



Mauritania

222 / POP 3.36 MILLION

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Restorante Galloufa (p377)
- ➔ Le Méditerranée (p374)
- ➔ Bla Bla Thé (p374)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Auberge Bab Sahara (p377)
- ➔ Auberge La Gueila (p379)
- ➔ Maison d'Hôtes Jeloua (p373)
- ➔ Eco-lodge du Maure Bleu (p381)

Why Go?

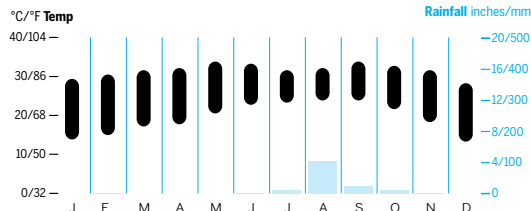
If West Africa is a playground for overlanders, then Mauritania often seems to be little more than a transit between the better-known attractions of Marrakesh, Dakar or Bamako. That's a shame because Mauritania has some tremendous secrets to reveal.

Just as impressive as the cultural diversity is some of the continent's grandest scenery. The Adrar region offers epic sand dunes, eye-popping plateaus and Africa's biggest monolith. The Tagânt has similar charms, and both hide ancient (and World Heritage-listed) caravan towns – Chinguetti, Ouadâne and Oualâta. The World Heritage feast continues along the coast at Parc National du Banc d'Arguin, which attracts millions of migratory birds and is a renowned bird-watching site.

If you just breeze through, you'll miss out on a truly incredible country. No one in Mauritania is in a rush, and you shouldn't be either.

When to Go

Nouakchott



Nov–Mar The most pleasant months to visit the desert, although nights can be cold.

Jun–Aug The *rifi* (hot winds) send temperatures soaring to 45°C and above.

Jul–Sep The short rainy season in Nouakchott can be prone to flooding after downpour.

NOUAKCHOTT

POP 1 MILLION

Barely 50 years old, Nouakchott has to be simultaneously one of Africa's strangest and most unassuming capital cities. This is urban planning nomad style: a city simply plonked down 5km from the coast as if on an overnight caravan stop and left to grow by accident. Most travellers use it as a staging post before the Adrar, Parc National Banc d'Arguin or the next international border.

Although it's not a highlight of the country, Nouakchott is sleepily idiosyncratic and you could do worse than spend an afternoon at the gloriously frantic fish market (one of the busiest in West Africa), treat yourself to a comfy guesthouse or feast in a good restaurant. It's also laidback and amazingly safe – bliss after the rigours of the desert.

Sights & Activities

Major landmarks in the centre include the **Grande Mosquée** (Rue Mamadou Konaté), also



Mauritania Highlights

- 1 Wake up at the crack of dawn in order to catch a glorious sunrise from the labyrinthine lanes of the old city in **Chinguetti** (p379).
- 2 Experience the magic of the Sahara and sleep

beneath the star-studded skies at the saffron dunes in the **Adrar** (p377).

- 3 Pack your binoculars and observe vast flocks of birds from a traditional *pirogue*

in **Parc National du Banc d'Arguin** (p377).

- 4 Hop on the **iron-ore train** (p376) – one of the world's longest trains – and be ready for the most epic journey of your life!