

Sudan

Wake at the break of day under the golden pyramids of God-like kings of old; traverse a searing desert to the place where two Niles become one; walk through the green hills where Africa bumps into Arabia; watch a million blood-red fish swarm through gardens of coral or a million stampeding antelope splash through an unexplored swamp. Whichever way you look at it, there's just no denying that among Sudan's sweeping hills of sand lie treasures we are only just beginning to understand.

Sudan is the largest, yet one of the least visited and least understood, countries in Africa. Although various ongoing conflicts mean much of this vast nation remains off-limits, the northeast is one of the safest places in Africa. And the easing of travel restrictions is opening up new swathes of territory to explore in the lush south, where pale desert browns transition into a riot of tropical extravagance.

And while the solitude is a top draw, visitors invariably agree that the Sudanese are among the friendliest and most hospitable people on earth, with a natural generosity that belies their poverty, and this alone makes any trip worthwhile. Whether you rush through on a Cairo-to-Cape Town trip or spend a slow month soaking up the history and hospitality, visiting Sudan is such an eye-opening and rewarding experience that more than a few people come away saying that Sudan was their favourite country in the entire continent.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 2.5 million sq km
- **ATMs** Only work with local accounts
- **Borders** Egypt and Ethiopia open; crossing to Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Libya and Uganda not recommended; Eritrea open but difficult for foreigners to cross; Chad closed
- **Budget** Khartoum from US\$50 a day, elsewhere from US\$25 a day
- **Capital** Khartoum
- **Languages** Arabic, English, over 100 regional languages
- **Money** Sudanese Pound; US\$1 = S£2.2, €1 = S£3.2
- **Population** 41 million
- **Seasons** Rainy season in north (July to September), Red Sea coast (October to December) and south (April to November)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 249; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +3
- **Visa** Best bought in Cairo or Aswan (Egypt), or with the help of a Khartoum travel agent



HOW MUCH?

- **Admission to historic sites** US\$8.70
- **100km bus ride** US\$0.50
- **Cup of tea** US\$0.20
- **Internet per hour** US\$0.90
- **Plate of fuul** US\$0.50

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L diesel** US\$0.43
- **1.5L bottled water** US\$0.90
- **Bottle of beer** Not available
- **Lokanda bed** US\$3
- **Midrange hotel** US\$45

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Begrawiya** (p204) Enveloped in sand dunes and just waiting for you to discover them, Begrawiya has Sudan's best-preserved pyramids.
- **Wadi Halfa to Dongola** (p205) Follow the sluggish Nile through searing desert past beautiful old ruins and remote sun-baked towns.
- **Kassala** (p206) Dive into exotic markets and scramble around the Taka Mountains.
- **Karima** (p205) Sweep away the sandy layers of time and discover a wealth of Pharaonic ruins, tombs and pyramids.
- **Nuba Mountains** (p208) Relish the lush greenery of the mountains where Africa meets Arabia in this new frontier for tourism.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Sudan's climate ranges from hot and dry in the north to humid and tropical in the equatorial south. November to March is the best time to visit. Daytime highs in the north exceed 40°C year-round, but peak from April to July. The heaviest rains (rarely more than 150mm in Khartoum) in July and August present few problems for travel in the north, though wreak havoc on minor roads in the Nuba Mountains and in the south. Fierce dust storms (the *haboob*) blow occasionally from July to August and November to January. In the slightly cooler south it rains year-round, but April to November is the wettest time.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Three days is plenty of time to visit Khartoum (p200) and get out to the Meroe Sites (p204).
- **Two Weeks** After seeing Khartoum and the Meroe Sites, follow the Nile on its lethargic amble through history. Don't miss the pyramids and other ruins near Karima (p205), the lazy days of Dongola (p205) and the fascinating site of Soleb (p205). Then either head to the seaside for some Red Sea scuba-diving out of Port Sudan (p208) or head south to explore the gorgeous, green Nuba Mountains (p208), where few other tourists tread.

HISTORY

Modern Sudan is situated on the site of the ancient civilisation of Nubia, which predates Pharaonic Egypt. For centuries sovereignty was shuttled back and forth between the Egyptians, indigenous empires such as Kush, and a succession of independent Christian kingdoms.

After the 14th century AD the Mamelukes (Turkish rulers in Egypt) breached the formidable Nubian defences and established the dominance of Islam. By the 16th century the kingdom of Funj had become a powerful Muslim state and Sennar, 200km south of present-day Khartoum, was one of the great cultural centres of the Islamic world.

Colonialism & Revolt

In 1821 the viceroy of Egypt, Mohammed Ali, conquered northern Sudan and opened the south to trade. Within a few decades British interests were also directed towards Sudan, aiming to control the Nile, contain French expansion from the west and draw the south into a British–East African federation. The European intrusion, and in particular the Christian missionary zeal that accompanied it, was resented by many Muslim Sudanese.

The revolution came in 1881, when one Mohammed Ahmed proclaimed himself to be the Mahdi – the person who, according to Muslim tradition, would rid the world of evil. Four years later he rid Khartoum of General Gordon, the British-appointed governor, and the Mahdists ruled Sudan until 1898, when they were defeated outside Omdurman by Lord Kitchener and his