

Nigeria

It's safe to say that Nigeria's reputation precedes it. Everyone seems to know the 'facts': it's big, crazy and dangerous, with email scams its most famous export. Enough to make you draw a big detour line on your travel map through West Africa? Think again, because we'd like to change your mind. Simply put: we love Nigeria.

Nigeria is superlative in every sense. It's the most populous country on the continent – every fifth African is a Nigerian – it dominates the region economically, and its cultural output ranges from literary masterpieces such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus* to the infectious grooves of Fela Kuti's Afrobeat.

Contrasts abound. The sprawling megalopolis of Lagos contrasts sharply with the ancient Muslim cities of the north and the river deltas and lush forests of the south and east. There's wildlife too, from pioneering conservation organisations in Calabar to Gashaka-Gumti National Park, recently reorganised to accept visitors.

Nigeria can feel like more than the sum of its parts – an unruly collection of regions and ethnicities pulling against each other with a centrifugal force that occasionally bursts into chaos. But against this, the hard work and proud smiles of Nigerians offer the perfect corrective for visitors.

We can't lie: getting around can sometimes be exhausting, and it's not a destination for first-timers to Africa. But put the scare stories to one side and you might be in for a pleasant surprise. If you don't visit Nigeria you can barely say that you've been to West Africa.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 924,000 sq km
- **Capital** Abuja
- **Country code** ☎ 234
- **Famous for** Corruption; email scams; writers Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe; Afrobeat
- **Language** English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba
- **Money** naira (N); US\$1= N147; €1= N196
- **Population** 146 million
- **Visa** Get in advance, letter of invitation usually required



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lagos** (p622) Plunge in and sample the adrenaline charge and social scene of Nigeria's wild beating heart.
- **Calabar** (p639) Take in colonial history and cutting-edge conservation in this easy-going old river port.
- **Kano** (p653) Find a trace of the old Saharan trade routes in the old city and the indigo dye pits.
- **Afi Mountain Drill Ranch** (p643) Head into the rainforest to spend time at a pioneering primate research centre, experiencing traditional village life and canopy walkways.
- **Gashaka-Gumti National Park** (p649) Head into the real wilds to explore this newly reorganised mountain-meets-savannah national park.

ITINERARIES

- **One to Two Weeks** No one should visit Nigeria without at least a few days in Lagos (p622), trying to navigate the city's mindset and traffic jams, and spending late nights in the bars and clubs. When Lagos gets too much, head east to Benin City (p635) to see the ancient craft of brass sculpture, before carrying on to the old port city of Calabar (p639), where you can check out some pioneering primate conservation work and the country's best museum, Calabar Museum. You could also stop off at Umuhaia (p638) to see the National War Museum and learn about the Biafran conflict. Extend your time in the southeast in the lush forests of the Afi Mountain Drill Ranch (p643).
- **One Month** A longer trip allows you to further explore the south, but also to take in northern Nigeria. From Lagos, fly to Abuja (p643), and then continue by road to the old trading cities of Zaria (p651) and Kano (p653). An interesting detour would be via the cool plateau city of Jos (p646), with a side trip to the remote and exciting Gashaka-Gumti National Park (p649).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

For travel to the south, March to August are the wettest months to visit, and best avoided if possible. Temperatures are hot year-round, peaking at about 35°C in the spring; the humidity is constant. Late spring to summer is the hottest part of the year in the north

HOW MUCH?

- **Okada (motorcycle taxi) ride across town** N40
- **Replica Benin brass sculpture** N12,000
- **Afrobeat CD** N400
- **Bribe at police roadblock** N20
- **One-minute local phonecall** N20

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** N70
- **1L of bottled water** N100
- **Beer (bottle of Star)** N200
- **Souvenir football shirt** N900
- **Street snack (stick of suya)** N100

(sometimes topping out at an extreme 45°C). The mercury drops from October to January at the onset of the dusty harmattan winds. See also Climate Charts, p810.

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.

HISTORY

The historical and cultural trajectories of northern and southern Nigeria followed vastly different paths up to their melding into one country under the British. The first recorded empire to flourish in this part of West Africa was that of the Kanem-Borno, in the north around Lake Chad. Its wealth was based on control of the important trans-Saharan trade routes from West Africa to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Islam arrived in the 12th century and was adopted as the state religion in the empire. A number of Islamic Hausa kingdoms also flourished between the 11th and 14th centuries, based around the cities of Kano, Zaria and Nupe.

Islam made little headway in the south, and the southwest became a patchwork of small states, often dominated by the Yoruba. One of the earliest kingdoms, Ijebu, arose in the 10th century, and built the earthworks at Sungbo's Eredo. This was followed in the 14th and 15th