

Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire: the name conjures images of starfish-studded beaches and pockets of deep-green jungle – the domain of forest elephants, tangled lianas, savannah palms and fat mahogany trees. It sounds poetic. It sounds like peace. It sounds like the name of one of the most developed nations in Africa.

Somehow, Côte d'Ivoire lost its footing. A 2002 rebellion tore the country in half and, from that moment on, travellers forgot about the beaches, hearing only the echoes of gunfire in their minds. It's time to stop remembering and start exploring, because Côte d'Ivoire is back. A reconciliation agreement has been signed, the rebels have been disarmed and the country is warmly embracing peace.

Head to Abidjan, where shimmering skyscrapers and cathedral spires pierce the heavens. When the daylight fades, sit back with a cocktail and watch the blue sky blush, making room for nightfall, warm laughter and the clever beats of *coupé-decalé*. Try *poisson braisé* and listen as musicians tease base notes from banjos. When you wake from slumber, make footprints on the eastern shores, embroidered with shells and sand dollars.

Though its beaches most certainly are, Côte d'Ivoire is not perfect. The skyscrapers of Abidjan stand tall but forests have fallen; elephants and chimps were among the casualties of war. Yet these early days of peace taste as good as the chocolate produced from this soil, and that's something worth sharing. It's time to forget the gunfire. These days, the only explosions you'll hear are fireworks.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 322,465 sq km
- **Capital** Yamoussoukro
- **Country code** ☎ 225
- **Famous for** Cocoa, music, skyscrapers
- **Languages** French, Mande, Malinké, Dan, Senoufo, Baoulé, Agni, Dioula
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA493; €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 20.1 million
- **Visa** Required by almost everyone (Americans are no longer exempt); arrange in advance



HOW MUCH?

- **Hand-spun Korhogo cloth** CFA10,000-30,000
- **Coupé-decalé album** CFA2000
- **Shared taxi across town** CFA200
- **Local celebrity magazine** CFA1700
- **Mobile phone top-up voucher** CFA1000

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** CFA425
- **1.5L of bottled water** CFA500
- **Bottle of Flag beer** CFA650
- **Souvenir football shirt** CFA3000
- **Plate of poisson braisé aloc** CFA800

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Abidjan** (p265) Eating haute Ivorian cuisine, dancing to *coupé-decalé* as night falls and never taking your eyes off the illuminated skyline.
- **Grand Bassam** (p275) Colonial streets galore and horse riding along white-sand beaches.
- **Man** (p280) Watching stilt dancers and trekking to the summit of Mt Tonkouï, with its view over three West African countries.
- **Assinie Mafia** (p276) Lazy pirogue rides, surfers sliding to the shore and *poisson braisé* under the stars.
- **Yamoussoukro** (p279) The quiet village that grew up to become a shining, modern capital.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Spend three days exploring Abidjan (p265) and its restaurants, live-music venues and sights. Head east to arty Grand Bassam (p275) and on to enchanting Assinie (p276).
- **Two Weeks** With an extra week you can throw in the charms of Sassandra (p277) and San Pédro (p278) and, if security permits, you can explore Parc National de Taï (p278) before crossing into Liberia. Alternatively, you could head north from Abidjan to Yamoussoukro (p279) and on to Man (p280).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Côte d'Ivoire has a humid, tropical climate with two rainy seasons: May to July and October to November. In the south of the country, annual rainfall is 1500mm to 2000mm. In the drier northern part of the country, the wet season extends from June to October with no intermediary dry spell. The south is very humid, with temperatures averaging 28°C. In the less-humid north, the average temperature is 26°C from December to February with midday maximums regularly above 35°C. Temperatures can drop to 10°C in the highlands. Come January, the dusty harmattan winds blow in from the Sahara, reducing visibility and prompting an epidemic of coughs and colds. See Climate Charts, p811.

HISTORY

The major ethnic groups in Côte d'Ivoire all migrated relatively recently from neighbouring areas. Around 400 years ago, the Krou (or Kru) people moved eastwards from Liberia while the Senoufo and Lobi moved southwards from Burkina Faso and Mali. It was not until the 18th and 19th centuries that the Akan people, including the Baoulé, migrated from Ghana into the eastern area and the Malinké (also called Mandingo) from Guinea moved into the northwest.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive. Compared with neighbouring Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire suffered little from the slave trade: European slave and merchant ships preferred other areas with better harbours. France took no interest until the 1840s when they enticed local leaders to grant French commercial traders a monopoly along the coast. Thereafter, the French built naval bases to keep out non-French traders and began a systematic conquest of the interior. To build

WARNING

Due to the risk of political insecurity in the north and west at the time of research, we were unable to travel to some areas outside of Abidjan. Instead, we relied on friends and journalists working in those places. At the time of writing, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office was advising against travel to areas north of Bouaké and travel west of the line between the towns of Seguela and Guiglo.