



Niger

📍 227 / POP 17.8 MILLION

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Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 1,267,000 sq km
- ➔ **Capital** Niamey
- ➔ **Currency** West African franc (CFA)
- ➔ **Languages Spoken** French, Hausa, Djerma, Fulfulde, Tamashek

Introduction

Niger rarely makes waves in the international consciousness, and when it does it's invariably for all the wrong reasons: coups, rebellions and famines. But those who have been lucky enough to visit this desert republic normally return with stories of a warm and generous population living in ancient caravan cities at the edge of the Sahara.

In the north, the stark splendour of the Aïr Mountains hides Neolithic rock art and stunning oasis towns. Within the expansive dunes of the Ténéré Desert are dinosaur graveyards and deserted medieval settlements, while to the south is the ancient trans-Saharan trade-route town of Agadez and the sultanate of Zinder.

As good as it all could be, though, the current security situation means that Niger is still largely off limits to travellers. Attacks against foreigners have occurred across the Sahel, and the threat of kidnapping remains high.

Top Sights

- ➔ **Agadez** A spiky summit of a majestic mud mosque overlooking town and the Sahara
- ➔ **Kouré** West Africa's last wild herd of giraffes.
- ➔ **Zinder** The sultan's palace within the fascinating Birni Quartier of this Hausa city tells of a brutal history.
- ➔ **Parc Régional du W** Home to lions, crocodiles, monkeys and elephants.
- ➔ **Ténéré Desert** A sublime section of the mighty Sahara.
- ➔ **Aïr Mountains** Where camel caravans plod through red sands and past mystical blue rocks.



UNDERSTAND NIGER

Niger Today

A series of unpleasant events have defined Niger to the outside world in recent years. In 2007 the Tuareg in the north of the country began a rebellion against Niger's government, whom it accused of hoarding proceeds from the region's enormous mineral wealth and failing to meet conditions of previous ceasefires, in a conflict that has reignited at regular intervals since the early 20th century.

A year later Niger again made headlines around the world for less-than-positive reasons when in a landmark case an Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) court found Niger guilty of failing to protect a young woman from the continued practice of slavery in the country. According to anti-slavery organisations, thousands of

people still live in subjugation. In 2014 a man was sentenced to four years in jail on a conviction of slavery. The first such prosecution of its kind.

There have been several high-profile terrorist attacks and kidnappings of tourists and foreign workers over the past few years by groups linked to Al-Qaeda factions operating in the Sahel and Sahara zone. The largest such attack was a coordinated assault by Islamic militants on military and mining sites in the north of the country in 2013. The Islamist takeover of northern Mali in 2012 created a security vacuum and opened up a safe haven for extremists and organised crime groups in the Sahara Desert. But even though terrorist attacks were on the rise in Niger, tens of thousands of refugees flooded into the country from neighbouring conflict zones.

Niger's economy continues to putter and struggle along. The country's main export,