

Angola

Angola is an eye-opener – in more ways than one. Scarred painfully by years of debilitating warfare and untouched by foreign visitors since the early 1970s, the country remains remote and undiscovered, with few observers privy to the geographic highlights and vast cultural riches that lie hidden behind an ostensibly violent veneer.

But, with the recent cessation of a 40-year civil conflict ushering in a prolonged period of peace and stability, opportunities for exploration are quietly opening up. For outsiders the attractions are manifold. Despite widespread poverty, inbred corruption and an infrastructure devastated by decades of indiscriminate fighting, Angola holds a lure that few other countries can match. Here in the heady heat of equatorial Africa you'll encounter some of the continent's most gracious people and discover many of its most closely guarded secrets.

Chill out on expansive beaches, sample the solitude in virgin wildlife parks or sift through the ruins of Portuguese colonialism. From Luanda to Lubango the nuances are startling.

Despite advancements in infrastructure and a dramatically improved security situation, travel in Angola remains the preserve of adventurers, diehards or those on flexible budgets. But with the transport network gradually recovering and wildlife being shipped in to repopulate decimated national parks, the signs of recovery are more than just a mirage.

Angola is halfway along the road to political and economic atonement and it would be a shame to miss out on its dramatic rebirth.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 1,246,700 sq km
- **ATMs** They exist, but don't generally accept foreign cards
- **Borders** Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia and Namibia
- **Budget** US\$120 per day
- **Capital** Luanda
- **Languages** Portuguese and various Bantu languages
- **Money** Kwanza; US\$1 = 80Kz
- **Population** 14 million (estimated)
- **Seasons** Dry (June to September), wet (October to May)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 244; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1
- **Visas** US\$75 for 30 days; must be obtained in advance



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Luanda** (p828) Expansive beaches, expensive bars and tatty overcrowded townships, Luanda is a kaleidoscopic vision of Angola at the sharp end.
- **Parque Nacional da Kissama** (p832) One of Africa's largest, emptiest and most surreal wildlife parks.
- **Benguela-Lobito Railway** (p833) Rattling and bumping through Benguela's rural pastiche is a unique and unforgettable Angolan experience.
- **Lubango** (p835) Almost untouched by the war, breezy Lubango offers cascading waterfalls, spectacular volcanic fissures and a vibrant small city ambience.
- **Miradouro de Lua** (p833) A spectacular lookout over a canyon of moonlike cliffs that cascade dramatically into the Atlantic Ocean.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Situated on the Atlantic littoral in a balmy subtropical setting, Angola's climate is heavily influenced by three local peculiarities; the cool Benguela sea current, the rugged interior mountains and the presence of the Namib Desert in the southeast. As a result, the country boasts a number of distinct climatic regions, including a wet, tropical northern jungle, a dryer and cooler central plateau, and an arid southern belt influenced by its proximity to the Kalahari Desert.

Although different regions vary significantly, the best time to visit Angola is during the cooler dryer months of June to September.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Visit Luanda's Fortaleza de São Miguel (p830), along with the city's selection of churches and museums before heading south to Benfica market (p831) for a spot of heated bargaining. Continue along the coast road to the Miradouro de Lua (p833) and the Kwanza River (p833), and round off the proceedings with a quick tour of Parque Nacional da Kissama (p832).
- **Two Weeks to One Month** Follow the Luanda itinerary before catching a bus south for the spectacular journey to Benguela (p833) and Lobito. A train ride on the famous Benguela railway (p834) between the region's two provincial coastal cities is a must. Fly on to Lubango (p835),

HOW MUCH?

- **Internet per hour** US\$3
- **Cup of coffee** US\$1.50
- **Car rental per day** US\$60
- **Bottle of wine** US\$20
- **Average meal** US\$10

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.50
- **1L bottled water** US\$1.50
- **Bottle of beer** US\$2
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$10
- **Baguette** US\$1

where you can soak up the fresh mountain air and make a nifty side trip to unhurried Namibe (p835). Backtrack to battle-scarred Huambo (p834) for a few days before returning by plane to the capital.

HISTORY

Angola's often violent and bloody history has left a country endowed with a vast expanse of natural resources and development possibilities perennially trying to stave off starvation. A terrain rich in oil, diamonds, iron ore and copper, plus a measurable hydroelectric capacity, has the potential to be one of Africa's richest states. Instead, the more common reality is of a nation of shattered infrastructure and devastated towns struggling to feed a desperately poor and eternally uprooted population.

Another Lost Empire

In 1483 Vasco da Gama first dropped anchor in Luanda Bay and unwittingly pre-empted the start of a conflict that, save for a few intermittent lulls in the fighting, went on for over half a millennium. The land now known as Angola was, at the time, inhabited by a number of small tribes living in loosely defined kingdoms that lacked the organisation and administrative cohesiveness of 15th-century Europe. But despite a natural curiosity borne out of years of seafaring exploration, the Portuguese had no real desire to settle on this malaria-ridden African shoreline. Post 1500 the more fertile and less threatening lands of Brazil held a far



greater attraction for colonial farmers and businessmen. For the next 300 years Portugal's African colonies had only two real functions: a strategic base on the route around the Cape of Good Hope, and a collecting centre for one of the largest forced human migrations in history.

Not surprisingly, slavery did little to endear the colonials to the Angolan people. Clashes first began after WWII and were inflamed in 1961 when the colonial authorities began to crush increasingly zealous uprisings from dissidents.

The initial independence movement split into three main groups in line with the various tribal affiliations (and international interests) they claimed to represent. The National Front

for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) was supported by northern tribes, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and anti-communist Western countries; the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) began with Marxist sensibilities and was supported by southern tribes, the USSR, Cuba and other Soviet allies; and the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (Unita) originally had the support of the Ovimbundu, but later formed alliances with the Portuguese right wing, the USA and apartheid South Africa.

In 1975 the Portuguese finally granted independence to Angola following the overthrow of the fascist Salazar government at home. But the colonial withdrawal – a mad scramble that involved one of the biggest airlifts in history –

was legendary in its ineptitude, converting central Luanda into a ghost town and robbing the country of its qualified human resources and administrative structure.

Not surprisingly, Angola in 1975 possessed all the essential ingredients for an impending civil war. An uneven and weak infrastructure, low levels of health and education, two feuding sets of tribally based elites and the inviting prospect of a large slice of unused government-oil revenue up for grabs. As the Moscow-backed MPLA party stepped into a dangerous power vacuum, a combination of new outside factors were dutifully thrown into an already crowded arena: US communist paranoia, Cuba's ambiguous aim to promote 'world revolution', South African security obsessions and the woefully inadequate process of decolonisation. The stage was set.

Angola's second major war was a long, protracted affair dominated by foreign intervention. Indeed, for the next 15 years the wishes and desires of the Angolan people were consistently undermined as foreign meddlers and Western business interests continued to fight greedily among themselves over a damaged and increasingly beleaguered country.

War & Peace

In 1991, prompted by the end of the Cold War, a ceasefire agreement was set in place by Cuba, the USA and Angola. But the accord broke down the following year after Unita, having lost a general election (seen by the UN as largely free and fair), returned to war with a newfound ferocity, claiming the poll was rigged. Almost 200,000 people died between May and October 1993 as Unita took war to the provincial cities, destroying most of the road, rail and communications network.

A revamped 'Lusaka Accord' signed in 1994 was consistently violated by both the governing MPLA and Unita, and the discovery of new diamond areas and oilfields allowed both sides to re-arm. UN sanctions (from 1998) against Unita diamonds caused Unita's cash supply to shrivel, and its control of the countryside gradually crumbled. Increasing military defeats drove a desperate Unita deeper into the hinterland and – hunted and on the run – its leader Jonas Savimbi was finally killed in a well-planned government operation on 22 February 2002.

A new peace accord was signed on 4 April 2002.

Angola Today

Since 2002 Angola has entered a period of peace and regeneration unprecedented in its history. With the 85,000-strong Unita army, re-integrated into the national forces and old animosities ceremoniously brushed underneath the carpet, the biggest obstacles to war and instability have been temporarily neutralised.

But the country still faces massive challenges before it can right four decades of economic and political ineptitude. Corruption is the most pressing problem. In 2004 Human Rights Watch, an independent lobby group, estimated that US\$4 billion of Angola's undeclared oil revenue had gone missing since the late 1990s. Voices inside the IMF were raised and supervisors were sent to investigate. The conclusion: either the ever-elusive President Eduardo dos Santos was employing a very creative team of accountants or something, somewhere, was clearly not adding up.

It is these financial anomalies that have prevented the lion's share of Angola's new peacetime economy from trickling down to the majority of the poorest classes. While skyscrapers reach new heights in Luanda and oil-obsessed government ministries forge investment deals with China and India, poverty in the countryside remains rampant and widespread. One can only hope that the second post-independence elections (which will take place sometime before December 31, 2007, according to Angolan president, Eduardo Dos Santos) will address some of these issues.

Economically speaking, Angola's future is brighter than it has been for decades. In 2007 the country – which currently churns out 1.4 billion barrels of oil per day – is due to join the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and this empowering move towards the hub of the world economy will give Dos Santos and his government a good deal more clout on the international stage.

CULTURE

Angolans are Africa's perennial survivors, an open and gregarious populace whose spirit – once garnered – is highly infectious and whose fortitude is nothing short of remarkable. Badly damaged by the longstanding tribal conflicts that set neighbour against neighbour throughout the 1980s and '90s, Angolan culture has remained defiantly intact in a country divided by complex ethnic loyalties and 42 different indigenous languages. At the forefront of

this colourful artistic patchwork is Angolan music, a rich and varied collection of offshoots and sub-genres, with styles such as *kizombe*, *samba*, *zouk* and *rebitta* manifesting themselves in countless dances and romantic songs.

Life in Angola is extremely hard. Many curable diseases are rife, GDP per capita is among the world's lowest and in 1999 the UN declared the country the worst on the planet for a child to grow up in. But for guarded optimists hope springs eternal. Since 2002 many émigrés have returned to reclaim their businesses and farms, and economic activity throughout the country has been kick-started. Angola's participation in the 2006 Football World Cup was like a lightning bolt that reawakened a tired yet ever-hopeful population.

PEOPLE

Angola's cornucopia of ethnic groups is dominated by the Ovimbundu, Kimbundu and Bakongo. Local tribal traditions remain strong, though Portuguese has evolved as the national language of choice, particularly among the young. Due in part to its volatile history, much of Angola's cultural legacy has been exported abroad through slavery and emigration where it has re-emerged in elements of modern Brazilian culture, such as the samba, carnival, Afro-American religion and a combative martial art, known as Capoeira.

ENVIRONMENT

Angola's 1650km of Atlantic coastline hosts a plethora of unspoiled beaches, and the sedimentary deposits of numerous full-flowing rivers have led to the formation of a handful of distinctive coastal sandbars, such as Mussulo and La Ilha in Luanda and Restinga in Lobito.

The country's grassy savannah provides the setting for six national parks, namely: Iona, Bicular, Mupa, Kissama, Cameia and Cangandala. Due to the devastation wreaked by decades of civil war, the wildlife in these parks has been almost completely eradicated.

LUANDA

☎ 222 / pop 3.5 million

Hot, heaving, oil rich and cash poor, Luanda is a city of unfathomable contrasts and vividly shocking extremes. Perched tantalisingly on the Atlantic coastline overlooking a narrow pine-fringed sandbar known col-

loquially as the Ilha, the balmy ocean-side setting is as spectacular as it is exotic. The sweeping vistas would be even more stunning if it weren't for the teeming *bairros* (townships) and ramshackle makeshift dwellings that have taken root around Angola's rapidly expanding capital in the 30 years since independence.

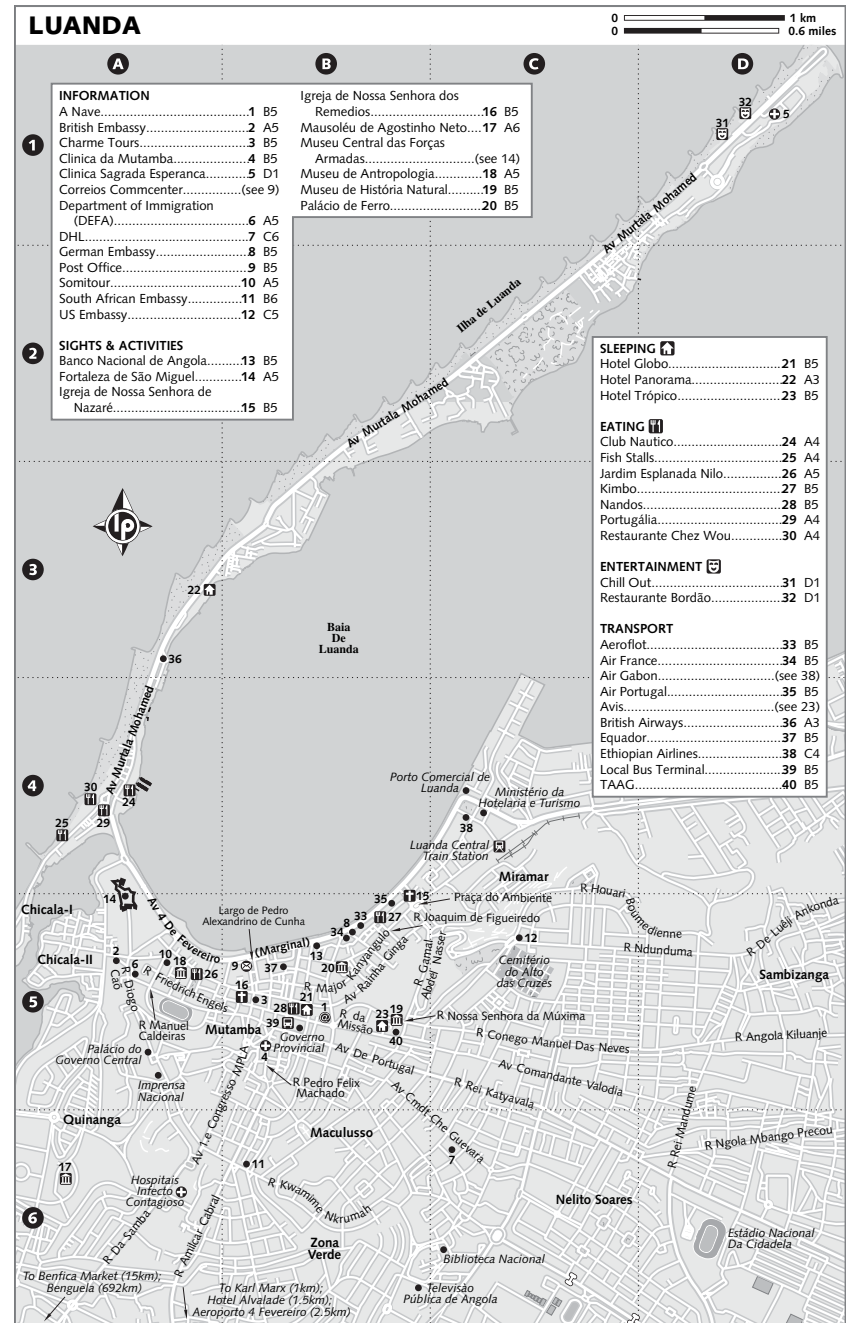
Built for a healthy half million, Luanda now bursts with 3.5 million beleaguered inhabitants and the evidence of this rampant overpopulation resonates everywhere. Whiff the stench of fetid water that intoxicates early-morning joggers on the picturesque Marginal promenade, dodge the manic lines of traffic that make hot afternoons in grid-locked central Luanda even more cauldron-like, and contemplate how running water and electricity are still comparative luxuries for all but a highly privileged (and often foreign) minority. But despite such calamitous problems, Luanda still manages to retain a dash of panache in the face of all this adversity.

HISTORY

Founded as São Paulo de Loanda on the Ilha de Cabo by 400 Portuguese soldiers and 100 families in 1575, the settlement was moved to the mainland one year later. In 1605 Luanda became a city, and two centuries later its resplendent buildings and flourishing trade earned it the title of the 'Paris of Africa'. But the Napoleonic comparisons didn't last. Despite sitting out the worst of the disastrous civil war, Luanda quickly became a refugee camp for millions of desperate internally displaced people fleeing the fighting. Packed to the rafters, it's still getting over the shock.

ORIENTATION

The airport is 4km south of Luanda. The city itself is set along a harbour overlooking the 7km-long Ilha de Luanda ('the Ilha'). The 2km promenade along the harbour, Av 4 de Fevereiro, is known as the Marginal and is the heart of the city. It hosts the reserve bank, head offices and international airlines. South along the Marginal is Mutamba, where you are most likely to stay, play and get away – second only to the Ilha (1km away), with its endless beaches, bars and restaurants. North of the city and up the hill from the Marginal is Miramar, home to the president, most of the embassies, rich oil expats and poor Angolans.



INFORMATION

Internet Access

Internet access cost around US\$3 per hour. All the top hotels have internet facilities.

Good, centrally located options:

A Nave (Rua da Missão, 55) Located at the back of a decent pizza joint.

Correios Comcenter (Largo de Pedro Alexandrino de Cunha, Mutamba) In the post office building.

Medical Services

There are many 24-hour *farmacias* (pharmacies) in the capital. Luanda's best clinics:

Clinica da Mutamba (☎ 39 37 83, emergency 39 72 22; Rua Pedro Felix Machado, 10/12) A one-stop medical facility that includes a pharmacy.

Clinica Sagrada Esperanca (☎ 30 90 34; Av Murtala Mohamed, Ilha de Luanda; ☎ 24hr) Located near the end of the Ilha.

Money

You can change money in banks and major hotels without a passport. There are plenty of options for changing money on the street (where you may get a better rate). Since 2003 the kwanza has remained relatively stable, floating around 80Kz to 83Kz for US\$1.

Post & Telephone

The **post office** (Largo de Pedro Alexandrino de Cunha, Mutamba), just off the Marginal, is in a large, historic building dating from 1850. Unfortunately, the postal system is similarly antiquated. In case of urgency, **DHL** (☎ 39 51 80; Av Cndt Che Guevara, 52A) is a faster and more expensive option.

The best public telephones are located at the post office.

Tour Operators

Charme Tours (☎ 222-39 64 99, 222-39 74 99; www.charmetours.com; Congresso MPLA, 33/35)

Somitour (☎ 39 90 91, 33 79; 65 Rua Manuel F Caldeira 3A/3B)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Although Luanda isn't, on first impressions, as dangerous as many other African cities, it is important for visitors to keep their wits about them and abide by a few basic safety precautions. Being robbed is one of the biggest dangers you'll encounter, although strolling around the central areas during the daytime is relatively low risk. Don't walk anywhere at night. Don't wear gold or silver jewellery (even

imitation), or an eye-catching watch. Keep money in a hidden money belt, and don't use a mobile phone on the street (phone robbery is one of Luanda's most common crimes). See also Dangers & Annoyances, p835.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The curvaceous sweep of the harbour-side **Marginal** (Av 4 de Fevereiro) makes an interesting stroll at any time of day. Look out for the striking domed pink façade of the **Banco Nacional de Angola** (Av 4 de Fevereiro, 151) designed by architect Vasco Regaleira and inaugurated in 1956. Architectural buffs will also want to check the **Palácio de Ferro** (Rua Major Kanyangulo), designed by Frenchman Gustave Eiffel (of Eiffel Tower fame) in the 1890s for the Paris Universal Exhibition. The construction was dismantled and brought to Luanda in 1902.

Luanda has a smattering of old colonial churches hidden among the skyscrapers. A bit of careful searching will reveal the diminutive **Igreja de Nossa Senhora de Nazaré** (Praça do Ambiente), dating from 1664, and the impressive double-domed façade of the **Igreja de Nossa Senhora dos Remedios** (Rua Rainha Ginga), built in 1655 and restored in 1995.

The **Fortaleza de São Miguel** guarding the entrance to the bay was constructed by the Portuguese in 1576 and is Luanda's oldest surviving building. Altered in 1664, whereupon it took its present star shape, the fort today houses the **Museu Central das Forças Armadas** (admission US\$2.50; ☎ 9am-6pm) and offers sweeping views of the city below. Other museums worth seeing are the **Museu de Antropologia** (Rua Friedrich Engels; donation accepted; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri), with its African masks, musical instruments and indigenous hunting artefacts housed in an old colonial building, and the **Museu de História Natural** (Rua Nossa Senhora da Múxima, 47; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), which boasts two permanent exhibitions in its marine and mammal halls.

Unmistakable on the Luanda skyline is the thin needle-like structure of the **Mausoléu de Agostinho Neto**, Angola's first president. At the time of writing it was still unfinished and, as yet, is not open to the public.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Carnival** is held in February and is set along the Marginal. It's a jovial and open affair, most notable for its ubiquitous half-dead cats (of which Angolans are very superstitious) tied to costumes and crucifixes.

Independence Day is held on 11 November and is also celebrated on the streets, with the added bonus of a public address and a few words from his nibs, the president.

SLEEPING

There are a handful of classy hotels in Luanda, but most rooms are grossly overpriced. Expect to pay US\$80 upwards for anything half-decent.

Hotel Globo (☎ 33 21 79; Rua Rainha Ginga, 100; s/d US\$42/63) Rock-bottom Luanda style with clean-ish, moth-eaten rooms in a centrally located position. General facilities beg for a major renovation.

Hotel Panorama (☎ 30 90 74; Av Murtala Mohamed; s/d US\$66/79) This scruffy haunt has been a permanent feature on the Luanda landscape since the early 1970s, but its magnificent setting on the Ilha facing the harbour belies a spectacularly grotty interior. Prepare yourself for dank, dark bathrooms and characterless rooms, and arrive armed with a mosquito net.

Hotel Trópico (☎ 37 00 70; Rua da Missão, 103; s/d US\$250/290; ☎ P ☎) An international-class hotel with rooms and facilities (including a top-notch gym and free internet) almost deserving of its astronomical price tag.

Hotel Alvalade (☎ 32 74 70; Rua Emídio Mbindi; s/d US\$250/290; ☎ P ☎) On a par with Trópico, but in a slightly more removed location (near the airport), the Alvalade is glitzy and swanky, and spanking new.

EATING & DRINKING

With some subtle gastronomic know-how and a budget of US\$10 and upwards for an edible meal, visitors to Luanda certainly won't starve. In fact, many of the myriad eating establishments that lie dotted around the city centre are better than advance publicity would have you believe. Thanks to the legacy of the Portuguese, *pastelerias* (pastry and coffee shops) have a distinctly European flavour.

Street food is easy to procure from the *barrio* women who sell fruit and baguette-like sandwiches from washing bowls in the thoroughfares around the city centre. More established street vendors sell beer, bags of roasted nuts, and barbecued chicken and corn. The beach at Chicala at the southwest end of the Ilha has some great outdoor fish stalls.

Kimbo (☎ 923 474 841; Rua Joaquim de Figueiredo, 15) Just off the Marginal, Kimbo is great for a mid-morning coffee or a buffet-style lunch.

Jardim Esplanada Nilo (Av Rainha Ginga) A salubrious tree-covered patio offering drinks and sweet tasting snacks.

Nandos (cnr Rua Amílcar Cabral & Rainha Ginga) This place mixes air-conditioned comfort with convenience food, serving Portuguese-style peri-peri chicken and french fries. Next door is 'Steers', a South African burger chain.

Restaurante Chez Wou (☎ 30 93 94) Angola's Chinese presence can be experienced (and tasted) quite literally at this businesslike establishment at the entrance to the Ilha.

Portugália (☎ 30 96 77) Portuguese fare offered in abundance on the Ilha, with good service and pleasant surroundings.

Club Nautico (Av Murtala Mohamed) A classy restaurant in Luanda's yacht club serving everything from tasty chicken to bog-standard *funje* (ground maize).

ENTERTAINMENT

Many flock to the Ilha in the evenings to such trendy haunts as **Chill Out** (☎ 30 99 63; Av Murtala Mohamed) and **Restaurante Bordão** (☎ 30 90 28; Av Murtala Mohamed) that seem more redolent of Miami than Luanda.

Karl Marx (Rua de Oliveira Martins, 19) This poignantly named, large semi-outdoor bar-cinema screens Hollywood flicks with Portuguese subtitles. It occasionally hosts a performance group from Lisbon or Brazil. Check *Jornal de Angola* for daily listings.

SHOPPING

The best place to shop is at Benfica market, 16km south of Luanda on the Kissama road. The atmosphere is relatively hassle free, and the handicrafts deftly sculpted and authentic. Don't buy the ivory.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can fly daily between Luanda and almost every major Angolan city with one of five different airlines (see p837). Destinations include Benguela (US\$110), Cabinda (US\$95), Huambo (US\$120), Malange (US\$95), Namibe (US\$130), Ondjiva (US\$135) and Lubango (US\$125). All flights depart from the domestic terminal at Aeroporto 4 de Fevereiro.

You can hire cars from **Avis** (☎ 32 15 51), which has offices at the airport and at Hotel Trópico, and **Equador** (☎ 33 07 46; Largo Tristão da Cunha, 11/12). Rental prices start per day at US\$60 for a sedan or US\$120 for 4WD; car

OPERATION NOAH'S ARK

A one-time habitat for giant herds of rhino, elephant and buffalo, Parque Nacional da Kissama suffered inexorably during Angola's acrimonious civil war when wildlife numbers plummeted to little more than zero. Those animals not finished off by landmines or sporadic military crossfire, quickly fell prey to poachers or were eaten by desperate locals anxious to stave off starvation.

But in 1996, with the end of the war in sight, the newly formed Kissama Foundation in tandem with the Angolan government hatched an ingenious relief plan aimed at rehabilitating the park by importing elephants from wildlife reserves in South Africa and Botswana. Called Operation Noah's Ark, this pioneering aid project re-trained ex-soldiers as game wardens, instructed local villagers in how to manage camp sites and refurbished old buildings as tourist bungalows. After four years of painstaking preparations, Kissama received its first stock of air-lifted animals in 2000 when 16 elephants were flown in on a Russian cargo plane from South Africa. One year later and the park was topped up with a further stock of 16 elephants, 12 zebras, 12 ostriches, 14 wildebeests and four giraffes.

The ultimate aim of Operation Noah's Ark is to transport up to 500 elephants from the overpopulated Tuli Block in Eastern Botswana by road and ship in what will be one of the largest translocations of wild animals ever attempted.

Though progress has been slow, early signs suggest that the project has been a success, and in 2001 the first elephant calf was born to Kissama's newly established herd.

and driver from US\$15 an hour. The chaotic nature of Luanda traffic makes hiring a driver highly recommended.

GETTING AROUND

Luanda's airport, Aeroporto 4 de Fevereiro, is 4km south of Luanda, with the domestic terminal next to the international one.

For getting around Luanda, buses and the ubiquitous Hiaces (blue-and-white Toyota Hiaces) start from a terminus in Mutamba, in front of the pale pink Governo Provincial building. They go to most places within Luanda and nearby (US\$0.50 to US\$1). Bus stops are conspicuous by their long queues. Private taxis are 4WDs; try **Macontaxi** (☎ 47 05 20), which charges approximately US\$25 an hour with driver. It has an office at the airport.

There is a daily bus service running 600km along the coast between Benguela and Luanda. Three companies make this spectacular trip (SGO, Empesco and Autoviação Fialho y Filhos), and the journey (approximately nine hours) costs US\$25 to US\$28.

COASTAL ANGOLA

Travelling outside the capital in cars or on buses is increasingly popular, and the overall security situation has improved immeasurably since lasting peace broke out in April 2002. The best road link is between Luanda and

Benguela via Port Amboim, Sumbé and Lobito, closely followed by the spectacular drive in the southwest from Lubango to Namibe. Other passable routes (with a 4WD) include Benguela-Huambo, Luanda-Malange, Lubango-Santa Clara (Namibian border) and Lubango-Huambo. Join up the dots and you'll quickly find that, with a decent car, plenty of patience and a gung-ho sense of adventure, you can now get from Namibia to Luanda via 2000km of rough, bone-rattling but seriously spectacular roads.

PARQUE NACIONAL DA KISSAMA & AROUND

Kissama (also spelt Quiçama), situated 70km south of Luanda, is Angola's most accessible and well-stocked wildlife park. Inaugurated as a nature reserve in 1938 and upgraded to a national park in 1957, this 990,000-hectare swathe of coastal savannah punctuated by gnarly baobab trees is home to elephants, water buffalo, indigenous *palanca* antelopes and a precarious population of nesting sea turtles. Despite years of poaching and neglect during the civil war, Kissama remains at the forefront of Angola's wildlife regeneration efforts thanks largely to a pioneering relief project known as Operation Noah's Ark (see above).

Visitors to Kissama can stay in **bungalows** (s/d US\$90/120), though bookings must be made in advance in Luanda through **Kurika Safari Park** (☎ 222-43 20 20; Rua Cónego Manuel das Neves).

There is also a restaurant on site that serves meals for US\$15 to US\$18. Wildlife viewing can be organised from US\$10 per person for two hours.

Other natural attractions in the area include the **Miradouro de Lua**, a veritable moonscape of rust and silver-coloured rock formations that cascade like a mini Grand Canyon into the Atlantic just off the Luanda-Benguela coast road, approximately 30km south of the capital. Boat trips (US\$100) on the nearby **Kwanza River** reveal copious amounts of birdlife, and can also be organised through Kurika Safari Park or at the nearby **Tarpon Lodge** (☎ 88-163 151 9324).

The only practical way of getting to the park is either with an organised group (see p830) or with a hire car. It is recommended that you hire both a car and a driver who knows the route in Luanda.

BENGUELA

☎ 2722 / pop 200,000

Coastal Benguela is Angola's second most important city and the self-proclaimed cultural capital. Nestled on the shores of the Atlantic approximately 30km south of the port of Lobito, the city is surrounded by fine beaches and bisected by the lush and agriculturally important Cavaco River valley; a veritable oasis of green in an otherwise dry and arid desert. Founded by the Portuguese in 1617,

Benguela was once an important slave port and the embarkation point for shiploads of human cargo bound for Brazil. With the onset of the 20th century, it became the terminus for the Benguela railway (below), though its position as an Atlantic port was rapidly upsurged by neighbouring Lobito. Spared a direct hit in the bloody 40-year civil war, Benguela retains a laid-back ambience in a bustling big-city setting. You'll encounter little hassle here and make plenty of spontaneous friends.

Benguela's yellow-sand beaches are rightly famous, with the centrally located **Praia Morena** acting as one of the city's unofficial meeting points. Watch out for svelte-looking athletes practicing their Capoeira here early in the morning. The most popular out-of-town beach is **Baía Azul**, situated 20km to the south on the road to Baía Farta (accessible by Hiace bus).

The town's only museum is the tiny **Museu de Arqueológica**, situated on the seafront in an old warehouse that was once a holding shed for captured slaves. The church of **Nossa Senhora do Pópulo** (Av Combatentes da Grande Guerra) was built in 1748 from stone carried in ships from Brazil as ballast and is Benguela's most beguiling building. Other gems include the **Palácio das Bolas** (Av Agostinho Neto), used as a headquarters by the provincial MPLA party, and the **Palácio do Governo** facing the beach.

THE BENGUELA RAILWAY

Commissioned by the Portuguese in 1899 and built by the British over the ensuing 30 years, the Benguela railway comprised a feat of engineering unmatched elsewhere in Africa. During its heyday in the 1960s and '70s the track stretched 1370km (850 miles) from the Atlantic port of Lobito to Luau on the DRC border, and ran an impressive stock of 69 steam locomotives.

But Angola's bitter civil war quickly put an end to the railway's glory days. By the early 1990s this once great link in southwest Africa's burgeoning oil, diamond and copper-based economy had – by a combination of ambush, sabotage and serial mine-laying – been reduced to a 30km spur between the twin coastal cities of Benguela and Lobito.

Successive renovation schemes have come up against crushing problems. In 1997, during a brief break in Angola's ongoing domestic war, Italian company Tor di Valle secured an agreement to rebuild the Benguela railway. Short on hard cash, the Angolan government offered to pay them with thousands of acres of eucalyptus forest planted commercially during the 1920s to provide a unique form of fuel for Angola's steam engines. But the deal – thanks to a re-eruption of the war the following year – never materialised.

Fast forward to 2006, and with peace once again a lasting possibility, the negotiations clawed their way back to the table. The Chinese were the successful bidders fighting their way through an obstacle course of disincentives – minefields, blown-up bridges and collapsed ravines to name three – that stand in the way of making this dream a reality. For Angolan observers the price is high, but with 30 months of scheduled man hours and an investment of over US\$300 million, it's only a matter of time before the railway is restored once again to its former glory.

For Benguela's most colourful and authentic day trip, take the train to **Lobito** (US\$2.50, 1½ hours, 30km, four daily) from the central station. Transport is in shabby cattle trucks, but the journey is like something out of an Indiana Jones movie.

Benguela has a wide selection of hostels and hotels and the list is growing.

At **Nancy's English School e Hospedaria** (☎ 923 594 093; Largo de Pioneiros, 16; r incl breakfast US\$45; 🏠 (P)), budget travellers will enjoy the facilities and atmosphere at this secluded gem. Run by a friendly American expat.

The good-value **Hotel Luso** (☎ 31 292; Av Aires de Almeida Santos; s/d US\$60/120; 🏠) has a quiet ambience and two different room options.

A hotel that doubles as one of Benguela's best eating joints, **Pensão Contente** (☎ 336 37; Rua Bernardino Correia, 81; s/d US\$66/99; 🏠) serves burgers, prawns and excellent desserts.

At **Hotel M'ombaka** (☎ 34 487; Rua do Mercado; s/d US\$120/140; 🏠 (P)), top of the Benguela accommodation pile, the leather and wood-panelled furnishings hide slightly dustier rooms upstairs.

Other eating options include **Pastelaria Flamingo** (☎ 30 153; Rua António J Almeida), with *galãos* (white coffee) and pastries, or more substantial seafood (a Benguela speciality) at **Restaurante Escondidinho** (☎ 33 206; Rua Cândido dos Reis, 7-9), which also metamorphoses into the city's most happening nightclub/disco.

Benguela is easily accessed by a daily plane service from Luanda (US\$90 to US\$120). The city has two airports, one 3km south of the city centre and the other in Catumbela 15km to the north. Regular planes also link Benguela with Lubango, Huambo and other major cities.

There are three companies offering a daily bus service (see p832) between Benguela and Luanda (690km, nine hours). A daily train runs to Lobito (30km) and, less frequently, to Cubal 150km inland.

SOUTHERN ANGOLA

HUAMBO

☎ 2412 / pop 400,000

Known formerly as Nova Lisboa (New Lisbon), Huambo was once renowned for its expansive parks and attractive colonial buildings. Indeed, in 1928 it was briefly touted by former Angolan high commissioner António

Vicente Ferreira as the country's capital-in-waiting. But then came the war and, in 1993, a gruesome 52-day siege reduced the city to little more than a pile of pock-marked rubble. Rising from the ashes, modern-day Huambo is taking its first tentative steps on the road to recovery.

While true sights are few and far between, Huambo's latent beauty can be glimpsed briefly in among the scores of bullet-strafed buildings that make up the Cidade Alta (Upper City) and the Cidade Baixa (Lower City). Take some time to check out **Parque Almirante Américo Tomás**, known locally as the *estufa*, with its eucalyptus trees and forlorn classical sculptures.

Gleaming and almost incongruous amid the ruins is the colonial **Palácio do Governo**, a pink Portuguese-inspired palace, while 3km outside of town, the **Granja Por do Sol** is a pleasantly landscaped tourist complex with caged birds, a boating lake and a rustic restaurant.

Huambo has some surprisingly good accommodation options.

Huambo's cheapest pensão, **Pensão Huambo** (☎ 20 747; Cidade Alta; s/d US\$35/45), is a basic bed-down just off the roundabout near the Palácio do Governo.

A block or so from Hotel Nino, **Tchinsanda House** (☎ 23 422; Cidade Baixa; s/d US\$38/76) has adequate rooms and a patio restaurant at the back.

One of only two well-maintained hotels in Huambo, **Hotel Konjevi** (☎ 20 737; Rua Serpa dos Santos, Cidade Baixa; s/d US\$64/70; 🏠) has clean, no-frills rooms and eager-to-please staff.

The **Hotel Nino** (☎ 22 780; Rua 5 de Outubro, Cidade Baixa; s/d US\$70/100; 🏠) is a cosy and comfortable option and a shade more spiffy than the Konjevi.

The city's most inviting café-restaurant is the Parisian-style **Novo Império** (☎ 23 176; Rua Dr Lacerda, Cidade Alta), which does great burgers, pizza, pastries and coffee. A few blocks further east is the cheaper and more traditional **Restaurante Pesticó Gigi** (☎ 20 258; Rua Dr Lacerda, Cidade Alta), which has a daily set menu for US\$7.

There are daily flights to Luanda and connections to Benguela and Lubango two to three times a week. The roads between Huambo and Benguela, and Huambo and Lubango are open but are in a pretty poor condition.

LUBANGO

☎ 2612 / pop 200,000

Cool and picturesque, Lubango defies popular images of Angola's war-ravaged past and impoverished present. Relatively unscathed by the 40-year conflict that tore the heart of communities elsewhere, the order and tranquillity of Lubango's central core has more in common with Namibia than Huambo or Kuito. You'll encounter a handful of adventurous overlanders here, some quirky cafés and a half-dozen or so comfortable, if overpriced, hotels.

Surrounded by mountains and nestled in a cool central valley, one of the best ways to get a bird's-eye view of Lubango is to rent a car and driver (US\$15 per hour) from the Grande Hotel da Huila and motor up to the **Cristo Rei**, a huge statue of Jesus (redolent of Rio's *Corcovado*) that overlooks the city. Other day or half-day excursions include the **Tunda-Vala volcanic fissure**, 20km outside town, where you can climb to 2600m above sea level for stellar views, and the famous **Leba Mountain Rd** on the way to Namibe that drops 1000m via a succession of precipitous switchbacks.

An excellent and viable side trip from Lubango is to the fishing town of **Namibe** on the Atlantic coast. Aside from boasting a number of decent sights and attractions in its own right, Namibe also provides easy access to **Flamingo Lodge**, a choice fishing and angling spot 70km south of the town professionally run by **Angolan Adventure Safaris** (☎ 88-163 151 9324; www.aasafaris.com). Prebooking is recommended.

Lubango has a selection of relatively comfortable hotels and restaurants.

Lubango's cheapest pensão, **Pensão Diocema** (☎ 21 788; Rua Deolinda Rodríguez, 98A; r US\$50), is scruffy, but friendly.

Situated on the edge of town, the burgeoning tourist park **Complexo Turístico Nuestra Señora do Monte** (☎ 20 183) is home to the **Wenda Ke Tai Lodge** (s/d US\$74/130), with 20 thatched units and an on-site casino, or the more modern **Casper Lodge** (s/d US\$100/125; 🏠 (P)), whose eight spanking-new rooms are kitted out in tasteful African décor.

At the dusty African gem **Grande Hotel da Huila** (☎ 20 512; Av Dr Agostinho Neto; s/d US\$106/160; 🏠 (P)), oodles of faded charm and a swimming pool devoid of water conjure up images from a seedy Graham Greene novel.

Lubango's coolest and most popular day-time hang-out is the funky **Huila Café** (☎ 24 582; Rua Irmão Roby), which does delicious burgers and top-notch *galãos*. Equally hip is **Mania Bar** (☎ 22 765; Rua Hoji ya Henda, 20), which boasts an internet café upstairs and a couple of billiard tables out the back.

There are daily flights from Lubango to Luanda and regular connections to Huambo and Benguela. TAAG (see p836) fly twice a week between Lubango and Windhoek, Namibia. The road between Lubango and the town of Namibe is one of the best in the country and intermittent buses (two hours) ply this route.

ANGOLA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Tourist accommodation has traditionally been scant in Angola, but the situation is changing and since 2002 a number of new hotels have opened in the major cities. Rooms, however, are not cheap. Expect to pay upwards of US\$40 for the most basic (bathroomless) room in the countryside and at least US\$80 in the cities.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses are open 8.30am to 12.30pm and 2pm to 6pm Monday to Friday, and 8.30am to 12.30pm Saturday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Contrary to popular belief, travelling in Angola is far safer than outsiders might first imagine – as long as you abide by a few basic ground rules. Luanda's street-crime aside, your biggest danger is probably health, with malaria a particular worry in the coastal areas. Consult your doctor before you leave and don't cut corners when it comes to medication, mosquito nets and other preventative measures; for more details, see Health (p1134). Crime against foreigners is low outside the

PRACTICALITIES

- Angola's newspapers and magazines include *Jornal de Angola*.
- The national radio station is *Radio Nacional de Angola*.
- Electricity in Angola is 220/240 V, 50 Hz.
- Angola uses the metric system.

capital and armed banditry in the provinces has diminished considerably since 2002. Furthermore, Angolan police – while certainly not incorruptible – are generally friendlier than many of their African counterparts. Nevertheless, ask permission before taking photos in public areas, always carry a photocopy of your passport and don't wander off the road in rural areas – the threat of unexploded landmines is still a huge problem.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Angola has diplomatic representation in Namibia, Gabon and South Africa (see the Directory section of the relevant country).

The following countries have diplomatic representation in Luanda:

Canada (☎ 44 94 94; Rua Rei Katyavala, 113)

Congo (☎ 31 02 93; Rua Fernando Pessoa, Vila Alice)

Democratic Republic of Congo (☎ 31 02 93; Rua Fernando Pessoa, Vila Alice)

France (☎ 33 4841; Rua Rev Agostinho Pedro Neto, 39)

Gabon (☎ 44 92 89; Rua Eng Armindo Adrade, 149)

Germany (☎ 33 45 16; Av 4 Fevereiro, 120)

Namibia (☎ 39 54 83; Rua dos Coqueiros, 37)

South Africa (☎ 33 41 87; Rua Kwamime Nkrumah)

UK (☎ 33 45 82; Rua Diogo Cão, 4)

USA (☎ 44 45 18; Av Houari Boumediene, 132)

Zambia (☎ 44 74 92; Rua Rei Katyavala, 106)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory (p1106), these are the principal public holidays in Angola:

New Year's Day 1 January

National Holiday 4 February

Victory Day 27 March

Worker's Day 1 May

Armed Forces Day 1 August

National Hero's Day 17 September

Independence Day 11 November

MPLA Foundation Day 10 December

MONEY

Angola's currency is the kwanza (Kz). It is not convertible and cannot be taken out of the country. As with many third-world economies, the US dollar is also widely accepted.

You can exchange money in banks, at hotels or on the street, where the rates are sometimes marginally better.

Angola is a cash economy and local ATMs rarely accept foreign bank cards. Credit cards are accepted by major hotels and airline companies, but the bulk of business is done in US dol-

lars or kwanza. Come prepared with plenty of hard cash and invest in a decent money belt.

Bargaining is possible when buying from markets or on the street. You can generally expect to haggle down to one-half to two-thirds of the initial asking price.

POST & TELEPHONE

The postal system is unreliable throughout the country. Angola Telecom often requires several attempts, but works in the main cities.

VISAS

Tourist visas cost US\$75 for 30 days. Visa applications from embassies abroad are referred to Luanda, and can take up to two weeks to come through. If you are travelling independently, you will require a letter of invitation from a person or organisation in Angola.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be renewed for 90 days in Luanda at the Department of Immigration (DEFA), adjacent to the British embassy, for US\$30.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following countries can be obtained in Angola. See opposite for embassy and consulate information.

Congo All visitors to Congo need a visa. Visa applications can be issued on the same or next day.

Democratic Republic of Congo All visitors need a visa. It is essential to get a visa before you arrive; a one-month, single-entry visa costs US\$75.

Gabon Visas cost US\$100 for 30 days and applications can be lodged from 8.30am to 12.30pm Monday to Friday (air ticket and one photo required).

Namibia Visas cost US\$50 for 30 days and applications can be lodged from 8am to 2.30pm on Friday (two days' processing time required).

Zambia Visas cost US\$100 for 30 days and applications can be lodged from 9am to noon and 2pm to 4pm Monday to Friday (ready same day; two photos and a copy of air ticket required).

TRANSPORT IN ANGOLA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Direct flights from Europe are possible from Paris (Air France), London (British Airways), Brussels (SN Brussels Airlines) and Lisbon (TAP), with prices starting at around US\$1800 return.

International flights fly into Aeroporto 4 de Fevereiro in Luanda. There are also twice weekly flights from Windhoek in Namibia into Lubango.

Your best bet for a cheaper deal is with Ethiopian Airlines, which flies to Luanda from Europe via its African hub of Addis Ababa twice weekly. Deals can be scooped for as little as US\$800. Try an online booking agent, such as **Holiday Genie** (www.holidaygenie.com).

From inside Africa you can fly to Luanda from Brazzaville (Congo), Harare (Zimbabwe), Johannesburg (South Africa), Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Windhoek (Namibia). There are also twice-weekly flights from Windhoek to Lubango.

The following international airlines are based in Luanda and fly to/from Angola:

Aeroflot (☎ 222-33 04 26; Av 4 de Fevereiro, 114)

Air France (☎ 222-33 54 16; Av 4 de Fevereiro, 123)

Air Gabon (☎ 222-31 06 14; Largo 4 de Fevereiro, 8)

Air Namibia (☎ 222-33 67 26; Rua Assalto Q Moncada, 12) Note that TAAG shares some routes.

Air Portugal (☎ 222-33 16 92; Av 4 Fevereiro, 80)

British Airways (☎ 222-30 92 70; Av Murtala Mohamed, La Ilha)

Ethiopian Airlines (☎ 222-31 06 15; Largo 4 de Fevereiro, 10)

South African Airways (☎ 222-39 18 58; Rua Clube Marítimo Africano, 2-4)

TAAG (☎ 222-39 25 41; 5th fl, Rua Missão, 123)

Land

According to the Angolan tourist ministry, all of the country's land borders are now open, though savvy travellers should think twice before negotiating the roads and bureaucracy between Angola–Zambia and Angola–DRC. The border with Namibia, on the other hand, is a relative formality. At the time of writing you could enter at either Santa Clara (Angola) from Oshikango (Namibia) or at Calai (Angola) from Rundu (Namibia), visa permitting.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Air travel is relatively easy within Angola and flights can often be booked the same day. The national carrier is **TAAG** (☎ 222-35 25 86; 5th fl, Rua da Missão, 123, Luanda), but there are a number of

equally good internal options, including **SAL Airlines** (☎ 222-35 08 69), **Sonair** (☎ 222-35 09 93), **Air Gemini** (☎ 222-35 12 49) and **Diexim Expresso** (☎ 222-44 29 10). Flights between Luanda and major cities run daily and interprovincial flights are also possible. Sample prices include: Luanda–Benguela US\$110; Benguela–Lubango US\$85; and Lubango–Huambo US\$80.

Bus

Public transportation is still in the embryonic stages outside of the cities, though compared to other African buses, the vehicles are relatively comfortable. See p832 for further information.

Car

Aided by Chinese and Portuguese investment, roads are slowly opening up in Angola, though you'll still need a 4WD to get you to most places. Plenty of cars now make the journey up from Namibia, and roads are passable (if rough) between the cities of Lubango, Huambo, Benguela, Lobito, Luanda and Malange.

Tours

At the forefront of Angola's tourist renaissance, **Charme Tours** (☎ 222-39 64 99, 222-39 74 99; www.charmetours.com; Congresso MPLA, 33/35) can organise anything from flight bookings to specially tailored tours. **Ecotur** (☎ 923 501 387; www.eco-tur.com) is an equally professional outfit, co-run by a British expat, that specialises in adventure trips, such as big game fishing, water sports and bird-watching. **Angolan Adventure Safaris** (☎ 163 157 4328, 27 021 462 6104; www.aasafaris.com), which runs the Tarpon Lodge on the Kwanza River and the Flamingo Lodge south of Namibe, can also organise visas and put together tailored trips.

Train

A one-time pioneer of 20th-century rail transport, Angola's war-damaged railways are currently getting a long-awaited Chinese makeover. Limited services are now available between Luanda and Dondo (twice weekly); Lobito and Cubal via Benguela (four daily); Lubango and Namibe (once weekly); and Huambo and Calenga (four daily).

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