

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Gone are the days when hotels in Libya were restricted to a small handful of run-down government establishments where there was always the danger of sudden eviction when a government delegation arrived in town. A new breed of international-standard private hotels has swept through northern Libya and, although top-end hotels are nowhere to be found outside Tripoli and Benghazi and budget hotels remain conspicuous by their absence, mid-range hotels are very comfortable and well-maintained. In the south of Libya, Sebha (p181) is the only place with a good range of accommodation, although the combination of camps and hotels in Germa (p190),

Ubari (p192) and Ghat (p197) are also reasonable. Otherwise, people tend to sleep in the desert under a canopy of stars (see below).

In addition to hotels and hostels, there are also well-run camps in the Saharan oasis towns and, found along Libya's coastline, *qaryat as-siyahe* (tourist villages) are aimed at a Libyan clientele and offer proximity to the beach and a break from hotel ambience.

In this era of escorted tours to Libya, your choice of hotel will depend on the company through whom you organise your visit. Larger groups are likely to have little choice and the information on individual hotels throughout this book is designed to give you some idea of what to expect. Smaller groups may be able to lobby for the hotel of their choice based on the information provided in this guide, although you'll need to give the tour company plenty of notice.

Throughout this book, budget hotels and hostels refer to places where dorm beds cost 5LD and a single/double in a hotel costs up to 25/35LD. Midrange hotels and tourist villages range from 35/40LD up to 75/90LD, while top-end choices start from 90/100LD and can go much higher.

Note that your passport will be held by the hotel for the duration of your stay – don't forget to collect it when you leave.

Throughout this book, all quoted prices for hotels and tourist villages are for rooms with private bathroom and breakfast unless otherwise stated. A full list of abbreviations and icons used when giving prices and hotel facilities can be found inside the front cover of this book.

Camping

There are two kinds of camping possibilities while in Libya. The first is to sleep in the Sahara wherever your guide finds a secluded spot. Sleeping under the stars in this way is one of Libya's great travel experiences and you should do this at least once on your tour. Remember, however, that desert nights can drop below freezing from late November until February (see p19). Tour

PRACTICALITIES

- The *International Herald Tribune*, *Financial Times*, *Newsweek* and *Corriere Della Sera* are only available in Tripoli (see Bookshops, p73). The *Tripoli Post* (www.tripolipost.com) is Libya's government-run English-language newspaper and a good place to read the official take on world and local news; it's widely available in Tripoli.
- Radio coverage in Libya includes the BBC World Service (15.070MHz and 12.095MHz) and other European radio on short-wave. International satellite TV channels (available in many hotels) include CNN, BBC World and a small range of Italian, French and German channels.
- Libya uses the Secam video system that is commonly used in France and Greece and some Eastern European countries. Libyan DVDs belong to DVD region 5 (also used in Russia, India and elsewhere in Africa) and so may not work back home.
- Libya's electricity system caters for 220V to 240V AC, 50Hz; plugs are mostly of the European continental-style two-pin type, although the three-pin UK plugs are also common.
- Libya uses the metric system for weights and measures.

companies provide tents, sleeping bags and mattresses, and most expeditions are fully equipped when it comes to food with a cook, kitchen car and even fold-out tables.

The other option is to sleep in one of the permanent camps in the desert oases of Ghat (p197), Al-Aweinat (Serdeles; p193), Ubari (p192), Germa (p190), Tekerriba (p186) and Sebha (p181). These usually consist of basic thatched-huts with shared bathroom and shower facilities, a kitchen and simple restaurant. Unless you have some reason for not wanting to sleep in the open desert (eg campervans for whom a dune is a road too far), we recommend that you use these camps for showering, using the toilet and not much more. Many of them are well-run, but also overrun by mosquitos in the evenings.

Some companies have also set up camps in the Awiss region in the north of the Jebel Acacus, but they're a scar on the landscape and a considerable drain on local water resources just so that you can have a shower.

The thatched huts in camps usually cost 10LD per person, while setting up tents costs 5LD and parking your campervan and connecting it to the electricity source costs 10LD. Parking your 4WD at the camp sometimes costs an additional 5LD to 10LD.

Some hotels and youth hostels will allow you to set up tents in their compound for 5LD or 10LD and are usually happy for you to use their shower and toilet facilities. It's also possible to set up your tent in car park No 1 (see p118) at the entrance to Leptis Magna.

Sleeping amid the spectacular sand dunes is, of course, free.

Hostels

Libya has an extensive network of *buyut ash-shabaab* (youth hostels), which can be pretty basic but dirt-cheap and fine for a night; a bed in a dormitory with shared bathroom costs 5LD. There are also some hotels for under 20/30LD for a single/double. Many youth hostels have areas set aside for women. Some also have very cheap meals available and can arrange breakfasts for larger groups.

At the time of writing, there were youth hostels in Tripoli, Sabratha, Al-Khoms, Zuara, Misrata, Sirt, Benghazi, Shahat, Yefren, Zintan, Nalut, Ghadames, Sebha, Houn and Fjeaj.

The headquarters for youth hostels in Libya is the **Libyan Youth Hostel Association** (Map p75; ☎/fax 021-3330118; 69 Sharia Amr ibn al-As, Tripoli). The office is in Tripoli's central youth hostel (see Buyut ash-Shabaab; p92).

Hotels

Libya's new crop of private hotels are outstanding with high-quality rooms, friendly service and high standards of cleanliness and maintenance. Almost all have private bathrooms, air-con, minibars, satellite TV, and prices include a reasonable breakfast buffet. Although very few of these new hotels are budget-oriented, the prices (an average of around 40/50LD per single/double) are eminently reasonable. In contrast, the government-run hotels may occupy the best patches of real estate (at least in Tripoli),

but service ranges from uninterested and painfully slow to downright dysfunctional, and prices can be excessive.

If we had one complaint about the new private hotels – and it's a minor one – it would be that most are international clones and few bear any traces of Libyan character. The only two significant exceptions where traditional architecture has been beautifully incorporated into the rooms and public areas are in the top-end category – in the Zomit Hotel (p90) in Tripoli and the Dar Ghadames Hotel (p174) in Ghadames.

Otherwise, you'll find excellent, recently opened hotels in Tripoli, Benghazi, Al-Bayda, Cyrene, Susa, Tobruk, Yefren, Ghadames, Sebha and Ghat, with other good choices of longer-standing in Zliten, Misrata, Derna, Sirt, Nalut, Germa and Ubari.

Libya's only international standard five-star hotel is the Corinthia Bab Africa Hotel (p91) in Tripoli.

Although the situation is changing, many hotels are still signed only in Arabic. For this reason, in most cases we have used the Arabic names ('funduq' means hotel).

Tourist Villages

Libya's tourist villages (*qaryat as-siyaha*) are not really set up for foreign tourists,

but rather for locals who flock to the coast in summer, and they're often packed out by Libyan families for months on end. As such, facilities get a thorough working over and maintenance levels don't always keep pace. Outside the peak period (mid-May to mid-September) getting a room is usually no problem, although many tourist villages close down at this time for repairs and maintenance. In the warmer months you'd need to book months in advance as Libyan families frequently block-book the rooms or villas for up to four months. Accommodation is usually right on the beachfront in self-contained, air-conditioned rooms or villas (with a kitchen, including fridge) and there's usually a restaurant, teahouse and children's play area. Some villages also have an on-site bakery, swimming pool, tennis courts, laundry and grocery store.

Although these villages offer some variety from the hotel experience, remember that these places can be impossibly crowded with large groups making noise throughout the night. Lone female travellers have also sometimes felt a little uncomfortable as some rooms are booked out by groups of young males. That said, most travellers who stay here enjoy the chance to mix with Libyan families and learn more about

RESPONSIBLE DESERT TRAVEL

When exploring the desert, there are some general rules to keep in mind in order to minimise your impact upon what is a surprisingly fragile environment.

- Carry out all your rubbish. If you've carried it in, you can carry it out. Most Libyan tour companies are sensitive to these concerns and leave behind little rubbish from camp sites, but you can play your part by making sure they do.
- Minimise the waste you must carry out by taking minimal packaging and instead take reusable containers or stuff sacks.
- Never bury your rubbish. Digging disturbs soil and ground cover, and encourages erosion. Buried rubbish will more than likely be dug up by animals, who may be injured or poisoned by it. It may also take decades to decompose in the dry desert air.
- Don't rely on bought water in plastic bottles. Disposal of these bottles is creating a major problem.
- Sanitary napkins, tampons and condoms should also be carried out despite the inconvenience. They burn and decompose poorly.
- Where there's no toilet, bury your waste. Dig a small hole 15cm (6in) deep. Cover the waste with soil and a rock. Use toilet paper sparingly and bury it with the waste, or burn it.
- If you light a fire don't surround it with rocks, as this creates a visual scar.
- When collecting firewood, only use dead wood and never take from a living tree.

(and from) the locals than you ever could in a hotel.

Chalets or villas usually range from 25LD to 75LD per night.

The best tourist village in Libya is undoubtedly Zuara's Farah Resort (p106), which is open year-round and has excellent facilities, while Benghazi's Qaryat Qar Yunis as-Siyaha (p129) is also good.

ACTIVITIES

As Libya's tourism industry begins to diversify, an increasing range of activities is becoming possible. The Jebel Nafusa (Western Mountains; p157) of northwestern Libya and the Jebel al-Akhdar (Green Mountains; p124) in the northeast are enticing worlds of as-yet-unexplored trekking opportunities.

Snorkelling is also yet to take off although long stretches of Libya's Mediterranean Coast could be a snorkellers' paradise, especially the sunken ruins off the ancient city of Apollonia (p147) were it not for the fact that, given Libya's history of plunder by explorers, colonial officers and tourists, the local authorities are understandably reluctant to let people venture underwater, especially close to ancient sites. Before you pack your mask and flippers, remember also that such

activities may also require Libyan government permission elsewhere; ask your tour company what's possible.

Camel Safaris & 4WD Expeditions

An increasing number of travellers are choosing to explore the Libyan Sahara by camel. Most tour companies can arrange camel expeditions to the Jebel Acacus or Wadi Meggedet.

The main advantage of seeing the desert in this way is that it slows you down to the pace of a loping desert rhythm, allowing you to truly experience the solitude of the desert without engine noise.

Camel safaris are also the most environmentally friendly way to see the Sahara; for more information on the environmental impacts, see Environmentally Piste-off, below.

The major disadvantage of travelling by camel is that you will be restricted to seeing just a small corner of the desert – so vast are the distances of the Libyan Sahara that exploring other regions astride a camel would involve more time than you probably have.

There's almost nowhere that you can't reach in the Libyan Sahara in a 4WD and that's certainly how most travellers travel while in the desert. For the best places to visit in the Libyan Sahara see Top Picks, p21.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PISTE-OFF

Before you decide to travel by 4WD it is worth considering the environmental cost of what is known as the 'Toyotatisation' of the Sahara. With their large wheels, 4WDs break up the surface of the desert, which is then scattered into the air by strong winds. By one estimate, the annual generation of dust has increased by 1000% in North Africa in the last 50 years. And in case you thought that your 4WD tracks across the sands would soon be erased by the winds, remember that tracks from WWII vehicles are still visible in the Libyan desert five decades after the cessation of hostilities.

Airborne dust is a primary cause of drought far more than it is a consequence of it, as it shields the earth's surface from sunlight and hinders cloud formation.

The consequences of our impatience in the desert extend far beyond Libya and its desert communities. The stirred-up sand threatens to envelop the world in dust with serious consequences for human health, coral reefs and climate change. Plankton on the surface of the world's oceans is also being smothered by sand with devastating implications for marine life. Dust storms are increasingly common in cities such as Madrid and the dust-laden winds threaten to transform 90% of Spain's Mediterranean regions into deserts. Once these deserts gain a European foothold, the process of desertification is extremely difficult and costly to reverse. Sand from the Sahara has even reached as far away as Greenland, settling on icebergs and causing them to melt faster.

Travelling by camel may be more restricting, but it's the best way to ensure that you leave behind nothing but easily erasable footprints in the sand.

TOP PLACES FOR A SWIM

You may not have thought about bringing your swimming costume, but with 1770km of Mediterranean coastline, Libya has some fine beaches with white sand and a wonderful absence of Tunisian-style tourist resorts dominating the coastline. Further south, swimming in one of the Saharan lakes is the stuff of legend.

Gebraoun (p188) Swimming in a lake in the middle of the Sahara and surrounded by sand dunes and palm trees – what more could you want?

Leptis Magna (p110) A picnic on the beach and a dip in full view of ancient Leptis – priceless.

Neqezzah (p107) One of the prettiest beaches along the Libyan coast and an ideal way to cool off after exploring Leptis Magna.

Ras al-Hammamah (p140) The beaches around here are some of the loveliest in Cyrenaica.

Ras al-Hillal (p149) Set against the backdrop of Libya's most picturesque coastal scenery.

Sabratha (p100) Bobbing in the Mediterranean alongside the astonishing ruins is one of the world's great swimming experiences.

Zuara to Ras al-Jedir (p106) Long miles of deserted shoreline, pristine white sand and crystal-clear water make for delightful and secluded swimming.

If travelling by 4WD, make sure that your vehicle is in excellent condition and that you're carrying sufficient water, petrol and spare parts.

Dune Skiing

Many Libyan sand dunes are so high as to resemble mountains and a novel way to experience this is to hire a set of skis or a snowboard available from the shore of Gebraoun (p188), one of the Ubari Lakes in the Idehan Ubari. The descents are exhilarating, but as dangerous as any ski-slope, so please take care.

Swimming

Taking a dip at one of the beaches along Libya's coast or in the salt lakes of the Sahara is a wonderful experience. For a list of our favourite places for a swim while in Libya, see above. Although Libyans are fast-becoming accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of foreign tourists, you should always be discreet and dress modestly.

BUSINESS HOURS

Friday is considered a holiday and most official businesses and shops are closed. Standard hours for banks are 9am to 1pm Sunday to Tuesday and Thursday; they open from 8am to 12.30pm and then again later in the day at 3.30pm to 4.30pm (sometimes 5.30pm) on Wednesday and Saturday.

Government offices, plus post offices, are usually open 7am to 2pm Saturday to Thurs-

day April to September, and 8am to 3pm Saturday to Thursday October to March.

Most internet cafés operate 9am to 1am from Saturday to Thursday, but also open from 5pm until midnight on Friday.

Restaurants generally open 12.30pm to 3pm (for lunch) and 6.30pm to 10pm Saturday to Thursday. Most eateries may also open 6.30pm to 10pm Friday.

Shops generally open their doors from 10am to 2pm then again from 5pm to 8pm Saturday to Thursday; some also open Friday evening.

Reviews in this book won't list business hours unless they differ substantially from these standards.

CHILDREN

Many Libyans live with or have close ties to their extended families and you'll find that most are terrific in dealing with children.

The difficulty you're most likely to encounter is keeping your children entertained during long journeys. Also, most sites in Libya (admission 1LD for children under 12) are more 'adult' in their appeal, although some can be fun if you think creatively – see Top Sights & Activities for Children, p216. Travelling with children also increases your chances of meeting and spending time with Libyan families, especially if you're travelling in a small group – it's a great way for your kids to make new friends and for you to learn a lot about Libyan families and about your kids' interaction with other cultures.

TOP SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

With a little imagination (and your kids will probably have it in bucketloads) some of Libya's best-loved sights can become playgrounds of the mind.

- Berber *qasrs* (fortified granary stores) at **Qasr al-Haj** (p160) and **Nalut** (p162) are like a *Star Wars* set come to life.
- Underground Berber homes at **Gharyan** (p158) – the mere idea of living underground brings a smile to the face of a child.
- The old city of **Ghadames** (p164) offers the sort of labyrinth of which dreams are made.
- **Leptis Magna** (p110) – no-one will be better able to hear the ghosts of the Romans or bring Leptis to life than your children.
- A **camel safari** (p214) is so much better than a ride in a fun-fair back home.
- Take to a desert lake for a **swim** (p215); they'll never forget this.
- The sand seas of **Idehan Ubari** (p186) or **Idehan Murzuq** (p203) provide mountain ranges built entirely of sand that is ripe for sandcastles.
- Rock art of the **Jebel Acacus** (p198) or **Wadi Methkandoush** (p204) – yes, the Sahara really once was green and let's see if you can draw any better.
- **Waw al-Namus** (p206) has multicoloured lakes, black sand and the wonder of a volcano.

For more information and hints on travelling with children, Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan is highly recommended.

Practicalities

Nappies (diapers), powders and most simple medications are available at pharmacies and grocery stores in most cities (especially Tripoli and Benghazi), although you should bring any special foods required and high-factor sunscreen. Disposable nappies are a practical solution when travelling despite the environmental drawbacks (and as long as they are disposed of responsibly).

Most hotels and many tour companies will not charge children under two years of age. For those between two and 12 years sharing the same room as their parents, it's usually 50% of the adult rate.

To avoid stomach upsets, stick to purified or bottled water. UHT, pasteurised and powdered milk are also widely available. You should also avoid travelling during summer when temperatures regularly exceed 50°C. Beware of dehydration and sunburn, even on cloudy days. For more health information, see p244.

CLIMATE CHARTS

Summer is generally very hot, with average temperatures on the coast approaching

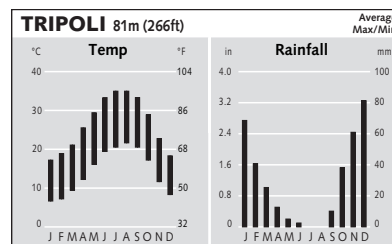
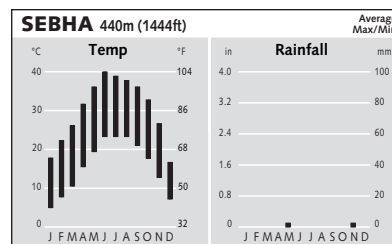
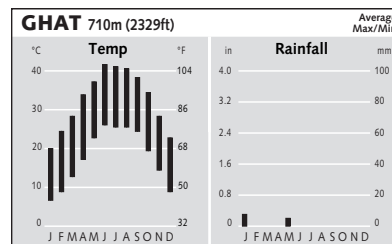
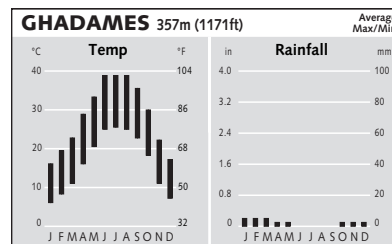
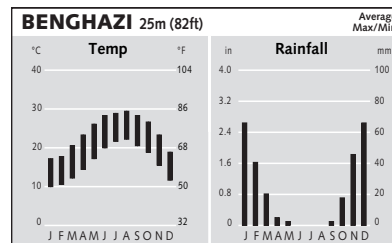
30°C often accompanied by high humidity. In the south temperatures can reach a sweltering 50°C.

The historian Herodotus claimed that 'in the upper parts of Libya, it is always summer'. And yet, in winter the weather can be cool and rainy on the coast between October and March, even snowing occasionally in the mountains. Most rain falls in the Jebel al-Akhdar in the northeast and, to a lesser extent, the Jebel Nafusa. Desert temperatures can drop to subfreezing at night and, in a good year, Libya's desert regions receive less than 100mm of rain for the whole year.

During the spring (March to May) in northern Libya, you may encounter the *ghibli*, a hot, dry, sand-laden wind, which can raise the temperature in a matter of hours to between 40°C and 50°C. The *ghibli* can last from just a few hours to several days. For advice on the best time to visit Libya, see p19.

CUSTOMS

Libyan customs checks on arrival at airports are pretty cursory with the quick passage of tourists seen as a priority. Bags are, however, X-rayed before you're allowed to enter the country with customs officials keeping an eagle eye out for alcohol, which is forbidden. Private cars entering Libya are searched more rigorously; expect up to



an hour of inspections. If alcohol is discovered in your car or baggage, it will be confiscated, although it may be returned to you if you later depart from the same land border.

For details on minimum currency requirements when entering Libya, see p231.

Upon departure, your bags are also likely to be X-rayed or searched, although this time they are looking for antiquities or fragments of Saharan rock art; to find out why see *The Day the Vandals Came to Libya*, p229.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Libya is an extremely safe country in which to travel. Hostility of any kind towards foreigners is practically nonexistent, theft is extremely rare and Libyans will go out of their way to make you feel welcome. Unlike elsewhere in North Africa, Libyans will rarely hassle you for information about getting a visa to your country. Overcharging of foreign visitors is also very rare.

Security

You're unlikely to come into contact with Libyan police or soldiers unless you point your camera at a restricted site (see p223) and even then you're likely to be warned off than in serious trouble. The only other time you'll encounter them at close quarters are at the ubiquitous checkpoints along Libya's major roads (see p239); they're little more than a minor inconvenience and corruption is unheard of.

The only time when you may want to be particularly careful is when world events impact upon Libya, even indirectly, although even then the Libyan authorities are likely to make protecting tourists a top priority. One of very few examples was in February 2006 when an Italian government minister publicly wore a T-shirt which showed the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed whose publication in a Danish newspaper had sparked worldwide protests in late 2005. Demonstrations in Benghazi turned violent with the Italian consulate set on fire and nine protesters killed. Although no tourists were directly targeted that's partly because the Libyan police were quick to shepherd tour groups away from potential flashpoints, especially in Cyrenaica. Any risk quickly subsided

THE LATEST TRAVEL ADVICE

Lonely Planet's website (www.lonelyplanet.com) contains information on what's new etc, and any new safety reports, as well as reports from other travellers recounting their experiences while on the road. The following government websites offer travel advisories and information on current hot spots.

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (☎ 1300 139 281; www.smarttraveller.gov.au)

British Foreign Office (☎ 0845-850-2829; www.fco.gov.uk)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs & International Trade (☎ 800-267 6788; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca)

Italian Ministero degli Affari Esteri (☎ 06491115; www.viaggiataresicuri.mae.aci.it in Italian)

Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.anzen.mofa.go.jp in Japanese)

US State Department (☎ 888-407 4747; <http://travel.state.gov>)

and within days it was business as usual for most travellers.

The major lesson from episodes such as these should be clear – keep an eye on world events, remember that situations like this are extremely rare and avoid demonstrations wherever possible.

Theft

Petty crime does occasionally occur in larger cities, but it's exceptionally rare. In fact, we've heard of only one example of a minor theft involving a traveller in the past six years. That said, be careful with your belongings on beaches while you're out in the water. If you're on a group tour, it is usually safe to leave your bags in the company's vehicle provided someone (preferably a direct employee of the company) will be keeping a watch over them. Valuables should either be carried with you in a money belt under your clothing or locked in the hotel safe.

Traffic

Driving in Libya can be hazardous with people driving at high speed the major danger, and police enforcement of road rules is marked by a decided lack of enthusiasm.

The danger is particularly acute in Tripoli (see p76) and along the main coastal highway, especially between Tripoli and Misrata at night. For more information about driving in Libya, see p238.

Unexploded Ordnance

As you'll be travelling with a guide, you're unlikely to stray into areas where unexploded mines still lie, but it is worth remembering that at the end of WWII there were 11 million such mines on or under Libyan soil. Although most have been cleared up, every year, Libyans continue to die from ones that haven't. The most dangerous areas are in the area around Tobruk and the Egyptian border south to the area around Al-Jaghbug.

The Tibesti area (p206) is also off-limits to travellers due to unexploded mines left over from Libya's war with Chad in the 1980s. In the late 1990s, a 4WD vehicle set off one of these mines, whereafter the region was closed.

The southern route from Waw al-Namus to Al-Kufra around the southern edge of the Ramlat Rabyaneh is also dangerous for the same reason, especially around the Kilingue Pass, and is especially perilous and should be avoided.

**EMBASSIES & CONSULATES
Libyan Embassies & Consulates**

Libyan embassies are known as Libyan People's Bureaus.

Algeria (☎ 92 15 02; 15 Chemin Cheikh Bachir el-Ibrahimi, El-Biar, Algiers)

Australia (☎ 02-6290 7900; 50 Culgooa Circuit, O'Malley, ACT 2606)

Austria (☎ 01-367 7639; Balaasstrasse 33, 1190 Vienna)

Belgium (☎ 02-649 37 37; Ave Victoria 28, B-1050 Brussels)

Canada (☎ 0613-230 0919; www.libya-canada.org/consulate-eng; Suite 1000, 81 Metcalfe St, Ottawa K1P 6K7)

Chad (☎ 519289; Rue de Mazieras, N'Djaména)

Egypt Cairo (☎ 02-735 1269; fax 735 0072; 7 Sharia el-Saleh Ayoub); Alexandria (☎ 03-494 0877; fax 494 0297; 4 Sharia Batris Lumomba, Bab Shark)

France Paris (☎ 01 47 20 19 70; 18 rue Kepler, 75116); Marseilles (☎ 04 91 29 03 80; 6 blvd Rivet, 13008)

Germany (☎ 030-20 05 96 0; info@libysche-botschaft.de; Poedbielskiallee 42, 14195 Berlin)

Italy Milan (☎ 02-86 46 42 85; Via Barrachini 7, 20123); Rome (☎ 06-86 32 09 51; Via Nomentana 365, 00162); Palermo (☎ 091-34 39 30, Via Libertà 171, 90143)

Netherlands (☎ 031 70 35 588 86; Parkweg 15, 1285 GH, The Hague)

Spain (☎ 91 563 57 53; Calle Pisuerga 12, 28071 Madrid)

Sudan (☎ 011 83222085; Mashtel St, Khartoum)

Switzerland (☎ 031-351 3076; Travelweg 2 CH-3006, Bern)

Tunisia (☎ 01-780 866; 48 Bis Rue due 1er Juin, Tunis 01)

Turkey Istanbul (☎ 212 25 18100; Miralay Sefik Bey Sok No 5, Gümüssuyu, Taksim); Ankara (☎ 312 43 81110; Cinnah cd 60, Cankaya)

UK (☎ 020-7589 6120; libya.embassyhomepage.com; 61-62 Ennismore Gardens, London SW7 1NH)

USA (Liaison office ☎ 202-944-9601; 2600 Virginia Ave NW, Suite 705, Washington DC 20037)

Embassies & Consulates in Libya

Algeria Embassy (Map p72; ☎ 021-4440025; 12 Sharia Kairoun); Consulate-General (Map p75; ☎ 021-3610877; off Sharia Jama'a as-Saqa'a, Tripoli)

Australia (Map p72; ☎ 021-3351468; Office 203, Level 20, Tower 1, Burj al-Fateh, Tripoli)

Belgium (☎ 021-4782044; www.diplomatie.be/tripoli; Jasmin St, Hay Andalus, Area 2, Tripoli)

Chad (☎ 021-4443955; 25 Sharia Mohammed Mossadeq, Tripoli)

Egypt Tripoli (Map p75; ☎ 021-4448909; egyemlib@hotmail.com; Sharia al-Fat'h, Tripoli); Benghazi (Map p128; ☎ 061-2223099, Sharia el-Awarsi)

YOUR OWN EMBASSY

It's important to realise what your own embassy can and can't do to help you if you get into trouble.

Generally speaking, it won't be much help in emergencies if the trouble you're in is remotely your own fault. Remember that you are bound by the laws of Libya. Your embassy will not be sympathetic if you end up in jail after committing a crime locally, even if such actions are legal in your own country.

In genuine emergencies you might get some assistance, but only if other channels have been exhausted. If you need to get home urgently, a free ticket home is exceedingly unlikely – the embassy would expect you to have insurance.

If you have all your money and documents stolen, it might assist with getting a new passport, but a loan for onward travel is out of the question.

France (Map p72; ☎ 021-4774891; www.ambafrance-ly.org in French; Sharia Beni al-Amar, Hay Andalus, Tripoli)

Germany (Map p72; ☎ 021-4448552; www.tripolis.diplo.de; Sharia Hassan al-Mashai, Tripoli)

Italy (Map p75; ☎ 021-3334131; www.ambrtripoli.esteri.it; 1 Sharia Uaharan, Tripoli)

Japan (Map p72; ☎ 021-4781041; Jamal al-Din al-Waeli St, Hay al-Andalus, Area 1, Tripoli)

Netherlands (Map p75; ☎ 021-4440216; tri@minbuza.nl; 20 Sharia Galal Bayar, Tripoli)

Niger (☎ 021-4834700)

Spain (☎ 021-3620051; Sharia al-Hawana, Al-Menshia, Tripoli)

Sudan (☎ 021-4778052; www.sudtripoli.net in Arabic; Sharia Mohammed Mossadeq, Tripoli)

Tunisia (Map p72; ☎ 021-3607181; off Sharia al-Jrabah, Bin Ashour, Tripoli)

UK (Map p72; ☎ 021-3351416; tripoliconular@fco.gov.uk; 24th fl, Burj al-Fateh, Tripoli)

USA (Map p75; ☎ 021-3351848; libya.usembassy.gov; Corinthia Bab Africa Hotel; Souq al-Thalatha, Tripoli)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Although there are festivals in Germa (p190) and Kabaw (p162), they don't happen every year. The festivals that have become an annual feature of the Libyan year are listed here. Check with your tour company for exact dates.

Ghadames (October/November; p173) This festival centres on a celebration of traditional culture and is held in October most years, but will most likely be in November in 2007 to avoid Ramadan.

Ghat (late December; p197) The Acacus Festival celebrates the town's Tuareg heritage.

Houn (March; p185) The coming of spring in the Fezzan is welcomed by a decadent round of sweet-making in keeping with the oasis' reliance upon the seasons.

Zuara (August; p106) The Awussu Festival takes place on the beach or in the water.

FOOD

Prices given for restaurant meals throughout this book include soup, salad, main course, dessert and one drink unless otherwise stated. Most towns and cities in Libya don't have a sufficient number of restaurants to warrant separation into price categories in this guide and the cost of your meals should, in any event, be covered in the cost of your tour. For the record, a budget meal in Libya should cost up to 10LD, a mid-range restaurant will cost you from 10LD to 15LD and top-end prices generally don't go much higher than 25LD.

For detailed information on Libyan food, see p66.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexuality is illegal in Libya, but it's an issue that rarely makes it into the public domain. Occasionally, you may see groups of Libyan men holding hands, but this is invariably an indication of friendship rather than homosexuality. Gay and lesbian travellers should experience no difficulties in Libya and most tour companies are discreet in handling such matters should it come to their attention. That said, it's unlikely to be an issue as the only questions Libyans will ask, and which are easily enough deflected, is whether you are married. If you're travelling with a partner, the rules are the same as for heterosexual couples: discretion is the key and public displays of affection are almost never appropriate.

HOLIDAYS

There are both religious and national holidays that are worth remembering as most businesses will be closed on these days. The major secular holiday to be wary of is 26 October (Day of Mourning, see right), when international phone lines are cut off between 6am and 6pm and all flights into and out of the country are cancelled.

National Holidays

Declaration of the People's Authority Day (2 March) Commemorates the founding of the Jamahiriya in 1977 with speeches and rallies.

Evacuation Day (28 March) Celebrates the evacuation of British forces from Libyan soil.

Evacuation Day (11 June) Celebrates the evacuation of other (non-British) foreign military bases with anti-imperialist speeches.

Revolution Day (1 September) The biggest nonreligious holiday in the Libyan calendar is a bonanza of speeches, rallies and even a military parade.

Day of Mourning (26 October) Pays tribute to Libyans killed during the Italian occupation with, yes, more speeches, closed borders, closed airports and phone communications cut off from the outside world.

Islamic Holidays

Islamic holidays vary in date according to the lunar calendar. For the dates of Islamic holidays in forthcoming years, see below. The significance of Ramadan is covered in detail in *The Five Pillars of Islam*, p53; for advice on travelling in Libya during the holy month of Ramadan, see p19.

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical treatment is a good idea. There is a wide variety of policies available, so check the small print. Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which may include scuba diving, motorcycling, 4WD expeditions and even trekking. In Libya, you'll have to pay for medical care on the spot and claim later so make sure you keep all documentation. Some insurance companies will ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made. Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home (for more details on medical insurance see p244).

Also check that your policy covers travel to Libya as some insurers still consider the region a 'danger zone' and either exclude it altogether from the policy or demand you pay premiums.

For advice on insurance for your car while in Libya, see p240.

INTERNET ACCESS

Just about any small town in Libya has an internet café, although connections can be slow beyond Tripoli or Benghazi. One hour's surfing costs a uniform 1LD.

If you intend to rely on cybercafés and you don't have a web-based email address (eg Hotmail, Yahoo! or Gmail), you'll need to carry three pieces of information with you to enable you to access your internet mail account: your incoming (POP or IMAP) mail server name, your account name and your password. Your internet service provider or network supervisor will be able to give you these. Armed with this information, you should be able to access your internet mail account from any internet-connected machine in Libya, provided it runs some kind of email software (which most do). It pays to become familiar with the process for doing this before you leave home.

Unless you are travelling in Libya for a prolonged period or there on business, taking a portable computer is not worth the hassle. Most international servers don't have reciprocal arrangements with servers in Libya, even those with global roaming facilities and wireless access is extremely rare. A handful of Libyan hotels do, however, have in-room internet access, such as Corinthia Bab Africa Hotel (p91), while Funduq Winzrik (p92) has computers in every room; both hotels are in Tripoli.

If you plan to carry your notebook or palmtop computer with you, remember that the power supply voltage in Libya may vary from that at home, risking damage to your equipment. The best investment is a universal AC adaptor for your appliance, which will enable you to plug it in anywhere without frying the innards. You'll also need a plug adaptor for Libya – buy it before you leave home.

See also Internet Resources (p21) for other information.

LEGAL MATTERS

Since the days of the revolution, Libya's judicial system has been heavily influenced by Islamic precepts, although modern laws are a mixture of religious and secular tenets. There are both civil and religious courts, but foreign visitors are highly unlikely to have need of the latter. Judges are appointed by the General People's Congress, and

judicial independence and due process are largely observed. All proceedings are conducted in Arabic with interpreters usually provided for non-Arabic aliens.

Libya's judicial system has come under the microscope in recent years as a result of the trial of five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor charged with deliberately infecting over 400 Libyan children with HIV in a Benghazi hospital. A sensitive issue in Libya, the trial has drawn international criticism from Western governments and human rights organisations, although the first death sentence was overturned on appeal. A second death sentence was handed down in the retrial and a further appeal was pending at the time of writing.

The best piece of advice we can give you is to stay within the law because Libyan prisons are no place for the faint-hearted. Generally, the same activities that are illegal in your own country are illegal in Libya. Foreigners will simply be deported for committing most minor crimes. Remember that alcohol is forbidden in Libya and drug offences carry stiff penalties. And if you try to smuggle antiquities out of the country you will be imprisoned, possibly for weeks while they decide what to do with you. If you flout these laws, don't expect your embassy to get you out, although it should be your first port of call in arranging legal representation.

In the extremely unlikely event that you're the victim of a crime, you're likely to find the police are very much on your side and vigorous (perhaps excessively so when it comes to dealing with Libyan suspects) in bringing the perpetrator to justice. The epic paperwork and time involved will, however, soon have you wondering whether it's all worth it.

MAPS

Many of the maps throughout this book have been drawn using satellite technology and should be enough to satisfy most travellers, although more-detailed maps would be necessary for desert expeditions in remote areas. For detailed advice on the best maps for expeditions in the Libyan Sahara, see p179. Among the maps covered is the best map on the market for the Sahara, the outstanding *Jebel Acacus – Tourist Map & Guide* (1:100,000).

The most reliable country map would be 953 –*Africa North and West* by Michelin

ISLAMIC HOLIDAYS

Holiday	2007	2008	2009	2010
Ramadan begins	13 Sep	2 Sep	22 Aug	11 Aug
Eid al-Fitr (end of Ramadan)	14 Oct	3 Oct	20 Sep	9 Sep
Tabaski	19 Dec	8 Dec	28 Nov	17 Nov
Moulid an-Nabi (feast celebrating Mohammed's birthday)	31 Mar	20 Mar	9 Mar	27 Feb
New Year begins	21 Jan (1428)	10 Jan (1429)	31 Dec (1430)	20 Dec (1431)
Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice)	21 Dec	10 Dec	30 Nov	19 Nov

(1:4,000,000). Other decent maps are Cartographia's *Libya* (1:2,000,000) and *Libya* (1:1,650,000) by Cartes de Voyage Internationale. The best map available inside Libya is published by Malt International and entitled *Map of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyah* (1:3,500,000), although its southern borders are not to be trusted as they're unjustifiably generous in Libya's favour. Also available inside Libya is the *Map of Libya & Ancient Cities*, which is of no use for navigation other than for the fact that it has the names of many towns written in Arabic alongside the English version.

Most of the maps mentioned in this book are available from **Stanfords** (☎ 0044 20 7836 1321; www.stanfords.co.uk), which is the world's largest map shop. You could also try www.sahara-overland.com.

MONEY

The official unit of currency is the Libyan dinar. Notes include 0.25LD, 0.5LD, 1LD, 5LD, 10LD and, although we've seen very few, 20LD. The dinar is divided into 100 piastres, or 1000 dirhams (also known as *mileem*), although the latter is less used these days. There are coins for 10 piastres, 25 piastres, 50 piastres and 1LD.

The ideal approach to bringing your money to Libya is to bring cash euros, US dollars or British pounds and carry a Visa card for emergency cash advances.

For details on minimum currency requirements when entering Libya, see p231.

ATMs

They've taken their time arriving, but ATMs are finally becoming commonplace in Libya, at least in Tripoli and Benghazi. However, maintenance levels are not always as they could be, so it would be a risk to rely on these as your primary source of funds. Most ATMs have a daily 200LD withdrawal limit.

The Masraf al-Tijara Watanmiya (Bank of Commerce & Development), which has branches throughout the country (including in Tripoli, Benghazi, Al-Bayda and Tobruk and possibly elsewhere by the time you read this), is the place to go for Visa or Visa Electron cash advances; some of its branches have ATMs.

MasterCard holders will need to rely on far less frequent branches of the Aman Bank for Commerce & Investment. The only two

branches we found were in the arrivals hall of Tripoli International Airport and on Sharia Mizran in downtown Tripoli (see p76).

Black Market

A small black market in foreign exchange exists in Libya, although rates are generally the same as in banks and it's more to serve the purposes of Libyans in need of foreign currency than tourists. Its only advantage is when you're in need of cash outside banking hours (eg Friday). You should always go with your guide and always check the prevailing bank exchange rate as rates can be subject to negotiation. Souq al-Mushir and Souq al-Turk (p76) in Tripoli's medina or the southern entrance to Souq al-Jreed (p126) in Benghazi are the main places to try. Otherwise, the gold shops of souqs (markets) are good places to start.

Cash

Cash is king in Libya and euros have become the currency of choice, although US dollars and British pounds are also easy to change. You should bring mostly large denomination notes as these sometimes attract slightly higher rates on the street (although rates are the same in banks) with a few smaller notes for changing as you near the end of your trip. Some shopkeepers, especially in Tripoli, will sometimes accept payment in foreign currency, and Libyan tour companies prefer foreign currency when you pay for your tour.

In case you're worried about bringing so much cash with you, remember that theft in Libya is extremely rare (see p218) and you should have no problems if you carry your money in a money belt.

Officially, any bank is able to change money, although some are surprisingly reluctant to do so. To change money at a bank ask your hotel for your passport in case the bank asks for identification, although this is becoming increasingly rare.

Before crossing into Libya, you can change money on the Egyptian or Tunisian side of the land borders, although if you don't manage to do it, your tour company representative should be waiting for you on the Libyan side and can explain the easiest way to get your hands on some dinars. If you're arriving by air, the airports in Tripoli and Benghazi have foreign-

exchange counters and ATMs, although the latter don't always work.

The Libyan dinar is not a hard currency, but if you find yourself stuck with dinars at the end of your trip, it's sometimes possible to change them at the airport exchange counters or across the land borders. That said, try not to get stuck with too many dinars in case currency regulations change. As a last resort, ask your tour company for advice.

Credit Cards

Paying with credit card is becoming increasingly widespread in Libyan hotels, restaurants, airlines and shops, but it remains the exception rather than the rule. As your single greatest expense is likely to be the cost of your tour and most tour companies still don't accept payment by credit card (some accept international bank transfers in advance of your visit), carrying a credit card will be of limited use. This is reinforced by the fact that the cost of most hotels and restaurants are most likely included in the cost of your tour, rather than requiring you to pay them directly. If you do pay by credit card, ask for the price to be credited in euros or US dollars to ensure the most favourable bank rates.

Cash advances against credit cards are, however, possible – for details see ATMs opposite.

Tipping

As more tourists visit the country, tipping is becoming more common in Libya, but there's rarely any pressure to do so. In restaurants, for helpful hotel staff or mosque caretakers, a dinar or two is suitable although up to 5LD may be appropriate depending on the circumstances.

The only time when larger tips are appropriate are for guides (eg in the desert or your escort around the country). In this case, it's entirely up to you, but any amount will generally be appreciated. A good starting point is 15LD per person for a few days, up to 50LD if the help has been exceptional over a couple of weeks.

Travellers Cheques

Don't bring travellers cheques as we're yet to find a Libyan bank that's willing to exchange them.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO Film & Equipment

Digital photography is catching on fast in Libya, although you should arrive in the country self-sufficient in equipment and flash cards. If you want to burn photos to CDs, it's possible at some internet cafés in Tripoli and Benghazi. However, this applies only to dedicated internet cafés and not to the ubiquitous phone centres that have a few computers out the back. If you're having trouble finding a place that can help, ask your tour company for advice.

Although print film is widely available in larger cities, you should bring all the film with you; you're unlikely to have any choice and many films on sale in Libyan shops are approaching their use-by dates if they haven't expired already. The most commonly available print film is Konica – a roll of 36 costs from 3LD to 5LD. Slide film is difficult to track down, even in Tripoli, and more expensive; expect to pay 10LD for a roll of 36-exposure Konica slide film or 12LD for Kodak if you're lucky enough to find it.

If you have a video camera, you should also bring your own video film. You may get lucky at one of the better photo studios or find an electronics store in one of Tripoli's more upmarket shopping centres that may stock film, but don't count on finding what you need.

Photographing People

Most Libyan men seem perfectly happy to have their photo taken, although you should still ask permission, especially in rural areas.

Male travellers should never take photos of local women without first being granted express permission; this may be refused even for women photographers. Some Tuareg in the Jebel Acacus have taken to asking for money (a negotiable 5LD seems to be the going rate) in return for having their photo taken.

Restrictions

Never point your camera at military installations of any description, or at any border posts, checkpoints, ports, police stations or at uniformed police or soldiers. Most of these are easy to avoid, although police

stations are often poorly signposted – always ask if you're not sure. As one traveller reported:

Towards the end of the trip I realised that I had very few photos of the giant posters of the 'great leader' (Colonel Gaddafi), which are all over the coast regions. At a roadblock I chanced my luck by getting my guide to ask if I could photograph a good one depicting the 'hero' of the Great Man-Made-River Project. The officer in charge said (as I well knew) that photography was forbidden near roadblocks, but then went back into his office, ripped off the wall a large cardboard-backed picture of Gaddafi addressing the masses and presented it to me as a consolation prize!

David Boyall, Australia

Still and video photography are permitted in all museums, archaeological sites and the medinas of the Saharan oases (eg Ghadames and Ghat), but you must buy a ticket for 5LD for still cameras and 10LD for a video camera.

Technical Tips

Lonely Planet publishes *Travel Photography – A Guide to Taking Better Pictures* by renowned travel photographer Richard I'Anson; it's filled with useful tips. In the same series, *People Photography* (by Michael Coyne) and *Landscape Photography* (by Peter Eastway) are great primers to carry in your suitcase.

POST

Libya's postal system is slow but reliable and almost every Libyan town has a post and telephone office, always easily recognisable by the tall telecommunications tower rising above the building.

Postal Rates

It costs 30 piastres (0.3LD, or 300 dirhams) to send a postcard to most places, including Europe and Australia. Sending letters is similarly cheap, generally between 50 piastres and 1LD. A 1kg parcel to Europe costs 15LD, while the same weight to Australia is 45LD. The best strategy is to travel as lightly as you can to allow for any souvenirs you buy.

Receiving Mail

Unless you're in the country for an extended period, you'd be unwise to get mail sent to you in Libya as in-bound deliveries can take an age. If you simply can't wait until you get home, there are generally reliable poste-restante services (letters only) at the central post offices in Tripoli (p76) and Benghazi (p126). Address mail to:

Your Name
Poste Restante
Main Post Office
Tripoli (or Benghazi)
Libya (GSPLA)

Libya doesn't have a system of postal deliveries to street addresses, only post-office boxes. If you're sending a letter or package to someone in Libya, make sure that you write the post-office-box number and city on the envelope. In the Fezzan, many addressees use the French equivalent, BP, followed by the number of the box and the town.

Sending Mail

Postcards and letters sent from the central post offices in Tripoli or Benghazi usually reach their destination within a week to ten days for the UK and Continental Europe or two weeks for Australia and the USA. Sending from a post office in a small town could take a lot longer. Always hand your mail to a post-office worker (never leave it in a post box), and write the address details as clearly as possible; if you can, write the name of the country in Arabic.

SHOPPING

Libya may not have the selection of handicrafts to rival Morocco or Egypt, but shopping in Libya is wonderfully hassle-free, prices are low and the quality is generally high. The best place in Libya to do your shopping is in the souqs of Tripoli's medina (p96). Many Tuareg in the Fezzan spread out their items for sale on a rug alongside the lakes and a few camping grounds.

For the most eye-catching souvenirs that you'll find while in Libya, see p226, while for Tuareg handicrafts see opposite.

The better Libyan (primarily Berber) rugs consist of high-quality, flat-weave kilim cushions and larger rugs, although in most places you'll mostly come across

TUAREG HANDICRAFTS

Tuareg jewellery and leatherwork are very distinctive and make wonderful gifts or souvenirs of your time in the Libyan Sahara.

The most unusual item is the *croix d'Agadez* (Tuareg cross of stylised silver with filigree designs) named after Agadez in Niger. Every town and region with a significant Tuareg population has its own unique version of the cross. Although European explorers saw the design as evidence of prior Christianity, traditional Tuareg see them as powerful talismans designed to protect against ill fortune and the evil eye. Some also serve as fertility symbols. The crosses are still used by Tuareg men as currency (eg for buying camels), although these days this is rare in Libya. At times, the crosses are worn by their wives as a sign of wealth.

Other silver items include a wide range of silver necklaces (those containing amber are generally from across the border in Niger); striking square, silver amulets that are worn around the neck by elders as a symbol of status (some are also used in weddings by women); and ornamental daggers made of silver with leather hilts.

Leather items include tasselled pouches worn around the neck by men for carrying tobacco or money when out on the desert trails (some contain a surprising number of pockets), and saddlebags or cushions. The strong odour of camel comes at no extra cost.

The best places in the Fezzan to find these items include many of the tourist camps across the Fezzan and around the lakes – the itinerant sellers at Umm al-Maa (p188) had the best selection when we visited.

heavy woven Berber rugs with simple, almost childlike animal motifs. The rugs on offer in the Misrata souq (p119) are noted for their bright colours.

Gharyan is the undisputed pottery capital of Libya (see p159). The road into town from Tripoli is lined with stalls offering colourful bowls decorated with swirling designs in different sizes. The quality is high and surprisingly reasonable in price.

Palm-woven products such as mats, baskets and bowls are the speciality of the coastal Tripolitanian towns of Tauorga (p120) and Ghadames (p175). The products are lightweight but bulky.

Bargaining

Don't come to Libya all primed to hone your bargaining skills; this is definitely not Egypt. For most purchases prices are fixed, any reductions are likely to be negligible and the process is never adversarial. There are always exceptions (some shops in the souqs of Tripoli's medina and the Tuareg jewellery sellers of the south). You're more likely to get a discount if you develop a friendly rapport with the vendor and if you go on your own, rather than as part of a group.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Travelling to Libya on your own has a number of advantages, not least among

them a greater likelihood of flexibility in choosing your itinerary, being able to meet locals more readily than if you were in a group, and forming a closer bond with your Libyan guide who may soon become a friend.

There are, however, a number of disadvantages. For a start, it can be prohibitively expensive as you must shoulder the full cost of transport. A private car costs at least 35LD per day while a 4WD in the desert starts from 80LD and could go as high as 120LD; if you're required to take two 4WDs into the desert as you should, costs really begin to escalate. Guiding fees (50LD) in Libya's ancient cities will also make a dent in your wallet that you wouldn't otherwise notice if travelling with other people.

Another disadvantage is that many tour companies will simply not be interested in arranging your visit (and may not even answer your initial query; see No Answer, Try Again, p228) because it's simply not worth their while financially. Libyan visa regulations also sometimes require a minimum of four travellers although most companies easily circumvent this requirement (see p228). To find a Libyan tour company willing to take you – international tour companies usually have set departure dates and require a minimum number of travellers for the tour to go ahead – requires persistence

TOP LIBYAN SOUVENIRS & WHERE TO FIND THEM

- Embroidered Ghadames slippers from the Bin Yeddar family workshop (p175)
- Colonel Muammar Qaddafi's masterpiece, *The Green Book*, in a range of languages from Fergiani's Bookshop (p74) in Tripoli
- A Colonel Qaddafi watch from the watch shops in Tripoli medina or Sharia al-Rashid (p96)
- Tuareg jewellery from the Tuareg salesmen next to Umm al-Maa (p188) in the Idehan Ubari
- Colourful Gharyan pottery (p159) from the roadside stalls as you enter Gharyan from Tripoli
- Berber flat-weave rugs from Carpet Bazaar – Ben Zeglam Shop (p96) in Tripoli's medina
- Tuareg turbans and baggy camel-riding pants from the clothes market in Ghat (p197)

and you should start contacting companies at least two months in advance of your visit.

TELEPHONE & FAX

The cheapest way to make international phone calls is via an internet-connected line in an internet café. Most cafés in Tripoli, and some in Benghazi and elsewhere, sell phone cards with come with a pin number. One of the better networks is Net2Phone with whom a 3.75/5.75/11LD card gets you 165/275/550 minutes to the UK, slightly less to other European countries and Australia. Another option is PC2Call, where cards cost 5.50/10LD for similar results. The quality of the lines is generally good, although it depends on the internet connection.

If there's no internet café nearby or you can't buy a card, Libya's landline phone system is excellent and connections are usually instant for domestic and international calls. All such calls, whether international or domestic, are best made at the government telephone offices attached to any post office. To make an international call, go to the counter, write out the number in full for the clerk who will make the connection, and then take the call in the allocated private booth. After completing the call, you pay at the counter. There are also private telephone offices around most towns – they're ever so slightly more expensive than the post offices but they're open longer hours. Avoid making international phone calls from hotels, where the rates can be ridiculous.

Calls within Libya invariably receive instant connections and are quite cheap (around 0.25LD, or 25 piastres).

Fax

The best places from which to send faxes are also the government telephone offices. For international faxes, the cost depends on how long the fax takes to go through. An international fax will rarely cost more than 2LD and a fax within Libya around 0.5LD.

The main post office in Tripoli (p76) provides a very handy **fax-restante service** (fax 021-3331199). For a small fee (no more than 1LD), staff will hold faxes for up to one month.

Mobile Phones

GSM Mobile networks now cover most Libyan towns and their hinterlands, although you'll obviously be out of range while in the Sahara or anywhere too far off-the-beaten track. There are two mobile-phone operators in Libya. **Libyana** (www.libyana.ly in Arabic) has the most extensive network, although **Al-Madar** (www.almadar.ly in Arabic) is fast catching up although still restricted to the northwest. There is a fair chance that your mobile will work in Libya, although using it for anything more than sending and receiving SMS can be prohibitively expensive; check with your carrier for their global roaming rates for Libya before setting out. To get the low-down on Libyana and Al-Madar (including their international roaming partners and a map of their coverage inside Libya), click on to the following website at www.gsmworld.com/roaming/gsminfo/cou_ly.shtml.

If your mobile carrier doesn't have a Libyan affiliate, you can easily buy a 5LD or 10LD SIM card from Libyana and put it in your phone. International calls are surprisingly cheap when calling from a Libyan mobile and are often even cheaper than

landlines. If you need to buy a SIM card, ask your tour company (Libyans are very mobile savvy) for the nearest store.

Satellite Phones

Whenever venturing off-road into the Libyan Sahara, you should always consider taking a satellite phone with you – this recommendation becomes a necessity if you're travelling in just a single vehicle. Most experienced Libyan drivers of 4WDs in southwestern Libya have a phone or know where you can find one. It is also possible in some places (your driver or guide should know where to ask) such as Sebha to rent (usually Thuraya) satellite phones. Expect to pay a minimum of 5LD per day plus pre-paid phone cards. Such phones should be used only for emergency purposes and not to call home as costs start from at least €3 per minute to Europe.

TIME

Despite its size, Libya has only one time zone – it's two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) – which means that the sun sets at least half an hour earlier in the east so take that into account, especially if you're travelling in the desert. There is no changing of the clock for summer, and offices and their employees simply adjust their attendance times to suit climatic conditions instead.

For a comprehensive guide to world time zones, see p270.

TOILETS

Public toilets are something that other countries have so if you're out and feel the urge, ask at a restaurant, teahouse, mosque or hotel if you can use their toilet; you'll rarely be refused. Ask for '*al-hammam*' or '*mirhad*'.

It's rare to come across a squat toilet in a hotel as most hotel rooms have sit-down flush toilets and a rare few even present you with a choice between a toilet and a bidet. Squat toilets are, however, found in most mosques and cheap restaurants. In all but the cheapest hotels or in desert camps, toilet paper is provided. Remember that some toilets are not designed for paper; if you're not sure, use the rubbish bin.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Libya has no tourist offices in Libya or elsewhere, and the country's tourism

authorities operate as overseers of the tourism industry and tour companies rather than sources of practical information. Their only visible tourist services are the excellent series of tourist posters on Libya that you'll see around the country.

The best sources of information about Libya (apart from this guidebook, of course) are the internet (see p21), books about Libya (p20) or Libyan tour companies.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

As long as you're healthy, there's no reason why people with a disability shouldn't enjoy travelling in Libya. If you're going as part of a group, notify your tour company well in advance of any special requirements you may have. Most of the better hotels have entrances at ground level and functioning lifts. Most group tours involve transport to all sites, which relieves the process (for all travellers) of negotiating public transport. Even in the desert, transport is usually by 4WD, rather than camel. Depending on your disability, you may find it difficult exploring some of the archaeological sites where paths are uneven and access for wheelchairs can be difficult. However, Ghadames, Tobruk and the major cities are generally no problem. Discuss the possibilities with your tour company before travelling. As one wheelchair traveller from the UK found, 'whilst there is very little access to anywhere for wheelchair users, there never seems to be a shortage of people who are more than eager and willing to lend a hand.'

You should also bring your own medications and prescriptions with you.

VISAS

Nationals of most African and Arab countries don't require visas to enter Libya. Everyone else does.

Registration

All holders of tourist visas must register with the Libyan authorities at any *jawazat* (passport office) within seven days of arrival in the country. Those who don't do this by the end of the seventh day face a minimum fine of 50LD. In this era of organised tourism, the process will invariably be completed by the tour company responsible for you during your stay. If you must complete the process yourself, it's better if

you can find an Arabic speaker to go with you as few officers speak English and the forms are in Arabic.

Tourist Visas

Entire books could be written about the Libyan tourist visa dance, but the process is actually quite simple.

First you need an invitation from an accredited Libyan tour company (see p243). Unless you're travelling with an international company (see right), obtaining this invitation involves writing to the company in question around six weeks or one month (a minimum) in advance, outlining your travel dates and your desired itinerary. If the company answers and agrees to arrange your visa and visit, you will need to send your passport details (they sometimes ask for a faxed copy of the front page of your passport) and sometimes your flight details. Once the invitation has been approved by the Libyan authorities, you can either pick up your visa at the Libyan People's Bureau in your country (see Embassies & Consulates; p218) or, more conveniently, on arrival in Libya. If picking up your visa on arrival, before leaving home you should make sure that your tour company sends you a scanned or faxed copy of the Arabic visa approval and, if you're arriving by air, a copy of the letter they should have sent to your airline confirming that your visa has been approved.

NO ANSWER, TRY AGAIN

Libya has numerous professionally run tour companies, although almost all of them suffer from an occasional inability to answer emails promptly. In fact, many of them don't answer emails at all. The actual visa process takes only a couple of weeks, but you're advised to start contacting tour companies long before that to take into account the incomprehensible periods of silence from the Libyan capital. This is a problem that particularly afflicts lone travellers (see p225) but it's something of an established Libyan business practice in all fields. Be persistent, try following up with phone calls and, as a last resort, threaten to write to us at Lonely Planet if visa deadlines are approaching.

If you are arranging your visa through a non-Libyan company (see p236), they should handle the process of dealing with the Libyan affiliates and the Libyan authorities and all you should need to provide to them are your passport details.

Choosing which company to travel with is one of the most important choices you'll make when visiting Libya and is about far more than arranging your visa to enter the country. The company which arranges your visa is also responsible for you during your time in Libya and will arrange all transport, accommodation, meals and a guide or escort in your language for the duration of your stay. We suggest that you contact a number of companies (both Libyan and international) to see which one best suits your needs.

When dealing with your tour company prior to the issuing of a visa, make sure you specify the point where you plan to enter Libya. At least one reader was turned away from the Egyptian border because his visa stated his entry point as Tripoli International Airport. If you have picked up your visa from a Libyan People's Bureau prior to departure, always check any conditions to make sure this doesn't happen to you.

Visas cost 15LD (the cost will most likely be included in the cost of your tour), are valid for 30 days from the date of entry and you must usually enter Libya within 30 days of the visa being issued. Although some Libyan government departments follow the lunar calendar, all visas and visa extensions are calculated using the Western calendar.

A couple of restrictions to bear in mind. Israeli citizens will not be issued with a visa under any circumstances, nor will those with Israeli stamps in their passport. The situation with regard to US nationals depends on the prevailing political winds – at the time of writing, no tourist visas were being issued to US citizens in retaliation for US restrictions on Libyan visitors, although the situation has probably changed by the time you read this.

Libyan visa regulations do change from time to time and even from embassy to embassy. Very occasionally, travellers have been issued with a tourist visa from an out-of-the-way Libyan embassy and found themselves free to explore the country without a guide. Things have tightened up since then and the rules restricting travellers to escorted visits

THE DAY THE VANDALS CAME TO LIBYA

The restrictive change in visa regulations at the end of 2000 is largely the fault of a small minority of tourists who took advantage of their freedom in Libya.

The story goes that a group of freewheeling European visitors visiting the Jebel Acacus (p198) of southwestern Libya decided that the region's famous rock art would make a wonderful souvenir of their time in Libya. Using silicone gel to take copies from the rock located in the Awiss region of the Acacus, they vandalised priceless art that had survived untouched for thousands of years. The thieves were caught with their shameful booty by government officials in Tripoli, detained for a couple of weeks, fined and then deported.

This incident was not the first, but it confirmed to the government that tourists were responsible for the increasing damage to ancient sites, and it shut down the independent travel option. Ever since, the Libyan government has insisted that you be accompanied by a Libyan escort from a tour company.

For details on protecting Saharan rock art, see p204.

remain firmly in place and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

The rules also officially require that you travel in a group comprised of a minimum of four people, although such rules are easily circumvented by most Libyan tour companies with the full knowledge of the Libyan authorities. If you are planning to travel in a group of less than four people, arrange to pick your visa up on arrival in Libya, so as to avoid dealing directly with an embassy.

For details on minimum currency requirements when entering Libya, see p231.

OTHER VISAS

Unless you're visiting Libya on business, the only other way to get a Libyan visa is if a private Libyan citizen invites you to visit him or her in Libya. While that sounds simple enough, it can be a long and drawn-out process that takes even longer than obtaining a tourist visa. Your Libyan friend will need to get the process started, be pretty savvy on the Byzantine workings of the Libyan bureaucracy and all you can really do is sit back and wait for the wheels to grind.

Travel Permits

Travel permits are required for some remote desert areas of Libya, including the Jebel Acacus, Waw al-Namus and Jebel al-Uweinat. You're unlikely to have any inkling, however, that you even have a permit as obtaining it is the responsibility of your tour company. For more information on permits for the Jebel Acacus, see p199.

Visa Extensions

If you wish to stay in Libya longer than one month, extensions (15LD; no photo) are possible, although rare. Applications are handled by the *jawazzat*, of which there is usually one in most towns. Extensions are usually no problem, but you're much more likely to be granted an extension if you allow your local tour operator to make the application on your behalf.

Visas for Onward Travel

At the time of writing, it was not possible to obtain visas in Libya for Algeria, Chad, Niger or Sudan. Check with the embassies in question (p219) to see whether the situation has changed.

Although visas can be obtained at their respective consulates or embassies in Tripoli, both Egypt and Tunisia grant tourist visas on arrival to nationals of most (and perhaps all) Western countries. An Egyptian border visa costs around €15, while its Tunisian equivalent should cost no more than 5TD.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Balancing the liberal and the conservative strands of Libyan society is an inexact science, but it's one that causes few difficulties for the overwhelming number of female visitors to Libya.

In general, Libya is one of the easiest countries in the region for women to travel in. This is partly because the overwhelming majority of people working in Libya's tourist industry are accustomed to negotiating potentially awkward cross-cultural misunderstandings. It is also true that most

Libyans are paragons of discretion and even if you have offended local sensibilities you're unlikely to know about it. But the policies of the Libyan government in relation to women (see p55) also deserve their fair share of credit as, since the 1969 revolution, government laws favouring gender equality have contributed to a less-misunderstood view of Western women than can be found elsewhere in the Middle East or North Africa. As a result, most female travellers have reported being treated with respect, with few incidents of unpleasant behaviour. When foreign visitors are introduced to Libyan men, men will in most circumstances shake hands with Western women.

Most Libyan restaurants do not have a segregated family area where women are expected to eat. Unlike many countries in the region, there's no need for single women to wear a wedding ring or carry a photo of 'their' children – most Libyans understand that Western societies have different rules – although travelling with a male friend can reduce further the small risk of problems. We haven't heard of unmarried couples encountering difficulties in getting accommodation or in other situations, although you should always be discreet.

The risk of serious assault in Libya is virtually nonexistent. Nonetheless, women should take the precautions of always locking their hotel room and never attempting to hitchhike on their own. Attracting looks from Libyan men can also be uncomfortable and it's worth remembering that most sectors of Libyan society remain deeply

traditional in both a religious and cultural sense. As one traveller reported:

The Libyan people are very curious and friendly, but as a woman I find Tripoli a little bit difficult, as the Libyan men can be a little too curious sometimes.

Anna Norman, Sweden

If you are harassed, tell your unwanted friend firmly, but politely, to desist and try to enlist the support of other Libyans, most of whom will be appalled enough to shame the man responsible. If you scream blue murder, the situation could get out of hand. If he persists, mentioning the police will most likely have the desired effect.

Given that Libya is a conservative society, choosing what to wear can be important. Trousers are perfectly OK as long as they're loose-fitting. The same applies to T-shirts and other tops, although these should have sleeves to cover the upper arm. There's no need to cover your head, except when entering a mosque (although even in mosques it's not always required), and you and your hosts may feel more comfortable wearing a headscarf if you visit a family home or small village, although no-one will expect you to. Swimsuits (not bikinis) should definitely be worn only on the beach, preferably with a T-shirt and shorts. Shorts (again, nothing too skimpy) are fine for desert expeditions when the only people around are other members of your party, but elsewhere even men in shorts will attract curious looks.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are three main ways to enter Libya: by air (to Tripoli, Benghazi or, less often, Sebha), by public transport to Libya's border with Egypt or Tunisia, or in your own vehicle, most often by boat to Tunisia and then driving into Libya. Many travellers also arrive and leave by cruise ship, although there are no ferry services. Land borders with other countries – Algeria, Niger, Sudan or Chad – are rarely open to travellers and were closed at the time of research.

ENTERING LIBYA

Entering Libya is generally a trouble-free process, provided you have an invitation from an accredited Libyan tour company (see p243 for details). Customs formalities are usually pretty cursory, especially if you're polite, but remember that your bags are likely to be X-rayed. The main item that officials will be looking for is alcohol, which is forbidden in Libya. On the way out, searches are sometimes stricter, with rock-art souvenirs the main target.

If you're collecting your visa on arrival in Libya, try to ensure that your tour company has a representative waiting for you inside the immigration area to smooth the process of obtaining your visa. It's also a good idea to carry with you contact details (ie a mobile phone number) of the tour company in question in case they don't turn up on time. Before leaving home, you should also ask for a copy of the letter confirming details of your visa approval that Libyan tour companies routinely send to airlines to ensure that you're allowed to board the plane, as well as a copy of the Arabic visa approval from the Libyan authorities.

A 2005 Libyan government regulation requires that anyone entering Libya should be carrying with them a foreign-currency equivalent of a minimum of 500LD (for exchange rates see inside the front cover of this book). Although this is rarely enforced and seems to be aimed at deterring immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, you should make sure that you're carrying at least this amount of money just in case. The only exceptions are those visiting Libya on government business and those who have already paid for their Libyan tour in full before arriving.

Passport

To enter Libya, your passport must be valid for six months from the date of entry. If you need to renew your passport, allow plenty of time, as it can take up to several months.

Travellers with passports bearing Israeli stamps are not allowed to enter Libya. For more detailed visa information see p227.

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying and climate change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon offset schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

AIR

Airports & Airlines

Libya's two main international airports are Tripoli International Airport and Benghazi's Benina International Airport. Metiga Airport, 10km east of Tripoli, also handles international flights for Al-Buraq Air (right), although these services may soon be moved to Tripoli International Airport. Libya's other international airport is Sebha International Airport which handles flights for Point Afrique (opposite).

Libyan Arab Airlines is the national carrier and, although its safety record and service are patchy, many of these problems date back to the embargo years and things are improving all the time. It flies throughout Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

Of the two other Libyan-based airlines, Afriqiyah Airways services Europe and sub-Saharan Africa and the private Al-Buraq Air has been subjected to operational restrictions in the EU, although only for its cargo services.

AIRLINES FLYING TO/FROM LIBYA

All of the phone numbers for the following airlines are Tripoli numbers unless stated otherwise.

Afriqiyah Airways (8U; Map p75; ☎ 021-4449734; www.afriqiyah.aero; Sharia Omar al-Mukhtar)

Air Algeria (AH; Map p72; ☎ 021-4444016; www.air.algerie.dz; Burj al-Fateh, Sharia al-Corniche)

Air Malta (KM; Map p72; ☎ 021-3350579; www.airmalta.com; ground level, Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 5, Sharia al-Corniche)

Al-Buraq Air (UZ; Map p75; ☎ 021-4444811; www.buraqair.com; Sharia Mohammed Megharief)

Alitalia (AZ; Map p72; ☎ 021-3350298; www.alitalia.com; Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 3, Sharia al-Corniche)

Austrian Airlines (OS; Map p72; ☎ 021-3350242; www.aua.com; Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 3, Sharia al-Corniche)

Blue Panorama Airlines (BP; ☎ in Italy 06 602 14 577; www.blue-panorama.com; www.blu-express.com)

British Airways (BA; Map p72; ☎ 021-3351278; www.britishairways.com; Burj al-Fateh, Flat 191, Sharia al-Corniche)

EgyptAir (MS; Map p72; ☎ 021-3335781; www.egyptair.com; Burj al-Fateh, Sharia al-Corniche)

Emirates (EK; Map p72; ☎ 021-3350597; www.emirates.com; Burj al-Fateh Tower 1, 10th fl, fl No 103)

Hemus Air (DU; Map p75; ☎ 021-4445560; www.hemusair.bg; 11 Sharia al-Baladiya)

JAT Yugoslav Airlines (JU; Map p72; ☎ 021-3351299; www.jat.com; Burj al-Fateh, Sharia al-Corniche)

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines (KL; Map p72; ☎ 021-3350018; www.klm.com; Office 91, Level 1, Burj al-Fateh, Sharia al-Corniche)

Libyan Arab Airlines (LN; Map p75; ☎ 021-3616738)
Lufthansa (LH; Map p72; ☎ 021-3350375; www.lufthansa.com; 12th fl, Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 4)

Point Afrique (☎ in Paris 04 75 97 20 40; www.point-afrique.com in French)

Qatar Airways (QR; Map p72; ☎ 021-3351818; www.qatarairways.com; 18th fl, Office 181-182, Burj al-Fateh, Sharia al-Corniche)

Royal Air Maroc (AT; Map p72; ☎ 021-3350111; www.royalairmaroc.com; Burj al-Fateh, Sharia al-Corniche)

Royal Jordanian (RJ; Map p75; ☎ 021-4442453; www.rja.com.jo; Sharia Mohammed Megharief)

Saudi Arabian Airlines (SV; Map p75; ☎ 021-4446468; www.saudiairlines.com; Sharia Mohammed Megharief)

Sudan Airways (SD; Map p72; ☎ 021-3351330; www.sudanair.com; Office 123, 12th fl, Burj al-Fateh, Sharia al-Corniche)

Swiss International Airlines (LX; Map p72; ☎ 021-3350052; www.swiss.com; Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 3, Sharia al-Corniche)

Syrianair (RB; Map p75; ☎ 021-4446716; www.syrianair.com; Sharia al-Baladiya)

Tunis Air (TU; Map p75; ☎ 021-3336303; www.tunisair.com in French; 3rd fl, 59 Sharia 1st September)

Turkish Airlines (TK; Map p72; ☎ 021-3351252; www.turkishairlines.com; Office 161, 16th fl, Burj al-Fateh, Sharia al-Corniche)

Tickets

Very few budget airlines fly to Libya and very little discounting takes place, but prices are falling all the time so it's worth shopping around. Booking your ticket well in advance also helps lower prices.

Reputable online agencies for scheduled carriers:

Cheap Tickets (www.cheaptickets.com)

ebookers (www.ebookers.com)

Expedia.com (www.expedia.com)

Lowestfare.com (www.lowestfare.com)

Orbitz (www.orbitz.com)

STA Travel (www.sta.com)

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

Travel.com.au (www.travel.com.au)

Africa

Given that heads of African governments were the ones who flew to Libya in defiance of the international air embargo in the late 1990s, it's surprising how few African airlines fly to Tripoli. That's probably because Afriqiyah Airways (www.afriqiyah.aero) does such a fine job, connecting Tripoli to Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Accra

(Ghana), Bamako (Mali), Bangui (Central African Republic), Cairo (Egypt), Cotonou (Benin), Douala (Cameroon), Kano (Nigeria), Khartoum (Sudan), Lagos (Nigeria), Lomé (Togo), N'Djaména (Chad), Niamey (Niger) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). Some flights also fly via Benghazi. The Afriqiyah Airways website has a list of ticket offices around Africa and elsewhere.

Other airlines which fly to/from African capitals include Air Algeria (Algiers), Sudan Airways (Khartoum), EgyptAir (Cairo and Alexandria), Libyan Arab Airlines (Casablanca, Cairo and Tunis), Tunis Air (Tunis) and Royal Air Maroc (Casablanca).

Asia & Australia

There are no direct flights to Libya from Asian cities, so travellers from Asia will need to fly to Europe and catch a connecting flight.

Similarly, if you're coming from Australia you'll need to pick up a connection elsewhere, preferably the Middle East. Emirates in particular has direct services from a number of Australian cities direct to Dubai with onward connections to Tripoli. EgyptAir also flies regularly to Tripoli via Southeast Asia and Cairo, although Emirates is usually a better choice. Qatar Airways from Doha is another possibility. Otherwise you'll need to pick up a connection in Europe.

Try the following agencies:

Flight Centre Australia (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) Has branches throughout Australia and New Zealand.

STA Travel Australia (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz) Has offices throughout Australia and New Zealand.
www.travel.com.au Online booking agency.

Continental Europe

Europe has the widest selection of direct flights to Libya. The national airlines of various European countries (see opposite) fly direct to Tripoli or Benghazi from their capitals although they're rarely cheap. Other airlines to consider include Blue Panorama Airlines (opposite; which offers return tickets for Rome-Tripoli for as low as €198), Point Afrique (left; which flies from Paris and Marseilles to Sebha), Afriqiyah Airways (opposite) and Libyan Arab Airlines (left). A return ticket for under €300 is generally an extremely good deal.

Eastern European travellers may want to consider flying from Sofia (Hemus Air; p232) or Belgrade (JAT Yugoslav Airlines; p232).

FRANCE

Lastminute (www.fr.lastminute.com in French) Online agency.

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr in French)

OTU Voyages (☎ 01 55 82 32 32; www.otu.fr in French) Student travel agency with 29 offices around the country; specialises in student and youth travellers.

Travelprice (http://voyages.travelprice.com in French) Online agency.

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 01 73 00 81 88; www.vdm.com in French)

GERMANY

Darr Travel Shop (☎ 089-28 20 32; Theresienstrasse 66, Munich) A great source of travel information and equipment.

Expedia (www.expedia.de in German) Online agency.

Lastminute (☎ 01805 284 366; www.lastminute.de in German) Online agency.

STA Travel (☎ 1805-45 64 22; www.statravel.de) An ever-reliable agency, with offices across Germany.

ITALY & SPAIN

Atrapalo (www.atrapalo.com) Good online Spanish booking agency.

Barcelo Viajes (☎ 902 116 226; www.barceloviajes.com in Spanish) Spaniards should consider this agency.

CTS Viaggi (☎ 06 462 0431; www.cts.it in Italian)

Travellers from Italy will want to check out this operator.

Despegar (www.despegar.es) Another good online Spanish booking agency.

NETHERLANDS

Airfair (☎ 020-620 5121; www.airfair.nl in Dutch) This agency is recommended.

Kilroy Travel Group (☎ 020-524 5100; www.kilroygroups.com) This excellent group offers discounted travel to people aged 16 to 33; it also has offices in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland.

My Travel (☎ 020-638 1736; www.mytravel.nl in Dutch) Dutch travellers will also find this to be a reliable source of discounted tickets, with 42 branches across the country.

Middle East

Libya is well-connected to Amman, Beirut, Damascus, Doha, Dubai, Istanbul, Jeddah and Riyadh with Libyan Arab Airlines or the national airlines of the country concerned.

One alternative, however, is to fly with Al-Buraq from Tripoli to Aleppo via Benghazi.

Sample one-way fares which we found within Libya include Istanbul (180LD) and Cairo (144LD).

The best place to pick up cheap tickets is in Turkey, especially from the travel agencies in Divan Yolu in Sultanahmet (Istanbul), which specialise in cheap airfares. Egypt is best avoided as hefty government taxes can make prices prohibitive.

UK

British Airways (London–Heathrow) and Afriqiyah Airways (London–Gatwick) both fly direct to Tripoli; Afriqiyah is generally much cheaper with fares from UK£230.

Discount air travel has always been big business in London; good places to try include the following (all have offices throughout the UK):

Flight Centre (☎ 0870 499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

STA (☎ 0870-160 0599; www.statravel.co.uk)

Traifinders (☎ 0845 050 5891; www.traifinders.com)

Advertisements for many further agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend newspapers, such as the *Independent* and the *Guardian* on Saturday and the *Sunday Times*, as well as in publications such as *Time Out*.

USA & Canada

There are no direct flights to Tripoli from the US or Canada – you'll need to fly to Europe and hook up with an onward connection there.

Council Travel (☎ 800-226 8624; www.ciee.org; 205 E 42 St, New York, NY 10017) America's largest student travel organisation has around 60 offices in the USA.

Call the head office for the office nearest you or visit its website.

STA Travel (☎ 800-777 0112; www.statravel.com) Has offices in many major US cities; call the toll-free ☎ 800 number for office locations or visit its website.

Travel CUTS (☎ 800-667 2887; www.travelcuts.com) Canada's national student travel agency; has offices in all major cities.

LAND

The most commonly used land borders for travellers are the coastal frontiers with Tunisia (Ras al-Jedir) and Egypt (Amsaad). At the time of writing, Libya's borders with Algeria, Niger, Chad and Sudan were closed to Western travellers, although these

borders open and close often, depending on the prevailing political winds. In all cases, check the latest situation with the relevant embassy or the Libyan authorities in Tripoli and, if the borders are open, make sure you have the necessary visas firmly ensconced in your passport before setting out – it's a long way to back track if there's some kind of problem.

Border Crossings

Libya's land borders with Tunisia (Ras al-Jedir; see p236) and Egypt (Amsaad; see right) are relatively hassle-free although customs searches of those travelling in their own vehicles are more rigorous; they're looking for alcohol above all else.

A representative from your Libyan tour company should be waiting for you at the immigration section on the Libyan side of the border. Their presence will ensure a smooth passage into Libya, unless of course your papers are not in order (see Visas, p227) or you're found to be carrying alcohol, in which case things will take longer. Again, carry the mobile-phone number of your guide or tour company representative in case they're not there waiting for you.

Car & Motorcycle

Drivers of 4WDs and campervans and riders of motorcycles will need the vehicle's registration papers, liability insurance, an international drivers' permit in addition to their domestic licence and a *carnet de passage en douane*. For more information on what you'll need to get across the border, see p239.

Algeria

Due to a dispute over the Libya–Algeria border close to Ghat (for more information see p195) in Libya's extreme southwest, the border was closed to travellers at the time of writing. If it reopens, roads lead from Ghat to Djanet and the Tassili-n-Ajjer. There's always talk of opening the crossing between Ghadames and Burj Messouda in the northwest of Libya, but for now it remains just talk.

Chad

The main Libyan–Chadian border post is close to the historically contested town of Aouzou in Chad, but it's years since this

border has been open to foreign travellers because of mines in the area and ongoing rebel activity on the Chadian side of the border.

Egypt

The Libyan–Egyptian border, 139km east of Tobruk and 12km west of Sallum in Egypt is Amsaad. This remote and, in summer, perishingly hot frontier is another busy crossing point, which one traveller described as having a 'Wild West atmosphere... dirty, chaotic and very busy'; bring your own water. Embarrassingly, however, foreign travellers are usually shepherded to the front of the considerable queue. We've never heard of anyone turning down such an offer as a matter of principle.

As your tour company will arrange all of your transport inside Libya, you don't need to worry about public transport on the Libyan side of the border. For the record, however, there are long-distance buses from Benghazi to Alexandria (50LD) and Cairo (60LD).

On the Egyptian side of the border, shared taxis shuttle between the frontier and Sallum (E£3 to E£4) where you can get buses (E£12) or service taxis (E£15) to Marsa Matruh.

Niger

The Libya–Niger border was closed to Western travellers at the time of research; it does open from time to time so check the situation in Tripoli before setting out. The border post is at the incredibly remote shacks of Tumu, 310km south of Al-Qatrun, although you may have to complete Libyan exit formalities in Al-Qatrun.

The route between Niger and Libya is only for serious desert travellers and for the thousands of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa making the dangerous journey north in search of work. The sandy journey would be madness in summer and at all times you'll need to be fully self-sufficient and aware of the risks involved.

Sudan

The Libyan–Sudanese land border was closed at the time of research due to the ongoing conflict across the border in the Darfur region of Sudan. Given that this conflict seems to be a long way from resolution,

the frontier is unlikely to open any time soon. For the record, the border post is in the remote southeast of the country, close to Jebel al-Uweinat, 325km southeast of Al-Kufra.

Tunisia

The Tunisian border crossing at Ras al-Jedir, 169km west of Tripoli, is the Libyan land border most frequented by Western travellers. Accustomed as they are to travellers, border officials on either side are generally quite friendly (although little English is spoken) and eager to get you on your way in the shortest time possible.

As with Egypt, because your tour company is responsible for arranging your transport inside Libya, you won't need to worry about public transport in Libya as they should be waiting for you on the Libyan side of the border. Buses run daily between Tripoli and Tunis (50LD from the Libyan side).

From the Tunisian side, you will need to take a shared taxi (known as a *louage* in Tunisia) or bus as far as Ben Guerdane which has a hotel and is 33km short of the border. From Ben Guerdane, a seat in a *louage* should cost no more than 12TD.

SEA

There are no scheduled ferry services connecting Libya with the outside world and the only way to enter and leave Libya by sea is aboard a cruise ship.

Travellers who want to bring their own vehicle to Libya usually do so by loading it (and themselves) aboard a ferry bound for Tunis (Tunisia) from France or Italy. If that's your plan, the following companies are good places to start:

Compagnie Tunisienne de Navigation (www.ctn.com.tn) Services from Marseilles or Nice to a number of Libyan ports, including Tunis, Sousse and Sfax.

SNCM (www.sncm.fr) French and Italian departures to Tunis.

Viamare (www.viamare.com) Departures from Civitavecchia, Genoa, Livorno, Naples, Palermo and Salerno to Tunis.

TOURS

European tour companies run professional tours of Libya and, in conjunction with their Libyan partners can arrange visas (see p227). These operators do, however, have set departure dates and less flexibility than

their Libyan counterparts in allowing you to custom-design your itinerary.

Australia

Few Australian companies offer tours to Libya, but it's easy enough to hook up with a UK agency. Companies offering tours: **Adventure Associates** (☎ 02-8916 3000; www.adventureassociates.com; Level 7, 12-14 O'Connell St, Sydney NSW 2000)

Intrepid (☎ 03-8602 0500; www.intrepidtravel.com; 360 Bourke St, Melbourne, Victoria 3004)

Middle East Tours (☎ 02-9605 3981; www.middleeasttours.com.au)

Passport Travel (☎ 03-9867 3888; www.travelcentre.com.au; Suite 11, 401 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne, Victoria, 3004)

Continental Europe

FRANCE

For advice from other travellers on making the choice on a tour company to Libya, see www.voyageforum.com. Some agencies recommended by travellers:

Ailleurs.com (☎ 0892 161 192; www.ailleurs.com in French)

Atalante (☎ 04 72 53 24 80; www.atalante.fr in French; 36 Quai Arloing, 69256 Lyon)

Couleurs Sables (☎ 06 13 61 55 32; www.couleurs-sables.com in French; Place Mailly, 66600 Rivesaltes)

Hommes et Montagnes (☎ 0438 86 69 19; www.hommes-et-montagnes.fr in French; 10 Blvd Gambetta, BP 122, 38001, Grenoble)

Point Afrique (☎ 01 44 88 58 39; www.point-afrique.com in French; 26 rue de la Grande Truanderie, 75001 Paris)

Voyailles (☎ 01 34 70 40 89; www.voyailles.fr in French; 69 rue Aurélien Cronnier, 60230, Chambly)

Zig-Zag Randonnées (☎ 01 42 85 13 93; www.zigzag-randonnees.com; 54 rue de Dunkerque, 75009 Paris)

GERMANY

Blue Planet Reisen (☎ 040-386 123 11; www.blue-planet-reisen.de in German)

Dabuka Expeditions (☎ 0605-987 98 96; www.dabuka.de; Feldwiesenstrasse 1, D-35647, Waldsolms)

Djoser (☎ 0221-920 15 80; www.djoser.de in German; Kaiser Wilhelm Ring 20, 50672 Köln)

ITALY

Antichi Splendori Viaggi (☎ 011-8126715; www.antichisplendori.it in Italian; Via Vanchlga 22a, 10124 Torino)

Best Tours (☎ 02-336331; www.besttours.it in Italian; Corso Sempione 36, 20154 Milano)

Exodus (☎ 072-130318; www.exodusviaggi.it in Italian; Corso XI Settembre 200, 61100 Pesaro)

Harmattan Tours (☎ 041-5420654; www.harmattan-tours.com in Italian; Via Orlanda 217-219, Tessera, Venezia)

Meta Mondo (☎ 041-8899211; www.metamondo.it in Italian; via Ca' Rossa 21A, 30174 Mestre)

NBTS Viaggi (☎ 011-0519575; www.nbts.it; Via Masena 48, 10128 Torino)

Osservando il Mondo (☎ /fax 030-3534778; www.osservandoilmondo.com in Italian; Via Boves 5, 25124 Brescia)

Shiraz Travel Tours (☎ 065-115708; www.shiraztravel.com in Italian; Via Tito Omboni 9, Roma)

Viaggi Dell'Elefante (☎ 06-6784541; www.viaggidellelefante.it in Italian; Via dei Condotti 61A, 00187 Roma)

ELSEWHERE

Afrika Tour (☎ 234 704 711; www.afrika-tour.cz in Czech; Voroněžská 20, 101 00 Prague, Czech Republic)

Anders Reizen (☎ 013-33 40 40; www.andersreizen.be in Flemish; Refugiestraat 15, 3290 Diest, Belgium)

Indigo Reisen (☎ 31 951 29 30; www.indigoreisen.ch in German; Dorfstrasse 84, Postfach 167, CH-3073 Gümligen, Switzerland)

SRC Cultuurvakanties (☎ 050-3 123 123; www.src-cultuurvakanties.nl in Dutch; Oude Boteringestraat 37-39, 9701 BR Groningen, The Netherlands)

Viajes Tuareg (☎ 932 652 391; www.viajestuareg.com in Spanish; Calle Consell de Cent 378, Barcelona, Spain)

UK

Ancient World Tours (☎ 020 7917 9494; www.ancient.co.uk; PO Box 838 Guildford GU3 3ZR)

Andante Travels (☎ 01722 713800; www.andante-travels.co.uk; The Old Barn, Old Rd, Alderbury, Salisbury SP5 3AR)

Caravanserai Tours (☎ 020 8855 6373; www.caravanserai-tours.com; 1-3 Love Lane, Woolwich, London SE18 6QT)

Cox & Kings (☎ 020 7873 5000; www.coxandkings.co.uk; Gordon House, 10 Greencoat Pl, London SW1P 1PH)

Dragoman (☎ 01728 861133; www.dragoman.com; Camp Green, Debenham, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 6LA)

Exodus (☎ 0870 950 0039; www.exodus.co.uk; Grange Mills, Weir Rd, London SW12 0NE)

Prospect Cultural Tours (☎ 01227 773 545; www.prospecttours.com; 94-104 John Wilson Park, Whitstable, Kent CT5 3QZ)

Responsibletravel.com (☎ 01273 600030; www.responsibletravel.com)

Silk Road and Beyond (☎ 020 7371 3131; www.silkroadandbeyond.co.uk; 371 Kensington High St, London W14 8QZ)

Simoon Travel (☎ 020 7622 6263; www.simoontravel.com)

USA & Canada

Bestway Tours & Safaris (☎ 1 800 663 0844; www.bestway.com; Suite 206, 8678 Greenall Ave, Burnaby, British Columbia V5J 3M6 Canada)

Mountain Travel Sobek (☎ 1-510-594-6000; www.mtsobek.com; Suite 4, 1266 66th St, Emeryville, CA 94608, USA)

GETTING AROUND

In this era of organised tours, if you're not driving your own vehicle, getting around Libya couldn't be easier because all transport within the country will be organised by your tour company. Most travellers to Libya get around by a combination of domestic flights, chartered buses and 4WDs. As you're extremely unlikely to be travelling by public transport while in Libya, our coverage of buses, minibuses and shared taxis in this chapter and throughout this book is restricted to general information only.

If you're bringing your own vehicle to Libya, you and/or your group must be at all times accompanied by a local representative or guide from the tour company that arranged your visa. In practical terms that means not much more than an extra body on board, although a good guide will greatly enhance your trip without interfering too much in it. Road conditions are generally good, although the incessant checkpoints, while painless and fewer in number than they used to be, can slow your journey.

AIR

Libya's domestic airline network seems to ebb and flow. Just when it looks like there are scheduled services to Ghadames and

LIBYA'S TRANSPORT NETWORK AT A GLANCE

- Domestic airports: Tripoli, Benghazi, Sebha, Lebreq and Al-Kufra
- Airports closed at time of writing: Ghadames, Ghat, Houn and Tobruk
- Railways: 0km
- Paved roads: 47,590km
- Unpaved roads: 35,610km
- Unmarked desert trails: endless

Ghat, the routes are closed without explanation. Tobruk's airport, meanwhile, was undergoing major renovations when we were there although it should reopen during the life of this book. As the closed airports represent some of the most far-flung Libyan destinations, this means that you'll spend a lot of time on often monotonous roads (the exception is the Benghazi–Al-Kufra service, which is a godsend).

Cancellations are more common from April through summer as the fiercely hot *ghibli* wind (for information see p216) can make flying hazardous. And if you're flying between Tripoli and Benghazi, keep an eye out the window for the ruins of Leptis Magna, which the planes sometimes fly over.

Airlines in Libya

At the time of writing, there were services from Tripoli (see p97) to Benghazi, Sebha and Lebreq (near Al-Bayda), with further services from Benghazi (see p131) to Sebha and Al-Kufra.

There are two airlines that fly domestically in Libya:

Al-Buraq Air (www.buraqair.com) Tripoli (☎ 021-4444811); Benghazi (☎ 061-2234469) Operates a Tripoli-Benghazi service that's more expensive but more reliable and comfortable than Libyan Arab Airlines. In Tripoli, its domestic services operate from Tripoli International Airport.

Libyan Arab Airlines Tripoli (☎ 021-3331143); Benghazi (☎ 061-9092064) The ageing workhorse of the Libyan skies, it's plagued by delays and even cancellations, but it's your only choice for Sebha and Al-Kufra.

If you're part of a large enough group with limited time and money to burn, you can reach Ghadames or Ghat by chartering a plane. An-Nakhl al-Khafeef, a subsidiary of Libyan Arab Airlines, runs a small number of 15-seater aircraft. A one-way flight from Tripoli to Ghadames costs 3500LD. Trying to book this through Libyan Arab Airlines is like the search for the Holy Grail so make the arrangements through your tour company.

BICYCLE

In this era of group tourism in Libya, it's rare to find cyclists traversing the roads, and indeed cycling is not a passion to which Libyans are generally predisposed. Although the roads are often well-surfaced

and flat (apart from in the Jebel Nafusa in the northwest and Jebel al-Akhdar in the northeast), the speed at which most Libyan traffic moves would make it an adventurous undertaking. Cycling lanes are also unheard of and even on some highways there is little additional space on the road outside the motor-vehicle lanes. Overtaking is also sometimes done on the inside with little forethought for two-wheelers that may be trying to stay out of trouble. If you do decide to cycle, you'll also need to be self-sufficient in spare parts, which, along with replacement bikes, can be hard to come by in Libya. *Always* wear a helmet.

BUS

Libya doesn't have the largest fleet of buses, but there are daily connections between the major cities and services along the coast are quite frequent. Beyond that, you'd be fortunate to find one travelling further south than Sebha. Most are air-conditioned, although the quality is variable, ranging from cramped buses well past their use-by date to those of more recent vintage and very comfortable. The two major companies are the government-owned An-Nakhl as-Seria (Fast Transport Company), and Al-Itihad al-Afriqi (the United Africa Company), which tends to have a slightly newer fleet. In Tripoli and Benghazi, these companies have depots close to the centre of town. Elsewhere, there are an insufficient number of departures to merit a dedicated bus station so bus-company offices are usually a stone's throw from the shared-taxi station.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The advantage of having your own vehicle, especially a 4WD, is that there are few limits on where you can go (one exception is the Tibesti region; see p206 for details). Until the Libyan Government decides to relax its visa regulations, you will need to be accompanied by at least one representative of the Libyan tour company who arranged your visa and who remains responsible for you for the duration of your stay, although this is unlikely to limit your freedom.

Indeed, if you're travelling in the desert, there's no substitute for an experienced local guide who knows the terrain. A Global Positioning System (GPS) can also be useful for pinpointing locations, but it can't

QADDAFI'S ROCKET CAR

In September 1999 at the Organisation of African Unity summit, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi unveiled his (or rather his scientists') latest invention – a prototype of the safest car on earth. The Saroukh al-Jamahiriya (Libyan rocket) is, dare we say it, surprisingly stylish and a far cry from the days when the coup leader got around in an old VW Beetle. The sporty lines (the front and rear are shaped like a rocket) and tinted windows are enhanced by a metallic shade of Libyan revolutionary green. Safety features included air bags, an in-built electronic defence system and specially designed collapsible bumper.

Libyan press reports, true to form, described the car as a 'revolutionary' moment in automotive history. A Libyan spokesman assured the sceptics that 'The invention of the safest car in the world is proof that the Libyan revolution is built on the happiness of man' and evidence that despite sanctions, Colonel G has been 'thinking of ways to preserve human life all over the world'. In a none-too-subtle play on words, the car's name was seen as proof that while other countries made rockets designed to kill, Libya designed them 'for humane and peaceful purposes'.

For all the fanfare, we're yet to see a single rocket car on Libya's roads.

tell you which route to take. Libyan guides weary of recounting stories of the know-more-than-the-local European drivers who think that with a GPS they can go anywhere only to lose half a day stuck in the sand. A good guide will know that not all sand dunes are the same: some areas in the Libyan Sahara, especially in the east in the Ramlat Rabyaneh (p207) or the Great Sand Sea (p155) but also elsewhere, consist of extremely fine, soft sand which makes for slow going and dramatically increases your fuel consumption.

Automobile Associations

You're unlikely to need to contact the **Automobile & Touring Club of Libya** (☎ 3605986; fax 3605866; Sharia Sayedy, Tripoli), unless bringing your own vehicle, but it is responsible for your local insurance while in the country and may be able to help out with any questions regarding vehicle documentation.

Bringing Your Own Vehicle

To enter Libya in your own vehicle, you'll need a number of documents:

- *Carnet de passage en douane* – a passport for your car; see p240 for details.
- International Driving Permit (IDP) – although most foreign licences are accepted in Libya, an IDP issued by your local automobile association is highly recommended.
- Vehicle registration documents – in addition to carrying all ownership papers, check with your insurer whether you're covered for Libya.

Upon entering Libya in your own vehicle, you'll also need to pay temporary membership of the Automobile & Touring Club of Libya (4WD/motorbike/campervan US\$50/50/100), local insurance (10LD per week for all kinds of vehicles) and local license or number plates for your vehicle which cost 110.50LD; upon returning the plates when you leave Libya, you'll receive a refund of 50LD.

Checkpoints

Checkpoints are a wearying feature of driving in Libya and while they are generally restricted to the roads into each town and major road junctions, their prevalence can considerably slow travel times.

It is rare that a checkpoint will, for foreign travellers, be anything more than a formality. On most occasions you may be asked for your carnet, passport or, if you're travelling as a part of a group, a copy of your itinerary. No matter how many times you have been waved through a checkpoint, never assume that you will be. Always slow down or stop until you get the wave from your friendly machine-gun-toting soldier.

There are two types of checkpoints. Those manned by the army (green uniforms) are on the lookout for people who haven't completed their military service, while the police (blue uniforms) are more concerned with flushing out illegal immigrants and drivers who have been involved in accidents or stolen cars. Tourists are rarely the target and there seems to have been a government directive to allow visitors to progress without delay.

CARNETS

A *carnet de passage en douane* is like a passport for your car, a booklet that is stamped on arrival and at departure from a country to ensure that you export the vehicle again after you’ve imported it. It’s usually issued by an automobile association in the country where the vehicle is registered.

Should the worst occur and your vehicle is irretrievably damaged in an accident or catastrophic breakdown, you’ll have to argue it out with customs officials. Having a vehicle stolen can be even worse, as you may be suspected of having sold it.

The carnet may also need to specify any expensive spare parts that you’re planning to carry with you (such as a gearbox), which is designed to prevent any spare part importation rackets. Contact your local automobile association for details about all necessary documentation at least three months in advance.

Driving Licence

An international driving licence is required for any foreign visitor who intends to drive a car in Libya, although it’s rarely checked other than perhaps at the border upon entry.

Fuel & Spare Parts

Petrol is ridiculously cheap, a fact that has encouraged a high rate of ownership in Libya (close to one car for every seven Libyans). ‘Normal’ petrol costs 0.15LD per litre, with diesel 0.14LD. Where else in the

world can you fill your car for around €3? When asking for directions to the nearest petrol station, you’ll need to ask ‘*wayn Shell?*’ Leadfree petrol is not available in Libya.

Libyans became masters of improvising without spare parts during the years of the embargo and as mechanics they have few rivals in the world. Spare parts for 4WDs are reasonably widely available for older-model vehicles, especially Toyota and Land Rover, but you should be self-sufficient in parts for newer or more-obscure model vehicles.

Hire

You’re unlikely to need to rent a car while in Libya as all transport should be arranged by your tour company and most cars come with a local driver attached. Renting from a local company without a driver usually costs 40LD per day.

Very few of the major international car-rental agencies operate in Libya. One exception is **Europcar** (Map p75; ☎ 021-4780906; www.europcar-libya.com; Corinthia Bab Africa Hotel, Souq al-Thalatha, Tripoli).

Insurance

For details on obtaining liability insurance upon your arrival in Libya, see p239.

Road Conditions

Libyan roads are generally good, although heavy truck traffic can lead to rapid deterioration on more frequented routes. This is particularly the case along the busy coastal highway. In particular, watch out for occasional potholes and cracks and always be careful when approaching bridges as many

LIBYAN ROADS – OUR WORST FIVE

While Libya’s roads generally present few problems, there are a few that we’ll be happy never to travel again.

- Ajdabiya to Al-Kufra (p132) – for the first 700km there’s nothing to see, while the last 200km into Al-Kufra is the worst road in Libya with crevasse-like potholes that make driving all but impossible. They’re fixing the road but it’ll take a while.
- Sebha to Houn – further advanced than the Al-Kufra repairs but still a bone-jarring, axle-threatening experience in the first third of the journey.
- Tobruk to Ajdabiya – a leading candidate for the most boring road in the world.
- Derj to Al-Qaryat – would probably win second prize in the same competition.
- Tripoli to Misrata – the road itself isn’t bad but the traffic is heavy, some lanes have deteriorated and so trucks use the only good lane. You should definitely avoid driving this road after dark.

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Ajdabiya	---																			
Al-Bayda	363	---																		
Al-Khoms	743	1106	---																	
Al-Kufra	905	1268	1648	---																
Benghazi	161	202	904	1066	---															
Derna	513	150	1256	1418	372	---														
Ghadames	1485	1848	731	2390	1646	1998	---													
Gharyan	870	1233	128	1776	1031	1383	615	---												
Ghat	1554	1917	1462	---	1715	2067	1425	1147	---											
Houn	672	1000	521	1542	798	1150	848	887	882	---										
Misrata	649	1012	94	1554	810	1162	825	222	1556	427	---									
Murzuq	1172	1535	893	---	1333	1685	1043	765	527	500	927	---								
Nalut	1138	1501	395	2043	1299	1651	336	288	1661	1034	489	1189	---							
Sebha	1002	1365	723	---	1163	1388	873	595	552	330	757	170	1019	---						
Sirt	400	763	343	1305	561	913	1085	471	1144	262	249	762	738	592	---					
Tobruk	372	292	1115	1277	494	142	1857	1242	1926	1044	1021	1544	1510	1374	772	---				
Tripoli	863	1226	120	1768	1024	1376	611	84	1342	641	214	960	275	790	463	1235	---			
Ubari	1192	1555	913	---	1353	1705	1063	785	362	500	947	165	1209	190	782	1564	980	---		
Zuara	972	1335	229	1877	1335	1485	535	193	1451	750	323	1069	199	899	572	1344	109	1089	---	
Zueila	1202	1565	923	---	1565	1715	1073	795	657	530	957	130	1219	200	792	1574	990	295	1099	---

entry/exit points have deteriorated to quite a bump on either side of the bridge.

Road Hazards

All road signs are in Arabic so it’s a good idea to familiarise yourself with the written Arabic for your destination and other towns en route – these are provided throughout the book alongside the name of each town.

If someone flashes their lights at you, it’s usually a warning of some impending danger up ahead, such as an accident or sheep or camels grazing by the roadside. Camels can be a particular problem and they’re at their most dangerous when on both sides of the road – slow to a crawl until you’re well past. Camels are also a big danger if you’re travelling desert roads at night.

Everywhere throughout the country, cars with a single (or no) headlight are a common hazard after dark. Sunset can also be a problem as farmers returning from the fields often amble onto major roads at a snail’s pace. Overtaking on blind corners is also more common than you’d like.

Sand blown across the road in southern and western Libya is also a problem.

Motorcyclists should be especially careful as Libyan drivers are not on the lookout for two-wheeled transport and rarely take such possibilities into account when overtaking.

Road Rules

Believe it or not, Libya does have road rules.

Driving is on the right-hand side of the road, and speed limits, which are rarely enforced, follow a set pattern with gradations depending on the type of road and car.

For the record, cars (including 4WDs) must stay on or below the following limits:

- 100km/h on highways
- 85km/h on main roads outside towns
- 70km/h on small roads outside towns
- 50km/h inside towns

The corresponding figures for larger vehicles (trucks, campervans and buses) must adhere to limits of 65/60/50/30km/h.

In reality, Libyan drivers generally drive along as fast as they think they can get away with. Fines are indeed the official punishment for speeding, but no Libyans we spoke to had heard of anyone getting one, nor did they know how much they amounted to.

Of far more credence than the official road rules are the unwritten ones. Many dual carriageways are punctuated with breaks in the roads where drivers undertake perilous U-turn manoeuvres. If you slow down too much, these drivers take that as permission to cross, but if you approach with a succession of short, quickly consecutive toots, they'll generally wait until you pass. The same applies to traffic entering from a side road – these drivers will generally expect you to watch out for them.

Parking restrictions also apply in most cities of any size and these are often enforced to the tune of a 30LD fine. The 'No Parking' areas are indicated by signs sporting a black circle with a white cross or red diagonal line. Be especially careful around Green Sq in Tripoli as the whole area can be cleared for public events and your car towed away.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. In Libya, given that you will be travelling around the country in the company of a guide and in transport organised by your tour company, it is extremely unlikely that you will have reason to hitch. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go. Women travellers in Libya should never hitch without a male companion.

Hitching among Libyans is relatively common along roads with little or no public transport, especially in the remote towns of the Fezzan and the quiet back roads of the Jebel Nafusa or Jebel al-Akhdar. If someone wants a lift, they'll stand by the side of the road with their arm extended and their open palm facing down. It would be unusual in Libya for owners of private vehicles to ask hitchers to pay.

LOCAL TRANSPORT Micro

There are no bus services within Libyan towns, but white-and-yellow micros (mini-buses) crisscross most towns, usually for half the price of a shared taxi on the same route. They usually congregate at the main shared-taxi station and follow roughly set routes, although they sometimes make small detours as demand requires. There are no timetables and micros usually don't leave the station until full. If the stations aren't convenient, stand on a main street en route to your general direction, hail down a micro and call out your destination as it slows.

Shared & Private Taxi

Libyan cities generally have plenty of shared taxis and they operate under the same system as the micros. While more expensive, shared taxis fill more quickly and can therefore be better if you're in a hurry and don't want to pay for a private taxi.

Private taxis are reasonably priced and journeys within towns, other than those to outlying airports, are unlikely to cost more than 2LD.

TAXI & SHARED TAXI

The yellow-and-white shared taxis are alternately called *siara al-arma*, *taksi moshtarak* or *saba'a taksi* (seven seater). This workhorse of the Libyan public transport system can be found anywhere where there's a paved road. They, and micros that operate on the same principle but take longer to fill, leave from designated areas that are often indistinguishable from parking lots and drivers shout out their destination to passers-by. Most leave not to a set timetable but when full.

Like shared taxis throughout the Arab world and Africa, Libyan shared taxis make no concessions to comfort and, although they don't cram you in quite as tight as in the African countries south of the Sahara, the absence of leg and shoulder room can still make for an uncomfortable journey.

As a general rule of thumb, shared-taxi fares cost 2.5LD per 100km or 0.5LD per 20km. Overcharging of foreigners is rare and any problems are more likely to arise from misunderstandings over language; few drivers speak anything other than Arabic.

Private taxis (black-and-white) are not really an economical way of getting around (eg a taxi from Tripoli to Nalut can cost 60LD), but they do enable you to dictate the journey.

TOURS

Organising your visa (see p227) and tour of Libya through a Libyan-based company has a number of advantages. For a start, most are more flexible in allowing you to tailor your itinerary and some operators (but not all) will happily organise tours for individual travellers or groups as small as two. Libyan companies also tend to be cheaper than international companies – remember international companies cannot travel to or within Libya without a local affiliate (ie a Libyan tour company) and so going with an international company usually means using two sets of bills. You can't cut out the middle man, so why not make him your sole guide?

If you go with a good company, everything is organised for you – hotel bookings, airport transfers, transport, visa applications and passport registration, guides for major sites – and included in the price, which can be calculated on a full- or half-board basis. Clearly, economies of scale demand that members of smaller groups will pay more per person.

We recommend that you contact a number of Libyan companies to see first of all which one answers (see No Answer, Try again, p228). All can arrange guides in most languages, especially English, Italian, French and, increasingly, Spanish.

The following companies are excellent places to start.

Ania Tours (☎ in Zuara 025-20436; www.ania.com)

Al-Muheet Tours (Ocean Tours; ☎ in Benghazi 061-9082084; info@almuheettours.net) The owner, Sami el-Gaibany has a reputation for running an efficient and flexible company.

Arkno Tours (☎ 021-4441452; www.arkno.com) Patchy record with lone travellers but long-standing company that works with Caravanserai Tours in the UK.

Bright Focus (☎ in Benghazi 061-9096608; www.brightfocus.com.ly)

Destination Libye (☎ in Tripoli 021-4779854; www.dlibye.com) Specialises in French-language tours.

Medusa Travel & Tourism Services (☎ mobile 0913158229; www.medusatours.com) Specialises in German-language tours.

Oea Net (☎ mobile 0913221338; www.oeanet.net) Works almost exclusively with Japanese groups.

Robban Tourism Services (☎ in Tripoli 021-4441530; www.robban-tourism.com) Outstanding and professional small company with flexible itineraries and good guides.

Hussein Founi should be your first port of call.
Sabri Tours & Travel (☎ in Tripoli 021-4775095; www.sabritours.com)

Sahara Friends Tours (☎ in Sebha 071-633354; www.saharafriendstours.com)

Sahara Link Travel (☎ in Tripoli 021-3343209; saharalink@hotmail.com)

Sari Tours (☎ in Tripoli 021-4873017; www.sarilibyatravel.com)

Sea & Desert Tours (☎ in Tripoli 021-4447864; www.sea-desert.net)

Shati Zuara Travel & Tourism (☎ mobile 0913222418; info@shati-zuara.de; www.shati-zuara.de)

Very good Libyan company with its main base in Germany.

Sukra Travel & Tourism (☎ in Tripoli 021-3340604; www.sukra-travel.com)

Taknes Co (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350526; fax 3350525) The owner is the helpful Ali Shebli.

Tilwan Tourism Services (in Tripoli ☎ 021-4836243; www.tilwan.com) Good for small-group Italian- or English-language tours.

Wings Travel & Tours (☎ in Tripoli 021-3331855; www.wingstours.com)

Winzrik Tourism Services (☎ in Tripoli 021-3611123; www.winzrik.com)

TRAIN

At the time of writing there were no rail services in Libya and the long-planned rail lines along the Libyan coast from Ras al-Jedir (Tunisia) to Amsaad (Egypt) and from Sirt to Sebha and beyond remain little more than barely discernible bumps in the landscape. Don't expect that to change in the foreseeable future.

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Health

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Prevention is the key to staying healthy while travelling in Libya, although given that most travellers spend no more than two weeks in the country, you'd be pretty unlucky to have any problems. The most common reason for travellers needing medical help is as a result of accidents – cars are not always well maintained and poorly lit roads are littered with potholes and other potential hazards. Medical facilities can be good in large cities, but in remoter areas may be more basic.

BEFORE YOU GO

A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save you a lot of trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip; carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses (and take your optical prescription with you); and carry a first-aid kit.

Travellers can register with the International Association for Medical Advice to Travellers (IMAT; www.iamat.org). Its website can help travellers to find a doctor with recognised training. Those heading

off to very remote areas may like to do a first-aid course (Red Cross and St John Ambulance can help), or attend a remote medicine first-aid course such as those offered by the Royal Geographical Society (www.rgs.org).

Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is a good idea.

If carrying syringes or needles, also carry a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures (in Libya doctors usually expect payment in cash); it's also worth ensuring your travel insurance will cover repatriation home or to better medical facilities elsewhere. Your insurance company may be able to locate the nearest source of medical help, or ask at your hotel. In an emergency contact your embassy or consulate. Your travel insurance will not usually cover you for anything other than emergency dental treatment. Not all insurance covers emergency aeromedical evacuation home or to a hospital in a major city, which may be the only way to get medical attention for a serious emergency.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (www.who.int/) recommends that all travellers regardless of the region they are travelling in should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, as well as hepatitis B. While making preparations to travel, take the opportunity to ensure that all of your routine vaccination cover is complete. The consequences of these diseases can be severe and outbreaks do occasionally occur in Libya.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Following is a list of other items you should consider packing in your medical kit.

- Antibiotics (if travelling off the beaten track)
- Antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- Acetaminophen/paracetamol (Tylenol) or aspirin
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- Antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- Antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- Steroid cream or cortisone (allergic rashes)
- Bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- Adhesive or paper tape
- Scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- Thermometer
- Pocket knife
- DEET – containing insect repellent for the skin
- Permethrin – containing insect spray for clothing, tents, and bed nets
- Sun block
- Oral rehydration salts
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Syringes and sterile needles (if travelling to remote areas)

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. For further information, the Lonely Planet website (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The World Health Organization (www.who.int) publishes a superb book, *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is MD Travel Health (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (www.cdc.gov) is a very useful source of traveller's health information.

TRAVEL HEALTH WEBSITES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available.

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel/)

Canada (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/index.html)

UK (www.dh.gov.uk)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

FURTHER READING

Recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood (Oxford University Press), *International Travel Health Guide* by Stuart R Rose, MD (Travel Medicine Inc) and *The Travellers' Good Health Guide* by Ted Lankester (Sheldon Press), an especially useful health guide for volunteers and long-term expatriates working in the Middle East.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of deep vein thrombosis is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle, or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and you may have difficulty breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of deep vein thrombosis on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and re-adjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side-effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN LIBYA

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Libya's health-care system is patchy. It can be excellent in Tripoli and other large cities and there are hospitals throughout the country, even in many small towns, although conditions can be pretty basic once you venture beyond the major cities. Many Libyan doctors did their training in the West. Reciprocal arrangements with Libya rarely exist and you should be prepared to pay for all medical and dental treatment, although medical care is cheap – expect to pay no more than 5LD to 10LD for a standard consultation.

In remote areas, medicine, and even sterile dressings or intravenous fluids, may need to be bought from a local pharmacy. Nursing care may be limited or rudimentary as this may be something families and friends are expected to provide. The travel assistance provided by your insurance may be able to locate the nearest source of medical help; otherwise ask your tour company. In an emergency contact your embassy or consulate.

Standards of dental care are variable and there is a risk of hepatitis B and HIV transmission via poorly sterilised equipment. And keep in mind that your travel insurance will not usually cover you for anything other than emergency dental treatment.

For minor illnesses such as diarrhoea, pharmacists can often provide valuable advice and sell over-the-counter medication. They can also advise when more specialised help is needed.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

The following infectious diseases are extremely rare in Libya.

Diphtheria

Diphtheria is spread through close respiratory contact. It causes a high temperature and severe sore throat. Sometimes a membrane forms across the throat requiring a tracheostomy to prevent suffocation. Vaccination is recommended for those likely to be in close contact with the local population in infected areas. The vaccine is given as an injection alone, or with tetanus, and lasts 10 years.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is spread through contaminated food (particularly shellfish) and water. It causes jaundice, and although it is rarely fatal, can cause prolonged lethargy and delayed recovery. Symptoms include dark urine, a yellow colour to the whites of the eyes, fever and abdominal pain. Hepatitis A vaccine (Avaxim, Vaqta, Havrix) is given as an injection: a single dose will give protection for up to a year while a booster 12 months later will provide a subsequent ten years of protection. Hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines can also be given as a single dose vaccine (Hepatyrix or Viatim).

Hepatitis B

Infected blood, contaminated needles and sexual intercourse can all transmit hepatitis B. It can cause jaundice, and affects the liver, occasionally causing liver failure. All travellers should make this a routine vaccination. (Many countries now give hepatitis B vaccination as part of routine childhood vaccination.) The vaccine is given singly, or at the same time as the hepatitis A vaccine (Hepatyrix). A course will give protection for at least five years. It can be given over four weeks, or six months.

HIV

Although official figures suggest that Libya's HIV prevalence rate is just 0.3% of the population, a risk (albeit small) remains of contracting HIV from poorly sterilised equipment or inadequately screened blood.

Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is spread through the excreta of infected rodents, especially rats. It can cause hepatitis and renal failure that may be fatal. It is unusual for travellers to be affected unless they are living in poor sanitary conditions.

Malaria

While we've never heard of travellers contracting malaria, mosquitos carrying the disease are found in some oases of the Sahara; for example, occasional cases have been reported in the Egyptian oasis of Siwa, close to the Libyan border. We're yet to meet a traveller whose doctor has advised antimalarial medication when travelling to

Libya, but for up-to-date information about the risk of contracting malaria in Libya, contact your local travel health clinic.

Anyone who has travelled in a country where malaria is present should be aware of the symptoms of malaria. It is possible to contract malaria from a single bite from an infected mosquito. Malaria almost always starts with marked shivering, fever and sweating. Muscle pains, headache and vomiting are common. Symptoms may occur anywhere from few days to three weeks after the infected mosquito bite. The illness can start while you are taking preventative tablets if they are not fully effective, and may also occur after you have finished taking your tablets.

Poliomylitis

Libya is officially free of polio, which is generally spread through contaminated food and water, although check with your doctor for the latest situation. Polio is present, though rare, throughout the Middle East. It is one of the vaccines given in childhood and should be boosted every 10 years, either orally (a drop on the tongue), or as an injection. Polio may be carried asymptotically, although it can cause a transient fever and, in rare cases, potentially permanent muscle weakness or paralysis.

Rabies

Spread through bites or licks on broken skin from an infected animal, rabies (present in Libya) is fatal. Animal handlers should be vaccinated, as should those travelling to remote areas where a reliable source of post-bite vaccine is not available within 24 hours. Three injections are needed over a month. If you have not been vaccinated you will need a course of five injections starting within 24 hours or as soon as possible after the injury. Vaccination does not provide you with immunity, it merely buys you more time to seek appropriate medical help.

Schistosomiasis

Otherwise known as bilharzia, this is spread through the freshwater snail. It causes infection of the bowel and bladder, often with bleeding. It is caused by a fluke and is contracted through the skin from water contaminated with human urine or faeces. Paddling or swimming in suspect freshwater

lakes or slow running rivers should be avoided, which shouldn't be too difficult to do as Libya has very little freshwater of any kind (the Saharan lakes are almost invariably salty). There may be no symptoms. Possible symptoms include a transient fever and rash, and advanced cases of bilharzia may cause blood in the stool or in the urine. A blood test can detect antibodies if you have been exposed and treatment is then possible in specialist travel or infectious disease clinics.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is spread through close respiratory contact and occasionally through infected milk or milk products. BCG vaccine is recommended for those likely to be mixing closely with the local population. It is more important for those visiting family or planning on a long stay, and those employed as teachers and health-care workers. TB can be asymptomatic, although symptoms can include cough, weight loss or fever months or even years after exposure. An X-ray is the best way to confirm if you have TB. BCG gives a moderate degree of protection against TB. It causes a small permanent scar at the site of injection, and is usually only given in specialised chest clinics. As it's a live vaccine it should not be given to pregnant women or immunocompromised individuals. The BCG vaccine is not available in all countries.

Typhoid

This is spread through food or water that has been contaminated by infected human faeces. The first symptom is usually fever or a pink rash on the abdomen. Septicaemia (blood poisoning) may also occur. Typhoid vaccine (Typhim Vi, Typherix) will give protection for three years. In some countries, the oral vaccine Vivotif is also available.

Yellow Fever

Yellow fever vaccination is not required for Libya. However, the mosquito that spreads yellow fever has been known to be present in some parts of North Africa. It is important to consult your local travel health clinic as part of your predeparture plans for the latest details. For this reason, any travellers from a yellow fever endemic area may need

to show proof of vaccination against yellow fever before entry. This normally means if arriving directly from an infected country or if the traveller been in an infected country during the last 10 days. We would recommend however that travellers carry a certificate if they have been in an infected country during the previous month to avoid any possible difficulties with immigration. There is always the small possibility that a traveller without an up-to-date certificate will be vaccinated and detained in isolation at the port of arrival for up to 10 days, or even repatriated. The yellow fever vaccination must be given at a designated clinic, and is valid for 10 years. It is a live vaccine and must not be given to immunocompromised or pregnant travellers.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution containing salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment but, if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as Loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours, is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Heat Illness

Heat exhaustion is a particular risk in Libya and occurs following heavy sweating and excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt. This is particularly common in hot climates when taking unaccustomed exercise before full acclimatisation. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. Dehydration is already happening by the time you feel thirsty – aim to drink sufficient water such that you produce pale, diluted urine. The treatment of heat exhaustion consists of fluid replacement with water or fruit juice or both, and cooling by cold water and fans. The treatment of the salt loss component consists of salty fluids as in soup or broth, and adding a little more table salt to foods than usual.

Heatstroke is much more serious. This occurs when the body's heat-regulating mechanism breaks down. Excessive rise in

body temperature leads to sweating ceasing, irrational and hyperactive behaviour and eventually loss of consciousness and death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is an ideal treatment. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement by intravenous drip is usually also required.

Insect Bites & Stings

Mosquitoes may not carry malaria but can cause irritation and infected bites. In Libya, mosquito bites can occur just about anywhere around sunset and at night, but are especially prevalent in Saharan oasis towns (especially camps) and even in the Jebel Acacus. Using DEET-based insect repellents will prevent bites.

Bees and wasps only cause real problems to those with a severe allergy (anaphylaxis). If you have a severe allergy to bee or wasp stings you should carry an adrenaline injection or similar.

Sand flies are located around the Mediterranean beaches. They usually only cause a nasty itchy bite. Bites may be prevented by using DEET-based repellents.

Scorpions are frequently found in arid or dry climates – anywhere in the Sahara or Jebel Nafusa, especially when the weather's warm. They can cause a painful bite which is rarely life threatening.

Bed bugs and scabies are extremely rare in Libyan hotels. They lead to very itchy lumpy bites. Spraying the mattress with an appropriate insect killer will do a good job of getting rid of them. Scabies are also frequently found in cheap accommodation. These tiny mites live in the skin, particularly between the fingers. They cause an intensely itchy rash. Scabies is easily treated with lotion available from pharmacies; people who you come into contact with also need treating to avoid spreading scabies between asymptomatic carriers.

Snake Bites

Do not walk barefoot or stick your hand into holes or cracks. Half of those bitten by venomous snakes are not actually injected with poison (envenomed). If bitten by a snake, do not panic. Immobilise the bitten limb with a splint (eg a stick) and apply a bandage over the site, apply firm pressure, similar to a bandage over a sprain. Do not

apply a tourniquet, or cut or suck the bite. Get the victim to medical help as soon as possible so that antivenin can be given if necessary.

Water

Tap water in Libya is technically safe to drink, but we recommend that you stick to bottled water for the duration of your visit to prevent diarrhoea and avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (iodine tablets). Also avoid dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Do not drink water from rivers or lakes, this may contain bacteria or viruses that can cause diarrhoea or vomiting.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

All travellers with children should know how to treat minor ailments and when to seek medical treatment. Make sure the children are up to date with routine vaccinations, and discuss possible travel vaccines well before departure as some vaccines are not suitable for children aged under one year.

In hot, moist climates any wound or break in the skin may lead to infection. The area should be cleaned and then kept dry and clean. Remember to avoid contaminated food and water. If your child is vomiting or experiencing diarrhoea, lost fluid and salts must be replaced. It may be helpful to take rehydration powders for reconstituting with boiled water. Ask your doctor about this.

Children should be encouraged to avoid dogs or other mammals because of the risk of rabies and other diseases. Any bite, scratch or lick from a warm blooded, furry animal should immediately be thoroughly cleaned. If there is any possibility that the animal is infected with rabies, immediate medical assistance should be sought.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Emotional stress, exhaustion and travelling through different time zones can all contribute to an upset in the menstrual pattern. If using oral contraceptives, remember some antibiotics, diarrhoea and vomiting can stop the pill from working and lead to the risk of pregnancy – remember to take condoms with you just in case. Condoms should be kept in a cool dry place or they may crack and perish.

Emergency contraception is most effective if taken within 24 hours after unprotected sex. The International Planned Parenthood Federation (www.ippf.org) can advise about the availability of contraception in different countries. Tampons and sanitary towels are not always available outside of major cities in the Middle East.

Travelling during pregnancy is usually possible but there are important things to consider. Have a medical check-up before embarking on your trip. The most risky times for travel are during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, when miscarriage is most likely, and after 30 weeks, when complications such as high blood pressure and premature delivery can occur. Most airlines will not accept a traveller after 28 to 32 weeks of pregnancy, and long-haul flights in the later stages can be very uncomfortable. Antenatal facilities in Libya are reasonable but you should always think carefully about whether you want to negotiate the major cultural and language differences from home. Taking written records of the pregnancy, including details of your blood group are likely to be helpful if you need medical attention while away. Ensure your insurance policy covers pregnancy delivery and postnatal care, but remember insurance policies are only as good as the facilities available.

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