

Tamanrasset, Djanet & the Sahara



تامنراست، جانت، الصحراء

If you thought that the Sahara was all about sand and camels then you'd better think again. While you'll get your fix of unwieldy dromedaries and undulating dunes, this part of the Sahara is also home to an alien landscape of twisted stone forests, stark volcanic mountain ranges, endless black gravel plains and deep dark canyons. It's the trump card of Algerian tourism and, now that the security situation has stabilised, thousands of visitors are heading back to marvel at its eye-popping natural beauty.

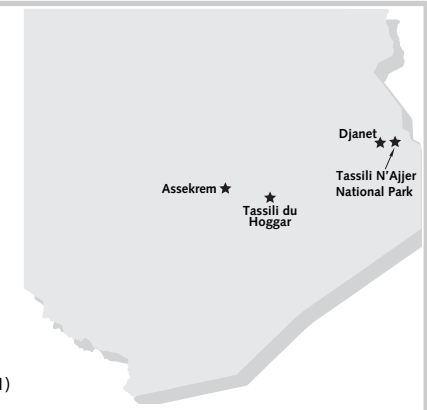
Stretching from In Salah right down to the Mali and Niger borders is the Ahaggar (Hoggar) National Park. Created in 1987 to safeguard the considerable riches of this part of the country, it's one of the largest protected areas in the world. At its heart is the laid-back town of Tamanrasset, resting at the foot of the brooding Hoggar massif.

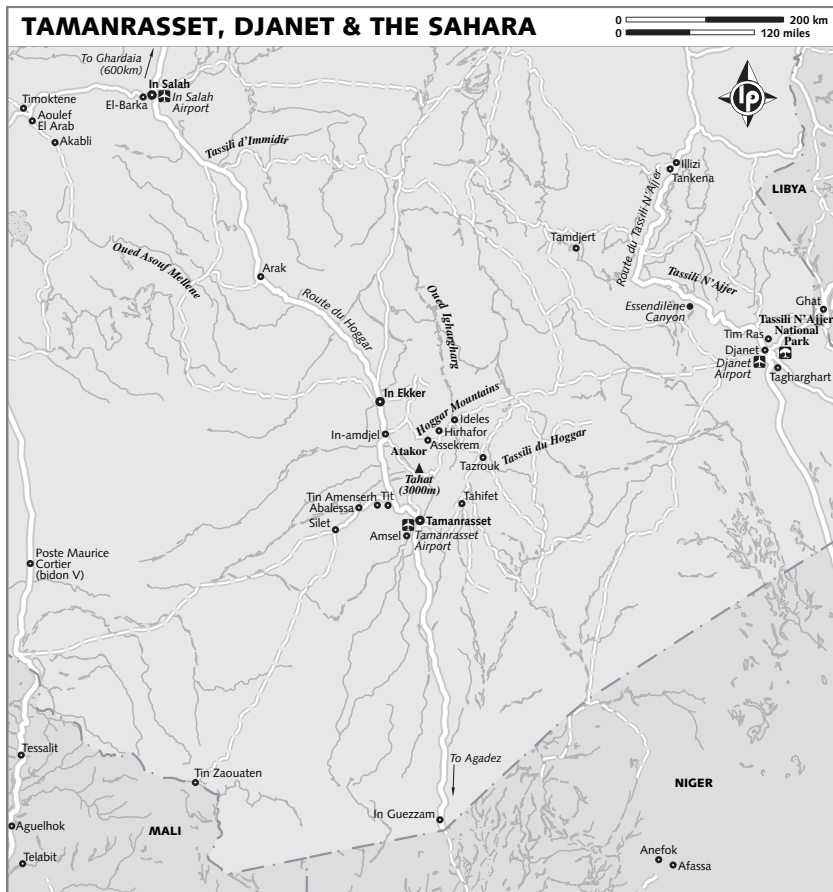
The craggy plateau that surrounds the sleepy oasis of Djanet is known as the Tassili N'Ajjer. Also one of Algeria's protected areas, its caves and canyons hide an abundance of engravings and paintings illustrating the once-blooming plant and animal life of the Sahara.

This is the Algerian heartland of the Tuareg, traditionally a nomadic people, who have roamed the desert regions of Algeria and its neighbouring countries for many centuries. You'll see beautiful women swathed in brightly coloured fabrics and refined silver jewellery and plenty of veiled 'blue men' (as Tuareg men are sometimes called, after the traditional colour of their robes) zipping through the streets of Tamanrasset and Djanet in burly jeeps.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike up steep escarpments and through shadowy canyons to reach the treasure trove of prehistoric art at **Tassili N'Ajjer National Park** (p194)
- Climb deep into the Hoggar Mountains for one of the most spectacular sunrises on earth at **Assekrem** (p188)
- Gaze up at great stone castles and bizarre, deformed mountains on the otherworldly plateau of the **Tassili du Hoggar** (p189)
- Evoke the ancient salt caravans by saddling up on a dromedary to experience the majesty of the Sahara near **Djanet** (p191)





TAMANRASSET & THE ROUTE DU HOGGAR

تامنراست وطريق الهوقار

The Route du Hoggar, one of the major routes across the Sahara to West Africa, is gaining popularity once more after many years in the wilderness. From El-Goléa, it extends south across the Tamemait Plateau, which stretches on like some sunburnt pancake; the largest thing in sight might be a rock the size of a tennis ball. It then passes

through In Salah, a town famed for its salty water, past the canyons and mountains of the Tassili d'Immidir (tassili means plateau in the language of the local Tuareg), through the steep gorges of Arak and then on to this region's hub – the Tuareg 'capital' of Tamanrasset. From Tamanrasset, the road continues for another punishing 410km to In Guezzam, which sits near the border crossing into Niger.

Much of the area covered in this section is protected territory and part of the Ahaggar National Park.

'Tam', as it is affectionately known, is the jumping-off point for exploring the attractions of the Hoggar Mountains, the highlight of which is Assekrem, which at

SUN, SAND & SAFETY

In February 2003 the dangers of desert driving were dramatically illustrated when no fewer than 32 people disappeared in the Sahara. Several separate expeditions, mostly German and Swiss, vanished in different parts of southeast Algeria. Speculation was rife about their fate: one Algerian source even claimed the travellers were being held illegally in a military facility and search attempts made by the Algerian government were a show put on for the benefit of the media. By March, however, it had become apparent that the travellers were in the hands of an extreme Islamist group, the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC).

In May, 17 of the hostages were released unharmed and eventually the remaining party was tracked down to Mali after they had crossed the southern Saharan border. Most were successfully rescued after long negotiations; one tourist died in captivity.

In the light of these events, travel in the desert areas south of Ghardaïa must be undertaken with a professional guide. If driving yourself from Mali, you must arrange to be met at the Algerian border by a guide. Several travel agencies in Tamanrasset, Djanet and Adrar can arrange this for you. If you ignore these regulations you will be found out – there are checkpoints throughout the desert.

some 2800m is one of the Hoggar's highest peaks. From here you can watch the sun rise over a carpet of peaks from the hermitage of Charles de Foucauld. South of Tamanrasset is the Tassili du Hoggar – a mystical plateau full of mushroom-shaped rocks and saffron sand.

IN SALAH عين صالح

Built in the red Sudanese style, In Salah would be a very pleasant place to stay were it not for the problem that gives the town its name: salty water. The water is disgusting, so bring as much water with you as you can from Tamanrasset or El-Goléa. Even the local soft drinks are made from it and bottled water is often unavailable.

The most interesting feature of the town is the presence of a creeping sand dune on the western edge by the Aoulef road. Behind the mosque you can see how the dune is gradually encroaching on the town. From the top of the dune it becomes apparent that In Salah has actually been cut in two.

The dune moves at the rate of about 1m every five years. The amount of sand on the move actually remains fairly constant, so while it is swallowing up a building on its leading edge, it is uncovering one behind it which may have been under the sand for a generation or two. Once the ruins of a house have been uncovered, it is established who it used to belong to and then that person's relatives rebuild the place and move in.

The view from the top of the dune is great at sunset. To the west of town along

the Aoulef road is the *palmeraie*, with some 250,000 trees. Formerly a trading town dealing in gold, ivory and slaves from the south in exchange for European goods from the north, the town's major occupation is now date-growing.

Information

There is a bank in the main street, and the post office is one block to the north. There is a big hospital out in the east of town near the Hôtel Tidikelt.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

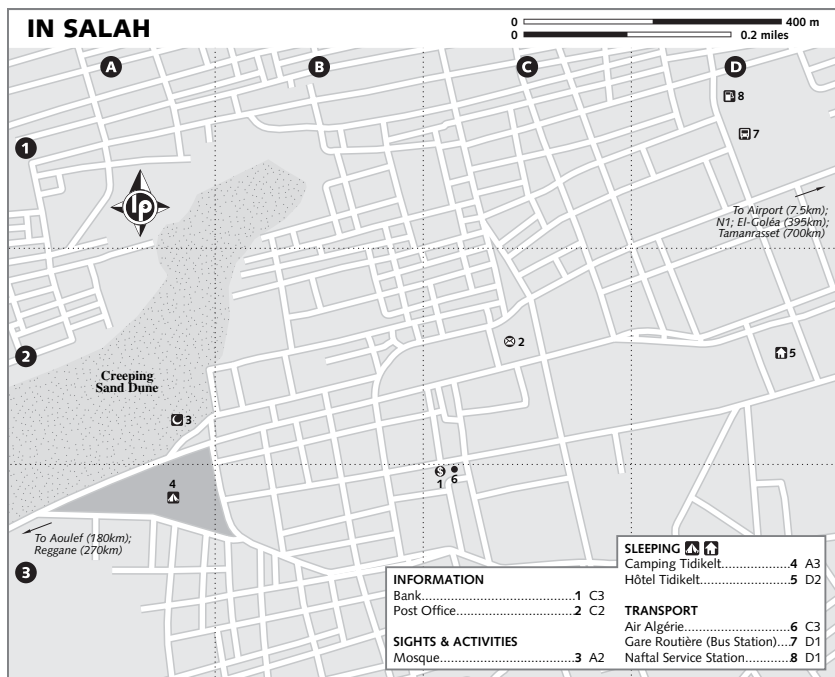
Ahnet Voyages (☎ 029 390223; fax 29360999; ahnetvoyages@hotmail.com/ahnet_voyages@yahoo.fr; In Salah) This agency has been organising trips into the Tassili d'Immidir since the late 1980s. It also runs good trips in the Hoggar as well as trips further afield to the M'zab.

Tanezrouft Voyages (☎ 029 360646; www.tanezrouft.com; Ksar el-Arab, In Salah) Offers trekking, camel and 4WD expeditions into the Tassili d'Immidir and Ahnet regions.

Sleeping

Camping Tidikelt (per person DA500) At the end of the main street near the centre of town, this the better of the two camping alternatives. There is a reasonable amount of shade and you can sleep in the tiny palm-frond huts if you want some privacy. It costs DA180 to sleep in the huts.

The only hotel is this three-star place **Hôtel Tidikelt** (☎ 029 370393; fax 029 340799) on the outskirts of town, 10 minutes' walk from the centre. It's a two-story mud-red building with a (mostly empty) swimming



pool. Rooms are air-conditioned and in the grand traditional of state-run hotels in Algeria, rather run down. There's a half-decent restaurant and an airport shuttle for those who need it.

Eating

There are several basic cafés in the town where you can get cheap, filling meals for around DA300. For something a bit more upmarket, you'll have to try the fancy restaurant at the Hôtel Tidikelt.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **Air Algérie** (☎ 029 360239) office is on the main street, next to a bank. The airport is 8km to the northeast, to the right of the El-Golèa road.

There is a weekly flight to Algiers (DA9800, three hours) and one to Tamanrasset (DA5400, one hour).

BUS

The *gare routière* is out in the east on the main Tamanrasset to El-Golèa road, about

20 minutes' walk from the centre. It is actually just a shopping centre (most of it unoccupied), and the bus office is inside towards the back.

There are buses to Adrar, Ghardaïa and Tamanrasset. The Ghardaïa buses leave at 4pm every day and it is essential that you book in advance as the buses come up from Tamanrasset. There are stops along the way (including a meal at Arak), but basically you need to be prepared with a bit of food and water.

TAXI

There are 4WD taxis between In Salah and Tamanrasset costing DA2130. Taxis run regularly from In Salah to Reggane (DA600, three hours), 270km west along the road to Adrar, and from there you can catch a daily bus to Adrar.

AROUND IN SALAH Tassili d'Immidir

Part of the Ahaggar National Park, the Tassili d'Immidir is one of the least-explored areas of this region, despite its beauty and

archaeological riches. Perhaps this is because of its relative isolation – it has to be accessed on foot and even then this is not a straightforward task – but the difficulty in getting here adds to its appeal. The landscape is wild and mysterious and the *gueltas* – pools of water found in the bottom of canyons – produce sufficient vegetation to support a range of animal life: gazelles, mountain sheep, jackals and even leopard can be found here. The Tassili d'Immidir is also rich in archaeological findings – arrowheads, shards of pottery and hundreds of ancient rock paintings all attest to a human presence from Neolithic times.

There is no way of getting here independently so you'll have to join a tour. There are several companies in Tamanrasset and in In Salah that organise tours here.

ARAK عراق

Although the gorges around Arak are quite spectacular, the little settlement itself is very humble. It doesn't have the altitude of Tamanrasset, and subsequently is as hot as all hell.

There is a camp site with *zeribas* (palm huts), a restaurant where you can get a reasonable meal and a fuel station.

If you are on the bus, it will stop here for a meal break.

TAMANRASSET تامنراست

As the last town on the route south to Niger, Tam, with a current population of around 120,000, has long been a vital rest stop for ancient caravans and desert traders and, as a major centre for Algeria's Saharan tourism, is still a busy crossroads today. It's one of those places where virtually all trans-Saharan travellers stop for a few days to rest up and make repairs to equipment. Tamanrasset is also the place from which to arrange trips up into the Hoggar Mountains, something that should not be missed on any account.

If you arrive by plane, as many tourists do, you will be treated to a spectacular preview of things to come – endless twisted peaks of red and brown are spread out below you and volcanic craters blister the ground like the surface of some far off planet.

With an altitude of nearly 1400m, Tamanrasset has a climate which stays relatively

moderate all year round. Even in midsummer the temperature rarely gets above 35°C. There's not a great deal to do here but it's an appealing place in which to while away a couple of days – there's a good market, some nice cafés and a friendly atmosphere. It's also a place where you can get things done – there are banks, one of which can change travellers cheques, several internet cafés and Malian and Nigerian consulates for arranging ongoing visas.

History

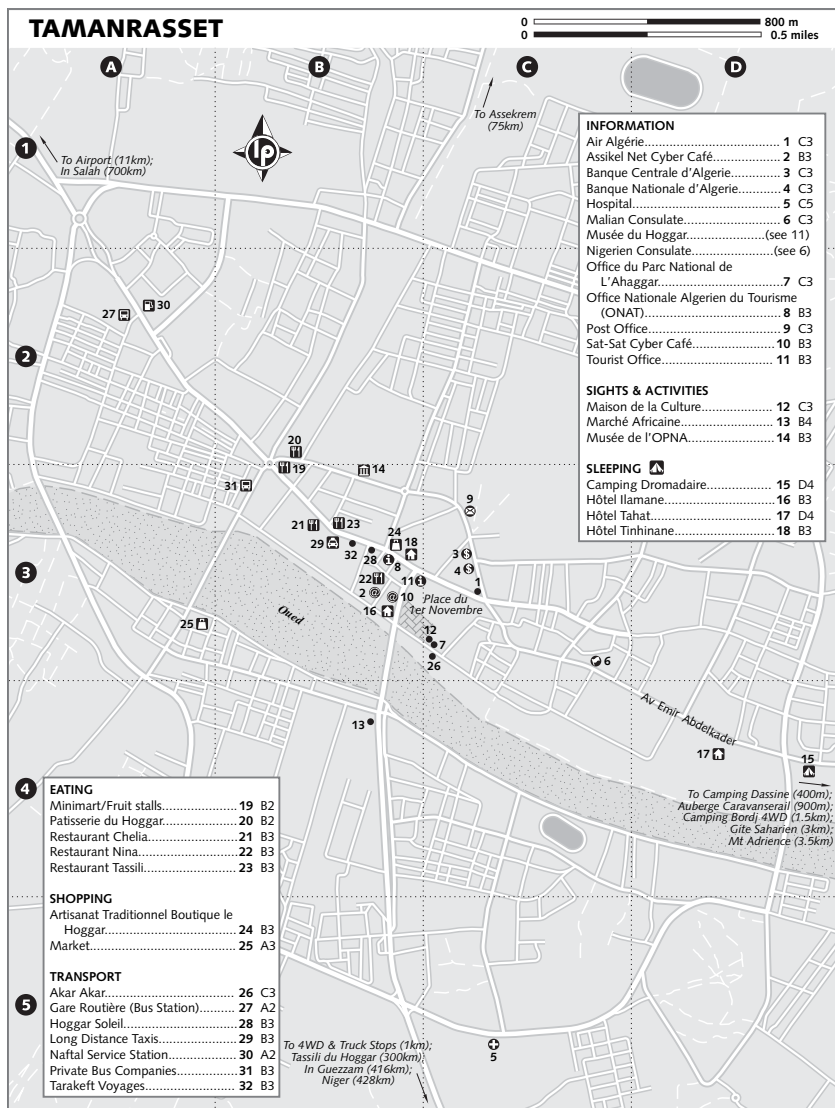
The Tuareg were the first settlers in this region, which they called Tamenghest, but when Charles de Foucauld (see the boxed text, p189) arrived here in 1905, Tamanrasset was just a dusty cluster of *zeribas*.

From the 1920s onwards, when the French colonial administration settled here because of the town's strategic location, Tamanrasset's growth accelerated. It became a *préfecture* in the 1950s and, after independence, the regional capital of the *wilaya* (province). Access routes were improved and more and more Algerians came to make their home here. In the '80s the explosion of tourism to the Algerian Sahara brought with it economic prosperity and urban planners.

The 1990s were lean years for Tamanrasset, as the town that had come to depend greatly on tourists saw its source of income dry up, due to the country's bitter civil war. The slow improvements brought on by the end of the troubles were dashed again when a group of tourists was kidnapped in the desert regions near the town in 2003, but at the time of writing the safety situation in the region had greatly improved and visitors to the town were on the increase once more.

Orientation

There's one main street in Tamanrasset that leads all the way from the airport through the town itself and out to Mt Adriane, a large peak that dominates the town. The bus station is at the northeastern end of this street, about 1km walk away from the town centre. South of the main street is the Oued Tamanrasset, a large dried riverbed that sometimes also serves as a truck park and camel market. On the south bank of this river you'll find the *Marché Africaine*



and the road towards Niger. Tam's best accommodation is located south of town on the route d'Adriane.

Information

FOREIGN CONSULATES

Both Mali and Niger have consulates here. They are next door to each other on av Emir

Abdelkader, about 500m from the centre of town.

Malian Consulate (☎ 029 341578; av Emir Abdelkader; ☎ 9am-3pm Sun-Thu) Operates a same-day service for visas. A one-month visa costs €15 for French citizens and €10 for people of other nationalities.

Nigerien Consulate (☎ 029 344122; av Emir Abdelkader; ☎ 9am-2.30pm Sun-Thu) Also operates a same-

day service – come first thing in the morning and pick up your visa in the afternoon. Visas costs €50 for one month.

INTERNET ACCESS

Assikel Net (per hr DA100; ☎ 8am-midnight) On a small side road off av Emir Abdelkader. Offers reasonable-speed internet access.

Sat-Sat Cyber Café (per hr DA100; ☎ 8am-9pm) Next to the Hotel Ilamane. The connection is slightly slow.

MEDICAL SERVICES

The main hospital is on the ring road between av Emir Abdelkader and the In Guezzam road.

MONEY

Neither bank can offer cash advances on credit cards.

Banque Centrale d'Algérie (☎ 9am-noon & 2-4pm, closed Fri & Sat) The only bank in town that accepts travellers cheques. You need to have the original receipt as proof of purchase and even then it can be a long process. The foreign-exchange division sometimes shuts earlier in the afternoon so it's best to go in the morning if you want to change travellers cheques.

Banque Nationale d'Algérie (☎ 9am-noon & 2-4pm, closed Fri & Sat) Next to Banque Centrale d'Algérie. Changes cash but not travellers cheques.

POST & TELEPHONE

The post office is northeast of the main street. It has a telephone office where it's possible to make international calls, although with the number of taxiphone offices in town it's not really worth the bother.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Office du Parc Nationale de l'Ahaggar (L'OPNA; ☎ 029 734117; place du 1er Novembre) Office of the national park; sometimes has interesting exhibitions on the life of the park.

Office National Algerien du Tourisme (ONAT; ☎ 029 346717; fax 029 344191; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm) Has very helpful staff and can provide useful information on the local area as well as organising tours in the vicinity from €50 per person per day.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Most of these agencies deal with bookings from foreign agencies. However, if contacted in advance they should be able to work something out for independent travellers. Prices range from €50 to €80 a day including food and equipment, depending on how many people there are in

your party. You won't usually be permitted to join an already existing group and will almost certainly have to arrange an individually tailored tour. If you haven't arranged a tour in advance your best bet is to contact ONAT when you arrive in Tamanrasset.

Many of the agencies have home-based offices so you'll have to make contact in advance by telephone. There are a couple of agency offices in the town centre, but these appear to be closed a lot of the time, so it's still best to phone in advance.

Akar Akar (☎ 029 344638; www.akar-akar.com) One of the oldest and biggest agencies in Tamanrasset and one of the few to have a functioning office in the town centre. Guests are housed in red-walled bungalows or authentic Tuareg tents at their gite not far from the airport.

Hoggar Soleil (☎ 029 346972; www.hoggarsoleil.com; BP 341 Tamanrasset) A well-established agency created in 1986. It offers treks from four to 14 days in the Tamanrasset environs as well as tours around Djanet and the Tassili N'Ajjer.

Immidir Voyages (☎ 029 344468/2484; www.immidir-voyages.com; BP777 Mouflon, Tamanrasset) Excellent and established agency providing 4WD treks and tours around the Tam region, with great tours into the Immidir, about which the owner is particularly enthusiastic and interested.

Tarakeft Voyages (☎ 029 342007; www.tarakeft.com) Runs 4WD and trekking tours in the region around Tamanrasset as well as tours into Mali and the Dogon country.

Walene Voyages (☎ 029 344229/037 2413004; www.walene-voyages.com; BP 439 Tamanrasset) Circuits include trips to Mali and Niger as well as a special camel trip in the footsteps of Foucauld.

Sights & Activities

There is a daily **market** held in the late afternoon held on the far side of the *oued* (dry river bed) away from the centre of town. As well as fruit, vegetables and grain there are several shoe and clothing stalls as well as tailors' booths.

Also on the far side of the *oued* is the gargantuan **Marché Africaine**, another daily market selling all manner of produce, from spices and traditional clothing to huge metal cooking pots, velour carpets and dodgy cologne (*Tuareg pour Homme* anyone?). To see the market at its liveliest, it's best to come in the morning. The **Musée du l'OPNA** (admission free; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Sun-Thu, 3-5pm Fri) provides interesting information on the history, geography and environment of the Hoggar region. The irregularly opening

Musée du Hoggar (☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Sun-Thu) has displays of Tuareg clothing, swords and daggers. You could also check out the **Maison de la Culture** on place du 1er Novembre, which has regular exhibitions about the landscape and animal life of the region as well as good second-hand-book sales.

Festivals & Events

LE TAFSIT

One of the most important festivals in Southern Algeria, this event takes place at the end of April in celebration of spring. Every springtime, different Tuareg tribes from all over the central Sahara have always met in Tamanrasset for a grand celebration of brotherhood, culminating in a camel race. This was formalised in the early '90s and it became known as **Le Tafsit** or the Spring Festival. It lasts for a minimum of three days and much of it takes place in the 'chameaudrome' 3km from Tamanrasset. As well as the famous camel race, there are exhibitions, music, singing, and street processions.

Sleeping

There are several nice places to stay in Tamanrasset, mostly located a few kilometres out of town. There are a couple of hotels located in the town centre, but these aren't nearly as nice so if you don't mind the walk (it's a pleasant one), you're better off staying away from the action. Places to stay in Tamanrasset are often called *campings*. These aren't camp sites, but are normally gîtes with bungalow or hut accommodation, with plenty of space on the side for pitching tents. All of the *campings* can organise tours up to Assekrem and beyond.

BUDGET

Hôtel Ilamane (☎ 029 345716; s/d/tr DA500/1000/1400) Just south of av Emir Abdelkader, this is the cheapest place to stay in the town centre. It has basic but very spacious rooms with friendly if somewhat confused service. It's nothing special though and unless you're desperate to stay in the centre of town it's best to stay somewhere a little further out.

Hôtel Tinhinane (☎ 029 734385; av Emir Abdelkader; s/d DA600/1100) Bang in the centre of town. It is not as cheap as the Hotel Ilamane though and we found the rooms, with shared bathroom, disappointing. At the time of writing

renovations were about to get underway – rooms were being improved and a number of new en suite rooms were planned.

Camping Bordj AWD (☎ 029 342258; route de l'Adriane; per person without bathroom from DA800, camping per person DA500; Ⓟ) Large two-storey pink building providing comfortable accommodation in simple single and double rooms or camping in its lovely gardens.

MIDRANGE

Camping Dromadaire (☎ 029 348252/061 648069; www.dromadaire-tourisme.com; rte de l'Adriane; s/d/tr DA850/1700/2450, dm DA850, camping per person DA400; Ⓟ) Nice, spacious place featuring double and triple red circular chalets with palm roofs, a 10-bed dorm, a large garden with plenty of room for pitching tents, a small boutique and plenty of cane-chaired chill-out areas. Meals are available if ordered in advance and dinner costs DA350. It also has a travel agency running tours around the Hoggar.

Camping Dassine (☎ 063 675837; s/d from DA900/1800, camping per person DA500; Ⓟ) About 500m further on from Camping Dromadaire, this is a large rambling place with tons of camping space, and clean, cool rooms in bungalows or thatch rondavels with spotless shared facilities. There's a traditional tented area for taking meals and tea or just shooting the breeze, and an outdoor fireplace. Meals are available, aided by a nice salad and herb garden at the back of the plot. To make it even better, there are lovely views of the hills all around.

Gîte Saharien (☎ 029 345452/020 812307; info@taggant.com; s&d, from around DA1400 B&B per person) Backed up against Mt Adriane with stunning views from all around the gîte, this is the nicest place to stay in town. It has wonderfully relaxing cool, calm rooms (including larger suites with seating and eating areas) set in red-mud chalets, with rustic beds and tables made from palm trees. There are plenty of areas in which to relax and take in the view, and an inviting lounge with a big fireplace for colder evenings. The huge garden is full of fruit trees and plants, and there are ducks, a goat pen and even a resident monkey. Step outside and the desert is on your doorstep. The gîte is also home to the Taggant Agency which as well as the usual 4WD trips organises simple camel treks in the vicinity of the gîte.

Auberge Caravanseraïl (☎ 029 345557; B&B per person DA1500, half board DA2300, full board DA3200; Ⓟ) Owned by M'zab Tours, who have similar set-ups in Ghardaïa and El-Goléa, this is another good choice. It has simple white bungalows with spotless shared ablutions and a bright courtyard filled with bougainvillea. It costs DA1500 per day for guides and the agency organises tailored trips throughout the Hoggar; there's even a conference room.

Hôtel Tahat (☎ 029 344475; fax 029 344325; av Emir Abdelkader; s/d DA2900/3400) As state-run hotels go this one is quite nice. Rooms are very comfortable and things actually seem to work. There are some nice communal areas including a pretty curtain-swathed, pillow-strewn lounge, plus it has a tour agency and it's one of the few places that you can get an alcoholic drink.

Eating

The restaurant scene in Tamanrasset is hardly pulsating. However there are a few places on the main road that are decent and there are several places to buy fresh fruit, veg and other supplies.

Restaurant Chelia (av Emir Abdelkader; meals around DA300; ☎ lunch & dinner) Just across the street from Restaurant Tassili this place serves tasty grilled kebabs to eat in or take away.

Restaurant Tassili (av Emir Abdelkader; meals DA350; ☎ lunch & dinner) This place has tables outside as well as an interesting dining room decorated with carpets, Tuareg swords, mini deer heads and even a pair of skis. It serves roast chicken, chips, *harissa* (red-chilli paste) and the like.

Restaurant Nina (meals DA400; ☎ lunch & dinner) Round the corner from the Hôtel Ilamane, this is a very popular place whose outside tables fill up at lunchtime. It serves a tasty range of Algerian dishes including *kefta* (meatballs made from seasoned, minced lamb), tagines, grilled camel and home-made *harissa*.

Pâtisserie du Hoggar has nice a nice selection of cakes and pastries as well as a few tables at which to sit and scoff them. For self-caterers there's a minimart and several fruit stalls near the roundabout at the top of av Emir Abdelkader.

Shopping

There are plenty of souvenir shops along av Emir Abdelkader offering a good selec-

tion of Tuareg jewellery and crafts. Things to look out for include heavy silver crosses and agate pendants, Tuareg swords, leather bags and camel saddles and the obligatory *taguelmoust* (Tuareg veil) to shield you from the desert wind. A good shop to try is the Artisanat Traditionnel Boutique le Hoggar, which has a selection of jewellery and traditional clothing and a very friendly owner.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **Air Algérie** (☎ 029-344499; place Emir Abdelkader) office is in the town centre near the two main banks. The airport is 12km north of town, off to the left of the main road.

There are six direct services a week to Algiers (DA1400, two hours), and one weekly service to Djanet (DA4100, 50 minutes), Ghardaïa (DA9800, two hours 20 minutes), In Salah (DA5499, one hour 40 minutes) and Ouargla (DA9300, one hour 45 minutes). There are also direct international flights to Paris and Marseille (France).

BUS

The *gare routière* (bus station) is in the northwestern part of town, a 15-minute walk from the centre. If you arrive late at night, or are heading out early in the morning, it is standard practice to doss down at the station. The bus schedule is displayed on a board inside the building and there are daily departures to In Salah (DA900, 11 hours), Ghardaïa (DA1500, 19 to 20 hours) and Ouargla (DA1600, 22 hours). Make sure you reserve your ticket the day before departure.

There are also a number of private bus companies whose offices are mostly centred on the northwestern end of the town centre. Most of the buses are 30-seater Toyota minibuses. You can reserve a seat in advance, and the buses tend to leave in the evening or early morning. Destination include In Salah (DA1000, 11 hours) and Ghardaïa (DA2000, 19 to 20 hours).

4WD

About 2.5km from the centre of town on the In Guezzam road there's a 4WD stop with share 4WD taxis heading for In Guezzam and beyond. They leave on a fill-up-and-go basis or if there's a group of you it's possible to hire the whole vehicle. It costs DA1500

per seat to In Guezzam or DA15,000 to hire the whole car. It is also possible to hire an entire car to go straight through to Agadez in Niger. The price is negotiable but it should cost about DA40,000 for the trip.

TAXI

Long-distance taxis depart from the town centre on av Emir Abdelkader just down from the Hotel Tinhanane. They depart on a leave-when-full basis and it's best to get here very early in the morning. Destinations include In Salah (DA1000, nine to 10 hours), Ghardaïa (DA2000, 17 hours), Arak (DA600, five hours) and Ouargla (DA1200, 19 hours).

TRUCK

Opposite the 4WD station on the In Guezzam road is a truck stop where large goods trucks and heavy vehicles heading for Niger pitch up. Travellers sometimes hitch rides on one of these for a price, although it's likely they don't end up with a seat in the cab but rather on top of the truck. The price for this is negotiable but the cost for a ride to In Guezzam or Niger should be a few hundred dinars.

AROUND TAMANRASSET

Tamanrasset is situated in the mountainous region of black volcanic rock known as the Hoggar Mountains, home to Tahat (3000m) and Assekrem (2800m), and agencies can arrange all manner of trips in the Hoggar and beyond.

Assekrem أسيكريم

Immediately north of Tamanrasset, and part of the Ahaggar National Park, is the plateau of **Atakor**, a Tolkein-esque land of dry earth and dark peaks, at the heart of which is Assekrem, 73km from Tamanrasset, where Charles de Foucauld (see the boxed text, opposite) built his hermitage in 1911. Without your own transport, getting out to the Atakor plateau can be difficult, but it's worth making the effort to get up to Assekrem.

The route up to Assekrem is long and bumpy but the spectacular landscape more than makes up for it. You drive through a warped landscape where strange mountains rise up from the rocky black plateau – many of them deeply scored as if they have been mauled by some mythical beast –

eventually reaching the heights of Assekrem where you'll be greeted with outstanding vistas over the sea of mountains below. Assekrem means 'the End of the World' in the language of the Tuareg and it's easy to see why; standing up here it feels like you're as far away from civilization as can be.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

It takes about five hours to reach the *refuge* (mountain hut) at Assekrem – a collection of stone walled bungalows and a camp site, where visitors stay the night. From here it's obligatory to visit the hermitage of Charles de Foucauld, a monk who came to live in the Hoggar in early last century. He chose to build a simple stone hermitage up on Assekrem (see the boxed text, opposite, for further details). The hermitage is on top of the Assekrem plateau and can only be reached on foot, which takes about 30 minutes from the *refuge*. A few monks from Foucauld's order live up at the hermitage and say mass every morning in the small simple chapel; guests are welcome to join in.

You can't come to Assekrem and not get up for the sunrise. The view from the *refuge* itself is stunning enough and in the cooler months, the slopes surrounding it are peppered with wildflowers, which the sunrise infuses with a dusky pink glow. The best way to experience the sunrise, though, is to climb the hundred or so metres up to the hermitage. This involves getting up at about 5am (the folks at the *refuge* will oblige you by giving you a wake-up knock) and you won't regret it. Watching the light slowly creep across the wild and tortured mountains spread out beneath you is a sight you're unlikely to forget.

SLEEPING

The only place to stay at Assekrem is the **refuge** (B&B per person DA1200) whose price also includes dinner. The refuge consists of a simple stone-walled building containing a couple of dormitories, as well as a few twin rooms in bungalows away from the main building and basic squat toilets away from the sleeping and eating areas. Guides and guests alike reunite for meals and tea in a homely living room, kept warm by a large fireplace. Dinners are taken *en famille* (all together) and are a good opportunity to

CHARLES DE FOUCAULD

Playboy adventurer turned Saharan priest, Père de Foucauld (1858–1916) was born Vicomte Charles Eugene de Foucauld to a wealthy aristocratic family in Strasbourg, France. There was no early indication of the path his life would take; Foucauld was fond of the good life and loved nothing better than to splash the cash on parties, champagne, foie gras and the ladies. He was also short on self-discipline and, while stationed with the French Army in North Africa, got into trouble because of his unruly behaviour. In a twist befitting a Shakespeare play, he turned his back on the army, disguised himself as a rabbi and headed off to explore the hill country of Morocco.

As the story goes, Foucauld found himself deeply touched by the faith of the Muslim people and returned to France a new man, entering a Trappist order at the age of 31. After several years of monastic pilgrimages he was ordained as a priest in 1901 and headed for the Sahara, first to Beni Abbès and then to Tamanrasset, where he discovered a passion for the desert and concocted the idea of a superabstemious religious order that would spend the majority of the day in prayer and live on a paltry diet of dates and barley. No surprises then that this didn't catch on and that the order had a membership of one (himself) during his lifetime. Christianity didn't exactly set the fires burning in the desert either and he only converted one person during his time in Tamanrasset.

Foucauld spent much of his days in the desert striving to get closer to the Tuareg, studying their culture and language and translating the gospels into Tamashek. He also developed the first ever French/Tamashek dictionary. In 1911, he chose the wild and remote Assekrem as the place to construct his hermitage and spent much of his time there before his death. He was assassinated in 1916 by a group of rebels who were resisting French attempts to infiltrate the Algerian Sahara. His body is buried in the cemetery in El-Goléa.

Charles de Foucauld was beatified in Rome in November 2006. His religious order still exists and today many people come on pilgrimages to Assekrem to walk in his footsteps and feel his spirit.

chat with the other guests. The food is good and plentiful – you'll usually get salads, couscous, meat stews and fruit. It is freezing at night so make sure you bring plenty of warm clothes as well as a torch (flashlight) in case the (rather unreliable) lights go out. There is also space for camping.

If you're not on a prearranged tour, you can reserve a room at the *refuge* through **Tim Missaw Tours** (☎ 029 347516/061, 649221; tim-missaw@hotmail.com), whose owner also runs the *refuge*. The organisation can also bring you up here; it costs DA7000 per person for a return transfer from Tamanrasset.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The only way to get up to Assekrem is to hire a 4WD and driver from one of the agencies in Tamanrasset. It is not possible to hire a vehicle without a driver. It will cost from €80 per person per day including food and accommodation. You definitely can't walk there, although the Tamanrasset-based agencies can organise trips with camels from Tamanrasset if you want to do it this way.

TASSILI DU HOGGAR تاسيلي الهوقار

Traversed for many centuries by nomad camel caravans bearing cloth, salt and spices, the Tassili du Hoggar, part of the Ahaggar National Park, is a set of sedimentary rock plateaus that begins approximately 300km south of Tamanrasset and extends to the Niger border. The plateau is characterised by some of the most haunting landscapes imaginable, presenting a mind-boggling series of photo opportunities. Whale-back boulders and craggy mountains share billing space with enormous figures of sculpted rock; squat round hulks stand alone like giant solitary mushrooms; and sharp pinnacles shoot to breathtaking heights, clinging together in clusters to form bizarre city skylines. Great swaths of creamy sand fill the spaces in between.

Information

The only way to get to the Tassili du Hoggar is on a tour, and it is included on many of the longer itineraries, often as part of a trip from Tamanrasset to Djanet. All of the travel agencies in Tamanrasset and Djanet

will be able to arrange a trip out here for you. If you're driving your own car through the Algerian Sahara you'll need to be accompanied by a guide anyway.

Despite what you might imagine there's plenty of animal life in the Sahara, although you're not likely to encounter a great deal. If you're lucky, in the Tassili du Hoggar you might see gazelle, tiny, big-eared desert mice, or fennec – a desert fox. If you're unlucky, you might come across a viper or a scorpion. This is not usually a problem in the cooler winter months but be aware that scorpions like to hide in rock crevasses and sometimes shoes; and vipers have been known to hide just beneath the surface of the sand, so don't run around with bare feet.

Sights & Activities

Most trips to this part of the country are by 4WD and you'll normally drive a few hours a day, in between which you'll stop for walks, to climb up dunes, to look at rock paintings or to gather wood for that evening's fire.

You'll be assaulted by jaw-dropping beauty on a daily basis in the Tassili du Hoggar, making it difficult to pick favourites. But possible highlights of a trip here include **El-Ghessant**, whose rock formations look from a distance like a medieval fortress, and **Tin Tarabine**, with its cracked earth and impressive examples of rock engravings. Perhaps the most beautiful sight of all is **Tinakachaker**, which is dominated by a great stone cathedral. All around it are gnarled and twisted stone fingers forming a series of valleys and corridors; and there are massive dunes from whose heights you'll appreciate the dreamlike splendour of the landscape to the full. At night it takes on a different character; the wind murmurs through the valleys and dark stone figures loom from above like the monsters of childhood nightmares.

Sleeping & Eating

There are no camp sites or huts in the Tassili du Hoggar, and on any trip here you'll almost certainly be bivouacking out in the open, but lying out in your sleeping bag under a starry sky is all part of the fun. If you're on a trip with a travel agency, you'll be accompanied by a cook as well as a guide, who'll concoct three meals a day and provide plenty of tea breaks. If you're lucky they might make a traditional Tuareg

bread made from semolina and then baked beneath hot coals in the sand.

IN GUEZZAM إن قزام

This town is 416km south of Tamanrasset and is the last place in Algeria before you cross into Niger. The Algerian border post is 10km south of In Guezzam, so there's no need to stop here long. There's not much to do anyway; there's no bank and one restaurant. Border formalities happen here.

Sleeping & Eating

There is only one restaurant in In Guezzam which has OK food and also allows you to stay overnight for a couple of hundred dinars. In theory it's open 24 hours although this is rarely the case in practice. If you have a tent it is possible to find places to pitch it and free-camp in the environs of town.

Getting There & Away

Daily 4WD shared taxis go between Tamanrasset and In Guezzam on a fill-up-and-go basis every morning at DA1500 a seat. Some people hitch a ride in a goods truck for a couple of hundred dinars. But if you're going to Niger, you are far better off getting a group together in Tamanrasset and hiring a 4WD. From Tamanrasset it's also possible to arrange a lift in a truck to Arlit or Agadez in Niger. Stock up with as much fuel as possible in Tamanrasset as there have been reports of fuel shortages in In Guezzam.

DJANET & THE ROUTE DU TASSILI N'AJJER

جنت وطريق التاسيلي الناجر

This route heads south from Hassi Messaoud along the Gassi Touil, a large *oued* between two sections of the Grand Erg Oriental, to In Amenas, 730km to the south-east and very close to the Libyan border through Illizi and on to Djanet and the Tassili N'Ajjer National Park. There is little traffic along this route and unless you have your own car it's difficult to traverse.

Djanet is a sleepy little oasis with white-washed buildings, a large *palmeraie* and a

relaxed air. It is also the starting point for tours into the Tassili N'Ajjer National Park, and during the high season, plane-loads of tourists from Europe arrive in the town each week. The Tassili N'Ajjer National Park has one of the most important collections of prehistoric cave art in the world. It holds more than 15,000 drawings and engravings which, like an open-air history lesson, tell the story of thousands of years of human evolution and environmental change within this area of the Sahara.

ILLIZI إليزي

Nearly 300km south of In Amenas, Illizi is the main settlement between there and Djanet. For a long time Illizi was called 'Fort Polignac' and was a military post created in 1904 by colonialists in order to keep an eye on the Libyan border.

The town boasts a fuel station, hospital, basic shop, customs post and a hotel. There are some interesting rock sites near here and a travel agency.

If you really get stranded here there are two flights a week to Algiers (DA1100, three hours) and one week to Ghardaïa (DA7300, two hours 10 minutes). The airport is 5km north of town. The only hotel here is the **Hotel Tahleb Larbi** (☎ 029 421733; fax 029 421181; s/d DA1100/1600) and there's also a camp site.

Mezrire Adventure (☎ in France 49 30 32 70 37 70; fax 029 422323; www.mezrire.com) can organise a variety of short excursions to sites around Illizi as well as longer expeditions from Illizi to Djanet. Tours cost from around €50 per person per day on foot and from €70 for tours in 4WDs. It also runs an auberge and camp site for people on their tours.

AROUND ILLIZI

Sights of interest near the town include **Tankena**, which has a notable collection of early stone tools, and **Tamdjert**, which has good examples of Neolithic paintings, including wonderfully fluid pictures of horse-drawn chariots, hunters and dromedaries, as well some writing in Tifinagh – some of the most ancient characters in the world. For more on rock art, see p80.

DJANET جانت

The main town of the Tassili, Djanet is a pretty place with its own colour scheme: whitewashed buildings with blue doors line

the main streets, set off by dark blue and gold lampposts that would look more at home in an English seaside town. The setting is charming too – the town is built on the edge of a *palmeraie* so feels quite lush and it is dwarfed by the mountains that surround it. The town centre is tiny with a post office, bank, basic restaurants and shops, although there's no internet café.

Quiet during the week, the town suddenly bursts into life come the weekend when dozens of package tourists arrive on flights from Paris and Marseille (France). They are all here for the main attraction – the stunning collection of rock paintings in the nearby Tassili N'Ajjer National Park.

Orientation

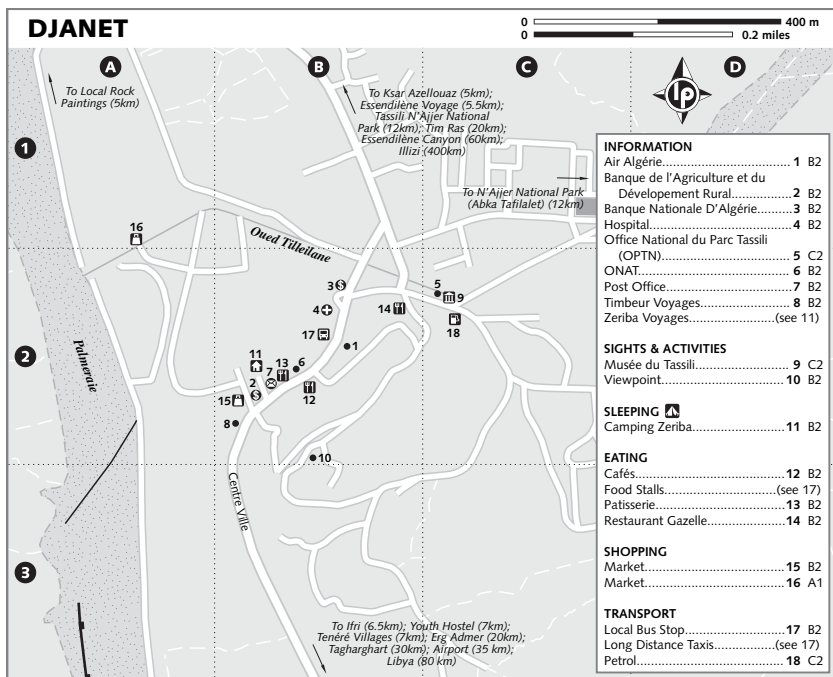
Central Djanet is tiny so it's impossible to get lost. Whether you enter the town from the north or the south you'll end up on the main street which has a collection of cafés, a couple of banks, a post office, a hospital and the Camping Zeriba. West of the main street is a large covered market and the town's *palmeraie*.

Information

There's as large hospital in Ifri, 7km out of town, as well as a smaller hospital in the town centre. The Office National du Parc Tassili (OPTN) is next to the museum and issues permits to visit the Tassili N'Ajjer National Park for DA100 per person, although your travel agency will usually organise this. There's also a Banque Nationale d'Algérie and a Banque de l'Agriculture et du Développement Rural on the main street. Both are open Sunday to Thursday 9am to 3pm and both offer foreign exchange although neither changes travellers cheques. There's also an **ONAT office** (☎ 029 475361; place du Marché).

TRAVEL AGENCIES

There are several travel agencies in Djanet, all of whom offer excursions to the Tassili N'Ajjer. Most of them work in collaboration with European tour agencies and in the high season it can sometimes be difficult to arrange a last-minute tour. Most agencies don't have offices in the centre of town, and those that do exist aren't always open. In addition, you won't usually be permitted to join a group and will have to arrange an individually tailored tour. If you haven't



arranged a tour in advance your best bet is to contact Zeriba Voyages, whose office is usually open and able to organise excursions at short notice, or ONAT. Prices range from €50 to €80 a day including food and equipment, depending on how many people there are in your party.

Essendilène Voyages (☎ 029 475295; www.essendilene-voyages.com) This outfit organises trips all over southern Algeria and down into the Ténére and Air regions of Niger. If asked well in advance it can also organise a number of specialised trips into the desert including yoga and trekking, art therapy and family trips for children over the age of two or three. They are also involved in projects that help the local community benefit from tourism.

Rêves et Nature (☎ 029 475860; www.voyages-timbeur.com) As well as camel and 4WD group and individually tailored tours, Rêves et Nature offers assisted 4WD and motorbike tours through the desert, where you drive your own vehicle and are accompanied by an experienced guide. If you're going to arrive in Djanet on your own, it can help put you in touch with like-minded travellers so you can share the expenses of a trip.

Timbeur Voyages (☎ 029 75270; www.voyages-timbeur.com) With offices next to the market this is one of Djanet's most established agencies. It offers short expeditions

such as trips to Erg Admer and Tagharghart as well as longer expeditions to the Tassili N'Ajjer and the Tassili du Hoggar. These cost from about €50 per person per day including airport transfers, taxes, guide, cook and all food.

Timtar Expeditions (☎ 029 346038; www.timtar.com) Has camel, trekking and 4WD expeditions as well as interesting alternatives to the usual treks such as family circuits. Between October and May it also offers week-long and group lessons on how to drive in the desert.

Zeriba Voyage (☎ 061 382853/346924; www.zeriba-voyage.com) Based at the hotel of the same name, Zeriba Voyage can organise a variety of excursions, the most popular being trips to Tassili N'Ajjer and longer trips from Djanet to Tamanrasset. This organisation is a good bet if you arrive in Djanet without a pre-arranged tour. Tours cost from around €60 per person per day for a trek into the Tassili N'Ajjer with pack animals.

Sights & Activities

For magnificent **views** over town walk up to the top of the hill just behind the town centre, taking the steps opposite the market. The **Musée du Tassili** (☎ 8am-5pm, closed Thu & Fri) has a small collection of exhibits detailing the history and environment of the region. One room concentrates on the formation of

Tassili N'Ajjer plateau and on its animal and plant life and has some gazelle and sheep skulls, ostrich eggs and ceramics. Another room contains a beautiful photographic exhibition of the rock paintings of the region. The best exhibition contains reproductions of nomad life, including a life-sized *zeriba* and Tuareg jewellery, weaponry and musical instruments.

About 30 minutes' walk out of the town centre to the north is the **Ksar Azellouaz**, the remains of one of the oldest original settlements in this area. It looks quite romantic from the outside and you can wander round the old streets and hollow, crumbling building but the romance is ruined by all of the scattered tin cans and animal skulls and bones. Further afield, about an hour's walk north of town, there are some **rock paintings** including elephant, cattle and giraffe. Walk out past the covered market; turn north and continue past the *palmeraie*, and after about an hour you'll hit the sealed road. Turn left – the paintings are hidden in the rocks about 50m in front of you. It's best to ask in town first before you head out there. If you're staying at Zeriba staff will probably give you a lift.

Festivals & Events

The biggest festival in Djanet is the **Sebiba**. Tuareg from around the Tassili N'Ajjer region meet in Djanet to remember and to reconstruct an ancient peace agreement that ended a long conflict between two warring Tuareg tribes – the El-Mihane and the Azellouaz. The event lasts for 10 days leading up to the reconstruction, all in traditional costume, of the last battle between the two tribes. Women in their most beautiful jewellery cheer on the men.

Sleeping

There's not much choice in Djanet. If you don't have a vehicle the only viable option is Camping Zeriba on the central drag. With a car you could stay at the youth hostel or the hotel called Ténére Villages, both about 7km out of town. At the time of research Timbeur Voyages was constructing a new 20-room lodge on the outskirts of Djanet.

Youth hostel (☎ 029 470261; dm DA200) Djanet's youth hostel is located 7km from the town centre off the airport road and has 30 beds in three- and four-bed dorms. The rooms

are rather cramped and the showers could be cleaner but it's the cheapest option in Djanet. There's an airy courtyard and a TV room, and meals are available on demand.

Ténére Villages (☎ 029 470049; www.tenerevoyages.com; s/d/t DA2500/2800/4000) Seven and a half kilometres from Djanet in Ifri, on the way out to the airport. This place has bright airy doubles in rondavels or bungalows, decorated with imitation rock paintings. The best thing about this place is its restaurant framed with a big old balcony giving splendid views out onto the dunes, mountains and the Tassili Plateau. There's also a great traditional tented area where you can take snacks and drinks bang on the side of the dunes. The only down side is the distance from town – it's only worth staying here if you have a car.

Camping Zeriba (☎ 065 594472, 062 067719; ☎ / fax 029 475546; www.zeribavoyage.com; r with/without bathroom DA3200/1500, camping DA400) This is the only place to stay in the centre of Djanet and it's located right on the main street. It's a large friendly place with a variety of rooms; the rooms with bathrooms also have TVs. The place is not in great nick but at the time of writing was undergoing renovations. There's a large area for camping, a *zeriba* in which to take tea and a restaurant. There's no menu and meals normally consist of soup followed by couscous and meat then fruit. Zeriba also has a tour agency.

Eating

There are a few small restaurants around the town centre serving the usual chicken, chips, couscous and stews. They're all pretty similar but you could try Restaurant Gazelle for tasty stews and couscous, or there's a nice large café opposite the bus station which is full of locals and a good place for coffee and people-watching. There are also several snack stalls selling eggs, peanuts and tea behind the bus stops. A great little patisserie next to ONAT sells a selection of French and Algerian pastries. In the evenings it does good pizzas to take away or you can cram in at the counter with the locals. You can pick up fruit, vegetables and meat at a small market just off the main road.

Shopping

The main drag contains quite a few tourist-oriented shops selling jewellery, handicrafts,

postcards and the like. They can be quite expensive though and you're best off heading to the market for cheaper prices. There's a market just off the main road containing fruit and veg stalls, a couple of tourist stalls and several butchers – you may even see severed camel heads on display. There's a much bigger, mostly covered market between the *oued* and the *palmeraie* selling clothing, shoes, cooking pots, electronics, and even spare parts. This is also where you can find the best-value jewellery and crafts. There are a couple of stalls on the outskirts of the market on the *palmeraie* side where you can see the artists at work.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There is an **Air Algérie** (☎ 029 475032; ✈ 8am-noon & 1-4pm, closed Thu afternoon & Fri) office in the town centre. The airstrip is 35km from town. Air Algérie flies twice a week to Algiers (DA13,500, two to three hours), and once a week to Ouargla (DA9000, 1½ hours) and Tamanrasset (DA4000, 50 minutes). **Aigle Azur** (www.aigle-azur.fr) operates direct international flights to Paris and Marseille (France).

BUS

There are no long-distance buses to and from Djanet. Minibuses leave from the town centre to go to the surrounding villages and cost around DA15 per ride.

TAXI

Shared taxis leave for Illizi from the town centre at around 6am daily. The journey takes around six hours and costs DA1000. Taxis also head for the Libyan border at Tin Alkoum but it is currently closed to foreigners.

AROUND DJANET

The reason most people come to this part of the world is to trek in the Tassili N'Ajjer and see its famous rock paintings; but this area has a great deal more on offer. About half an hour's drive out of Djanet, off the road to the airport, is **Tagharghart**. Hidden among the rock faces and the sand dunes is one of the most famous engravings in this area, called **La Vache qui Pleure**, or Crying Cows. It features three graceful, long-horned cattle and is so called because of the teardrops falling from their eyes. It is thought to date

from around 6000 years ago. Near the engravings is a fantastic camping spot, where you can bivouac at the top of the dunes with superb views over the mountains and the Tassili plateau itself.

Also worth a look is **Erg Admer**. About 20km west of Djanet, this is the place to come for a trek through those stereotypical sculpted dunes or to have mint tea at sunset. For the more adventurous, many tour companies in Djanet can arrange for a few hours of dune skiing.

About 30km north of Djanet off the road towards Illizi is **Tim Ras**, where wide sandy planes dotted with jagged mountains give way to broad boulevards of pockmarked rocks, towering like huge deformed beehives – a magical place to spend the night.

More than 60km north of Djanet is the **Essendilène Canyon**, known for its incredible biodiversity. Inside you'll find palm trees, acacias and cool green pools of water.

TASSILI N'AJJER NATIONAL PARK

تاسيلي الناجر الحوض الوصني

This Unesco World Heritage site covers an area of about 80,000 sq km. Tassili N'Ajjer means 'Plateau of Chasms'; and the chasms, canyons and stone forests of this strange, prehistoric landscape, formed by thousand of years of volcanic activity and erosion, are home to a dramatic open-air art exhibition. Imprinted in hidden caves and on rock faces are some 15,000 rock paintings that tell the story of the evolution of human and animal life in this part of the Sahara. They recall times when the Sahara was green and fertile; when men hunted in the valleys and lion, elephant, antelope and buffalo roamed the plains. They also attest to the more 'recent' history of the Sahara and you'll see illustrations of horses, chariots and dromedaries. It's thought that the first human beings settled here more than two million years ago and that the Tassili rock paintings date back as far as 7000 or 6000 BC. For in-depth information on Algeria's rock art, see p80.

The existence of such paintings would be reason enough to visit, but the surrounding landscape makes a stay here even more incredible. The majority of the paintings are up on a plateau, some 600m above Djanet, and can only be reached on foot – it's a four-hour climb to the top, scrambling up rock faces and through narrow, shady canyons.

Information

You are not allowed to enter the area without an official guide. Treks up to the Tassili N'Ajjer plateau are the mainstay of the travel agencies in Djanet so once there it should be possible to arrange a trip heading out within days, for which you'll usually be accompanied by a guide, a herder, and several pack animals to carry your bags, food, water and cooking equipment.

The Tassili N'Ajjer plateau is accessed via one of two very steep passes, which can only be traversed on foot. The most common starting point for trips onto the plateau is Akba Tafilalet, 12km east of Djanet. You're likely to be driven out at an ungodly hour of the morning to this pass where you'll be met by your pack animals. From here, the climb to the top of the plateau, through a series of steep slopes and gorges, takes two to three hours, and once you reach the top it's another two hours to Tamrit, the first camping spot.

The best time to go to the park is November to April as this is the coolest time of year. From May to September the daytime temperatures can prove to be uncomfortably hot and can get as high as 40°C. Bear in mind that during the winter it can be freezing up on the plateau at night. Take plenty of warm clothes and a suitable sleeping bag.

This is not a national park in the traditional sense; you won't come across park wardens and there is no official entry gate but it is a nationally protected area and you must act accordingly. The rock paintings are very fragile. Don't use a flash when photographing them and never wet the paintings in order to get a brighter picture.

Sights & Activities

Tamrit is the first sight you'll see when you reach the top of the plateau – a vast mass of weathered, sand-covered stone and conical towers. It's also home to the **Valley of the Cypresses**. The trees are thousands of years old and you'll find a handful of these knotted giants spread out along a surprisingly green valley. Tamrit has plenty of good camping spots and is usually the base for the first day or so of exploration on the plateau.

There are a number of sights of interest here. About one hour's walk north of Tamrit is **Tan Zoumaitek** – the highlight of which is a large fresco painted in ochre and white

featuring a number of beautifully fluid scenes. You'll see distinctive, round-headed figures, including a mother and child, and a couple of jewel-draped, tattooed women who appear to be on the point of dancing; also interesting are a long-horned mouflon and a curious circular creature that's reminiscent of a jellyfish. An hour's walk to the east from Tamrit is **Timenzouine** – where you'll find an impressive elephant, engraved on a flat slab on the ground, complete with stepladder for getting a better view.

The next major site on from Tamrit is **Sefar**, some 12km or about a four-hour walk away. It's a tough but spectacular hike through avenues of stone pillars. Sefar has some of the most famous paintings in the park, representing a number of different periods. You'll see battle scenes, archers, antelope, giraffes, masks and, most famously, the Great God of Sefar – a devilish-looking horned figure, rising high above the others.

A good two days' walk 30km south of Sefar is **Jabbaren**, perhaps the most famous sight of all, which features thousands of paintings carried out by successive civilisations, including graceful cattle, horned goddesses, hippopotamuses, dancers and round-headed figures.

In three days you could go up the Akba Tafilalet pass and get to see Tamrit, Tan Zoumaitek and Timenzouine; four or five days and you could make it to Sefar and back. To reach Jabbaren you would need to do a circular seven-day trek – taking in the aforementioned sights, walking another serious two days to Jabbaren, then descending at **Akba Aghoum pass**, south of the entry point at Akba Tafilalet. Jabbaren can also be reached via the Aghoum Pass, on a back-breaking one-day tour involving a steep and punishing climb starting at the break of dawn to see the paintings and descending again before dark.

Getting There & Away

The only way to get to the Tassili N'Ajjer is on a guided tour. There are a number of different options offered by the agencies in Djanet ranging from a one-day trip to Jabbaren to a comprehensive seven-day circuit. Prices start from €50 to €60 a day depending on the number of people in your party. For further details on Djanet's travel agencies, see p191.

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