

Nigeria

We shouldn't beat about the bush: Nigeria has an image problem. It dominates West Africa economically and politically, and has produced music and literature whose influence spreads far beyond the continent. But for all this clout, mention the country's name to the person on the street and they're more likely to come up with a litany of woe: corruption, ethnic violence and email scams. As a travel destination, Nigeria seems more a place to avoid than to book a flight to.

And yet, Nigeria is a country we're coming to love. Getting around can sometimes be a little tough, and it's certainly a challenging destination for first-timers to Africa, but you shouldn't believe all the scare stories. In Lagos, Nigeria has one of the most exuberant cities in Africa. Along the south, old kingdoms carry on their customs, from creating elaborate brass sculptures to venerating the ancient gods. More modern traditions include one of the world's pioneering primate conservation organisations. In the north, where the land dries out as it stretches towards the desert, Muslim Nigeria thrives in dusty trade cities where memories of the Saharan trade routes still linger.

Nigeria is a country of extremes. Great wealth and great poverty sit cheek by jowl, and tensions between different communities can boil over into civil strife. While a few parts of the country remain problematic, the vast majority is as warm and welcoming to visitors as anywhere in Africa. Challenging yet exuberant, this is Africa in the raw – there's nowhere quite like it on the continent.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 924,000 sq km
- **ATMs** None
- **Borders** Benin, Niger, Chad, Cameroon
- **Budget** US\$25 to US\$50 per day
- **Capital** Abuja
- **Languages** English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, Efik
- **Money** Naira (N); US\$1 = N128
- **Population** 140 million
- **Seasons** Wet (April–October in north; March–November in south); dry (November–March in north; December–February in south)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 234; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +1
- **Visa** US\$60 to US\$100 for one month; best obtained in country of residence



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lagos** (p458) Dive in to taste the night-clubs and go-slows of Nigeria's wild and exuberant metropolis.
- **Calabar** (p464) Learn about primate conservation with the rescued chimpanzees of the southeast's old colonial port.
- **Kano** (p466) Follow traces of the old Saharan trade routes in the dusty desert capital of northern Nigeria.
- **Osun Sacred Forest** (p463) Look for the old Yoruba gods in the tranquil green of Oshogbo's World Heritage-listed holy sculpture park.
- **Yankari National Park** (p468) Search for wildlife and finish your day with a soak in the delightful Wikki Warm Spring.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

For travel to the south, March to August are the wettest months to visit Nigeria, and best avoided if possible. Temperatures are hot year-round, peaking in the spring; the humidity is constant. Late spring to summer is the hottest part of the year in the north, with the mercury dropping slightly from October to January at the onset of the dusty harmattan winds.

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

ITINERARIES

- **One to Two Weeks** No-one should go to Nigeria without visiting Lagos (p458) and trying to navigate the city's night-clubs and traffic jams. From there, head east to Benin City (p463) to see the ancient craft of brass sculpture, before carrying on to the old port city of Calabar (p464), where you can check out some pioneering primate conservation work and the country's best museum.
- **One Month** A longer trip allows you to further explore the south, but also to take in northern Nigeria. From Lagos, fly to Abuja (p465), and then continue by road to the old trading city of Kano (p466). An interesting detour would be via the cool plateau city of Jos (p465), with a side-trip to Yankari National Park (p468) and the delightful Wikki Warm Spring.

HOW MUCH?

- **Okada ride across town** US\$0.50
- **Replica Benin brass sculpture** US\$94
- **Afro-beat CD** US\$4
- **Bribe at police roadblock** US\$0.20
- **One-minute local phone call** US\$0.20

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.60
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.70
- **Bottle of Star** US\$1.20
- **Souvenir football shirt** US\$6.50
- **Stick of suya** US\$0.80

HISTORY

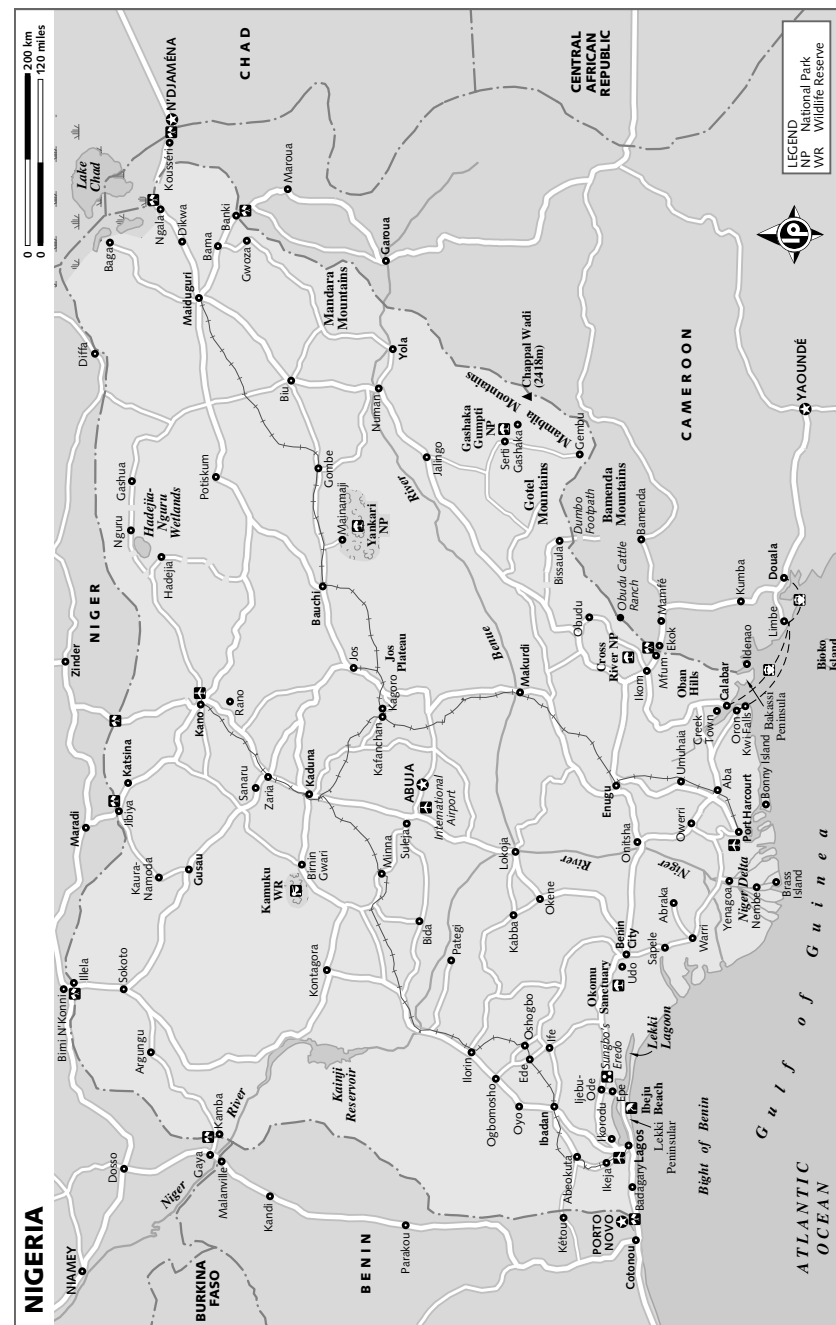
Early Nigeria

Northern and southern Nigeria are essentially two different countries, and their histories reflect this disparity. The first recorded empire to flourish in this part of West Africa was Kanem-Borno around Lake Chad, which grew rich from the trans-Saharan trade routes. Its adoption of Islam in the 12th century helped. Islamic states based in the Hausa cities of Kano, Zaria and Nupe also flourished at this time.

Meanwhile, the southwest developed into a patchwork of small states, often dominated by the Yoruba. The Ijebu kingdom rose in the 10th century and constructed the mysterious earthworks at Sungbo's Eredo. Most famously, the Benin Kingdom, became an important centre of trade and produced some of the finest metal artwork in Africa. The political systems of these states rested largely on a sacred monarchy with a strong court bureaucracy. In the southeast, the Igbo and other agrarian peoples never developed any centralised empires, instead forming loose confederations.

Colonial Era

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



As the slavery abolition movement grew in the early 19th century, the British took a lead in suppressing it along the Niger Delta, where conflicts with Yoruba slavers led to the annexation of Lagos port – a first colonial toehold. This led to further annexation to thwart the French, who were advancing their territory along the Niger River. By the turn of the 20th century, British soldiers had advanced as far north as Kano and Sokoto, where Islamic revivalism had created a rapidly expanding caliphate. From the clash, colonial Nigeria was born.

Nigeria was divided in two – the southern, mainly Christian, colony and the northern Islamic protectorate. The British chose to rule indirectly through local kings and chiefs, exacerbating ethnic divisions for political expediency.

Military Misrule

These divisions came back to haunt Nigeria as soon as independence came in October 1960. Politics immediately split along ethnic lines, destabilising the country. In early 1966 a group of Igbo army officers staged a coup. General Johnson Ironsi took over as head of state. Another coup, led by Yakubu Gowon, quickly followed on its heels, along with large-scale massacres of Igbos. In 1967 this provoked Igbo secession from Nigeria, the declaration of independent Biafra and civil war.

Biafra was recognised by only a handful of African countries, and the civil war dragged on for three years. By early 1970, as a result of the blockade imposed by the federal government, Biafra faced famine and its forces were compelled to capitulate. Up to a million Igbos died, mainly from starvation.

The 1970s oil boom smoothed Nigeria's path to national reconciliation, however the rush of money proved too tempting for the self-serving elite. Gowon was overthrown by General Murtala Mohammed in a bloodless coup in 1975, while Mohammed himself was assassinated in an attempted coup in early 1976 and succeeded by Lieutenant-General Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian Yoruba, who did the unthinkable for an African military leader and actually stood down, retiring to his farm after paving the way for a civilian regime.

Democracy proved the briefest of interludes. Shegu Shagari's civilian government

lasted just four inept years before falling to the General Mohammed Buhari in 1983. Two years later he was for the chop too, with General Ibrahim Babangida taking the reins and promising another return to democracy. A presidential election finally went ahead in June 1993 with Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba from the south, claiming victory. Yet Babangida was unhappy with the results and annulled them within a fortnight, announcing another poll.

He never got to oversee it. Vice-president General Sani Abacha seized control instead, and he had no pretensions of giving up the military's privileges. A grotesque caricature of an African dictator, he purged the army of potential coup plotters, abolished many institutions and locked up intellectuals, unionists and pro-democracy activists. His rule reached a nadir in 1995 with the judicial murder of the Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa – an act that led to Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth. Abacha didn't care – he was getting rich stealing oil money from the government's coffers.

Salvation finally came in June 1998, in what Nigerians called the 'coup from heaven'. Aged 54, and worth about US\$10 billion in stolen money, Abacha died of a heart attack in the arms of two prostitutes. His successor immediately announced elections and in February 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo, the former military leader and southern Yoruba Christian, was returned as president.

Nigeria Today

Obasanjo inherited a country in tatters. Free from the military yoke, the deep political and cultural differences between the north and south of the country began to play themselves out in an unruly manner. A major test came in 2000 when several northern states introduced sharia (Islamic law). Tensions between communities became inflamed, resulting in mass riots and bloodshed. The flames were fanned again in 2002 when Nigeria was due to hold the Miss World contest, an event that caused fresh outbreaks of fighting. During Obasanjo's first term as president, over 10,000 people were killed in communal violence.

One area where Obasanjo has had success was in returning Nigeria as a player on the international stage. Nigeria now plays a lead role in the Commonwealth and as a regional peace-

DASH

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

maker. Obasanjo's re-election in 2003 was generally regarded as consolidating civilian rule. Despite this, domestic critics have claimed his high international profile is a distraction from tackling Nigeria's myriad problems.

Nigeria's economy has not prospered. A much-publicised anti-corruption drive has had mixed results, claiming back some of Abacha's stolen millions but netting few high-profile officials on the make. A major achievement was the cancelling of Nigeria's debts in 2005, but attempts to revamp the neglected oil industry have been less successful. Repeated governments neglected the oil infrastructure to the point where Nigeria was left needing to import refined fuel at a higher price than it sold its crude for, resulting in frequent petrol shortages. Government plans to remove fuel subsidies in 2004 were met with a crippling general strike by Nigerians seeing cheap fuel as a birthright, having seen many of the other benefits of statehood pass them by. This sense of alienation is particularly acute in the oil-producing delta. In 2005, local militias put their case against marginalisation by launching guerrilla attacks on oil installations.

Elections are next due in 2007. With Obasanjo constitutionally barred from standing for a third term, Babangida fancies another attempt at running the country, this time as a civilian. As Nigeria continues to lurch from crisis to crisis, whoever takes on the challenge will have a lot on their plate.

PEOPLE

Nigeria's already swollen population is estimated to be rising by about 3% a year, and it's thought that by the middle of the 21st century every third African will be Nigerian. About half the people are Muslim, 35% are Christian

and the rest follow traditional religions. Jujù, the native magic that was the original basis for Caribbean voodoo, is still an important element in many tribal cultures, and you'll find fascinating charms and potions in the markets in most towns. Ordinary Nigerians struggle on against systematic corruption with the natural entrepreneurship of one of Africa's best-educated populations.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Nigeria's rich art heritage is unequalled anywhere in West Africa. The oldest discovered sub-Saharan Africa sculptures are the 2000-year-old terracotta figures found near Nok village. In music and literature, Nigeria is a leader, with Fela Kuti, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka all world-beaters in their fields.

ENVIRONMENT

Nigeria's topography is relatively unvaried. The north touches on the Sahel and is mostly savannah with low hills. Mountains are found only along the Cameroon border in the east, although there is a 1500m-high plateau around Jos in the centre of the country. The coast is an almost unbroken line of sandy beaches and lagoons running back to creeks and mangrove swamps and is very humid most of the year.

An underfunded national parks service does exist, but in practice very little land in Nigeria is effectively protected. The expanding population has contributed to widespread deforestation – 95% of the original forests have been logged. However, the oil industry has caused the greatest number of environmental problems: oil spills and gas flaring have damaged the fishing industry, with little of the industry's wealth trickling down to the local level.

FOOD & DRINK

For a Nigerian, food is 'chop'. Dishes are hot and peppery, usually consisting of a meat sauce mopped up with a hearty portion of starch such as cassava or pounded yam. *Isiewu* (goat's head soup) is the closest thing to a national dish, with cow leg soup or *jollof* (peppery) rice with chicken almost as popular. Look for signs saying 'food is ready' when you're hungry. Vegetarians will have a hard time in Nigeria. Drinking water is sold on the streets in plastic bags as 'pure water'.

LAGOS

📶 01 / pop 15 million

Lagos is chaos theory made flesh and concrete. It's the largest city in Africa, with wall-to-wall people, bumper-to-bumper cars, noise and pollution beyond belief, a crime rate out of control, and public utilities that are simply incapable of coping with the demands of the huge population. Elevated motorways ring the city, jammed with speed freaks and traffic jams ('go-slows') on top, and tin-and-cardboard shacks underneath.

The city takes its name from the Portuguese for lagoon, and has been a Yoruba port, a British political centre and until 1991, Nigeria's

capital. It remains the economic and cultural powerhouse of the country, and has a superb live music scene and West Africa's most imitable street life. It won't be to everyone's taste, but if you're up for an urban adventure then you might find Lagos truly compelling. A true megacity and the face of modern Africa as much as any picture postcard national park – jump right in.

ORIENTATION

For the traveller, there are four main areas of Lagos: Yaba on the mainland, south of the international and domestic airports; Lagos Island, the heart of the city; Ikoyi Island, a smart suburb with some embassies and top-end hotels; and Victoria Island (VI), an even

smarter suburb facing the Atlantic Ocean with the bulk of the embassies and a number of top-end hotels. The islands are connected by elevated expressways and bridges.

It's a 30-minute to one-hour ride from Murtala Mohammed International Airport to Lagos Island; head for the yellow taxis outside the departure lounge upstairs. Know your destination and expect to pay about N3000. There's no public transport. Domestic flights leave from a separate terminal a couple of kilometres away.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

Internet places open and close on a weekly basis, usually charging N100 per hour for internet access. Two of the best:

Cybercafé (Map p462; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi) Opposite the YMCA.

Internet Planet (Map p462; Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave, VI) In Mr Biggs Bldg.

Medical Services

Chyjob Pharmacy (Map p462; ☎ 269 4545; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat)

St Nicholas Hospital (Map p460; ☎ 263 1739; 57 Campbell St, Lagos Island) Has a 24-hour emergency clinic.

Money

Lagos' banks are as useless as anywhere in Nigeria for changing money. There is no foreign exchange at the airport, but convenient moneychangers for travellers include the following:

Eko Hotel (Map p462; Adetokumbo Ademola St, VI)

Hausa moneychangers at the craft shops by the gatehouse.

Ikoyi Hotel (Map p462; Kingsway Rd, Ikoyi) There's both a bureau de change office and Hausa moneychangers outside the (closed) hotel.

Post

Main post office (Map p460; Marina St, Lagos Island; ☎ Mon-Fri)

Post office (Map p462; Bourdillon Rd, Ikoyi)

Post office (Map p462; Adeola Odeku St, VI)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Contrary to popular perception, violent crime has decreased in Lagos in recent years. Most crime against foreigners targets expats in expensive cars, and travellers are unlikely to encounter any serious problems. That said, it always pays to take sensible precautions. Never carry any more money than is

necessary and avoid flaunting valuables. Avoid walking at night where possible, particularly around hotels and restaurants frequented by foreigners, including on VI. Crowded areas carry a risk of pickpocketing.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

In Lagos Island the many markets are by far the best attractions. They're safe enough to get lost in during the day, but photography isn't usually appreciated. **Jankara Market** (Map p460; off Adeyinka Oyekan Ave) sells fabric and a witches' brew of juju ingredients. **Balogun Market** (Map p460; off Breadfruit St) sells fabric from across West Africa. Finally, **Sandgrouse Market** (Map p460; off Lewis St) slightly further east is the place for interesting food, as much of it is sold live.

In Lagos Island also look out for examples of old Brazilian architecture in the distinctive houses built by former slaves and descendants who returned from Brazil.

The **National Museum** (Awolowo Rd; admission N100; ☎ 9am-5pm) has some interesting displays and exhibits, including many fine works of ancient sculpture. It also has a nonprofit craft centre. No cameras allowed.

SLEEPING

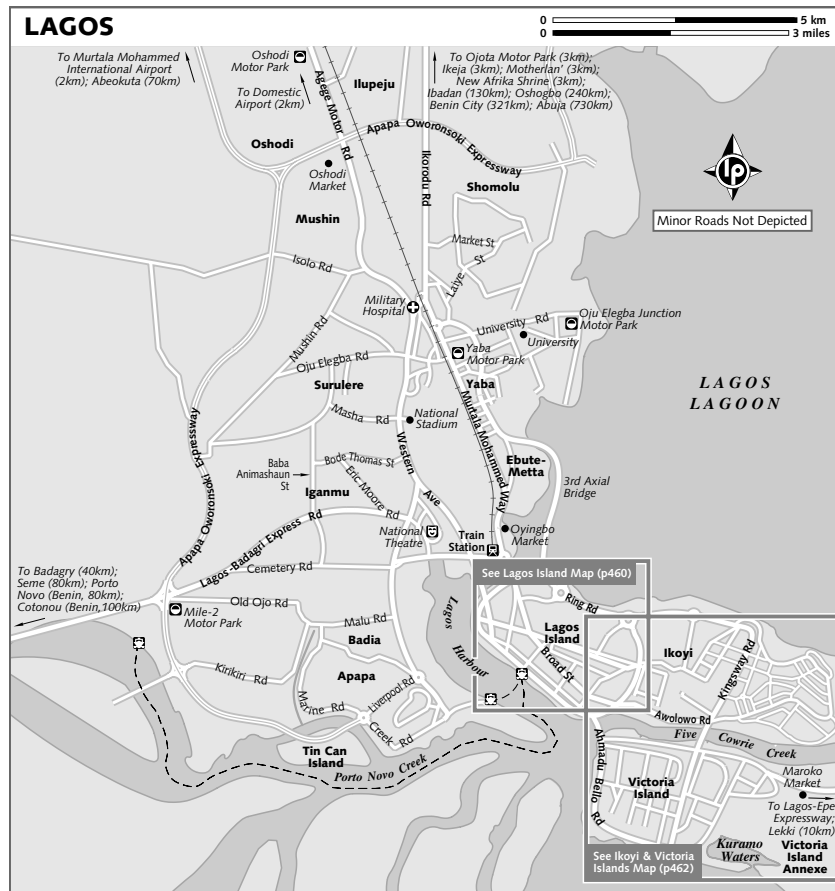
Lagos has both some of the best hotels in Nigeria – and the worst. There's very little in the midrange bracket. Hotels either tend to top of the range or at the grubbier end of the budget spectrum.

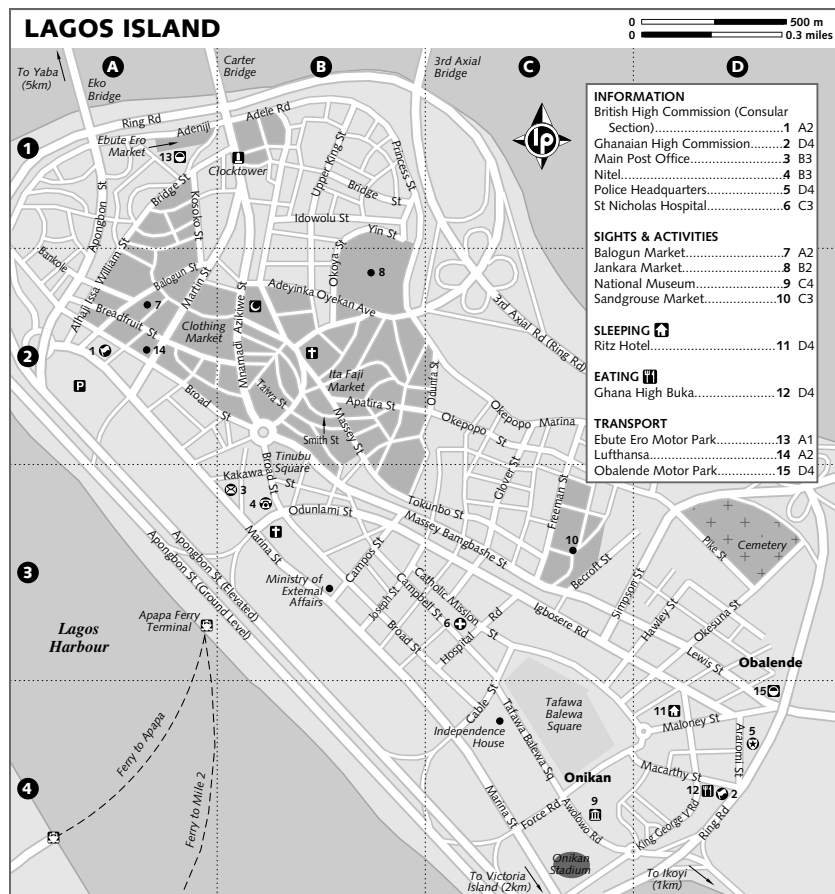
YMCA (Map p462; ☎ 773 3599; 77 Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi; dm N500, r N1700-2700; ☎ ☎) Very simple fare, this hotel is frequently full with West Africans. It's decent if not inspirational. Dorms have four beds and all share communal bathroom facilities. Men only.

Ritz Hotel (Map p460; ☎ 263 0481; King George V Rd, Lagos Island; r with/without air-con N2300/1400; ☎ ☎) The name's a bit of a misnomer, but this hotel is still a decent budget option. Rooms are grubby, but they're secure and come with friendly management.

Hotel Victoria Palace (Map p462; ☎ 262 5901; hotelvp@alphalinkserve.com; 1623 Sake Jojo St, VI; s/d N9660/12,075; ☎ ☎) A genuine midrange hotel on VI is a rarity indeed, and this place is good value. There's a great Indian restaurant attached.

Michael's (Map p462; ☎ 461 6802; michael@hyperia.com; Plot 411 Adetokumbo Ademola St, VI; r N13,800-17,250; ☎ ☎ ☎) Pleasant compact rooms in this small guesthouse cluster around a pool,





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overlooked by a mural of generously proportioned mermaids.

B-Jays Hotel (☎ 262 2902; bjayshotel24@yahoo.com; 24 Samuel Manuwa St, VI; r from N32,500; 📶 📺 📺 📺 📺) A plush guesthouse, this place was undergoing a refit when we visited. Rooms have flat-screen TV and internet connections, and there's a very stylish bar.

EATING

Broad St and Campbell St in Lagos Island are good for chophouses and *suya* (kebabs served with *pepe* spice); the better restaurants are in Ikoyi and VI.

Ikoyi Hotel Suya (Map p462; Ikoyi Hotel, Kingsway Rd, Ikoyi; *suya* from N100; 🕒 10am-10pm) Lagosians claim the best *suya* in town can be found at the stall

outside the Ikoyi Hotel. Not just beef and goat, but chicken, liver and kidney, plus some great fiery *pepe* (pepper) to spice it all up.

Sherlaton Restaurant (Map p462; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi; mains from N600; 🕒 12-3pm & 7-10pm) Vegetarians suffer a lot in Nigeria, but this Indian restaurant really comes to the rescue. With tasty, filling portions at good prices, this is the city's best curry option.

Ghana High Buka (Map p460; King George V Rd, Lagos Island; mains from N300; 🕒 10am-9.30pm) Just outside the Ghanaian High Commission, this 'food-is-ready' place serves up great Nigerian dishes. It's always busy; you'll likely come back for more yourself.

Bangkok Restaurant (Map p462; Muri Okunola St, VI; mains from N1100; 🕒 11am-11pm) With the best Thai

419

If you're online, the chances are that at some point you've received a 419. These spam emails offer the recipient a cut of an implausibly huge sum of money in return for help getting it out of Nigeria. All you have to do is send your own bank details – together with a handling fee – and the money is yours. The name 419 comes from the section of the Nigerian criminal code that covers fraud – a crime rife in Nigeria. Scammers even have their own anthem – the single 'I Chop Your Dollars' was hugely popular in 2005.

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

food in Lagos, Bangkok is a treat. The cooks and waitresses are all Thai, offering you a broad menu of fragrantly spiced dishes.

Cactus (Map p462; Ozumba Mbadiwe St, VI; mains from N1200; 🕒 8am-10pm) At this patisserie-cum-restaurant breakfasts of pancakes or bacon are good and the club sandwiches with salad and chips are simply huge – excellent value at N1500.

DRINKING

Nimbus (Map p462; Maitama Sule St, Ikoyi; 🕒 8am-11pm) Part of an art gallery, this is a lovely place for a drink – mellow in the day and happening at night. At weekends there's usually live music, so there's a cover charge of around N1000 to get in.

Atlantic Bar (Map p462; Adeola Hopewell St, VI; 🕒 12pm-late) Head here if you want to hang with the fashionable Lagos kids. There's great music, a few bar snacks and live bands playing on the weekend. Very cool.

ENTERTAINMENT

Lagos' nightlife is legendary, with the happening nightclubs in Ikeja (13km north of Lagos Island) and Yaba. Clubs usually have a mix of live music and DJs, but don't even think of turning up before 11pm.

New Afrika Shrine (Pepple St, Ikeja; cover charge N500; 🕒 Thu-Sun) Fela Kuti's original Shrine was burned down, but this replacement is run by his son Femi, who plays on Fridays and Sundays when he's in town (N1000). It's a huge shed, but the music blows the roof off.

Motherlan' (Opebi Rd, Ikeja; cover charge N1000; 🕒 Thu-Sun) Owned by musician Lagbaja, who mixes groovy jazz with African drums while always remaining hidden under a traditional Yoruba mask (his name simultaneously means anybody and nobody). Lagbaja himself plays the last Friday of the month (N1500).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Murtala Mohammed International Airport is the main gateway to Nigeria and is roughly 10km north of Lagos Island.

Airline offices based in Lagos include the following:

Aero (☎ 496 1340; www.flyaero.com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport)

Air France (Map p462; ☎ 461 0461; www.airfrance.com; Idejo Danmole St, VI)

Bellview (Map p462; ☎ 791 9215; www.flybellviewair.com; Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave, VI)

British Airways (Map p462; ☎ 262 1225; www.britishairways.com; 1st fl, C&C Tower, Sanusi Fafunwa St, VI)

Cameron Airlines (Map p462; ☎ 261 6270; Oko Awolowo Close, VI)

Chanchangi Airlines (☎ 493 9744; www.chanchangi-airlines.com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport)

Ethiopian Airlines (Map p462; ☎ 263 1125; www.flyethiopian.com; Idoju Taylor St, VI)

Ghana International Airlines (Map p462; ☎ 266 1808; www.fly-ghana.com; Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi)

Kenya Airways (Map p462; ☎ 461 2501; www.kenya-airways.com; Churchgate Tower, Afribank St, VI)

KLM (Map p462; ☎ 461 2501; www.klm.com; Churchgate Tower, Afribank St, VI)

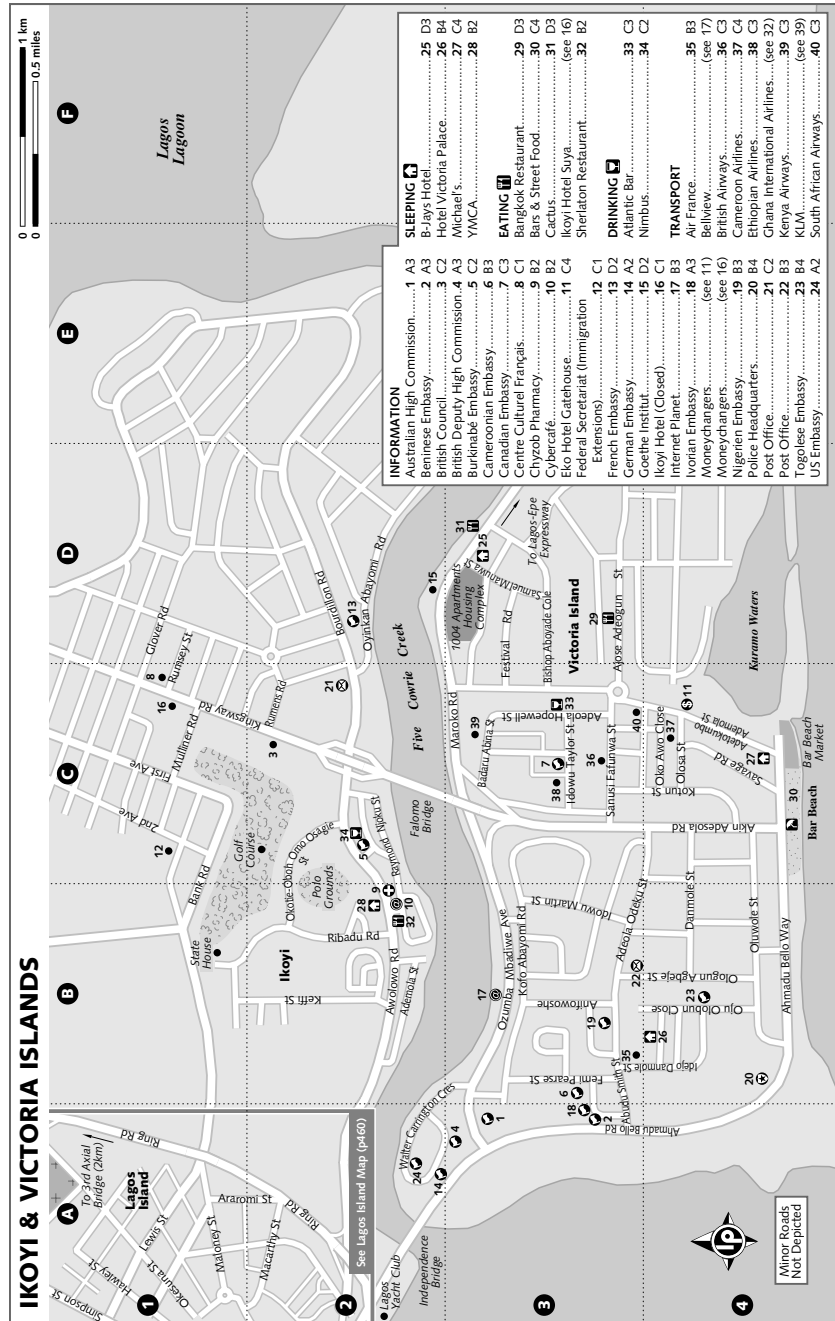
Lufthansa (Map p460; ☎ 266 4227; www.lufthansa.com; Broad St, Lagos Island)

South African Airlines (Map p462; ☎ 262 0607; www.flysa.com; Adetokumbo Ademola St, VI)

Sosoliso Airlines (☎ 497 1492; www.sosolisoairline.com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport)

Virgin Nigeria (☎ 461 2747; www.virginnigeria.com; Sheraton Hotel, Ikeja)

Lagos' motor parks are pictures of anarchy. Ojota Motor Park (with Ojota New Motor Park next door), 13km north of Lagos Island, is the city's main transport hub. Minibuses and bush taxis leave to just about everywhere in the country from here. Sample fares are Benin City (N800, four hours), Ibadan (N250,



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Post Office	21 C2	Ethiopian Airlines	38 C3
Trogolesse Embassy	22 B3	Ghana International Airlines	(see 32)
	23 B4	Kenya Airways	39 C3
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90 minutes), Oshogbo (N450, three hours) and Abuja (N1600, 10 hours).

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

GETTING AROUND

Arriving in Lagos can be complicated and you may be dropped at one of several motor parks – Oshodi, Yaba and Oju Elegba Junction are the likeliest candidates. Minibuses run from these to more central points, such as Obalende Motor Park on Lagos Island.

Minibuses (fares N30 to N200 according to distance) serve points all over Lagos – prices increase when you cross a bridge from one part of Lagos to another, but you'll have a job working out the routes unless you stay here for some time. Yellow private taxis start from N200. For short distances, *okadas* (motorcycle taxis) are a better bet; a medium-length trip shouldn't top N100. If you're in a go-slow, an *okada* may be the only way out.

SOUTHERN NIGERIA

IBADAN

☎ 02 / pop 1.4 million

The word sprawling could have been invented to describe Ibadan. You're likely to pass through this major transport junction, but there's little to amuse yourself with here before pushing on to more exciting destinations.

If you're looking for a bed, try **Lizzy Guest-house** (☎ 241 3350; off Easy Life Rd; r N2875; 🚽). At the top of a hill, the Lizzy has smallish but tidy rooms with cold showers and satellite TV. Staff are helpful, and there's a bar and a restaurant rustling up breakfast and a few Nigerian standards.

Another option is **D'rovans Hotel** (☎ 231 2907; drovans@skanet.com.ng; Ring Rd; s/d N6325/7475; 🚽 📺 📺 📺), which has rooms that are well turned out (although try to avoid those next to the generator shed). It also has a couple of shops, a restaurant and a nightclub where the owner's highlife band plays every weekend.

There are plenty of 'food-is-ready' places around Dugbe Market. For restaurants, try **Kokodome** (by Cocoa House; dishes from N400; 🕒 9am-11pm), which is set around a pool. The menu has a definite Lebanese theme, but there's

jollof on offer too. Upstairs, you can dine in slightly plusher surroundings.

Iwo Rd is Ibadan's major motor park; minibuses run to all points from here, including Lagos (N250, 90 minutes), Abuja (N1200, eight hours) and points north. For Oshogbo (N250, 90 minutes), go to Gate Motor Park in the east of the city.

OSHOGBO

This quiet Yoruba city has been a centre for contemporary Nigerian art since the 1950s. It's worth a visit to see the Osun Sacred Forest, a shrine to Yoruba religion that's a real Nigerian highlight. While here, also wander through the Oja Oba Market across from the Oba's Palace – it's packed with stalls selling juju material.

The delightful **Osun Sacred Forest** (Osun Shrine Rd; admission N200, camera N500; 🕒 10am-6pm) is a cool, green oasis. An ancient centre for Yoruba goddess Osun, its groves are filled with sculptures and shrines revering the traditional deities. The forest is a lovely place to walk in, and was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2006.

Several contemporary art galleries are also worth checking out, including the **Nike Centre for Arts & Culture** (Old Ede Rd; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri), **Jimoh Buraimoh's African Heritage Gallery** (1 Buraimoh St; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) and the **New Sacred Art Shop** (41A Ibokun Rd; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri).

Rooms at the **Heritage Hotel** (☎ 241881; hotelheritage@yahoo.com; Gbongan Rd; r N1265-2875; 🚽 📺 📺 📺) are fair-sized with huge beds, although the mustard walls make them seem gloomier than they should be. There's also a restaurant-bar, and a pretty anaemic generator.

Osun Oshogbo's grand old lady, **Osun Presidential Hotel** (☎ 232299; Old Ikurin Rd; r from N9200; 🚽 📺 📺) is adequate but almost ready to be pensioned off. Rooms are average for the price, which also sums up the restaurant.

Old Ede Rd is the main drag for chophouses serving 'food-is-ready'.

Okefia Rd is the main motor park. Minibuses leave pretty regularly for Ibadan (N250, 90 minutes) and Lagos (N450, three hours).

BENIN CITY

☎ 052

Benin City is one of the old Yoruba capitals. The kingdom, which flourished here in the medieval period, gave rise to one of the first African art forms to be accepted internationally –

the 15th-century Benin Brasses. The art of the brass statuary has recently been revived, and you can see craftsmen at work near the museum.

The **National Museum** (King's Sq; admission N100; ☎ 9am-6pm) is primarily dedicated to the Benin Kingdom, with a display of beautiful brasses. The upstairs galleries are more ethnological in nature, providing a survey of traditional cultures from across Nigeria.

Brass Casters St nearby has been given over to reviving the 'lost wax' sculpture technique. The brassmakers are happy to show you their works in progress, usually copies of the most famous Benin sculptures, and sell you one of your own.

For a friendly budget sleeping option, try **Edo Delta Hotel** (☎ 252722; Akpakpava Rd; s N1500-2500, d from N3500; ☎). It has a jumble of chalets and a hotel block proper. The cheapest rooms feel a little cramped and have fans only; other rooms are better value.

Formerly the Genesis Hotel, the **Lixborr Hotel** (☎ 256699; Sakowpba Rd; s N2875, d 3450-4025; ☎) is a great, well-run place with comfortable, tastefully decorated rooms. Look for the giant statue of the Benin woman outside; it's opposite the brass caster's street.

The restaurant at the **Saidi Hotel** (Murtala Mohammed Way; mains from N800) has a good Chinese lunch buffet (N1200) every Sunday from 12pm to 3pm.

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

Aero (☎ 2711512) have a daily flight to Lagos (N8000, 40 minutes). Yaro motor park is the main place for Lagos transport, with minibuses leaving throughout the day (N800, four hours), with more minibuses to Port Harcourt (N850, five hours) and Calabar (N1200, eight hours). Transport north leaves from Usela Rd motor park.

CALABAR

☎ 087 / pop 500,000

Tucked into Nigeria's southeastern corner, the capital of Cross River state is one of the most likeable cities in Nigeria for visitors. Its port has historically made the town a prosperous place – Calabar was once one of Nigeria's biggest slave ports and later a major exporter of palm oil. A popular stopover for travellers

heading to Cameroon, Calabar has a great museum and two excellent primate conservation centres.

Sights

Calabar Museum (Court Rd; admission N100; ☎ 9am-6pm) is housed in the beautiful old British governor's building overlooking the river. It has a fascinating collection covering Calabar's days as the Efik kingdom, the slave and palm-oil trade, and the colonial period.

Home to a colony of rescued drill monkeys and chimpanzees, the **Drill Ranch** (☎ 234310; drill@infoweb.abs.net; Nsefik Eyo Layout, off Atekong Rd; donations appreciated; ☎ 9am-5pm) is home to Pandrilus, one of Africa's most progressive primate conservation bodies. Placing great emphasis on local education to combat poaching and the bushmeat trade, it can arrange trips to its excellent **Afi Mountain Drill Ranch** (community charge N200, cars/motorbikes N500/250, camping N1000, huts N2000) near Cross River National Park.

On the other side of town in the Botanic Gardens, **Cercopan** (www.cercopan.org; Mary Slessor Ave; donations appreciated; ☎ 9am-5pm) works with smaller monkeys such as guenons and mangabeys. The **gardens** (www.irokofoundation.org) are worth visiting to learn about the amazing biodiversity of the area.

Sleeping

Nelbee Executive Guesthouse (☎ 232684; Dan Achibong St; s/d N2300/2530; ☎ P) Close to Watt Market is this handy budget option. Rooms are comfortable, the management friendly, and there's a terrifically formal dining room.

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

Metropolitan Hotel (☎ 230911; metrocal@hitecpro.com; Murtala Mohammed Way; s/d N6000/7200, ste from N15,000; ☎ P) Calabar's poshest hotel, the Metropolitan has large, well-appointed rooms with a decent restaurant, a couple of shops and a popular pool.

Eating

Cosy Garden Restaurant (Nsefik Eyo Layout, off Atekong Rd; mains from N300; ☎ 9am-8pm) If your mama was Nigerian, she'd cook like this. Choose hot and tasty pepper soup or delicately flavoured *egusi* (meat, vegetable and smoked fish stew)

with a mountain of pounded yam. It's poorly signed; look for the lime green building near the Drill Ranch.

Freddy's Restaurant (Atekong Dr; mains from N1200; ☎ 11.30am-3pm & 6.30-11pm Mon-Sat, 6.30-11pm Sun) Something of an institution, Freddy's serves Lebanese and Continental dishes in well-presented surroundings – the *shwarmas* (kebabs; N1400) are ever-popular. It also has a large bar.

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

Getting There & Away

ADC Airlines (☎ 234477) flies daily to Lagos (N12,000, one hour). A taxi to the airport is N250.

Destiny (☎ 085 514475) sails every Tuesday and Friday to Limbe, Cameroon (N5000, 10 hours) from Calabar dock. For more information see p471.

The main motor park is tucked between Mary Slessor Ave and Goldie St. Sample minibus fares include Port Harcourt (N900, four hours) and Lagos (N3000, 10 hours).

NORTHERN NIGERIA

ABUJA

pop 1.3 million

Nigeria's made-to-measure capital, Abuja was founded during the boom years of the 1970s. After the divisive Biafran war the decision was made to move the capital from Lagos to the ethnically neutral centre of the country. Clean, quiet and with a good electricity supply, sometimes Abuja hardly feels like Nigeria at all. There's not much to do, but it's a good place to catch your breath and do some visa shopping.

Abuja tends to empty at weekends with people leaving for more exciting destinations, so many hotels offer discounts for Friday and Saturday nights.

For a nice quiet budget option, try **African Safari Hotel** (☎ 234 1881; Plot 11 Benue Cres; r from N2300; ☎ P). It has a range of rooms increasing in size and price. Nearby, Area 1 Shopping Centre is good for street food.

The **Valley Pride Hotel** (☎ 2342401; Plot 1373 Borno St; r from N4500-7500; ☎) is a well-located hotel with cosy rooms and friendly management, close to the eating places on Moshood Abiola.

If you want the cheapest rooms you'll have to argue your case, as the management only considers them suitable for your driver.

The main draw at **Smi Msira Restaurant** (Moshood Abiola Way; dishes from N700) is being able to sit out in the pleasant leafy surroundings – something of a genuine beer garden. Claims to never close are exaggerated, but the Nigerian food is still good.

Tantalisers (Moshood Abiola Way; dishes from N200; ☎ 8am-10pm) is a standard Nigerian fast-food chain; clean and bright with good chips and handy toilets. For a splurge, hit the restaurants at the Hilton and Sheraton Hotels. In Maitama, Yedseram Cres has several decent 'food-is-ready' places.

The airport is 40km west of Abuja – N3000 in a taxi. Flights depart hourly for Lagos with several airlines (N9000, one hour). There are also daily flights to Kano and Port Harcourt, as well as flights several times a week to Ibadan, Calabar and Maiduguri.

Jobi Motor Park (also called Utoka) is the main terminus for Abuja. Transport goes to all points from here; sample minibus fares include Kano (N1000, four hours), Jos (N700, three hours), Ibadan (N1200, eight hours) and Lagos (N1600, 10 hours).

JOS

☎ 073

The temperate climes of the Jos Plateau are one of the older inhabited parts of Nigeria; the ancient Nok Terracottas originated in the area. At 1200m above sea level, it's noticeably cooler than most other parts of the country. Modern Jos is a British creation, with popular tradition claiming its name is an abbreviation of 'Jesus Our Saviour' from the first missionaries.

The **Jos National Museum** (admission N10; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) has a superb collection of pottery, including several Nok Terracotta sculptures – at over 2500 years old they're Africa's oldest figurative sculptures. On the same site, the **Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture** (admission free; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) has full-scale reproductions of buildings from each of Nigeria's major regions. You can see a reconstruction of the Kano wall, traditional mosques and village architecture. The museum also has an excellent restaurant.

Actually a church mission, **Ecwa Guesthouse** (☎ 454482; off Noad Ave; dm/r N450/1000; ☎ P) is a tranquil spot to rest your head. The facilities

are of a Spartan nature that you feel must be good for the soul. No alcohol is allowed.

Smart green paint unifies the set of slightly sprawling blocks at the **Country Home Hotel** (☎ 462479; Tudun Wada Rd; r N4100-6350, ste from N8450; ♿ P). Inside, rooms are cosy and all have water heaters. There's also a pleasant garden bar and huge numbers of staff scurrying about, everywhere. Good value for the price.

Cedar Tree Restaurant (Yakubu Gowan Way; dishes from N500; ☎ 12-3pm & 7-10pm Tue-Sun) is a Lebanese restaurant some way out of town. There's a good meat grill, while cheaper mezzes such as falafel and hummus are great for jaded palates.

There are several chophouses dishing out 'food-is-ready' on Bank Rd south of ATTN, and more near the stadium.

There's a daily flight to Lagos with **Slok Air** (☎ 455300). The airport is 30km south of Jos – N2800 by taxi.

Head for Bauchi Motor Park if you're going north or east. Minibuses run to Kaduna (N600, four hours) and Kano (N600, five hours). From Plateau Express Motor Park, minibuses leave for Abuja (N700, three hours) and points further south.

KANO

☎ 064 / pop 3.8 million

Kano is the oldest city in West Africa (it was founded around 1400 years ago) and Nigeria's third largest. It was a major crossroads in the trans-Saharan trade routes and, from the Middle Ages, an important centre for Islamic scholarship. A favoured traveller destination, Kano has terrible air pollution, with traffic fumes mixed with the dusty harmattan wind.

As capital of a sharia state, alcohol was technically banned in 2004, although you can still get a drink in upmarket restaurants or in the bars of the Christian Sabon Gari district.

Information

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

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

Kano State Tourist Board (☎ 646309; Tourist Camp, 11 Bompai Rd) That rarity in Nigeria – a working tourist office. Has pamphlets and can arrange guides to the old city (N1500 per hour).

Sasinet Cybercafé (per hr N150) Inside the Daula Hotel compound.

Sights

With thousands of stalls in a 16-hectare area, **Kurmi Market** is one of the largest markets in Africa, and is the city's main attraction. It's a centre for African crafts, including gold, bronze and silver work, and all types of fabrics. Away from the throng are the **Kofar Dye Pits** (Kofar Mata Gate; ☎ 7am-7pm), where indigo cloth has been dyed for hundreds of years. Finished cloth is for sale, starting from around N1200 according to the design. A dash of around N100 is appropriate for a guided tour.

The **Gidan Makama Museum** (Emirs Palace Rd; admission N100; ☎ 8am-6pm) stands on the site of the original Emir's Palace (the modern one sits opposite), and is a wonderful example of traditional Hausa architecture. The museum has a fascinating photographic history of Kano, and displays on Nigerian Islam and traditional culture. The **Gidan Dan Hausa** (Dan Hausa Rd; admission N50; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu, 8am-1pm Fri) is another museum in a beautifully restored traditional house showcasing regional crafts and ceremonial costumes.

Festivals & Events

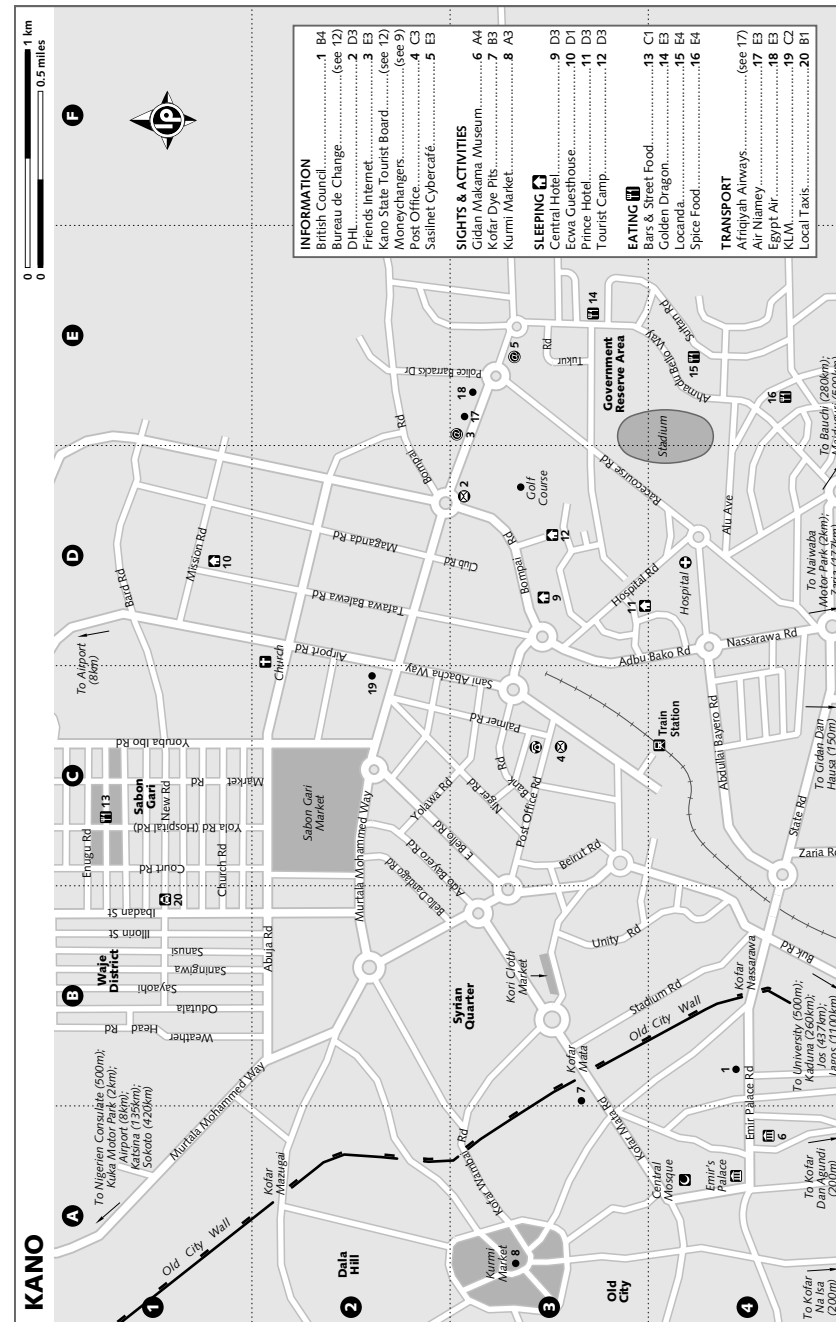
The **Kano Durbar**, the biggest festival of its kind in Nigeria, is held annually just after the end of Ramadan. Exact dates are variable, so check in advance if possible (see also Holidays, p1106). There is a cavalry procession featuring ornately dressed men mounted on colourfully bedecked horses. Kano's emir rides in the middle of the cavalry. The procession finishes outside the Emir's Palace, where there is drumming, singing, and massed cavalry charges.

Sleeping

Ecwa Guesthouse (☎ 631410; 1 Mission Rd; r N1500-2500; ♿) This church mission has Spartan but spotlessly clean rooms – it's a good budget choice. There's a restaurant, but alcohol is forbidden.

Tourist Camp (☎ 642017; 11 Bompai Rd; r N2000) This state-run enterprise has a soporific air, and if you stay for too long you might end up as dusty and sleepy as the rooms and staff. Rooms are small and hot, but handy and cheap.

Central Hotel (☎ 630002; Bompai Rd; r N3250-6960; ♿ P) A huge concrete confection in pink and blue, the Central's rooms are more staid than the exterior would have you believe. Accommodation is fair to good as the tariff rises.



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

Eating & Drinking

Spice Food (Magasin Rumfa Rd; dishes from N450; ☎ 12-3.30pm & 6-11pm) If you've been craving some vegetarian food in Nigeria, this excellent Indian restaurant will answer all your prayers (meat dishes also served). The N750 buffet every Sunday at 7.30pm is not to be missed.

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

Golden Dragon (Ahmadu Bello Way; mains N900-1200; ☎ 10.30am-11pm) Liveried waiters and traditional Chinese decorations give this place a great ambience; try not to fill up on the delicious spring rolls before your main course arrives.

The best 'food-is-ready' is found in Sabon Gari, with plenty of *egusi* and pepper soup always on offer. Most of these places double up as bars. Upscale restaurants also serve alcohol.

Getting There & Away

The airport is 8km northwest of Sabon Gari – N150 by *achaba*, three times that in a taxi.

There are daily flights to Lagos (N14,000, 90 minutes) and Abuja (N12,000, one hour). Kano also has a few international connections to Niamey (Niger), Cairo (Egypt), Tripoli (Libya) and N'djaména (Chad).

Kuka Motor Park is the motor park for the north and the Niger–Nigerian border. Naiwaba Motor Park serves points south and west. Sample fares and travel times include the following: Zaria (N300, two hours), Kaduna (N400, three hours), Maiduguri (N1000, six hours), Sokoto (N700, six hours) and Jos (N600, four hours).

YANKARI NATIONAL PARK

Yankari, 225km east of Jos, is Nigeria's best national park (admission N300, camera permit N100-1000) for observing wildlife. The park still holds reasonable numbers of buffalo, waterbuck, bushbuck and plenty of baboons. The biggest

draw is the 500-strong population of elephant and it's possible that lion may also survive. The bird-watching is excellent.

The best time to see animals is from late December to late April, before the rains, when the thirsty animals congregate at the Gaji River. You're permitted to drive your own vehicle if you take a guide, otherwise the park has a safari truck that takes two-hour tours (N300) at 7.30am and 3.30pm daily.

Yankari's other attraction is the **Wikki Warm Spring** (admission N200), near the park camp site. The crystal-clear water is a constant 31°C, forming a lake 200m long and 10m wide. Bring your swimming gear – the spring is a real highlight and shouldn't be missed.

The **Wikki Warm Springs Hotel** (☎ 077 542174; camping per person N500, bungalows N1730-3450; 🍷 🍷) is set high above the spring and has a serene view over the lush area. There's a decent restaurant and bar.

You can get to the park gate at Mainamaji by minibus from Bauchi (N600, five hours). After paying the entrance fee, you'll need to arrange transport to the camp – around N2800 in a taxi or N1000 by *okada*.

NIGERIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels are of a fair standard throughout Nigeria, although poor value compared to neighbouring countries. Most towns and cities have something to suit all pockets; the big exception to this is Lagos, where rooms are either very cheap and not particularly wonderful or very expensive – there's not much middle ground.

Rooms come with air conditioning and attached bathroom as standard, but take promises of hot water with a pinch of salt. You'll also be asked to pay a deposit, which is usually somewhere between one and two night's room rate. This is refundable against your final bill.

BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Government offices are open from 7.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday and 7.30am to 1pm Saturday. Banking hours are from 8am to 3pm Monday to Thursday and 8.30am to 1pm Friday. Sanitation days are held on the last Saturday of the month –

traffic isn't allowed before 10.30am to allow the streets to be cleaned.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Nigeria has a poor reputation for safety and civil unrest and yet, for the traveller, it can seem like the friendliest and most welcoming country in western Africa. Navigating these apparently contradictory states is the key to getting the most out of your visit.

Consistently the most troubled region of the country is the Niger Delta, due to the long-running grievances between the local population and the big oil companies, where the kidnapping of Western oil employees is a continued threat. In the north, communal disturbances between Muslims and Christians periodically spill over into bloody violence. Stay clear of demonstrations and areas where you suddenly see large numbers of police or army troops. Lagos has a terrible reputation for violent crime, not always undeserved.

As a traveller you're unlikely to have trouble with corruption and bribery. Police road-blocks are common, but fines and bribes are paid by the driver. Some caution should be exercised on the major highways into Lagos, where armed robbery is a problem, although almost always at night.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Nigerian Embassies & High Commissions

Nigeria has diplomatic representation in the following countries, among others:

- Australia** (☎ 02-6286 1222; 7 Terrigal Cres, O'Malley, ACT 2606) New Zealanders can also use these services.
- Belgium** (☎ 02-735 40 71; 3B Ave de Tervueren, Brussels 1040)
- Benin** (☎ 21 30 11 42; Blvd de la Marina, Contonou; ☎ 10-11.30am)

PRACTICALITIES

- English-language newspapers available in Nigeria include the *Guardian*, *Daily News*, *Daily Times* and *Vanguard*.
- There are over 30 national and state TV stations in English and major local languages. South African DSTV is hugely popular.
- Electricity supply is 220V, with both round European two-pin and square British three-pin plugs.

Cameroon Yaoundé (☎ 221 3509; Rue Joseph Mballa Eloumden, Bastos; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri); Douala (☎ 343 2168; Blvd de la Liberté); Buea (☎ 332 2528; Nigeria Consulate Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Visas not issued in Douala.

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

Chad (☎ 522498; Av Charles de Gaulle, N'Djaména)

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

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

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

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

Niger (☎ 73 24 10; Rue des Ambassades, Niamey; ☎ 10am-1pm Mon-Fri)

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

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

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

Embassies & Consulates in Nigeria

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

Australia (Map p462; ☎ 261 8875; 2 Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave, VI, Lagos)

Benin Abuja (☎ 413 8424; Yedseram St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri); Lagos (Map p462; ☎ 261 4411; 4 Abudu Smith St, VI; ☎ 9am-11am Mon-Fri)

Burkina Faso (Map p462; ☎ 268 1001; 15 Norman Williams St, Ikoyi, Lagos)

Cameroon Calabar (☎ 222782; 21 Ndidan Usang Iso Rd; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri); Lagos (Map p462; ☎ 261 2226; 5 Femi Pearse St, VI; ☎ 8am-11am Mon-Fri)

Canada (Map p462; ☎ 262 2516; 4 Idowu Taylor St, VI, Lagos)

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

Côte d'Ivoire (Map p462; ☎ 261 0963; 5 Abudu Smith St, VI, Lagos)

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

France (Map p462; ☎ 260 3300; 1 Oyinkan Abayomi Rd, Ikoyi, Lagos)

Germany (Map p462; ☎ 261 1011; 15 Walter Carrington Cres, VI, Lagos)

Ghana (Map p460; ☎ 263 0015; 23 King George V Rd, Lagos Island, Lagos)

Niger Abuja (☎ 413 6206; Pope John Paul II St; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri); Kano (☎ 080 6548 1152; Airport Roundabout;

☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri); Lagos (Map p462; ☎ 261 2300; 15 Adeola Odeku St, VI; ☎ 9am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

Togo (Map p462; ☎ 261 1762; Plot 976 Oju Olubun Close, VI, Lagos)

UK Abuja (☎ 413 2010; Aguyi Ironsi St); Lagos (Map p462; ☎ 261 9541; 11 Walter Carrington Cres, VI)

US Abuja (☎ 523 0916; 9 Mambila St); Lagos (Map p462; ☎ 261 0150; 2 Walter Carrington Cres, VI)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The most elaborate festivals are the celebrations in northern Nigeria – particularly in Kano, Zaria and Katsina – for the two most important Islamic holidays: the end of Ramadan (sometime during September or October; dates vary), and Tabaski, 69 days later, which feature colourful processions of cavalry. Ramadan can be a tiring time to travel in the north – head for the Sabon Gari (Christian quarter) in each town, where food is served throughout the day.

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

HOLIDAYS

Principal public holidays in Nigeria:

New Year's Day 1 January

Labour Day 1 May

National Day 1 October

Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Good, cheap connections are widespread in major towns, for around N100 to N150 per hour. Never use internet banking in a Nigerian cybercafé.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the naira. Bring only US dollars cash to Nigeria – travellers cheques are useless, although ATMs are likely to become widespread in cities during the life of this book. Avoid using a credit card in Nigeria because of fraud.

There are banks aplenty, but virtually none offer currency exchange – you'll have to change on the street. Moneychangers are almost always Hausa, so it's usually a safe bet to ask around at the town's mosque. In our experience, the moneychangers are among the most honest in Africa. Western Union

branches are everywhere if you need to get money wired to you.

POST

Mail sent to or from Nigeria is notoriously slow. Worldwide postcards cost about N80. For parcels, use an international courier like DHL or FedEx, who have offices in most towns.

TELEPHONE

Nigeria is in love with the mobile phone, and networks are more reliable than the creaky Nitel fixed-line company. Calls at roadside phone stands are quick and easy to make, costing N15 to N30 per minute inside Nigeria, and around N60 for an international call. Most mobile phone numbers start with 080.

VISAS

Visas are required for all except nationals of most West African countries. Most Nigerian embassies (including the high commissions in the UK and Australia, and the embassy in Benin) issue visas only to residents and nationals of the country in which the embassy is located. Exact requirements vary, but as a rule of thumb, forms are required in triplicate, along with proof of funds to cover your stay, a round-trip airline ticket, and possibly confirmed hotel reservations.

You also need a letter of invitation from a resident of Nigeria or a business in the country. This must explain the purpose of your visit and, preferably, take immigration and financial responsibility for you during your trip. The cost of a 30-day visa is from US\$60 to US\$100 according to nationality.

If you're travelling overland to Nigeria, the embassy in Accra (Ghana) is consistently rated as the best place in West Africa to apply for a visa, as no letter of introduction is required. The embassy in Niamey (Niger) also claims to issue visas the same way.

Visa Extensions

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

Visas for Onward Travel

One month visas for Chad (N5500), Cameroon (N10,000), Niger (N5300) and Benin (N3000) can be obtained in Abuja or Lagos.

Other convenient consulates for visas are Calabar (Cameroon) and Kano (Niger).

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

Cameroon A one-month single-entry visa costs CFA50,000, with one photo, and is issued in a day.

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

Niger Best obtained in Abuja, a one-month single-entry visa costs N5300 with two photos, and is issued in 48 hours.

TRANSPORT IN NIGERIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Lagos is Nigeria's air hub, and is served by all the major African airways and international carriers (although there are no direct flights to the USA). Virgin Nigeria is the closest thing to a national carrier, with good regional connections and flights to the UK.

Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos has traditionally been the nightmarish entry point into the country, but has raised its game in recent years and shouldn't present travellers with any undue horror (although there is no currency exchange at the airport – only black-market touts). Abuja and Port Harcourt are alternative entry points with connections to Europe.

Land

BENIN

The main border crossing is on the Lagos (Nigeria) to Cotonou (Benin) highway. Expect requests for bribes. An alternative border crossing is further north at Kétou, but there's not so much public transport that way.

CAMEROON

There are two main border crossings. The northern border post is at Bama, 2½ hours from Maiduguri, across to Banki in Cameroon. A remote alternative crossing is at Ngala (Nigeria), which is used mainly for transiting to Chad.

The southern border crossing is at Mfum (Nigeria), near Ikom. The road infrastructure collapses pretty much as soon as you cross to Ekok (Cameroon), making this border problematic during the rainy season, so consider

taking the Calabar–Limbe ferry instead during the wettest months (see below).

CHAD

Although there are no official border crossings between the two countries, it's possible to make a quick transit across Cameroon. In Nigeria, the border crossing into Cameroon is at Ngala. On the Cameroon side ask for a *laissez-passer* to allow you to make the two-hour traverse to the Chad border point at Kousseri.

NIGER

There are four main entry points into Niger. The busiest is the Sokoto route, which crosses at Ilela (Nigeria). Minibuses and bush taxis run daily to the border, just past Ilela. Crossing to Birni N'Konni you can get on a bus straight for Niamey. Travelling between Kano (Nigeria) and Zinder (Niger) is equally straightforward. The final option is between Katsina and Maradi.

From Niger, it's easiest to cross at Gaya. You'll probably have to hire a bush taxi to take you from the Nigerian side at Kamba on to Sokoto. Beware the potholes.

Sea

A ferry sails from Calabar to Limbe every Tuesday and Friday evening (N5000, 10 hours), returning on Monday and Thursday. It's an overnight trip in each direction. Your passport is collected on boarding and returned at immigration. Try to keep hold of your luggage – if it gets stowed in the hold you'll be waiting hours to get it back.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Internal flights are a quick and relatively cheap way of getting around Nigeria. Flights range between N8000 and N14,000. Most cities are linked by air to Lagos; you'll usually have to change planes here if you want to fly between two smaller cities. Airlines include the following:

Aero (☎ 496 1340; www.flyaero.com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport)

Bellview (Map p462; ☎ 791 9215; www.flybellviewair.com; Ozumba Mbadiwe Ave, VI)

Sosoliso Airlines (☎ 497 1492; www.sosolisoairline.com; Murtala Mohammed International Airport)

Virgin Nigeria (☎ 461 2747; www.virginnigeria.com; Sheraton Hotel, Ikeja)

Car & Motorcycle

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

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

Local Transport

Each town has at least one motor park full of minibuses and bush taxis that serves as

the main transport depot. They're Nigeria in microcosm – sprawling, chaotic and noisy. Vehicles have wooden signs on their roofs showing their destination, while touts shout out those that need filling. Minibuses don't run to any schedule, but depart when full.

Bush taxis – big old Peugeots – cost about 25% more. All travel at horrendous speeds, slowing only for potholes and to pay bribes at police checkpoints.

Motorcycle-Taxi

The quickest way to get around town is on the back of a motorcycle-taxi called an *okada* (*achaba* in the north), although many drivers seem to have a fatalist's view of their own mortality. Fares shouldn't top N50 for a short trip; sling your backpack over the handlebars.

Train

Maps show a Nigerian train line, but barely any services run these days. The main lines are Lagos–Kano (via Ibadan and Kaduna) and Port Harcourt–Maiduguri (via Jos).