



PDF

# Africa

## Country Coverage

At the time of research very few travellers were heading the countries listed below, so we're providing historical and cultural information rather than reviews and listings. A good source of information for on-the-ground travel in these countries is Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree on-line travel forum [www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree).

## Central Africa (PDF Chapter)

**Edition** 13th Edition, Nov 2013

**Pages** 26

**Page Range** 474-482, 516-419,  
539-542, 567-570, 652-255

## Useful Links

**Want more guides?**

[Head to our shop](#)

**Trouble with your PDF?**

[Trouble shoot here](#)

**Need more help?**

[Head to our FAQs](#)

**Stay in touch**

[Contact us here](#)

## COVERAGE INCLUDES:

- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Equatorial Guinea
- São Tomé & Príncipe
- Eritrea
- South Sudan

# Central Africa





# Central African Republic

## Includes ➔

Understand Central African Republic.....	475
Central African Republic Today .....	475
History.....	475
Culture.....	477
Environment.....	477

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Capital** Bangui
- ➔ **Population** 5.05 million
- ➔ **Languages** French (official), Sango (national)
- ➔ **Area** 622,984 sq km
- ➔ **Currency** Central African franc (CFA)
- ➔ **Visa requirements**  
Required by most visitors and should be obtained in advance. If there is no CAR embassy near you the French embassy will issue CAR visas.
- ➔ **Tourist information** [www.centrafricaine.info](http://www.centrafricaine.info)

## Jungle, Elephants & Lowland Gorillas

Central African Republic (CAR) is a country with staggering rare natural beauty and some of the world's most amazing wildlife. It's one of the best places in Africa for encounters with forest elephants and lowland gorillas, and the best place in the world, some say, to see butterflies. It's also one of the most impoverished and least developed countries on the continent.

For centuries CAR has endured rapacity from colonisers and then from its own leaders in collusion with former colonisers. Yet the people of this plundered nation are open and friendly; and their conversations are more full of hope than despair.

CAR is landlocked, its border crossings can be difficult and dangerous, and flights are expensive and infrequent. At the time of writing most of the country was not considered stable or safe enough to travel through. Whatever you do, check the situation with your embassy before attempting to visit.

## Central African Republic Top Sights

- ➔ **Dzanga-Sangha Reserve** Get up close to lowland gorillas and elephants in this little-visited pocket of virgin rainforest
- ➔ **Bangui** Sip beer on the banks of the Oubangi River in the country's capital and largest city
- ➔ **Bayanga** Go out on a hunting trip with the BaAka (a pygmy tribe) from this village outside the Dzanga-Sangha Reserve

# UNDERSTAND CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

## Central African Republic Today

General François Bozizé won some 60% of the vote in elections held in 2011, which the opposition denounced as fraudulent. Today the government still controls less than half the country.

## History

Although stone tools provide evidence of human life from 6000 BC, the most notable ancients resided around present-day Bouar some 2500 years ago. Little is known about them, though it must have been a highly organised civilisation because it left behind about 70 groups of megaliths, some weighing three or four tonnes. The present cultures most likely arrived in the 15th century, probably fleeing Arab slave traders, but by the 18th century they, too, were sending their captives across the Sahara to markets in Egypt or down the Congo River to the Atlantic Ocean. This industry, which didn't completely end until 1912, decimated entire cultures and largely depopulated the eastern half of the country.

## Colonial Days

France launched into CAR in 1885, finding a shattered society rich in agricultural potential and under the rule of Sudanese-born Sultan Rabah. France killed Rabah in 1900 and soon after consolidated its control of the country, which it divided into 17 parts that were offered 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. They resisted for decades, but opposition was eventually broken through a combination of French military action, famine and severe smallpox epidemics.

The first signs of nationalism sprang up after WWII via Barthélemy Boganda's Mouvement d'Evolution Sociale de l'Afrique Noire. In 1960, a year after Boganda was killed in a suspicious plane crash, his party forced the French to grant independence.

## 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 brutal regimes Africa has ever experienced. In one instance Bokassa



reportedly ordered the killing (some claim he participated) of schoolchildren who protested against expensive mandatory school uniforms made by a company owned by his wife.

France, coveting the uranium deposits at Bakouma and the abundant big-game hunting grounds near the Sudan border (personally sponsored by the former French president, Valéry 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. His final fantasy was to have himself crowned 'emperor' of a renamed Central African Empire in 1977. Despite the worldwide derision, France helped to fund much of his coronation's price tag of more than US\$20 million.

Such excess, together with the out-of-control violence, 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. Dacko did no better this time around and was overthrown again in 1981 and replaced by André Kolingba, who in 1986 created a one-party state that was also widely seen as corrupt. At this point 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 the palace he'd constructed at Berengo.

Kolingba's 12 years of absolute rule ended when he was defeated in presidential elections in 1993, held at the insistence of the US and France, and Ange-Félix Patassé became the leader of CAR's first real civilian government. Patassé immediately stacked the gov-

ernment with fellow ethnic group members, which prompted a 1996 army mutiny, led by officers from a southern ethnic group. The capital became a war zone, although a peace deal signed the next year was backed up by an 800-strong African peacekeeping mission, later replaced by UN forces. Patassé's 1999 re-election was followed by riots over government mismanagement and corruption in 2000 and attempted coups in 2001 and 2002.

Former army chief of staff General François Bozizé, who led the 2002 coup attempt, didn't stop fighting after Libyan forces sent to protect the regime thwarted his initial bid on Bangui. The next year, when Patassé made the familiar African mistake of popping out of the shop (for a state visit to Niger), Bozizé marched into the capital and made himself president. Patassé scooted off to exile in Togo. The euphoria was short-lived, however, as little changed under the Bozizé regime. He made the usual promise to hold elections, but abandoned the second part of the promise, not to stand himself. Bozizé won the election in 2005, though Patassé was not allowed to run.

After Bozizé came to power the safety situation in Bangui improved dramatically, as did the economy, but not much changed elsewhere. Fighting continued upcountry, and by the end of 2006 rebel attacks in the northeast and northwest forced some 300,000 people to flee their villages. In June 2008, after most rebel groups signed a peace agreement with the government, fighting slowed down considerably although it didn't stop. A unity government, including leaders of the main rebel groups, kicked off 2009; just a few months later rebel attacks were back on the increase, including by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of neighbouring Uganda, whose insurgency had spread to the wider region.

## COUNTRY COVERAGE & WARNING

At the time of research very few travellers were heading to CAR so we're providing historical and cultural information rather than reviews and listings.

While Bangui was secure (but not at the time of writing), and the southwest can be visited with extreme caution, the rest of the country remains largely lawless and potentially very dangerous since fighting continues between the government and various rebels. In 2013 African and United States troops were tracking the murderous Lord's Resistance Army, which had set up a base in the east of the country. Highway robbery is common.

Check the situation before travelling here. A good source of information for on-the-ground travel in CAR is Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree online travel forum [www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree). Another source of good internet-based information is [www.africas-eden.com/Central-African-Republic.asp](http://www.africas-eden.com/Central-African-Republic.asp).

## DZANGA-SANGHA RESERVE

Hoots and laughter rattled through the forest, flashes of colour flitted in and out of the shade and then a pathetic gurgled bleat indicated that the hunt had been a success and the BaAka, otherwise known as pygmies, would be eating blue duiker (a type of forest antelope) that night. Just a few kilometres away, in Bai Dzanga, dozens and dozens of lumbering elephants frolic and play in the sunshine of this forest clearing. Moving shyly through the shadows slinks a family of western lowland gorillas.

**Dzanga-Sangha National Park** ([www.dzanga-sangha.org](http://www.dzanga-sangha.org)) is even better than you dared hope Central Africa would be. This massive forest reserve, in the southwest corner of the Central African Republic, today sits at the heart of the newly created Unesco World Heritage-listed Sangha Trinational reserve. Neighbouring parks in the DRC and Cameroon make up the other two-thirds of this botanical hothouse, but of the three this would be the pick of the bunch. Sure the neighbouring parks might be a bit less disturbed by humans, but CAR's Dzanga-Sangha has huge concentrations of elephants. And then there are the chimpanzees and gorillas, both of which are found in impressive numbers; some of the gorillas are habituated to humans, meaning heart stopping close-up encounters. But a trip to Dzanga-Sangha is about more than just megafauna. It's about people as well and you can join the BaAka net hunting for forest antelopes or even spend days camping deep in the jungle with them.

This is the most organised and visitor friendly of the three parks, and has the best array of accommodation. You won't do much better than the South African-run **Sangha Lodge** ([www.sanghalodge.com](http://www.sanghalodge.com)), where delicious food, a peaceful location and comfortable cottages will keep any jungle explorer happy. The park authorities can organise all activities, including hunting trips with the BaAka, but for a more intensive immersion contact **Louis Sarno** ([akkaman11@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:akkaman11@yahoo.co.uk)), an American and author of *Song from the Forest: My Life Among the Ba-Benjelle Pygmies*.

Despite a ceasefire agreement the New Seleka rebel alliance swept into capital Bangui in March 2013, ousting President François Bozizé, who fled to neighbouring Cameroon.

## Culture

Half of Central Africans are Christian, 15% are Muslim and 35% have stuck wholly with traditional animistic convictions; these ancient customs still strongly influence most people's lives, regardless of their principal faith.

CAR encompasses over 80 ethnic groups, which can basically be grouped into riverine, grassland and forest cultures; the latter include the Aka people (pygmies, though they don't like that term; singular is MoAka, plural is BaAka). The Baya-Mandjia and Banda, originating in the western and central savannahs respectively, compose 75% of the population.

Some 70% of the population lives a rural existence, and subsistence agriculture remains the backbone of the economy. The same percentage lives on less than a dollar a day.

While rice and yam are sometimes available, Central Africans love their cassava, eating it at virtually every meal with a meat, fish or vegetable sauce. Koko, which is a

little like eating grass (only it's pretty tasty), is another popular sauce ingredient. Bushmeat, particularly monkey, boar and antelope, is also common in markets and even on menus. Forest caterpillars are a popular treat during June. A dash of piment (hot sauce) is put on almost everything.

Palm wine is the most popular firewater in the south, while *bili-bili*, a sorghum-based alcohol, predominates in the north. Both are available in Bangui, but beer is king there.

## Environment

CAR, just a tad smaller than France, is landlocked smack bang in the middle of the continent. The country is one immense plateau varying in height mostly between 600m and 700m, tapering down to 350m in the far southwest. The closest thing to a real mountain is Mt Ngaoui, which at 1420m is the highest point in the country.

Often associated with the tropical rainforest found in the southwest, CAR is mainly covered by savannahs interspersed with rivers. Poaching is a huge problem and logging is on the increase, threatening CAR's standing as one of the last great wildlife refuges.





# Chad

## Includes ➔

Understand Chad .....	480
Chad Today .....	480
History .....	480
Culture .....	482
Food & Drink .....	482

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Capital** N'Djaména
- ➔ **Population** 10.9 million
- ➔ **Languages** French, Arabic and more than 120 local languages
- ➔ **Area** 1,284,000 sq km
- ➔ **Currency** Central African franc (CFA)
- ➔ **Visa requirements** Must be obtained before arrival from the nearest Chadian embassy or consulate

## Dramatic Moonscapes & Oasis Towns

Wave goodbye to your comfort zone and say hello to Chad. Put simply, Chad is a place and an experience that you'll never forget! If Ghana and Gambia are Africa for beginners, Chad is Africa for the hard core.

Travel here is tough. Many of the roads are broken due to years of conflict and lack of maintenance. There are few comfortable hotels and there is plenty of bureaucracy and demands for *cadeaux* (gifts) to negotiate. Added to that, the summer heat is mind-melting, travel costs can be astronomical and the security situation remains unpredictable.

So why bother, you may ask? Well, we could list the sublime oases lost in the northern deserts, tell you about the stampeding herds of wildlife in the national parks or the deep blue lure of a boat trip on Lake Chad. But let's be honest about it, these things alone aren't why people come to Chad. Chad offers an opportunity to break emphatically with a comfortable Western world and come to a place that promises experiences, good and bad, that you'll be recalling forever.

## Chad Top Sights

- ➔ **Zakouma National Park** Track herds of elephants and ogle dazzling birds in this sublime national park
- ➔ **Gaoui** Sigh over the beautiful painted houses of Gaoui, a fascinating village just minutes from N'Djaména
- ➔ **Sarh** See the green and pleasant side of sandy Chad and chill out along the Chari River
- ➔ **Guetè** Scan the horizon for egrets and hippos on Lake Chad, Africa's most mysterious lake
- ➔ **Bol** Get out on Lake Chad from this frontier market town
- ➔ **Ennedi** Marvel at dramatic desert scenery and rock formations





## UNDERSTAND CHAD

### Chad Today

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 President Déby broke this agreement at the start of 2006, there was virtually no change for average citizens in what Transparency International ranks as the most corrupt country in Africa.

From 2003 unrest in neighbouring Sudan's Darfur region spilled across the border, along with hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees. They have been joined by thousands of Chadians who are fleeing rebel fighting as well as violence between ethnic Arab and ethnic African Chadians.

Chad and Sudan accuse each other of backing and harbouring rebels, and the dispute led to severing of relations in 2006. However, since then, progress has been made towards normalising ties, with the two countries' presidents meeting for the first time in six years in 2010.

Chad's population is about 10 million with a growth rate of 3%. Around 64% of people live below the poverty line and the country is rated 175 out of 182 on the United Nations Development Program Human Development Index.

### History

Dominated historically by slave-trading Arab Muslims from the northern regions, Chad is

### COUNTRY COVERAGE & WARNING

At the time of research very few travellers were heading to Chad, so we're providing historical and cultural information rather than reviews and listings. Make no mistake, travelling in Chad is no walk in the park. There is rebel activity all across the south and southeast and the chances of further attacks on N'Djaména are high. All Western governments advise against travel to most of the country. Check the situation very carefully before coming here. A good source of information for on-the-ground travel in Chad is Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree online travel forum [www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree). Another source of good information is [www.chadnow.com](http://www.chadnow.com).

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. But by arresting opposition leaders and banning political parties, President François Tombalbaye provoked a series of conspiracies in the Muslim north – the

### NAME & NUMBER

Within 72 hours of arriving in N'Djaména you must register at the immigration office, which is on the right side at the back of the Commissariat Central compound on Ave Félix Éboué. It's a relatively hassle-free process (except for returning to your hotel to get the forms stamped), requiring two photos and various financial 'gifts' to whoever is yielding the stamps.

An Autorisation de Circuler (Travel Permit) is required for travel anywhere beyond the immediate vicinity of N'Djaména. 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 Sécurité Publique* and wait about three days for approval. In theory this sounds easy – in theory...

Finally, in each town you visit, you should register with both *securité* (Agence Nationale de Sécurité) – which needs a long form filled out, one photo and, invariably, some cash – 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.

## ZAKOUMA NATIONAL PARK

Years of poaching and civil war ravaged local wildlife in this 305,000-hectare park, with elephant numbers falling from an estimated 4300 in 2002 to 454 in April 2011. However, the Chadian government with the help of the EU has restocked the park and begun to implement tough anti-poaching measures.

As a result, 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 weird and wonderful birdlife. The best time to come is March and April when the animals congregate around watering holes. June to October is to be avoided because of the rains.

Zakouma is 800km south of N'Djaména. Public transport is practically nonexistent so the most realistic option is to organise a trip through one of N'Djaména's travel agencies, such as the **Tchad Evasion Travel Agency** ([www.tchadevasion.com](http://www.tchadevasion.com)). Expect a six-day round trip since it takes two just to reach the park.

Inside Zakouma, **Le Campement Hôtelier Tinga** ([www.zakouma.com](http://www.zakouma.com)) has comfortable rooms and a good restaurant.

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 Félix Malloum, a fellow southerner. Over US\$1 million in cash was found in Tombalbaye's residence, along with plans to proclaim himself emperor.

The Government of National Unity was then formed by Malloumand 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.

In 1990 Idriss Déby, 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 leaving Déby with a clear run to N'Djaména and the presidency of his war-ravaged country, which Déby 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 Déby's former minister Youssef Togoimî.

To nobody's surprise, Déby 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.

Three weeks after a failed 2006 coup and one year after the constitutional two-term presidential limit was overturned, Déby won a presidential election boycotted by the opposition and most citizens. In the April 2011 presidential election, boycotted by the opposition, Déby was again declared winner.

The fact that Déby's government has not already fallen has much to do with the presence of the French. France maintains a huge military base on the edge of N'Djaména (due to be closed in 2013) and, while the French have never admitted to actual involvement in repelling the rebel attacks of 2006 and 2008, it was reported in the French media that in the 2008 attack France provided logistical support to the government, funnelled weapons to the government via Libya, offered to evacuate Déby to France and sent special forces in to fight the rebels.

## Culture

The north is populated by people of Arab descent, as well as nomadic Peul-Fulani and Toubou people. Black Africans are in the majority in the south – the Sara are by far the biggest ethnic group (25% of the population) 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 (54%) are desert-dwelling pastoralists.

Surprisingly, for such a subsistence economy, education is looked upon favourably and literacy stands at 48%. Freedom of speech is also fiercely, if somewhat vainly, defended – but as the security situation continues to deteriorate, so too does the media's room to move.

Most of the crafts you'll see in Chad are imported from Nigeria and Cameroon,

though the leatherwork and pottery is usually made locally and many of the large wool rugs come from Abéché and other desert towns.

## Food & Drink

The food in Chad is typical of the region: tiny street stalls dish up meals of rice, beans and soup or stew, while indoor restaurants offer omelettes, liver, salads, *brochettes* (kebabs), 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 *bili-bili*, a millet beer; *cochette* is a low-alcohol version.



# Equatorial Guinea

## Includes ➔

Understand Equatorial Guinea .....	517
Equatorial Guinea Today .....	517
History .....	518
Culture .....	518
Environment .....	519

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Capital** Malabo
- ➔ **Population** 685,991
- ➔ **Languages** Spanish, French, Fang, Bubi
- ➔ **Area** 28,051 sq km
- ➔ **Currency** Central African franc (CFA)
- ➔ **Visa requirements** US visitors can get a visa at the point of entry. Other nationals must obtain a visa before travel.

## Virgin Rain Forest & Glittering Oil Towns

Failed coups, danger money, bushmeat and buckets of oil – you could say Equatorial Guinea has something of a reputation. But mercenaries and crime writers aren't the only ones attracted to the country's beautiful black-and-white shores. This is the land of primates with painted faces, soft clouds of butterflies and insects so colourful they belong in the realm of fiction.

Though the country is dripping in oil wealth, many people's taps run dry. Poverty permeates ordinary life, making a trip to Malabo – alive with the flames of oil rigs and the buzz of rapid construction – at once hedonistic and heartbreaking.

Beyond Malabo, on Bioko Island, are volcanic views, fishing villages, rain forests full of endangered primates and shores of nesting sea turtles. On the mainland, white beaches, forest paths and junglescapes await.

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.

## Equatorial Guinea Top Sights

- ➔ **Bata** Watch the city grow vertically with oil money
- ➔ **Bioko Island** Go wide-eyed over the strange combination of dense rain forest, rare wildlife and oil platforms
- ➔ **Monte Allen National Park** Whisper during forest walks in search of gorillas, elephants and chimps
- ➔ **Cogo** Pierce the border by *pirogue* (canoe) at this southern frontier village
- ➔ **Isla Corisco** Tread softly on the squeaky-clean sand of this paradise isle
- ➔ **Malabo** Explore the architecture and nightlife of this bizarre oil town



## LIFE AT BLACK BEACH

Though it's not far from the warm waters of the Atlantic, the whitewashed prison at Playa Negra (Black Beach) is one of Africa's most notorious hellholes. It's here that South African mercenary Nick du Toit and fellow coup plotter Simon Mann were locked up for their roles in a 2004 attempted coup, an operation that aimed to overthrow President Obiang and install exiled opposition leader Severo Moro in his place. Oil rights were promised to the coup's financiers and plotters, among them Mark Thatcher, the son of former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher. But the coup attempt failed spectacularly: in March 2004 Mann, du Toit and 60 others were arrested when their Boeing jet landed in Harare, Zimbabwe, on a weapons-gathering stop. While du Toit was sent to Black Beach immediately, Mann served four years in jail in Zimbabwe before being extradited to Malabo in 2007, where he was handed a 34-year sentence. The same year, Amnesty International called a Black Beach term a 'slow, lingering death sentence'. President Obiang released Mann, du Toit and other accused prisoners in early 2009, citing good behaviour.

democratic reform. However, critics of the changes say that the reforms, which were endorsed by voters, will in fact cement Obiang's position.

Obiang's son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, was promoted to vice president in May 2012, fueling speculation that he is being groomed to take his father's place. The same year he asked a US court to dismiss an attempt to seize around US\$71 million worth of his assets, including a California mansion and a Gulfstream jet. The US government alleges they were obtained using corrupt funds taken from his country. Teodoro is also facing corruption charges in France.

## History

Bantu tribes, including the Bubi, came to the mainland in the 12th century from other parts of West and Central Africa. The Bubi are said to have fled to Bioko to escape the Fang, who are believed to have become the dominant ethnic group in the 1600s. Europeans made their first contact on the distant island of Annobón, which was visited by the Portuguese in 1470. In the 18th century, Bioko, Annobón 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 in the early 19th century and was 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 attained independence in October 1968 under the presidency of Macías Nguema. Months later, relations with Spain deteriorated rapidly and Nguema's 10-year dictatorship began. Thousands of people were tortured and publicly executed or beaten to death in the forced-labour camps of the mainland. Much of the violence was tribally motivated – the Bubi were particularly sought. By the time Nguema's regime was finally toppled in 1979, only a third of the 300,000 Guineans who lived there at the time of independence remained. In August 1979, Nguema was overthrown by his nephew Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who then ordered his uncle's execution. A coup attempt was made on Obiang in 2004.

## Culture

On the mainland 80% of the population is Fang, while on Bioko Island the Bubi are the most numerous group, making up about 15% of the total population. Smaller groups, including the Benga, inhabit the other islands. Oil has brought many Americans, and a lot of 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 strong and are often practiced concurrently.

Traditional rituals and arts including dance are still performed, including mask arts and the *balélé*, which is accompanied by drums, wooden xylophones, *sanzas* and bow harps. There's 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

Both Bioko Island and the mainland hide a wealth of wildlife, some of which is endangered. Rio Muni is home to a hefty wedge of Central African rain forest with gorillas, chimpanzees and forest elephants. It is unknown exactly how many large mammals remain. 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 hikes. Logging is being more carefully controlled than in the past, but deforestation and the bushmeat trade are still big problems. Over the past decade, conservation staff have recorded the number of monkeys in meat markets; the tally had reached more than 20,000 by the end of March 2008, according to the Bioko Biodiversity Protection Program.





# São Tomé & Príncipe

## Includes ➔

Understand São Tomé & Príncipe.....	541
São Tomé & Príncipe Today.....	541
History.....	541
Culture.....	542
Environment.....	542

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Capital** São Tomé
- ➔ **Population** 183,000
- ➔ **Languages** Portuguese, Portuguese-based Creole
- ➔ **Area** 1000 sq km
- ➔ **Visa requirements** Required by all
- ➔ **Tourist Information** [www.saotomeislands.com](http://www.saotomeislands.com)

## Beaches, Whales & Faded Colonial Splendour

If you adore quietude, take a trip to São Tomé & Príncipe, Africa's second-smallest country. These two tiny volcanic bumps anchored off the Gabonese coast easily win the hearts of foreigners with their Portuguese-Creole flavour and relaxed vibes, and it won't take too long before you're infected with the pervasive *leve leve* (which loosely means 'take it easy') mood.

The sublime laid-back tempo is enhanced by a wealth of natural attractions: miles of perfect palm-fringed beaches, huge swaths of emerald rain forest, soaring volcanic peaks and mellow fishing villages. The birdlife is excellent, and endemic plants (especially orchids) are plentiful. In season, turtle- and whale-watching opportunities abound.

This two-island nation has its cultural gems as well, with a surprising number of heritage buildings dating back to the colonial era, including impressive *roças* (plantation estates). Tourism is still low-key and is being developed in a carefully controlled, ecologically minded way. There are no tacky resorts, just a number of locally run, enticing, nature-oriented lodges and hotels.

## São Tomé & Príncipe Top Sights

- ➔ **São Tomé town** Wander amid the faded colonial buildings of this charming capital town
- ➔ **Rocha São João** Feast on gourmet eats and stay the night in this ethereal, rejuvenated plantation estate
- ➔ **Banana Beach** Dive into the crystal-clear waters of this deserted beach, one of many ringing the island of Príncipe
- ➔ **Praia Jalé** Witness the nesting sea turtles in this ecotourism haven, located at the southernmost point of São Tomé island
- ➔ **Ilhéu das Rolas** Straddle the equator and sun yourself on the divine white-sand beaches of this tiny islet off the south of São Tomé



# UNDERSTAND SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE

## São Tomé & Príncipe Today

Former strongman Manuel Pinto da Costa returned to power in presidential elections in 2011, two decades after losing office. Patrice Trovoada, the son of former president Miguel Trovada, was named prime minister after his Independent Democratic Action (ADI) party won parliamentary elections in August 2010.

## History

Before being 'discovered' and colonised by the Portuguese during the late 15th century, the islands of São Tomé & Príncipe comprised rain forests dense with vegetation and birdlife, but, most likely, no people. The islands' volcanic soil proved good for cultivation, and, under Portuguese rule, by the mid-16th century the islands were the foremost sugar exporter, though the labour-intensive process required increasing numbers of slaves from Africa. When sugar prices 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 producer of cocoa.

In 1876 slavery was outlawed, but was simply replaced with a similar system of forced labour for low wages. Contract workers came from Mozambique, Cape Verde and other parts of the Portuguese empire. During these

## SÃO TOMÉ TOWN

São Tomé may be the country's economic, political and commercial hub, but rush hour in the capital lasts an unbearable five minutes! São Tomé town has a charming seafront setting, a budding arts scene, some excellent dining options, a collection of fading pastel colonial buildings and plenty of activities of its own and nearby, making it an ideal base from which to make day and overnight trips. **Cocoa Residence** ([www.hotelcocoasaotome.st](http://www.hotelcocoasaotome.st)), in a tranquil setting not far from the seafront, is highly recommended.

times there were frequent uprisings and revolts, often brutally ended by the Portuguese. In 1953 the Massacre of Batepá, in which many Africans were killed by Portuguese troops, sparked an independence movement in the country. Portugal held on, however, until the fall of its fascist government in 1974, after which it got out of its colonies in a hurry. São Tomé & Príncipe achieved independence on 12 July 1975, but the Portuguese exodus left the country with virtually no skilled labour, an illiteracy rate of 90%, only one doctor and many abandoned cocoa plantations.

Manuel Pinto da Costa ruled São Tomé with an iron fist for 15 years after independence. The country remained aligned with Angola, Cuba and communist Eastern Europe until the demise of the Soviet Union, when São Toméans began demanding 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.

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 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.

## COUNTRY COVERAGE

At the time of research very few travellers were heading to São Tomé & Príncipe so we're providing historical and cultural information rather than reviews and listings. A good source of information for on-the-ground travel in São Tomé & Príncipe is Lonely Planet's ThornTree online travel forum [www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree). Other sources of good internet-based information are [www.saotome.st](http://www.saotome.st) and [www.africas-edem.com/Sao-Tome--Principe.asp](http://www.africas-edem.com/Sao-Tome--Principe.asp).

## GET ACTIVE IN SÃO TOMÉ

When it comes to activities, São Tomé really delivers.

- ➔ **Whale- and dolphin-watching** From July to September, don't miss the chance to snorkel with dolphins. The best spots include Ilha das Cabras and Lagoa Azul.
- ➔ **Birdwatching** São Tomé is a paradise for birdwatchers. It's home to 29 endemic species including the São Tomé sunbird and the elusive São Tomé Grosbeak.
- ➔ **Hiking** Northern São Tomé offers excellent hiking, from two-hour jaunts to a challenging two-day expedition to Pico de São Tomé, the island's highest point (2024m). Cross-island trips with overnights in plantation estates can be arranged through travel agents.
- ➔ **Diving** Just when you thought that nothing could be more beautiful than the primeval landscape, a trip below the ocean's surface reveals a scenic kingdom of plateaus and arches teeming with life. The owner of **Club Maxel** (☎ 904424; [www.clubmaxel.st](http://www.clubmaxel.st); Praia Lagarto) tells us that the best sites are around Ilha da Santana and Ilhéu das Rolas, where you'll find that the seascape is particularly dramatic. This reputable dive centre is staffed with qualified, English-speaking instructors. It's located on Praia Lagarto, but there's also an annexe at the Pestana Equador.

## Culture

*Leve leve* is the name of the game in São Tomé. Island life is slow and there's no use in getting fussed about anything. This is as evident in daily life as it is in the islands' politics. During the 2006 elections, disruptions were rare. The few villages that protested did so by politely turning vote staff away from their polling stations, saying 'no water, no electricity, no votes, thank you'.

A recent influx of young repatriates from Portugal determined to make good happen here has brought a new energy to the islands.

Outside the capital most São Toméans still live simple island lives, with agriculture and fishing 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.

São Toméans are a mixed bunch of *mes-tiços*, 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 São Toméans belong to the Roman Catholic Church, though traditional animist beliefs are still strong.

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 bienales and holds arts workshops.

When it comes to food, don't miss out on the *con-con*, fish grilled and served with baked breadfruit. Traditional stews, such as *calulu*, are made with more than 20 different plants and can take hours to prepare. Other dishes include fish or meat with beans, rice or plantains, and omelettes with endemic spices, some said to be aphrodisiacs. Palm wine, freshly gathered from the trees, is a local favourite.

## Environment

The islands are of volcanic origin and almost 30% of the land is covered by high-altitude, virgin rain forest, referred to as the Obo, and filled with more than 700 species of flora and bird, 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 the second most important in Africa in biological terms, they have received much attention, and conservation groups have started to set up protection programs and ecotourism outfits.

Outside the jungle the islands comprise varying beaches, including some nesting sea turtle grounds from October to December. Whales and dolphins can be observed from July to September.



# Eritrea

## Includes ➔

Understand Eritrea ...	568
Eritrea Today .....	568
History .....	568
Culture .....	570
People of Eritrea .....	570
Environment .....	570

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Capital** Asmara
- ➔ **Population** 6.09 million
- ➔ **Languages** Tigrinya, Arabic
- ➔ **Area** 124,320 sq km
- ➔ **Currency** Nakfa
- ➔ **Visa requirements** All foreign nationals require visas, from the Eritrean embassy or consulate before you leave your home country
- ➔ **Tourist information** [www.asmera.nl](http://www.asmera.nl)

## Nature, Culture & Adventure

Historically intriguing, culturally compelling and scenically magical, Eritrea is one of the most secretive countries in Africa. For those who have a hankering for off-the-beaten-track places, it offers challenges and excitement aplenty, with a unique blend of natural and cultural highlights.

Eritrea wows visitors with its awesome scenery, from the quintessentially Abyssinian landscapes – escarpments, plateaus and soaring peaks – to the deserted beaches of the Red Sea coast. Culturally, Eritrea is a melting pot. It might be a tiddler of a country by Africa's standards, but it hosts a kaleidoscopic range of ethnic groups. It also features a superb array of archaeological sites that tell volumes of history. The cherry on top is Asmara, Eritrea's utterly adorable capital and a whimsical art deco city.

Despite the tough political and economic landscape and the odd travel restrictions, this country remains one of the most inspiring destinations in Africa.

## Eritrea Top Sight

- ➔ **Asmara** Discover the capital's dazzling collection of colonial architectural wonders
- ➔ **Massawa** Explore the alleyways and streets of this historic coastal town
- ➔ **Keren** Soak up the languid atmosphere of Eritrea's beguiling second city
- ➔ **Dahlak Archipelago** Sunbathe on sparkling beaches
- ➔ **Qohaito** Speculate on Eritrea's mysterious past at these enigmatic ruins
- ➔ **Dankalia** Travel to the ends of the earth and immerse yourself in Martian landscapes
- ➔ **Old Railway** Hop on Africa's most atmospheric train and be ready for the most scenic ride of your life

# UNDERSTAND ERITREA

## Eritrea Today

Today Eritrea is not exactly a wonderland. Freedom of press and speech is nonexistent. The state has taken control of all private companies, and the country has one of the most restrictive economies on the planet. Mass conscription has deprived many industries of manpower. The end result? Eritrea has won the less-than-enviable sobriquet of 'the North Korea of Africa'. Despite these harsh realities and the clampdown on civil liberties, Eritreans show an exceptional resilience and have not entirely lost hope in the future.

## History

Around the 4th century BC, the powerful kingdom of Aksum, situated in Tigray, in the

north of modern Ethiopia, began to develop. Much foreign trade – on which Aksum's prosperity depended – was seaborne, and came to be handled by the ancient port of Adulis in Eritrea. By the 4th century AD Christianity had become the Aksumite state religion. The new religion had a profound impact on Eritrea's culture, influencing much of the country's art and literature.

Islam, the arrival of which coincided with Christian Aksum's decline in the 7th century, was the other great influence on the region. Islam made the greatest inroads in the Dahlak Islands. Muslims traders also settled in nearby Massawa on the mainland.

The Turks first arrived in the Red Sea at the beginning of the 16th century. For the next 300 years (with a few short-lived intervals) the coast, including the port of Massawa, belonged to the Ottomans.

By the middle of the 19th century, new powers were casting covetous eyes over



the region. The Egyptians took the western lowlands of modern-day Eritrea. When the Egyptian armies were defeated by the Ethiopian forces in 1875, another foreign power – Italy – stepped in. Italian colonisation started in 1869 near Assab.

Following the Battle of Adwa in 1896, when the Ethiopians resoundingly defeated the Italian armies, new international boundaries were drawn up: Ethiopia remained independent and Eritrea became, for the first time, a separate territory – and an Italian colony. Of all Italy's colonies (Eritrea, Libya and Italian Somaliland), Eritrea was considered the jewel in the crown, and much effort was put into industrialising the little country. By the end of the 1930s, Eritrea was one of the most highly industrialised colonies in Africa.

In 1940, with the outbreak of WWII, Italy declared war on Britain, and soon became embroiled in conflicts in what was then Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The year 1941 marked a turning point: the British took the strategically important town of Keren before defeating the Italians in Asmara. The colony became administered by the British. At the end of WWII, the territory lost its strategic importance and in 1945 the British began a slow withdrawal.

In 1948 Eritrea's fate was pondered by a commission consisting of the UK, the USA, France and the Soviet Union. Unable to reach a decision, the commission passed the issue on to the UN's General Assembly. In 1950 the very contentious Resolution 390 A (V) was passed. Eritrea became Ethiopia's 14th province and disappeared from the map of Africa. Little by little, Ethiopia began to exert an ever-tighter hold over Eritrea, as both industry and political control were shifted to Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. When, in the early 1960s, Ethiopia formally annexed Eritrea in violation of international law, Cold War politics ensured that both the US and the UN kept silent.

With no recourse to the international community, the frustration of the Eritrean people grew. In 1961 the fight for independence began. In 1978 the Eritreans were on the brink of winning back their country, but the Ethiopians benefitted from the logistical support of the Soviet Union. From 1988 the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the most important resistance movement, began to inflict major losses on the Ethiopian army. In 1990, amid some of the fiercest fighting of the war, the EPLF took the strategically important port of Massawa.

## COUNTRY COVERAGE

At the time of research very few travellers were heading to Eritrea so we're providing historical and cultural information rather than reviews and listings. A good source of information for on-the-ground travel in Eritrea is Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree online travel forum [www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree). Other sources of good internet-based information are [www.dehai.org](http://www.dehai.org) and [www.asmera.nl](http://www.asmera.nl).

By a fortuitous turn of events, the Ethiopian dictator Mengistu was overthrown in 1991, his 140,000 troops fled Eritrea and a final confrontation in the capital was avoided. The EPLF walked into Asmara without having to fire a single bullet. Asmara was one of the very few Eritrean towns to survive the war undamaged.

In April 1993 the provisional government of Eritrea held a referendum on Eritrean independence. More than 99.81% of voters opted for full Eritrean sovereignty, and on 24 May 1993 independence was declared. Eritrea was back on the African map.

After the war, the little nation worked hard to rebuild its infrastructure, repair the economy and improve conditions for its people. Eritrea was also at pains to establish good international relations with, among others, Ethiopia, the Gulf States, Asia, the USA and Europe. However, this progress was seriously undermined in 1998, when war broke out with Ethiopia. In early May 1998 a number of Eritrean officials were killed near the border. On 12 May Eritrea upped the stakes by occupying the border town of Badme. Over the next month there was intense fighting between the two sides. In February 1999 a full-scale military conflict broke out that left tens of thousands dead on both sides before it finally ceased for good in mid-2000.

In December 2000 a formal peace settlement was signed in Algiers. In April 2001 a 25km-wide demilitarised strip, which ran the length of the internationally recognised border on the Eritrean side, was set up under supervision of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE).

Since the guns fell silent there have been periods of extreme tension between the two nations that have seen forces massed on both sides of the border, and today the two armies continue to eye each other



## ART (DECO) ATTACK IN ASMARA

One of the most entrancing cities in Africa, Asmara is a surprisingly slick city crammed with architectural gems harking back to the city's heyday as the 'Piccolo Roma' (small Rome). Isolated for nearly 30 years during its war with Ethiopia, Asmara has kept its heritage buildings almost intact. Wander the streets in the centre and you'll gaze upon a showcase of the art deco, international, cubist, expressionist, functionalist, futurist, rationalist and neoclassical architectural styles. Among the most outstanding buildings are the Opera House, the Ministry of Education, the Cinema Impero, the Municipality Building, the Cinema Roma and the Irga Building. But nothing can compare with the Fiat Tagliero Building. Built in 1938, it is designed to look like a plane (or a spaceship, or a bat). The central tower with its glass 'cockpit' is similar to many structures in Miami, USA.

The best way to see Asmara's built heritage is to walk around town. *Asmara – Africa's Secret Modernist City*, by Edward Denison, is the most comprehensive book on the subject.

suspiciously over the desert. For the moment a wary calm prevails, but everyone knows that the merest spark could reignite a war that neither country can afford.

## Culture

Eritreans appear 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 self-reliance, vigour and independence.

The contrast in lifestyle between Asmara and elsewhere is stark. No matter the state of the economy and rationing, Asmarans still take the *passeggiata* (evening promenade) 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 comprised more than one-third of troops in both the recent wars against Ethiopia.

## People of Eritrea

There are nine ethnic groups, each with their own language and customs, as well as a

handful of Italians who live in Asmara. The most important group is the Tigrinya, who make up approximately 50% of the population, followed by the Tigré (30%), the Saho (5%) and the Afar (5%).

Approximately 35% of the population are nomadic or seminomadic. About one million Eritreans live abroad, mostly in Europe and the USA.

## 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. Major Eritrean marine ecosystems include the coral reefs, sea-grass beds and mangrove forests.

Eritrea's birdlife is very rich. Of the 2600 species of birds in Africa, Eritrea hosts 560 to 660 species, including 18 endemic ones.



# South Sudan

## Includes ➔

Understand South Sudan.....	653
South Sudan Today ...	653
History.....	654
Culture.....	655
Wildlife & Environment.....	655

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Capital** Juba (government considering moving the capital further north)
- ➔ **Population** 8.2 million
- ➔ **Languages** English, Arabic and numerous tribal languages – Arabic as an official language is being replaced entirely with English.
- ➔ **Area** 619,745 sq km
- ➔ **Currency** South Sudan Pound
- ➔ **Visa Requirements** Best obtained in Nairobi (Kenya), Kampala (Uganda), Washington (USA) or Brussels (Belgium)

## The World's Newest Country

On 9 July 2011 Africa's largest country, Sudan, split into two and with that South Sudan, the world's newest country, was born.

The birthing process was a violent and bloody one. For decades the people of South Sudan have known little but war as they fought for independence from the north – and potential visitors should know that fighting between the new government and various rebel groups continues today in many parts of the country.

Today South Sudan is one of the poorest, least-developed and most little-known nations on the planet, but the very fact that South Sudan remains such an unknown is the thing that is likely to attract the first intrepid visitors here. And once they arrive they will be amazed by a wealth of tribal groups and excited by national parks packed with vast numbers of large mammals.

## South Sudan Top Sights

- ➔ **Boma National Park** This vast wilderness is home to huge quantities of wildlife including migrating herds of over a million antelope
- ➔ **Nimule National Park** Home to hippo, Uganda kob, elephants, buffalo and beautiful scenery
- ➔ **Bandingalo National Park** A paradise for giraffe, hippo and wild dog, this park also welcomes hundreds of thousands of migrating antelope
- ➔ **Tribes** Possibly no other corner of Africa has such a wide diversity of tribal peoples, many of whom continue to live a largely traditional lifestyle
- ➔ **Juba** The capital is a bustling boom town with busy markets and the grave of John Garang, the former leader of the South Sudan independence movement
- ➔ **Wau** The nation's second city is a tribal meeting point and homeland of the Dinka people

# UNDERSTAND SOUTH SUDAN

## South Sudan Today

The road to independence for South Sudan has been long and hard. Sudan, formally Africa's largest country, was an ethnic jigsaw comprising hundreds of tribes and languages, but broadly these could have been divided into a black African south and an Arab Islamic north. The people of what is now South Sudan had long complained of discrimination at the hands of the north Sudanese and it was this discrimination that was partially to blame for the fact that for 40 of the past 40 years Sudan had been at war with itself. The war left around two million dead, but with the hammering out of a peace agreement the people of South Sudan went to the polls and in January 2011 voted overwhelmingly for independence from north Sudan.

The independence honeymoon was short-lived. The new government faces a daunting task in building a stable state from almost nothing. On independence South Sudan was ranked one of the poorest, least developed nations on Earth. There are almost no surfaced roads, and outside the main towns virtually no hospitals or medical centres, few schools and little industry. Almost all South Sudanese survive by subsistence agriculture. Violence, or the threat of violence, has continued to grip the country. There's

## COUNTRY COVERAGE

At the time of research very few travellers were heading to South Sudan so we're providing historical and cultural information rather than reviews and listings. A good source of information for on-the-ground travel in South Sudan is Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree online travel forum [www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree). Privately run Juba Travel Guide ([www.jubatravelguide.com](http://www.jubatravelguide.com)) is an excellent source of practical travel information for this tourism frontier. Another source of good internet-based information is the Wildlife Conservation Society ([www.wcs.org](http://www.wcs.org)), which can give you a brief low down on some of the national parks in South Sudan. The government of South Sudan's website ([www.goss-online.org](http://www.goss-online.org)) has a few pages dedicated to tourism and immigration rules.

widespread tribal fighting (often over grazing land, water and cattle) that can result in heavy casualties, there are a number of armed rebel groups fighting the government in Juba and, perhaps most worryingly, South Sudan and its old foe Sudan have already come close to all-out war over disputed areas of the shared border (and the oil wealth that lies underneath).

It's not all bad though. South Sudan has oil, and Juba and other urban centres are



## THE GREATEST (WILDLIFE) SHOW ON EARTH

So you've heard all about the wildebeest migration in Kenya and Tanzania and how it's been described as the greatest wildlife show on earth. Well, have you heard about South Sudan's own wildlife migration involving possibly even larger numbers of animals? When the **Wildlife Conservation Society** (WCS; [www.wcs.org](http://www.wcs.org)) conducted aerial surveys of what is now South Sudan in 2007, the last thing they expected to see was migrating herds of over a million white-eared kob, tiang antelope and Mongalla gazelle, but that's exactly what they found. In addition there are thought to be over 8000 elephants, 8900 buffalo and 2800 ostriches as well as lions, leopards, giraffe, hippos and numerous other species.

Looking at how big-buck-spending tourists flock to the national parks of neighbouring Kenya, the new government of South Sudan has not been slow to recognise the tourist goldmine these animals may represent, and it is now trying to promote wildlife-watching tourism. The focus of these efforts is Boma National Park. This huge park, abutting the Ethiopian border, is crawling in mega-fauna. A visit is a real wild adventure to a near-pristine African wilderness. Due to the limited tourist facilities in the park, and throughout rural South Sudan in general, the vast majority of the park's few visitors sign up to one of the trips organised by the couple of safari companies based in Juba.

now rapidly growing boomtowns full of investors from around the world. If South Sudan plays its cards right it could in the short term become a major regional centre and in the long term – well, the sky's the limit.

## History

The history of South Sudan is of course very much tied up with that of its northern neighbour Sudan.

We know little of the history of early South Sudan. Around the 1500s Nilotic speakers such as the Dinka and Luo are thought to have moved down into what is now South Sudan from further north. Although there is evidence that transhumant cattle raisers have inhabited the region for around 5000 years.

In 1899 South Sudan became a part of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan under the control of Britain and Egypt. Almost no development at all took place in the area that is today South Sudan, although the British encouraged Christian missionaries to work in the area in order to counter the spread of Islam southwards.

In 1956 Sudan as a whole became independent and the people of South Sudan found themselves being ruled by Khartoum. Almost straight away southerners complained of discrimination and an unfair division of wealth, opportunities and political power between northerners and southerners. In addition, southern leaders

accused Khartoum of trying to impose an Islamic and Arabic identity on the south and of renegeing on promises to create a federal system.

In 1962 a rebellion originally launched by southern army officers seven years earlier turned into a full-scale civil war against Khartoum led by the Anya Nya guerrilla movement. In 1969 a group of socialist and communist Sudanese military officers led by Colonel Jaafar Muhammad Numeiri seized power in Khartoum. For the people of South Sudan the defining moment of Numeiri's 16 years in power came in 1972 when he signed the Addis Ababa agreement which granted the southern provinces a degree of autonomy.

The future looked bright when, in 1978, the first oil was discovered in South Sudan, but in 1983 civil war broke out again after Khartoum cancelled the autonomy arrangements. This time the southerners were led by John Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its armed wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

In the ensuing 22 years of fighting around 1.5 million people are thought to have lost their lives and more than four million were displaced.

The conflict finally ended with the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, under which the south was granted regional autonomy along with guaranteed representation in a national power-sharing government as well as a referendum for the south on independence. In July of that year John Garang

was sworn in as first vice-president of Sudan, but then, just one month later, he was killed in a plane crash. Many southerners suspected foul play and demonstrations and fighting broke out again. John Garang was replaced by Salva Kiir Mayardit.

Despite the establishment in Khartoum of a power-sharing government between Omar al-Bashir and Salva Kir, numerous deadly skirmishes occurred. The oil-rich state of Abeyi, which sits on the frontier of Sudan and South Sudan is, and continues to be, a particular flash point.

Finally, in January 2011, 99% of southern Sudanese voted in the long-promised referendum to split from the rest of Sudan. In July of that year South Sudan became independent.

## Culture

The population of South Sudan is around 8 million. There are numerous ethnic groups speaking around 60 languages. The main ethnic groups are the Dinka, who make up around 15% of the population, the Nuer (around 10%), the Bari and the Azande. Indigenous traditional beliefs are widespread and even though Christianity has made inroads it's still very much a minority religion that's often overlaid with traditional beliefs and customs.

Despite the potential oil wealth the vast majority of South Sudanese live a life of subsistence farming and cattle herding. For

many tribes cattle are of huge cultural importance. They are the source of wealth and the key to marriage. A young boy is traditionally given an ox to care for by his father and he is even given a 'bull name', which often relates to the colour of his ox. Many tribes have a large vocabulary for cattle and their different colours. Cattle rustling is very common and clashes between tribal groups occur frequently.

## Wildlife & Environment

South Sudan is made up of vast areas of savannah (including the biggest savannah ecosystem in Africa), swamps (the Sudd, a swamp the size of England, is the largest such habitat in Africa) and flood plains interspersed with areas of woodland.

The wildlife of South Sudan has fared the years of war remarkably well, but since the end of the war conservationists have faced a number of challenges in their bid to protect the nation's wildlife. Oil companies are looking for oil in a number of wildlife-rich areas and illegal hunting, farming and construction work is taking place in and around protected zones. A big potential threat is water diversion projects, which could have a dramatic impact on the annual flooding of the White Nile. Fortunately the government has realised the potential value of wildlife tourism and, working alongside international conservation bodies, appear to be serious in its efforts to conserve the environment.

© Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd. To make it easier for you to use, access to this PDF eBook 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 PDF eBook 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.'