

Niger

Niger only seems to make the news for bad reasons: its recent coup, the Tuareg Rebellion, famine and – incredibly, as revealed in a trial in 2008 – its ongoing slavery problem. But if you make the effort to visit this desert republic, you'll find a warm and generous Muslim population and some superb tout-free West African travel through ancient caravan cities at the edge of the Sahara.

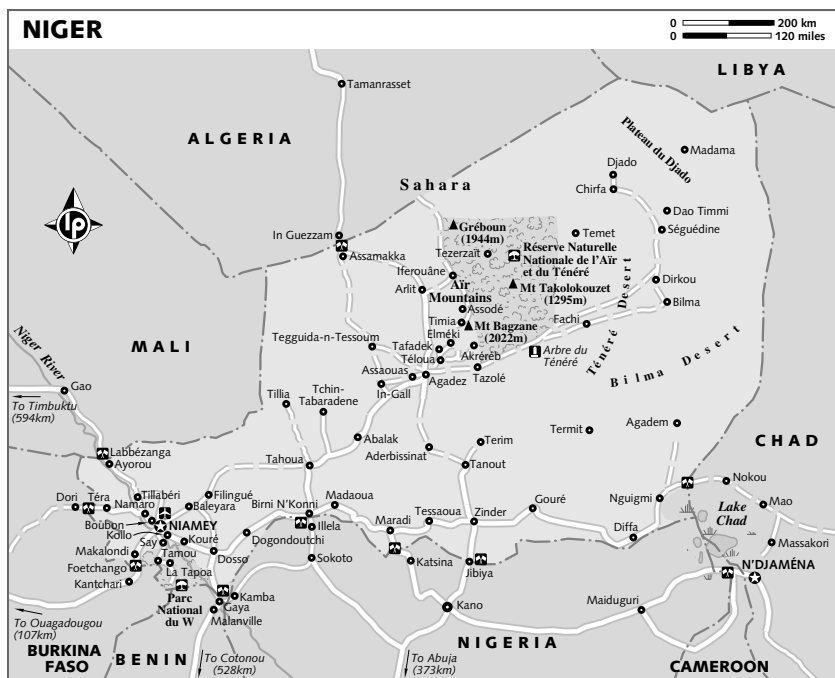
Sadly, at the time of writing the country's greatest attractions, the Ténéré Desert and the Air Mountains in the north remained closed to travellers due to the Tuareg Rebellion. However, Libyan-brokered ceasefire talks between the Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ) and the government brought an end to the conflict, on paper at least, in 2009. The situation on the ground remains unstable, however, and you should always check the latest information before heading to the country's north.

Despite the closure of much of the county's north, at the time of writing the fascinating trans-Saharan trade-route town of Agadez was still accessible, as well as a bevy of attractions in the peaceful south: the ancient sultanate of Zinder, the fantastic W National Park, West Africa's last herd of wild giraffe at Kouré and the impossibly romantic Sunday market of Ayorou. Add to this the laid-back but cosmopolitan capital of Niamey and a trip down the mighty Niger River in a dugout pirogue, and you've got yourself a West African adventure that can cheerfully rival any other in this book.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 1,267,000 sq km
- **ATMs** Nonexistent
- **Borders** Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Nigeria, Chad; the land border with Libya is currently closed
- **Budget** US\$15 to US\$70 a day
- **Capital** Niamey
- **Languages** French, Hausa, Djerma, Fulfulde, Tamashek
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA463, €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 14.7 million
- **Seasons** Hot and dry (September to May), wet (June to August)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 227; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1
- **Visa** Required by almost everyone except West African citizens. Obtained easily in Algeria, Benin, Chad, Mali and Nigeria. Niger is covered by the Visa des Pays de l'Entente.





HIGHLIGHTS

- **Agadez** (p454) Spiral up to the spiky summit of the majestic mud mosque here for incredible views over the Sahara and beyond.

- **Ayorou** (p450) Savour the aromas at the country's most exciting market.
- **Kouré** (p450) Wander in wonder with West Africa's last wild herd of giraffes.
- **Zinder** (p452) Explore the Birni Quartier and soak up the brutal history at the sultan's palace in this fascinating Hausa city.
- **Parc Régional du W** (p451) Come face to face with lions, crocodiles, monkeys and elephants in this incredibly diverse national park.

HOW MUCH?

- **Sachet of purified water** US\$0.10
- **Croix d'Agadez (historically stylised silver cross)** US\$3.30
- **Simple Tuareg grigri (amulet)** US\$4.40
- **Street snack (beignet)** US\$0.05
- **Moto-taxi across any town** US\$0.50

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.50
- **1.5L bottled water** US\$1.10
- **Bottle of Bière Niger** US\$1.10
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$3.30
- **Grilled beef brochettes** US\$0.20

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

December to February, the coolest and driest period, is the best time to visit. Temperatures can soar beyond 45°C from March through to June, making desert travel unfeasible. Rains dampen the south from late May until September.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Base yourself in Niamey and make a series of day trips to Ayorou (p450), Filingué (p451) and to the giraffes near Kouré (p450), before spending two nights in the wonderful Parc Régional du W (p451) in the south.