

Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire offers a wealth of starfish-studded beaches and pockets of deep, green jungle – the domain of forest elephants, tangled lianas, savannah palms and fat mahogany trees.

However, CI lost its footing as a travel destination when a 2002 rebellion tore the country in half. From that moment on, travellers forgot about the beaches, hearing only the echoes of gunfire in their minds. Though political insecurity is still a possibility, the country is gradually embracing peace.

Head to Abidjan, where shimmering skyscrapers and cathedral spires pierce the heavens. When the daylight fades, sit back with a cocktail and watch the blue sky blush, making room for nightfall, warm laughter and the clever beats of *coupé-decalé* (see p309). Try *poisson braisé* and listen as musicians tease bass notes from banjos. Check out colonial architecture, spot monkeys between baobab trees, and make footprints on white-sand beaches embroidered with shells and sea urchins.

Though its beaches most certainly are perfect, Côte d'Ivoire is not. The skyscrapers of Abidjan stand tall, but forests have fallen. Yet these early days of peace taste as good as the chocolate produced from this soil, and that's something worth sharing.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 322,465 sq km
- **ATMs** In Abidjan and Yamoussoukro
- **Borders** Liberia, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea
- **Budget** US\$70 to US\$100 per day in Abidjan, US\$30 to US\$60 elsewhere
- **Capital** Yamoussoukro
- **Languages** French, Mande, Malinke, Dan, Senoufo, Baoulé, Agni, Dioula
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA463, €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 18.4 million
- **Seasons** Wet (May to July and October to November), hot and humid (rest of the year)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 225; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visa** Required by almost everyone (Americans are no longer exempt) – arrange in advance; also covered by the Visa des Pays de l'Entente (see p1147)



WARNING

Due to the risk of political insecurity in the north and west at the time of research, we were unable to travel to some areas outside of Abidjan. Instead, we relied on friends and journalists working in those places for our research. At the time of writing, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office was advising against travel to areas north of Bouaké. See p315 for more information.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Abidjan** (p309) Order Ivorian haute cuisine, then, as night falls, dance to *coupé-decalé* – never taking your eyes off the illuminated skyline.
- **Grand Bassam** (p311) Get some downtime, explore colonial streets and ride horses along white-sand beaches.
- **Man** (p314) Watch stilt dancers; hike to the summit of Mt Tonkoui and, breathless, take in the view of three West African countries.
- **Assinie** (p312) Take a lazy *pirogue* ride, watch surfers slide to shore and tuck into *poisson braisé* under the stars.
- **Yamoussoukro** (p313) Explore the quiet village that became a shiny capital.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The south has two wet seasons: May through July and October through November. In the drier north, the wet season lasts from June to October. The south is very humid, with temperatures in Abidjan averaging 28°C. In the north, the average is 26°C from December to February, with midday maximums regularly hitting 35°C the rest of the year.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Spend three days exploring Abidjan (p309) and its restaurants, live-music venues and sights. Head east to arty Grand Bassam (p311) and on to enchanting Assinie (p312).
- **Two Weeks** With an extra week you can throw in the charms of Sassandra (p312) and San Pédro (p313), and if security permits, you can explore Parc National du Taï (p313) before crossing into Liberia. Alternatively, you could head north from Abidjan to Yamoussoukrou (p313) and on to Man (p314).

HISTORY

Until the 1840s, the indigenous people of Côte d'Ivoire were protected from European colonialism by the inhospitable coastline. In this relative isolation, kingdoms such as the Krou, Senoufo, Lubi, Malinke and Akan flourished. When the French began a big push towards colonising the region, they met fierce resistance, but eventually took control, trading for ivory and establishing coffee and cocoa plantations, which are still the backbone of the economy today.

When independence came in 1960, Félix Houphouët-Boigny was the obvious choice for president. Born in 1905, Houphouët-Boigny was a labour leader who turned his trade union into a pro-Independence political party. He was elected to the French parliament and eventually became the first African to be a minister in a European government. His policies were, for a long time, wildly successful – Côte d'Ivoire became the world's largest producer of cocoa and the economy maintained a 10% annual growth rate for 20 years. But it didn't last. World recession, drought, collapsing prices on agricultural products and over-logging all contributed to Côte d'Ivoire's economic troubles. Although Houphouët-Boigny initiated hardship measures, he was re-elected in the 1990 elections, which were open to other parties for the first time. He died in 1993 after 33 years as the country's president.

HOW MUCH?

- **Hand-spun Korhogo cloth** CFA10,000 to CFA30,000
- **Coupé-decalé album** CFA2000
- **Shared taxi across town** CFA200
- **Local celebrity magazine** CFA1700
- **Mobile phone top-up voucher** CFA1000

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** CFA425
- **1.5L bottled water** CFA500
- **Bottle of Flag beer** CFA650
- **Souvenir football shirt** CFA3000
- **Plate of poisson braisé alocó** CFA800