

Chad

Wave goodbye to your comfort zone and say hello to Chad. Put simply, Chad is a place and an experience that you'll never forget! If Ghana and Gambia are Africa for beginners, Chad is Africa for the hardcore.

To say that travel here can be tough is a major understatement. In much of the country the roads are utterly diabolical, the tourist infrastructure somewhere below zero, the paperwork overwhelming, the corruption wallet draining, the summer heat mind melting, the costs astronomical and the security situation highly unstable.

So why bother you may ask? Well, we could list the sublime oases lost in the northern deserts, tell you about the stampeding herds of wildlife in the national parks or the deep blue lure of a boat trip on Lake Chad. But let's be honest about it, these things alone aren't why people come to Chad. People come here because Chad promises them an opportunity to fall completely off the edge of the known world and into a place that promises experiences, good and bad, that you'll be recalling forever.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 1,284,000 sq km
- **ATMs** N'Djaména
- **Borders** Cameroon, Libya, Niger and Nigeria open; Sudan closed; Central African Republic (CAR) often closed; Libya and CAR not recommended
- **Budget** From US\$50 per day in N'Djaména, US\$25 to US\$50 per day in other towns
- **Capital** N'Djaména
- **Languages** French, Arabic and more than 120 local languages
- **Money** Central African CFA; US\$1 = CFA463, €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 10 million
- **Seasons** Dry (October to May), wet (June to September)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 235; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +1
- **Visa** Must be obtained before arrival



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Zakouma National Park** (p559) Track herds of elephants and ogle dazzling birds in the Zakouma National Park
- **Gaoui** (p558) Sigh over the beautiful painted houses of Gaoui, a fascinating village just minutes from N'Djaména.
- **Sarh** (p559) See the green and pleasant side of sandy Chad and chill out along the Chari River.
- **Guètè** (p558) Scan the horizon for egrets and hippos on Lake Chad, Africa's most mysterious lake.
- **Ennedi** (p560) Marvel at dramatic desert scenery and rock formations.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Chad has three distinct climatic zones: in the tropical south, temperatures usually range from 20°C to 25°C, but can rise to 40°C before the rains; the centre, where N'Djaména and Lake Chad are located, often exceeds 45°C before the rains; and temperatures can get even higher in the north.

November to January is the coolest and thus best time for general travel, unless you are here for Zakouma National Park – then it's March and April (the hottest months). It is fascinating to see the Sahel turn green in July, but travel in the rainy season is not pleasant. You can't believe how waterlogged the capital becomes during July and August and road travel elsewhere slows dramatically.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Visit N'Djaména (p554), Gaoui (p558) and Guètè (p558).
- **One Week** Visit N'Djaména, Gaoui and Guètè while you get your permits in order, then head north to Mao (p559) and Bol (p559) or south to Moundou (p558) and Sarh (p559).
- **Two Weeks** Sign up for a two-week organised tour of the spectacular Ennedi desert (p560).

HISTORY

Dominated historically by slave-trading Arab Muslims from the northern regions, Chad is primarily an agricultural nation with over 80% of the population living at subsistence level. Its recent history was shaped when the French began taking an interest in central and western Africa in the 1900s. By 1913 the

WARNING

Make no mistake, travelling in Chad is no walk in the park. There is intense rebel activity all across the south and southeast and the chances of further rebel attacks on N'Djaména are high. All Western governments advise against travel to Chad. Check the situation very carefully before travelling here (see p1139 for details of government travel advisory services).

country was fully colonised: sadly the new rulers didn't really know what to do with their conquest, and investment all but dried up after a few years, leaving much of the territory almost entirely undeveloped.

When independence was granted in 1960, a southerner became Chad's first head of state. Unfortunately, President François Tombalbaye was not the best choice. By arresting opposition leaders and banning political parties, he provoked a series of conspiracies in the Muslim north – the violent repression of which quickly escalated into full-blown guerrilla war. For the next quarter of a century, Chadian politics was defined by armed struggles, shifting alliances, coups and private armies, overseen and often exacerbated by France and Libya, who took a keen interest in the area. In addition, the Sahel drought of the 1970s and early 1980s destroyed centuries-old patterns of existence and cultivation, causing large-scale migration to urban centres.

In 1975 Tombalbaye was assassinated, and succeeded by General Félix Malloum, a fellow southerner. Over US\$1 million in cash was found in Tombalbaye's residence, along with plans to proclaim himself emperor.

Modern Politics

The Government of National Unity was then formed by Malloum and Hissène Habré (a former northern rebel commander); it was a tenuous alliance between two men who shared little more than mutual distrust. The resulting internal power struggle in 1979 pitted north against south, and Muslim against Christian or animist, all colliding with destructive force in the capital, where thousands of civilians were massacred. Eventually Malloum fled the country, and Goukouni Oueddei – the son of a tribal chieftain from