiscent of a 19thcentury hunting camp, with accommodation in rustically luxurious stone and thatch cottages surrounded by bush. The price includes wildlife drives, walking safaris, park entry and meals, and is good value compared to many of the private reserves near Kruger National Park in South Africa. Reservations are through the **Royal Swazi Big Game Parks office** (www.biggameparks .org; (2) 528.3943/4).

For day-trippers, the reserve organises a couple of good-value **safaris** (see above).

HLANE ROYAL NATIONAL PARK

In the northeast near the former royal hunting grounds, **Hlane Royal National Park** (528 3943/4; www.biggameparks.org; admission US\$3.50; 6am-6pm) offers wonderfully low-key wildlife watching. There are white rhinos and many antelope species. Elephants and lions have been re-introduced. There are guided walking trails (US\$5 per person), two-hour wildlife day drives (US\$20 per person, minimum two), a cultural village tour with dance performances (US\$6.20 per person, minimum four) and mountain-bike hire (US\$9 per hour).

Ndlovu Camp (camp sites per person US\$5.50, rondavels s/per person sharing US\$31/23, self-catering cottage per person sharing from US\$26) is a pleasant and rustic fencedoff camp, with no electricity, a communal area and a restaurant.

Bhubesi Camp (s/d cottages US\$27/54) offers selfcontained huts with electricity. Book for both through the Royal Swazi Big Game Parks office ((2528 3943; www.biggameparks.org).

Minibus taxis to Simunye will drop you at the entrance to Hlane (US\$0.70; 7km from Simunye).

MLAWULA NATURE RESERVE

This tranquil **reserve** (B 416 1151; www.sntc.org .sz; adult/child US\$3.50/1.70; O 6am-6pm), where the lowveld plains meet the Lebombo Mountains, boasts antelope species and hyenas, rewarding bird-watching, and the odd crocodile. You can hire fishing rods for US\$3 and bring your own mountain bike. Check the status of bilharzia (p1136) and watch out for ticks.

There's tented accommodation at **Siphiso** camping ground (camp sites per person US\$8.50) and **Sara Camp** (s/d US\$21). **Mapelepele Cottage** (accommodates 4 people US\$70) is self-catering. Book accommodation through the **National Trust Commission** ((a) 416 1151/78; www.sntc.org.sz) at the Mantenga Reserve office.

PIGGS PEAK

This small, gritty town in the northwest of the country is the centre of Swaziland's logging industry and there are huge pine plantations throughout the area. The town was named after a prospector who found gold here in 1884.

Sights

In addition to its scenery, including the **Phophonyane Falls** located about 8km north of town, this area is known for its handicrafts. Check these out at the Peak Craft Centre just north of Orion Piggs Peak Hotel & Casino. At Peak Craft Centre you'll find **Ethnic Bound** (347 3099; ethnicbound@africaonline.co.sz), Likhweti Kraft (343 73127) and Tintsaba Crafts (343 73099; www.tintsaba.com). There are also numerous craft vendors set up along the road up from Mbabane.

An interesting detour from Piggs Peak is to wind your way 20km through scenic plantation country to the ghost village of **Bulembu**, a former asbestos mining town. It's a true-life time warp; thousands of deserted corrugatediron houses and many Art Deco buildings nestle on a pretty hilly landscape. Warning: asbestos (chrysotile) dumps exist around the village.

RHINO WARS

In 1965 white rhino were re-established in the kingdom after an absence of 70 years. That was the easy part. Since then there has been an ongoing battle to protect them from poachers. At the forefront of this battle has been Ted Reilly and a band of dedicated hand-picked rangers.

This defence wasn't easy, especially as the poachers had received hefty financial backing from crime syndicates supplying rhino horn to the lucrative Asian market. Poaching escalated in the late 1980s, and there were determined efforts to change rhino-poaching laws in Swaziland. Rhinos were dehorned and confined to enclosures for their own protection. After Hlane Royal National Park was attacked in January 1992 by poachers with AK47s, the rangers armed themselves. With the rhinos dehorned at Hlane, the poachers shifted to Mkhaya Game Reserve. The battle commenced.

In April 1992 there was a shoot-out between rangers and poachers at Mkhaya, and some poachers were captured. A follow-up operation lead to another shoot-out at Big Bend in which two poachers were killed while selling their freshly poached horns. While the Swazi courts deliberated over action against the rangers relating to this incident, another rhino, the majestic bull Mthondvo, was killed for horn in December 1992. The young king, Mswati III, intervened on behalf of Reilly's rangers, and the poaching of rhinos came to a halt. The rangers, however, still wait with their rifles at the ready. You can help: your presence at any one of the big wildlife parks assists in rhino conservation.

In 1996 the Taiwanese government donated money to purchase six black rhinos; a gesture of good faith that was welcomed with open arms. The black rhinos, which were relocated from parks in KwaZulu-Natal, are breeding well.

Sleeping

SWAZILAND

Phophonyane Lodge & Nature Reserve (2437 1319; www.phophonyane.co.sz; tents US\$68-97, s/d cottages with breakfast from US\$97/135) This stunning hideaway – in a nature reserve of lush indigenous forest on the Phophonyane River – is one of the best places to stay in Swaziland. Ring ahead for directions (you can usually arrange to be collected from Piggs Peak). Bring the mosquito repellent!

Roads in the northwest of the country are mainly dirt, but they're in reasonable condition. The minibus taxi stand is next to the market at the top end of the main street, with several vehicles daily to Mbabane (US\$2, one

hour). For Bulembu, you'll need your own wheels – this road can be boggy when wet.

MALOLOTJA NATURE RESERVE

A large piece of wilderness in the hilly northwest of this tiny country, this **nature reserve** (**a** 416 1151, 442 4241; www.sntc.org.sz; adult/child US\$3/1.70; **b** 6am-6pm) is both rugged and largely unspoiled.

It's jumping with antelope species, more than 280 species of bird, and boasts wildflowers and **rare plants**. The **Komati River** cuts a gorge through the park and continues east in a series of falls and rapids until it meets the lowveld.

The reserve has one of the world's oldest known **mines**, where haematite and specularite were mined for cosmetic and ritual uses from 41,000 BC. You can visit the mine, but you must be accompanied by a ranger.

Hiking trails range from short day walks to a week-long jaunt, extending from Ngwenya in the south to the Mgwayiza Range in the north. For the extended trails, you must obtain a permit (US\$0.80) and a map from the reserve office. Bring all your own food and a camp stove as fires are not permitted outside the base camp.

Accommodation consists of **camping**, either at the well-equipped (but infrequently used) main site (US\$9), with ablutions and braai (barbecue) area, or along the overnight trails (US\$6; no facilities). There are also self-catering wooden **cabins** (per person US\$32, children half-price), for six persons. Book through **Swazi Trails** (**1**46 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz) or with the **National Trust Commission** (**1**416 1151/78; www.snt cors.z; Mantenga Reserve), both in Ezulwini Vallev.

The entrance gate for Malolotja is about 35km northwest of Mbabane, along the Piggs Peak road (MR1); minibus taxis to/from Mbabane will drop you here.

SWAZILAND DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Many of the country's hotels are geared towards South African tourists and are pricey, but there are some good B&B-style options. Nearly all designated camp sites in Swaziland are in national parks and reserves. If you camp in rural areas always ask permission from local people.

ACTIVITIES

Swaziland's wildlife reserves offer some excellent walking and mountain biking. In the rainy season, white-water rafting is optimal (see p1046).

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Swaziland Embassies & Consulates

In countries without Swazi representation, contact the UK representative: UK (2020-7630 6611; www.swaziland.org.uk; 20 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6LB) USA (202-234 5002; 1712 New Hampshire Ave, NW, Washington DC, 20009)

Embassies & Consulates in Swaziland

PRACTICALITIES

- The Times (www.times.co.sz), and Swazi Observer are the country's Englishlanguage daily newspapers.
- Electrical plugs have three large round pins as used in South Africa.
- Swaziland uses the metric system.

USA (@ 404 6441; http://mbabane.usembassy.gov; 2350 Mbabane PI, Mbabane; 🕑 8.30am-12.30pm Mon & Thu, except for emergency services)

See p1050 for details on getting visas for onward travel.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Colourful ceremonies (and traditional dress, which is still commonly worn) underline the Swazis' unique identity.

Incwala ceremony Held sometime between late December and early January. Swaziland's most sacred ceremony, celebrating the New Year and the first fruits of the harvest in rituals of thanksgiving, prayer, atonement and reverence for the king. As part of the festivities the king grants his people the right to consume his harvest, and rains are expected to follow the ceremony.

Umhlanga (Reed Dance) A great spectacle in August or September, performed by unmarried girls who collect reeds for the repair and maintenance of the royal palace. It is something like a week-long debutante ball for marriageable young Swazi women and a showcase of potential wives for the king. On the sixth day they perform the reed dance and carry their reeds to the queen mother. Princesses wear red feathers in their hair.

The venue for both festivals is near Lobamba in the Ezulwini Valley. Ask at the tourist office in Mbabane for exact dates.

Photography is not permitted at the Incwala but is at the Umhlanga dance.

HEALTH

Malaria is a risk in the northeast near Mozambique; the threat is highest from November to April, although there have been serious eradication programs in recent years (using DDT). Swimming in still waters is risky because of bilharzia (for more information on these potentially deadly diseases, see the Health chapter, p1130). Crocodiles are present in some places.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106), the principal public holidays in Swaziland are: New Year's Day 1 January King Mswati III's Birthday 19 April National Flag Day 25 April King Sobhuza II's Birthday 22 July Umhlanga (Reed Dance Day) August/September Somhlolo (Independence Day) 6 September Incwala Day December/January

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet facilities are in Mbabane and a couple of places in the Ezulwini and Malkerns Valleys.

MAPS

Topographical maps (1:50,000) are available from the Surveyor-General's office at the **Ministry of Public Works** (**a** 404 6267; Mhlambanyatsi Rd, Mbabane). The Swaziland Tourism Authority has recently printed hiking maps of most of the popular hiking spots, including Shewula, Mlawula, Sibebe, Mlilwane, Mantenga, Mahamba, Ngwempisi and Malalotja.

MEDIA

There are two English-language daily newspapers: the *Times of Swaziland* and the *Swazi Observer*. The former is an independent, and frequently courts the wrath of government and royalty, the latter is owned by the 'nation' and toes a conservative line.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the lilangeni; the plural is emalangeni (E). It is tied in value to the South African rand. Rands are accepted everywhere and there's no need to change them. Emalangeni are difficult to change for other currencies outside Swaziland.

Only a few ATMs accept international credit or debit cards. The most convenient are at Standard Bank in Swazi Mall, Mbabane and inside the Royal Swazi Hotel's casino.

Nedbank and First National change cash and travellers cheques. Banking hours are generally from 8.30am to 2.30pm weekdays, and until 11am Saturday. Most banks ask to see the receipt of purchase when cashing travellers cheques.

TELEPHONE

To call Swaziland from South Africa dial the prefix 09-268. To call overseas from Swaziland, use the code 00. The best way to make international calls is with phone cards (US\$2 to US\$9) from post offices and shops.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Swaziland's main tourist information is in Mbabane. The websites of **Swazi National Trust** (www.sntc.org.sz) and **Royal Swazi Big Game Parks** (www.biggameparks.org) offer useful parks information. The privately run **Swazi Trails** ()/fax416 2180; www.swazitrails.co.sz; Mantenga Craft Centre, Ezulwini

Valley, Swaziland) also has tourist information in its office.

VISAS

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for Mozambique are available at the borders but it's cheaper to arrange them in advance at the **Mozambiquan High Commission** (2) 404 3700; Princess Dr, Mbabane) or Nelspruit (South Africa). Allow 24 hours.

TRANSPORT IN SWAZILAND

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Swaziland's main airport is Matsapha International Airport, southwest of Manzini. (Schedules and tickets often refer to the airport as Manzini.) Swaziland Airlink (518 6155/92; www .saaiflnk.co.2a) flies daily between Swaziland and Johannesburg (US\$127 one way). Swazi Express Airways (518 6840; www.swaziexpress.com) flies four times a week to Durban (US\$63 to US\$175) and twice a week to Maputo (US\$21 to US\$63) and Vilanculos (US\$21 to US\$197) in Mozambique.

Land

BUS & MINIBUS TAXI

Generally speaking, Manzini has the main international transport rank for transport to Jo'burg, Durban and Mozambique. Less frequent departures are in Mbabane for the northern destinations of Gauteng and Mpumalanga (South Africa).

Mozambique

The main border crossing between Swaziland and Mozambique is at Lomahasha–Namaacha (open 7am to 8pm). The border crossing between Mhlumeni and Gobahas is open 7am to 6pm. Inquire at the tourist office in Mbabane about bus services from Mbabane to Maputo

DEPARTURE TAX

A US\$7 departure tax is levied at Matsapha International Airport.

(Mozambique). Minibuses depart Maputo daily in the morning for the Namaacha– Lomahasha border (US\$2, 1½ hours) with some continuing on to Manzini (US\$4.50, 3½ hours). Minibus taxis operate daily from Manzini to Maputo (US\$10, 2½ hours).

South Africa

The main border crossings with South Africa are: Josefsdal–Bulembu (open 8am to 4pm); Oshoek–Ngwenya (open 7am to 10pm); Emahlathini–Sicunusa (open 8am to 6pm); Mahamba (open 7am to 10pm); and Golela– Lavumisa (open 7am to 10pm).

The **Baz Bus** (South Africa 021-439 2323; www.baz bus.com) runs from Jo'burg/Pretoria to Durban via Mbabane and Manzini three times a week, returning direct to Jo'burg/Pretoria on alternate days.

Minibus taxis run daily between Jo'burg (Park Station), Mbabane and Manzini (US\$20, five to six hours) and Manzini and Durban (US\$21, six hours). On many routes, you'll change minibuses at the border. Most longdistance taxis leave early in the morning.

GETTING AROUND Bus & Minibus Taxi

There are a few infrequent (but cheap) domestic buses, most of which begin and terminate at the main stop in the centre of Mbabane. Generally you'll find minibus taxis are the best public transport, although they often run shorter routes. There are also nonshared (private hire) taxis in some of the larger towns.

Hitching

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country, and we don't recommend it. But in some parts of Africa there is often simply no other option to grabbing lifts on trucks, 4WDs, lorries or whatever vehicle happens to come down the road first. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk.

Hitching is easier here than in South Africa, as the skin colour of the driver and hitchhiker aren't factors in the decision to offer a lift. You will, however, have to wait a long time. © Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'

Zambia

If you're out to experience the 'real' Africa, Zambia is that diamond in the rough. The country boasts some of the continent's best wildlife parks, and shares (with Zimbabwe) some of the region's major highlights: Victoria Falls, Lake Kariba and Lower Zambezi National Park. It is also an angler's dream, as fishermen hail from all over the world to try their luck on the mighty Zambezi River with the hopes of landing a toothy tigerfish or the rare, giant vundu. Avid birders also flock to Zambia to glimpse its fabulous diversity of birds, most notably Chaplin's barbets.

For independent travellers Zambia can be a challenge: distances between major towns and attractions are large, and getting around by car or public transport takes time and patience. But for many, this challenge is part of Zambia's appeal. Save Lusaka and Livingstone, this is the 'real' Africa, so rare among the increasingly developed and Westernised parts of the region.

So if you like your travel easy and your wilderness neatly bundled into a homogenised and Westernised version of 'Africa', then much of Zambia may not appeal. But if you enjoy a raw edge and an Africa with few tourists, Zambia is the place you're looking for.

FAST FACTS

- Area 752,614 sq km
- ATMs Only in main cities
- Borders Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia
- Budget US\$20 to US\$30 per day
- Capital Lusaka
- Languages English, Bemba, Lozi, Nyanja and Tonga
- Money Kwacha; US\$1 = 4200ZMK
- Population 11.5 million
- Seasons cool & dry (May to August), hot & dry (September to November), hot & wet (December to April)
- Telephone country code 🖻 260; international access code 🖻 00
- Time GMT/UTC + 2
- Visa US\$25 for 90 days, issued at point of entry





HIGHLIGHTS

- **South Luangwa National Park** (p1060) Soak up the wildlife and bush in one of the most majestic parks in Africa.
- Lower Zambezi National Park (p1064) Gaze in awe at elephants strolling along the bank, teeming hippos in the river, and fish eagles soaring overhead, while canoeing or fishing on the river.
- **Lake Kariba** (p1064) Boat or fish, or just sunbathe at a resort along one of the world's largest artificial lakes.
- Victoria Falls (p1064) Gaze at the magnificent, thundering waters; then get your adrenaline fix with a dare devil-activity in the Batoka Gorge below.
- **Off the beaten track** (p1062) Head for the wilderness of Northern Zambia to discover hidden waterfalls and serene lakes, with scarcely another soul in sight.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

There are three seasons: the dry season (mid-April to August), when temperatures drop at night, but the landscape is green and lush; the hot season (September to mid-November), the best time to see wildlife as flora is sparse; and, the wet season (mid-November to mid-April), ideal for bird-watching.

ITINERARIES

• **One Week** With only one week, hit one of *the* major attractions of southern Africa: Victoria Falls (p1064) or South Luangwa National Park (p1060).

HOW MUCH?

- Small wood carving US\$15
- Soapstone ashtray US\$12
- Waste basket made of beer caps US\$8
- T-shirt US\$10
- Batik US\$11

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- 1L petrol US\$1.80
- 1L bottle of water US\$3
- Bottle of Mosi lager US\$1.80
- Souvenir T-shirt US\$15
- Street snack US\$2

- Two Weeks You will have time for the great Victoria Falls (p1064) as well as one or two of the national parks – probably South Luangwa (p1060) or Lower Zambezi (p1064).
- Three Weeks With extra time and money, go to Victoria Falls (p1064), South Luangwa National Park (p1060), a lodge on the Lower Zambezi (p1064) and the Copperbelt province (p1063). If you are travelling to/from Tanzania or Malawi, or have even more time up your sleeve, you can explore Northern Zambia (p1062), including the Kalambo Falls (p1062) and Shiwa Ng'andu (p1062).

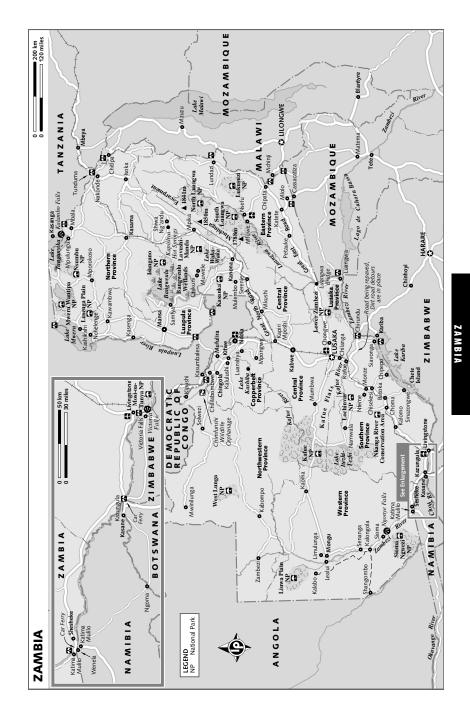
HISTORY

Zambia was originally inhabited by huntergatherer Khoisan people. About 2000 years ago Bantu people migrated from the Congo basin and gradually displaced them. From the 14th century more immigrants came from the Congo, and by the 16th century various dispersed groups consolidated into powerful tribes or nations, with specific territories and dynastic rulers.

The first Europeans to arrive were Portuguese explorers, following routes established many centuries earlier by Swahili-Arab slavetraders. The celebrated British explorer David Livingstone travelled up the Zambezi in the early 1850s in search of a route to the interior of Africa. In 1855, he reached the awesome waterfall that he promptly named Victoria Falls.

Livingstone's work and writings inspired missionaries to come to the area north of the Zambezi; close on their heels came explorers, hunters and prospectors searching for whatever riches the country had to offer. In 1890 the area became known as Northern Rhodesia and was administered by the British South Africa Company, owned by empire-builder Cecil John Rhodes.

At around the same time, vast deposits of copper were discovered in the area now called the Copperbelt. The indigenous people had mined there for centuries, however now large European-style opencast pits were being dug. The main sources of labour were the Africans who had to earn money to pay the new 'hut tax'; in any case, most were driven from their land by the European settlers. In 1924 the colony was brought under direct British control.



Nationalist Resistance

Meanwhile, African nationalism was becoming a more dominant force in the region. The United National Independence Party (UNIP) was founded in the late 1950s by Dr Kenneth Kaunda, who spoke out against the federation. Northern Rhodesia became independent in 1964, changing its name to Zambia. Kaunda became President and remained so for the next 27 years, largely because in 1972 he declared UNIP the only legal party and himself the sole presidential candidate.

Over the years, however, government corruption and mismanagement, coupled with civil wars in neighbouring states, left Zambia's economy in dire straits, and violent street protests were quickly transformed into a general demand for multiparty politics. Full elections were held in October 1991, and Kaunda and UNIP were resoundingly defeated by Frederick Chiluba and the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD). Kaunda bowed out gracefully, and Chiluba became president.

With backing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, financial controls were liberalised to attract investors. But austerity measures were also introduced – and these were tough for the average Zambian. Food prices soared, inflation was rampant and state industries were privatised or simply closed, leaving many thousands of people out of work.

By the mid-1990s, the lack of visible change gave Kaunda the confidence to re-enter the political arena. He attracted strong support but withdrew from the November 1996 elections in protest at MMD irregularities. Chiluba won a landslide victory and remained in firm control – sometimes too firm. There was much speculation that the elections were rigged. However, most Zambians accepted the result, in the hope that at least the country would remain peaceful.

Zambia Today

The political shenanigans continued unabated at the start of the new millennium: in mid-2001, Vice-President Christon Tembo was expelled from parliament by Chiluba, so he formed an opposition party: the Forum for Democratic Development (FDD).

Although Chiluba tried to amend the constitution to enable himself to run for a third term, he was unsuccessful. In 2001 Levy Mwanawasa, the new MMD leader, was elected Zambia's third president. Mwanawasa has set a strong precedent during the first half of the decade by supporting an investigation into alleged charges of corruption and misappropriation of funds against Chiluba. The former president is rumoured to have squirreled away millions in overseas bank accounts.

Because Zambia was deemed a Heavily Indebted Poor Country, most of its US\$7 billion international debt was eliminated in 2005. However, the country still suffers from high unemployment, a rapid population growth rate, a tragic HIV/AIDS pandemic, and an ineffectual government. Mwanawasa was elected to a second, five-year term in September 2006.

CULTURE

On the day-to-day level, the biggest issues on the table for most Zambians are high unemployment and the HIV pandemic, as the urban prevalence of the disease might be as high as 35%. HIV/AIDS has had an unexpected effect on the population including a new population of 'street kids', who live in roadside sewers and on middle-of-the-road dividers in urban centres. There are also funeral processions on a daily basis as the disease has claimed enough lives to lower the average life expectancy to under 33 years. The population density is about 15 people per sq km, making Zambia one of the most thinly populated countries in Africa. But since almost 45% of Zambians live in urban centres, compounds designed for 50,000 now house over 150,000.

A social issue often discussed on the radio is cohabitation rather than marriage. The argument is that many Zambians feel that this will rock the foundations of their traditional values and therefore be the beginning of the end of society. Finally, soccer is always a topic on the minds of Zambians, whether it be domestic, within Africa, or the premiership or World Cup.

PEOPLE

Tribal groups are (in order of size) the Bemba, the Tonga, the Nyanja, the Ngoni, and the Lozi. While most descendents of the original white settlers have since moved away, one can still find a fair few, mostly farmers and business types. Indians and Pakistanis have long been a part of the mix, so don't be surprised to hear them proudly call themselves Zambians. The majority of Zambians are Christians (75%), though others are Muslims and Hindus (24%) or animists (1%).

ARTS & CRAFTS

Zambia has a thriving contemporary art scene. One of the country's most famous and respected painters is the late Henry Tayali whose works have enjoyed a popular following among ordinary folk, and have inspired many other Zambian painters.

Other internationally recognised artists include Agnes Yombwe, who works with purely natural materials and uses traditional ceramics and textile designs in her striking sculptures.

Zambian artistry includes skilfully woven baskets from Barotseland (Western Province) and Siavonga, malachite jewellery from the north, and woodcarvings and soapstone sculptures from Mukuni village near Livingstone.

All of Zambia's tribal groups have their own musical traditions. The Lozi are famous for the large drums played during the remarkable Ku'omboka ceremony (described on p1068), and the Bemba are also renowned drummers.

The most notable traditional dance is the *makishi*, which features male dancers wearing masks of stylised human faces, grass skirts and anklets.

Contemporary musicians who have achieved some international fame include Larry Maluma and Ricki Ilonga, both exponents of a traditional style called *kalindula* (a rumba-inspired sound).

ENVIRONMENT

Landlocked Zambia is one of Africa's most eccentric legacies of colonialism. Shaped like a contorted figure of eight, its borders do not correspond to any tribal or linguistic area.

The diversity of animal species in Zambia is huge. The rivers support large populations of hippos and crocs, and the associated grasslands provide plenty of fodder for herds of zebra, impala and puku (antelopes common in Zambia, but not elsewhere). The pukus naturally attract predators, so most parks contain lions, leopards, hyenas and cheetahs. The other two big drawcards – buffaloes and elephants – are also found in huge herds in the main national parks. Bird-lovers can go crazy in Zambia, where about 750 species have been recorded. Zambia boasts 19 national parks and reserves, and 34 game-management areas (GMAs). After decades of poaching, clearing and generally bad management, many are difficult to reach and others don't contain much wildlife. Since 1990, however, with the help of international donors, several of Zambia's parks have been rehabilitated and the wildlife protected by projects that also aim to give local people some benefit from conservation measures. Zambia's parks are well known for walking safaris, and some, particularly South Luangwa, have a great diversity of wildlife.

FOOD & DRINK

The national dish is unquestionably *nshima*, a bland but filling maize porridge-like substance. It's eaten with your hands and always accompanied by a 'relish', such as beans or vegetables (in inexpensive eateries), or chicken or fish (in slightly better restaurants). If you like lagers, the local beer, Mosi, is good. Traditional 'opaque' beer made from maize is sold commercially in cardboard cartons, but make sure you shake the carton before drinking.

Z A M B I A

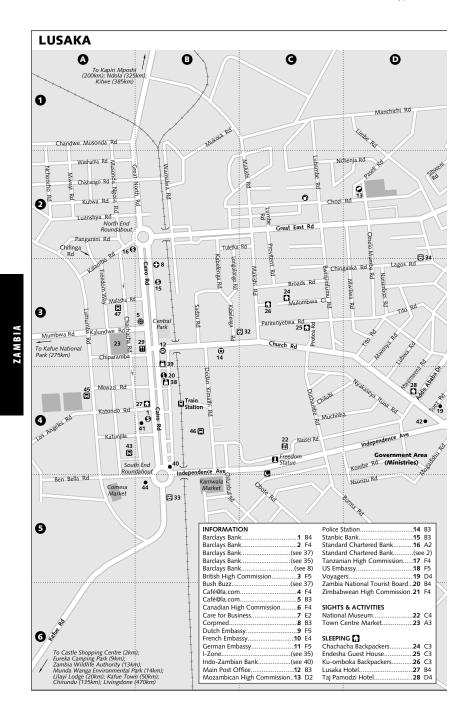
LUSAKA

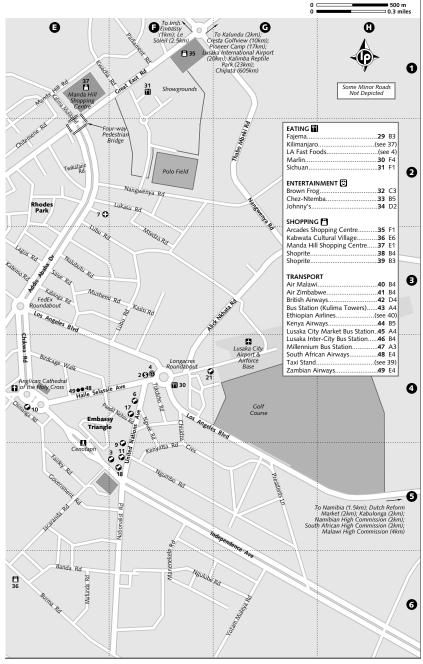
🖻 01 / pop 1.2 million

The capital of Zambia is a small city, part modern and part traditional African, where dusty markets sit alongside Soviet-looking high-rise blocks. Although Zambia is a fascinating country, Lusaka will never be a highlight for tourists. There are few notable buildings, monuments or other sights, but it does boast a lively ambience and genuine African feel. The markets are good, there's a decent arts scene and the nightclubs throb at weekends. If you have to be in Lusaka for a few days you'll have no trouble passing the time pleasantly enough.

ORIENTATION

The main street, Cairo Rd, is lined with shops, cafés, supermarkets, travel agencies, banks and bureaux de change. To the north is a major traffic circle and landmark, the North End Roundabout; to the south is the South End Roundabout. East of Cairo Rd are the wide jacaranda-lined streets of the smarter residential suburbs and the area officially called Embassy Triangle. West of Cairo Rd are 'compounds' (read 'townships').





INFORMATION

Emergency

Ambulance (2 992) Police (🕿 991; Church Rd)

Internet Access

Café@la.com (Cairo Rd) This place is incredibly popular and modern, and there is a second branch at Longacres Roundabout.

I-Zone (Arcades Shopping Centre, Great East Rd) This café has the fastest connection in Lusaka, and you can even bring a laptop.

Medical Services

Good options include the private clinics Care for Business (🕿 254396; Addis Ababa Rd) and Corpmed (222612; Cairo Rd), behind Barclays Bank. For evacuations, both clinics work with Specialty Emergency Services (273303).

Money

Along Cairo Rd, Barclays, Standard Chartered Bank, Indo-Zambian Bank and Stanbic Bank have several branches with ATMs. These banks also have branches with ATMs at the Manda Hill and Arcades Shopping Centres (Great East Rd).

To change cash, try the Zampost Bureau de **Change** (inside the main post office, cnr Cairo & Church Rds); or Prosper Bureau de Change (Findeco House, South End Roundabout, Cairo Rd), which also offers reasonable rates for American Express travellers cheques.

Post

Main post office (cnr Cairo & Church Rds; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat) Contains Zambia's only reliable poste restante.

Tourist Information

Zambia National Tourist Board (🕿 229087; www .zambiatourism.com; Century House, Cairo Rd; 🕑 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12pm Sat) The head office has friendly enough staff, but information is limited to Lusaka and its environs.

Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA; 🖻 278524; zawaorg@zamnet.zm; Kafue Rd; 🕅 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) In Chilanga, about 16km south of the city centre, facing Munda Wanga.

Travel Agencies

Bush Buzz (256992; www.bush-buzz.com; Manda Hill Shopping Centre, Great East Rd) At the back of Kilimanjaro, this agency is especially popular for trips to Kafue and Lower Zambezi National Parks

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Like most African cities, pickpockets take advantage of crowds, so be alert in the markets and bus stations and along the busy streets immediately west of Cairo Rd. At night, most streets are dark and often empty, so even if you're on a tight budget, take a taxi. If you have your own wheels, be aware that the incidence of armed carjacking is on the rise in Lusaka.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Though there's not much to see, the downstairs galleries in the National Museum (Nasser Rd; US\$2; (9am-4.30pm) offer a perfect snapshot of Zambia, both past and present. Highlights are the displays of contemporary Zambian paintings and sculpture.

The Town Centre Market (Chachacha Rd; 🕑 7am-7pm) is chaotic and, frankly, malodorous, but fascinating. Zambians get their bargains here, whether it's fruit or veggies, new or secondhand hardware, tapes or clothes. The market is relaxed and tourists don't get hassled.

Munda Wanga Environmental Park (278456; www.mundawanga.com; Kafue Rd, Chilanga; adult/child US\$4/2: (8am-5pm) rehabilitates all sorts of animals for re-entry into the wild. The park features plenty of regional flora and fauna, including two cheetahs and seven lions, though the American Black Bear (a gift from Kenneth Kaunda) looks a little out of place. It's about 16km south of central Lusaka and accessible by any minibus heading towards Chilanga or Kafue from the City Bus Station or South End Roundabout.

SLEEPING

Chachacha Backpackers (222257; www.chachachasa faris.com; 161 Mulombwa CI; camp site per person US\$5, dm US\$10, d without bathroom US\$25; 🔲 😰) Traditionally popular with young backpackers, when we visited it was being renovated. The courtyard, pool and bar are inviting, and other facilities include a restaurant, laundry service, a communal kitchen, and baggage store.

Ku-omboka Backpackers (222450; kvkirkley@ zamtel.zm; Makanta CI; dm US\$10, d without bathroom US\$33) A fairly new kid on the block, this is the best value for a backpacker passing through Lusaka, as it's clean, safe and cheap.

Endesha Guest House (🖻 225780; Parirenyetwa Rd; d with/without US\$65/53) A cosy pension with eight rooms (so book ahead). The 'standard' rooms have unattached, but private, bathrooms, while the more expensive rooms have a private bathroom inside. The bar is chilled out and a great place to meet some interesting characters.

Book accommodation online at lonelyplanet.com

Lusaka Hotel (🕿 229049; lushotel@zam net.zm; cnr Cairo & Katondo Rds; s/d US\$88/96, d with air-con US\$112; 🔀 😰) Remarkably, this is the only hotel in the city centre. It's the longest-standing hotel in Lusaka and has almost top-end facilities for a midrange price. But the rooms are small and some are noisy.

Lilayi Lodge (a 279022; www.lilayi.com; s/d with breakfast from US\$90/100, incl all meals & activities US\$250/290; 🔀 😰) This is one of Lusaka's finest options. The bungalows in this private wildlife reserve are very comfortable, and the gardens and pool are lovely. The lodge is about 8km off Kafue Rd and about 13km south of the city centre, and only accessible by taxi or car.

Taj Pamodzi Hotel (🖻 254455; pamodzi@zamnet.zm; Church Rd; s/d from US\$165/190; 🕄 🕥) By far the fanciest of the top-end hotels in Lusaka. It's a large multistorey complex with comfortable rooms offering views and all the mod cons.

EATING

Faiema (Cairo Rd; meals about US\$2) Just back from the main road, this is a far better place than the food stalls to try some tasty Zambian food while sitting inside a restaurant.

LA Fast Foods (Longacres Roundabout, Haile Selassie Ave; meals US\$2-3) An ideal place to grab a meal if you have to wait a while for your visa from any of the nearby embassies. Allow some time to plough through the confusing array of menus on the counter offering Chinese food, burgers, steaks and a hundred variations of 'chicken and chips'.

Kilimanjaro (Manda Hill Shopping Centre, Great East Rd; snacks US\$3-6) With a travel agency and an internet café, it serves tasty coffee and pastries, which can be enjoyed at tables or on couches.

Sichuan (🖻 253842; Showgrounds, off Nangwenya Rd; mains US\$11-17; 🕥 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner Sun) The best Chinese restaurant in Lusaka is bizarrely situated in a warehouse at the Showgrounds. However, the prices are reasonable and the ambience relaxing.

Marlin (🖻 252206; Longacres Roundabout, Los Angeles Blvd; mains US\$15-20; 🕑 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, dinner

Mon) Housed in the colonial-era Lusaka Club, this perennial, wood-panelled favourite is the best steakhouse in Zambia. While they do serve gargantuan portions of every cut of meat under the sun, most guests come for the aged fillet with mushroom or pepper sauce. Reservations are strongly recommended.

ENTERTAINMENT

Johnny's (9 Lagos Rd; 🕑 lunch & dinner Mon-Thu, 7pm-late Fri & Sat; 😰) An extremely popular nightclub with a tiki feel, Johnny's is the only discotheque in Zambia with an indoor pool, which the occasional drunken dancer jumps into. At weekends it costs US\$15 to enter.

Brown Frog (Kabelenga Rd; 🕑 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, 10am-3am Fri & Sat) Popular with NGO workers who come to dance at weekends, this Britishstyle pub is a bit of an institution. At weekends you'll have to shell out US\$1.70 to enter.

Chez-Ntemba (Kafue Rd; US\$10; 🏵 9pm-6am Wed, Fri & Sat) This is the best nightclub in the downtown area, but only blasts loud rumba. It warms up at midnight and rocks until dawn.

SHOPPING Manda Hill Shopping Centre (Great East Rd) and Arcades Shopping Centre (Great East Rd) are swish chopping place (dut shopping plazas that are easy to reach by minibus from along Cairo Rd or from the Millennium Bus Station, or by taxi. As well as banks, bookshops, internet cafés, furniture stores, restaurants and fast-food outlets, the two shopping centres boast a huge Shoprite and Spar supermarkets, respectively. Shoprite has a few other locations in town too.

Kabwata Cultural Village (Burma Rd; 🕑 9am-5pm) is a scruffy collection of huts and stalls southeast of the city centre. Prices are cheap, however, because you can buy directly from the workers who live here. The specialties are carvings, baskets, masks, drums, jewellery and fabrics.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

For international and domestic flights to/from Lusaka, see p1071 and p1072.

Bus & Minibus

Bus and minibus services to surrounding towns such as Siavonga (US\$3.50) and Chirundu (US\$3) leave from either Lusaka City Market Bus Station (Lumumba Rd) or the City Bus Station (off Chachacha Rd), also called the Kulima Towers Station.

All long-distance public buses (and a few private ones) use the **Lusaka Inter-City Bus Sta**tion (Dedan Kimathi Rd). From this terminal, buses and minibuses go several times a day to Ndola (US\$5, four hours), Kitwe (US\$5, five hours), Livingstone (US\$10, seven hours) and Chipata (US\$18, eight hours). Buses operated by JR Investments go to Mongu (US\$10, 12 hours) on Tuesday and Friday, and buses operated by CR Holdings depart daily for Kitwe, via Ndola, as well as Livingstone, Mongu and Chipata.

Train

The Zambezi Express to Livingstone (US\$6/ 8/10/13 economy/standard/1st class/sleeper, 18 hours), via Choma, leaves Lusaka at 7pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Tickets are available from the reservations office inside the **train station** (btwn Cairo & Dedan Kimathi Rds) from 3pm to 5pm on the day of departure. Get there early and be prepared to hustle and bustle. Slow, 'ordinary' trains to Ndola (US\$5.50, eight hours), via Kapiri Mposhi, depart Monday, Wednesday and Friday at about 10pm.

GETTING AROUND

Local minibuses run along Lusaka's main roads, but there are no route numbers or destination signs, so the system is difficult to work out. The standard fare is US\$0.50 to US\$0.75.

Official taxis can be identified by the numbers painted on the doors. They can be hailed along the street or found at ranks near the main hotels and markets, and outside the Shoprite supermarket on Cairo Rd.

EASTERN ZAMBIA

CHIPATA

a 062

Chipata is the primary town near the Zambian side of the border with Malawi, and a base from which to venture into the South Luangwa National Park. It's lively and friendly, and boasts a large market (500m north of the town centre), as well as several bars, cafés, petrol stations and banks. There's an internet café on Pererenyatwa Rd opposite the Finance Bank.

Sleeping & Eating

Dean's Hill View Lodge (a 221673; deanmitch@zamtel .zm; camp site US\$5, tw US\$20) Take the first right

after the welcome arch, just before the petrol station, and you'll find this great little place run by an affable British chap who has lived in the area for several years. It features twin rooms and camping, spacious and spotless shared bathroom and grand views over Chipata and the hills. Good, simple meals can be provided with prior notice.

Chachacha Backpackers (© 01-222257, 097 805483; www.chachachabackpackers.com; camp site US\$5, dm/d US\$10/25) This place has tidy dorms, space for camping in the small front garden, a backpacker's kitchen and a bar-lounge. It's the only place in town with dorms, but unfortunately it's not the friendliest of places. They do run excellent budget safaris though, and five days in South Luangwa National Park costs US\$495.

Mama Rula (mamarula@iwayafrica.com; camp site US\$8; s/d ind breakfast US\$80/100; D Sour kilometres out of Chipata along the Mfuwe Rd, this huge, grassy, garden camp site with a large bar is very popular with the overland crowd. Next door is the bed and breakfast, which has a swimming pool, a good restaurant, an internet café, cosy en-suite rooms and a resident parrot.

Food Garden Restaurant (Umodzi Hwy; meals about US\$3) About 100 yards east of the traffic lights next to the Konica Photo Studio, bang on the main road. Serves decent Zambian food and has a good area outside to watch the world go by. The only downside is there's no beer.

Getting There & Away

Several bus companies in Lusaka offer services to Chipata. See opposite for details about travelling between Chipata and South Luangwa National Park.

SOUTH LUANGWA NATIONAL PARK ବ୍ଲ ୦୦୧

For scenery, variety of animals, accessibility and choice of accommodation, **South Luangwa** (per person/vehide US\$25/15; 💮 6am-6pm) is the best park in Zambia and one of the most majestic in Africa. Impalas, pukus and buffalo wander on the wide open plains, leopards, of which there are many in the park, hunt in the dense woodlands, herds of elephant wade through the marshes, and hippos munch serenely on nile cabbage in the Luangwa River.

The focal point is **Mfuwe**, a village with shops, a petrol station and a market. About 1.8km further on is **Mfuwe Gate**, the main entrance to the park, where a bridge crosses Luangwa River and several cheaper lodges/ camps and camp sites are set up. Most of the park is inaccessible between November and April (especially February and March), so many lodges close at this time.

Activities

Unlike other parks in Zambia, boat trips are not available in South Luangwa, but all lodges/ camps run excellent day or night **wildlife drives** (all year) and **walking safaris** (June to November). These activities are included in the rates charged by the upmarket places, while the cheaper lodges/camps can organise activities with little notice. A two-hour morning or evening wildlife drive normally costs around US\$35, while a **night drive** (US\$40) offers the chance to spot an elusive leopard.

Sleeping & Eating

Kawaza Village (www.kawazavillage.co.uk; US\$70 full board, day visits US\$20) This enterprise is run by the local Kunda people and gives tourists the opportunity to visit a real rural Zambian village while helping the local community. The village has four *rondavel* huts (each sleeps two) reserved for visitors, and there are open-air reed showers and long-drop toilets. Visitors are encouraged to take part in all aspects of village life such as learning how to cook *nshima* and other traditional food, attending local church services and visiting local schools.

Puku Ridge Camp (☎ 01-271366; www.starofafrica .com; ♀) Drop dead luxurious. The voluminous safari tents, of which there are only six, are a travel-agent's dream – they have massive mahogany beds, separate seating areas, sunken corner baths, indoor and outdoor showers (complete with puku-skull towel rails) and expansive balconies. There's a small open lounge and bar area with a curved infinity pool below and a deck for wildlife watching. And the views are incredible: the plains stretch on for miles and there's so much wildlife on display you could easily forgo the safari drive and just get comfortably sozzled in the pool while watching the elephants prance around in front of you.

Mfuwe Lodge (254041; www.mfuwelodge.com; US\$295; (C) This lodge was rebuilt in 1998 and the results are impressive: a central restaurant and bar area, with a gigantic thatched roof and open sides, leading out onto a deck with swimming pool and splendid views over a lagoon. The hotel-standard rooms in the cottages (each cater for two or three people) have private verandas and fab bathrooms, with floor to ceiling windows and bathtubs with views of the river.

All the lodges/camps and camping grounds provide meals. There are also a couple of basic eateries in Mfuwe village. Moondog Café, next to the airport has a small menu of standard café food such as burgers, samosas and fish cakes, but the small portions are not particularly good value. **Cobra Resthouse** (meals US\$2.50-4) offers cheap Zambian stews, burgers and breakfasts.

ZAMBIA

Getting There & Away

Most people reach South Luangwa by air. Mfuwe (Masumba) airport is about 20km southeast of Mfuwe Gate and served by chartered flights from Lusaka and, occasionally, from Lilongwe (Malawi). **Zambian Airways** (**¹**01-256586/7, 01-271142) offers regular flights between Lusaka and Mfuwe every day except Monday for US\$200 one way.

To get to Mfuwe Gate and the surrounding camps you're better off in a 4WD. In the dry season the dirt road is usually poor and the drive takes about three hours. In the wet season, however, the drive can take all day (or be impassable), so seek advice before setting off.

Minibuses leave when the are very full one or two times a day between Chipata and Mfuwe village. Fares are squarely priced for foreigners (about US\$8). You'd be wise to offer some extra kwacha to the minibus driver to take you on to one of the camp sites near Mfuwe Gate.

LUANGWA BRIDGE

The Great East Road crosses the Luangwa River on a large suspension bridge about halfway between Lusaka and Chipata. The nearby

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settlement of Luangwa Bridge serves as an ideal place to break up a journey. Luangwa Bridge Camp (🖻 873 763981315; bridgecamp@amosconnect .com; camp site per person US\$5, s/d chalets without bathroom US\$15/25; 🔊) is on the western side of the river, about 3km south of the main road. This is an excellent place to base yourself for a couple of days of rest and relaxation. It features clean ablution blocks, cooking facilities and shady lawns, as well as a bar, restaurant and plunge pool. Short and long hikes and canoe trips can be arranged at the camp.

1062 NORTHERN ZAMBIA •• Mpulungu

Get off any bus between Lusaka and Chipata at the place called 'Luangwa station', from where it's a 3km walk to the camp.

NORTHERN ZAMBIA

MPULUNGU

eastern, central and southern Africa. Although it's always very hot, don't be tempted to swim in the lake because there are a few crocs. Tanganyika Lodge (2 455130; camp site per person US\$5, chalets without bathroom per person US\$12-15) is in a superb spot about 6km west along the lake. A bar and restaurant are attached, and staff can help arrange fishing boats to Kalambo Falls. Look for the signpost along the main road about 5km before town. Otherwise, jump in any taxi boat going towards Kasakalbwe village from near the Mpulungu market.

Isanga Bay Lodge (🖻 096 646991, 096 646992; www .isangabay.com; chalets per person from US\$40) is a beautiful Robinson Crusoe-esque lodge, perfect for a few days of snorkelling, water-skiing, beach volleyball or just plain lazing. Road access is possible with a 4WD, and boat transfers from Mpulungu are possible for \$80 per round trip.

Most buses/minibuses tie in with the Lake Tanganyika ferry. To/from Lusaka, RPS buses (US\$20, 18 hours) travel three times a week via Kasama and Mbala. Alternatively, take the Tazara train to Kasama, from where minibuses leave when bursting. Minibuses also depart from near the BP petrol station in Mpulungu for Mbala.

AROUND MPULUNGU Kalambo Falls

About 40km northwest of Mbala, and along the border between Zambia and Tanzania, is the 221m-high Kalambo Falls (admission free;

permanently open). Kalambo is the second-highest single-drop waterfall in Africa; from spectacular viewpoints near the top of the falls, you can see the Kalambo River plummeting off a steep V-shaped cliff cut into the Great Rift Valley escarpment into a deep valley, which then winds down towards Lake Tanganyika.

There is nowhere to stay, so you'll have to day-trip from Mbala. If you don't have a vehicle, ask around the Old Soldier's Restaurant in Mbala (see below), where someone will take you for a negotiable US\$20 to US\$30 per person return. Many visitors also arrive by boat from Mpulungu.

MBALA **a** 04

Mbala is a small town perched on the edge of the Great Rift Valley from where the road north drops over 1000m in less than 40km down to Mpulungu and Lake Tanganyika. All buses/minibuses travelling between Mpulungu and Kasama stop in Mbala.

The Moto Moto Museum (admission US\$5: 19 9am-4.45pm), about 3km out of town, showcases a huge and fascinating collection of artefacts, focusing on the cultural life of the Bemba people of the surrounding area. The Grasshopper Inn ((2) 04-450589; s/d US\$7/10) has simple, clean rooms and Old Soldier's Restaurant (meals about US\$1.50), along the main street, offers good company and helpful information about local attractions

KASAMA **a** 04

Kasama is the capital of the Northern Province and the cultural centre for the Bemba people. You might find yourself stuck here overnight if you're travelling between Lusaka and Mpulungu, or getting off the Tazara train before exploring the north. Places to stay include the Thorn Tree Guesthouse (221615; www .thorntreesafaris.com; 612 Zambia Rd; s US\$20, d US\$30) near the Heritage Centre, which offers comfortable rooms (all with breakfast) in lush and colourful gardens, and the Elizabeth Guesthouse (s/d without bathroom US\$6/12) near the Tazara station.

SHIWA NG'ANDU **a** 04

The vast estate of Shiwa Ng'andu (www.shiwangan du.com; tours US\$20; 🕑 9am-11am Mon-Sat, 10am-11am Sun) was established in the 1920s by British aristocrat Stewart Gore-Brown. At its heart is Shiwa House, a splendid English-style mansion as described in The Africa House by Christina Lamb (see p1069).

Kapishya Hot Springs is about 20km west of Shiwa House, but still on the Shiwa Ng'andu estate. The setting is simply marvellous - a blue-green steaming lagoon surrounded by palms - and the springs are bath-water hot. It is possible to stay next to the springs at Kapishya Lodge (🖻 01-229261; www.shiwasafaris.com; camp site per person US\$10, self-catering chalets per person US\$60, incl meals & activities US\$130), and rather grand accommodation is also available at Shiwa House (www.shiwangandu.com; incl meals from US\$350) itself.

To reach Shiwa House, head along the highway by bus (or car) from Mpika for about 90km towards Chiosso. Look for the signpost to the west, from where a dirt road (13km) leads to the house. Kapishya Hot Springs and the Lodge are a further 20km along this track. There is no public transport along this last section, but vehicle transfers are available from the North Rd turnoff.

SAMFYA

Perched on the western shore of Lake Bangweulu, about 10km east of the main road between Mansa and Serenje, you'll find Samfya. This small trading centre and lake transport hub is small enough to get to know people and large enough to have rest houses, restaurants and bars. Just outside town is the majestic, sandy Cabana Beach. But stay away from the water; it may look inviting but it's full of crocs.

In Samfya, the Transport Hotel (s/d without bathroom US\$3/4, d with bathroom US\$10), at the port, offers basic rooms, whilst **Bangweulu Lodge** (camp site per person US\$5, s/d without bathroom US\$15/25) offers comfortable accommodation and a great camp site along Cabana Beach.

Samfya is regularly served by minibuses from Serenje. Buses between Lusaka and Mpulungu go via Serenje.

THE COPPERBELT

NDOLA & KITWE a 02

These two towns lie at the heart of the industrial Copperbelt region, and although not tourist attractions in themselves, you might find yourself passing through on the way to Chimfunshi Wildlife Orphanage.

In Ndola (population 500,000), the Royal Hotel (🖻 610331; royalhotel@zamnet.zm; Vitanda St; s/d inclbreakfast US\$33/60), though slightly dilapidated, is the best value in town. All rooms come with TV and bathroom. It's 1km north of the public bus station and 200m southwest of the train station.

In Kitwe (population 700,000) the YMCA (2 / fax 218108; Independence Ave; d with/without US\$30/20), located one and a half kilometres north of the city centre, is a good choice - it's spotless and has cool blue satin blankets on every bed. Another good is Mukwa Lodge (224266; fax 230389; Mpezeni Ave; r with bathroom incl breakfast US\$100; 🔀 😰) with its 11 gorgeous rooms, modern courtyard and an aviary full of parrots and parakeets.

The bright yellow buses operated by Marks Motorways, as well as express buses operated by CR Carriers, leave daily from Lusaka to Kitwe via Ndola (US\$8, five hours). Slow, 'ordinary' trains to Ndola (US\$5.50 standard class, eight hours), via Kapiri Mposhi, depart Monday, Wednesday and Friday at about 10pm.

CHIMFUNSHI WILDLIFE ORPHANAGE

On a farm 70km northwest of Chingola is this magnificent chimpanzee sanctuary (2 311293; www.chimfunshi.org.za; admission US\$15; 🕑 10am-5pm), home to over 80 adult and young chimps confiscated from poachers and traders in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo and other parts of Africa. It's apparently the largest of its kind in the world. This is not a natural wildlife experience, but it's still fascinating to observe the chimps as they feed, play and socialise.

The sanctuary is not interested in mass tourism, so only small numbers of visitors are allowed at any one time. And do not come if you're sick in any way; the chimps can easily die of a disease like the flu. Visitors can stay at the camp site (US\$5 per person) or dormitory (US\$20) at the education centre, which has self-catering facilities. Bookings are essential through accommodation manager, Sylvia Jones (2svlvia@bushmail.net).

By car, take the Solwezi Rd for about 100km northwest from Kitwe (the road passes Chingola), then turn right at the signposted junction and follow it for 19km. Buses between Chingola and Solwezi can drop you off at the junction, from where you'll have to hike to the sanctuary.

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SOUTHEASTERN ZAMBIA

Siavonga is the main town and resort along the Zambian side of Lake Kariba. Just a few kilometres from the massive Kariba Dam, Siavonga is a quiet and low-key village. From here you can arrange houseboat trips on Lake Kariba and canoeing safaris on the Zambezi River.

Tours (free, but donations welcome) of Kariba Dam are run by the dam authorities. These tours can be arranged through your hotel/lodge. If you visit the dam, make sure you tell the Zambian immigration officers if you're not going on to Zimbabwe.

Leisure Bay Lodge also rents out **canoes** (per person per hr k25,000) and **Vundu Adventure** (2009) 485208), also based there, runs one-to-six-day camping canoe tours of the lake and river (US\$75 to US\$530 per person).

Eagles Rest (511168; www.eaglesrestresort.com; camp site per person US\$11, chalets US\$50; (2) has twelve chalets overlooking the lake, with meals available in the restaurant. The camp site is secluded and shady. There's a nice sandy beach; just don't go in the lake, as the crocs would love to eat you. **Leisure Bay Lodge** ((a) /fax 511136; s/d ind breakfast US\$60/80; (2) (a) faces a beach along the lakeshore. It is by far the best value in Siavonga, although the food is nothing to write home about. Guests can pre-order meals (US\$10). Note that the beach is sometimes commandeered by resident hippos!

Minibuses from Lusaka (US\$10, three hours) leave when bursting to capacity for Siavonga and the nearby border. For the adventurous, a local ferry runs Tuesdays between Siavonga and Chipepo (US\$11 one way, 12 hours). Check at the ferry jetty in Siavonga about the current timetable (if there is one).

LOWER ZAMBEZI NATIONAL PARK

The best wildlife viewing is on the flood plain and along the river itself, so **boat rides** are a major feature of all camps and lodges. Seeing groups of elephant swim across the river could be the highlight of your trip.

The main entrance is at **Chongwe Gate** along the southwestern boundary, though there are gates along the northern and eastern boundaries for hardy travellers.

Sleeping

Community Campsite (campsite US\$5) A basic place a few kilometres before Chongwe Gate. It's mainly set up for travellers with their own vehicles. Run by local people, the modest profits are put back into the community.

Nvuu Lodge (South Africa 27-16-9871837; www.mvuu lodge.com; safari tents d/tw both \$100) This lodge has comfortable tented rooms overlooking the Zambezi River with balconies and sandy outdoor fireplaces that are lit outside your tent every night. The food is good and the hosts are super-friendly.

Kaylia Lodge (a 3320606; www.safpar .com; ind meals US\$250; () A beautiful lodge with en-suite chalets smack bang on the river. The ordinary chalets are nice enough, but the best is the tree-house suite – a chalet accessed by ladder, high up in a sausage tree, with a massive shower room constructed around its base. The dining and bar area has one of the funkiest toilets around, built inside the hollow of a baobab tree – great fun, and you'll also have the odd bat for company.

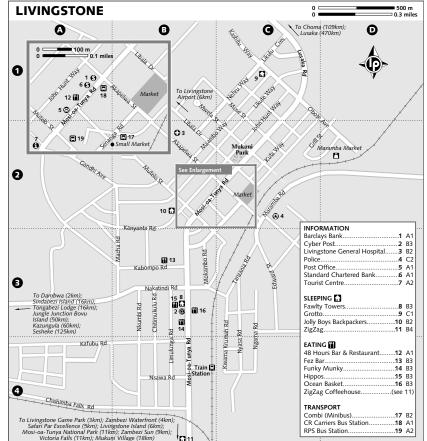
Getting There & Away

There's no public transport to Chongwe Gate, nor anything to the eastern and northern boundaries, and hitching is very difficult. Most people visit the park on an organised tour, and/or stay at a lodge that offers wildlife drives and boat rides as part of the deal.

SOUTHWESTERN ZAMBIA

LIVINGSTONE & VICTORIA FALLS

When an awestruck David Livingstone first saw Victoria Falls in 1855, he wrote in his journal 'on sights as beautiful as this, angels in their flight must have gazed'. He named the falls after the queen of England at the time, but



they were (and still are) known as Mosi-oa-Tunya in the Kololo language - 'The Smoke that Thunders'. While Zimbabwe struggles to maintain its crumbling infrastructure, the recent tourist swing to Livingstone and the Zambian side of the falls has initiated a construction boom in the area. Local business owners are riding the tourism wave straight to the bank, and the Zambezi waterfront is rapidly being developed as one of the most exclusive destinations in southern Africa. The town abounds with hotels, restaurants and bars catering to budget and well-to-do travellers alike, and there are enough adrenaline activities on offer to make you think twice about leaving town immediately after stopping to see the falls.

Information EMERGENCY

Livingstone General Hospital ((2) 321475) Located on Akapelwa St. Police ((2) 320116; Maramba Rd)

INTERNET ACCESS

 $\mbox{Cyber Post}$ (216 Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd; per hr US\$4) Offers internet access, international phone calls and faxes.

MONEY

Barclays Bank (cnr Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd & Akapelwa St) and **Standard Chartered Bank** (Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd) accept major brands of travellers cheques, offer cash advances on Visa and MasterCard, and change money. lonelyplanet.com

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POST

 $\ensuremath{\text{Post Office}}$ (Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd) Has a poste restante and fax service.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Dangers & Annoyances

Don't walk from town to the falls as there have been a number of muggings along this stretch of road – even tourists on bicycles have been attacked.

Sights

If it isn't already there, put Victoria Falls at the top of your sightseeing itinerary. This waterfall is simply spectacular and must be seen, felt and heard to be understood. You can see the falls up close at the Victoria Falls section of **Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park** (admission US\$10; 🟵 6am-6pm). The entrance is just before the Zambian border post. Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park also has a small wildlife reserve, **Mosi-oa-Tunya Game Park** (admission US\$3; 🏵 6am-6pm), which has a good selection of animals including giraffes, zebras, antelopes and a few heavily guarded rhinos.

Another top attraction in the area is **Livingstone Island**, which is where the famous explorer caught his first glimpse of the falls. The island is located in the middle of the Zambezi River at the top of the falls, so you can literally hang your feet off the edge. Tours to the falls (from US\$45) can be arranged at your hotel or hostel.

Mukuni Village (admission US\$3; \bigcirc dawn-dusk) is a 'traditional' Leva village that welcomes tourists on guided tours. Although the village can be inundated with tourists at times, the admission fee does fund community projects.

Activities

Adrenaline junkies of the world unite – if you've got the cash, they've got the fix. See opposite for a list of companies who can hook you up with your adventure of choice.

Spend the day scrambling up rocks, abseiling down cliffs and swinging across canyons in the scenic Batoka Gorge. Half-/full-day **abseiling** excursions cost from US\$80/100. Tackling the third-highest **bungee jump** in the world (111m) costs a mere US\$90 (US\$130 for tandem).

High-water rafting runs through Rapids 11 to 18 (or 23), which are relatively mundane and can be done between 1 July and 15 August, though in high rainfall years they may begin as early as mid-May. Wilder low-water runs operate from roughly 15 August to late December, taking in the winding 22km from rapids four to 18 (or 23) if you put in on the Zimbabwean side, and from Rapids one to 18 (or 23) if you put in on the Zambian side. Half-/full-day trips cost about US\$110/125, and overnight trips about US\$165. Longer jaunts can also be arranged. Although most travellers are set on rafting the Zambezi, there are plenty of thrills to be had by **canoe** or **kayak**; half-/full-day trips along the Zambezi cost from US\$60/75; overnight jaunts cost about US\$150, and threenight trips start at US\$300.

What about lying on a boogie board and careering down the rapids? 'Waterfall surfing', as it's sometimes called, costs from US\$135/150 for a half/full day. The best time of year for **river-boarding** is February to June. Why avoid whirlpools in a raft when you can drive straight into them in a **jet boat**? This hairraising trip costs US\$90, and is combined with a **cable-car ride** down into the Batoka Gorge.

The aptly named 'Flight of the Angels' is a 15-minute **helicopter joy ride** (US\$90) over the falls, or 30 minutes (US\$180) across the falls and Zambezi National Park. Motorised hang-gliders offer the best views from the air, and the pilot will take pictures for you with a camera fixed to the wing. **Microlight/Ultralight flights** cost about US\$85/104 (15 minutes) over the falls and about US\$160/185 (30 minutes) over the falls and Zambezi National Park.

It's easy enough to spot wildlife from a boat, though some passengers seem more interested in the free drinks. **River cruises** along the Zambezi range from civilised jaunts on the 'African Queen' to full on, all-you-can-drink booze cruises. Prices range from US\$30 to US\$60. A guided **wildlife safari drive** in Mosioa-Tunya Game Park will maximise your chances of a face-to-face encounter with one of the few remaining white rhinos in Zambia. Game drives cost around US\$45. Live out your wildest African dreams on an **elephantbacksafari** through the bush. A half-day excursion costs US\$120 plus US\$10 for park fees.

Appreciate the beauty and grandeur of Mother Nature by burning litres upon litres of her precious natural resources – a one-hour **quadbiking** spin costs US\$60.

Tours

Below is a list of well-established and reputable travel and adventure operators. Keep in mind however that this list is by no means comprehensive, and that the industry is changing rapidly. Note the majority of companies do not have offices, and instead work in conjunction with larger tour operators, booking agencies, hotels and hostels.

jump over the Victoria Falls bridge.

Batoka Sky (a 323672; www.batokasky.com) Specialises in flights over the falls.

Bundu Adventures (**a** 324407; www.bunduadventu res.com) Offers river-boarding and rafting.

Bwaato Adventures (a 324227; bwaato@zamnet.zm) Runs wildlife drives and walks.

Jet Extreme (🗟 321375; www.jetextreme.com) Does jet-boating in the Batoka Gorge.

Makora Quest (🖻 324574; quest@zamnet.zm) Organises tranquil canoeing trips in Klepper canoes.

Raft Extreme ((a) 323929; www.raftextreme.com) Offers river-boarding and rafting.

Safari Par Excellence (326629; www.safpar.com) Offers a variety of activities, though they're well regarded for their rafting trips.

Taonga Safaris ((2) 324081) Runs booze and sunset cruises.

Zambezi Elephant Trails (2 321629; www.zambezi safari.com) Specialises in elephant-back safaris.

Sleeping

Grotto (a 323929; grotto@zamnet.zm; 2 Maambo Way; camp site per person US\$3; **P**) This shady camp site, which is adjacent to a lovely colonial home and a manicured garden, caters mostly for overland trucks.

Jolly Boys Backpackers (2324229; www.backpack zambia.com; 34 Kanyanta Rd; camp site per person US\$4, dm/d from US\$6/25; P 2 2 2) The entire property, from the sunken pillow lounge to the lofty observation tower, was painstakingly designed by the fun-loving owners.

ZigZag (a 322814; www.zigzagzambia.com; Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd; s/d/fUS\$35/60/70; P () Cutesy rooms are well decorated with African paraphernalia, while the grounds feature a quaint coffee house (see below), a lovely swimming pool and a small craft shop.

Jungle Junction Bovu Îsland (323708; www.jungle junction.info; camp site per person US\$8-15, huts per person ind all meals US\$40-50; P P) Located on a lush island in the middle of the Zambezi, the Jungle Junction attracts travellers who want to do nothing more than lounge beneath the palm trees.

Eating & Drinking

48 Hours Bar & Restaurant (Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd; snacks/ mains US\$2-3) This unassuming spot serves up cheap eats and takeaway including burgers, meats and local dishes.

Funky Munky (216 Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd; snacks/mains US\$2-4) This laid-back bistro is a popular backpackers' hangout. Funky Monkey serves up salads, baguettes and pizzas in a comfortable setting.

Setting. **ZigZag Coffee House** (Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd; US\$3-5) This alluring coffee house offers a diverse range of dishes, from tacos to tandoori, and is ideal for a coffee or milk shake.

Fez Bar (Kabompo Rd; US\$3-6) This Moroccan inspired bar and lounge serves tasty and eclectic meals throughout the day, though things really get kicking here once the sun goes down.

Hippos (Limulunga Rd; mains US\$3-6) This raucous bar-cum-restaurant at the back of Fawlty Towers is housed underneath a soaring twostorey thatched roof.

Ocean Basket (82 Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd; US\$4-8) Sure, you're dining on seafood in a land-locked country, but the quality and selection here is surprisingly good.

Getting There & Away AIR

Nationwide Airlines (🗟 03-323360; www.flynation wide.co.za) Daily flights from Johannesburg to Livingstone (US\$195 one way).

South African Airways (C Lusaka-254350) Flies once a day from Johannesburg (US\$200 one way).

Zambian Airways (C Lusaka 271230) Flies daily from Lusaka (from US\$180 one way) and from Mfuwe (US\$300 one way).

BUS & TRAIN

RPS (Mutelo St) has two bus services a day to Lusaka (US\$8, seven hours). CR Carriers (cnr Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd & Akapelwa St) runs four services a day to Lusaka (US\$9, seven hours). Buses to Shesheke (US\$7, five hours) leave around 10am from Mingongo bus station next to the Catholic church at Dambwa village, 3km west of the town centre. Direct buses to Mongu (US\$11, nine hours) leave at midnight from Maramba market, though you might feel more comfortable catching a morning bus to Shesheke, and then transferring to a Mongu bus (US\$5, four hours). Combis to the Botswana border at Kazungula (US\$2.50, one hour) leave from Dambwa on Nakatindi road. The Zambezi Express leaves Livingstone for Lusaka (US\$4/5/7/8 for economy/standard/1st class/sleeper, 15 hours), via Choma, on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 7pm. Reservations are available at the train station (2 320001), signposted off Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd.

Getting Around

Livingstone Airport is located 6km northwest of town, and is easily accessible by taxi (US\$5 each way). Combis run regularly along Mosi-oa-Tunya Rd to Victoria Falls and the Zambian border (US\$0.50, 15 minutes). Taxis, which can be easily identified by their skyblue colour, cost about US\$4.

MONGU

a 07

The largest town in Barotseland, and the capital of Western Province, Mongu is spread out, but boasts a pleasant lively feel, so a walk along the main street is always interesting. Around the **harbour** is a fascinating settlement of reed-and-thatch buildings, where local fishermen sell their catch, and passenger boats take people to outlying villages.

Mongu really comes alive once a year, when thousands of people flock here for the Ku'omboka ceremony held annually in March or early April. This colourful ceremony takes place when the king of the Lozi people moves from his dry-season palace out on the plains to his wet-season palace on higher ground. The king is transported to higher ground on a decorated river barge. The wet-season palace is at Limulunga, about 20km north of Mongu, where you'll find a museum containing exhibits about the Lozi people and the Ku'omboka ceremony.

Lyamba Hotel (21138; Lusaka Rd; d incl breakfast US\$15), 1.2km west of the public bus station and past the post office, is a little bit run-down, but is good value, and guests can enjoy fine views from the garden. Mongu Lodge (221501; Mwanawina St; d without bathroom US\$30, d with bathroom & air-con US\$60, all incl breakfast; 🕄) is located just south of the Lyamba. It's worth paying extra for the renovated rooms with a bathroom and air-con.

Several companies offer buses between Lusaka and Mongu (US\$10, 12 hours) at least every day. A bus travels between Livingstone and Mongu (US\$10, 10 hours) twice a week via Sesheke, Kalongola and Senanga. Minibuses and pick-ups leave on a fill-up-and-go basis from near the Caltex filling station in Mongu for Senanga (US\$4, three hours), from where minibuses head to Sesheke.

ZAMBIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

There isn't a great range of budget accommodation on offer in Zambia. The widest choice is in Livingstone, but Lusaka also has a couple of backpackers' hostels. However, there are plenty of cheap local guesthouses throughout the country. Most towns will also have one or two midrange accommodation options, with en-suite rooms going for around US\$40 to US\$50 per double.

All national parks have expensive privately operated lodges and 'camps' which will set you back around US\$200 or more per person per night. These rates usually include all meals, drinks and activities, such as wildlife drives

ACTIVITIES

Companies in Livingstone offer a bewildering array of activities, such as white-water rafting, river-boarding and bungee jumping. The less adventurous may want to try some hiking and horse riding. Canoeing is also a great way to explore the Zambezi River and can be arranged in Siavonga (or Kariba in Zimbabwe).

Many tour companies in Livingstone offer short wildlife drives in Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park near Victoria Falls, while companies in Lusaka and Livingstone can also arrange longer wildlife safaris to more remote national parks.

PRACTICALITIES

- The metric system is used in Zambia.
- Electricity supply is 220V to 240V/50Hz and plugs are of the British three-prong variety.
- The Daily Times and Daily Mail are dull, government-controlled rags. The Independent Post (www.postzambia.com), featuring a column by Kenneth Kaunda, continually needles the government.
- Monthly Lowdown magazine (www.lowdown.co.zm; k3000) has useful information for visitors such as restaurant reviews and lists of upcoming events in the capital, as well as handy adverts for package deals for lodges around Zambia. Semi-annual Kapaso magazine (k5000) is the Copperbelt's answer to Lowdown.
- Both of the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) radio stations can be heard nationwide; they play Western and African music, as well as news and chat shows in English.

BOOKS

The Africa House, by Christina Lamb, tells the story of Stewart Gore-Brown and his grand plans for a utopian fiefdom in a remote part of Zambia during the 1920s. His country mansion at Shiwa Ng'andu is still standing (see p1062).

Although a personalised selection of observations on wildlife and humans, Kakuli, by Norman Carr, also raises deeper issues and suggests some practical solutions to current conservation problems. The author spent a lifetime working with animals and people in the South Luangwa National Park.

Zambia, by Richard Vaughan, is a highly recommended coffee-table book with superb photographs. It covers the magnificent landscape and wildlife, but also the less 'touristy' aspects, such as city life and mining.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Generally, Zambia is very safe, though in the cities and tourist areas there is always a chance of being targeted by muggers or con-artists. As always, you can reduce the risk considerably by being sensible.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Zambian Embassies & Consulates

Zambia has high commissions in Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Zambian embassies and high commissions are located in Angola, Kenya and Tanzania, as well as in the following countries:

Belgium (2 02-343 5649; embassyofzambia@skynet.be; 469 Ave Moliere, 1060 Brussels)

Germany (🖻 030-2062940; www.sambia-botschaft.de; Axel-Springer-Strasse 154A, 10117 Berlin)

Sweden (🖻 08-6799040; www.zambiaembassy.se; Engelbrektsgatan 7, Stockholm)

UK (2 020-7589 6655; www.zhcl.org.uk; 2 Palace Gate, London W8 5NG)

USA (🖻 202-265 9717; www.zambiaembassy.org; 2419 Massachusetts NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Zambia

The following countries have embassies or high commissions in Lusaka (area code ⁽²⁾ 01). The British High Commission looks after the interests of Aussies and Kiwis, since the nearest diplomatic missions for Australia and New Zealand are in Harare (Zimbabwe). Most consulates are open 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.30am to 12.30pm Friday, though visas are usually only dealt with in the mornings.

Canada (250833; fax 254176; 5119 United Nations Ave)

France (251322; fax 254475; 74 Independence Ave, Cathedral Hill)

Germany (250644; 5209 United Nations Ave)

Malawi (🖻 096 437573; fax 260225; 31 Bishops Rd, Kabulonga)

Mozambique (🖻 220333; fax 220345; 9592 Kacha Rd, off Paseli Rd)

Namibia (🕿 260407/8; fax 263858; 30B Mutende Rd, Woodlands)

Netherlands (🖻 253819; fax 253733; 5208 United Nations Ave)

South Africa (🖻 260349; 26D Cheetah Rd, Kabulonga) Tanzania (🖻 253223/4; fax 254861; 5200 United Nations Ave)

UK (251133; fax 251923; 5210 Independence Ave) USA (a 250955; cnr Independence & United Nations

Aves) Zimbabwe (254006; fax 254046; 11058 Haile Selassie Ave)

HOLIDAYS

During the following public holidays, most businesses and government offices are closed:

New Year's Day 1 January Youth Day Second Monday in March Easter March/April – Good Friday, Saturday & Easter Monday Labour/Workers' Day 1 May

Africa (Freedom) Day 25 May Heroes' Day First Monday in July **Unity Day** First Tuesday in July Farmers' Day First Monday in August Independence Day 24 October Christmas Day 25 December Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

There are internet centres in Lusaka, Livingstone and Chipata. Access at internet centres is cheap - about US\$1.50 for 30 minutes - but irritatingly slow at times.

LANGUAGE

Of the 70 languages and dialects spoken in Zambia, seven are recognised by the government as official 'special languages'. These include Bemba (mainly spoken in the north); Tonga (in the south); Nyanja (in the east), which is similar to Chichewa spoken in Malawi; and Lozi (in the west).

As a lingua franca, and the official, national language, English is widely spoken across Zambia.

MEDIA

The Daily Times, Daily Mail and Post are the main national daily newspapers. Major international papers and magazines are also available in bookshops in Lusaka. The Lowdown magazine has news and information on events around Lusaka, and other useful tourist information.

MONEY

Zambia's unit of currency is the kwacha (k), sometimes listed as 'ZMK' (Zambian kwacha) or 'kw'. Inflation is high in Zambia, and due to elections in late 2006 and the skyrocketing price of copper, some prices are quoted in kwacha and others in US dollars (US\$), as different businesses base their rates on the different currencies.

In the cities and larger towns, you can change cash and travellers cheques at branches

find in all cities and larger towns.

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POST

Postcards and normal letters (under 20g) cost US\$0.90 to send to Europe and US\$1.10 to the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Sending international letters from Lusaka is surprisingly quick (three or four days to Europe), but from elsewhere in the country it's less reliable and much slower.

TELEPHONE

Public phones operated by Zamtel use tokens, which are available from post offices (US\$0.15) or local boys (US\$0.30) hanging around phone booths. These tokens last three minutes, but are only good for calls within Zambia. Phone booths operated by Tele2africa use phone cards (from US\$7), available from post offices and grocery shops; these phone cards can be used for international calls. But it's often easier to find a 'phone shop' or 'fax bureau', from where all international calls cost about US\$4 per minute.

Mobile Phones

MTN, Celtel and Zamcell all offer mobile (cell) phone networks. If you own a GSM phone, you can buy a SIM card for US\$5 without a problem, and top-up cards are widely available. Numbers starting with 2095, ⓐ 096, ⓐ 097 and ⓐ 099 are mobile phone numbers.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Zambia National Tourist Board (ZNTB: www.zambia tourism.com) has two international offices: in the UK (🖻 020-7589 6655; zntb@aol.com; 2 Palace Gate, Kensington, London W8 5NG) and in South Africa (🖻 012-326 1847; zahpta@mweb.co.za; 589 Ziervogel St, Arcadia, Pretoria). The official ZNTB website is outstanding and provides links to dozens of lodges, hotels and tour agencies.

VISAS

All foreigners visiting Zambia need visas, but for most nationalities tourist visas are available at major borders, airports and sea ports. But it's important to note that you should have a Zambian visa before arrival if travelling by train or boat from Tanzania.

Citizens of South Africa and Zimbabwe can obtain visas on arrival for free. For all other nationalities, tourist visas are issued on arrival, but cost about US\$25 for a transit visa (valid for seven days), US\$25/40 for a single-/double-entry visa (valid for three months) and US\$100 for a multiple-entry visa (valid for three years). Brits, however, are slugged for transit/single/double/multiple-entry visas US\$60/60/80/80.

Visas for Onward Travel

It's always best to visit any embassy or high commission in Lusaka between 9am and noon from Monday to Friday.

Visas for Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania and Botswana are easy to obtain on arrival at the borders of these countries for most visitors. However, if you're travelling by train or boat to Tanzania, check with the Tanzanian high commission in Lusaka about whether you need a visa beforehand. If so, three-month visas cost from US\$25 to US\$50 (depending on your nationality). You cannot obtain a visa for Namibia at the border; tourist visas are either free or cost US\$30, depending on your nationality, in Lusaka. For Mozambique, transit visas (valid for seven days) cost US\$11, single-entry visas (for one month) cost US\$20, and multiple-entry visas (for three months) cost US\$40.

TRANSPORT IN ZAMBIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Zambia's main borders are open from 6am to 6pm except for those at Victoria Falls, which close at 8pm and Chirundu, which closes at 7pm.

Air

Zambia's main international airport is in Lusaka, though some international airlines fly to the airport at Livingstone (for Victoria Falls), Mfuwe (for the South Luangwa National Park) and Ndola. The major domestic and international carrier is Zambian Airways (www.zambian airways.com). Zambia is well connected to the region. Zambian Airways flies daily between Lusaka and Harare (Zimbabwe; US\$155/305 one way/return), while Air Zimbabwe (www.airzim .co.zw) also flies to Lusaka (US\$150/295) from Harare on the way to Nairobi (Kenya) each Thursday.

DEPARTURE TAX

The departure tax for all international flights is US\$20. The departure tax for domestic flights is US\$5. These taxes are not included in the price of your airline ticket and must be paid at the airport (in US dollars only).

Air Malawi connects Lusaka with Lilongwe (Malawi) three times a week (US\$150/200) and with Blantyre (Malawi; US\$185/299) twice a week. Comair (a subsidiary of British Airways) and South African Airways both fly daily between Lusaka and Johannesburg (South Africa) for about US\$200/295.

Nationwide Airlines (🖻 03-323360; www.flynation wide.co.za) has daily flights from Johannesburg to Livingstone, and South African Airways (🖻 in Lusaka 254350) connects Johannesburg with Lusaka (US\$155/300) and also flies into Livingstone (US\$200/395).

Land

BOTSWANA

Several minibuses leave Livingstone every day for the terminal used by the pontoon ferry to Kazungula (US\$4, 12 hours). The pontoon carries motorbikes/cars/4WDs for US\$5/15/20, while foot passengers are free. From the Botswana border, minibuses regularly leave for Kasane.

A quicker and more comfortable (but more expensive) way to reach Botswana from Zambia is to cross from Livingstone to Victoria Falls (in Zimbabwe), from where shuttle buses head to Kasane. From the Lusaka Inter-City Bus Terminal (Dedan Kimathi Rd) Seabelo Express has buses to Gaborone (US\$70, 22 hours), via Kasane and Francistown on Tuesday and Saturday.

MALAWI

Direct buses between Lusaka and Lilongwe are infrequent and slow, so it makes sense to do this trip in stages. From the BP petrol station on the main street in Chipata, regular minibuses (US\$2) run the 30km to the Zambian border. Once you've passed through Zambian customs, it's a few minutes walk to the Malawian entry post from where you can get a shared taxi to Mchinji for around US\$1.50 per person followed by a minibus to Lilongwe (US\$2).

MOZAMBIOUE

There is no public transport between Zambia and Mozambique and the only common border leads to a remote part of Mozambique. Most travellers, therefore, chose to visit Mozambique from Lilongwe in Malawi.

NAMIBIA

Every day, at least one bus and several minibuses leave Livingstone for Sesheke (US\$7, six hours). The bus may terminate in Sesheke or continue another 5km to the pontoon (car ferry). The pontoon carries motorbikes/cars/4WDs for US\$10/20/30, while foot passengers travel for free. If the pontoon isn't operating, foot passengers pay about US\$1.50 to cross by dugout canoe, and vehicles are stuck at the border.

From the Namibian side, it's a 5km walk to Katima Mulilo, from where minibuses depart for other parts of Namibia.

Alternatively, cross from Livingstone to Victoria Falls (in Zimbabwe) and catch a shuttle bus to Windhoek (Namibia).

SOUTH AFRICA

ZAMBIA

For South Africa, City to City has buses every day to Johannesburg (26 hours). Chat Boeing travels to Jo'burg four days per week, but their buses are not as comfortable as those offered by City to City, though tickets are slightly cheaper. In addition, the reliable Translux buses travel to Jo'burg twice a week. All buses between Lusaka and Jo'burg travel via Harare, Masvingo and Pretoria.

TANZANIA

Boat

The MV Liemba leaves from Mpulungu harbour every Friday, arriving in Kigoma, Tanzania on Sunday. Fares for 1st, 2nd and economy class are ÚS\$60/45/35. Visas can be issued on the ferry and cost US\$50.

Bus

Services to Dar es Salaam from Lusaka (US\$35, 24 hours) run once or twice a week, but aren't very reliable. Alternatively, walk across the border from Nakonde, and take a minibus from Tunduma to Mbeya in Tanzania.

Train

The Tazara railway company usually operates two international trains per week between Kapiri Mposhi (207km north of Lusaka) and Dar es Salaam. The 'express train' (42 to 45 hours)

leaves Kapiri Mposhi at 4pm on Tuesday and Friday, while the 'interstate train' (50 to 52 hours) leaves Kapiri Mposhi at noon on Friday. The fares on both trains are US\$60/50/35 in 1st/2nd/3rd class (1st and 2nd class are sleeping compartments). A discount of 50% is possible with a student card.

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ZIMBABWE

To Zimbabwe, take any bus going to South Africa. If you're travelling from Siavonga, take a minibus or charter a car to the border, and walk (or take a shared taxi) across the impressive Kariba Dam to Kariba, from where buses leave daily to Harare.

GETTING AROUND Air

The main domestic airports are at Lusaka, Livingstone, Ndola, Kitwe, Mfuwe, Kasama and Kasaba Bay, though dozens of minor airstrips cater for chartered planes.

AIRLINES IN ZAMBIA

Scheduled internal flights are offered by Zambian Airways (256586-8; www.zambianairways.com), Proflight Air Services (271139; www.proflight-zambia .com) and occasionally, South African Airlink (www .saairlink.co.za). Tickets can be booked through any travel agent in Zambia. The schedule for Zambian Airways includes the following:

Flights between	Frequency	Fare (US\$)
Lusaka & Livingstone	daily	180
Lusaka & Mfuwe	daily	200
Lusaka & Ndola	daily	130

Bus & Minibus

Distances are long, buses are often slow and many roads are badly potholed, so travelling around Zambia by bus and minibus can exhaust even the hardiest of travellers, even those who do like a good butt massage.

All main routes are served by ordinary public buses, which run on a fill-up-and-go basis or have fixed departures (these are called 'time buses'). 'Express buses' are faster - often terrifyingly so - and stop less often, but cost about 15% more. In addition, several private companies run comfortable European-style express buses along the major routes. Many routes are also served by minibuses, which only leave when full. In remote areas the only public transport is often a truck or pick-up.

Car & Motorcycle

Cars can be rented from international and Zambian-owned companies in Lusaka, Livingstone, Kitwe and Ndola, but renting is expensive. For example, Voyagers/Imperial Car Rental (www.voyagerszambia.com/imperialrates.htm) charges from US\$51 per day for the smallest vehicle, plus US\$0.38 per kilometre (less per day for longer rental periods). Other companies, such as 4x4 Hire Africa (www.4x4hireafrica.com), rent oldschool LandRover Discovery vehicles, fully decked out with everything you'd need for trip to the bush, with prices starting at US\$120 per day, though hiring a private driver will cost US\$100 extra per day.

Most companies insist that drivers are at least 23 years old and have held a licence for at least five years; you can drive in Zambia using your driving licence from home as long as it's in English.

While most main stretches of sealed road are excellent, beware of the occasional pothole. Most gravel roads are pretty good, though they also suffer from potholes. It is best to travel by 4WD if using a private vehicle.

Tours

Tours and safaris around Zambia invariably focus on the national parks. Since many of these parks are hard to visit without a vehicle,

joining a tour might be your only option anyway. Most Zambian tour operators are based in Lusaka (p1058) and Siavonga (p1064), as well as Livingstone (p1067).

Train

The Tazara trains between Kapiri Mposhi and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania (see opposite) can also be used for travel to/from Northern Zambia. While the Lusaka-Kitwe service does stop at Kapiri Mposhi, the Lusaka-Kitwe and Tazara trains are not timed to connect with each other, and the domestic and international train terminals are 2km apart.

Zambia's only other railway services are the 'ordinary trains' between Lusaka and Kitwe, via Kapiri Mposhi and Ndola, and the 'express trains' between Lusaka and Livingstone. Refer to the relevant sections for schedules and costs.

CLASSES

On the 'express train' between Lusaka and Livingstone, a 'sleeper' is a compartment for two people; 1st class is a sleeper for four; 2nd (or 'standard') class is a sleeper for four; 2nd 3rd class (economy) is a seat only. On the 'ordinary train' between Lusaka and Kitwe, 'standard' class - the only class - is also just a seat.

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