

Africa's Capital Cities

Capital cities in Africa are listed below along with images, facts and travel information. There are 54 official countries in Africa and 2 disputed countries (Western Sahara and Somaliland). Each African country has at least one capital city. Some countries have a *de facto* capital and an administrative capital. The capitals vary widely in size, the largest African city is Cairo, with an estimated population of 17 million living in its metropolitan area. Maseru, Lesotho's capital has a population of 14,000.

African capitals are not necessarily the largest cities in neither their respective countries nor the most populated. Nigeria is a good example. Lagos is a city of almost 8 million people whereas the official capital, Abuja, has a population of just 700,000.

Many of Africa's capitals are generally not places of interest for the average tourist. But most of the international airports are based there, as well as embassies, major hospitals, large hotels and banks.

1. Algiers, Algeria

Basic Facts about Algiers



Algiers is the capital city of Algeria in North Africa. Algiers is located on a bay of the Mediterranean Sea and is an important port. Algiers was first settled over 1000 years ago and has now grown to a large city with a metropolitan population of over 3 million.

While downtown Algiers looks modern, the capital is struggling to keep up with rapid growth and standards of living for most of its population is very poor. Algiers has also been marred by violence in the past decade. A civil war which started in 1991 has destroyed much of the country. In recent times things have quieted down yet two bombs exploded in the capital in December 2007. The bombings were linked to al-Qaeda.

Algiers is known locally as El-Djazaïr and the residents speak Berber, Arabic and French.

Claim to Fame

Algiers is the backdrop to one of my favorite movies, *Battle for Algiers* (1965). It's a riveting movie documenting the battle for independence in Algeria (from France) during the 1950's.

A referendum was held in Algeria on 1 July 1962, and France declared Algeria independent on 3 July. On 8 September 1963, a constitution was adopted by referendum, and later that month, Ahmed Ben Bella was formally elected the first president.

On 19 June 1965, Houari Boumédiène deposed Ahmed Ben Bella in a military coup d'état that was both swift and bloodless. Ben Bella "disappeared", and would not be seen again until he was released from house arrest in 1980 by Boumédiène's successor, Colonel Chadli Bendjedid. Boumédiène immediately dissolved the National Assembly and suspended the 1963 constitution. Political power resided in the Council of the Revolution, a predominantly military body intended to foster cooperation among various factions in the army and the party.

In 1996 a referendum introduced changes to the constitution, enhancing presidential powers and banning Islamist parties. Presidential elections were held in April 1999. Although seven candidates qualified for election, all but Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who appeared to have the support of the military as well as the FLN, withdrew on the eve of the election amid charges of electoral fraud. Bouteflika went on to win with 70 percent of the cast votes.

Following his election to a five-year term, Bouteflika concentrated on restoring security and stability to the strife-ridden country. As part of his endeavor, he successfully campaigned to provide amnesty to thousands of members of the banned FIS. The so-called Civil Concord was approved in a nationwide referendum in September 2000. The reconciliation by no means ended all violence, but it reduced violence to manageable levels. An estimated 80% of those fighting the regime accepted the amnesty offer.

Travel to Algiers

Algiers is not a tourist hotspot and the US State Department warns against travel to certain parts of the country. In Algiers, most of the interesting sights are in the old part of the city known as the *Casbah* or *Medina*. The travelers that do make it to Algiers are impressed with the very friendly and hospitable people. The old French buildings, the promenade along the seafront and the food also get good ratings.

2. Antananarivo, Madagascar



Basic Facts About Antananarivo

Antananarivo (Tana) is the capital city of Madagascar and the largest city on this big island in the Indian Ocean. The city is situated inland, about 90 miles from the East coast. Antananarivo was founded in the early 1600's and its position on top of a high ridge made it easy to defend against enemy attack. Antananarivo means "the city of a thousand", a reference to the 1000 soldiers that supposedly protected the newly founded city during the reign of the revered King Andrianjaka. In 1895, the French took over and expanded it greatly to include many new buildings and roads. Madagascar gained its independence from the French in 1960. Today, Antananarivo has a population of about 1.4 million people.

Claim to Fame

Tana will surprise you with its rice paddies, pollution, Asian looks, and numerous stairs up steep hills, palaces, cobbled streets and churches. This is not Africa or Asia, Madagascar is totally unique.

Travel to Antananarivo

Most people traveling to Madagascar will arrive in the capital since the international airport is situated there. Antananarivo is a bustling place with lots of churches, a mosque, a zoo and plenty of markets called *Zomas*. The capital is basically built on 12 hills and steep steps lead to the main Independence square in the town center. The architecture is a mixture of old wooden houses, modern offices and French colonial style buildings. The best way to see Tana is to walk around and take taxis. Many visitors take a taxi up to the *Rova* in the Upper Town and walk around from there. The Tsimbazaza Botanical and Zoological Park houses some of Madagascar's unique flora and fauna including lemurs. Tana is somewhat typical of many cities in a developing country: lots of poverty, pollution, and crumbling infrastructure interspersed with modern cafes, restaurants and shops selling western goods.

3. Nairobi, Kenya



Basic Facts about Nairobi

Nairobi is the capital city of Kenya and East Africa's most populous city (3.5 million). Nairobi was founded in 1899 as a railway stop en route to Mombasa. Within a decade it grew to become the capital of British East Africa and became Kenya's capital after independence in 1963. Nairobi is a major business hub and many Aid agencies headquarter here as well. Nairobi has a modern city center, some beautiful suburbs, as well as Africa's largest slum. The city is built on a plateau and it stays pleasantly cool year round. Both English and Swahili are widely spoken. See

Claim to Fame

Nairobi's crime rate is quite high and the US Government warns travelers to visit with care. On a lighter note, Nairobi is unique in having a very good wildlife park situated just 5 miles from the city center.

Travel to Nairobi

Nairobi is a major travel hub and most people stay for a night or two in transit. Getting around the city is easy by taxi, *matatu* or *tuk-tuk* and now you can travel easy by uber by simply installing a taxify application n your phone and request a taxi ride at an affordable price.

A full-day tour showcases the most incredible sites Nairobi has to offer. Join a small group to traverse the landscapes of Nairobi National Park, Drive into history at the Karen Blixen Museum, Of (Out of Africa Fame)

At Bomas different aspects of Kenyan culture are displayed including living styles, crafts, music and dancing.

The word Bomas was derived from "Boma"-a Swahili word for enclosed homestead and there are now many different "Bomas", each one representing one of Kenya's major ethnic groups.

You cannot afford to miss the most exciting traditional dances and acrobatic show which start at 2.30pm to 4.00pm during a weekdays and 3.30pm to 5.15pm weekends and public holidays.

If you like tacky Disney theme restaurants you will love this place. Average to poor food. Dried out and generally tough meat and overpriced considering the poor quality of food. Not worth making the effort to visit.

Born from one family's passion for Kenya and its wilderness, the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust is today the most successful orphan-elephant rescue and rehabilitation program in the world and one of the pioneering conservation organizations for wildlife and habitat protection in East Africa. So choose to visit this place whenever in Nairobi.

Where to Stay in Nairobi

- Recommended hotels include the luxurious boutique hotel Ngong House, where you can stay in a tree house, or the ultra-modern Tribe Hotel. The family owned Fairview Hotel is the best mid-range option, and the tiny Miit Mingi Guesthouse for budget travelers. If you want to avoid the city center, check out Nairobi Tented Camp, just 15 minutes from Wilson airport and situated in the heart of Nairobi National Park. Around the leafy suburbs of Karen, there are some excellent boutique hotel options including: House of Waine, and Giraffe Manor. The Panari Hotel and the EKA Hotel are both close to the international airport. Click [here](#) for a list of my recommended hotels in Nairobi.
- Nairobi has many restaurants serving a wide variety of cuisines. For people-watching grab a snack at the Thorn Tree Cafe. Fresh seafood can be had at Tamarind, and French cuisine at Alan Bobbe's Bistro. Of course the Carnivore Restaurant is perfect for meat lovers.
- Nairobi city tours are a good option for those worried about their personal safety.

4. Cairo, Egypt's Capital City



Basic Facts About Cairo

[Cairo](#) is the capital and largest city in [Egypt](#), North Africa. More than 17 million people live greater Cairo which makes it Africa's most populated city. About 8 million people live in the city proper. Egypt is Africa's most popular tourist destination and most visitors will spend at least a day or two in Cairo. Cairo is situated on the banks of the Nile River in Northern Egypt.

[Claim to Fame](#)

Cairo has been a tourist destination for thousands of years because on the outskirts of this great city you'll find the last remaining ancient wonder of the world, the [Pyramids of Giza](#) and of course the Sphinx.

[Travel to Cairo](#)

Cairo is not for the faint of heart. Traffic lights are routinely ignored and donkey carts still vie with cars for the right of way. Mosques and minarets mingle uneasily with gleaming skyscrapers. Cairo is a shopper's paradise (if you like to bargain), an archaeologists' fantasy, and a drivers' nightmare; Cairo is all of these and more. Follow the links below for more information.

[Travel Information about Cairo](#)

Cairo is a city where the ancient and the modern collide, creating a unique opportunity to enjoy history in a bustling city. With approximately 22 million residents, Cairo is one of the biggest cities found in the Middle East; you can expect crowds, traffic, and noise along with the incredible chance to explore a fascinating area. Cairo keeps all five senses busy with the mix of nightlife, culture, history, and more.

The **Great Sphinx of Giza** ,The Terrifying One; literally: Father of Dread), commonly referred to as the **Sphinx of Giza** or just the **Sphinx**, is a limestone statue of a reclining sphinx, a mythical creature with the body of a lion and the head of a human. Facing directly from West to East, it stands on the Giza Plateau on the west bank of the Nile in Giza, Egypt. The face of the Sphinx is generally believed to represent the Pharaoh Khafre.

5. Kigali, Rwanda



Basic Facts about Kigali

Kigali is the capital city of Rwanda. Kigali is Rwanda's biggest city with a population of 850,000; it's also the commercial capital of the country. Kigali was founded by the Germans in 1907 but only became Rwanda's capital when the country became independent (from Belgium) in 1962. Kigali was at the center of the horrendous genocide that took place in 1994 which took the lives of 800,000 people and displaced many more in the space of just 100 days.

Since 1994, Kigali has slowly been rebuilt and income from tourism (mostly coming to see the gorillas) as well as numerous aid workers have buoyed the capital's economy. Kigali is a relatively safe and sophisticated small city; it has come a long way in a short time. Kigali is a pretty city which sprawls over several hills, its avenues are filled with flowering trees and it is surrounded by lush green mountains.

In Kigali you'll hear people speaking Kinyarwanda, English, and French.

Travel to Kigali

Kigali is often the first stop for tourists coming to see the gorillas in the Parc National Des Volcans (about 3 hrs drive from Kigali). Flights into the capital arrive from Brussels, Nairobi, Entebbe, Addis Ababa, Kilimanjaro, and Johannesburg. Tourists also arrive in

Kigali by long-distance bus from Uganda. Kigali has a few interesting sights easily reached by taxi, they include:

Kigali Genocide Memorial Center contains a permanent exhibition of the genocide. The center is built on a site where over 250,000 people are buried.

Caplaki - market stalls where you can shop for woodcarvings, drums, baskets and ceramics. Prices start high, so be prepared to bargain.

The Dancing Pots - offers visitors a chance to buy some Batwa pottery and learn more about the *Twa* people.

Kigali Travel Resources

Recommended hotels: Hotel des Milles Collines (the actual *Hotel Rwanda*), an upscale choice and one of the best hotels in Kigali. Another good high-end hotel is the Kigali Serena. The Hotel Gorillas and Hotel Chez Lando are good mid-range options. The Lonely Planet Guide likes the *Kigali Hotel* for those on a budget.

Recommended restaurants: Aux Caprices du Palais for French cuisine; Addis Ethiopian for Ethiopian dishes; India Khazana and La Sierra for Indian food; and Sol e Luna for some Italian.

6. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's Capital City



Dar es Salaam is Tanzania's capital city and the largest city in the country. Located in southern Tanzania on coast of the Indian Ocean, Dar is a bustling, chaotic place, filled with life and color.

Dar es Salaam is primarily a port city in southern [Tanzania](#), located on a huge natural harbor. "Dar es Salaam" means "haven of peace", but you'll find with almost 3 million people calling the city home, it's not exactly tranquil. Dar es Salaam it is the economic heart of the country, the high rise business district buzzes with activity throughout the day. The government was officially moved to Dodoma in the center of Tanzania in the 1970's, but Dar es Salaam is the true capital and the central government by and large still operates from here. Visitors to Dar es Salaam are usually en route to Tanzania's fantastic [southern national parks](#) including the Selous and Ruaha, or catching a ferry to the exotic [Zanzibar](#) archipelago.

The best time to visit Dar es Salaam is during the dry season from June - October, otherwise temperatures can get very hot and humid (but you can always dip in the Ocean).

[Dar es Salaam's Top Attractions](#)

The easiest way to see Dar es Salaam's attractions is by taxi, unless you've been in the country a while and know how to figure out the mini-bus taxi system which is cheaper. There aren't a lot of major attractions, but if you've been on the road for a while, Dar offers the chance to get some good food, stock up on supplies and swim in a nice hotel pool. Take a walk in the older parts of town to check out the German and British colonial buildings. Shopping for cloth and t-shirts is fun in the Asian district northwest of the main drag Samora Avenue. Arts and craft shops are plentiful too, check out Nyumba ya sanaa (the Mwalimu Nyerere Cultural Center). For some original [Tingatinga](#) paintings, head to the Tingatinga Center on Haile Selassie Road. The Mwenge Carver's Market is great if you like wood carvings.

The National Museum - From fossils to cars, this museum has a little bit of everything that touches upon Tanzania's history. Some of the early hominid findings courtesy of the Leakeys are on display here (some from the [Olduvai site](#) in Northern Tanzania). There are also cultural displays from the various tribes that make up modern Tanzania.

Kariakoo market - Lively central market that takes up several city blocks, with people selling everything from vegetables to school bags.

[Fish Market](#) - Guaranteed to be a lively morning when you head to the [fish market](#) and watch the daily catch come in.

If you'd like to escape town and snorkel in the Ocean, check out Bongoyo Island, part of a marine reserve. You can catch a boat out to the island (30 minutes) from the Mashua

Waterfront Bar & Grill at Slipway, north of the city center in the Msasani Peninsula. It's wonderful for snorkeling and chilling on the beach.

Where To Stay in Dar es Salaam

There are plenty of hotels in the city center to choose from. If you'd prefer to be out of the urban hubbub, check out the luxurious Ras Kutani just south of the city on the coast, or the [Amani Beach Hotel](#). Just north of the city, have a peek at The Retreat, a very nice boutique hotel on the beach.

Budget/Mid-range hotel options include: [Jambo Inn Hotel](#), [Palm Beach Hotel](#), [Mediterraneo Hotel](#), [Swiss Garden Hotel](#), and [Hotel Slipway](#).

High-end hotels include: [Dar es Salaam Serena Hotel](#), [The Kilimanjaro](#), [Hotel Sea Cliff](#) and [Oyster Bay](#) (north of city)

Where to Eat and Drink in Dar es Salaam

Travelers and expatriates favorite pub is either O' Willie's or the Slipway pub. The best rooftop bar is the "Level 8" on the roof of the Kilimanjaro Kempinski Hotel. You can get all kinds of cuisines in Dar es Salaam, good Ethiopian at Addis in Dar and upscale Indian food at Nawabi Khana (but there's lots of good Indian food to get in the Asian neighborhood for cheaper). Japanese/Thai food is excellent at the [Oriental](#).

Traditional dances are held at the Mwalimu Julius K Nyerere Cultural Center every weekend. For more on what's happening in Dar check out [Dar 411](#).

Getting to Dar es Salaam

Dar es Salaam's Julius Nyerere International Airport (DAR) lies 10 km out of town. Daily flights come in from Europe on KLM, BA and Swissair. Middle East options include Emirates and Qatar. Regional airlines that fly in daily include Kenya Airways, Ethiopian, EgyptAir, and South African Airways. Domestic flights are well served by [Precision Air](#).

If you are traveling by bus, [Scandinavian Express](#) has daily service to Nairobi (Kenya), Kampala (Uganda) and Arusha (northern Tanzania). The main express bus terminal is on Msimbazi Road, on the corner of Nyerere Road, in central Dar es Salaam.

Ferries to and from Zanzibar: There are several daily [high-speed ferries](#) from the port in Dar es Salaam to Stone town on Zanzibar. The trip takes about an hour and a half and tickets can be bought on the spot from the ticket office (or touts) for US Dollars. You need your passport as authorities will ask to check it.

There is a very limited train service out of Dar es Salaam, but fun if you can get on it and have the time! [Tazara](#) trains run between Dar es Salaam and Mbeya (handy to get to the border of Malawi and Zambia). The [Tanzania Railway Corporation](#) (TRC) runs the other railway line and you can travel from Dar es Salaam to Kigoma and Mwanza; and also along the Kaliua-Mpanda and Manyoni-Singida Branch Lines. See [Seat 61](#)'s passenger-train schedules to find out when the trains run.

7. Harare, Zimbabwe



Basic Facts about Harare

Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe in southern Africa. Harare is Zimbabwe's biggest city with a population of around 2 million; it's also the commercial capital of the country. The British founded the city in 1890 and called it Salisbury. When Zimbabwe gained independence in the early 1980's, the name was changed to Harare after a Shona chief, *Neharawa*.

Harare is a fairly cosmopolitan capital, with an excellent climate. It's easy to walk around central Harare; there are lots of shops, parks, banks and restaurants in the city-center

as well as high-rise office buildings. There are nicely maintained suburbs where the wealthier folks live along with several golf courses. The outskirts of Harare are filled with townships that are home to most of Harare's workers.

Shona, Sindebele and English are the most common languages spoken in Harare.

Travel to Harare

Visitors fly into Harare via London (on BA and Air Zimbabwe) or Johannesburg (on SAA or Kulula). Regional airlines include Air Zimbabwe, Air Botswana and Malawi Airlines (web site coming soon!). Long-distance buses travel between Harare and Blantyre (Malawi), Johannesburg (South Africa), and Lusaka (Zambia).

Minibuses and taxis will get you around Harare. Commuter trains are used by locals making their way from the townships into the city center. It's not advisable to walk around Harare at night.

Where to Stay: Meikles Hotel (high-end, central location); Bronte and Baines B&B (luxury/mid-range, Harare suburbs); Imba Motombo and Wild Geese Lodge (luxury, outside city center); Small World Backpackers Lodge.

Where to Eat: Amanzi (International); Keg and Maiden (British Pub food); Shangri-La (Chinese); Kwa Mereki (African BBQ).

Harare's Attractions

- Harare Gardens and Africa Unity Square -- two parks that are worth checking out. Have a coke, enjoy street performers and watch Harare's youth stroll by.
- Tobacco Auctions -- as a major tobacco producer, the auctions are fascinating to watch, tours are available (April - October).
- Chapungu Sculpture Park -- a recreated Shona village with an excellent gallery showcasing Shona sculpture.
- National Botanic Gardens - 58 hectares of gorgeous flowers, trees and shrubs.
- National Gallery -- good display of African art and traveling exhibits.
- Harare International Festival of the Arts -- excellent cultural festival, not to be missed in April/May.

8. Kampala, Uganda



Basic Facts About Kampala

Kampala is the capital city of Uganda in East Africa. Over 1 million people live in Kampala making it Uganda's largest city. Kampala was the capital of the Bugandan Kingdom several hundred years ago. Today, Kampala is a modern looking city, with outlying townships spreading far beyond the original "seven hills" the city was built upon. Many of Kampala's more modern buildings were built in the 1980's since the city suffered significant destruction during the "Liberation War" between Tanzania and Uganda in the late 1970's. The war was fought to oust the brutal dictator, Idi Amin who was in power during that time.

Kampala is built close to the shores of Lake Victoria, the world's second largest fresh water lake and the source of Nile River. English, Swahili and Luganda are the predominant languages spoken in the streets of Kampala.

Claim to Fame

Kampala is one of Africa's "greenest" cities, with parks, gardens and golf courses in the city center. This reputation may not last long however as Kampala is one of the fastest growing cities in Africa.

Travel to Kampala

Kampala is a relatively safe city, (despite the awful terrorist attack in 2010). You can walk the main streets at night without too much fear of getting mugged or robbed. The center of the city is relatively clean, the bars and nightclubs are fun, (check out the

Kabalagala district) and there are plenty of restaurants. Most of the large banks, offices, big hotels and embassies are situated on Nakasero Hill.

At the bottom of Nakasero Hill, the streets get more congested with traffic as well as pedestrians and hawkers selling goods along the sidewalks. There are several Hindu temples and Mosques as the Indian community has a long history in Uganda and play a big role in the economy.

Kampala's attractions aren't too plentiful. It's a nice city to stay in and use as a base for exploring the country further (and the Indian food is great). But if you have a few afternoons to spare, you can visit the Kasubi Tombs, the Uganda Museum and follow the Kabaka's Trail, which takes you to the pretty Ssesibwa Falls on this cultural Bugandan heritage tour.

The best way to get around Kampala is by taxi or mini-bus.

9. Malabo, Equatorial Guinea's Capital City



Malabo is [Equatorial Guinea](#)'s capital city. Despite being an oil-rich town, Malabo has a fairly poor infrastructure. Paved streets are few and far between and the Spanish

colonial buildings are somewhat faded along the main avenues. But the markets are lively and there are some worthwhile sights to keep visitors occupied. Attractions include the Cathedral and exhibits at the French and Spanish Cultural centers.

[Equatorial Guinea](#)'s capital Malabo is located just off the mainland on Bioko Island. It's an oil town these days, with some high end, expensive hotels and lots of oil platforms dotted around the harbor. Because of the oil industry, Malabo is a fairly cosmopolitan city and there are plenty of restaurants and bars to enjoy especially along the main street in town, Ave de la Independencia. In January 2012 Malabo co-hosts the [Africa Cup of Nations](#), so the town will be filled with fans and soccer players alike. Malabo is a relatively small capital, with a population hovering around 100,000.

History

The Portuguese explorer Fernão do Pó, was the first European to discover the island of Bioko in 1472. He called it Formosa ("Beautiful"), but it ended up being named after Fernao himself and officially colonized by Portugal in 1474. In 1778, the island, adjacent islets, and commercial rights to the mainland between the Niger and Ogoue Rivers were ceded to Spain in exchange for territory in the American continent. As an important settlement, Malabo started life as Port Clarence in 1827, after the British leased Bioko island from the Spanish, to establish a naval station to help fight slavery along the coast. Newly freed slaves called [Fernandinos](#) settled in the town and their descendants can still be found in Malabo today, speaking an Afro-Portuguese dialect. When the Spanish regained control of the island, it was renamed Santa Isabel and finally Malabo in 1973 after independence. Malabo became the capital city of Equatorial Guinea in 1969, replacing Bata on the mainland, (which is still a larger city to this day).

Malabo lost much of its soul during the 1970's under the then [President Macías Nguema](#), who led a reign of terror on the dominant tribe of Bioko island, the Bubi. Talk to anyone in Malabo today and you'll find out that this period of darkness still affects them.

Malabo Today

Despite being an oil-rich town, Malabo has a fairly poor infrastructure. Paved streets are few and far between and the Spanish colonial buildings are somewhat faded along the main avenues. But the markets are lively and there are some worthwhile sights to keep visitors occupied. Attractions include the Cathedral and exhibits at the French and Spanish Cultural centers.

The dry months between December and February are the best time to visit [Equatorial Guinea](#). It is warm year round.

Recommended Hotels in Malabo

Sofitel Sipopo

Hilton Malabo

Ibis Malabo
Hotel Bahia
Hotel Yoli

Getting to Malabo

Most visitors will fly into the Saint Isabel International airport in Malabo. Regular flights from Europe as well as Africa arrive daily. Airlines servicing the capital include: Ethiopian, Kenya Airways, Iberia, and Swissair. You can fly the local airline [General Work](#) - to Equatorial Guinea's larger city, Bata on the mainland (takes about 30 mins).

Malabo is located on Bioko Island, there are some ferries to the mainland, but they take a long time so it's best to fly to Bata, or neighboring capitals in Cameroon (Douala) and/or Libreville (Gabon).

10. Gaborone, Botswana



Basic Facts About Gaborone

Gaborone is Botswana's capital city and its commercial hub. Gaborone has a population of around 250,000 people. It's located in a valley on the Notwane River, in the south-east corner of Botswana (see map), close to the border of South Africa. Gaborone was named after Kgosi (Chief) Gaborone who led the Batlokwa tribe into the area in the 1880's. The small town grew into the administrative center of Bechuanaland, a British protectorate (1885 -1966). When Botswana gained independence in 1966, Gaborone became its capital.

Gaborone is a fairly affluent city, with shopping malls, restaurants, some nightclubs, decent hotels and a University. It's a small city, not very lively or vibrant but quite safe, tidy and relaxing. Gaborone is the setting for Alexander McCall Smith's delightful detective series, *The No 1 Ladies Detective Agency*, and home town of his leading lady, Precious Ramotswe.

Gaborone Sights

The Mall -- the hub of Gaborone is The Mall, a main street lined with shops, banks and craft sellers.

The National Art Gallery -- an excellent place to learn more about Botswana, its history, ecology and culture.

No 1 Ladies Detective Agency Tours -- Alexander McCall-Smith's detective series put Gaborone on the map. Take a tour and see Precious Ramotswe's, home town come to life.

Gaborone Game Reserve -- small reserve with good roads, you can see ostrich, rhino, kudu, eland, zebra and a huge array of birds.

Getting to Gaborone

Botswana's main international airport, *Sir Seretse Khama International Airport* (airport code: GBE) is located 9 miles outside of Gaborone. Airlines that operate include: Air Botswana (to/from Harare, Johannesburg, Lusaka, Nairobi, Victoria Falls, Windhoek), Air France, Air Zimbabwe, South African Airways and British Airways.

Long-distance buses to Gaborone are available from Johannesburg and Pretoria on the Intercape Mainliner. You can also reach Gaborone from other cities and towns in Botswana, either by mini-bus or intercity coaches, some operated by Seabalo. Botswana Railways suspended passenger services in April 2009.

Gaborone Hotels

Hotels in Gaborone are modern and most have little personality. Recommended hotels include: Cresta Lodge; Gaborone Sun Hotel and Casino; Oppi-Koppi Bed and Breakfast; Mokolodi Backpackers.

11. Freetown, Sierra Leone



Basic Facts about Freetown

Freetown is the capital of Sierra Leone in West Africa and just over one million residents live there. Freetown was founded in the 1780's as a home for freed slaves from North America and the Caribbean. The freed slaves who settled Freetown were called *Krio* and they brought their [unique language](#) with them (also called *Krio* or *Creole*) which is the predominant language of Freetown today.

Freetown is situated on a peninsula jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean and is Africa's largest natural harbor.

Freetown is etched in many people's minds as the backdrop to one of the world's most horrendous civil wars which included a military operation called "Operation No Living Thing". [The civil war](#) lasted from 1991-2002 and left hundreds of thousands of civilian's dead and many more maimed for life. The war was basically about controlling the lucrative diamond trade. Check out [Sorious Samura's](#) incredible documentary "[Cry Freetown](#)" for more.

Claim to Fame

In 1792 when freed slaves came to settle Freetown, they built their houses around a cotton tree which [still stands today](#).

Travel to Freetown

Freetown bears the scars of the civil war but it is slowly regaining its vibrancy. There are still lots of war refugees in town but there is optimism present despite the noise, traffic jams and general Lumley Beach is particularly popular. Many of the better hotels are situated on, or close to the beach. Lush, green mountains provide a nice backdrop to the city.

Major sights in Freetown include The Cotton Tree (see above), the National Museum, several churches and mosques that date back to the 1820's, and West Africa's oldest University, [Fourah Bay College](#) founded in 1827. Markets in Freetown offer lots of color, bargaining and relatively inexpensive tourist trinkets.

The best way to get around Freetown is by taxi. Getting from Lungi International Airport to Freetown requires a ride in a [helicopter](#), ferry or hovercraft, an exciting way to enter a city.

12. Libreville, Gabon's Capital City



Libreville, the capital of [Gabon](#) on the west coast of Central Africa, is a modern African city with plenty of 5 star hotels, decent French wine, good beaches, malls and fast-food restaurants. The markets, Musée des Arts et Traditions du Gabon and National Museum are worth a look. The nightlife is vibrant, check out hotel bars for live music and numerous nightclubs around town for dancing. Libreville will host the [Africa Cup of Nations in 2012](#). More about Libreville below...

[Gabon](#)'s capital city Libreville is a vibrant city with a population of around half a million people. Compared to other regional capitals, Libreville is a fairly modern looking town in parts, with casinos and large hotels lining the best beaches in town. It's not cheap, but the beer and wine is plentiful and the restaurants are very good if you can afford the French/African upmarket restaurants.

History of Libreville

Libreville was founded as a town by freed slaves in 1848. The French navy had stopped a Portuguese ship carrying the slaves to Brazil, and let the liberated men and women settle in Libreville. "Libreville" means *free town* in French. The city grew slowly up until independence from France in 1960, and since has steadily increased its population, whereby almost half of all Gabonese now live in the capital.

Libreville's Top Attractions

Libreville is a mixed bag of a city; wide boulevards with modern buildings can give way to ramshackle neighborhoods and areas showcasing soviet architecture at its most drab. The best way to get around Libreville to all the attractions is by taxi.

Musée des Arts et Traditions offers a good insight into Gabon's thriving traditional arts scene. Plenty of masks, sculptures and traditional crafts on display. To buy your own masks and curios, head for the artisan market.

Traditional Ceremonies - traditional Bitwi performances and ceremonies are offered by several associations in town, one that comes recommended is the [Ebando Association](#).

L'Eglise St-Michel (St Michael Cathedral) has 31 carved wooden columns that depict various biblical scenes. (It's said that a blind craftsman carved the columns.)

Beaches in Libreville are plentiful; a little outside of town is the popular Pointe Denis and Ekwata Island. In town, head for the fancy hotels to use their pools and beaches.

Presidential Palace, built in 1970, is an interesting building that rises from the low-lying landscape of the city.

Best Time to Visit Libreville

The drier cooler months between June - August is the best time to visit Gabon, or the short dry period between Decembers - January. It is warm and tropical year round.

Getting to and from Libreville

Most visitors will arrive by air, and land at the Leon M'ba International Airport in Libreville. Airlines with regular flights to Gabon include: Air France, KLM, Lufthansa and Emirates. Regional destinations are covered by: Gabon Airlines, South African Airways, Ethiopian Airlines, Royal Air Maroc, Rwandair Express and Kenya Airways.

Where to Stay in Libreville

Libreville is home to several European chain luxury hotels; all offer similar facilities at high prices. The better ones include: [Le Meridien Re-Ndama](#), [Résidence Le Maisha](#). Good options for those on a budget or paying their own way include: Hotel Tropicana, and [Le Patio](#).

13. Dakar, Senegal



Basic Facts about Dakar

Dakar is the capital city of Senegal in West Africa. Over 1 million people live in Dakar (double that for the whole metropolitan area) making it Senegal's largest city. Dakar is located on the Cape Verde peninsula that juts into the Atlantic Ocean. It was first settled in the early 15th Century and the Portuguese arrived just a few decades later to set up slaving forts on Goree Island (Ile de Goree). Dutch, French, British and Portuguese colonialists vied with each other over the next 250 years for control over the slave-trade until it was permanently abolished by the French in 1815.

Today, Dakar is a sprawling, lively cosmopolitan city. Modern buildings stand side by side with impressive colonial architecture. Bustling markets selling everything from second hand clothes to livestock are scattered throughout. The nightclubs are legendary. It's a big African city so it's chaotic, crowded, and dusty and hustlers abound especially around the beaches and markets.

The central Place d'Indépendance is a good place to orientate yourself from. If you speak French, you'll have no problem conversing with anyone in Dakar.

Travel to Dakar

Getting There:

Direct flights from the US can be found on Delta and SAA. Fly direct from Paris (AF), Brussels (SN), and Amsterdam (KLM). Dakar is a regional hub and you can get to most West African capitals. Air Senegal is the national airline. And once you are in Dakar, the best way to get around is by taxi, or try a scooter tour.

Recommended hotels you can stay in include: Le Meridien President (luxury); Hotel Djoloff (mid-range, boutique); Hotel du Phare Les Mamelles (budget/mid); Senegal Style B&B (budget).

What to See

IFAN Museum: One of Africa's oldest art museums, IFAN is a treasure trove of masks, musical instruments, carvings and more from all over Africa. Sandaga Market: The biggest market in Dakar, a great place to get some clothes but watch out for the hustlers. Goree Island: It's just a boat ride away to this tranquil island that was a major slave-trading post. Visit the "House of Slaves" for a poignant reminder of the horrors of slave-trading.

14. Tunis, Tunisia's Capital City



Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, is often ignored by the many European tourists who flock to Tunisia's beach resorts. But they're missing a true gem of a city, particularly the Medina, which rivals that of [Marrakech](#) and [Fes](#) in [Morocco](#). The main avenue leading to the medina is lined with tropical trees giving shade to the numerous sidewalk cafes. Perfect

to enjoy a coffee and watch the world walk by. Tunis is a very modern town, safe and pleasant. The restaurants are good and offer fine cuisine that's a mix of Arab and French. Enjoy a local [hammam](#) if you're brave and want a good scrub and massage.

Tunis is home to one the best museums in North Africa, [The Bardo](#), which is housed in a beautiful palace filled with the treasures found at numerous ancient sites dotted around Tunisia. It's easy to get to, just jump on tram number 4. The local tourist offices have maps and are helpful; their employees speak fluent French and decent English.

While there are many hotels in Tunis, a light [rail system](#) makes it very easy to stay in the gorgeous, picturesque village of [Sidi Bou Said](#) on the coast, just 20 minutes away. En route are the ancient ruins of [Carthage](#).

Getting around Tunis is easy by foot, [light rail](#) or taxis. Just make sure the taxis use their meters.

15. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Basic Facts about Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia in East Africa. Around 3 million people live in Addis Ababa. Addis (as it's commonly referred to) was founded by Emperor Menelik II in 1887.

Addis is the third highest capital in the world at 2440m. It's a sprawling city that takes some getting used to. Mud huts, Italian fascist architecture, glitzy hotels, cathedrals and Marxist billboards provide the backdrop to Africa's fourth largest city. Nightclubs and restaurants serving international cuisine rub shoulders with bars serving traditional honey wine (*Tej*). Despite its mix of wealth and poverty, tradition and modernity, Addis is a safe city with little violent crime but lots of petty theft.

Travel to Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa's Bole International Airport is the entry point for most visitors to Ethiopia and a major regional transport hub.

What to see

You'll need at least 2 days to enjoy the major sights of Addis, city tours are available.

- **National Museum** -- See the 3.5 million year old hominid fossil skeleton, Lucy.
- **Ethnological Museum** -- Cultural museum located in Haile Selassie's former palace
- **St George's Cathedral** -- Built to commemorate the defeat over Italy in 1896 and the site of Haile Selassie's coronation (as the King of Kings) in 1930.
- **Holy Trinity Cathedral** -- Important place of worship and final resting place of Haile Selassie.
- **Merkato** -- Shop 'til you drop in one of Africa's largest markets, but watch out for pickpockets and go with a local to guide you.

Addis Travel Resources

Hotels: Business travelers usually opt for the high-end Sheraton Addis or the Hilton Addis. Mid-range try Adot-Tina and Z Guesthouse. Budget hotels in the Piazza district include Taitu Hotel and the Baro Hotel.

Getting around Addis

Churchill Avenue is the main thoroughfare in Addis and it's best to orient yourself around it since street names either don't exist or have changed. Minibuses and taxis are readily available, give the driver the name of a place rather than an address.

16. Pretoria, Administrative Capital of South Africa



South Africa has 3 capital cities. Pretoria is the administrative capital, Cape Town is the legislative capital and Bloemfontein is the judicial capital.

About Pretoria (Tshwane)

Pretoria (Tshwane) is South Africa's administrative capital and is located in Gauteng Province. Over 2 million people live in Pretoria and this is also where all the foreign embassies are located. It's a well-planned out, large city, see map. The main street, Church Street is 26 km (16 miles) long. Many of the hotels, museums and restaurants are in the center around Church square, to the east in Arcadia and south in the upscale suburb of Waterkloof.

Getting to Pretoria/Tshwane

The Johannesburg International Airport about a 40 minute drive from Pretoria and shuttle buses offer frequent service.

Trains run from Jo'burg, Durban, and Cape Town. You could splash out and get the famous, ultra-luxurious Blue Train from Cape Town.

Renting a car is easy, it's about a 40 minute drive from Johannesburg, 5 hours from Bloemfontein, and 15 hours from Cape Town. Five major highways meet nearby, so it's easy to get to from anywhere in the country.

Catch a long-distance bus on the Trans-lux, Greyhound, or Intercape Mainliner.

While in Tshwane stay in a township or at one of Pretoria's many hotels, B&B's and Guesthouses. For budget travelers check out the Hatfield area.

Pretoria has lots of excellent restaurants, for a good list [click here](#). For bars and nightlife head over to the Hatfield area near the University.

Getting Around

Buses, taxis and a train will get you from city center to the Loftus Versfeld stadium.

What to See in Pretoria/Tshwane

- Union Buildings -- where South Africa's Presidents are sworn into Government
- Museums and historical sights.
- The Zoo

17. Lusaka, Zambia



Basic Facts about Lusaka

Lusaka is the fast-growing capital city of Zambia in Southern Africa. Around 3 million people live in Lusaka making it Zambia's largest city and commercial center. The British established Lusaka as the capital of Northern Rhodesia in 1935, it remained the capital once Zambia gained independence in 1964.

Lusaka has a modern looking business area, lots of scrambling shanties on its outskirts, lively markets, decent nightlife and some upscale hotels and restaurants. Cairo Road is the main avenue in town, lined with shops, banks and businesses, west of Cairo Road is considered the center of town. [Click here for a basic tourist map.](#)

Main languages spoken in Lusaka are English and Nyanja.

Travel to Lusaka

Lusaka is not an unsafe city but petty theft is common given the high number of unemployed, so don't walk around with valuables and take a taxi at night.

What to see in Lusaka

Most people arrive at Lusaka's international airport and continue on to the Victoria Falls or one of Zambia's many excellent game reserves like South Luangwa. Lusaka is a friendly, relaxed city with some interesting sights:

- Lusaka National Museum - Zambian history, ethnography and contemporary art is on display.
- Munda Wanga Environmental Park has an impressive botanical garden, wildlife sanctuary, and swimming pool.
- Kalimba Reptile Park for your fill of snakes, crocodiles, tortoises, and chameleons. Sample a crocodile burger.
- Kabwata Cultural Village for local handicrafts, lots of wood carvings to bargain for.
- Markets - check out City Center and Soweto Markets.

Where to Stay in Lusaka

Taj Pamodzi (high end, business, good Indian food), Southern Sun Ridgeway (high end), Inter Continental (high-end, diplomatic district) Eight Reedbuck Hotel (high end, boutique hotel); Lusaka Hotel (mid-range and central); KuOmboko Hostel (budget,

backpacker accommodation); and Lusaka Backpackers (formerly Chachacha - popular, budget).

Getting Around Lusaka

Minibus taxis are everywhere and ply set routes, a cheap way to get around. Private taxis can be called and will get you from A to B more efficiently.

18. Monrovia, Liberia



Basic Facts about Monrovia

Monrovia is the capital city of Liberia in West Africa, it's located on the Atlantic Coast. Just over 1 million people live in Monrovia making it Liberia's most populated city. Monrovia was founded in 1822, named after US President James Monroe, who was in favor of re-settling freed African-American slaves. As the city grew during the next century it was divided into two sections, one for the returning African-Americans and the other for the existing local population. The city continued to grow as more people moved into Monrovia from the countryside. Things were looking up in the late 1970's as Monrovia's public housing and education system saw significant improvements. Unfortunately this came to a dead halt in 1980, when Samuel Doe led a military coup

and Liberia was caught in two consecutive civil wars, infamous for their destructive violence.

Today, Monrovia is at peace and Africa's first female president is in charge. Monrovia is a working port, but it's sprawling neighborhoods are generally poor with intermittent electricity. Despite its past, Monrovia has a friendly reputation thanks to its warmhearted residents.

The most common languages you'll hear in Monrovia are English, Bassa and Kru.

Travel to Monrovia

You can fly to Monrovia's International Airport via Belgium on Brussels Airlines, or via London on Astraeus Airlines. Regional airlines include Elysian Airlines and Kenya Airways. Delta may operate flights in June 2010 from NY.

What to See

- **Liberian National Museum** - looted during the war, but some interesting items remain.
- **Providence Island** - where the freed American slaves first arrived.
- **Waterside Market** - bustling with activity and goods for sale
- **Beaches** - Kendeja, Silver Beach, Ellen's Beach.

Where to Stay in Monrovia

Mamba Point Hotel; Moko's Bed and Breakfast; Royal Hotel; Kendeja Resort Villas (just out of town, where the old cultural center used to stand).

While in Monrovia Taxis is the best way to get around town.

19. Port Louis, Mauritius Capital City



Port Louis - bustling port, market town, horse racing capital, former home to the Dodo, offers much more.

Basic Facts About Port Louis

Port Louis is the capital city of Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean, east of Madagascar. Around 150,000 people live in the capital, a bustling port on the north-west coast of the island. Port Louis is one of Africa's busiest commercial ports; it's also a popular landing spot for cruise ships. It has a rich history; the harbor was in use by traders as early as the 1630's. The French made it the administrative capital as early as 1735 and used it as a provisions center for their ships sailing around the stormy Cape of Good Hope. Port Louis was named after the French King Louis the XV (1710-1774).

Port Louis is truly a microcosm of the world today. Its population is total melting pot of cultures, languages, traditions and religions. The grandest architecture reflects its early colonial history which is now battling for sea views with sky-scrappers. The modern concept of a "waterfront mall" is alive and well in the form of Le Caudan. But the heart and soul of the place can be found in its bazaars (markets). This is where housewives and restaurant owners mingle in the early hours of the morning to buy their fresh produce for the day.

Traffic is chaotic in the small capital, but you can easily escape the fumes and head into the Port Louis Moka Range that surrounds the port, or one of the numerous beaches .

What to See in Port Louis

Port Louis has many attractions including:

- **Cathedrals, Mosques and Temples** - St Louis Cathedral, Jummah Mosque, and Kaliammen Kovil (Hindu Temple).

- Champs de Mars - A great Saturday out watching the horses race and mingling with the locals.
- Natural History Museum - Featuring the Dodo!
- **Central Market** - From fish to key chains, Farquahar Street is still the shopping heart of the city.
- Caudan Waterfront - Restaurants, bars and duty-free shops.

Where to Stay

If you're spending a few nights in Port Louis, check out: Le Labourdonnais, Le Suffren, and Villa Jorico.

Where to Eat

Mauritian cuisine is absolutely delicious, especially if you like seafood and/or spicy, Indian cuisine. Try the snack food available at little stalls in the central market, Dhal Puris Stall is popular. For Chinese food, head to Chinatown and check out the First Restaurant. For views and international cuisine check out L'escale.

20. Ouagadougou - Burkina Faso's Capital City



Basic Facts about Ouagadougou

Ouagadougou is the capital city of Burkina Faso in West Africa. Almost 1.5 million people live in Ouagadougou, making it Burkina Faso's largest city and its commercial capital. Ougadougou was founded in the mid-15th century by the Yonyonse tribe who named the area "Wogodogo," meaning "where people get honor and respect". It soon became the capital of the Mossi Empire. When the French colonized what was then called French West Africa in the 1890's, (later Upper Volta and now Burkina Faso), they gave Wogodogo a French accent, and named the capital Ougadougou.

Today, Ouagadougou (commonly called Ouaga - pronounced wa-ga) is a sprawling city with a lively economy. The city is also a major cultural center and hosts the biennial FESPACO film festival. The heart of the city is focused around the Grand Marche, newly built since the last one burned to the ground in 2003. Ouagadougou is laid out in a grid-like pattern and is easy to navigate from the Place des Nations Unies (pictured above) where the city's 5 main roads converge.

In Ouaga most people speak French, More, Dyula and Fulfulde.

Travel to Ouagadougou

Ouaga is home to Burkina's international airport. Air Burkina is the national airline serving domestic and regional cities. You can also fly direct from Paris on Air France.

What to see in Ouaga

- Musee National - Housed in a new complex, you'll find tribal artifacts, masks and textiles.
- Moro-Naba Palace - You can't go in, but do attend a traditional ceremony held outside the gates at 7am every Friday.
- Grand Marche - newly reconstructed after a fire burned it down, the market is still a lively place for bargaining.
- Le Musee de la Musique - a good selection of traditional musical instruments.
- Village Artisanal - Great place to watch local craftsmen at work.

Hotels

Luxury - Laico Ouaga 2000 Hotel; Mid-range - Hotel OK Inn and Hotel Les Palmiers; Budget - Le Pavillon Vert.

Transport

Ouaga is easy to get around by taxi. You can travel to and from the capital by train or long-distance bus to Burkina's other main towns as well as Ghana, Cote D'ivoire, Benin, Mali and Niger.

21. Lilongwe, Malawi's Capital City



Lilongwe is Malawi's capital, a pleasant enough city where you'll find embassies and government departments. It's a planned capital, and the population is smaller than Blantyre, at around 1 million. The "new town" is spread out with modern office buildings and residential areas. The "old town" is much livelier with a really great market where you can buy everything from bikes to fans. Just watch your valuables here and enjoy a little bartering.

Lilongwe is a good place to regroup if you've been on the road for a while, lots of accommodation options and some decent restaurants can be found in both the old and the new town. The Lilongwe Wildlife center and the tobacco auctions (see above) are two of several worthwhile attractions in the capital. Some of the embassies and cultural centers host local art shows which are worth attending.

If you're seeking a new favorite getaway, look no further than Lilongwe. Visitors to Lilongwe can take time to see places such as Lilongwe City Mall and Civic Stadium. There's plenty more to see, including sights such as Lilongwe Golf Course.

Capital City Motel offers accommodation in Lilongwe. The property is set 1.4 km from Lingadzi Namilomba Forest Reserve and 1.9 km from National Herbarium & Botanic Gardens of Malawi. The property is 2.1 km from World War I & II Memorial Tower.

22. Khartoum, Sudan



Basic Facts about Khartoum

Khartoum is the capital city of Sudan in North East Africa. Over 1 million people live in Khartoum which is situated at the confluence of the Blue Nile and the White Nile.

Khartoum was founded by the Egyptians in 1821 and became the capital of Sudan upon independence from the British in 1956. Khartoum is said to derive its name from the thin spit of land at the convergence of the rivers, which resembles an elephant's trunk (khurtum).

Khartoum is really one of three cities in this area. There's Omdurman to the north-west across the White Nile, North Khartoum (the industrial heartland), and Khartoum itself on the southern bank of the Blue Nile.

War refugees from Chad, Ethiopia and other neighboring countries have flocked to Khartoum in the past few decades and there are plenty of slums. [Booming oil revenues](#) are slowly changing the city's landscape as the long civil war between Sudan's North and South ended in 2005.

Travel to Khartoum

Khartoum and indeed Sudan is not a very popular tourist destination to say the least. [Recent heavy fighting](#) in Khartoum makes the city less than safe to visit at this time. Those that do make it however, always gush at the friendliness of the local population and hospitality despite the huge amount of poverty.

Attractions include [The National Museum of Sudan](#). Two reconstructed Egyptian Temples can be found in the gardens of the museum, they were salvaged from Nubia after the flooding of Lake Nasser. Sudan is actually home to [more ancient pyramids than Egypt](#).

The market across the river in [Omdurman](#) (a larger city than Khartoum) is excellent; the best time to visit is Friday morning. And there's an authentic camel market a few kilometers away.

Sufi dancers, better known as *whirling dervishes*, perform their magic every Friday outside the Hamed al-Nil tomb in Omdurman (just south of the market). Check out [this video](#) to see what it's like.

23. Abuja, Nigeria



Basic Facts About Abuja

Abuja is the capital of [Nigeria](#) in West Africa, Africa's most populous nation. Just fewer than 800,000 people live in Abuja (less than a tenth that live in Lagos, the old capital). Abuja is a planned city, it became Nigeria's capital city in 1991 and it's situated in the center of the country. Many developing nations have planned capital cities situated in the geographic center in order to maintain some political neutrality as well as create an economic base in a previously underdeveloped part of the country. Abuja was constructed during the 1980's. The downtown area is planned out and mostly completed. Multinationals have their headquarters here, embassies are based here, there's a mosque, church and a large national assembly. The outskirts of town are still somewhat of a mess with little in the way of modern conveniences such as electricity and running water. Shanty towns are growing in number as the rural population is drawn to the city in search of jobs.

Claim to Fame

Planned cities generally have some out-of-place projects going on and Abuja is no exception with a huge planned amusement park being built, called [Mataima Amusement Park](#). So far some of the attractions that have opened include rotating teacups, bumper boats and a photo booth. Phase two of the project will include a waterpark as well as a small zoo complete with some animatronics. This will be interesting in a city that experiences daily power cuts.

Travel to Abuja

Abuja is not a tourist destination since there isn't much in the way of sights to attract anyone. Businessmen however do come to Abuja and it has a reputation as being one of the most expensive cities in Nigeria as far as the price of hotels and restaurants are concerned. There is also not much in the way of public transportation, so you have to rely on taxis to get around.

24. Rabat, Morocco



Basic Facts about Rabat

Rabat is the capital city of Morocco in North Africa. Over 2 million people live in Rabat, making it the country's second largest city. Rabat is located on the Atlantic Ocean, but Casablanca further south along the coast is the main port. Rabat is where the government is located, as well as the King of Morocco, but it's not the commercial capital (that would be Casablanca). Rabat has a rich history but is a fairly new capital, the French gave it this status in 1912 and it remained the capital as per the King's wishes, after independence in 1956.

Rabat is a very pleasant capital, and not as congested as some other Moroccan cities. The boulevards are wide, the souqs are not too hectic and there's a cosmopolitan feel to the outdoor cafes and well-dressed middle classes that live and work here. As with many Moroccan cities, it's divided into the *Medina* (old-walled city) and the *Ville Nouvelle* (new city, built by the French).

Arabic and French are the most common languages you'll hear on the streets of Rabat.

Travel to Rabat

Rabat has a small airport, Rabat-Sale Airport, just outside of town; serviced by Royal Air Maroc and Air France. Most visitors will arrive by train from Casablanca (where the main international airport is). Frequent trains from Casablanca take an hour to reach Rabat. Long-distance buses are also readily available from every major town in Morocco. You need to take a petit-taxi to get around, make sure the meter is working.

Where to Stay:

Riads, traditional homes converted into boutique hotels, are my favorite. Rooms aren't spacious, but they are gorgeous, intimate and in the heart of the medina. Rabat's best Riads include: Riad Kalaa, Dar el Kebira; and Riad Marhaba.

What to See:

The Medina -- More sanitized than Marrakech or Fes, the Medina in Rabat is a fun place to shop and stroll. Food, copper, carpets, leather, mint, western-style clothing -- it's all there.

Kasbah des Oudaias -- a beautiful fortified city, on a bluff overlooking the ocean. The main gate leads to narrow streets inside the Kasbah, stroll around and visit the oldest mosque in town.

Chellah -- an ancient Roman site, very pretty with fruit trees and storks, and crumbling ruins.

Hassan Tower -- famous landmark and close to the mausoleum housing the King's father and grandfather.

25. Djibouti (city), Djibouti



Basic Facts About Djibouti

Djibouti is the capital and largest city in the Republic of Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. Two thirds of the country's population lives in the city. Djibouti city is situated on the coast, on the Gulf of Tadjoura right across from Yemen. In 1891 the French made Djibouti the capital of French Somaliland. Djibouti gained independence from France in 1977. The population of Djibouti is around 500,000 and they're largely of Somali, Afar and Arab descent. The inhabitants of Djibouti city are predominantly Islamic.

Claim to Fame

[Lac Assal](#), about 100 km from Djibouti city, is the lowest point on the African continent. This salt lake lies at 156m below sea level. The salt fields around the lake can reach depths of 65 meters.

Travel to Djibouti City

The *[Lonely Planet Guide](#)* describes Djibouti City as "a ramshackle little port village, with

peeling colonial and modern buildings ... Unashamed Qat-chewing men, sensuous women swathed in superb shawls, proud but desperate Somali refugees, gaunt faced beggars and stalwart foreign legionnaires in their knee-length socks all roam the streets". The appeal of Djibouti city is to walk or cycle around, take it all in and enjoy the scene. Djibouti city is known for being more expensive than cities in neighboring countries, and you don't really get more value for your money.

There aren't any obvious points of interest in Djibouti city except for the Central Market (Marche Central) which buzzes with activity in the mornings. By the afternoon, Djibouti city gets very quiet and it's not just the heat that folks are avoiding, but the national pastime - chewing [Qat](#), begins in earnest. *Qat* (or *Khat*) is a mild narcotic. The leaves of the *Qat* plant are chewed; it has to be fresh for the narcotic effect to work best. The daily *Qat* delivery from Ethiopia to Djibouti city arrives at around 1pm in the local markets.

Djibouti's location on the Red Sea means there are some [excellent diving](#) and swimming opportunities particularly around the islands of Maskali and Moucha in the Gulf of Tadjoura. It takes 30-40 minutes to get to the islands by boat.