

Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire was once the economic miracle of Africa and a role model for stability on the continent. Never completely breaking with their colonial masters, the post-independence leaders wooed French capital to build a modern infrastructure and considerable prosperity. The long-serving and charismatic first president, Houphouët-Boigny, managed to promote the notion of a happy amalgam of pragmatic Western capitalism with benign African values. The society he presided over, however, was far from liberal and the dream ended with his death.

A consequent string of coups and popular insurgencies shook the country and a northern-led rebellion in 2002 violently split it in half. Most of the huge French expat community jumped ship and the economy has since crumbled. However, the country abounds in some of the best natural attractions in West Africa, such as Parc National de Tai's vast patch of rainforest and the string of beaches along the Atlantic coast. It's also a land rich in tradition due to a diverse tribal mix that includes Dan, Lobi, Baoulé and Senoufo peoples.

But it's really the modernity that sets Côte d'Ivoire apart from other West African nations. Abidjan is decidedly dog-eared these days, no longer justifying monikers such as the 'Paris of West Africa', but its shimmering skyscrapers will still astound. Yamoussoukro is famous for its basilica, an astonishing replica of Rome's St Peter's, which epitomises the Houphouët-Boigny era and in a way Africa's current place in today's world, since the Big Man philosophy shows few signs of fading.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 322,465 sq km
- **Capital** Yamoussoukro
- **Country code** ☎ 225
- **Famous for** Cocoa
- **Languages** French, Mande, Malinké, Dan, Senoufo, Baoulé, Agni, Dioula
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA544.89; €1 = CFA655.96
- **Population** 17.3 million
- **Visa** Required of most nationalities; not available at borders or the airport.



WARNING

The British Foreign & Commonwealth Office advises against all travel to only two countries: Somalia and Côte d'Ivoire. The situation on the ground can change rapidly, and most of the threats and rumours turn out to be false alarms – but history clearly shows you can not dismiss such talk. A few people still travel to Abidjan and the nearby beaches, but seek up-to-the-minute information if you decide to join them. Due to violent street protests and additional threats in Abidjan and elsewhere, we were unable to do on-the-ground research for this edition. Instead, we relied on friends and journalists residing in the country.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **West Coast beaches** (p275) Soak up the sun at these rainforest-clad strands.
- **Parc National de Taï** (p278) Commune with chimpanzees.
- **Yamoussoukro** (p279) Cast your eyes upon the awe-inspiring basilica.
- **Grand Bassam** (p273) Wander the town and bask in the faded colonial charm.
- **Man** (p281) Take in a live performance of exhilarating music and masked dance.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

In the south of the country, annual rainfall is 1500mm to 2000mm, and there are two wet seasons: May to July and October to November (see p813). In the drier northern half of the country, the wet season extends from June to October with no intermediary dry spell. The south is very humid, with temperatures averaging 28°C. In the less-humid north, the average temperature is 26°C from December to February with midday maximums regularly above 35°C. Temperatures can drop to 10°C in the highlands.

Since the intercity roads are all sealed, the rains shouldn't impede general travel too much; however, they will affect visits to beaches and national parks, especially the heaviest downpours in May, June and July. Come December the harmattan winds, blowing in from the Sahara, greatly reduce visibility.

HISTORY

The major tribal groups in Côte d'Ivoire all migrated relatively recently from neighbouring areas. Around 400 years ago, the Krou (or Kru) people moved eastward from Liberia while the Senoufo and Lobi moved southward from Burkina Faso and Mali. It was not until the 18th and 19th centuries that the Akan people, including the Baoulé, migrated from Ghana into the eastern area and the Malinké (also called Mandingo) from Guinea moved into the northwest.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive. Compared with neighbouring Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire suffered little from the slave trade. European slaving and merchant ships preferred other areas with better harbours. France took no interest until the 1840s when they enticed local chiefs to grant French commercial traders a monopoly along the coast. Thereafter, the French built naval bases to keep out non-French traders and began a systematic conquest of the interior. They accomplished this only after a war in the 1890s against Malinké forces headed by the illustrious Samory Touré. But guerrilla warfare by the Baoulé and other eastern tribal groups continued until 1917.

Once the French had complete control and established their capital, initially at Grand Bassam then Bingerville, they had one overriding goal – to stimulate the production of exportable commodities. Coffee, cocoa and palm trees (for palm oil) were soon introduced along the coast, but it wasn't until a railway was built that the interior was opened up. To build the railway and work the cocoa plantations, the French conscripted workers from as far away as Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso). Cocoa was the country's major export; although by the late 1930s coffee ran a close second.

Côte d'Ivoire was the only country in West Africa with a sizable population of *colons*, or settlers. Elsewhere in West and Central Africa, the French and English were largely bureaucrats. But here, a good third of the cocoa, coffee and banana plantations were in the hands of French citizens.

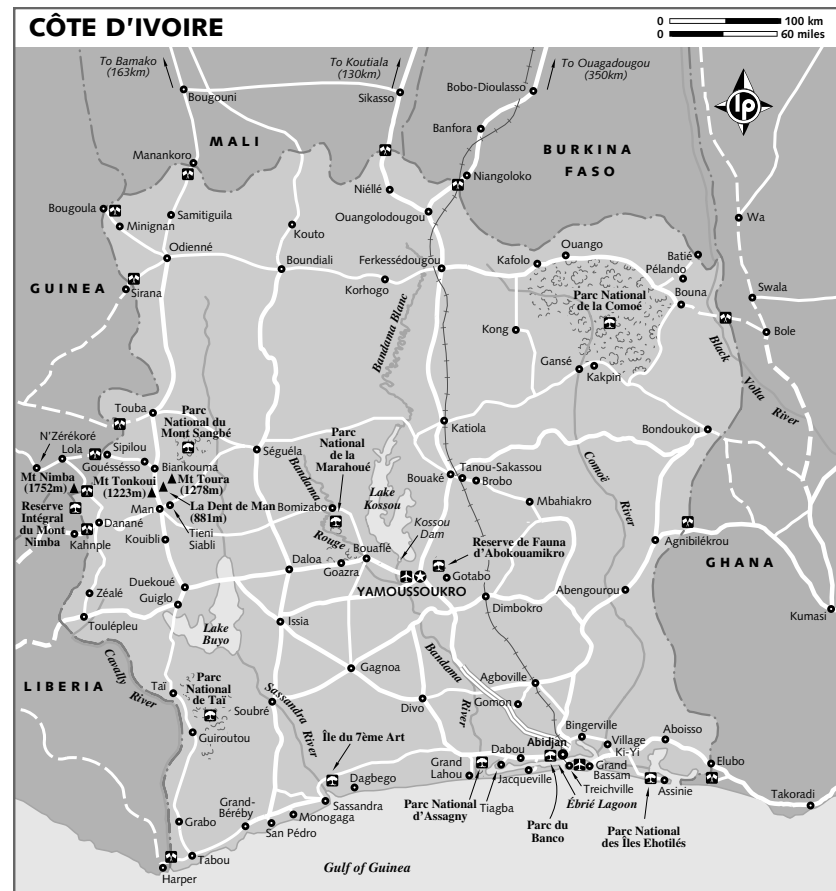
The hated forced-labour system was the backbone of the economy. Under this system, known as the *levée*, young males were rounded up and compelled to work on private estates or public sector projects, such as the railway.

Houphouët-Boigny

Born in 1905, the son of a wealthy Baoulé chief, Félix Houphouët-Boigny became Côte d'Ivoire's father of independence. After studying medicine in Dakar, he became a medical assistant, prosperous cocoa farmer and local chief. In 1944 he turned to politics and formed the country's first agricultural trade union – not of labourers but of African planters. Opposing the colonial policy, which favoured French plantation owners, the planters united to recruit migrant workers for their own farms. Houphouët-Boigny soon rose to prominence and within a year converted the union into the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI). A year later, he al-

lied the PDCI with the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), becoming the RDA's first president. That year the French abolished forced labour.

In those early years, Houphouët-Boigny was considered a radical. The RDA was closely aligned with international Marxist organisations and staged numerous demonstrations in Abidjan, resulting in many deaths and arrests. It wasn't long, however, before Houphouët-Boigny adopted a more conciliatory position. France reciprocated, bringing two representatives, including Houphouët-Boigny, to Paris as members of the French national assembly. Houphouët-Boigny was the first African to become a minister in a European government.



Even before independence, Côte d'Ivoire was easily French West Africa's most prosperous area, contributing more than 40% of the region's total exports. Houphouët-Boigny feared that, with independence, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal would find themselves subsidising the poorer ex-colonies if all were united in a single republic. His preference for independence for each of the colonies coincided with French interests.

Independence

In 1960, Houphouët-Boigny naturally became the country's first president. While leaders throughout Africa offered varying strategies for development, Houphouët-Boigny favoured continued reliance on the former colonial power.

He was also one of the few leaders who promoted agriculture and gave industrial development a low priority – at least initially. Houphouët-Boigny's government gave farmers good prices and stimulated production. Coffee production increased significantly and, by 1979, Côte d'Ivoire had become the world's leading cocoa producer, as well as Africa's leading exporter of pineapples and palm oil. The Ivorian 'miracle' was foremost an agricultural one.

For 20 years, the economy maintained an annual growth rate of nearly 10%. The fruits of growth were widely enjoyed since the focus of development was on farming – the livelihood of 85% of the people. Another reason was the absence of huge estates; most of the cocoa and coffee production was in the hands of hundreds of thousands of small producers. Literacy rose from 28% to 60% – twice the African average. Electricity reached virtually every town and the road system became the best in Africa, outside South Africa and Nigeria. Still, the many Mercedes and posh African residences in Abidjan's Cocody quarter were testimony to the growing inequality of incomes.

Houphouët-Boigny ruled with an iron fist and the press was far from free. Tolerating only one political party, he eliminated opposition by largesse – giving his opponents jobs instead of jail sentences.

The Big Slump

The world recession of the early 1980s sent shock waves through the Ivorian economy. The drought of 1983–4 was a second body

blow. From 1981–4 real GNP stagnated or declined. The rest of Africa looked on gleefully as the glittering giant, Abidjan, was brought to its knees for the first time with constant power blackouts. Overlogging finally had an impact and timber revenue slumped. Sugar had been the hope of the north, but world prices collapsed, ruining the huge new sugar-refining complexes there. The country's external debt increased 300% and Côte d'Ivoire had to ask the IMF for debt rescheduling. Rising crime in Abidjan made the news in Europe. The miracle was over.

Houphouët-Boigny slashed government spending and the bureaucracy, revamped some of the poorly managed state enterprises, sent home one-third of the expensive French advisers and teachers and, most difficult of all, finally slashed cocoa prices to farmers in 1989 by 50%.

In 1990 hundreds of civil servants went on strike, joined by students who took to the streets protesting violently, blaming the economic crisis on corruption and the lavish lifestyles of government officials. The unrest was unprecedented in scale and intensity, shattering Houphouët-Boigny's carefully cultivated personality cult and forcing the government to accede to multi-party democracy. The 1990 presidential elections were opened to other parties for the first time; however, Houphouët-Boigny still received 85% of the vote.

Houphouët-Boigny was becoming increasingly feeble, intensifying the guessing game of who he would appoint as his successor. Finally, in late 1993, after 33 years in power as Côte d'Ivoire's only president, *le Vieux* (The Old Man) died aged 88.

A New Beginning, An Old Story

Houphouët-Boigny's hand-picked successor was Henri Konan-Bédié, a Baoulé and speaker of the national assembly. In 1995, Bédié achieved some legitimacy, receiving 95% of the vote in open presidential elections, while his party, the PDCI, won an overwhelming victory in legislative elections over a bickering and fragmented opposition. True democracy, however, was stifled by the application of the new 'parenthood clause', which stipulated that both a candidate's parents must be Ivorian. After the elections, Bédié continued to discriminate against immigrants and their descendants who for dec-

ades had fuelled the country's agricultural expansion. This persecution was focused, in particular, on foreign Muslim workers in the north, but extended to all northern Muslims regardless of their origin.

In December 1999, Bédié's unpopular rule was brought to an end by a military coup led by General Robert Guéi; however, having deposed Bédié on the basis of his discriminatory policies, Guéi only pursued them further. The coup was quickly followed by military rebellion, violence and elections in 2000 in which Guéi was able to have his main opponent, Alasanne Ouattara, a former prime minister and IMF official, disqualified by the Supreme Court on the grounds that his mother was from Burkina Faso and papers proving otherwise were forgeries. When Guéi tried to steal the subsequent result from winner Laurent Gbagbo, he was deposed by a popular uprising.

The first two years of Gbagbo's presidency were marked by attempted coups and tensions. Scores of Ouattara's supporters were killed in the wake of their leader's call for a new election, though his party won the most seats in the 2001 municipal elections. On 19 September 2002, a failed coup led to a full-scale rebellion and troops from the north gained control of much of the country. Former president Guéi was killed early in the fighting and his death has never been investigated. A month later the government agreed to a cease-fire with the rebels, now known as the Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), who had the full backing of the mostly Muslim northern populace. France sent in troops to maintain the cease-fire boundaries, but this truce was short-lived, and fighting over the prime cocoa-growing areas resumed, with both sides employing Liberian militias who pillaged much of the western border region. The rebels tired of their new friends and executed those they couldn't kick out. The loyalists have maintained ties with the militias to this day.

In January 2003, President Gbagbo and leaders of the rebel factions met in Paris and signed the Linas-Marcoussis Peace Accord, creating a 'government of national unity' with representatives of the rebels taking places in a new cabinet. This was slowly but peacefully implemented, curfews were lifted and French troops cleaned up the lawless western border. On 4 July 2003 both

sides officially declared the war over and vowed to work for demobilization, disarmament and reintegration; but the harmony was short-lived. The MPCI, now called the 'New Forces', pulled out of the government in September, citing President Gbagbo's failure to honour the peace agreement. Three months later, the north and south shook hands again.

Côte d'Ivoire Today

No improvement in the country's situation was seen in 2004 and neither side drew any closer to its ultimate goal. The government hadn't regained control of the north and Ouattara's backers still had no guarantees of new elections, with their candidate eligible to run. In fact, things grew less stable and more violent. In March, the PDCI accused Gbagbo of 'destabilising the peace process' and quit the government. A few weeks later, after security forces in Abidjan opened fire on an opposition demonstration demanding Gbagbo implement the peace deal (killing 120 unarmed civilians), the New Forces followed suit. UN peacekeepers, under the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (Unoci) banner, arrived soon after to help keep things rolling forward; or at least stop them from slipping back. New talks held in Accra in July resulted in yet another peace agreement, and once again, the government fell short of meeting its end of the bargain, so the New Forces rebels refused to disarm.

On 4 November Gbagbo broke the cease-fire and began bombing rebel strongholds including Bouaké. Two days later, jets struck a French military base killing nine French peacekeepers. The French destroyed the Ivorian air force in retaliation, and then all hell broke loose in the streets of Abidjan. Government soldiers clashed with peacekeepers while state-run TV and radio broadcasts whipped citizens into a frenzy, imploring them to take revenge against French soldiers and citizens. The Young Patriots, a nationalist militia closely linked to President Gbagbo, which had already been torching opposition newspapers and political party offices, led the mobs on sprees of looting and targeted violence. Thousands of foreigners were evacuated by their governments and dozens of Ivorians died in clashes with French soldiers. The government called off the mayhem after

a few days, but for many, the anti-French sentiment behind it lingers even today.

The UN Security Council quickly imposed an arms embargo against the government and threatened to freeze the assets of individual leaders. In December, the African Union asked South African President Thabo Mbeki to get the peace process back on track and his intervention prompted parliament to enact key proposals for the 2003 peace agreement. Though the issue of Ouattara's ballot eligibility remained muddled, further talks in Pretoria in 2005 led to a cease-fire and a specific timetable for August disarmament and October presidential election. All this happened amidst continued violence, including a tribal massacre in Duekoué leaving over 100 dead, and suspicious attacks on police stations in Abidjan and Agboville that some suggested had been carried out by government forces in order to disrupt the peace process.

Predictably, neither side followed through on disarmament and when the government failed to properly prepare for the elections, they were cancelled. Though his constitutional mandate expired 31 October, Gbagbo declared he would remain president until elections were held, while the rebels called for the appointment of an independent transitional government. Amidst credible reports that Gbagbo was rebuilding his air force, a UN resolution backed his bid

to stay in office for another year. In December, African mediators named Charles Konan Banny interim prime minister and charged the respected economist with organising elections by October 2007. Both sides hailed the appointment, but a split between rebel groups in the north and anti-UN rioting in the south further complicates the picture. Côte d'Ivoire remains trapped in an untenable status quo.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Everyone in Côte d'Ivoire worries about the war and dreams of peace, but after riding a five-year rollercoaster of peace deals brokered and broken, many are losing hope. The government has never made any serious efforts at compromise and the rebels, having enriched themselves, through extortion and black market trade, have lost their moral authority.

But despite the various groups – Muslim and Christian, northern and southern, immigrant and indigenous – falling into the same dire straights, there is little reconciliation among them and old tribal conflicts that have nothing to do with the current crisis have been enflamed. The country only came together after the Ivorian Elephants qualified for football's 2006 World Cup for the first time ever. But when the all-night partying finished, the goodwill evaporated.

THE CHILD JUGGLERS

No, we don't mean precocious Indian-club swingers, but men of superhuman strength of the Guéré, Wobé and Dan (Yacouba) peoples, who literally juggle young girls.

The preparation for both juggler and juggled is long and demanding. The juggler retires to the sacred forest, where he undergoes tests of endurance and learns the arcane secrets of his skill, which are handed down from father to eldest son. During his training he remains isolated from the village. His food, prepared by a group of specially nominated young girls, is left at the edge of the forest. The girls, selected when they're only five years old, are kept apart from the rest of the village children and wear a special headdress to emphasise their separateness.

When the juggler returns from isolation, he offers two sheep and four chickens to the families of the girls who will be his accomplices. In preparation for the ritual performance, the girls are washed in a liquid with secret medicinal properties and also drink secret concoction of roots and herbs to make them supple and light. Their faces are painted white and their lips are coated with a black substance, which, it's believed, encourages silence, for they mustn't utter a word or cry.

Four adolescent drummers and a sidekick, whose role is to highlight the skill of his superior, warm up the crowd. And then, as the girls roll their heads, trance-like, to stimulate the spirits, it begins. They're tossed in the air, the juggler brandishes knives on which they seem certain to be impaled and the crowd becomes more frenzied. But all the while, the countenances of the girls remain as still as death masks. Child juggling can be seen in Diourouzon and also in Boleu.

STILT DANCERS

In the mountain villages around Touba, a group of young Dan men perform heart-stopping masked dances atop three-metre-high stilts. It's an exciting spectacle well worth going out of your way to experience, as much for the cultural setting as the dance itself. One such village is Silacoro, where circular mud-brick houses with conical thatched roofs are surrounded by a sacred forest. There are fetish houses with sacred yucca plants and interesting-shaped sacred rocks.

The dance takes place as the sun is setting, when houses and compound walls are bathed in radiant ochre light. Most of the villagers participate in the cooperatively run performances. As kola nuts are passed around, proceedings begin with a chorus of young women singing and swaying to the beat of five young drumming men.

Eventually a beturbaned young woman, the village beauty, appears swinging a pair of tail-like brushes to the uplifted voices and drums. She represents the beauty of girls in traditional society. Individual dances by young men follow as the drumming becomes more and more frantic. By this stage the chief and other dignitaries have arrived and have seated themselves in the best vantage points. It's at this point that the stilt dancers make their appearance. Their costume is otherworldly; on their high stilts they don't resemble the human form in any way. Their frightening masks are of woven raffia dyed a dark indigo with tassels cascading from their mouths. Around their heads they wear cowrie shells and bells and their bodies are hidden beneath ballooning straw overcoats. As their swirling dance progresses the acrobatic feats become more and more outrageous, until they are spinning at a terrific speed and hurtling themselves into the air, throwing their stilts over their heads then miraculously landing on them. The crowd goes wild. After each dangerous whirl the dancer approaches the chief and dignitaries howling like a demented wounded jungle bird until gifts of money are surrendered to their clutch.

Before they can dance publicly the dancers undertake three to five years of training. They tell no-one, not even their wives, what they're doing. Once initiated, they become empowered to communicate with the spirits who, during the dancing, direct their elaborate stunts.

Daily Life

Before the war, despite the economic wonders the country was famous for, the literacy rate was below 50% and life expectancy was only 45 years. No one is able to take statistics on such things these days, but, needless to say, things have deteriorated dramatically. Business owners are struggling or closing up shop, farmers are barely breaking even, and many people are giving up and getting out. People understand that, even when peace comes, there will still be problems.

Population

The 60-plus tribal groups in Côte d'Ivoire can be divided, on the basis of cultural unity, into four principal groupings, each of which has tribal affiliations with members of the same group living in bordering countries.

The Akan (Baoulé and Agni primarily) live in the eastern and central areas and constitute about 42% of the indigenous population. The Baoulé, which separated from the Ashanti in Ghana around 1750 (following a dispute over the chieftaincy) and

migrated west into the central area under the leadership of Queen Awura Pokou, is the country's largest tribal group.

The Krou (15% of the indigenous population) originated from present-day Liberia. The Bété are its most numerous subgroup and the second-largest tribal group in the country.

The savanna peoples can be divided into the Voltaic and Mande groups. The Voltaic group (17% of the indigenous population) includes the Senoufo, animists and renowned artisans who live in the north around Korhogo, and the Lobi, who straddle the borders with Burkina Faso and Ghana. The Mande (27%), who live in the north and west, include the Malinké (numerous around Odienné) and the Dan (renowned for their impressive masks and stilt dancers), who inhabit the mountainous region around Man.

See the Peoples chapter (p73) for more information on the Dan, Senoufo and other tribal groups of Côte d'Ivoire.

Before the fighting, up to five million residents were non-Ivorian; of this, one-third

to a half were Burkinabé, 100,000 Lebanese and 14,000 French. It's unclear how many people have fled, but most of the French evacuated in November 2004.

RELIGION

Although the country has two of the largest Catholic cathedrals in the world, only about 35% of the people are Christian, including some Protestants. Some 40%, mostly the Malinké and Dioula (plus most West African immigrants), are Muslims, living primarily in the north. Discrimination, both real and perceived, against the mostly Muslim north by the mostly Christian south has played a significant role in the current crisis. The remaining people practice traditional religions based upon ancestral worship, which can be loosely termed animist.

ARTS

Arts & Craftwork

The art of Côte d'Ivoire is among the most outstanding in West Africa. Three groups stand out – the Baoulé, the Dan and the Senoufo. The definitive Ivorian craft is

Korhogo cloth, a coarse, cream-coloured cotton painted with either geometrical designs or fantastical animals. It's made in the northeast, but sold all over. Also prized are Dan masks of wood or copper from the Man region and Senoufo wooden statues, masks and traditional musical instruments from the northeast. For more details see below.

Music & Dance

Reggae is one of the most popular musical styles in Côte d'Ivoire, and the country's best-known export, Alpha Blondy, has achieved considerable international success following the footsteps of Bob Marley. An early great, and probably his best recording, is *Apartheid is Nazism*. Other reggae stars are Serge Kassy, Ismael Isaac and Tiken Jah Fahkoly. Top female vocalists include Aïcha Koné, Monique Seka and Nayanka Bell. Gadjji Celi plays more traditional Ivorian music. For more about the music scene see Music of West Africa chapter, p58.

Côte d'Ivoire is renowned for its masked dances and there are numerous opportunities to watch them, particularly in the

Man region. Dan stilt dancing is detailed on p261.

Literature

The doyen of Côte d'Ivoire literature is Bernard Dadié, who is credited with writing the country's first play, first poetry anthology and first collection of short stories in French. He has a warm, simple style, even when expressing his dissatisfactions. One of his first novels, published in 1970, is *Climbié*, an autobiographical account of his childhood. Other works translated into English include *The Black Cloth* (1987) and *The City Where No One Dies* (1986).

Aké Loba is best known for *Kocoumbo* (1970), an autobiographical novel of an impecunious, uprooted African in Paris being drawn toward militant communism. Ahmadou Kourouma's first hit novel was *The Suns of Independence* (1981), the wry and humorous story of a disgruntled village chief, deposed following independence. His second novel, *Monné, Outrages et Défi*, written in 1990 after 22 years of silence, took that year's Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noire – Francophone Africa's premier literary prize.

Among younger writers, Bandama Maurice won the same honour in 1993 for his novel *Le Fils de la Femme Mâle*. Two Ivorian novelists and poets who are also widely read throughout Francophone Africa are Véronique Tadjo and Tanella Boni.

Cinema

Côte d'Ivoire was one of the first African countries to promote a film industry, establishing the Ivory Coast Cinema Company, in 1962. Some noteworthy releases, all in French, include Roger Gnoan M'Bala's *Adanggaman* (2000), a courageous look at the role of Africans in the slave trade, and the feminist *Faces of Women* (1985), directed by Désiré Ecaré.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Côte d'Ivoire covers an area about the size of Germany. The central area, where most of the coffee and cocoa grows, is generally flat. A pair of impoundments here have created lakes Buyo and Kossou, two of the largest lakes in West Africa. In the west and northwest the interior rises to a plateau aver-

aging around 300m. Here, Man, with its rolling hill country, is punctuated by several peaks over 1000m. Mount Nimba (1752m), on the Guinean and Liberian borders, is the country's highest peak. In the drier north, the land becomes savanna grassland interspersed with acacia and other bushes and trees.

Little remains of the dense rainforest that once covered most of the southern half of the country. The residue is mostly confined to the southwest, inland from the coast and toward the border with Liberia; the largest tract is protected within the spectacular Parc National de Taï (p278).

A coastal lagoon with a unique ecosystem stretches from the Ghanaian border westward for nearly 300km.

Wildlife

While Côte d'Ivoire has a large range of fauna, poaching and tragic habitat destruction mean numbers are small and the possibility of sightings limited; however, there are chimpanzees, at least 11 species of monkey, and 17 species of carnivore, including lions and leopards. There are giant pangolins, aardvarks, rock hyraxes, hippopotamuses, elephants, sitatungas, buffaloes, duikers, waterbucks, kobs, roan antelopes, oribi and warthogs.

Côte d'Ivoire has superb bird-watching potential, particularly in Comoé (with over 500 species) and the Parc National de Taï. Notable species include the white-breasted guineafowl, Nimba flycatcher, western wattle cuckoo-shrike and the yellow-throated olive greenbul. There are 10 species of heron, as well as yellow-billed egrets, ducks, raptors, plovers, francolins, hammerkops, black-winged stilts, four of the six West African stork species and five of the six West African vulture species.

National Parks

Côte d'Ivoire has some of West Africa's best parks, though for the time being only four are feasible for visits: Parc National d'Assagny, a rainforest park east of Grand Lahou with good birdwatching; Parc National des Îles Ehotilé, a marine park protecting six islands in the Abi Lagoon near Assinie; Parc National de la Marahoué, a savanna and woodland park northwest of Bouaflé, and Parc National de Taï (p278), a

WOODCARVINGS OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Côte d'Ivoire has a greater variety of masks and woodcarvings than any other country in West Africa. Dan masks show a high regard for symmetry and balance, and are often highly expressive. Traditionally, they were carved spontaneously, inspired perhaps by a beautiful face. The most common mask is that of a human face, slightly abstract but with realistic features; a smooth surface, protruding lips, slit or large circular eye holes and a calm expression. These masks often have specific uses; a mask representing a woman, for example, is used to prevent women from seeing uncircumcised boys during their initiation into adulthood. Other common Dan carvings include large rice-serving spoons that typically rest on two legs carved in a human form.

Baoulé masks often represent an animal or a human face. The latter are intended to portray particular individuals who can be recognised by the mask's facial marks and hairstyles. Other Baoulé masks, however, are wholly works of the imagination. The *kplekple* horned mask, for example, represents a forest demon and is very stylised. The same is true of the painted antelope and buffalo masks called *goli*, which have large open mouths and are intended to represent bush spirits.

The Baoulé also carve figures. These often incorporate fine details and a shiny black patina. Baoulé *colon* carvings of people in European-style clothing are sold all over West Africa. Current opinion is that, far from portraying a colonial official, such figures represent a person's other-world mate – *blolo bian*, a wife from beyond, and *blolo bla*, a husband from beyond. Of course, these days most are carved for the tourist trade, and not necessarily by a Baoulé carver.

Senoufo masks are very stylised, like the animal masks of the Baoulé. The most famous, perhaps, is the 'fire-spitter' helmet mask, which is a combination of antelope, warthog and hyena. Powerful and scary, it is said to represent the chaotic state of things in primeval times. The human face masks, on the other hand, can often have a very serene expression. One that you'll see everywhere in the tourist markets is the *kpelie* mask that features a highly stylised hairdo, thin eyes, small round mouth, various facial markings and two horns. The Senoufo also carve a great variety of statues, mostly female, which are used in divination and other sacred rituals.

Unesco World Heritage site protecting one of the largest remaining virgin rainforests in West Africa. Parc National de la Comoé, in the savanna country of the northeast is another World Heritage site, but it's off limits until the crisis ends; and even then it won't be what it once was. Poaching and cattle grazing are putting it's long term future at risk. For additional information try the **Directorate of National Parks** (☎ 20-225366).

Environmental Issues

Between 1977 and 1987, when hardwood exports exceeded Brazil's, a country over 20 times larger, 42% of Côte d'Ivoire's woodland was felled: the highest rate of destruction in the world. During the 1990s the deforestation rate slowed to 3.1%, but this was still the fifth worst in Africa and nearly three times the continental average. Wood exported includes mahogany, samba, sipo, bété and iroko. Along with logging, the expansion of agricultural lands (from 3.1 million hectares in 1965 to nearly eight million hectares in 1995) has taken a devastating toll on the forests, and thus the diverse flora and fauna. The south was once covered in dense tropical rainforest, but is now largely given over to coffee and cocoa production and massive groves of native palm, tapped for palm oil.

Even before the deforestation crisis began, elephant poaching was a serious problem and, along with the loss of habitat, it dropped their numbers to an estimated few hundred. It is now conceivable that the country's namesake will be completely wiped out in the not so distant future. For years the government, in flagrant violation of the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, has done nothing to stop the sale of ivory. While most of it ends up being sold illegally overseas, you can find carvings in many markets and gifts shops – don't listen when they tell you it came from elephants that died naturally. Tusks aren't the only coveted body part: many Ivoirians still have a taste for elephant steak.

The country's large hydroelectric projects, such as those on the Sassandra River at Buyo and the Bandama River at Kossou, produce about a third of the country's electricity production, but also considerable ecological damage. There are also problems with water pollution from industrial and, in particular, agricultural effluent.

FOOD & DRINK

There are three staples in Ivorian cooking: rice, *fufu* and *attiéké*. *Fufu* is a dough of boiled yam, cassava or plantain, pounded into a sticky paste similar to mashed potato and so glutinous that it sticks to your palate. *Attiéké* is grated cassava with a subtle taste and texture similar to couscous. They're invariably served with a sauce, such as *sauce arachide*, which is made with groundnuts (peanuts); *sauce graine*, a hot sauce made with palm oil nuts; *sauce aubergine*, made with eggplant; or *sauce gombo* and *sauce djoumbré*, both with a base of okra (ladies' fingers). In the sauce there will usually be some sort of meat, from chicken, pork or fish to more exotic offerings such as *hérrison* (hedgehog) or *biche* (antelope), which you should choose to avoid on environmental grounds.

Aloco, a dish of ripe bananas fried with chilli in palm oil, is a popular street food. *Kedjenou* – chicken, or sometimes guinea-fowl, simmered with vegetables in a mild sauce and usually served in an attractive earthenware pot – is almost a national dish. Many restaurants will serve you a whole chicken unless you specify that you only want half. While vegetarians are on the whole not well catered for, it is possible to find a variety of bean dishes and spicy vegetable stews containing yam, pumpkin and baby cabbage. Spinach stew is quite common and very delicious.

Fizzy drinks are widely available. Youki Soda, a slightly sweeter version of tonic

water, is a good thirst quencher. *Bandji* is the local palm wine, which is very palatable when freshly tapped. Distilled, it makes a skull-shattering spirit known as *koutoukou*.

The standard beer is Flag, which locals order by asking for *une soixante-six*, a 660ml bottle. If you've a real thirst, go for *une grosse bière*, a hefty 1L bottle. For a premium beer, call for a locally brewed Tuborg.

ABIDJAN

pop 3.5 million

Abidjan, the capital in all but name, was an unimportant town until it became a major port in 1951 when the French finished the Vridi Canal connecting the Ébrié Lagoon with the ocean. Since then, its population has skyrocketed from 60,000 to 3.5 million.

If you've just flown in from the USA or Europe, you won't fully savour the uniqueness of Le Plateau, the business district. But if you arrive after a few weeks of bus- and bush-taxi travel around West Africa, you'll gasp.

Your first glimpse of the city will probably be from across the lagoon; water in the foreground, offset by daring high-rises which puncture the sky. If you can ignore the dispossessed, the beggars, the street hawkers and the gun-toting soldiers who've slipped in from another world, the impression's sustained; smart hotels and boutiques, chic Ivorian ladies clacking along in high heels, on their way to restaurants of four-star Parisian quality – and prices to match – with their smooth escorts, talking in French. You'll sense the same atmosphere in the leafy residential areas of Cocody and Les Deux Plateaux, though many of the villas here are 'a louer' (for rent) and the people who have stayed are building taller fences.

But Abidjan has always had two faces. Adjamé, on the north side of town, plus Marcory and Treichville to the south of Le Plateau, linked by two major bridges, are areas in which rural immigrants have settled – these neighbourhoods remain pure Africa in all its vitality and urban poverty.

ORIENTATION

Abidjan spreads around the inlets and along the promontories of the large Ébrié Lagoon. Le Plateau, with its boulevards

and skyscrapers, is the hub of the business and government districts. These days it's nearly a ghost town at night. Across a finger of the lagoon, east of Le Plateau, is the exclusive residential district of Cocody. North of Cocody lies the residential and restaurant district of Les Deux Plateaux. To the north of Le Plateau is Adjamé and the main bus station, the frantic Gare Routière d'Adjamé. South of Le Plateau, across two busy bridges is Treichville. The international airport and main marine port are at Port Bouët, further south, on the Atlantic Ocean.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Librairie de France (Map p268; ☎ 20-306363; Ave Chardy, Le Plateau) Very good for French titles, but it also has a small collection of English-language classics. There are other smaller branches around the city.

Cultural Centres

Goethe-Institut (Map p266; ☎ 22-400160; Rue 27, Cocody; ☎ 9am-noon & 2.30-6pm Tue-Fri) Shows European films and hosts local art exhibits.

Emergency

☎ 147

Internet Access

Cybercafés, most with good connections, are found virtually everywhere. Rates average CFA400 per hour.

Medical Services

Polyclinique Internationale St Anne-Marie (Pisam; Map p268; ☎ 22-445132; off Blvd de la Corniche, Cocody) The only hospital with a 24hr intensive care unit.

Money

Euros can be changed at main branches of banks in Le Plateau, most hotels and many Lebanese-owned stores, including Hayat supermarkets.

Bicici Bank (Map p268; Ave Delafosse) Has an ATM.

Cobaci (Airport; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm) Changes euros, dollars and Swiss francs, but does not take travellers cheques.

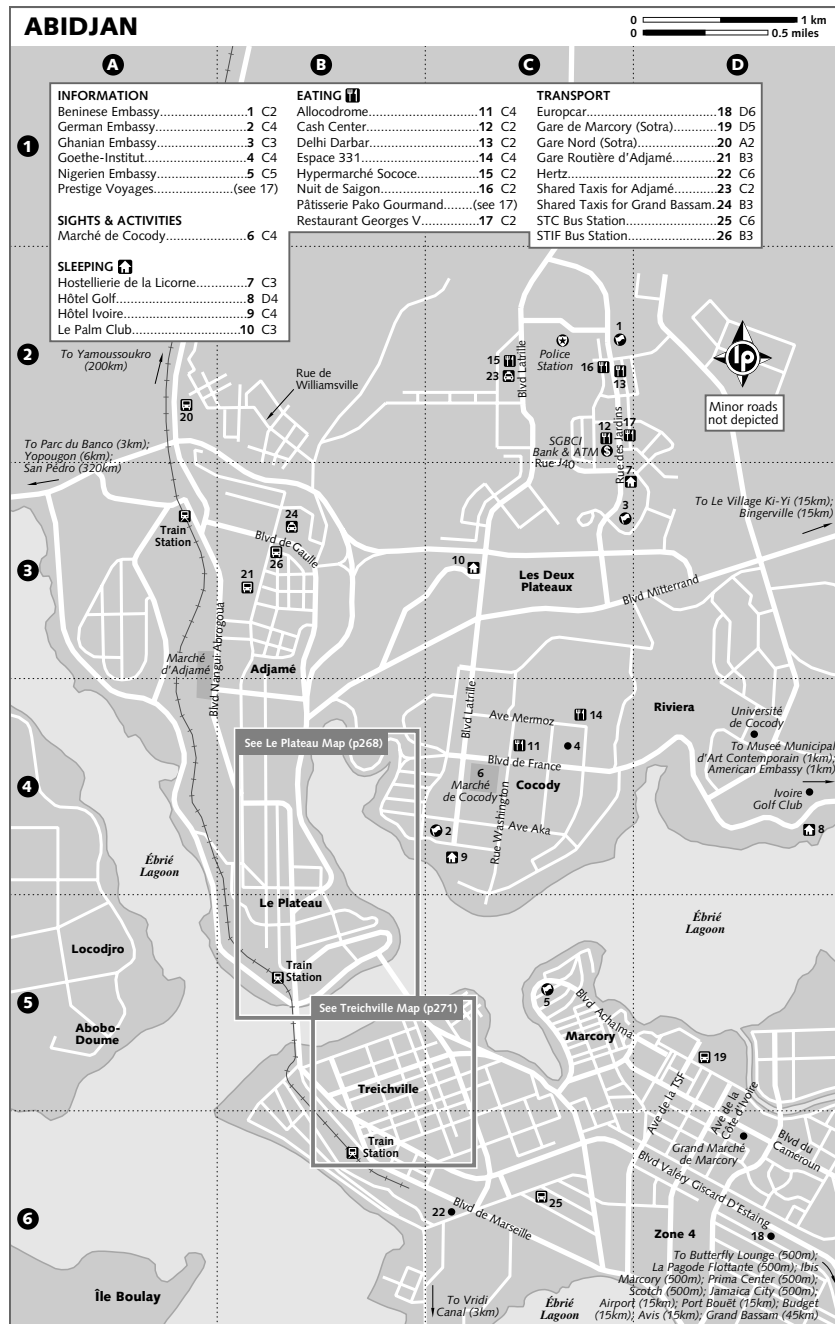
Sgbci Bank (Map p268; Ave Anoma) Has an ATM.

Post

Post office (Map p268; opposite Place de la République; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Post restante letters cost CFA1000 each to collect and are held for one month.

EATING OUT IN A MAQUIS

The *maquis* is Côte d'Ivoire's contribution to eating in West Africa. Much copied by the country's Francophone neighbours, a typical *maquis* is a reasonably priced open-air restaurant, often housed under a *pailote* (a pole-and-thatch roof of varying degrees of sophistication). Usually open for lunch and dinner, they generally offer one or two of the standard sauces (aubergine, peanut, okra and *kedjenou*) containing chunks of meat or fish accompanied by rice, bread or *attiéké* (grated cassava). In the evenings, charcoal grills sizzle with meat, fish or poultry, normally served in an onion and tomato salad. On the coast the fish is superb and comes either whole or as brochettes.



Tourist Information

Côte d'Ivoire Tourisme (Map p268; ☎ 20-251610; dg@tourismeci.org; Place de la République, Le Plateau; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) They have welcome centres at the airport and opposite the post office in Le Plateau where you can get a good, free map of Abidjan.

Travel Agencies

Net Voyages Côte d'Ivoire (Map p268; ☎ 20-336121; info@voyager-en-afrique.com; Immeuble Borija, Ave Noguès, Le Plateau)
Osmosis Akan (Map p268; ☎ 07-801518; osmosisak@yahoo.fr; Rue du Commerce, Immeuble le Mali, Le Plateau)
Prestige Voyages (Map p266; ☎ 22-417673; prestige.voyages@yahoo.fr; Rue Des Jardins, Centre Commercial Louis Panis, Les Deux Plateaux)

Visa Extensions

La Sureté Nationale (Police de l'Air et des Frontieres; ☎ 20-222030; Police de l'Air et des Frontieres, Blvd de la République, Immeuble Douane; ☎ 8am-noon, 3-5pm Mon-Fri) Near the main post office in Le Plateau in Abidjan. An extension, valid for up to three months, costs CFA20,000 (plus two photos) and is ready the same day if you apply early.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime is a serious problem in Abidjan, though the increased UN and French troop presence and swell of security guards have significantly cut down on the incidence of armed robbery. Still, take a taxi after dark. While most people remain friendly, there is a general suspicion of white faces because of all the rumours flying around about spies and mercenaries, so it helps to move around with an Ivorian if you can.

Despite its reputation for crime, Treichville is relatively safe up to 15th Ave, but for the time being, Marcorcy and Adjamé are best avoided as much as possible since the chance of travellers getting mugged there remains relatively high. The bridges between Treichville and Le Plateau have long been notorious for theft, so don't walk over them, day or night. You might not even want to drive over Pont du Général de Gaulle during rush hour when many taxi passengers get robbed.

Getting around the city can be frustrating because police regularly stop vehicles, especially shared taxis, demanding bribes from the drivers, and sometimes passengers. Those presumed to be French often get a little extra hassle.

SIGHTS

Le Plateau

Step back and look up at some of the buildings of Le Plateau; they're as breathtaking up close as from a distance. **La Pyramide** (Map p268; cnr Ave Franchet d'Espèrey & Rue Botreau-Roussel), designed by the Italian architect Olivieri, was the first daring structure.

Looming over the cathedral are the towers of the **Cité Administrative** (Map p268; Blvd Angoulvant), featuring giant copper-coloured slabs with fretted windows. The shimmering **Ministry of Post & Telecommunications** (Map p268; cnr Ave Marchand & Rue Lecoœur), all rounded angles and curves soaring skyward, contrasts with its cuboid, right-angled neighbours.

Musée National

About 1km north of Le Plateau market is the **Musée National** (Map p268; ☎ 20-222056; Blvd Nangul Abrogoua, Le Plateau; admission CFA1000 ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat). It has a very dusty collection of over 20,000 objects, including wooden statues and masks, pottery, ivory and bronze.

Musée Municipal d'Art Contemporain

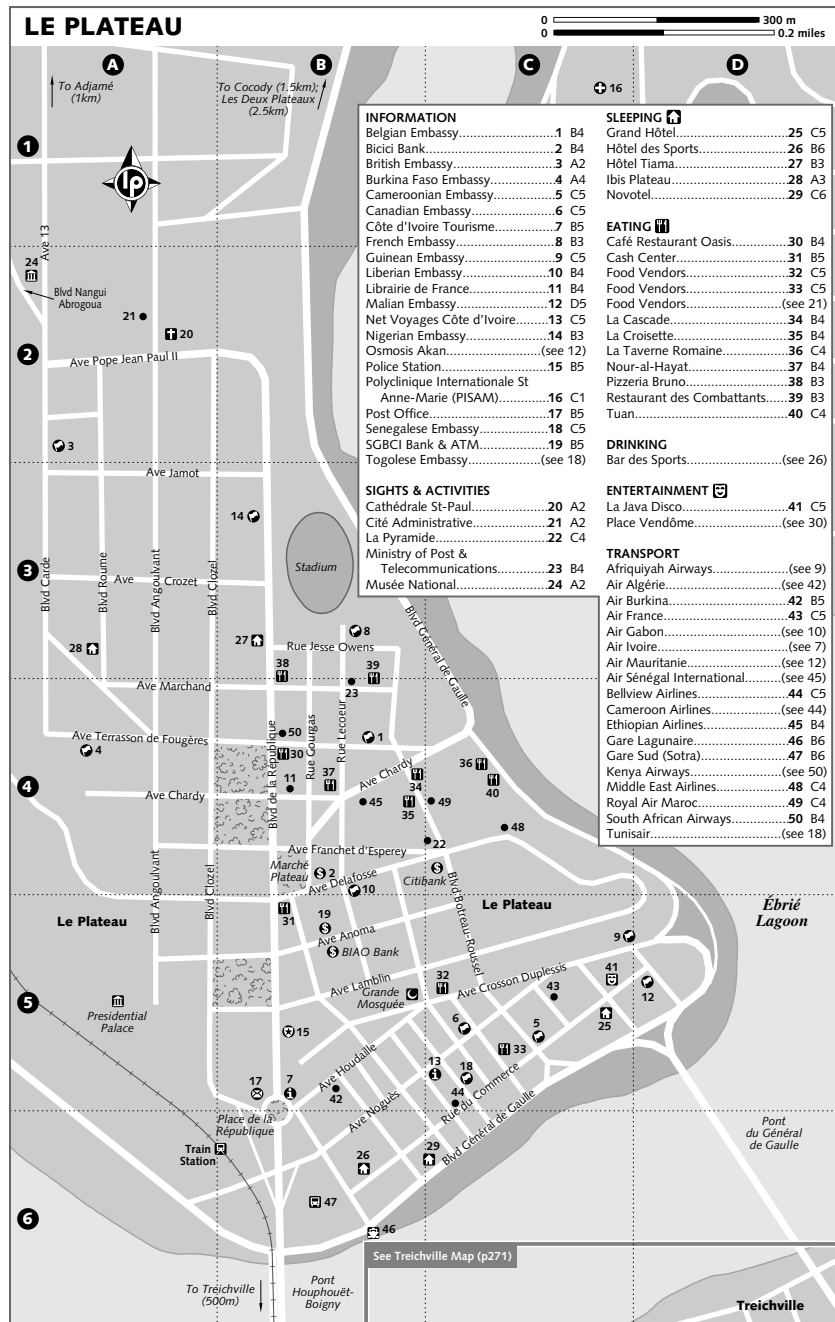
This **art museum** (☎ 22-471686; off Route de M'Pouto, Riviera; admission free; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sat) beyond the Hôtel Golf has a thought-provoking collection of works by contemporary Ivorian and other African artists and regularly mounts exciting, temporary exhibitions.

Cathédrale St-Paul

Designed by the Italian Aldo Spirito, this is a bold and innovative **cathedral** (Map p268; Blvd Angoulvant, Le Plateau; admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm). The tower is a huge stylised figure of St Paul, with the nave sweeping behind him like trailing robes. Inside, the stained-glass tableaux are as warm and rich as those of the basilica in Yamoussoukro. Make a point of seeing these three in particular: the one behind the altar depicting God blinding St Paul on the road to Damascus; the storm on Lake Galilee with Jesus pointing the way ahead as the disciples jettison the cargo; and, opposite, the tableau of the first missionaries stepping ashore to a scene of African plenty – elephants, gazelles, luxuriant palms and smiling villagers.

Hôtel Ivoire

Visiting the colossal **Hôtel Ivoire** (Map p266; ☎ 22-408000; Blvd Latrille, Cocody), once West Africa's premier hotel and a small city in



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itself, was always an odd experience, but the lack of guests these days makes it almost surreal. The complex has 11 tennis courts, swimming pools, a cinema, casino, restaurants, grocery store, nightclub, sauna and bowling alley.

Parc du Banco

On the northwest edge of town is the **Parc du Banco** (Autoroute de Nord) rainforest reserve. It has very pleasant walking trails, majestic trees and a lake, but little in the way of wildlife. Stay away for the time being as many of the convicts who escaped prison in November 2004 are rumoured to hide out here. Near the park entrance is Africa's largest outdoor laundrette (see below).

Markets

The **Marché de Treichville** (Map p271; Ave Victor Blaka) is an ugly Chinese-built building, but inside it's African to the core and well stocked. There is little you can't find. The top floor of the **Marché de Cocody** (Map p266; Blvd de France) is geared for tourists with all the usual trinkets. **Marché Plateau** (Map p268; Blvd de la République) has been razed, but will be rebuilt.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Marché des Arts et du Spectacle Africains** (MASA Festival) is ostensibly a pan-African trade fair to promote dance, drama and music, but the highlight is the week of live performances. It used to take place in March and April of odd years, but recently dates have varied considerably.

SLEEPING

Budget

Hôtel Terminus (Map p271; ☎ 21-241577; Blvd Delafosse, Treichville; r CFA15,000; (P) ♿) Treichville's most

comfortable option is in a good, busy location; though it's not great value for money.

Hôtel l'Ariegeois (Map p271; ☎ 21-249968; Blvd de Marseille, Treichville; s/d CFA15,000/22,000; (P) ♿) This hotel, 400m north of Treichville train station, has unassuming rooms, but it's a convenient location.

Hôtel International (Map p271; ☎ 21-240747; Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Treichville; s/d CFA12,000/18,000; (P) ♿) When they finish the ongoing renovation, this hotel should be pretty good.

Midrange

Hôtel Ivoire (Map p266; ☎ 22-408000; Blvd Latrille, Cocody; s CFA30,000, d from CFA56,000; ♿ (P) ♿) More than just a nearly empty hotel, the 750-room Ivoire is a monument of Abidjan's bygone glory. See p267 for a list of the hotel's many entertainment options.

Grand Hôtel (Map p268; ☎ 20-332109; Rue du Commerce, Le Plateau; r CFA25,000-45,000; ♿ (P) ♿) The Grand is good value and the staff is accommodating.

Hostellerie de la Licorne (Map p266; ☎ 22-410730; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateau; r CFA30,000-40,000; ♿ (P) ♿) Immaculate and friendly. It is down a side street behind the Total petrol station and has a great ambience, a garden and a swimming pool.

Le Palm Club (Map p266; ☎ 22-444450; Blvd Latrille, Les Deux Plateau; r CFA20,000-25,000; ♿ (P) ♿) Formerly the Palme Industrie guesthouse, the rooms are drab but it remains popular. There are pleasant garden surrounds, two pools, a tennis court and an attractive *paillote*, which has a menu that changes daily.

Hôtel des Sports (Map p268; ☎ 20-836404; Rue du Commerce, Le Plateau; ♿) The cheapest place to stay in Le Plateau was undergoing a

THE OUTDOOR LAUNDRETTE

Every day some 375 *fanicos* (washermen), mostly Burkinabé and none Ivorian, jam together in the middle of a small stream near the Parc du Banco, frantically rubbing clothes on huge stones held in place by old car tyres. Afterward, they spread the clothes over rocks and grass for at least 500m (never getting them mixed up) and then iron them. Any washer not respecting the strict rules imposed by the washers' trade union, which allocates positions, is immediately excluded.

The black soap is sold by women who make it from palm oil in small wooden sheds on the hills surrounding the stream. The *fanicos* begin arriving with their loads around 6.30am, but it's best to come between 10.30am and noon when the action is at its peak. You'll get some superb photos, although payment is expected. In the afternoon all you'll see is drying clothes.

much-needed restoration at the time of research. Enquire about prices.

Top End

Novotel (Map p268; ☎ 20-318000; 10 Blvd Général de Gaulle, Le Plateau; r CFA85,000-90,000; 📞 📺 📺 📺) This superswish, lagoon-side complex will have you wanting for nothing. You pay more for a good view.

Hôtel Golf (Map p266; ☎ 21-431044; golfhotel@golfhotel-ci.com; Blvd de France, Riviera; s/d CFA50,000/60,000; 📞 📺 📺 📺) This relaxing hotel, on Ébrié Lagoon in the Riviera neighbourhood and a 15-minute taxi ride from the centre, has a pool and tennis courts. The **Ivoire Golf Club** (☎ 22-430844), one of Africa's best courses, is across the street.

Ibis Plateau (Map p268; ☎ 20-301600; 7 Blvd Roume, Le Plateau; r CFA40,000-45,000; 📞 📺 📺) A comfortable and popular hotel. Some of the rooms have views of adjacent bat-infested trees which, if you like bats, is quite entertaining.

Ibis Marcory (☎ 21-756300; Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing; r CFA42,000-49,000; 📞 📺 📺 📺) Sister to its clone in Le Plateau, this one is handy to the airport and has a pool. It has grown in popularity because of its location near a French military camp.

Hôtel Tiama (Map p268; ☎ 20-313333; com@hotel.tiama.ci; Blvd de la République; r CFA72,000-85,000, ste CFA190,000; 📞 📺 📺 📺) It has a piano bar and exercise room and sauna, but some find the Tiama more sterile than plush.

EATING

Abidjan Gourmand, available around town, is an excellent bilingual directory of Abidjan and Grand Bassam restaurants.

Restaurants

AFRICAN

Espace 331 (Map p266; Rue 12, Cocody; dishes CFA2000-6000; 📞 lunch & dinner) This is a happening, tree-shaded outdoor joint with lunch time sauce dishes and evening grills such as *brochette d'escargots* (grilled snail kebabs).

Maquis Le Sole Plus (Map p271; Ave 27, Treichville; meals CFA3000-5000; 📞 lunch & dinner) The best sole in town. Just order from the lady in back and take a seat outside.

Restaurant des Combattants (Map p268; Ave Marchand, Le Plateau; meals CFA2000-5000; 📞 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A huge colonial building with a wide-ranging African menu featuring *es-*

cargot, sauce feuille (manioc leaf sauce with beef tail, fish and crab) and other dishes not often found in sit-down restaurants.

Maquis Chez Fiffine (Map p271; Ave 26, Treichville; meals CFA3000-5000; 📞 lunch & dinner) This place serves African dishes during the day and delicious grills at night.

Café Restaurant Oasis (Map p268; Blvd de la République, Le Plateau; meals less than CFA3000; 📞 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The Oasis is, as its name suggests, a good place to take refuge from the busy streets outside. Afro-European food is served in a diner-style atmosphere.

ASIAN

La Pagode Flottante (Blvd de Marseille, Zone 4; meals CFA15,000; 📞 lunch & dinner) High-priced but very tasty Vietnamese is served on a barge on the Ébrié Lagoon. There is indoor and outdoor seating.

Delhi Darbar (Map p266; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateaux; meals CFA4500-12,000; 📞 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Delhi Darbar has very good, authentic Indian dishes – most notably seafood – served in tasteful surroundings.

Nuit de Saigon (Map p266; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateaux; meals CFA3000; 📞 lunch & dinner) This is arguably the best Vietnamese restaurant in Abidjan; the food is first rate and the décor swish. It specialises in duck and has an excellent French wine list.

Tuan (Map p268; Blvd du Général de Gaulle, Le Plateau; meals CFA2000-5000; 📞 lunch & dinner) Tuan serves good but expensive food in a relaxing atmosphere.

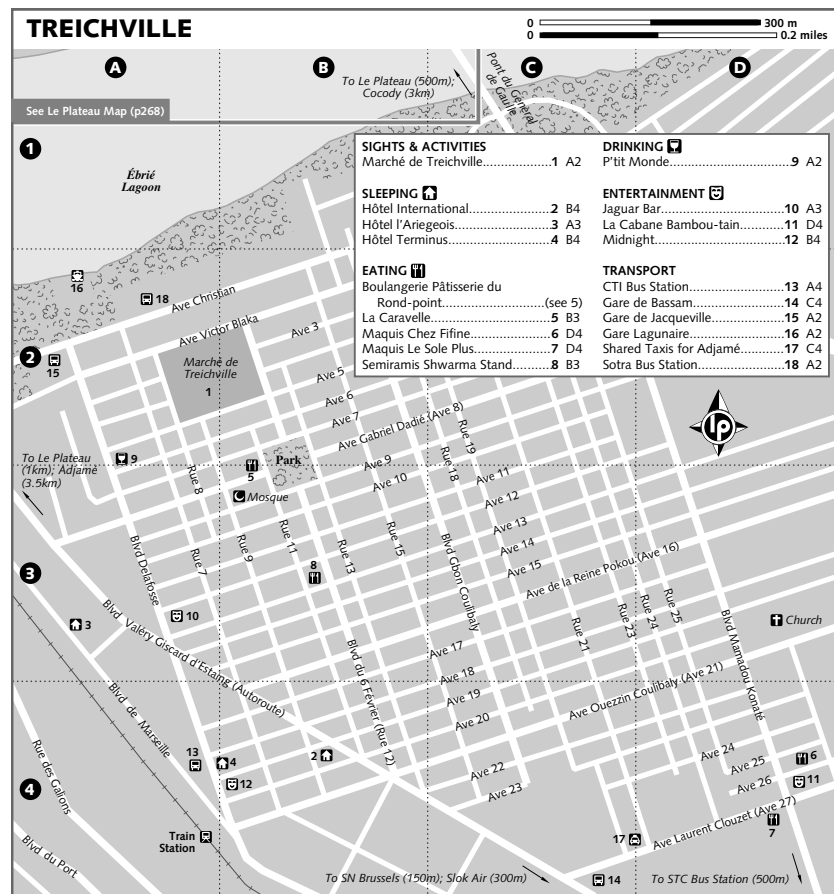
FRENCH & ITALIAN

Most Italian restaurants offer both Italian and French cuisine.

La Cascade (Map p268; Ave Chardy, Le Plateau; meals CFA10,000; 📞 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The cuisine at Cascade is superb so it's usually packed. Try the *feuilleté de foie gras* (pâté in puff-pastry) for a not-quite-African experience. A gushing waterfall and pond add to the ambience.

La Croisette (Map p268; Rue Botreau-Roussel, Le Plateau; meals CFA8000-14,000; 📞 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) The food is excellent, especially the fish, and it is served in airy, nautically inspired surroundings.

Pizzeria Bruno (Map p268; Blvd de la République, Le Plateau; meals CFA5000-8000; 📞 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This popular pizzeria does big, wood-fired pizzas in apt surroundings, and real coffee to boot.



La Taverne Romaine (Map p268; Blvd du Général de Gaulle, Le Plateau; meals CFA5000-15,000; 📞 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This place does great wood-fired pizzas for around CFA6000 and focaccias, the house speciality, for CFA7000.

LEBANESE

You'll find Lebanese restaurants and shawarma outlets all over town.

Restaurant Georges V (Map p266; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateaux; meals CFA750-5000; 📞 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This is a friendly, inexpensive diner/takeaway with free Internet.

Semiramis Shawarma Stand (Map p271; Ave 13, Treichville; meals CFA1000-5000; 📞 lunch & dinner) Semiramis is great for fresh shawmas and takeaways.

La Caravelle (Map p271; Ave 8, Treichville; meals CFA200-3000; 📞 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place has copious, all-inclusive meals including hamburgers and pizza (lunch only). Its adjacent sweet shop produces delicacies as good as any sold in Beirut.

Pâtisseries

Pâtisserie Pako Gourmand (Map p266; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateaux; 📞 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This popular place does sweet French fare superbly – cakes, pastries, buttery croissants and brilliant, real coffee – plus there is ice cream and African food. Strongly recommended.

Boulangerie Pâtisserie du Rond-point (Map p271; Ave 8, Treichville; 📞 breakfast & lunch) Despite

the simple surrounds, the pastries here are superb.

Quick Eats

Le Plateau is superb for inexpensive African food at lunchtime. Food vendors on the short streets between Ave Noguès and Rue du Commerce are so popular that you'll have to wait in line. There's also a cluster of small, highly recommended lunch-time food vendors at the base of the towers of the Cité Administrative on Blvd Angoulvant. East of the Grande Mosquée, on Ave Cros-son Duplessis, a walled compound houses women with simmering pots of delicious sauces.

Allocodrome (Map p266; Rue Washington, Cocody; ☎ dinner) This fantastic outdoor grill in Cocody is sizzling from 4pm until late. Dozens of vendors barbecue fish, chicken and beef, providing filling meals for around CFA2000.

Self-Catering

Abidjan has two established supermarket chains with stores in Le Plateau: Nour-al-Hayat (Map p268) and the cheaper, gaudier Cash Center (Map p268). The vast **Hyper-marché Sococé** (Map p266; Blvd Latrille) in Les Deux Plateaux is worth a visit for its own sake: you'll need to pinch yourself to confirm you are still in Africa.

DRINKING

Butterfly Lounge (off Blvd de Marseille, Zone 4) The hippest place in town is stylish, cool and bright and has live jazz in the garden on Thursday nights. With the young Ivorian elite spending freely on cocktails and Johnnie Walker, it pulls off a New York vibe. It's right near the Notre Dame church.

Scotch (Rue Paul Langevin, Zone 4) The latest 'in' venue sports a swimming pool in the courtyard. There is no cover charge, but dress smart or you won't get in.

Bar des Sports (Map p268; Rue du Commerce, Le Plateau) The bar below Hôtel des Sports is a favourite watering hole for French expats and old-school Ivorian professionals. With its bustle and French football-league tables posted on the wall it could have been transplanted from Marseille. It's the ideal place to watch the world go by.

P'tit Monde (Map p271; Blvd Delafosse, Treichville) This is a tastefully decorated, cheery little bar.

ENTERTAINMENT

Most clubs are open around 9pm to 6am.

Dancing

Place Vendôme (Map p268; Blvd de la République, Le Plateau) Popular with well-heeled Ivorians. You can sometimes dance to Afro-Cuban rhythms.

Midnight (Map p271; Blvd Delafosse, Treichville) One of the oldest clubs in Abidjan and also one of the many in this happening part of Treichville.

Le Cabane Bambou (Map p271; Ave 27, Treichville) A long-time favourite, despite all the prostitutes. Some nights you can dance to live bands.

La Java Disco (Map p268; Rue du Commerce, Le Plateau) Java belts it out till late.

Live Music

Jaguar Bar (Map p271; Blvd Delafosse, Treichville) The Jaguar has live bands Wednesday to Sunday night.

Jamaica City (opposite Prima Center, Zone 4) This place has cheap drinks, a fun atmosphere and excellent reggae bands.

Hôtel Ivoire (Map p266; Blvd Latrille, Cocody) Starting around 7pm the lobby resonates with the sounds of a lively band.

Le Village Ki-Yi (Blvd Mitterrand) Le Groupe Ki-Yi M'bock, who enjoy national fame, once offered a fantastic dinner show here. Today all you can do is see the little shop with woodworking and books...and hope the traditional music and dance returns.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Port Bouët International Airport is on the south side of town. For details on international flights see p288 or p290 for domestic travel.

Bus & Bush Taxi

The main bus station is the shambolic Gare Routière d'Adjamé, some 4km north of Le Plateau. Most buses and bush taxis leave from here and there's frequent transport to all major provincial towns.

Bush taxis and minibuses for destinations east along the coast, such as Grand Bassam, Aboisso and Elubo at the Ghanaian border, leave primarily from the Gare de Bassam at the corner of Rue 38 and Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, south of Treichville. Trans-

port for Grand Bassam also departs from Gare Routière d'Adjamé, but takes longer.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Walk out, turn sharp left and continue for about 20m to a long line of waiting orange taxis. Try to get the driver to switch on his meter; when he refuses, establish a price, which shouldn't exceed CFA4000 (rates double between midnight and 6am), to Le Plateau or Cocody. If he won't accept this, make a show of getting out; you'll quickly reach an agreement and, if not, there are plenty more behind him. The fanciest hotels have free shuttle services.

Boat

Abidjan has a good ferry service on the lagoon. It goes from Treichville to Abobo-Doumé (across the lagoon, west of Le Plateau) to Le Plateau to Treichville again (in that sequence; it's a long ride from Treichville to Le Plateau). Taking a *bateau-bus* (boat-bus) is a great way to see the city from a different perspective. The *gare lagunaire* (ferry terminal) in Le Plateau is 100m east of Pont Houphouët-Boigny. The fare from there across the lagoon to the Treichville ferry terminal, also east of Pont Houphouët-Boigny, is CFA200. There are several departures every hour from around 6am to 8pm.

Bus

The city's Sotra buses tend to be crowded, but they're cheap – CFA200 for regular service and CFA400 for Express. They display their route number, which also features on bus-stop signs, but only rarely their destination. The people waiting for a bus with you should know which ones go where.

The major Sotra bus station in Le Plateau is the Gare Sud, south of Place de la République. Other stations are the Gare Nord in Adjamé, 500m north of the train station, and a Sotra bus station on Ave Christian in Treichville. The buses on most lines operate from about 6am to between 9pm and 10pm daily.

Car

Hiring a car is expensive if you use one of the multinational agencies: **Avis** (☎ 20-328007), **Budget** (☎ 21-751616), **Europcar** (☎ 21-20-313333) or **Hertz** (☎ 21-751105). All of the companies

have branches at the airport and in Le Plateau. Prices and terms vary, but in general a small car starts around CFA31,000 per day, including tax and compulsory insurance, plus CFA225 per kilometre. The price will rise if you want to leave the city. A 4WD is CFA48,000 per day, plus CFA500 per kilometre. You are generally better off arranging a car and driver with the many men who wait in front of the fancy hotels. You should be able to arrange one for the day for around CFA15,000 to CFA20,000. Most journalists hire cars from **Mr Konan** (☎ 07-675508) who keeps his Mercedes in front of Hôtel Tiama.

Taxi

Private taxis in Abidjan are reasonably priced, but drivers probably won't switch on their meter without prompting. Make sure it's set to tariff No 1. The more expensive No 2 rate only applies between midnight and 6am. Fares from Le Plateau to Treichville and Cocody should cost around CFA1000. If you want to hire a taxi driver for a day plan on paying about CFA30,000.

Woro-woro (shared taxis) cost between CFA250 and CFA700, depending on the length of the journey. They vary in colour according to their allocated area (although drivers are now beginning to ignore this convention). Those between Plateau, Adjamé, Marcory and Treichville, for example, are red, while those in Les Deux Plateaux and Cocody are yellow and Yopougon's are blue.

THE EAST COAST

The beaches east of Abidjan are still the playground of wealthy Ivorians and expats; there are just far fewer of them soaking up the sun than there once was. A dramatic increase in petty criminals and muggers means that most visitors now weekend at Assinie, which is much safer.

GRAND BASSAM

☎ 21

Grand Bassam, some 45km east of Abidjan, retains a fascinating colonial heritage; though most come for the beach. The narrow strip of land between ocean and lagoon, known as Ancien Bassam, is where the French first settled, distancing

COLONIAL BUILDINGS

Confident structures with spacious balconies, verandas and shuttered windows were the style of the day. Of the colonial-era buildings, mostly constructed between 1894 and 1920, the elegant former post office and the *mairie* (town hall) have been beautifully restored. The former governor's palace, with its imposing outer staircase, is now the **Musée National du Costume** (admission CFA1000). It has a nice little exhibit of the housing styles of various tribal groups. Most of the remainder, including the old *palais de justice* (law courts), tax office, customs house, prison and hospital, are vacant and in various stages of decay.

sam, it seemed, was headed for oblivion. Construction of a wharf two years later, however, brought new life and substantial new construction. In 1931, when the French built another wharf in Abidjan, three golden decades came to an end. The *coup de grace* was the opening of the Vridi Canal, connecting the lagoon and the ocean.

Dugout canoe trips to see traditional crab fishers, mangroves and birdlife can be arranged with local boatmen. There are also artisan stalls on the road into town so you can get some souvenir shopping out of the way. The best time to visit is in late October or early November during the colourful week-long Fête de l'Abissa, when the N'Zima people honour their dead.

Sleeping & Eating

Taverne la Bassamoise (☎ 301062; r/bungalow incl breakfast CFA25,000/29,000; 🍴 📺 📶 📶) This lovely lodge mixes African design with old-world charm, and adds tennis courts and a swimming pool.

Hôtel Boblin la Mer (☎ 301418; r with fan CFA10,000, with air-con CFA15,000-20,000; 📺 📶) This

Italian-owned hotel, west of town, has a great ambience and small, but good-value rooms overlooking the ocean.

Auberge de la Plage du Parrain (☎ 301541; r CFA8000; 📶) The attractive *paillote* bar is the best part of this hotel.

Maquis l'Estomac (lagoon-side road; meals from CFA2000; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Along with the hotels listed above, all of which serve good food, the best dining options are the many welcoming *maquis*, such as l'Estomac, serving African food at African prices on the lagoon-side of Ancien Bassam.

Getting There & Away

Bush taxis (CFA500) from Abidjan's Gare de Bassam arrive faster than from Gare Routière d'Adjamé. UTB has busses from Gare Routière d'Adjamé (CFA500). In Grand Bassam, the *gare routière* is beside the Place de Paix roundabout, north of the lagoon.

ASSINIE

Some 85km east of Grand Bassam, Assinie, near the tip of a long sand spit where the Canal d'Assinie meets the mouth of the Abi Lagoon, has magnificent beaches. The preserve of rich weekenders from Abidjan and formerly package tours from Europe, it has little to do with Africa.

Accommodation is largely top end but **Blue Cargo** (☎ 07-539276; huts with shared bathroom CFA12,000; 📶 📶) has funky wooden huts with fans on the lagoon. There is a swimming pool and their brochettes are fantastic. Also good value, for the area, is **Beach Lodge** (☎ 07-872040; r CFA30,000-35,000; 📶 📶) in nearby Assouindé. The French owner knows nearly everything about Côte d'Ivoire.

From Abidjan, head first for Grand Bassam, from where there are irregular bush taxis to Assinie (CFA1500).

THE WEST COAST

The rainforest-clad beaches in the western half of the country are some of Africa's most beautiful. There aren't many people roaming the sands these days due to the crisis, but many of the rivers and forests still teem with wildlife. So does Parc National de Taï, which is well known for its chim-

panzees. And when you're not communing with nature, there are many fascinating fishing villages to explore.

TIAGBA

About 100km west of Abidjan is Tiagba, a fascinating village on the Ébrié Lagoon where many of the houses are on stilts. Hiring a pirogue for a trip around the lagoon is well worth the haggle. Reportedly, the **Hôtel Aux Pilotis de l'Ébieyé** (☎ 07-182791; r CFA4500), near the boat dock on the mainland, is still in business, though it closes in the rainy season. Its terrace bar facing the lagoon is a good place for a drink. It is also possible to stay in villagers' homes.

There is one minibus per day from Dabou (CFA1000), which leaves late in the afternoon and returns early the next morning. To make it a day trip, you can charter a taxi in Dabou.

SASSANDRA

☎ 34

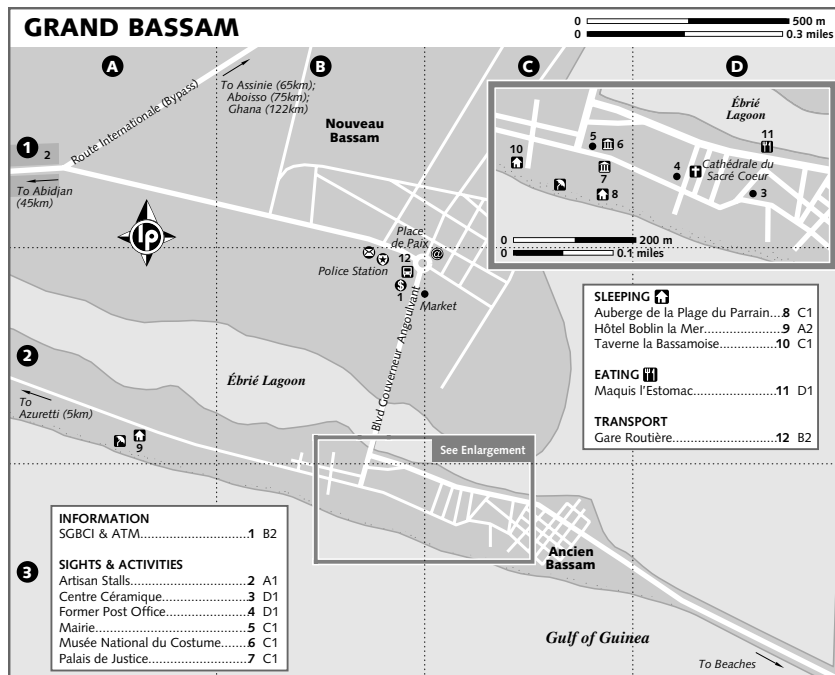
Sassandra is a great base for visiting the spectacular beaches to its west. It's also an interesting Fanti fishing village on a scenic river estuary. (The Fanti, renowned as fishing people, are recent arrivals from present-day Ghana.) Sassandra was originally established by the Portuguese in 1472, who named it São Andrea. Settled successively by the British and the French, who developed it mainly as an outlet for timber from Mali, it went into swift decline once the port at San Pédro was constructed in the late 1960s to the west. Although the lack of travellers has precipitated another decline, the town is small enough to explore on foot and you can still see several old colonial buildings, such as the governor's house.

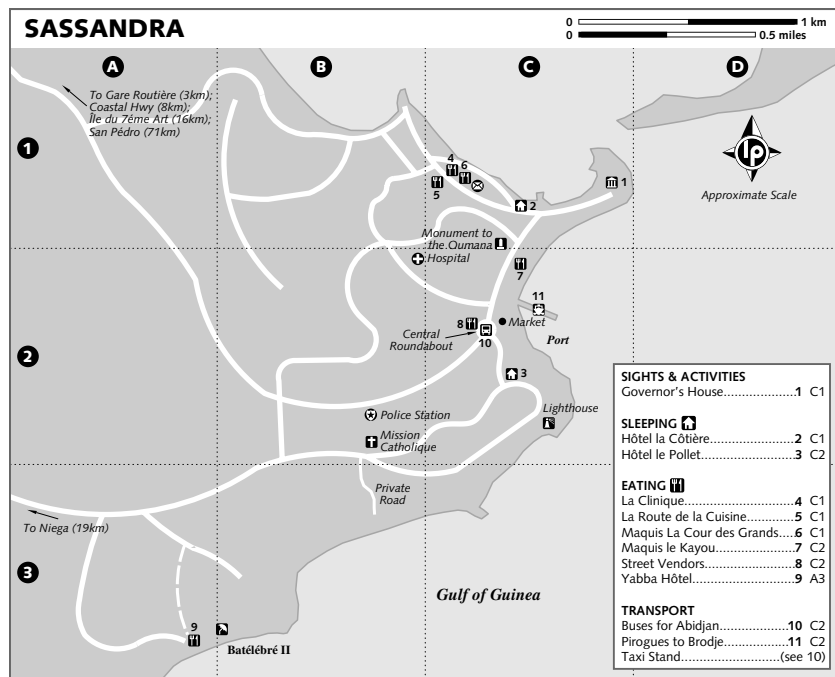
Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel la Côtière (☎ 720120; s with fan CFA6000, d with air-con CFA10,000; 📶 📶) The small bungalows sit on the estuary beneath coconut palms and a giant flame tree. You might have to wait awhile to be served, but Mademoiselle Tantie Youyou's delicious African fare (fish dishes CFA3000) is worth it. Some rooms have mosquito nets.

Hôtel le Pollet (☎ 720578; r CFA17,000; 📶 📶) Near the lighthouse, this place is rather sterile, but a friendly French owner and

themselves from the locals, whose own settlement across the lagoon expanded as servants' quarters. Grand Bassam was declared capital of the French colony in 1893, but a mere six years later a major yellow-fever epidemic broke out prompting the French to move their capital to Bingerville. Bas-





exceptional views over Sassandra and the ocean more than make up for it. It has the most reliable kitchen in town.

There are plenty of street food vendors at the central roundabout plus some good *maquis* like **La Clinique** (meals from CFA1000) and **La Route de la Cuisine** (meals from CFA1000) near the post office, grilling up the day's catch, which often includes swordfish and barracuda. (Help the survival of an endangered species and skip the turtle steak.) **Maquis La Cour des Grands** (meals from CFA1000), which has dancing on weekends, is the most popular *maquis* at the moment.

Getting There & Around

STP and AMT both run two buses a day between Abidjan and Sassandra (CFA4000), leaving Sassandra from the central roundabout. Bush taxis and minibuses, departing from the small *gare routière*, some 3km north of town, connect Sassandra and San Pédro (CFA3000); buses cost CFA2000. Shared taxis around town cost CFA150, even for the longish journey to the *gare routière*. A new motorboat service crosses

the Sassandra River several times a day to the small Noyo village of Brodjé.

AROUND SASSANDRA Beaches

Except for Dagbego, all these beaches are along a dirt road west of Sassandra. Most of the hotels have closed, but you can still find a few Robinson Crusoe-style huts at some beaches. Otherwise, talk to village chiefs about spending the night. To reach all but the nearest, you'll have to hire a taxi. The trip to Niéga, the furthest beach, costs at least CFA6000. For the return journey, make firm arrangements in advance.

You can walk from Sassandra to **Batébré II**, the nearest beach. The Yabba Hôtel no longer rents rooms, but does serve simple meals and drinks on weekends and holidays. Look for crocodiles beneath the water lilies in the small lake here. Another 2km westward is the stunning **Plage Nizeko**.

About 8km down the coast from Sassandra is the small fishing port of **Drewen** (*dray-van*) and its ruined cocoa-oil factory, possibly the first factory in West Af-

rica. Just beyond Drewen at **Wobuko**, the former owners of the Helice de Sassandra hotel (destroyed during the crisis) offer five-hour **hippopotamus-watching trips** (☎ 05-119790; CFA45,000) and will also take you out fishing on the ocean. They also rent gear (CFA5000) if you'd rather do some surf casting. There is a simple *campement* here with cheap rooms.

The final and brightest jewel in this necklace of beach paradises is **Niéga**, where the road ends. With its curling breakers, it's a popular surfing venue. Its other great attraction is the dense forest stretching inland. For a modest fee, the village boys will guide you along the narrow trails.

About 35km east of Sassandra, at Dagbego, is **Best of Africa** (☎ 34-720606; best@bestofafrica.org; bungalows CFA40,000-60,000;), a gorgeous and luxurious resort. The food is fantastic and the facilities are top-notch, from the library right down to the foam in the settees. The beach is riptide free and a variety of on-site activities and nearby nature tours are available. They are working with local villages to create the Trepoint Mask Festival, intended to be held biannually on 7 August and 31 December. Just 1km away, a former 'Best of employee has opened the **Tribunal** (huts CFA2500), a *campement* with a few simple huts.

Île du 7ème Art

This little island oasis up the Sassandra River, owned by film director Yéo Kozolola, is a good wildlife-watching spot. You might see hippo and manatee on a boat tour (CFA8000) and there are two simple rooms and a **bungalow** (☎ 22-424394; r CFA16,000;) if you want to spend the night. Take the road to the north opposite the Sassandra turn-off. It's about 8km to the park.

SAN PÉDRO

☎ 34

Built from nothing in the late 1960s, San Pédro, 330km west of Abidjan, is the country's second-major port. Much of the country's timber, palm oil, rubber, coffee and cocoa is exported from here; although business has dropped considerably in recent years because bribes demanded by soldiers and police make it cheaper to truck the goods to Abidjan.

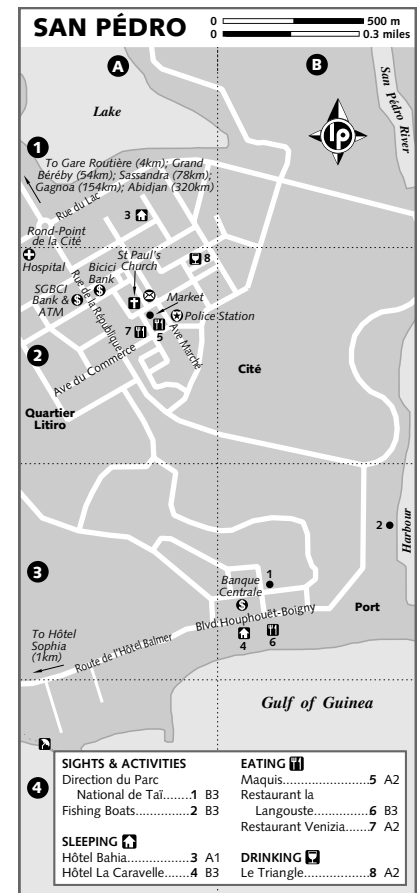
If you get stuck here en route to Sassandra, Grand-Béréby or Parc National de Taï

your night won't be wasted. The Cité area in the heart of San Pédro throbs after dark, with *beaucoup maquis* and dance clubs. The latter cluster around what locals call Le Triangle. The main public beach is 1km west of the commercial port, which itself is of no interest, but the small, reeking area where the fishing boats moor is well worth a browse.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Bahia (☎ 712733; Rue Akossika; r CFA8000-12,000;) In the centre of town, this is one of the city's cheaper hotels.

Hôtel La Caravelle (☎ 05-715507; Blvd Houphouët-Boigny; r CFA15,000-20,000;) Down on the beach, small and beautifully decorated, this hotel



serves excellent African food, including the best grilled pigeon you'll ever taste.

Hôtel Sophia (☎ 34-713434; Rue à la Plage; s/d CFA36,000/46,000; P) Just out of town, this hotel has a large swimming pool and offers sport fishing trips.

San Pédro is great for eating out. The Cité has an animated strip of cheap *maquis* and drinking places wedged one beside another next to the market.

Restaurant la Langouste (Blvd Houphouët-Boigny; meals CFA3500-12,000) Specializing in *langouste* (lobster), this place has an attractive terrace overlooking the ocean.

Restaurant Venizia (Ave du Commerce; sandwiches CFA1000; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) For salads and sandwiches, as well as first-rate coffee, try this stylish restaurant.

Getting There & Away

All transport leaves from the main *gare routière*, some 4km north of the Cité. Several companies run buses to Abidjan for CFA5500. UTB, AMT and CTM run one bus a day to Man (CFA6000) and UTB has daily bus service to Boauké (CFA8000) stopping in Yamoussoukro (CFA6000). Bush taxis also go west to Grand-Béréby (CFA2500) and east to Sassandra (CFA3000).

GRAND-BÉRÉBY

Grand-Béréby, a fishing village some 50km west of San Pédro, has magnificent palm-fringed beaches. On the western side of its promontory is a protected bay with calm waters where reasonable snorkelling can be done. The surf is quite good to the east. The ambience fits the name at **Baba Cool** (☎ 07-710465; r with fan/air-con CFA5000/8000; P) on the eastern side of the promontory. There's also a mirror-filled disco and a restaurant with fish and chicken for around CFA5000. Bush taxis run here from San Pédro (CFA2500).

PARC NATIONAL DE TAÏ

Parc National de Taï (☎ 34-712353; www.parc-national-de-tai.org; per person CFA5000) protects one of the largest remaining areas of virgin rainforest in West Africa. The towering trees, hanging vines, swift streams and varied wildlife within its 454,000 hectares create an enchanting environment. Thanks to the World Wildlife Fund and other outside agencies, anti-poaching patrols continue, though the war has taken a toll through illegal log-

CONSERVATION & ECOTOURISM: THE TAÏ EXAMPLE

The Parc National de Taï team has had remarkable success in preserving West Africa's largest rainforest from further destruction. The key has been to give a stake in its development to those who made their living from the forest. A proportion of the revenue from tourism is used to improve the quality of life in the villages bordering the park by, for example, opening health care centres, improving drinking water and providing veterinary support for livestock. One program trains people to raise agoutis (rabbit-sized rodents) in captivity to reduce the demand for poaching. As a result of these projects, logging and poaching were diminished significantly; before the war that is.

ging and gold mining. For more information about the park's special conservation scheme, see above.

At press time, the park wasn't fully operational, but visits could be arranged through the park office in San Pédro. There was a hotel and restaurant and they hope to reopen again, but for the time being, overnight visitors are lodged in nearby villages. Guided walks through the forest cost CFA15,000 per person and visiting a habituated group of chimpanzees is CFA20,000. You can opt for all-inclusive, full board packages. A two-day chimpanzee expedition is CFA65,000 per person; a two-day ascent of Mont Niénokoué (396m), the highest point in the park and a sacred mountain for the local Krou population, is CFA95,000 and a four-day visit including chimpanzees, a mountain climb, and pirogue trip is CFA125,000. This is a very rainy, humid area, so the best time to visit is from December to February, when there's a dry season. In these months, you can get there by car; at other times, travelling by 4WD is strongly recommended.

THE CENTRE

Yamoussoukro has suffered right along with the rest of the country, but the amazing Basilique de Notre Dame de la Paix is such a point of pride that it was spared during the November 2004 riots. Though

it is still possible to travel to the capital, the nearby national parks are off limits until the crisis ends, and even then, unfortunately, it's hard to believe there will be much forest or wildlife left.

YAMOUSSOUKRO

Yamoussoukro has no embassies, ministries or significant commercial life, even though it has been the country's capital since 1983. Originally a village called Ngokro with no more than 500 inhabitants, it has grown because of the whim of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who happened to be born hereabouts and who wanted to glorify himself, his family and ancestors. With its six-lane highways (bordered by more than 10,000 streetlights) leading nowhere, and its grandiose monuments set just far enough apart to be inconvenient for walking, it's a lasting testament to Africa's greatest curse – the Big Boss, who can get away with anything.

But let's not be churlish. Some of the overweening monuments are architecturally stunning, even if they owe little to Af-

rica: the Basilique de Notre Dame de la Paix with its many superlatives, Hôtel Président and the complex of structures that constitute the Institut National Polytechnique Houphouët-Boigny are worth a look. Plus, the Reserve de Fauna D'Abokouamiro, which might still have elephants, is just a day trip away; though at the time of research it was closed.

Information

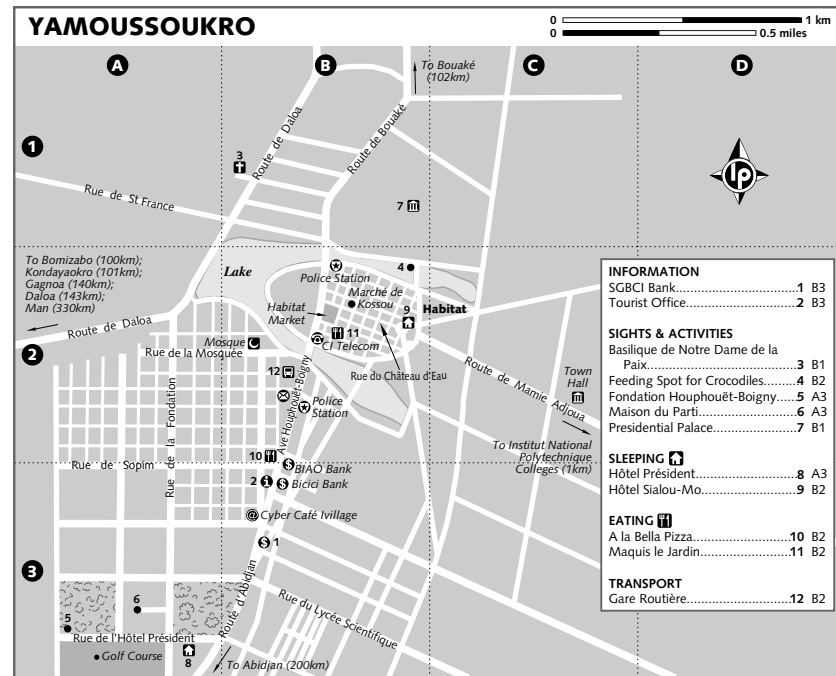
Sgbc bank (Ave Houphouët-Boigny) Has a 24hr Visa card-friendly ATM.

Tourist office (☎ 30-640814; Ave Houphouët-Boigny; ☎ 8am-noon, 3-6pm Mon-Fri) Arranges Baoulé dancing performances in nearby villages for around CFA50,000.

Sights

BASILIQUE DE NOTRE DAME DE LA PAIX

One of Africa's most astonishing sites is the **basilica** (Route de Daloa; admission CFA1000; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2pm-5pm Sun), which remains in tiptop shape, with English-speaking guides on duty. Don't forget to take your passport, which the guard holds until you leave. See p280 for more details.



YAMOUSSOUKRO'S AMAZING BASILICA

A visit to Yamoussoukro's Basilique de Notre Dame de la Paix is an emotion-provoking experience not to be missed. You will struggle to reconcile this wondrous construction with its time and place. For miles around, it broods on the humid skyline like a giant, pearl-grey boiled egg.

Its statistics are startling. Completed in 1989, it was built in three years by a labour force of 1500, working day and night in great secrecy. The price tag was about US\$300 million and annual maintenance costs US\$1.5 million. It bears a striking and deliberate resemblance to St Peter's in Rome. Although the cupola is slightly lower than St Peter's dome (by papal request), it's topped by a huge cross of gold, making it the tallest church in Christendom. Inside, each of its 7000 seats is individually air-conditioned, a system only used on the two occasions when it has been full: at its controversial consecration by a reluctant Pope John Paul II and at the funeral of the man responsible for its creation. The basilica can fit a further 11,000 standing worshippers and as many as 300,000 pilgrims in the 3-hectare plaza – an area slightly larger than St Peter's. There are only one million Catholics in the country and no more than a few hundred attend Sunday mass!

Except for its architect, Pierre Fakhoury, an Ivorian of Lebanese descent, and its toiling construction workers, it owes nothing to Africa. Stop in front of the second bay to the left of the entrance. There, frozen in stained glass, are the architect, the French lady who chose the furnishings, the French foreman and the French stained-glass master craftsman. And, at Christ's feet is the only African face in all of the glass, the conceiver, one Félix Houphouët-Boigny.

The president was reluctant to discuss the details of its financing. He had done a 'deal with God' and to discuss God's business publicly would be more than indiscreet. Proponents of the basilica will rhetorically ask, were there no poor in France when Chartres Cathedral was lovingly built? And was England affluent when the spires of Canterbury Cathedral first stabbed the sky?

What's certain is that you'll catch your breath as you cross the threshold and see the 36 immense stained-glass windows, all 7400 square metres of them, with their 5000 different shades of warm, vibrant colour. It's like standing at the heart of a kaleidoscope.

INSTITUT NATIONAL POLYTECHNIQUE

The institute has three colleges: the Institut National Supérieur de l'Enseignement Technique (Inset), which trains applied scientists, the École Nationale Supérieure des Travaux Publics (Enstp) for engineers and the École Normale Supérieure Agronomique (Enmsa) for agricultural specialists. Each building is a jewel of contemporary architecture and can be visited during business hours.

PRESIDENTIAL PALACE

Houphouët-Boigny's massive palace, where he is now buried, can be seen only from beyond its 5km perimeter wall. A few crocodiles live in the lake on its southern side and the keeper tosses them some meat at 5pm.

FONDATION HOUPHOUËT-BOIGNY

The **Fondation Houphouët-Boigny** (Rue de l'Hôtel Président), on the south side of town, was

built as the headquarters of the largesse-distributing association established by the former president. The impressive structure has several auditoriums (including one with a capacity of 4500), huge air-conditioned public spaces and marble floors. All it lacks is people. Nearby, the **Maison du Parti**, the old headquarters of the country's first political party, the PDCI, is closed to the public.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Président (☎ 30-641582; Route d'Abidjan; s/d/ste CFA31,000/36,000/65,000; P) The city's better hotels were looted during the 2004 riots, but the city's best has been fixed. The 284-room tower has plenty of extras like tennis courts, an 18-hole golf course, nightclub (popular with the Lebanese community) and the 14th-floor Restaurant Panoramique.

Hôtel Sialou-Mo (☎ 36-641364; r & paillotes CFA5000-6000; P) Like an African village

within the lively Habitat *quarter*, this a fun place to stay. The Sialou-Mo (which means 'thanks, mother' in Baoulé) has attractive *paillotes* with fan and bathroom for the same price as the undistinguished, shower-only rooms in the main block.

Shacks around the **Marché de Kossou** on Rue du Château d'Eau in Habitat and the *gare routière* across the lake sell dishes such as *sauce graine* for around CFA600 plus snack food and brochettes. **Maquis le Jardin** (across from Habitat market; meals CFA3000-5000; ☎ lunch & dinner), is more upmarket and expensive than the others clustered by the lake, but the quality justifies the price. French-owned **A la Bella Pizza** (Ave Houphouët-Boigny; meals CFA3500-5000; ☎ lunch & dinner) serves great pastas, crêpes and local fare as well as its namesake pies.

Getting There & Away

Onward travel in all directions is, in principal, easy from Yamoussoukro, which is a transit hub; however, some buses roll through full so you may have to wait a while. Bush taxis and minibuses leave from the main *gare routière*, which is basically the first 100m of Ave Houphouët-Boigny south of the lake. MTT and UTB, whose stations are south of town, run buses frequently to Abidjan (CFA4000), with the latter also going frequently to Bouaké (CFA3500) and once daily to Man (CFA5000) and San Pédro (CFA6000).

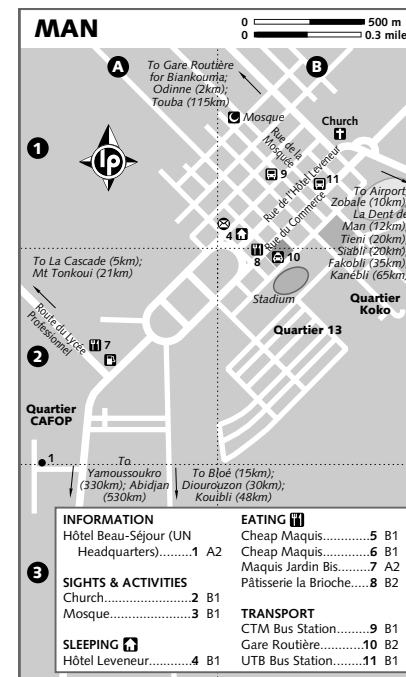
When the security situation improves, you'll again be able to catch buses direct to Bamako, Mali and Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso.

THE NORTH

The rebel-held half of Côte d'Ivoire, once one of the most fascinating cultural destinations in West Africa, is suffering. The infrastructure is crumbling, the banks are gone, jobs are scarce, and gun-toting soldiers expect handouts. Even if you have all your papers in order, travel here is risky, especially beyond Man and Bouaké.

MAN

☎ 33
Man, known as *la cité des 18 montagnes* (city of 18 mountains), has the most beau-



tiful location of any inland Ivorian town; unfortunately illegal logging is destroying the lush hills that envelop it. War damage is visible at the entrance and around the mayor's office, while the rest of Man is now falling apart due to neglect. The city's famous charm, however, hasn't completely faded.

Man is a good base for exploring the Dan villages nearby, though wandering out of town on foot is a bad idea. Don't leave Man without getting a *laissez-passer* (travel permit) from the rebel chief. He is no pushover; expect to be interrogated thoroughly.

Sleeping & Eating

All of Man's midrange hotels have either closed or now serve as headquarters for NGOs and the UN. The centrally located **Hôtel Leveueur** (☎ 791481; Rue de l'Hôtel Leveueur; r CFA8000; P) is the best place still standing, though it is in sorry shape. It has a decent restaurant and everybody from rebel commanders to stranded legionnaires gather here for drinks on the terrace.

Man has many simple *maquis*, though **Maquis Jardin Bis** (Route du Lycée Professionnel; meals CFA1000-3000; ☎ lunch & dinner) on the west side of town is especially recommended. It has fabulous brochettes and French dishes. The **Pâtisserie la Brioche** (Rue du Commerce; croissants CFA220; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) is a great place for breakfast or morning coffee and the pastries are amazing. The main *gare routière* is the best place for cheap street food.

Getting There & Away

The main *gare routière* for minibuses and bush taxis is located on Rue du Commerce. Peugeot taxis cost about CFA7000 to Abidjan. Most taxis for N'zérékoré Guinea run via Sipilou. Make sure you check the security situation before attempting to travel this route.

UTB (four blocks northeast of Hôtel Leveneur) and CTM (three blocks northeast of the post office) run regular buses to Abidjan (CFA7000) via Yamoussoukro (CFA5000) and one a day to San Pédro (CFA6000).

AROUND MAN

Natural Attractions

Some 5km west of town is **La Cascade** (CFA300), a waterfall within a bamboo forest. August to November are the months of fullest spate, but the site is still beautiful in the dry season. Ask your guide to take you to see the monkeys nearby.

Mt Tonkouï (1223m) is the second-highest peak in Côte d'Ivoire and a further 16km of steep, winding road beyond La Cascade. The views from the summit are quite breathtaking and extend to Liberia and Guinea, although not during the harmattan season.

Hikers will love **La Dent de Man** (The Tooth of Man), a steep molar-shaped mountain (881m) 12km northeast of town. The climb begins in the village of Zobale, 4km from Man. There, the inhabitants ask for a CFA5000 village tax and children will offer to show you the way. A guide isn't necessary, but they make good company. Allow at least four hours for the round trip, including a breather at the summit, which you'll need after the final gruelling ascent.

Villages

The villages around Man are well used to visitors, not that they get many these days. All of these are accessible by car and, much less conveniently, minibuses. Arranging dances (this used to cost about CFA20,000) must be done with the chief in the morning to give the village enough time to prepare for a later performance.

The nearest to Man is **Bloé**, where a Yacouba dance is performed by girls wearing Goua masks. **Biankouma**, north of Man, is known for its acrobatic Goua dances, which usually take place on Sunday, and the village's traditional houses with decorative paintings in kaolin clay. The fetish houses are sacred, so ask permission before taking any pictures. In **Kanébli** you can hire a pirogue for a trip to view hippos and crocodiles, or, perhaps, see the Tematé dance performed by Wobé girls at the end of the rice harvest. **Diourouzon** is one of the places where child juggling (see p260) is performed.

The most celebrated village around is **Silacoro**, about 110km north of Man, which is famous for its stilt dancing (see p261). It's also a very attractive village, consisting entirely of mud houses with thatched, conical roofs. A spring-fed pond is teeming with large, whiskered fish which will slide onto dry land and eat bread from your hand.

BOUAKÉ

☎ 31

Spawning and filthy, Bouaké is the country's second-largest city and the capital of the New Forces. Before the war it had around half a million inhabitants; there's probably less than half that today. The Dioula are dominant now, having chased most of the Boualé away when the fighting began. Rag-tag soldiers shouldering Kalashnikovs are everywhere (keep plenty of coins handy) and damage from the November 2004 bombings remains. Even before the war, there was little reason to come here other than **Le Carnaval de Bouaké**, one of Africa's largest carnivals, previously held every March. You can't come here without a *laissez-passer* from the rebels, and they don't just hand them out to anyone. Despite all this, Bouaké is a much safer city than Abidjan.

Sights

Bouaké's **Grand Marché** was one of the most diverse markets in the country, though few crafts and fabrics are sold here now. A couple of stalls next to the Ran Hôtel, now the rebel headquarters, sell masks and bronze statuettes. Like a vast hangar when empty, the modern **Cathédral St-Michel** (Ave Houphouët-Boigny) is brightened by abstract stained-glass windows. Also notice the black Madonna in bronze to the left of the altar.

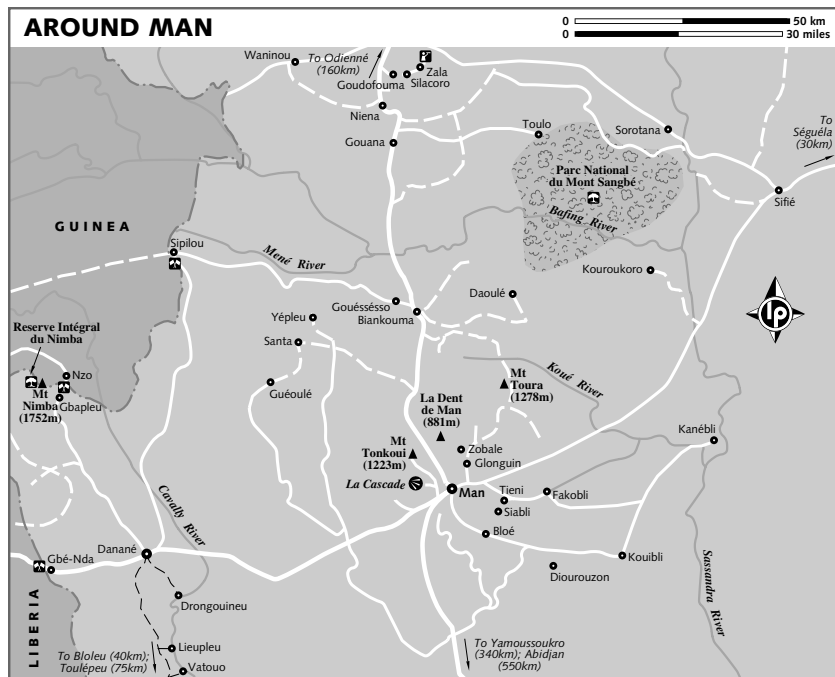
Sleeping & Eating

The **Hôtel Printemps** (☎ 07-845632; Rue de la BCAO; r CFA10,000-14,000; ☎) is a pleasant hotel inside the Moroccan-controlled UN compound. Also safe is the nearby **Hôtel du Centre** (☎ 633278; Ave Mamadou Konaté; r CFA12,000; ☎) which has large, well-appointed rooms and a nice terrace in front. The staff is friendly and the service still good. The adjoining restaurant is pleasant plus cheap steak and fries are available across the street. You could also call **Madame Delon** (☎ 06-349749; CFA20,000-25,000; ☎), a well-known French woman who offers B&B-style accommodation and serves the best French food in the city.

The area around the *gare routière* and market abounds with cheap, simple stalls. **Maquis Walé** (Ave Houphouët-Boigny; meals CFA1500-3500; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a friendly, value-for-money place with a pleasant street-side terrace. The food and service are impressive. The French-run **Pâtisserie les Palmiers** (Ave Gabriel Dadié; breakfast CFA1500; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is unbeatable for breakfast and coffee. It also does inexpensive pastries and baguettes; there's the **Restaurant Black & White** (Ave Jacques Aka; meals CFA4000-6000; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Mon) has an intimate outdoor thatched terrace and an ambitious French menu. It is popular with rebel leaders for drinks at night.

Getting There & Away

Most buses and bush taxis leave from Gare Routière du Grand Marché. UTB has several buses a day to/from Abidjan (CFA7000) and one to San Pédro (GF8000) – both via Yamoussoukro (CFA3500) – from its station south of the market. Peugeot taxis serve the same routes and charge about the same.





CÔTE D'IVOIRE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Many of the country's hotels have shut down and most that remain are going to pot. Most cheapies double as brothels. Before the war, accommodation was generally expensive and poor value for money, but now places are so desperate for guests that you can bargain over the already low rates in some four-star hotels. Note that there is no running water in the north. In this chapter budget accommodation is CFA15,000 and below, while top end is

over CFA40,000 and midrange is in between the two.

ACTIVITIES

The area around Man is good for hiking, while for swimming, there are unlimited possibilities all along the coast. Several spots on the coast, most notably Bassam, Dagbege and Drewen, have decent surfing. **Kamesurf** (☎ 21-256401) in Abidjan's Prima Center shopping mall can provide information.

Côte d'Ivoire also has a lot to offer bird-watchers. It's worth polishing your binoculars before visiting the Parc National de Taï (p278) or the last remaining coastal rainforest around San Pédro (p277). See p263 for more details.

PRACTICALITIES

- Côte d'Ivoire uses the metric system
- Electricity voltage is 220V/50Hz and plugs have two round pins.
- Most of the nearly 20 daily newspapers, all in French, are political party mouthpieces, though *Soirinfo*, *24 Heures* and *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan* steer independent courses.
- La Première and TV2 are government-run stations while TVNP, run on a shoestring from Bouaké, is the voice of the rebels.
- Radio Jam (99.3FM) and Radio Nostalgie (101.1FM) play hit music while the BBC World Service broadcasts some programs in English on 94.3FM.

BOOKS

A trio of beautifully written books offer insight into Ivorian village life. Sarah Erdman, a Peace Corps health worker, began her two year stint in a Senoufo village in 1998, just as AIDS and other trappings of modern life were arriving. She recounts the highs and lows of her stay in *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha*. Both *In the Shadow of the Sacred Grove* by Carol Spindell and *Parallel Worlds* by Alma Gottlieb and Philip Graham, date back to around 1980, but their year-long experiences still ring true today. If you read French, look for *La Crise en Côte d'Ivoire* by Thomas Hofnung, which offers an up-to-date overview of the current crisis.

BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are 8am to noon and 2.30pm to 6pm Monday to Friday, and mornings only on Saturday. Government offices are open 7.30am to noon and 2.30pm to 5.30pm Monday to Friday. Banking hours are from 8am to 3pm Monday to Friday and 8am to noon Saturday.

CUSTOMS

Travellers may not take more than CFA500,000 out of the country. You'll also need a permit (inquire at the Musée National; p267) to export Ivorian artefacts.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Côte d'Ivoire can be visited safely, but overall it is still not a safe country. There has only been sporadic violence since the attacks of November 2004 and most of the rumours of violence turn out to be false, but the situation remains volatile and the possibility of further unrest – or a resumption of all-out war – can't be discounted. Additionally, the north-south divide is strong and even elections might not end the crisis.

But, unless fighting breaks out again, the biggest concern is crime. Poverty and unemployment are rampant and there is no shortage of guns. Armed robberies and carjackings are common, as are grab-and-run street crimes. Do not display jewellery, cash or cameras and always take a taxi at night.

Security checkpoints are frequent in the north and south, particularly near the Zone of Confidence and on the outskirts of cities. Soldiers inspect documents and frequently demand money or cigarettes. These encounters can be friendly or tense. Either way, just remain calm, talk with them, and hand over what they ask for – usually CFA500.

Travelling around the north without proper paperwork from rebel leaders (the Abidjan rebel headquarters is at the Hôtel du Golf) is foolish. Even when their documents are in order, Westerners are greeted with suspicion, especially in Bouaké.

Finally, take care at the beach. The Atlantic has fierce currents and a ripping undertow and people drown every year; often strong, overly confident swimmers. Heed local advice.

For assessment of Abidjan's security risks, see p267.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Ivorian Embassies & Consulates

In West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire has embassies in Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Nigeria, Liberia and Burkina Faso. For details see the relevant country chapter. Elsewhere, Côte d'Ivoire has the following embassies: **Belgium** (☎ 02-661 34 50; mailbox@ambcibnl.be; 234 Ave Franklin-Roosevelt, Brussels 1050) **Canada** (☎ 613-236 9919; www.ambaci-ottawa.org; 9 Marlborough Ave, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 8E6) **France** (☎ 01-53 64 62 62; bureco-fr@cotedivoire.com; 102 Ave R-Poincaré, Paris 75116)

Germany (☎ 0228-26 30 45; Clausewitz St 7, Berlin 10629)

UK (☎ 020-7201 9601; 2 Upper Belgrave St, London SW1X 8BJ)

USA (☎ 202-797-0300; 2424 Massachusetts Ave, Washington DC, NW, 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Côte d'Ivoire

The following embassies and consulates in Abidjan are mostly in Le Plateau, unless otherwise indicated:

Belgium (Map p268; ☎ 20-219316; abidjan@diplomel.org; Immeuble Alliance, Ave Terrasson des Fougères 01; ☎ 8.30am-11.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Assists Dutch nationals.

Benin (Map p266; ☎ 22-414413; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateaux; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Burkina Faso (Map p268; ☎ 20-211501; Ave Terrasson de Fougères; ☎ 8.30am-1pm Mon-Fri) Also a consulate in Bouaké.

Cameroun (Map p268; ☎ 20-212086; 3rd fl, Immeuble le Général, Rue du Commerce; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

Canada (Map p268; ☎ 20-300700; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/abidjan; Immeuble Trade Centre, 23 Ave Nogues; ☎ 7.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu, to 1pm Wed, to 12.30pm Fri) Assists Australian nationals.

France (Map p268; ☎ 20-200404; www.ambafrance-ci.org; 17 Rue Lecoquer; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 1pm Fri)

Germany (Map p266; ☎ 22-442030; www.abidjan.diplo.de; 39 Blvd Hassan II, Cocody; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri)

Ghana (Map p266; ☎ 22-410288; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateaux; ☎ 8.30am-1pm Mon-Fri)

Guinea (Map p268; ☎ 20-329494; Immeuble Crossover Duplessis, Ave Crossover Duplessis; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1pm Fri)

Liberia (Map p268; ☎ 20-324636; Immeuble Taleb, Ave Delafosse; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri)

Mali (Map p268; ☎ 20-311570; Maison du Mali, Rue du Commerce; ☎ 7.30am-noon Mon-Fri) Also a consulate in Bouaké.

Niger (Map p266; ☎ 21-262814; Blvd Achalma, Marcory; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Nigeria (Map p268; ☎ 20-211982; Blvd de la République; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Senegal (Map p268; ☎ 20-332876; Immeuble Nabil, off Rue du Commerce; ☎ 8.30am-1pm Mon-Fri)

Togo (Map p268; ☎ 20-320974; Immeuble Nabil, off Rue du Commerce; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri)

UK (Map p268; ☎ 20-226850; Immeuble les Harmonies, Blvd Carde) Operations were suspended on 1 April 2005. Services are now provided from Accra.

USA (☎ 22-494000; http://abidjan.usembassy.gov; Riviera Golf; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Côte d'Ivoire is rich in traditional festivals, though not all are being celebrated during the crisis. Some particularly exuberant ones include the following:

Fête de l'Abissa Held in Grand Bassam in October or November. A week-long, traditional carnival in which N'Zima people honour their dead and publicly exorcise evil spirits. Travellers can join in some parts of the celebration.

Fête des Harristes Held in Bregbo near Bingerville, 15km east of Abidjan, on 1 November, this is a major annual Harrist festival. Harrists have a 'born again' amalgam of Christianity and traditional beliefs. Their founder was William Wade Harris, who in 1913 began a preaching journey, walking barefoot from Liberia, through the Ivory Coast and on into the Gold Coast (modern Ghana).

Fêtes des Masques Masks are an integral part of Dan society, serving as the community's collective memory and embodying a divine energy. The annual Fêtes des Masques in February, held in the villages around Man, brings together a great variety of masks and dances from the area.

Fête du Dipri Held in Gomon in April, 100km northwest of Abidjan. At midnight, naked women and children carry out nocturnal rites to rid the village of evil incantations. Before dawn the village chief appears to the sound of drums, and villagers are sent into a trance. An animated frenzy carries on throughout the following day.

Le Carnaval de Bouaké This weeklong celebration of friendship and life in March is one of Africa's largest carnivals.

HOLIDAYS

For more information on Islamic holidays, see p18. Public holidays in Côte d'Ivoire include the following:

New Year's Day 1 January

Easter March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Independence Day 7 August

Assumption Day 15 August

All Saints' Day 1 November

Fête de la Paix 15 November

Christmas Day 25 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Most cities in government territory have cybercafés, though outside Abidjan, connections can be slow and unreliable.

INTERNET RESOURCES

A good news source, if you read French, is www.abidjan.net.

LANGUAGE

French is the official language and widely spoken. In Abidjan and other towns that used to get tourists, some people speak English. Principal African languages include Mande and Malinké in the northwest; Dan/Yacouba in the area around Man; Senoufo in and around Korhogo; Boulou and Agni in the centre and south; and Dioula, the market language, everywhere. See p861 for useful phrases in French, Dioula, Senoufo and Dan.

MAPS

The Michelin 1:800,000 map gives the best coverage of Côte d'Ivoire.

MONEY

Endeavour to bring a Visa card and euros, otherwise you'll find obtaining CFA costly and time consuming in Abidjan, and nearly impossible most other places. Change as much as you can in Abidjan because rates are better than anywhere else. Banks for changing money include Bicici (Banque Internationale pour le Commerce et l'Industrie en Côte d'Ivoire), BIAO (Banque Internationale pour l'Afrique Occidentale), Sgbc (Société Générale de Banques en Côte d'Ivoire), Cobaci (Compagnie Bancaire de l'Atlantique – Côte d'Ivoire) and Citibank. You can also change euros commission-free at most hotels and many shops. There are no banks in rebel territory.

You won't be able to pay with credit cards very often (and when you can, make sure the transaction is completed electronically in front of you – fraud is a growing problem), but Sgbc and Bicici have ATMs in Abidjan, San Pédro and Yamoussoukro that reliably provide holders of Visa cards with CFA. Commission charged on travellers cheques varies significantly from bank to bank.

In Abidjan there is a black market for changing US dollars; however, you shouldn't use it unless a local friend makes the introduction as most of these guys are hustlers and there is a lot of counterfeit money floating around these days. Moneychangers in the north prefer dollars over euros.

TELEPHONE

There are CI Telecom offices in major towns, but calls from private *télécentres* and cybercafés are cheaper – calls to USA/Europe/

Australia can be as low as CFA75/100/200 per minute in Abidjan. Phonecards are also handy and if you have a GSM mobile phone, you can buy a SIM card for as low as CFA5000.

VISAS

Everyone except nationals of Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States) and US citizens need a visa. Visas are usually valid for three months and are good for visits of up to one month. The cost varies quite substantially depending on your nationality and where you are applying for it. You can't get a visa at the border or the airport.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be extended at **La Sureté Nationale** (Police de l'Air et des Frontières; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-5pm) near the main post office in Le Plateau in Abidjan. An extension, valid for up to three months, costs CFA20,000 (plus two photos) and is ready the same day if you apply early.

Visas for Onward Travel

In Côte d'Ivoire, you can get visas for the following neighbouring countries.

BURKINA FASO

Three-month single-/multiple-entry visas cost CFA25,000/30,000 and require two photos. They are usually issued the same day. A consulate in Bouaké also issues visas.

GHANA

Four photos, CFA15,000 and 24 hours are required of most nationalities for one-month single-entry visas.

GUINEA

One-month single-entry visas cost CFA32,000 for most nationalities, though Americans pay CFA55,000. Everyone pays CFA96,000 for three-month multiple-entry. You need three photos and visas might be ready the same day if you get there early.

LIBERIA

One-month single-entry visas, issued the same day, cost CFA27,000 for most nationalities. Multiple-entry visas are good for a year and cost CFA57,000. You need two photos.

MALI

For most nationalities, one-month single-entry visas cost CFA20,000, three-month

multiple entry visas cost CFA40,000, and one-year multiple-entry visas cost CFA60,000. Americans are charged \$100. You must bring one photo and a letter detailing your reason for visiting Mali and can pick up your visa within 24 hours. A consulate in Bouaké also issues visas.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

With the possible exception of persistent men at the few coastal resorts, women travellers are unlikely to meet with special hassles. For more general information and advice, see p828.

TRANSPORT IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering Côte d'Ivoire

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is mandatory and will be requested when applying for a visa and on arrival.

Air

Port Bouët is Côte d'Ivoire's only international airport. Ignore the touts who offer to speed you through passport control and customs, and if someone is picking you up, make sure the person holding the sign with your name is really who they say they are.

Airlines servicing Côte d'Ivoire and with offices in Abidjan include the following:

Afriqiyah Airways (8U; Map p268; ☎ 20-338785; www.afriqiyah.aero; Abidjan Universel Voyages, Crosse Duplessis, Le Plateau) Hub: Tripoli.

Air Algérie (AH; Map p268; ☎ 20-325651; www.airalgerie.dz; Ave Houdaille) Hub: Algiers.

Air Burkina (2J; Map p268; ☎ 20-328919; www.air-burkina.com; Ave Houdaille, Le Plateau) Hub: Ouagadougou.

Air France (AF; Map p268; ☎ 20-202424; www.airfrance.com; Immeuble Kharrat, Rue Nogués, Le Plateau) Hub: Charles de Gaulle, Paris.

Air Gabon (GN; Map p268; ☎ 20-215506; Ave Delafosse) Hub: Leon M'ba International Airport, Libreville.

Air Ivoire (VU; Map p268; ☎ 20-251561; www.airivoire.com; Immeuble Le République, Place de la République) Hub: Abidjan International Airport, Abidjan.

Air Mauritanie (MR; Map p268; ☎ 20-320991; www.airmauritanie.mr; Immeuble du Mali, Rue du Commerce) Hub: Nouakchott.

Air Sénégal International (V7; Map p268; ☎ 20-302380; www.air-senegal-international.com; Ave Chardy) Hub: Dakar.

Bellview Airlines (B3; Map p268; ☎ 20-320714; www.flybellviewair.com; Immeuble l'Amiral, Rue du Commerce) Hub: Lagos.

Benin Golf Air (A8; ☎ 20-338887; www.beningolfair.com) Hub: Cotonou.

Cameroon Airlines (UY; Map p268; ☎ 20-211919; www.cameroon-airlines.com; Immeuble l'Amiral, Rue du Commerce) Hub: Douala.

Ethiopian Airlines (ET; Map p268; ☎ 20-215284; www.flyethiopian.com; Ave Chardy, Le Plateau) Hub: Addis Ababa.

Kenya Airways (KQ; Map p268; ☎ 20-320767; www.kenya-airways.com; Immeuble Jeceda, Blvd de la République, Le Plateau) Hub: Nairobi.

Middle East Airlines (ME; Map p268; ☎ 20-226282; www.mea.com.lb; Blvd Delafosse) Hub: Beirut.

Royal Air Maroc (AT; Map p268; ☎ 20-212811; www.royalairmaroc.com; Immeuble Le Paris, Blvd Botreau Rousset) Hub: Casablanca.

Slok Air (SO; Map p271; ☎ 21-248867; www.slokairstinternational.com; Immeuble les Dunes, Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Treichville) Hub: Banjul.

SN Brussels (SN; Map p271; ☎ 21-232345; www.flysn.com; behind Supermarché Cap Sud, off Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Treichville) Hub: Brussels.

South African Airways (SA; Map p268; ☎ 20-218280; www.flysaa.com; Immeuble Jeceda, Blvd de la République, Le Plateau) Hub: Johannesburg.

Tunisair (TU; Map p268; ☎ 20-224542; www.tunisair.com; Immeuble Nebil, Rue du Commerce, Le Plateau) Hub: Tunis.

Weasua Air Transport (XA; ☎ 21-586981) Hub: Monrovia.

AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST

Elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East you can get direct to Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Algiers (Algeria), Beirut (Lebanon), Casablanca (Morocco), Johannesburg (South Africa), Libreville (Gabon), Nairobi (Kenya), Tripoli (Libya) and Tunis (Tunisia).

EUROPE

The cheapest flights from Europe are out of Paris and can come as low as €350/€600 one-way/return. Air France and Air Ivoire fly nonstop from Paris though the best price usually comes with a change of planes in Marseille. Other airlines, including Air Sénégal International, Royal Air Maroc and Tunisair, have convenient connections between Paris and Abidjan through their African hubs. SN Brussels fly nonstop from Brussels for around €850 return.

REGIONAL FLIGHTS FROM ABIDJAN

Destination	Flights per week	Airline	One-way/return fare (CFA)
Accra (Ghana)	18	Air Ivoire, Air Sénégal International, Bellview Airlines, Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways	99,000/132,000
Bamako (Mali)	14	Air Ivoire, Air Mauritanie, Air Sénégal International, Benin Golf Air, Cameroon Airlines, Slok Air, Tunisair	112,000/189,000
Banjul (The Gambia)	1	Slok Air	213,000/272,000
Conakry (Guinea)	7	Air Ivoire, Bellview Airlines, Slok Air	123,000/147,000
Cotonou (Benin)	15	Afriqiyah Airways, Air Ivoire, Air Mauritanie, Air Sénégal International, Benin Golf Air	91,000/133,000
Dakar (Senegal)	15	Air Gabon, Air Ivoire, Air Mauritanie, Air Sénégal International, Bellview Airlines, Benin Golf Air, Cameroon Airlines, Slok Air	117,000/183,000
Douala (Cameroon)	9	Air Ivoire, Cameroon Airlines, Kenya Airways	226,000/290,000
Freetown (Sierra Leone)	3	Bellview Airlines, SN Brussels	278,000/392,000
Lagos (Nigeria)	9	Bellview Airlines, Cameroon Airlines, Middle East Airlines	94,000/164,000
Lomé (Togo)	10	Air Ivoire, Benin Golf Air, Air Sénégal International	88,000/135,000
Monrovia (Liberia)	4	Bellview Airlines, Weasua Air Transport	117,000/186,000
Niamey (Niger)	3	Air Burkina, Air Ivoire	183,000/273,000
Nouakchott (Mauritania)	3	Air Mauritanie	209,000/254,000
Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)	6	Air Burkina, Air Ivoire,	129,000/284,000
Yaoundé (Cameroon)	1	Cameroon Airlines	289,000/423,000

Prices are approximate.

NORTH AMERICA & AUSTRALASIA

There are no direct flights from North America or Australia. A return flight from New York via Paris with Air France or via Casablanca with Royal Air Maroc in the low/high season is about US\$1250/1450. If you can find a deal on the trans-Atlantic leg of the trip, it's usually cheaper to buy a ticket to Europe and then a separate discounted ticket onward from there. Doing it this way might cost as little as US\$1000 from the east coast. Best bet from Australia is through Johannesburg with South African Airways: a return will cost around A\$3000.

The table above details regional flights.

Land

At the time of research all borders were open, though this is subject to change based on the situation on the ground at any particular time.

BURKINA FASO

The route to Burkina Faso through Ouagadougou is sealed all the way, and there is

still regular bus and bush taxi traffic to/from Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou, but it would be foolish to take any of them until the crisis ends. The train still runs to Ouagadougou, but only for cattle and cargo.

GHANA

The coastal road connecting Abidjan to Ghana is sealed and still in pretty good condition. The most reliable bus service to Accra is STC which has its own bus station south of Treichville and charges CFA18,000. Also decent are STIF and UTB, departing from Gare Routière d'Adjamé and charging CFA20,000. Each company charges CFA300 per kilogram for luggage (the final total is subject to bargaining) and possibly a CFA1000 whip-round at the border (at Noé) to cover bribes to border officials. Tickets should be purchased a day in advance because the buses are usually full and you should get to the station at least 45 minutes before departure to guarantee your seat.

It is faster to go to by bush taxi from the Gare de Bassam in Abidjan, even though it

will involve walking across the border and changing cars. A seat to Noé costs CFA5000 and then it is about another 100,000 cedi to Accra.

The border crossings further north near Agnibilékrou and Bouna should be considered off limits to travellers for the time being.

GUINEA

The most frequently travelled route to Guinea is between Man and N'zérékoré, either through Danané and Nzo or Biankouma and Sipilou. By bush taxi it is quicker to use the later route. Roads on both are bad. Do not set off on this trip without first getting clearance from the rebel authorities in Man. Though it is off limits to travellers, bush taxis also link Odienné and Sinko, which is where most traffic headed to Kankan goes because the more direct route through Mandiana is nearly impassable.

LIBERIA

The main route is from Danané to Ganta via Sanniquellie. Minibuses sometimes make the quick hop from Danané to the border at Gbé-Nda (border fees will set you back about \$20), but you may have to hitch. On the Liberian side there is a daily bush taxi (charging about CFA3000) on to Sanniquellie. A bus takes this route from Abidjan to Monrovia (around CFA25,000) several times a week.

The coastal route, between Tabou and Harper, is impractical, though adventurous. Bush taxis travel to the border at the Cavally River (crossed by boat) in both directions daily, but beyond Harper the journey to Monrovia is difficult enough (it takes two to three days with a 4WD in the dry season) that residents of Harper going to the capital sometimes cross into Côte d'Ivoire and use the Danané route.

MALI

The routes to Bamako via Ferkessédougou or Odienné are sealed all the way, and buses and bush taxis still run from Abidjan, Yamoussoukro and Bouaké; but until the crisis is over, it would be unwise for a traveller to be on any of them.

GETTING AROUND

Because of all the hassles, locals aren't travelling as much as they used to, and consequently there is less transport available; however, all sizable towns, even those in the north, are still connected. But, unless things change, travel to the north by public transport is unwise. Also note that security checkpoints make estimating travel times impossible. A bush taxi from Abidjan to Sassandra, for instance, can take anywhere from five to ten hours depending on how the stops go.

Air

Sophia Airlines (☎ 34-713434) flies daily except Sunday between Abidjan and San Pédro for CFA75,000/140,000 one-way/return.

Bus

The country's large, relatively modern *cars* (buses) are around the same price and are significantly more comfortable than bush taxis or minibuses. Most have fixed departure times and don't charge extra for luggage. Before all the security checkpoints were initiated, they used to take the same time as bush taxis, but are now usually much slower.

Bush Taxi & Minibus

Bush taxis (ageing Peugeot or covered pickups, known as *bâchés*) and minibuses cover major towns and outlying communities not served by the large buses. They leave at all hours of the day, but only when full so long waits may be required. While they are usually not as comfortable as the buses, they generally cover the same routes faster.

Car & Motorcycle

Côte d'Ivoire used to have one of the best road systems in Africa, but most paved roads are deteriorating, in particular the highway between Sassandra and San Pédro which now takes three hours to traverse. The highway linking Abidjan to Yamoussoukro remains good. But checkpoints, rather than potholes are the biggest hassle.

Tours

The Abidjan travel agencies listed (p267) lead personalized tours throughout government territory.

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