

Africa Directory

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Pan-continental information of a practical nature is briefly outlined in this Africa Directory. For more specific details, turn to the Directory sections towards the end of each country chapter.

ACCOMMODATION

In the country chapters, we sometimes list accommodation options in three categories – budget, midrange and top end. Of course, not all the places you'll be visiting will have accommodation choices that span this range. In many rural areas you'll find budget homestays only, while in certain national parks there's little available besides expensive luxury lodges.

Prices in this book are given for accommodation with a private bathroom, unless otherwise stated. If you're staying somewhere for a few nights, or at a quiet time, consider asking for discounts: some hotels will work out a deal, others will remain immovable, but it's always worth a try.

Camping

A tent usually saves you money, and can be vital in some national parks or wilderness areas. However, it's not essential for travel in Africa, as many campsites have simple cabins, with or without bedding and cooking utensils. Official campsites, of varying quality and security, allow you to pitch a tent, as do most backpackers' hostels.

'Wild' camping is sometimes OK if you're in a place where no one will find you (or no animals trip over you). In rural areas, if there's no campsite, you're usually better off pitching your tent near a village. Seek permission from the village chief first, and you'll probably be treated as an honoured guest and really get under the skin of Africa.

Homestays

In rural areas you can sometimes arrange informal 'homestays' simply by politely asking for somewhere to bed down and get a dish of local food, in return for a payment. Do not get carried away with bargaining – pay a fair fee, normally the cost of a cheap hotel.

Hostels

Lodges and hostels aimed squarely at backpackers line the popular routes from Nairobi to Cape Town, although elsewhere in Africa they're less common. Most have beds in a

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dorm, as well as double or twin rooms. Backpackers' hostels are good places to get information on stuff to do or onward transport, and they also offer a range of cheap safaris and tours. A potential downside is that you'll be surrounded by fellow travellers, rather than the Africans you came to meet.

Hotels

Africa has numerous hotels, B&Bs and guest-houses, ranging from no-frills establishments and spotless family homes, to sky's-the-limit dens of luxury. Under the 'hotel' category you could also be bedding down at a guest-house, rest house, *pensao* (in Mozambique) or *campement* (in West Africa). The latter is a simple rural hotel, often with a campsite attached. In West Africa (especially Burkina Faso), watch out for B&Bs that go by the names of '*chambres d'hôtes*' or '*maisons d'hôtes*'. A cheap local hotel in East Africa is called a *gesti* or lodgings, while *hoteli* is Swahili for basic eating place.

In cheaper local hotels, it's rare to get a private bathroom and you can forget air-conditioning. Other 'extras' like a fan or mosquito net usually increase the price. Africa has a huge choice of midrange hotels, and standards can be high, especially in privately run (as opposed to government-run) places. At the top end of the range, you'll find international chain hotels with all the trimmings, or boutique hotels with interior-design flair, delicious food and a great atmosphere.

ACTIVITIES

For those energetic types keen to enjoy the outdoors or work up a sweat, there's a great choice in Africa. This section gives an overview; see the individual country chapters for more inspiration.

Adrenalin Pumping

If you want to get the blood pumping, you'll find white-water rafting, bungee jumping, jet boating, microlighting (a cross between a hang glider and an ultralight aircraft) and abseiling at Victoria Falls – billed as the adventure hub of Africa. All these and more can be arranged on both the Zambian (p1096) and Zimbabwean (p1124) sides.

Swakopmund (p992) in Namibia is coming to rival Victoria Falls as southern Africa's adventure-sports capital. South Africa also offers a broad range of extreme activities.

PRACTICALITIES

Electricity

Most countries use a 220/240V current, but some mix 110V and 240V. Some (eg Liberia) still use mostly 110V. Generally, in English-speaking countries, sockets are the British type. In Francophone parts of Africa they're the Continental European two-pin variety. South Africa has yet another system. In some countries you'll find whatever people can get hold of. And if all that hasn't put you off, power cuts and surges are part of life in many African countries.

Weights & Measures

Metric units (metres, kilograms, litres etc) are officially used in most African countries.

In East Africa, head for Jinja in Uganda (see the boxed text, p831), the 'Vic Falls of East Africa', with adrenalin activities galore at nearby Bujagali Falls.

You can also raft and kayak on white water, or canoe on more gentle stuff, in Ethiopia (p699) and Swaziland (see the boxed text, p1076).

Cycling

Long-distance travel by bike is a great way to see Africa, but it's only for a hardy few; see p1156 for some pointers. For shorter trips, you can often hire bikes by the day or week, and tour some wonderful areas. Our favourites for relaxed peddling include Malawi, Uganda and the Cape region of South Africa. If you've got your own wheels, legs of steel and a sense of adventure, mountain bikers will love the ancient trails through Morocco's Atlas Mountains, the Fouta Djallon plateau in Guinea, rural Madagascar and the mountain tracks of Ethiopia.

For inspiration, see the excellent website of the **International Bicycle Fund** (www.ibike.org/africaguide).

Diving & Snorkelling

The east side of Africa is where you strap on goggles, snorkels or tanks, and slip into paradise. Egypt's Red Sea (p97 and p102) is one of the world's premier diving destinations, while Sudan (p208), Kenya (p725), Mozambique (p971 and p972) and Tanzania, especially Zanzibar (p781), have some of the finest reefs