

Nigeria

It's safe to say that Nigeria's reputation precedes it. Everyone seems to know the 'facts': it's big, crazy and dangerous, with email scams its most famous export. Enough to make you draw a big detour line on your travel map through West Africa? Think again, because we'd like to change your mind. Simply put: we love Nigeria.

It's a superlative country in every sense. It's the most populous nation on the continent – every fifth African is a Nigerian – it dominates the region economically, and its cultural output ranges from literary masterpieces such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus* to the infectious grooves of Fela Kuti's Afrobeat.

Contrasts abound. The sprawling megalopolis of Lagos contrasts sharply with the ancient Muslim cities of the north and the river deltas and lush forests of the south and east. There's wildlife too, from pioneering conservation organisations in Calabar to Gashaka-Gumti National Park, recently reorganised to accept visitors.

Nigeria can feel like more than the sum of its parts – a collection of regions and ethnicities pulling against each other with a force that occasionally bursts into chaos. But against this, the hard work and proud smiles of Nigerians offer the perfect corrective for visitors.

We can't lie: getting around can sometimes be exhausting, and it's not a destination for first-timers to Africa. But put the scare stories to one side and you might be in for a pleasant surprise. If you don't visit Nigeria you can barely say that you've been to West Africa.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 924,000 sq km
- **ATMs** In major cities only, though not all accept international bank cards
- **Borders** Benin, Niger, Chad, Cameroon
- **Budget** US\$40 to US\$70 per day
- **Capital** Abuja
- **Languages** English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, Efik
- **Money** Naira (N); US\$1 = N150, €1 = N212
- **Population** 146 million
- **Seasons** Wet (April to October in north; March to November in south); dry (November to March in north; December to February in south)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 234; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +1
- **Visa** US\$70 to US\$150 for one month; best obtained in country of residence, letter of invitation usually required



HOW MUCH?

- **Okada ride across town** US\$0.25
- **Replica Benin brass sculpture** US\$80
- **Afrobeat CD** US\$2.70
- **Bribe at police roadblock** US\$0.15
- **One-minute local phone call** US\$0.15

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** US\$0.45
- **1L of bottled water** US\$0.65
- **Bottle of Star beer** US\$1.35
- **Souvenir football shirt** US\$6.00
- **Stick of suya (Nigerian kebab)** US\$0.65

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lagos** (p464) Plunge in and sample the adrenalin charge and social scene of Nigeria's wild beating heart.
- **Calabar** (p471) Take in colonial history and cutting-edge conservation in this easygoing old river port.
- **Kano** (p473) Find a trace of the old Saharan trade routes in the old city and the indigo dye pits.
- **Gashaka-Gumti National Park** (p475) Head into the real wilds to explore this newly reorganised mountain-meets-savannah national park.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

If you're travelling to the south of Nigeria, March to August are the wettest months to visit Nigeria, and best avoided if possible. Temperatures are hot year-round, peaking in the spring; the humidity is constant. Late spring to summer is the hottest part of the year in the north, with the mercury dropping slightly between October and January at the beginning of the dusty harmattan winds.

As well as the weather, take note of political developments when planning your trip. Although Nigeria is generally calm, local trouble flare up pretty quickly, so once you're in the country keep an eye on the news for developments and be prepared to change your plans at short notice if necessary.

ITINERARIES

- **One to Two Weeks** No one should visit Nigeria without at least a few days in Lagos (p464), trying to navigate the city's mindset and traffic jams, and spending late nights in the bars and clubs. When Lagos gets too much, head east to Benin City (p470) to see the ancient craft of brass sculpture, before carrying on to the old port city of Calabar (p471), where you can also check out pioneering primate conservation work in the lush forests of the Afi Mountain Drill Ranch (p471).
- **One Month** A longer trip allows you to further explore the south, but also to take in northern Nigeria. From Lagos, fly to Abuja (p471), and then continue by road to the old trading city of Kano (p473). An interesting detour would be via the cool plateau city of Jos (p472), with a side-trip to the remote Gashaka-Gumti National Park (p475).

HISTORY**Early Nigeria**

Northern and southern Nigeria are essentially two different countries, and their histories reflect this disparity. The first recorded empire to flourish in this part of West Africa was Kanem-Borno around Lake Chad, which grew rich from the trans-Saharan trade routes. Islamic states based in the Hausa cities of Kano, Zaria and Nupe also flourished at this time.

Meanwhile, the southwest developed into a patchwork of small states, often dominated by the Yoruba. The Ijebu kingdom rose in the 10th century and constructed the mysterious earthworks at Sungbo's Eredo. Most famously the Benin kingdom became an important centre of trade and produced some of the finest metal artwork in Africa. In the southeast, the Igbo and other agrarian peoples never developed any centralised empires, instead forming loose confederations.

Colonial Era

The first contact between the Yoruba empires and the Europeans was made in the 15th century, when the Portuguese began trading in pepper, and later, slaves. In contrast, the northern Islamic states remained untouched by European influence until well into the 19th century.