

Angola

Angola is an eye-opener – in more ways than one. Scarred painfully by years of debilitating warfare and untouched by foreign visitors since the early 1970s, the country remains remote and undiscovered, with few observers privy to the geographic highlights and vast cultural riches that lie hidden behind an ostensibly violent veneer.

But, with the cessation of a 40-year civil conflict ushering in a prolonged period of peace and stability, opportunities for exploration are quietly opening up. For outsiders, the attractions are manifold. Despite widespread poverty, inbred corruption and an infrastructure devastated by decades of indiscriminate fighting, Angola holds a lure that few other countries can match. Here in the heady heat of equatorial Africa you'll encounter some of the continent's most gracious people and discover many of its most closely guarded secrets.

Chill out on expansive beaches, sample the solitude in virgin wildlife parks or sift through the ruins of Portuguese colonialism. From Luanda to Lubango the nuances are startling.

Despite advancements in infrastructure and a dramatically improved security situation, travel in Angola remains the preserve of adventurers, diehards or those on flexible budgets. But with the transport network gradually recovering and wildlife being shipped in to repopulate decimated national parks, the signs of recovery are more than just a mirage.

Angola is halfway along the road to political and economic atonement and it would be a shame to miss out on its dramatic rebirth.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 1,246,700 sq km
- **ATMs** They exist, but rarely accept foreign cards
- **Borders** Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia and Namibia
- **Budget** US\$150 per day
- **Capital** Luanda
- **Languages** Portuguese and various Bantu languages
- **Money** Kwanza; US\$1 = 90Kz, €1 = 128Kz
- **Population** 18 million (estimated)
- **Seasons** Dry (June to September), wet (October to May)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 244; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1
- **Visas** US\$75 to US\$125 for 30 days; must be obtained in advance



HOW MUCH?

- **Internet per hour** US\$3
- **Cup of coffee** US\$1.50
- **Car rental per day** US\$100
- **Bottle of wine** US\$20
- **Average meal** US\$20

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.50
- **1.5L bottled water** US\$2
- **Bottle of beer** US\$2
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$10
- **Baguette** US\$1

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Luanda** (p854) Expansive beaches, expensive bars and tatty overcrowded townships, Luanda is a kaleidoscopic vision of Angola at the sharp end.
- **Parque Nacional da Kissama** (p858) One of Africa's largest, emptiest and most surreal wildlife parks.
- **Benguela** (p859) Chill out on the blissfully empty beaches of Angola's most laid-back town.
- **Lubango** (p861) Almost untouched by the war, breezy Lubango offers cascading waterfalls, spectacular volcanic fissures and a vibrant small-city ambiance.
- **Miradouro de Lua** (p859) A spectacular lookout over a canyon of moonlike cliffs that cascade dramatically into the Atlantic Ocean.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Situated on the Atlantic littoral in a balmy subtropical setting, Angola's climate is heavily influenced by three local peculiarities; the cool Benguela sea current, the rugged interior mountains and the presence of the Namib Desert in the southeast. As a result, the country boasts a number of distinct climatic regions, including a wet, tropical northern jungle, a drier and cooler central plateau, and an arid southern belt influenced by its proximity to the Kalahari Desert.

Although different regions vary significantly, the best time to visit Angola is during the cooler, drier months of June to September.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Visit Luanda's Fortaleza de São Miguel (p857), along with the city's selection of churches and museums before heading south to Benfica market (p858) for a spot of bargaining. Continue along the coast road to the Miradouro de Lua (p859) and the Kwanza River (p859), and round off the proceedings with a quick tour of Parque Nacional da Kissama (p858).
- **Two Weeks to One Month** Follow the Luanda itinerary before catching a bus south for the spectacular journey to Benguela (p859) and Lobito (p859). A train ride on the famous Benguela railway (p859) is a must, though at present you can only sample a tiny section of the track. Head for Lubango (p861) to soak up the fresh mountain air and make a nifty side trip to unharried Namibe (p861). Back-track to battle-scarred Huambo (p860) for a few days before enjoying one of Angola's most scenic bus rides on your return to the capital.

HISTORY

Angola's often violent and bloody history has left a country endowed with a vast expanse of natural resources and development possibilities perennially trying to stave off starvation. A terrain rich in oil, diamonds, iron ore and copper, plus a measurable hydroelectric capacity, has the potential to be one of Africa's richest states. Instead, the more common reality is that of a nation of shattered infrastructure and devastated towns struggling to feed a desperately poor and eternally uprooted population.

Another Lost Empire

In 1483 Vasco da Gama first dropped anchor in Luanda Bay and unwittingly pre-empted the start of a conflict that, save for a few intermittent lulls in the fighting, continued for over half a millennium. The land now known as Angola was, at the time, inhabited by a number of small tribes living in loosely defined kingdoms that lacked the organisation and administrative cohesiveness of 15th-century Europe. But despite a natural curiosity borne out of years of seafaring exploration, the Portuguese had no real desire to settle on this malaria-ridden African shoreline. Post-1500, the more fertile and less-threatening