

Guinea

Guinea's landscape is spectacular. The country has some of the world's few remaining tropical dry forests, and the rainforests that remain in the south are lush and verdant and full of wildlife. The waterfall-rich Fouta Djalon plateau in the west has breathtaking scenery and some of the best hiking in West Africa. Guinea is not well endowed with beaches, but those it has are superb; and often empty.

Matching the country's beauty is its vibrant culture. Across Guinea, there's a strong tradition of music and dance and visitors have many opportunities to see performances. Also, thanks largely to Sekou Touré's impassioned defiance of the French, most Guineans are as proud of their nationality as they are of their ethnicity. They have stood together through the difficult decades of independence instead of turning on each other.

Guinea is not as prepared for tourism as some other West African countries, and beyond the capital, creature comforts are sparse. You won't always have to rough it upcountry, but as long as you are prepared for the possibility, a visit here can be very rewarding.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 245,855 sq km
- **Capital** Conakry
- **Country code** ☎ 224
- **Famous for** Bauxite; Camara Laye; Circus Baobab; Les Ballets Africains
- **Languages** French, Malinké, Pulaar (Fula) and Susu
- **Money** Guinean franc (GF); US\$1 = GF4310; €1 = GF5120; CFA1 = GF7.8
- **Population** 9.5 million
- **Visa** Required in advance



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Fouta Djalon** (p418) Hiking in the green heartland of the Peul people.
- **Sobané** (p431) and **Îles de Los** (p417) Lazing on palm-fringed sands.
- **Bossou** (p431) Coming face to face with chimpanzees.
- **Conakry** (p415) Listening to live music.
- **Forêt Classée de Ziama** (p428) Tracking elephants in the virgin rainforest.

ITINERARIES

- **One week** Spend a day or two in **Conakry** (p409) and the rest of your time exploring the mountains, waterfalls and villages of the **Fouta Djalon** (p418). If beaches are more your thing, head to **Îles de Los** (p417) and **Sobané** (p431) instead of the mountains.
- **Two weeks** Add **Upper Guinea** (p424) or the **Forest Region** (p428) to the one-week itinerary, perhaps roaming **Parc National du Haut Niger** (p425) for a few days. If you hustle, you could see the highlights of both regions. Or stay in the **Fouta Djalon** (p418) and strike out on an extended village-to-village trek.
- **One month** This is enough time to venture through all four of the country's regions if travelling by public transport, or start in the capital and circle the Fouta Djalon by bike (see p438).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Guinea is one of the wettest countries in West Africa. Rainfall along the coast averages 4300mm a year, half of which falls in July and August, while the central mountainous region receives about 2000mm, more evenly distributed between May and October. Temperatures average 30°C along the coast, where it is always humid, and can fall to 10°C and below at night in Mali-ville and other highland areas during the winter (see climate charts p813).

The best time to visit is November and December, after the rains but before the dusty harmattan winds (December to March) spoil the views. The rains sometimes make minor roads impassable, though there's something to be said for visiting the Fouta Djalon when it's wet. The rains, which generally don't last very long, make the waterfalls more explosive and the countryside more verdant while the clouds lower the daytime temperatures.

HOW MUCH?

- **Raffia backpack** GF3000
- **100km bush taxi ride** GF13,000
- **World Cola** GF1000
- **Two pagnes (about 2m) of hand-woven indigo cloth** GF30,000
- **A night at a music show** GF5000

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** GF3800
- **1.5L of bottled water** GF1500
- **Bottle of Skol** GF2300
- **Souvenir T-shirt** GF25,000
- **Bag of groundnuts** GF100

HISTORY

Rock paintings found in the Fouta Djalon show Guinea was inhabited 30,000 years ago. By 2000 years ago, the Coniagui, Baga and other small tribes had established farming and fishing settlements in the northwest. These were slowly pushed aside by influxes of Susu and Malinké following the fall of the Ghana Empire. From the 13th century AD, the Malinké established dominance over much of Upper Guinea and by the 14th century all of Guinea had been incorporated into the powerful Mali Empire. (For more information about early empires, see p33.) Around the 15th century – about the same time that Portuguese navigators first reached the Guinean coast – Peul (or Fula) herders started migrating into the area and settled in the mountainous Fouta Djalon region where they established an influential theocracy.

In the 19th century, the Guinean hero Samory Touré led the fight against French colonialists. He was captured in 1898 and resistance gradually withered. Once the railway from Conakry to Kankan was completed, France began serious exploitation of the area, which by then had become part of French West Africa.

The most famous Guinean of all was Sekou Touré, a descendant of Samory Touré who was born into a poor Malinké family. After becoming the foremost trade unionist in French West Africa he led the fight for independence. In 1956 he led a breakaway

movement from the French parent union to form a federation of African trade unions.

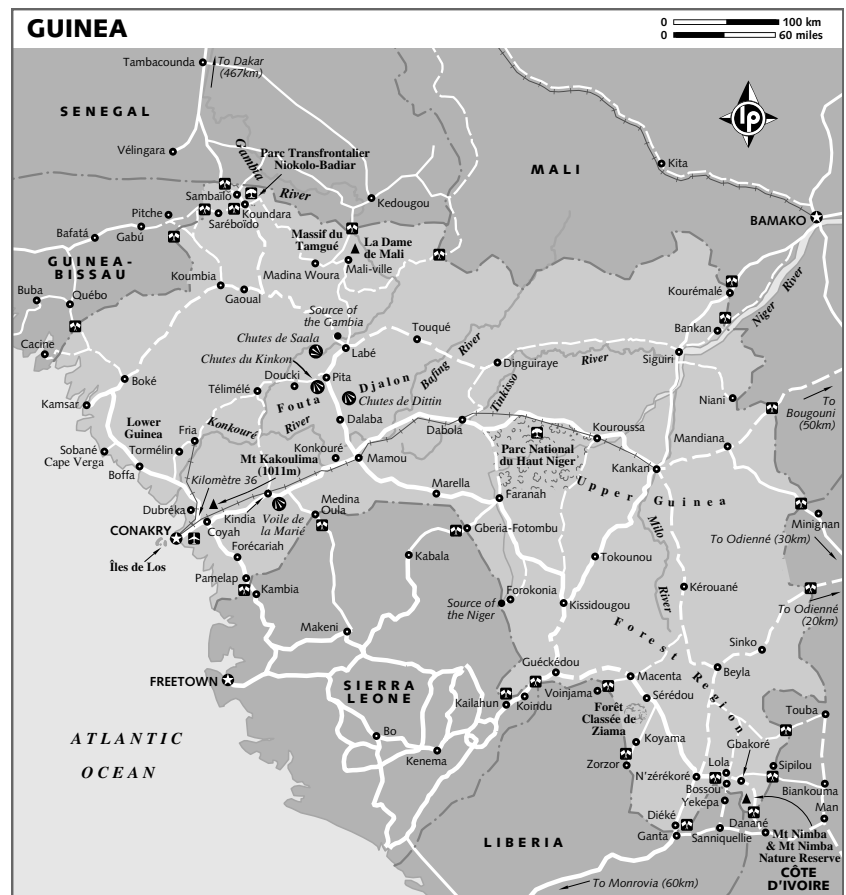
Independence

In 1958 Charles de Gaulle offered the French colonies in West Africa a choice between autonomy as separate countries in a Franco-African community or immediate independence. Sekou Touré declared that Guinea preferred 'freedom in poverty to prosperity in chains' and was the only leader to reject de Gaulle's proposal. Thus, Guinea became the first French colony to gain independence. Sekou Touré became an African legend in his own time and, as leader of Guinea's only viable political party, the country's first president.

De Gaulle, infuriated, immediately withdrew the French colonial administration. French private citizens fled with massive amounts of capital, precipitating an economic collapse in Guinea.

Wanting nothing more to do with the CFA franc, which was linked to the French franc, Touré introduced a new currency, the syli. But with French economic assistance gone, the new country badly needed foreign aid. Touré turned to the USSR, but the link was short-lived.

The government continued on a socialist road, however, and in 1967 commenced a campaign of cultural revolution, with state-run farms and weekly meetings of revolutionary units. It was an unmitigated disaster.



As many as one million Guineans fled into neighbouring countries, while remaining farmers were able to work only one-quarter of the country's cultivable land.

Reign of Terror

Sekou Touré appointed Malinké to all major government positions and treated his political opponents with cruelty. Following an unsuccessful Portuguese-led invasion in 1970, he became paranoid, often speaking of a plot against his regime. Waves of arrests and executions followed; torture became commonplace. In 1976 Touré charged the entire Peul population with collusion in an attempt to overthrow the government. Thousands of Peul went into exile.

Toward the end of his presidency, Touré changed many of his policies. A major influence was the 1977 Market Women's Revolt, in which several police stations were destroyed and three governors killed, as part of the fight against state plans to discourage private trade.

Sekou Touré died of heart failure in 1984. Days later a military coup was staged by a group of army colonels, including Diarra Traoré, who became prime minister, and Lansana Conté, the new president. They denounced Touré and promised an open society and restoration of free enterprise.

The Second Republic

The change of government opened up Guinea, but tensions among leaders created problems. Following Traoré's failed coup in 1985, Conté was forced to face the urgent matter of reforming the economy. He introduced austerity measures to secure International Monetary Fund (IMF) funding and a new currency, the Guinean franc.

A new constitution in 1991 created a multiparty political system. Within months there were 34 legalised parties and eight presidential candidates for the 1993 election, which Conté won with just over 50% of the ballot against a divided opposition and despite accusations of fraud.

Conté's control was challenged in 1996, when an army mutiny, instigated by soldiers protesting poor salaries, threatened to become a full-blown coup. With political savvy, Conté quelled the uprising, but not before several dozen civilians were killed and the presidential palace was torched.

The 1998 presidential elections were considered freer than those of 1993, but proceeded in much the same vein: the campaign period was marred by widespread violence, military interference of opposition party rallies, and arrests of opposition supporters. On election day the country's borders were closed and irregularities (generally favouring Conté) were evident in polling stations. The following day, Alpha Condé, candidate of the leading opposition party, was arrested in Lola and charged with a slew of offences – including, ironically, attempting to overthrow the government. Two other opposition candidates were placed under house arrest while the results were announced: Conté had won again with 56% of the vote. The results were disputed by most observers.

Instability in the Neighbourhood

Guinea was plagued with violence in 1998 and 1999, when cross-border raids by Sierra Leonean and Liberian rebels (and possibly Guinean dissidents) in the southeast resulted in dozens of deaths. Tension continued into 2000, when unidentified men from across the border in Liberia attacked the Guinean border town of Massadou, killing almost 50 people.

The world took notice days later when a UNHCR employee was killed, along with several others, in a raid on Macenta. By December, Guéckédou was a battle zone, and attacks on Macenta, Kissidougou and other small towns near the border were frequent. The crisis was compounded by the fact that refugee camps in the area were either destroyed in the process or else deliberately targeted by Guineans in retribution for the attacks. Thousands of refugees were trapped in the bush, while others fled further north in Guinea or to other countries. Things gradually quietened down in 2001, but over 1000 people had died in the fighting.

Guinea Today

In November 2001 a nationwide constitutional referendum, also marred by irregularities, repealed the two-term limit for presidents and lengthened the term from five to seven years, effectively setting up Conté as president for life. Not surprisingly, he won the December 2003 election. Key opposition leaders, citing government

obstruction, boycotted both this and the earlier parliamentary election. Conté, a chain-smoking diabetic, appeared in public just once during the campaign and has been rumoured to be on his death-bed several times since.

In January 2005 shots were fired at the presidential motorcade, though Conté was unhurt. Alpha Condé, who spent two years in prison before being pardoned, returned from exile in France in July. Three months later, he and other opposition leaders, united under the Front République pour l'Alternance Démocratique (FRAD) banner, called for the ailing Conté's resignation, for the sake of the nation, and proposed a transitional government. Conté ignored their advice, though he did allow local elections in December.

Today Guinea faces an unknown future. The economy is faltering and Conté appears not to have planned for his succession. Some observers, including the international, nonprofit International Crisis Group, say Guinea is in danger of becoming a failed state. Others cite the Guineans' unity and abhorrence of violence and predict that whatever happens will be peaceful.

THE CULTURE

When Guinean women get together they complain about the rapid rise of prices in the market. With men, the conversation invariably turns to football. Both topics reflect the harsh reality of life in Guinea these days. While men have always talked about football, there was once also plenty of debate about politics and corruption. It's not the fear of the police state that has silenced them; they've just grown tired of the topics.

Despite a wealth of resources (over 30% of the world's bauxite supply, for instance), 40% of the population lives below the poverty line. Nobody expects life to change much when a new dictator (democracy is just a dream) takes over, though many figure it just has to get better. Guineans await their new future eagerly, anxiously...and silently.

Population

Guinea's main tribal groups are Peul (about 40% of the population), Malinké (about 30%) and Susu (about 20%). Fifteen other groups, living mostly in the Forest Region, constitute the rest of the population. Susu

predominantly inhabit the coastal region, Peul the Fouta Djallon and Malinké the north and centre. About 50,000 Liberian refugees remain, mostly in the southeast and Conakry, and repatriation continues apace. Non-Africans, mostly French and Lebanese, total about 10,000.

RELIGION

About 85% of the population are Muslims, 8% are Christians, and the remainder follow traditional religions. Most of the Christians are in Conakry and the Forest Region while the animists are mostly in the Forest Region and, to a lesser degree, Upper Guinea. While devoted followers of traditional beliefs continue to decline in number, the magic of the past is still respected by many Muslims and Christians: traditional medicines are common and sacred forests respected.

There is little religious discord in the country and mixed families are common. Some Muslims have even begun to celebrate Christmas.

ARTS

Arts & Craftwork

In the Fouta Djallon there are many textile cooperatives where you can see the production of a variety of indigo cloths. In the south you can watch women making mud-cloth, as most travellers call it. (Actually there is no mud involved: the earthy browns come from kola nuts and tree bark. Guineans call it forest cloth.) Masks and statues are vital to traditional religions but rarely seen by outsiders except in museums, especially since Sekou Touré was an ardent iconoclast. Modern artists have little opportunity to make a living from their work, though this is slowly changing. Painting is becoming more popular and a new breed of sculptors working with scrap metal has emerged in some cities.

Music & Dance

Traditional music and dance have flourished in Guinea, partly due to government subsidies during the Sekou Touré era. This cultural heritage is accessible to visitors in Conakry, where performances are often held at the Palais du Peuple (p415) and Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen (p415) as well as restaurants and nightclubs. One of the best known exports from Guinea is Les Ballets Africains, acclaimed as much for its music

as its movement. Earning its own international reputation is the energetic Circus Baobab. Early musical groups like Bembeya Jazz, Super Boiro and the all-female Les Amazonas de Guinée recorded on the state-owned Sylphone record label and were among the most popular groups in Africa. For more about Guinea's music scene see the Music of West Africa chapter (p58).

Literature

Guinea's most famous cultural figure, Camara Laye, has been described as 'the first writer of genius to come out of Africa'. Several of his books are available in English including his autobiographical first effort, *The Dark Child* (AKA *The African Child*): it offers fascinating insights into Malinké traditions. A couple of Tierno Monenembo's books have been translated into English, such as *The Oldest Orphan*, but not *Cinema*, his best-known work.

Cinema

Guinea has a limited cinematic oeuvre, though it features two of Africa's most controversial films. Mohamed Camara's *Dakan* (1997) is the first feature film about homosexuality from sub-Saharan Africa. Director David Achkar's search for answers about his father, executed by Sekou Touré, is documented in *Allah Tantou* (1991). Both are in French, but available on tape with English subtitles. French Director Laurent Chevalier adapted *The Dark Child* for the screen using members of the author's family.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Guinea has four distinct zones: a narrow coastal plain, the Fouta Djallon plateau, northeastern dry lowlands and the Forest Region of the southeast. The Fouta Djallon plateau, rising to over 1500m, is the source of the Gambia and Senegal Rivers and of much of the Niger (although the actual source of the Niger River lies to the south, near the Sierra Leone border). Southeastern Guinea is hilly and heavily vegetated, although little virgin rainforest remains.

Wildlife

Large animals are rarely sighted, though waterbucks, bongos, buffalos, baboons, leopards and lions wander the forests while

crocodiles, manatees and hippopotamuses swim the rivers. The abundant birdlife includes brown-cheeked hornbills, long-tailed hawks, grey parrots and Nimba flycatchers. Two amphibians of note, both of which live on Mont Nimba, are the goliath frogs, which can weigh three kilograms, and the Nimba toads, which bear live young.

Guinea is one of West Africa's last strongholds for chimpanzees. One group living near Bossou got a lot of press in 2005 after a Japanese researcher documented that they not only knew how to detect and destroy traps but taught this skill to others. Because Guinea shares borders with Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, two countries that permit ivory sales, its already small elephant population is especially endangered.

National Parks & Reserves

Guinea has many designated protected areas (*forêts classée*), although there is little enforcement of environmental regulations. The Mount Nimba Nature Reserve in the far southeast, on the Côte d'Ivoire border, is a Unesco World Heritage Site, but this didn't stop the government from opening an iron mine on the mountainside. Nearby is Forêt Classée de Ziama, where the rainforest remains pristine (for now, anyway) and elephants are often spotted. The future of the two national parks, Parc Transfrontalier Niokolo-Badiar, near Koundara, and Parc National du Haut Niger, northeast of Faranah, is unclear due to lack of funding. Inquire at the **Direction Nationale des Forêts et de la Faune** (Map pp410-11; Route de Donka, Conakry) before making a trip to either.

Environmental Issues

Guinea's environmental record is atrocious. Most animal populations are declining and even basic data on much of the flora and fauna has never been gathered. The primary concern is deforestation. The departure of most refugees has eased the problem of unsustainable slash-and-burn agriculture, though logging continues largely unchecked and has proceeded so rapidly in the south that the Forest Region really ought to adopt a new name. On the coast, much of the mangrove forest has been cleared for rice production and overfishing is a growing problem. Large mining

companies have pledged to improve their practices and there is some evidence this is happening.

FOOD & DRINK

Guinean food is not the best of the west. Despite the abundance of peppers for sale in the markets, most cooks spare the spice. Thankfully, if the food is a little bland for your tastes you can usually get a pepper sauce or some crushed pepper to add to your bowl. Outside Conakry there are few proper restaurants (except those at hotels and they mostly serve European-style dishes) though most towns have one or two basic eating houses doing cheap meals of rice and sauce and lots of street food vendors. Rice is reserved for breakfast and lunch while nights are all about grilled meat. The most common sauces are made of manioc leaves (*feuille de manioc*) and groundnuts (*patate*).

Although Nescafé is available everywhere, Guinea is fortunate enough to have a real coffee tradition: *café noir* is a bit like espresso, and is served in small cups with lots of sugar. Guinea has two main beers – Skol, a light lager, and Guiluxe, a darker brew. European beers are available at most Conakry bars and restaurants.

CONAKRY

pop 2 million

Historically, Conakry was one of colonial France's major ports in West Africa, but it has been a very long time since it wore the 'Paris of Africa' label. Today, even with an ongoing facelift, it's still a long way from regaining it and many travellers head up-country as fast as they can.

There is nothing really wrong with Conakry – it's calmer, cleaner and safer than many other West African capitals and getting around is easy because most traffic is limited to a few main roads – but it is certainly short of must-sees and must-dos; unless you consider the palm-fringed beaches of the Îles de Los a part of the city.

But Conakry's many good restaurants, live music and vibrant neighbourhood life make it well worth spending a few days here before you explore the rest of Guinea. These more subtle charms are likely to grow

on you and many people end up loving the city by the time they leave.

ORIENTATION

La ville (downtown; Map pp410–11), an island until the late 19th century, centres on Ave de la République: banks, airline offices and several restaurants are on or around this street. About 10km northeast, the colourful Taouyah *quartier* (neighbourhood), is livelier than the centre at night. Further out (Map p412) are the well-to-do Ratoma, Kipé and Kaporo *quartiers* with many hotels and restaurants.

The city is divided into five main communes: Kaloum covers downtown; Dixinn runs from Cameroun to Minière; Ratoma, a sprawling district that includes the Taouyah, Ratoma, Kipé and Kaporo *quartiers*; Matam, on the south side, contains Coléah and Madina; and Matoto is out by the airport and continues far inland.

The main streets are the Autoroute, Route du Niger and Route de Donka. Route du Niger runs into Ave de la République in town and into the Autoroute at the airport, and Route de Donka branches off the Autoroute at the Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen and then continues into Ratoma. Conakry's location on a narrow peninsula means the city – now home to 20% of Guinea's population – suffers horrible rush hour traffic.

Maps

Libraries, *papeteries* and Ave de la République street vendors sell Conakry maps for about GF15,000.

INFORMATION

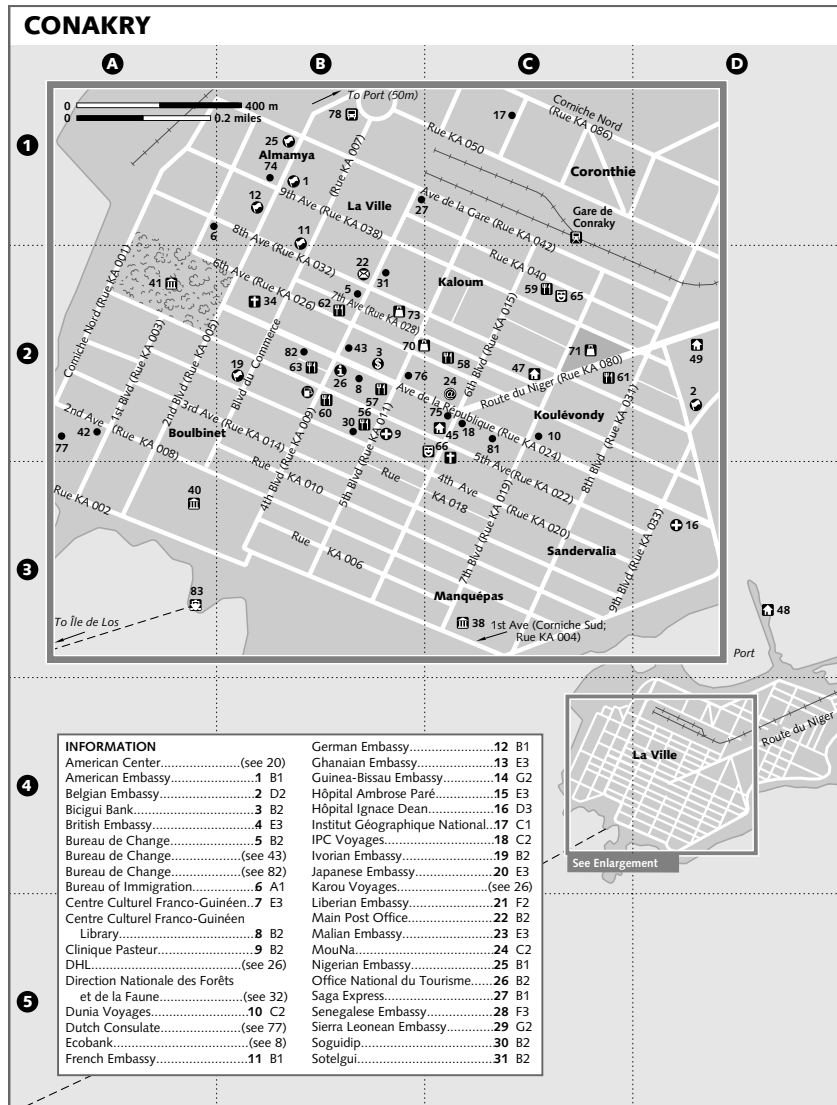
Bookshops

Soguidip (Map pp410-11; 4th Ave, La ville) Has books in French, including works by Guinean authors as well as many French magazines and some in English. Their newsstand by the Hyper-Bobo Supermarket carries the *International Herald Tribune*.

Cultural Centres

American Center (Map pp410-11; ☎ 454486; Corniche Sud, Coléah; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 7.30am-1pm Fri)

Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen (Map pp410-11; ☎ 013-409625; Corniche Nord, Tumbo; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, closed Aug) The centre also runs a library (Map pp410-11) on Ave de la République.



INFORMATION	
American Center.....(see 20)	German Embassy.....12 B1
American Embassy.....1 B1	Ghanaian Embassy.....13 E3
Belgian Embassy.....2 D2	Guinea-Bissau Embassy.....14 G2
Bicigui Bank.....3 B2	Hôpital Ambrose Paré.....15 E3
British Embassy.....4 E3	Hôpital Ignace Dean.....16 D3
Bureau de Change.....5 B2	Institut Géographique National..17 C1
Bureau de Change.....(see 43)	IPC Voyages.....18 C2
Bureau de Change.....(see 82)	Ivorian Embassy.....19 B2
Bureau of Immigration.....6 A1	Japanese Embassy.....20 E3
Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen..7 E3	Karou Voyages.....(see 26)
Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen	Liberian Embassy.....21 F2
Library.....8 B2	Main Post Office.....22 B2
Clinique Pasteur.....9 B2	Malian Embassy.....23 E3
DHL.....(see 26)	MouNa.....24 C2
Direction Nationale des Forêts	Nigerian Embassy.....25 B1
et de la Faune.....(see 32)	Office National du Tourisme.....26 B2
Dunia Voyages.....10 C2	Saga Express.....27 B1
Dutch Consulate.....(see 77)	Senegalese Embassy.....28 E3
Ecobank.....(see 8)	Sierra Leonean Embassy.....29 G2
French Embassy.....11 B1	Soguidip.....30 B2
	Sotelgui.....31 B2

Internet Access

Cybercafés are all over the city, and connections are fast. The following are large with modern computers, open daily and have air-conditioning.

Cyber Ratoma (Map pp412; Route de Donka, Ratoma)

MouNa (Map pp410-11; Ave de la République, La ville)

Medical Services

There are many good pharmacies along Ave de la République.

Clinique Pasteur (Map pp410-11; ☎ 747576) This clinic in the centre is good, though for anything serious you'll probably need to get to Dakar or Europe.

Hôpital Ambrose Paré (Map pp410-11; ☎ 011-211320; Dixinn) Considered the best in Guinea.



SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Botanical Garden.....32 E3	Camp Boiro.....33 E3
Cathédrale Sainte-Marie.....34 B2	Garnal Abdel Nasser University of Conakry.....35 F2
Grande Mosquée.....36 F3	Jardin 2 Octobre.....37 E3
Musée National.....38 C3	Oppe Atelier.....39 E4
Palais des Nations.....40 A3	Palais Présidentiel.....41 A2
Woodcarvers.....42 A2	Woodcarvers.....43 B2

SLEEPING	
Hôtel Camayenne.....44 E3	Hôtel Central.....45 C2
Hôtel du Golfe.....46 G1	Hôtel du Niger.....47 C2
Hôtel Petit Bateau.....48 D3	Maison d'Accueil.....49 D2

EATING	
A-Z.....(see 29)	Al Forno.....50 E3
Belvédère.....51 G2	Chez Sylvie.....52 E3
Family Choice.....53 G1	Hyper-Bobo.....54 E3
Indochine.....55 G1	Jbara.....56 B2
La Gondole.....57 B2	La Petite Bateau.....(see 48)
Le Cédre.....58 C2	Le Gentilhomme.....59 C2
Le Soft.....60 B2	Le Soguidip.....61 C2
Pâtisserie Centrale.....62 B2	Pâtisserie du Damier.....61 C2
Restaurant Chinois.....62 B2	Rice Women.....63 B2

ENTERTAINMENT	
Atlantis.....64 E3	Circus Baobab.....65 C2
Fourchette Magique.....66 C2	La Paillette.....67 E3
Palais du Peuple.....68 E4	Siège des Ballets Africains.....69 F3

SHOPPING	
CAAF (Women's Cloth Coop).....70 B2	Marché du Niger.....71 C2
Marché Madina.....72 G3	Papeterie Centrale.....73 B2

TRANSPORT	
Air France.....74 B1	Air Ivoire.....75 C2
Air Sénégal International.....76 B2	Avis.....77 A2
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Europcar.....(see 44)	Gare Voiture Matam.....79 H2
Gare Voiture Siguiri.....80 G3	Hertz.....81 C2
Mondial Tours.....82 B2	Pirogues to Iles de Los.....83 A3
Slok Air.....(see 18)	

Money

Men offering to change money line Ave de la République, though it is best to go to one of the bureaux de change. There are several along 4th Blvd.

Bicigui (Map pp410-11; Ave de la République) The main branch changes travellers cheques and has an ATM (available 24 hours) that works with Visa cards.

Ecobank

(Map pp410-11; Ave de la République) Just across the street, from Bicigui, this bank has better hours (open Saturday) and better exchange rates, but they still fall below what you will get from private money-changers.

Post

DHL (Map pp410-11; 4th Blvd, La ville)

GUINEA

GUINEA

Main post office (Map pp410-11; 4th Blvd, La ville; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, until 3pm Sat) To collect a letter from the disorganised poste restante you must open an account (GF12,000).

Saga Express (Map pp410-11; 4th Blvd, La ville) The agent for FedEx.

Telephone & Fax

Downtown you'll probably be approached by guys who run illicit phone services with international prices around GF1000 per minute.

Sotelgui (Map pp410-11; fax 453670; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) Faxes can be received for GF2000 per page and sent for GF8000 per page at this office, though they no longer handle phone calls.

Tourist Information

Office National du Tourisme (Map pp410-11; ☎ 455163; outour@sotelgui.net.gn; 2nd fl, Karou Voyages Bldg, Ave de la République, La ville) It's an office rather than a welcome centre, but the folks are friendly.

Travel Agencies

The following agencies, all on Ave de la République, are long established and very professional.

Dunia Voyages (Map pp410-11; ☎ 454848, milkaloga@yahoo.fr)

IPC Voyages (Map pp410-11; ☎ 455662; www.ipctravel.net/ipcgn.htm)

Karou Voyages (Map pp410-11; ☎ 452042, karou.voyagegn2003@yahoo.com)

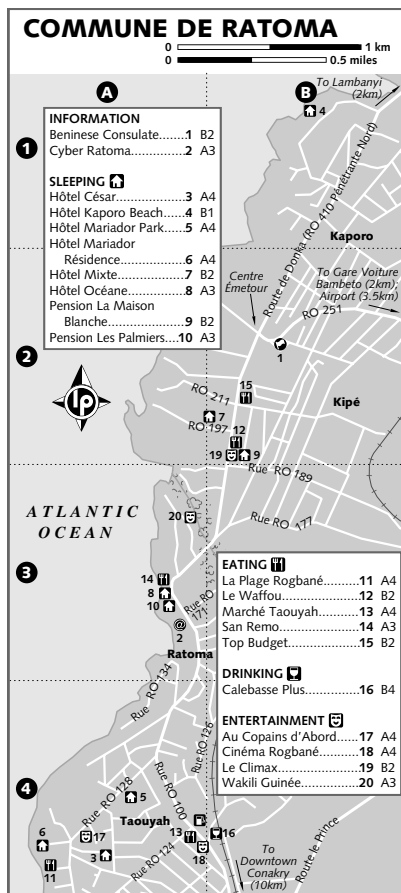
Visa Extensions

Bureau of Immigration (Map pp410-11; ☎ 441339; 8th Ave) Visas can be extended for up to three months for GF80,000.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Conakry is pretty safe by African standards, but the usual big-city precautions apply. The places you're most likely to have trouble with petty street crime are the airport and the markets, especially Madina. At night, the whole Madina *quartier* has a bad reputation for crime, though things have gotten better as of late. Conakry's frequent traffic jams make it easy for bag snatchers to reach in vehicle windows, so keep hold of your belongings.

After midnight, checkpoints are set up at Place du 8 Novembre (Map pp410-11) and the Japanese embassy (Map pp410-11), the two routes to and from downtown, and it's common for the soldiers manning them to



seek bribes. As long as you have your papers in order, you shouldn't have to pay if you're riding in a taxi. In your own car, most people simply pay GF1000 or GF2000 up front to avoid protracted discussion. If the soldiers are drunk the going rate is GF5000.

SIGHTS

Musée National (Map pp410-11; ☎ 415060; 7th Blvd, La ville; admission GF1000; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) is the country's largest collection of masks, statues and musical instruments. It's modest, but interesting. Woodcarvers and drum-makers ply their trades on the museum grounds.

Financed primarily by Saudi Arabia and inaugurated in 1984, the impressive **Grande Mosquée** (Map pp410-11; Autoroute, Camayenne) has

an inner hall capable of accommodating 10,000 worshippers. Although visitors are not usually allowed inside, you can inquire at the Islamic Centre next door about arranging a tour. Sekou Touré's grave is in a small gazebo on the grounds.

Not as impressive as the mosque, Conakry's yellow and red **Cathédrale Sainte-Marie** (Map pp410-11; Blvd du Commerce, La ville) is nevertheless a beautiful building. Behind the Cathedral is the Palais Présidentiel.

Intended to be the venue for the Organisation of African Unity conference in 1984, which was cancelled when Sekou Touré died, the grand **Palais des Nations** (Map pp410-11; quartier de Boulbinet, La ville) served as the president's office until being destroyed in the February 1996 army rebellion. It's in ruins. Near the palace are 50 Moorish-style villas, built to house African presidents during the conference and now used as residences and offices.

Oppo Atelier (Map pp410-11; Corniche Nord, Tumbo; ☎ 8am-6pm) is an association of welders that makes funky sculptures from scrap metal near the Palais du Peuple. You can watch the statues being made and if you bring a picture they will do custom work.

The two large and interesting mosaics at the **Gamal Abdel Nasser University of Conakry** (Map pp410-11; Route de Donka, Dixinn) are worth a look.

Many families gather in **Jardin 2 Octobre** (Map pp410-11; Corniche Nord, Tumbo) on weekends.

Surrounding the Direction Nationale des Forêts et de la Faune, the **Botanical Garden** (Map pp410-11; Route de Donka, Camayenne) is the coolest place in the city, though not the cleanest.

COURSES

The **Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen** (Map pp410-11; ☎ 013-409625; Corniche Nord, Tumbo) arranges drum and dance lessons.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

If you are here during the week-long **Guinea Festival** (see p438) you will have the chance to see Les Ballets Africains and other top groups perform.

SLEEPING Budget

Inexpensive lodging is scarce in Conakry, and most of what exists is in Ratoma, a 30-minute taxi ride from the city centre.

Maison d'Accueil (Map pp410-11; ☎ 343655, traore_celestine@yahoo.fr; Route du Niger, La ville; s/d with fan from GF30,000/45,000, s/d with air-con GF50,000/75,000; ☎ ☎) With rooms so clean you could eat off the floor, the Catholic Mission is the best of the budget accommodation and, unusually, it is right in the centre of town, but you are unlikely to get in without booking well in advance. Rooms at the back face a tranquil yard.

Pension La Maison Blanche (Map p412; signposted off Route de Donka, Kipé; r with fan GF40,000; ☎) This simple hotel is in a quiet location and is excellent value. You'll often hear the Amoussou drum and dance troupe practicing next door – they welcome visitors.

Hôtel du Niger (Map pp410-11; ☎ 414130; 6th Blvd, La ville; r with fan GF35,000, r with air-con 45,000-50,000; ☎ ☎) Rooms at this, the only other cheap accommodation in the centre, are musty and

CAMP BOIRO

Although over 20 years have passed since Sekou Touré's death, his legacy continues. Some knowledge of his era is important if you want to understand present-day Guinea.

A good place to start is Camp Boiro (Map pp410-11), in the centre of Conakry on Route de Donka. Called Garde Républicaine on some maps, this military base rapidly became synonymous with the worst atrocities carried out during Touré's 'reign of terror'. From 1960 until Touré's death in 1984, thousands of prisoners were tortured or killed at Camp Boiro, including many prominent figures. Every sector of society was affected, and most Guineans you meet can tell of a family member or friend who was there. Many prisoners were held for years in isolation; others were kept in a horrifying cement holding-pen open to the elements until they died.

Boiro was not the only camp of this kind in Guinea; there was another notorious one in Kindia, as well as smaller camps throughout the country. The bodies of many of those who died at Boiro have been lost. Others are buried in unmarked graves at the overgrown Nongo cemetery on the outskirts of town beyond Kaporo. The present government is not eager to discuss this part of Guinea's history, but in 1998 a group of organisations associated with family members of victims succeeded in walling off a cemetery in Boiro to commemorate those who died.

ragged, but generally clean. The bar can get pretty noisy.

Hôtel Mixte (Map p412; ☎ 280644; Rue RO 197, Kipé; r with fan GF30,000; (P)) Like most of the cheap places hidden off Route de Donka in Ratoma, the clientele here generally rents by the hour, but its okay for a night or two. Single women, however, may want to look elsewhere.

Midrange

Pension Les Palmiers (Map p412; ☎ 421103; Route de Donka, Ratoma; s/d GF100,000/120,000; (P) (S)) Known to most as Pension Ghussein, after the delightful French owner, Les Palmiers is as homey as they come. The seaside patio is great for breakfast and sunsets.

Hôtel Kaporo Beach (Map p412; ☎ 527978; signposted off Route de Donka, Kaporo; r GF90,000; (P) (S) (W)) Not only are rooms bright and spotless, but they come with a swimming pool and a view that will make you forget you're in a city. The restaurant is good too.

Hôtel Petit Bateau (Map pp410-11; ☎ 013-406275, www.hotelpetitbateau.com; port de plaisance; s/d GF155,000/220,000, ste 245,000-280,000; (P) (S) (W)) Nice rooms with nice views; Petit Bateau takes full advantage of its seaside location.

Hôtel Mariador Résidence (Map p412; ☎ 011-333535, residence@mariador.com; off Rue RO 128, Taouyah; s GF120,000-140,000, d GF140,000-160,000; (P) (S) (W)) This popular hotel has a seaside terrace, a pool (GF15,000 for nonguests) and comfortable rooms. The most expensive rooms have sea views.

Hôtel Mariador Park (Map p412; ☎ 229740, park@mariador.com; Rue RO 128, Taouyah; r GF132,000-180,000; (P) (S)) Despite the higher prices, the Mariador Park is a small step down from the Résidence, but still good. Rooms are spacious and clean and the higher priced ones have sitting rooms and kitchens.

Hôtel Océane (Map p412; ☎ 422022; Route de Donka, Ratoma; s/d incl breakfast GF150,000/175,000; (P) (S) (W)) This is a nice-looking place on the ocean, where waves crash up to the large swimming pool, but make sure everything in your room works before handing over your francs.

Hôtel César (Map p412; ☎ 221067; off Rue RO 124, Taouyah; r GF100,000; (P) (S)) The César is a homey little place and decent enough for the price.

Hôtel du Golfe (Map pp410-11; ☎ 421394; off Route de Donka, Minière; s GF65,000-75,000, d 70,000-80,000, ste GF125,000; (P) (S)) Nothing fancy, but the rooms

here are good value and the place is as professionally run as more expensive hotels.

Hôtel Central (Map pp410-11; ☎ 431250; 6th Blvd, La ville; s GF160,000-200,000, d 180,000-220,000; (P) (S) (W)) The large rooms at this downtown hotel have balconies and plenty of fixings, though the price is a little high for what you get.

Top End

Hôtel Camayenne (Map pp410-11; ☎ 012-664848, info@camayenne.net; Corniche Nord, Camayenne; s GF560,000-720,000, d GF640,000-800,000; (P) (S) (W)) All 96 of the Camayenne's comfortable, fully equipped rooms overlook the ocean, and the pleasant pool and bar area catch sea breezes and sunsets. Besides the swimming pool, fitness centre and tennis courts, Camayenne has a little beach.

EATING & DRINKING La Ville

Places with good street food for less than GF3000 include Marché du Niger (Map pp410-11) and the stalls at the intersection of Corniche Nord and Blvd du Commerce. At lunch time, you'll find a slew of women serving rice at several (often hidden) spots just south of Ave de la République.

Le Gentilhomme (Map pp410-11; Rue KA 040; meals GF15,000-30,000; (S) lunch & dinner) Gentilhomme doesn't look like much from the outside, but the bamboo, thatch and calabash interior invites you to stick around a while; as does the wide variety of African dishes.

Pâtisserie le Damier (Map pp410-11; Route du Niger; meals GF12,000-40,000; (S) breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) This place serves some of the best French cuisine in the city and successfully pulls off a Parisian vibe. The handmade chocolates are expensive, but worth it, as is the all-you-can-eat Saturday brunch.

Le Cédre (Map pp410-11; 7th Ave; meals GF17,000-27,000; (S) lunch & dinner) With the best Middle Eastern food in town, Le Cédre is always busy.

Le Petit Bateau (port de plaisance; meals GF15,000-30,000; (S) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Famous for seafood, naturally, but you can also eat Asian and Italian favourites under the thatch roofs while enjoying the cool ocean air.

La Gondole (Ave de la République; meals GF2500-30,000; (S) breakfast, lunch & dinner) La Gondole has a full menu, but it's really all about the ice cream, which comes in 20 flavours includ-

ing banana and chewing gum and is fairly good: at GF5000 per scoop it ought to be.

Pâtisserie Centrale (Map pp410-11; Ave de la République; meals GF5000-30,000; (S) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place has lots of sweets as well as fast food like shwarma and pizza slices.

Le Soft (Map pp410-11; 4th Blvd; meals GF5000-10,000; (S) lunch & dinner) Crowded little Le Soft serves large plates of Guinean, Ivorian and Senegalese dishes and packs them in for the flavour, not the décor.

Restaurant Chinois (Map pp410-11; 6th Ave; meals GF5000-30,000; (S) lunch & dinner) This pleasant restaurant has a monstrous menu and a mostly Asian clientele. It's the best Chinese food downtown.

Dixinn

Chez Sylvie (Map pp410-11; fronting Hôtel Camayenne; meals GF4000-6000; (S) dinner) Chez Sylvie is one of several little simple rice bars on this end of the street that prepare the best-quality *attiéké* (cassava couscous) in town.

Al Forno (Map pp410-11; ☎ 011-589482; Rue DI 011, Camayenne; meals GF10,000-26,000; (S) lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) This cute little place has crepes and brick-oven pizzas; and they deliver.

Indochine (Map pp410-11; Rue DI 777, Minière; meals GF23,000-34,000; (S) lunch Tue-Sun, dinner daily) Indochine serves delectable dishes from China, Thailand and Vietnam and features one of the classiest dining rooms in Conakry.

Belvédère (Map pp410-11; Route de Donka, Bellevue; meals GF8000-32,000; (S) dinner) The food – sandwiches, steak, pizza – is nothing special, but this brightly lit open-air place is a lot of fun at night. The playground equipment entertains the kids and there is sometimes live music on weekends for the adults.

Ratoma

Plenty of good street food vendors front the Marché Taouyah (Map p412), especially in the evening. Hôtels Océane, Kaporo Beach and Mariador Residence all draw diners as much for the seaside settings as the food.

Le Waffou (Map p412; off Route de Donka, Kipé; meals GF5000-20,000; (S) lunch & dinner) Le Waffou, a colourful spot with tables under thatch-roofed huts, serves delicious Ivorian food, including banana *fufu* (pounded cassava). The Amoussouu drum and dance troupe performs at 8pm on Friday nights.

San Remo (Map p412; Route de Donka, Ratoma; meals GF15,000-30,000; (S) dinner Wed-Sun) A quiet little

place in Ratoma with a brick oven that just might make Guinea's best pizza.

La Plage Rogbané (Map p412; near Rue RO 128; Taouyah; meals GF10,000-20,000; (S) lunch & dinner) This stretch of beach at the end of an unmarked alley was cleaned up (well, sort of) so people could use it, though the water is pretty dirty. The bar is aimed right at the sunset and they serve surprisingly good seafood.

Calebasse Plus (Map p412; Rue de Donka, Taouyah) No longer a live music hotspot, this animated bar is still a good place for a drink.

Supermarkets

Well-stocked (but expensive) supermarkets include **A-Z** (Map pp410-11; Carrefour Bellevue), **Family Choice** (Map pp410-11; Minière), **Hyper-Bobo** (Map pp410-11; Camayenne), **Jbara** (Map pp410-11; downtown) and **Top Budget** (Map p412; Kipé).

ENTERTAINMENT

Conakry has *beaucoup de* night spots, most out in Ratoma, that get busy around 11pm. Saturday is the busiest night. Cover charges start around GF5000, more on weekends.

You chance of seeing a performance by Les Ballet Africains, the national dance company, or the renowned Circus Baobab are pretty slim, but when they aren't touring the world you are welcome to drop by their practice spaces. You can watch them practice on weekday mornings at **Siège des Ballets Africains** (Map pp410-11; off Corniche Sud, Coléah). **Circus Baobab** (Map pp410-11; Rue KA 040) has its home base downtown. They rehearse Monday to Saturday mornings and share their space with the Fatou Abou drum and dance troupe who practice in the afternoon.

Live Music

Wakili Guinée (Map p412; signposted off Route de Donka, Ratoma) Opened by local musicians, Wakili plans to feature drum, balafon (xylophone) and *kora* (a harp-like instrument) players on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. They also intend to open some budget-priced guestrooms with air-conditioning.

Fourchette Magique (Map pp410-11; 6th Blvd, La ville) An intimate place downtown with live jazz Wednesday through Sunday night.

Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen (Map pp410-11; Corniche Nord, Tumbo) Every Wednesday is Café Concert night, with free live music and there are sometimes performances by local and visiting artists on other nights.

Au Copains d'Abord (Map p412; Rue RO 128, Taouyah) The live music, sometimes played by blind musicians, goes well with the pizzas at this lively spot.

La Paillotte (Map pp410-11; Corniche Nord, Camayenne) Once the stage of choice for Guinea's old-school stars, Paillotte now has a mix of old and new artists most Saturdays.

Palais du Peuple (Map pp410-11; Corniche Nord; Tumbo) The place for special events, whether it's a Guinean women's rap festival or a touring act down from Paris.

Dancing

Atlantis (Map pp410-11; Corniche Nord, Tumbo) The Hôtel Riviera Royal's flashy nightclub is an expat favourite.

Le Climax (Map p412; Route de Donka, Kipé) A long-running night spot that once appealed to the younger set, but is now trying to reinvent itself for an older crowd.

Cinemas

Near the Marché Taouyah, the recently renovated **Cinéma Rogbané** (Map p412; Route de Donka, Taouyah) has shows most evenings. The Centre Culturel Franco-Guinéen and the American Center (see p409) also frequently show films, both Western and African.

SHOPPING

Marché Madina (Map pp410-11; Madina) is one of West Africa's largest markets and there is little you can't find, including some talented thieves. A walk through the **Marché du Niger** (Map pp410-11) is an experience.

The **Centre d'Appui à l'Autopromotion Féminine** (CAAF; Map pp410-11; 5th Blvd, La ville) women's co-operative outlet has a huge selection of interesting tie-dyed cloth. The numerous vendors opposite Hôtel Camayenne sell all the usual crafts while the shops around the CAAF have a smaller selection but higher quality. In general, it's better to buy baskets, textiles and other crafts upcountry, as quality is as good or better and prices are lower. Several woodcarving shops are found around town.

Papeterie Centrale (Map pp410-11; 8th Ave, La ville) has the city's best postcards.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Conakry has the only functioning airport in the country, though at the time of research there was talk of resuming flights

to Kankan, Labé, N'zérékoré and Siguiiri. When available, domestic flights use the *aérogare nationale* near the international airport. For details of international flights to/from Conakry see p436.

Bush Taxi, Minibus & Bus

Domestic destinations, and some foreign ones, are served by two *gares voitures*: Bambeto and Matam (Map pp410-11). In terms of destinations served, they're nearly the same (big buses to Kankan, Boké and N'zérékoré only use Matam). The big difference is that Bambeto is paved and orderly while Matam is a bit busier so cars often fill faster. Bush taxis coming into Conakry drop passengers off along the main roads and don't necessarily go to the *gare voiture*. For a few thousands francs (it's best to arrange this at your point of departure when everyone else in the car will keep the driver honest on the price) you can usually convince your driver to take you right to your hotel.

Leaving Guinea, there are several taxis daily from each *gare voiture* for Freetown, Sierra Leone (GF55,000, seven hours) and Diaoubé, Senegal (GF100,000, two days). A bus also goes to Freetown (GF60,000) from Matam on Tuesday and Friday. For Bamako, Mali (GF110,000, 24 hours), cars use the Gare Voiture Siguiiri (Map pp410-11) in the Madina market (see also left) and the three-day marathon to Monrovia (GF150,000) begins at the Gare Voiture de Matoto. See also p436.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Chartering a taxi between downtown and the airport shouldn't cost more than about GF15,000 (GF20,000 to GF25,000 at night). You can also catch a shared taxi from just outside the airport to most destinations in the city.

Bus

Though the bus (GF400) is the slowest way to get around and there aren't very many of them, when every taxi that has passed you by for the last 20 minutes is full you may want to jump on. Buses run along Route de Donka in Ratoma as well as up the Autoroute past the airport. You can catch buses for both places downtown at the roundabout opposite the port.

Car

Prices and terms between these companies vary widely though you can expect Hertz to be the lowest. Be sure to inquire about what is and is not included in the price.

Avis (Map pp410-11; ☎ 445021; Novotel)

Europcar (Map pp410-11; ☎ 215060; Hôtel Camayenne)

Hertz (Map pp410-11; ☎ 433778; Ave de la République)

Taxi & Minibuses

A seat in a shared taxi around town costs GF700 per zone, with the downtown zone ending at Dixinn (on the Route de Donka) and Madina (on the Route du Niger and Autoroute). Believe it or not, you can almost always trust drivers to charge you the right price. To catch one, stand on the appropriate side of the road and yell your destination as the taxi passes. There's also a clever hand-signal method by which you point in the direction that the taxi takes at the major roundabouts. Drivers sign back the number of seats available. The slightly cheaper minibuses (*magbanas*) work like taxis, only they are a lot slower. They cost GF500 per zone.

If you want to charter a taxi (called *déplacement*) you'll need to find an empty one and then bargain hard. From downtown to Taouyah, for example, should cost around GF15,000 during the day and GF20,000 to GF25,000 at night.

AROUND CONAKRY

ÎLES DE LOS

The Îles de Los are a group of small islands about 10km southwest of Conakry, once used as a way station for the slave trade and later by the British (who controlled the islands during much of the 19th century) to resettle freed slaves. They're now popular for weekend excursions. Besides the hotels, some locals rent out rooms in their homes, but keep your belongings locked up if you choose this option.

Tiny **Île Room** has a tranquil beach, which is good for swimming, and a pretty hotel, **Le Sogué** (☎ 215959; s GF160,000, d GF195,000; ☎ Oct-mid-Jun; ☎) which can organise return transport for CFA30,000. **Foré-Foté** (r around GF15,000) in the village has basic rooms, the price is negotiable. Ask at the beach for Sinny or Kalla, who run the place along with their drumming school.

Île de Kassa is closer to Conakry and a beautiful place to walk around. Near **Soro** (admission GF1000), the attractive main beach, are some cheap **bungalows** (Mon-Fri around GF35,000) and a restaurant. **Le Magellan** (☎ 422022; r GF212,000; ☎ Oct-mid-Jun; ☎) is a fancy place on the other side of the island owned by the same people as Hôtel Océane in Conakry. They can organise return transport for GF20,000.

Île Tamara, used by the French and later by Sekou Touré as a penal colony, is not as popular, as its beaches aren't particularly good, although it offers some interesting hikes. Fotoba, with its small Anglican church, is the main village.

Getting There & Away

Overcrowded *pirogues* (traditional canoes, up to GF3000) leave regularly for Soro, Fotoba and Room from Port Boulbinet, near Palais du Nations. Alternatively, several of Conakry's fanciest hotels run their own weekend boats.

You can also hire your own *pirogue* (which holds up to 30 people) for any of the islands at Port Boulbinet or over by the Novotel. The price depends more on where you want to go than how long you want to stay out: bargain hard and don't pay the full amount upfront.

DUBRÉKA

Dubrêka is President Lansana Conté's home town and the starting point for excursions to several natural attractions. Near the town are mangrove swamps with a rich variety of bird and animal life. You can hire a large *pirogue* at Port Soumba (where you can also see some captive crocodiles) for about GF150,000, but be sure it's in good condition as it takes over an hour to really get into the swamps.

Les Cascades de la Soumba (admission GF7500; r with breakfast GF180,000; meals GF10,000-28,000; ☎) make a good outing; except from February to May, when they dry up to a trickle. The falls were held sacred by locals and were once a site for sacrifices. Beneath the falls is a refreshing pool where you can swim. There's a nice restaurant here and, nearby, six fully equipped bungalows. The owner can organise hikes into the surrounding area. The signposted turn-off to the falls is 11km after Dubrêka junction on the Boké highway; the falls are 5km further down a

dirt road. To charter a taxi for the day from Dubréka junction costs about GF20,000.

About 10km east of Dubréka **Mt Kakoulima** (1011m) offers some good day hikes. Ask someone at Dubréka junction to point out the famous **Le Chien Qui Fume** rock formation.

KINDIA

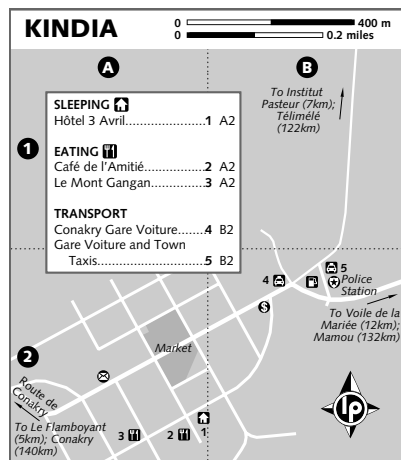
After Conakry, Kindia is Guinea's most crowded and hectic town. It's a good place to look for indigo cloth and if you ask around somebody will lead you to one of the cooperatives, where you can watch it being made. About 5km north of town is the decaying **Institut Pasteur** (☎ 7.30am-4pm), which locals call Pastoria, once an important medical research centre. Today it hosts a horrific little zoo. A shared taxi costs GF1500, though you'll probably wait a long time to get back.

Voile de la Mariée (Bridal Veil Falls; admission GF1000), 12km out of town, are worth a visit during the rainy season. A taxi to Bendougou (GF2000) will drop you off right there or you can walk 3km from the highway.

Sleeping & Eating

There's little reason to stay here since the sights can be quickly seen on your way to or from Conakry, though there are plenty of options if you choose to.

Bungalows (r GF25,000; (P)) Best located are these bungalows at Voile de la Mariée. They're getting old, but the setting more than makes up for it. Meals are available by request.



Le Flamboyant (☎ 610212; signposted off the Conakry Hwy; r GF60,000; (P) (♿) (♿)) This place, west of town, is in a tranquil setting and has beautiful rooms and shady grounds. They can advise you on hikes in the surrounding hills.

Hôtel 3 Avril (r GF10,000) This hotel is pretty dingy, but it's in the centre of town and the staff is friendly.

Kindia has a number of good hole-in-the-wall cafés in town.

Café de l'Amitié (snacks from GF1000) South of the market is this place with good coffee and a warm atmosphere.

Le Mont Gangan (meals GF3000-7000) Serves up simple comfort food like spaghetti and chicken plus good people watching.

Getting There & Away

Taxis leave daily for Télimélé (GF17,000, five hours), Mamou (GF13,500, three hours) and Conakry (GF10,000, three hours). For Kamakwie (GF25,000, seven hours) in Sierra Leone there is a departure about every other day. See also p437.

All taxis run from the *gare voiture* and town taxi stand, except taxis for Conakry, which leave from the stand further west.

FOUTA DJALON

The Fouta Djallon plateau – an area of green rolling hills, 1000m peaks, orchards and farmland – is one of the most scenic areas of Guinea and the heartland of the country's Peul population (the language spoken is Pulaar). It's also one of the best hiking places in West Africa, especially from November to January, when temperatures are cooler and the sky is not too dusty.

MAMOU

Mamou, sometimes called the gateway to the Fouta Djallon, is a dusty junction town with an interesting hilltop mosque. Mamou offers little reason to stop, but there are some worthy sights nearby. Several vine bridges span area rivers, including one at **Soumayereya**, 30 minutes by motorcycle from Marella, southeast of Mamou, on a very bad road. It's some hassle to get here, but worth it. Not only is it a good vine bridge, but the village is very traditional and beautiful and the men might drive their cattle across the river for you.

HIKING IN THE FOUTA DJALON

The Fouta Djallon is excellent for hiking (and mountain biking) as – unlike many other places in West Africa – you can essentially go at will. It's suitable either for an extended series of day trips based in one of the towns, or for village to village walking (the villages are closely spaced). The terrain is hilly, but not overly strenuous for the most part, and the landscape is pastoral with wide views over rolling hills and small mountains.

Logging is basic (with villagers) and cheap, and limited food is available en route; you should carry your own supplies as well as water-purifying tablets. Bring a jacket, as it gets surprisingly chilly at night. It's advisable to use topographical maps from the IGN in Conakry (see p434 for more details).

Outside the major towns there is no infrastructure and the area is not much visited, although tourism is increasing. Even so, you'll probably be the only traveller on the back paths.

Twenty-five kilometres west of town, at the village of **Konkouré**, is a beautiful waterfall and 15km the north is **Lake Bafing**, a Sunday getaway for picnics and swimming. Also near Mamou is **Timbo**, former capital of the Fouta Djallon and, together with Fougoumba near Dalaba, an important religious centre for Guinea's Peuls. Just west of town is **École Forestière** (Enatef), a forestry school perched on the edge of a wooded reserve; trails through the woods are open to visitors.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Rama (☎ 011-570757; signposted off the Dalaba road; r GF25,000-35,000; (P)) Rama, a long walk northwest of downtown, has clean and comfortable rooms and the staff is a wealth of knowledge about the area. The nightclub next door can get loud.

Hôtel Balys (☎ 011-573070; Dalaba road, Quartier Pétel; s/d with fan GF40,000/45,000, r with air-con GF55,000; (P) (♿)) Rooms at this new place 4km from the centre (GF750 in a shared taxi) have separate sitting rooms and all the fixings. A disco is under construction, but it's being built underground so it shouldn't get very loud. With dishes like cow's liver with lemon juice averaging GF13,000, this is also the best kitchen in town.

École Forestière (☎ 680634; Conakry road; dm GF15,000, r GF25,000; (P) (♿)) The forestry school has rooms with three beds each and clean shared bathrooms, as well as rooms in 'villas' with a sitting area and kitchen.

Hôtel Luna (☎ 680739; Luna Carrefour; r GF15,000-20,000; (P)) This grubby hotel has no generator. Its only plus is that it is located in town.

Getting There & Away

Mamou is a major transport junction. Frequent bush taxis to Conakry (GF22,000, six hours), Kindia (GF13,500, three hours), Dalaba (GF7000, one hour), Labé (GF17,000, three hours), Faranah (GF22,000, three hours) and Kissidougou (GF35,000, six hours) depart from the two *gares voiture*, on the main drag, as do a few morning buses to Conakry (GF16,000). Vehicles for Dabola (GF17,000, three hours) and sometimes Kankan (GF40,000, seven hours) leave from the *gare voiture* near the Hôtel Rama.

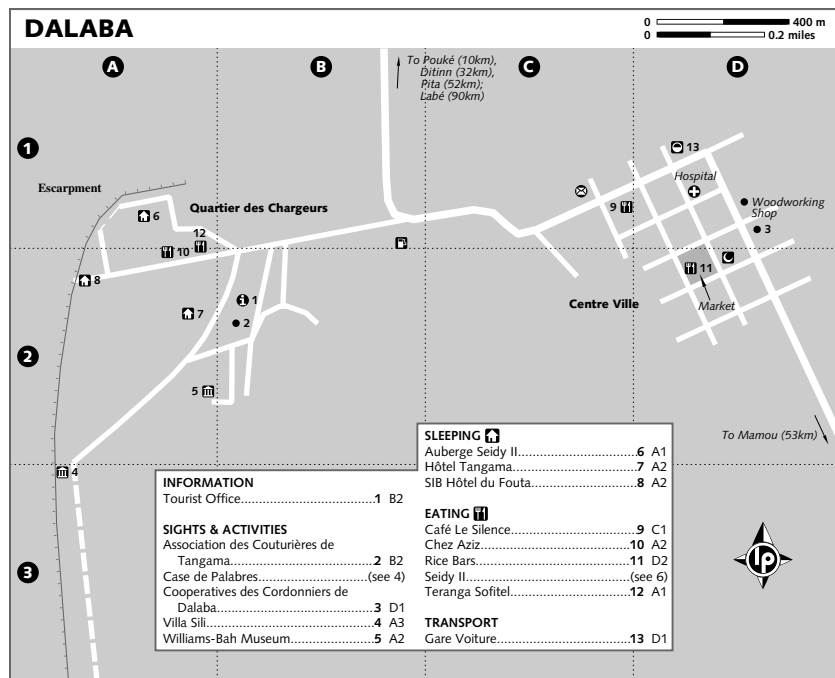
DALABA

With its pretty pine groves and interesting nearby villages, Dalaba makes a superb base for hiking or biking in this region. Before independence, the town, perched at a pleasant 1200m, was a therapeutic centre for colonial administrators and many buildings from the era remain. Market day is Sunday.

There's an excellent **tourist office** (☎ 011-269348; Quartier des Chargeurs; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm). Informative booklets with maps, photos and descriptions (in English and French) detail dozens of area attractions. Use these to plan your own adventure or let the director, Mr Mamadou Diallo, get you a guide (GF45,000 per day for up to three people). He also has motorcycles for hire (GF30,000 per day) and arranges village stays (GF35,000 for up to three people).

Sights IN TOWN

The old French governor's residence, **Villa Sili**, built 1936, is fascinating in its decay. Next door, the **Case de Palabres**, decorated with Fula bas-relief designs, was used as a meeting hall. The caretaker will show you around both for a small tip. The odd little **Williams-Bah Museum** (☎ 9am-6pm) has a few Fula artefacts plus posters about eminent African-Americans. You can also get on the Internet here, though the connection is very slow.



CRAFTS

The Dalaba region is good for crafts. Places worth visiting include the **Association des Couturières de Tangama** for fabrics, **Cooperatives des Cordonniers de Dalaba** for leather and the village of **Pouké**, 10km from town, for baskets. You can place custom orders for crafts at the tourist office.

AROUND TOWN

One of Guinea's tallest waterfalls, the **Chutes de Ditinn**, takes a remarkable 80m drop straight down off the cliff. Bush taxis run from Dalaba to the namesake village (they're easiest to find on Thursday, market day), 32km away and the parking area is 5km further on. From here it's a 20-minute walk and it helps to take one of the local children as a guide.

Much closer is the impressive **Chutes de Garaya**. Monkeys are often spotted here and also by the **Pont de Dieu**, a natural rock bridge. Shady **Chevalier Gardens** was started in 1908 to determine which European plants could grow in Guinea. The waters of **Lake Dounkimagna** nourish strawberries and other vegetables in the dry season.

Sleeping

Hôtel Tangama (☎ 691109; r with shared bathroom GF20,000, s/d with bathroom GF30,000/40,000, villa GF60,000; (P)) This cosy place has good rooms and a fireplace in the lounge.

Auberge Seidy II (☎ 691063; r GF25,000; (P)) This homey place has four large rooms and the two upstairs have great views.

SIB Hôtel du Fouta (☎ 695036; s/d GF50,000/60,000; (P)) Dalaba's luxury option has fully equipped rooms and something resembling a golf course. Even if you don't stay here, swing by for a drink at sunset; the views of the valley from the terrace are wonderful.

Eating & Drinking

On the west side of the market are several good rice bars and you can find *attiéké* in the neighbouring alleys at night.

Seidy II (meals from GF10,000; ☎ dinner) All three hotels have good restaurants, but this is the most noteworthy. The *plat du jour* is usually just chicken and chips, but if you order in advance Mr Koffi will whip up almost any West African dish you can name.

Chez Aziz (meals from GF5000; ☎ dinner) Little Chez Aziz has inexpensive local fare and satellite TV.

Café Le Silence (☎ breakfast & lunch) A petit spot with *café noir* and cheap sandwiches.

Teranga Sofitel (☎ dinner) This friendly bar often has drumming and dancing late in the evening.

Getting There & Away

Bush taxis go to Pita (GF7000, one hour), Labé (GF14,000, two hours), Mamou (GF7000, one hour) and Conakry (GF28,000, seven hours).

PITA

Pita's major attraction, **Chutes du Kinkon**, is below the hydroelectric plant. To get there, take the main road north out of town for 1km, then head left 10km down a dirt road to the falls. It's a good walk or an easy bike ride. You are supposed to get a permit at the police station though this is a hassle; it's easier and probably cheaper to just pay the police at the entrance.

A much better excursion is the three-tiered **Chutes de Kambadaga** about 35km from Pita, though you'll need your own transport. Follow the dirt road from Pita to Kinkon and then branch right. It's a steep hike to the bottom. There's a small **bungalow** (r GF10,000) where you can overnight; bring your own food and water.

Sleeping & Eating

Auberge de Pita (signposted off the Dalaba road; r GF20,000; (P) ☎) The rooms are clean and spacious, while the bar/lounge has a TV and a friendly atmosphere. Out front is an outdoor weaving centre with looms lined up in the shade of the trees.

Centre d'Accueil (rondavels GF10,000, r with shared/private bathroom GF15,000/20,000; (P)) The *rondavels* (huts) are a bit rundown, but the rooms in the main building are alright. It's behind the *préfecture* (police headquarters).

Soyez le Bienvenus (meals from GF1300; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Pita has many good small cafés with cheap sandwiches and omelettes, but only this one, across from the Rex Cinéma, is also a hardware store.

Petit Nirvana (meals from GF5000; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Meals are only available with prior notice, but it's worth visiting for the *café noir* and a chat with Oury, who speaks

English and has information on the area. Petit Nirvana is on the northwest side of town, ask for directions on the main street.

Getting There & Away

Bush taxis for Labé (GF5000, one hour) and Dalaba (GF7000, one hour) leave from the Rex Cinéma, and on a nearby side street for Doucki (GF9000, 1½ hours).

DOUCKI

About 45km from Pita on the Télimélé road is the village of Doucki where the one-of-a-kind Hassan Bah (who speaks English, French and Spanish) runs a guesthouse of sorts. Twelve dollars gets you lodging in a traditional Fula hut, three meals and guided hikes to slot canyons and waterfalls in and around what many call Guinea's Grand Canyon. The scenery is amazing and otherworldly. Hiking with Hassan is an unforgettable experience, and, for many, the highlight of the trip. Bush taxis to Donghol-Touma will drop you at his brother's shop where you walk 2km to the village.

LABÉ

The largest town in the Fouta Djalon, Labé is the area's administrative capital. It's a pleasant town with restaurants and nightlife.

Lying on a wide plain, Labé isn't the best base for hiking, though when you do get out to the hills, the scenery is excellent. **Chutes de Saala**, about an hour's drive down a rugged road off the Route de Koundara, is a good destination. Be sure to visit the falls at both the main entrance – where you can picnic and swim – and at the lookout (veer right at the fork in the road as you approach). Expect to pay about GF65,000 for a chartered taxi. Also worth a trip is **Mont Kolima**. Hotel Tata has a map and information about these and other sights and can arrange guides and village stays. **Fouta Trekking Ventures** (☎ 011-231048) leads hikes from one to nine days across the Fouta Djalon. They are building *campements* (hostels), using traditional designs, in three area villages.

Information

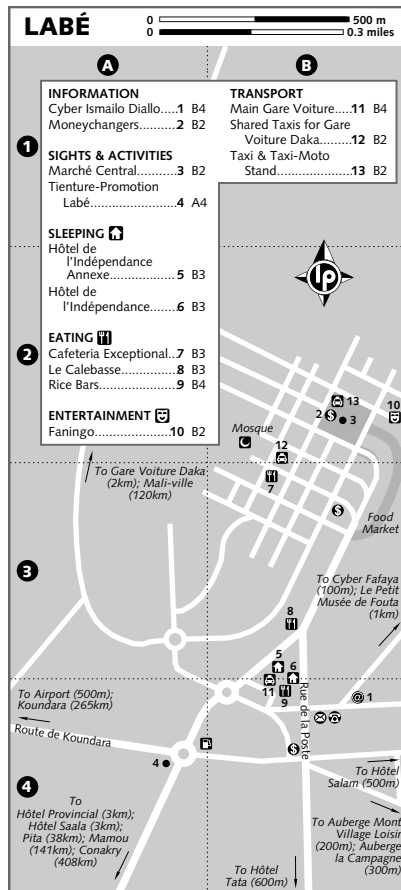
The banks won't change travellers cheques, but one of the moneychangers at the market will. For Internet visit Cofoprec next door to the Hôtel de l'Indépendance or Cyber Ismailo Diallo and Cyber Fafaya near the

post office. They charge around GF6000 per hour and connections can be good.

Sights

Narrow, covered passageways give the **Marché Central** an Arab feel. In the north end is an area full of indigo cloth (for the finished product try **Tienture-Promotion Labé** south of the *gare voiture*) and a leather workshop turning out sandals and handbags.

Le Petit Musée de Fouta (admission by donation; ☎ 8am-6pm) has crafts and other regional items. The mock-up of a Peul woman's home is illuminating. Just behind the museum is **Alpha Bah's Garden** where you can discuss environmentalism and buy organic coffee and flowers from the enthusiastic owner.



Sleeping

Hôtel de l'Indépendance (☎ 511000; r in annexe/main bldg GF10,000/25,000) Labé's cheapest and most centrally located lodging has decent rooms right at the *gare voiture*. Rooms in the annexe are clean, but the toilets often aren't.

Hôtel Salam (☎ 512472; r with shared bathroom GF20,000, s/d with private bathroom 30,000/35,000; (P)) The Salam needs a paint job, but is otherwise fine. It's in a quiet *quartier* on the south side of town and many rooms have balconies.

Auberge Mont Village Loisir (☎ 574445; r GF25,000; (P)) Though the rooms are a tad spartan, they are the best you will find at this price. The hard-to-find green and white building is behind the football field on the south side of town.

Auberge la Campagne (☎ 571702; s/d GF45,000/65,000; (P)) The Mont Village Loisir's upscale neighbour has six brand new rooms and eager staff.

Hôtel Tata (☎ 510540; r & huts GF75,000; (P)) The hotel of choice for Peace Corps volunteers, both the rooms and the *cases* (huts) are cosy and spotless. Madame Raby, the owner, has lots of information on the area.

Hôtel Saala (☎ 011-520462; r with/without bathroom GF25,000/15,000, villas GF30,000; (P)) The Saala, 3km south of town, is convenient for nightlife. The rooms with shared toilet are smelly, but the rest are good.

Eating & Drinking

Labé has good street food. You'll find stands everywhere selling rice and beans, fried sweet potatoes and *brochettes* for under GF1000. There are rice bars along the length of the *gare voiture* and a few good small restaurants down the street as you head into town.

Le Calebasse (meals GF3000-15,000; ☎ lunch & dinner) This cosy place is tucked downstairs, away from the street noise and serves some exceptional shwarma and *riz gras* (rice and sauce).

Hôtel Salam (meals GF5000-10,000; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The restaurant here doesn't look like much, but Chef Barry works wonders in the kitchen and will whip up whatever you request if you ask early enough in the day.

Cafeteria Exceptional (meals from GF1500; ☎ breakfast & lunch) This little snack counter is good for coffee, sandwiches and people-watching.

Hôtel Tata (pizzas GF10,000; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The pizzas are fantastic, though you take your chances with anything else.

Entertainment

The most popular dance spots are **Salaa Plus** (Hôtel Salaa), and **Bain de Kouré** (Hôtel Sofiton), both on the road out of town. Faningo, by the market, is the busiest nightclub in the centre.

Behind Hôtel Salaa is **Hôtel Provincial**, a tranquil garden with live music on Sunday. Moutcar Paraya, among other well-known Guinean musicians, often performs here.

Getting There & Away

Labé is an important transport junction. Bush taxis for Mali-ville (GF18,000, four hours), Koundara (GF35,000, eight hours) and Kamsar (GF35,000, 15 hours) leave from Gare Voiture Daka, 2km north of town. There is one car a day to Diaoubé (GF75,000) in Senegal, except Monday and Tuesday when many go. There is also a daily taxi to Basse Santa Su (GF95,000) in Gambia. For all of these trips, the roads are so bad on the Guinean side that taxis leaving in the morning rarely make it to the border before it closes, meaning you need to sleep there. Many cars depart at night to avoid this hassle. Shared taxis (GF800) for Gare Voiture Daka leave from near the mosque in the town centre. See also p437.

Bush taxis for Labé (GF5000, one hour), Dalaba (14,000, two hours), Mamou (GF17,000, three hours) and Conakry (GF35,000, eight hours) leave from the main *gare voiture* in the centre. There is also a big bus to Conakry (GF20,000) daily and Bamako (GF120,000) a few times a week.

When local airlines are in business they usually have flights between Conakry and Labé.

MALI-VILLE

Mali-ville sits on the edge of the spectacular Massif du Tangué, just before its precipitous drop toward Senegal and the plains below. Officially, the town is called Mali, but it usually has the 'ville' added to distinguish it from Mali the country. At over 1400m Mali-ville is the highest town in the Fouta; the climate is cool – sometimes downright cold – and the scenery superb. It makes an excellent base for hiking and mountain bik-

ing excursions into the surrounding area. There's no electricity or running water in town, and only basic provisions.

On Sunday, Mali-ville has a good market. Look for the **honey vendors**; they gather the honey from the baskets you see in the trees lining the road to Labé. Opposite the market is the **Centre d'Appui à l'Auto-Promotion Féminine** (CAAF), a cloth-weaving cooperative with a small boutique that also sells pottery. Just around the corner is the **Bureau de Tourisme** (☎ 511739), staffed by the enthusiastic Monsieur Souaré who runs Campement Bev and knows about local waterfalls, caves, mountains and artisan villages. He'll get you a guide (GF30,000 per day) or detailed directions so you can visit the sights on your own.

Mali-ville's best-known attraction is **Mt Loura**, which has the **La Dame de Mali** rock formation on its side. The top (look for the radio antenna) is 7km from town by bike (shorter if you hike), and offers unparalleled views over the surrounding countryside. On a clear day you can see the Gambia River and Senegal. It's a three-hour hike to the top of **Mt Lansa** for more excellent views. You'll need a guide on the upper section; ask him to point out the stone platform used for drumming messages to the villages below.

The gorgeous **Chute de Guelmeya**, 15km away, is the largest waterfall in the area and a good day-trip, as are the pottery and weaving villages **Toqué** and **Kolossi**.

Sleeping & Eating

L'Auberge Indigo (☎ 510274; s/d GF15,000/20,000; (P)) The only place in town with electricity (solar powered) has cute little rooms and a peaceful garden. The staff has all sorts of information on the area. You can cook your own meals in the kitchen or have them find someone to cook for you (otherwise there are a few rice bars in town).

Campement Bev (☎ 511739; huts GF10,000, r GF10,000 per person; (P)) You'll definitely want to stay in one of the four huts here, each of which has a comfy double bed. It is set in the friendly village of Donghol-Teinseire, 7km away, and is perfectly aligned with La Dame de Mali's profile. Meals are available. Solo women may not want to stay here.

La Dame de Mali (s/d GF7500/10,000; (P)) The building, near the library, is crumbling and most guests are short-term visitors from the adjoining bar, but rooms are pretty clean.

A fancy place, tentatively named Windy Kana, is supposed to open in 2006.

Getting There & Away

There are a few taxis between Mali-ville and Labé (GF18,000, four hours) every day and one to Conakry (GF50,000, 12 hours) on Monday and Thursday. Transport from Mali-ville to Koundara is only feasible on Saturday, market day in Madina Woura, where you change taxis.

Generally there are three vehicles per week to Kedougou, Senegal (GF50,000) in the dry season. Many people choose to travel this route on foot, not because the road is so horrible (which it is), but because the scenery is so good. The tourist office has all the details on the six-to-12 hour downhill hike (it's much more difficult in the other direction) and can arrange boys to guide you and carry your bags.

To get from Mali the city to Mali the country you can take the seldom travelled road west toward Kita and Bamako. There's no public transport. For more details, see p436.

KOUNDARA



Koundara, a fairly sleepy town with some lovely mountains nearby, is the starting point for visits to Parc Transfrontalier Niokolo-Badiar, which consists of Guinea's Parc Regional du Badiar and Senegal's Parc Regional du Niokolo-Koba. Together they encompass a 950,000-hectare protected area, of which about 50,000 hectares are in Guinea. Unlike the Senegalese side, there is little development here other than a simple *campement* near the park headquarters in Sambaïlo. You can't walk or ride mopeds in the park so if you don't have a car, you'll have to charter one in Koundara. Animals you might see include bushbucks, roan antelopes, wart hogs and patas monkeys. There are also chimpanzees and hippopotamuses in the region. Your chance of seeing large mammals is slim (it's much better on the Senegalese side), but there are some interesting birds here and the landscape alone makes for a nice drive. The park is officially closed during the rainy season, from June to November. In Conakry, information on the park is available from the **Direction Nationale des Forêts et de la Faune** (Map pp410-11; Route de Donka, Conakry).

There are many tribal groups in this area, including the Badiaranké, Bassari, Peul

and Coniagui, and the colourful mixture makes Koundara an interesting place to visit. The little **museum** at the *préfecture* is open weekdays, whenever the caretaker is around. About 25km from Koundara, near the Guinea-Bissau border, is **Saréboïdo**; it has a good Sunday market.

Sleeping & Eating

All of Koundara's hotels are near the radio antenna.

Hôtel Nafaya (r GF10,000-15,000;  ) Nafaya has basic rooms with shared bathrooms. There's a decent restaurant here and a nightclub that can get noisy on Thursday and Saturday nights.

Hôtel Gangan (r GF15,000) This hotel is quieter and about the same quality as Nafaya, but there's only electricity at night if enough people are staying here.

There are several rice bars near the *gare voiture*. In the mornings, look for *goseytiga*, a rice porridge with ground peanuts and sugar that is a speciality of the region. The **Niokolo-Badiar Café** near the Saréboïdo taxis has good coffee and the unsigned **Café Theino**, behind where the trucks park, makes good omelettes.

Getting There & Away

Bush taxis run frequently to Saréboïdo (GF5000, one hour) and daily to Labé (GF35,000, eight hours). For Boké go to Saréboïdo to find a car bound for Conakry (GF59,000, 13 hours); only a sure thing on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. For those driving their own vehicle, note there are ferry crossings on both of these routes.

A bush taxi generally heads daily for Diaoubé (GF35,000, six hours), Senegal along a horrible road. For Gabú, Guinea-Bissau, also a rough journey, you'll need to take three taxis, changing at Saréboïdo and the border. See also p437.



UPPER GUINEA



In Upper Guinea (Haute Guinée), the hills and greenery of the Fouta Djallon give way to the reds and browns of the country's grassy, low-lying savanna lands. Although few travellers make it to this region, it's an area well worth exploring, even if it does get hot as hell in the dry season.

DABOLA

Dabola is a peaceful town set amid hills. The main attraction is the **Barrage du Tinkisso**, which supplies electricity for Dabola, Faranah and **Dinguiraye**, an influential religious centre with the country's most famous mosque. At the bottom of the dam is a picnic area, which is popular on weekends. You can also cross over the stream, where there's a beach and a small waterfall. The dam is 8km from town, signposted on the Conakry road.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Tinkisso (Conakry road; bungalows/r GF20,000/40,000;  ) Just out of town, this is Dabola's top hotel, with spotless rooms. The thatch-roofed bungalows have electricity and bathrooms, but are in an isolated area far behind the main building.

Hôtel Le Mont Sincery (s/d 25,000/30,000;  ) This friendly and peaceful place is 2km south of Tinkisso and nearly as nice.

Most people eat at their hotel (Tinkisso has a bigger menu; Le Mont Sincery has a prettier dining area; both have satellite TV), but it's much more fun to join the crowds at the row of busy open-air restaurants branching off the main junction downtown. *Brochettes* (cubes of meat or fish grilled on a stick), salads and other simple meals cost GF1500 to GF3000.

Getting There & Away




Dabola is a junction town, but it's small, so it can take a long time for taxis to fill. There is at least one departure daily to Faranah (GF15,000, two hours), Mamou (GF17,000, three hours), Kankan (GF25,000, four hours) and Conakry (GF37,000, nine hours).

FARANAH

President Sekou Touré came from Faranah and the city still bears his marks. There's a conference centre, airstrip built to accommodate a Concorde, oversized presidential villa and street lights: all now abandoned. It's also the highest point on the Niger River that is easily accessible, just 150km from the source. The main reason to come here is to visit Parc National du Haut Niger (see below). Behind the old Cité de Niger conference centre is the house of renowned Guinean drummer **Fadoua Oularé**. Serious students can arrange lessons for a fee; or just stop by to see if there are any performances scheduled.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Bibisch ( 011-276599; r with fan/air-con GF40,000/50,000;  ) Brand new and the best in town, Bibisch is about 2km from the centre on the way to Sidakoro and has a decent restaurant.


Hôtel Firya ( 581682; r GF25,000, villas with air-con GF35,000;  ) Firya, in a quiet, pastoral

PARC NATIONAL DU HAUT NIGER

The Parc National du Haut Niger covers one of West Africa's last remaining tropical dry forest ecosystems. The park's 1200-sq-km core areas (there are another nearly 6000 sq km of inhabited buffer zones) have an interesting assortment of wildlife that is, unfortunately, not very easy to spot, including waterbucks, bushbucks, buffalos, duikers, crocodiles, hippos, chimpanzees, leopards and lions.

The park headquarters and an interesting botanical garden are in Sidakoro, 50km from Faranah on a rough road. There are some nice rooms available for around GF15,000 per person, though you'll need to bring your own food and water.

In Somoria, the gateway to the core area, about 30km into the park on a very rough track that barely qualifies as a road, you can arrange with local fishermen for a *pirogue* ride on the Niger. The small **campement** (per person GF20,000) here has a few huts with bathroom. There's running water, but no restaurant. Somoria is also home to the **Chimpanzee Conservation Center** (CCC; www.projectprimate.org) where confiscated or donated chimps are prepared for release into the wild. They are hoping to have a habituated group ready to meet visitors in coming years.

To visit the park, you'll need your own 4WD. Permits for entering the park cost GF15,000 per person per day, with a GF10,000 additional charge for the mandatory guide. The CCC, though a separate entity from the park, works hard to protect it and is the best source of information, though you could also inquire at the **park office** ( 810482; Faranah) or the **Direction Nationale des Forêts et de la Faune** (Map pp410-11; Route de Donka, Conakry).

setting across the Niger from town, has a shady yard and the villas have two rooms.

Hôtel Camaldine (☎ 581598; r GF15,000; P) Rooms are aging, though the lakeside setting is nice. The nightclub gets loud on Thursday and Saturday nights. Camaldine is unmarked, 2km from the centre off the Dabola road.

Hôtel Bati (r with shared/private bathroom GF8000/10,000) Stuffy and scruffy, but clean enough. It's one of the few places in the centre.

Restaurant Bantou (meals GF1000-10,000; ☺ lunch & dinner) This loud and lively outdoor bar-restaurant is near the Bati and is as good as any restaurant in the centre.

Best bet for street food is around the *gare voiture*.

Getting There & Away

The *gare voiture* is on the main street next to the petrol station. Vehicles go daily to Kissidougou (GF15,000, two hours), Mamou (GF22,000, three hours), Dabola (GF15,000, two hours) and Conakry (GF40,000, nine hours). The road to Kabala (GF38,000, seven hours) in Sierra Leone is very bad and so there is little traffic, but taxis do go a couple of times a week. See also p437.

KANKAN

Guinea's second city and a university town, Kankan is a pleasant place with a Sahelian feel. It sits on the banks of the Milo River (a large tributary of the Niger River). The capital of the ancient Empire of Mali was at Niani, 130km northeast, and today Kankan has become an unofficial 'capital' for Guinea's Malinké people. Nearly every Malinké you meet, even as far away as Senegal, regards Kankan as their spiritual home. Kankan is big enough to have some cybercafés.

Sights

Kankan's **Grande Mosquée** is as beautiful inside as it is outside, and you're welcome to visit between prayer times. Women should cover their heads before entering. The old presidential palace, **Villa Syli**, overlooking the Milo, is undergoing restoration, though supposedly you'll still be able to walk the grounds when the work is done. Just over the river is **Samory Kourou**, the hill from which Samory Touré's famed siege of Kankan and later standoff against the French colonialists took place. It offers nice views of the city.

To see **traditional dancing** in one of the nearby villages talk with the delightful Millimouno 'Robert' Saa at **Makona Photocopy Centre** (☎ 583128) across from Hôtel Uni. He can usually arrange things, for a small fee, with two days' notice.

Kouroussa, about 65km from Kankan on the Dabola road, is the birthplace of Guinean author Camara Laye (see p408). You can visit the family compound here and there are a few decent hotels if you want to overnight. Catch a bush taxi (see opposite).

Sleeping

Centre d'Accueil Diocésain (r GF20,000 P) The Catholic mission guesthouse has some of the cleanest rooms in the city. They have showers and sinks (toilets are down the hall), mosquito nets, ceiling fans and electricity at night.

Hôtel Baté (☎ 712368, hotelbate@yahoo.fr; s GF70,000, d GF80,000, annexe r with fan GF40,000; P ☺) The large rooms here have all the fittings (though make sure everything works), and rates include breakfast. The cheaper rooms in the annexe aren't nearly as good. It is the first choice of NGO workers.

Hôtel Uni (☎ 011-580414; r GF60,000; P ☺) Rooms are just as nice and well equipped as the Baté.

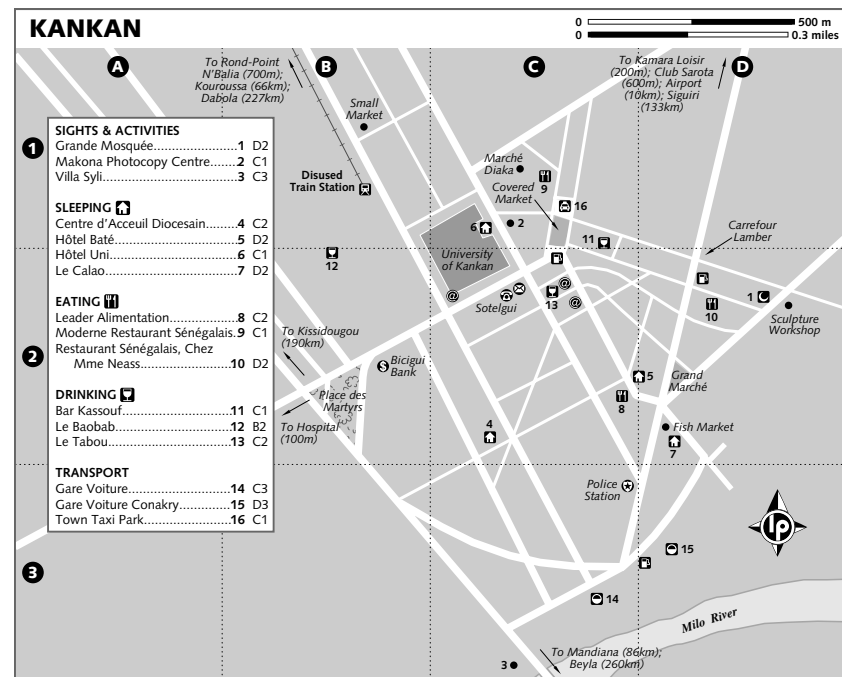
Le Calao (☎ 712797; r GF45,000; P ☺) It doesn't look like much at first sight, but the good-value rooms are clean and well appointed.

Eating

Restaurant Sénégalais, Chez Mme Neass (meals GF2000-5000; ☺ lunch & dinner) Mme Neass makes a great *riz gras au poisson* (rice and sauce with fish) and will prepare just about any West African dish, including *yassa* (onion and lemon sauce), with advance notice.

Leader Alimentation (meals from GF1000; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place, facing Hotel Baté, is a well stocked supermarket with plenty of expensive imported goods. They sell cheap shwarma out front while the restaurant upstairs has the biggest menu in town – hamburgers, *riz sauce* (rice with sauce), chicken, pizza and much more – though it's not all available every day.

Kankan has good street food and many rice bars. One of the best spots to look at night is around the Marché Diaka where simple places like **Moderne Restaurant Sénégalais** (meals from GF1500; ☺ dinner) serve tasty *riz sauce*.



Entertainment

Le Baobab, in the field behind the university – look for the two baobab trees – is popular with students for conversation in the afternoon and dancing at night. Bar Kassouf is a long-time Kankan favourite and usually crowded and lively.

Kankan's most popular nightspot, **Club Sarota** (Fri & Sat cover GF5000), is hidden away on the north side of town (take a *taxi-moto*). Besides the bar and dance floor, you can cool off in the swimming pool. **Le Tabou** is near the university, and thus a popular dance floor for students.

Odds are the double feature at **Kamara Loisir** will feature guns or Bollywood song and dance.

Getting There & Away

Bush taxis for most places, including places like Conakry (GF65,000, 13 hours), Kissidougou (GF25,000, five hours), Siguiri (GF20,000, two hours) and N'zérékoré (GF48,000, 12 hours), leave from the twin *gares voiture* near the bridge. A big bus goes daily to Conakry (GF40,000). With the

road paved nearly the whole way, Bamako can be reached in seven hours by bush taxi (GF65,000) while the big buses (GF40,000) going several times a week take longer. The best way to get to Côte d'Ivoire (when that becomes safe again) is via Bamako because the road to Odienné via Mandiana is so bad that taxi drivers don't use it. See also p436.

There's also a smaller bush taxi stand near Rond-point N'Balía for Kouroussa (GF10,000, one hour) and Dabola (GF25,000, four hours).

When local airlines are in business they usually have flights between Conakry and Kankan.

SIGUIRI

Siguiri is the last major town en route to Mali. If you find yourself with some time to kill you can check out the scant ruins of a 19th-century **French fort** atop a little hill just a few minutes from the *gare voiture* or head out further for a stroll along the Niger and Tinkisso Rivers.

The best option is **Hôtel Tam Tam** (☎ 582272; r with fan GF30,000, with air-con GF40,000-60,000; P ☺)

on the Kankan road, which is clean and has a good restaurant. The only lodging near the *gare voiture* is the **Hôtel Niani** (r GF25,000; **P**) which is a real pit, though not the filthiest place in town.

From Siguiri, two roads lead to Mali. Bush taxis go via Kourémalé to Bamako (GF42,000, five hours). The secondary route along the Niger River makes a great bike trip during the dry season. See also p437. Bush taxis also leave daily for Kankan (GF20,000, two hours) and Conakry (GF75,000, 15 hours). During the rainy season there is usually a boat or two a week down the Niger to Bamako. The trip takes a day and costs GF5000. Get your passport stamped before departing. There are sometimes flights from Conakry.

FOREST REGION

Guinea's Forest Region (Guinée Forestière), in the southeast, is a beautiful area of hills and streams, although deforestation has taken a heavy toll and there are only pockets of primary forest left. What little remains, however, offers excellent wildlife watching, especially for chimpanzees and elephants.

KISSIDOUGOU

Kissidougou, running seemingly forever along the Conakry highway, is a good place to break your journey south. The **Musée Préfectoral de Kissidougou** (admission GF1000; **M**) 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) across from the police station is small but has great masks and other supposedly magical objects. The surrounding area, with gently rolling hills and many villages, is perfect for exploring by bicycle. The seldom visited village of **Koladou**, 30km down a rough, nearly nonexistent road, has a vine bridge above some rapids. If you go, take some kola nuts for the village chief and check in at the police station along the way. Just 3km east of Kissi is a metal bridge built in vine-bridge style. From the roundabout, head down the Kankan road, take the second right and ask often for the *pont artisanal*.

Between Kissidougou and Faranah a dirt road branches about 70km south toward the village of Forokonia (no hotel, but you'll be able to find a place to sleep) from where you can walk the 7km to the **source of the Niger River**, which is considered sacred by locals.

For food and lodging, the nicest place in town is **Hôtel Savannah** (**T** 981040; r with fan/air-con & breakfast GF35,000/45,000; **P** **WC**) on the Faranah side of town. The restaurant, surrounded by flowers, is beautiful and the food superb; pizzas and seafood cost around GF15,000. **Hôtel Bélélé** (**T** 981234; r GF20,000; **WC**), sign-posted 500m south of the highway, is a funky little place with a rooftop patio. Friendly staff and a pleasant restaurant compensate for the cell-like rooms at **Hôtel de la Paix** (r GF8000; **P**), which is 300m east of the market.

Bush taxis go daily to Faranah (GF15,000, two hours), Kankan (GF25,000, five hours), Guéckédou (GF11,000, 2½ hours) and Macenta (GF23,000, five hours). For Conakry (GF55,000, 12 hours) many taxis depart around 6pm. Every Thursday a 4WD (GF12,000, four hours) departs for Forokonia, returning late on Friday, market day. The scenic Kankan road is very potholed: for cyclists, Tokounou, which despite its size still consists mostly of traditional houses, makes a good stop. Friday is market day.

MACENTA

The Forest Region begins in Kissidougou, but the area's beauty (what's left of it, anyway) really kicks in at Macenta, a busy town ringed by hills and streams. Inside the market is a **theatre** which puts on occasional dance performances.

About 40km south of Macenta the 116,000-acre **Forêt Classée de Ziama**, one of Guinea's few remaining virgin rainforests, blankets the mountains. Elephants are often spotted here, and you don't need a car to enter the forest. Guides and information are available at the headquarters in Sérédou, though they request that you call the **Centre Forestier** (**T** 910389) in N'zérékoré first so the staff can prepare for your visit. Admission is GF50,000 and the mandatory guide is another GF15,000. Simple rooms that can be arranged at the office cost GF10,000 per night.

Hôtel Bamala (**T** 011-585227; r with fan GF20,000-25,000, r with air-con GF30,000; **P** **WC**), 3km from the centre off the N'zérékoré road, is old but clean. The cheap rooms at **Hôtel Palm** (**T** 526113; r GF5000-25,000; **P**) smell bad while the best aren't that far behind the Bamala. It's near the N'zérékoré *gare voiture*.

Bush taxis head daily to Kissidougou (GF23,000, five hours) and to N'zérékoré (GF18,000, 2½ hours). Several taxis a day

take the rough road to Voinjama, Liberia (GF14,000, two hours) via Daro; however, if you're heading to Monrovia it's better to go from N'zérékoré. See also p436.

N'ZÉRÉKORÉ

N'zérékoré, the major city in Guinea's Forest Region, is a busy and fast-growing place and a good base for exploring the surrounding area. This is Guinea's NGO central so you'll find many foods and services unavailable in most other cities. Market day is Wednesday.

The **Musée Ethnographique** (**M**) 8.30am-5pm Sat-Thu, 8.30am-1pm Fri; admission GF1000) has a small but fascinating collection of masks, fetishes and other objects of traditional forest culture. The museum director is a spritely old man who tells good stories about the forest. You can watch women dyeing mud-cloth at the **artisan village** in the small 'sacred' forest as you enter town. A variety of other crafts are also made and sold here, including masks and the region's distinctive raffia basketry.

Many local villages have vine bridges, particularly those along the Oulé River. Ask at the museum for advice and directions. There's a more accessible one near the hamlet of Koya, just north of Koulé, about 40km north on the Macenta road. Give the chief a small tip and he will get you a guide for the Pont de Liana (not to be confused with Pont Diana, a highway bridge nearby). Forty-five minutes and forty-five thousand butterflies later you're there.

Information

Bicigui and Ecobank change cash only, but some of the moneychangers at the market and *gare voiture* take travellers cheques; and with better rates than in Conakry. You can get online (sometimes) at both Cyber Café Espoir and Sotelgui.

Sleeping

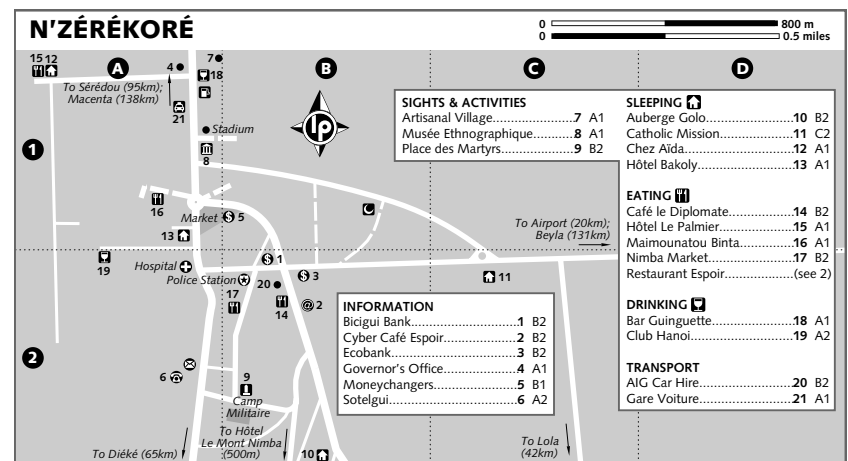
Chez Aïda (**T** 910747; r with fan/air-con GF35,000/40,000; **P** **WC**) Aïda, on the north side of town, has four clean and spacious rooms with fan and an excellent restaurant that draws many NGO workers (most dishes cost around GF9000). The air-con rooms are in another nearby building; though larger and more modern, they're not as cosy.

Auberge Golo (**T** 911719; r with fan/air-con GF35,000/45,000; **P** **WC**) A friendly and quiet choice near most of the NGO offices. All rooms have separate sitting areas and the air-con rooms have satellite TV. Golo also serves good food with steaks and pizzas costing around GF11,000.

Catholic Mission (**T** 910897; r GF20,000; **P**) The Catholic Mission, on the east side of town, has simple but spotless rooms with shared toilets and mosquito net. It's a nice, quiet location downhill behind the church.

Hôtel Bakoly (**T** 910734; r GF5000-10,000; **P**) This hotel near the market is the cheapest place to stay. The basic rooms have a bucket shower; toilets are shared.

Hôtel Le Mont Nimba (**T** 911557; s GF120,000-200,000, d 160,000-240,000; **P** **WC** **TV**) If you have



money to burn there's this fancy, but over-priced place owned by President Conté. Nonguests can use the pool for GF15,000.

Eating

There are some excellent street food vendors near the *gare voiture*.

Hôtel Le Palmier (meals GF3000-8000; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Dishes at Le Palmier are simple but fresh – the *poulet avec sauce curry* (chicken with curry sauce) is amazing.

Mouminatou Binta (meals GF2000-5000; ☒ lunch & dinner) This friendly woman whips up a mean rice with *arachide* (peanut) sauce at her simple place, which is hidden with several others directly behind Sougué Boutique.

Restaurant Espoir (meals GF5000-10,000; ☒ lunch & dinner) Espoir, attached to N'zérékoré's best cybercafé, serves dishes from Guinea and its neighbours.

Café le Diplomate (☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner) You'll get a good *café noir* at the Diplomate, and many of the men who hang here love to share their knowledge of the Forest Region.

Nimba Market (☒ daily) This little supermarket has instant ramen, chocolate bars and other imported goods.

Drinking

Bar Guinguette (☒ lunch & dinner) This simple watering hole at the entrance to town is a good people-watching spot. At night, women sell grilled fish right out front.

For dancing, NGO workers tend to gravitate toward **Club Hanoi** (admission GF5000) on Friday and **Hôtel Le Mont Nimba** (admission GF5000)

on Saturday, but both are busy both nights. Cover charges are often waived for women.

Getting There & Away

Bush taxis depart daily from the well-organised *gare voiture* for Lola (GF6000, 30 minutes), Macenta (GF18,000, 2½ hours), Beyla (GF20,000, four hours), Kankan (GF48,000, 12 hours) and Conakry (GF80,000, 20 hours).

Travel to Monrovia, Liberia, is a rough, all-day trip with many checkpoints: seek local advice before heading there. Bush taxis go to the border at Diéké (GF19,000, three hours) frequently and there you get another car to complete the trip. If Côte d'Ivoire becomes safe again, you can get taxis to Man via Sipilou. See also p436.

AIG (☎ 911430) hires 4WDs for GF200,000 per day with driver plus GF2000 per kilometre.

Flights are sometimes available to/from Conakry.

LOLA

Lola, near the borders of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, is the starting point for hiking up Mt Nimba (see the boxed text, below). There are several mud-cloth cooperatives in town and if you ask around someone will lead you to one. Lola is also home to the endangered grey parrot, which, because it can imitate sounds, is often sold into captivity. There are some places (called *dortoirs*) around town where the birds sing daily at dawn and dusk. On Tuesday the market overwhelms the town.

HIKING ON MOUNT NIMBA

Mount Nimba, Guinea's highest peak at 1752m, is part of the mountain range straddling Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. The summit, best reached from the village of Gbakoré, 18km southeast of Lola, offers phenomenal views of surrounding peaks in all three countries. It's a steep, winding four-hour trek to the top and a guide (the friendly Guillah Bamuh who lives in Gbakoré comes highly recommended) is mandatory.

Getting the required permit at the *préfecture* in Lola is a royal pain in the ass and will likely put plenty of francs in some official's pocket (reportedly this is not the case at the governor's office in N'zérékoré), so it's best to go straight to Gbakoré and let your guide get the permit for you. Come in the afternoon and you can climb the next day; come early enough in the morning and you might be able to summit the same day. The price is negotiable, but count on GF100,000 for everything. There is no guesthouse in Gbakoré (one is planned) but food and lodging can be arranged.

The Nimba mountains host a rich variety of plant and animal life. Nearly a dozen vertebrate species are endemic to the area, including some notable amphibians (see p408). The range is protected as a World Heritage Site, but this didn't stop the government from granting a license for an iron mine. Because of this, Unesco has also inscribed it on their List of World Heritage in Danger.

Hôtel Heinoukoloa (r GF15,000; ☒), signposted 1km off the main road, has basic but acceptable rooms. En route is the newer **Hôtel Noukети** (r with shared bathroom GF10,000, r with private bathroom GF20,000-25,000; ☒) which has a friendly staff and a good restaurant.

Bush taxis head to N'zérékoré (GF6000, 30 minutes), Bossou (GF4000, 30 minutes) and Gbakoré (GF4000, 45 minutes). To Yekepa (GF6000, 45 minutes) in Liberia the road is pretty good. Heading toward Man in Côte d'Ivoire it's a bad road whether you go via Danané or Sipilou. See also p436.

BOSSOU

The **Bossou Environmental Research Institute** (☎ 584761; gban@nifty.com) attracts researchers from around the world to study the famous chimpanzees (see p408) living in the surrounding hills. There's not a lot of primary forest left, though the area remains scenic and, because the chimps are tracked daily, your chances of finding them are excellent. (Note that they take an early afternoon nap.) A guide for a couple hours in the forest costs GF50,000, with half the money going to the village.

The **Monkey Nest Guesthouse** (r GF5000) at the base of Mont Gban has surely the cleanest, most comfortable rooms at this price in the country. If space is available you can also sleep at the research centre for GF10,000.

Instead of heading straight back to Lola, consider taking the seldom-travelled rocky track east to Gbakoré where you'll enjoy gorgeous views of Mt Nimba. About 4km before Gbakoré the road crosses a natural bridge cut through the rock by the Cavally River. It's a magical little spot, ideal for a picnic and a swim.

LOWER GUINEA

While much of Guinea's coast is rocky or marshy and inaccessible, there are beautiful spots worth discovering. Lower Guinea (Basse Guinée) also has some interesting caves and other geological formations, though most visitors are here for the beaches.

FRIA

Fria is a bustling town in an attractive area, marred only by the enormous bauxite mining compound that dominates views on ap-

proach. The main reason to come here is to explore the geologically fascinating surrounding countryside. About 15km from Fria, beyond Wawayá village, are the **Grottes de Bogoro**, a good place for a swim. The **Grottes de Konkouré** can be reached by continuing out of town on the airport road and then down about 4km on a very rough road (best on bike or foot) to the Konkouré River where fisherman will take you in their boat to the caves. The trip is best done in the dry season when the river is calmer. There are also interesting caves in **Tormélin**, between Fria and the Boké highway; they're about a 6km walk from the Tormélin mosque.

Fria's fanciest hotel (and nightclub too) is **Le Bowal** (☎ 240490; airport road; r GF80,000-100,000; ☒ ☒), but the best choice for people coming to explore the area is **Hôtel Yaskadi** (☎ 240984; signposted off Route Unite; r with fan/air-con GF15,000/30,000; ☒ ☒). It has clean, decent rooms and the affable staff know all about the area and can arrange guides. **Restaurant-Nightclub Le Kamsoum** (meals GF10,000; ☒ breakfast, lunch & dinner), a colourful place behind the mineworkers' apartments, is one of Fria's best restaurants. It's open early to late, and as midnight approaches the dancing starts.

Bush taxis go daily to the Boké highway junction (GF5000, one hour), Conakry (GF12,000, three hours) and Téliimélé (GF14,000, four hours), from where you can continue on to Pita.

BEL AIR & SOBANÉ

About 40km north of Boffa is the signposted turn-off leading to Plage de Bel Air, Cape Verga, the fishing village of Koukoude and a beautiful coastline. Bel Air beach, 25km from the highway, was once a great place to relax in simple beach huts, but now it's dominated by President Conté's flash **Grand Hôtel de Bel Air** (☎ 434840; r GF200,000-250,000, ste GF800,000; ☒ ☒ ☒).

Three kilometres before Bel Air is the signposted turn-off for Conté's wife's **Village Touristique Sobané** (☎ 011-545129; bungalows GF80,000; closed Jul-Oct; ☒), a much better choice whether you're a backpacker or a billionaire. Big beautiful thatch-roofed bungalows sit below palm trees just off a gorgeous stretch of sand or you can sleep on the beach for GF10,000. The restaurant is pretty good and the nightclub has

dancing on weekends. Beach access for nonguests us GF2000.

In between the other two, a short walk to the beach, is the simple **Hôtel Soumatel** (r&huts with shared bathroom GF30,000;). It's overpriced, but you should be able to bargain.

Without your own transport, you'll need to charter a taxi in Boffa (GF75,000) or Boké (GF100,000) or be prepared for a long wait at the junction for the occasional pick-up truck plying this route (GF5000), but you'll probably still have to walk the 5km to Sobané.

BOKÉ

Boké is a clean and orderly town with views over the surrounding countryside. You might find yourself stopping here if you are heading to Guinea-Bissau or Senegal. If you spend the night, ask if there are any concerts taking place; there often are. If you'd rather do the performing, inquire about drum and dance lessons with **Batafon Arts** (011-291116), which offers all-inclusive stays at their simple huts in the nearby village of Tamakéné for anything from a few days to a few months.

Near the *gare voiture* is the **Fortin de Boké** (admission negotiable; 8am-6pm), now a museum with a small collection of artefacts. You can also see the prison cells downstairs where rebellious slaves were kept before being taken downriver to the coast. You can sometimes check email at the unnamed shop next to Sotelgui.

Hôtel Filao (310202; r with fan GF25,000, r with air-con GF35,000-40,000;), about a kilometre east of Boké, isn't the most expensive hotel in town, but it is the best value. The restaurant is good and the bar relaxed. The **Maison des Jeunes** (GF10,000) near the *gare voiture* has clean rooms with shared bathroom. **Restaurant Bibine** (meals GF2500-12,000; breakfast, lunch & dinner) near Sotelgui is homey and friendly and the *riz gras* and roast chicken are good. They open very early and serve until very late.

There are direct bush taxis to Conakry (GF23,500, three hours). For Labé you'll need to go to Kamsar where a taxi departs most mornings. Minibuses run to Québo (GF30,000, six hours) in Guinea-Bissau on Tuesday and Saturday. Trucks sometimes go on other days. The road is very bad. See also p437.

GUINEA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Conakry has lots of luxury properties and even more dives, plus plenty of choices in between, though nothing truly priced in the budget category. The budget category covers places under GF50,000 and the top end encompasses places that cost over GF200,000. Upcountry, where most towns have at least one cheap hotel with rooms from around GF10,000, the more expensive places to stay are usually excellent value. You can often get a lovely, comfortable room with private bathroom and air-con for the same price as a grubby brothel in the capital.

Outside Conakry most hotels are on the outskirts of towns to offer peace and quiet, or, in the case of the cheap places, privacy. The roar of traffic is sometimes replaced by the music of the attached nightclubs.

A tourism tax of GF5000 per person applies to top-end and some midrange hotels.

ACTIVITIES

The Fouta Djallon region (p418) is great for hiking and biking and the Forest Region (p428) also has good possibilities. Anglers should bring a rod; there are streams and rivers everywhere and deep-sea fishing is possible off the coast by Conakry. Guinea has many wild and scenic rivers to paddle; the biggest adventure is on the remote upper reaches of the Niger. The trip from Faranah to Kouroussa through Parc National du Haut Niger (p425) is highly recommended, but not for the inexperienced.

If you have more time, you can easily find teachers of traditional dance and music across the country. Faranah (p425) and Boké (left) have established schools.

BOOKS

Guinea Today by Mylène Rémy has a good historical background. You can pick up a copy for GF25,000 in Conakry at Soguidip and from vendors on Ave de la République.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are open from 8am to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday and 8am to 1pm Friday. Most businesses are open from 8am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, except Friday, when many close at 1pm.

PRACTICALITIES

- Guinea uses the metric system.
- Electricity is 220V/50Hz and plugs have two round pins.
- Guinea's best-selling newspaper is the satirical weekly *Le Lynx*.
- The only TV station is the government-owned RTG, which shows a lot of sports and speeches.
- The BBC World Service is broadcast in French on FM and English on short wave.

Businesses also close for an hour or so at lunch. Banking hours are from 8.30am to 12.30pm and 2.30pm to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.30am to 12.30pm and 2.45pm to 4.30pm Friday.

CUSTOMS

You're not allowed to export more than GF100,000 in local currency or US\$5000 in foreign currency. You must have a licence to export precious stones. To export art objects (interpreted to include anything made of wood), you'll need a permit from the Musée National in Conakry (p412). The cost varies, but averages 15% of the value for items worth less than GF50,000, and 25% of the value for more expensive pieces. It's best to do this a day before departure and to bring purchase receipts.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Overall, travel in Guinea is safe; but there are several things to keep in mind. Some towns in the Forest Region suffer occasional tribal fighting. While these incidents are usually small scale and don't directly affect travellers, it would be wise to inquire locally before visiting the region. There are also occasional armed robberies of bush taxis and private cars in the south, so don't travel at night.

Many bush taxi drivers are maniacs; disregarding lanes and passing other vehicles on blind corners. The many wrecks and mangled rails lining the roads offer ample evidence that this is bravado, not skill. Don't be afraid to ask your driver to slow down. No matter how good your driver is, the vehicle is bound to be crap and breakdowns are common.

Electricity, running water and phones (even mobiles) are all intermittent. Most hotels have generators, though they don't usually run all night at cheap hotels.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Guinean Embassies & Consulates

Within West Africa, Guinea has embassies in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Liberia. For details see the relevant country chapter. Elsewhere, Guinea has the following:

Belgium Brussels (02-771 0126; ambassadeguinee.bel@skynet.be; 108 Auguste Reyers Blvd, 1030)

Canada Ottawa (613-789-8444; 483 Wilbrod St, K1N 6N1)

France Paris (01-47 04 81 48; 51 rue de la Faisanderie, 75116)

Germany Berlin (030-20 07 43 30; berlin@embaguinee.de; Jägerstraße 67-69, 10117)

UK London (020-7078 6087; 83 Victoria St, SW1H 0HW)

USA Washington DC (202-986-4300; 2112 Leroy Place NW, 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Guinea

All of the following are in Conakry.

Belgium (Map pp410-11; 412831; Corniche Sud, Kouléwondy; 9am-12.30pm & 3-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri)

Benin (Map p412; 292688; cbc-gn@yahoo.fr; Rue RO 251, Kipé; 9am-1pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Côte d'Ivoire (Map pp410-11; 451082; Blvd du Commerce; 8.30am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-2pm Fri)

France (Map pp410-11; 411655; Blvd du Commerce; 7-11am Mon-Fri) Processes visas for Burkina Faso and Togo.

Germany (Map pp410-11; 411506; www.conakry.diplo.de; 2nd Blvd; 7.30am-noon Mon-Fri)

Ghana (Map pp410-11; 409560; Corniche Nord, Camayenne; 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Guinea-Bissau (Map pp410-11; 422136; Route de Donka, Bellevue; 8am-2.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-1pm Fri)

Japan (Map pp410-11; 468510; Corniche Sud, Coléah; 8am-5pm Mon-Thu, 8am-1pm Fri)

Liberia (Map pp410-11; 012-676526; Rue DI 258, Landreah; 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri)

Mali (Map pp410-11; 461418; Corniche Nord, Camayenne; 7.30am-4pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-1pm Fri)

Netherlands (Map pp410-11; 415021; Novotel, Rm 121) 8am-11pm Mon-Fri)

Nigeria (Map pp410-11; 411681; Ave de la Gare; 11am-1pm Mon, Wed & Fri)

Senegal (Map pp410-11; 409037; Corniche Sud, Coléah; 8am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Thu, 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Fri)

Sierra Leone (Map pp410-11; ☎ 464084; Carrefour Bellevue; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

UK (Map pp410-11; ☎ 434715; britcon.oury@basy.net; Corniche Sud, Residence 2000, Villa 1; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Fri) Assists Australian and Canadian citizens.

USA (Map pp410-11; ☎ 411520; http://conakry.usembassy.gov; 9th Ave; ☎ 7.30am-noon Mon-Fri) A new embassy is under construction in *quartier de Lambanyi*.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

During May, the **Fish Festival**, in the village of Baro (near Kouroussa, p426) draws big crowds. People try to catch (and release) sacred fish to get good luck. There is also plenty of drumming and dancing. The **Hunting Festival** held annually in the Kankan area (p426, the time and location changes) lets Malinké men show off their shooting prowess. During September's **Potato Festival**, the city of Mali-ville (p423) throws a party for the farmers of the surrounding villages.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays include:

New Year's Day 1 January

Easter March/April

Declaration of the Second Republic 3 April

Labour Day 1 May

Assumption Day 15 August

Market Women's Revolt 27 August

Referendum Day 28 September

Independence Day 2 October

Christmas Day 25 December

Islamic holidays are also observed, and Eid al-Fitr is one of Guinea's biggest celebrations; see p818.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet services are easy to come by in Conakry, though outside the capital only a few towns have Web connections. In the capital, costs are rarely more than GF6000 per hour.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Friends of Guinea (www.friendsofguinea.org) A useful little site created by a group of returned Peace Corps volunteers.

Guinea Forum (www.guinea-forum.org) A good site for current news.

National Tourist Office (<http://ontguinee.free.fr>) Still a work in progress.

LANGUAGE

French is the official language, and it is widely spoken throughout the country to varying degrees of proficiency. Major African languages are Malinké in the north, Pulaar (also called Fula) in the Fouta Djallon and Susu along the coast. Learning some phrases in these local languages is helpful if you'll be spending time off the main routes. See p861 for a list of useful phrases in French, Malinké, Pulaar and Susu.

MAPS

Institut Géographique National's (IGN) 1992 map of Guinea is outdated, though a new version is due in 2006. It's available at some stationary stores in Conakry, and on the street (GF15,000). The IGN also sells black-and-white or colour copies of topographical maps (scales 1:50,000 to 1:500,000) covering individual regions of the country for GF10,000 to GF20,000.

MONEY

Banks outside Conakry exchange only cash. If you're arriving overland carry some US dollars, euros or CFA, as they're easily changed almost everywhere. Black-market dealers are widely used throughout Guinea and some even take travellers cheques. Their rates are generally about 5% better than the bank rate. They work in the open, but you should still be discreet when dealing with them, especially in Conakry: not all are honest and there are occasional police crackdowns. No matter who you change with, rates are best in Conakry.

Only a few fancy hotels take credit cards, (and the numbers are sometimes stolen), though the Banque Internationale pour le Commerce et l'Industrie de la Guinée (Bicigui) branches in Conakry, Kindia, Labé and N'zérékoré will advance cash from Visa cards. By sometime in 2006, they say, all of their branches (Boké, Fria, Kamsar, Kankan, Kissidougou, Macenta, Mamou and Sangaredi) will offer this service. The ATM at Bicigui's Ave de la République branch in Conakry also works with Visa cards.

The exchange counter at the airport is rarely open and offers bad rates. Neither this bank nor any other will change Guinean francs back into hard currency when you leave Guinea, even if you have your exchange receipts.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Photo permits are not required, although don't snap government buildings, airports, bridges, military installations or anything that might be deemed embarrassing to Guinea's image or you could be in for some trouble. In fact, it's best not to use a camera at all in cities and towns unless you're sure the police aren't watching and locals don't object: unfortunately many will. Copies of a government decree expressly permitting tourist photos are available at the tourist office and it's worth picking one up because officials outside the capital will be impressed by the stamps on the last page. The same restrictions apply to video.

Konica and Tudorcolor film are available in Conakry. For developing, the best place is Labo Photo with several locations on Ave de la République in Conakry, although quality is erratic. For more general information, see p823.

POST

Outside Conakry the post cannot be trusted for anything other than postcards, and even in the capital there is a good chance a letter or package won't get through. If you are sending something valuable, use the private shipping services in Conakry (p411).

TELEPHONE

For domestic and international calls there is a government-owned Sotelgui office in all large- and medium-sized towns, though most people use the many telecentres. Sotelgui phonecards are another possibility, but it's not always easy to find a phone you can use them on.

Telecentres usually charge GF500 per minute for local calls and around GF3000 for international. Be sure to shop around because some charge nearly double for the same call as their neighbours. In Conakry, many telecentres will offer illicit international lines for as low as GF1000 per minute. Internet phone connections (GF1500 to GF2000 per minute) are another choice, but the quality isn't always good.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Office National du Tourisme in Conakry (see p412) can provide some general information. There are Ministère du Tourisme, de l'Hôtellerie et de l'Artisanat offices

in many upcountry towns, but the staff are just as likely to hinder as help you.

VISAS

All visitors, except nationals of Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) countries, Morocco and Tunisia, need a visa. Visas, usually valid for three months, are not available at airports or land borders.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be extended for up to three months at the **Bureau of Immigration** (Map pp410-11; ☎ 441339; 8th Ave) in Conakry for GF80,000.

Visas for Onward Travel

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

One month single-entry visas cost GF84,000 to GF168,000, depending on nationality, plus two photos, and are issued in two days.

GUINEA-BISSAU

One-month single-entry visas cost GF70,000 (GF120,000 for three-month multiple-entry visas). You need two photos and visas are issued within three hours.

LIBERIA

Three-month single-entry/multi-entry visas cost GF200,000/250,000 for most nationalities and six-month multiple-entry visas are GF350,000. US citizens must buy a US\$100 one-year multiple-entry visa. You need two photos and a letter of request. Visas are ready within two days.

MALI

One-month single-entry visas cost GF16,200; except for Americans, who must get a one-year multiple-entry visa for US\$100. Two photos are required and the visas can be ready the same day if you go early. Reportedly you can also get a *laissez-passer* (travel permit) valid for up to a month for GF10,000 in Kankan. Take two photos and photocopies of your passport front page and the Guinean visa to the *gendarmerie* near the market in the morning and pick up the pass in the afternoon.

SENEGAL

Visitors from Canada, the USA and EU do not need a visa for stays up to 90 days. Most other nationals, including Australians pay

GF14,600/33,600 for a one-month single-entry/three-month multiple-entry visa and they should be issued right away.

SIERRA LEONE

A one-month single-entry/three-month multiple-entry visas costs up to CFA430,000/650,000. You need one photo and they are ready within 72 hours, or you can pay CFA85,000 for rush service.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Women travellers are unlikely to experience any special problems in Guinea. For more general information and advice, see p828.

TRANSPORT IN GUINEA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering Guinea

A certificate with proof of a yellow fever vaccination is required of all travellers.

Air

Guinea's only international airport is Conakry-G'bessia, 13km from the centre of Conakry. It remains one of the most chaotic and exasperating in West Africa. Direct flights from Europe are available with Air France (Paris) and SN Brussels (Brussels) for as little as £660 return.

The table on below lists flights between Conakry and West African destinations. Regional flights leave from the *aérogare nationale*, next to the international airport. For Southern and East Africa, you can connect to Johannesburg via Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) and Dakar (Senegal); Nairobi via Abidjan and Dakar; and to Addis Ababa via Abidjan.

DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax for international flights is usually included in the ticket; otherwise it's GF20,000.

The following airlines service Guinea and have offices in Conakry:

Air France (AF; Map pp410-11; ☎ 413657; www.airfrance.com; 9th Ave, Conakry) Hub: Paris.

Air Ivoire (VU; ☎ 434526; www.airivoire.com; Ave de la République, Conakry) Hub: Abidjan.

Air Sénégal International (V7; Map pp410-11; ☎ 212120; www.air-senegal-international.com; Ave de la République, Conakry) Hub: Dakar.

Bellview (B3; Map pp410-11; ☎ 434340; www.flybellviewair.com; Ave de la République, Conakry) Hub: Lagos.

Slok Air (S0; Map pp410-11; ☎ 295676; www.slokaairinternational.com; 6th Blvd, Conakry) Hub: Banjul.

SN Brussels (SN; ☎ 413610; www.flysn.com; Ave de la République, Conakry) Hub: Brussels.

Land

Though Guinea is small, it shares borders with six countries.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Transport continues to run to and from Côte d'Ivoire, but until the situation changes, you shouldn't be on it. The most frequently travelled route is between Lola and Man either via Nzo and Danané or via Sipilou and Biankouma. By public transport, the latter is the fastest choice. From Kankan it is easiest to go via Bamako as the road to Odienné via Mandiana is so bad. There's also a seldom-travelled route between Beyla and Odienné (via Sinko). The roads here are also horrible, but taxis run from Kankan and N'zérékoré to Beyla where you can connect onward.

REGIONAL FLIGHTS FROM CONAKRY

destination	flights per week	airline	approximate one-way/return fare (GF)
Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)	9	Air Ivoire, Bellview	900,000/1,400,000
Accra (Ghana)	5	Air Ivoire, Bellview	1,000,000/2,000,000
Bamako (Mali)	3	Air Ivoire, Slok Air	800,000/1,200,000
Banjul (The Gambia)	3	Slok Air	550,000/830,000
Bissau (Guinea-Bissau)	5	Air Sénégal International	1,600,000/1,900,000
Dakar (Senegal)	10	Air Sénégal International, Slok Air	600,000/1,050,000
Praia (Cape Verde)	2	Air Sénégal International	1,840,000/2,300,000

GUINEA-BISSAU

Most people travelling by taxi get to Bissau via Labé, Koundara and Gabú. You have to taxi hop between Koundara and Gabú and the road beyond the border is horrible (especially in the rainy season), but it can be done in a day if you start in the morning. Traffic picks up considerably on the days around Saréboïdo's Sunday market.

Minibuses go a couple times a week (you might find a truck on other days) from Boké and Kamsar up the horrible road to Québo. Going to Koundara (to get to Gabú) via Boké is only feasible on weekends and even then involves long waits for taxis to fill. With your own vehicle you can shave some distance, though not necessarily time, off this journey by going direct from Koumbia to Pitche.

LIBERIA

Because of the large number of refugees in Guinea there is a lot of traffic to Liberia, but check the security situation before heading there. The primary route is from N'zérékoré to Ganta via Diéké. Bush taxis go frequently from N'zérékoré to the border where you can get a *taxi-moto* or walk the remaining 2km to Ganta where you can get a Monrovia-bound taxi.

From Macenta, bush taxis go via Daro to the border and on to Voinjama, although the Voinjama road is terrible. The route south from Guéckédou to Foya is similarly difficult. It's probably better to go from Macenta to Koyama, where you can find transport to Zorzor and on to Monrovia, because this road is reportedly being upgraded. Still, plan on a full day to reach the capital.

Another route goes from Lola via Bossou to Yekepa but traffic is sporadic beyond here. For all of these routes you buy a single ticket, but change cars at the border.

MALI

Taxis and buses travel direct to Bamako from Kankan, Siguiri, Labé and Conakry. The road is sealed and in excellent shape, except for a 50km-stretch in Mali that is due to be upgraded soon. If you have your own 4WD you can also go from Kankan via Mandiana to Bougouni, or Mali-ville via Kita.

SENEGAL

Taxis to Senegal going via Koundara, the busiest route, stop at Diaoubé, a small town

with a huge market, where you can connect to almost everywhere, including Dakar. Because the roads on the Guinean side are so bad, you often end up getting to the border so late you need to sleep there, though some taxis leave at night to avoid this hassle.

There is also a rough road between Mali-ville and Kedougou, though many people travel this route on foot. See p424 for more details.

SIERRA LEONE

Bush taxis run regularly from Conakry to Freetown. The road is sealed most of the way and at the time of research work had already begun to finish the job. Alternatively, you can take a bush taxi to the border at Pamelap and connect with vehicles on the other side to all other large towns in Sierra Leone.

From Kindia to Kamakwie there are regular taxis to the border at Medina-Oula, but little transport further south. The road on the Sierra Leone side is quite bad and sometimes during the rainy season the Little Scarcies River runs so high the ferry shuts down. The road from Faranah to Kabala is also in bad shape and so sparsely travelled, but taxis do go a couple times a week.

The crossings in Guinea's parrot's beak, the point of land west of Guéckédou, are probably best avoided for the time being. Not only are the roads bad, but we've heard reports of Sierra Leone border officials here demanding travellers purchase visas even though they already have one. If you do cross this way and are travelling by bush taxi, go to Kailahun rather than Koindou because there is much more traffic there.

River

During the rainy season (July to November) barges run once a week or so from Siguiri to Bamako in Mali. It's a one-day journey downstream and at least two days coming back up.

Sea

Boats go from Kamsar (southwest of Boké) to Bissau (GF30,000) stopping in Cacine and Kamkhonde, where many passengers catch bush taxis to complete their trip to the capital. The boats follow no set schedules.

The ferry service to Freetown is expected to begin again, so it's worth asking around at the port if you are interested.

Tours

Batafon Arts (☎ 01273 605791, www.batafonarts.co.uk) This English (Sussex-based) drum-and-dance school offers a four-week accompanied trip to Boké, the artistic director's hometown, in February, or individualised trips the rest of the year.

Guinea Festival (www.festagg.com) Created to promote tourism, particularly among African-Americans, this week-long packaged tour event, usually held in February of even years, features music and dance performances, hands-on cultural workshops and guided tours upcountry. Book through **Brock Travel** (☎ 404-244-1980) in the US and **Mondial Tours** (Map pp410-11; ☎ 433550; Ave de la République, Conakry).

GETTING AROUND

With few good roads, travel can be long and hard. You won't always have to rough it upcountry, but as long as you are prepared for that possibility a visit here can be very rewarding.

Air

At the time of research there were no internal flights. Many local airlines – usually flying to Kankan, Labé, N'zérékoré and Siguiri – have come and gone in recent years so it's always worth asking what is available.

Bicycle

Although Conakry is too congested for cycling, many areas upcountry, particularly the Fouta Djalon, are excellent for mountain biking. Villages are spaced closely enough that lodging and food are seldom a problem on longer trips. You'll need to be fully equipped with spare parts, as you won't find fittings for Western-made cycles anywhere, though most towns have at least one shop that can mend flat tyres and take care of other basics.

Bus

A big bus (*grand car*) usually runs daily between Conakry and Boké, Kindia, Mamou, Labé, Kankan and N'zérékoré. Although buses are fairly comfortable and less expensive than bush taxis, they're slow and break down often.

Bush Taxi & Minibus

Bush taxis are the main form of transport in Guinea. They're always overcrowded and breakdowns are common, though the driv-

ers usually manage to fix things before too long. The standard Peugeot station wagons usually carry ten or eleven passengers (plus more on the roof). In general, transport is faster and more frequent in the morning and on or around market days. Please note that all of the travel times given are just rough approximations.

Although minibuses are cheaper than taxis, they are just as overcrowded and take far longer to fill up. They also usually travel slower, especially on bad roads; however, a new minibus will cover the same route faster than a decrepit old taxi.

The post office in Conakry has its own minibuses departing twice a week (the days often change) to and from Dabola, Kankan, Faranah and Kissidougou. Post buses, which generally cost a little more than bush taxis, are a good choice because you get a seat to yourself, though you'll need to book at least a day in advance.

In Guinea, the term *gare voiture* is used for taxi and bus stations.

Car & Motorcycle

If you're driving your own or a hired vehicle in Guinea, be sure the insurance and registration papers are in order, as they will likely be checked. They'll also sometimes be held for bribes – remember that amounts are always negotiable. See p417 for details of car-hire agencies in Conakry.

ROAD CONDITIONS

The main road east from Conakry to Lola via Mamou and Kissidougou is sealed and in good condition, except for the stretch between Kissidougou and Sérédou.

From Mamou north, the road is sealed and excellent as far as Labé. Continuing on to Mali-ville it is in fair shape; to Koundara it is worse. There's a ferry crossing between Labé and Koundara.

In Upper Guinea, the roads from Mamou and Kissidougou to Kankan are sealed but riddled with potholed. From Kankan north to Siguiri the road is excellent while south to Beyla is one of Guinea's worst.

The coastal road from Conakry is sealed and in excellent condition as far as Boké; from there it's dirt.

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