

Burkina Faso

Standing at the geographical heart of West Africa, Burkina Faso (formerly Haute or Upper Volta, or just Burkina to the locals) is the sort of place that captures the imagination – how many of your friends back home even know that Burkina Faso exists? – and wins the hearts of travellers with its relaxed pace of life, friendly people and wealth of interesting sights.

From the deserts and unrivalled Gorom-Gorom market in the north, to the green countryside and strange rock formations of the country's southwest, Burkina spans a rich variety of landscapes. The country, too, is home to a fascinating cultural mix, with the Burkinabé (people from Burkina Faso) almost as diverse as the terrain.

This may be one of the world's poorest countries, but it's also one of the most stable in the region and runs with an efficiency that's the envy of many of its neighbours. Throw in the continent's most important film festival, the delightful small-town atmosphere of Bobo-Dioulasso, wildlife safaris in the south, the enjoyable and gloriously named capital, Ouagadougou, and there's enough here to transform Burkina from the country that no-one knows to an experience you'll never forget.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 274,122 sq km
- **ATMs** Major towns only
- **Borders** Mali, Niger, Togo and Ghana open; crossing at Niangoloko with Côte d'Ivoire closed
- **Budget** US\$15 to US\$25 per day
- **Capital** Ouagadougou
- **Languages** French, Moré, Fulfulde and Lobi
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA498
- **Population** 11.9 million
- **Seasons** Wet (June to October), dry (November to February), hot (March to June)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 226, international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visa** Available at borders (CFA10,000) or Burkina Faso embassies (up to CFA30,000)



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Gorom-Gorom's Thursday market** (p272) Lose yourself in one of West Africa's most colourful experiences.
- **Bobo-Dioulasso** (p269) Kick back in the languid charm of the old quarter and the beautiful Grande Mosquée.
- **Ouagadougou** (p265) Explore one of West Africa's most agreeable capital cities, with great restaurants and friendly people.
- **Sindou Peaks** (p271) Track down hippos and explore the otherworldly landscape here, near Banfora.
- **Tiébébé** (p272) Get off the beaten track to the colourfully painted fortress houses of the south.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Burkina Faso is at its best from mid-October to December. It can be downright wet between June and September, when the south can be uncomfortably humid and many roads are impassable. From December to February the weather is marginally cooler, although dusty harmattan winds can produce hazy skies in January and February. The hot season is from March to early June.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** With only a week at your disposal, charming Bobo-Dioulasso (p269) is worth at least two days' stay, while the country around Banfora (p271) merits a couple more. Pause for a day in Ouagadougou (p265), an unusually friendly and relaxed capital city with an active nightlife, before heading north for the Thursday market of Gorom-Gorom (p272) for another two days.
- **Two Weeks** With two weeks to spare, plan on spending more time in the southwest; allow at least two extra days exploring around Banfora (p271). Gaoua (p271), in the heart of Lobi country, is also worth a few days. A two-day round trip from Ouagadougou (p265) to the colourful village of Tiébébé (p272) is likewise hugely rewarding.

HISTORY

The Mossi & the French

By the 14th century the territory of present-day Burkina Faso was occupied by the Bobo, Lobi, Gourounsi and the Mossi. The Mossi, who now make up almost half of Burkina Faso's

HOW MUCH?

- **Ouagadougou-Bobo-Dioulasso bus ride** US\$11
- **Museum admission** US\$1.80
- **Guide per day** US\$18 to US\$27
- **Internet connection (per hour)** US\$0.60 to US\$1.40
- **4WD rental (per day)** US\$72 plus petrol

LP INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.10
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.90
- **Bottle of beer** US\$1.35
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$9
- **Serve of Riz sauce** US\$0.90

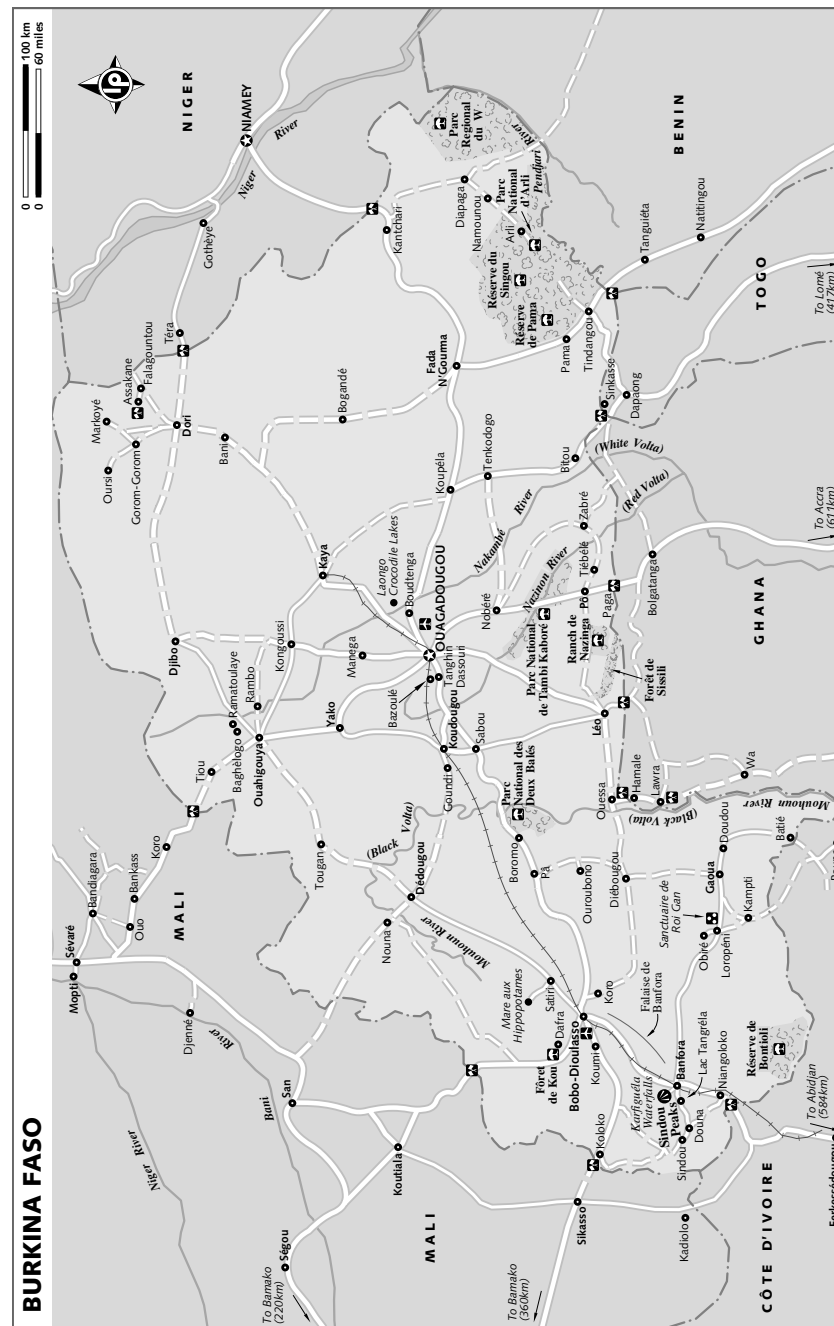
population, founded their first kingdom more than 500 years ago in Ouagadougou. Three more Mossi states ruled over the remainder of the country, known for their devastating attacks against the Muslim empires in Mali.

During the Scramble for Africa in the second half of the 19th century, the French broke up the traditional Mossi states, but French rule in Upper Volta, as Burkina Faso was then known, saw money and resources go elsewhere. By the time that independence came in 1960, Upper Volta was neglected, desperately poor and had become little more than a repository for forced labour.

Thomas Sankara

Maurice Yaméogo, Upper Volta's first president, proved to be an autocratic ruler more adept at consolidating his own power than managing the challenges of the fledgling state. Between 1966 and 1982 Upper Volta suffered a cycle of coups and counter-coups and the country stagnated. In November 1982 Captain Thomas Sankara, an ambitious young left-wing military star, seized power.

Over the next four years 'Thom Sank' (as he was popularly known) recast the country. He changed its name to Burkina Faso (meaning 'Land of the Incorruptible'), restructured the economy to promote self-reliance in rural areas, launched literacy and immunisation drives and tackled corruption with rare zeal.



The economy improved, financial books were kept in good order and people developed a genuine pride in their country. In December 1985 Sankara engaged the country in a five-day war with Mali, which merely enhanced his appeal among ordinary Burkinabés.

Despite his popularity, in late 1987 a group of junior officers seized power; Sankara was taken outside Ouagadougou and shot.

The Compaoré Years

The new junta was headed by Captain Blaise Compaoré, Sankara's former friend and co-revolutionary, and son-in-law of Côte d'Ivoire's long-standing leader, the late Houphouët-Boigny. In late 1991 Compaoré achieved a modicum of legitimacy when, as sole candidate and on a low turnout, he was elected president. Clément Ouédraogo, the leading opposition figure, was assassinated a couple of weeks later.

In disputed legislative and presidential elections in 1997 and 1998, the president and his supporters won more than 85% of the vote. Since 2000 President Compaoré has been accused of involvement in the trade of illegal diamonds, and of meddling in the conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Burkina Faso Today

Burkina Faso remains one of the more stable countries in the region, although rumblings of discontent continue. Street demonstrations in April 2000 forced the government to draft a constitutional amendment that limits presidents to two terms. Arguing that the two-term limit did not apply to terms served before the amendment was passed, and with the opposition divided, President Compaoré won re-election on 13 November 2005 with 80% of the vote.

CULTURE

Burkinabés are a laid-back lot, have a genuine pride in their country and, like so many Africans, often find themselves torn between the modern world and the emotive tug of tradition. Although ethnicity (along with religion) is the bedrock of identity, you'll see little if any antagonism between members of different ethnic groups.

Life for the Burkinabé is as tough as it gets. In 2005 the UN ranked Burkina Faso 175th out of 177 countries across a range of quality-of-life indicators. Almost 50% of the

population survives on less than US\$1 a day. Adult literacy stands at 13% and one in every five Burkinabé is malnourished. Just 2% of the government's budget is spent on health. Over one-third of Burkinabés will not live to 40. Thus it is that daily life for Burkinabés is all about survival.

PEOPLE

The largest of Burkina Faso's 60 ethnic groups is the Mossi (48%), who are primarily concentrated in the central plateau area. Important groups in the south include the Bobo (7%), Lobi (7%) and Gourounsi (5%). In the Sahel areas of the north are the Hausa, Fulani (8%), Bella and Tuareg. Some 80% of Burkinabés live in rural areas.

Around 90% of Burkina Faso's population observes either Islam (about 50%) or traditional animist beliefs based on the worship of ancestors and spirits (40%) – although there is often considerable overlap.

ARTS

While each ethnic group in Burkina Faso has its own artistic style, the work of the Mossi, the Bobo and the Lobi are the most famous; in the museums of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, you'll see examples of all three. The tall antelope masks of the Mossi and the butterfly masks of the Bobo are perhaps the most recognisable, but the Lobi are also well known for their figurative sculptures.

Burkina Faso has a thriving film industry, which receives considerable biennial stimulation from the Fespaco film festival held in Ouagadougou (see opposite).

ENVIRONMENT

Landlocked Burkina Faso's terrain ranges from the harsh desert and semidesert of the north, to the woodland and savannah of the green southwest. The country's dominant feature, however, is the vast central laterite plateau of the Sahel, where hardy trees and bushes thrive.

Parc National d'Arlé, close to the border with Benin, is home to Burkina Faso's few remaining species of large animals, among them elephants, hippos, warthogs, baboons, monkeys, lions, leopards, crocodiles and various kinds of antelope.

Burkina Faso suffers acutely from deforestation and soil erosion, not to mention drought. Some sources attribute an annual

GNP loss as high as 9% to such degradation. Ouagadougou, for example, is surrounded by a 70km stretch of land virtually devoid of trees. Firewood accounts for more than 90% of the country's energy consumption, while commercial logging, slash-and-burn agriculture and animal grazing also take their toll.

FOOD & DRINK

Burkina Faso's culinary tradition has little to mark it out as distinctive from its neighbours. Sauces are the mainstay and are always served with a starch – usually rice or the Burkinabé staple, *tô*, a millet- or sorghum-based pâte (a pounded dough-like substance).

Stewed *agouti* (grasscutter, a large rodent that is a whole lot easier to stomach if you don't see its rat-like resemblance) is a prized delicacy, as is *capitaine* (Nile perch). Grilled dishes of chicken and fish are available on seemingly every street corner and are often the cheapest food around. Lunch is the main meal; at night grilled dishes are popular.

Castel, Flag, Brakina and So.b.bra (pronounced so-bay-bra) are popular and palatable lager-type beers. As one Burkinabé said, if you learned to drink beer in Bobo-Dioulasso, you drink Brakina. If it was in Ouaga, then it just has to be So.b.bra.

OUAGADOUGOU

pop 1.09 million

Most travellers end up liking Ouaga (as locals call it). While it could just be that the city's name rolls off the tongue in a wonderfully rhythmical African way, there's no mistaking the fact that, for the capital of the world's third-poorest country, Ouagadougou is surprisingly upbeat, friendly, and home to good hotels, restaurants and nightspots.

FESPACO

From humble origins in 1969, **Fespaco** (Festival Pan-African du Cinema; ☎ 50 39 87 01; www.fespaco.bf; Ave Kadiogo/Route de Bobo, Ouagadougou) has become Africa's most prestigious film festival. Fespaco, held in Ouagadougou every odd year in February/March, sees 20 African films selected to compete for the prestigious Étalon D'Or de Yennenga – Fespaco's equivalent of the Oscar.

Since its early days Fespaco has helped stimulate film production throughout Africa and built on the passion for films among Burkina Faso's film-literate population. It has also become such a major African cultural event that it attracts celebrities from around the world, and Ouagadougou is invariably spruced up for the occasion. Tickets and hotel rooms can be hard to find at this time, so book ahead.

ORIENTATION

Take your bearings from the unmistakable globe at the centre of the busy Place des Nations Unies, from where the city's five main boulevards lead. The city centre – where the majority of shops, hotels, restaurants and other services are located – lies west and southwest of this crossroads.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Librairie Diafa (☎ 50 30 65 47; Rue de l'Hôtel Ville; ☎ 8.30am–12.30pm & 3.30–6.30pm Mon–Sat) Sells a wide range of magazines and newspapers, including some in English.

Cultural Centres

Centre Culturel Français Georges Méliès (☎ 50 30 60 97; ccf@fasonet.bf; Ave de la Nation; ☎ 9am–noon & 3–6.15pm Tue–Sat) A full programme of concerts, exhibitions and movies.

Emergency

Commissariat Central (☎ 50 30 62 71; Ave Loudun) Police station.

Emergency (☎ 17, 18)

Internet Access

Cyber K (Ave Dimdoloobsom; per hr CFA500; ☎ 24hr Mon–Fri)

Espace Internauts (Ave Kwame N'Krumah; per hr CFA750; ☎ 7.30am–4am) Fastest connections in Burkina.

Medical Services

Hôpital Valgado (☎ 50 31 16 55; Ave d'Oubritenga)

Pharmacie de la Concorde (☎ 50 31 29 49; Ave Kwame N'Krumah)

Money

Biciab (1st fl, Ave Kwame N'Krumah) Has an efficient exchange office. ATMs (Visa only) are located here, and on Ave Loudun and Ave Yennenga.

early November; the latter attracts artisans and vendors from all over the continent.

SLEEPING

Centre d'Accueil des Soeurs Lauriers (Mission Catholique; ☎ 50 30 64 90; off Rue Joseph Badoua; d US\$7.20) The only budget beds that we recommend for lone women travellers, the Mission Catholique, within the cathedral compound, is simple, spotless and rooms come with a mosquito net, shower and fan.

Hôtel Yennenga (☎ 50 30 73 37; Ave Yennenga; s with fan & shared/private bathroom US\$11.20/13.30, d US\$13/15.15, s/d with private bathroom & air-con US\$20.75/22.60; 📶) Hôtel Yennenga represents top budget value and gets the thumbs-up from travellers. The rooms are simple, well-maintained and all come with mosquito nets.

Le Pavillon Vert (☎/fax 31 06 11; pavillonvert@iptinfor.bf; Ave de la Liberté; s/d with fan & shared bathroom US\$10.85/11.85, with private bathroom US\$18/20, with air-con US\$28/29; 📶) The closest Ouaga comes to a travellers' hang-out, Le Pavillon Vert is laid-back and highly recommended. The rooms (especially those with air-con) are spacious and all the facilities are spotless. The courtyard bar and restaurant are lovely.

Hôtel Ricardo (☎ 50 30 70 72; ricardo@cenatrin.bf; North of Barrage 2; s/d US\$55/64; 📶 📶 📶) With lovely, leafy grounds, a pleasant pool, a restaurant, disco, quiet location and satellite TV in all rooms – it's not hard to see why the colonial-style Ricardo is popular. The rooms are a touch spartan for the price, but spacious enough.

Hôtel les Palmiers (☎ 50 33 33 30; hotellespalmiers@cenatrin.bf; Rue Joseph Badoua; d from US\$54; 📶 📶 📶) This place is something special, blending the best of African style with European levels of comfort. The rooms are ranged around a tranquil compound and adorned with local decoration; the more expensive rooms have satellite TV and an internet connection for laptops.

EATING

Sindabal's (Ave Loudun; entrées US\$2-6, sandwiches & hamburgers US\$1.25-3, mains US\$3-7; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Most travellers who come to Ouaga on a budget end up at this low-key place with a varied menu (including spaghetti bolognese and some Lebanese dishes).

Chez Tante Propre (Ave Loudun) A wildly popular hole-in-the-wall that turns out yogurt sandwiches and simple rice dishes. There are plenty of other cheap places in the area.

Restaurant Akwaba (Ave Kwame N'Krumah; entrées US\$3-5, mains US\$5-8; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Friendly service and decent African food are the order of the day. The *foutou* (sticky yam or plantain paste) is strangely addictive and goes perfectly with the *poulet de kedjenou* (slowly simmered chicken with peppers and tomatoes, US\$6).

Restaurant de Chine (Ave Houari Boumediene; mains US\$5.50-11; 🍴 lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Ouaga's best Chinese restaurant promises fine cuts of meat and the freshest of ingredients. Not surprisingly, it's a popular place, especially on weekends when the extensive menu draws the crowds.

Espace Gondwana (Rue 13-14, off Blvd Onatel; mains mostly US\$6-9; 🍴 6pm-late) Tucked away in eastern Ouaga, this stunning restaurant has three dining rooms richly adorned with masks and traditional furniture. The food is splendid, from the *brochette de capitaine, sauce Hollandaise* (US\$11) to bite-sized tapas (six for US\$10).

DRINKING

Zaka (drinks from US\$1; 🍷 noon-1am) In the heart of Ouaga, Zaka is a hybrid live-performance venue and cultural centre, with groups playing traditional or modern music from around 8.30pm. Otherwise it's a pleasant open-air watering hole.

For late-night drinking, one of the liveliest areas is north of the city centre, around Ave de la Liberté. Our favourite is **Le Festival** (Ave Kouanda).

ENTERTAINMENT

Ciné Burkina (Ave Loudun) Built for Fespaco in the late 1960s, Ciné Burkina has a wide screen and good seats. It regularly shows African-produced films, as well as recent international releases and a diet of kung fu and Bollywood hands-in-the-air extravaganzas.

Nightclubs abound along Ave Kwame N'Krumah. **Jimmy's Discotheque** (Ave Kwame N'Krumah; admission US\$5) is an old favourite, with Western dance music with occasional African rhythms.

SHOPPING

Ouagadougou is an excellent place to shop. Following are good places:

Centre National d'Artisanat et d'Art (☎ 50 30 68 35; Ave Dimdolosom; 🍳 8am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri)

Espace Gondwana (☎ 50 36 11 24; Rue 13-14, off Blvd Onatel; 🍴 6pm-late)

Nuance (☎ 50 31 72 74; nuancebf@yahoo.fr; Ave Yennenga; 🍳 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun)

Village Artisanal de Ouaga (☎ 50 37 14 83; village.artisanal@cenatrin.bf; Blvd Tengsoba, known as Blvd Circulaire; 🍳 7am-7pm)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most buses leave from their own private depots, which are dotted around town. Most useful are **Transport Confort Voyageurs** (TCV; ☎ 50 39 87 77; Rue de la Mosquée), which has services to Bobo-Dioulasso (US\$11, five hours, five daily), and **STMB** (☎ 50 31 34 34; off Rue Commerce), which has good buses to Bobo-Dioulasso, Dori and Ouahigouya.

Most bush taxis and minibuses leave in the early morning from the *gare routière* (bus station), 4km south of the city centre.

GETTING AROUND

Sotrao city buses (US\$0.20) run throughout Ouaga with well-marked bus stops along major routes.

Shared taxis, mostly beaten-up old green Renaults, cost US\$4.50 for a ride within the city. The basic rate for a private taxi (orange or green), which you commission just for yourself, is US\$0.90 – more for longer journeys.

SOUTHERN BURKINA FASO

BOROMO

Halfway between Ouagadougou and Bobo, Boromo serves as the gateway to the **Parc National des Deux Balés**. Although the main section of the park is some distance from town, there are several areas close to Boromo that are great places to see elephants. On the road to the national park, 7km from Boromo, is the well-run **Campement Le Kaicedra** (☎ 76 62 17 78; http://kaicedra.waika9.com/camp.htm; 2-/4-bed bungalow US\$32/40, meals US\$10). Accommodation is in bungalows by the river, where elephants come to drink. The staff can arrange guides (US\$4), three-hour 4WD elephant safaris (US\$60 per 4WD) or *pirogue* (traditional canoe) trips (US\$2). They may even pick you up from the bus station in Boromo if you ask politely.

BOBO-DIOULASSO

pop 360,106
Bobo, as it's widely known, may be Burkina Faso's second-largest city, but it has a small-town charm and its quiet tree-lined streets

exude a languid, semitropical atmosphere that makes it a favourite rest stop for travellers. It has a thriving market, a fine mosque and a small popular quarter, Kibidwe, which is fascinating to roam around. There's also a lively music scene.

Information

Centre Culturel Français Henri Matisse (☎ 20 97 39 79; cnr Ave Général de Gaulle & Ave de la Concorde; 🍳 9am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) A monthly programme of concerts and exhibitions.

Emergency (☎ 17, 18)

Intelec Cyber Café (Ave Ouédraogo; per hr CFA300; 🍳 8am-midnight)

Librairie Diafa (☎ 20 97 10 19; Rue Joffre; 🍳 8am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

Sights

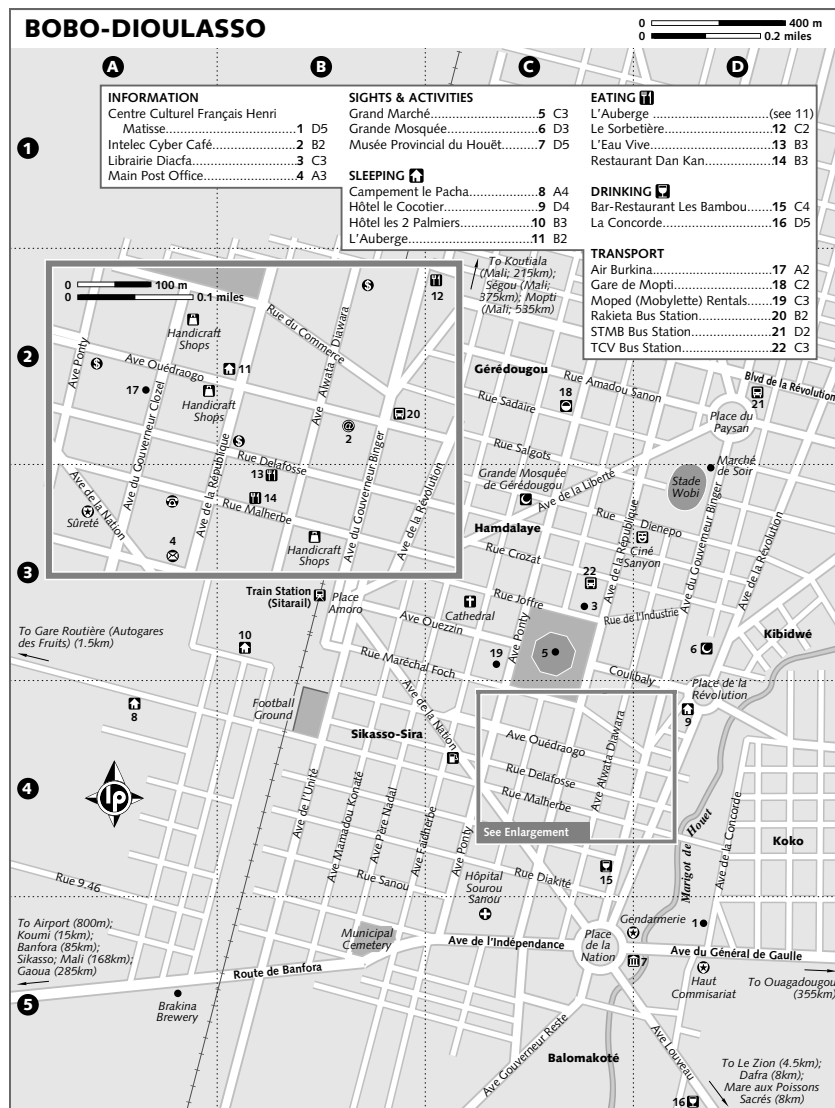
Bobo's **Grande Mosquée** (admission to grounds CFA1000), built in 1893, is an outstanding example of Sahel-style mud architecture and is easily Bobo's stand-out sight. Although entry is forbidden for non-Muslims, it's the exterior that is so captivating, especially at sunset when the façade turns golden. A powerful sense of community life revolves around the mosque and much of it comes from **Kibidwe**, the oldest part of the city that straddles the river. Bobo-Dioulasso's centrepiece, the expansive **Grand Marché**, is Burkina's most atmospheric market.

The small but interesting **Musée Provincial du Houët** (Place de la Nation; admission US\$2; 🍳 9am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sat) showcases masks, statues and ceremonial dress from all over Burkina Faso, and there are full-scale examples of traditional buildings in the grounds.

Sleeping

Campement le Pacha (☎ 20 98 09 54; lepachabo@yahoo.fr; Rue Malherbe; camping per person/moto/car/campervan US\$3/3/4/6, s/d from US\$8/16; 📶 📶) The Franco Swiss-owned Campement le Pacha is arrayed around one of Bobo's prettiest courtyards, with a veritable forest of palms and potted plants. The rooms are among the nicest budget beds in Burkina Faso.

Le Zion (☎ 78 86 27 25; cbodelet@voila.fr; r US\$6-11) Some 5km south of the town centre, Le Zion offers simple, comfy rooms, live music, a shady mango tree, home-cooked meals, *mobylette* (moped) rental, an artisan's workshop, loads of advice on the surrounding area and a wonderfully chilled ambience. It can be difficult



to find, so call and staff will pick you up from the city centre.

Hôtel le Cocotier (☎ 70 75 90 09; Place de la Révolution; d with fan & without bathroom from US\$9) This is Bobo's best budget hotel in the city centre, with a good mix of bare but tidy rooms (all with mosquito nets), friendly staff and a rooftop bar-terrace.

L'Auberge (☎ 20 97 17 67; hoberge@fasonet.bf; Ave Ouédraogo; s/d/ste US\$52/56/86; 🚿 🚿) Bobo's best hotel. L'Auberge is a well-run place with large, comfortable rooms, many of which have balconies overlooking the good-sized pool and fragrant, palm-filled garden.

Hôtel les 2 Palmiers (☎ 20 97 27 59; fax 20 97 76 45; off Rue Malherbe; d from US\$58; 📶 🚿) This fine hotel

has traditional masks in all the public spaces and the rooms are spacious, nicely decorated and quiet. The location is better than it looks on the map – an easy walk into town but on a nice quiet street.

Eating

Restaurant Dan Kan (Rue Malherbe; entrées & soups US\$1.50-3, mains US\$1-5; 🚿 8.30am-3.30pm & 6-10.30pm) With agreeable outdoor (but covered) tables, very reasonable prices and a varied menu, Restaurant Dan Kan is an excellent deal. It's kept spotlessly clean and service is attentive.

L'Eau Vive (Rue Delafosse; mains US\$4-8; 🚿 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Run by nuns, L'Eau Vive offers imaginative French cooking and a varied menu. Main dishes come with potatoes or vegetables, and the dining area offers a star-filled canopy of the night sky.

L'Auberge (☎ 20 97 17 67; Ave Ouédraogo; 3-course menu US\$10; 🚿 lunch & dinner) Far and away the best restaurant, with everything from sardine salads to crêpes and flourishes like fresh basil and a garlic-and-chive butter to accompany your entrecôte. If you've been on the road for a while, it will all taste like paradise.

La Sorbetière (Ave du Gouverneur Binger; 🚿 8am-10pm) Try this place for pastries and snacks.

Drinking & Entertainment

The popular quarter of Balomakoté, which is rich in traditional music, offers great music in small, unpretentious *buvettes* (small cafés that double up as drinking places), where you can drink *chopolo*, the local millet-based beer. Elsewhere, bars we like for a drink include **Bar-Restaurant Les Bambou** (Ave du Gouverneur Binger; admission US\$1.10; 🚿 6am-2.30pm & 6pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 6pm-midnight Sun) and **La Concorde** (Ave Louveau).

Getting There & Away

The bus companies **STMB** (☎ 20 97 08 78; Blvd de la Révolution) and **TCV** (☎ 20 97 23 37; Rue Crozat) have the best buses to Ouagadougou (US\$11, five hours), with five daily departures each. For getting around the southwest, **Rakieta** (☎ 20 97 1891; Ave Ouédraogo) is a good local company that has regular departures to Banfora (US\$4, 1½ hours, 10 daily) and Gaoua (US\$7.50, around five hours, two daily).

Getting Around

To hire a bicycle, ask at your hotel or around the market. A reasonable rental price is US\$3.75 per day. For a *mobylette*, expect to

pay at least US\$7.50 per day, and US\$11 for a motorbike.

Shared taxis are plentiful and most trips within town cost US\$0.40 to US\$0.55. Prices increase after 10pm and luggage costs extra.

BANFORA

pop 60,288

Banfora is a dusty, sleepy little town in one of the more beautiful areas in Burkina Faso. As such, it serves as a good base for exploring the lush green surrounding countryside.

For the nicest beds in town, look no further than **Hôtel la Canne à Sucre** (☎ 20 91 01 07; hotelcannasucree@fasonet.bf; off Rue de la Poste; d with air-con US\$34, 4-bed apt US\$89; 🚿 🚿), an unexpected touch of class in Banfora with immaculate rooms and a super restaurant. The next best alternative is **Hôtel le Comaré** (☎ 20 91 01 51; Rue de la Poste; d from US\$13; 🚿).

Banfora's other stand-out restaurant is **McDonald** (off Rue de la Préfecture; entrées US\$1-2, mains mostly US\$1-4; 🚿 7am-10pm Thu-Tue, 7am-1pm Wed), with enormous servings of *brochettes* (kebabs), fish, pasta and hamburgers.

Rakieta (☎ 20 91 03 07; Rue de la Poste) has regular departures for Bobo-Dioulasso (one way/return US\$2/4, 1½ hours, 10 daily) and Gaoua (US\$6, 3½ hours, two daily). **STMB** (☎ 20 91 05 81; Rue de la Poste) also leaves five times daily for Bobo-Dioulasso.

AROUND BANFORA

Just 7km west of Banfora, **Lac Tengréla** (admission US\$4) is home to a variety of birdlife and, if you're lucky, hippos. The admission price includes a *pirogue* trip.

Some 15km northwest of Banfora, **Karfiguélé Waterfalls** (Cascades de Karfiguélé; admission US\$2) are reached through a magnificent avenue of mango trees.

The **Sindou Peaks** (Pics de Sindou; admission US\$2) are a narrow, stunningly craggy chain that extends northwest from Banfora. The tortuous cones of these structures, sculpted and blasted by the elements, were left behind when the surrounding softer rocks eroded away. This area is ideal for a short steep stroll, a day hike or even a couple of days' trekking, for which you'll need to be self-sufficient.

GAOUA

Gaoua is a good base for exploring Lobi country, a region that's culturally distinct from the rest of the country. There's a vital

Sunday market and, if you like your music traditional and untainted, Gaoua has plenty of great *boîtes* (informal nightclubs) with live music. There's also the small **Musée de Poni** (☎ 20 87 01 69; admission US\$2) devoted to Lobi culture.

Hôtel Hala (☎ 20 87 01 21; d from US\$18) is the town's only habitable hotel and, thankfully, it's a reasonable if unexciting place. It also serves excellent Lebanese fare. It's just outside of town on the road to Banfora.

Rakieta (☎ 20 87 02 18) has a twice-daily service to Bobo-Dioulasso (US\$8, five hours) via Banfora (US\$6, 3½ hours).

TIÉBÉLÉ

Tiébélé, 40km east of Pô via a dirt track, is a wonderful detour if you're travelling up from Ghana, but it's also well worth visiting from Ouagadougou. Set in the heart of the green, low-lying Gourounsi country, Tiébélé is famous for its colourful and fortress-like windowless traditional houses. Once a Gourounsi capital, Tiébélé has an exceptional **chiefs compound** (admission US\$3), as well as other beautiful structures throughout the town.

Auberge Kunkolo (☎ 50 36 97 38, 76 53 44 77; dm US\$8, s/d with fan & without bathroom US\$16/18) is French-run and is a wonderful Tiébélé haven.

From Ouagadougou, STMB has five daily buses to Pô (US\$4, three hours).

NORTHERN BURKINA FASO

DORI

pop 27,380

Dori is dusty and has few charms of its own, other than as a quintessentially somnambulant and dusty Sahel town – most people come here only as a means of reaching Gorom-Gorom, two hours further north. If you do stay long enough to visit the market, one speciality is the prized Dori blankets, woven from wool provided by the seminomadic pastoralists who camp around the town.

Hébergement de Dori (d US\$15; ☒) offers simple *campement* (guesthouse) accommodation at the eastern end of town. In the centre of town, **Auberge Populaire** (Chez Tanti Véronique; d with/without shower US\$8.50/7) is cheap, basic and noisy. You can eat simply at **Café la Joie de Vivre** (riz gras US\$0.50, spaghetti US\$7).

Numerous bus companies run between Dori and Ouagadougou (US\$9, five to seven hours). **STMB** (☎ 40 66 98 67) is generally the best. For Gorom-Gorom, it's shake, rattle and roll on a rough track all the way. Bush taxis (US\$4, two hours) are plentiful on market day; most pull out by 8am.

GOROM-GOROM

pop 6840

Gorom-Gorom's Thursday **market** is the most colourful in Burkina Faso, and one of the best in all West Africa. Its charm lies in the fact that it's an authentic local market, drawing traders – Tuareg, Bella, Songhaï and Fulani among others – from all around the surrounding countryside. As such, tourists are simply part of the menagerie. The market gets into full swing by about 11am.

Upon entering the town, you have to register at the *commissariat* (police station) and pay a 'tourist tax' of US\$2.

The best place to stay and eat is **Le Campement Rissa** (☎ 40 46 93 96; r from US\$7.50), a simple, family-run *campement*, where you can organise trips into the surrounding desert.

On market day, Sogebaf, CTI and ZSR buses depart from Gorom-Gorom soon after 2pm bound for Ouagadougou (US\$11, eight hours). Bush taxis head back to Dori (US\$4, two hours) around 7pm after the market's all said and done.

Ouahigouya

pop 61,096

Most people stay in Ouahigouya (wae-gee-ya), 182km northwest of Ouagadougou by sealed road, only long enough to find onward transport to Mali.

A short walk northeast from Ouahigouya's market, the expansive but modest **Maison du Naba Kango** dates back to the days of the Yatengo kingdom, a pre-colonial rival of the principal Mossi kingdom, centred in Ouagadougou.

Hôtel Dunia (☎ 40 55 05 95; Rue de Paris; s/d with fan US\$11/15, d with air-con from US\$27; ☒) is a wonderfully homey place to stay and the cooking is easily the best in town. In the evening you can get grilled chicken and *brochettes* at **Caïman Bar & Restaurant**.

There are almost hourly departures to Ouagadougou (US\$6, two to three hours), but only **STMB** (☎ 40 55 00 59) has buses (six daily) that you can be sure will not break down.

For details of getting to Mali, see p275.

BURKINA FASO DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso and, to a lesser extent, Banfora and Ouahigouya have excellent accommodation. Elsewhere, choice is extremely limited.

Expect to pay US\$6 to US\$7.50 for a bed in a dorm, while singles/doubles in a decent cheapie cost US\$6/9 to US\$15/18. Midrange hotels, where you'll get a private bathroom and TV, cost US\$18/22 for a single/double to US\$60/72. In Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso you pay a *taxe de séjour*, also known as a *taxe communale*, at each place you stay, a once-off payment of US\$1 per person.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks open from 7am to 11am and 3.30pm to 5pm Monday to Friday; Ecobank is open 7.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and 8am to noon Saturday. Bars are open from noon until late, and nightclubs from 9pm until late. Restaurants open from 11.30am to 3pm and 6.30pm to 10.30pm. Shops open from 7.30am to noon and 3pm to 5.30pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 1pm Saturday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Burkina Faso is one of the safest countries in West Africa. Crime isn't unknown, particularly around big markets, cinemas and *gares routières*, but it's usually confined to petty theft and pickpocketing.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Burkina Faso Embassies & Consulates

In West Africa, Burkina Faso has embassies in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria. For more details, see the Directory section for each relevant country chapter. Following are embassies further afield:

Belgium (☎ 02-345 99 12; www.ambassadeduburkina.be; 16 Place Guy-d'Arezzo, Brussels 1180)

Canada (☎ 613-238 4796; www.burkinafaso.ca; 48, Chemin Range, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8J4)

France (☎ 01 43 59 90 63; www.ambaburkinafrance.org; 159 Blvd Haussmann, 75008 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-301 05 990; Karolingerplatz 10-11, 14052 Berlin)

USA (☎ 202-332 5577; www.burkinaembassy-usa.org; 2340 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

PRACTICALITIES

- Electricity supply is 220V and plugs are of the European two-round-pin variety.
- International versions of French- and (a few) English-language publications are available in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso.
- BBC World Service (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice) is on 99.2 FM in Ouagadougou. For French-language FM services, tune in to Horizon FM (104.4) and RFI (94).
- Burkina Faso uses the metric system.

Embassies & Consulates in Burkina Faso

For details of getting visas for neighbouring countries, see p274. Embassies and consulates in Ouagadougou include the following:

Canada (☎ 50 31 18 94; ouaga@dfait-maeci.gc.ca; 586 Rue Agostino Neto) Represents Australia in consular matters.

Côte d'Ivoire (☎ 50 31 82 28; cnr Ave Raoul Follereau & Blvd du Burkina Faso)

France (☎ 50 30 67 74; www.ambafrance-bf.org; Ave de l'Indépendance)

Germany (☎ 67 30 67 31; amb.allemagne@fasonet.bf; Rue Joseph Badoua)

Ghana (☎ 50 30 76 35; Ave d'Oubritenga) Opposite the Unesco office.

Mali (☎ 50 38 19 22; 2569 Ave Bassawarga) Just south of Ave de la Résistance.

UK (☎ 50 30 73 23; fax 50 30 59 00; Hôtel Yibi, cnr Ave Kwame N'Krumah & Rue du Dr Gourisson) British honorary consul.

USA (☎ 50 30 67 23; www.ouagadougou.usembassy.gov; 622 Ave Raoul Follereau)

There was no Niger embassy or consulate in Burkina Faso at the time of writing.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

For details of the festivals held in Ouagadougou, see p267. In March/April of even years, Bobo hosts the **Semaine Nationale de la Culture** (www.snc.gov.bf), a week of music, dance and theatre.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January

Women's Day 8 March

Good Friday & Easter Monday March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Ascension Day 4 to 5 August

Anniversary of Sankara's Overthrow 15 October

All Saints Day 1 November

Christmas Day 25 December

Burkina Faso also celebrates Islamic holidays, which change each year. See p1106 for details of Islamic holidays.

INTERNET ACCESS

Far and away the best connections are in Ouagadougou (p265), where you'll pay US\$0.60 to US\$1.40 per hour. In Bobo, they're painfully slow, while elsewhere they often charge by the minute.

MAPS

Burkina Faso (1:1,000,000), a map published by the French-based Institut Géographique National (IGN), is the most widely available. It's available at the **Institut Géographique du Burkina** (IGB; ☎ 50 32 48 23; Ave de l'Indépendance) in Ouagadougou. IGB and Librairie Diacfa in Ouagadougou sell detailed city maps (US\$11) for Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso.

MONEY

The unit of currency in Burkina Faso is the West African CFA franc.

Banks that will change money (usually euros in cash only) with a minimum of fuss include Banque Internationale du Burkina (BIB), Ecobank and Banque Internationale pour le Commerce, l'Industrie et l'Agriculture du Burkina (Biciab).

Biciab's ATMs in larger cities issue easy cash advances against Visa (but not MasterCard), although transaction fees are prohibitive; take out as much as the machine lets you each time.

TELEPHONE & FAX

You can make international phone calls at Onatel offices from 7am to 10pm daily. A three-minute call costs US\$4.80 (US\$1.50 for each additional minute) to Europe or the USA, and US\$7.50 (US\$2.30 for each additional minute) to Australia. The only place where you may be able to make internet-connected calls is at **Espace Internautes** (Ave Kwame N'Krumah; ☎ 7.30am-4am) in Ouagadougou.

The **main post office** (fax 50 33 81 30; off Ave de la Nation; ☎ 7.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) in Ouagadougou has a fax restante service.

Most mobile phones from European countries work in Burkina Faso; local SIM cards cost from US\$36. Local mobile companies include Telemob, Celtel or Telecel.

VISAS

Everyone except Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) nationals needs a visa. You can buy a tourist visa at Ouagadougou's airport, Aéroport International d'Ouagadougou, for US\$18 (paid in local currency; there's an exchange booth at the airport). Travellers also report that visas are issued at Burkina Faso's land borders for the same price, although they're invariably issued on the spot.

Burkina Faso embassies usually require at least two photos, may ask for proof of yellow fever vaccination and charge US\$45 to US\$75. In countries where there is no Burkina Faso embassy, French embassies sometimes issue 10-day visas on their behalf.

Visas for Onward Travel

Benin, Niger and Togo do not have embassies in Burkina Faso. If you just want to slip over the border to Benin, you can get a 48-hour visa at the border post for US\$18.

Visas for the following neighbouring countries can be obtained in Burkina Faso. See p273 for embassy information.

Côte d'Ivoire Single-entry, 30-day visa (US\$18) requires two photos.

Ghana One-month visa (US\$27) is issued within 24 hours and requires four photos.

Mali One-month visa (US\$36) is issued within the hour.

TRANSPORT IN BURKINA FASO

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The country's two international airports are Aéroport International d'Ouagadougou and Aéroport International Borgo (Bobo-Dioulasso). The following airlines have offices in Ouagadougou:

Afriqiyah (8U; ☎ 50 30 16 52; www.afriqiyah.aero)

Air Algérie (AH; ☎ 50 31 23 01; www.airalgerie.dz)

Air Burkina (2J; ☎ 50 30 76 76; www.air-burkina.com)

Air France (AF; ☎ 50 30 63 65; www.airfrance.com)

Air Ivoire (VU; ☎ 50 30 11 95; www.airivoire.com)

Air Sénégal International (V7; ☎ 50 31 39 05; www.air-senegal-international.com)

Ghana Airways (GH; ☎ 50 30 41 46; www.ghana-airways.com)

Point Afrique (☎ 50 33 16 20; www.point-afrique.com)

Land

The main border crossings are at Niangoloko for Côte d'Ivoire; Porga (on the Beninese side) for Benin; 15km south of Pô or Hamale (on the Ghanaian side) for Ghana; Sinkasse (on the Togolese side) for Togo; east of Kantchari for Niger; and Koloko or west of Tiou for Mali. Borders tend to be closed by 5.30pm or 6.30pm at the latest. Remember that Benin and Niger are one hour ahead of Burkina Faso time.

BENIN

A TCV bus runs every Sunday from Ouagadougou to Cotonou (US\$36). The alternative is to take a bus (eg STMB) to Fada N'Gourma (US\$7, five hours), from where infrequent bush taxis and minibuses lie in wait. Minibuses leave for Natitingou from the Total petrol station immediately north of Zaka on Ave Yennenga in Ouagadougou.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Passenger train services were suspended at the time of writing, cross-border traffic was minimal and the border frequently closed.

GHANA

A Ghanaian Intercity STC bus leaves Ouagadougou's main *gare routière* three mornings a week bound for Accra (US\$29, 1000km) via Tamale (US\$20, 363km) and Kumasi (US\$23, 720km). Purchase tickets a day in advance.

STMB has five daily buses from Ouagadougou to Pô (US\$4, three hours), 15km from the border, from where there's infrequent transport to Paga (US\$3) and on to Bolgatanga in Ghana (US\$2.50).

The other frequently used border crossing is at Hamale in the southwest of Burkina Faso. Rakieta has a daily bus between Bobo-Dioulasso and Hamale (US\$11.20), departing from Bobo at 2.30pm.

MALI

Almost every bus company offers a daily service to Bamako from Bobo-Dioulasso (US\$16.50, 15 hours), leaving Bobo at 1pm or Ouagadougou (US\$27) at 8am. All travel via Sikasso and Segou and arrive after midnight.

If you're heading from Bobo-Dioulasso to Mopti, Peugeot taxis (US\$17, 15 hours) leave

from Bobo's Gare de Mopti from about 7am or in the early evening.

If you're heading for Dogon country, STMB buses depart from Ouahigouya for Koro (US\$4.50, two to four hours). From Koro you'll need to connect by bush taxi to Bankass and then Mopti.

NIGER

The Niger-registered SNTV bus runs between Ouagadougou and Niamey (US\$18, nine to 11 hours) a couple of times a week from the *gare routière*. Minibuses from Ouagadougou to Niamey (US\$14.60, 10 to 12 hours) leave from the Total petrol station immediately north of Zaka in Ouagadougou.

TOGO

Sogebaf has a daily service between Ouagadougou and Lomé (US\$23 to US\$27, 18 hours), while at least three Togolese companies offer a similar service from Ouagadougou's *gare routière*.

There are direct bush taxis from Ouagadougou's *gare routière* to Lomé (US\$27, 24 to 36 hours), but consider breaking up the journey en route. Minibuses to the Togolese border often leave in the morning from the Total petrol station immediately north of Zaka in Ouagadougou.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Air Burkina has at least three flights a week between Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso (US\$64).

Bus

Buses are the most reliable and comfortable way to get around. STMB buses are generally better maintained and more reliable than the host of private companies tormenting Burkina's roads. TGV is the exception, with the best buses, but it only travels between Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. Buses almost always operate with guaranteed seating and fixed departure times.

Bush Taxi & Minibus

Bush taxis and minibuses, mostly ageing Peugeot 504s, cover major towns, and outlying communities that large buses don't serve. Most leave from the *gares routières*, and morning is the best time to find them. Minibuses are usually a third cheaper than Peugeot taxis, but can take an age to fill up.

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