

Chad

Long seen by travellers as a place to get through rather than visit, few visitors in Chad do more than spend a couple of days in N'Djaména, the busy, broken-down capital, on their way between Niger and Cameroon. And as the government increasingly loses its grip on the nation, travellers are getting fewer and further between. Even many NGO workers dread drawing this assignment.

Travelling here certainly poses many problems: few roads are paved, it gets hot as hell in summer, the costs are among the continent's highest, and the police and soldiers are quite nervous these days. But, of course, there are rewards in this struggling but interesting country for those who take the Chadian challenge and you will soon discover a wealth of warmth and culture beneath the rough exterior.

Known for its endless Sahelian expanses, Chad has a few surprises up its sleeve, too, like boat rides on Lake Chad or strolling the shady streets of southern towns where the dusty landscape, fed by small rivers, is interspersed with incongruously green scenes providing a quasi-tropical break from the rigours of the road. The best destinations – the otherworldly desert landscapes of Ennedi and the teeming wildlife of Zakouma National Park – lie way beyond backpacker budgets but are both world class.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 1,284,000 sq km
- **ATMs** Should work with Visa cards soon
- **Borders** Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, Niger and Nigeria all open; Sudan closed; Libya and CAR not recommended
- **Budget** From US\$40 per day in N'Djaména, US\$20 to US\$30 per day in other towns
- **Capital** N'Djaména
- **Languages** French, Arabic and more than 120 local languages
- **Money** Central African CFA; US\$1 = CFA498
- **Population** 9 million
- **Seasons** Dry (October to May), wet (June to September)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 235; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1
- **Visas** Must be obtained before arrival



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Zakouma National Park** (p546) Keep an eye out, this is one of the best places to see wildlife in Central Africa.
- **Gaoui** (p544) Explore this fascinating village just minutes from N'Djaména.
- **Sarh** (p546) Chill out along the Chari River.
- **Bol** (p547) Get out on Lake Chad from this frontier market town.
- **Ennedi** (p547) Marvel at dramatic desert scenery and rock formations.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Chad has three distinct climatic zones. In the tropical south, temperatures usually range from 20°C to 25°C, but can rise to 40°C before the rains. The centre, where N'Djaména and Lake Chad are located, often exceeds 45°C before the rains, and temperatures can get even higher in the north.

November to January is the coolest and thus best time for general travel, unless you are here for Zakouma National Park, then it's March and April (the hottest months). It is fascinating to see the Sahel turn green in July, but travel in the rainy season is not pleasant. You can't believe how waterlogged the capital becomes during July and August and road travel elsewhere slows dramatically.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Visit N'Djaména (p542) and Gaoui (p544).
- **One Week** Visit N'Djaména and Gaoui while you get your permits in order, then

HOW MUCH?

- **Small calabash bowl** US\$1
- **100km Land Cruiser ride** US\$10
- **Coke** US\$0.50
- **30 minutes of internet use** US\$1
- **Handmade leather sandals** US\$4

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.20
- **1.5L bottled water** US\$1.20
- **Bottle of Gala beer** US\$1.20
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$10
- **Small bag of peanuts** US\$0.05

WARNING

At the time of publication rebel activity was intensifying and Chad appeared to be heading into all-out civil war, though fighting had so far been largely limited to the east. Check the situation very carefully before travelling here.

head north to Mao (p547) and Bol (p547), taking a boat trip out on Lake Chad if you can, or south to Moundou (p546) and Sarh (p546).

- **Two Weeks** Add Zakouma National Park (p546) to the one-week itinerary, or visit towns both north and south of N'Djaména. Two weeks is the minimum time needed to properly explore Ennedi (p547).

HISTORY

Dominated historically by slave-trading Arab Muslims from the northern regions, Chad is primarily an agricultural nation with over 80% of the population living at subsistence level. Its recent history was shaped when the French began taking an interest in central and western Africa in the 1900s. By 1913 the country was fully colonised: sadly the new rulers didn't really know what to do with their conquest, and investment all but dried up after a few years, leaving much of the territory almost entirely undeveloped.

When independence was granted in 1960, a southerner became Chad's first head of state. Unfortunately, President François Tombalbaye was not the best choice. By arresting opposition leaders and banning political parties, he provoked a series of conspiracies in the Muslim north, the violent repression of which quickly escalated into full-blown guerrilla war. For the next quarter of a century, Chadian politics was defined by armed struggles, shifting alliances, coups and private armies, overseen and often exacerbated by France and Libya, who took a keen interest in the area. In addition, the Sahel drought of the 1970s and early 1980s destroyed centuries-old patterns of existence and cultivation, causing large-scale migration to urban centres.

In 1975 Tombalbaye was assassinated, and succeeded by General Malloum, a fellow southerner. Over US\$1 million in cash was found in Tombalbaye's residence, along with plans to proclaim himself emperor.

Modern Politics

The Government of National Unity was then formed by Malloum and Hissène Habré (a former northern rebel commander); it was a tenuous alliance between two men who shared little more than mutual distrust. The resulting internal power struggle in 1979 pitted north against south, and Muslim against Christian

or animist, all colliding with destructive force in the capital, where thousands of civilians were massacred. Eventually Malloum fled the country, and Goukouni Oueddei – the son of a tribal chieftain from northwestern Chad and an arch-enemy of Habré – took over.

In 1980 Libyan forces supporting Oueddei briefly occupied N'Djaména. The French

army drove them northwards, leaving Habré as the nominal ruler of Chad. A stalemate ensued with the country divided in half, with neither France nor Libya willing to risk an all-out confrontation.

In 1987, both foreign powers agreed to withdraw their forces; however, Libya, whose forces had occupied northern Chad and the uranium-rich Aouzou Strip since 1977, reneged and attacked Habré's army. Armed with little more than swords and machine guns, the Chadian forces pushed the better-equipped Libyans across the border.

In 1990 Idriss Deby, a northern Muslim warlord in self-imposed exile in Sudan, swept back into Chad with a private army of 2000 soldiers and Libyan backing. Habré fled to Senegal (The 'African Pinochet', as Human Rights Watch calls him, is currently facing trial in Dakar to answer for his widespread use of torture and political murder), leaving Deby with a clear run to N'Djaména and the presidency of his war-ravaged country, which Deby consolidated by winning the first-ever presidential elections in 1996. While this ballot was widely regarded as rigged, the parliamentary elections a year later were considered much fairer. In 1998 a new rebellion broke out in the north, led by the Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJT) under Deby's former minister Youssouf Togoimi.

Although Chad has enjoyed relative peace and close relations with Libya over the past few years (despite regular guerrilla raids in the Tibesti region of northern Chad), politically, little has changed. To nobody's surprise, Deby won the May 2001 presidential elections by a comfortable margin, although results from a quarter of the polling stations had to be cancelled because of 'irregularities'.

Chad Today

In 2004 Chad became an oil exporter. The World Bank helped fund the 1000km-long pipeline crossing Cameroon to the coast only after Chad agreed to dedicate 80% of oil income to reducing poverty. Even before Deby broke this agreement at the start of 2006, there was virtually no change for average citizens in what Transparency International ranks as the world's most corrupt country.

But the World Bank is not Deby's biggest worry. Several rebel groups based in and surely supported by Sudan, and some led by members of Deby's family and former senior

army officers, have their eyes on N'Djaména. They almost got it in April 2006 after launching an unsuccessful attack on the capital. The government was helped by the incompetence of the rebels, who had to ask directions when they arrived and ended up at the empty Palais du Peuple (the parliament) instead of the Palais du President.

Three weeks after the failed coup and one year after the constitutional two-term presidential limit was overturned, Deby won a presidential election boycotted by the opposition and most citizens. Power in Chad has always changed hands by the bullet, not the ballot, and most observers expect a rebel takeover sooner rather than later. While most Chadians would welcome this, there is concern that the rebel alliance will falter after taking control, bringing 1979-style anarchy, or perhaps worse. Already-emerging coordination between Chadian rebels and Sudan's Janjaweed, the militia behind the genocide in Darfur, have created 50,000 Chadian refugees in their own country.

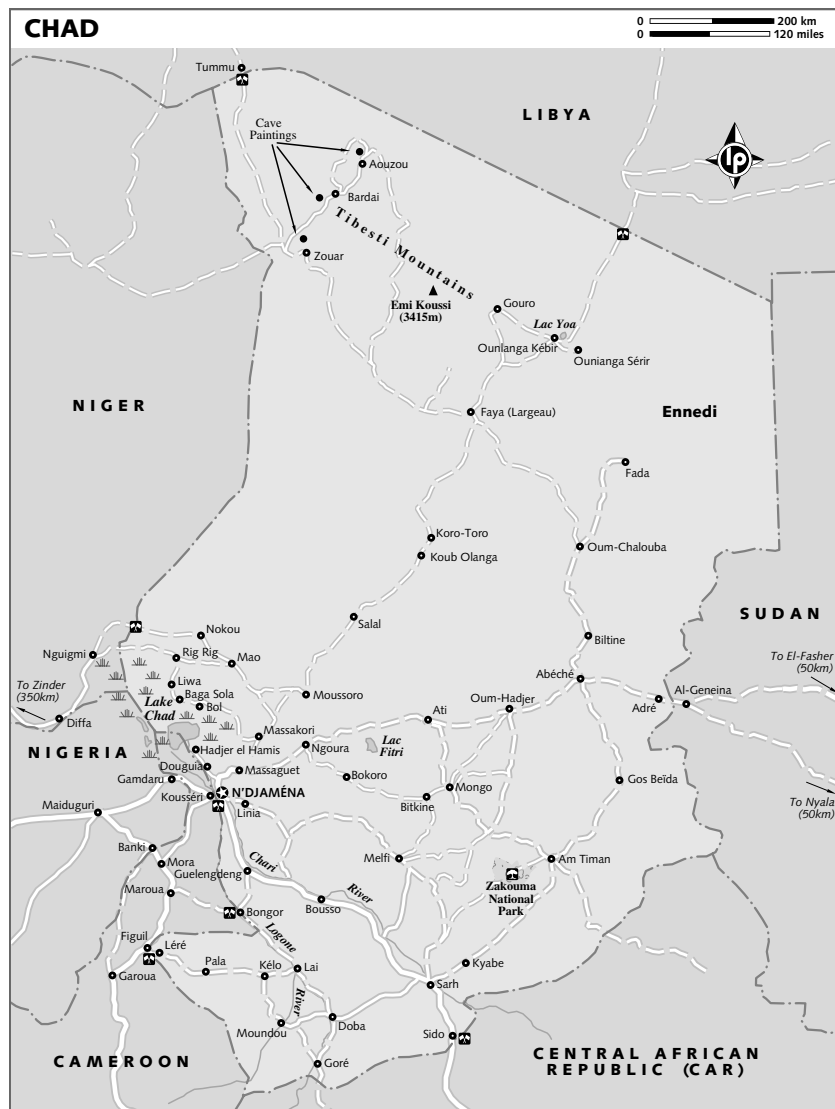
CULTURE

'Chadians are traumatised', one young man told us when we asked why people so rarely complain about the country's sorry state for affairs. Chad's history of war, corruption and oppression is appalling, even by African standards, and it has drained most people of hope. 'How can you have hope if you can't trust anybody?' he added. Even those who, a few years back, believed the flow of oil would bring change have humbly accepted their friends' and families' I-told-you-so's.

Surprisingly, for such a subsistence economy, education is looked upon favourably, and literacy stands at 48% (it's 18% in neighbouring Niger). Many wealthy Cameroonians send their children to N'Djaména to complete their baccalaureate. Freedom of speech is also fiercely, if somewhat vainly, defended by various private newspapers and journals in N'Djaména. The arrest of the editors of *Notre Temps* in 2003 inspired vigorous protests.

PEOPLE

The north is populated by people of Arab descent, as well as nomadic Peul-Fulani and Toubou. The black Africans are in the majority in the south, and have traditionally dominated business and the civil service. The difference between these two broad



groups is profound – the Christian (35% of the population) or animist southerners are mostly peasant farmers, tilling fertile land, while the northern Muslims (51%) are desert-dwelling pastoralists. Still, there is virtually no discord between them.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Most of the crafts you'll see are imported from Nigeria and Cameroon, though the leather work and pottery is usually made locally, and many of the large wool rugs come from Abéché and other desert towns. The embroidered wall hangings and decorated calabash bowls make good souvenirs.

ENVIRONMENT

Physically you couldn't mistake landlocked Chad for anything except a Sahel country, though the far south turns a little tropical. The northern deserts include the Tibesti Mountains, which rise to the peak of Emi Koussi (3415m), the highest point in the Sahara.

FOOD & DRINK

The food in Chad is typical of the region: tiny street stalls dish up cheap meals of rice, beans and soup or stew, while indoor restaurants offer omelettes, liver, salads, brochettes, fish and *nachif* (minced meat in sauce). To drink you have the usual range of *sucrieries* (soft drinks), including the local Top brand, and fresh *jus*, fruit concoctions with more resemblance to smoothies than normal juice; bear in mind they're usually made with local water and ice. Beer is the favoured poison in bars, with a choice of local brews, Gala and Chari, or Cameroonian Castel. Also popular is *bilibili*, a millet beer; *cochette* is a low-alcohol version.

N'DJAMÉNA

pop 721,000

You'll face stark contrasts between modern and traditional at every step in N'Djaména. Thanks to Chad's rural exodus the capital is growing fast – from a population of 37,000 in 1950 it is expected to be home to nearly two million within a decade – but it still often feels more like a village than a city with mud houses remaining the norm and farmers working the banks of the Chari River.

The country's only large city buzzes at night, both literally and figuratively, as hundreds of generators take the strain off the city's beleaguered power grid and feed the sound systems of some of Central Africa's most vibrant bars.

ORIENTATION

The airport is under a kilometre from downtown; despite the small distance involved, you'll have to bargain hard to get a taxi there or back for less than US\$10, particularly at night.

The city's two distinct sectors highlight its colonial roots. To the west of the Marché Central is the commercial district sheltering well-to-do Chadians and a small expat community in its wide, leafy streets. The western end of Ave Charles de Gaulle is a 1km strip boasting banks, airline offices, and similar services. On the other side, the main residential areas consist mostly of mud-brick houses with little in the way of modern amenities but plenty of character.

INFORMATION

Bookshop

Librairie Al Akhbaar (Ave Charles de Gaulle) Sells a good selection of books and journals in French, plus a handful of English-language newspapers and magazines.

Internet Access

Internet access is widely available, with most places charging US\$2 per hour. The following are reliably fast.

Cyber-Poste (main post office, Blvd de Paris; per hr US\$2; ☎ 8am–3pm Mon–Sat)

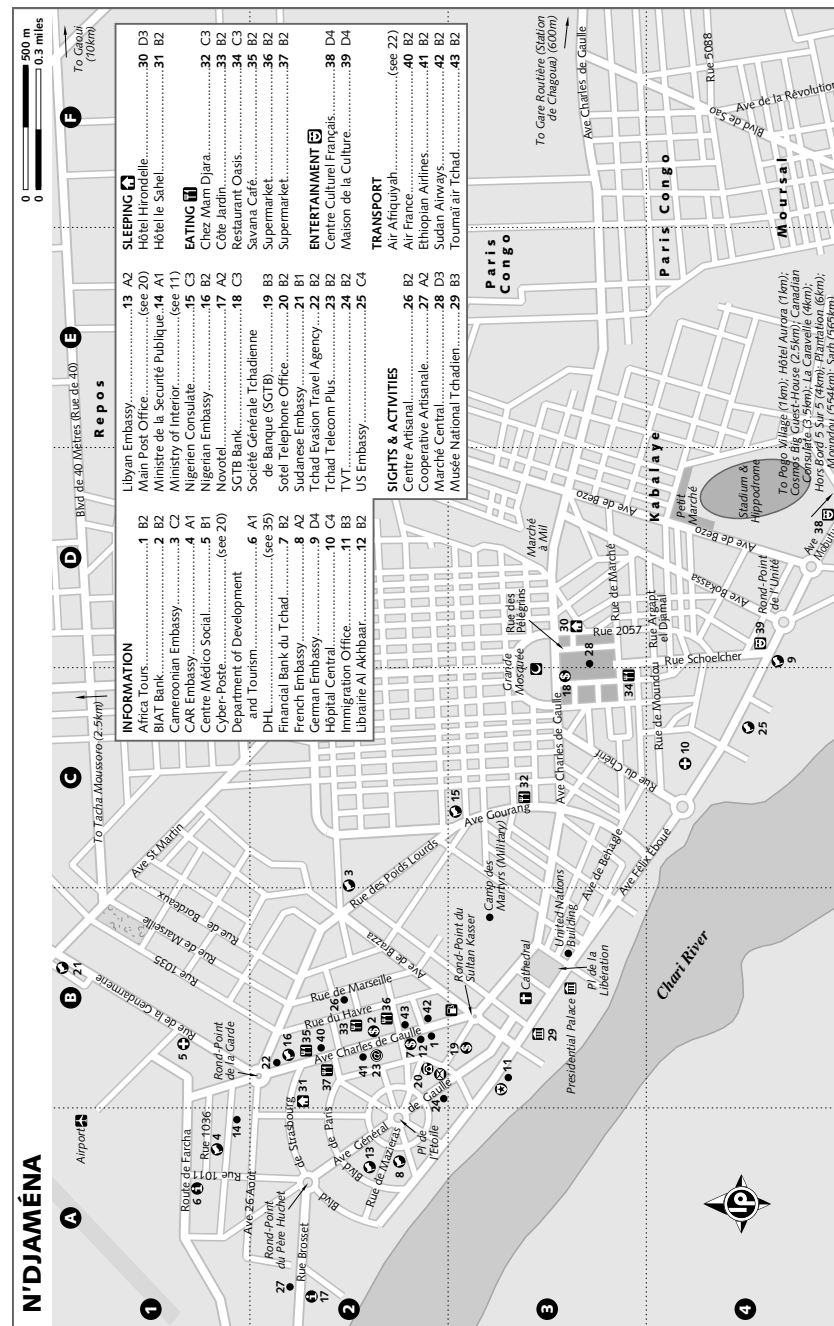
Tchad Telecom Plus (Ave Charles de Gaulle; per hr US\$3; ☎ 8am–6pm)

Medical Services

The **Hôpital Central** (☎ 516168) is the largest medical facility in Chad, though conditions are not ideal. First try the French embassy-affiliated **Centre Médico Social** (☎ 522837). For anything serious, you'll need to be evacuated. The pharmacies on Ave Charles de Gaulle are generally reliable.

Money

The best bank for travellers is the **Société Générale Tchadienne de Banque** (SGTB; main branch just off Ave Charles de Gaulle), which changes cash and travellers cheques, and doles out cash to those with Visa cards. **BIAT** (Ave Charles de Gaulle) and **Financial**



Bank du Tchad (Ave Charles de Gaulle) both change cash at about 5% better rates than SGTB; rates are 5% better still from the money changers on the north side of the **Marché Central**.

Post & Telephone

The **main post office** (Blvd de Paris; ☎ 7am-noon Mon-Sat & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) shares digs with the Sotel telephone office.

Tourist Information

Chad's tourist office is the under-resourced **Department of Development and Tourism** (☎ 524416; Rue 1011). The Novotel gives a big fold out N'Djaména map to anyone who asks.

Travel Agencies

Africa Tours (☎ 518727; Ave Charles de Gaulle) Reliable for plane tickets.

Tchad Evasion Travel Agency (☎ 526532; www.tchadevasion.com; Ave Charles de Gaulle) The first name in Chad travel offers many tours and expeditions, including to Lake Chad and the Ennedi region, and hires out cars for Zakouma National Park.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There is considerable pickpocketing and petty street crime in N'Djaména, especially at night. It's best to avoid the western end of Ave Charles de Gaulle all day Sunday, and the whole area around it on Saturday and Sunday, since there are few people around and muggings are common. Also watch your wallet around the **Marché Central**, no matter what hour. It is generally safe to walk along the busy streets in Moursal into the early evening, but be vigilant.

On the other side of the law, police conduct ID checks at major roundabouts starting at around midnight.

You are meant to apply for a photo permit, but few people bother. If you want to be official, bring a letter requesting permission to take tourism photos, US\$40 and two passport photos to the Service de Controle de Films at TVT.

SIGHTS

The **Musée National Tchadien** (☎ 524445; Ave Félix Éboué; admission US\$2; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Fri) has some fascinating cultural artefacts from around the country, plus fossils and pottery.

The **Cooperative Artisanale** (Rue Brosset; ☎ 8am-6pm) has the best selection of crafts for sale, but you can see some being made at the **Centre Artisanal** (Rue de Marseille; ☎ 7am-3pm Mon-Thu, 7am-noon Fri). Some of these same items can be found in the lively **Marché Central**, which has a great atmosphere during the day.

The best thing to do in N'Djaména is get out to the pottery-making village of **Gaoui**, just 10km away. Many of the mud-brick houses are brightly painted, and a **museum** (admission US\$2; ☎ by request) discusses the culture of the ancient Sao people. Minibuses (US\$0.10) from Char Gaoui (Gaoui Rd), by the Kempinski Hotel, will drop you nearby: either walk the last 2km or hop on a motorcycle.

SLEEPING

There is little accommodation in N'Djaména, and nothing that costs even remotely close to what it should.

Hôtel Hirondelle (☎ 515470; adjacent to Rue 2057; r US\$16) Not quite the cheapest lodging in town, but the cheapest we can recommend (though really, we don't). Insist on a terrace room rather than the grotty downstairs ones.

Hors Bord 5 Sur 5 (☎ 777413; off Rue de Chagua; r US\$24) You can't hear the adjacent nightclub from the east facing rooms, but you will hear many of its patrons popping over for an hour. Still, it's safe and clean.

Cosmos Big Guest-House (☎ 533521; Ave Bealoum Kondol; r with fan/air-con US\$34/54; ☎) On a busy (ie safe) street in Moursal, this is the best deal in town by Chadian standards. It surrounds a popular restaurant, and the screen doors are a nice touch.

Hôtel Aurora (☎ 535551; Ave Mobutu; r US\$36) Aurora is closer to downtown in an area with many nightclubs and services, including an internet café. It's older than Cosmos and it shows, but it's still a good choice.

Hôtel le Sahel (☎ 520333; Blvd de Strasbourg; s/d US\$100/120; ☎ ☎) Set in a leafy compound, Hôtel le Sahel lacks the four-star facilities of its internationally affiliated neighbours, but then it's only half the price. The pool is at an annex.

EATING

At lunchtime there's plenty of basic street food (around US\$0.50) next to the cathedral, and you can get camel meat two blocks over. At night you'll find many similarly cheap unlit stalls in Moursal and Paris Congo. Downtown you'll find a Lebanese, two Chinese, and several French restaurants, plus some decadent patisseries and fairly well-stocked supermarkets.

Restaurant Oasis (Rue de Marché; mains US\$1.40-4; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of many simple sit-down restaurants knocking out the standards around the market.

Chez Mam Djara (off Ave Gourang; plat d'jour \$1.50; ☎ lunch) A little hard to find (just ask around; everybody knows it) but worth it for the fantastic plates of Senegalese rice.

Savana Café (Ave Charles de Gaulle; crepes US\$1-2, mains US\$4-7; ☎ lunch & dinner) A French café and snack shop with really good food.

Pogo Village (Ave Mobutu; mains US\$2-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of many relaxing open-air affairs in Moursal, Pogo serves a mix of African and European food at somewhat high prices.

Côte Jardin (Rue du Havre; mains US\$8-18; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) French, Italian and African meals,

including pizza and camel, are served up in a leafy courtyard. Sometimes there is live music.

ENTERTAINMENT

Moursal has many simple bars and nightclubs that are popular with locals, but are also welcoming of outsiders; though get local advice before you head out as a few are pretty rough. Those downtown on Ave Charles de Gaulle are more exclusive, but have just as many prostitutes. One out-of-the-ordinary club experience can be found on a Sunday afternoon (don't get stuck out in this part of town in the evening) at **Plantation**, a relaxed place across the river (about a US\$10 taxi ride), playing a good mix of African and Western music for a throng of middle-class Chadians and a few expats.

The **Centre Culturel Français** (☎ 517705; Ave Felix Éboué; ☎ Oct-Jun) hosts cultural events and exhibitions, as well as regularly screening African and French films. The **Maison de la Culture** (Ave Felix Éboué) has a more limited schedule. **La Caravelle** (Rue de Chagua) restaurant features free traditional drum and dance performances on Friday evenings from 7.30pm until 10.30pm.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

All of the following have offices on the west end of Ave Charles de Gaulle.

Air Afriquyah (☎ 526532)

Air France (☎ 523932)

Ethiopian Airlines (☎ 523027)

Sudan Airways (☎ 525148) Currently closed, but should reopen when relations between the two countries thaw.

Toumai air Tchad (☎ 524104)

Land transport for southern destinations depart the chaotic Gare Routière Dembé east of the centre. For points north, head to Tacha Moussoro.

GETTING AROUND

Shared taxis and minibuses around town should cost about US\$0.25 per seat: the price depends on how far the vehicle, not you, is going. They run all night, but start getting scarce after 10pm. To get to downtown from Moursal, first get a taxi to the **Marché Central** and then hop in one heading *en ville*. A taxi course (private hire) is negotiable, but the minimum is US\$2.

NAME & NUMBER

Within 72 hours of arriving in N'Djaména you must register at the *sûreté* (Ave Félix Éboué); it's a relatively hassle-free process (except for returning to your hotel to get the forms stamped), requiring two photos. The **immigration office** (☎ 7am-3pm Mon-Thu, 7am-noon Fri) is on the right side of the compound at the back.

An *Autorisation de Circuler* (travel permit) is only required for travel to the far north and far east (though inquire whether this has changed when you get there), but you may want to get one if you are going anywhere outside N'Djaména because it can help get you past suspicious soldiers at highway checkpoints; this is particularly helpful in the south. First visit the Department of Development and Tourism, which will type up a letter with your itinerary. Then deliver this letter to the nearby *Ministre de la Sécurité Publique* and wait about three days for approval.

Finally, in each town you visit, you should register with both *securité* (Agence Nationale de Sécurité), which needs a long form filled out and one photo, and the police, who just record your details in their book. You can try to avoid this, but it won't be long before they find you and escort you to their offices to register.

SOUTH OF N'DJAMÉNA

The south, where the soils turn red, is more developed than the north, but the soldiers are much more suspicious.

MOUNDOU

Set on the north bank of the Logone River, Chad's second-largest town is best known for the **Gala brewery**, which famously stayed open throughout the civil war. It's not a bad place to spend a day. The little, privately owned **Premier Musée du Logone Géographique** (☎ 6-375533; admission is negotiable; 🕒 8am-noon & 4-5pm Mon-Sat) has some examples of Chadian crafts and a few animal skins. Nearby you can watch wood-carvers and painters work at the **Centre Artisanal**.

Sleeping & Eating

Centrally located **Auberge Fraternité** (☎ 691578; r with/without bathroom US\$13/10) is a bit noisy, but clean. Right by the *gare routière*, **Residence de Palmiers** (☎ 6-263757; r US\$30; 🚿) is a new construction so the rooms, which come with TV, are in excellent shape.

A crush of women serving street food line Moundou's main road in Quartier Geuldjeme near the centre, as do many bars and a nightclub. Also here is the immaculate and friendly **Sympathique Café** (mains US\$1.50-4.50; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner), which does omelettes, pigeon and sometimes takes requests. Further south you'll find many open-air restaurants, the fanciest of which is **Club du Logone** (mains US\$4-16; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) with a big French menu spanning crepes to steak to pizza. It also serves wine and whiskey.

Getting There & Away

Frequent transport leaves for N'Djaména (US\$18, six hours) and Sarh (US\$15, six hours) from scattered locations around what passes as the *gare routière*. Many pick-ups to Sarh also depart from across the river. Minibuses go to Léré (US\$15, four hours) on the Cameroon border, but it's usually quicker to go to Kélo and change there.

SARH

An agreeably sleepy town shaded by enormous trees, Sarh was constantly raided by Arabs from the north looking for slaves. These days it's not so well frequented. Despite its

status as Chad's cotton and sugarcane capital, the oil money transforming the local economy in Doba, just 200km away, means that Sarh looks destined to remain little more than a provincial backwater.

The recently spruced up **Musée Régional de Sarh** (☎ 681394; admission free; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) has old weapons, musical instruments and masks. Just down the road, the **Centre Artisanal** (☎ 681478; 🕒 7.30am-12.30pm Mon-Fri & 4-6pm Mon-Thu) has a good selection of crafts for sale, and the friendly women who work here might take you to see some of the items being made. Most nights at dusk, **hippos** feed on the banks of the Chari River below the Hôtel de Chasses.

Sleeping & Eating

Even in its fading glory, **Hôtel de Chasses** (☎ 6-429575; s/d US\$21/29; 🚿) is one of the best places to sleep in Chad. A plant-filled, screened dining room overlooks the river, and all rooms have balconies. A meal will cost under US\$5. **Auberge Berceau Populaire** (☎ 681619; r US\$8) near the Grand Marché in the centre of town has dirty rooms with even dirtier toilets.

For cheap food, head over to the Grand Marché or Ave Cascani near the central truck park.

Getting There & Away

Most vehicles depart for Moundou (US\$15, six hours) and N'Djaména (US\$25, 12 hours) from near the market, but pick-ups have their own park north of town.

ZAKOUMA NATIONAL PARK

This 305,000-hectare park, 800km southeast of N'Djaména, is a major Chadian success story. After poaching and civil war ravaged local wildlife, the Chadian government and the European Union restocked the park with an eye on the affluent European tourist market. Consequently, Zakouma is once again one of the best places in Central Africa to see large herds of elephants, as well as giraffes, wildebeests, lions and a wide variety of antelopes, primates and birdlife. The best time to come is March and April when the animals congregate around watering holes. It is not possible to visit from June to October because of the rains.

Visiting the park costs US\$15 per person, plus US\$7 per vehicle. Public transport, even

from Sahr, is practically nonexistent and it would take you many days to get there, so the most realistic option is to organise a trip through one of N'Djaména's travel agencies. Tchad Evasion Travel Agency (p544) charges US\$150 per day for a 4WD and driver, plus petrol (around US\$50 per day). Expect a six-day round trip since it takes two just to reach the park (you'll overnight in Mongo).

Inside Zakouma, **Le Campement Hôtelier Tinga** (☎ 524412; www.zakouma.com; s/d US\$30/40; 🚿) has comfortable rooms and a good **restaurant** (breakfast US\$5, dinner US\$15). Guided safaris cost US\$90 per day, and a horse ride is US\$16.

NORTH OF N'DJAMÉNA

Travelling through the Sahel to these near northern towns is generally more interesting than time spent in them. If you have time to visit Ennedi, you'll never regret or forget it.

MAO

Perched high above a long oasis, Mao is the capital of the once-powerful Kanem Empire. The Sultan still lives here, and if you so much as ask about him someone will probably offer to arrange a meeting. A few of his effects, along with regional crafts, are on display in the tiny **Musée du Kanem** (admission free; 🕒 Mon-Sat), which the caretaker will open by request – if he can find the key. Wednesday is market day, and the thriving traditional **donkey and camel market** draws people from far and wide.

The **Maison de Culture** (☎ 503082; r US\$8), home of the museum, has dusty cell-like rooms with no electricity, but plenty of roaches for company. It's the only hotel in town. They might cook something for you if you ask in advance, otherwise you can get simple meals near the *gare routière*.

There are a couple of Land Cruisers to/from N'Djaména (US\$25, seven hours) every morning, and on Wednesday (also sometimes on Tuesday) you can get one direct to Bol (US\$20, four hours).

BOL

Lake Chad was once one of the largest freshwater lakes in the world. Its dry-season area of under 10,000 sq km can rise to 25,000 sq km at the height of the rains; however, it is slowly drying up and even vanished during the worst of the Sahel drought in 1984.

Its slow disappearance is creating problems for, and conflicts between, fishermen and farmers.

A finger of the lake reaches Bol year-round, and trade with Nigeria has made this small town relatively prosperous. To get out on the lake (best done November to February) and see floating islands, massive numbers of birds and maybe hippos, hire a boat down at the port. The price depends on how far you want to go, but you can do a nice trip through the grassy channels for about US\$50. Expect to pay double that to reach inhabited islands like Fitiné, home to fishermen from many countries, and Tchongolet with many big trees.

The **Société de Développement du Lac** (SODE-LAC; ☎ 6-252911; villa US\$20; 🚿) has large villas. Cleaning, maintenance and the water supply are spotty, but there's usually air-con until around midnight. The only other choice is **Chez Mado** (☎ 6-783871; r US\$6), a bar-auberge with three very basic rooms with mattresses and fans. There is one shared toilet for the whole place. **Restaurant la Tchadien** (mains US\$1.20; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) near the market gets the nod as the best in town, though you'll find broader menus at the simple joints surrounding it.

There are a couple of Land Cruisers to/from N'Djaména (US\$25, eight hours) every morning and on Wednesday (also sometimes on Tuesday) you can get one direct to Mao (US\$20, four hours). You can also check at the port to see if any of the cars regularly imported from Cotonou (Benin) are headed to N'Djaména: you may or may not save money, but it will probably be a more comfortable ride.

ENNEDI

The Tibesti Mountains remain off-limits (this could change in a year or two), but the less-famous Ennedi desert is just as weird and wonderful. Attractions include prehistoric cave paintings, slot canyons, desert lakes and some unbelievably bizarre rock formations. There are even ancient sea arches, formed when Lake Chad stretched out here, now swimming in sand dunes.

You need to be a Saharan expedition expert to try the trip yourself, but Tchad Evasion Travel Agency (p544) leads 15-day trips (with five in Ennedi) for US\$125 per day (six person minimum).

CHAD DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Outside the capital, most hotels are very basic and overpriced. In N'Djaména all hotels are grossly overpriced, but there are many good ones. Singles can usually be shared by two people for no extra cost.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Simmering rebel activity and unexploded mines mean that travel to far northern Chad, including the Tibesti region, is impossible, and the growing rebellion rules out most of the east.

The various police forces outside the capital can be a nuisance, but requests for bribes are rare. They're just not used to seeing travellers and so are unsure how to ensure your papers are in order; expect lots of questions.

Even in N'Djaména electricity and running water are intermittent, and many towns are completely off the grid. All but the cheapest hotels have generators, but low-end places usually turn it off by midnight.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Chad Embassies & Consulates

Chad maintains diplomatic representation in all neighbouring countries (Sudan, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and CAR). See the appropriate chapter for details.

France (☎ 0145 53 36 75; Rue de Belles Fenilles, Paris)
Germany (☎ 228-356026; Botschaftskanzlei, Basteistrasse 83, Bonn)

PRACTICALITIES

- The metric system is used.
- Electricity voltage is 220V/50Hz and most plugs have two round pins.
- Of the dozen small newspapers, all in French or Arabic, only *Le Progrès*, the voice of the president, is daily.
- Most people prefer the programming (in English and French) on Cameroon's CRTV to the state-owned TVT.
- RNT (94FM) is the voice of the government, FM Liberté (105.3FM) is run by a group of human rights organisations and BBC Africa broadcasts some English programs on 90.2FM.

USA (☎ 202-462-4009; www.chadembassy-usa.org; 2002 R St NW, Washington, DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Chad

All of these are in N'Djaména.

Cameroon (☎ 523473; Rue des Poids Lourds)

Canada (☎ 534280; signposted 1km from Rond-point de Chagua)

CAR (☎ 523206; Rue 1036)

France (☎ 522576; off Ave Félix Éboué)

Germany (☎ 516202; Ave Félix Éboué)

Libya (☎ 519289; Rue de Mazieras)

Niger (☎ 518813; off Ave Gourang)

Nigeria (☎ 522498; Ave Charles de Gaulle)

Sudan (☎ 525010; off Rue de la Gendarmerie) If closed, try the Libyan embassy.

USA (☎ 517009; Ave Félix Éboué)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Fest Africa is a two-week celebration of the arts, mostly music, near the end of odd years.

HOLIDAYS

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

1 January New Year's Day

1 May Labour Day

25 May Africa Freedom Day

11 August Independence Day

1 November All Saints' Day

28 November Republic Day

1 December Day of Liberty and Democracy

INTERNET ACCESS

Reliable, though only moderately fast connections, are widely available in N'Djaména. You'll find cybercafés in Moundou and Sarh and other southern towns, but good luck actually getting online.

MAPS

The outdated country map published by IGN is the best available: buy it before you come.

MONEY

SGTB's ATMs in N'Djaména, Moundou, Sarh and Abéché plan to work with Visa cards any time now. Until then, the main bank in N'Djaména will give you a cash advance against your card for US\$20. Cash (Euros get a better return than dollars, but both are widely accepted) and travellers cheques can be changed easily enough, particularly in N'Djaména.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Strictly speaking you should apply for a photo permit, but few people bother. If you want to be official, bring a letter requesting permission to take tourism photos, US\$40 and two passport photos to the Service de Contrôle de Films at TVT in N'Djaména. Then you'll fill out a three-page form and all this will be taken to the police for approval, which takes several days. If you decide to skip it, be very discreet: the police do check, particularly in N'Djaména.

POST & TELEPHONE

The postal service is reliable, but can be slow outside N'Djaména. DHL and EMS rapid-parcel services are available in major towns.

Sotel, the national telecom company, has phone offices in most towns, charging US\$1.65 per minute for calls to Europe and about US\$0.50 for local calls. Private telephone offices, usually just a guy with a mobile and a sign, are common everywhere and charge the same, though late-night rates on international calls drop. Buying a SIM card for your own mobile costs about US\$5. There are no local telephone area codes in Chad, but mobile provider Celtel uses 6 and Tigo uses 9.

VISAS

Everybody except nationals of some Central and West African countries needs a visa to visit Chad. As visas are not available at the airport or borders, travellers should obtain one before they arrive or in their home country. Costs for 30-day visas can be as high as US\$100 for some nationalities. The application form can be downloaded at www.chadembassy-usa.org.

Visa Extensions

The **sûreté office** (Ave Félix Éboué) in N'Djaména issues visa extensions, usually on the same day. Generally it just reissues a visa at the same price as the first one.

Visas for Onward Travel

Cameroon One-month visas cost around US\$100; you'll need one photo and have to wait one day. If you're just passing through, transit visas, available immediately, are free.

CAR One-month visas cost US\$70. You need two photos and they are issued on the same day.

Libya The friendly staff will give you visa advice, but all requests must go through a Libyan travel agency, which

arranges your invitation. This might take two weeks, but plan on several more.

Niger The consulate issues three-month visas right away for US\$40; you need two photos.

Nigeria One-month visas cost between US\$60 or US\$110, depending on your nationality. They require two photos and are usually issued within two days. No letter of invitation is needed.

Sudan The embassy was closed at the time of research. Chad used to be an easy place to get a Sudanese visa, but that has probably changed.

TRANSPORT IN CHAD

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air connections (see p545 for a list of airlines) between N'Djaména and other African cities – including Addis Ababa (Ethiopia; US\$820 one way), Bamako (Mali; US\$680), Kano (Nigeria; US\$365), Khartoum (Sudan; US\$850) and Niamey (Niger; US\$620) – continue to grow. Air France flies direct to Paris five times weekly for around US\$1000 return.

DEPARTURE TAX

The airport departure tax is included in the price of all tickets.

Land

Chad's borders with Libya and CAR are not currently safe for travellers, and Sudan is closed.

CAMEROON

Minibuses (US\$0.40, 15 minutes) and *clandos* (motorcycle taxis, the only ones allowed to operate legally in the city; US\$2) run from Rond-point de Chagua in N'Djaména out to the border town of Nguelé. From there you can catch a motorcycle taxi over the bridge into Kousséri where there are regular minibuses to Maroua. You may have to pay 'taxes' on both sides of the border. You can also enter Cameroon further south, via Léré or Bongor.

NIGER

The main route between Chad and Niger is a sandy track looping round to the north of Lake Chad from N'Djaména to Nguigmi, via Mao. There are Land Cruisers daily to Mao

and then one on Wednesday to Nguigmi (US\$25, six hours). Cheaper pick-ups and big lorries go other days, but you'll probably have to do the journey in stages via Massakori and Nokou, which can take several days. Get your passport stamped in Mao (you'll be asked for US\$6, but resist paying as best as you can: this money is not going into the treasury) and Nguigmi.

Once in Niger, from Nguigmi take a pick-up or bush taxi to Diffa (US\$5), from where there is plenty of public transport to Zinder; there are also two weekly SNTV buses between Nguigmi and Zinder (US\$16, 10 hours) going on to Niamey.

NIGERIA

The easiest way to Nigeria is through Cameroon. Follow the directions above to reach Maroua, from where you can take a bush taxi straight to Maiduguri or a minibus to the border at Banki. You could also hop a boat across Lake Chad from Bol, though seek local advice first.

GETTING AROUND

In Chad, Land Cruisers, pick-ups and minibuses are your main choices for cross-Chad travel. Buses, which depart at set times, are rare. Land Cruisers are the fastest choice because, unlike the others, they rarely stop to drop off or pick up passengers en route.

Travel times given in this chapter are not the absolute fastest you might make it, but they are in best-case-scenario territory. In the rainy season the combination of washed-out roads and rain barriers can triple travel times. Prices are for sitting in the cab of a Land Cruiser or pick-up, you'll save about 20% riding in the back of these or taking buses and minibuses.

Air Tchad currently flies to Abéché and Faya; flights to Moundou and Sarh are planned. Prices should be around US\$100 one way for the these.

Outside N'Djaména you'll find fleets of *clandos* (motorcycle taxis) charging a fixed fee (unless you are going very far) of about US\$0.50 per trip. A 4WD rental (driver included, but not petrol) can be as high as US\$160 per day.