

Cameroon

For many, the word 'Africa' conjures a certain image: dense jungle of deep green, women balancing baskets on their brightly wrapped heads, men strolling down rust red roads made of earth that looks like Mars, whip-thin herders driving cows and goats across dry yellow grasslands, Pygmies whispering through the forest and masked dancers jumping in rhythm in front of mud-and-thatch huts, their carved faces fascinating.

This, then, is Cameroon, a country that markets itself, with some justification, as all of Africa in one. The description is apt, even eerie: physically, from the southern rainforests to the lazy beaches, from the Mountain of Thunder, an active volcano, to the brown hills of the Sahel and across to the wild eastern frontier that tempts the adventurous; culturally, in its blend of religions and ancient tribal traditions; linguistically, as one of the few Anglophone and Francophone nations in the continent. Even politically – Cameroon is both blessed by the stability many African nations vie for and hamstrung by accusations of corruption.

This, too, is Cameroon. But that's the reward of travelling here: seeing Africa at her most quintessentially African, warts and all. None of it stops us from loving this country and the continent she encompasses, an affection that's easy to feel as your first Cameroonian evening slips over you, and *makossa* music or a guitar made of gourds sets the rhythm, the street smells like roasting bananas and all that stands between you and African bliss is grilled fish and a sweaty beer.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 475,440 sq km
- **Capital** Yaoundé
- **Country code** 237
- **Famous for** International football success
- **Languages** French, English, Bamiléké, Fulfude, Fulani and Ewondo
- **Money** Central African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA493; €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 18.4 million
- **Visa** Arrange in advance, US\$60



HOW MUCH?

- **Ingredients for juju fetish** CFA500
- **100km bus ride** CFA1000
- **Moto-taxi ride across town** CFA150
- **Bottle of palm wine** CFA1000
- **Carved mask** CFA15,000-30,000

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** CFA375
- **1.5L of bottled water** CFA450
- **Bottle of '33' beer** CFA600
- **Souvenir football shirt** CFA3500
- **Stick of brochettes** CFA100

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Mt Cameroon** (p191) Don your hiking boots to climb the mist-shrouded slopes of West Africa's highest peak.
- **Maroua** (p208) The surreal streets of the crossroads of the Sahel.
- **Ebodjé** (p219) Sea turtle lays her eggs along a pristine beach, before you settle to sleep in a hut in remote, rural Africa.
- **The Grassfields** (p197) Green plateaus along the edge of dozens of traditional chiefdoms.
- **Mandara Mountains** (p210) The red dust and sharp mountains of Cameroon's wild north.

ITINERARIES

Travel in Cameroon can be slow, especially off main routes, including in the Ring Road area and in the far north around Maroua. Allow plenty of time and keep your schedule flexible.

- **One Week** With just a week of travel, starting from either Douala (p183) or Yaoundé (p178), head to Limbe (p187) for a night or two to get your bearings. Then – if you have a bit of an adventurous bent – head either to Mt Cameroon (p191) or to Korup National Park (p194) for a few days exploring (in the dry season only), finishing again in Douala. Alternatively, if you're more interested in culture and history, go from Douala to Foumban (p203) via Bafoussam (p201). After a night there, head to the Ring Road area (p197), ideally

fitting in a day in Bafut (p200) and another on the stretch between Sabga (p197) and Kumbo (p198). Finish back in Douala or Yaoundé.

- **Two or Three Weeks** With two weeks, spend the first week exploring the Ring Road area (p197) and visiting Foumban (p203). Then you could head to Yaoundé (p178) from where you can head north to Maroua (p208) and venture into the Mandara Mountains (p210) for a few days trekking – this last leg is easier to accomplish with three weeks.
- **One Month** With a month or more you'll have time to expand this itinerary, perhaps starting with a night or two in Limbe (p187) followed by climbing Mt Cameroon (p191) or visiting Korup (p194), before making your way up to Bamenda (p195) and the Ring Road area (p197). During the dry season, you could then go from Kumbo (p198) on the Ring Road direct to Foumban (p203); otherwise head to Foumban via Bafoussam (p201). From here, make your way to Yaoundé (p178) to rest for a day or two, before heading north by train to N'Gaoundéré (p205) and beyond. Spend the remainder of the time exploring northern Cameroon (p205). If you have time, detour south to Kribi (p216) and Ebodjé (p220) to see sea turtles and rainforest – all at once.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The north has a single wet season from April/May to September/October. The hottest months here are March to May, when temperatures can soar to 40°C, although it's a dry (and therefore somewhat bearable) heat. The south has a humid, equatorial climate, with rain scattered throughout the year and almost continual high humidity. The main wet season here is June to October, when secondary roads often become impassable. From March to June are the light rains.

Throughout Cameroon, November to February are the driest months, though dust from harmattan winds greatly restricts visibility. These are the best months to visit, although you'll have harmattan haze during much of this time (which is not good for photography). The worst months are between July and October, when it rains almost everywhere and many roads are impassable. See also Climate Charts, p810.