

# Africa

## Country Coverage

At the time of research very few travellers were heading the countries listed below, so we're providing historical and cultural information rather than reviews and listings. A good source of information for on-the-ground travel in these countries is Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree on-line travel forum [www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree).

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# North Africa





# Libya

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## Fast Facts

- **Capital** Tripoli
- **Population** 5.6 million
- **Languages** Arabic, Berber
- **Area** 1.759 million sq km
- **Currency** Libyan dinar (LD)
- **Visa requirements**  
Arranged as part of organised tour; current requirements in a state of flux

## Roman Ruins & Saharan Sand

Libya is a classic North African destination and its primary appeal derives from its position as an ancient crossroads of civilisations – these civilisations bequeathed to the Libyan coast some of the finest Roman and Greek ruins in existence, among them Leptis Magna, Cyrene and Sabratha. This is also one of the best places in Africa to experience the Sahara Desert, from seas of sand the size of Switzerland and sheltering palm-fringed lakes (the Ubari Sand Sea) to remote massifs adorned with prehistoric rock art (the Jebel Acacus), labyrinthine caravan towns (Ghadames) and an isolated black-as-black volcano (Wawa al-Namus) in the desert's heart.

The upheaval caused by Libya's democratic revolution in 2011–12 continues, but Libya's tourism and transport infrastructure are excellent. As such, once peace returns fully to the country, expect it to be one of the hottest travel destinations on the continent.

## Libya Top Sights

- **Leptis Magna** One of the world's best-preserved Roman cities looking out across the Mediterranean
- **Tripoli** Atmospheric whitewashed medina and a world-class museum that largely survived the war
- **Ghadames** The Sahara's most enchanting oasis town with a labyrinth of covered passageways shadowed by palm gardens
- **Cyrene** Extraordinary ancient city in the country's east with some of the finest monuments to ancient Greece in North Africa
- **Jebel Acacus** Jagged Saharan massif with 12,000-year-old rock art, Tuareg inhabitants and extraordinary scenery
- **Ubari Lakes** Idyllic lakes surrounded by exquisite sand dunes in one of the world's largest and most beautiful sand seas
- **Waw al Namus** Black-sand volcano sheltering multicoloured lakes and otherworldly scenery

## UNDERSTAND LIBYA

### Libya Today

Libya is a country awakening from a nightmare. In February 2011, at the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring and with neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt in turmoil, a protest in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi quickly spread. Most of northeastern Libya soon fell to the rebels. The rebels, backed by NATO air strikes, battled government forces loyal to the old regime, with fighting particularly heavy along the coast road and in the Jebel Nafusa in the country's northwest. The government's failure to take the cities of Misrata and Zintan in particular enabled the rebels to close in on Tripoli, which finally fell to the rebels in August 2011. Most of Libya soon fell into rebel hands, and the capture and killing of Colonel Qaddafi in October 2011 marked the end of a brutal civil war in which as many as 10,000 people died.

Despite reports of score settling, the ongoing power of armed militias and the difficulties in building national, democratic institutions, the aftermath of the war in Libya has been largely peaceful. Elections for a General People's Congress in July 2012 saw liberals outnumber Islamists, although neither secured absolute majority. After several false starts, a new government was formed in November of the same year. A month later, insecurity in the south prompted the government to close its southern borders and declare vast swathes of the country's south to be closed military zones. The move highlighted what remains the greatest threat to a peaceful future in Libya – the ongoing power of armed militias and the government's difficulties in asserting effective control over the country.

### COUNTRY COVERAGE

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## History

### The Great Civilisations of Antiquity

From 700 BC, LebDAH (Leptis Magna), Oea (Tripoli) and Sabratha formed some of the links in a chain of safe Phoenician (Punic) ports stretching from the Levant around to Spain. Traces of the Phoenician presence in Libya remain at Sabratha and Leptis Magna.

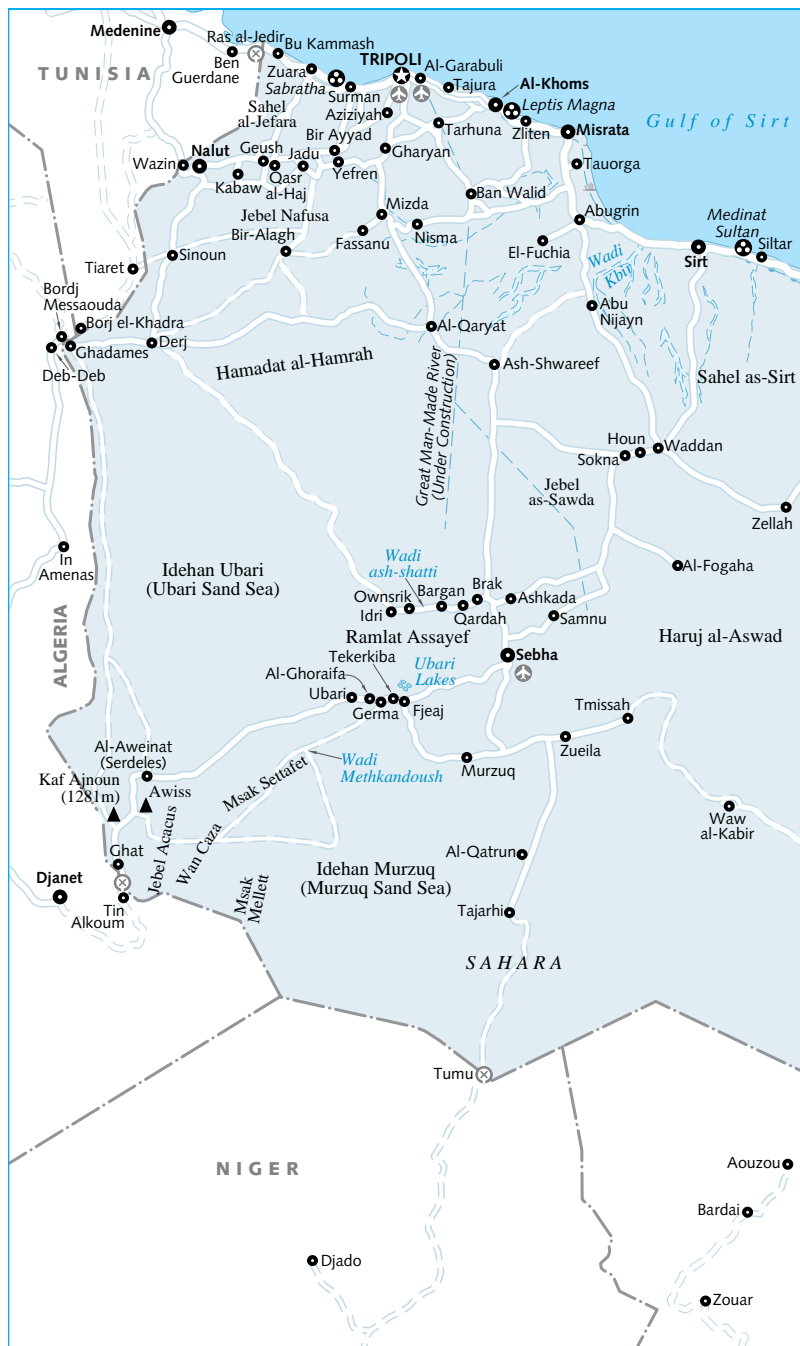
On the advice of the Oracle of Delphi, in 631 BC Greek settlers established the city of Cyrene in the east of Libya. Within 200 years the Greeks had built four more cities of splendour as part of the Pentapolis (Five Cities), which included Apollonia. But with Greek influence on the wane, the last Greek ruler, Ptolemy Apion, finally bequeathed the region of Cyrenaica to Rome in 75 BC.

Meanwhile, the fall of the Punic capital at Carthage (in Tunisia) prompted Julius Caesar to formally annex Tripolitania in 46BC. The Pax Romana saw Tripolitania and

### LEPTIS MAGNA

If Leptis Magna was the only place you saw in Libya, you wouldn't leave disappointed. Leptis (originally spelled Lepcis and known locally in Arabic as LebDAH) was once the largest and greatest Roman city in Africa: it enjoyed its golden age in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Because no modern city was later built on the site and because it was constructed of sturdy limestone, Leptis is that rare ancient city where sufficient traces remain to imagine the city in its heyday. Among its numerous monumental highlights, the triumphal arches (particularly the Arch of Septimius Severus), Hadrianic Baths, Severan Forum, theatre and amphitheatre all stand out. Adjacent to the site entrance is the splendid Leptis Museum, one of Africa's premier collections of Roman statuary.

Leptis Magna is 3km east of Al-Khoms and 123km east of Tripoli. Although you *could* visit as a day trip from Tripoli, Al-Khoms is a better choice as it means you can be here early morning or late afternoon when the Mediterranean light is at its most magical.





Cyrenaica become prosperous Roman provinces. Such was Libya's importance that a Libyan, Septimius Severus, became Rome's emperor (r AD 193–211).

## Islamic Libya

By AD 643, Tripoli and Cyrenaica had fallen to the armies of Islam. From 800, the Abbasid-appointed emirs of the Aghlabid dynasty repaired Roman irrigation systems, restoring order and bringing a measure of prosperity to the region, while the mass migration of two tribes – the Bani Salim and Bani Hilal – from the Arabian Peninsula forever changed Libya's demographics. The Berber tribespeople were displaced from their traditional lands and the new settlers cemented the cultural and linguistic Arabisation of the region.

The Ottomans occupied Tripoli in 1551. The soldiers sent by the sultan to support the Ottoman pasha (governor) grew powerful and cavalry officer Ahmed Karamanli seized power in 1711. His Karamanli dynasty would last 124 years. The Ottoman Turks finally reined in their erstwhile protégés in 1835 and resumed direct control over much of Libya.

On 3 October 1911 the Italians attacked Tripoli, claiming to be liberating Libya from Ottoman rule. During almost three decades of brutal Italian rule, a quarter of Libya's population died as a result of the occupation, whether from direct military attacks, starvation or forced migration.

With the onset of WWII, devastating fighting broke out in the area around Tobruk. By January 1943, Tripoli was in British hands and by February the last German and Italian soldiers were driven from Libya.

## Qaddafi's Libya

Desperately poor Libya became independent in 1951, but the country's fortunes were transformed by the discovery of oil in 1959 at Zelten in Cyrenaica. Over the decade that followed, Libya was transformed from an economic backwater into one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

On 1 September 1969, a Revolutionary Command Council, led by a little-known but charismatic 27-year-old Muammar Qaddafi, seized power in Libya. Riding on a wave of anti-imperialist anger, the new leader closed British and American military bases, expanded the armed forces and closed all newspapers, churches and political parties. Some 30,000 Italian settlers were deported.

As the colonel balanced his political theories of participation for all Libyans with the revolutionary committees that became renowned for assassinating political opponents, the US accused Libya of involvement in a string of terrorist attacks across Europe. On 15 April 1986, the US Navy fired missiles into Tripoli and Benghazi.

After Libyan agents were charged with the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 (aka the Lockerbie disaster) and the 1989 explosion of a French UTA airliner over the Sahara, UN sanctions came into effect. Finally, in early 1999, a deal was brokered and the suspects were handed over for trial by Scottish judges in The Hague. The sanctions, which had cost Libya over US\$30 billion in lost revenues and production capacities, were lifted.

In December 2003 Colonel Qaddafi stunned the world by announcing that Libya would give up its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs and open its sites to international inspections. When asked why, Colonel Qaddafi replied that 'the program started at the very beginning of the revolution. The world was different then.' Sounding very much the international statesman, Colonel Qaddafi went on to say that 'there is never permanent animosity or permanent friendship. We all made mistakes, both sides. The most important thing is to rectify the mistakes.'

In the decade that followed, Libya (and indeed Colonel Qaddafi) regained a measure of international respectability, as world leaders once again visited Tripoli and international companies began clamouring for contracts in the country's lucrative oil and natural-gas industries.

## People of Libya

Libya's demographic mix is remarkably homogenous: 97% are of Arab and/or Berber origin (Sunni Muslims), with many Libyans claiming mixed Arab and Berber ancestry.

Another important group is the Tuareg, whose pre-revolution population in Libya numbered around 50,000.

Southeastern Libya is home to another once-nomadic community: the Toubou, who number less than 3000. They have strong links with a larger population of Toubou across the border in Chad.

There are also small communities of Kharjites (an offshoot of orthodox Islam) and Christians.

# Southern Africa







# Angola

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## Fast Facts

- **Capital** Luanda
- **Population** 18,056,000
- **Languages** Portuguese and various Bantu languages
- **Area** 1,246,700 sq km
- **Currency** Kwanza
- **Visa requirements** 30-day visas must be obtained in advance
- **Tourist information** [www.angolamarket.com](http://www.angolamarket.com)

## Oil, Diamonds & Unspoilt Coastline

Angola is an eye-opener – in more ways than one. Scarred painfully by years of debilitating warfare and practically untouched by foreign visitors since the early 1970s, the country remains remote, with few observers privy to its geographic highlights and vast cultural riches.

Despite advancements in infrastructure and a dramatically improved security situation, travel in Angola remains the preserve of adventurers, or those on flexible budgets. But with the transport network gradually recovering and wildlife being shipped in to repopulate decimated national parks, the signs of recovery are more than just a mirage.

For outsiders, the attractions are manifold. Chill out on expansive beaches, sample the solitude in virgin wildlife parks or sift through the ruins of Portuguese colonialism. From Luanda to Lubango the nuances are startling.

## Angola Top Sight

- **Lubango** Almost untouched by the war, breezy Lubango offers cascading waterfalls, spectacular volcanic fissures and a vibrant small-city ambience
- **Parque Nacional da Kíssama** One of Africa's largest, emptiest and most surreal wildlife parks
- **Benguela** Chill out on the blissfully empty beaches of Angola's most laid-back town
- **Luanda** Expansive beaches, expensive bars and tatty overcrowded townships, Luanda is a kaleidoscopic vision of Angola at the sharp end
- **Miradouro de Lua** A spectacular lookout over a canyon of moonlike cliffs that cascade dramatically into the Atlantic Ocean

## UNDERSTAND ANGOLA

### Angola Today

Since 2002 Angola has entered a period of peace and regeneration unprecedented in its history. With the 85,000-strong Unita army re-integrated into the national forces and old animosities ceremoniously brushed underneath the carpet, the biggest obstacles to war and instability have been temporarily neutralised.

But the country still faces massive challenges before it can right four decades of economic and political disarray. Corruption is the most pressing problem. In 2004 Human Rights Watch, an independent lobby group, estimated that US\$4 billion of Angola's undeclared oil revenue had gone missing since the late 1990s. Voices inside the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were raised and supervisors were sent to investigate. Their conclusion: either the president, José

Eduardo dos Santos, was employing a very creative team of accountants or something, somewhere, was clearly not adding up.

It is these financial anomalies that have prevented the lion's share of Angola's new peace time economy from trickling down to the majority of the poorest classes. While skyscrapers reach new heights in Luanda and oil-obsessed government ministries forge investment deals with China and India, poverty in the countryside remains rampant and widespread.

The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections held in September 2008, the first such polls to be held in the country for 16 years.

Long-awaited presidential elections were expected to be held in 2009, but were delayed, and in January 2010 parliament approved a new constitution abolishing direct elections for the president.



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The presidency is now automatically filled by the top-ranking candidate of the party winning the parliamentary election. The MPLA won the 2012 election comfortably, guaranteeing dos Santos another five-year term in office.

## History

Angola's often violent and bloody history has left a country endowed with a vast expanse of natural resources and development possibilities perennially trying to stave off starvation. A terrain rich in oil, diamonds, iron ore and copper, plus a measurable hydroelectric capacity, has the potential to be one of Africa's richest states. Instead, the reality is that of a nation of shattered infrastructure and devastated towns struggling to feed a desperately poor and eternally uprooted population.

## Another Lost Empire

In 1483 Vasco da Gama first dropped anchor in Luanda Bay and unwittingly pre-empted

the start of a conflict that, save for a few intermittent lulls in the fighting, continued for over half a millennium. The land now known as Angola was, at the time, inhabited by a number of small tribes living in loosely defined kingdoms that lacked the organisation and administrative cohesiveness of 15th-century Europe. But despite a natural curiosity borne out of years of seafaring exploration, the Portuguese had no real desire to settle on this malaria-ridden African shoreline. Post-1500, the more fertile and less threatening lands of Brazil held a far greater attraction for colonial farmers and businessmen. For the next 300 years Portugal's African colonies had only two real functions: a strategic base on the route around the Cape of Good Hope, and a collecting centre for one of the largest forced human migrations in history.

Not surprisingly, slavery did little to endear the colonials to the Angolan people. Clashes first began after WWII and were inflamed in 1961 when colonial authorities began to crush increasingly zealous uprisings from dissidents.

The initial independence movement split into three main groups in line with the various tribal affiliations (and international interests) they claimed to represent. The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) was supported by northern tribes, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC; formerly Zaïre) and anti-communist Western countries; the MPLA began with Marxist sensibilities and was supported by southern tribes, the USSR, Cuba and other Soviet allies; and the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (Unita) originally had the support of the Ovimbundu people, but later formed alliances with the Portuguese

## ANTÓNIO AGOSTINHO NETO

Immortalised in street names and bespectacled busts across the country, António Agostinho Neto is a much-loved figure in Angolan history. Neto was a founding member of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the country's first president, leading Angola towards independence in 1975. Despite the ensuing civil war, Neto is fondly remembered by most, and his birthday is marked with a national holiday, labelled National Heroes' Day (17 September).

Born in 1922, Neto moved to Portugal to practise medicine but spent much of his time avoiding (or sometimes succumbing to) arrest for revolutionary acts. During his 15-year exile he forged lasting ties with Che Guevara and Fidel Castro and gained huge support from an array of high-profile intellectuals.

Although largely remembered for his politics, Neto was also an accomplished poet and many statues depict him as an academic, holding a pen and paper in one hand while gripping his Kalashnikov in the other.

Neto never saw his country at peace; he died in 1979 in the USSR.

right wing, the USA and apartheid South Africa.

In 1975 the Portuguese finally granted independence to Angola, following the overthrow of the fascist Salazar government at home. But the colonial withdrawal – a mad scramble involving one of the biggest airlifts in history – was legendary in its ineptitude, converting central Luanda into a ghost town and robbing the country of its qualified human resources and administrative structure.

Angola in 1975 possessed all the essential ingredients for an impending civil war: a weak, uneven infrastructure, low levels of health and education, two feuding sets of tribally based elites and the inviting prospect of a large slice of unused government oil revenue up for grabs. As the Moscow-backed MPLA party stepped into a dangerous power vacuum, a combination of new outside factors were thrown into an already crowded arena: US communist paranoia, Cuba's ambiguous aim to promote 'world revolution', South African security obsessions and the woefully inadequate process of decolonisation. The stage was set.

Angola's second major war was a long, protracted affair dominated by foreign intervention. Indeed, for the next 15 years the wishes and desires of the Angolan people were consistently undermined as foreign governments and Western business interests continued to fight among themselves over a damaged and increasingly beleaguered country.

## War & Peace

In 1991, prompted by the end of the Cold War, a ceasefire agreement was set in place by Cuba, the USA and Angola. But the accord broke down the following year after Unita, having lost a general election (seen by the UN as largely free and fair), returned to war with a new-found ferocity, claiming the poll was rigged. Almost 200,000 people died between May and October 1993 as Unita took war to the provincial cities, destroying most of the road, rail and communications network.

A revamped 'Lusaka Accord' signed in 1994 was consistently violated by both the governing MPLA and Unita, and the discovery of new diamond areas and oilfields allowed both sides to re-arm. UN sanctions against Unita diamonds caused Unita's cash supply to shrivel, and its control of the countryside gradually crumbled. Increasing military defeats drove a desperate Unita deeper into the hinterland, and its leader Jonas Savimbi – hunted and on

## LUBANGO

Surrounded by mountains and nestled in a cool central valley, Lubango, a peaceful city of 200,000 inhabitants, seems a different world from the capital. Relatively unscathed by the 40-year conflict that tore the heart of communities elsewhere, the order and tranquility of Lubango's central core has more in common with Namibia than with many other Angolan towns. You'll encounter a handful of adventurous overlanders here, some quirky cafes and some of the country's most charming hotels.

One of the best ways to get a bird's eye view of Lubango is to rent a taxi and motor up to the *Cristo Rei*, a statue of Jesus (a mini version of Rio's Cristo Redentor) that overlooks the city. Alternatively you could hike the 5km up from town.

**Casper Lodge** ([www.casperlodge.com](http://www.casperlodge.com)), set in lush gardens around a cool pool, is a popular choice.

the run – was finally killed in a government operation on 22 February 2002.

A new peace accord was signed on 4 April 2002.

## Culture

Angola's cornucopia of ethnic groups is dominated by the Ovimbundu, Kimbundu and Bakongo. Local tribal traditions remain strong, though Portuguese has evolved as the national language of choice, particularly among the young. Due in part to its volatile history, much of Angola's cultural legacy has been exported abroad through slavery and emigration, where it has re-emerged in elements of modern Brazilian culture, such as the samba, carnival, Afro-American religion and the combative martial art, capoeira.

Badly damaged by the long-standing tribal conflicts that set neighbour against neighbour throughout the 1980s and '90s, Angolan culture has remained defiantly intact in a country divided by complex ethnic loyalties and 42 different indigenous languages. At the forefront of this colourful artistic patchwork is Angolan music, a rich and varied collection of offshoots and sub-genres, with styles such as *kizombe*, samba, *zouk* and *rebitta* manifesting themselves in countless dances and romantic songs.

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