

# Africa

**Africa** is the wellspring of the human race. The second largest continent in the world in both area and population, it offers the visitor a unique blend of natural wonders, renowned prehistoric sites, numerous and often sprawling remains of several of the world's greatest ancient civilisations, vibrant cultures, remote villages and modern cities. Africa has shorelines on the Indian Ocean to the southeast, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Red Sea to the northeast, the Gulf of Aden slightly further south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the north. This huge continent is more than 8,000 km (5,000 mi) across north-south and 7,500 km (4,800 mi) east-west with some islands even further out and contains many vastly different peoples, religions, and cultures. Africa has more than 50 sovereign countries—the most of any continent.

Africa's Nile River is claimed by some to be the longest river in the world (other geographers argue that the Amazon is longer); the Nile runs 6,650 km (over 4,100 mi) from Burundi to Egypt. The Congo River in the DR Congo is the second largest in terms of discharge, and the deepest with a depth of over 230 m (750 ft) in some spots. Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania is the world's tallest free-standing mountain at 5,890 m (19,340 ft). Lake Assal in Djibouti is the second-lowest point on Earth, the saltiest lake outside Antarctica, and one of the hottest places on Earth. While the first activity most people associate with Africa is safaris, there are endless possibilities for adventure. For example, you can purchase crafts in markets, venture into the Sahara with a Tuareg caravan, visit traditional villages, hike through the jungle to watch gorillas, climb mountains with rugged landscapes and icy peaks, snorkel in the numerous marine parks while feeding fish, relax on tropical islands in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, snack on exotic treats, paddle down a river in a dugout *piroque* or travel across savanna on a colonial-era railway.



Giraffes in Maasai Mara National Park in Kenya

Africa's cultural diversity cannot be overstated — most countries are internally diverse and there are huge differences between the Muslim countries in the north with their Arab- and Berber-influenced cultures and the sub-Saharan nations, including the rainbow nation of South Africa that has strong European influences in addition to Bantu and other African traditions. It is also the continent with the largest genetic diversity among the population by far: There is far more genetic diversity among Africans than there is between Africans and inhabitants of any other continent. Despite what lacking media coverage might have led you to believe, Africa is not one country but over 50 countries, making it impossible to make generalisations about "all of Africa". Also, partly due to the nature of colonial borders, most African countries are anything but homogeneous (for example, South Africa has 11 official languages), and culture, cuisine, language or even the dominant religion may change dramatically within a few hundred kilometres without ever crossing a border.

Despite rapidly growing economies in many places, there are still many pockets of poverty in both the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. While poverty, corruption, and ethnic and religious violence exist in some parts of the continent, large parts of Africa have made impressive progress, with many cities that have

growing middle classes and deal with problems such as traffic jams and crowded public transport, rather than the war or famine you might have heard about in some 1980s documentary or development aid commercial.

## Regions

Most people outside the continent divide Africa into two regions: the Arabic-speaking North Africa, and everywhere else as Sub-Saharan Africa. However, Africa is a very diverse continent, and this division represents a somewhat shallow understanding.

### North Africa

(Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Western Sahara)

The Arab and Berber nations that rim the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the northwestern Atlantic coast of Africa with many ancient sites, being part of various civilisations including Ancient Egypt, the Greeks, the Punic empire and the Roman empire.

### Sahel (Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sudan)

The desert and savannah nations that span the Sahel and southern half of the Sahara Desert. There are many ancient sites from pyramids to mosques as well as a nomadic way of life in some regions.

### West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo)

The tropical Atlantic coastal nations. Most of these countries have a Christian south that



was more directly affected by European colonisation and a Muslim north that was more influenced by the colonizing Arabs. A rapidly bustling and developing area.

**Central Africa** (Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Sudan)

The heart of Africa, with high mountains in the east and the world's second largest jungle — the Congo rainforest.

**East Africa** (Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somaliland, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda)

The region that was the wellspring of most early hominids, comprising nations that border the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, plus a few neighbouring landlocked nations. Known for some of its monasteries, natural springs, wildlife, as well as bazaars.

**East African Islands** (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte, Réunion, Seychelles)

The islands in the Indian Ocean have a heritage from Austronesian, Indian and Muslim seafarers, as well as the Cape Route between Europe and Asia.

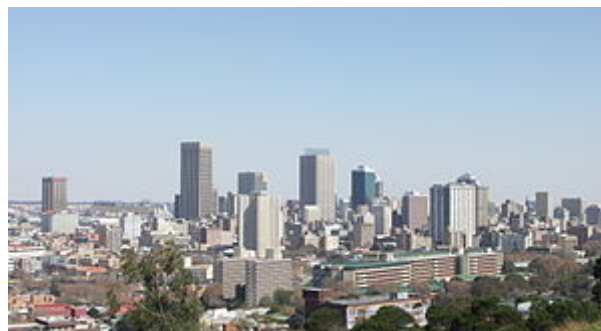
**Southern Africa** (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe)

Likely the birthplace of modern *Homo sapiens* as well as the part of Sub-Saharan Africa where European influence is most visible today. Noted for an incredible diversity of plant life, as well as the Namib Desert, one of the driest places on Earth other than the Atacama or Antarctica.

## Cities

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- **1 Accra** — Ghana's capital
- **2 Addis Ababa** — Ethiopia's capital is one of Africa's "global cities" as a seat of the African Union and of many non-government organisations. Chinese investment built the AU headquarters and a new light rail line.
- **3 Cairo** — Egypt's bustling capital is the most populous city in North Africa and a gateway to the heritage of Ancient Egypt.
- **4 Cape Town** — the *Mother City* of South Africa with Table Mountain, the Cape of Good Hope, and numerous other attractions.
- **5 Dakar** — the capital of Senegal and the westernmost city in Africa.
- **6 Johannesburg** — South Africa's largest city and perhaps the continent's key financial and economic centre.
- **7 Luanda** — Angola's capital and largest city, which has been through a huge renaissance in the past decade.
- **8 Marrakech** — a blend of the ancient and modern in Morocco.
- **9 Nairobi** — the capital of Kenya, the largest city in East and Central Africa, and home to the only UN agency headquarters outside of Europe and the U.S.



Johannesburg

## Other destinations

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- **1 Axum (Aksum)** — the ancient capital of Ethiopia, famous for the ruins of various palaces and its stelae

- **2 Dogon Country** <sup>W</sup> — a region of south-central Mali renowned for its secluded villages embedded on cliffs and a very distinct culture
- **3 Kruger National Park** — surely among the best-known national parks in Africa
- **4 Leptis Magna** — intended by the Roman Empire as a model city, its ruins are still impressive
- **5 Mount Kilimanjaro** — the highest mountain on the continent and one of the most striking sights of Tanzania
- **6 Serengeti National Park** — together with Maasai Mara National Reserve across the border in Kenya, this is Tanzania's best known national park and one of the most famous on the continent
- **7 Valley of the Kings** — burial place of several dozen Ancient Egyptian pharaohs and the site of King Tut's tomb
- **8 Victoria Falls** — These waterfalls between Zimbabwe and Zambia are among the most impressive in the world
- **9 Volcanoes National Park** — full of impressive tropical rain forest and volcanic scenery, trekking, and is perhaps the best place in the world to see the rare mountain gorillas.



Victoria Falls

See also: [African national parks](#)

## Understand

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### History

Non-Africans often think of Sub-Saharan Africa as being comprised only of hunter-gatherer societies prior to European colonialism. However, these views often have their roots in racist pseudoscientific theories used by Europeans to justify slavery and later, colonialism from the 16th to early 20th centuries. While hunter-gatherer societies were indeed widespread in much of the continent, many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa were in fact home to great cities and civilisations dating back to the medieval era.



The pyramids at Giza: The only one of the seven ancient wonders of the world still left standing and perhaps the symbol of Ancient Egypt

### From the dawn of humanity to the first empires

See also: [Ancient African nations](#)

Early precursors to human beings, most notably *Australopithecus afarensis* (named for the Afar region in Ethiopia), the species "Lucy" belonged to, lived and walked on two feet as early as 3 million years ago. Remains of later species such as *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus* (the first hominid to leave Africa, as far as we know) were found in other parts of East Africa such as Kenya, Tanzania and around the Great Lakes. *Homo sapiens* (modern humans), most likely originated either in Southern Africa or in East Africa somewhere in what is now Ethiopia or Kenya. The oldest homo sapiens remains to date are about 195,000 years old and were found in Ethiopia but there are also hints that *Homo sapiens* may have been present earlier in Southern Africa. Some of the remains of early hominids as well as their tools are on display in various museums in Ethiopia, Namibia and other countries. The Cradle of Humankind is a site in South Africa with plenty of early human fossils.



North Africa has a recorded history dating back to about 3300 BCE with numerous buildings, ruins, writings, arts, and crafts which have left traces for us to marvel at. The ancient **Pharaonic civilisation** based in Egypt was the most enduring and among the most impressive ancient civilisations. Egypt was one of the earliest cultures to build monumental buildings, form a hierarchical state and wage large-scale warfare with standing armies, and was one of the stablest empires in recorded history, frequently surviving and absorbing foreign invaders, immigrants and usurpers and turning them (culturally) Egyptian.

South of the Pharaonic civilisation and sometimes in their sphere of influence was the Nubian culture, which had a long history of mutual influence with its northern neighbours and even came to rule over Egypt for a short time. Their most famous remnants are the pyramids of Meroe, Sudan. Another early centre of settled civilisation and later an early centre of Christianity outside the Roman Empire was Ethiopia, where the Aksumite Empire reigned between the fourth century BCE and the 7th century CE and served as an important trading partner of both Indian and Mediterranean powers.

Today, the legacy of ancient African civilisations lives on; many of their monuments, temples and cities are well-preserved and have become popular tourist attractions, and museums host their artifacts. Modern Jews believe themselves to be descendants of slaves from ancient Egypt and Ethiopians of all religions believe they are the descendants of the union of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon (Sheba thought by most to refer to what is now the nation of Yemen, but the queen is believed by many to have also ruled Ethiopia). Yet outside of North Africa, Sudan and Ethiopia, very little is known about African history prior to 1000 CE, as most people were hunter-gatherers (similar to some cultures still found today on the continent), with no writing systems nor lasting structures, arts or crafts, aside from some cave paintings.

## Classical antiquity

*See also: Ancient Greece, Roman Empire*

The Phoenicians, based in what's now Lebanon and part of the coasts of Syria and Israel, colonised North Africa, and established the city of Carthage (now a suburb of Tunis). Eventually, the Carthaginian Republic became a separate one, and a rival of the Romans as the dominant power in the Mediterranean. The Romans destroyed Carthage in the Third Punic War in 146 BCE, burning it to the ground.

In the period after 360 BCE, **Europeans invaded** the continent. Macedonian ruler Alexander the Great conquered what were then the Egyptian parts of the Persian Empire in 326 BCE, founded a city named after him and had himself declared pharaoh. Egypt would come under the rule of one of his generals after Alexander's death and under the Ptolemaic dynasty, Alexandria became one of the leading centres of Jewish, Greek and Egyptian philosophy and culture. It was here that a library holding "the wisdom of the ancient world" stood and it was here that the Jewish holy books were translated into Koine Greek. Starting with the Punic wars, the Romans entered the African picture as a major player, and they founded cities such as Leptis Magna, before the partially Hellenised Egypt also became Roman in 31 BCE. Northern Africa and later Nubia and Ethiopia were also among the earliest centres of Christianity with the first Christians in the area already by the first century CE, even before Christianity would spread to other parts of the Roman Empire. A famous letter exchange of Plinius the Younger (then governor in Carthage) and Emperor Trajan is among the best known sources of documentation on the treatment of Christians in the 2nd century CE. Few documents from this time remain, but evidence suggests that heterodox forms of Christianity such as Gnosticism, which were not in line with the officially sanctioned version practiced in Constantinople, were popular in Northern Africa, and Egypt seems to have been a centre of precursors of Christian monasteries



Roman remains like this theater in Leptis Magna, Libya can still be found in much of North Africa

and of apocryphal gospels (i.e. religious texts not included in the "official" Bible). Gnostic Christianity, which was very prevalent in Egypt starting in the 2nd century CE, was largely crushed there by the 5th century, but left behind important papyri such as the Gnostic Gospels, which were discovered in Nag Hammadi, Upper Egypt in 1945 and have been translated into many languages. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church also recognises several apocryphal gospels, which were not included in the canon by European churches, as being part of the canon to this day.

## Muslim conquest

The **Muslim invasion** and the beginning of the **Arab Slave Trade** in the 7th century CE changed the cultural landscape of Northern and much of Eastern and Western Africa. The newly formed Arab caliphate conquered North Africa and the Horn of Africa within a few decades. Due to the shrewd policy of nominal toleration combined with taxation for Christians and Jews, the Muslim conquerors were able to pacify and religiously assimilate the conquered areas remarkably fast. Some scholars have suggested that the aforementioned heterodoxy in much of the African provinces of the Roman Empire helped in the easy conquest by the Islamic conquerors who were more tolerant (or at least indifferent) towards forms of Christianity not in line with Constantinople. In the west, Berbers intermarried with the Arab invaders to become the Moorish population that later invaded the Iberian Peninsula. When Damascus was invaded in the early eighth century, the Islamic religious and political centre of the Mediterranean shifted to Kairouan in Tunisia. Their progress was limited only by the dense forests of West and Central Africa and to coastal areas in the East. The last region to come under Muslim influence was that of Nubia (modern-day northern Sudan) in the 14th century. While some of the Christian and Jewish heritage is still visible in Northern Africa, actual followers of those religions have become few and far between and Islam is culturally very dominant from Egypt to Morocco and south to Sudan and the northern parts of Nigeria. While Christianity is shrinking due to conversion and emigration from its erstwhile centres in Egypt and elsewhere, Judaism virtually disappeared in the decades following the establishment of Israel when most Jews left or were forced out. That being said, Jewish communities continue to survive in Tunisia and Morocco, albeit with much smaller populations than before the establishment of Israel.

The 7th-9th centuries were a period of significant change to the history of sub-Saharan Africa. In the west, there was a rise of large and powerful inland kingdoms, such as the **Ghana** (in Mali & Mauritania, no relation to modern Ghana, capital in Koumbi Saleh), **Dahomey** (which lasted until French capture in 1894, now Benin, capital in Abomey), **Za/Gao** (in Mali and Niger), **Kanem** (in Chad), and **Bornu** (in Nigeria). As many of these kingdoms converted to Islam (usually the conversion of a king included the conversion of his subordinates, at least nominally), trans-Saharan trade grew as salt and gold were transported to Libya and Egypt in large caravans—a trade made possible by the introduction of camels from Arabia in the 10th century that would support much of the area from northern Nigeria west to Mali and Mauritania until the 19th century. The introduction of Islam also brought writing to many African civilisations for the first time, with some of their cities eventually growing into major centres of Islamic scholarship. During the 13th-16th centuries, many of these early kingdoms were replaced with new empires, chief among them the **Mali** (in Mali, Guinea, and Senegal), **Kongo** (in Angola, Gabon, Republic of the Congo and Democratic Republic of the Congo, capital in M'banza-Kongo), and later **Songhay** (in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, capital Gao), **Ashanti** (in Ghana, capital in Kumasi) and a plethora of small, single-ethnicity kingdoms and city-states sprouted. Many of Mali's popular tourist destinations, including Timbuktu, Djenne, and Gao, rose to prominence during this period as they became hubs of trade and Islamic scholarship. Mansa Musa, one of the kings of Mali, is often said to have been the richest person in history. The Hausa people in northern Nigeria began organising in walled city states, of which remnants remain in Kano, and would eventually consolidate into the **Sokoto Caliphate** (1804-1903), with its capital in modern-day Sokoto. Coastal, forested West Africa remained largely unorganised, with the exceptions of a few Yoruba city-states of Benin, Ife and Oyo, along with small Dahomey and Igbo empires all in modern-day Benin and Nigeria.

Meanwhile, Islamic influence and prosperity from **Indian Ocean trade** rose in East Africa as ships from Arabia, Persia, India, and as far as Southeast Asia dropped anchor in major ports from Somalia down to Mozambique, bringing spices and in return for slaves and ivory. This area, known as the **Swahili Coast**, would become home to many city-states such as Kilwa Kisiwani, Mombasa and Zanzibar. Between the 7th and 19th centuries, over 18 million people were taken from the region as part of the Arab slave trade—roughly twice as many as the Atlantic slave trade would take to the Americas. Today, that influence remains in the culture and gastronomy of many places, most notably on the Indian Ocean islands such as Zanzibar, Comoros, the Seychelles, and Mauritius, and descendants of these slaves would go on to form the Siddi community in India, who continue to preserve many African traditions despite now speaking Indian rather than African languages.

Southern Africa remained largely undeveloped, with primarily nomadic hunter-gatherers such as the San people, but it did contain some small kingdoms. The **Kingdom of Zimbabwe** (namesake of today's state) was one of the most notable, constructing the greatest stone structures in pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa at their capital Great Zimbabwe. The Kingdom of Mapungubwe in modern eastern South Africa also left smaller stone ruins. Both profited from the trade in gold and ivory with Arab and Asian merchants.



Ruins at Great Zimbabwe

Despite the spread of Islam, Ethiopia would continue to hold fast as a bastion of Christianity. Among the most impressive examples of Christian architecture dating to this period are the 13th-century rock-cut churches of Lalibela.

## European exploration and early colonialism

Perhaps the most pernicious prejudice about Africa is that it is "poor". But just a bit of logical thinking shows just how mistaken this assumption is. Why would countless Europeans, Arabs and others have come here, braved tropical disease and hostile locals (who very much did not want to part with their possessions or be ruled by some pith-helmeted buffoon, thank you very much) if Africa had been *poor*? No, it was and is precisely Africa's wealth - in gold, in spices, in mineral resources, in oil and also the labor of its people - that made and makes it attractive for would-be colonisers. That said wealth has subsequently been siphoned off to the pockets of small elites and colonisers may cause many Africans to be poor, but it does not make Africa poor per se.

While a few Genoese, Castilian, and French explorers managed to reach parts of West Africa in the Middle Ages, **European exploration** of the continent began in earnest when Prince Henry "the Navigator" set out to acquire African territory for Portugal in the mid-15th century. The **Portuguese** reached Cape Verde in 1445, and by 1480, had charted the course to and began trade with the entire Guinea coast (modern Guinea-Bissau to Nigeria). In 1482, Diogo Cão reached the mouth of the Congo River, in 1488 Bartolomeu Dias reached the Cape of Good Hope, and in 1498 Vasco da Gama sailed up the eastern coast, where in Kenya his expedition set up a trading post at Malindi before finding a guide to take them to India.

This voyage established the Cape Route around Africa. The Portuguese set up numerous forts along the African coast and established a highly profitable trade. They initially held good relations with locals, and remained the dominant European power around coastal Africa until the 17th century while Spain, France, and Britain began exploring the Americas.

The lucrative trade and large amounts of gold obtained by the Portuguese lured other nations to the continent. As the demands for labor in the Americas grew, Portuguese sailors began taking shiploads of slaves to the Americas, beginning the Atlantic slave trade. In the early 17th century, the **Dutch** fought the Portuguese to win control of most of their West and Central African ports, some of which (for example,

Luanda) would be retaken later, and established a couple dozen forts of their own, notably at Goree Island in Dakar and at the Cape of Good Hope—a port they hoped to use for trade routes to East Asia and which has become modern-day Cape Town. In 1642, the French built their first fort on Madagascar (which they claimed in 1667) and in 1663, the British built their first fort on the continent in the Gambia. Swedish merchants established a fort on Cape Coast, which was later overpowered by the Danish nearby at modern Accra.

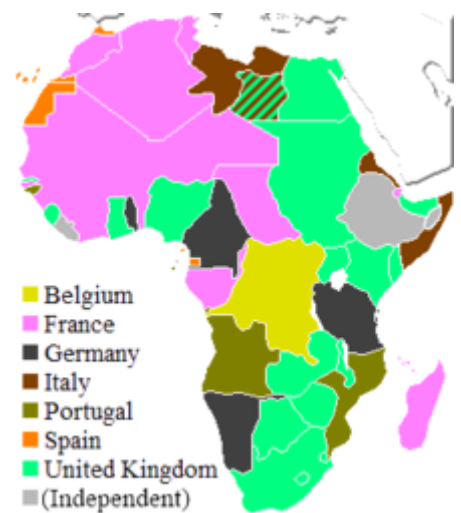


Slaving castle in Cape Coast, Ghana

## 19th-century imperialism

In the 19th century, European attention shifted from establishing coastal ports for trade to fighting one another to colonise the continent and explore its uncharted interior. With slavery abolished by Britain and their strong efforts to thwart slavery around the world, Europe began to look for other sources of wealth on the continent. The most successful European colony, the Dutch **Cape Colony**, was seized by the British in 1795. Napoleonic France conquered Egypt in 1798, notably discovering the Rosetta Stone, only to be forced out by the British and then the Ottoman Turks. France invaded a significant amount of coastal West Africa and the Barbary states in Algeria, cutting rampant piracy in the region. Accounts of brave adventurers travelling inland to find places such as Mount Kilimanjaro and rumoured "inland sea" (the Great Lakes) and city of gold on the Nile sparked a wave of exploration in the mid-century primarily by Jesuit and other Catholic missionaries in the Southern, Eastern and Great Lakes regions of Africa. Chief among explorers was the British national hero **David Livingstone**, who as a poor missionary with few porters explored much of Southern and Eastern Africa, flowed down the Congo River from its sources, and sought the source of the Nile. In West and Central Africa, French, Belgian and Spanish explorers ventured into the Sahara to find the legendary Timbuktu and Malian gold mines and the Congo in search of the Pygmies and hairy, large peoples (gorillas) of Greek legend.

As accounts of Africa's interior reached Europe, nations and merchants began to view the continent as a major source of commerce and wealth, similar to their Asian exploits, while the philanthropic and missionary class saw a great opportunity to "Christianise" and "civilise" the "savage" people of Africa. With social Darwinism introduced, many countries saw Africa as a great opportunity to establish colonial empires and establish their pre-eminence among other European nations — chiefly Germany, to catch up with other European nations, and France, to regain glories lost in North America and under Napoleon. Britain and Portugal joined this **Scramble for Africa** when they saw their interests threatened. In 1885, the **Berlin Conference** brought together European colonial powers to carve up the continent into defined colonial territories with many straight lines and no input from any African kingdom or settlement. Following the Berlin meeting, Italy was designated as a 'protector' over Ethiopia. In 1898, Italy waged an all-out war to colonise Ethiopia and they were defeated at the battle of **Adwa**. This was possible because all Ethiopians came together under emperor Menelik II to stand together, more important however was that Ethiopia was armed with European weapons and thus the disparity of arms was not as decisively in the European favor as elsewhere. This marks the first time Africans defeated European invaders, and made Ethiopia the only African country that was never colonised by a foreign power (Liberia, the other country that survived the Scramble for Africa, was a U.S. territory).



Colonial division of Africa, 1914



At the same time, disaster was befalling the people of the Congo, a land awarded at the Berlin Conference as the private property of King Leopold II of Belgium, who proceeded to enslave the people and subject them to mass killings and mutilations when unmeetable production targets for rubber were not achieved. Millions of people were killed in a genocide which extended into the 20th century, ending only in 1908 when worldwide criticism forced the king to relinquish his private ownership over the land and it was turned into a Belgian colony under the control of their parliament. Joseph Conrad wrote the novel *Heart of Darkness* from his experience as a witness to some of these crimes, which were also condemned in the satirical pamphlet *King Leopold's Soliloquy* by Mark Twain and another pamphlet, *The Crime of the Congo*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

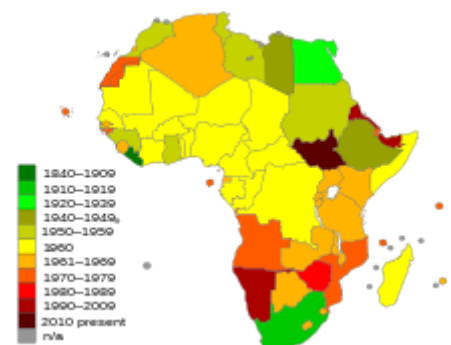
Colonialism would be devastating to many of Africa's civilisations, with the most notable casualties arguably being Benin City and Kumasi, both of which were great pre-colonial cities that were razed to the ground by the invading British in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many cultural artifacts from both cities, as well as other civilisations, were looted in the ensuing wars, and these are now mostly on display in various museums in the Western world, such as the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the Ethnological Museum in Berlin and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Debates as to the return of at least parts of the plundered cultural heritage began in the 1970s before fizzling out without concrete results and have started up again in the 2010s and 2020s.

At the turn of the 20th century, Britain began a series of deadly **South African Wars** from their Cape Colony into surrounding African and Boer (white descendants of the Dutch) lands in modern South Africa, which brought **Cecil Rhodes** to fame for his vision to unite Africa under British rule from Cairo to Cape Town. There was one World War I battle in German East Africa (Tanzania) which the British lost, although post-war, German possessions were divided among France, Belgium, Portugal and the UK with South Africa *de facto* taking over what is now Namibia until 1990. The Union of South Africa was granted independence from the UK in 1930 and the Afrikaner minority voted to become a Republic in 1960 (see 20th century South Africa).

In the prelude to **World War II in Africa** fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia but was driven out in 1941. The Axis also tried to capture North Africa, but were evicted by the Allies. It was the social changes stemming from the war, in which tens of thousands of Africans fought for their colonial power, and the Atlantic Charter which led to the spread of nationalistic movements after the war.

## Decolonisation and the legacy of the colonisers

The **decolonisation** of Africa began with Libyan independence from Italy in 1951. Colonial powers employed varying means of control over their colonies, some granting natives representation in the government and cultivating a select few civil servants while others maintained a firm grip with an all-European government. In some countries, nationalist movements were quashed and their leaders killed or jailed, while others were able to peacefully achieve independence. In the 1950s, Guinea, Ghana and North African nations gained independence non-violently. In Algeria, France violently fought independence movements until 1963. With the establishment and new constitution of France's Fifth Republic in 1958, French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa ceased to exist, and after a brief "community" with France, the countries of these regions gained independence in 1960. By 1970, all but a handful of African nations were at least nominally independent, though in many cases the European former colonial masters retained control of the natural resources. The Portuguese bitterly fought to maintain their African possessions until 1975; all but one gained independence through war. Zimbabwe was the last major colony to gain independence from a



Dates of independence across Africa.

non-African colonial overlord, in 1980, following a 14-year period of rule by a white minority government not recognised by Britain, the former colonial power. In 1990, semi-autonomous Namibia gained independence from South Africa and in 1993, Eritrea separated from Ethiopia following a protracted war — a peace deal was only achieved in 2018. South Africa remained under firm control by its white minority, oppressing its black, Asian and mixed-raced populations under a system called **apartheid** until 1994. Morocco maintains control over Western Sahara despite an established independence movement, and this remains a point of contention between Morocco and Algeria. The conflict flared up again in 2020. Following years of civil war, South Sudan became independent from Sudan after a referendum was held in 2011.

Europeans divided Africa with complete disregard for the cultures and ethnic groups in Africa, often dividing a people between two or more countries and forcing peoples with a history of fighting or differing religions into one country. Additionally, a lack of training in civil service before and even after independence left most countries with dysfunctional governments. Leaders tended to reward their own ethnic groups with jobs and money, and in many cases oppressed other ethnic groups. This has been a cause of much strife post-independence across much of sub-Saharan Africa and has led to dozens of prolonged **civil wars** (notably in Sudan, Angola, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo), genocides (notably the Rwandan Genocide), countless coups, and countless inept, corrupt leaders. During the cold war some leaders played the big power blocs against each other while others stayed in power mostly because they were backed by either side. Especially after the cold war ended, some countries such as Somalia descended into protracted internal fighting and are considered failed states as nobody really has any power over the state as a whole and local rackets and militias are unable to provide more than the most basic government functions (with the exception, in that case, of the former British colony of Somaliland). The discovery of valuable natural resources such as oil, uranium, diamonds, and coltan (columbite–tantalite, an ore from which the rare earth metals niobium and tantalum, in very high demand for technological products such as cell phones, are extracted) is one of the reasons separatist movements have sprung up, motivated in part by the greed of warlords and in part by the neglect of resource-rich areas that want a share in the profits, like the oil-rich exclave of Cabinda, Angola and the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

Fortunately, there are numerous examples in Africa where past conflict has made way for functional and stable governments, offering some hope for the future of Africa. The bleak picture often painted of Africa as a whole could not be further from the truth in many places and thanks to tourism, more stable and accountable governance and rapidly growing economies, some African countries are now looking towards a bright future of which the first signs are already visible.

## Climate

As the second largest continent, there is a wide range of climates to be found. However, since the continent is nearly centred on the equator, much of the continent is quite warm/temperate with very few, small areas on the continent experiencing any temperatures that can be considered "cold". In the temperate regions (parts of northern Morocco & the Mediterranean coast as well as South Africa), temperatures generally range from the 10s C to the mid-30s°C (40s-90s°F) year round. Closer to the equator and on islands like Cape Verde or Mauritius, temperatures may only vary less than 20 degrees Celsius (15-35°C/60-95°F) throughout the year. In the deserts and arid regions like the Sahel and Horn of Africa, temperatures routinely hit 40°C or higher (and even 50°C or higher in the heart of the Sahara) but because sand does not retain heat like moist soil does, those same places can easily fall down to 15°C at night. There are a few bastions of cooler weather, however. Higher elevations, such as the Atlas Mountains in Morocco & Algeria or the mountains in Lesotho, are quite cold and snowy during winter and Mount Kilimanjaro, almost on the equator, is cold year-round (cold enough to support glaciers!). Peaks on islands such as Reunion, the Canary Islands, Cameroon and other countries are cool enough to necessitate a jacket much of the year.

A far more important factor to consider when travelling to Africa is when the **rain/monsoon season** occurs. Timing varies a bit even in neighbouring countries, so check the page of the country you are visiting for more info. In West Africa the season starts in March around Cameroon, but not until June in Senegal or the Sahel and ends around September. While rain may not be a huge factor when travelling to southern or East Africa, it is very problematic in West Africa and on islands in the Indian Ocean. In West Africa, rains will often flood and make many roads and railways impassable and, due to poor drainage, can literally result in rivers of water flowing down streets and sewage lines overflowing. In the Sahel, it can result in flash floods in low-lying areas. In fact it is said that drowning is the most common cause of death in the desert, as flash floods can surprise people walking in wadis (dry riverbeds).

The largest weather-related dangers for travellers to Africa other than flooding are **lightning** and **tropical cyclones**. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has more lightning strikes each year than any other country on earth, especially in the eastern part of the country near Goma. Lightning risk is highest from western Kenya/Tanzania and Ethiopia west to Senegal and south to Angola, Zambia and the Northern parts of South Africa. Tropical cyclones affect the islands of the Indian Ocean, with the season running from 15 November-30 April (15 May in the Seychelles & Mauritius). Tropical cyclones also infrequently affect the horn of Africa near Djibouti & Somalia, but when they do, the arid land results in major flooding. Tropical cyclones often form off the coast of western West Africa (Guinea/Senegal) during the early part of the Atlantic Hurricane Season (June–August) and will rarely impact Cape Verde, for which these particular storms are called "Cape Verde-type hurricanes".

## Politics

After Africa's messy divorce from its European colonial powers, many African countries became mired in political power struggles and civil war. Since the 1980s, however, the nations of this continent have drawn closer and many conflicts on the continent have seen neighbouring countries intervene positively rather than intervention/invasion by European and Western powers. Most African countries are developing democracies—struggling with corruption, but moving towards democratic values, like free and fair elections, freedom of speech, and involvement in government by several strata of society.

Nevertheless, there are a few countries which still retain authoritarian governments, dictatorships, and kleptocracies. Prior to peace agreements ending civil war in each, Angola and Mozambique were Communist one-party states and remain under the control of these parties, which have shifted from Marxist-Leninist to far-left/socialist ideology and retain Communist symbols in their flags, coats of arms, national anthems, and other national symbols. Equatorial Guinea and Eritrea remain among the most authoritarian countries on Earth, with severe repression of opposition.

Several national governments have a weak hold of their territory, such as Somalia, both Congos, the Central African Republic, Chad, Libya and Mali. In addition to national governments, some "tribes" continue to retain kings/chiefs recognised by the national government as well as local people and are sometimes even given limited autonomy/authority over "tribal" lands. The problem of "tribalism" that plagues many African countries is somewhat of a misnomer, as many of these "tribes" are ethnically and linguistically more diverse and different from each other than most European ethnicities, and often they were forced to live in one state due to the arbitrary nature of colonial borders. Still in some African countries ethnic and personal loyalties were more important than party ties or ideologies and the marginalised ethnicities often strived to overturn these regimes, only to replace them with one dominated by their ethnicity.

Today, more than at any time in the continent's history, the nations of the continent are cooperating on important issues and increasingly relying on themselves to stop conflict and broker peace, rather than allowing the UN and Western powers to do so. The **African Union** (<http://www.au.int/en/>) (**AU**) is the continent's answer to the United Nations and promotes unity and the resolution of conflicts. It was

established in 2002, with its administrative seat in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and represents all African nations and territory, and various European possessions in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. The AU has been able to achieve some accomplishments in promoting human rights, development, economic integration, harmonising business/customs/immigration rules, and intervening to stop conflicts (notably in Somalia) and unconstitutional power plays in member states. However, much work remains to be done and corruption remains rampant, numerous countries suffer from political/ethnic strife, and quality measures in development, education, health, and human rights remain low.

## **European influence and development aid**

European colonial powers remained active in many nations post-independence; France retains close diplomatic ties with many of its former colonies, and many of the others, such as the United Kingdom, Portugal and Belgium, have large African immigrant communities originating from their respective former colonies. The U.S., largely unburdened by the "former colonial power" stigma, has long been active in promoting conflict resolution, human rights, and providing development aid and emergency assistance. While development aid rarely exceeds 1% of the donor countries' budgets, some African countries are or have in the past been dependent on aid money and credits from countries and international institutions such as the World Bank. While there has been a change in focus from large-scale projects such as dams and highways to more local initiatives such as rural electrification or public transport for individual cities, the topic remains controversial and some African voices have even called for an end to development aid altogether. Another problem with the World Bank credits is that new (democratic) governments often have to pay back old credits that their (authoritarian, kleptocratic) predecessor have taken out and wasted or outright embezzled, thus forcing their political agenda to conform to the wishes of the World Bank in large part instead of their own people. The question whether some or all of those "onerous loans" should or could be forgiven is another contentious issue between the (mostly European and North American) creditor nations and the African debtors. Another source of money for many people as well as countries is so-called "remittances" — that is, money that emigrants from African countries send back to their friends and relatives in their former home countries. While this has sometimes helped grow local economies and bring direly needed investment, the extreme dependence of some areas on this source of revenue has created a great deal of economic problems. As a traveller you will probably notice that Western Union and similar services are available almost ubiquitously, as they are frequently used for the purpose of receiving remittances.

## **Chinese influence**

China has notably been a major player on the continent since 2000 and Western diplomats are now trying to play catch-up and fight for influence with China. The Chinese demand for natural resources is great and the Chinese have accosted many African governments without the stigma of being a rich, Western nation or caring much about the values (human rights, political freedom, etc.) of the governments they deal with. Another selling point for them is the large number of state-run companies they have and the integration between the Chinese government and the state-owned companies they use to mine and build roads and infrastructure compared to the relationship between Western governments and private businesses. China has largely sought mineral rights by building infrastructure and seeking lucrative concessions for their state-owned companies as up-front "payment" for resources to be later extracted. The most auspicious gift from the Chinese is likely the new US\$200 million headquarters complex for the African Union, built and financed by China and opened in 2012. There is also an increasing number of African students choosing to



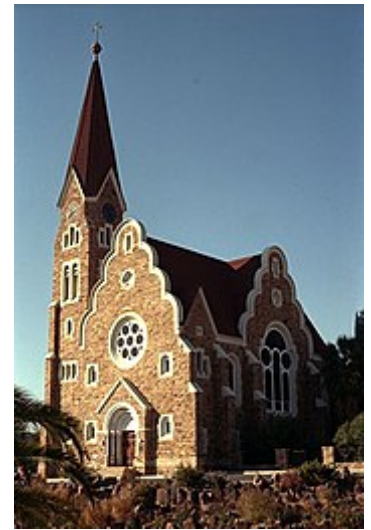
study at Chinese universities, and several scholarships offered by the Chinese government for that purpose. Whether the Chinese involvement proves beneficial or is just another form of neo-colonialism remains to be seen, and is a controversial topic both inside the countries China is involved in and outside of them.

## Religion

Religion and spirituality are important all across Africa. The most prolific religions are Christianity and Islam, with a sizeable number of irreligious/atheist Africans and adherents of traditional religions. The exact percentages of religious adherents vary widely among respected sources, with roughly 40-45% Christian, 40-50% Muslim, 10-15% indigenous beliefs and 5-10% irreligious.

Christianity is spread across a large region, encompassing nearly all of Southern, Central and Eastern Africa, and has a long history in Africa. Egypt is closely associated with early Christian Church history. Ethiopia was among the first nations to adopt Christianity as their official religion (in 330 C.E.) Most Christians are Protestant or Roman Catholic and mix it with indigenous beliefs, except for the Orthodox populations of Egypt, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Christian missionaries and the desire to "civilise" tribal Africans through conversion was a major drive of European colonisation.

Islam is the largest religion on the continent by number of adherents (according to most sources) but, bolstered by the large Muslim populations of Egypt and Nigeria, covers a smaller geographic footprint. All North African countries are overwhelmingly Muslim with only Egypt having a sizeable Christian minority, but irreligion is growing, especially among urban youth. Nearly all of West and Sahelian Africa is also majority Muslim, except for Cape Verde, Liberia, Ghana, Benin and Togo. Nigeria, Chad and Cote d'Ivoire are all about equally split between Muslim populations in the north and Christians in the south. Islam was first brought to the continent in the centuries after its birth, spreading across northern Africa and later being spread down the Indian Ocean coast by merchants and seafarers to the coasts of Kenya, Tanzania and the Comoros. The Swahili language is strongly influenced by Arabic. Most Muslims are Sunni, with a large population of moderate Sufis in West Africa and Sudan, who often blend Sunni Islam with traditional beliefs. An attempt has been made to promote more conservative forms of Islam since the 1990s, through Muslim NGOs and Saudi Arabian assistance, although this coincides with a fear of radicalisation and the emergence of al Qaeda and other Islamist groups in parts of North Africa and the Sahel (particularly Mali, Niger and Algeria). In certain Muslim regions, adherence to religious law is expected such as no alcohol consumption (but khat is fine, *where legal*) and the covering of women's limbs, and extreme offence is taken when these rules are broken or, worse, Islam or its prophets are insulted.



Christuskirche (Christ's Church) in Windhoek, Namibia, built in colonial style.

### Ramadan

Ramadan is the 9th and holiest month in the Islamic calendar and lasts 29–30 days. Muslims fast every day for its duration and most restaurants will be closed until the fast breaks at dusk. Nothing (including water and cigarettes) is supposed to pass through the lips from dawn to sunset. Non-Muslims are exempt from this, but should still refrain from eating or drinking in public as this is considered very impolite. Working hours are decreased as well in the corporate world. Exact dates of Ramadan depend on local astronomical observations and may vary somewhat from country to country. Ramadan concludes with the festival of *Eid al-Fitr*, which may last several days, usually three in most countries.

Traditional African religions are practiced by many Africans either exclusively or as syncretic elements woven into their practice of Christianity or Islam. There is no single uniting aspect to these religions beyond the fact that they all rely on oral tradition and animism. In some cases, the belief isn't in particular deities, but rather "magic". Among common, but certainly not universal, elements of indigenous African religions are:

- Recognition of one god or dual gods and respect for natural elements as supernatural beings
- Respect of the cyclical nature of life (agriculture, rain/drought, wax/wane of the moon)—the "circle of life";
- Communication with ancestors is practised or integral to communication with god and other deities;
- Medicine men and traditional healers are consulted for a broad range of topics, such as physical, psychological, spiritual, moral, and legal matters. They may also facilitate communication with ancestral spirits and/or use magic & sorcery — hence the term "witch doctors".

Magic plays a role in many traditional African beliefs. Magic refers to the interaction between the natural & supernatural worlds, the seen & the unseen. Magicians, witches, shamans and sorcerers are believed to have special skills to manipulate communication/relations between the two worlds, either for better or for worse. Unfortunately, it is a somewhat common occurrence (especially in rural Central & West Africa) for people to claim that others are using magic for improper reasons and are witches. Accusations of being a witch or using magic/witchcraft often lead to ostracism of individuals — women are thrown out of homes, children are abandoned by parents, are subjected to violent/painful exorcisms, and are frequently murdered. In some places, witches are believed to be the source of terminal illnesses such as cancer and AIDS.

The Vodun religion practised in Togo and Benin (a precursor to Haitian Voodoo and related religions among the African Diaspora in the Americas) believes that all creation is divine and thus carries the power of the divine. This explains how certain plants have the ability to heal and why mundane "fetishes", such as statues or dried plants/animals, hold healing & rejuvenating powers.

Hinduism is practised by the large ethnic Indian populations in former British colonies of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, the Seychelles and Mauritius, where many Indians were indentured servants under British masters. Mauritius is the only African country, and for that matter, the only country outside South Asia, where a majority of the population practices Hinduism (52%). Judaism has a long, if not well known, history on the continent. The Beta Israel of Ethiopia are legally-recognised Jews and believed to be descendants of one of the Ten Lost Tribes (the Tribe of Dan). There is also a large Jewish community in South Africa, mostly descended from immigrants from Lithuania in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many Jewish communities existed throughout North Africa, some from the early Diaspora while others fled persecution in Iberia in the 7th and 15th centuries. Those communities are now almost entirely gone,

- 23 March – 20 April 2023 (1444 AH)
- 11 March – 9 April 2024 (1445 AH)
- 1 March – 29 March 2025 (1446 AH)
- 18 February – 19 March 2026 (1447 AH)

If you're planning to travel to Africa during Ramadan, consider reading Travelling during Ramadan.



A Shona witch doctor in Zimbabwe

having emigrated to North America, Israel and France to escape persecution or being outright forced out after the founding of the state of Israel, though vestiges of these communities do still survive in Morocco and Tunisia.

## Read

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. The classic work of modern African literature. Though set in pre-colonial Nigeria, Achebe's magnum opus is in some sense the story of European colonisation of Africa as a whole. It was groundbreaking when published for telling an African story from the perspective of Africans, rather than Europeans. At the time, it was standard to portray African cultures as primitive and simple; Achebe broke this assumption by depicting the richness and complexity of an African society.
- Battuta, Ibn. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*. The travel diaries of the legendary explorer Ibn Battuta, considered one of the greatest travellers in history. In 1325, he set out on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca from his native Morocco, age 21, and over the next three decades passed through more than 40 modern countries travelling over three times the distance than near-contemporary Marco Polo. His 1325-1332 trip visited North Africa, Somalia, and the Swahili Coast (Kenya, Zanzibar and Tanzania). A journey between 1349-1354 visited Timbuktu, passing through modern Morocco, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Algeria. A few modern translations exist, including the 1829 translation by Samuel Lee (*The Travels of Ibn Battuta*. Cosimo Classics, 2009. ISBN 978-1605206219) and a 2003 one by Tim Mackintosh-Smith (*The Travels of Ibn Battuta*. Macmillan UK, 2003. ISBN 978-0330418799), who also re-traced Battuta's footsteps in the early 21st century and published a few other books about his journeys. Battuta's pilgrimage to Mecca, travelling across medieval North Africa & the Middle East was the basis for the 2009 IMAX film (*Journey to Mecca: In the Footsteps of Ibn Battuta* (<http://www.journeytomeccagiantscreen.com/>), IMDb (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1235836/>)). Berkeley University has a good online account (<http://orias.berkeley.edu/resources-teachers/travels-ibn-battuta>) of his travels.
- Dowden, Richard. *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles*. PublicAffairs, 2010. ISBN 978-1586488161 This book attempts to examine the continent of Africa and explain why Africa is the way it is. This book has numerous case examples highlighting the issues/struggles faced by the continent & its people today. 592 pages.
- Kapuscinski, Ryszard. *The Shadow of the Sun*. Vintage, 2002. ISBN 978-0679779070 Memoirs of African journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski, who arrived in 1957 to see the first states gain independence and offers insight on the tumultuous years of the late 20th century on the continent.
- Meredith, Martin. *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*. PublicAffairs, 2005. ISBN 978-1-58648-398-2 One of the best and most comprehensive books available to cover the tumultuous recent history of Africa, from the events leading to independence to the 21st century. 752 pages.
- Naipaul, V. S.. *The Masque of Africa: Glimpses of African Belief*. Picador, 2010. ISBN 978-0-330-47205-0 Examines the complex interactions of traditional religions, Western religions, and other beliefs in modern African society in Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Gabon, and South Africa.
- Reader, John. *Africa: A Biography of the Continent*. Vintage Books, 1997. ISBN 0-679-73869-X Covers the history of the continent from early man to the first decades of

independence, including ancient societies and peoples, early exploration by Westerners, colonisation, and independence. 801 pages.

## Get in

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### By plane

*Main article: [Flying to Africa](#)*

The continent has perhaps the least extensive air route network of all the world's inhabited continents. When flying to major destinations like [Johannesburg](#), [Nairobi](#), or [Accra](#), there's a good amount of choice and airfare costs about average when compared to routes of similar length around the world. Airfares tend to be cheaper when booked from a European capital that has a strong colonial link to your destination, which typically means from [London](#), [Paris](#), [Brussels](#) and [Lisbon](#). [Egypt](#) also has plentiful, cheap connections with the Middle East & Europe. However, less popular destinations like [Brazzaville](#) or [Niamey](#) may only be served by a few flights per week operated by major airlines and the cost of airfares can be expensive. Some African airlines (such as South African airlines) only service their neighbouring African countries.



The [Harare](#) International Airport

Africa's major airlines—Royal Air Maroc, Kenya Airways, Egypt Air, & Ethiopian Airlines—all offer a decent level of service to the continent's capitals and other major cities and fly to many major cities around the world. Few other African airlines operate inter-continental flights and many have poor or questionable safety records and offer poor levels of service. Many flights to Africa are available from/through Europe and the Middle East. Keep in mind that many airlines are part of alliances and code share agreements and you will likely fly on more than one airline.

See your destination's article for more specific information on flights. Bear in mind that many African countries only offer a few international flights each day, or in some cases, each week. While it isn't hard to reach South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria or Egypt, getting to Malawi or Togo can be quite a challenge.

### From Europe

There are more flights to Africa from Europe than from any other continent. Popular holiday destinations such as [Egypt](#), [Tunisia](#), [Morocco](#), [Cape Verde](#), [Kenya](#) & [South Africa](#) are well-served from Europe's major cities, even with discount and charter airlines. Royal Air Maroc, Tunisair, Egypt Air have a good selection of European destinations and Ethiopian, Kenya Airways, Rwanda Air, Air Senegal, TAAG Angola airlines serve one of more major cities (London, Paris, Lisbon etc.). The cheapest flights to African cities are often through the African country's former colonial power. Cities with large immigrant populations such as London, Marseille, and Paris have a good number of flights to Africa.

- Turkish Airlines flies to 44 destinations in 41 African countries as of 2023 and has some of the lowest fares..

### From Asia and the Middle East



Nearly all North African countries along with Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia have extensive connections with the Middle East. And similarly, countries with large Muslim populations are likely to have a connection to Jeddah/Mecca either year-round or seasonal (e.g. during hajj). Middle Eastern airlines such as Emirates, Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways have greatly expanded their services to Africa, and offer connections to many major African cities at competitive rates than European airlines.

## From the Americas

Multiple destinations are served non-stop or directly from the United States, including Johannesburg, Nairobi, Lagos, Addis Ababa, Accra, & Dakar. Limited service is available from Brazil (to Angola & Canary Islands), Canada (to Algeria), Cuba (to Angola), and Venezuela (to the Canary Islands). Kenya Airways, Delta, United, & Ethiopian Airlines are the main operators between the US and Africa. Delta's Johannesburg to Atlanta flight is the second-longest flight in the world by both distance (13,582 km) and scheduled time (16 hr 40 min).

## From Australia

There are only a handful of direct flights connecting Johannesburg to Perth and Sydney. Additionally there is a connection between Mauritius and Perth.

## By road or ferry

The only land connection to another continent is the 163 km-wide Isthmus of Suez, which is found in Egypt (although the Sinai peninsula is sometimes considered a part of Africa for geopolitical reasons). Thus the only way to drive into Africa is to drive through Egypt. Most people driving from the Middle East to Africa travel through Jordan and take a short car ferry to Egypt to avoid transiting Israel, since Egypt's two African neighbours (Sudan and Libya) deny entry for persons with Israeli stamps or Egyptian/Jordanian stamps indicating travel to Israel.

Despite there being just one, narrow land crossing into the continent, there are other ways to bring vehicles into Africa by short car ferries. The short crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar between Spain and Morocco is crossed by several ferries daily and relatively inexpensive. Other car ferries include:

- Italy-Tunisia ferries are operated by a couple of different companies (<http://www.directferries.co.uk/tunisia.htm>). However, you must pass through Algeria to Mauritania/Niger -or- Libya to Egypt, both very expensive and difficult to enter with a car.
- Spain/France to Algeria car ferries are run by Algerie Ferries. Their website is in French only (<http://www.algerieferries.dz/>).
- Yemen-Djibouti ferries may be running weekly or more frequently (information about this crossing is little and conflicting) to avoid Egypt (because of the extremely high import taxes) or Sudan (as the Ethiopian-Sudan border is prone to banditry). It is also possible to cross by dhow in motorcycles or small/light vehicles.
- Port Sudan, Sudan to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia car ferries are run daily and are a great way to avoid the very high tariffs to enter Egypt, although visas for SA are difficult to obtain.
- Ferries link Morocco with Spain and Gibraltar. In addition, there are also connections between mainland Spain and its African possessions Ceuta and Melilla, from which you can drive across the border to Morocco.

Several overland trucks make journeys which cross between Europe or the Middle East and Africa, these companies are listed below under "Get around/By overland truck".

## By boat

Many Mediterranean cruises stop in North African countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, the Canary Islands and Cape Verde. Some ocean liners will stop in the Canary or Cape Verde Islands on trans-Atlantic crossings or in South Africa, Madagascar, Mombasa, Zanzibar, the Seychelles, or Mauritius on round-the-world trips.

Elsewhere in Africa, cruises are limited to luxury or 'boutique' cruise lines often aboard small vessels and quite expensive or "freighter cruises" which do not offer much to "passengers" but may spend a few days in a handful of ports. Grimaldi Freighter Cruises (<http://www.grimaldi-freightercruises.com>) has weekly departures to West Africa making the round-trip from Amsterdam in 38 days.



Some places, like Mahé in the Seychelles, can only be reached by boat or plane.

The Seychelles, Reunion and Mauritius are popular destinations for yachts and private vessels, but piracy around the Horn of Africa has kept a lot of the European vessels away.

## Get around

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### Visas

The general rule that visas are more difficult to obtain for countries that have more authoritarian governments and are less "classical" tourist destinations is true for Africa as well, although there are exceptions. Also with few exceptions it is easier to get into most countries if you are from a "first world" country. Visa requirements and costs for African countries differ depending on your nationality/citizenship and by country. Many countries in southern and eastern Africa have visa-free or visas available at the airport or border crossing for EU, American, Canadian, and a few other nationalities with a minimal amount of paperwork and wait. On the other hand, some countries have burdensome requirements that often differ among their embassies and border crossings.

Most countries in West Africa require visas for travellers from outside the region. In some cases these visas can be arranged at airports or (less commonly) at borders, but this is often not an option. West African embassies are not widespread outside of the region (generally limited to former colonial metropolises), and visa services are sometimes not available in some neighbouring countries. Sometimes visas are issued rapidly, sometimes it's a lengthy and costly process. Check before starting a trip across the region, as regulations and practices often change.

- More and more African countries now have E-visas.

There are four customs unions in effect in Africa:

- Southern Africa (South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini)
- West Africa (Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, Togo, Benin, Niger, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone)

- Central Africa (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of the Congo, Gabon)
- East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi)



**Note:** Most African states demand that international travellers show yellow fever vaccination certificates upon arrival.

## Accessibility

### By plane

There are a number of reliable airlines that ply the African Continent. Chief among them are:

- **South African Airways (SAA)** (Johannesburg, South Africa), [1] (<http://www.flysaa.com>), has daily flights to most major Southern, Eastern, & Central African political and economic hubs. The flight from Washington, D.C. does stop in Senegal, but if you get off there, SAA has no connections to anywhere else.
- **Kenya Airways** (Nairobi, Kenya), [2] (<http://www.kenya-airways.com>), connects more African cities than any other airline on the continent. It is partly owned by KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, offers good service and frequent flights to all countries within the East African region and many other major African and international destinations.
- **Ethiopian Airlines** (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), [3] (<http://www.ethiopianairlines.com>) carries more passengers than any other African airline. It offers a direct service from many European cities & Washington to its hub Addis Ababa. From there it has a very good coverage to many cities in Africa. The flight from/to Washington refuels in Rome.

There are also many airlines which are noteworthy in particular regions, such as TAAG Angola Airlines (South/Central Africa), Royal Air Maroc (West/Central/North Africa, but its hub is in Morocco), Air Côte d'Ivoire (West Africa), Air Burkina (West Africa), Air Senegal (West Africa), Air Austral (Indian Ocean), Air Mauritius (Indian Ocean), Tunis Air (North Africa), and Rwanda Air (East Africa). Many other African carriers offer flights to more remote locations.



**Note: Consider airline safety when flying in Africa.** Although South African Airways, Ethiopian Airlines, and Kenya Airways all meet EU and FAA safety standards, the same isn't true for all airlines, especially smaller domestic carriers in countries where political stability may be lacking, tenuous or only recently reintroduced. Check with the EU Commission on Air Safety ([http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/safety/air-ban\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/air/safety/air-ban_en)) for a list of airlines that do not meet their safety standards.

### By car

If you want to drive your own car around Africa see also Carnet de Passage

For sightseeing trips, it may be less expensive to hire a taxi than to rent a car, but be sure to negotiate taxi fares beforehand. Travel on rural roads can be slow and difficult in the dry season and disrupted by floods in the rainy season. If you plan on travelling in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa, avoid the rainy months of

May through October above the equator and the rainy months of November through April below the equator. Some roads may be flooded or washed out during these months.

Travel by car outside large towns can be dangerous. Major roads are generally well maintained but there are few divided highways in Africa. In addition, rural auto accidents are fairly common because of high speed limits and the presence of wildlife in these areas. Night driving, especially in rural areas, is not recommended, and visitors are encouraged to hire reputable tour operators for safaris or other game viewing expeditions.

## **By bus**

Bus service is extensive in Africa and in almost all countries it is the main means of transportation for locals and tourists alike. Styles of busses and minibusses vary across the continent, refer to country pages for more info.

## **By thumb**

Locals hike rides in vehicles with strangers throughout Africa, often paying a fee to the driver in return for the favour or service. The distinction between a private vehicle and a taxi is blurred and in many countries, informal taxi business flourish, by picking people up from the side of the road who want a lift. In some areas, such as Johannesburg, specific hand signals are used by hitchhikers to indicate where they wish to go and it is common for vehicles to carry several people at the same time a particular area. Foreigners may expose themselves to considerable personal risk by travelling in this way, and it is important to understand the political and social climate of each region before doing so.

## **By overland truck**

Some people with limited amounts of time or who would prefer not to make their own arrangements opt for the "overlander" experience. Many operators run tours in large trucks that are comfortable and equipped with facilities for around 8-30 persons. They're generally run on a pretty tight schedule and cover a lot of distance, such as "Nairobi to Johannesburg in six weeks". These tours are run throughout the whole continent but East and Southern Africa are by far the most popular destinations. Accommodation is mostly camping with tents provided. Most meals are arranged and many are prepared by those on the trip (cooking duties rotated throughout the trip), and free time (like everything else) is scheduled. However, there is plenty of time to participate in the adventure activities that certain areas of Africa are famous for such as Victoria Falls, Swakopmund, Zanzibar, and Serengeti National Park. Some people really enjoy these tours, especially when they do not have enough time to organise all travel arrangements themselves. Others loathe the very thought of travelling in a group and think that they keep you way out of touch with the "real" Africa. Whatever the case, they're a very different way to travel through Africa. The people that go on these tours tend to be young at heart and slightly adventurous; these tours are not luxury trips.

## **By train**

Most railway lines in Africa were built by the colonial powers, often with great human cost, with the main purpose of extracting wealth from the interior to coastal cities for export. After the fall of colonialism, many lines haven't been extended or maintained. passenger railways in Africa are therefore sparse with the majority being short, slow and within one country. However, during the 2010s, Chinese and European investment have rehabilitated several lines and also built new standard gauge railway lines in several countries.



The North African states of Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia all have rail networks of adequate quality, some of them even comparing favorably to a few European or East Asian countries, with connections to most major cities. In 2018, Morocco opened Africa's first true high speed rail line between Tangier and Rabat. Due to political tensions (and in part the sparse population in border areas) there are however no international train services between these countries. For travellers to and from Egypt the old Wadi Halfa to Khartoum, in Sudan, train is useful as it connects with the ferry across Lake Nasser to the Egyptian rail terminus in Aswan. A unique experience, but not very useful as a means of transportation, is to ride the longest train in the world in Mauritania, either in the caboose or atop open iron ore carriages. Libya has no railways and plans to change that were derailed by the political troubles that have shaken this country since the 2010s.



Caricature of Cecil Rhodes, the colonialist behind the never-built Cape to Cairo Railway.

South Africa has a long history with passenger rail, there are overnight trains from most major cities several times per week. Additionally Gauteng province is served by the fast *Gautrain*, connecting the major cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria with O.R. Tambo International Airport. There are no proper international trains to South Africa but several lines terminate at border cities, making it quite easy to travel from neighbouring countries such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Most other countries in Southern Africa have some form of passenger services, but quality and frequency vary greatly. Finally, for those with money to splurge, there are luxury trains like the **Blue Train** (<http://www.bluetrain.co.za/>) and **Rovos Rail** (<https://www.rovos.com/>) which offer luxurious old world charm.



A train in Zambia

East Africa has had declining services for a long time but due to recent investment several new lines have opened between major cities. Both Ethiopia and Kenya now boast brand new trains connecting major cities. The classic *TAZARA* line, connecting Dar es Salaam with Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia still holds up, passing through several national parks. Central African countries have fared worse with little to no investment, and railways to show for it. Angola has rehabilitated its railway lines but services remain spotty. Very limited and erratic services are available in other countries.

A few services remain in West Africa with Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire being the most usable for tourists. Nigeria is however investing heavily in rail and several new intercity trains have sprung up. Senegal has also built a new commuter rail line, linking the capital Dakar with several nearby suburban towns.

## By boat

Where there is water, there are usually boat services to some extent. In the DRC, boats are the primary means of transportation due to the extensive network of rivers and lack/quality of roads and railways. Some noteworthy river journeys in Africa are:

Along the **Niger River** small, wooden *pirogues* varying in design from a 2-person canoe to wide, ~10 person boats with a canopy and toilet. Travelling by pirogue is slow, but the Sahelian scenery and people you meet on the boat and during stops make this a memorable African experience. Due to cataracts,

pirogues on the Niger only operate in Mali & Niger

Along the **Congo River** large, old and often overcrowded ferries connect cities along the river in the Republic of the Congo, DR Congo, & Central African Republic. Small boats from villages come out and moor themselves to these ferries to sell food and merchandise and the boat is a bustling marketplace of hundreds of people much of the time. Conditions aboard these ferries are poor and bearable only by the most seasoned of travellers. Talk to the captain to see if you can use one of the handful of rooms to sleep.



Pirogue on the Niger River in Mali

## Talk

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There is no dominant language in Africa, but if you are travelling in West or Central Africa, French and English will be the most useful across these nations and regions. Arabic is the dominant language in North Africa, although French is also widely spoken in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. English is also useful in many countries, and dominant in much of Southern Africa. Swahili is the most useful language in East Africa. In Ethiopia, most people speak Amharic, which is indigenous to Ethiopia. Even if you know a blanket language like French, it is always a good idea to bring phrasebooks for the native languages. In Senegal, for example, despite being part of Francophone Africa, visitors are likely to find Wolof very useful and sometimes necessary when dealing with residents. It also helps if you have a basic understanding of the language used by a country's former colonist (e.g. German is useful to know if you are going to Namibia, since there is a large German-speaking white population). The more you wish to interact with locals or go out of the cities, the more important it will be for you to have resources to communicate in the local African languages.



A typical storefront in Swakopmund, Namibia written in the former colonial German language.

Africa's linguistic diversity is exemplified by South Africa, which has eleven official languages, some of which have the most complex inventory of sounds in any human language, with over a hundred different sounds to distinguish meaning. English in comparison has less than half that number.

## See

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### Flora and fauna

Many visitors are attracted by the African flora and fauna and several countries benefit from safari tourism to African national parks.

### Natural wonders

Africa is home to many famous natural wonders, from the Nile River, the world's longest river, to Victoria Falls. The continent is home to two of the world's four volcanoes with permanent lava lakes—the dramatic Mount Nyiragongo which rises hundreds of metres above Goma, DR Congo and Erta Ale in Ethiopia's stark Danakil Depression (the others are Mt.



A giraffe in Niger

Erebus in Antarctica & Kilauea in Hawaii). Both volcanoes can be climbed by the adventurous tourist to stand at the rim gazing in awe at the bubbling lava below, an especially incredible sight at night! Mount Cameroon and its glorious stretch of lava also creates a beautiful site with a variety of flora and fauna.

## Landscapes

Roughly centred on the Equator, Africa is known for landscapes typical for warm parts of the world.

Northern Africa is dominated by the immense Sahara desert wedged between the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Apart from the coastal rim and the banks of the Nile, this is a dry and remote part of the continent. The most notable (and likely easiest accessible) mountain range here is the Atlas mountains range in Morocco. The highest peak is Jbel Toubkal, the highest mountain in Africa not located in the east of the continent.

South of the Sahara, vegetation gradually increases the further south one travels. From southern Sahel onwards, the terrain is rather flat with savanna and steppe. This is however not the case at these latitudes in the eastern part of Africa; this is the northern end of Africa's "backbone" of several mountain chains stretching down all the way from Ethiopia to South Africa like an extension of the Nile. East Africa is also where you can find the largest lakes, including Lake Victoria. Named after the 19th century British queen Victoria, this is Africa's largest and the world's second largest fresh water lake by surface area and the source of one of the two forks of the Nile. The countries bordering Lake Victoria are reknowned as the best places in Africa to go on safari, as well as the only places left to see chimpanzees and gorillas in their natural habitat. Due east of the lake, a little more than halfway to the Indian Ocean, and on the northern border of Tanzania, lies Africa's highest free standing mountain, Kilimanjaro. Off the coast is the Zanzibar Archipelago.

Bisected by the Equator, unsurprisingly the heart of Africa is dominated by rainforest. The Congo rainforest is the second largest in the world, remote and mostly uninhabited, and going here is often more of an expedition than a tourist trip. The Eastern Central part is also the best place to go on the continent if you are interested in volcanoes.

Further south, the landscape becomes more and more dry again, especially in the western half. Namibia in particular is known for its deserts and canyons. The landscape is different in the east with scenic mountains and waterfalls including the mighty Victoria Falls, yes, it too was named after the queen. On the highland plateau in this corner of Africa is Lesotho, the only country in the world that is entirely located higher than 1400 m above the sea level. The southernmost part of the continent — in other words South Africa — is reminiscent of the northernmost rim with Mediterranean climate and subtropical vegetation.



Mt. Nyiragongo's lava lake, viewed from the rim.



The view of Lake Assal from a nearby mountain, with a camel caravan in the foreground. Lake Assal and the surrounding areas are an excellent example of moonscapes.

There are also several island nations or territories located in the oceans outside mainland Africa. They are as a rule mountainous with mountain chains often consisting of volcanoes. Surrounded by sea, they as a rule have cooler temperatures than inland locations at the same latitudes.

## Historical civilisations

While the continent's diverse and unique wildlife is often all that is mentioned in regards to African travel, as home to the oldest civilisations on the planet, Africa has equally impressive cultures and history. The most famous civilisation on the continent, and arguably in the world, is that of ancient Egypt. From the southern city of Abu Simbel to Luxor and all the way north to Alexandria and Cairo, including the Pyramids of Giza, the only surviving one of the original Seven Wonders of the World and the most iconic symbols of this ancient kingdom. Sites from the Nubian Kingdom that had close ties with Egypt can be found in Sudan, such as Gebel Barkal and many other pyramids in Meroe. There are also remains of the former city-state of Carthage that can be found in modern-day Tunisia.

Ethiopia offers many ruins from the ancient **Axumite Kingdom** where the Queen of Sheba ruled. The obelisks and Dungur ruins in Axum were built prior to the kingdom's conversion to Christianity. As one of the world's oldest Christian nations, it is also home to many of the world's greatest and oldest Christian religious monuments, such as the Ezana Stone and the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion, where the Ark of the Covenant is said to be stored. Other famous Christian structures built later by the kingdom's successor, the **Abyssinian Empire**, especially during the 12th and 13th centuries, can also be found in Lalibela.

In West Africa, structures from the ancient **Mali Empire** can be found in Timbuktu and Djenne. Although there are Islamic influences, the architectural styles of the Malian Kingdom's mosques are still quite unique and recognizably African. The cliff dwellings in Mali's Dogon Country, built by the Dogon people, are also impressive ancient structures in Mali. Remnants of the **Ghana Empire** can be found in parts of Mauritania and Mali, including the archaeological sites at Koumbi Saleh, Oualata and Aoudaghost. Often overshadowed by Africa's other monuments, **Sungbo's Eredo** in Ijebu Ode, Nigeria, built by the Yoruba people, is actually the largest pre-colonial structure remaining on the continent. Today it towers over the city, covered in vegetation. The royal palaces of the **Dahomey Kingdom** still stand in their former capital of Abomey, and ruins of the **Kingdom of Kongo** can still be found in their former capital of M'banza-Kongo. While they were largely destroyed by the British during the Scramble for Africa, Benin City and Kumasi still contain a few relics of the **Kingdom of Benin** and **Ashanti Empire** respectively. In Sokoto, Nigeria, remnants of the **Sokoto Caliphate** can still be found in the local museums, as well as the sultan's palace, and the city continues to serve as one of Africa's main centres of Islamic scholarship.

Ruins from the ancient **Swahili culture** can be found in the coastal areas of East Africa, particularly in Kenya and Tanzania. The Swahili structures combines elements of African architecture with Islamic architecture, which was quite prominent around the 14th century. Some of the most famous Swahili structures include the **Gedi Ruins** and **Pillar Tombs** around Malindi, and Kilwa Kisiwani. Mombasa and Zanzibar's Stone Town feature Swahili structures spanning hundreds of years from its early days to the 18th century.

In Southern Africa, the ruins of Great Zimbabwe have fascinated visitors ever since Europeans discovered them. No European had believed that the inhabitants of black Africa were capable of creating any great monuments on their own until the ruins of this ancient culture were discovered.

Many cities, such as Leptis Magna, Timgad, and Dougga feature Roman ruins as impressive as those in Europe itself. Many other European structures can be found throughout the continent, dating back to the earliest days of imperialism. One of the most unique European-influenced styles is the **Cape Dutch** style found in South Africa, which traces its origins to the first white settlers in sub-Saharan Africa in the 17th

century. Although clearly influenced by Dutch architectural conventions, it has also diverged significantly from European architecture to adapt to African conditions, making it a unique style in its own right. Uniquely among white communities in Africa, the descendants of these Dutch settlers, now known as the Afrikaners, have developed their own ethnic identity, and by and large consider themselves to be Africans rather than Europeans.

## Music

Music has been called "Africa's common language", and is part of everyday life in most African nations. Music in Africa is divided into six musical regions each of which have their own unique styles. The musical regions are Southern, Northern, Eastern, and Central Africa, and lastly Sene-Gambia. Southern African styles include Chimurenga (mostly dominant in Zimbabwe) and Mbaqanga which has come to be widely known as South African jazz (mostly dominant in Botswana and South Africa), Sene-Gambia African styles include, Griot (played across Mali, Guinea, Gambia and Senegal). Central African styles include Soukous which takes pieces of Latin rumba, American jazz, a bit of rock and incorporates it into a style very unique to the Congo (very dominant in the Congo regions). East African styles include the very energetic Benga which is dominant in East African countries like Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

West African styles include Juju and Highlife, Juju is a style of Nigerian popular music derived from traditional Yoruba Percussion while Highlife originates from Ghana but is also played in Nigeria. Northern African styles include Magrib and Rai both of which bear strong Islamic and Arabic stamps thanks to the Medieval Islamic expansions. This kind of music is very popular in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Western popular music and many musical genres from the Americas (including ragtime, country music, jazz, the blues, rock'n'roll, reggae, calypso, salsa and samba) exhibit strong influences from traditional African music, while these genres in turn have exerted a strong influence on modern African pop music. South Africa is also known for its jazz musicians who participated in their own unique genre, among the most famous of Hugh Masekela whom was as trumpet player.

Most African countries have their own unique indigenous music styles of which a few are popular in other African countries. Botswana has styles which are a must-see for any traveller going there; it is also one of the few countries whose styles are popular in other African countries. Their unique styles include Setapa, Dikoma, Hosana, Chiperu and Tsutsube. All these styles have their own designated dance styles, which go along with the music as it is performed hence why they are popular in other Southern African countries and among tourists.

## Do

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## Safaris

*See also: Safaris*

Safari – an overland travel to view the stunning African wildlife – is arguably the greatest tourist attraction in Africa. Most countries, except in the north, have at least one national park with organised safaris. A safari can take on a range of forms, from a simple one-day minibus ride, to week-long stays at a lodge. Commonly it is a 4x4 ride across the savanna in search of the "Big five": elephants, lions, leopards, rhinos, & buffalo. Such safaris are offered primarily in Southern and East Africa. Many parks have strict regulations both on visitor activities and behavior, along with entry & camping fees. Among the most well-known parks are South Africa's Kruger National Park, Tanzania's Ngorongoro Crater, Etosha National Park in Namibia, the Okavango Delta region of Botswana, and the Tsavo East/West National Parks, and Nairobi National Park.



The three basic safari styles are driving safari, walking safaris, and mobile safari. Some regions also offer safaris on boats/canoes, horses, elephants, or hot air balloon or light aircraft. The **driving safari** is by far the most popular form of safari and is best for most first-timers as it is easier, often cheaper, and generally allows you to see more wildlife. A driving safari can be a one-day affair, but it often includes a couple nights spent camping or in lodges. Low-price driving safaris are often made in minibuses without a guaranteed window seat. Luxury safaris will likely include drives in a 4x4 vehicle in small groups and stays at fine lodges with swimming pools and spas. A **walking safari** consists of hiking, either for a few hours or several days, with fewer opportunities to see many animals, but allows hikers to get closer to some animals and have experiences like stumbling upon the bones of a recent lion kill. For **mobile safaris**, a camp is set up each night of your safari; it might also contain a portable lunch camp. At a *fly-in safari*, the visitor is flown directly (or very close) to a lodge, instead of hours of overland transit.

For the most basic trips, travellers should have a minimum budget of US\$70/day, while some of the most visited parks may cost US\$100–150/day. Luxury trips can easily run over US\$1000/day. If a price offer seems too good to be true, it often is, and there is probably a good reason why. This can be the result of hidden fees, large errors/omissions/lies when calculating a price, an unlicensed operator, abusive labor practices, poor equipment, length of the trip, and extras that you may not have thought of or which this operator plans to charge a steep fee. Thoroughly check what each tour operator provides in their cost, and make sure to get a written agreement before payment and departure. Self-drive safaris are possible in some parks, but highly discouraged for beginners.

## Climbing

Africa does not have tall, jagged mountain ranges comparable to the Himalayas, Andes, Rockies, or Alps and there are very few mountains requiring technical gear. The Atlas Mountains across Morocco, Algeria, & Tunisia; the Drakensberg in South Africa & Lesotho; the Semian Mountains in Ethiopia; and the Rwenzori Mountains between Uganda & the DR Congo are the only considerable mountain ranges on the



Viewing zebras in Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania.



Many different animals can be found in Etosha National Park, Namibia.



Interior of a more luxurious tented camp.



The downside to visiting large parks. One vehicle spots a lion in the shade (hidden), reports their location on the radio, and within minutes, a dozen other vehicles arrive on scene for the sight.

continent, all with numerous peaks which can be easily climbed. Additionally, there are some tall volcanoes along the Great Rift Valley, on the Indian Ocean islands, & in Cameroon. Some of the continent's most climbed or unique mountains are:

- Jbel Toubkal (4165 m) near Marrakech, Morocco is the tallest peak in the Atlas Mountains and can be climbed without technical gear in summer.
- Mount Cameroon (4040 m) near Douala, Cameroon, is the tallest peak (actually a volcano) in Cameroon and is famous for the 1986 Lake Nyos disaster, when the lake released a huge volume carbon dioxide gas, suffocating thousands. Fast-paced hikes to the top and back are possible in a day.
- Mount Kilimanjaro (5895 m) in Tanzania near the Kenya border is the continent's highest peak, the world's tallest free-standing mountain, and perhaps the most climbed mountain on the continent, owing to its accessibility and the lack of need of technical gear. The range of scenery one passes from base to peak makes it a destination almost all climbers have on their wishlist.
- Mount Kenya (5199 m) is Kenya's tallest mountain and also popular climb with many non-technical walking and climbing routes through lush scenery and is less than 200 km from Nairobi. The surrounding national park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Table Mountain National Park (1086 m) which dominates the city of Cape Town has hundreds of routes to the plateau, ranging from easy walks to technical rock climbs. In November 2011, Table Mountain was named one of the new 7 Wonders of Nature.
- Mount Nyiragongo (3470 m) in the DRC on the Rwanda border is one of just 3-4 volcanoes in the world with a lava lake in its crater. A climb takes ~8 hours and involves camping on a ledge at the top—a safe 700 m above the lake—for the night (of course, the steaming, bubbling lava is more spectacular at night).

Abseiling and rock climbing can be done in many parts of Africa, with many opportunities in South Africa.

## Trekking and hiking

Most of Africa's mountain ranges and highlands are suitable for trekking. The **Drakensberg** in South Africa & Lesotho, the **Garden Route** in South Africa, **Ethiopian Highlands**, and Mali's Dogon Country are the most popular trekking destinations in Africa and most guidebooks to these countries describe the most popular routes. In the dense jungles of the Central African Republic & DRC treks, almost always organised, to pygmy settlements are available. Established trekking routes exist in the forests of Guinea's Fouta Djallon highlands and in Cameroon.

The Air Massif in Niger is popular for hiking around its sand scraped rock formations and oases, usually short distances from your camel or vehicle transport. Hiking can also be done in many forests with established paths. In Uganda, Rwanda, & the adjacent DR Congo, hiking to see the endangered mountain gorilla is a major tourism draw, although permits are US\$500 to spend hours hiking through tropical forests to spend 1 hour in close proximity to the gorillas.

## Sport fishing

## Diving

There are a good number of great scuba diving sites across Africa. The **Red Sea** off Egypt offers clear, tranquil waters. Diving in the **Indian Ocean** is common off all islands and on the continent from Kenya south. Diving in South Africa is most famous for "shark dives", where divers are lowered in cages to watch

sharks feed on bait, although other diving opportunities exist. Few locations inland are popular with divers; **Lake Malawi**—which is clear, deep and filled with unique species—is the only lake with a significant number of dive operators.

## Relax on a beach

Africa has a very long coastal line with thousands of beautiful beaches as it is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, both the Suez Canal and the Red Sea along the Sinai Peninsula to the northeast, the Indian Ocean to the southeast, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west.



Relax on a beach in Zanzibar.

## Sports

Soccer is the most widespread and popular sport with games between countries usually drawing tens of thousands of patriotic, cheering fans filling basic stadiums, as many world class African players return from Europe to play for their respective national teams. Watching a football match in Africa is a must; try to dress in the colours of the home team and join the cheering celebration with your neighbours! The biennial **Africa Cup of Nations** is the continent's premier championship. The most recent AFCON was held in Cameroon in 2022, the tournament was originally scheduled to be played between 9 January and 6 February 2021 but was delayed due to the covid-19 pandemic, the tournament's date were moved to January 2022 whilst retaining the name 2021 Africa Cup of Nations for sponsorship purposes. Upcoming Cups will be hosted by Côte d'Ivoire (2023). South Africa played host to the first African FIFA World Cup in 2010.

Rugby is played by several former British colonies in Southern & Eastern Africa. South Africa's *Springboks* are among the best teams in the world. And while they were traditionally associated with the white and specifically the *Afrikaner* part of the population they have now significant following among all ethnic groups after Nelson Mandela famously wore a Springbok jersey during the 1995 world cup that was held in and won by South Africa.

Cricket is also played, especially in former British colonies, with South Africa being considered one of the elite teams in world cricket, and Zimbabwe also considered a respectable team.

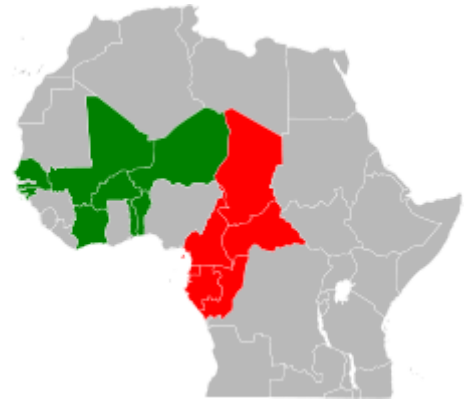
## Buy

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### Money

The three easiest currencies to exchange within Africa are the euro, US dollar, & UK pound sterling. In some countries with a large tourism sector Australian & Canadian dollars and Japanese yen *may* be exchanged at large banks and some currency exchanges, but you will receive a poor exchange rate as these currencies are uncommon and more troublesome for the banks in turn to exchange. The continent is roughly split between regions where the US dollar is easiest to exchange and use and others where the euro is. In Southern African countries the South African rand enjoys a regionally dominant position (see below) and may be easier to exchange than other currencies. Generally speaking you will experience poor exchange rates outside of most of these countries, and even currency movement restrictions.

Due to concerns about counterfeiting, money changers, banks, and most likely even merchants will not accept US dollar banknotes that are worn or more than ten years old. As strange as that sounds, it seems to be a rule among anyone dealing much in dollars and you will find it difficult or even impossible to dispose of worn or older dollar banknotes. The same does not seem to hold true for euro banknotes, but may do so for other non-African currencies.



CFA franc usage: West African (green),  
Central African (red)

With few exceptions (most notably the South African rand), African currencies are generally not accepted by banks or money changers outside their native territory, or at least not at a decent exchange rate. The currencies of some smaller countries are non-exchangeable and become worthless abroad, with some countries prohibiting export of their currencies and confiscating and even fining people leaving the country with currency (most notably the Angolan kwanza).

There are three currency unions in Africa:

- Common Currency Area (using South African rand): South Africa, Eswatini (Swaziland), Lesotho, & Namibia.
- West African CFA franc (XOF): Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, & Togo.
- Central African CFA franc (XAF): Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, & Gabon

Some countries that are part of a currency union still mint their own currency as well (such as Namibia's dollar), meaning that both forms of currency are legal tender.

Despite sharing the same name and same exchange rate (655.957 CFA francs = €1), the two "CFA franc" currencies are issued by different banks and are **not** interchangeable. A 1000 CFA franc banknote from Gabon will not be accepted by a merchant in Benin, and vice versa. Indeed, even with banks and money changers it will likely be easier (and you'll receive a better exchange rate) to exchange euro banknotes or even US dollars. Given the fixed exchange, if visiting any of these countries, the euro will receive a more favorable exchange rate.

The Mauritanian ouguiya & Malagasy ariary are the only two non-decimal currencies in use in the world, divided into 1/5th fractions known as khoums & iraimbilanja, respectively.

## US dollar

The U.S. dollar has been the *de facto* currency of Zimbabwe since the collapse of the Zimbabwean dollar and allowance of foreign currency as tender in January 2009. Dollar coins are usually not accepted in Zimbabwe and you may have problems getting change for small purchases. The Djiboutian franc (178.8=US\$1) and Eritrean nakfa (16.5=\$1) are pegged to the dollar.

The U.S. dollar is the easiest currency to exchange (and may receive a better exchange rate compared to the euro) in Southern Africa and East Africa, as well as the DR Congo, Nigeria, & Liberia. Many tour operators, tourist attractions, and hotels in these regions set their prices in dollars, some even going as far as to offer poor exchange rates for or even refuse local currency. Also, many countries in these regions set their visa prices in dollars and will only accept dollars (or perhaps pound sterling).

## Euro

The euro is the official currency of France's Mayotte & Reunion territories, Spain's Canary Islands and Portugal's Madeira and Porto Santo. The West & Central African CFA francs are pegged to the euro at 655.975 (formerly, 100 to the French franc). The Moroccan dirham is pegged (with a fluctuation band) to the euro at roughly 10 dirhams to one euro. The Cape Verdean escudo is pegged at 110.265 to one euro and the Comoran franc is pegged at 491.9678 to one euro. The Sao Tome and Principe dobra was fixed at 24500 to one euro in 2010 to guarantee stability—it was worth just 12000 per euro in 2004.

The euro is the easiest currency to exchange and receives the best exchange rate in countries whose currencies are fixed to the euro, with strong European ties, and/or where the majority of tourists are European. This generally corresponds with North Africa, the Sahel, West Africa, & Central Africa with the exceptions of Egypt, Sudan, & Ghana, neither the euro nor dollar is better, and Nigeria, the DRC, & Liberia. Due to the relatively recent creation of the euro and long-standing status of the dollar, beware that there are some regions of Africa where people either have never heard of the euro or will see it as worthless.

## South African rand

The South African rand is an official currency and widely circulated in South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini (Swaziland), & Namibia. Although the latter three issue their own currencies, they are pegged 1:1 with the rand and are not legal tender in the other countries as is the SA rand. The rand has also been accepted in Zimbabwe since the Zimbabwean dollar's demise, but not as widely as the U.S. dollar. It is also readily exchanged (and sometimes accepted for payment) in Botswana, Mozambique and most of the tourist spots in Botswana and Zambia. Namibia mints a *local currency* which is also legal tender alongside the SA rand in Namibia, so always note the form of currency used on goods for sale.

## Banking

### Cashless forms of payment

Due to the nigh-ubiquity of cellphone ownership and the sometimes highly volatile currencies (and shortage of "hard currency" banknotes or their value being much too great for everyday transactions) various mobile phone based payment systems have been pioneered in Africa. Depending on your itinerary, it can be very advisable to make yourself familiar with those systems and have them installed to your phone.

## Markets

Many African countries and tribes are known for their **handicraft**. High-quality sculptures, utensils and textiles can be found for a fraction of the price of a similar item made in a high-income country.



North Africa is known for carpets.

## Prohibited items

Trade in ivory is prohibited by nearly all countries in the world, with hefty penalties and even jail time for offenders. Many animal products (some commonly found in fetish markets) are also banned by western countries, such as tortoise shells, tusks of any animal, or any part of or item made with an endangered species. Some African countries keen on conservation will prosecute all violators to the fullest extent of the law...so be careful when purchasing animal products unless you want to spend years in an African prison. Keep in mind that even if an item may be exported from an African country it may be illegal to import into a Western country; the EU and US have strict laws on importing animal products in the name of conservation. See also animal ethics.

Some medications which may be purchased without a prescription in Western countries or parts of Africa may contain ingredients considered illegal narcotics or controlled substances in some countries. In particular, diphenhydramine is a "controlled substance" in Zambia and several Americans have been fined and jailed on drug-trafficking charges for possessing the over-the-counter allergy medicine Benadryl (elsewhere called Dimedrol) and the pain reliever Advil PM whose main active ingredient is diphenhydramine.

Drug trafficking is as common an offense as in most Western countries. The list of which substances are considered prohibited or restricted drugs varies from country to country. *Khat* which is readily grown and consumed in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, is an illicit drug in most other African countries. Organised drug trafficking is a major problem in Guinea and Guinea-Bissau en route from South America to Europe.

As with most countries, check local laws concerning antiquities before trying to leave the country with anything that appears to be over 100 years old.

Always make sure that any diamonds or other jewels you are buying can satisfy 2 conditions:

1. The number of, weight, and/or total value of the jewels you purchase can be legally imported back to your home country.
2. No jewels or diamonds are **Conflict Jewels**, which means that they are mined and/or sold by terrorist groups, rebel groups, or are mined in non-sustainable ways.

## Eat

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Food varies wildly and you can find Arab-influenced cuisine (in the North) as well as European-derived (in South Africa and Namibia) or local food originating from times before colonisation. While you won't find five-star restaurants in every city or indeed every country, if you keep an open mind, you are in for some truly amazing and once-in-a-lifetime culinary experiences, once you venture out of standard tourist fare.

## Drink

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As could be expected from a continent as huge and diverse as Africa, there are a large variety of drinking options. While South Africa has come to be known as a wine-growing region of international acclaim, drinking anything alcoholic in the Muslim-majority countries or the predominately Muslim areas of

countries such as Nigeria may be unwise or even illegal. There are also a variety of non-alcoholic drinks that either originated from Africa or have been perfected here, such as rooibos tea in South Africa or coffee in Ethiopia.

## Sleep

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While business districts and resort cities have high-end hotels, accommodation can be very basic off the beaten path.

While camping in a national park can be an exciting experience, be aware of dangerous animals, and of crime.

## Stay safe

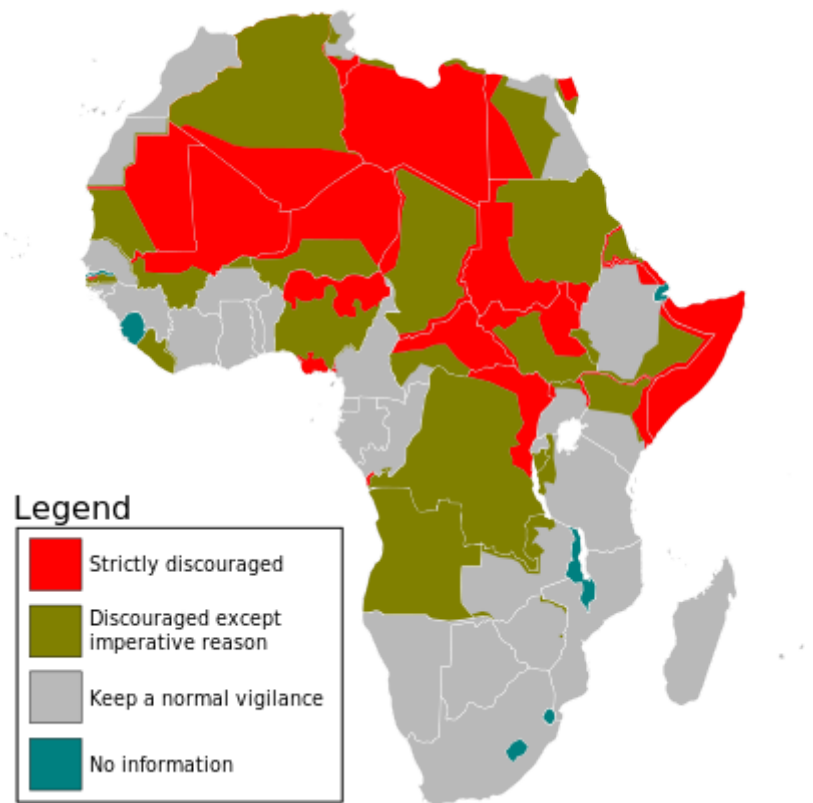
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While much of Africa is safe for travel and many tourist attractions on the continent are far from conflict, there are still a few regions in which conflict and/or sociopolitical tensions exist. Political unrest, religious extremism and piracy are also concerns in some areas with a recent rise in militant Salafist groupings.

Jihadist groups are mostly concentrated in the Horn of Africa, parts of North Africa and the Sahel region, as well as their adjacent areas. Somalia, where warlords have fought for control since the collapse of the central government in 1993, and the Central African Republic, where general lawlessness and rebels exist throughout most of the country, should only be visited by experienced travellers who are *very* competent regarding the dangers that exist. Otherwise, these areas should be considered no-go regions. Exceptions are Somaliland which is *de facto* independent and relatively safe and the CAR's isolated Dzanga Sangha National Reserve.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is home to the second largest jungle after the Amazon and most of the country is impassable by land. The eastern and northeastern regions are home to rebels and general lawlessness and have been home to the bloodiest conflict since World War II. Safer regions are the west (incl. Kinshasa), south (near Zambia border, incl. Lubumbashi), and a few spots practically *on* the border, such as Goma, Bukavu, & Virunga National Park.

The Central Sahara is host to numerous problems, notably that a growing presence (or at least impact) of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in much of Saharan Algeria, northern Mali (north of Timbuktu, east of Gao, and near the Nigerien border), and far eastern Mauritania has resulted in several kidnappings (incl. one Briton beheaded, kidnapped near the Mali-Niger border) and a couple of suicide bombings in



Safety map of Africa as of 2012

Nouakchott. Since the end of a civil war in Mali in 2012, Northern Mali (including Timbuktu, Gao, & the Mauritania & Niger borders) is highly dangerous on account of the presence of Tuareg & Islamist rebels. A Tuareg uprising has left much of the area around Agadez, Niger—once a popular tourist destination—off-limits and unsafe. Several borders in the Sahara are closed or very unsafe as a result of banditry: Libya-Sudan (closed), Libya-Chad (closed), Chad-Sudan (unsafe due to Darfur conflict), Chad-Niger (banditry), Libya-Niger (banditry), Mali-Algeria (no road crossings, AQIM), Algeria-Mauritania (AQIM), Mali-Niger (AQIM/rebels), Mali-Mauritania (AQIM/rebels), & Algeria-Morocco (closed).

Portions of Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Chad are home to rebels and it is important to obtain up-to-date information on which parts of these countries are safe to visit (see warnings on those pages). Northern Nigeria is home to Islamic extremists who have carried out several attacks against non-Muslims, mostly targeting other Nigerians, but there is still a significant risk to Westerners. The region around the Niger River delta has been home to rebels for decades. Similarly, in Sudan, only the western Darfur regions and south-central "boundary" between the conflicting North-South are dangerous.

Many countries in Africa are *unsafe* for **gay travellers**, with high levels of homophobia widespread in the general population. Homosexuality is illegal in most African countries, with South Africa and Botswana being notable exceptions and in some cases carries imprisonment or even the death penalty. Nigeria and Uganda have taken it a step further by making it a criminal offence to know that someone is homosexual and not report it to the police.

## Crime

Crime in major African cities varies significantly by country and it is usually unwise to travel around at night alone. While much of it involves scamming, mugging or petty theft, violent crimes are generally less common. Check the "stay safe" areas of the individual countries you are going to.

## Wildlife

In most parts of Africa dangerous wildlife should be of only very minor, if any, concern at all. In some parts of East Africa and South Africa large abundances of potentially dangerous animals can be found, but the majority of the time any traveller would most likely be perfectly safe in a vehicle with their tour guide. Nonetheless, attacks and deaths do occur (rarely with foreigners, but commonly with locals) and it is best to be well-informed. Nile crocodiles can be extremely dangerous and swimming is not an option in most low-lying portions of East Africa. Lions and leopards can be dangerous, but you are unlikely to encounter them on foot unless you are being extremely foolish. Large herbivores such as elephants and rhinos can also be very dangerous if aggravated, even while in a vehicle, Hippopotamuses are the animal most likely to attack or kill a human unprovoked and should be avoided without an experienced guide. Venomous snakes exist and are plentiful, but are very shy and you are unlikely to even see one let alone be bitten by one. When it comes to pests, most insects in the country are no more dangerous than what you would find in any other country, and the spiders are mostly harmless to humans. Despite all of this, easily the most dangerous non-human animal in the entire African continent is the mosquito, which infects a very large number of Africans with malaria every year, and tsetse flies that cause sleeping sickness are also a major problem in some areas. (Check individual country and region pages and WHO reports to see whether the places you plan to travel to are affected by these diseases.)

## Stay healthy

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See also: Tropical diseases, Pests, Travel in developing countries

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of HIV and AIDS infection on Earth. A 2005 UN Report says over 25 million Africans are infected, over 7% of adults on the continent. Be extremely cautious about any sexual activity in Africa. The rates of HIV infection among sex workers are phenomenally high.

Bushmeat from gorillas, monkeys, chimpanzees and mandrills should be avoided. Due to their similarity to humans, a number of diseases (including yet-undiscovered or poorly studied ones) can be spread by consuming their flesh, especially if it is not sufficiently heated. HIV is undoubtedly the most famous disease transmitted from other primates, but others include Ebola, anthrax and yellow fever.

As **tap water** is not always up to hygienic standards, bottled water (be careful to take a look at the seal before opening the bottle as some people simply refill bottles with tap water) is an option if you want to decrease the risk of traveller's diarrhoea, especially on shorter stays. Remember to always drink enough, especially in hot climates, and avoid drinking too much alcohol when you don't know your surroundings and/or have just recently arrived.

Various infectious diseases, including mosquito-borne diseases, are a problem in parts of Africa. Vaccines, medication, and other precautions may be recommended to avoid infection. A nonexhaustive list that travellers should think about: dengue, malaria, measles, polio, rabies, yellow fever. Measles and polio vaccines are routine in many countries, but you should make sure yours are up to date.

## Connect

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### Telephone

*See also: [Telephone service](#) and [List of country calling codes](#).*

Country calling codes for Africa are generally 3-digit numbers beginning with 2—in the form +2XX. Examples are +234 for Nigeria, +233 for Ghana, +263 for Zimbabwe, +254 for Kenya, and +262 for Reunion. Exceptions are Egypt and South Africa, with the 2-digit country calling codes +20 and +27, respectively. A full list of country calling codes can be found [here](#).

Traditional landline telephone services are sketchy. South Africa and the North African countries are the only regions of the continent to have decent quality. It is largely owing to this that mobile phones have proliferated across the continent. Don't be surprised when you are in a seemingly remote corner of the continent and among a poor tribe, when a man whips out a mobile phone to show you pictures of family or ask you to find your Facebook profile for him to send a friend request. In many places, you will receive offers from traders to use their mobile phone for a fee, much as you would be solicited to purchase a wood carving or mat. Texting is more commonly used than calling.

If you decide to purchase a mobile phone locally, beware counterfeit phones. Smartphones are likely to be cheaply-made versions of phones a couple years behind those found in Western markets (that's not to say the latest Galaxy S model or iPhone can't be found). Should you choose to bring a phone from home, your best bet would be to bring a GSM phone (the most common network type worldwide). A GSM phone will have a removable chip, called a SIM card. The SIM card in your phone can be replaced with a SIM card for a local network, enabling you to access local mobile phone networks. Minutes can then be purchased for use and added to your phone. It's not terribly difficult to find a dealer selling scratch cards to replenish minutes/texts/data for your phone; simply scratch to reveal a PIN number and enter into your phone (per the instructions). The cost of purchasing a SIM card and minutes is far less than charges for roaming with a mobile phone network from a Western country.

Continent-wide, faster data networks (3G & 4G) are being installed at a fast pace. However, outside major cities, data service is often at very slow 2G speeds (comparable to dial-up internet or worse). Many telecom companies limit use of 4G/3G networks to post-paid customers.

## Internet access

Computers are out of the reach of most Africans. Therefore, computer shops (cyber cafés) are common throughout the continent, except perhaps the most isolated corners of the most inaccessible countries (Chad, CAR, Somalia). Many computers are full of viruses and malware. With a little bit of computer savviness, you can load a flash drive or burn a CD with an anti-virus program and possibly an alternative web browser (Firefox, Opera, Chrome) to use on public computers at cyber cafés.

Wi-fi internet access is becoming increasingly common. Most upscale hotels along with some mid-range hotels (mainly in more developed countries) will offer wi-fi internet access for guests. Some may charge a fee for this. Using your personal laptop, tablet, or smartphone on a wi-fi connection is preferable to internet cafés for accessing banking, email, social networking, and other sensitive accounts.

The fastest internet services can be found in North Africa, parts of West Africa such as Ghana, Nigeria and around East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, Rwanda), where an impressive roll-out of fiber-optic networks and fast, new undersea cables to the Middle East has made Kenya an up-and-coming hotspot for tech companies and international businesses requiring fast connections. South Africa has the most developed and fastest internet connections on the continent. In contrast, some less-developed countries and regions continue to rely on slow satellite connections, with speeds comparable to or even worse than dial-up connections once common in Western countries. Ghana is also emerging as one of the more consistent internet service providers in Africa with the use of dongles especially being common. Wifi hotspots are also available in hotels, pubs and university campuses.

**Internet censorship** is an issue in various countries on the continent, often implemented or ramped up for political reasons. This often consists of blocked social media and other communication tools; less commonly, governments may shut off the internet altogether surrounding elections or other contentious events.

## Post

Postal networks are generally slow, if not unreliable altogether. Boxes and parcels sent to destinations outside the continent may take weeks or even months to arrive at their destination. FedEx, UPS, & DHL maintain a good network of offices in major cities throughout the continent and the ease of shipping, speed, and better reliability are worth the higher shipping charges.

Post restante is available in some countries (check with the national postal service first) and allow mail to be sent to a post office, where it is kept for the receiver. No address is written on the piece—just receiver's name, city/country, postal code, and "Poste Restante". Make sure the sender spells your (the receiver's)



Cybercafe in Kigali, Rwanda.



name correctly and clearly. The receiver shows up at the post office, presents identification (such as a passport), and pays a small fee. Since some post offices are rather disorganised, so make sure to have the clerk check under your first name and for any possible spelling errors (describe the piece to them, ask to be shown items with a similar name, look under Q instead of O).

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