

Somaliland, Puntland & Somalia

Since 1991 the country that is still known among the diplomatic community as 'Somalia' has effectively been a patchwork state, with three countries stitched into one: Somalia in the south, Somaliland in the northwest on the Gulf of Aden, and Puntland perched in the northeast corner. The internal situation in each zone is radically different. Put simply: there's one success story – Somaliland – and two horror stories – Puntland and Somalia, where the law of the gun, kidnapping of foreigners, piracy, banditry, food shortages, fighting among rival factions and a host of humanitarian crises have created a post-apocalyptic feel.

While Puntland and Somalia have been sliding towards the abyss and are absolute no-go zones for all Westerners (and it's unlikely to change anytime soon), the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland has, like a phoenix, risen from the ashes by restoring law and order within its boundaries. Discreetly. So discreetly that nobody knows that it has a representative government, a capital, a flag, a currency, an army and a functioning administration! But it has yet to gain international recognition as an independent nation, with very few diplomatic supporters and little media coverage to voice its progress. It's slowly emerging as the ultimate destination for adventurous travellers. Its tourist infrastructure is still embryonic but it's this sense of pushing Africa's secret door ajar that makes Somaliland one of the most weirdly fascinating countries you could hope to visit right now. Even if you can't get a cold beer.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 637,657 sq km
- **ATMs** None
- **Borders** Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti (only the Djiboutian and Ethiopian borders with Somaliland are open to travellers)
- **Budget** US\$25 to US\$100 per day
- **Capital** Mogadishu (Somalia), Hargeisa (Somaliland), Bosasso (Puntland)
- **Languages** Somali
- **Money** Somaliland shilling; US\$1 = SISH1405, €1 = SISH2059
- **Population** 10 million (3.5 million in Somaliland)
- **Seasons** Wet (April to June and October to November), dry (July to September, December to March)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 252-2; international access code ☎ 16
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 3
- **Visa** Somaliland US\$30 to US\$50



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Berbera** Nurse a soft drink, feast on fresh fish and relax on porcelain-sand beaches (p764).
- **Diving** Be a pioneer and take the plunge in the waters of the bay of Berbera (p764).
- **Hargeisa** Purchase your own ship of the desert at the camel market (p762).
- **Las Geel** One of the world's finest open-air galleries of prehistoric rock art (p763).
- **Sheekh** Feel the pulse of this laid-back, provincial town (p765).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

There are regional variations but generally it goes like this: Somalia has two rainy seasons (April to June and October to November) and two dry seasons (July to September and December to March). From July to September temperatures are unbearable, reaching 40°C. In the south, near the border with Kenya, the climate is tropical.

Travel is much easier during the winter dry season, from December to March, when daily temperatures do not exceed 30°C.

HISTORY

Originally, Somalis probably hail from the southern Ethiopian highlands, and have been subject to a strong Arabic influence ever since the 7th century, when the Somali coast formed part of the extensive Arab-controlled trans-Indian Ocean trading network.

In the 19th century, much of the Ogaden Desert – ethnically a part of Somalia – was annexed by Ethiopia (an invasion that has been a source of bad blood ever since), and then in 1888 the country was divided by European powers. The French got the area around Djibouti and Britain much of the north, while Italy got Puntland and the south. It wasn't until 1960 that Somaliland, Puntland and southern Somalia were united.

Sadly, interclan tensions, radical socialism, rearmament by the USSR and the occasional (often disastrous) war with Ethiopia helped tear the country apart. Mohammed Siad Barre, Somalia's last recognised leader, fled to Nigeria in 1991. At the same time the Somali National Movement (SNM) moved quickly and declared independence for Somaliland. Puntland also broke away and declared itself an autonomous state in 1998.

Restoration of Hope?

Fierce battles between warring factions throughout southern Somalia took place throughout the 1990s, but in 1992 the US led a UN mission (Operation Restore Hope) to distribute food aid to the southern population. Without much ado a nasty little conflict between the US-UN and warlord General Aideded began, during which it's estimated that thousands of Somalis died. The last UN troops pulled out in 1995, having alleviated the famine to some extent, but the nation was still a disaster area.

Utter Failure

Designed to establish control across the whole of the country, Somalia's lame-duck Transitional National Government (TNG) was set up in 2000. Alas, it didn't manage to gain recognition from its own people in Somalia, who continue to regard it as a creature in the hands of international interests. Although it's the only internationally recognised body, it has proved too weak to impose its rule and has failed in curbing the power of militias. It has had to cower in the west in the town of Baidoa, its redoubt, leaving the rest of the country in the hands of feuding warlords.

The Case of Somaliland

The self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland was formed in 1991 after the collapse of unitary Somalia. Thanks mainly to the predominance of a single clan (the Isaq), it has

HOW MUCH?

- **Cost of an armed bodyguard (per day)** US\$15 to US\$20
- **Entrance fee to Las Geel site** US\$20
- **Internet connection** US\$1 per hour
- **Airfare Djibouti to Hargeisa** US\$130 (one way)
- **1g (21 carats) of gold** US\$16

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.50
- **1.5L bottled water** US\$0.40
- **Bottle of beer** No alcohol is available
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$3
- **Plate of camel meat and rice** US\$3