

Algeria

Some of Africa's most exciting travel experiences await you in the sands of Algeria, just a short hop from Europe. The North African nation is once again welcoming independent travellers to its myriad sights, having spent the last 20 years being largely off limits due to a brutal civil war in the 1990s and subsequent problems of violence and kidnapping. Now again considered safe, Algeria is an incredible destination where tourists still remain a novelty and almost anywhere is off the beaten path.

Africa's second-largest country has attractions as varied as they are pristine. The capital, Algiers, is one of North Africa's most charismatic cities, a mix of colonial French and modern socialist architecture, with an ancient medina at its heart. The north of the country also offers some stunning Roman cities, including Djemila, where you're likely to be one of the only visitors. But the country's trump card is its Saharan region: the largest slice of the world's greatest desert is contained within Algeria's borders. Whether you skirt the sand seas in the ancient towns of Ghardaïa, or plunge headlong into its depths in the Saharan 'capital' of Tamanrasset, the Algerian Sahara offers arguably the best desert landscapes on earth.

While Algeria's tourist infrastructure remains fairly basic, it's still a breeze to get around compared with much of the rest of Africa. Affordable flights connect you to everywhere in the country, the road network is well maintained and infrastructure is decades ahead of its southern neighbours. For accessible adventure, unforgettable vistas and a taste of the Maghreb without the tour groups of Morocco, head for Algeria now.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 2.3 million sq km
- **ATMs** Very few outside Algiers, and only a couple in Algiers accept foreign cards
- **Borders** Niger and Tunisia open; Morocco, Libya, Mali and Mauritania closed
- **Budget** US\$35 to US\$75 per day
- **Capital** Algiers
- **Languages** Arabic, Berber, French
- **Money** Algerian dinar (DA); US\$1 = DA72, €1 = DA105 (black market rates are more favourable)
- **Population** 34.2 million
- **Seasons** In the north: wet (October to March), dry (June to September); in the south: hot (March to October), cool (November to February)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 213; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +1
- **Visa** US\$40 to US\$90 for one month



HOW MUCH?

- **Cup of tea** DA50
- **Newspaper** DA100
- **Antique tin box** DA300
- **Large quality carpet** from DA12,000
- **Tuareg taguelmoust** DA400

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** DA110
- **1L bottled water** DA25
- **Bottle of beer** DA150
- **Souvenir T-shirt** DA300
- **Shared taxi in Algiers** DA100

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Algiers** (p72) Modern and traditional Algeria meet in 'la Blanche' – the country's fascinating capital.
- **The Algerian Sahara** (p77) Sleep under the stars in the Tassili du Hoggar and see some of the world's greatest desert scenery.
- **Assekrem** (p77) Watch the sun set beyond a sea of mountains, before getting up to see the sun rise again.
- **Ghardaïa** (p76) Bargain for a technical-our carpet, before peeking inside the ancient Muslim town of Beni Isguen.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Algeria has a Mediterranean climate along the coast, with mild, wet winters, and hot, dry summers. The coastal area is best visited in spring and summer months. The Sahara desert has famously ferocious summer temperatures, so visiting this part of Algeria is best done between late autumn and early spring (November to April). Despite daytime temperatures seldom falling below 25°C, desert nights can be cold, even in the height of summer. Rainfall ranges from more than 1000mm per year in the northern mountains, to zero in the Sahara. Some places go decades without a drop.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Fly to Algiers (p72) for a couple of nights to explore the chaotic cap-

ital before flying south to Tamanrasset (p77) for a desert expedition trip, sleeping under the stars for five days and taking in Assekrem (p77) and the Tassili du Hoggar.

- **Two Weeks** Follow the one-week itinerary, then fly on from Tamanrasset to Ghardaïa (p76), where you can take in the beauties of this ancient town in one day, with its market, colourful carpets and the daily souq (market), then visit the nearby ultraconservative town of Beni Isguen (p76), where women only ever expose one eye. Back in Algiers, make an overnight trip to Djemila (p76), and a day trip to Tipaza (p76).

HISTORY

The modern state of Algeria is a relatively recent creation. The name was coined by the Ottoman Turks in the 16th century to describe the territory controlled by the regency of Algiers – initially a Turkish colony. The regency broke free of the Ottoman Empire and founded a military republic of unusual stability. This endured almost 300 years until spurious diplomatic problems prompted the French to invade in the 19th century.

The Barbary Coast

Before the arrival of the French, Algeria was known to Europeans as the Barbary (a corruption of Berber) Coast, whose notorious pirates preyed on Christian shipping. The dreaded Khayr al-Din, going under the chilling pseudonym of Barbarossa, was the first regent of Algiers during this period, and at one point held no fewer than 25,000 Christians captive in the city. Piracy sent shivers down many a spine until the US Navy defeated a Barbary fleet off Algiers in 1815. Despite this, the feared pirates were not entirely beaten until the French attacked Algiers in 1830 and forced the ruling *dey* (commander or governor) to capitulate. It took another 41 years for total French domination of the country.

The main opposition came from Emir Abdelkader, ruler of western and central inland Algeria and the great hero of Algeria's nationalist movement. His forces resisted the French for almost six years before they were defeated near Oujda in 1844. Abdelkader himself finally surrendered in 1846 and