

Burkina Faso

Forget about big-ticket attractions in Burkina Faso. Bar a scattering of dunes and colourful markets in the Sahel, a range of eerie rock formations around Banfora in the southwest, and a couple of national parks (but none that can rival those in east or southern Africa), the country has few iconic calling cards. So why does it invariably win the hearts of travellers? The answer: the people. The Burkinabé (as people from Burkina Faso are called) are the country's greatest asset. They're disarmingly charming and easy-going. Wherever you go, you'll be greeted with a memorable *bonne arrivée* (welcome). It's this genuine welcome that makes travel in Burkina Faso such a delight.

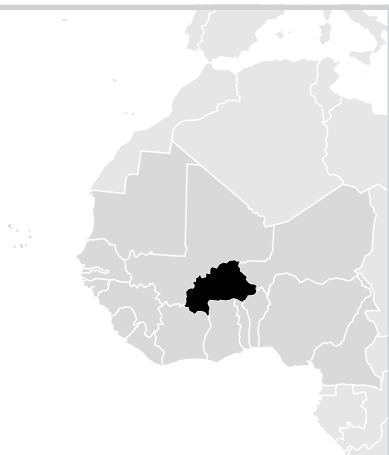
The country's other big draws? Arts, craftwork and culture. There's a fantastic arts scene in Ouagadougou, the enjoyable and gloriously named capital, along with a famous musical tradition and beautiful handicrafts. Throw in Fespaco, Africa's premier film festival, and there's enough to engage your mind and senses for a couple of weeks or so. Burkina Faso is also alive with a vibrant cultural mix of peoples, from the proud Fulani people of the Sahel to the animist societies of the Senoufo or the Lobi. If you want to immerse yourself in local culture, opportunities abound, from drumming and dance lessons to cooking classes and theatre performances.

Tourism infrastructure is fairly limited, but there is a handful of gems, especially in Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou, in the form of adorable B&Bs and good restaurants, as well as family-run, eco-friendly *campements* in more remote areas.

Be warned: staying longer than you planned is a common issue.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 274,122 sq km
- **Capital** Ouagadougou
- **Country code** ☎ 226
- **Famous for** The coolest name for a capital city in the world; Thomas Sankara, Africa's Che Guevara
- **Languages** French, Moré, Fulfulde and Lobi
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA493; €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 14.9 million
- **Visa** Available at borders (CFA10,000) or Burkina Faso embassies (up to CFA30,000)



HIGHLIGHTS

- **The Sahel** (p162) Colourful markets and camping out with camels under starry desert skies.
- **Ouagadougou** (p136) Famed arts scene, craft bargains, and dancing into the wee hours in a *maquis-dancing*.
- **Bobo-Dioulasso** (p149) Stunning Grande Mosquée and languid atmosphere.
- **Sindou Peaks** (p158) Martian landscape reminiscent of *Planet of the Apes*.
- **Tiébébé** (p161) Intricately decorated traditional houses in the heart of the Gourounsi country.
- **Ranch de Nazinga** (p161) Elephants stroll past your bungalow in this wildlife sanctuary.

ITINERARIES

- **One week** With only a week, plan on spending a couple of days in the capital, Ouagadougou (p136), which has few 'sights' but boasts a steamy nightlife, a thriving arts scene and fine restaurants. Then bus it to Bobo-Dioulasso (p149) and soak up the mellow vibes of this utterly charming city.
- **Two weeks** Consider further exploration of the southwest. Rent a mofette or a bike in Banfora (p155) and make a foray into Senoufo country – make a beeline for the eerie Sindou Peaks (p158) and the mystifying Dômes de Fabledougou (p158). Push on to Niansogoni (p158), a fascinating village blessed with a scenic backdrop.
- **Three weeks** A third week would give you enough time to add the Sahel to your trip. Head up to Gorom-Gorom (p163) and the nearby villages of Oursi (p164) and Markoye (p164), which are the best launching pads for exploring this fascinating region, famous for its dunes and its clamorous markets; allow at least three days. Back in the capital, point the compass south to the colourful village of Tiébélé (p161), which boasts finely decorated traditional houses, and make a detour to Ranch de Nazinga (p161), where you can spot bus-sized elephants. You could also include Gaoua (p159), in the heart of Lobi country.
- **One month** Lovers of wildlife who are visiting between December and May

HOW MUCH?

- **Ouagadougou-Bobo-Dioulasso bus ride** CFA6000
- **Museum admission** CFA1000
- **Guide per day** CFA10,000 to CFA17,000
- **Internet connection per hour** CFA500
- **4WD rental per day** CFA55,000 plus petrol

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** CFA650
- **1L of bottled water** CFA500
- **Bottle of beer** CFA800
- **Souvenir T-shirt** CFA5000
- **Serve of riz sauce** CFA500

should make a three-day trip to Parc National d'Arli (p160).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit is from mid-October to December. It can be downright wet between June and September, when the south can be uncomfortably humid and many roads throughout the country are impassable. By October you're less likely to find your travel plans disrupted by constant rains. From December to February the weather is marginally cooler (although if you've come from colder European climes you're unlikely to think so), with daily maximums only occasionally exceeding 35°C. During this period, the dry heat is more bearable, although dusty harmattan winds can produce hazy skies and sore throats in January and February. The hot season is from March to early June, when the mercury can rise well above 40°C in the capital. See also Climate Charts, p810.

Film enthusiasts won't want to miss Fespaco, Africa's premier film festival, which will run in late February in 2011. For more information, see the boxed text Fespaco, p135. For other festivals which you may want to attend, see p141.

HISTORY

The earliest known inhabitants were the Bobo, the Lobi and the Gourounsi, who were in the area by the 13th century. A century later, the