

# Nigeria

Nigeria is superlative in every sense. It's the most populous country on the continent – every fifth African is a Nigerian – it dominates the region economically, and its music and literature have made it a major cultural player far beyond its borders. It's also a country of extremes. Great wealth and great poverty sit cheek by jowl, and, while awash with oil, it suffers from chronic power shortages and decrepit infrastructure. The sprawling megalopolis of Lagos contrasts sharply with the ancient cities of the north and the river deltas and lush forests of the south and east.

Nigeria can feel like more than the sum of its parts – an unruly collection of regions pulling against each other with a centrifugal force that occasionally erupts into violence. While the three main ethnic groups – the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa – may sometimes rub together uncomfortably, and strife between the Christian and Muslim communities simmers below the surface, the marvel is that amid all this disorder the country seems to work, and Nigerians have such obvious pride in where they come from.

Nigeria carries a fearsome reputation among travellers. Getting around can sometimes be tough, and it's not a destination for first-timers to Africa, but you shouldn't believe all the scare stories. While a few parts of the country remain problematic, the vast majority is as warm and welcoming to visitors as anywhere in Africa. Chaotic and exuberant yes, but never dull. If you don't visit Nigeria you can barely say that you've been to West Africa.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 924,000 sq km
- **Capital** Abuja
- **Country code** ☎ 234
- **Famous for** Corruption; email scams; writers Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe; football
- **Language** English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba
- **Money** naira (N); US1= N132; €1= N162
- **Population** 140 million
- **Visa** Get in advance, letter of invitation usually required



## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lagos** (p629) Plunge in and sample the adrenaline charge and social scene of Nigeria's wild beating heart.
- **Calabar** (p647) Meet rescued chimpanzees and monkeys at the conservation centres in the southeast's old colonial port.
- **Kano** (p659) Find a trace of the old Saharan trade routes in the old city and the indigo dye pits.
- **Osun Sacred Forest** (p641) Enjoy the cool green peace of this place in Oshogbo, dedicated to the old Yoruba gods.
- **Yankari National Park** (p655) Look for wild-life and finish your day with a soak in the delightful Wiki Warm Spring.

## ITINERARIES

- **One to Two Weeks** No one should visit Nigeria without at least a few days in **Lagos** (p629), trying to navigate the city's mindset and traffic jams, and spending late nights in the bars and clubs. When Lagos gets too much, head east to **Benin City** (p642) to see the ancient craft of brass sculpture, before carrying on to the old port city of **Calabar** (p647), where you can check out some pioneering primate conservation work and the country's best museum. You could also stop off at **Umuhaia** (p647) to see the National War Museum and learn about the Biafran conflict. Extend your time in the southeast in the lush forests of the **Afi Mountain Drill Ranch** (p650).
- **One Month** A longer trip allows you to further explore the south, but also to take in northern Nigeria. From Lagos, fly to **Abuja** (p650), and then continue by road to the old trading cities of **Zaria** (p658) and **Kano** (p659). An interesting detour would be via the cool plateau city of **Jos** (p652), with a side-trip to **Yankari National Park** (p655) and the delightful Wiki Warm Spring. A month-long trip can easily encompass all these areas and give an excellent taste of Nigeria's diversity.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

For travel to the south, March to August are the wettest months to visit, and best avoided if possible. Temperatures are hot year-round, peaking at about 35°C in the spring; the humidity is constant. Late spring to summer is the hottest part of the year in the north (sometimes topping out at an

## HOW MUCH?

- **Okada ride across town** N50
- **Replica Benin brass sculpture** N12,000
- **Afrobeat CD** N500
- **Bribe at police roadblock** N20
- **One minute local phonecall** N20

## LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** N65
- **Litre of bottled water** N80
- **Beer (bottle of Star)** N150
- **Souvenir football shirt** N800
- **Street snack (stick of suya)** N100

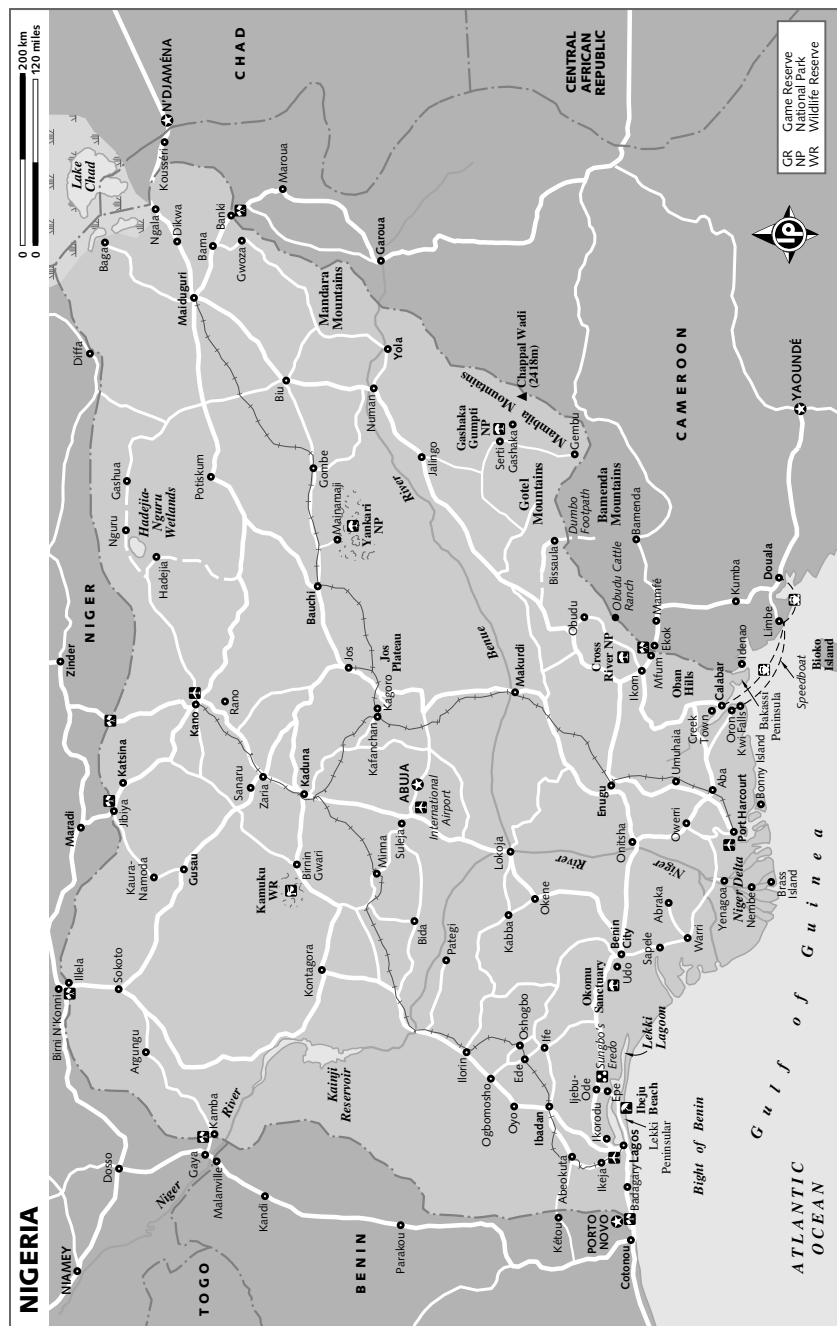
extreme 45°C). The mercury drops from October to January at the onset of the dusty harmattan winds.

As well as the weather, take note of political developments when planning your trip. Although the country is generally calm, local trouble can quickly flare up, so once you're in Nigeria keep an eye on the news and be prepared to change your plans at short notice if necessary.

## HISTORY

Northern and southern Nigeria are essentially two different countries, and their histories reflect this division. The first recorded empire to flourish in this part of West Africa was that of the Kanem-Borno, in the north around Lake Chad. Its wealth was based on control of the important trans-Saharan trade routes from West Africa to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Islam arrived in the 12th century and was adopted as the state religion. A number of Islamic Hausa kingdoms also flourished between the 11th and 14th centuries, based around the cities of Kano, Zaria and Nupe.

Islam made little headway in the south, and the southwest became a patchwork of small states, often dominated by the Yoruba. One of the earliest kingdoms, Ijebu, arose in the 10th century, and built the earthworks at Sungbo's Eredo. This was followed in the 14th and 15th centuries by the Ife, Oyo and Benin Kingdoms, which became important centres of trade. The Benin, the most famous,



produced some of the finest metal artwork in Africa. The political systems of these states rested on a sacred monarchy, with a strong court bureaucracy. The *obas* (kings) of these states retain considerable influence. In the southeast, the Igbo and other agrarian peoples never developed any centralised empires, instead forming loose confederations.

### Colonial Contacts

The first contact between the Yoruba empires and Europeans was made in the 15th century, when the Portuguese began trading in pepper – which was later supplanted by the more lucrative slave trade. In contrast, the northern Islamic states continued to trade principally across the Sahara, and remained untouched by European influence until well into the 19th century.

While the slave trade flourished until the early 19th century, the Portuguese were eventually pushed out by other European powers. As the abolition movement grew, the British took a lead in suppressing slavery along the Niger Delta, where conflicts with Yoruba slavers led to the annexation of Lagos port – their first colonial foothold.

At the same time, Islamic revivalism was sweeping the north. The Hausa kings were overthrown by their Fulani subjects who, in the 1820s, set up a caliphate based in Sokoto, led by Osman Dan Fodio. The caliphate eventually stretched from Senegal to Cameroon, with its religious fervour inspiring Islamic revolutions across the region.

The British grab for Nigeria was a classic piece of imperial buccaneering, inspired by the palm oil trade which replaced slaving. The Royal Niger Company was formed in 1879, to cut out local middlemen and thwart the ambitions of the French, who were advancing along the Niger River. From here it was a short step to full annexation, and after the turn of the 20th century, British soldiers stormed Sokoto and Kano to create Nigeria.

Nigeria was divided in two – the southern Colony and the northern Protectorate. The British chose to rule indirectly through local kings and chiefs, a policy that worked well in the northern city-states, but much less so in the southwest, where none of the traditional Yoruba rulers had ever extracted taxes. In the southeast, where there had never been any centralised authority, the policy was even less successful.

### Independence & Other Struggles

Indirect rule stored up trouble for the future. The north remained economically underdeveloped, while in the south, Western education and Christian missionaries were promoted. As cries for independence grew louder after WWII, the British struggled to balance the interests of the regions whilst drawing up a new constitution. It was a tricky task. The Hausa north feared that the southerners' educational advantage would allow them to dominate politics and commerce, while mistrust between the Yorubas and Igbos divided the south. The British solution was to divide the country into three regions between these major ethnic groups.

Tensions arose over who was to dominate the federal parliament. After the hard-fought elections of 1959, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, a moderate northerner, was asked to form a government. Nigeria became an independent republic on 1 October 1960.

The coalition government of the First Republic was a disaster. Politics quickly degenerated into regional self-interest, corruption became rampant and the elite accumulated wealth by any means possible. The elections of 1965 were so outrageously rigged that protesting groups went on a rampage.

By early 1966, the stage was set for a development which would dominate Nigeria for years: the army got involved in politics. A group of Igbo officers staged a coup. Balewa and the premiers of the north and west were assassinated, and General Ironsi, the Igbo head of the army, took the reins of power.

Ironsi barely lasted four months. Anti-Igbo riots broke out in the north, and he was overthrown by a regime led by Yakubu Gowon, a Christian northerner. The violence grew, with anti-Igbo pogroms in the north and attacks on Hausas in the south. A state of emergency was announced, but in May 1967 the east's military governor, Lt Colonel Ojukwu, announced the secession of Biafra; the Igbo homeland which was awash with newly found oil. A bloody civil war began.

Independent Biafra was recognised by only a handful of African countries, who were often insecure in their own post-colonial borders; most international powers supported the federal government. The civil war dragged on for nearly three years, as the Igbo forces fought tooth and claw for every inch of territory which the federal forces took

back. By early 1970, as a result of a blockade imposed by the federal government, Biafra faced starvation – this was the world's first 'TV famine', reported by a largely pro-Biafra international media. Biafra's forces finally capitulated, and Ojukwu fled the country. Up to a million Igbos had died in the war, mainly from hunger.

### Oil Boom and Bust

A policy of 'no victors, no vanquished' smoothed the path to reconciliation, which was aided in part by the sudden rocketing of world oil prices. Nigeria's oil production increased sevenfold between 1965 and 1973, and Gowon's military government became drunk on easy money. Foreign contractors chased oil dollars to Lagos, corruption exploded and crime was rampant. The chaos eventually became unbearable and, in July 1975, Gowon was overthrown in a bloodless coup led by General Murtala Mohammed.

The new government launched a clean-up of the civil service, the judiciary and the universities. However, despite his widespread popularity, Mohammed was assassinated by the army in early 1976. His successor, Biafran war hero Olusegun Obasanjo, drafted a US-style constitution and handed power back to a civilian government following elections in 1979. A northerner, Shehu Shagari, was sworn in as president.

Shagari followed earlier leaders by squandering Nigeria's wealth, a problem compounded when the price of oil crashed in the early 1980s. The country plunged into debt. Foreign workers packed up and left, and those who didn't (three million West Africans) were expelled as convenient scapegoats for the economic crisis. Shagari's end came with a coup on New Year's Eve 1983.

The new general in charge, Mohammed Bahari, tried playing the autocrat, but didn't have much time to enjoy his position. As regular as clockwork, another coup – Nigeria's sixth since independence – toppled him from power, to be replaced by General Ibrahim Babangida in 1985.

### Military Misrule

Babangida gained instant popularity by releasing political prisoners, and by lifting press controls. He also attempted something of an economic revolution, by devaluing the naira and privatising many

public enterprises, but these measures bore little fruit. Oil revenues dropped again and the country's debt rose to US\$20 billion. Crime and corruption increased, with those on government payrolls often the worst culprits. The country was broke.

Babangida promised to return Nigeria to democracy with the Abuja Declaration, announced from the new capital. Under this, political parties were allowed, but a return to civilian rule was twice postponed. A multi-billion dollar oil windfall from the Gulf War disappeared before even reaching the government's coffers and, as the general population suffered fuel shortages, unrest spread.

The much-delayed presidential elections went ahead in June 1993. Chief Moshood Abiola, a wealthy Yoruba Muslim from the south, claimed victory, having gained unprecedented support across ethnic and religious lines. The result met with little favour among the Hausa-dominated military, and Babangida annulled the election result within a fortnight. Abiola fled and an announcement of new polls was greeted by widespread rioting. Babangida's army colleagues forced him out of power, to be replaced by the vice-president General Sani Abacha.

Abacha was a grotesque caricature of an African dictator. He offered no warm words about a return to democracy, and abolished any institutions that might suggest otherwise. Aware of his own route to power, he purged the army of potential coup plotters. Abiola, who had returned from exile to claim power, was arrested and charged with treason. Intellectuals, labour leaders, politicians and prodemocracy leaders were also arrested. Dozens of newspapers were shut down and strikes brutally suppressed.

Unrest in the oil-rich Delta brought a particularly tough clampdown. Ken Saro-Wiwa, an Ogoni activist and writer, was executed in November 1995 for allegedly plotting to overthrow the government – an action that led to Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth and EU oil sanctions.

Abacha cared less about Nigeria's international isolation than siphoning off its wealth into Swiss bank accounts. But in June 1998, Nigerians were finally rescued by the 'coup from heaven'. Aged 54, and worth about US\$10 billion in stolen money, Abacha died of a heart attack in the arms of two Indian prostitutes. His defence chief, Abdulsalam

Abubakar, was sworn in as his successor and immediately promised reforms. In a strange echo of Abacha's fate, Abiola died of a heart attack in prison within a month of the dictator, still claiming the presidency. While viewed as suspicious by many Nigerians, his death cleared the way for the military to hold elections, and many other political prisoners were subsequently released.

True to his word, Abubakar allowed elections to proceed, and in February 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo, the former military leader and southern Yoruba Christian, was returned as president.

### Nigeria Today

Obasanjo inherited a country in tatters. Free from the military yoke, the deep political and cultural differences between the north and south of the country began to play themselves out in an unruly manner. A major test came in 2000, when several northern states introduced sharia, or Islamic law, amid a climate of religious revivalism. Tensions between communities became inflamed and the federal government handled the situation badly, resulting in mass riots and bloodshed.

The flames were fanned again in 2002, when Nigeria was due to hold the Miss World contest, an event that caused fresh fighting. With democracy having had little chance to grow roots, local and national politicians repeatedly used ethnic and religious differences to build power bases, sometimes stoking unrest for their own gain. During Obasanjo's first term as president, over 10,000 people were killed in communal violence.

One major area where Obasanjo has had success, however, is in returning Nigeria to its status as a major player on the international stage. Nigeria now plays a lead role in the Commonwealth, and has been deeply involved in projects such as debt relief and the New African Partnership for Economic Development (NEPAD) and it has acted as mediator in several conflicts. His reelection in 2003 was generally regarded as a consolidation of civilian rule. Despite this, domestic critics have claimed Obasanjo's high international profile is a distraction from tackling Nigeria's problems at home.

Nigeria's economy has not prospered. A much-publicised anticorruption drive has had mixed results, claiming back some of

Abacha's stolen millions, but it hasn't netted many high-profile officials on the make.

Nigeria's oil industry is in an even worse position. Governments have neglected the infrastructure, to the point where Nigeria was left needing to import refined fuel at a higher price than it sold its crude for, resulting in petrol shortages. Plans to remove fuel subsidies in 2004 were met with a general strike by Nigerians, who see cheap fuel as a birthright, having witnessed many of the other benefits of statehood pass them by. This sense of alienation is particularly acute in the oil-producing Delta, one of the most underdeveloped parts of the country. In 2005, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force put their case against marginalisation by launching guerrilla attacks on oil installations.

Presidential elections are due in 2007, and while Obasanjo is barred from standing for a third term, many of his supporters are urging a change to the constitution to allow it. This is already causing political turmoil, and huge potential damage to Nigeria's standing. Babangida is back on the scene, fancying another attempt at running the country, this time as a civilian. As Nigeria continues to lurch from crisis to crisis, whoever takes on the challenge will have a lot on their plate.

### THE CULTURE National Psyche

The economy lumbers on, but is a long way from keeping up with the rapidly growing populace, let alone reaching the bright potential it showed at independence. Oil has proved to be a curse on the country, with governments repeatedly pumping money straight out of the wells and into private bank accounts. In 2005, the government's anticorruption commission announced that over US\$352 billion had been stolen or misused since the oil came on tap: four times the value of all western aid given to the whole of Africa in the last 40 years.

Ordinary Nigerians have been the ones to pay the price. Infrastructure has been neglected and agriculture, the mainstay of most of the population, has been largely ignored. Once a food exporter, Nigeria now imports most of its food, meaning higher prices for the majority of Nigerians living on just a few dollars a day. Healthcare is also in crisis. Nigeria is one of the few African countries where polio is still endemic,

**419**

If you're online, the chances are that at some point you've received a 419 email. A particularly pervasive form of spam, the email offers the recipient a cut of an implausibly huge sum of money in return for help getting it out of Nigeria. All you have to do is send your own bank details – together with a handling fee – and the money is yours. The name 419 comes from the section of the Nigerian criminal code that covers fraud – a crime rife in Nigeria. An average scammer can make around US\$6000 a month from 419, targeting the greed of the victims, or *maghas* (Yoruba slang for fool). Scammers even have their own anthem – the single 'I Chop Your Dollars' was hugely popular in 2005.

Foreigners aren't the only victims of fraud. Inside Nigeria, a popular scam is to break into an empty property and then sell it on to an unsuspecting buyer – watch out for painted signs everywhere announcing 'This house is not for sale: beware 419'.

although to date the country seems to have avoided the worst of the AIDS pandemic.

Corruption is probably the worst problem facing Nigeria, as its corrosive effects have permeated every aspect of society. While roadside billboards plead with people to pay their taxes, federal and state budgets are constantly skimmed by dodgy officials and ordinary people have to pay cash for everything from government services to getting through police roadblocks. No country in Africa has such a vast gap between its super-rich and abject poor.

Against all this, it almost seems incredible that smiles come so readily to Nigerian faces. An international survey in 2003 announced that Nigerians were in fact the happiest people on earth. The important role that religion plays in everyday life is a major factor, along with the natural entrepreneurship of one of Africa's best-educated populations. Ill-served by repeated governments, Nigerians have had to learn to survive. As Fela Kuti sang, 'we suffer and we smile.' This resilience holds the best key to Nigeria's future.

**Population**

With 140 million people already, Nigeria has a huge and expanding population. By the middle of the 21st century it's thought that as many as one in three people on the African continent will be a Nigerian.

**SPORT**

Football is the only game that matters in Nigeria, and they regard themselves as virtually African footballing royalty. The country regularly produces fine players that make their way to Europe to play in the Premiership, La Liga and Serie A

(notable recent players include Kanu and Obodo), and travellers should get used to being asked their opinions on the relative merits of Beckham and Ronaldinho. Unfortunately for Nigeria, their foreign-based players have a great tradition of being prima donnas, and of putting club before country. Used to good performances in successive World Cups since the mid-1990s, the country was shocked when the national side – the Super Eagles – failed to qualify for Germany 2006.

**RELIGION**

Nigeria may just be the most visibly religious country in Africa, but there's a very clear divide between the Christian south and the Muslim north.

In the south, everything stops on a Sunday, as the population goes to church en masse. The more traditional churches imported during colonial rule are now being upstaged by an explosion of evangelism. You'll constantly see them publicised on huge billboards, usually announcing 'miracle crusades' and faith healing. Large gatherings can attract tens of thousands of worshippers, but there's tight – and not always particularly faithful – competition between the churches for new souls. Older Nigerian faiths, such as those involving the rich pantheon of Yoruba gods, are also increasingly threatened, but some traditions have been carried over – look out for adverts for schnapps, used for libations at prayers: 'Don't offend your ancestors with fakes: insist on the Original Prayer Drink', reads one.

This 'good time' religion collides hard and fast with the mosques and minarets of the north. Cities such as Kano have long pedi-

grees as centres of Islamic learning, but they haven't been immune to the politicisation sweeping the Islamic world. Since the return to democracy in 1999, many northern states have enacted laws based on Islamic Sharia law. Alcohol bans have been enforced (with mixed success) and education is increasingly segregated. While Nigerian Muslims are tolerant and welcoming to foreign visitors, relations with Christians in the north are under increasing strain. The introduction of Sharia law, and the issue of its application to non-Muslims is a political tinderbox, and one that has ignited with worrying frequency into communal violence. Sharia law has also brought international attention to Nigeria, particularly over the case of Amina Lawal in 2002, who was sentenced to death by stoning for adultery, despite her lover being acquitted. The sentence was eventually dropped after worldwide condemnation.

**ARTS**

Nigeria's vast and rich art heritage is unequalled anywhere in West Africa.

**Literature**

Nigeria seems to have as many writers as the rest of the continent combined. Chinua Achebe is probably Nigeria's (and Africa's) most famous author, although he faces strong competition from Amos Tutuola, Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka and Booker Prize winner Ben Okri. For details of these writers, see p47. Nigeria also produced Africa's first major female novelist, Flora Nwapa.

More recently, a new generation of young Nigerian writers have been claiming a seat at the literary table. Internationally acclaimed novels by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Purple Hibiscus*), Helen Oyeyemi (*The Icarus Girl*) and Helon Habila (*Waiting for an Angel*) have demonstrated that Nigerian literature is in rude health. Lagos has a thriving publishing scene, and is a great place to pick up African novels.

**Music**

Some of Africa's best-known singers come from Nigeria. Foremost among them are the late Fela Kuti and King Sunny Ade. Along with Ebenezer Obey, Sunny Ade is the king of *juju* (from the Yoruba word for dance), one of Nigeria's most popular styles. Another famed Nigerian singer is Chief Stephen Osita Osadebe, a proponent of the Igbo-favoured highlife style. Sonny Okusun is a popular master of many styles, but currently records sermons as a pastor rather than a musician.

Massively popular in Lagos and throughout Yoruba-land is *fuji*, incorporating elements from *juju*, talking drums and praise singing. Sikiru 'Barrister' Ayinde and Ayinlu Kollington are *fuji*'s prime movers (for more details, see p58).

**Cinema**

Hidden from the eyes of most of the world, Nigeria has the third-biggest film industry on the planet, after the USA and India. With typical local wit it is dubbed 'Nollywood',

**FELA KUTI – KING OF AFROBEAT**

Fela Kuti, born in 1938 in Abeokuta, remains one of Africa's most famous musicians. Immensely popular in Nigeria, Fela was also highly vocal politically. When he travelled to Los Angeles in 1964, Fela met Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, who stirred black consciousness in him; on the musical front, James Brown was a huge influence. Returning to Nigeria, Fela mixed Brown's soul grooves with the many intricacies of Nigerian music to create Afrobeat.

During the 1970s, he formed the Kalakuta Republic, a commune for playing music. Government forces burnt it down in 1977, an action which resulted in the death of Fela's mother. Fela went into exile in Ghana during the late 1970s, but when he returned to Nigeria he continued to play music with lyrics critical of the regime. His views brought him repeated political trouble – briefly jailed on trumped-up currency-smuggling charges in 1985, he was later falsely accused of killing a man. Fela avoided the authorities throughout the 1990s and retired to a quiet life of performing twice a week at The Shrine, his Lagos nightclub. When he died of AIDS in 1997, his funeral prompted one of Lagos' greatest go-slows. His musician son, Femi Kuti, has stepped out from Fela's shadow and regularly tours internationally with his band Positive Force, pushing an even funkier line in Afrobeat than his father (to check them out at the new Shrine, see p636).



and turns out anything from 400 to 800 films a year. As cinemas are a rarity in Nigeria, films are shot to video and sold at shops and market stalls. They're great fun and hugely popular.

Nollywood's heartland is Surelere in Lagos. Movies are shot quickly and without fuss – it can take just two months to go from script to marketplace, with budgets as low as US\$15,000. Plots are simple and melodramatic – spurned lovers, criminals and long-lost relatives are all staples – while fans buy magazines in the thousands to follow the (often no less dramatic) lives of the stars.

## Sculpture

Nigeria boasts some of the earliest and most acclaimed sculpture in Africa. The Jos Plateau's Nok Terracottas, featuring human figures 120cm tall and dating back over 2500 years, are the oldest sub-Saharan sculptures known. More famous still are the 16th-century Benin Brasses, ceremonial figures and masks produced for the court of the Benin Kingdom using the lost wax method, which were famously looted by the British army in 1897; those not in Lagos' National Museum are in the British Museum or Berlin.

Many tribal groups still produce fine sculptures and masks, most notably the wood carvings of the Yoruba. Most represent the gods of the Yoruba pantheon and its numerous cults, and are often used in rites of passage ceremonies; Oshogbo (p641) is good for Yoruba art. Masks are also common among the Igbo and Ekoi, and the northeastern Mumuye are renowned for their cubistlike figure carvings of ancestors.

## ENVIRONMENT

Nigeria occupies 15% of West Africa, but contains half of its people. In the north, the Sahel gives way to savanna and low hills, rising to a plateau in the centre of the country. From the west, the country is bisected by the Niger, Africa's third-longest river, which enters the Atlantic through a delta fringed with lagoons and swamps. Nigeria's second river is the Benue, which flows west from Cameroon and joins the Niger. Shared with Cameroon are Nigeria's mountains, the Adamawa Massif. Forest forms a thick line along the southern coast, inland from the delta.

Nigeria has extraordinary biological diversity, but the country's rapidly expanding

population has put the environment under extreme pressure. An underfunded National Parks service does exist, but in practice very little land in Nigeria is protected. Deforestation is one of the largest problems, with Nigeria having logged around 95% of its original forests since independence. Where original forest exists, the local bush meat trade threatens mammal species further.

In the Delta, the oil industry has created a host of problems to match the wealth it generates. Oil spills are commonplace, with few ever cleaned up adequately. The local fishing industry, a mainstay of the delta economy, has suffered grievously. Air pollution caused by gas flaring (the burning of excess fuel during extraction) is also a serious problem, and continues unabated, despite being declared illegal in 1984.

## Wildlife

Despite the problems facing the Nigerian environment, it is possible to see wildlife in the country. **Yankari National Park** (p655) is the best-known area. It's home to elephants, buffaloes, waterbucks and several antelope species. The bird-watching is superb, but the fate of some mammal species, such as lions, is unknown. In the southeast, primates are well-represented in the forested **Cross River National Park** (p650). Chimpanzees, drills and guenons exist here in uncertain numbers, as do tiny populations of western lowland gorillas and forest elephants. **Gashaka-Gumti National Park** (p655) is the largest national park in Nigeria. It remains largely unsurveyed, but is very ecologically diverse and contains both savanna and forest species.

Nigeria's other national parks are largely devoid of game. Highlights for bird-watchers include Kamuku Wildlife Reserve, west of Kaduna, and the Hadejia-Nguru Wetlands near Nguru, about 200km northeast of Kano.

Two organisations based in and around Calabar, **Cercopan** ([www.cercopan.org](http://www.cercopan.org)) and **Pan-drillus** (☎ 234310; [drill@infoweb.abs.net](mailto:drill@infoweb.abs.net)), are carrying out pioneering work in environmental education and primate rescue (see p647).

## FOOD & DRINK

Nigerians like their food – known as 'chop' – hot and starchy. Classic dishes are based on a fiery pepper stew or soup, made with meat and accompanied by pounded yam, cassava

or manioc (*gari*). The Yoruba dish *isiewu*, or goat's head soup, is the closest thing to a national dish, while cow leg soup is also common on menus. Less spicy is *egusi*, made with meat, chopped greens and smoked fish. Cutlery isn't generally used – the yam or cassava is used to soak up the juices of the stew. As in most of Africa, you only eat with your right hand.

Another dish you'll eat a lot of is *jollof* – peppery rice with chicken. In the south, palm-nut soup – a thick stew made with meat, chilli, tomatoes, onions and palm-nut oil – is popular, along with groundnut soup, okra stew and, in the west, *ikokore*, a main course made with ground yams and various types of fish. Most dishes include meat, so vegetarians can have a hard time in Nigeria.

Chophouses serve food throughout the day, usually just cooking up one or two dishes and announcing when they're ready to eat by placing a sign saying 'food is ready' outside the door – look for these signs when you're hungry. Most hotels can rustle up 'tea bread eggs' for breakfast.

Street food is everywhere. *Moin-moin* are steamed bean cakes, while *suya* are simple kebabs served with a sprinkling of hot *pepe* spice. Also on offer are fried yam chips, fried plantains, meat pies, *akara* (a puffy deep-fried cake made with black-eyed peas and eaten with chilli dip), *kulikuli* (small deep-fried balls made of peanut paste), and lots of fresh fruit. Nigeria also has a few fast food chains, such as Mr Biggs, serving *jollof* and the like – they're worth noting for their clean toilets and air-con as much as for their food.

Nigerians drink a lot of beer. Star is the most popular but, as in much of West Africa, Guinness is drunk in vast quantities. In the north, Sharia law means that alcohol is often not available. Mineral water is widely available, although water is more commonly sold in sealed plastic bags – half a litre for N5. Labelled 'pure water', its provenance is not always guaranteed, so drink with care.

## LAGOS

☎ 01 / pop 16 million

Tell people that you're going to Lagos, and the reaction is quite likely to be one of concerned incredulity: 'You're going *where*?' The city carries an unenviable reputation before

it – crowded, polluted and dangerous; chaos theory made flesh and concrete. Exactly the kind of place you'd make a big detour to avoid. While all these problems do exist to lesser or greater extents, Lagos is also vibrant and exciting, with a good arts scene, great bars and restaurants, and all the raw energy of Nigeria distilled down into one city.

The city takes its name from the Portuguese word for lagoon. From the 16th century it was an important trading port between the Europeans and local Yorubas, before being subsumed into the Benin Kingdom. In 1861 the port became a British colony, later to become capital of the Nigerian Protectorate and, upon independence, of the new Nigerian nation. It lost the title to Abuja in 1991, but remains the economic and cultural powerhouse of the country, and the financial capital of West Africa itself.

Lagos' infrastructure has never kept pace with its growth. The modern city is an explosion of raised expressways hanging over mobbed streets of people and traffic. The electricity supply and garbage collection are hugely inadequate, and whole districts flood during the rainy season. Slums sit cheek by jowl with the richest addresses in Africa. The sprawl continues to grow irresistibly: already the biggest city in Africa, the UN estimate that by 2025 it will be the world's largest, with a mind-boggling 24 million people.

Lagos isn't going to be to everyone's taste, but its inhabitants frequently say they couldn't live anywhere else and if you're up for an urban adventure you'll begin to understand why. Unruly, exciting and compelling, Lagos is a true megacity, and the face of modern Africa as much as any picture postcard national park. Jump right in.

## ORIENTATION

Lagos is a series of islands, with Lagos Island the commercial heart of the city. The major road is Broad St, which passes Tinubu Sq, a major intersection near the centre of the island, and ends at Tafawa Balewa Sq. North of this is the market district, a warren of packed streets and shops. Running roughly parallel with Broad St is Marina St, which overlooks the harbour and is home to numerous large commercial establishments. The entire island is encircled by Ring Rd.

The island of Ikoyi to the east has now merged with Lagos Island; it's a mainly

upscale residential area. Between the two areas is Obalende, with a useful motor park. On Ikoyi, the wide Kingsway Rd leads to the old Ikoyi Hotel. The liveliest street is Awolowo Rd, where there are many restaurants.

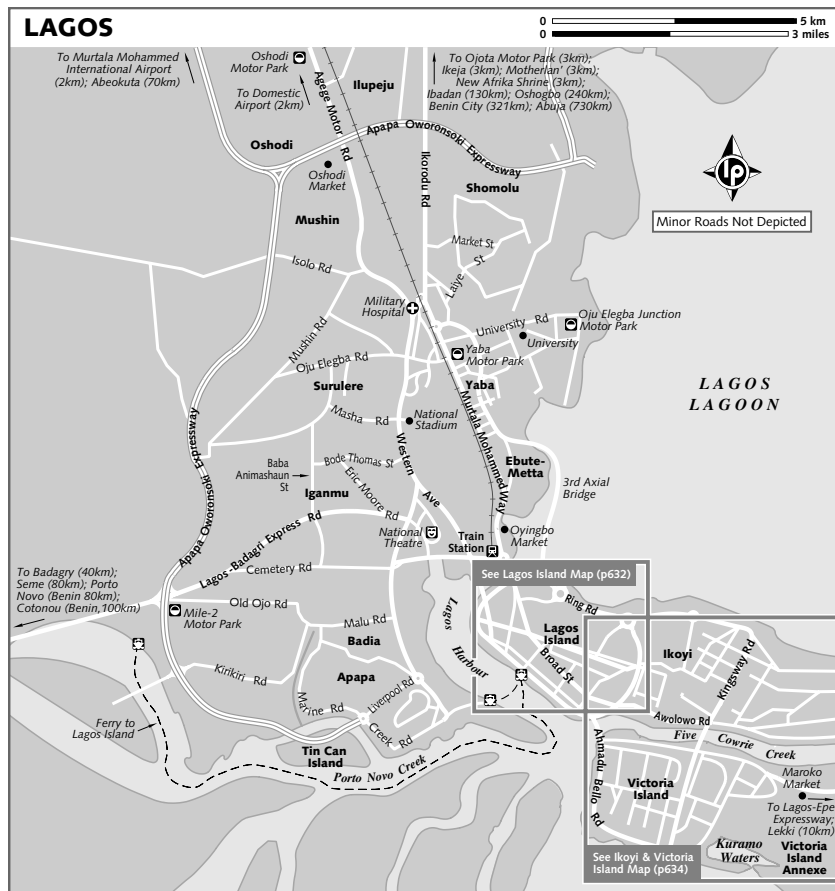
Most of the embassies and big houses are on Victoria Island (VI) to the southeast of Lagos Island – the most expensive part of Lagos. The towering 1004 Apartments building on the north of VI is a useful landmark. Ahmadu Bello Way skirts the south of VI, along sandy Bar Beach. VI is linked to Ikoyi by Falomo Bridge and to Lagos Island by Independence Bridge.

Most of the city's residential quarters are on the mainland, in the direction of the airport, and are connected to Lagos Island by

three bridges. From east to west they are 3rd Axial Bridge, Carter Bridge and Eko Bridge. Heading north, Murtala Mohammed Way bisects the lively Yaba and Surulere districts. Two major expressways, Agege Motor Rd (leading to the airports) and Ikorodu Rd, intersect in Yaba. The latter passes through the major transport terminal of Ojota Motor Park in Ikeja. Ikorodu Rd eventually intersects with the Lagos–Ibadan Expressway, which leads to all points north.

## Maps

*Lagos Street Map* (West African Books) is the best available, followed by the *Satod Street Guide to Lagos*. Both cost around N600 in bookshops.



## INFORMATION

If you're spending any serious time in Lagos, pick up a copy of *Lagos Easy Access* by the American Women's Club of Lagos (N2500), which is a great guide, albeit aimed primarily at expats.

## Bookshops

Lagos has Nigeria's best bookshops by a country mile.

**Bookworm** (Map p634; Eko Hotel Shopping Complex, Ajose Adeogun St, VI)

**Glendora Bookshop** (Map p634; Eko Hotel, VI) Also good for international newspapers and magazines.

**Jazz Hole** (Map p634; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi) Also good for Nigerian music.

## Cultural Centres

**British Council** (Map p634; ☎ 269 2188, 269 2192; 11 Kingsway Rd, Ikoyi; ☎ 9am–6pm) Day membership costs N500. Available are a library, magazines, free Internet access and café.

**Centre Culturel Français** (Map p634; ☎ 269 2365; Kingsway Rd; ☎ 10am–7pm) This library and café opposite the Ikoyi Hotel also has live music several nights a week.

**Goethe Institut** (Map p634; ☎ 261 0717; Maroko Rd, VI; ☎ 10am–5pm) Has regular art exhibitions.

## Internet Access

Internet places mushroom and then close on a weekly basis, usually charging N100 per hour. You're never likely to be far from one, but the following are three of the best:

**Cybercafé** (Map p634; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi) Opposite the YMCA.

**Internet Planet** (Map p634; Ozumba Mbadiwe Rd, VI) In Mr Biggs Building.

**Mega Plaza Internet** (Map p634; Mega Plaza, Idowu Martin St, VI) On the top floor.

## Medical Services

While the following places are recommended, if you do have a medical problem, consider contacting your diplomatic representatives for a list of reputable medical practitioners.

**Chyob Pharmacy** (Map p634; ☎ 269 4545; Awolowo Rd; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Sat)

**Medicines Plus** (Map p634; Mega Plaza, Idowu Martin St, VI; ☎ 10am–9pm Mon–Sat, 1–9pm Sun)

**St Francis Clinic** (☎ 269 2305; Keffi St, Ikoyi) Recommended general practitioners.

**St Nicholas Hospital** (Map p632; ☎ 263 1739; 57 Campbell St, Lagos Island) Has a 24hr emergency clinic.

## Money

Travellers should note that there is no foreign exchange at the airport, and that Lagos' banks are as useless as anywhere in Nigeria for changing money. Always check if your hotel will change money, otherwise the following are convenient moneychangers:

**Eko Hotel** (Map p634; Adetokumbo Ademola St, VI) Find Hausa moneychangers at the craft shops by the gatehouse.

**Ikoyi Hotel** (Map p634; Kingsway Rd, Ikoyi) There's a bureau de change office and Hausa moneychangers outside the (closed) hotel.

## Post

**GPO** Ikoyi (Map p634; Bourdillon Rd); VI (Map p634; Adeola Odeku St); Lagos Island (Map p632; Marina St; ☎ Mon–Fri)

## Travel Agencies

There are travel agencies on the southern side of Tafawa Balewa Sq on Lagos Island. Other good agencies include the following:

**Bitts Travel & Tours** (Map p634; ☎ 269 6095; Falomo Shopping Centre, Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi)

**Dolphin Travel & Tours** (Map p634; ☎ 262 4927; Federal Palace Hotel, Ahmadu Bello Rd, VI)

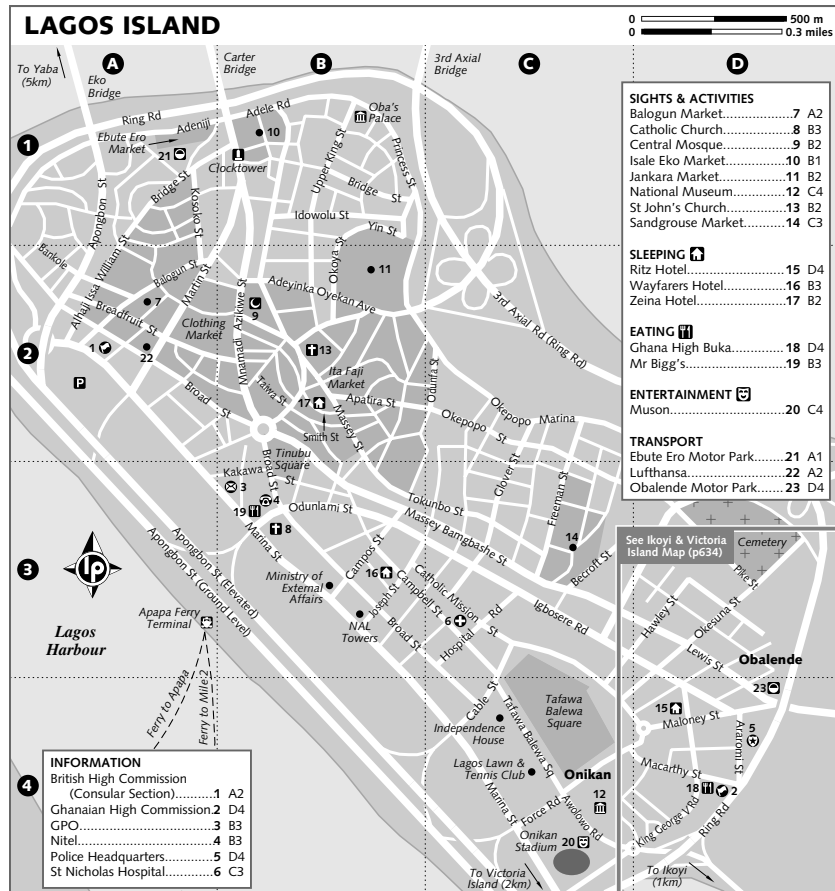
## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Contrary to popular perception, violent crime has decreased in Lagos in recent years. Most crime against foreigners targets expats in expensive cars, and travellers are unlikely to encounter any serious problems. That said, it always pays to take sensible precautions. Never carry any more money than is necessary and avoid flaunting valuables. Avoid walking at night where possible, particularly around hotels and restaurants frequented by foreigners, including on VI. Crowded areas carry a risk of pickpocketing. Listen out for the term Area Boy, Lagosian for a petty criminal or gang member, sometimes found holding up traffic or intimidating passengers or drivers in motor parks. The wide spaces under flyovers are common Area Boy hangouts, so give these a wide berth.

Rather than crime, the worst problem in Lagos is actually the traffic – the insane jams and drivers who treat the roads like a war zone. Take special care on the backs of *okadas* (motorcycle taxis; see p637).

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Look out in Lagos Island, along Kakawa and Odunfa Sts, for examples of old Brazilian architecture – distinctive houses built



by former slaves and descendants who returned from Brazil. Sadly most are in need of rescue and renovation.

### National Museum

The **museum** (Map p632; Awolowo Rd; admission N100; ☎ 9am-5pm) is definitely worth seeing, but note no cameras are allowed. The stars are the brasses from Benin City, which get their own gallery. The Nok Terracottas are well represented. Another gallery dedicated to traditional symbols of power contains carved ivory and a royal host of crowns. A less fortunate symbol of power is the bullet-riddled car in which Murtala Mohammed was assassinated in 1976. The museum has a small crafts village with handicrafts for sale at fixed

prices; you might also see a demonstration of *adire* – cloth-making from Abeokuta.

The museum is 150m southeast of Tafawa Balewa Sq, a huge arena adorned by statues of horses. In the square is Remembrance Arcade, with memorials to Nigeria's dead from two world wars and the Biafran conflict.

### Markets

On Lagos Island the many markets are by far the best attractions, but consider hiring a guide to show you around. They're safe enough to get lost in during the day but be circumspect with your camera, as photography isn't usually appreciated. The main market area is north of Broad St, and is divided into several distinct districts.

**Jankara Market** (Map p632; off Adeyinka Oyekan Ave) is a delight, with its closely packed stalls selling fabric and a witches' brew of juju ingredients. **Isale Eko Market** (Map p632; off Adeniji Adele Rd) has plenty of food and household goods on offer. The rambling maze of **Balugun Market** (Map p632; off Breadfruit St) is excellent for clothes and fabric from across West Africa. Finally, **Sandgrouse Market** (Map p632; off Lewis St) slightly further east, is the place for interesting food, much of it sold live.

On VI, **Bar Beach Market** (Map p634; off Ahmadu Bello Way) has fresh fish and a few handicrafts to attract the expats. Of course, thanks to the go-slow, every road in Lagos becomes an impromptu market, with hawkers making offerings to your vehicle as you wait in the stalled traffic.

### Beaches

You'll need to travel slightly outside Lagos to reach the best beaches. **Tarkwa Beach** is popular, as there's no undertow and it's safe for swimming. There are sun lounges and umbrellas, and a few stalls selling *suya* and chop. It's accessible by launch from along Walter Carrington Crescent in VI. The price is negotiable, with N800 per person (return) the maximum. Make arrangements to be picked back up in the afternoon.

The new favourite with fashionable Lagosians is **Eleko Beach**, a big 60km trip east of the city. You can rent a beach hut for the day here, and get someone to make a barbeque for you. There's also a small market selling interesting art. You'll need to hire a drop taxi to get there.

### SLEEPING

Lagos has some of the best hotels in Nigeria – and some of the worst. There's very little in the midrange bracket. Hotels either tend to be top of the range, or at the grubbier end of the budget spectrum. There is no real budget accommodation on Victoria Island.

### Budget

**Ritz Hotel** (Map p632; ☎ 263 0481; King George V Rd; r with/without air-con N2300/1400; ☎) The name's a bit of a misnomer, but this hotel is a reasonably decent budget option. Rooms are fine in a grubby 'by the hour' sort of way, but they're secure and management is friendly.

**YMCA** (Map p634; ☎ 773 3599; 77 Awolowo Rd; dm N500, r N1700-2700; ☎ P) Very simple fare for

men only, the YMCA is a busy hostel and is often full with other West Africans. It's decent, if not inspirational. Dorms have four beds and room prices drop by N200 after the first night; all share bathroom facilities.

**Zeina Hotel** (Map p632; ☎ 263 3254; 11 Smith St; r N2500; ☎) This hotel is tucked away in the heart of Ita Faji Market. A little battered, rooms are still comfy enough for a few nights. There's no hotel sign – look for the number 11 on the unassuming yellow door.

**Wayfarers Hotel** (Map p632; ☎ 263 0113; 52 Campbell St; s/d N2500/3000; ☎) Rooms here are good-sized and in fairly decent order. The reception doubles as a restaurant/bar and there are plenty of chophouses on the street outside. Rooms on the main road are noisy, but where in Lagos isn't?

### Midrange

**Bogobiri House** (Map p634; ☎ 270 7406; www.bogobirilagos.com; 9 Maitama Sule St, Ikoyi; s/d incl breakfast N18,000/23,100; ☎) A charming boutique hotel owned by the Nimbus Art Gallery opposite, Bogobiri House is an exhibition in itself. Beautifully decorated with paintings and sculptures by local artists, its side street location provides a calm escape from the Lagos buzz. There are just ten rooms, each exceedingly comfortable and more salon than sleeping place. Worth the budgetary blowout.

**Hotel Victoria Palace** (Map p634; ☎ 262 5901; hotelvp@alphalinkserv.com; 1623 Sake Jojo St; s/d N9660/12,075; ☎) A genuine midrange hotel on VI is a rarity indeed, and luckily this place is good value. Rooms are generous and comfy, and there's a great Indian restaurant attached.

**Victoria Lodge** (Map p634; ☎ 262 0885; 5 Ologun Agbaje St; s/d N10,350/11,500; ☎ P) A small and low hotel, with huge rooms – the feeling of space is added to by the acres of white tiles. A quiet, tidy option.

**Michael's** (Map p634; ☎ 461 6802; michael@hyperia.com; Plot 411 Adetokumbo Ademola St; r incl breakfast N13,800-17,250; ☎ P) The pleasant compact rooms in this small guesthouse cluster around a small pool, overlooked by a mural of generously proportioned mermaids. It's a neat little choice.

### Top End

**B-Jays Hotel** (Map p634; ☎ 262 2902; bjayshotel24@yahoo.com; 24 Samuel Manuwa St; r from N32,500; ☎ P) A plush guesthouse popular with expats,







cultivating the same slightly Bohemian air, this is a lovely place for a drink – mellow in the day and happening at night. At weekends there's usually live music, so there's a cover charge of around N1000 to get in.

**Cowrie Restaurant & Bar** (Map p634; Samuel Manuwa St; ☎ 8am–11pm) Immaculately put together, the bar at B-Jays hotel is a classy place for a drink. It's very laid back, with squashy sofas and low lighting, all the better for sampling the good array of whiskies. Only the terrace on the busy main road feels a bit out of place.

**Atlantic Bar** (Map p634; Adeola Hopewell St; ☎ 12pm-late) Head here if you want to hang with the fashionable Lagos kids. There's great music, a few bar snacks and live bands play at weekends. It's very cool.

The shacks along Bar Beach serve up cold beer throughout the day and into the small hours, with *suya* and other snacks on hand. They're authentically down at heel and enjoy a refreshing sea breeze, but keep to the well-lit areas after dark and don't carry valuables with you.

It's difficult to pick out bars on Lagos Island – every street has one or two local places serving drinks from early morning to late at night, and music blasting out – so follow your ears and dive right in.

## ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

The happening nightlife is on the mainland in Ikeja and Yaba, to the north of Lagos Island. There's usually a mix of live music and DJ's, all blasting out the best Nigerian tunes. Don't even think of turning up before 11pm.

**New Afrika Shrine** (Pepple St, Ikeja; admission N500, ☎ Thu–Sun) The spiritual home of Afrobeat, Fela Kuti's original Shrine was burned down, but this replacement is run by his son Femi, who plays on Fridays and Sundays when he's in town (cover charge N100). It's a huge shed, but the music blows the roof off (see p627 for more on the Kuti family).

**Motherlan'** (Opebi Rd; Ikeja, admission N1000; ☎ Thu–Sun) This place is owned by Lagbaja (see p64), who mixes groovy jazz with African drums, and is always hidden under a traditional Yoruba mask (the name simultaneously means anybody and nobody). Lagbaja plays the last Friday of the month (cover charge N1500). Motherlan' also hosts regular comedy nights, but the mix of Pidgin English and Yoruba slang can be hard to follow.

## Cinemas

**Silver Bird Cinema** (Map p634; Galleria Building, Ahmadu Bello Rd, VI; N750) For Hollywood, rather than Nollywood, blockbusters.

## Theatre

**Muson** (Map p632; Musical Society of Nigeria; ☎ 264 6670; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi) Opposite the museum, Muson puts on regular plays and classical music concerts – call for details.

## SHOPPING

There are some good crafts on offer at the **Eko Hotel Gatehouse** (Map p634; Adetokumbo Ademola, VI), including carvings, calabashes and some unfortunate animals' skins. For batiks, Njoku St on the western side of Falomo Shopping Centre in Ikoyi is good. They're sold on the street and the selection is extensive.

The **National Museum** (Awolowo Rd) has a non-profit crafts centre with batiks, calabashes, woodcarvings and textiles at fixed prices.

**Jankara Market** (Map p632; off Adeyinka Oyekan Ave) is the largest market in Lagos. You'll find tie-dyed and indigo cloth, trade beads, jewellery and pottery. There is also a juju market here, where you can buy various medicines.

If you're going to the Lekki Conservation Centre (opposite), you should also check out the excellent handicrafts market there, which probably has the best selection in and around Lagos.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Murtala Mohammed International Airport is the main gateway to Nigeria. It has a scary reputation, but security has been greatly improved in the last few years. The airport is roughly 10km north of Lagos Island. For international connections see p669.

Domestic flights depart from a separate terminal next door. Tickets are bought on departure. Flights to Abuja depart virtually hourly (N9000, one hour); most domestic airlines operate this route. Every other major city in Nigeria is also connected to Lagos. Flights include Kano (N14,000, 90 minutes), Calabar (N12,000, one hour), Port Harcourt (N9000, one hour), Kaduna (N11,000, one hour) and Jos (N10,000, one hour).

It's worth calling the information desk to check on schedules before travelling. For details of airlines operating out of Lagos, see above.

## Minibus & Bush Taxi

Unsurprisingly, Lagos' motor parks are pictures of anarchy. Ojota Motor Park (with Ojota New Motor Park next door) on Ikorodu Rd is the city's main transport hub. Minibuses and bush taxis leave to just about everywhere in the country from here, but you'll have to ask repeatedly to find the vehicle you want – it's a crazy place. Sample fares are Benin City (N800, four hours), Ibadan (N250, 90 minutes), Oshogbo (N450, three hours) and Abuja (N1600, 10 hours).

**Mile 2 Motor Park** (Map p630) serves destinations east of Lagos, including the Benin border at Seme (N250, 90 minutes). You'll also find a few minibuses going as far north as Ibadan from here.

Arriving in Lagos can be more complicated as, depending on your point of departure, you'll be dropped at various motor parks, but probably not Ojota itself. **Oshodi** (Map p630), **Yaba** (Map p630) and **Oju Elegba** (Map p630) motor parks are the likeliest candidates – minibuses run from these to more central points, such as **Obalende Motor Park** (Map p632) on Lagos Island.

## GETTING AROUND

Might is right on the roads of Lagos, and driving is very much a contact sport. That's when it's moving: traffic jams, or go-slows, are an intrinsic part of travel in the city. Go-slows are worst at rush hours, or when you're trying to reach an important appointment.

## To/From the Airport

A taxi from the airport to Lagos Island or VI should cost around N3000 – allow an hour for the journey. Airport taxis are licensed, so ask to see the driver's ID if necessary. Alternatively, most hotels can arrange to meet you on arrival for a premium. Note that there is nowhere to change money at the airport, although you'll be approached by moneychangers. It's common practice to sit in your car and count out the naira before handing over your cash – a very Nigerian introduction to the country, it's not as bad as it sounds.

There are no airport buses. The public transport alternative is to walk 20 minutes from the airport and flag down a minibus – ideally to Obalende for Lagos Island or VI, but you'll probably have to change at Yaba Motor Park.

## Ferry

There are useful ferry services. One runs from Lagos Island to Apapa and on to Mile-2 in west Lagos. The terminal is to the southwest side of Lagos Island, just south of Ring Rd; each leg is N50. Smaller boats hop between VI and Ikoyi every few minutes for N30 from the Tarzan Jetty on VI's Maroko Rd.

## Minibus

Lagos is held together by an endless procession of battered yellow (or green and white on VI) minibuses, or *danfos*, each more beaten-up than the last. Short fares are around N30; long trips which involve crossing bridges ramp the price up considerably (for example a ride between Obalende and Mile 2 Motor Parks costs N200).

## Taxi & Okada

Yellow taxis are everywhere. Fares start from N200, while crossing half of Lagos will be closer to N2000. For short distances, *okadas* (motorcycle taxis) are a better bet, faster and nimbler in heavy traffic. Even a medium length trip shouldn't top N100, but you'll attract a hefty surcharge to persuade the driver to head out of his area and cross a bridge. If you're in a go-slow, jumping on an *okada* may be the only way out.

# AROUND LAGOS

## LEKKI CONSERVATION CENTRE

A mere 20-minute drive east from Lagos is **Lekki Conservation Centre** (Lagos-Epe Expressway; admission N50, camera fee from N700; ☎ 8am–6pm). Run by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, it has 78 hectares of wetlands which have been set aside for viewing wildlife. Raised walkways enable you to see monkeys, crocodiles and birds; early morning is the best time. There is a visitors centre, library and simple café. Make time to visit the market, which is good for all sorts of handicrafts from metalwork and carvings to paintings and batiks.

The easiest way to get there is to flag down a passing bus on VI along Maroko Rd; the cost is around N100.

## BADAGRY

On the road to the Benin border, Badagry was once Nigeria's busiest slave port. Established in the 16th century, thousands

of people a year were shipped from here, mainly to Brazil, before slavery's abolition in the 1880s. Modern Badagry is worth visiting to see its slave heritage. The town is the site of Nigeria's first church.

### Sights

**Chief Obee Slave Relic Museum** (N100, ☎ closed Sundays) is run by the family of the local chief, descended from the area's slavers. It's a room full of interesting artefacts, including fearsome slave chains and shackles that you can try on. You'll need to find someone to open the display. A short walk from here is the **Heritage Museum** (N100, ☎ closed Sundays), which has similar displays, including a model of a slave ship with the captives crammed into every space. On the waterfront, you'll pass the **Brazilian Baracoons** (N50 dash) once used to house slaves but now part of someone's house.

Near the baracoons, you can take a ferry (N20, 10 minutes) to the **Point of No Return**, on an island facing the Atlantic. It's a contemplative point, marked by a large arch, and the prettiness of the beach seems a shocking contrast to its dark history. The point is a well-marked (and very hot) 15-minute walk from the ferry. Halfway is a **Spirit Attenuation Well** – slaves were forced to drink from this to make them forget their homeland.

### Getting There & Away

Minibuses to Badagry leave from Mile 2 Motor Park in Lagos (N150, one hour), returning from 'roundabout'. You can also

catch transport to the Benin border at Seme (N100, 30 minutes)

### ABEOKUTA

Abeokuta, 70km north of Lagos, translates as 'under the rock' in Yoruba. It's famous sons are a roll call of contemporary Nigeria – President Obasanjo was born here, along with the late musician Fela Kuti and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka.

The city is dominated by **Olumo Rock** (admission N50). This huge chunk of granite is sacred in Yoruba religion and is used in various celebrations and rituals. Climbing the rock (140m) affords commanding views of city and surrounding countryside. There are several traditional shrines on the rock. Guides will approach you, and can give interesting insights into Yoruba religion and history for a small dash.

At the Itoku Market you can buy Abeokuta's renowned *adire* cloth and plenty of juju material.

Bush taxis leave from Ojota Motor Park in Lagos (N200, two hours).

## THE SOUTH

The South is the most populous part of Nigeria. Roughly bisected by the Niger River, to the west lie the lands of the Yoruba, and to the east live the Igbos, in the territory that declared itself independent Biafra in the 1960s (see p263). It's green and fertile, most

notably around the troubled Niger Delta, although there's a fair degree of urbanisation – towns and freeways cut through the bush, and a multitude of billboards advertise the explosion of evangelical churches.

Calabar, near the Cameroon border, is a big draw for travellers, as are the brass sculptures of Benin City, and the unexpected peace of Oshogbo's Sacred Forest.

### IBADAN

☎ 022

A hundred years ago, hilly Ibadan could claim to be West Africa's largest city. It's easy to see why even today – the word sprawling could have been invented to describe the city. Congested and unattractive, it's a hard city to love. You're likely to pass through, as Ibadan is a major transport junction, but there's little else to amuse yourself with here before pushing on to more exciting destinations.

### Orientation

Ibadan doesn't have a centre as such. Oyo Rd runs north–south, turning into the Fajuyi Rd at the useful landmark of Mokola Roundabout (where it's bisected by Queen Elizabeth II Rd). Further south, it changes name again into Dugbe Rd around Dugbe Market – the high rise Cocoa House here is another handy landmark for taking bearings – before changing name again to Yaganku Rd.

### Information

The moneychangers around the mosque on Racecourse Rd are reliable and friendly.

**Bureau de Change** (Lebanon Rd, Dugbe Market)

**Kokodome Internet** (Cocoa House, Commercial St; per hour N100)

**Periscope Internet** (Mokola Roundabout; per hour N80) Also has Internet phone (per min N20).

**Post office** (Dugbe Rd)

### Sleeping

#### BUDGET

**Lizzy Guesthouse** (☎ 241 3350; off Easy Life Rd; rN2875; ☎) At the top of a hill, the Lizzy has smallish but tidy rooms, with cold showers and satellite TV. Staff are helpful, plus there's a bar and a restaurant which rustles up breakfast and a few Nigerian standards.

**Ibro Guest House** (☎ 0805 2636559 mobile; Ring Rd; s/d N2625/3675; ☎ P) This budget option is opposite D'Rovans hotel. The rooms are pretty compact, but OK for the price. A few

have unimpressive shared bathrooms – if these are the only choices available there's some room to negotiate a discount.

### MIDRANGE

**D'Rovans Hotel** (☎ 231 2907; drovans@skanet.com.ng; Ring Rd; s/d N6325/7475; ☎ ☎ P ☎) This hotel is making a good attempt to break into the top end. Rooms are well turned-out, although try to avoid those next to the generator shed. There are a couple of shops, a restaurant, and a nightclub where the owner's highlife band plays every weekend.

**Premier Hotel** (☎ 240 0340; Mokola Hill; r from N6800; ☎ P ☎) With a commanding view over Ibadan, the Premier tries to lord it over lesser establishments. It's not entirely successful, but rooms are comfy nonetheless, the Chinese restaurant is good, and you can burn off some calories in the pool.

### TOP END

**Kakanfo Inn** (☎ 231 1471; reservation@kakanfoinn.com; Nihinlola St; r from US\$126; ☎ ☎ P ☎) A comfortable top-end option, with good rooms and an on-site masseur. Ask for the resident rate if you can, which should garner you a healthy naira discount.

### Eating

**Kokodome** (By Cocoa House, Commercial St; dishes from N400; ☎ 9am-11pm) An open terrace around a pool makes this a pleasant place to eat or just sink a few drinks. The menu has a definite Lebanese theme, but there's some trusty *jollof* on offer too. Upstairs, you can dine in slightly plusher surroundings.

**Bisi Restaurant** (Kakanfo Inn, Nihinlola St; dishes from N700; ☎ 8am-10pm) Along with the usual suspects this hotel restaurant does a line in Indian cuisine, with a selection of vegetarian dishes. If you make it there in the morning, the cooked breakfasts are good too.

**Dragon D'Or** (Premier Hotel, Mokola Hill; dishes from N800; ☎ 12-3pm & 7pm-10.30pm, closed Mon) The Chinese food here is quite excellent, with generous servings and plenty of noodles, rice and crackers.

**Tantalizers** (Mokola Roundabout, dishes from N200; ☎ 8am-10pm) Off-the-peg fast food. You might find yourself here if you have a craving for genuine chips, a rarity in Nigeria. Otherwise, the toilets are nice and clean.

There are plenty of 'food-is-ready' places around Dugbe Market.

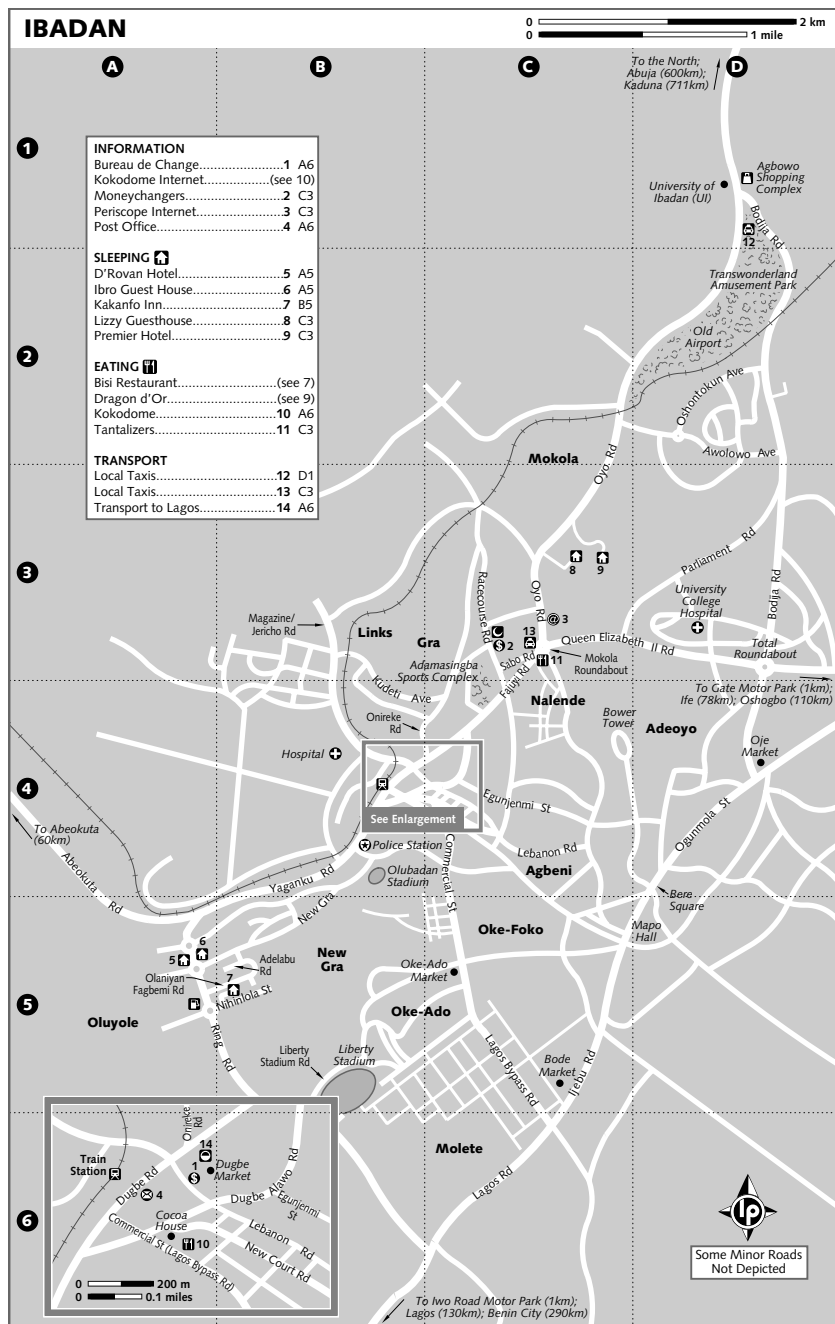
### SUNGBO'S EREDO

It almost defies belief, but Africa's largest single man-made construction – bigger even than the Pyramids – lies just an hour away from Lagos, virtually unknown to the outside world. Sungbo's Eredo is a 160km-long 1000-year-old linear boundary rampart, sometimes as high as a seven-storey house, and dotted with guardhouses and barracks.

Its history is murky. It was built around 950AD in several stages, and its construction involved moving millions of tonnes of soil. It is believed that it was built for the Ijebu Kingdom, although tradition implausibly ascribes it to the Queen of Sheba, locally called Bilikisu Sungbo. The motives for construction are even hazier – the fact that it was built in a heavily forested area seems to defy normal military defensive tactics. Current theories suggest a spiritual role, or that it may even have been built to keep out marauding elephants. State-building in forests on this scale is simply unknown in Africa, and sadly few archaeologists are pursuing the topic.

The Eredo is still covered with the gloomy brooding forest that has kept it from the eyes of the modern world, and a foray into the deep 'ditch' can be quite eerie. It's difficult to take in its enormity in a day trip, but you'll certainly feel like an adventurer treading where few have gone before.

To reach Sungbo's Eredo, take a minibus from Ojota Motor Park in Lagos to Ijebu-Ode (N150, one hour). Locals should be able to direct you to the best sites.



## Getting There & Around

Iwo Rd, to the south of the city, is Ibadan's major motor park; minibuses run to all points from here, including Lagos (N250, 90 minutes), Abuja (N1200, eight hours), Kaduna (N1700, 11 hours) and points north. The further you're travelling, the earlier you should get to the motor park. Transport to Lagos departs from Dugbe Market. For Oshogbo (N250, 90 minutes), go to Gate Motor Park in the east of the city.

Ibadan's sprawling nature makes *okada* trips more expensive than usual – around N50 for a typical ride. Pricier taxis are white with a thin blue stripe.

## OSHOGBO

☎ 035

This quiet Yoruba city has been a centre for contemporary Nigerian art since the 1950s, although some of the galleries are feeling a little tired these days, with artists relocating to more profitable climes in Lagos and New York. It's still worth a visit to see the Osun Sacred Forest, a shrine to Yoruba religion that's a real Nigerian highlight.

## Information

Change money before coming to Oshogbo. For Internet access try **Megatech Plaza Cybercafé** (Gbongan Rd; per hour N120).

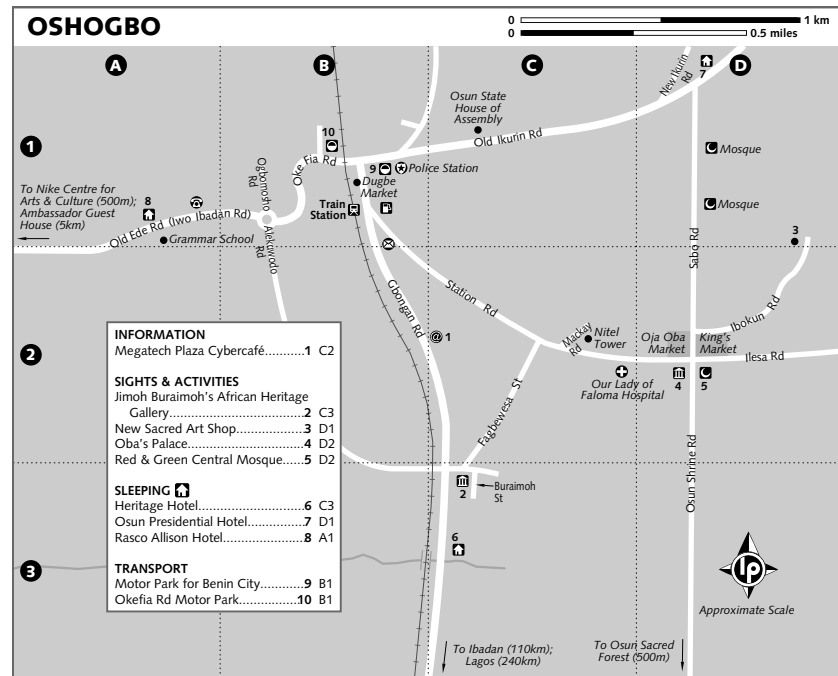
## Sights

While here, wander through the **Oja Oba Market** (cnr Station & Sabo Rds) across from the Oba's Palace. It's packed with stalls selling *juju* material.

## OSUN SACRED FOREST & GROVES

This delightful **forest** (Osun Shrine Rd; admission N200, camera N500; ☎ 10am-6pm) is a cool green oasis away from the daily hustle of Nigerian life. An ancient centre for the Yoruba goddess Osun, the 'mother' of Oshogbo, its groves are filled with sculptures and shrines revering the traditional Yoruba gods – under increasing threat from the growth of evangelical Christianity. Many of the gods, some looking positively extraterrestrial, are overgrown and mossy, but somehow this adds further to their primal power.

Even without the shrines, the forest is a lovely place to walk, spotting monkeys and





bright butterflies, with little more to disturb you than the sound of birdsong and running water. The forest was declared a World Heritage Site in 2006.

An *okada* from the centre of Oshogbo costs N50.

### ART GALLERIES

In its heyday, Oshogbo was the flourishing centre of the Oshogbo School of Art, a movement which started in the 1960s. To see some of the artists' work, you'll have to visit individual studios, as there is no central outlet for the sale of Oshogbo art.

Several galleries stand out: the **Nike Centre for Arts & Culture** (Old Ede Rd) run by Nike Davies-Okundaye, and strong on traditional and modern fabrics; **Jimoh Buraimoh's African Heritage Gallery** (1 Buraimoh St) selling abstract paintings; and the **New Sacred Art Shop** (41a Ibokun Rd).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Heritage Hotel** (☎ 241 881; hotelheritage@yahoo.com; Gbongan Rd; r N1265-2875; 🍴 📺 📺 📺 📺) Owned by artist Jimoh Buraimoh, rooms here are fair-sized with huge beds, although the mustard

walls make them seem gloomier than they should be. There's also a restaurant/bar, and a fairly anaemic generator.

**Rasco Allison Hotel** (☎ 240 705; Old Ede Rd; r N1500; 🍴 📺) Cheap as chips, rooms here reflect the price, but it's fine for a short stay if your funds are low.

**Osun Presidential Hotel** (☎ 232 299; Old Ikurin Rd; r from N9200; 🍴 📺 📺 📺 📺) Once Oshogbo's grand old lady, this hotel is still adequate, but is almost ready to be pensioned off. Rooms are average for the price, which also sums up the restaurant.

**Ambassador Guest House** (☎ 242 254; Ido Osun Junction; r N15,000 🍴 📺 📺 📺 📺) This place, in large leafy grounds, is a real treat. More a home than a hotel, it's owned by artist Nike Davies-Okundaye and is decorated beautifully. Not all rooms have en suites, but otherwise the Ambassador does everything to treat you like a VIP. Reservations are accepted in advance.

Old Ede Rd is the main drag for chop-houses serving 'food-is-ready' fare.

### Getting There & Away

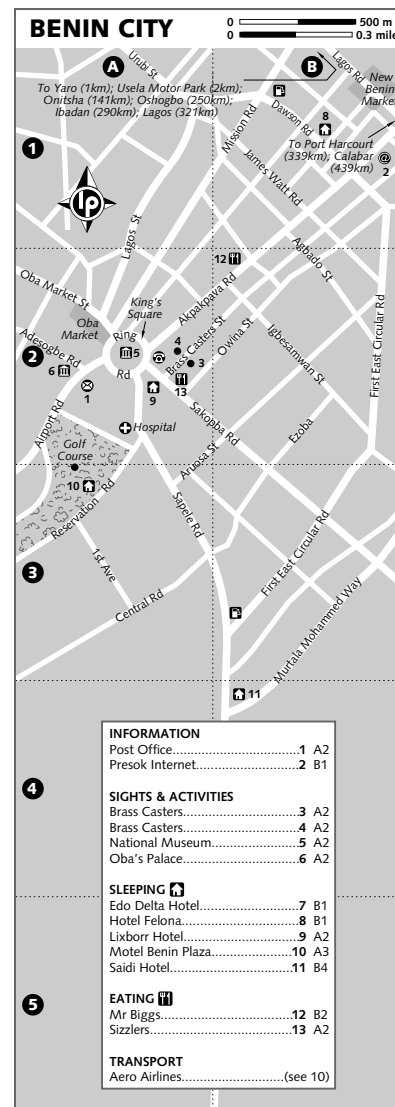
Okefia Rd is the main motor park. Minibuses leave pretty regularly for Ibadan (N250, 90 minutes) and Lagos (N450, three hours). For other destinations, it's quicker to head to Ibadan and change there. Most *okadas* in town cost around N30; taxis are blue with a yellow stripe.

### BENIN CITY

☎ 052

Until the end of the 19th century, Benin City was one of the great African cities. It's *obas* ruled much of southwest Nigeria and received embassies from the Portuguese, sending emissaries to Europe in return. The Bini people were particularly skilled at casting brass statues of superb quality, which were used to decorate the Oba's Palace. Their other great skill was in human sacrifice, with hundreds of captives frequently dispatched to maintain the kingdom's good fortune.

In 1897, the killing of a British consul to Benin was met with a punitive military campaign. No amount of sacrifice could ward off modern weaponry, and when the British captured the city they promptly burned it to the ground. Nearly 5000 brass statues were collected, and then auctioned off in London to pay for the expedition. The Western world was astounded by their quality and the



statues (often erroneously called the Benin Bronzes) became one of the first styles of African art to win worldwide recognition.

Today, Benin City, capital of Edo State, is a sprawling and undistinguished place. However, the art of brass statuary has recently been revived, and you can see craftsmen at work near the museum.

A good time to visit is December, when the seven-day Igue (Ewere) Festival – featuring traditional dances, a mock battle and a procession to the palace – and the nine-day New Yams Festival, celebrated with parades and dancing, giving thanks for a productive harvest, takes place around Edo State.

### Orientation

King's Square is at the centre of town, circled by Ring Rd. Running northeast from here is Akpakpava Rd, with Sapele and Sapoba Roads leading off to the southeast. You will find places to stay, plus restaurants, shops and local transport along these routes.

### Information

**Post office** (Airport Rd) Next to the hospital.

**Presok Internet** (Akpakpava Rd; per hr N80) Open 24 hours.

### Sights

#### BRASS CASTERS

Part-funded by Unesco, **Brass Casters St**, near the centre, has been given over to reviving Benin brasswork. Craftsmen use the 'lost wax' technique, whereby a sculpture is made in wax, covered in clay and baked; the melted wax drains away, and the mould is poured with brass. As the mould must be smashed to retrieve the sculpture, every piece is unique (see p71 for more). The brassmakers are happy to show you their works, usually copies of the most famous Benin sculptures.

Everything is for sale – prices range from N300 for the smallest to over N50,000 for the big statues – and there's a blissful lack of sales pressure.

#### NATIONAL MUSEUM

The **museum** (King's Sq; admission N100; 🕒 9am-6pm), surrounded by the ferocious traffic of Ring Rd, is the city's main landmark. The ground floor is dedicated to the Benin Kingdom, with a display of beautiful brasses. Photos represent the more important pieces now overseas. The more bloodthirsty aspects of Benin culture are neatly glossed over, but look out for the representations of Portuguese traders. The upstairs galleries are more ethnological in nature, providing a good survey of traditional cultures from across Nigeria.

The museum is dark when there's no National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), so a torch is a good idea.

### BLESSED SCULPTURE

Since the 1950s, Austrian sculptor Suzanne Wenger has been working in the Osun Sacred Forest outside Oshogbo to bring the Yoruba shrines back to life through her imaginative restorations.

Called Aduni Olosa (meaning 'Adored One') by the local inhabitants, Wenger is so highly regarded that the local women have made her the priestess of two cults.

With the help of local artisans she has worked on restoring the shrines while adding her own touches. The result is a forest of spectacular, monumental and unique shrines. While they are different in style from what is traditionally associated with African art, the inspiration is still totally Yoruba.

The principal shrine is that of the river goddess Osun, in a grove enclosed by an intricately designed wall. By the sacred river, near the Lya Mapa grove where huge sculptures soar skywards, you can see a monumental and complex cement sculpture to Ifa, the divine Yoruba oracle. Another impressive sculpture, approximately 5m high, is the shrine to Onkoro, the mother goddess.

**OBA'S PALACE**

The mud-walled **Oba's Palace** (nr Adesogbe Rd & Airport Rd), a block southwest of the museum, is quite spectacular. The palace contains sculptures, brass relics and other art depicting historical events during Benin City's heyday. It also has an impressive array of traditional crafts and other works of art. It is still very much a working palace, and you'll see plenty of attendants and petitioners at the court.

You need the secretary's permission to visit, preferably arranged a day in advance; ask at the security post at the entrance. There's no fee but you'll be asked for a dash.

**Sleeping & Eating**

**Edo Delta Hotel** (☎ 252 722; Akpakpava Rd; s 1500-2500, d from N3500; ☹) This is a friendly budget option, with a jumble of chalets and a hotel block proper. The cheapest rooms feel a little cramped and have fan only; other rooms are better value. The reception doubles as a small, impromptu bar, with decent sofas.

**Lixborr Hotel** (☎ 256 699; Sakopba Rd; s/d N2875/3450-4025; ☹) Formerly the Genesis Hotel, this is a great, well-run place with comfortable, tastefully decorated rooms. Look for the giant statue of the Benin woman outside; it's opposite the brass casters street.

**Hotel Felona** (☎ 256 699; Dawson Rd; s/d N3450/4025-5175; ☹ P) Rooms are decent and comfortable here, and there's a 24-hour generator. The restaurant serves good Nigerian and Continental dishes, and is worth visiting for nonguests to have the bacon and eggs breakfast (from N240), or the Nigerian dishes throughout the day.

**Saidi Hotel** (☎ 253 237; Murtala Mohammed Way; www.saidihotelsltd.com; r from N6900, apt from 12,075; ☹ P) Never knowingly underdecorated, this huge compound mixes traditional Benin décor with Chinese theme park and 1970's kitsch. Get past that though, and rooms are large and plush with good amenities. If there are several of you, the two-bedroom apartments are excellent value. The restaurant has a good Chinese buffet every Sunday from 12pm to 3pm (N1200).

**Motel Benin Plaza** (☎ 254779; motelbeninplaza@info.web.abs.net; Reservation Rd; s/d/ste from N5750/7425/9775; ☹ P) Easily Benin City's fanciest hotel, with immaculate rooms, a restaurant, a couple of shops, moneychangers and a great bar next to the pool (with live music each evening).

**Mr Biggs** (Akpakpava Rd, ☎ 8am-10pm) and **Sizzlers** (Sakopba Rd; ☎ 8am-10pm) both offer Nigerian fast food with bright lights and clean toilets. The southern end of Akpakpava Rd has plenty of chophouses serving 'food-is-ready' fare.

**Getting There & Away**

**Aero Airlines** (☎ 271 512; Motel Benin Plaza, Reservation Rd) have a daily flight to Lagos (N8000, 40 minutes). They also have an office at the airport.

Yaro, in the north, is the hub for transport in Benin City, although it's less a depot than a street with minibus garages. Transport to Lagos (usually to Yaba or Ojota motor park) leaves constantly throughout the day (N800, four hours). There are plentiful minibuses to Onitsha (N350, two hours), Port Harcourt (N850, five hours) and Calabar (N1200, eight hours). Transport north to Oshogbo and Ibadan leaves from Usela Rd motor park.

*Okadas* are everywhere in Benin City (N30 to N50 a ride), plus there are plenty of taxis, painted red with a yellow stripe.

**PORT HARCOURT**

☎ 084

Built as a port for exporting coal from Enugu, Port Harcourt now has another *raison d'être*: oil. Oil flares from the Delta light up the night, and you can taste the pollution. Although oil wealth washes through the city, it mostly ends up in Abuja, fuelling local grievances about corruption and underdevelopment, and giving the place a definite edge. Although there's nothing much for travellers, a visit to Port Harcourt can lift the lid on many of the problems facing Nigeria.

**Orientation**

Port Harcourt is all urban sprawl. Azikwe Rd runs north from Old Township by the docks, eventually turning into Aba Rd. On Azikwe Rd you'll find the (defunct) train

**WARNING**

Political instability meant that we were unable to visit Port Harcourt or the Niger Delta during research, so some information in this section may be unreliable. The threat of kidnap in the Delta region remains high – check the security situation carefully before considering travel to the area.

station, major banks, and the post office. Aggrey Rd in Old Township is another commercial centre, with food stalls and shops.

**Information**

The expat-run website [www.oyibosonline.com](http://www.oyibosonline.com) is an excellent guide for visitors to Port Harcourt, with everything from restaurant listings to weekly security briefings.

**AIRLINES**

For information on domestic and international carriers based in Port Harcourt see p646 and p636.

**POST**

**Post office** (Station Rd)

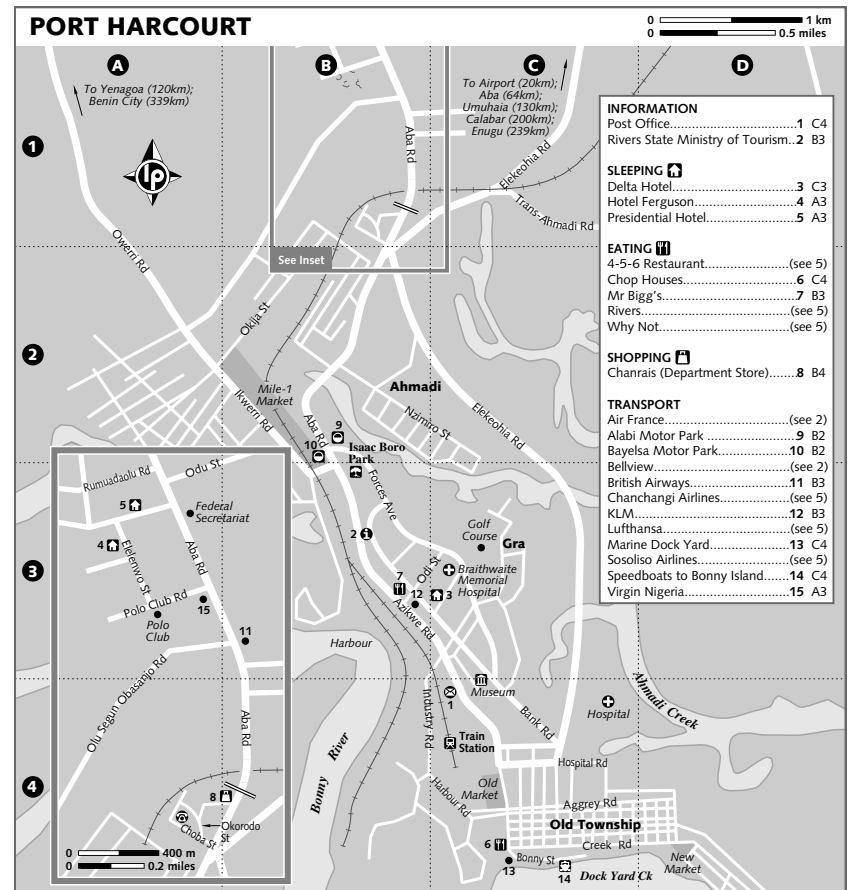
**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**Rivers State Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 334 901; 35 Aba Rd) May help with advising on trips to the Delta.

**Sleeping & Eating**

**Hotel Ferguson** (☎ 230 505; 1b Eelenwo St; s/d N3400/5000; ☹) The quiet, quirky Ferguson is one of the least-expensive and comfortable places you'll find in Port Harcourt, with clean rooms and an attached restaurant.

**Delta Hotel** (☎ 236 650, 1-3 Harley St; r N2500-5000; ☹) The Delta is a good choice, and although it's a bit away from the centre in the Gra district, this makes it quiet and relaxing. The nicely maintained rooms have air-con, TV and telephone. It has a decent bar and restaurant.



**Presidential Hotel** (☎ 310 400; off Aba Rd; r from N14,500; 🍷 🍴) Once Port Harcourt's top hotel, the Presidential is a little down at heel these days, but still gets a good showing from the oil crowd. Sosoliso Airlines, Chanchangi and Lufthansa have their offices here, and you'll find it easy to change money. As a nonguest, you can use the pool for N100, visit the cinema or dine in the restaurants.

There are eateries on Aba Rd, three at Presidential Hotel alone: **4-5-6 Restaurant** (dishes from N1200) serving Chinese food; **Why Not** (mains from N800) with Lebanese and European fare; and **Rivers** (mains from N750) with Nigerian dishes.

For inexpensive chop, try any of the *suya* stalls scattered throughout the grid of Old Township, or the stalls at Old Market. These stalls are all lit by lamps, and with the frequent power cuts in the port it is probably the best light you'll get. For predictable fast food, try **Mr Bigg's** (Azikwe Rd), just north of Chanrais supermarket on Azikwe Rd.

### Getting There & Away

There are plenty of flights every day between Port Harcourt and Lagos or Abuja (both around N9000, one hour) – it's simple to arrive at the airport and take the next flight. **Bellview** (☎ 230 518; 47 Aba Rd), **Chanchangi** (☎ 234 937; Presidential Hotel, off Aba Rd), **Sosoliso** (☎ 231 908; Presidential Hotel, off Aba Rd) and **Virgin Nigeria** (☎ 467 000; 175 Aba Rd) fly these routes. International connections include twice a week to London with Virgin Nigeria, twice a week to Paris with **Air France** (☎ 486 901; 47 Aba Rd) and three times a week to Frankfurt with **Lufthansa** (☎ 232 014; at Presidential Hotel, off Aba Rd). **British Airways** (☎ 238351; 180 Aba Rd) flights to London were suspended at the time of research. A taxi to the airport costs N2000 (45 minutes).

There are two main motor parks, Abali and Bayelsa, both under flyovers on Azikwe Rd. Sample minibus fares include Calabar (N900, five hours), Benin City (N850, five hours) and Umuhai (N450, two hours).

For information on getting to the Delta, see below.

*Okadas* are the best way of getting around Port Harcourt's go-slows; there are also blue taxis.

### THE NIGER DELTA

The Niger Delta – Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States – is one of Nigeria's most fascinating regions. A labyrinth of creeks, forests

and mangrove, its history is one of great exploitation. Until the 19th century it was a major hub for the slave trade, which was eventually replaced by the British with palm oil exportation, and then, following independence, by the oil industry. Bonny Island in the Delta gives its name to Bonny Light, an important crude for making petrol.

Extreme care should be taken if planning a visit, as the Delta is infamous for kidnappings. Foreigners are often presumed to be oil employees and therefore worth holding for ransom. Warri, the capital of Delta state, is regularly out of bounds to foreigners. If security allows it, the most accessible part of the Delta is Brass Island, reached by boat from Yenagoa. Alternatively, it's possible to hire a boat to Bonny Island off Creek Rd in Port Harcourt. Potentially, exploring the backwaters and traditional fishing villages of the region could be a highlight of any Nigerian trip, but safety concerns should always be paramount. Take heed of local warnings; once you're on the water, extracting yourself from a difficult situation might not be easy.

### Brass Island

Home to the Nembe people, Brass Island got its name from a misunderstanding. When the British arrived, they sought information from a lone woman, an officer gripped her by the shoulder and demanded 'Where are we?' She retaliated with '*Barasi*' (meaning 'leave me alone' in Nembe), which was duly noted down by the map-makers. The colonial influence is still visible in some fine, if dilapidated, period buildings on the waterfront.

Today Brass is home to an Italian oil installation and a small, friendly fishing community. It's a place to soak up the atmosphere, enjoy the seafood, chat with the locals over palm wine and watch future football champions battle it out barefoot on the village's dusty pitch. Try the overpriced **Eirika Hotel** (rN6800), or stay in a local house – ask for Tom's Place, or Casey's Guesthouse – you usually pay around N2000.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Getting to Brass is an adventure. Speed-boats leave from Swali Market in Yenagoa. The boats (N1400, 90 minutes) are hectic and not always that safe – one reader wrote to us to say her boat crashed, and recommended future travellers invest in a life-

### OIL ON TROUBLED WATERS

Oil accounts for over 95% of Nigeria's exports, but despite being the source of the country's wealth, the Niger Delta remains one of the most underdeveloped parts of the country. Oil money simply flows out of the Delta into the deep pockets of central government – and secret overseas accounts – leaving the locals with a neglected infrastructure and massive environmental damage – oil spills, gas flaring and even acid rain.

The first major attempt to confront the state and the western oil companies was by the minority Ogoni people in the 1990s. Led by the writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (Mosop) mounted a vigorous campaign in Rivers State that was met with extreme violence by the Nigerian government. Saro-Wiwa was executed for treason by the Abacha regime in 1995, which led to Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth.

A decade on, the struggle for redistribution of oil wealth has been taken up by the Ijaws. The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), led by Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, has taken a militant line, demanding increased sovereignty for the Ijaws. It began a paramilitary campaign against oil installations, using arms paid for with the proceeds of smuggled oil. Threats to blow up oil platforms led to government talks; when they stalled, the NDPVF kidnapped Western oil employees. Following Dokubo-Asari's capture in 2005, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has replaced the NDPVF, and stepped up the military campaign against the oil companies.

As we went to press, the governor of Bayelsa State was undergoing impeachment proceedings for corruption, a first in Nigerian history. Many western oil companies are now developing offshore oil platforms, and while this may bring a short-term solution to their security problems, the deeper issues surrounding Nigeria oil production can't be moved away so easily.

jacket. If you can, enjoy the green channels of the Delta, spotting plenty of birdlife and fishing canoes (and oil pipelines). Minibuses to Yenagoa (N300, 90 minutes) leave from Port Harcourt's main motor parks.

### UMUHAIA

An otherwise unremarkable slice of urban Nigeria, Umuhai (pronounced *oh-MOY-ah*) was the headquarters of the Biafran army during the civil war in the 1960s (see p623), and has the interesting **National War Museum** (Museum Rd; N40; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) which commemorates the conflict.

The ingenuity of the blockaded Biafrans is on display in the grounds, with homemade armoured cars and the remains of their pitiful (but surprisingly effective) airforce, including a two-seater Cessna whose occupants literally dropped its bombs out of the window. There's also a 25m-long gunboat used by the Nigerian navy, now converted to a pleasant café serving drinks and simple meals. Inside the museum proper there's a fearsome array of traditional weapons, army uniforms and a photographic history of the Biafran war (inside the bunker that housed the Voice of Biafra radio station).

Umuhai can be visited en route to other destinations, such as Calabar (N600, 2½

hours) or Port Harcourt (N450, two hours). Travelling west, it's easier to head to Onitsha (N700, four hours) and change there. Onward transport leaves from All Roads Motor Park. An *okada* to the museum costs N30.

### CALABAR

☎ 087

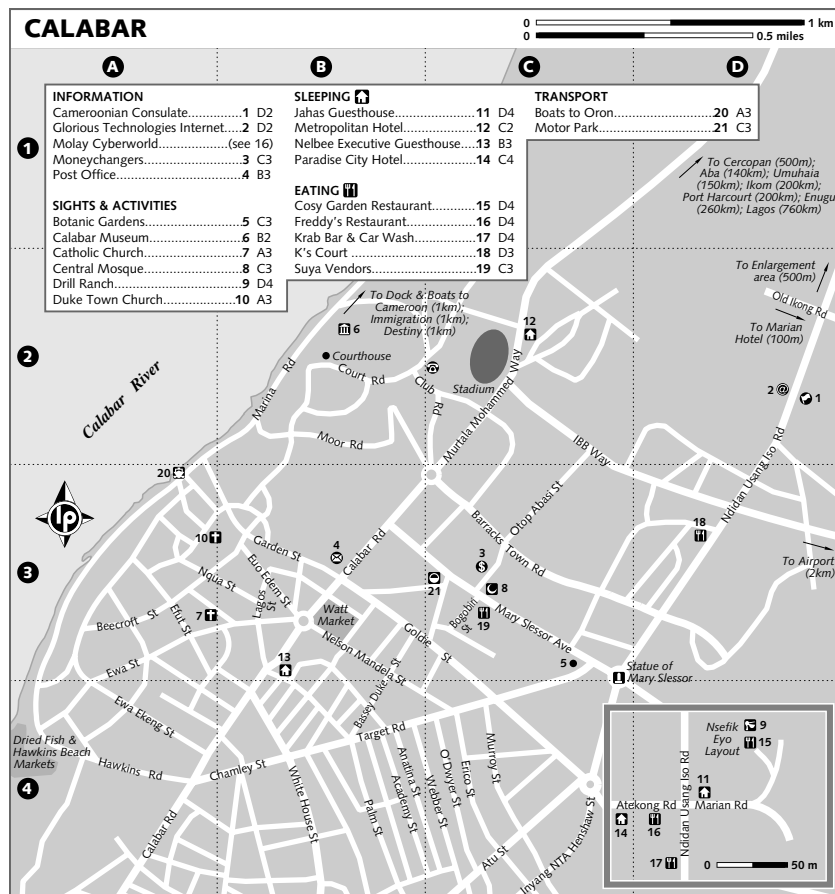
Tucked into Nigeria's southeastern corner, the capital of Cross River state is one of the most likeable cities in Nigeria for visitors. It's certainly the cleanest. It sits high on a hill overlooking Cross River, and its port has historically made the town a prosperous place – Calabar was one of Nigeria's biggest slave ports, and later a major exporter of palm oil. Even its name seems the picture of an equatorial trading post.

Many travellers pass through Calabar to or from Cameroon, and either way it is a great introduction or farewell to Nigeria. There's also plenty to do – an excellent museum, and two primate conservation centres that, along with the lush riverine vegetation, make this the greenest corner of the country.

### Orientation

Calabar is surprisingly hilly. Calabar Rd runs high above the river. On the waterfront is the older colonial quarter of Duke Town,





where you'll find the town's first church and the tomb of the still-revered Scottish missionary Mary Slessor. At the centre of Calabar Rd is the warren-like Watt Market, where everything is for sale. To the east, Ndidan Usang Iso Rd runs north-south, which is where you'll find several of the better hotels and restaurants. The airport is 2km further to the east.

## Information

Hausa moneychangers can be found in the area around the central mosque on Mary Slessor Ave.

**ADC Airlines** (☎ 234 477; airport desk)

**Glorious Technologies Internet** (Ndidan Usang Iso Rd; per hr N100)

**Molay Cyberworld** (Atekong Rd; per hr N150)

**Post office** (Calabar Rd)

## Sights

### CALABAR MUSEUM

This **museum** (Court Rd; admission N100; ☎ 9am-6pm) housed in the beautiful old British governor's building, is Nigeria's best by some distance. It has a fascinating and impressive collection covering Calabar's precolonial days as the Efik kingdom (and is remarkably frank about the local slave trade), the palm-oil trade, the British Oil Rivers Protectorate and Nigerian independence. Take a torch – the upstairs galleries are very dark when there's no NEPA. The museum also has great views of the river and a good café.

## DRILL RANCH

Run by the pioneering charity Pandrillus, this **primate rescue centre** (☎ 234 310; drill@infoweb.abs.net; Nsefik Eyo Layout, off Atekong Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm) is home to a colony of drill monkeys and orphaned chimpanzees, both found in the forests east of Calabar but increasingly endangered. Pandrillus has been at the forefront of primate conservation in Nigeria and places great emphasis on local education to combat poaching and the bushmeat trade. The ranch runs the most successful drill captive breeding programme in the world, with groups eventually taken to Afi Mountain Drill Ranch (p650) near Cross River National Park – visits can be arranged from here. Pandrillus also co-run the Limbe Wildlife Centre in Cameroon (p189). Donations are welcome.

## CERCOPAN & BOTANIC GARDENS

The second of Calabar's primate charities, **Cercopan** (www.cercopan.org; Ishie Lane; ☎ 9am-5pm) works with smaller monkeys, such as guenons and mangabeys, and has a visitor centre with rescued primates. Cercopan works closely with schools in teaching conservation. In 2006, Cercopan plans to relocate to the **Botanic Gardens** (www.irokofoundation.org; Mary Slessor Ave), which are under redevelopment. The gardens will draw attention to the biodiversity of the area. Donations are welcome.

## Sleeping

**Nelbee Executive Guesthouse** (☎ 232 684; Dan Achibong St; s/d N2300/2530; ☎ (P)) Close to Watt Market is this handy budget option. Rooms are comfortable, the management friendly, and there's a terrifically formal dining room, but it can be gloomy when there's no NEPA.

**Jahas Guesthouse** (Marian Rd; r N3500; ☎) This clean and tidy budget option has a warm welcome, and is a pleasantly quiet option, off the main road. For those feeling weary from Nigeria's bustle, the health centre in the same compound offers restorative 'blood massages'.

**Marian Hotel** (☎ 220 233; Old Ikong Rd; s/d N3500/4600; ☎ (P)) From the outside this hotel, east of town, looks to be aspiring to a little more than it can successfully carry off. Rooms are spacious and tidy, if a bit disappointing, with the usual creaky TV and optimistic plumbing.

**Paradise City Hotel** (☎ 235 726; Atekong Rd; r N2990-3450; ☎) Away from the centre, this

three-storey hotel is popular with conferences and evangelical meetings – none of which deters the bar girls in the hotel's lively Fountain Bar. Rooms are large, and there's a 24-hour generator.

**Metropolitan Hotel** (☎ 230 911; metrocal@hitecpro.com; Murtala Mohammed Way; s/d N6000/7200; ste from N15,000; ☎ (P)) Calabar's poshest sleeping option, the Metropolitan has large well-appointed rooms, aimed at business travellers, plus a decent restaurant, a couple of shops and a popular pool.

## Eating

**Cosy Garden Restaurant** (Nsefik Eyo Layout, off Atekong Rd; mains from N300; ☎ 9am-8pm) If your mama was Nigerian, she'd cook like this. Choose hot and tasty pepper soup or delicately flavoured *egusi* with a mountain of pounded yam. It's poorly signed: look for the lime green building near the Drill Ranch.

**Freddy's Restaurant** (Atekong Rd; mains from N1200; ☎ 11.30am-3pm, 6.30pm-11pm, closed Sun lunch) Something of an institution for Calabar's tiny expat community, Freddy's serves Lebanese and continental dishes in well-presented surroundings, and has a large bar. The shwarms (N1400) are ever-popular.

**K's Court** (Ndidan Usang Iso Rd; dishes from N300; ☎ 11am-late) An open-air chophouse, this place gets going better the later the day gets. It serves up fiery bowls of cow-leg soup with plantain, and once that's gone, pushes back the tables and cranks up the music to dance the weekend nights away.

**Krab Bar & Car Wash** (Ndidan Usang Iso Rd; dishes from N300; ☎ 10am-late) How Nigerian: drive to dinner, sink a few beers while your car gets washed and then drive home. During the day, meals don't run much past *jollof* rice, but in the evening the *suya* and grilled fish stands get going – there's cheap tasty meals either way.

There are some other good *suya* stands near the central mosque, and chophouses around the main motor park.

## Getting There & Away

**ADC Airlines** (☎ 234 477) fly every morning to Lagos (N12,000, one hour); the flight continues to Abuja (N15,000, two hours). Calabar's dark blue taxis will charge around N250 for an airport drop.

**Destiny** (☎ 085 514475 mobile; Calabar dock) sails every Tuesday and Friday to Limbe in

Cameroon (N5000, 10 hours). For more information see p671.

The main motor park is tucked between Mary Slessor Ave and Goldie St. Sample minibuss fares include Port Harcourt (N900, four hours), Lagos (N3000, 10 hours), Umuhaia (N600, 2½ hours) and Ikom (N700, three hours).

An average *okada* ride around town should cost N30 to N40.

## AROUND CALABAR

Cross River National Park dominates the landscape to the east of Calabar – hilly, rugged and spectacular. Park facilities are severely dilapidated, so the best way to appreciate the area is to visit the Afi ranch on the edge of the park.

## Afi Mountain Drill Ranch

In the lush forests north of Cross River National Park, **Afi Mountain Drill Ranch** (N200 community charge, hut N2000, camping N1000, car/motorbike N500/250) is a satellite set-up of Pandrillus (p649) and houses six large drill groups (captive bred as well as rehabilitated) and orphaned chimps. The monkeys and apes live in separate huge natural enclosures, in as close a state to the wild as possible. Long-term plans will involve releasing drills back into the wild, but it is impossible to release chimps which have been habituated to humans.

The camp consists of a series of simple huts, a kitchen hut, basic shower and drop toilets. The views over the mountains are gorgeous and wild, and well worth the effort of getting here. Nearby are the Bano Waterfalls, where it's possible to swim. There are also plenty of birds and wild monkeys to spot.

The N200 charge goes directly to the local Boki villages, towards community development projects; the ranch is the area's largest private employer. There is no food at the ranch; you'll need to bring tinned goods with you, while beans, rice, eggs etc can be bought at local villages.

Visits to the ranch should be arranged in advance through Pandrillus in Calabar. A drop taxi from Calabar should cost around N8500; the road is under improvement to allow all-year access. From Calabar, the road leads past Ikom to Obudu, then turns west to Katabang village over the Afi River. It's a further 6.5km from the village to the ranch.

## THE CENTRE

Nigeria's centre is a transitional area, acting mainly as a hinterland between the northern and southern halves. It is home to the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja, the modernist capital, and the city of Jos, which sits cool and high on a temperate plateau. There are also a couple of national parks – Yankari and the remote and rugged Gashka-Gumti.

## ABUJA



Nigeria's made-to-measure capital, Abuja was founded in the booming 1970s. After the Biafran war, the decision was made to move the capital to the ethnically neutral centre of the country. Construction began as the price of oil crashed in the 1980s and, even today, it feels like a work in progress. The National Mosque, law courts and Presidential Palace are impressive, but the city has only slowly become the actual capital; many ministries and some embassies are in Lagos. Clean, quiet and with good electricity, sometimes Abuja hardly feels like Nigeria at all. There's not much to do, but it's a good place to catch your breath and do some visa shopping.

## Orientation

Abuja is criss-crossed by expressways and wide avenues – it's not built for pedestrians. Running parallel to each other southwest to northeast, the main roads are Constitution Ave, Independence Ave and Moshood Abiola Rd. These surround the Central Business District, and are crossed by the expressways Olusegun Obasanjo Way and Shehu Shagari Way, with the latter running near the Presidential Palace and Supreme Court. Maitama is to the north, where there are many embassies. The National Mosque and large Sheraton Hotel are good for getting your bearings.

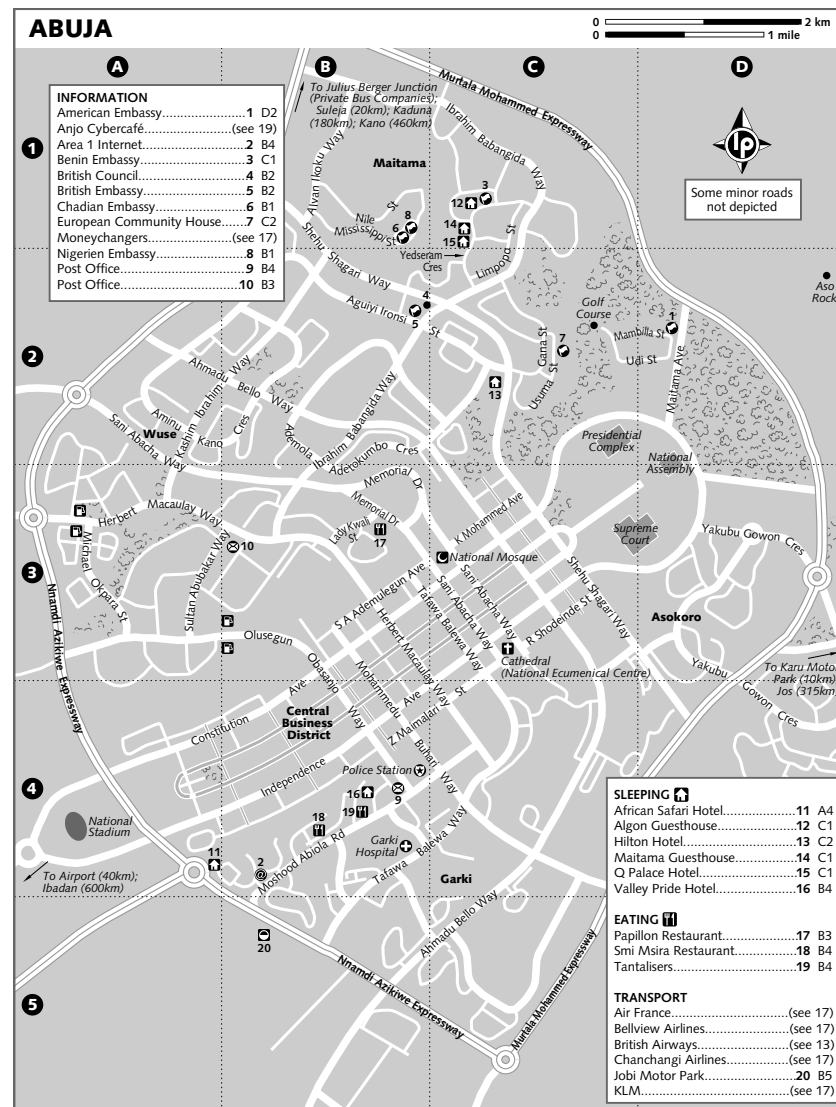
## Information

The best place to change money is with the Hausa moneychangers outside the Sheraton Hotel.

**Anjo Cybercafé** (Borno St; per hr N100)

**Area 1 Internet** (Area 1 Shopping Centre, Moshood Abiola Way; per hr N100)

**British Council** (Plot 2395 Ibrahim Babangida Way; day membership N500; ☎ 10am–6pm) With a library, free Internet and rooftop café.



**Post office** (☎ Mon–Fri) Garki (Moshood Abiola Way); Wuse Shopping Centre (Wuse Shopping Centre)

## Sleeping

Abuja tends to empty at weekends, with people leaving for more exciting destinations, so many hotels offer discounts for Friday/Saturday nights – always ask if

there's a deal when checking in. Budget hotels are thin on the ground.

## BUDGET

**African Safari Hotel** (☎ 234 1881; Plot 11, Benue Crescent; r from N2300; ☎) A nice quiet budget option, with a range of rooms which increase in size as the price does – the cheapest

are tucked away behind the kitchen, but the best are airy and spacious. Area 1 Shopping Centre is nearby for good street food.

**Q Palace Hotel** (☎ 413 3021; qpalacehotel@yahoo.com; Yedseram Crescent; r N2500-5000; 🏠) A rare budget option for this part of Abuja, this is a pleasant hotel, with a restaurant and handy shop on site. Ask to see a few rooms – those facing inward are a little gloomy.

## MIDRANGE

**Algon Guesthouse** (☎ 413 4798; Yedseram Crescent; r N6500-13,000; 🏠 P) Built in 'African modernist' style – lots of glass and marble – this is a good-value guesthouse with generously large rooms. Ask about weekend discounts here.

**Maitama Guesthouse** (☎ 413 0219; Yedseram Crescent; r N4000-7000; 🏠 P) A bright orange and blue paint job welcomes guests here. It's a decent enough option, if nothing special; some rooms could be on the larger side.

**Valley Pride Hotel** (☎ 234 2401; Plot 1373, Borno St; r from N4500-7500; 🏠) A well-located hotel with cosy rooms and friendly management, and close to eateries on Moshood Abiola. If you want the cheapest rooms you'll have to argue your case, as the management generally only considers them suitable for your driver.

## TOP END

**Hilton Hotel** (☎ 413 811; hilton.abuja@hilton.com; Aguiyi Ironsi; r from US\$270; 🏠 P) Abuja's best hotel by far, this is one for the business account holder, although residents can cut the tariff to as little as N23,000. All the top-flight facilities you'd expect are on offer – luxurious rooms, gym and tennis courts, shops, several restaurants and a poolside bar.

## Eating & Drinking

**Papillon Restaurant** (Sheraton Hotel, Ladi Kwali Way; dishes from N1300; 🍽️ 12-3.30pm, 6.30-10.30pm) The Sheraton Hotel is worth visiting for its restaurants – there are two others but Papillon is the best. The nightly buffet is excellent, with a selection of Continental, Indian and Chinese dishes. You can finish your meal with drinks in the Elephant Bar until 1am.

**Smi Msira Restaurant** (Moshood Abiola Rd; dishes from N700; 🍽️ 9am-midnight) You can get all your favourite Nigerian dishes here, but the main draw is being able to sit in the pleasant leafy surroundings – a genuine beer garden. Claims they never close are exaggerated, but the food is still good (especially in the evenings).

**Tantalisers** (Moshood Abiola Rd; dishes from N200; 🍽️ 8am-10pm) A standard Nigerian fast-food chain – clean and bright with good chips and handy toilets.

In Maitama, Yedseram Crescent has several decent 'food-is-ready' places, and Area 1 Shopping Centre is handy for supplies and good *suya*.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The airport is 40km west of Abuja, a hefty N3000 taxi ride away. Flights depart roughly hourly for Lagos with several airlines (N9000, one hour), including Virgin Nigeria and Bellview. From Abuja it's also possible to fly daily to Kano (N12,000, one hour) and Port Harcourt (N9000, one hour), and several times a week to Ibadan, Calabar and Maiduguri. Check timetables at the **information desk** (☎ 810 0001).

Abuja also has several international connections: flights leave five times a week to London with **British Airways** (☎ 413 9610; Hilton Hotel; Aguiyi Ironsi); and three times a week to Frankfurt with Lufthansa. **Air France** (☎ 461 0777; Sheraton Hotel, Ladi Kwali Way) and **KLM** (☎ 523 9966; Sheraton Hotel, Ladi Kwali Way) also fly this route, but timetables change frequently.

For a list of airlines operating out of Abuja see p669.

### MINIBUS & BUSH TAXI

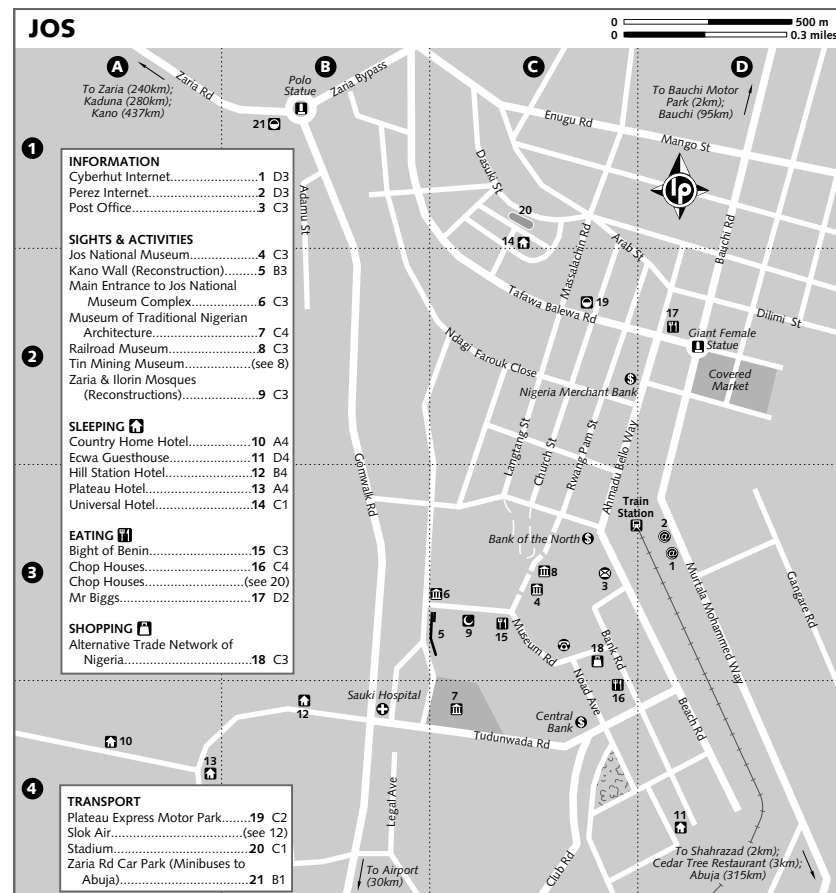
**Jobi Motor Park** (Utoka; Nnamdi Azikiwe Expressway) is the main terminus for Abuja, on the Ring Rd close to the stadium. Transport goes to all points from here; sample minibus fares include Kano (N1000, four hours), Jos (N700, three hours) and Ibadan (N1200, eight hours). Private cars from here are the quickest way to reach Lagos by road (N3200, nine hours). A drop taxi to Jobi from the centre of Abuja is N250.

Most *okada* riders in Abuja charge around N40 for a trip, otherwise hail a green cab.

## JOS

☎ 073

The Jos Plateau, with its temperate climes, is one of the older inhabited parts of Nigeria, and the ancient Nok Terracotta originated here. At 1200m above sea level, Jos is noticeably cooler than most other parts of the country, and at night you might have the bracing sensation of having to put an extra layer on.



Modern Jos is a British creation which grew on tin mining, and popular tradition claims its name is an abbreviation of 'Jesus Our Saviour', from the first missionaries. It's a good story, but a corruption of a local name is a more likely and prosaic explanation.

The stone-covered rolling hills of the plateau make the area around Jos scenic, and in the city itself there's an unusual but worthwhile museum of Nigerian architecture.

## Orientation

The city has two main north-south drags. One is Bauchi Rd, along which you'll find the large covered market, the train station and some commercial establishments; it becomes Murtala Mohammed Way after

the major junction with Tafawa Balewa Rd (look for the giant woman statue). Roughly 1km to the west is Gromwalk Rd, known as 'The Beach', which runs parallel to the now-defunct railway line.

## Information

**Cyberhut Internet** (Murtala Mohammed Way; per hr N100)

**Perez Internet** (Murtala Mohammed Way; per hr N100)

**Post office** (Ahmadu Bello Way)

## Sights

The **Jos National Museum complex** (Museum Rd) is really four separate museums in one. The **Jos National Museum** (admission N10; 🍽️ 8.30am-5.30pm) has a superb collection of pottery, including



several Nok Terracotta sculptures – which, at over 2500 years old, are Africa's oldest figurative sculptures. There are also displays of costumes, some scary masks and a bewildering variety of old currency.

The **Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture** (admission free; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm) is also worth a visit. Spread out over several hectares are full-scale reproductions of buildings from each of Nigeria's major regions. You can see a reconstruction of the **Kano Wall**, **Ilorin Mosque**, the old **Zaria Mosque**, with a Muslim museum inside, and examples of the major styles of village architecture – such as the circular *katanga* buildings of the Nupe people, with beautifully carved posts supporting a thatched roof. In many instances, such as the Kano Wall, these replicas are in better condition than the originals.

The **Railroad Museum** (admission N20; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm) and **Tin Mining Museum** (admission N20; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm) are for devotees only. There's also a small zoo, which animal lovers will certainly want to avoid.

## Sleeping

**Universal Hotel** (☎ 459 166; Pankshin St; r N550–2150) There are several combinations of room styles available at this place on Pankshin St (also known as Nziki Ave), with shared or en suite facilities, or with satellite TV, but even the priciest rooms are good value. Lone female travellers may feel a little uneasy in the bar area.

**Ecwa Guesthouse** (☎ 454 482; off Noad Ave; dm N450, r N1000; ☎ ☎ P ☎) Actually a church mission, this is a tranquil spot to rest your head. The facilities are of such a spartan nature that you feel they must be good for the soul. No alcohol is allowed.

**Plateau Hotel** (☎ 455 741; Rest House Rd; r from N2875; ☎ ☎ P ☎) This government hotel is a bit run down, but the price has slipped as well, making it a decent budget option. Rooms are fairly modest, while the addition of water would improve the swimming pool immeasurably.

**Country Home Hotel** (☎ 462 479; Tudunwada Rd; r N4100–6350, ste from N8450; ☎ ☎ P) Smart green paint unifies this set of slightly sprawling blocks. Inside, rooms are cosy and all have water heaters. There's also a pleasant garden bar and a huge number of staff scurrying about everywhere. Good value for the price.

**Hill Station Hotel** (☎ 455 300; johillstationhotel@yahoo.com; Tudun Wada Rd; s/d from N6325/7475, chalet N23,690; ☎ ☎ P ☎) Set in huge grounds with shady trees and cacti, this hotel has two main blocks with fine rooms, and some nicer chalets set slightly further up in the hills. Non-guests can pay N300 to use the pool all day.

## Eating

**Bight of Benin** (Jos National Museum Complex; dishes N250; ☎ 10am–5.30pm) This restaurant is a good reason in itself to visit the museums. It's in a replica of a traditional chief's hut – you even sit on logs – and there's a tasty selection of Nigerian dishes served throughout the day.

**Cedar Tree Restaurant** Yakubu Gowon Way; dishes from N500; ☎ 12–3pm & 7–10pm, Tue–Sun) Worth the taxi ride, this Lebanese restaurant is some way south of town. There's a good grill, serving a variety of kebabs, while the cheaper mezze like falafel and hummus dishes are great for jaded palates.

**Shahrazad** (Yakubu Gowon Way; dishes from N800; ☎ 12–3pm, 7–10.30pm) In the same style as the Cedar Tree but closer to the centre of Jos, this also has Lebanese food, but is equally good for its decent selection of Chinese dishes. There's lively music at weekends.

**Mr Biggs** (Ahmadu Bello Way; ☎ 8am–10pm) The usual fare served up on formica, for fans of fast food and clean toilets.

There are several chophouses dishing out 'food-is-ready' fare on Bank Rd south of ATNN (Alternative Trade Network of Nigeria), and more near the stadium.

## Shopping

The **Alternative Trade Network of Nigeria** (ATNN; Museum St) is a worker's cooperative selling attractive handicrafts such as baskets, leatherwork, and jewellery. It's part of the UK Fair Trade Network.

The Hill Station Hotel has a shop at the entrance selling Nok-style pottery.

## Getting There & Away

There is a daily flight between Jos and Lagos with **Slok Air** (☎ 455 300; desk at Hill Station Hotel). The airport is 30km south of Jos – N2800 by taxi.

Head for Bauchi Motor Park, northeast of town, if you're going north or east. Minibuses and bush taxis from here include to Kaduna (N600, four hours), Zaria (N500, four hours) and Kano (N600, five hours).

From **Plateau Express Motor Park** (Tafawa Balewa Rd), minibuses leave for Abuja (N700, three hours) and points further south.

*Okadas* in Jos cost around N30–40 for a ride.

## BAUCHI

☎ 077

Bauchi city, capital of Bauchi State, is a convenient stop on your way to or from Yankari National Park. It was the home to Nigeria's first prime minister Tafawa Balewa, and you can visit his **mausoleum** (near Central Market Roundabout; admission free; ☎ 7am–6pm). Sharia law operates in Bauchi.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Horizontal Motel** (Jos Rd; r N1600; ☎ ☎ P) In the centre of Bauchi, the Horizontal is an adequate budget option, with reasonably well turned out facilities.

**Obuna Royal Hotel** (☎ 541 941; Murtala Mohammed Way; ☎) Near the football stadium, this is a good bright place, with nice rooms and a restaurant serving dependably tasty Nigerian food and alcohol.

**Zaranda Hotel** (☎ 543 814; Jos Rd; r N5870; ☎ ☎ P ☎) The Zaranda is several kilometres west of town. Rooms are comfortable, the hotel has a decent bar and two good restaurants, plus a booking office for Yankari National Park.

## Getting There & Away

The main motor park is just north of Bauchi Market. Minibuses depart to Maiduguri (N1000; five hours), Jos (N250, two hours) and Abuja (N900; five hours) from here. To get to Yankari, transport leaves erratically from Minivan motor park (N600, five hours) – the road is poor.

## YANKARI NATIONAL PARK

Open for wildlife viewing year-round, **Yankari** (admission N300, photo permit N100–1000 depending on type) is 225km east of Jos, and covers an area of 2244 sq km. It was once one of West Africa's best wildlife areas, but animal populations have suffered due to poaching. The park still holds reasonable numbers of buffaloes, waterbucks, bushbucks and plenty of baboons. The biggest draw is the 500-strong population of elephants, but these can be hard to see and remain threatened – during research we were

offered ivory from, it was claimed, Yankari. Hyenas and leopards can be found and it's possible that lions may also survive. The bird-watching is excellent.

The best time to see animals is from late December to late April, before the rains, when the thirsty animals congregate at the Gaji River. You're permitted to drive your own vehicle if you take a guide, otherwise the park has a **safari truck** (N300; ☎ 7.30am & 3.30pm daily) that takes two hour tours. It's a pretty basic affair, just a flatbed truck with benches in the back, but it gets the job done.

Yankari's other great attraction is the incredibly picturesque **Wikki Warm Spring** (admission N200), near the park campsite. The crystal-clear mineral water is a constant 31°C, forming a lake 200m long and 10m wide. Bring your swimming gear – even if you don't see much wildlife, the spring is a real highlight and shouldn't be missed.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Wikki Warm Spring Camp** (☎ 077 542 174; camping per person N500, bungalows N1730–3450; ☎) Yankari's only accommodation is 40km inside the park. It has slightly tatty circular bungalows, and a generator which keeps odd hours. We'd suggest giving the cheaper ones rooms a miss. Luckily, for its location, food in the restaurant is pretty good, and there's a bar. It's a short walk from the camp to the spring.

## Getting There & Away

You can get to the park gate at Mainamaji by minibus from Bauchi (N600, five hours). After paying the entrance fee, you'll need to arrange transport to the camp – around N2800 in a taxi, or N1000 by *okada* (if you've got the stamina). Remember to arrange a pick-up from the camp for when you want to leave – you could be waiting days for a lift otherwise.

## GASHAKA-GUMTI NATIONAL PARK

Nigeria's largest national park, Gashaka-Gumti, is also the remotest part of the country, and its least explored. Its 6700 sq km area contains rolling hills, savanna, montane forest and Nigeria's highest mountain, **Chappal Wadi** ('Mountain of Death'; 2418m). It is as wild and spectacular a corner of Africa as you could wish for.

It also holds incredible diversity and is one of West Africa's most important

primate habitats. A new (to science) subspecies of chimpanzee was discovered here in 2003. The park is also supports lions, elephants, hippos and buffaloes. Much of the park remains unsurveyed, although human encroachment presents a clear threat.

Visiting Gashaka-Gumti is not a casual affair, as infrastructure is virtually nonexistent. The park headquarters are at Serti, eight hours from Jos. There is a small rest-house here, and you should be able to arrange a guide and vehicle hire. The area has no phone connections. It might also be worth visiting the WWF office 35km south in Gashaka, where they may be able to advise on current projects and accessibility. Inside the park, you'll need to be completely self-sufficient. With the proper planning, a trekking expedition here could be truly fantastic.

**Jemi-Alade Tours** (☎ 01 496 0297; jemi-alade@alpha.linkserve.com) in Lagos have run a few expensive tours to the park.

## THE NORTH

Northern Nigeria feels like a completely different country to the south and, but for the accident of colonial borders, it would be. The green of the countryside becomes drier as the Sahel approaches, and there's a whiff of desert sand in the air. The profusion of churches also begins to disappear, and is replaced by mosques and the call to prayer. Most northerners are Hausa or Fulani.

Islam informs every aspect of life in the north. The ancient trading cities of Kano, Zaria and Sokoto carry echoes of the old Sokoto Caliphate, and still have ties to the old trading routes across the Sahara. And, while many of the political and religious issues which divide Nigeria – such as the introduction of Sharia law – find their centre in the region, visitors to the north are likely to find nothing more than traditional Muslim hospitality welcoming them on their visit.

## KADUNA

☎ 062

If you're travelling up from southern Nigeria, Kaduna is likely to be your first port of call. It was founded by Frederick Lugard, Nigeria's first colonial governor in 1913 (locals can still point out his residence) as a new political centre for the north. More re-

cently, Kaduna found unwanted fame as the centre of communal riots resulting from the aborted Miss World competition in Abuja in 2000. It's a small, modern city and, as the capital of a Sharia state, finds itself on one of Nigeria's political and religious fault lines.

Kaduna's main artery is the wide Ahmadu Bello Way, running north to south.

### Information

**Al-Ameen Bureau de Change** (Hamdala Hotel, Muhammed Buhari Way) A useful moneychanger. Hausa moneychangers also congregate outside the hotel gate.  
**British Council** (☎ 236 033; Yakubu Gowon Rd) Near the post office and banks.  
**Netpoint Internet** (Leventis Bldg, Ahmadu Bello Way; per hr N200)

### Sights

The **national museum** (Ali Akilu Rd; admission N100; ☎ 9am-6pm), at the northern end of the city, on the road to Kano and across from the Emir's Palace, has local masks, carvings, pottery, brasswork and woodcarvings. Better is the replica Hausa Village on site, with traditional huts and, in the late afternoon, drumming and dancing. It's worth dashing one of the staff to give you a guided tour.

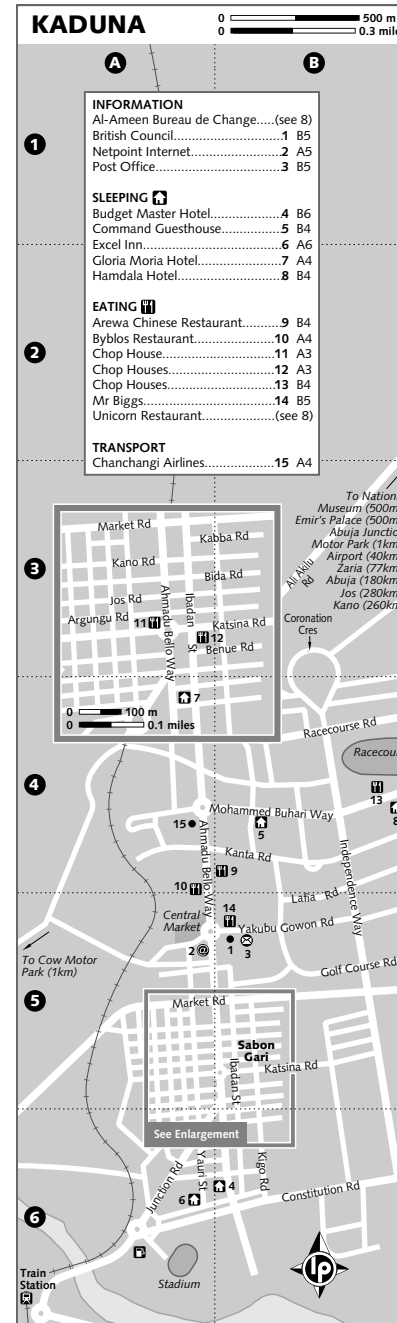
### Sleeping

**Budget Master Hotel** (☎ 372 915; www.nanet-hotels.com; 15 Abubakar Kigo Rd, r N1700-2200; ☎) More than living up to its name, this hotel offers good quality, cheap lodgings. Rooms come with satellite TV and kettle, and there's a fast food restaurant and bar off the lobby.

**Gloria Moria Hotel** (☎ 240 720; 2 Ahmadu Bello Way; r incl breakfast N3000; ☎) With cosy carpeted rooms, this is a tidy place to lay your head. All rooms have fridges, but try to choose one at the back, away from the noisy mosque on the main road.

**Excel Inn** (☎ 243 556; 23 Constitution Rd; r/st N3450/6900; ☎) Large rooms here are comfortable, if characterless, with lots of sterile white tiles and marble in evidence, but each come with a handy fridge. The shop next to reception offers an eclectic selection of clothes and pocket calculators.

**Command Guesthouse** (☎ 242 918; 10 Mohammed Buhari Way; r from N11200; ☎) If the name has a slightly martial ring, then it should be no surprise to find this hotel being run with military precision: everything is spotless and the bed sheets are immaculately crisp.



The atmosphere for guests is, thankfully, a little more relaxed, making this a great choice for a night or three.

**Hamdala Hotel** (☎ 245 440; 26 Mohammed Buhari Way; r US\$69-98, ste from US\$144; ☎) Kaduna's large upscale establishment, with good, if occasionally bland, rooms. There's a restaurant and pleasant garden bar, plus a well-stocked bookshop (selling international press) and a moneychanger. Nonresidents pay in US dollars.

### Eating

**Byblos Restaurant** (Ahmadu Bello Way; mains from N1000, meze from N400; ☎ 12-30pm & 7-11pm) Tucked behind a supermarket, Byblos has white linen and cheesy muzak as side orders to decent Lebanese and continental dishes. The meze platter for four (N10,500) is a good choice.

**Arewa Chinese Restaurant** (Ahmadu Bello Way; mains N650-1200; ☎ 12-3pm & 7-10pm) Decorated with red Chinese lanterns, this is a classy place for dinner. Meals come in small, medium or large servings, whichever the dish, and, for a restaurant in a Sharia state, there's an impressive amount of alcohol served, and pork on the menu to boot.

**Unicorn Restaurant** (Hamdala Hotel; ☎ 245 440; 26 Mohammed Buhari Way) Offers similar fare to Arewa.

**Mr Biggs** (Yakubu Gowon Way; ☎ 8am-10pm) Kaduna has a branch of the reliable Nigerian fast food outlet.

There are chophouses open all day on Ibrahim Talwo Rd and Ibadan St, and others serving up Nigerian dishes clustered around the Central Market and in Sabon Gari. Don't expect alcohol to be served.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

**Chanchangi Airlines** (☎ 249 949, Ahmadu Bello Way) fly twice a day to/from Lagos (N11,000, one hour). The airport is 40km north of Kaduna; expect to pay N2800 for a taxi.

#### BUS & BUSH TAXI

The main motor park is at Abuja Junction on the northern edge of Kaduna. Minibuses and bush taxis go from here to Abuja (N500, four hours), Jos (N600, four hours), Kano (N400, three hours) and Zaria (N170, one hour). Zaria transport also goes from Cow Motor Park in the east – minibuses fill quickly from here.

## ZARIA

While Kano is the north's biggest draw, it would be shame to miss this smaller walled city, just an hour from Kaduna. Another big player on the medieval Saharan trade routes, Zaria was one of the Hausa city states swept up by the tide of the Fulani jihad which formed the Sokoto Caliphate. Today, Zaria is a quiet and peaceful place, with its old walled centre surprisingly intact, sitting next to the tree-lined cantonments set up by the British in the early 20th century. Zaria's emir still lives in a grand palace, and leads the population in a grand ceremony at Friday prayers – an event worth seeing.

Sokoto Rd is the main road running through Zaria. At its northern end is Gra – the old British area with most of the hotels and the main motor park. As it crosses the Kubani river, it becomes Kaduna Rd, passing through Koko Dofa city gate and into the Old City.

## Information

Change money before travelling to Zaria. For net access, try **Grant Cybercafé** (Sokoto Rd, per hour N120) 250m north of Aiffas Motel.

## Sights

### EMIR'S PALACE & CENTRAL MOSQUE

The Emir's Palace and Central Mosque form the spiritual centre of Zaria's old city. Both are modern affairs, built on the sites of much older constructions.

The palace has a brightly painted carved plaster façade, covered with abstract Hausa designs which somehow manage to look both traditional and very modern. They sit above the public gateway, with its shaded benches for those waiting for an audience with the emir. The emir's gate is actually the duller brown gate 20m to the right – look for the green flag that indicates if he is in residence. Outside the royal gate is a green-roofed round building which houses the emir's war drums. The head drummer (who has been in the position for over 55 years) will show you inside for a small dash.

Every Friday at around 2pm, the emir walks from his palace to the mosque opposite to lead prayers, surrounded by his splendidly dressed royal guards. The entire area surrounding the compounds fills with up to 10,000 (male) worshippers. It's an impressive sight, and it's worth getting there early

to watch the street fill up and the prayer mats being unrolled. The actual prayers are over very quickly, but the silence during the ceremony is amazing. Unfortunately, women aren't likely to feel very comfortable here. Men are welcome, but don't take photos.

An *achaba* (motorcycle taxi) from Gra to the palace costs around N60.

### ZARIA MARKET & DYE PITS

Zaria has a small area of dye pits in the south of the old city. They're tricky to find – ask around once you're in the main market. The cloth is dyed in much the same way as it is in Kano (p661). The market is also well worth exploring, and gives a good taste of Zaria's history on the desert trading routes.

## Sleeping

**Teejay Palace Hotel** (☎ 333 303; Western Way Close; r N3000-3800, ste N5000; ☺ ☺ P) In a very secluded location, well away from the thick of things, this is a well-maintained modern hotel, with tidy rooms around courtyards with neatly clipped hedges, just about tipping it into Zaria's top accommodation spot.

**New Zaria Motel** (☎ 332 451; Queen Elizabeth Rd; chalet N2300; ☺ P) Set in large grounds, this motel is a series of colonial-style bungalows, each with huge rooms and large beds. With a decent restaurant also on site, it's good value; but check the air-con is working in your room before checking in.

**Aiffas Motel** (☎ 332 033; Sokoto Rd; r N3450-5600, ste N5175; ☺) This Muslim-run establishment has a shady rooms with a homely feel. There's a shady garden and fast food out the front, while the breakfast menu even runs to cornflakes. Be advised, however, that the management doesn't welcome 'careless or indecent dressing'.

**Zaria Hotel** (☎ 333 092; Samura Rd; r N4025-5750, ste N9775; ☺ ☺ P) Once the city's classiest hotel, the Zaria has fallen on harder times since Sharia law came in. The tacky nightclub just about lumbers on, but the pool is now a stagnant puddle. Rooms are decent enough though, with extra cushions and tea-making facilities thrown in at the higher tariff.

## Eating

**La Reine** (Queen Elizabeth Rd; dishes from N500; ☺ 7am-11pm) Just inside the main gate of New Zaria Motel, you can find large plates topped with the usual variations on meat/rice/pepper

sauce here. They also do a good, if greasy, chips with baked beans – curiously only for breakfast though, not dinner.

**Emanto** (Sokoto Rd; dishes from N750; ☺ 12-3pm, 7-10pm) Signed just off the main road, Emanto is a Lebanese-run restaurant, with meze and kebabs, along with a fair selection of pasta and continental dishes.

**Al Nasara Restaurant** (Sokoto Rd; dishes from N250; ☺ 8am-9pm) Between Dadi motor park and the Aiffas Hotel, the Al Nasara is a typical Nigerian 'food-is-ready' joint, with all the cow-leg soup, *egusi* and pounded yam which that entails.

**Tonia Restaurant** (Sokoto Rd) A few doors up from Al Nasara, this has more of the same.

For a fast food fix, there's a **Mr Biggs** (Kaduna Rd; ☺ 8am-10pm), just south of Gra. The **Zaria Hotel** (☎ 333 092; Samura Rd) is the only place to get a beer in this Sharia city.

## Getting There & Away

Dadi motor park is on Sokoto Rd next to the Kano-Zaria Highway flyover. Bush taxis and minibuses leave constantly for Kano (N300, two hours) and Kaduna (N170, one hour), as well as Sokoto (N500, four hours), Jos (N500, four hours) Abuja (N800, six hours) and further destinations. Bush taxis fight here for the same custom.

## KANO

☎ 064 / pop 4million

Largest of the ancient Hausa city states, Kano is the oldest surviving city in West Africa, and was founded around 1400 years ago. It was a major crossroads in the trans-Saharan trade routes and, from the Middle Ages, an important centre for Islamic scholarship. Today, it is still the economic centre of the northern Nigeria, and is the country's third biggest city. It's also the major draw for travellers in the region.

Kano's main attractions are found in the Old City. Indigo cloth has been made in dye pits here for hundreds of years, and the market remains atmospheric enough to evoke thoughts of Ibn Battuta and Mungo Park. Kano also has one of Nigeria's best museums, Gidan Makama.

Modern Kano is a huge place, with notoriously bad traffic. Fumes, coupled with the scouring harmattan wind, mean that on a bad day you'll have grit in your teeth and the sky will turn a dusty brown. Kano is

dry in other ways too – as capital of a Sharia state, alcohol was technically banned in 2004. The law is yet to be fully enacted, and you can still get a drink in upmarket restaurants, or in the bars of Sabon Gari, but this could change at a politician's whim.

## Orientation

Murtala Mohammed Way is one of Kano's most important roads, running east-west through the city. Travellers often base themselves near here, particularly around Bompai Rd, where there are good restaurants and other facilities. North of Murtala Mohammed is Sabon Gari, where you'll find most of Kano's Christian population, along with the majority of bars and the cheaper hotels.

The Old City is to the southwest, surrounded by the decrepit old walls. Some of the gates in the wall, however, are still intact; the main gate is Kofar Mata, which leads to the central mosque and the Emir's Palace. The warren of Kurmi Market is in the centre of the Old City; for amazing views, climb Dala Hill just to the north.

## Information

### CULTURAL CENTRES

**British Council** (☎ 626 500; Emir Palace Rd) Built in traditional Hausa style.

### INTERNET

**Friends Internet** (Murtala Mohammed Way; per hr N200) Possibly Nigeria's nicest Internet café.

**Sasinet Cybercafé** (Inside Daula Hotel compound; per hr N150)

### MONEY

Try the moneychangers at the craft stalls outside the Central Hotel; they'll also exchange West African CFA. The tourist office has a bureau de change.

### POST

**DHL** (☎ 649752; 139 Murtala Mohammed Way)  
**Post office** (Post Office Rd)

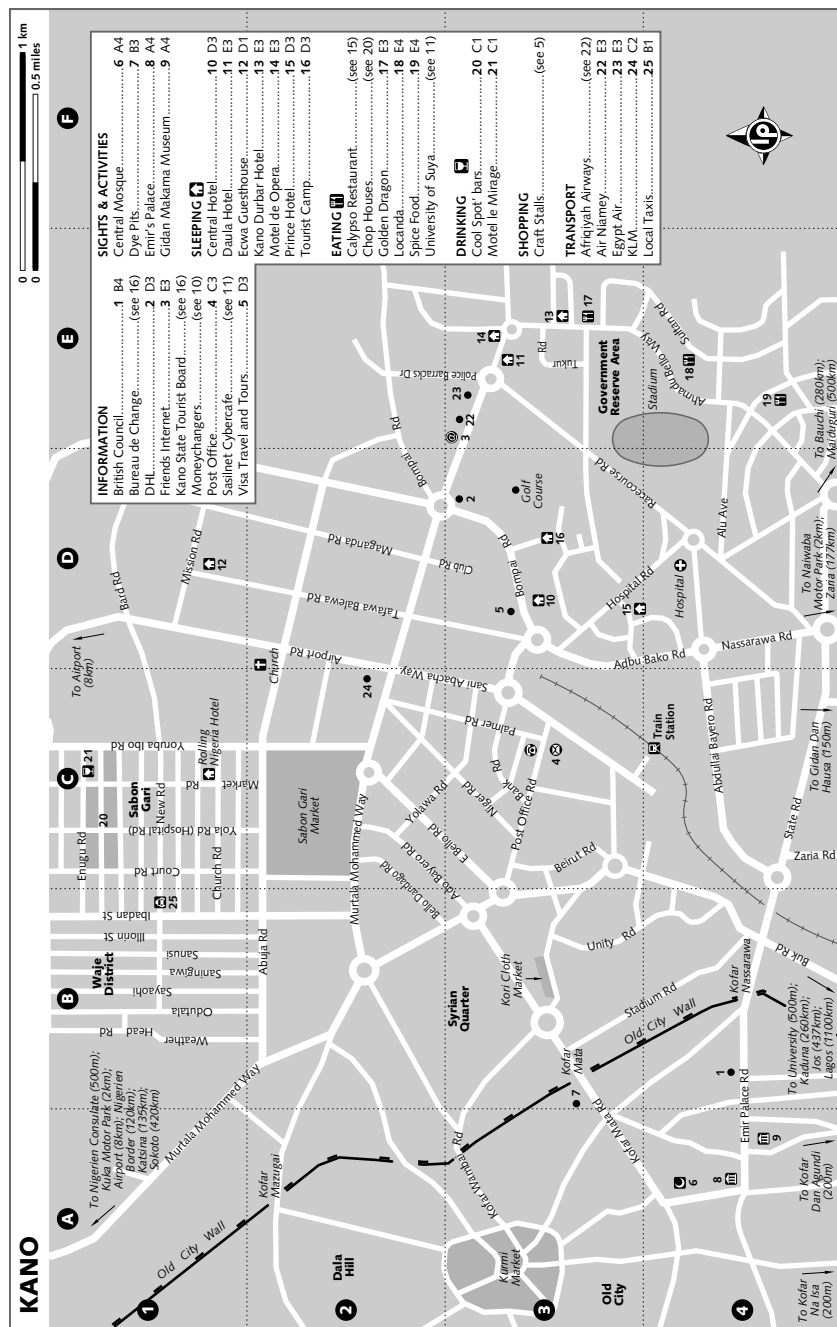
### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Kano State Tourist Board** (☎ 646 309, Tourist Camp, Bompai Rd) A rarity in Nigeria – a working tourist office. Has pamphlets and can arrange guides to the Old City (per hr N1500).

### TRAVEL AGENTS

**Visa Travel & Tours** (☎ 646 298; Bompai Rd)





## Sights

### KURMI MARKET & DYE PITS

With thousands of stalls in a 16-hectare area, Kurmi Market is one of the city's largest markets in Africa, and is the city's main attraction. It's a centre for African crafts, including gold-, bronze- and silver-work, and all types of fabrics – from ancient religious Hausa gowns and a huge selection of hand-painted African cloth to the latest imported suits. It can be a bit overwhelming; you might want to take up the offer of a guide, who will no doubt approach you.

Away from the throng are the **Kofa Dye Pits** (Kofa Mata Gate; ☎ 7am-7pm daily), where indigo cloth has been dyed for hundreds of years. Each narrow pit is 6m deep, and is filled with 100kg of indigo, along with 30 buckets of ash and 5 buckets of potassium (usually from urine); the resulting mix lasts one year. The depth of colour varies according to the time the cloth is dipped – 90 minutes gives a pale blue, while the deepest indigo needs a six-hour soaking. Check out the room to one side where the finished cloth is hammered to give it a fashionable sheen. Finished cloth is for sale, starting from around N1200 for a couple of metres according to the design. A dash of around N100 is appropriate for a guided tour.

### GIDAN MAKAMA MUSEUM

This **museum** (Emir Palace Rd; N100; ☎ 8am-6pm) is the best in northern Nigeria. It stands on the site of the original Emir's Palace (the oldest part is 15th century), and is a wonderful example of traditional Hausa architecture. In the entrance are two of Kano's original city gates, leading into a series of compounds. One of the first buildings is a mock-up of a Hausa bride's hut, followed by an interesting exhibition on the history of Islam (and particularly Sufism) in the region. Also on display is a fascinating photographic history of Kano, starting with the taking of the city by the British in 1902.

It's well worth taking one of the museum's guides, as they are very knowledgeable. A dash is appreciated.

### EMIR'S PALACE & CENTRAL MOSQUE

The modern **central mosque** (Kofar Mata Rd) hosts Kano's main Friday prayers at around 1pm, attracting up to 50,000 worshippers – which is an amazing sight. The original Hausa

mudbrick mosque was torn down in the 1960s after Kano's emir had been on the Hajj to Mecca, to be replaced with a Saudi design. There are good photos of the original in the Gidan Makama museum.

The **Emir's Palace** (Emir Palace Rd), next door, has a parade ground outside which is used for the annual Durbar.

### GIDAN DAN HAUSA

A great example of Kano's architecture is the **Gidan Dan Hausa** (Dan Hausa Rd; N50; ☎ 8am-4pm, 8am-1pm Fri), blending Hausa and Arab styles. It's the former home of Hanns Vischer, the first British administrator, and was built in 1905. The house is now a museum, showing regional crafts and ceremonial costumes, but it's worth visiting for the building alone.

### Festivals & Events

The Kano Durbar is held annually just after the end of Ramadan, and is the biggest festival of its kind in Nigeria. Exact dates are variable (see p818) and check in advance if possible. There is a cavalry procession featuring ornately dressed men mounted on colourfully bedecked horses. The horsemen wear breastplates and coats of flexible armour and, on their scarlet turbans, copper helmets topped with plumes. The emir, draped in white and protected by a heavy brocade parasol embroidered with silver, rides in the middle of the cavalry. The procession finishes outside the Emir's Palace, where there is drumming, singing, and massed cavalry charges.

### Sleeping

For a city of its size, Kano's sleeping options feel a bit limited. Hotels usually add on a mysterious 1% tourist tax (included in all prices below).

### BUDGET

**Ecwa Guesthouse** (☎ 631 410; 1 Mission Rd; r N1500-2500; ☎) This church mission has spartan, but spotlessly clean rooms, to make it a good budget choice. Unusually for Nigeria, there are a few genuine twin rooms, with the cheapest having a fan only. There's a restaurant but alcohol is forbidden.

**Tourist Camp** (☎ 642 017; 11 Bompai Rd; r N2000) This state-run enterprise has a soporific air, and if you stay for too long you might end up as dusty and sleepy as the rooms and staff. Rooms are small and hot, but handy

and cheap, with the novelty of a genuine working tourist office on site.

**Motel le Mirage** (☎ 311007; 27 Enugu Rd; r N1300-3200; 🚻) In the heart of Sabon Gari, le Mirage has small, slightly tatty rooms, which are nevertheless fair value for the price. There's a handy restaurant and bar, and dozens more within crawling distance.

#### MIDRANGE

**Central Hotel** (☎ 630 002; Bompai Rd; r N3250-6960; 🚻 📺 📺 📺) A huge concrete confection in pink and blue, with a crazy sci-fi dome in the courtyard, the Central's rooms are more staid than the exterior would have you believe. Accommodation is fair to good as the tariff rises, occasionally touching on the cosy.

**Daula Hotel** (☎ 640 010; 150 Murtala Mohammed Way; daulahotel@hotmail.com; r N3400-4200; 🚻 📺 📺 📺) Rooms are fair to middling in this large complex, but check for scary nests of wires poking from every plug. There are not one, but two, Internet cafés and a money-changer, while helpful signs remind guests not to spit on the walls.

**Motel de Opera** (☎ 316 347; 62 Hadejira Rd; r N4500-5500; 🚻) On a busy main road, rooms here are small but functional, with a few decorated by someone with a clear Disney obsession. All have fridges. There's a pleasant courtyard café-bar, but no alcohol is served.

**Kano Durbar Hotel** (☎ 641 139; 116 Ahmadu Bello Way; r N8120-9280; 🚻 📺 📺) This hotel has large bright rooms, and bathrooms come with water heaters. It's a decent choice, although the acres of white tiles do much to preclude any outbreak of personality.

#### TOP END

**Prince Hotel** (☎ 639402; Tamandu Rd; r N11,600-16,240, ste N24,360; 🚻 📺 📺) Modern and exceedingly comfortable rooms, with gleaming bathrooms in a quiet close. It's often fully booked, but even nonguests should enjoy visiting the posh restaurant and bar.

#### Eating

**Spice Food** (Magasin Rumfa Rd; dishes from N450; ☎ 12-3.30pm & 6-11pm) If you've been craving some veggie food in Nigeria, this great Indian restaurant will answer your prayers (meat dishes are also served). The spices range from delicate to lively, with plenty of great naan bread and dhal as side orders. The N750 buffet every Sunday at 7.30pm is not to be missed.

**Golden Dragon** (Ahmadu Bello Way; mains N900-1200; ☎ 10.30am-11pm) Liveried waiters and traditional Chinese decorations give this place a great ambience – there are even hot towels to freshen up. Dishes run the range of Chinese classics, but try not to fill up on the delicious spring rolls before your main course arrives.

**Locanda** (Sultan Rd; pasta from N750, ☎ 10.30am-10.30pm Tue-Sun) Step inside here and you could be forgiven for thinking yourself transported to an old Italian bistro. Even the red-checked tablecloths look the part. The menu is stuffed with tasty pasta, pizza and meat options, and doesn't neglect the vegetarians either.

**Calypso Restaurant** (Prince Hotel; Tamandu Rd; meze from N400, mains from N1000; ☎ 12-4pm & 7pm-midnight) The classiest presentation in town, you don't want to feel too scruffy eating here. The Lebanese meze are the highlight at Calypso, although there's a wide selection of good steaks. Only the muzak lets the atmosphere down.

**University of Suya** (Daula Hotel compound; suya from N100; ☎ 10am-10pm) Claiming to be the 'Faculty of Meatology', you'd expect good things of the grilled meat here. It doesn't disappoint, with delicious chicken, liver and kidney supplementing the usual beef *suya*, plus some fiery *pepe* to garnish.

The best 'food-is-ready' fare is found in Sabon Gari, with plenty of *egusi* and pepper soup always on offer. Enugu Rd has plenty of **chophouses** (dishes from N250, ☎ 8am-late), most also doubling up as bars.

#### Drinking

Sabon Gari has heaps of bars – although a Sharia-crackdown could change all that during the life of this book. The best places are around Enugu Rd and Ibo Rd – any chop-house with 'Cool Spot' in the name is also a bar. There are also plenty of tavern stores where you can buy alcohol to take away. Don't drink in public outside Sabon Gari.

Most upscale and foreign restaurants also serve alcohol. The bar at the Prince Hotel is a particularly swish place to have a drink.

#### Shopping

On Bompain Rd, opposite the Central Hotel, there's a small line of craft stalls, selling an interesting selection of goods and souvenirs from across north Nigeria. Beads,

and wood or stone carvings are particularly well-represented.

#### Getting there & Away

##### AIR

Kano airport is 8km northwest of Sabon Gari – N150 on an *achaba*, three times that in a taxi. **Bellview** (☎ 311 462; Kano Airport) and **IRS** (☎ 637939; Kano Airport) fly daily to Lagos (N14,000, 90 minutes); IRS also has a daily flight to Abuja (N12,000, one hour).

Kano also has good international connections: once a week to Niamey with **Air Niamey** (☎ 316 904; Murtala Mohammed Way), twice weekly to Cairo with **Egypt Air** (☎ 630 759; Murtala Mohammed Way), and also twice weekly to both Tripoli and N'Djaména with **Afriqiyah Airways** (☎ 977 255; Murtala Mohammed Way). There's also a useful European connection twice a week to Amsterdam with **KLM** (☎ 632 632; Sani Abacha Way).

##### MINIBUS & BUSH TAXI

Kuka Motor Park, on the road to the airport on the west side of town, is the motor park for Sokoto and Katsina and to Maradi on the Nigerien border. Naiwaba Motor Park, possibly Nigeria's most disorganised transport depot (though there's some stiff competition) serves points south and west, including Zaria, Kaduna and Maiduguri, and is on Zaria Rd on the southern outskirts of town.

Sample fares and times include: Zaria (N300, two hours), Kaduna (N400, three hours), Maiduguri (N1000, six hours), Sokoto (N700, six hours) and Jos (N600, four hours). Stamina permitting, Lagos is reachable by bush taxi in 16 hours.

#### Getting Around

Kano's *achabas* are fast and furious, charging N50 or thereabouts for a ride. They're the most practical option in the Old City, but Kano also has plenty of taxis if you don't fancy the adrenaline hit. In December 2005, a Sharia decree banned women from riding on *achabas*, a ruling that brought demonstrating drivers – and violence – to the streets, forcing a hasty legal retreat on the issue.

#### AROUND KANO Katsina

Katsina is a backwater, but of all the cities in northern Nigeria it feels the closest to how the area must have been in its heyday

as a medieval Hausa trading kingdom. Its Old City is still relatively intact, and you can wander the back streets and markets getting a real taste of the Sahel. Camels and mudbrick architecture abound.

The highlight of a trip to Katsina is the Gobarau Minaret, the best preserved example of traditional religious architecture in the region. Standing 15m high, it has an unusual spiral design, with steps on the outside. This is thought to be a Fulani concept, brought by pilgrims who would have seen similar minarets in Cairo and Samarra (Iraq). The minaret is in Kangiwa Sq, off Ibrahim Babangida Way, Katsina's main road. Also off this road is the Central Mosque and Emir's Palace.

The best accommodation option in Katsina is the **Katsina Motel** (☎ 065 430 017; Mohammed Bashir Rd; r N3000), with good inexpensive rooms, and an adequate restaurant. There's also street food along Ibrahim Babangida Way.

Katsina is an easy day trip from Kano (N300, two hours). It's also possible to travel from here to the Niger border at Maradi 30km away.

#### SOKOTO

☎ 060

Tucked away in the hottest and dustiest corner of Nigeria, Sokoto is a scruffy city with a grand past. One of the ancient Hausa city states, in the early 19th century it was the seat of the Sokoto Caliphate, its Fulani masters administering an empire which stretched from Senegal to Cameroon. While Sokoto is now a pale shadow of its former glorious self, and concentrates primarily on trade with Niger, its sultan remains the spiritual head of Nigeria's Muslims today.

At the Sultan's Palace, between 9pm and 11pm on Thursday, you can hear Hausa musicians outside playing to welcome in the Holy Day, Friday. The Shehu Mosque is nearby. At the end of Ramadan, long processions of musicians and elaborately dressed men on horseback make their way from the prayer ground to the Sultan's Palace, a smaller version of Kano's Durbar.

The central market, well known for its handmade leather goods, is held daily except Sunday. Camels are sold just northeast of the market, near the city gate.

## Festivals & Events

Sokoto can be used as a base to visit the spectacular **Argungu Fishing & Cultural Festival** (every Feb), 100km to the southwest – for more details, see p667.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Sokoto Guest Inn** (☎ 233 205; Kalambaina Rd; r N1500) Rooms here are in basic but bright chalets; it's a good budget option.

**Shukura Hotel** (☎ 230 006; Gusau Rd; r N3500; ☎ (P)) This busy hotel, south of the centre, is decent value, with fair rooms.

**Double 7** (Abdullahi Fodio Rd; meals from N800; ☎ 8am-11pm) The best option if you're at the end of Nigeria and bored of pepper soup, Double 7 has a good range of Lebanese and continental food, as well as a convenient supermarket.

Chophouses serving 'food-is-ready' are dotted about the main roads, along with lots of *suya* stalls. Don't expect to find much alcohol.

## Getting There & Away

Sokoto feels a long way from anywhere. **ADC Airlines** (☎ 230 006; Shukura Hotel) fly five times a week to Kano (N7000, one hour), where you'll need to change for other destinations. Taxis to the airport (25 minutes) cost N1500.

The main motor park is next to the central market. Minibuses and bush taxis depart frequently to Kano (N700, six hours), Zaria (N500, four hours) and Kaduna (N650, five hours) and less frequently to further destinations. Transport also leaves from here to the Nigerian border at Ilela (N300, 90 minutes).

## MAIDUGURI

☎ 076

Maiduguri is the capital of Borno State, and is close to the Chad and Cameroon borders. Once a British garrison town (its railway station marks the farpoint of colonial influence in Nigeria), the city seems to be sleeping its time away. Even by Nigerian standards electricity is a problem here, so it's a case of early to bed, early to rise – not a bad idea given the scorching daytime temperatures.

Very few travellers make it to Maiduguri, and those who do are mostly on their way to or from Cameroon. The more adventurous might attempt a visit to Lake Chad.

**City Internet** (Shehidu Lamido Way) has Internet access for N130 per hour. For money, try **Barewu Bureau de Change** (Kashim Ibrahim Rd), near the Total petrol station.

Kashim Ibrahim Rd and Shehu Lamido Way, the main thoroughfares in Maiduguri, run north-south, roughly parallel to each other. There's a small, slightly dull, museum off Bama Rd, 1km east of the centre.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Deribe Hotel** (☎ 231 662; off Kashim Ibrahim Rd; r N3500; ☎ (P) ☎) Cavernous and gloomy, the Deribe has large rooms and friendly staff. Everything works too – when there's electricity. Ask how many guests there are when checking in, as they won't run the generator if the place is near empty.

**Lake Chad Hotel** (☎ 232 400; Kashim Ibrahim Rd; r N4650; ☎ (P) ☎) Another slightly tired but serviceable option, this hotel also has a decent restaurant, a shop selling old international newspapers and a desk for Albaraka Airlines.

**Chez Frenchies** (Kashim Ibrahim Rd; mains from N500; ☎ 9am-8pm) Around the corner from the Deribe Hotel, this small restaurant serves pepper soup and *jollof*. Further south, along Kashim Ibrahim Rd, you might also try Jil's Restaurant or, in a pinch, Mr Biggs.

## Getting There & Away

Border transport to Cameroon is the main reason to find yourself in Maiduguri. Minibuses to the border at Bama (N370, 90 minutes) leave from the busy Tishanbama Motor Park. Transport south also departs from here. Transport to Kano (N1000, six hours) leaves from Kano Motor Park, along with most other westbound vehicles.

There's a daily flight to Abuja with Albaraka Airlines (N10,000, two hours).

## AROUND MAIDUGURI

### Lake Chad

In recent years Lake Chad has receded northeast across the border, which means that Nigeria is no longer as good a vantage point for seeing the enormous lake as Chad or Cameroon. Given this, it is best to go when the water is at its highest, between December and February. Take a minibus to Baga (N600, two hours) from Baga motor park and arrange onward transport from there, most likely by *achaba*.

The bird-watching is excellent, and so is the people-watching – turbaned men leading camels and fisherman mending their nets by the water. It's very remote, but it's a special place and well worth the effort of getting there. If you want to stay, you'll need to be self-sufficient.

# NIGERIA DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATION

Throughout this chapter, we've considered budget accommodation as costing up to N2500, midrange N2500 to N5000, and top end from N5000 and up. Hotels are of a fair standard throughout Nigeria, although often poor value compared to neighbouring countries. Most towns and cities have something to suit all pockets. The big exception to this is Lagos, where rooms are either very cheap and not particularly wonderful or very expensive; there's not much middle ground.

Even at the cheaper end of the scale, rooms come with air-con and attached bathroom – the shower is usually a bucket-and-scoop affair in the bathtub, unless you're paying top whack. Bathrooms often have water heaters (useful in the event of an electricity failure), otherwise take promises of hot water with a pinch of salt. Rooms are subject to a hefty 15% tax, which has been included in all prices quoted in this chapter. When checking in, you'll also be asked to pay a deposit, which is usually somewhere between one and two night's room rate. This is refundable against your final bill. Many hotels, midrange and above, have a resident and nonresident rate; if you make it a habit of asking for the resident rate you can sometimes get lucky.

## PRACTICALITIES

- Privately owned English-language daily newspapers include the *Guardian*, *Daily News*, *Daily Times* and *Vanguard*.
- There are over 30 national and state television stations, broadcasting in English and all major local languages. South African satellite DSTV is hugely popular.
- Electricity supply is 220V. Plugs are an unpredictable mix of round European two-pin and square British three-pin.

Camping isn't really an option anywhere in Nigeria.

## ACTIVITIES

As countries in the region go, Nigeria isn't a great destination for specific 'activities', lacking the wildlife, mountains or beaches of its neighbours. Visiting Nigeria should perhaps be seen as an activity in itself – travelling by public transport, people-watching in local bars, checking out the nightlife and talking to Nigerians themselves. Nigerians love to talk (and shout and laugh – often all at the same time) and are constantly delighted to see foreigners travelling outside the expat bubbles of the major cities – perhaps the best activity of all.

## BOOKS

*This House Has Fallen*, by Karl Maier, is an excellent primer on modern Nigeria, and is essential reading for anyone visiting the country who wants to hold an informed conversation about the one topic everyone talks about: politics.

*A Month and a Day*, by Ken Saro-Wiwa – executed in 1995 – was written by the Ogoni activist in prison, and is part detention diary and part manifesto for a development in Nigeria. It is well recommended.

*Nigeria: Giant of Africa*, by Peter Holmes, is an excellent coffee-table book.

*The Art of Benin*, by Paula Girshick and Ben Amos, is a great introduction to the amazing art produced by the Benin Kingdom.

For more on Nigerian fiction, see p47.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Government offices are open from 7.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday, and 7.30am to 1pm Saturday. Banking hours are from 8am to 3pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.30am to 1pm Friday. Sanitation days – when the streets are cleaned and rubbish collected – are held on the last Saturday of the month and traffic isn't allowed on the streets before 10.30am.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There's no getting around the fact that Nigeria has a terrible reputation for safety. Corruption, fraud, civil unrest – it's all there in a big volatile mix. And yet, for the traveller, Nigeria really can seem like the



**POWER CUTS**

Despite being in the world's top 10 oil exporting countries, Nigeria has chronic power shortages. The moribund National Electric Power Authority, NEPA, is more laughingly known as 'No Electricity Power Again' and other unflattering monikers, and for good reason – power cuts are long and frequent across the country, and you'll quickly get used to lights going out followed, a minute later, by the sound of generators striking up. When checking into hotels – particularly budget ones – always ask what time they 'off the gen'. That air-conditioning will be useless without it.

friendliest and most welcoming country in West Africa. Navigating these apparently contradictory states is the key to getting the most out of your visit.

It's a good idea to read the news before travelling; plenty of Nigerian newspapers have good websites (opposite). Notwithstanding the most troubled region is the Niger Delta – Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta states – due to the long-running grievances between the local population and the big oil companies (for more on see p647). Kidnapping of Western oil employees is a continued threat here, and the Delta was the one part of Nigeria we were not able to visit to carry out research for this edition. In the north, communal disturbances between Muslims and Christians periodically spill over into bloody violence. Stay clear of demonstrations and areas where you suddenly see large numbers of police or army troops. Lagos has a terrible reputation for violent crime, not always undeserved. For more specific information, see p631.

Despite most preconceptions, as a traveller you are unlikely to have any trouble with corruption and bribery. Police roadblocks are common, but fines and bribes are paid by the driver. Some caution should be exercised on the major highways into Lagos, where armed robbery is a problem, although almost always at night. You should always travel in daylight – a good rule of thumb anyway, considering the terrible driving on Nigeria's roads.

Finally, while taking care to be sensible, it's important not to get too hung up on Nigeria's bad name. Many travellers fear the worst and avoid the country; those who

do make it here are more likely to come away with positive impressions rather than horror stories.

**EMBASSIES & CONSULATES  
Nigerian Embassies & High Commissions**

In West Africa, Nigeria has embassies in all countries, except Cape Verde. For more details, see the relevant country chapter. Elsewhere, embassies and high commissions include the following:

**Australia** (☎ 02-6286 1222; 7 Terrigal Cres, O'Malley, ACT 2606) New Zealanders can also use their services.

**Belgium** (☎ 02-735 40 71; 3B Ave de Tervuren, Brussels 1040)

**Canada** (☎ 613 236 0521; www.nigeriahcottawa.com; 95 Metcalfe St, Ottawa K2P 1R9)

**France** (☎ 01 47 04 68 65; 173 Ave Victor Hugo, 75016 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 30-477 2555; www.nigeria-online.de; Platanen Strasse 98a, 13156 Berlin)

**Ireland** (☎ 01-660 4366; 56 Leeson Park, Dublin 6)

**Netherlands** (☎ 070-350 1703; www.nigembassy.nl; Wagenaarweg 5, 2597 LL, The Hague)

**Switzerland** (☎ 022-7342140; 1 Rue Richard Wagner, 1211 Geneva)

**UK** (☎ 020-7839 1244; www.nigeriahighcommissionuk.com; 9 Northumberland Ave, London WC2N 5BX)

**USA** (☎ 202-986 8400; www.nigeriaembassyusa.org; 3519 International Court, Washington, DC 20008)

**Embassies & Consulates in Nigeria**

Many embassies have yet to relocate from Lagos to Abuja. Opening hours listed are for visa applications.

**Australia** (Map p634; ☎ 261 8875; 2 Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave, VI, Lagos)

**Benin** Abuja (☎ 413 8424; Yedseram St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri); Lagos (Map p634; ☎ 261 4411; 4 Abudu Smith St VI; ☎ 9am-11am Mon-Fri)

**Burkina Faso** (Map p634; ☎ 268 1001; 15 Norman Williams St, Ikoyi, Lagos)

**Cameroun** Calabar (☎ 222782; 21 Ndidan Usang Iso Rd; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri); Lagos (Map p634; ☎ 261 2226; 5 Femi Pearse St, VI; ☎ 8am-11am Mon-Fri)

**Canada** (Map p634; ☎ 262 2516, 4 Idowu Taylor St, VI, Lagos)

**Chad** (☎ 413 0751; 53 Mississippi St, Abuja; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

**Côte d'Ivoire** (Map p634; ☎ 261 0963; 5 Abudu Smith St, VI, Lagos)

**European Union** (☎ 523 3144; 63 Usuma St, Abuja) Represents EU countries that don't have embassies in Nigeria, or those with representation in Lagos only.

**France** (Map p634; ☎ 260 3300; 1 Oyinkan Abayomi Rd, Ikoyi, Lagos)

**Germany** (Map p634; ☎ 261 1011; 15 Walter Carrington Crescent, VI, Lagos)

**Ghana** (Map p632; ☎ 263 0015; 23 King George V St, Lagos Island, Lagos)

**Niger** Abuja (☎ 413 6206; Pope John Paul II St; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri); Kano (☎ 080 6548 1152 mobile; Airport Roundabout; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri); Lagos (Map p634; ☎ 261 2300; 15 Adeola Odeku St, VI; ☎ 9am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

**Togo** (Map p634; ☎ 261 1762; Plot 976 Oju Olubun Cl, VI, Lagos)

**UK** Abuja (☎ 413 2010; Aguyi Ironsi St); Lagos (Map p634; ☎ 261 9541; 11 Walter Carrington Cres, VI)

**USA** Abuja (☎ 523 0916; 9 Mambila St); Lagos (Map p634; ☎ 261 0150; 2 Walter Carrington Cres, VI)

**FESTIVALS & EVENTS**

Of all the festivals in West Africa, the most elaborate are the celebrations in northern Nigeria (particularly in Kano, Zaria and Katsina) for two important Islamic holidays: the end of Ramadan, and Tabaski, 69 days later, which feature colourful processions of cavalry (see p661). Ramadan can be a tiring time to travel in the north – head for the Sabon Gari (Christian quarter) in each town, where food is served throughout the day.

Around mid-February, the three-day Argungu Fishing and Cultural Festival takes place on the banks of the Sokoto River in Argungu, 100km southwest of Sokoto. The fishers' customs and traditions are closely tied to Islamic religious practices. Several months before the festival, the Sokoto River is dammed. When the festival begins, hundreds of fishers jump into the river with their nets and gourds. Some come out with fish weighing more than 50kg. It's quite a sight.

Every August is the Pategi Regatta. Pategi is on the Niger River, halfway between Ibadan and Kaduna. There's swimming, traditional dancing, acrobatic displays, fishing and a rowing competition.

On the last Friday in August, the Oshun Festival takes place in Oshogbo, 86km northeast of Ibadan. It has music, dancing and sacrifices, and is well worth seeing.

The Igwe (Ewere) Festival, held in Benin City, usually in the first half of December, has traditional dances, a mock battle and a procession to the palace to reaffirm loyalty to the *oba*. It marks the harvest of the first new yams of the season.

**HOLIDAYS**

Public holidays include the following:

**New Year's Day** 1 January

**Easter** March or April

**May Day** 1 May

**National Day** 1 October

**Christmas** 25 December

**Boxing Day** 26 December

Islamic holidays are observed in Nigeria, even in the south – for a table of estimated dates for these holidays, see p818.

**INTERNET ACCESS**

Nigerians are great lovers of the Internet. Cybercafés (as they are locally called) can be found in any town, usually prominently displaying requests that users don't send spam or scams. Costs average N100 to N150 per hour, and most places can also burn photos onto CDs. Never use Internet banking in a Nigerian cybercafé.

**INTERNET RESOURCES**

**www.nigeriaworld.com** Huge portal site with news and current affairs, sport and business directory.

**www.kickoffnigeria.com** A good introduction to Nigerian football.

**www.remembersarowiwa.com** Campaigning website with background on the political and environmental problems in the oil-rich Delta.

**www.oyibosonline.com** Expat guide to Port Harcourt, but with useful travel and security information for visitors to Nigeria.

**www.nigeriavillagesquare.com** Generic guide to Nigeria, strong on music, culture and politics.

**LANGUAGE**

English is the official language in Nigeria. The three principal African languages are Hausa in the north, Igbo in the south-east and Yoruba in the southwest, around Lagos. Nigerian English – Pidgin – has its own cadences and vocabulary, which take a while to get your ear into (see p861).

**MONEY**

The unit of currency is the naira, with bills ranging from N5 to N1000. There are no coins.

In Nigeria, cash is king, and you shouldn't really bring anything other than US dollars. It is estimated that around 60% of the nation's currency is currently held outside the banking system. Although the

**DASH**

Used freely as both a noun and verb, dash is a word you'll hear a lot of in Nigeria. It can mean either a bribe or a tip. The most frequent form of dash you're likely to encounter is at roadblocks, which the driver pays. Although you're actually unlikely to be asked for dash as a bribe, dashing someone who performs a service for you, such as a guide, is often appropriate.

streets of towns are lined with banks, you are extremely unlikely ever to darken their doors, as none offer currency exchange. It is sometimes possible to find official exchange shops, otherwise you'll have to get used to changing on the street. Moneychanging areas are listed in the text – if you get caught short, head for an international hotel. They don't always let nonguests change money, but there are frequently moneychangers outside who will offer you business. Moneychangers are almost always Hausa, so if you're in the south, it's usually a safe bet to ask around at the town's mosque. In our experience, the moneychangers are among the most honest in Africa, but you should always be aware of potential scams (see p821). US\$100 and US\$50 bills attract better rates. Travellers cheques are useless in Nigeria.

Credit cards aren't much use either, and given the high levels of financial fraud, trying to use one anywhere in the country should be avoided. If you're worried about carrying large amounts of cash, even small towns usually have a Western Union branch to have money wired through. It is highly likely that ATMs will become commonplace in Nigerian cities during the life of this guide. Ecobank, First Bank of Nigeria and Standard Chartered should be the first to offer such facilities.

**POST**

The internal mail service in Nigeria has improved in the last few years, most letters taking just a few days, but you are still almost certain to beat your postcards home (N80 to most destinations worldwide). Sending packages by courier is far preferable to entrusting it to the post office; the international couriers have offices in most towns.

**TELEPHONE**

Nitel is the national phone company, but its poor connections and infrastructure have been greatly overtaken by the explosion in mobile phone use. It's quicker and easier to make a call at a phone stand on the street than track down a Nitel office. Phone stands are run by women with a mobile phone, a table and sun umbrella, timing your call with a stop watch. Calls inside Nigeria cost N15 to N30 per minute, depending on the network, and international calls around N60.

If you're taking your own phone, local GSM sim cards cost from N400, according to the amount of credit purchased. Operators include Glo, MTN and V-Mobile. Coverage is good in most parts of the country.

**VISAS**

Everyone needs a visa to visit Nigeria, and applications can be quite a process. Nigerian embassies (including the high commissions in the UK and Australia, and the embassy in Benin) issue visas only to residents and nationals of the country in which the embassy is located, so it's essential to put things in motion well before your trip. Exact requirements vary, but as a rule of thumb, forms are required in triplicate, along with proof of funds to cover your stay, a round-trip air ticket, and possibly confirmed hotel reservations.

You also need a letter of invitation from a resident of Nigeria, or a business in the country. This must explain the purpose of your visit and, preferably, take immigration and financial responsibility for you during your trip. If the invitee is an expat, the letter should also attach a copy of their residence permit. Nigerian officialdom doesn't give the impression of encouraging tourism.

Fees vary. At the time of research, a one-month single entry visa cost £40 in London and US\$100 in Washington, or £70/\$200 for a three-month multiple entry visa. Applications at the High Commission in London were notably troublesome.

If you're travelling overland to Nigeria, the embassy in Accra (Ghana) is consistently rated as the best place in West Africa to apply for a visa, as no letter of introduction is required. The embassy in Niamey (Niger) also claims to issue visas the same way. The embassy in Cotonou (Benin) issues 48 hour transit visas if you can provide an onward plane ticket.

On arrival in Nigeria, immigration will ask the length of your stay and write this on your entry stamp – if your visa is one month then ask for this, even of you plan on staying for a shorter time. Several travellers have come unstuck having been stamped in for a week, then deciding they wanted to stay longer, but being unable to without either getting stuck in labyrinthine bureaucracy, or paying out lots of dash. Always check your passport stamp carefully before leaving immigration.

**Visa Extensions**

Visas can reportedly be extended at the Federal Secretariat in Lagos, but it's a byzantine process of endless forms, frustration and dash, with no clear sense of success.

**Visas for Onward Travel**  
**BENIN**

One-month visas cost CFA15,000, with one photo, and take 24 hours to issue. You can't pay in naira – although, as the embassy in Lagos carries a bad reputation for asking for dash, don't be surprised if greasing palms miraculously solves this 'problem'.

**CAMEROON**

A one-month single entry visa costs CFA50,000, with one photo, and is issued in a day. The consulate in Calabar is a good place to pick up a visa if you want to avoid Lagos, but it gives a poor exchange rate if you try to pay in naira – it's cheaper to change some cash into CFA on the street.

**CHAD**

Two photos and N5500 will get you a one-month single entry visa, which you can pick up the next day.

**NIGER**

Best obtained in Abuja, a one-month single entry visa costs N5300 with two photos, and is issued in 48 hours. The consulate in Kano, where the fee is CFA15,000 (payable in local currency), is also a good place to apply – take three photos.

**WOMEN TRAVELLERS**

Nigeria is a nation where women have made more gains than in most African countries, but there is still a lot to achieve before any claims of gender equality can be made. Women

shouldn't encounter any specific problems, although an effort should be made to dress modestly in the northern Sharia states, covering the shoulders and legs. Women generally aren't allowed in mosques, and will feel conspicuous at open-air prayers.

For more general information and advice, see p828.

## TRANSPORT IN NIGERIA

**GETTING THERE & AWAY****Air**

The vast majority of flights to Nigeria arrive in Lagos, although there are also international airports in Abuja, Port Harcourt and Kano. Murtala Mohammed international airport in Lagos has traditionally been a nightmarish entry point into the country, and its chaos and con artists have been responsible for many peoples' bad impressions of the country. In recent years, however, the airport has sharpened its game considerably, and shouldn't present travellers with any undue horror. Nigerian airports have official porters, and notices urge passengers to ignore the services of touts. Since Nigeria Airways went bust, Virgin Nigeria and Bellview vie for the mantle of national carrier.

**AIRLINES**

Most domestic airlines just have desks at the airport. The following are airlines with service from Lagos (all offices are on Victoria Island unless stated):

**Aero** (☎ 496 1340; Airport desk)

**Air France** (Map p634; AF; ☎ 461 0461; www.airfrance.com; Idejo Danmole St) Hub: Paris Charles De Gaulle.

**Bellview** (Map p634; B3; ☎ 791 9215; www.flybellview.air.com; Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave) Hub: Lagos.

**British Airways** (Map p634; BA; ☎ 262 1225; www.britishairways.com; 1st fl, C&C Tower, Sanusi Fafunwa St) Hub: London Heathrow.

**Cameroon Airlines** (Map p634; UY; ☎ 261 6270; Oko-Awo Close) Hub: Douala.

**Chanchangi Airlines** (☎ 493 9744; www.chanchangi-airlines.com; Airport desk) Hub: Lagos.

**Ethiopian** (Map p634; ET; ☎ 263 1125; www.flyethiopian.com/et; Idowu Taylor St) Hub: Addis Ababa.

**Ghana Airways** (Map p634; GH; ☎ 266 1808; www.ghana-airways.com; 130 Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi) Hub: Accra.

**Kenya Airways** (Map p634; KQ; ☎ 461 2501; www.kenya-airways.com; Churchgate Tower, Badaru Abina St) Hub: Nairobi.

**KLM** (Map p634; KL; ☎ 461 2501; www.klm.com; Churchgate Tower, Badaru Abina St) Hub: Amsterdam.

**Lufthansa** (Map p632; LH; ☎ 266 4227, www.lufthansa.com; Broad St, Lagos Island) Hub: Frankfurt.

**South African Airlines** (Map p634; SA; ☎ 262 0607; www.flysa.com; Adetokumbo Ademola St)

Hub: Johannesburg.

**Sosoliso** (SO; ☎ 497 1492; www.sosoliso.airline.com; Airport desk) Hub: Lagos.

**Virgin Nigeria** (VK; ☎ 461 2747; www.virginigeria.com; Sheraton Hotel, Ikeja) Hub: Lagos.

The following are airlines with offices in Port Harcourt:

**Air France** (AF; ☎ 486 901; www.airfrance.com; 47 Aba Rd) Hub: Paris Charles De Gaulle.

**Bellview** (B3; ☎ 230 518; www.flybellviewair.com; 47 Aba Rd) Hub: Lagos.

**Chanchangi Airlines** (☎ 234 937; www.chanchangi-airlines.com; at Presidential Hotel, off Aba Rd) Hub: Lagos.

**KLM** (KL; ☎ 231 645; www.klm.com; 47 Aba Rd) Hub: Amsterdam.

**Lufthansa** (LH; ☎ 232 014; www.lufthansa.com; at Presidential Hotel, off Aba Rd) Hub: Frankfurt.

**Sosoliso** (SO; ☎ 231 908; www.sosoliso.airline.com; at Presidential Hotel, off Aba Rd) Hub: Lagos.

**Virgin Nigeria** (VK; ☎ 467 000; www.virginigeria.com; 175 Aba Rd) Hub: Lagos.

The following are airlines with offices in Abuja:

**Aero Airlines** (☎ 810 0197; Abuja airport)

**Air France** (AF; ☎ 314 7419; www.airfrance.com; Plot 1267 Ahmadu Bello Way) Hub: Charles De Gaulle.

**Bellview Airlines** (B3; ☎ 523 0225; www.flybellviewair.com; Sheraton Hotel) Hub: Lagos.

**British Airways** (BA; ☎ 413 9610; www.britishairways.com; Hilton Hotel; Aguiyi Ironsi) Hub: London Heathrow.

**Chanchangi Airlines** (☎ 249 949, Ahmadu Bello Way) Hub: Lagos.

**KLM** (KL; ☎ 523 9966; www.klm.com; Sheraton Hotel, Ladi Kwali Way) Hub: Amsterdam.

## AFRICA

Virgin Nigeria operates daily flights from Lagos to Douala (Cameroon) and Accra (Ghana) and three flights a week to Johannesburg (South Africa). Kenya Airways operate four flights a week between Lagos and Nairobi; South African Airways have four flights a week from Johannesburg; while Ethiopian have a daily service from Addis Ababa. Bellview operate services to several West African cities, including Cotonou (Benin), Accra, Freetown (Sierra Leone),

Banjul (Gambia), Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) and Dakar (Senegal). Air Niamey fly weekly between Kano and Niamey (Niger). Egypt Air fly twice weekly to Kano from Cairo. Afriqiyah Airways has a twice weekly service between Kano and Tripoli (Libya) via N'Djaména (Chad).

## EUROPE & THE USA

There are frequent flights to Lagos from all major European hubs: British Airways and Virgin Nigeria fly daily from London, Air France daily from Paris, Lufthansa three times a week from Frankfurt, KLM daily from Amsterdam and Alitalia six times a week from Milan. Non-Lagos flights include London–Abuja (BA, five a week), Amsterdam–Kano (KLM, twice a week) and Paris–Port Harcourt (Air France, four a week). Lufthansa fly three times a week from Frankfurt to both Abuja and Port Harcourt. At the time of going to press, the Virgin Nigeria service from London to Port Harcourt was threatened with cancellation.

There are no direct flights between the USA and Nigeria. Continental Airlines have had a Newark–Lagos service planned since late 2004, but it has been repeatedly delayed by US air traffic authority restrictions.

## Land

### BENIN

The main border is on the Cotonou–Lagos highway. It's busy but slow, with lots of paper checks. Although Nigeria carries the worse reputation for corruption, it's actually the Beninese officials at this border that have the greediest appetite for bribes. Getting away with paying less than CFA3000 is a good day. The border point is Kraké in Benin and Seme in Nigeria. Transport to either Cotonou or Lagos is plentiful on either side, as are police checkpoints – Seme to Lagos probably has the highest density in Nigeria. If you're in rush, note that minibuses get stopped more frequently than taxis. If you're not in a rush, consider stopping at Badagry (p637), 30 minutes from Seme. Travelling from Lagos, border transport departs from Mile Two Motor Park.

An alternative border crossing is further north at Kétou, but there's not so much public transport. It's worth considering if you have your own vehicle and (understandably) can't face driving through Lagos,

as the road takes you to Abeokuta and on to Ibadan.

## CAMEROON

There are two main border crossings, in the north and south. The northern border post is at Bama, 2½ hours from Maiduguri. You'll have to ask to have the immigration office pointed out to you, as it's not immediately clear – it's a short hop on an *okada* from the bus stand. Leaving Nigeria, you have to walk through a small market to find the Cameroon border post (Banki). This is conveniently next to the minibus rank for transport on to Mora (two hours, CFA2000). Border facilities and customs are pretty relaxed here. A remote alternative crossing is at Ngala, used mainly for transiting to Chad (see below).

The southern border crossing is at Mfum, 30 minutes from Ikom. Arrangements are straightforward on the Nigerian side, but the road infrastructure collapses pretty much as soon as you cross to Ekok in Cameroon. From Ekok, minibuses struggle on terrible roads to Mamfe, 60km away (CFA1500). An alternative route to Mamfe is by pirogue, up the Cross River. This border is problematic during the rainy season, and you might consider taking the Calabar–Limbe ferry instead during the wettest months (see right).

## CHAD

Although Nigeria and Chad share a short border, there are no official border crossings between the two countries. However, it is possible to make a quick transit across Cameroon, even without a Cameroonian visa. In Nigeria, the border crossing is at Ngala. You enter Cameroon here, but ask for a *laissez passer* to allow you to make the two-hour traverse to the Cameroon–Chad border point at Kousseri (see p226). Tell Nigerian immigration of your plan when getting stamped out. There's no fee for the paperwork on the Cameroon side, but this is a remote outpost with bored officials, so you're potentially a target for dash. During the research trip, we also saw *laissez passers* for Chad being issued at the Nigeria–Cameroon border further south at Banki.

## NIGER

There are four main entry points into Niger. From east to west they are Kano to Zinder,

Katsina to Maradi, Sokoto to Birni N'Konni and Kamba to Gaya. Of these, the busiest is the Sokoto route, as this is the main road for trade between the two countries. Minibuses and bush taxis run daily to the border, just past Ilela. Crossing to Birni you can get on a bus heading straight for Niamey.

From Niger, it is easiest to cross at Gaya, four hours from Niamey. You'll probably have to hire a bush taxi to take you from the Nigerian side at Kamba on to Sokoto; beware the potholes.

## Sea

### CAMEROON

A ferry sails from Calabar to Limbe every Tuesday and Friday evening, very occasionally continuing on to Douala. The boat sails in the opposite direction on Monday and Thursday (see p649 for more details). It's an overnight trip in each direction. It's a very atmospheric way of entering Nigeria, sailing up the delta past grey-green trees under leaden skies to a tropical port: perfect for imagining that you're in a Graham Greene novel. Immigration at Calabar is straightforward – your passport is collected before boarding and returned on arrival – and there are moneychangers at the docks. Try to keep hold of your luggage – if it gets stowed in the hold you'll be waiting hours to get it back.

On a more ad hoc basis it's possible, if risky, to catch a speedboat to Limbe. These are fast, highly dangerous, and leave you open to paying lots of dash. They leave from Oron, a N100 boat ride across the river from Calabar port.

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

Internal flights are a quick and cheapish way of getting around Nigeria. Flights range between N8000 and N14,000. Most cities are linked by air to Lagos; you'll usually have to change planes here if you want to fly between two smaller cities (buying separate tickets for each leg if you need to change airline).

Lagos–Abuja is the busiest route – Virgin Nigeria alone has eight flights a day – along with the Port Harcourt and (to a lesser extent) Kano routes. In these cases it's easy just to go straight to the airport, buy a ticket and be airborne pretty quickly. Lagos flights leave from the domestic terminal, where you should be aware of touts selling tickets.



On less busy routes, try to buy a ticket the day before departure. In some cities, airlines only have offices at the airport, and occasionally in the larger hotels.

Along with Virgin Nigeria, local airlines include Bellview, Aero, Sosoliso Airlines, IRS and ADC. Not all planes are perfectly maintained; in October 2005, a Bellview flight from Lagos to Abuja crashed on take-off, with the loss of over 170 people. The crash was blamed on catastrophic engine failure. Sample fares include Lagos to Abuja, N9000, Lagos to Calabar N12,000 and Lagos to Kano N14,000.

### Bus & Bush Taxi

Each town has at least one motor park full of minibuses and bush taxis which serves as the main transport depot. These places are Nigeria in microcosm – sprawling, chaotic and noisy. Vehicles have wooden signs on their roofs showing their destination, while touts shout out those that need filling. Minibuses don't run to any schedule – you pitch up at the motor park and wait until the vehicle is full. You'll do a lot of waiting during your trip. Luckily, motor parks are also huge markets, and there is a constant procession of hawkers and street food vendors, so you won't go hungry.

Minibuses are usually 'four across', referring to the number of passengers in each row – often a tight fit. 'Three across' is sometimes offered, at a premium comfort price. Bush taxis – big old Peugeots – somehow manage to squeeze in nine passengers. Bush taxis are faster than minibuses and cost about 25% more. You'll also sometimes find private cars at motor parks – the comfiest, fastest and most expensive option. Slower minibuses have the edge on the danger front, and account for most traffic fatalities on the roads. Nigerians call them 'maulers' for good reason.

There are a few companies operating large buses from their own depots, usually on long-distance intercity routes. These almost always travel at night, which can be dangerous, and they aren't recommended.

The main roads are littered with roadblocks, allowing the Nigerian police to supplement their meagre income with highway robbery. An accomplished minibus driver can pass through and pay the standard N20

dash without stopping. There seems to be no system to decree whether a driver stops or speeds past – the extent to which the police are armed often seems a deciding factor. There are fewer roadblocks in the north.

### Car & Motorcycle

Nigeria's road system is good, although for drivers this can bring problems in itself, as smooth tarmac allows Nigerians to exercise their latent talents as rally drivers. The accident rate is frighteningly high, and the only real road rule is survival of the fittest. Avoid driving at night at all costs.

Foreigners driving in Nigeria shouldn't get much hassle at roadblocks, particularly if your vehicle has foreign plates. If you get asked for a dash, a smile and some patience will often diffuse the request. Note however, that it's a legal requirement to wear a seatbelt; not doing so leaves you open to both official and unofficial fines. Petrol stations are everywhere, but keep your ear out for strikes than can cause fuel shortages. Diesel can sometimes be hard to come by, so keep your tank topped up.

### Taxi & Okada

In towns and cities, the quickest way to get around is to hop on the back of a motorcycle taxi or *okada* (*achaba* in the north). In a Lagos go-slow they're the only practical option. A trip shouldn't cost more than N50, slightly more at night. *Okadas* are absolutely everywhere – just flag one down and hold on tight. Many drivers seem to have a fatalist's view of their own mortality, so don't be afraid to tell them to slow down (say 'small, small').

Taxis generally operate set routes, and you pay a similar price to an *okada*. If you want the car to yourself, ask for a 'drop'. Small change is essential for both taxis and *okadas*.

### Train

Maps of Nigeria indicate that it has a rail network, but you'll be standing a long time on the platform waiting for a train – railway staff insist that passenger services still exist in the face of all available evidence. Should the decrepit locos ever run again, the main lines are Lagos–Kano (via Ibadan and Kaduna) and Port Harcourt–Maiduguri (via Jos).

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