

Cameroon

For many, the word 'Africa' conjures a certain image: dense jungle of deep green, women balancing baskets on their bright headwraps, men strolling down rust-red roads made of earth that looks like Mars, whip-thin herders driving cows and goats across dry yellow grasslands, pygmies whispering through the forest, and masked dancers jumping in rhythm in front of mud and thatched-roof huts, their carved face masks fascinating.

This, then, is Cameroon, a country that markets itself, with some justification, as all of Africa in one. The description is apt, even eerie: geographically, from the southern rainforests to the lazy beaches, from the Mountain of Thunder, an active volcano, to the brown hills of the Sahel and across to the wild eastern frontier that tempts the adventurous; culturally, in its blend of religions and ancient tribal traditions; linguistically, as one of the few Anglophone and Francophone nations on the continent. Even politically – Cameroon is both blessed by the stability many African nations vie for and hamstrung by accusations of corruption.

This, too, is Cameroon. But that's the reward of travelling here: seeing Africa in all its diversity, warts and all. None of it stops us from loving this country and the continent it encompasses, an affection that's easy to feel as your first Cameroonian evening slips over you, and *makossa* music or a guitar made of gourds sets the rhythm, the street smells like roasting bananas and all that you need for African bliss is grilled fish and a sweaty beer.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 469,440 sq km (a little smaller than Spain, a little bigger than California)
- **ATMs** At banks in large cities, linked to Visa
- **Borders** Chad, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Nigeria all open; border with Congo sometime closed, check in advance
- **Budget** US\$40 to US\$60 per day
- **Capital** Yaoundé
- **Languages** French, English and many local languages
- **Money** Central African franc; US\$1 = CFA463, €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 18.8 million
- **Seasons** Hot (year-round), wet (north, April to September), heavy rains (south, June to October)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 237; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +1
- **Visa** Required by all, available in neighbouring countries for US\$60



HOW MUCH?

- **Ingredients for juju fetish** US\$1.10
- **100km bus ride** US\$2.20
- **Moto-taxi ride across town** US\$0.22 to US\$0.33
- **Bottle of palm wine** US\$1.77
- **Carved mask** US\$45 to US\$50

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.40
- **1.5L bottled water** US\$1
- **Bottle of '33' beer** US\$1.50
- **Souvenir football shirt** US\$10
- **Stick of brochettes** US\$1.50 to US\$2

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Mt Cameroon** (p289) Don your hiking boots to climb the mist-shrouded slopes of West Africa's highest peak.
- **Kribi** (p295) Chill on the white beaches and practise your French with the locals over grilled fish.
- **Ring Road** (p293) Explore the cool green scenery and rolling countryside near Bamenda.
- **Mandara Mountains** (p300) Head into the remote landscape and trek from village to village.
- **Parc National du Waza** (p300) Watch elephants at the water holes of one of the region's best national parks.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The north has rains from April/May to September/October. The hottest months are March to May, when temperatures can soar to 40°C, although it's a dry heat. The south has a humid, equatorial climate, with rain scattered throughout the year. Its main wet season is June to October, with light rain from March to June. Throughout Cameroon, November to February are the driest months.

The best months to visit are November to February, although you'll have harmattan haze during much of this time. The worst months are July to October, when it's raining, and many roads are impassable.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Starting from either Douala (p287) or Yaoundé (p282), go to Limbe (p289) for a night or two to get your bearings before climbing Mt Cameroon (p289). Alternatively, leave the cities for Fouban (p294) or Bamenda (p291) and then head to the open country of the Ring Road area (p293). Finish back in Douala or Yaoundé.
- **Two to Three Weeks** Spend the first week exploring the Ring Road area (p293) and visiting Fouban (p294). Then head to Yaoundé (p282), fly north to Maroua (p298) and venture into the Mandara Mountains (p300) for a few days of hiking. With more time, you could go from Yaoundé to N'Gaoundéré (p296) by train, and from there make your way north by road to Maroua.
- **One Month** Start with a night or two in Limbe (p289), followed by a climb of Mt Cameroon (p289) before making your way up to Bamenda (p291) and the Ring Road area (p293). Cross to Fouban (p294), and from here make your way to Yaoundé (p282) before taking the train to N'Gaoundéré (p296). Spend the remainder of your time exploring northern Cameroon (p296).

HISTORY

Cameroon is another example of colonial powers creating a country without regard for tribal boundaries or geography. The parts of what is now Cameroon were divided and ceded between European countries throughout the colonial era until the modern boundaries were established in 1961, creating

IDENTIFY YOURSELF

In Cameroon it's a legal requirement to carry identification with you at all times. If you're not happy with always carrying your passport, it's possible to get an official certified copy. Photocopy the title and visa pages and go to the main police office in any large town during office hours and ask to have it 'legalised'. The process is quick and easy, leaving you with a passport copy with enough official stamps to satisfy even the surliest of checkpoint police. The certification costs CFA1000.