

Burkina Faso

Forget about big-ticket attractions in Burkina Faso. Bar a scattering of dunes and colourful markets in the Sahel, a range of eerie rock formations around Banfora in the southwest and a couple of national parks (but none that can rival those in eastern or southern Africa), the country has few iconic calling cards. So why does it invariably win the hearts of travellers? The answer: the people. The Burkinabé (as people from Burkina Faso are called) are the country's greatest asset. They're disarmingly charming and easygoing. Wherever you go, you'll be greeted with a memorable *bonne arrivée* (welcome).

The country's other big draws include arts, craftwork and culture. There's a fantastic arts scene in Ouagadougou, the enjoyable and gloriously named capital, along with a famous musical tradition and beautiful handicrafts. Throw in Fespaco, Africa's premier film festival, and there's enough to engage your mind and senses for a couple of weeks or so. Burkina Faso is also alive with a vibrant cultural mix of peoples, from the proud Fulani people of the Sahel to the animist societies of the Senoufo or the Lobi.

Tourism infrastructure is fairly limited, but there is a handful of gems, especially in Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou, as well as family-run, ecofriendly *campements* in more remote areas.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 274,122 sq km
- **ATMs** In all major towns (Visa only)
- **Borders** Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Togo; all borders open
- **Budget** US\$20 to US\$50 per day
- **Capital** Ouagadougou
- **Languages** French, More, Fulfulde and Lobi
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA463, €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 14.9 million
- **Seasons** Wet (June to October), dry (November to February), hot (March to May)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 226; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visa** Issued at Ouagadougou airport (CFA10,000), some border posts or Burkina Faso embassies (up to US\$100); Burkina Faso is covered by the Visa des Pays de l'Entente, p1147



HOW MUCH?

- **Ouagadougou–Bobo-Dioulasso bus ride** US\$13.50
- **Museum admission** US\$2.25
- **Guide per day** US\$22.50 to US\$38
- **Internet connection (per hour)** US\$1.10
- **4WD rental (per day)** US\$125 plus petrol

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.45
- **1.5L bottled water** US\$1.10
- **Bottle of Brakina beer** US\$1.80
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$11.20
- **Serve of riz sauce** US\$1.10

HIGHLIGHTS

- **The Sahel** (p273) Experience the magic of the Sahelian markets and landscapes.
- **Ouagadougou** (p266) Let the beat get under your skin in Burkina Faso's wonderfully named capital.
- **Bobo-Dioulasso** (p269) Wind down a few gears in Burkina's mellow second city.
- **Ranch de Nazinga** (p273) Come face to face with elephants in this wildlife sanctuary.
- **Sindou Peaks** (p272) Wander amid craggy rock formations and bizarrely shaped peaks.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit is from mid-October to December. It can be downright wet between June and September, when the south can be uncomfortably humid and many roads throughout the country are impassable. From December to February the weather is marginally cooler, although dusty harmattan winds can produce hazy skies in January and February. The hot season is from March to early June, when the mercury can rise well above 40°C in the capital.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Plan on spending a couple of days in the capital Ouagadougou (p266), which has few sights as such but boasts steamy nightlife, a thriving arts scene and fine restaurants. Then bus it

to Bobo-Dioulasso (p269) and soak up the mellow vibes of this charming city.

- **Two Weeks** You could add the Sahel to your trip and head up to Gorom-Gorom (p273) and the nearby Sahelian settlements, or consider further exploration of the southwest by renting a moped in Banfora (p271).

HISTORY**The Mossi & the French**

By the 14th century, the territory of present-day Burkina Faso was occupied by the Bobo, Lobi, Gourounsi and the Mossi. The Mossi, who now make up almost half of Burkina Faso's population, founded their first kingdom more than 500 years ago in Ouagadougou. Three more Mossi states ruled over the remainder of the country, known for their devastating attacks against the Muslim empires in Mali.

During the Scramble for Africa in the second half of the 19th century, the French broke up the traditional Mossi states, but French rule in Upper Volta, as Burkina Faso was then known, saw money and resources go elsewhere – mostly Côte d'Ivoire. By the time that independence came in 1960, Upper Volta had become little more than a repository for forced labour.

Thomas Sankara

Between 1966 and 1982 Upper Volta suffered a cycle of coups and countercoups and the country stagnated. In November 1982 Captain Thomas Sankara, an ambitious young left-wing military star, seized power.

Over the next four years 'Thom Sank' (as he was popularly known) recast the country. He changed its name to Burkina Faso (meaning 'Land of the Incorruptible'), restructured the economy to promote self-reliance in rural areas and tackled corruption with rare zeal. The economy improved, financial books were kept in good order and people developed a genuine pride in their country.

Despite his popularity, in late 1987 a group of junior officers seized power; Sankara was taken outside Ouagadougou and shot.

The Compaoré Years

The new junta was headed by Captain Blaise Compaoré, Sankara's former friend and