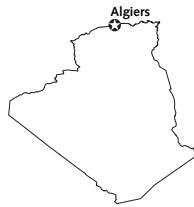


Algiers & Around



Algiers 'la blanche', the white one, is what the French called the capital of Algeria. A big, bustling, whitewashed city, with the Mediterranean out front, hills and rich farmland behind, Algiers (El-Djazaïr in Arabic) is an exciting destination and the gateway to the country's interior.

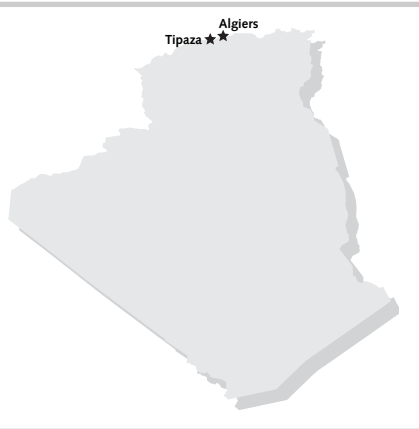
Algiers was the most successful of all the Barbary pirate bases, especially in the 16th century under the most remarkable pirate of all, Kheireddin Barbarossa. It was also the most cherished of all French colonial centres. And since independence in 1962, it has been the political, economic and cultural hub of an extremely large and culturally and geographically diverse country. The largest port in northwest Africa and the largest city too, it now spreads far to accommodate a population that has doubled in 20 years.

Algiers suffered along with the rest of the country during the 'black years' of the 1990s. Since then, it has seen a strange split in its fortunes. You don't have to walk far in the centre to see people hanging around with nothing to do. All capitals have their jobless and homeless, but they look out of place in a country that has just paid off its foreign debt. Thanks mainly to oil and gas revenue, there has never been so much cash in the city – the state is spending large sums and there is a sense among some individuals that money is there to be made. The number of new cars choking the main roads is a sign of growing personal prosperity.

Yet, in its rush to modernise Algiers has still preserved some of its old mystique; it has a strong sense of identity and is still dazzlingly white.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Lie low in the **Casbah** (p93) – follow pirates and princes through the lower part of Algiers' old town
- Sip a cold drink in the garden of the **Hôtel el-Djazaïr** (p102), the old St Georges
- Visit the ruins of **Tipaza** (p104) to see how sweet life must have been here 2000 years ago
- Roll up your sleeves to enjoy a plate of seafood at one of the many **seafood restaurants** (p100)
- Live like a king, or at least a prince, at the **Palais des Raïs** (p95)



ALGIERS الجزائر

☎ 021 / pop 3.3 million

HISTORY

The beginning could not be more romantic: legend tells that 20 companions of the hero Hercules sailed into the bay and settled here. The truth of the city's earliest origins is lost in the sand or still buried beneath modern buildings, but there are clear signs that the bay, with its perfect natural harbour, attracted early settlers. The Phoenicians used it as a staging post between Carthage in the east and the pillars of Hercules to the west. For many centuries it was a convenient anchorage fought over by passing powers – the Romans took it in 146 BC, the Vandals swept through in the 5th century AD, during the 6th century the Byzantines retook it and developed a small Christian community, and in 650 it came under Arab control – but it remained insignificant until the 10th century and the emergence of a strong ruler. The local Berber leader Bologhin ibn Ziri took control of the region in the 970s, after the Fatimid moved their capital from Mahdia (Tunisia) to Cairo, and named the city El-Djezaïr, as it is still called today.

Successive Maghrebi rulers – the sultans from Tlemcen, Fès and elsewhere – always ensured they had control of the port, which still only had local strategic importance. All this changed in the 16th century when the great powers of the Mediterranean, the Spanish, French, Venetians, Genoese and Ottomans, fought for control of the sea. In 1510 the proselytising Spanish took control, but eight years later in an inspired move, the inhabitants declared themselves subjects of the Ottoman sultan and called on the Greek pirates, Aroudj and his younger brother Kheireddin Barbarossa to protect them. After Aroudj was killed fighting the Spanish, Barbarossa led the fight and finally defeated his more powerful adversary in 1529, establishing the regency of El-Djezaïr and becoming High Admiral of the Ottoman navy.

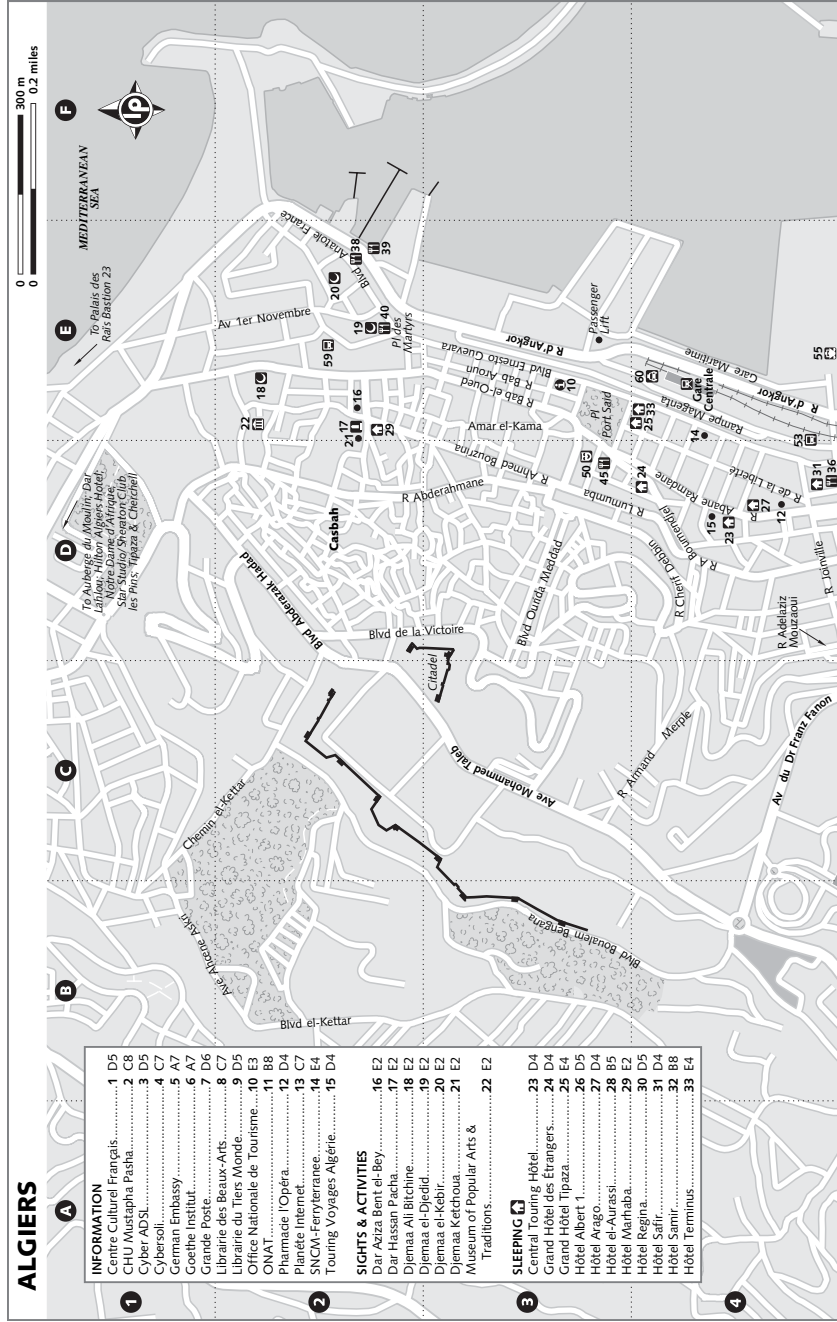
Barbarossa established the city as we can see it – the harbour with its protective arm, tipped with a lighthouse; the huddled houses of the Casbah sloping up the hill; the lookout and fortifications on the hilltop where

the citadel now stands. The site was ideal, the place well planned and for 300 years, El-Djezaïr remained the pre-eminent Mediterranean pirate base that even the mighty British navy proved unable to destroy. Under Mohamed ben Osmane Khodja, dey from 1766–91, El-Djezaïr flourished into a well-fortified city of 100,000 inhabitants. The city became increasingly rich as one of the trailheads for the trans-Saharan caravans, as well as from demanding tribute from passing ships and taking action if the tribute was denied: there are many stories of both Christian and Muslim ships being captured by Algerian pirates, with all hands on board either being ransomed or pressed into slavery. It was during this period that many of the most interesting buildings in the city were constructed.

British Admiral Nelson bombarded the port in 1804, hoping to slow the movement of slaves; it didn't work. In 1815 it was the turn of Commodore Decatur and his American squadron: they captured the Algerian flagship and forced the dey of El-Djezaïr into an agreement to end tribute and slavery. Decatur was dubbed the 'conqueror of the Barbary pirates'. In August the following year a British and a Dutch squadron were sent to secure the release of the British consul and more than 1000 other Christians held captive in the city. The commander of the British ships, Admiral Pellew, again bombarded the city into submission, and forced the dey to abandon his palace for the safety of the citadel.

The continuing threat of piracy in the southern Mediterranean provided a resurgent France with the pretext it needed to move south. Their hope was to counterbalance British influence in the Mediterranean by controlling the southern straits of one of the sea's more narrow passages. On 14 June 1830, a force of 37,612 Frenchmen landed on the beach of Sidi Ferruch, just north of the city. The French claimed they had no initial plan to establish a colony, but in 1834 they officially annexed much of northern Algeria, making Algiers the capital of their new colony.

The city was rebuilt under French rule. The citadel, with its strategic position, was strengthened to ensure security and a large area of the lower Casbah was demolished to make way for new roads. After the French



emperor Napoléon III and his wife, the empress Eugénie, visited in 1860, the area south of the Casbah was laid out as the Ville Nouvelle, with broad boulevards and large buildings. It was, in the words of an old colon (colonial) sifting through his memories, 'one of the most beautiful cities the French ever built'. It also became part of metropolitan France, unlike other French-controlled cities in North Africa, such as Tunis and Casablanca, which were mere colonies.

Algiers' strategic importance was underlined during WWII, when it became the base for Charles de Gaulle's Free French army as well as the headquarters of British and American war planners. Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower were among the power players who spent time in the city from 1943 to the end of the war.

The independence movement's origins stretch way back, but it began in earnest with the end of the war – VE Day celebrations in Constantine, Guelma and especially Sétif became bloody confrontations. Although Algiers was quieter than other northern towns and cities, by the late 1950s it was the epicentre of an increasingly savage struggle to free the country, which culminated in independence in 1962.

Algeria's oil and gas resources have helped turn the former colonial capital into a modern city, although progress was halted in 1992 when the military-backed government annulled an election it had just lost to an Islamist party. The resulting violence, during which corpses were regularly thrown out into the streets, cast a pall of anxiety and suspicion over the city, which is only now, and very slowly, beginning to dissipate.

ORIENTATION

Algiers spreads around a huge crescent bay, hemmed in by steep hills and facing north into the Mediterranean. The city skyline is dominated by two structures, both impossible to miss. To the south of the centre is the 92m-high Makam Eshahid (Martyrs' Memorial), and closer to the city centre, a concrete box rises on pillars above the whitewashed colonial city, the five-star Hôtel Aurassi.

The Casbah, the heart of the old or 'upper' town, fills the hillside above the northern part of the port, and is topped by the citadel. South of the Casbah is the French-built Ville Nouvelle, the 'lower' town. This is the com-

mercial and business centre, where you will find the major shops, banks, hotels and the post office. The train station and *gare maritime* (ferry terminal) are only five minutes' walk north of this area, and the *gare routière* (bus station) 20 minutes to the south.

Algiers is a good city to walk in, especially in the lower town (see the walking tour p97). However, you are advised against walking in parts of the Casbah unless you feel confident about the risks (see p92). Most sites in the centre are within walking distance.

The French adapted a grid system of roads to the curves of Algiers bay. A major highway runs along the edge of the water, passing the train station, port and continuing out to the airport. The city centre is raised above this, with blvd Zirout Youssef serving as a corniche, popular in the evenings as a place to stroll and catch the evening breeze.

A long street, which changes name several times – rues Bab Azzoun, Ali Boumendjel, Larbi ben M'Hidi, Emir Abdelkader, Didouche Mourad – joins the upper and lower towns, running south from the place des Martyrs at the edge of the Casbah, past the elegant place Port Said and the Grande Poste to climb to the residential heights lined with shops, offices and restaurants.

Most embassies are in the suburb of Hydra, 5km south of the centre, or in the suburbs of El-Biar and Bouzaréah, all easily reached by taxi or by bus from place des Martyrs.

Traffic in Algiers has become worse in recent years, as the number of privately owned cars has risen dramatically. The morning and evening rush hours are now a real problem, and it can take hours to make a journey which, at other times, might take half an hour.

Maps

The **Institut National de Cartographie et de Télé-détection** (INCT; ☎ 021 739260; 20 rue Abane Ramdane) is the state mapping agency and produces excellent 1:7500 large-scale sheet maps of the city. You usually have to buy them in sets of six, but Sheet 1.5 covers all of central Algiers, from Bologhine in the north to beyond the transport hubs at Sidi Mohamed in the south (and with a larger-scale inset of the Casbah). The INCT maps may also be available, or can be ordered, in some bookshops.

ALGIERS IN...

Two Days

The obvious place to start the first day would be the citadel, above the Haute Casbah, but as it is closed for the foreseeable future, start with a coffee or mint tea on the terrace of the **Tontonville Café** (p101), watching the crowd and money-changers on place Port Said. Visit the **Palais des Raïs** (p95) and then follow the lower Casbah walk (p97), which takes in the best of the old town. Save the afternoon for museums – the **Bardo Museum** (p96) and the **National Museum of Antiquities** (p96). From here you are well placed for a drink at the **Hôtel el-Djazaïr** (p102), or you could cross town for the spectacular view over the city from the **Cathedral of Notre-Dame d'Afrique** (p95).

Start early the second day, beating the rush hour, and get to **Tipaza** (p104). Spend the morning among the ruins, then have lunch at one of the restaurants beside the park, or move on to **Cherchell** (p106). Drive back to Algiers before nightfall for dinner in town (p100).

Three Days

If you have more time in the city, be sure to check if the **Jardin d'Essai** (p97) has reopened. If not, walk the seafront in the morning and spend the afternoon walking through the Ville Nouvelle or at the **Makam Echahid** (Martyrs' Memorial; p96) and the **Musée National Du Jihad** (p96).

Agir-Plus Edition has used these maps in its pocket-size *Guide et Plans d'Alger* (DA750), also packed with practical information.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Algiers has several bookshops, but most of them only sell books in French and Arabic. The few English-language titles on sale tend to be either practical or academic.

Librairie des Beaux-Arts (☎ 021 634014; 28 rue Didouche Mourad) A small but excellent shop on one of the main shopping streets, with staff who know books and are happy to help. It has a good selection of books in French about Algeria, including guides, history, fiction and picture books.

Librairie du Tiers Monde (☎ 021 715772; place de l'Emir Abdelkader) A larger store than the Beaux-Arts, it doesn't have much more of a selection when it comes to French or English books. Although it does have a larger French-language fiction selection.

Cultural Centres

Centre Culturel Français (☎ 021 730100; 7 rue Hassani Issad) The most active of the foreign cultural centres, it has a library and theatre-cinema.

Goethe Institut (☎ 021 741959; 165 Chemin de Sfindja) Housed in the German embassy, it stages theatre and screens films around town.

Palais de la Culture (☎ 021 291010; Les Anassers, Kouba) Stages music and literary events.

Emergency

SOS Santé (☎ 115)

SOS Sécurité (☎ 112)

Internet Access

There's no shortage of internet places in the centre, often off the main streets, in a basement or up on the 1st floor. Fees are usually around DA50 to DA80 per hour. These are among the more reliable:

Cyber ADSL (53 rue Larbi ben M'Hidi)

Cybersoli (16 rue Hassiba ben Bouali)

Planète Internet (☎ 021 643196; rue Didouche Mourad; per hr 60B)

Medical Services

For medical emergencies you should call **SOS Santé** (☎ 115), but for something less urgent, French speaking **Dr Maouchi** (☎ 073 341322) has been recommended.

CHU Mustapha Pasha (☎ 021 235555; place du 1 Mai) One of the most central general hospitals.

Pharmacie l'Opéra (☎ 021 731342; 4 rue Abane Ramdane; ☎ 8am-midnight Sat-Thu, 5pm-midnight Fri) This place is particularly helpful.

Money

Algiers is awash with ATMs, but only one is likely to accept foreign cards, the **Crédit Populaire d'Algérie** (☎ 021 635687; blvd Colonel Amirouche), and even that is not to be relied on. Travellers cheques can be cashed at several large banks near the Grande Poste, but it is slow, as is drawing cash on Visa. There are many Western Union branches, the most central at the Grande Poste. Cash can be changed at many banks, hotels and, at the best rate, on the street at place Port Saïd.

Post

The **Grande Poste** (p97; ☎ 021 726072) is on place Grande Poste, a Moorish monolith right at the centre of town; it sells stamps and phone cards. There are several branches in the city, including one at 119 rue Didouche Mourad near the Sacré Coeur.

Telephone

You don't have to walk far in the centre to find a taxiphone (an inexpensive metered phone service), by far the easiest and cheapest way to make local and international calls. Post offices sell prepaid cards for the many orange call boxes scattered across the city. And if you have an unlocked mobile phone, it might be worth buying a SIM card, which usually comes with credit.

Tourist Information

The **Office Nationale de Tourisme** (☎ 021 712981; www.ont.dz; 2 rue Smail Kerrar; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Sat-Wed) was undergoing a face-lift at the time of research, but should have a shiny new office just off Blvd Ernesto Guevara and some information on travelling in the country.

Travel Agencies

L'Île de l'Occident (☎ 021 300134; www.iledeloccident.com; Lot H, 39 rue El-Achour) The leaders in cultural and adventure tourism, as well as a general travel agency. Highly recommended.

Mili Voyage Algérie (☎ 021 633643; 16 rue Didouche Mourad)

ONAT (☎ 021 742985; www.onat-dz.com; 2 rue Didouche Mourad) The state-owned agency has several branches in the city, but this is the largest and most central for local and international travel.

Touring Voyages Algérie (☎ 021 739516; www.touringvoyagesalgerie.dz; 21 rue Abane Ramdane) One of three branches in the capital for this nationwide agency.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Algiers is a big and busy city that has seen more than its fair share of violence over the years, as plaques around the centre commemorate. At times tension bubbles up and there is a visible increase in the number of police in the street and roadblocks on the main arteries. At the end of 2006 bombs went off on the outskirts of the city. Most of this violence is targeted at police, but a bus carrying foreigners was also attacked.

Some parts of the city are more difficult for foreigners to visit than others, the upper

ROCKING THE CASBAH

In the 1937 cult French film *Pépé le Moko*, Jean Gabin plays a French gangster who is safe from the police as long as he stays in the Casbah. The days when the police feared to enter the steep, narrow alleys and the Casbah still poses difficulties for travellers; even some of the most experienced have had bags or cameras snatched there. Poverty-fuelled crime is not exclusive to the Casbah, but if foreign governments advise against travelling anywhere in the city, it is here. With care, and following our route (p97), you will find more frequented areas where it is safer to visit, particularly in the lower Casbah. All areas of the Casbah should be avoided after dark unless you know where you are going or are walking with an Algerian known to you.

Casbah being the most obvious example. The greatest risk is of petty theft and, as with big cities throughout the world, you will greatly reduce the risk of being a target if you take care of your valuables and ensure that you are not alone in the busier, and the quietest areas.

Foreigners are also targeted by the city's thieves, whose scams may include an outward show of friendship leading to an invitation to a meal, during which a theft may occur. The majority of theft, however, is opportunistic: if you leave a camera sitting on a table or a bag hanging over the back of a chair, it may not be there for long.

SIGHTS

Algiers, like many other places in the country, is only just beginning to recognise its tourism potential. As a result, some of the city's most popular sights are often closed and in the process of being renovated. The municipal authorities made efforts to speed things up as Algiers celebrates being Arab Cultural Capital in 2007, but many sites remain closed.

Entry into all mosques is officially closed to non-Muslims, but in practice it is possible to visit between the morning and noon prayers (roughly between 9am and noon) if you obtain permission from the mosque's imam and are dressed appropriately, which

means no shorts or short sleeves. Women will need to wear a headscarf.

The Casbah & Around

THE CASBAH

The Casbah of Algiers is a unique urban environment, a fact recognised by Unesco when it inscribed the Casbah on the World Heritage list and described it as 'one of the finest coastal sites on the Mediterranean'. The part of the city that sits on the steep hill between the citadel and the seafont, the Casbah was mostly built between the 16th and 18th centuries. It is a tight-knit warren of alleys where whitewashed houses lean so close they cut out the sharp sun for most of the day. Difficult to police and therefore a home to lawlessness for much of its history, the Casbah has changed dramatically over the past few decades. With problems of sanitation and water shortages, many of the old Casbah families who were able to, moved out to more modern accommodation elsewhere in the city. The Casbah has suffered: since independence as many as a thousand houses have been lost. Not all were of architectural beauty, yet part of the wonder of the place is in the sum of its parts. But it is not too late and it seems that things may be changing. The state does provide funds, and there are various organisations devoted to helping save the Casbah. A great deal of restoration work is ongoing and several significant houses have already been restored.

DJEMAA EL-DJEDID

Colonial French town planners cleared many Ottoman buildings when they redesigned the Algiers waterfront and laid out what is now the place des Martyrs, but they left the **Djemaa el-Djedid** (place des Martyrs). Contrary to its name, the New Mosque, sometimes also called the Pêcherie Mosque, was built in 1660 on the site of an earlier Quranic school and paid for by public subscription. The mosque is unusual for Algiers, built in a recognisably Turkish style, with a series of domes and vaults, although the minaret is Andalusian in style. It is also unusual for being designed as a cross: local legend has it that the architect was a Christian, supposedly executed for his trickery. It has two entrances, one on the place and another on the steps of the ramparts, leading down to

the port. One of the most popular of the inner city mosques, entry to non-Muslims is periodically banned.

DJEMAA EL-KEBIR

A few steps away, the **Djemaa el-Kebir** (Grand Mosque; rue el-Mourabidine) continues a tradition that goes back to the early history of Algiers. On a rise above the inner port, early Berber and Phoenician inhabitants built places of prayer here, which the Romans turned into a temple; later it was converted into a Christian basilica. One apse of the basilica faced east and was hung with carpets and icons. This was later torn down and replaced, in the 11th century, by the mosque, which has since been much altered and enlarged. Inside the five doors the prayer hall is supported by rows of columns, 72 in all, and contains a cedarwood minbar which carries an inscription stating that the mihrab, the niche indicating the direction of Mecca, was constructed in 490AH (AD 1097). This supports the idea that the mosque was built by Youssef ben Tachfine, the Almoravid ruler of Tlemcen at a time when the Mediterranean was transformed by the First Crusade. The minaret, 15m high, carries an inscription urging us to contemplate its beauty and the magnificent appearance of its crowns.

The mosque's location made it central to Algiers' court life – this was where the bey came for Friday prayers, in procession from his palace by the port or from the citadel. Among the later additions to the structure were a small garden and, after the British bombardment in 1816, an installation for four cannons. Just over a hundred years later, in a ceremony held here in March 1919, the French government officially recognised the sacrifice of the *indigènes* (native North Africans) who died in WWI by awarding the mufti Ben Nacer the Legion of Honour in their name.

DJEMAA ALI BITCHINE

In the rough days of Algerian piracy, when a man might be snatched off a ship in the high sea and given a choice of slavery or conversion, there were many so-called renegades, people around the Mediterranean who changed religion. Ali Bitchine was one. A sailor from Venice, his original name may have been Piccinino. Whoever he had been

in Italy, in Algiers he was a sailor who rose to become a grand admiral of the fleet. In 1622 he built the **Djemaa Ali Bitchine** (rue Soualah). The plan is unusual, the domed design clearly influenced by Italian or Byzantine churches. Like several other mosques, this one was used as a church during the French occupation, when it was known as Notre Dame des Victoires. The minaret was destroyed towards the end of the 19th century. The building was reclaimed as a mosque in 1962 and at the time of writing was being restored.

DJEMAA KETCHOUA

Of all the central Algiers mosques the Djemaa Ketchoua has had the most turbulent history. Its exact date of construction is not known, but it is estimated as being some time at the beginning of the 17th century and certainly before the Djemaa el-Djedid. Its name translates as place or plateau of goats, a reminder of the time when this space – between the port and citadel – was open ground. It was remodelled in 1794 by Hassan Pasha, when he built his palace next door (below). The work is commemorated by a long inscription that begins: ‘What a beautiful mosque!’ Today it seems more unusual than beautiful, with its high steps, three-tiered minarets and partitioned walls.

A plaque to the left of the great doors notes that on 5 July 1830 a cross was placed on top of the mosque, beginning more than 130 years of French occupation. During this time it served as the city’s cathedral and one of the centrepieces of the French-held city: French artists and sculptors decorated it, Emperor Napoleon III took Mass here in 1860 and the composer Saint-Saëns played the organ here in 1873. The building was reconsecrated as a mosque on 5 July 1962, 132 years to the day after it was converted to a church and just two days after General de Gaulle recognised independent Algeria.

DAR HASSAN PACHA

The building beside the Ketchoua Mosque was once the city’s grandest mansion and carries the name of its original owner, Dar Hassan Pacha. Hassan was the ruler or dey of Algiers, a man with a sense of purpose – in 1795 he concluded a peace treaty with the fledgling United States of

America guaranteeing their ships safe passage in Algiers’ waters. Before that, around 1791, he began his palace on the edge of the Casbah, but away from the waterside, which was vulnerable and damp in winter. When Algiers fell to the French the house was turned into the governor’s winter residence. Its façade was remodelled, and unlike most large houses here the Dar Hassan Pacha was given a European-style front, with rows of large windows and balconies, and a grander entrance. During the occupation it played host to the great and good: the Emperor Napoleon and Empress Eugénie stayed during their 1860 tour. The house has been undergoing a major renovation since 2005 and is closed to the public, but photographs suggest that some of the early decoration has survived, including wall tiles, ornate plasterwork and carved and painted wood ceilings.

DAR AZIZA BENT EL-BEY

Aziza may have been a *bent* (daughter) of the bey of Constantine, who built the sumptuous Dar Aziza for her. In contrast to Dar Hassan Pacha, immediately opposite, its whitewashed façade has smaller windows – a less impressive face to the world. Inside, however, this was one of the most gorgeous of Algiers’ grand houses, which was built beside – and perhaps at one time part of – the Jenina, the old palace of the deys, since demolished. Dar Aziza is currently the office of the National Archaeology Agency and is closed to visitors, although there are occasional exhibitions.

MUSEUM OF POPULAR ARTS & TRADITIONS

This **museum** (☎ 021 713414; www.musee-mnatp.art.dz; 9 rue Mohamed Akli Malek, Dar Khedoudj el-Amia; adult/student DA20/10; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-4.30pm Sun-Thu, 1-4.30pm Sat), is the most accessible of the buildings one can visit in the Casbah. The museum is housed in a fine example of an Ottoman-period town house, the Dar Khedoudj el-Amia, which follows the classic town house plan, with an entrance leading to an inner hall and a staircase up to the principal rooms. The museum contains a fascinating collection of traditional Algerian arts and crafts.

The ground floor corridor of fluted marble columns leads to rooms showing traditional Berber crafts, including *ikoufan*,

huge pots used for storing grain, and *sendouk*, large carved wooden chests for storage of clothes and linen. The upper floor, which still has decoration from the 1860s, has four rooms off a central court, in which are shown leatherwork, the highly skilled craft of embroidery on velvet (much prized here), jewellery and copperware. There is also a mock-up of a traditional room such a mansion would have had.

CITADEL

The city’s stronghold, the citadel dominates the Casbah and the port and was, from the 16th century, the guarantor of peace and a safe haven in times of war. Although there was a Berber stronghold here from early times, the present massive structure was begun in 1516 by Aroudj, the brother of Kheireddin Barbarossa. With its walls lined with batteries of canon, 188m above sea level, it dominated the port, the lower town and the surrounding countryside: canons were placed facing inland as well as out to sea, for the ruler of Algiers was never free of threats from Berber and Bedouin tribes. The citadel was little more than military barracks until 1816, when the British bombardment of Algiers persuaded the ruler, Dey Ali, to move up from his palace by the port. It took 76 mules to move his gold and silver up with him. It was here, in 1830, that Dey Hussein slapped the French consul and gave France a pretext for invasion.

The citadel has been closed for some years, while renovation works continue on the palace, the harem, barracks and other buildings in the complex, all of them having suffered during years of occupation and, after independence, of local squatters. So for now, visitors have to make do with a view from the imposing gate, a glimpse into the Mosque of the Invitees (another Ottoman-period structure just beside the gate), and some spectacular views over the city and out to sea.

PALAIS DES RAÏS BASTION 23

So many of Algiers’ historic buildings are either derelict, undergoing renovation or newly restored but closed to visitors, that it comes as a relief to find the **Palais des Raïs** (☎ 021 739570; www.palaisdesrais-bastion23.dz; adult/child DA20/10; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-4.30pm Sun-Thu, 1-4.30pm Sat) open. The palace is in fact a row of

several large waterfront houses, joined up to form a single compound and now home to the Centre des Arts et de la Culture. Palace 18, the main building, was begun in 1750 and completed around 1798 by the Dey Mustapha Pacha, who used it as one of his residences. The French military occupied it for a while, after which it served as the American consulate, a school and a library before becoming the most successful restoration project in the city. The buildings are used as exhibition space for some excellent shows, but much of the pleasure and interest is in seeing inside a grand, Ottoman-period mansion. The rooms are rarely massive, occasionally elaborately decorated with tiles and painted ceilings, but there is a sense of grandeur about the compound and it is still possible to get a sense of the good life that might once have been lived in this place, helped for once by descriptions in English and French.

NOTRE DAME D’AFRIQUE

The Byzantine-inspired **Notre Dame d’Afrique** (☎ 11am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm), known locally as Madame Afrique, sits above the bustle of the city, seemingly impervious to the fact that the people who created it and filled its pews have long gone. The idea for the church is said to have come from two women of Lyon, who missed the shrine that sits above their native city and who placed a statue of the virgin in the hollow of an olive tree on the north of the city. The basilica was finally consecrated in 1872 by Bishop Lavignerie, founder of the White Fathers. Four years later, the statue was crowned ‘queen of Africa’ with the approval of the Pope in Rome. The date of that event, 30 April, has become the statue’s feast day. Sitting 120m above sea level on the plateau of Bouzaréah, the basilica is, above all, a monument to departed French piety; its walls are covered in small memorial plaques, placed by people in need of the Virgin’s help. Mass is said daily in French (6pm) and on Friday in English (10am). In November 2006 the EU, French government and city of Algiers agreed to share the cost of restoring the building.

Ville Nouvelle

The Ville Nouvelle (New Town) is not new and nor is it completely French. Early

on, the Ottoman-backed rulers of Algiers and their powerful courtiers were building themselves summer houses and pleasure pavilions up on the heights of the broad crescent of hill that backs the bay of Algiers. Although the entire hillside and much beyond has now been developed to accommodate a growing population, some of the old villas remain, a few of them converted into museums and other public spaces.

BARDO MUSEUM

The **Bardo Museum of Prehistory & Ethnography** (☎ 021 747641; www.musee-bardo.art.dz; 3 rue Franklin Roosevelt; adult/child DA20/10; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4.30pm Sun-Thu, 1-4.30pm Sat) was built at the end of the 18th century as the country residence of a Tunisian prince exiled in Algiers. Enlarged by a Frenchman during the colonial period, it has been a museum since 1930, displaying the early history and later ethnology of the region. This includes some fabulous fossils, a collection of Neolithic pottery and stones, and particularly impressive rock carvings and paintings of horses and chariots brought from deep in the Sahara in the Tassili N'Ajjer region. Better still is the collection of urban artefacts in the ethnography section. See the elegant copper tea pot, the carved and painted wooden furniture and the grand rooms in which these objects are displayed. Stroll out into the upper courtyard with its cooling central pool and the world in which these objects were created suddenly seems much more familiar. The gardens are a delight. A café

was planned at the time of our visit, but was not yet open.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES

The richness of Algeria's heritage is brought home in the understated but well chosen collection on display at the **National Museum of Antiquities** (☎ 021 746686; www.musee-antiquites.art.dz; adult/child DA20/10; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4.30pm Sun-Thu, 1-4.30pm Sat), a short walk from the Bardo Museum. The collection of antiquities is drawn from sites around the city and throughout Algeria. Among the early works are fine ivory carvings and large, totemic Libyan-period warriors on horseback. There is sculpture from Cherchell and mosaics from Tipaza, a room of bronzes including a wonderful fragment of a horse's leg and hoof, and an extraordinary 3rd-century figure of a chubby child holding an eagle to its chest. There is also a collection of Islamic art from across the Maghreb. The museum sits at the top of the Parc de la Liberté, a classic piece of French urban planning at the top of rue Didouche Mourad.

MAKAM ECHAHID & MUSÉE NATIONAL DU MOUDJAHID

One of the most recognisable landmarks in the city, the **Makam Echahid** (Martyr's Memorial; Riadh el-Feth) celebrates the sacrifice of the unknown martyr who fell for his country. The monument, constructed by the Canadians in the early 1980s, is made up of three massive concrete palm fronds that come together and soar 92m into the

sky; they represent the coming together of agriculture, culture and industry to make independent Algeria great. The nearby Bois des Arcades offers shade and some great views.

The **Musée National du Moudjahid** (☎ 021 743414; Riadh el-Feth, Martyrs' Memorial; adult/child DA20/15; ☎ 9am-5pm Oct-Feb, 9am-7pm Mar-Sep) sits beneath the memorial, its mission to collect, preserve and display objects and memories of the struggle against colonialism. It starts with the story of the French invasion of 1830, but focuses on the glorious struggle from the uprising in Sétif, Constantine and Guelma in 1944 to Independence Day in July 1962. Although information is in Arabic, the meaning of the exhibits is easy to understand, from Abdelkader's pistols to reports of executions of 'terrorists'. The museum's lower floor is a domed sanctuary, a natural shrine of low light and no noise, its walls inscribed with verses from the Quran.

MUSÉE DES BEAUX ARTS

At the edge of the Jardin d'Essai and a short walk from the Martyrs' Memorial, the **Musée des Beaux Arts** (☎ 021 664916; placette Dar es-Salaam, El-Hamma; adult/child DA20/10; ☎ 9am-noon Sun-Thu, 1-5pm Sat) houses the best collection of art in the country. Opened in 1930 and with some 8000 items on the walls and in store, it traces the progress of European and particularly French art from the 16th century, starting with Barnaba di Modena, passing through the neoclassicists such as David and Delacroix, Orientalists including Fromentin and Renoir painted during the artist's visit in 1882. There is also a sizeable collection of work by Algerian artists and by artists from elsewhere, donated when Algeria won independence.

GRANDE POSTE

A post office might not be high on everyone's list of things to see, but **Grande Poste** (☎ 021 726072; place Grande Poste), completed in 1908 after eight years of construction, is a classic piece of French-inspired hispano-Moorish architecture and is worth a brief visit, even if you don't need stamps or a phone card. One of the world's most elaborate post boxes is near the entrance, while the façade carries the names of Algeria's principal towns and cities.

JARDIN D'ESSAI

Another grand civic project planted by the French, the **Jardin d'Essai** (El-Hamma; www.jardindessai.com) dates to the first years of their occupation. In the early 1830s, as soon as the French were in control of Algiers, land was set aside for a model farm and a garden in which they could try out various plants. The idea was to test what would grow best here, given the soil and climate, in the hope of improving crop yields and greening the landscape. The model farm disappeared, but the Jardin d'Essai flourished and by the end of the 19th century was one of the world's great natural hothouses. It has continued to develop and is currently undergoing improvements. A place of outstanding beauty, when it reopens it will once again be somewhere to escape from the overwhelming whiteness of the city, among the avenues of palms, the stands of exotic trees and the rows of plants.

ACTIVITIES Golf

As everywhere else in the world, golf is becoming increasingly popular among a certain section of Algerians. If you can't resist the urge to play, **Le Golf Club de Dely Brahim** (☎ 021 375362) has an 18-hole course.

Swimming

Many Algerians are happy to jump into the sea near the port, but the water is far from clean and you need to drive a long way out of the city to find clean water. Swimming pools can be just as difficult to find. The **Complexe Nautique** (☎ 021 924787) has one indoor and two open-air Olympic-sized pools, although you may need to join (and therefore bring a passport) to get into the water. Easier, though more expensive, is the pool of the **Hôtel el-Djazair** (☎ 021 230933; www.hoteleldjazair.dz; 24 av Soudanai Boujmaa; s/d DA2300/4000).

WALKING TOUR

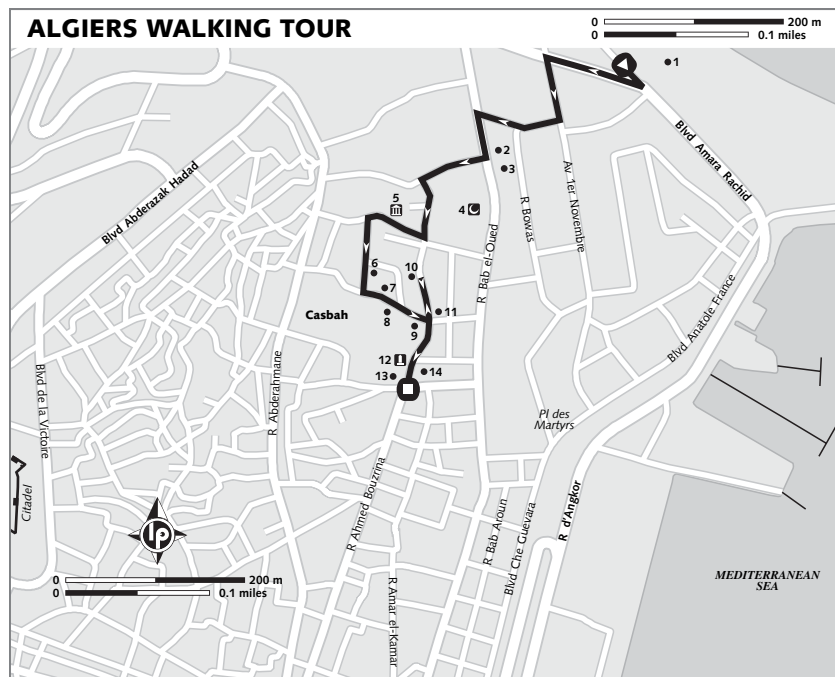
The Casbah has a reputation as a difficult place for foreigners to walk and not entirely without reason: even experienced travellers have been mugged here recently. This walk is designed to give a taste of the safer, lower Casbah, taking in many of the city's most remarkable sights. However, avoid taking this tour at night (for more information see the boxed text, p92).

SHANGHAI BLUE *Zahia Hafs*

Traditionally the trousers and jackets worn by the fishermen were made of thick blue cotton called 'le bleu de Shanghai' (Shanghai blue). If you walk around Algiers' charming fishing port, near the place des Martyrs, especially at night during Ramadan, you will still see 'the blue men' sitting at small terraces, sipping strong coffee or mint tea, eating pastries and playing dominos. Others hang around smoking their cigarettes with delight on the parapet and the steps leading to the water. This outfit has passed through time with whole generations of men who work the seas wearing the distinctive garments. In the past they also wore white sandals and it was appropriate for unmarried men to have a mint leaf stuck behind their ear allowing girls to know they were single.

If you walk around the Casbah you will also see some elderly men, mainly retired fishermen, wearing this blue costume. However, little by little, the younger generations are dropping this outfit and with it one part of typical Algiers' scenery.

Strangely, across the Mediterranean in Marseille the distinctive two piece outfit is not called 'Shanghai blue' but 'China blue', and back across the seas in Tamanrasset, in the south of Algeria, it is called 'Marseille blue'.



WALK FACTS

Start Palais des Raïs
Finish place Port Said
Distance 3km
Duration Four to five hours

Start at the **Palais des Raïs** (1; p95). From its windows (or the road nearby if you don't want to enter), take a look at the admiralty, the bit of land that closes Algiers' inner port, with its lighthouse built by Barbarossa. This was where the legendary figures of the city's history plied their trade and now is a military zone. Cross **blvd Amara Rachid** and the small place with a fountain of rearing horses. Beyond it, turn left onto **av 1 Novembre** and then take your first right, crossing **rue Bouras**. Just before you reach **rue Bab el-Oued**, you pass (on your left) **Dar el-Hamra** (2; closed to visitors). The last day of Algiers, Hussein, built this fine mansion in 1800, before he reached power. It was rented by the British Consul Robert St-John in the 1820s, although **Dey Hussein**

returned to it for some days in 1830, after the city had fallen to the French.

The **Bab el-Oued** (3), the River Gate, was the northern entrance to Algiers, but was not wide enough for carts heading to the port jetty and was dismantled in 1846. One of the pedestrian arches of the gate has survived near **Dar el-Hamra**. Just beyond it, past the covered market, the **Djemaa Ali Bitchine** (4; p93) is being restored, but its outside fountain and tile work can be admired. Take the passage that leads between the mosque and market, the pedestrian **rue Prof Mohamed Boualah**. As you climb the steps the Casbah rises above you. Take the first left, **rue Hadj Omar**. No 2, the **École Ahmed Hamouche**, is a large Ottoman house currently undergoing some restoration work.

The first right turning off **rue Hadj Omar** is **rue Mohamed Akli Malek**. Visit the **Museum of Popular Arts & Traditions** (5; p94) at No 9, in the **Dar Khedaoudj el-Amia**. Continue up the hill from the museum, then take the first left (**rue Mohamed et Ahmed Mecheri**), which leads to an open

space in front of the restored but closed **Dar es-Souf** (6).

Turn left at the end of the street, onto **rue de l'Indépendance**. This street is lined with some of the largest houses in the Casbah. No 1, **Dar Zaid Aissa** (7), has a massive white façade and the sign *monument classé*. At No 7 you can just make out the sign for the **Tribunal de 1er Instance**, one of the old town courts. At a turn in the street, on the right, **Dar Mustapha Pacha** (8) was built, like many of these houses, at the end of the 18th century. It was given to a religious order. Under the French it was turned into a library and still bears an engraved, **Bibliothèque Nationale**, sign. More impressive is the carved cedarwood canopy above the main entrance. Just before the end of the street on the right is No 2, the **Hammam Sidna** (9), a classic hammam of 16th-century origin, at one time used by the court. The hammam was working until recently (as recently as the poster of Zidane and his Real Madrid colleagues, which still hangs on the wall). There are plans for it to reopen in the near future.

You are now back on **rue Hadj Omar**. On your left are another pair of classic Algerian houses: at No 17, a marble entrance and large wooden door announce the **Dar el-Cadi** (10), while across the road at No 10, a large doorway supported by four pillars is the entrance to **Dar Ahmed Bey** (11), now the headquarters of the Algerian National Theatre.

Turning right onto **rue Hadj Omar**, the road comes into an open space. **Dar Hassan Pacha** (12; p94), once the residence of the French Governor of Algeria (under restoration) and **Djemaa Ketchoua** (13; p94) are both on the right. On your left is the whitewashed façade of **Dar Aziza** (14; p94), the headquarters of the Archaeological Agency, and beyond it lies the **place des Martyrs**, convenient for transport, close to the restaurants of the **Pêcherie** (p100) and a short walk from the cafés of **place Port Said**.

TOURS

The travel agencies listed in the Information section (p92) all offer tours of the city and the surrounding sights. **Île de l'Occident** is particularly recommended for cultural tours.

SLEEPING

Algiers has a large number of hotels, but a shortage of good beds. Many of the places listed here are small, although 'boutique hotel' is a concept that has not yet arrived. The big hotels, with one notable exception, are concrete blocks, some from the tourism boom of the 1960s and 70s. The Minister of Tourism has vowed to improve the situation by encouraging investment, and there are rumours of Saudis and others trying to buy the city's prominent hotels, but none of this has brought the necessary improvements.

Hotels in Algiers tend to be more expensive than elsewhere in Algeria (with the possible exception of Oran). While you can still find a budget room for under DA1000, many will cost up to DA1500, while midrange may cost as much as DA3500 a double.

Budget

Hôtel Marhaba (☎ 021 711666; 4 rue Abdelkader Aoua; s/d DA400/600) Overlooking the Ketchoua Mosque and a busy street, the Marhaba has grubby rooms with basins and worn beds, but no in-house showers. Basic.

Grand Hôtel Tipaza (☎ 021 736515; 4 rue Rachid Kessentini; s/d B&B DA800/1000) This long-standing backpackers favourite is a one-star dive above the noisy square, cafés and shops, right in the centre and a short walk from train and shared taxi connections. It has communal showers.

Hôtel Terminus (☎ 021 737817; 2 rue Rachid Kessentini; s/d B&B from DA900/1500) A noisy former colonial hotel overlooking **place Port Said** and the sea, it has some rooms (at midrange prices) with air-con. Not ideal for women travelling alone.

Hôtel Arago (☎ 021 739495; rue Haffaf Nafaa; s/d DA975/1545) A survivor from the days when French colonial officials and their families flocked to the city, the Arago has dropped the Grand from its name and offers simple, clean rooms, without air-con, in a more salubrious part of town than the **Port Said** area, but still near the port and train station.

Grand Hôtel des Étrangers (☎ 021 743359; 1 rue Ali Boumendjel; s/d/tr B&B DA1200/1300/1400) A welcoming hotel in the cheap-hotel area, it's a little less noisy than the others.

Midrange

Central Touring Hôtel (☎ 021 737644; 9 rue Abane Ramdane; s/d DA1638/1930; 🚻) On a busy street

in the centre of town, this is another old favourite and a cut above most of the city's budget places. Air-con rooms available.

Hôtel Regina (☎ 021 740035; 27 blvd ben Boulaïd; s/d B&B DA3000/3200; 🏠) The welcome could be warmer, but rooms in this imposing seafront hotel, a short walk from the Grande Poste, are well maintained and a good size, if a little noisy.

Hôtel Samir (☎ 021 630251; www.hotelsamir.com; 74 rue Didouche Mourad; s/d/tr B&B DA3100/3600/4600; 🏠) One of the best midrange hotels in the centre, a very popular place in a 19th century building on a busy shopping street. Reservation recommended.

Hôtel Safir (☎ 021 735040; 2 rue Asseleh Hocine; s/d B&B DA4200/4800; 🏠) You get more than a bed to sleep in at the Safir, a hotel popular with out-of-town officials with business at the local government offices. Under French occupation this was the Aletti, one of the city's chic addresses. The building is grand, the view over the harbour perfect and some of the rooms still vast and decorated with character, but while renovation continues, much of the furnishings and fittings are tired and the plumbing unreliable. Expect to pay more for renovated or seafront rooms.

Top End

Hôtel Albert 1 (☎ 021 736506/737441; hotelalbert@yahoo.fr; 5 av Pasteur; s/d B&B DA 4100/4700; 🏠) In another city, or in Algiers in another time, the Albert 1 would have taken more advantage of its fabulous wedding-cake building and central location, right on one of the main squares and with views out to sea. As it is, rooms are worn, water is erratic and street noise can be bad, even late at night, but this is still one of the most interesting places to stay in town.

Dar Diaf (☎ 021 361010; Chemin de la Redoute, Cheraga; s/d DA5300/7200; 🏠 🏠) The better of the two hotels of this name (though not nearly so convenient), Dar Diaf is a long drive out of the centre. And while it's rated four star it's still a long way from being a luxury hotel. That said, it does offer clean and comfortable rooms and has a good restaurant.

Hôtel el-Aurassi (☎ 021 748252; 2 blvd Frantz Fanon; s/d from DA10,000/11,000) There's no missing the Aurassi, one of the city's landmarks that people either love (the modernists) or hate

(everyone else). A concrete box perched on a concrete plinth, it is due for a much needed overhaul. Views of the city are fabulous as are the gardens.

Hôtel el-Djazair (☎ 021 230933; www.hotel eldjazair.dz; 24 av Souidani Boujmaa; s/d 18,000/22,000; 🏠 🏠 🏠) Minor shortcomings with service and upkeep of the rooms are far outweighed by the charm of the place, which has been the city's address of choice for over a century. Famous guests include Rudyard Kipling and André Gide. The Allied Force Headquarters was based in Room 141 while planning the invasion of Sicily, and Churchill and Eisenhower met here in June 1943. They might tut at the modern extensions but would still enjoy the gardens and pool, the elegance and character.

Hilton Algiers Hôtel (☎ 021 219696; www.hilton.com; Pins Maritime; s/d from 27,000/31,000; 🏠 🏠 🏠) A huge curve of concrete out of town near the Exhibition Centre and therefore usually full of delegations (and the British embassy and British council, which has permanent residence here). The Hilton is extremely secure, very comfortable and has just about everything you would expect at this price.

EATING

There is no shortage of places to pick up a quick bite. There are also many restaurants in the centre, often serving French-influenced food.

Budget

Milk Bar (40 rue Larbi ben M'Hidi; snacks DA50-100) A reliable all-day food stop on place Emir Abdelkader, it's good for a coffee and croissant, or a slice of pizza at lunch, and has pavement seating.

Big Blue (1 rue Didouche Mourad; DA60) Omelettes, burgers and fries are served from this stall, just opposite the gates of the university. Extremely popular at lunch and dinner.

Restaurant le Faubourg (rue Pichon; mains DA150-250) Down a flight of steps off place Audin, this restaurant is a simple place that serves straightforward meals of soup and roast chicken on plastic tables, either in the main room (with TV) or *salle familiale* (family room). No alcohol is available.

Le Brussels (☎ 021 633754; 2 rue Didouche Mourad; breakfast & light lunch DA150-300) A cool café that runs all day on a Belgian theme, it serves hot chocolate and *pain au chocolat* (choco-

late croissant) for breakfast, sugar and savoury crepes for lunch, and good coffee all day to a young crowd, most of whom come from the nearby university.

Le Magelan (☎ 021 710130; 8 Rampe de la Pêcherie; DA200) There's a line of fish restaurants along the Rampe de la Pêcherie, the passage that leads from beside Djemaa el-Djedid to the port (or used to until the lower gate was blocked during the 1990s). All have the same sort of product and prices: choose a fish from the display and say whether you want it grilled or fried. Le Magelan (formerly the Sirène de Mer) also does a fine fish soup, but no alcohol is available.

Tontonville Café (☎ 021 748661; 7 place Port Said; mains DA200-300) The entrance is on the side street by the theatre. Inside this high-ceilinged canteen, popular at lunchtime, take a tray and choose from a range of dishes – perhaps a tagine, a lamb stew, or a couscous – and have drinks served. Afterwards, you can go out front and have a coffee on the terrace.

Restaurant Yulmaz (☎ 021 7333301; 8 rue Pichon; mains DA300-500) This small, bright place just off place Audin is a little more expensive than others in the alley, but it is a cut above the rest with good grills and tagines, although there's no alcohol.

Midrange

L'Arc en Ciel (☎ 021 738360; 3 rue Col Haouas; mains DA500-800) This place is particularly busy at lunchtime, when the small room fills with people from the town hall and other nearby offices, who look as though they have been coming here for years. Service is fast, food is unfussy and fish, couscous and paella are the specialities.

La Vague Bleu (rue d'Angkor; mains DA500-1000) The owner is a fisherman who sells whatever he has caught on his boat in this dark little restaurant under the city rampart, across the road from the port. There's not a lot of ambience and no alcohol, but the fish couldn't be fresher and the prices are reasonable for the quality.

La Maison de Couscous (rue Claude Debussy; mains DA600-800) Up by the concrete Sacré Coeur Cathedral, high up rue Didouche Mourad, this local no-frills place serves what its name says: couscous. Algerians don't often go out to eat couscous – it's the sort of

dish your wife or mother cooks best – but they come here in numbers. No alcohol is available.

Top End

Brasserie des Facultés (☎ 021 6440531 rue Didouche Mourad; meals DA1000-1500) The food side of this popular and often smoky bar fills up early and for good reason. It isn't the cheapest place in town, but it is consistently good, with a well-priced plat du jour. Tables alongside the window are referred to as *front de mer*, overlooking not the beach but the passage along busy rue Didouche Mourad and the entrance to the university.

Le Dauphin (☎ 021 716557; rue d'Angkor; mains DA1000-1500, whole fish per kilogram DA1500-2700) Don't be fooled by the faux Greek exterior or the Muzak inside, this is one of the city's best, where the freshest fish and the best wine is enjoyed by well-heeled locals and oil workers. Alcohol is served and it has a terrace.

Dar Lahlou (☎ 021 210807; maisonlahlou@yahoo.fr; Pins Maritimes; dinner DA1000-2000) A relative newcomer, Dar Lahlou is doing the seemingly impossible: serving upmarket couscous. Yet, it works. But then this isn't just any old couscous. The family is from the Kabylie where they and women in surrounding villages still make couscous by hand, for which they won the gold medal for the best couscous in the Mediterranean in 2005, a source of national pride. If wheat couscous is hard to digest, try the barley, corn or rice couscous, though Dar Lahlou also serves tagines and roasts in a place that the owners have made look like home.

Auberge du Moulin (☎ 021 361073; 24 rue Abane Ramdane, Cheraga; mains DA1000-2000) Consistently rated the best meal in town, the old windmill, set in a beautiful garden, serves fine Franco-Algerian food with great style. There's dining outside when the weather allows.

Self-Catering

There are several large food markets around the centre, excellent for stocking up on fresh food. The most convenient is on rue Amar el-Kama, off place Port Said. There is a larger, covered market off rue Didouche Mourad, near the junction of rue Ahmed Zabana and rue Boukhlfâ Khalifa. There are also plenty of food shops and bakeries in the centre, not to mention the ever-present pizza place.

Les Puits d'Amour (☎ 021 237356; 93B rue Didouche Mourad) If you need some serious French baked goods, look no further than this retro patisserie.

Promy Plus (☎ 021 747770; 39 rue Larbi ben M'hidi) This department store has dried foods in its basement.

DRINKING

Considering its image abroad as a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism, there are a surprising number of places to drink in the city. Most of these will be filled with men out to get drunk and are, therefore, not the sort of place where a foreign girl is going to have a quiet time. The exceptions are hotel bars, where access is often restricted to hotel guests.

Bar Dey (☎ 021 230933; Hôtel el-Djazair, 24 av Soudani Boujmaa) This is one of the most relaxing places to drink, especially on a warm day if you can persuade the waiters to serve you in the garden. The bar has an elaborate Moorish interior. Drinks are suitably expensive, up to DA550 for an imported beer, a little less for a half bottle of local wine.

Also recommended:

Alger Bar (1 av Pasteur) Also known as Chez Frères Acherar.

Taverne du Parc (117 rue Didouche Mourad)

ENTERTAINMENT

Cinema & Theatre

The risks associated with going out at night during the 1990s, the lack of spare cash and the advent of the DVD all spelled trouble for Algiers' cinemas. But some are still managing to run decent programmes of films that may be in French or Arabic. Also worth checking is the space in front of the Hôtel Albert I, off av Pasteur, where free outdoor films are often screened.

Cinéma Algeria (rue Didouche Mourad)

Cinéma Algérienne (26 rue Larbi ben M'hidi)

Théâtre National Algérien (☎ 021 717607; place Abdelkader Alloula) Stages regular performances of theatre, music and dance in its grand 19th-century building.

Live Music

Algiers has several live music venues, two of the most popular being the Théâtre de Verdure and the Salle Ibn Zeydoun, at **Riadh el-Feth** (☎ 021 670282). Listings are published in papers such as the daily *El-Watan*.

Le Racym's (☎ 021 716883; 8 rue Aouchiche Larbi) The kitchen managed to spoil even the

most basic French dishes, but perhaps its claims to serve authentic Vietnamese food are more convincing. Instead, come late for the music, especially on nights when there is a live act, when the place gets packed and the audience begins to move.

Nightclubs

A number of nightclubs go in and out of fashion depending on the season, including the VIP, Veranda and Triangle, all near the Martyr's Memorial. These are currently among the more popular:

Pasha (☎ 021 230933; Hotel el-Djazair, 24 av Soudani Boujmaa) The nightclub of the Hôtel el-Djazair.

Star Studio (☎ 021 377 7777; Sheraton Club des Pins, Staouelli; ☎ ☎ ☎) A long ride out of town, it's worth checking if it is running before making the trip.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The newly expanded **Houari Boumediène Airport** (☎ 021 506000; www.algiersairport.free.fr) is 19km from the centre and has separate domestic and international terminals.

For details of international airline offices in Algiers, see p208. **Air Algérie** (☎ 021 742428; www.airalgerie.dz; 1 place Maurice Audin) flies to more than 20 destinations within the country. Fares are reasonable and service, although often a little delayed, is reasonably efficient. Return fares are usually twice the price of a one-way ticket, which makes open-jaw tours possible. One way to Tamanrasset, the southernmost airport and furthest from Algiers, costs from DA14,000.

Boat

Algiers is an important port with plenty of traffic and good sea connections to Spain and France.

Algérie Ferries (☎ 021 635388/641864; 6 blvd Khemisti) Also known as the Entreprise Nationale de Transports Maritimes de Voyageurs (ENTMV), Algérie Ferries sails from Algiers to Marseille (19 hours) and Alicante (12 hours).

SNCM-Ferryterranee (☎ 021 718115; blvd Zirout Youcef) Also sails to Marseille and Alicante.

Bus

The Algiers **gare routière** (☎ 021 497151/54; av de l'ALN), unlike most in the country, still functions properly, with information desk, café, shops and departures board. It is several kilometres from the centre, along the road

to the airport. From the centre, 200m south of place Audin, catch the bus headed to Tafoura. A taxi from there or the Grande Poste should cost DA250 to DA300.

There are departures to all corners of the country, including Annaba (DA700, nine hours), Oran (day/night DA540/710, seven hours), Biskra (DA470, eight hours) and Ouargla (DA900, 12 hours). To get to Tamarrasset and the deep south you need to change at Adrar (DA1500, 12 hours).

Car

Given the number of road incidents in Algeria as a result of dangerous driving and also false roadblocks – one of the favourite techniques of kidnappers – you need to know what you are doing before you rent a car. With some agencies you also need to be over 30. However, it is possible to drive yourself, and several agencies would be delighted to have your business. As well as international agencies, the following local agencies rent cars, from DA3300 per day for a basic car.

Love Tour (☎ 021 509262; Houari Boumediène Airport) It also has a desk at the ONAT office on 2 rue Didouche Mourad.

Rapide Car (☎ 021 509512/506112; www.rapidecar.com; Houari Boumediène Airport) It also has an agency at the Hôtel el-Aurassi.

Taxi

Long-distance communal taxis, which have six places in three rows and are marked 'Inter-Wilaya', leave when they are full, from the Rampe Magenta, which slopes down from near place Port Said to the train station. Taxis leave for destinations across the northern half of the country including Biskra (DA800, six hours), Bou Saada (DA500, four hours), Oran (DA900, six to seven hours), Constantine (DA900, six to seven hours) and Annaba (DA1100, 10 hours).

Train

The Algerian national rail company, **SNTF** (☎ 021 711510) runs services out of two train stations in the capital. **Gare Centrale** (☎ 021 647380/81; rue d'Angkor), beside the *gare maritime*, has services along the eastern line to Bejaia, Constantine and Annaba (1st/2nd class DA1330/945, seven to 10 hours). Trains from the **Gare de l'Agha** (☎ 021 636525; off rue Hassiba ben Bouali) run four times a day

along the western line to Oran (five to six hours), from where there is a daily service to Tlemcen (2½ hours). Since the closure of the Algerian–Moroccan border, the international express has been stopped.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

A shuttle bus runs to the airport (DA50) from blvd Zirout Youcef, near the Hôtel Safir, during the day and early evening. Departures occur at least once an hour, sometimes every 30 minutes. The journey takes at least 30 minutes, more during rush hours. A taxi will cost up to DA1000 depending on the time of day/night and your ability to haggle.

Car & Motorcycle

Driving in Algiers is a frustrating experience, for much of the day traffic is bumper to bumper. And when you get where you are going, there is always a shortage of parking spaces. Happily this has created work for space minders (official or otherwise), people who will usher you into a space and watch your car, for a fee. However, it is not worth renting a car while staying in the city as there are plenty of taxis and much of the centre is easier to walk than drive around, while the Casbah is mostly pedestrian-only.

Public Transport

Buses serve most parts of the city, leaving from several main points around the centre: place des Martyrs, place Grande Poste, place Audin, Bab el-Oued and place 1 Mai, south of Agha train station. Destinations are marked at each stop, although increasingly these are in Arabic only. Entry is through the back door, where you pay the conductor.

An underground system has been under construction for some years – you could be fooled into thinking there is one already by the subway entrances near the Grande Poste. Work seems to have stalled, but the first line, running near the coast from Bab el-Oued to Hussein Dey (for the *Tarfouara gare routière*), is due to be completed in 2008.

Taxi

There are plenty of taxis cruising the streets of the centre and although they can be in short supply during rush hours, at other times it is usually possible to hail one in

the street. Taxis should be equipped with meters, but especially after dark and when taking a taxi from a hotel, expect to haggle. Local *taxis collectifs* (share taxis) run along some of the main streets of the city, their destination written on a board in the window or on the roof. Flag one down, if it is heading in your direction and get out when you like. DA20 per ride.

If you need to be sure of a service – useful to get around, essential if you are not being met on arrival at the airport – call **Taxi Yacine** (☎ 071 170026) or **Taxis Minutes** (☎ 021 666666).

AROUND ALGIERS

If you want to get out of the city for some hours or a day, then look to the west: you don't have to go far to find beautiful countryside, evocative ruins and sleepy villages alongside the deep blue sea. Tipaza is the must-see sight, an ancient Roman port impressive enough to be inscribed on Unesco's list of World Heritage sites and a delightful place to wander around. Cher-

chell, the other side of the headland and another natural harbour, is its twin, with a particularly rich museum. Between these two towns and the capital, the coast road passes some of the better resorts around Algiers.

Getting There & Away

The road between Algiers and Tipaza is currently being upgraded and, at the time of writing, there was a dual carriageway until 15km before Tipaza. Buses run regularly during the week between Algiers and Cherrhell, stopping at Tipaza (1½ hours).

TIPAZA تيبازة

Albert Camus wrote that Tipaza was inhabited by the gods in spring of the sun and silvered sea, blue sky and flower-covered ruins. But Tipaza isn't just beautiful and inspiring in spring. Somehow the gods are still talking if you go in the summer, when the ruins buzz with vibrating cicadas; in autumn, when the winds blow brine off the sea; even in winter, when the weak sun brings out the honey tones of marble and sandstone.

Seventy kilometres along the coast road, Tipaza is a delight at any time.

History

Most settlements along the Algerian coast began as anchorage for early travellers, perhaps Phoenician, perhaps even earlier, as their primitive boats clung to the coast during a journey from Carthage or further east towards the Pillars of Hercules. There are no records of this early period nor of the Numidians who lived here in the early centuries BC, just the clues thrown up by the 5th- or 4th-century BC cemeteries. The first mention of Tipaza is by Pliny the Elder, in the 1st century, by which time it was under Roman control. It was then that the town we can visit took shape.

Tipaza's story is shaped by the same forces and influences as other big towns in the region; it grew by strengthening its ties across the Mediterranean and reaching a peak of wealth and influence under the Severan emperors in Rome, particularly Septimius Severus (AD 193–211), a North African by birth. During this period much wealth was spent on civic projects, including an impressive enclosing wall. Like other towns along the coast, Tipaza embraced Christianity with enthusiasm in the first half of the 3rd century, a time when pagan buildings were neglected and Christian basilicas built. While neighbouring Cherrhell (p106) and Icosium, the ancient settlement at Algiers, were sacked by rebel Berbers in AD 371, Tipaza's wall – 2200m long, defended by 37 towers, held, only to give way the following year to the force of the Vandals. There was a brief renaissance under Byzantine rulers, but the end was irresistible, a slow seeping away of power and people, after which many of its stones were carted away to be reused in the building of a new city, El-Djezaïr (Algiers).

Sights

Tipaza was built on a beautiful site and the ruins of this **archaeological park** (☎ 9am–noon & 2.30–6.30pm) roll down, through pine and other trees, to the beach, dominated by 900m Djebel Chenoua to the west. It is best to start at the **museum** (☎ 021 478938/47543; www.musee-tipaza.art.dz; rue du Musée; ☎ 9am–noon & 2–5.30pm) outside the park, which has some fine funerary stele showing warriors on horseback and

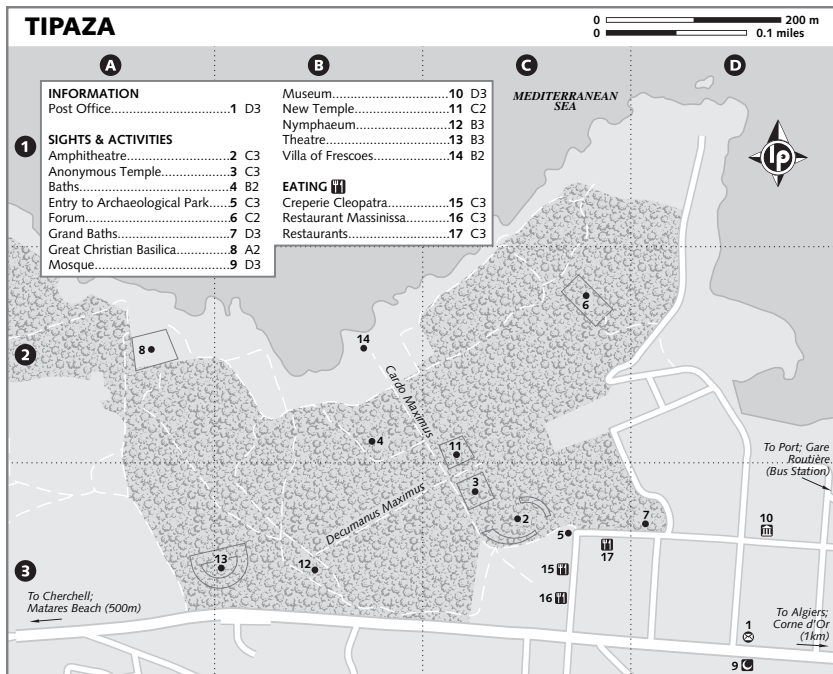
a mosaic of captives – the centre depicts parents and their son bound; around the border are heads of various Africans. Here too are finely carved sarcophagi and some exquisite 1st- to 3rd-century AD glass.

The site is divided into two, the main part being to the west of the museum. The entrance leads almost immediately to an **amphitheatre**, which would have been one of the main entertainment centres of the ancient town. There isn't much left of the surrounding structure, but the oval walls of the arena still describe the area where, in the 4th and 5th centuries, gladiator fights and other popular events were held. Just beyond the amphitheatre the path leads to the central point of the town, where the two main streets, the paved *decumanus* and *cardo maximus*, join. Follow the *decumanus*, to the left, and you will come to the other place of entertainment, the theatre. This is also much ruined, but the props that supported the stage are there, as is the slope that was once covered with seating blocks. North of here – head straight for the sea – there is an area developed by Christians. The religious complex here includes two basilica, tombs and baths, all of which can be easily identified. The grand **basilica** was the largest Christian building in North Africa when it was finished in the 4th century.

Return back along the shoreline, the middle of this cove was devoted to large villas and bath complexes, some of which still have mosaics on the floors. The house at the centre, on the *cardo maximus*, was the Villa of Frescoes, an unusually large house of 1000 sq metres built at the height of Tipaza's prosperity, in the 2nd century AD.

The civic buildings lie to the east of the *cardo*, on a promontory which formed one of the arms of the port. Beyond the remains of the ancient wall lie the **forum**, a 25m by 50m paved area which originally had porticoes on three sides and the capitol on the fourth. Little remains of this, the town's most important temple, beyond its steps and podium. Here too are the *curie* (municipal assembly), where political matters were settled, and the courthouse, a basilica built at the end of the 2nd century AD.

On the east side of Tipaza, beyond the museum, the old Punic harbour is still in use, protecting the town's boats. Further east, beyond the walls of the ancient town,



the remains of two more Christian basilica stand in a cemetery that stretches from the sea and the main road.

Sleeping & Eating

Because most people visit Tipaza as a day trip, accommodation is limited and the choice is between budget and top end.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 024 439752; Route de Tipaza; per person DA100) Has a central location in town.

Corne d'Or (☎ 024 470815; s/d half board DA5050/7070; 📍) Just beyond the town limits in the direction of Algiers, this place is an attractive domed compound with its own small harbour, but was for sale at the time of writing and barely functioning.

Just beyond the western limit of the archaeological zone is the **Complexe Touristique de Matarès** (☎ 024 461822; 📍), a large whitewashed tourist village with a fortress-like façade above a beautiful beach, and the dilapidated four-star **Hôtel de la Baie** (☎ 024 470822; s/d B&B DA1800/3400; 📍). These developments remain controversial – you don't have to be an archaeologist to recognise the historical value of the site. You can swim off the beach here.

The pedestrian street that leads from the entrance back to the main road is lined with restaurants. There isn't much to choose between them – they all do simple meals of chicken and lamb and may have some fresh fish. Most have shaded terraces and will serve mint tea or fresh juices. **Restaurant Massinissa** (☎ 042 470216; mains DA230-600) and **Creperie Cleopatra** (☎ 076 740473; mains DA200-650) are among the better ones here.

CHERCHELL شرشال

Unlike Tipaza, where the ruins were exposed before the modern town could infringe too far (although there is always tension between conservation and development), Cherchell (ancient Caesarea) has less to show of its glorious past. The small town is, however, a delightful place to visit: it's slow, a little sleepy, well shaded with great sea views, and its museum ranks as one of the finest in the country.

Remains from a 5th-century BC Punic settlement have been found and Caesarea obviously flourished long before Tipaza, as it is mentioned as a town and port in a *periplus* (nautical guide), written in the 3rd,

perhaps even the 4th century BC. It rose to prominence in the 1st century AD thanks to the Numidian King Juba II. His father, Juba I, resisted the rise of Rome in North Africa and when his army was defeated by Julius Caesar, preferred suicide to the humiliation of being taken in triumph to Rome. His son, Juba II, was taken to Rome, where he was educated in the conqueror's house and after 44 BC, by Caesar's nephew, Octavius Augustus. He showed great intelligence and aptitude and by the end of his studies, wrote a book on Roman archaeology. He was also a warrior and fought alongside Augustus at the Battle of Actium, at which they defeated the combined forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra. Juba married their daughter Cleopatra Selene and returned to North Africa as King of Mauretania. Caesarea, their capital, flourished in this period – 'most splendid Caesarea' it was referred to at the time – and Juba lived an exceptional life, worshipped as a god by his own people and honoured as far away as Athens, where a statue was raised in his honour. But following Juba's death in 23 BC, Caesarea's story follows that of other settlements along this coast: adopting Christianity (it was visited by St Augustine in AD 418) it was overwhelmed soon after by the Vandals, enjoying a brief resurgence under the Byzantines and then sinking into obscurity. By the 10th century it was described as a town of great antiquity with a port and the debris of ancient buildings, much like today.

The main inland road from Tipaza crosses some beautiful countryside of lush fields and old trees that shade the road. Closer to Cherchell, you will see pieces of ancient columns and capitals along the road, and the remains of the great aqueduct Juba II built to bring water from a source 35km away. At the eastern entrance to the modern town, the remains of the amphitheatre and eastern baths lie just off the main road. This road follows the ancient road to the centre of town and the place des Martyrs, site. The wide plaza, shaded by hundred-year-old fig trees, was one of the ancient forums: this one, from the 3rd century AD, was a later addition. Remains of columns line the modern square and a copy of a monumental Roman fountain crowns its centre. The ancient port, the site's original attraction, is still used by local fishermen. If you need a guide, multilingual Abdelkader

Bensalah (☎ 071 427 426) is a local archaeologist who knows a huge amount about the town's sites and Algeria's antiquities.

Leading off the place des Martyrs, the **muséum** (adult/child DA20/10; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Sun-Fri) houses some of the finest sculpture in the country, much of it from the reign of Juba II. Among many highlights are marble busts of the royal family, who wear the royal band across their foreheads, and an exceptionally rare portrait of Juba's late mother-in-law, the famous Cleopatra of Egypt. A colossal statue of a Roman emperor, probably Augustus, is wonderfully carved, especially the breast-plate with figures including a deified Julius Caesar. The finest of the sculptures, though, is a statue of a naked Apollo in finest white marble (a copy of a 5th century BC Greek original), believed to be by the master Phidias. The collection of mosaics is equally stunning and includes a scene of Odysseus and his followers passing the sirens, and a vivid portrayal of agricultural scenes. Cherchell has provided such a rich source of antiquities that, in spite of the export of many pieces before and during the colonial period (now in museums across Europe), there is too much to contain in the original 1908 building. A second, larger museum (same ticket, same opening hours) was opened in 1979 at the mosaic park (left-hand side of the road as you enter from Tipaza) to display mosaics, sculpture and glass from antiquity and the early Islamic period. Marked 'Nouveau Musée', it stands next to military barracks, flanked by Roman columns.

The ancient theatre can be reached by continuing along the main road, away from Tipaza, and taking the third street on the left, rue du Théâtre Romain. The theatre is believed to be another of Juba II's constructions. If it is, then it is one of the earliest surviving Roman theatres. The stage has survived, the capitals of the theatre's columns can be seen in place des Martyrs, some of its statues are in the museum and you can see where seating was arranged for 5000 spectators, although the stones are said to have been taken to be used as pavements by the French.

Return to the main street along rue Youcef Khodja. On the left, at No 25, **Herboristerie ibn Sina** (☎ 077 211323) is a third-generation business where Kamel Djebbour and his son Amine distil essential oils and prepare

tisanes, herbs and spices *à l'ancienne*. If the shop is closed feel free to ring the bell – they live above the shop.

Further down the street on the right, are the remains of Caesarea's first forum, now enclosed between buildings behind a railing. The site was discovered by chance in 1977, when a statue was discovered when builders started digging the foundations for a new cultural centre. An Algerian-British team excavated the site over two seasons and, as well as the forum, revealed a church and remains of earlier Punic settlement. Down this street on the right, the family-run **Restaurant Cercle de la Fraternité** (☎ 071 544223) serves the freshest of fish and delicious salads, soups and desserts in a large, bright room, beneath mementoes of members of the Cherchell football team, who died in the independence struggle between 1948 and 1950.

BETWEEN TIPAZA & ALGIERS

The 100km of coast between Cherchell and Algiers has some good beaches, all of which can be busy in summer and full of washed-up refuse at any time. If you are going east to Annaba or Bejaia, or west to Oran, you will find better beaches. Thirty-one kilometres from Tipaza, heading east towards the capital, the highway turns inland, while the N11 hugs the coast, passing the resort village of Zeralda. There are two good, popular beaches – **Les Sables d'Or** and **Palm-Beach Plage** – between here and the next resort, **Sidi Ferdj**. Formerly Sidi Ferruch, the resort has the dubious distinction of being the place where the French landed their army on 14 June 1830, and where the Algerian president now has a villa. There is a range of **accommodation** (☎ 021 376778; www.sidiffredj-hotels.com), built around a pleasure port which has a range of facilities, including port, nightclub, shops and companies running motorboat excursions out to sea (count on at least DA3000 an hour for a boat holding five passengers). Most places like the hotels around Tipaza, are state-owned, run down and up for sale. Among the restaurants, if you can't wait for the city, are **Le Vivier** (☎ 021 376910; mains DA700-900), a fish restaurant tucked away from the main drag and overlooking the sea, and the more central **Le Corso** (☎ 021 376910; mains DA500-900), serving Algerian dishes including couscous and *brik*. Both restaurants serve alcohol.

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