

Libya

Libya is everything you could want a Middle Eastern destination to be.

First and foremost, it's a crossroads of history, continents and ancient empires, home to the Mediterranean's richest store of Roman and Greek cities – Sabratha, Cyrene and, above all, Leptis Magna – each of which is overlaid by remnants of Byzantine splendour. It's a place where history comes alive through the extraordinary monuments on its shores. Every corner of cosmopolitan Tripoli resonates with a different period of history. It's where the Sahara meets the Mediterranean.

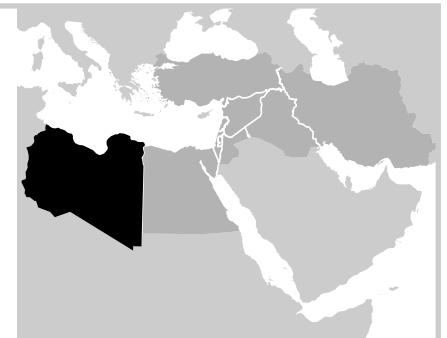
Libya is also home to the Middle East's most exceptional and accessible desert scenery. The Sahara engulfs over 90% of the country, offering up vast sand seas the size of small European countries. Visit the enchanting oasis towns of Ghadames and Ghat where the caravans once showcased the riches of Africa. Marvel at palm-fringed lakes surrounded by sand dunes in the desert's heart. Be bewitched by extinct volcanoes, such as Waw al-Namus, where black sand encircles multicoloured lakes. Go deeper into the desert and experience Jebel Acacus, one of the world's finest open-air galleries of prehistoric rock art.

One important point to note is that visits to Libya can only be made as part of an organised tour. While independent travellers may prefer the chance to go it alone, remember that Libya is a vast country and on a tour you'll be able to cover so much more territory than you otherwise could. Remember also that organised groups can be as small as a party of one and with most tour companies you can design your own itinerary.

Until recently, Libya was the Middle East's best-kept secret. Now riding an exciting wave of optimism and openness, Libya is a place that will live long in the memory.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 1,759,540 sq km
- **Capital** Tripoli
- **Country code** ☎ 218
- **Languages** Arabic, Berber
- **Money** Libyan dinar (LD);
US\$1 = 1.27LD; €1 = 1.50LD
- **Official name** Great Socialist People's
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (GSPLAJ)
- **Population** 5,499,074



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Leptis Magna** (p479) One of the world's best-preserved Roman cities with exceptional baths complexes, theatres, forums and a stunning seaside location.
- **Jebel Acacus** (p498) Striking mountain range, home to the indigenous Tuareg and some magnificent 12,000-year-old rock art.
- **Ghadames** (p491) A labyrinthine, palm-fringed old city and the most enchanting caravan post in the Sahara.
- **Tripoli** (p473) Delightful whitewashed medina replete with Ottoman mosques and houses and the world-class Jamahiriya Museum.
- **Waw al-Namus** (p498) Remote volcanic crater, off the beaten track in the heart of the Sahara, with black sand and red, green and blue lakes.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Libya is at its best in November and from February to April. Because of the lack of natural barriers, both the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea affect the country's climate. In summer it's generally very hot with average temperatures on the coast of around 30°C, often accompanied by high humidity. Don't even think of going into the desert from late May until October, when temperatures can reach a sweltering 55°C. At other times, desert nights can drop below freezing. Also see Climate Charts, p643.

HOW MUCH?

- **Museum admission** 3LD
- **Tripoli-Sebha flight** 37.50LD
- **Colonel Gaddafi watch** 5LD to 40LD
- **Internet connection (one hour)** 1LD
- **4WD hire per day** 90LD

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 0.11LD
- **Litre of bottled water** 1LD
- **Bottle of beer** 1.50LD
- **Souvenir T-shirt** 11LD
- **Shwarma** 1LD

HISTORY

Throughout history Libya has been blighted by its geography, lying in the path of invading empires and someone else's war.

The Great Civilisations of the Mediterranean

From 700 BC Lebdah (Leptis), Oea (Tripoli) and Sabratha formed links in a chain of safe Phoenician (Punic) ports stretching from the Levant to Spain. Traces of the Phoenician presence remain at Sabratha and Leptis Magna.

On the advice of the Oracle of Delphi, in 631 BC Greek settlers established the city of Cyrene in the east of Libya. Within 200 years the Greeks had built four more cities of splendour as part of the Pentapolis (Five Cities), which included Ptolemais (Tolmeita) and Apollonia. But with Greek influence on the wane, the last Greek ruler, Ptolemy Apion, finally bequeathed the region of Cyrenaica to Rome in 75 BC.

Meanwhile in the west, the fall of the Punic capital at Carthage (in Tunisia) prompted Julius Caesar to formally annex Tripolitania in 46 BC. The Pax Romana saw Tripolitania and Cyrenaica become prosperous Roman provinces – Tripolitania was a major source of Rome's olive oil. Such was Libya's importance that a Libyan, Septimus Severus, became Rome's emperor (r AD 193–211; see p480). A massive earthquake in AD 365 sealed the fate of the Libyan colonies.

The Garamantes Empire of the Fezzan

While Europe's empires were battling over the Mediterranean littoral, an enlightened and longer-surviving indigenous empire, the Garamantes, held sway over southern Libya.

A legendary, warlike, nomadic people, the Garamantes nonetheless built sophisticated settlements and for centuries mastered the desert's most precious resource – water – by utilising hundreds of *foggara* (underground channels). The community, a loosely connected confederation of tribes centred on Garama (now Germa), is credited with introducing writing, horses, wheeled-transport and camels to the Sahara and also controlled many of the ancient caravan routes across the Sahara. By AD 500 the last of the Garamantes people disappeared from Garama and from history when underground water supplies dried up.

Islamic Libya

In AD 533 Byzantine armies captured Libya for Emperor Justinian. With tenuous and unpopular Byzantine control over Libya restricted to a few poorly defended coastal strongholds, the Arab horsemen of the Islamic armies encountered little resistance and by 643 had taken Tripoli and Cyrenaica.

From 800 the Abbasid-appointed emirs of the Aghlabid dynasty took their custodianship of Libya seriously, repairing Roman irrigation systems, restoring order and bringing a measure of prosperity to the region.

After Libya's flirtation with Sunnism, the Shiite Fatimid rulers in Cairo sent two tribes from the Arabian Peninsula into the Maghreb. The Bani Salim settled in Libya, particularly in Cyrenaica, while the Bani Hilal, numbering up to 200,000 families, spread across North Africa. The destruction of Cyrene and Tripoli by this unstoppable mass migration was the most effective conquest Libya had seen. The Berber tribespeople were displaced from their traditional lands and the new settlers finally cemented the cultural and linguistic Arabisation of the region.

Ottoman & Italian Rule

Tripoli was occupied by the Ottomans in 1551. The soldiers sent by the sultan to support the Ottoman pasha (governor) grew powerful and cavalry officer Ahmed Karamanli seized power in 1711. His Karamanli dynasty would last 124 years, ruling from Tripoli's Al-Saraya al-Hamma. The Ottoman Turks finally reined in their erstwhile protégés in 1835 and resumed direct control over much of Libya.

The Sanusi Movement, led by Islamic cleric Sayyid Mohammed Ali as-Sanusi, called on the Cyrenaican people to resist Ottoman rule. The Grand Sanusi established his headquarters at Al-Jaghbug (and then later Al-Kufra) while his *ikhwan* (followers) set up *zawiyas* (religious colleges or monasteries) across North Africa and brought some stability to regions not known for their submission to central authority.

With Ottoman control tenuous at best, the Italian government sensed an opportunity. On 3 October 1911 the Italians attacked Tripoli claiming somewhat disingenuously to be liberating Libya from Ottoman rule. The Ottoman sultan had more important concerns and ceded Libya to the Italians.

In 1922 Mussolini announced the *Riconquista* of Libya. In response the legendary Sanusi sheikh Omar al-Mukhtar became the leader of the uprising against Italian rule in Cyrenaica. He was still fighting at the age of 73, before being captured and hanged in Benghazi in front of his followers in 1931.

Italy's Libya policy plumbed new depths of oppression. More than 100,000 people ended up in concentration camps in eastern Libya where up to 80,000 died in squalid conditions. Some 95% of Libyan livestock was also killed. The wholesale massacring of civilians fleeing Al-Kufra was the final outrage of a ruthless occupation. A quarter of Libya's population died during the almost three decades of Italian occupation.

By 1934 Italian control extended into the Fezzan, and in 1938 to 1939 Mussolini sought to fully colonise Libya, introducing 30,000 Italian settlers, which brought their numbers to more than 100,000 (proportionally more than the French settlers in neighbouring Algeria).

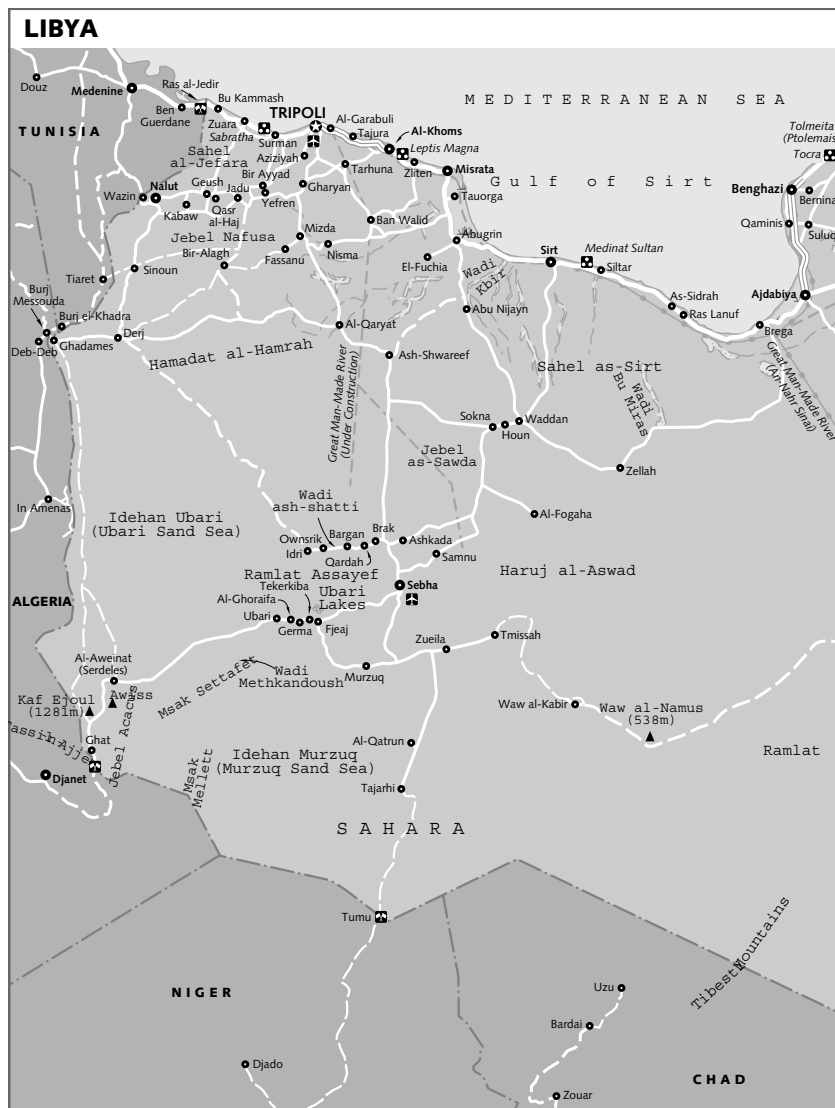
With the onset of WWII, devastating fighting broke out in the area around Tobruk. By January 1943 Tripoli was in British hands and by February the last German and Italian soldiers were driven from Libya.

In November 1949 the UN General Assembly approved the formation of an independent state. On 24 December 1951 the independent United Kingdom of Libya, with King Idris as its monarch, was finally proclaimed by the National Assembly.

Gaddafi's Libya

Libya's fortunes were transformed by the discovery of oil in 1959 at Zelten in Cyrenaica. By early 1960, 35 wells had been sunk nationwide and international oil companies clamoured to obtain exploration rights in Libya, much as they do today. Over the decade that followed, Libya was transformed from an economic backwater into one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

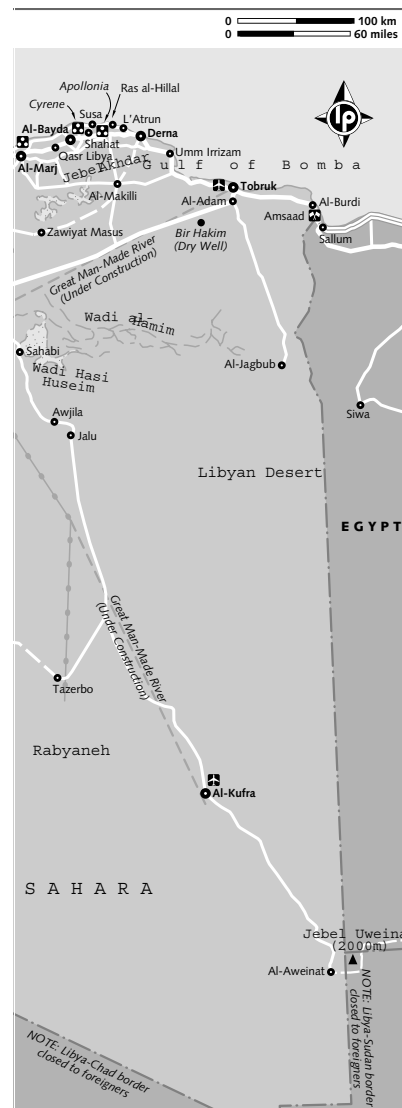
With nationwide political trends coalescing around the devastating 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the charisma of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, it came as no great surprise when a Revolutionary Command Council, led by a little-known but charismatic 27-year-old Mu'ammer Gaddafi, seized power in Libya on 1 September 1969.



Riding on a wave of anti-imperialist anger, the new leader closed British and American military bases, expanded the armed forces and closed all newspapers, churches and political parties. Some 30,000 Italian settlers were deported and their assets expropriated. The new government injected massive funds into agriculture and

long-overdue development programmes with a concomitant rise in the standard of living of ordinary Libyans.

In the mid-1970s Colonel Gaddafi retreated into the desert for a period of reflection. He re-emerged clutching his Third Universal Theory, spelled out in *The Green Book*. Central to its philosophy was the



aim of political participation by all Libyans rather than a representative system. Less savoury were the Revolutionary Committees who became famous for assassinating political opponents throughout Europe. Their takeover of the Libyan People's Bureau in 1984 confirmed Libya's increasing international isolation.

The US accused Libya of involvement in a string of terrorist attacks across Europe and on 15 April 1986, the US navy fired missiles into Tripoli and Benghazi. Up to 100 people were killed in Tripoli and around 30 in Benghazi. Two of Gaddafi's sons were injured and his adopted daughter, Hanna, was killed.

After Libyan agents were charged with the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie and the 1989 explosion of a French UTA airliner over the Sahara, UN sanctions came into effect. Finally, in early 1999, a deal was brokered and the suspects were handed over for trial by Scottish judges in The Hague. The sanctions, which had cost Libya over US\$30 billion in lost revenues and production capacities, were immediately lifted.

Libya Today

When Colonel Gaddafi's urbane, Western-educated and media-savvy son Seif al-Islam al-Gaddafi told the Davos 2005 World Economic Forum that 'the old times are finished', you could almost hear the collective sigh of relief from Libyans. Libya today is like a country awakening from a nightmare. Years of tortuous negotiations yielded a solution of sorts to the Lockerbie crisis with Libya agreeing to pay billions of dollars in compensation to families of the victims. Libya's announcement on 19 December 2003 that it would abandon its chemical and nuclear weapons programmes finally ended its international isolation. Suddenly, Libya was the West's best friend, held up as an example to so-called rogue states across the region.

World leaders have since flocked to Libya, the US has announced plans to reopen its embassy in Tripoli and Western businesspeople are clamouring for lucrative oil contracts. The Libyan government has promised far-reaching economic reforms as part of its plans to overhaul Libya's moribund economy.

The only shadow over Libya's future is uncertainty over who will lead Libya after Colonel Gaddafi. Two of his sons – Seif al-Islam and Al-Saadi, who plays soccer for Perugia in Italy – are the most likely candidates. Libyans prefer to hold fast to Colonel Gaddafi's public rejection of a dynasty and his statement that 'all Libyans will be president'.

MU'AMMAR GADDAFI – MAN OR MYTH?

Libya's self-proclaimed 'Leader of the Masses' has been called just about every name under the sun. Ronald Reagan decided that the Libyan leader was a 'mad dog'. Yasser Arafat dubbed him the 'knight of the revolutionary phrases'. To trendy young Libyans in Tripoli, their leader is known simply as 'the man'.

Colonel Gaddafi was born in 1942 in the desert near Sirt to poor Bedouin parents. The future leader of the revolution was a serious, pious child who attended primary school in Sirt until the age of 14 and became the first member of his family to learn to read and write. His childhood was difficult, with reports that he was ridiculed by his classmates because of his impoverished background.

Stung by these experiences, and caught up in the Arab nationalist fervour of the day, Gaddafi was politically active from an early age. After attending secondary school for a time in Sebha, he was expelled because of his political activities. In 1961 he organised a demonstration against Syria for breaking the unity agreement with Egypt and proceeded to a military academy in Benghazi, from which he graduated in 1965. In 1966 he went to England for further training – a difficult experience for the young Libyan and he quickly became embittered by the racial discrimination and prejudice he suffered.

Apart from his alternately eccentric and revolutionary behaviour, it is for his remarkable survival skills that Gaddafi will be most remembered. His capacity to recover from bitter defeats (domestic opposition, the war with Chad and vilification by the West) and reinvent himself (eg as the saviour of Africa) is central to his endurance. As are, of course, his female bodyguards.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

In some ways, Libyans are everything that Colonel Gaddafi isn't – reserved, famed for their tolerance, and discreet. They are self-sufficient and wonderful improvisers, characteristics fostered during the long years of sanctions. They are open to outsiders, as devoid of hostility to the West as they are hospitable, and summed up the Libyan saying: 'if you have a good heart, one spoon can feed 100 people'. Libyans are also deeply attached to their land, proud of it and even loathe to leave it, especially at such an exciting time in their history. Libyans never forget where they came from, whether it be their home village or the dark years of isolation. Surprisingly knowledgeable about the world, they remain refreshingly untouched by it. You'll often hear Libyans say, 'we are a simple people', which is true only to the extent that the old ways of decency and generosity survive. But above all, for the first time in decades, Libyans are optimistic, convinced that the future is theirs.

Daily Life

Life revolves around the family, a bond that took on added significance during the years of international isolation when Libyan society turned inwards in search of company and support. Grafted onto the immedi-

ate family are multiple layers of identity, among them extended family, tribe and village, with an overarching national component of which every Libyan is proud. The nuclear family was traditionally large with numerous children, although some, mainly urban, Libyans now opt for a more manageable Western-style number of offspring.

Perhaps more than any other Arab country, the role of women also has many layers, with far-reaching laws safeguarding equality in this deeply traditional society. Libyan women nominally have equal status with men, from marriage and divorce laws to rights of equal pay in the workplace. Social safety nets, such as free medical care and education, were also provided by the state to all Libyans. The reality is somewhat different from the theory, with men still the predominant players of public life and few women reaching the summit of any industry. Traditional elements also remain – when guests arrive at someone's home, the men and women eat separately and the majority of women outside Tripoli and Benghazi wear traditional headscarves.

Population

With its vast territory inhabited by less than three people per square kilometre, Libya's population density is one of the lowest in the world. Over 70% of people live in urban

centres (some put the figure closer to 90%), in stark contrast to Libya's pre-oil days, when less than 25% lived in cities. Libya also has an overwhelmingly youthful population, with almost half under 15 years of age.

Libya's demographic mix is remarkably homogenous – 97% are of Arab or Berber origin, with many claiming mixed Arab and Berber ancestry due to intermarrying between the two communities.

The Tuareg (singular: Targi) are the indigenous people of the Sahara, the bearers of a proud desert culture whose members stretch across international boundaries into Algeria, Niger, Mali and Mauritania. The nation's 17,000 Tuareg are concentrated in the southwestern desert, particularly in the oases around Ghadames and Ghat, and have strong historical cross-border links.

Southeastern Libya is home to another nomadic community, the Toubou, thought to number about 2600. They were strongly influenced by the Sanusi Movement during the 19th century. Their homeland is the Tibesti Mountains and the area around Murzuq.

For more information, see p48.

Religion

More than 95% of Libya's population is Sunni Muslim with most following the Maliki school of Quranic interpretation. Founded by Malik ibn As, an Islamic judge who lived in Medina from AD 715 to 795, it is based on the practice that prevailed in Medina at the time. The Maliki strand of thought preaches

the primacy of the Quran (as opposed to later teachings) and tolerance. In this sense, orthodox Islam in modern Libya bears strong similarities to the Sanusi teachings.

ARTS

Literature

Libya has a strong literary tradition that has always been highly politicised. At first it was associated with resistance against the Italian occupation (Suleiman al-Baruni, Al-Usta Omar, Ahmed Qunaba and Alfagi Hassan) and later with the 1960s preoccupation with imperialism and the massive social change that Libya was experiencing (Khalifa Takbali and Yusuf al-Sharif).

After the 1969 revolution, writers were required to align themselves closely to the government. Ahmed Ibrahim al-Fagih and Mohammed al-Zawi, in particular, became the foremost intellectuals of this generation, although for outsiders their work blurs the line between fiction and propaganda.

Libya's best-known writer throughout the Arab world is Ibrahim al-Kouni whose works reveal a fascination with the desert. He has published eight volumes of short stories and a number of novels, including *The Magians* and *The Bleeding of the Stone*; the latter is a stirring ecological desert fable and is available in Fergiani's Bookshop (p471) in Tripoli.

A younger generation of Libyan writers has now emerged. Of the novelists, Khalifa Hussein Mustapha has come to prominence, while poetry is increasingly the

LIBYA'S FINEST ARCHITECTURE

- Leptis Magna (p479) – the finest surviving monuments to Roman civilisation in North Africa
- Cyrene (p485) – superbly located Greek and Roman city in the foothills of the Jebel Akhdar (Green Mountains)
- old city of Ghadames (p491) – arguably the best-preserved caravan town in the entire Sahara
- Ghat's medina (p498) – an enchanting, crumbling and compact mud-brick medina deep in the Sahara
- Tripoli's medina (p473) – the Ottoman heart of Libya's cosmopolitan capital, with richly decorated mosques and whitewashed homes
- Qasr al-Haj (p489), Nalut (p490) and Kabaw (p490) – fairy-tale and cavelike Berber fortified granaries
- Mausoleum & Mosque of Sidi Abdusalam (p481), Zliten – Libya's most dazzling example of modern Islamic architecture
- Old Town Hall (p482), Benghazi – the most elegant and decrepit example of colonial Italy's architectural largesse

preserve of voices such as Gillani Trebshan and Idris at-Tayeb. The voice of women is slowly coming to the fore in the short stories of Lutfiah Gabaydi and the poetry of Mariam Salame and Khadija Bsikri.

Music

One of the most famous traditional music forms in Libya is the celebratory *mriskaawi*, which came from Murzuq and forms the basis for the lyrics of many Libyan songs. *Malouf*, with its origins in Andalusia, involves a large group of seated revellers singing and reciting poetry of a religious nature or about love. Groups capable of performing the *malouf* are highly sought-after.

Libya's best-known singer of modern music is Mohammed Hassan whose music carries the heartfelt passion of Arab music elsewhere; it's the subject matter (always Libyan topics), rather than the style, that marks him as distinctively Libyan. Another male singer of note is Mohammed Sanini. Libya's best-loved female singer is Salmin Zarou.

One name to watch out for in the future is Ayman al-Aathar (see Arab Pop Idol, p78).

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Libya is the fourth-largest country in Africa, twice the size of Egypt and over half the size of the EU. Northwestern Libya (Tripolitania) contains the fertile Sahel al-Jefara (Jefara Plain), along Tripoli's narrow strip of Mediterranean coast. The plain rises to the formerly volcanic hills of the Jebel Nafusa with an average elevation of 600m to 900m.

LIBYA'S GEOGRAPHY: THE STATS

- length of Libya's Mediterranean coastline: 1770km
- proportion of country covered by desert: 95%
- proportion of Libya covered by sand dunes: 20%
- proportion of country covered by forest: 1%
- proportion of country suitable for agriculture: 1%
- number of permanent rivers or watercourses: zero

The hills give way to a series of east-west depressions that lead into the Fezzan.

In the Sahara, the *idehan* (sand seas) are interspersed with oases, lakes and wadis. The most dominant features of the Libyan Sahara include *hamada* (plateaus of rock scoured by wind erosion) and mountain ranges, such as the Jebel Acacus in the southwest and the larger massifs of the Tibesti along the border with Chad.

In Cyrenaica in the east, the low-lying terrain of the Sahara is separated from the northeastern coastline of Libya by the fertile Jebel Akhdar (Green Mountains), which drop steeply into the Mediterranean from a height of around 600m.

Wildlife

The prehistoric rock-paintings of the southern Sahara suggest that leopards, elephants and giraffes once roamed the region. Even 2500 years ago, elephants, lions, horned asses and bears were reported in Cyrenaica. Not surprisingly, none remains and Libya has few surviving species of mammal.

In desert regions, there are still gazelles in remote areas, and nocturnal fennecs (small foxes with large ears) can be glimpsed if you're lucky, as can the occasional wolves. Lizards, snakes and scorpions are also quite common. The shy waddans – large goatlike deer – can sometimes be seen hiding on the rocky ledges of the Jebel Acacus.

Environmental Issues

Some say the last decent, regular rainfalls in Libya stopped 8000 years ago. Underground water reserves have been Libya's only reliable water sources, with reservoirs of fresh, underground water preserved for millennia in porous rocks between impermeable layers. Colonel Gaddafi's brainchild in tapping these vast underground reserves is the Great Man-Made River, which pipes water from under the desert to Libya's thirsty coastal cities. Depending on your perspective, the project is either visionary or grossly irresponsible – the reserves are expected to last only for around 50 years. No-one knows the environmental side effects and supplies will be exhausted at around the same time that Libya is expected to run out of oil. For further details see p83.

Compounding concerns over the depletion of Libya's resources and the damage

caused to the environment is the fact that Libya depends completely on fossil fuels for its power needs. Some new tourist developments are being designed with solar power as the energy source, but this doesn't go far in terms of addressing Libya's energy imbalance.

Another major environmental problem for Libya is rubbish – lots of it. The fields littered with black plastic bags on the outskirts of most towns can somewhat diminish Libya's aesthetic appeal for many visitors.

FOOD & DRINK

If you're on a tight budget, the staple tourist diet consists of couscous and chicken in Tripolitania and the Fezzan, with rice replacing couscous in Cyrenaica. For a little variety, there are also macaroni-based dishes inspired by the Italians; vegetable stews and potatoes might be a recurring theme if you're lucky.

Tripoli, Benghazi and a few other cities have some wonderful restaurants serving dishes of great variety. Particular highlights are the seafood dishes at specialist fish restaurants in Tripoli.

Many restaurants will assume that you will have a banquet-style meal, which consists of soup, salad, a selection of meat (or fish)

THE BEST OF LIBYAN FOOD

It's a pity that few Libyan restaurants serve the delicious home-cooked foods that Libyans themselves eat at home. Here we recommend the local specialities that you may find on a restaurant menu (and where you may find them).

bourdim – meat slow-cooked in a sand pit; try this at Mat'am al-Najar or Mat'am al-Khayma (p479), both near Al-Khoms

fitaat – lentils, mutton and buckwheat pancakes cooked together in a tasty sauce in a low oven and eaten with the hands from a communal bowl – it's served in some of the old houses of Ghadames (see the boxed text, p494)

osban – a sheep's stomach cleaned out and filled with rice, herbs, liver, kidney and other meats, and steamed or boiled in a sauce; eat this at Mat'am ash-Sharq (p475) in Tripoli

rishda – delicately spiced vermicelli-style pasta noodles with chickpeas, tomatoes and caramelised onions can also be tried at Mat'am ash-Sharq (p475) in Tripoli

dishes, rice or couscous, a few vegetables and tea or coffee. In this book, the prices given for meals refer to these banquets.

Vegetarians should always specify their requirements as soon as they arrive in the restaurant. Tour companies should also be told in advance to help with planning. Remember that vegetarianism is rare in Libya, but most restaurants are obliging and keen to make sure you don't leave hungry.

For drinks, soft drinks and bottled mineral water will be your staples, along with coffee or tea. Nonalcoholic beer is also widely available.

TRIPOLI

طرابلس

📍 021 / pop 1.15 million

Set on one of North Africa's best natural harbours, Tripoli exudes a distinctive Mediterranean charm infused with a decidedly Arab-Islamic flavour. Tripoli (Al-Tarabulus in Arabic) is Libya's largest and most cosmopolitan city. With such a rich mosaic of historical influences – from Roman ruins and artefacts to the Ottoman-era medina – few travellers leave disappointed.

HISTORY

Tripoli has worn many guises throughout history. The Oea of Roman antiquity yielded to an Islamic city and by the end of the 17th century, Tripoli was Libya's only city of size with over 30,000 inhabitants. The disparate civilisations that have occupied Tripoli have all left their mark in this sophisticated modern city that beats with an ancient heart.

ORIENTATION

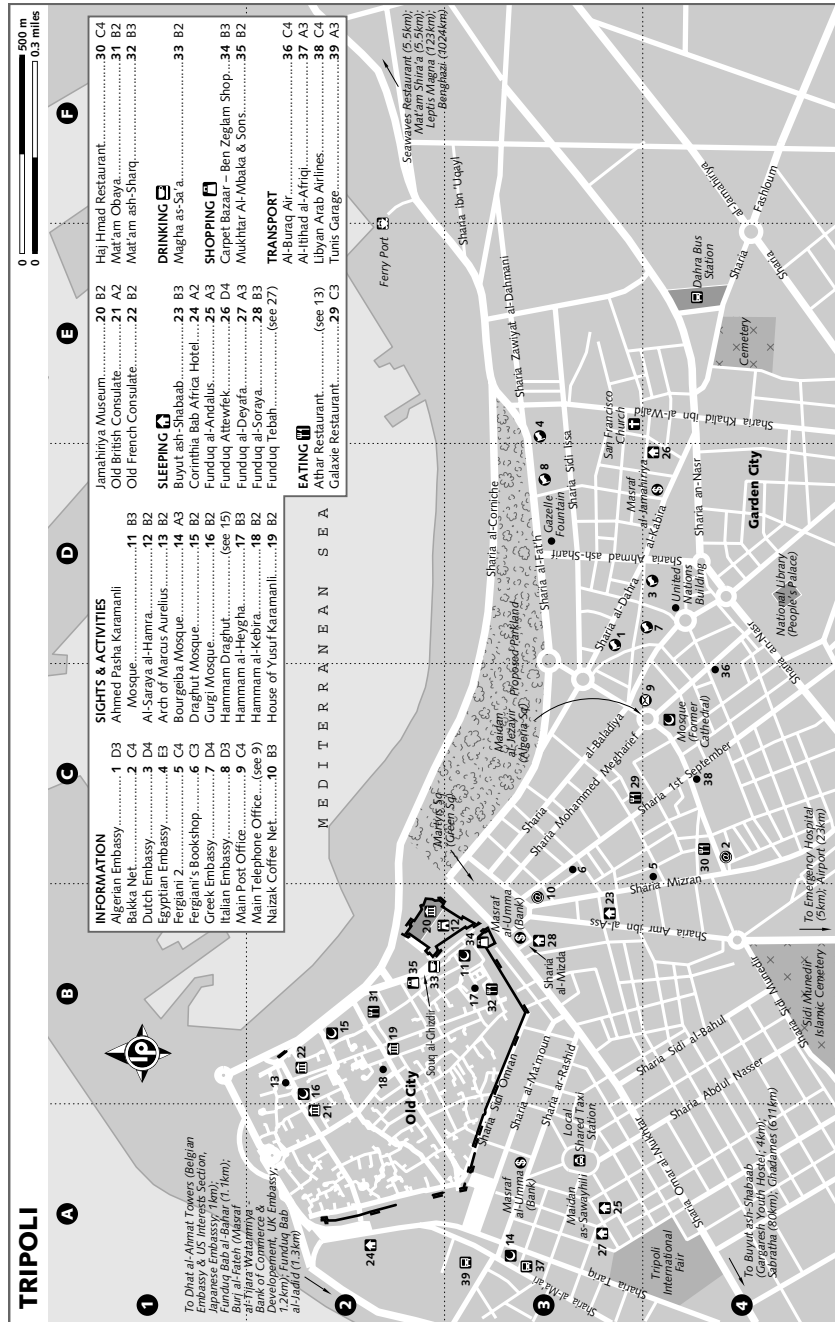
The city's most recognisable landmark is the castle, Al-Saraya al-Hamra, at the eastern corner of the medina beside the central Martyrs Sq (Green Sq). The main shopping and business streets radiate from the square.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Fergiani's Bookshop (☎ 4444873; fergi_u@hotmail.com; Sharia 1st September; 🕒 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Sat-Thu) An excellent selection of hard-to-find English-language books on Libya, good postcards and a smaller number of books in French and Italian.

Fergiani 2 (☎ 3330192; fergiani_b2@hotmail.com; 🕒 10am-2pm & 5-9pm Sat-Thu)



Emergency
Emergency Hospital (☎ 121)

Internet Access
Bakka Net (cnr Sharias Mizran & Haity; per hr 1LD; ☎ 8.30am-midnight Sat-Thu, 5pm-midnight Fri)
Naizak Coffee Net (☎ 0913216723; off Sharia 1st September; ☎ 9am-2am)

Money
The most easily accessible *masraf* (banks) are in the streets between Martyrs Sq and Maidan al-Jezayr (Algeria Sq). Masraf al-Tijara Watanmiya (Bank of Commerce & Development) has a branch on the ground floor of the Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 1 and the 1st floor of the Burj al-Fateh where you can obtain cash advances on your Visa card.

Post & Telephone
Main post office (Maidan al-Jezayr; ☎ 8am-10.30pm Sat-Thu) Has a reasonably efficient poste restante service.
Main telephone office (Maidan al-Jezayr; ☎ 8am-midnight) Inside the main hall there's a useful fax restante service (fax 3331199 or 3340040; 1LD), which is signed as 'Flash Fax'.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES
Few travellers encounter any difficulties in Tripoli and the most arduous task you're likely to encounter is finding your way in a city where most of the street signs are written in Arabic. If in doubt, ask a local to help out. One potential hazard is crossing those same streets.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES
Jamahiriya Museum & Al-Saraya al-Hamra (Tripoli Castle)
One of the Mediterranean's finest classical art collections is found in Tripoli's **Jamahiriya Museum** (☎ 3330292; Martyrs Sq; adult/child 3/1LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Sun). Built in consultation with Unesco, it's extremely well designed and provides a comprehensive overview of all periods of Libyan history.

If time is limited, you may want to restrict yourself to those galleries that provide context to the places you're most likely to visit. Most of the galleries are located on the ground floor, which covers, among other subjects: **Saharan rock art** (Gallery 4); the **Garamantian empire** of Wadi al-Hayat (Gallery 5); artefacts from **Cyrene** and **Greek Libya** (Galleries 7 and 8); and the excep-

TRIPOLI IN...

Two Days
You could easily spend a day exploring the medina, factoring in shopping time in the medina's southeastern corner. Not to be missed are the exceptional **mosques** (p474), the **Old British and French Consulates** (p474) and the **House of Yusuf Karamanli** (p474). Just outside the medina's walls, the **Jamahiriya Museum** (left) and **Al-Saraya al-Hamra** (left) could collectively occupy an entire morning. For the remainder of the second day, linger in a **teahouse** (p476) smoking nargileh, explore the attractive white Italianate architecture southeast of Martyrs Sq and seek out Tripoli's excellent **restaurants** (p475).

Four Days
If you have four days, you could do everything in the two-day itinerary and spend a day each at the outstanding Roman ruins of **Sabratha** (p477) and **Leptis Magna** (p479). Both are an easy day trip from the capital.

tional displays covering Roman **Leptis Magna** and **Sabratha** (Gallery 9). On the 2nd floor, the sections on **Islamic architecture** (Galleries 15 to 19) and the **Libyan ethnographic exhibits** (Gallery 20), with some fine sections on Ghadames, are also excellent.

The museum's only drawback is that most of the exhibits are labelled only in Arabic, although there are informative general descriptions in English. Taking a **guide** (50LD) will enhance your visit. If he's not already booked up, Dr Mustafa Turjman, who works with the **Department of Antiquities** (☎ 3333042), is outstanding.

The museum once formed part of the 13,000-sq-metre **Al-Saraya al-Hamra** (Tripoli Castle or Red Castle; ☎ 3330292; Martyrs Sq; adult/child 3/1LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Sun), which represented the seat of power in Tripolitania from the 7th until the 20th centuries. Tripoli Castle has a separate entrance.

Medina
Tripoli's whitewashed medina is an evocative place where modern Libya barely encroaches. The first fortified wall around the medina was built in the 4th century, while

further ramparts and reinforcements were added by subsequent occupiers to safeguard the city from seaborne attack. The layout follows the blueprint of the old Arab city and although much modified, its design has changed little. Most of the public buildings, houses and 38 mosques in the medina date from the Turkish period.

The **Arch of Marcus Aurelius**, the only intact remnant of the ancient Roman city of Oea, was completed in AD 163 to 164. It stood at the main crossroads of the Roman city and provided an entrance from the harbour. One reason for the preservation of the arch is that an ancient prophecy foretold terrible punishments for anyone who removed a stone.

The 19th-century **Gurgi Mosque**, the last mosque built in Tripoli under the Turks, has one of the most beautiful interiors in the city with imported marble pillars from Italy, ceramic tilework from Tunisia and intricate stone carvings from Morocco.

Near the mosque, the **Old British Consulate** (Sharia Hara Kebir; admission 2LD, camera/video 2/5LD; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu) housed Her Majesty's representatives from the second half of the 18th century until 1940. As well as diplomatic representation, the consul's representatives used their position to launch expeditions into the Sahara with an eye on lucrative trade routes. With a marble-paved courtyard and elegant Moorish archways, it's one of old Tripoli's most attractive buildings.

In the same area, the **Old French Consulate** (Zenghet el-Fransis; admission 2LD, camera/video 2/5LD; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu), dating from 1630, is set around a compact, high-walled courtyard complete with some fine tilework and wooden doors around the perimeter. Not far away, the 16th-century **Draghut Mosque**

has elegantly rendered pillars and arches (15 in the prayer hall alone).

Just south of the Roman Column Crossroads, in the centre of the medina, the 19th-century **House of Yusuf Karamanli** (admission 2LD, camera/video 2/5LD; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu) has another fine courtyard and ethnographic exhibits from the period.

The largest mosque in the medina, with a beautiful octagonal minaret, the richly decorated **Ahmed Pasha Karamanli Mosque** was opened in the 1730s. The intricate carvings around the five doorways and 30 domes suggest a high level of Moroccan and Andalusian influence.

Hammams

All of Tripoli's best *hammams* (bathhouses) are in the medina. Charges are 1LD for a steam bath, 2LD for a massage and 5LD for the full scrubbing works. Try **Hammam Draghut** (Draghut Mosque; ☎ women 7am-5pm Mon, Wed & Thu, men 7am-5pm Tue, Sat & Sun), **Hammam al-Kebira** (☎ women 7am-5pm Mon, Wed & Thu, men 7am-5pm Tue, Sat & Sun) or **Hammam al-Heygha** (☎ women 7am-5pm Mon, Thu, Sat & Sun, men 7am-5pm Tue & Wed, Fri).

SLEEPING

All prices for midrange and top-end hotels listed here include a private bathroom and breakfast unless otherwise stated.

Budget

Buyut ash-Shabaab (Central Youth Hostel; ☎ 4445171; fax 3330118; Sharia Amr ibn al-Ass; dm HI nonmembers/members 4/6LD) The location is ideal and the shared bathrooms are fine, but otherwise this hostel is a pretty basic place.

Buyut ash-Shabaab (Gargaresh Youth Hostel; ☎ 4776694; fax 4474755; off Sharia Gargaresh; dm HI nonmembers/members 4/6LD) It's a long way from Tripoli's sights, but this well-run hostel is marginally better than its more central counterpart. It's 5km south of the town centre in the lively district of Gargaresh.

Funduq Bab al-Jadid (☎ 3350670; fax 3350670; Sharia al-Corniche; s/d with private bathroom 30/40LD; ☎) With a good seafront location, this popular place is outstanding. It has small but spotless and well-appointed rooms.

Funduq al-Soraya (☎ 4443817; fax 3330821; off Sharia Omar al-Mukhtar; s/d 25/40LD; ☎) One of the closest hotels to Martyrs Sq, Funduq al-Soraya has simple, drab but comfortable

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Funduq al-Andalus (☎ 3343777; www.andalushotel.com; Sharia al-Kindi; s/d 50/60LD; ☎) It can be hard to choose between the new private hotels, but our favourite is Funduq al-Andalus, which is just the sort of place that Tripoli, and indeed Libya has been crying out for. It has all the necessary bells and whistles – satellite TV, air-conditioning, minibar – but the decoration is more stylish than most and the service is attentive. The location, a 10-minute walk to Martyrs Sq and the medina, is also ideal.

rooms. The location is unbeatable and staff are friendly.

Midrange

Funduq al-Deyafa (☎ 4448182; diafatip@hotmail.com; Sharia al-Raza; s/d 40/50LD; ☎) A good choice in the area, Funduq al-Deyafa is as friendly as Funduq al-Andalus, but the rooms lack character. Bathrooms in most rooms is a plus. It's a well-run place that's worth every dinar.

Funduq Tebah (☎ 3333575; www.tebah-ly.com; Sharia al-Raza; s/d 40/50LD; ☎) Similarly impressive, this place has very tidy rooms with exactly the kind of attention to detail that government hotels lack.

Funduq Attewfek (☎ 4447253; fax 3340316; Sharia Qusban; s/d 55/65LD; ☎) A stone's throw from San Francisco Church and an easy 15-minute walk into the centre, Funduq Attewfek has spacious if simple rooms with balconies (some overlook the church), a laundry service, Internet access and a good buffet breakfast. This is also one of the few hotels to accept Visa card.

Top End

Corinthia Bab Africa Hotel (☎ 3351990; tripoli@corinthia.com; Souq al-Thulatha; d €225-250, junior ste €275-450; ☎) A towering temple of glass and elegance, this is Libya's classiest hotel. The rooms are enormous and luxurious, the restaurants of the highest order and the service everything you'd expect for the price. The hotel has a business centre, conference facilities, two swimming pools, a gymnasium, an exclusive spa and plans for wi-fi Internet connection in every room. Credit cards are also accepted. All of which adds up to Libya's premier address.

Funduq Bab al-Bahar (☎ 3350676; fax 3350711; Sharia al-Corniche; s/d/ste 60/75/120LD; ☎) Seen in the light of the Corinthia's emergence, the Bab al-Bahar is anything but the five stars it claims to be. The rooms are fine and most afford good views over the town or Mediterranean, but the service is woeful. That notwithstanding, it's a favourite of tour groups and probably not bad value for money.

EATING

Medina

Athar Restaurant (☎ 4447001; meals 17-20LD; ☎) lunch & dinner) This excellent place, next to the Arch of Marcus Aurelius, has a wonderful location and some of the outdoor tables (almost impossible to snaffle on a summer's evening) are among the most pleasant in Tripoli. The food is high quality and ranges from more traditional couscous or *tagen* (a lightly spiced lamb dish with a tomato-and-paprika-based sauce) to mixed grills and fish. Visa cards are accepted.

Mat'am ash-Sharq (Mat'am al-Bourai; ☎ 091315 7772; Sharia al-Halqa; meals from 10LD; ☎) lunch & dinner) Above one of the liveliest thoroughfares in the medina, this bright and busy restaurant has basic décor, but excellent food. Its speciality is the delicious *rishda* (noodles with chickpeas and onions) and, for the more adventurous, *osban* (sheep's stomach filled with liver, kidney and other meat, rice and herbs, and steamed or boiled in a sauce), which is a Libyan favourite.

East of Martyrs Square

The area sprawling east of Martyrs Sq is awash with restaurants.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Mat'am Obaya (Obaya Seafood Restaurant; ☎ 0925010736; Souq al-Turk 114; ☎) lunch Sat-Thu) This is the sort of place that Lonely Planet authors hesitate to include in a book for fear that they can't get a table next time they visit. It's small with no pretensions to luxury, but there's no finer seafood in Libya and all of it's home-cooked. The stuffed calamari is the tastiest restaurant dish you'll find and the *shola* fish with sauce is not far behind. Expect to pay no more than 10LD for one of these main dishes, the octopus salad and a drink. Exceptional.

ENTERING MEDINA MOSQUES

None of the mosques in Tripoli's medina have official opening hours, but the custodians of the keys are never far away. A gentle knock on the door should elicit some response if you're prepared to be patient. If no-one appears, ask a nearby shopkeeper who will invariably know where the *miftah* (key) is. Avoid visiting during prayer time, especially Friday prayers around noon. Entry is free, but a tip for the caretaker is appreciated.

Galaxie Restaurant (☎ 4448764; galaxie_libya@yahoo.com; Sharia 1st September 135; meals 14-18LD; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of the best restaurants in this area, Galaxie is tastefully decorated and does the usual dishes with a touch more imagination than similar places elsewhere. The *jara* (a meat stew) is excellent but needs to be ordered three hours in advance. Shawarma and sandwiches are available downstairs.

Haj Hmad Restaurant (☎ 0913136367; Sharia Haity; meals from 8LD; ☎ lunch & dinner) Haj Hmad is a great place to enjoy traditional Libyan dishes heavy on internal organs, feet and heads. But there are plenty of nonoffal dishes (including fish and beans) to choose from and it's popular with locals – always a good sign.

For a totally different eating experience, head 5.5km east of the port along the road to Tajura where there's a ramshackle fish market. Choose the fish or other seafood that you want, buy it and then take it to one of the basic restaurants where they'll grill it for you for a small fee (around 1.50LD). The most pleasant place to eat your meal is **Seawaves Restaurant** (☎ 0925061406); you could also try **Mat'am Shira'a** (☎ 0913206971). If you're going there under your own steam, ask the taxi driver for the Marsa or Al-Hufra area; it's opposite the turn-off to Sharia 11 June.

DRINKING

Magha As-Sa'a (Clock Tower Coffee Shop; ☎ 0925032511; Maydan al-Sa'a; ☎ 7am-2am) Opposite the Ottoman clock tower in the medina is Tripoli's outstanding traditional teahouse. You can sit outside, but make sure you check out the ground-floor room with its eclectic and distinctly musical theme – an old electric guitar, archaic jukebox and gramophone.

SHOPPING

The souqs of the medina are definitely the most atmospheric places in Libya to shop.

Carpet Bazaar – Ben Zeglam Shop (☎ 0913212660; Souq al-Attara; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8.30pm Sat-Thu) This is one shop that stands out in terms of quality, price and range for Libyan (mostly Berber) items, such as pottery, Tuareg jewellery, knives and boxes, flat-weave kilim cushions and larger rugs. The owner, Ahmeda Zeglam, is a delight.

Nearby, behind the clock tower, the Souq al-Ghizdir (Copper Souq) is a great place to see and hear the artisans at work and there are plenty of items for sale. At the north-western end of the Copper Souq, you'll find **Mukhtar Al-Mbaka & Sons** (☎ 3331057; Souq al-Turk 12-16; ☎ 9am-8pm) where traditional Libyan silver items are on offer from Mukhtar himself who can explain the history of each piece.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Libyan Arab Airlines (☎ 3331143; Sharia Haity) flies from Tripoli International Airport and **Al-Buraq Air** (☎ 4444811; Sharia Mohammed Megharief) flies from Metiga Airport, 10km east of Tripoli. They both operate domestic flights.

Bus & Shared Taxi

Long distances buses and shared taxis for most cities around Libya depart from the area near Tunis Garage at the western end of Sharia al-Rashid.

GETTING AROUND

Tripoli International Airport is located some 25km south of the city. A private taxi costs 10LD, but if you're leaving after mid-

night, the drivers will ask for more. Elsewhere in the city, a trip rarely costs more than 2LD.

SABRATHA

صبراتة

☎ 024 / pop 102,037

The ruins of the ancient Roman city of Sabratha, 80km west of Tripoli, are among the highlights of any visit to Libya, especially as it is home to one of the finest theatres of antiquity.

HISTORY

There was a Punic settlement here from the 4th century BC, but Sabratha's Punic character was altered with the arrival of Greek (Hellenistic) settlers in the 2nd century BC. After a violent earthquake in the 1st century AD, the city's architects turned towards Rome for inspiration, resulting in the Roman character so strongly evident today. Sabratha's heyday was during the reigns of the four Roman emperors Antoninus Pius (AD 138–61), Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (AD 161–80), Lucius

Aelius Aurelius Commodus (AD 180–92) and Septimus Severus (AD 193–211). Although it never competed in significance or grandeur with Leptis Magna, it was given the coveted title of *colonia* (colony) in the 2nd century AD. Sabratha was destroyed in AD 365 by an earthquake.

INFORMATION

Guides (50LD) are compulsory for entrance to the **ancient city** (☎ 622214; admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-6.30pm). **Dr Mustapha Turjman** (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3333042) is highly recommended.

SIGHTS

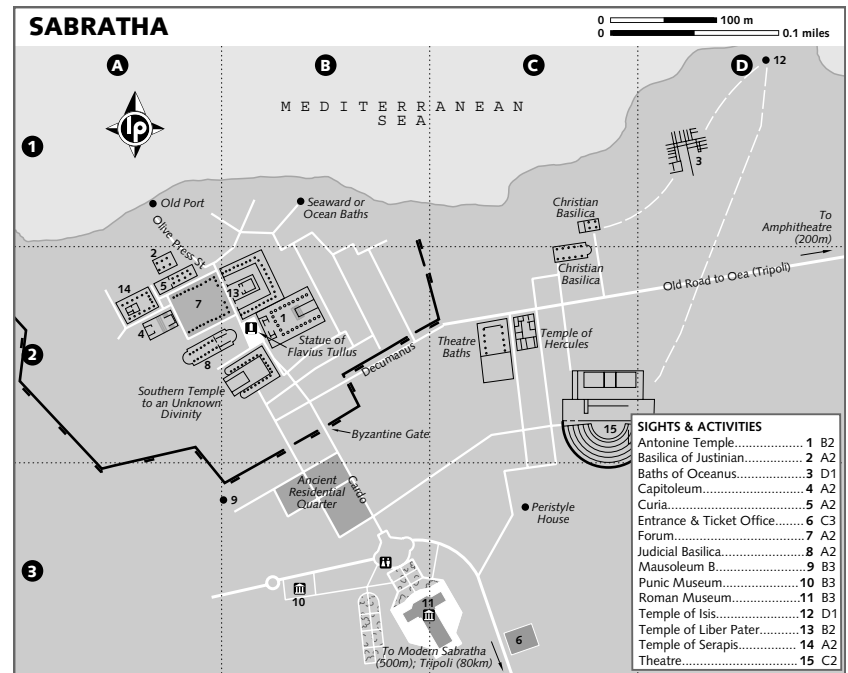
The **Roman Museum** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-6pm Tue-Sun) contains a number of wonderful mosaics and frescoes. It's located close to the site entrance. The nearby **Punic Museum** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-6pm Tue-Sun) probably appeals only to those with a specialist's interest in the city's earliest history.

Heading northwest into the monumental heart of Sabratha, the 24m-high **Mausoleum B** (Mausoleum of Bes) is one of the few

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS FROM TRIPOLI

Destination	Airline	One-way/return (LD)	Frequency
Benghazi	Libyan Arab Airlines	37.50/75	2 daily
	Al-Buraq Air	42.50/85	2 daily
Ghadames	Libyan Arab Airlines	26.50/53	2 weekly*
Ghat	Libyan Arab Airlines	56/112	2 weekly
Houn	Libyan Arab Airlines	28/56	2 weekly
Lebreq (near Al-Bayda)	Libyan Arab Airlines	56/112	3 weekly
Sebha	Libyan Arab Airlines	37.50/75	1 daily

* The Tripoli–Ghadames service is not regular despite appearing in airline schedules.



SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Antonine Temple.....	1 B2
Basilica of Justinian.....	2 A2
Baths of Oceanus.....	3 D1
Capitoleum.....	4 A2
Curia.....	5 A2
Entrance & Ticket Office.....	6 C3
Forum.....	7 A2
Judicial Basilica.....	8 A2
Mausoleum B.....	9 B3
Punic Museum.....	10 B3
Roman Museum.....	11 B3
Temple of Isis.....	12 D1
Temple of Liber Pater.....	13 B2
Temple of Serapis.....	14 A2
Theatre.....	15 C2

remaining Punic structures in Sabratha. After passing through the 6th-century **Byzantine Gate**, pause at the elevated **Antonine Temple**, dedicated to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius. The temple offers superb views from the top.

The **Judicial Basilica** (Basilica of Apuleius of Madora or House of Justice) was originally built in the 1st century AD as a Roman court. Most of what remains dates from around AD 450 when the Byzantines converted it into a basilica.

Sabratha's Roman **forum** formed the centrepiece of the ancient city and served as a market and public meeting place where the news of the city was disseminated. Overlooking the forum is the 1st-century **Capitoleum**, also known as the Temple of Jupiter or Zeus, the principal temple of the city and the soapbox of choice for the great orators of the era.

On the northern side of the forum is the **Curia** (Senate House), the meeting place of the city's magistrates and senators. East of the Curia is the **Temple of Liber Pater** (Temple of Dionysius; 2nd century AD). Dedicated to one of the most revered gods of Roman Africa, it was second only to the Capitoleum in the hierarchy of temples in Roman Sabratha.

Immediately east of the Curia are the **Temple of Serapis** and the 6th-century **Basilica of Justinian**, one of the finest churches of Byzantine Sabratha. The buildings around the Basilica of Justinian date from the 1st century AD when the city was still primarily Punic in character.

East of Sabratha's centre is the outstanding **theatre**, the jewel in Sabratha's crown. Begun in AD 190 under Commodus' reign and in use until AD 365, its auditorium once measured 95m in diameter. As such, it was the largest theatre in Africa. The three-tiered façade behind the stage is one of the most exceptional in the Roman world, with alcoves and 108 fluted Corinthian columns that rise over 20m above the stage and are adorned with exquisite carvings of Roman divinities. The front of the elevated stage is simply magnificent.

A pleasant hike off to the northeast takes you to the once-lavish **Baths of Oceanus** and the superb 1st-century **Temple of Isis**, one of Sabratha's finest and dedicated to the Egyptian goddess Isis, the protector of sailors.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Shared taxis run regularly to/from Tripoli's Sharia al-Corniche station.

LEPTIS MAGNA & AROUND

Leptis Magna is the most impressive Roman city outside Rome and its intoxicating coastal location make this *the* must-see in Libya. The nearby coastal cities of Al-Khoms and Zliten have little to hold your interest but make for comfortable places to eat and sleep on your way east.

AL-KHOMS

☎ 031 / pop 201,943

As the closest town to Leptis Magna, Al-Khoms makes a good base for exploring the ruins. A pleasant if unspectacular town, it's 120km east of Tripoli.

Information

Along Sharia al-Khoms, the main road through town that continues east to Leptis Magna 3km away, are private telephone offices, a sprinkling of Internet cafés, the post office and the *jawazzat* (passport office); all are close to the intersection with Sharia al-Jamahiriya.

Sleeping & Eating

Inside Leptis itself, it is possible to camp (5LD) in car park No 1 under the pine and eucalyptus trees – it's a quiet spot at night and guarded by police from the station opposite.

Buyut ash-Shabaab (Youth Hostel; ☎ 621880; dm Hl members/nonmembers 3/5LD) In a quiet area 2km west of the town centre, this is a typically basic but friendly hostel.

Al-Madinah Hotel (☎ 620799; al_madinahotel@yahoo.com; s/d with private bathroom 15/25LD; 🏠) The rooms here may be simple but they're spotless and come with TV, phone and decent bathrooms. For this price, you won't find better in Libya. Dodgy pillows are the only disappointment. It's behind the *jawazzat*.

Leptes Hotel (☎ 621252; lepdahotel@yahoo.com; Sharia al-Khoms; s/d with private bathroom from 15/25LD; 🏠) Almost as good as the Al-Madinah Hotel, the Leptes has rooms that have more character, but which can be a bit dark and

الخميس

overdone. The bathrooms are excellent and it's the closest hotel to Leptis Magna. There's no elevator.

Funduq al-Andalus (☎ 626667; Tripoli-Misrata Hwy; s with shared bathroom 20LD, tw/d with private bathroom 30/40LD; 🏠) The rooms here are clean and spacious; those at the back are quieter. There is also a pleasant restaurant (meals 15LD).

Tell Libyans that you're passing through Al-Khoms and many will ask with envy whether you'll be eating at either **Mat'am al-Najar** (☎ 0913205398) or **Mat'am al-Khayma** (☎ 0913205169), 12km west of Al-Khoms on the road to Tripoli. That's because they're famous throughout the country for their *bourdim* (meat slow-cooked in a sand pit). Most meals go for around 8LD.

Inside Leptis, between the ticket office and museum, is **Mat'am Addiyafa** (☎ 621210; meals 15LD; 🍴 lunch), which has an agreeable atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

Al-Khoms is connected by regular shared taxis with Tripoli and Zliten.

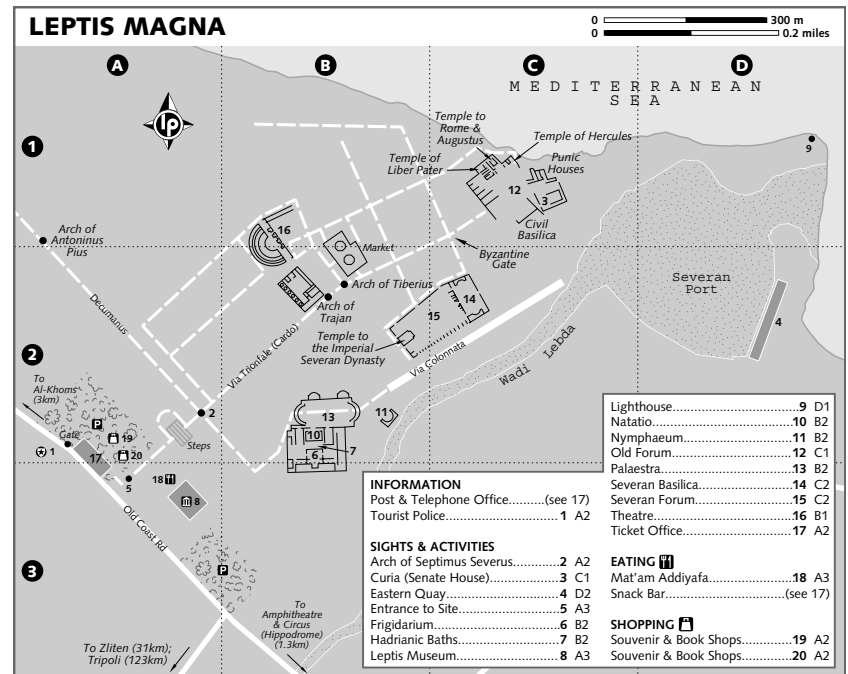
LEPTIS MAGNA

☎ 031

It must have been a great place to live. Leptis Magna (called LebDAH in Arabic) is one of the best-preserved and most evocative Roman cities in the Mediterranean. It's a testament to extravagance with abundant examples of lavish decoration, grand buildings of monumental stature, indulgent bath complexes and forums for entertainment.

History

Although founded by Punic refugees in the 7th century BC, Leptis Magna came under Roman influence in 111 BC and was raised to prominence under Emperor Augustus (r 27 BC–AD 14) when the city was laid out in Roman style and adorned with monuments of grandeur. It soon became one of the leading ports in Africa, an entrepôt for the trade in exotic animals and locally grown olives. Leptis became Africa's premier Roman city during the reign of Leptis' favourite son, Septimus Severus (see p480).



Information

Leptis Magna (☎ 624256; admission 3LD, guide 50LD, camera/video 5/10LD; 🕒 8am-6.30pm) is accessible through car park No 1. Note that there are separate entry fees for the **Leptis museum** (admission 3LD, guide 50LD, camera/video 5/10LD; 🕒 8am-6.30pm Tue-Sun) and **amphitheatre** (admission 3LD, guide 50LD, camera/video 5/10LD; 🕒 8am-6.30pm). It is compulsory to have a **guide** (50LD) to visit Leptis Magna. Guides we recommend include Dr Mustapha Turjman, Miftah Mansor, Mahmud at-Taib, Khalifa Wada, Mr Darnaoti and Hajj Omar.

Sights

The **Arch of Septimus Severus** is a grand introduction to the architectural opulence of Leptis. Built in AD 203 to mark the emperor's visit to his native city, its Corinthian columns and relief carvings of the great events of the Severan era are breathtaking.

The arrival of water (via aqueduct) and marble in Leptis early in the 2nd century AD prompted Emperor Hadrian to commission the superb **Hadrianic Baths**, which became one of the social hubs of the city. The baths were opened in AD 137. The *natatio* contained an open-air swimming pool paved with marble and mosaics. Off the *natatio* was the grandest room of the baths complex and one of the most splendid in Leptis – the **frigidarium** (cold room). Eight massive cipolin columns nearly 9m high supported the vaulted roof, the floor was paved with marble and the roof adorned with brilliant blue-and-turquoise

mosaics. The niches around the walls once held more than 40 statues, some of which are in the museums in Leptis and Tripoli.

East of the **palaestra** (sports ground) and Hadrianic Baths is the **Nymphaeum** (Temple of Nymphs) with its superb façade of red-granite and cipolin columns.

Septimus Severus' audacious transformation of Leptis involved reconfiguring the heart of the city, moving it away from the old forum to the new one that bore his name. The open-air **Severan Forum** measured 100m by 60m and its floor was covered with marble. In the great tradition of Roman city squares, Septimus Severus' forum was once surrounded by colonnaded porticoes. On the façades between the arches were Gorgon heads, of which over 70 have been found.

The **Severan Basilica**, 92m long and 40m wide, ran along the northeastern side of the Severan Forum and served as the city's House of Justice. Begun by Septimus Severus and completed by his son Caracalla in AD 216, it contains extravagantly sculpted pillars at either end honouring Liber Pater (Dionysius) and Hercules.

The **old forum** of Leptis Magna was the centre of Leptis from the 7th century BC until the early Roman era when it formed the monumental heart of the building projects by Emperor Augustus. Paved in AD 2, it was surrounded by colonnaded porticoes on three sides, contained three temples and was home to the **Curia** (Senate House; 2nd century AD).

SEPTIMUS SEVERUS – THE GRIM AFRICAN

Lucius Septimus Severus was born in Leptis Magna in AD 145 and spent his formative years in a city that was already one of Rome's great centres. He quickly progressed through military ranks and was declared a provincial governor. After the assassinations of the Roman emperors Commodus in AD 192 and Pentinax three months later in AD 193, Septimus Severus was proclaimed emperor by his troops. Emboldened by the fierce devotion of his army, he marched on Rome where he swept all before him to assume full imperial powers in AD 193. A military man first and foremost, he waged a ruthless campaign to extend the boundaries of Rome's empire. By this stage known as 'the Grim African', the feared emperor won a further victory over the Parthians in AD 202–03, temporarily dispelled all challenges to his power, and ushered in an period of relative peace.

It was in this period that he returned to his native city with a grand vision of turning Leptis into a centre to rival imperial Rome. He built a new forum, basilica, the Great Colonnaded St and greatly expanded the port. His fellow citizens did their part by hastily constructing their own monument to their emperor – the exquisite triumphal arch that bears his name. By AD 207 Rome was once again at war with its neighbours and in AD 211 Septimus Severus was killed in battle in England.

The **port**, another key element of Septimus Severus' vision, contained a **lighthouse** that was once more than 35m high and may have rivalled the more-famous Pharos of Alexandria. The reason the buildings of the **eastern quay** are still relatively intact is that the port was hardly used. Soon after its construction, the harbour silted up and it is now covered by vegetation.

The **market** is one of the most unusual and attractive of the Leptis monuments, with two reconstructed octagonal halls where stalls were set up to sell the bounty of Leptis farmers and fabric merchants. First built in 9 to 8 BC, the market was rebuilt during the reign of Septimus Severus.

Leptis' **theatre** is one of the oldest stone theatres anywhere in the Roman world and is the second-largest surviving theatre in Africa after Sabratha. Begun in AD 1 to 2, its most striking feature is the stage with its façade of three semicircular recesses surrounded by three-tiered fluted columns dating from the era of Antoninus Pius (AD 138–61). The stage was adorned with hundreds of statues and sculptures that included portraits of emperors, gods and wealthy private citizens.

The evocative **amphitheatre** once held 16,000 people and was hollowed out of a hill, 1km east of the port in the 1st century AD. The **circus**, below the amphitheatre, dates from AD 162. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, it was home to chariot races attended by up to 25,000 people.

The **museum** is very well organised with labels in both English and Arabic. To see the museum properly, you'll need to allow a minimum of two hours. Particularly fine galleries include Rooms 4 to 7 (Roman triumphal arches with wonderful statues and busts from Leptis), Room 8 (artefacts from the Hadrianic Baths), Room 10 (theatre) and Room 11 (Severan Forum).

Getting There & Away

Leptis Magna is just over 1km from the centre of Al-Khoms.

ZLITEN

☎ 0571 / pop 99,289

Zliten, 34km east of Al-Khoms, has an excellent hotel and a fine mosque and so it makes for a good overnight stay.

Sights

The **Mausoleum & Mosque of Sidi Abdusalam** is one of the finest modern Islamic buildings in Libya. Its distinctive green dome is surrounded by a multitude of minarets and smaller domes. The external panels of the façade contain some superb ceramics with floral and arabesque motifs. The tiled pillars are most attractive. Non-Muslims are not permitted inside the mausoleum's inner sanctum but the gilded tomb is clearly visible from the door, as are the marvellous stucco ceilings.

Sleeping & Eating

Funduq Zliten (☎ 620121; fax 620120; Sharia al-Jamahiriya; s/d/ste with private bathroom 30/40/70LD; 🍽️) It's the only hotel in town but this place is very comfortable with attractively furnished rooms, satellite TV, phone, balcony, video player and comfortable beds. The staff are friendly if not always helpful and there's a reasonable restaurant (meals 18LD).

There's a handful of cheap restaurants close to the post office and between the highway and main roundabout.

Getting There & Away

Shared taxis connect Zliten with Al-Khoms (or the Leptis Magna turn-off) and Tripoli.

SIRT

☎ 054 / pop 128,123

Colonel Gaddafi's birthplace is a custom-built city yearning to be the capital of Libya, if not Africa. Sadly, this supposed show-piece of the revolution is a city without soul, a lifeless place of few charms. Without any apparent attempt at irony, one sign in Arabic proudly proclaims: 'The best thing about Sirt is that it is in the centre of Libya'. The only reason for travellers to spend any time here is to break up the long journey between Benghazi and Tripoli.

Sleeping & Eating

Buyut ash-Shabaab (Youth Hostel; ☎ 61825; off Sharia al-Corniche; dm HI members/nonmembers 3/5LD) This is a friendly, down-to-earth place without pretensions to luxury. Arrive early as it's often full if you arrive late in the day. Staff can arrange simple meals from 1LD.

Funduq Bab al-Medina (☎ 60906; fax 60908; Sharia al-Jamahiriya; s/tw/d with private bathroom incl breakfast 20/30/35LD; 🍽️) Sirt's only privately

run hotel. It has a run-down air but the rooms aren't bad.

Funduq al-Mehari (☎ 60100; fax 61310; Sharia al-Jamahiriyah; s/d with private bathroom incl breakfast 35/45LD) Funduq al-Mehari is a bit out on a limb, just north of the road, almost 6km west of the post office, but the rooms are comfortable, spacious, spotless and most travellers' hotel of choice in Sirt. If the showers are an indication of the achievements of the Great Man-Made River, then it is literally a roaring success.

There are plenty of cheap restaurants doing hamburgers and grilled chicken along Sharia al-Jamahiriyah in the blocks west of the post office.

Getting There & Away

At 592km to Sebha, 561km to Benghazi and 463km to Tripoli, it's a long ride to anywhere. Buses pass through here en route to Benghazi or Tripoli.

EASTERN LIBYA

The northeastern region of Cyrenaica is home to the verdant Jebel Akhdar (Green Mountains), stunning Mediterranean coastline and superbly preserved ancient Greek cities. In the area around Ras al-Hillal, the northern ridges plunge down towards the Mediterranean to spectacular effect.

BENGHAZI

☎ 061 / pop 650,629

Libya's second-largest city makes a comfortable base for exploring the ancient cities of eastern Libya. While it may lack the cosmopolitan charm of Tripoli and has few monuments to its ancient past, Benghazi is known for its pleasant climate and friendly people.

History

Benghazi was founded by Greek settlers from Cyrene, and the area around Benghazi is thought to be the site of the legendary garden of Hesperides, from the Greek myth of the golden apples. In the face of fierce resistance by the surrounding tribes, Benghazi became an Italian fortress in 1911. During WWII the city constantly changed hands and came under bombardment from the Allies and the Axis powers. By the time the war ended there was very little left.

Information

As with everywhere in Libya, Internet cafés are to be found on almost every street of the city centre. Most of the hotels also have Internet access, including **Funduq al-Fadheel** (per hr 1LD; ☎ 3pm-midnight) and **Funduq Tibesti** (per hr 1LD; ☎ 10am-midnight).

There are plenty of banks in the central area. The **Masraf al-Tijara Watanmiya** (Bank of Commerce & Development), where you can get Visa cash advances, has branches at the airport, Islamic Call Building, Funduq Uzu and Funduq Tibesti; the latter has what was for a time Libya's only internationally connected ATM.

The **main post & telephone office** (Sharia Omar al-Mukhtar) is about 300m north of the harbour, on the southeastern side of the road.

Sights

Benghazi's **Old Town Hall** runs along the western side of **Freedom Square**. It's largely derelict but strong traces of its former elegance remain in its whitewashed Italianate façade, which has some lovely arched doorways and pillars. The balcony played host to its share of important orators, among them Mussolini, Field Marshal Rommel and King Idris.

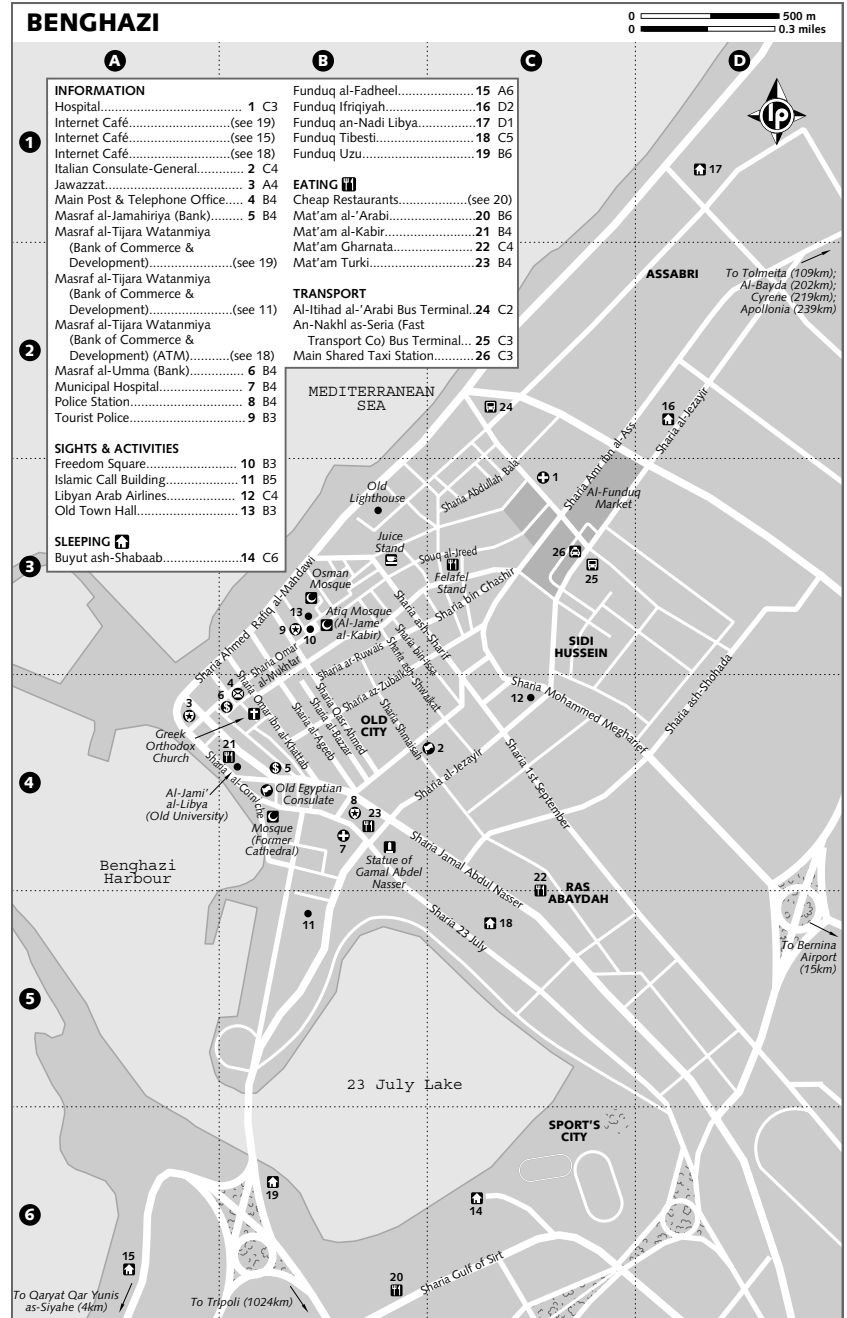
The covered **Souq al-Jreed** stretches for more than a kilometre and, like any Middle Eastern market worth its salt, it offers just about anything you could want and plenty that you don't, including 'anything you want, one dinar'. It's all displayed to the accompaniment of the music of Umm Kolthum crooning out from the latest Sony sound systems.

Sleeping

At all of the following places (except **Buyut ash-Shabaab**), quoted room prices include private bathroom and breakfast.

Buyut ash-Shabaab (Youth Hostel; ☎ 2234101; dm HI members/nonmembers 3/5LD) Benghazi's well-run youth hostel, behind sports stadium, is basic but most rooms are well maintained and there are a few family rooms. It's a popular place, so book ahead.

Funduq Ifriqiya (☎ 338044; fax 3386698; Sharia al-Jezayir; s/d/tr 15/20/25LD; ☎) Funduq Ifriqiya is a fine budget choice with simple but tidy rooms (with satellite TV) and you're an easy walk from the centre of town. It's little used by tour groups, an attraction in itself.



THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Funduq al-Fadheel (☎ 9099795; elfadeel.hotel@hotmail.com; Sharia el-Shatt; s with city/sea view 37/40LD, d/ste from 55/60LD; 📶 📺 📺 📺) Built in 2003, this is one of the best hotels in Libya. The pleasant rooms are spacious, well appointed and come with facilities for which you'd pay triple the price elsewhere: balconies, a barber, laundry service, two restaurants (meals from 20LD to 25LD), swimming pool, large-screen TV, computers with wi-fi Internet (7.50LD per 24 hours) in all suites, and an Internet café. Service is professional and you can pay with Visa. Welcome small touches include a detailed city map for each guest.

Funduq an-Nadi Libya (☎ 3372333; fax 3372334; Sharia Ahmed Rafiq al-Madawi; s/d 25/40LD; 📶) Funduq an-Nadi Libya, located 3km north of the centre, is similarly excellent and has comfortable, quiet and spacious rooms with satellite TV.

Qaryat Qar Yunis as-Siyah (Qar Yunis Tourist Village; ☎ 9096903; www.tourist-village.com; Sharia Qar Yunis; s/d/ste incl breakfast from 27/38/60LD, chalet/ap/villa from 20/25/50LD; 📶 📺 📺 📺) Six kilometres south of Benghazi, this enormous tourist village has a range of high-quality accommodation, from spacious hotel rooms (some with renovated bathrooms) to recently built villas by the beach. There's also a children's funfair. It's a terrific base for Cyrenaica.

Funduq Uzu (☎ 9095160; www.uzuhotel.com; Sharia al-Jezayir; s with/without lake view 60/50LD, d 75/65LD, ste 100-220LD; 📶 📺 📺) One of Benghazi's top hotels, Funduq Uzu has superbly appointed rooms with all the requisite bells and whistles. The buffet breakfasts are among the best in town.

Funduq Tibesti (☎ 9090017; fax 9098029; Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser; s with/without lake view from 80/75LD,

d from 115/100LD, ste from 150LD; 📶 📺 📺) On the northern side of the harbour, this is another classy hotel with a luxurious ambience. Facilities include a patisserie, health club, three coffee shops and four restaurants. Visa card is accepted.

Eating

Benghazi has a number of high-quality, reasonably priced Turkish restaurants. For many diners, the delicious cheese bread that accompanies meals is an undoubted highlight.

Mat'am al-Kabir (☎ 9081692; Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser; meals 18LD; 🍴 lunch & dinner) The friendly service and bright atmosphere complement the excellent banquet-style meals, which have all the usual accompaniments.

Mat'am Gharnata (☎ 9093509; Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser; meals 15-17LD; 🍴 lunch & dinner) The food and service here are similarly good, although the banquet includes five salads, fish and a choice of cakes.

Mat'am Turki (☎ 9091331; Sharia 23 July; sandwiches from 1LD, pizza 2-6LD, meals 12LD; 🍴 10am-1am) This newly opened place offers a bright and breezy mood and scrumptious Turkish food.

Mat'am al-Arabi (☎ 9094468; Sharia Gulf of Sirt; meals 16.50LD; 🍴 lunch & dinner Sat-Thu, dinner Fri) The upstairs eating area has a delightful ambience, with a mosaic floor, tented roof and soft lighting. This is one of Benghazi's finest restaurants, but it has an eminently reasonable price tag. Not surprisingly, it's popular with locals, tour groups and expats alike.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Benghazi's Bernina Airport handles both international and domestic flights. **Libyan Arab Airlines** (☎ 9092064; Sharia al-Jezayir) and **Al-Buraq Air** (☎ 2234469; Bernina Airport) operate a range of domestic flights.

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS FROM BENGHAZI

Destination	One-way/return (LD)	Airline	Frequency
Al-Kufra	Libyan Arab Airlines	64/128	3 weekly
Sebha	Libyan Arab Airlines	46.50/93	1 daily
Tripoli	Libyan Arab Airlines	37.50/75	2 daily
	Al-Buraq Air	42.50/85	2 daily

BUS & SHARED TAXI

There are daily buses and shared taxis to Tripoli, Sirt, Al-Bayda, Sebha and Tobruk from Al-Funduq Market.

Getting Around

Bernina Airport is 18km east of the city. A private taxi to the airport costs 10LD. Elsewhere in town, private taxi journeys will cost 2LD.

TOLMEITA (PTOLEMAIS)

طلمينة

Palm-fringed Tolmeita, one of the five cities of the Greek Pentapolis, is an especially good place to see the transition from Greek to Roman and then Byzantine occupation. Although founded in the 4th century BC, the excavated areas of the city (10% of the original) mostly date from the 1st and 2nd centuries BC.

Information

At **Tolmeita** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; 🍴 7.30am-5.30pm) you'll find an excellent guide, **Abdusalam Bazama** (☎ 0685-2124; 50LD).

Sights

Tolmeita climbs up the hill towards the Jebel Akhdar. Included among its highlights are the compact 5th-century **Byzantine Church**, the 4th-century **Villa of the Four Seasons** and the enchanting **Odeon**, a small theatre that was once covered by a roof and had seating for up to 500 people. The Greek **agora** (marketplace) later served as the Roman **forum** and was surrounded by temples. Along the northern side were three temples, each with four Doric columns. Northeast of the agora you'll find the **Villa of Columns** and the 5th-century **Athanasius' Fortress**.

Tolmeita's **museum** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; 🍴 7.30am-5.30pm) is dominated by the superb Four Seasons mosaic from the villa of the same name and a wonderful Medusa mosaic from the Villa of Columns.

Eating

There's nowhere to stay in Tolmeita, but an **open-air restaurant** (meals 10LD) in the car park serves simple food and drinks.

Getting There & Away

Occasionally, you may be able to find a shared taxi to Benghazi.

AL-BAYDA

البيضاء

☎ 084 / pop 120,000

Al-Bayda is an attractive city on the northern fringe of the Jebel Akhdar and another good base for exploring the ruins of Cyrene, Apollonia and Qasr Libya.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Loalot el-Jebel el-Akhdar (☎ 630968; fax 630971; Sharia el-Oroba; s/d/ste with private bathroom 30/40/70LD; 📶 📺) This welcome addition to the Al-Bayda hotel scene has attractive rooms, friendly management and a central location. A standard Libyan-style tourist restaurant here provides ample banquet-style meals (15LD). There's also a 24-hour Internet café (1LD per hour) next door.

Albaida Palace Hotel (☎ 633455; qaseralbaida@yahoo.com; Sharia al-Ruba; s/d with private bathroom 30/40LD; 📶) Now faced with competition, this erstwhile favourite of tour groups has improved – the rooms are good and the service less dysfunctional than it used to be.

Asservium (Sharia al-Ruba; meals from 10LD; 🍴 lunch & dinner Sat-Thu, dinner Fri) This cool place has trendy music and great outdoor seating. The upstairs terrace is a wonderful place from which to watch the world go by with a *shay* (tea, 1LD) or a *nargileh* (1LD).

Mat'am al-Barqa (☎ 635328; Sharia al-Ruba; meals from 15LD; 🍴 lunch & dinner Sat-Thu, dinner Fri) At the eastern end of town, Mat'am al-Barqa serves good-quality banquets in pleasant surroundings.

Getting There & Away

Shared taxis run from the station at the eastern end of town to Benghazi, Tobruk and Shahat (for Cyrene).

SHAHAT (CYRENE)

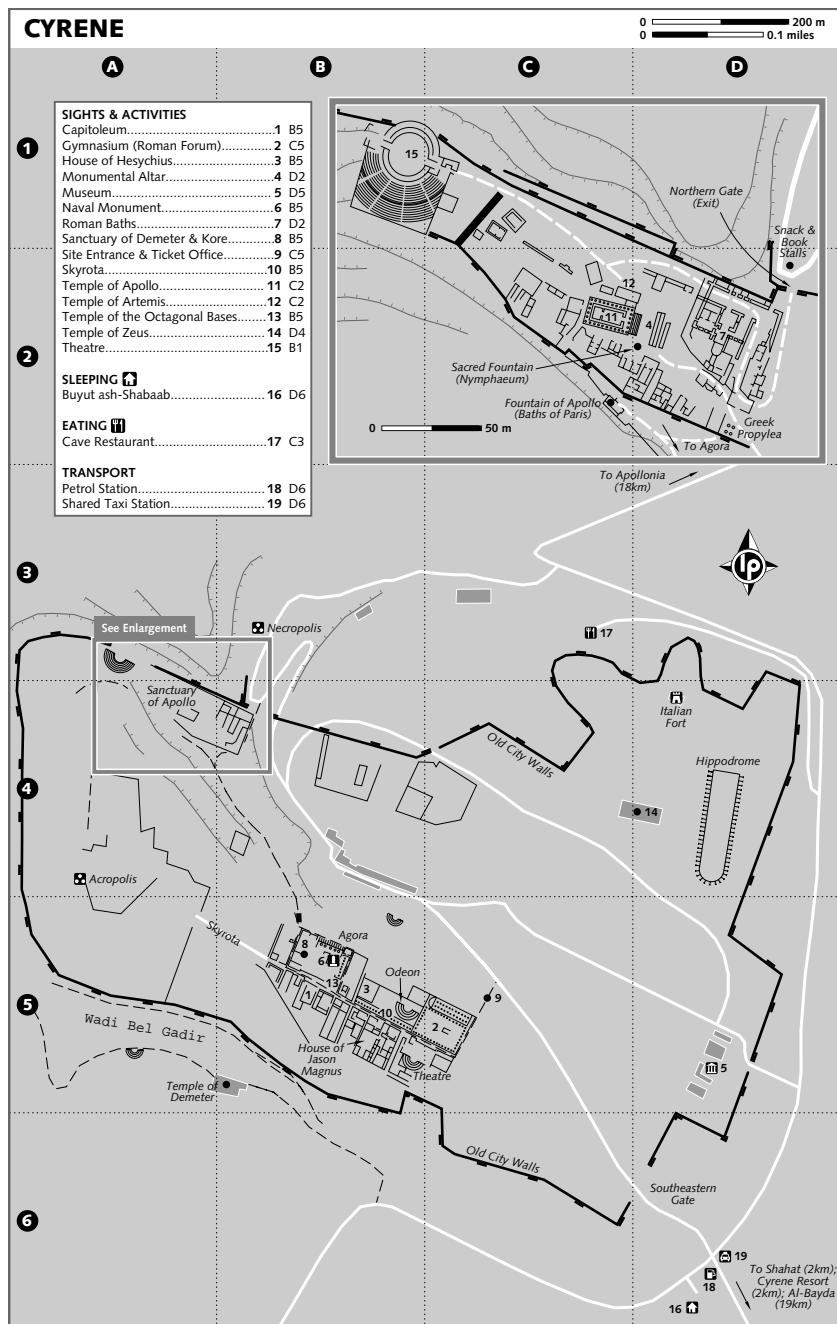
شحات

☎ 084 / pop 43,376

The small village of Shahat, 17km east of Al-Bayda, is the gateway to the spectacular ancient city of Cyrene and is the best place to stay if you want to get an early start into the old city. It's easy to spend a day exploring the stunning ruins of Cyrene, where the spectacular setting is as captivating as the extraordinary monuments.

History

Founded by Greek settlers from the island of Thera (modern Santorini) in 631 BC, Cyrene was the pre-eminent city of the



Greek world in the 4th century BC. It was renowned for its philosophers, astronomers, mathematicians and other scholars. After the change from Greek to Roman administration in 75 BC, Cyrene became an important Roman capital.

Information

Visiting **Cyrene** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-6.30pm) requires a **guide** (50LD). Mahmoud Abu Shreet, Ali Mahmud, Abdul Ghader and Fadi Ali Mohamed are all recommended guides.

Sights

The large, open **gymnasium** was originally built by the Greeks in the 2nd century BC as the major sporting building of Cyrene. In the second half of the 1st century AD, it was converted by the Romans into a forum (caesareum; Forum of the Caesars). The **Skyrota**, the main road through the Greek city, is still lined with impressive columns bearing graven images of Hermes and Hercules. The **House of Hesychius** contains a fine mosaic of an angel alongside an inscription imploring God to protect the women and children of Cyrene.

The **agora** was the heart of ancient Cyrene, serving as a public square, a forum for orators, a market and a magnet for the powerful people of the day. Many civic and religious buildings were clustered around the agora, among them the **Temple of the Octagonal Bases** (2nd century AD), the striking **Naval Monument** (3rd century BC) and the unusual **Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore**, the scene of a riotous, women-only annual celebration. Outside the agora's southern wall is the **Capitoleum**, the customary temple to the Greek trinity of Zeus, Hera and Athena (or, if you were Roman, Jupiter, Juno and Minerva).

The rich collection of temples, baths and other public buildings in the **Sanctuary of Apollo** includes the 6th-century-BC **Temple of Apollo**, one of the earliest temples at Cyrene, preceded by the 22m-long **monumental altar** where animals were sacrificed. Adjacent is the **Temple of Artemis**, which may predate the Apollo temple. There are fine views down over the coastal plain from here.

Just west of the sanctuary is the spectacularly situated **theatre**, which could once seat 1000 spectators. It was originally

constructed by the Greeks and probably dates from the 6th century BC, although it was much modified in subsequent centuries. The **Roman baths**, built in AD 98 to 99, contain some good mosaics and cyprian columns.

Up the hill from the rest of Cyrene is the famed 5th-century-BC **Temple of Zeus**, which was once larger than the Parthenon in Athens. Under the Romans it was used as a temple of Jupiter and it also served the Greek-Libyan hybrid deity Zeus Ammon.

Cyrene's **museum** (admission 3LD, guide 50LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Tue-Sun), south-east of the Temple of Zeus, has wonderful statues, sculptures and other artefacts that once adorned this extraordinary Graeco-Roman city.

Sleeping & Eating

Buyut ash-Shabaab (☎ 637371; camping 5LD, dm HI members/nonmembers 3/5LD) The hostel is a stone's throw from the gate leading down to the ruins. It's clean, friendly and has been recommended by a number of travellers – the hot water is reliable.

Cyrene Resort (☎ 0851-64391; s/d with private bathroom 35/45LD; ☎) This former Winzrik Hotel, 2km northeast of the police station, is set in the fields around Cyrene. It has pleasant rooms and an excellent café and restaurant cut into one of the caves.

Cave Restaurant (☎ 635206; elbadertours@hotmail.com; meals from 15LD; ☎ lunch) Living up to its name, this is another cave restaurant. It's an atmospheric place offering tasty food, friendly young waiters and good views down towards the coast from the terrace.

Getting There & Away

Shared taxis between Al-Bayda and Shahat arrive and leave from under the eucalyptus trees, just short of the pillars marking the gate leading down to Cyrene.

SUSA (APOLLONIA)

☎ 084

The small town of Susa, about 20km from Shahat, is the gateway to another wonderful ancient Greek city, Apollonia, the one-time port of Cyrene. Apollonia came to rival Cyrene in significance in the late Roman period. Most of what remains today dates from the Byzantine era when Apollonia was known as the 'city of churches'.

Information

Apollonia's **ticket office** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-7pm Oct-Apr) is on the waterfront at the northern end of Susa. Two excellent **guides** (50LD) are Ali Mahmud and Mahmud Abu Shreet.

Sights

APOLLONIA

The ruins of Apollonia are strung out along a narrow strip of coastline and include the **Western Church** with its mixture of Roman and Byzantine columns. The marble floor of the **Central Church** is better preserved and some pillars bear traces of Byzantine crosses. Throughout the site, especially around the 2nd-century **Roman baths** and **gymnasium**, is strewn pottery from the Greek (black) and Roman (red) eras. Above the baths on the hill is the **Byzantine Duke's Palace**, once one of the biggest palaces in Cyrenaica, while northeast of here lies the **Eastern Church**, once the biggest church in Cyrenaica. Although this was among the earliest of the churches (5th century AD), some mosaics still remain. Remnants of the **port**, including cisterns, line the beach, while over the hill to the southeast is the plunging and picturesque **Greek theatre**.

APOLLONIA MUSEUM

The **museum** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-5pm Tue-Sun) has poorly labelled exhibits. Among the highlights are the exquisite door frame from the Byzantine Duke's Palace and four mosaics found in the Eastern Church.

Sleeping & Eating

Al-Manara Hotel (☎ 63035; www.manarahotel.com; s/d/ste with private bathroom 45/60/95LD; 📞 📺 📺) One of the new breed of private hotels sweeping Libya, Al-Manara Hotel is exceptional. It has outstanding rooms, a prime location just 50m from the site entrance, fine views from most rooms, a good restaurant (meals 15LD) and professional service.

Getting There & Away

There's little if any public transport to Susa. A private taxi from Shahat will cost you 10LD one way or 25LD return (including waiting time).

TOBRUK

☎ 087 / pop 121,052

Tobruk was the scene of some of the most important WWII battles. Its main (and only) attraction is the war cemeteries – remember that Tobruk was fought over for its strategic significance, not its aesthetic beauty.

Sights

Tobruk's **WWII cemeteries** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu, 2-5pm Fri) are well maintained.

The **Knightsbridge (Acroma) Cemetery**, 20km west of town, is the largest in Tobruk. Contained within its walls are 3649 graves housing fallen soldiers from the UK, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and Canada.

Between the Knightsbridge Cemetery and Tobruk is the former battlefield dressing station, which is known as the **Australian (Fig Tree) Hospital**. The now-peaceful plains surrounding Tobruk were an ideal location for a hospital, with deep natural caves (now heavily silted up) and shelter offered by fig trees just a few kilometres from the front line. It was also connected by a ridge to the battlefields of Knightsbridge.

The **Tobruk (Commonwealth) War Cemetery**, 6km south of the harbour, also has an air of simplicity and dignity and contains 2479 graves. The countries most represented include Australia, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK.

Most of the more than 300 soldiers buried in the **French Cemetery**, 8km south of the harbour, died in the Battle of Bir Hakim, 80km southeast of Tobruk, in May and June 1942.

The names of 6026 German soldiers are inscribed in mosaic slabs lining the inside walls of the **German Cemetery**, a forbidding sandstone fort 3.2km south of the harbour.

Sleeping & Eating

Funduq Qartaj (☎ 623043; Ring Rd; tw with shared bathroom from 20LD, tw/tr with private bathroom 30/45LD; 📞) This is a fine choice, 2km northwest of the harbour. The tidy rooms are clustered in groups of three and open out onto a shared sitting room with TV.

Funduq al-Masira (☎ 625761; fax 625769; s/d with private bathroom 35/45LD; 📞) This concrete eyestone on the southwestern corner of the harbour also happens to be Tobruk's finest hotel. It has declined in recent years and suffers from a lack of competition. The rooms,

طبرق

with satellite TV, are ageing but should be comfortable for a few more years.

The largest concentration of cheap restaurants is in the city centre, in the streets fanning out from the main post office. There are also a couple of outdoor sandwich shops along the western end of the harbour.

Getting There & Away

Shared taxis leave a few times per day for Al-Bayda, Benghazi, Shahat and the Egyptian border.

Getting Around

If you want to see every one of the WWII sites listed in this section, expect to pay at least 25LD for a private taxi and budget a minimum of three to four hours.

JEBEL NAFUSA & GHADAMES

The barren Jebel Nafusa (Western Mountains) protect Libya's northeastern coast from the Sahara, which stretches away deep into the heart of Africa from the mountains' southern slopes. It's a land of rocky escarpments and stone villages clinging to outcrops high above the plains. Away to the southwest, on the northern reaches of the world's greatest desert, is the enchanting oasis of Ghadames.

GHARYAN

☎ 041 / pop 135,000

Gharyan sprawls across the top of a plateau and is one of the last towns of any size before Sebha, 690km south across the desert. It's a place to rest from long desert journeys and take in its unusual underground Berber houses.

Sights

Built by the ancient Berber inhabitants of the area, Gharyan's **underground houses** consisted of living quarters at the base of a dramatic, circular pit three-storeys deep, which were reached by a tunnel leading from street level. They provided a refuge from cold winters, hot summers and invaders (the houses were invisible to all but those within a few hundred metres). The most accessible houses are close to Funduq

Rabta; ask your guide or at the hotel for directions to the *dammous*.

Gharyan is also famous throughout Libya for its pottery, and stalls line the road in from Tripoli selling everything from huge serving bowls to small storage jars at reasonable prices (not much more than 10LD).

Sleeping & Eating

Funduq Rabta (☎ 631970; fax 631972; Sharia al-Jamahiriya; s/d with private bathroom 35/45LD) This place is expensive for what you get (uninspiring, cramped and run-down rooms) but it's OK for a night. There's a mediocre restaurant (meals 15LD) that lacks atmosphere, although in Gharyan you are not exactly spoiled for choice.

Gharyan Hotel (☎ 631483; fax 631415; s/d with private bathroom 25/35LD; meals 15LD) Gharyan Hotel, located off the main highway near the town entrance, is similar to the Rabta with tired, 1970s-era décor that has been kindly left unaltered. The restaurant here is like that at Funduq Rabta – uninspiring banquet-style meals (15LD) that will fill but not excite you.

Getting There & Away

The shared taxi and micro station is 500m south of Funduq Rabta.

QASR AL-HAJ

قصر الحاج
The small village of Qasr al-Haj has one of Libya's most spectacular examples of Berber architecture. The circular and completely enclosed **fortified granary** (admission 2LD; ☎ daylight hr) is an extraordinary structure that has stored the local harvests since the 12th century. The main courtyard is breathtaking with the walls completely surrounded by 114 cavelike rooms – exactly the same number as there are suras (chapters) in the Quran.

Public transport to Qasr al-Haj is non-existent but as you'll almost certainly come here as part of a tour, that's unlikely to be a problem.

YEFREN

☎ 0421

Yefren is one of the more appealing towns in this mountainous region, situated high on a series of rocky bluffs, overlooking the flat coastal plain and surrounded by attractive wooded areas. It's a relaxed place

and nothing happens here in a hurry. The deserted, old part of town dates from over 500 years ago and there are a few ruined remains scattered around the hillsides. The largest concentration of old houses is on the hilltop overlooking the town.

Sleeping & Eating

Yefren Hotel (☎ 60278; fax 021-4830117; s/d/tr with private bathroom 25/45/55LD) This place opened in early 2005 and is arguably the best base for exploring the Jebel Nafusa. The rooms (without air-con) are pleasant but the views over Yefren and the surrounding hills are spectacular, especially at sunset. It's at the western end of town (look for the green-domed mosque nearby). The meals (15LD) in the restaurant here are, like the rooms, the best you'll find for miles around.

Getting There & Away

There are shared taxis between Yefren and Tripoli (two hours) or Gharyan (one hour).

KABAW

كاباو

The pleasant Berber town of Kabaw, 9km north of the Gharyan–Nalut road, is set among rolling hills and is home to another superb *qasr*.

Sights

Known locally as the *ghurfas*, **Qasr Kabaw** is over 700 years old and one of the oldest in the region. Smaller and less uniform than the one at Qasr al-Haj, Qasr Kabaw is nonetheless captivating, with a wonderful medieval charm. None of the storage rooms

remains in use and the gate is permanently left open.

Festivals & Events

In April every year, Kabaw hosts the **Qasr Festival**. The festivities celebrate the unique heritage of the Berber people of the area, with particular emphasis on Berber folklore. Important local ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals and harvests, are re-enacted by people in traditional dress.

Eating

There are no hotels in Kabaw. The only restaurant is **Hannibal** (☎ 0912123957; ☺ lunch & dinner), which is actually 11km southeast of town, on the Gharyan–Nalut road, 2km east of the Kabaw turn-off. The soup is hearty, the chicken dishes tasty and the service willing.

Getting There & Away

There are no regular shared taxis to Kabaw.

NALUT

نالوت

☎ 0470 / pop 66,228

At the more-barren, western end of the Jebel Nafusa, the regional centre of Nalut boasts yet another exceptional Berber *qasr* and is a good place to break up the long journey from Ghadames to Tripoli.

Sights

QASR NALUT

Perched on a rocky bluff overlooking the western mountain valleys, **Qasr Nalut** (admission 1LD; ☺ daylight hr) has the most captivating setting of any in Jebel Nafusa. It's almost completely surrounded by the uninhabited

remains of the village that cling to the edge of the steep hillside.

Qasr Nalut, built in AD 1240, has the feel of a small, fortified village. Rather than facing onto an open courtyard, the rooms are tightly packed and overlook two narrow thoroughfares without any hint of uniformity. There were 400 chambers, but the keeper always knew how much each family had in storage at any given time. The rooms were last used in 1960.

OLD TOWN

Nalut's derelict old town, surrounding the *qasr*, has crumbling stone-and-gypsum houses and three old mosques. The 1312 **Alal'a Mosque** is the oldest and has low arches, a stone mihrab and a functioning well. Two old **olive oil presses** with their impressive huge circular platforms and crushing stones are also in the vicinity.

Sleeping

Buyut ash-Shabaab (☎ 2858; Sharia Ghadames; dm HI members/nonmembers 3/5LD) Close to the petrol station, this small hostel is basic but as cheap as you'll get in Nalut and it's rarely crowded.

Funduq Winzrik (☎ 2204; s/d/ste with private bathroom 25/40/50LD) Magnificently located across the valley from the old town, Funduq Winzrik has been restored although not with much imagination. Design features include carpet on the floors, carpet on the walls, carpet on the bedside table... The rooms are spacious and simple but the bathroom plumbing is in need of attention. Meals cost from 13LD to 25LD.

Eating

There are small sandwich bars along the road in from Ghadames and just down the hill from the roundabout in the centre of town; most charge 1LD for a filled baguette and soft drink.

If you're arriving by private vehicle around lunch or dinner time, consider stopping at **Mat'am Ajweiba** (☎ 0913705327; meals 10-12LD; ☺ lunch & dinner), 8km south of town. One of the better restaurants in this part of the country, it has a pleasant dining room, good food and friendly service.

Getting There & Away

Shared taxis between Ghadames and Tripoli stop at the main roundabout.

GHADAMES

غدامس

☎ 0484 / pop 16,752

The Unesco World Heritage-listed old city of Ghadames has everything that you imagine a desert oasis to have – abundant palm groves, a wonderfully preserved, labyrinthine old town and a pace of life largely unchanged for centuries. It's an extraordinary place.

History

When Romans occupied the area around Ghadames in 19 BC, it had been inhabited for almost 3000 years. The Romans fortified the town and called it Cydamus. The old city as you see it today was founded around 800 years ago and was occupied by both the Ottomans and Italians. Ghadames was bombed by the French in 1943, causing terrible damage and loss of life. In 1984 there were 6666 people living in the old town; four years later there was just one family left. The government, as part of its push for modernisation, had built new air-conditioned housing in the new part of town and put pressure on people to move.

Information

The story of Ghadames is largely an oral history and a guide is essential for exploring the old city. The standard charge is 40/60LD for a half/full day. Highly recommended guides include **At-Tayeb Mohamed Hiba** (☎ 62300; dandoomer731@yahoo.com) and **Mohamed Ali Kredan** (☎ 62190; fax 021-3601374).

Dan Do Omer Internet Café (☎ 62300; dandoomer@yahoo.com; per hr 1LD; ☺ 9.30am-late Sat–Thu, 9.30am–1.30pm & 3.30pm-late Fri) Also offers international phone calls. It's in the heart of town near the main junction and opposite Restaurant Awwal.

Post office (☺ 8am–1pm & 5–8pm Sat–Thu) South of the New Mosque.

Sights

OLD CITY

Old Ghadames (adult/child 3/1LD, camera/video 5/10LD) is another world of covered alleyways, whitewashed houses and extensive palm gardens irrigated by wells.

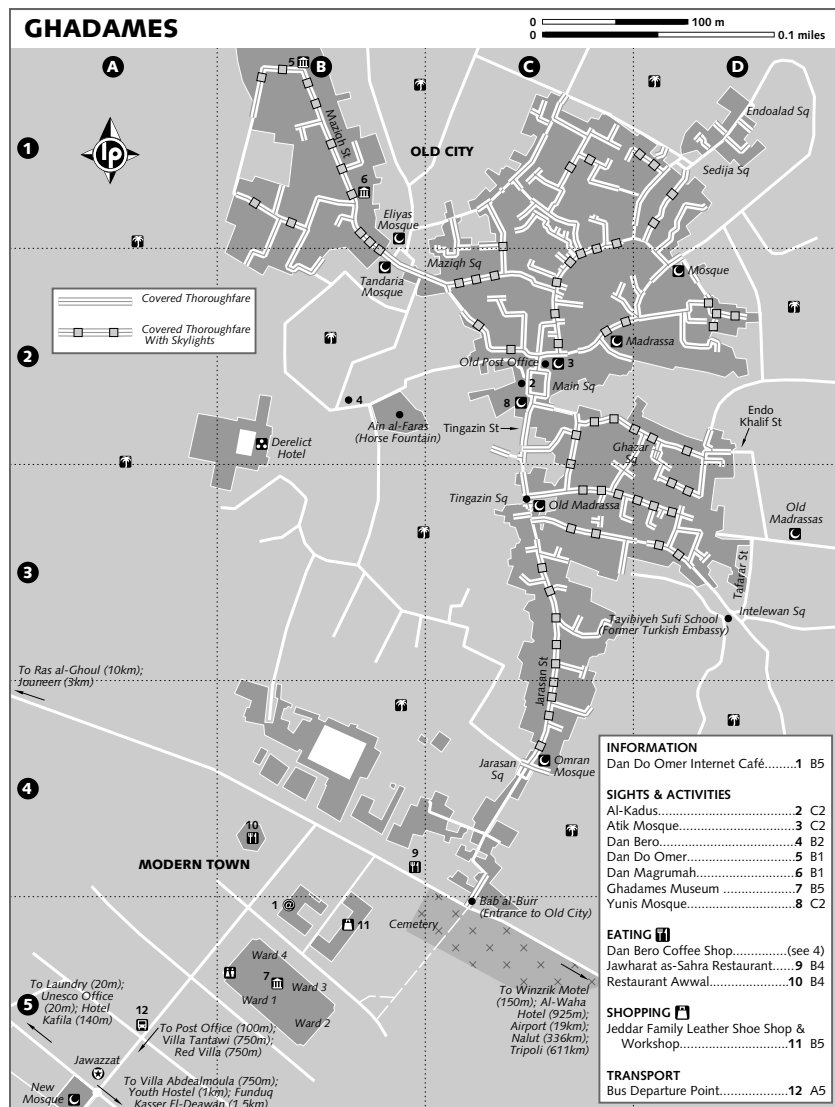
The old city of Ghadames comprised loosely configured concentric areas containing residential and commercial districts and covering around 10 hectares. The city was divided into seven 'streets', each the domain of a different subsection of the Bani

THE BERBER QASRS OF JEBEL NAFUSA

Berber architecture in the Jebel Nafusa is like something out of a *Star Wars* film set. Most of the fortified granary stores, known as *qasrs*, date from the 12th century and have stood the test of time remarkably well.

Despite their name ('*qasr*' means castle), these structures were rarely used as a form of defence. Instead they offered protection for the local crops necessary for the community's survival. Constructed entirely from local rock, sun-dried mud brick and gypsum, the cool storage areas, sealed with doors made of palm trunks, warded off insects, thieves and inclement weather alike. Their purpose was akin to that of a modern bank, with the system of enforced saving and stockpiling preventing the cropholders from squandering their resources.

Rooms below ground were used to preserve olive oil; the above-ground rooms customarily housed barley and wheat. You'll often see animal horns high on the ramparts; these served as amulets of good fortune. Also evident are the remains of ancient winches used for hoisting produce from ground level to the upper storage rooms.



Walid and Bani Wazid tribes. Each 'street' was essentially a self-contained town, with a mosque, houses, schools, markets and a small communal square for public events.

The designers of the **traditional houses** of Ghadames made maximum use of vertical space and a visit to one is a must. Eye-catching with whitewashed walls and

brightly painted interiors, all of the houses were connected. The rooftops were the domain of women in the same way that the public laneways below belonged to men. At least three of the old houses have been stunningly restored and opened to the public: **Dan Do Omer** (☎ 62300; dandoomer731@yahoo.com); **Dan Bero** (ask at Dan Bero Coffee Shop,

p494) and **Dan Magrumah**. Talk to your guide about arranging a visit.

Apart from the houses, it's the overall experience – a town that time forgot, your way lit by shafts of natural light – that will live longest in the memory. Specific sights to watch out for include the distinctive **palm-trunk doors**; delightful **Tingazin Square**, at once intimate and picturesque; and **Ghazal Square** with its alcove niches and encircling balcony. Take in the ancient **Yunis** and **Atik Mosques** in the main square, which also houses a niche, **Al-Kadus**, from where water was drawn and distributed across Ghadames. **Mazigh Square**, with its arched alcoves, is overlooked by two fine mosques.

GHADAMES MUSEUM

The **museum** (☎ 62225; adult/child 3/1LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Sat-Thu) has five sections devoted to everything from Roman artefacts to the more-recent ethnographic displays. Highlights include the famous embroidered slippers of Ghadames; huge copper keys and padlocks, the like of which are still used in the old city; a large selection of folk medicines; old black-and-white photos of Ghadames; and Tuareg handicrafts.

Festivals & Events

In October every year, the annual three-day **Ghadames Festival** brings the old city alive in a riot of colour and activity. Ghadamsis return to their family homes in the old town and throw open the doors for singing, dancing and public festivities including wedding and

initiation ceremonies. Most of the festivities are performed in traditional dress.

Sleeping

HOSTELS & VILLAS

Youth Hostel (Buyut ash-Shabaab; ☎ 62023; dm HI members/nonmembers 3/5LD) Ghadames' youth hostel is basic, has small rooms and is plagued by problematic plumbing, but for this price you can hardly complain.

One solution to Ghadames' shortage of beds is the prevalence of villas – homes that operate like bed-and-breakfast places. All offer kitchen facilities and charge 20LD (including breakfast).

Villa Abdealmoula (☎ 62844; villa_moula@yahoo.com; ☎) Run by the energetic Othman, this is the most homely of the villas and is very well run.

Villa Tantawi (☎ 62205; ☎) Friendly place with ornate, over-the-top rooms and a resident cat.

Red Villa (☎ 0912133524; fax 021-4778225; ☎) Simple rooms but most have private bathrooms.

HOTELS

All of the following places have air-con and private bathrooms unless stated otherwise and prices include breakfast.

Funduq Kasser El-Deawan (☎ 63350; fax 041-634115; s/d/tr 30/40/50LD; ☎) Almost as far south as you can go in Ghadames (which isn't far), this new place is outstanding with its spacious, well-appointed rooms with satellite TV. There are plans for expansion.

Al-Waha Hotel (☎ 62569; fax 62568; s/d 30/40LD; ☎) The rooms here are simple and the bathrooms could do with an overhaul but

THE GREAT CARAVANS OF GHADAMES

Ghadames became one of the principal trading towns of the Sahara, despite not possessing any lucrative products of its own. Indeed, embroidered slippers and salt were about all Ghadames could muster. What enabled Ghadames to become one of the great entrepôt towns for goods from all over Africa was its abundance of wells in the harsh deserts of the northern Sahara. The reach of Ghadames' commerce and the sheer volume of trade that passed through its gates was so great that when caravans arrived in towns across the Sahara, they were assumed to be caravans from Ghadames.

In ancient times, goods from the interior of Africa that passed through the gates of Ghadames en route to the coast included an exotic array of precious stones, gold and silver, ivory, dates and ostrich plumes. In the other direction, glass necklaces and paper for use in religious texts from Venice, pearls from Paris and linen from Marseille passed through on their way south.

The arrival of a caravan in town was quite an event. The camels bearing great chests were unloaded and the goods almost immediately offered for sale in the markets of the town. The world that many Ghadamsis would never see for themselves was brought to life in the perfumes from Timbuktu, spices from the Maghreb and precious metals from central Africa.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

The ultimate eating experience in Ghadames is lunch in one of the traditional houses (see p492) of the old town. The most frequently prepared meal is the delicious *fitaat* (lentils, mutton and buckwheat pancakes cooked together in a tasty sauce in a low oven and eaten with the hands from a communal bowl). Eating this wonderful meal amid an evocative atmosphere is a highlight. **Dan Do Omer** (☎ 62300; dandoomer731@yahoo.com) does this to perfection; ask for At-Tayeb Mohamed Hiba.

it's comfortable and a favourite of tour companies.

Winzrik Motel (☎/fax 82485; camping/s/d 5/30/35LD; 📶) The closest hotel to the entrance to the old city, this comfortable place has spotlessly clean rooms that are better kept than other Winzrik hotels in Libya.

Eating

Restaurant Awwal (☎ 62429; meals 12-15LD; 🍽 lunch & dinner) The only problem with the Awwal is that it's so good most of the other restaurants in town have closed. Its chicken and lamb dishes, especially the *tagen*, are great, as is the service. There's also an enormous garden, which is an ideal place to pass a summer Ghadames evening. It's located at the main intersection.

Jawharat as-Sahra Restaurant (☎ 62015; meals 10-15LD; 🍽 lunch & dinner Sat-Thu, dinner Fri) This small place somehow survives. The chilled atmosphere is a pleasant alternative to the crowds at Awwal. It does great coffee.

Drinking

In the old city, it's hard to tear yourself away from the **Dan Bero Coffee Shop** (🕒 9am-midnight), which has a delightfully shady palm garden, friendly, laid-back owners and great tea and coffee. There is no finer place to pass a hot Ghadames afternoon.

Shopping

Brightly coloured embroidered slippers, unique to Ghadames, have been produced by the Jeddar family for centuries. They still have a shop and workshop north of the museum. The slippers aren't cheap (50LD and upwards) but make a wonderful souvenir.

Getting There & Away

There are, in theory, two weekly flights with Libyan Arab Airlines between Ghadames and Tripoli (26.50/53LD one way/return), although they don't always run. Some tour companies organise charter flights from Tripoli.

There's a daily bus and a shared taxi from Ghadames to Tripoli (via Nalut).

TO THE SAHARA

Desert tracks lead south across the Hamadat al-Hamrah, a featureless rocky plateau that separates northern Libya from the sand dunes and rocky mountain ranges of the south; all tour companies (p506) can arrange such expeditions.

The most popular route skirts the Algerian border all the way to Ghat or Al-Aweinat, both gateways to the exceptional Jebel Acacus. The journey takes a minimum of two to three days with the second day passing through the western reaches of the Idehan Ubari (Ubari Sand Sea) with its towering dunes.

FEZZAN & THE SAHARA

The Fezzan region of southern Libya is engulfed by the Sahara and is home to some of the most spectacular and diverse desert scenery in the world. The majestic dunes of the Idehan Murzuq and Idehan Ubari (Murzuq and Ubari Sand Seas) cover thousands of square kilometres, and deep valleys conceal idyllic, palm-fringed lakes. In the Jebel Acacus in the southwest, you'll find breathtaking rock formations of the once-volcanic mountains that rise starkly from the sands and conceal carvings and paintings dating back 12,000 years. Off to the southeast of the country, Waw al-Namus is an astonishing volcano featuring stunning scenery amid a horizon that never seems to end.

SEBHA

☎ 071 / pop 126,387

The promise of an Internet café, a cold drink or the company of people can make Sebha feel like an oasis, at least for a few hours. Sebha is the largest settlement in the Libyan Sahara, although it's not a particularly attractive town.

سبها

Orientation & Information

It's unlikely that you will need to stray beyond the two main streets, Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser (the extension of the road in from Murzuq and Germa) and Sharia 5 October (formerly Sharia Mohammed Megharief), which run parallel to each other through the heart of town. An **Internet café** (Sharia 5 October; per hr 1LD; 🕒 9am-midnight Sat-Thu, 5pm-midnight Fri) can be found 50m east of the Acacus Restaurant.

Sleeping

Sebha has plenty of hotels, most of which are fine if sterile and few offer service with a smile. It's about the comfort of a bed and a hot shower, but stay too long and you're likely to long for the freedom of star-spangled desert nights.

Fezzan Park (☎ 0925131967; fax 632860; 3-bed huts 30LD, ste 50LD; 📶 📺) Arguably the best of the Sahara's camps, this appealing place is 12km southwest of Sebha off the road to Ubari. It offers the usual huts but they're airtight and pleasant, while the suites will seem like paradise after dusty desert trails. There's a swimming pool and a zoo with desert animals. The roaming ostriches are more inquisitive than dangerous. Breakfast costs 4LD.

Funduq Afriqiya (☎ 623952; fax 631550; Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser; s/d/tr/ste with private bathroom 25/40/65/80LD; 📶) The recently renovated Funduq Afriqiya has large rooms that are unexciting but comfortable. There are some fine views over town from the upper floors.

Funduq al-Mehari (☎ 631910; fax 631914; Sharia al-Jamahiriyah; s/d with private bathroom 25/40LD; 📶) Once Sebha's finest choice, this place is ageing, but not particularly gracefully, and the service can be quite indifferent. The rooms are comfortable if a tad bland.

Eating

Acacus Restaurant (☎ 634934; Sharia 5 October; meals from 6.50LD; 🍽 lunch & dinner) This is an outstanding choice with excellent, friendly service. The quality of the food is first-rate and the airy dining area can seem like an oasis in this uninspiring town. Great coffee is another bonus.

Mat'am an-Nasser (☎ 628220; Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser; meals 10LD; 🍽 lunch & dinner) Although not quite as impressive, Mat'am an-Nasser is also good; the atmosphere in the upstairs air-con dining room is a bit plain, despite

the eerie blue aviary. However, it produces fine food and the service is well intentioned if a little quirky at times.

Getting There & Around

Libyan Arab Airlines (☎ 623875; cnr Sharias Jamal Abdul Nasser & al-Jamahiriyah; 🕒 7am-2pm Sat-Thu May-Sep & 8am-3pm Sat-Thu Oct-Apr) has nightly flights to Tripoli (37.50LD) and to Benghazi (46.50LD) as well as a twice-weekly flight to Ghat (28LD). Sebha airport is 4km southeast of the town centre. Private taxis into town shouldn't cost more than 3LD, however their drivers often demand and won't budge from 5LD.

Shared taxis connect Sebha with Tripoli and Ubari.

IDEHAN UBARI & THE UBARI LAKES

بحيرات اوباري

The Idehan Ubari (the eastern stretch of which is known as the Ramlat Dawada) is a dramatic sea of towering sand dunes, shadowed to the south by Wadi al-Hayat (Valley of Life). While elsewhere many oases of the Sahara have been consumed by sprawling towns, the salt lakes of the Idehan Ubari still provoke that sense of awe that only water in the desert can inspire.

There are at least 11 lakes in the area. Although many have dried up and most require longer expeditions, three – pretty **Mavo**, dramatic **Gebraoun** and the enchanting **Umm al-Maa** (Mother of Water) – are easily accessible and majestically beautiful at sunset.

Swimming in the buoyant waters surrounded by sand dunes and palm trees is one of the great desert experiences; Gebraoun is the best lake to swim in due to the proximity of a freshwater well to wash off the sand. Camp Winzrik, on the northern shore of Lake Gebraoun, has some skis and a snowboard (5LD) available, so you can try the exhilaration of dune skiing.

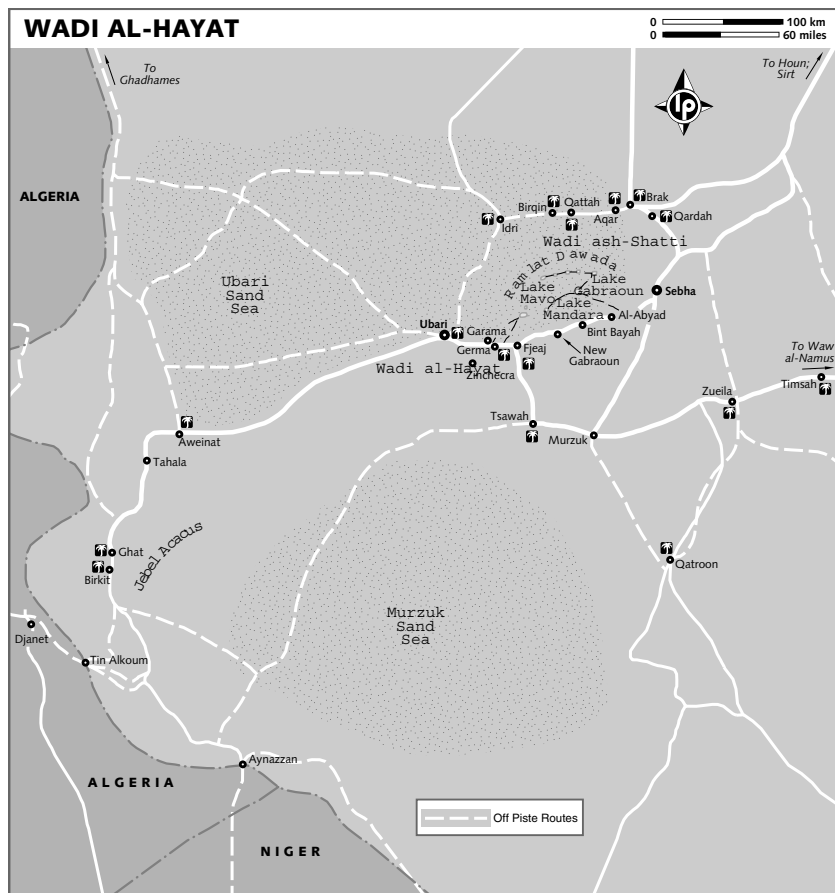
Finally, if you're considering sleeping by the lake shore, remember that mosquitoes will ruin the experience – camp nearby in the sand for an undisturbed night's sleep.

GERMA

☎ 0729

Germa is one of the largest settlements in Wadi al-Hayat and carries with it a wealth of historical associations. It's adjacent to the

جرمة



ancient city of Garama, the one-time capital of the Garamantian empire (see p464).

Sights

ANCIENT GARAMA

Garama (adult/child 3/1LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-7pm May-Sep & 9am-5pm Oct-Apr) was founded in the 1st century AD. It's a city built from stone, clay and animal dung at the foot of the sand dunes. With the ruins of a **Garamantian palace, temple** and narrow, twisting lanes, there's just enough here to provide some idea of how the city must have once been.

MUSEUM

In Germa's small **museum** (Tripoli-Ghat Hwy; admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8.30am-2pm

& 3-6.30pm Tue-Sun), there are informative English explanations that illuminate some (but not all) of the highlights of the area. Displays include the history of Garamantian civilisation, an excellent time graph of prehistoric rock art, and a dramatic satellite photo that shows the Idehan Murzuk and Idehan Ubari separated by Wadi al-Hayat.

Festivals & Events

Every year in March the town hosts the **Germa Festival**, which is a colourful occasion when inhabitants of the Wadi al-Hayat don their traditional dress and perform local dances, all contributing to a highly festive atmosphere.

Sleeping & Eating

Germa's camping grounds and hotels are generally better for showering (2LD for nonguests) and eating after emerging from the sand than for sleeping; at the camps, night-time mosquitoes are a problem. All camping grounds have kitchens that can be used for a small fee. The options include **Eirawan Camping** (☎ 2413; huts per person 10LD), which offers breakfast for 15LD and meals for 10LD, and **Timbuktu Camp** (☎ 2416), next to Eirawan Camping, which was under construction when we visited.

Funduq Dar Germa (☎ 2396; s/d with private bathroom & breakfast 30/40LD) If you're arriving in Germa from the desert, Funduq Dar Germa will feel like the Garden of Eden. The rooms are very comfortable and the squeaky-clean private bathrooms come with, wait for it, a bathtub. Not surprisingly, you'll need to book ahead. Meals cost 20LD to 25LD.

Old City Tourist Restaurant (☎ 0722-642245; tents 5LD; meals 8-12LD) Next to the gate of ancient Garama, this restaurant is laid-back and pleasant enough on a hot afternoon. You can use the kitchen (4LD) and smoke the nargileh (1LD).

Getting There & Away

Shared taxis run occasionally throughout the day to Ubari and Sebha.

UBARI

☎ 0722 / pop 42,975

The friendly town of Ubari has little of interest for travellers, but you're likely to pass through here en route to the Jebel Acacus. It's also the only town of any size between Al-Aweinat and Germa.

Orientation & Information

Ubari sprawls either side of the highway, but most of the facilities you'll need are along the main road. There are two **Internet cafés** (per hr 1.50LD) 50m west of the roundabout in the town centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Wat Wat Camp (☎ 642471; south of Tripoli-Ghat Hwy; tents 5LD, hut with/without breakfast 13/10LD) Reasonable huts, outdoor eating (meals 8LD to 15LD) and friendly staff are the order of the day here, but sleeping could mean a plague of mosquitoes.

Funduq Qala'a (☎ 626000; castle_oberi@hotmail.com; Germa-Ghat Hwy; s/d with shared bathroom 30/40LD; ☎) Ubari's most atmospheric choice, this converted castle has tidy rooms that are extremely comfortable for this part of the country. The castle origins can mean some rooms are a little cell-like but it's very well maintained and the courtyard's an antidote to the bleakness of the town surrounds. Meals cost 15LD.

Funduq Ubari (☎ 623095; s/d with private bathroom 30/35LD; ☎) It's difficult to decide whether the pervading smell of disinfectant is reassuring or disconcerting. The beds also sag prodigiously and the atmosphere is that of a typical government hotel – fine, but depressing. Meals cost 15LD.

Simple food rules in Ubari with basic restaurants along the highway serving couscous, chicken and not much else.

Getting There & Away

Shared taxis run to Ghat (via Al-Aweinat) and Sebha (via Germa).

AL-AWEINAT

☎ 0716

The pleasant and small oasis town of Al-Aweinat straddles the highway and can make an alternative staging post to Ghat en route to the Jebel Acacus. Another alternative is the challenging route from Ghadames to Al-Aweinat (see p494). **Aflaw Camp** (☎ 32040; fax 0724-2828; Tripoli-Ghat Hwy; bed in thatched hut 15LD) is well run and has a delightful open-sided dining area (meals 10LD).

GHAT

☎ 0724 / pop 24,347

The ancient trading centre of Ghat is one of the most attractive of the Libyan oasis towns. There's an evocative mud-brick medina in the heart of town and a superb setting: a backdrop of stunning sand dunes, the dark ridges of the Jebel Acacus to the east and the distant peaks of the Tassili-n-Ajjer (in Algeria) to the west.

History

The medina was built at the end of the 1st century BC, but most of what's visible originated in the 12th century. First built by the Garamantians, Ghat was one in a chain of fortified oases that afforded protection to merchants as they crossed the desert in

المعونات

أوبارى

غات

their caravans. Although it never rivalled Ghadames in size, its strategic location as the only significant town in the region ensured that it played a critical role in the ebb and flow of Saharan conflicts and trade.

Sights

Ghat's compact **medina** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD) is a fine example of an ancient Saharan town. Largely deserted, it has some haunting remnants of its former role as the lifeblood of the surrounding desert. There's an ancient **well**; crumbling **mud-brick houses** with **palm-trunk doors**; a 9th-century **mosque**; and a ziggurat-like **former congress building** where public meetings once were held. Fine views can be had from a Turkish-Italian **fort** that rises above the town.

Festivals & Events

The **Acacus Festival** (December to January) features a spectacular sunset concert amid the cathedral-like Jebel Acacus, with Tuareg dancing and reenactments of traditional ceremonies in the medina to bring in the New Year.

Sleeping & Eating

Most visitors to Ghat stay in one of the camps – **Anay Camping** (☎ 2622; fax 2479), Rifa as-Sahara Camp, or Tuareg Camping – all of which have simple thatched huts, kitchens and charge 15LD per person including breakfast; you can also pitch a tent for 5LD.

Tassili Hotel (☎ 2560; s/d with private bathroom 25/30LD) Ghat's oldest hotel has seen better days and is in urgent need of a make-over. You'd be better off staying at one of the camps until it gets its act together. It does, however, have the town's only restaurant to speak of (meals 15LD).

Getting There & Away

Libyan Arab Airlines flies twice a week to Tripoli (56LD) via Sebha (28LD), but is often booked out months in advance. The airport is 25km north of town. Shared taxis only go as far as Ubari (via Al-Aweinat).

THE JEBEL ACACUS

جبل اكاكوس

The Jebel Acacus is an other-worldly landscape of dark basalt stone monoliths that rise up from the sands of the central Sahara. This is a Unesco World Heritage-listed area, which is home to some wonderful scenery.

The site features a number of unique natural rock formations enhanced by the ever-shifting sands of the desert, not to mention prehistoric rock paintings and carvings including elephants, giraffes, wedding ceremonies and dancing human figures.

The possible routes for exploring the Acacus region are endless, although the most usual starting points are Ghat and Al-Aweinat. Places you won't want to miss include the awe-inspiring 150m-high **Natural Arch**, the **Awiss** region, the fine rock art of **Wadi Anshal** and **Wadi Tanshal**, the relief of **Imenineh well**, and the prolific rock art of the beautiful **Wadi Tashwinat**.

IDEHAN MURZUQ

أدهان مرزوق

For many travellers the Idehan Murzuq is the sand sea of which they have always dreamed, if only because it's less frequented than the Idehan Ubari. This incomprehensibly vast mountain range (over 35,000 sq km), made entirely of sand, is simply breathtaking with dunes rising hundreds of metres. The northern face of the sand sea rises up from the impossibly barren Murzuq Plateau; myriad wavelike ridges, sculpted by the wind, ascend to razor-sharp summits. From a distance during the heat of the day, the Idehan Murzuq shimmers pale yellow in the haze. As the sun lowers, the undulations in the midst of the dunes change into subtle yet magical plays of light and shadow.

WADI METHKANDOUSH

وادي متخنوش

Wadi Methkandoush, accessible from both Germa (150km) and the Jebel Acacus, has one of the richest concentrations of **prehistoric rock carvings** in the world. Most of the carvings in the soft sandstone date back at least 12,000 years, making this one of the oldest rock-art sites in Libya. This open-air gallery contains hundreds of carvings of animals, including wild cattle, giraffes, hippopotamuses, elephants, ostriches and rhinoceroses.

WAW AL-NAMUS

واو الناموس

The extraordinary extinct and steep-sided volcanic crater of Waw al-Namus is a weird-and-wonderful place and one of the most remote destinations in the world. It's 300km southeast of where the paved road ends at Tmissah. The black-and-white volcanic sand

THE ROCK ART OF THE LIBYAN SAHARA

The rock art of the Jebel Acacus and Wadi Methkandoush have an almost whimsical beauty, combining a childlike understanding of the natural world with extremely skilful artistic ability. The local Tuareg believe that the ancient artists saw their art as a school for their descendants, a record of what they saw and how they lived.

The Sahara had a temperate climate from 10,000 BC until 2500 BC. The rock art spans the following periods, thereby depicting humankind's changing relationship with nature.

Wild Fauna or Early Hunter Period (10,000–6000 BC) Characterised by the portrayal of elephants, giraffes and Barbary sheep from the time when the Sahara was covered by the plentiful savanna.

Round Head Period (8000–6000 BC) Known for human figures with formless bodies and painted circular heads devoid of features; its later stages feature more-decorative figures adorned with headdresses and unusual clothing.

Pastoral or Bovidian Period (5500–2000 BC) Charts the gradual transition from temperate to arid climate with human figures shown in positions of dominance over the natural world (spears, domesticated cattle and ceremonies in keeping with more-settled communities).

Horse Period (1000 BC–AD 1) Horses and chariots reflect more-sophisticated transport and human movement and human figures are represented by two triangles with a circular head.

Camel Period (200 BC–present) Camels replace wild and domesticated cattle.

The wet pigment (derived from ground-and-burnt stone) necessary for the paintings was usually applied using a brush made of feathers or animal hair, a spatula made of stick or bone or the fingers of the artist. Liquid binders (egg white, milk, urine, animal fat or blood) were then added and account for the paintings' remarkable longevity. The carvings or petroglyphs were rendered using a method known as 'pecking', which involved the use of a heavy, sharp stone.

Please leave the paintings and carvings as you find them. That seemingly obvious point is lost on a small minority of travellers whose greed to take home the perfect gift has placed the rock art under threat. Wetting the rock to enhance a photograph can also cause irreparable damage.

If you want to learn more about Saharan rock art, contact the **Trust for African Rock Art** (TARA; ☎/fax 254-2-884467; tara@swiftkenya.com), which is based in Kenya.

is stunning, as are the three palm-fringed lakes in which the water is red, green and blue. The crater is 7km in circumference and the summit of the rocky mountain in the centre affords stunning views. Not for nothing is Waw al-Namus known as the Crater of the Mosquitoes, so bring repellent and don't even think of camping in the crater. Also be sure to use the existing tracks down into the crater to avoid scarring the landscape for others.

Visiting here is a major undertaking and involves a two-day round trip in reliable, well-equipped vehicles. The road east from Zueila goes as far as the tiny town of Tmissah (76km). Thereafter, it is unsurfaced for about another 100km to Waw al-Kabir, an army camp with showers and basic meals. Beyond Waw al-Kabir are two army checkpoints, including one just before you arrive at Waw al-Namus; dropping off cigarettes and reading matter is much appreciated by the bored conscripts manning them. A permit is officially needed to visit Waw al-

Namus, but this should be handled by your tour company and the price included in the overall cost of your tour.

You may be thinking that this is a lot of trouble and expense just to see a crater, but this is not a place you'll easily forget.

LIBYA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Libya has an extensive network of *buyut ash-shabaab* (youth hostels), which can be pretty basic but dirt-cheap and fine for a night; a *Hostelling International* (HI) card entitles you to discounts of 2LD. As for camping, sleeping on the desert sand under a canopy of stars is free and unrivalled in beauty.

Funduq (government-run hotels) are frequently well situated and possess rooms of a reasonable standard, but service is often suspicious and downright dysfunctional. The crop of new private hotels is usually

PRACTICALITIES

- International newspapers and magazines are not available in Libya.
- Radio and TV coverage in Libya includes the BBC World Service (15.070MHz and 12.095MHz) and other European radio on short-wave, and International satellite TV channels in most hotels.
- Libya has the PAL (B) video system as in western Europe.
- Libya's electricity system caters for 220V to 240V AC, 50Hz; plugs are of the European continental-style two-pin type.
- Libya uses the metric system for weights and measures.

cheaper, friendlier and much better maintained; some are outstanding. Along Libya's coastline, *qaryat as-siyah* (tourist villages) offer proximity to the beach and a break from hotel ambience.

Throughout this chapter, budget hotels and hostels refer to places where hostel dorm beds cost 3LD up to 20/30LD for singles/doubles in a hotel. Midrange hotels and tourist villages range from 30/40LD up to 50/60LD, while top-end choices start from 70LD for a single and can scale the giddy heights of 400LD.

ACTIVITIES

Desert safaris by 4WD (and occasionally camel) enable you to experience some of the finest scenery the Sahara has to offer. All Libyan tour companies (p506) can arrange such expeditions lasting from two days up to deep desert expeditions of two weeks. At Gebraoun Lake (p495), dune skiing or sandboarding is also possible.

BOOKS

Desert Encounter, by Knud Holmboe, is a classic and sympathetic account of a journey across Libya and one of the few first-hand accounts of the Italian occupation of Libya in the early 1930s.

Difficult & Dangerous Roads: Hugh Clapperton's Travels in Sahara & Fezzan 1822-1825 is a sometimes cranky, but highly readable account of Hugh Clapperton's journeys through the Libyan Sahara.

South from Barbary, by Justin Marozzi, is an epic journey by camel from Ghadames to Al-Kufra. Although it reads a little like a *Boy's Own* adventure at times, it contains a wealth of historical detail.

African Rock Art, by David Coulson and Alec Campbell, is a beautifully illustrated study with a section on Libya's rock art.

Libya: The Lost Cities of the Roman Empire, by Robert Polidori et al, is unrivalled in its superb coverage of Libya's Greek and Roman sites, rich as it is with detailed research and great photography.

The Green Book, by Mu'ammarr Gaddafi, lays out the philosophical basis that underpins Colonel Gaddafi's Libya.

Libya and the West: From Independence to Lockerbie, by the respected analyst Geoff Simons, is one of the more up-to-date (2004) explorations of Libyan history.

Libya's Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction, written by Mansour O el-Kikhia, is a penetrating and readable account of Libya under Colonel Gaddafi.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks Open from 9am to 1pm Sunday to Tuesday and Thursday, 8am to 12.30pm and 3.30pm to 4.30pm or 4.30pm to 5.30pm Wednesday and Saturday.

Government offices Open from 7am to 2pm Saturday to Thursday April to September, and 8am to 3pm Saturday to Thursday October to March.

Internet cafés Open 9am to 1am Saturday to Thursday, and 3pm to 1am Friday.

Restaurants Open 12.30pm to 3pm and 6pm to 10pm Saturday to Thursday, and 6pm to 10pm Friday.

Shops Open 10am to 2pm and 5pm to 8pm Saturday to Thursday.

CHILDREN

Many Libyans live with or have close ties to their extended families and you'll find that most are terrific in dealing with children. Nappies (diapers), powders and most simple medications are available at pharmacies and grocery stores in most cities (especially Tripoli and Benghazi). The difficulty you're most likely to encounter is keeping your children entertained during the long journeys between towns.

CUSTOMS

Libyan customs checks on arrival are pretty cursory although bags are X-rayed. Don't even think of trying to bring algo-

hol into the country. If you're bringing your own car into the country, expect an hour or two of inspections at the border and make sure you have your carnet (see p662). Customs inspections upon departure tend to be slightly more rigorous; they're especially concerned about antiquities and fragments from the Saharan rock art of southern Libya being taken out of the country.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Libya is a very safe country in which to travel and Libyans are generally a hospitable and friendly bunch. Police checkpoints can be tiresome and slow your journey but you'll rarely be asked to show identification. The only occasion on which you may encounter difficulties is if you point your camera at a restricted site (ie a government building or police station). Petty theft is extremely rare but does occur. Driving in Libya can be hazardous with the major danger being people driving at high speed.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

As long as you're healthy, there's no reason why you shouldn't enjoy travelling in Libya. If you're going as part of a group, notify your tour company well in advance of any special requirements you may have. Most of the better hotels have entrances at ground level and functioning lifts and most group tours involve transport to all sites. Even in the desert transport is usually by 4WD rather than camel. Depending on your disability, you may find it difficult exploring some of the archaeological sites where paths are uneven and access for wheelchairs can be difficult.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Libyan Embassies & Consulates

Libyan embassies are known as Libyan People's Bureaus.

Australia (☎ 02-6290 7900; 50 Culgoa Circuit, O'Malley, ACT 2606)

Austria (☎ 01-367 7639; Balaasstrasse 33, 1190 Vienna)

Belgium (☎ 02-649 15 03; Ave Victoria 28, B-1050 Brussels)

Canada (☎ 0613-230 0919; Suite 1000, 81 Metcalfe St, Ottawa K1P 6K7)

Egypt (☎ 02-735 1269; fax 02-735 0072; 7 Sharia el-Saleh Ayoub, Zamalek)

France Marseille (☎ 091 71 50 60; 424 rue Paradis, Marseille 13008); Paris (☎ 01 40 67 75 75; 3 villa Copernic, 75116)

Germany (☎ 030-20 05 96 0; Schützenstrasse 15-17, 10117 Berlin)

Italy Milan (☎ 02-86 46 42 85; Via Barrachini 7, Milan 02); Rome (☎ 06-86 32 09 51; Via Nomentana 365, Rome 00 162)

Netherlands (☎ 020-355 8886; Parkweg 15, 1285 GH, The Hague)

Spain (☎ 91 563 57 53; Calle Pisuergra 12, 28071 Madrid)

Switzerland (☎ 031-351 3076; Travelweg 2 CH-3006, Bern)

Tunisia (☎ 01-780 866; 48 Bis Rue due 1er Juin, Tunis 01)

Turkey (☎ 18100 225 12101; Miralay Sefik Bey Sok No 3, Gumussuyu, Taksim, Istanbul)

UK (☎ 020-7589 6120; 61-62 Ennismore Gardens, London SW7 1NH)

USA (☎ 212-752 5775; lbyun@undp.org; 309 East 48th St, New York 10017)

Embassies & Consulates in Libya

Both the Australian and US governments have announced plans to open embassies in Tripoli. At the time of research they were yet to open.

Belgium (☎ 021-3350115; Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 4, Level 5, Tripoli)

Egypt (Map p472; ☎ 021-6605500; Sharia al-Fat'h, Tripoli)

France (☎ 021-4774891; Sharia Beni al-Amar, Hay Andaluz, Tripoli)

Germany (☎ 021-3330554; Sharia Hassan al-Mashai, Tripoli)

Italy (Map p472; ☎ 021-3334131; italconstrip@esteri.it; 1 Sharia Uaharan, Tripoli)

Japan (☎ 021-3350056; Dhat al-Ahmat Tower 4, Level 1, Tripoli)

Netherlands (Map p472; ☎ 021-4441549; 20 Sharia Galal Bayar, Tripoli)

Spain (☎ 021-3336797; Sharia al-Amir Abd al-Kader al-Jezayir, Garden City, Tripoli)

Tunisia (☎ 021-3331051; off Sharia al-Jrabah, Bin Ashour, Tripoli)

UK (☎ 021-3351422; Burj al-Fateh, Level 24, Tripoli)

USA (c/o US Interests Section, Belgian embassy)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Germa Festival (p496) Held in March and showcases local ceremonies and dance.

Qasr Festival (p490) Honours the Berber traditions of the Jebel Nafusa and centres around Kabaw's evocative *qasr*. Held in April.

Ghadames Festival (p493) Held each October in the old city with celebrations of traditional culture and weddings.

Acacus Festival (p498) Held in Ghat during December and January. Celebrates the town's Tuareg heritage and includes concerts in the mountains.

HOLIDAYS

For a full list of religious holidays that are celebrated in Libya, see p647. Most government offices and some shops will be closed during the main national holidays.

Declaration of the People's Authority Day On 2 March commemorates the founding of the Jamahiriya in 1977.

Evacuation Day On 28 March celebrates the evacuation of British forces from Libyan soil.

Evacuation Day On 11 June celebrates the evacuation of other foreign military bases.

Revolution Day The biggest nonreligious holiday in the Libyan calendar occurs on 1 September.

Day of Mourning Pays tribute on 26 October to Libyans killed during the Italian occupation.

INTERNET ACCESS

Libya has joined the Internet revolution with Internet cafés present in almost every small town – look for the blue Internet Explorer sign on the window. Connections can be quite slow. The costs range from 0.75LD per hour in Tripoli to 1.50LD in more-remote places.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Some of the better Libya-specific websites:

Libya Online (www.libyaonline.com/) The most extensive directory devoted to Libyan society with a contemporary twist – everything from recipes to Libyan fashion.

Libya Our Home (http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dr_ibrahim_ighneiwa/) An expansive range of links on Libya, with sections on history, the arts, sport, human rights and travel.

Libyana (www.libyana.org) Another excellent site devoted to Libyan arts, especially music and poetry.

Society for Libyan Studies (www.britac.ac.uk/institutes/libya/) Useful for researchers and those interested in the archaeological work being undertaken in Libya.

LANGUAGE

Arabic is the national language of Libya and all signs are in Arabic – not even motorway signs are translated. English signs have recently been declared legal for sites and businesses that are tourist-related, but it's taking a while to catch on. Although some English or Italian is spoken in the main

cities, few people elsewhere speak a foreign language. Some French is spoken in Ghadames and Ghat.

MAPS

For desert expeditions in remote areas, the most reliable map is Michelin's Map No 953, *Africa North and West* (1:4,000,000). The best maps available in Libya include Malt International's *Map of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya* (1:3,500,000) and Cartographia's *Libya* (1:2,000,000), which would be the map of choice were it not for the fact that it omits the Jebel Acacus and Waw al-Namus.

MONEY

The official unit of currency is the Libyan dinar. Notes include 0.25LD, 0.50LD, 1LD, 5LD, 10LD and, rarely, 20LD. For changing money, the bank and black-market exchange rates are all but identical. Large denomination euros, US dollars or British pounds are the preferred currencies. No banks change travellers cheques – cash is king in Libya. The following were the official bank rates at the time of publication.

Country	Unit	Libyan dinar (LD)
Australia	A\$1	0.93
Egypt	£E1	0.24
Canada	C\$1	1.16
euro zone	€1	1.50
Japan	¥100	1.18
New Zealand	NZ\$1	0.94
UK	UK£1	2.21
USA	US\$1	1.27

It's also now possible to obtain a cash advance on your Visa card (although not, at the time of writing, with any other card). The Masraf al-Tijara Watanmiya (Bank of Commerce & Development), with branches in Tripoli (p473) and Benghazi (p482), is the only bank to do this. Libya's only ATM for Visa cards at the time of writing was in the lobby of the Funduq Tibesti (p484) in Benghazi.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Digital photography has been slow to catch on in Libya. While you may find that some photo shops know what they're talking about in Tripoli, you're better off arriving fully equipped. If you want to burn pho-

tos to CDs, it is possible at some Internet cafés in Tripoli and, to a lesser extent, in Benghazi. However, this applies only to dedicated Internet cafés and not to the ubiquitous phone centres that have a few computers out the back.

POST

Almost every town in Libya has a post office that's easily recognisable by the tall telecommunications mast rising above the centre of town. It costs 0.30/0.50LD to send a postcard/letter to most places, including Europe and Australia.

SHOPPING

The best place in Libya to shop is in the souqs of Tripoli's medina (p476), where you'll find the largest selection of goods. For Tuareg items, many Tuareg in the Fezzan spread out their goods for sale on a rug alongside the lakes.

The most distinctive items for sale include high-quality flat-weave Berber cushions and rugs, colourful pottery, copper items and leatherwork. Other must-haves are Colonel Gaddafi watches, embroidered leather slippers from Ghadames (p494) and silver Tuareg jewellery.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Travelling to Libya on your own is not generally a problem, although it can be prohibitively expensive. Even on your own, you're required to travel with a guide, which means you shoulder the full cost of transport, guiding fees etc, rather than sharing them among a group. To visit the desert requires a minimum of two 4WD vehicles (90LD each per day), in case one breaks down, which can really blow out costs.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Calls within Libya invariably receive instant connections and are quite cheap (around 0.25LD). To make an international call, go to the counter of a government telephone office, write out the number in full for the clerk who will make the connection, and then take the call in the allocated private booth. For most Western countries, the cost is 1.50LD per minute. Far cheaper is using an Internet café to telephone via the Internet. Most cafés sell 8LD cards and can help you connect. For

8LD, you will have 210/145/152 minutes to the UK/USA/Italy.

Fax

An international/local fax will rarely cost more than 2/0.50LD. The best places from which to send faxes are also the government telephone offices. The main telephone office in Tripoli offers a handy fax restante service (see p473).

Mobile Phones

You're unlikely to get coverage for your mobile phone in Libya – check with your company at home before travelling.

TOILETS

There are no public toilets in Libya, but you're never too far from a restaurant or mosque where they're usually happy to point you in the right direction. In the event of an emergency ask for *al-hammam* or *mirhab*.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Libyan government tourist offices operate as overseers of the tourism industry and tour companies, *not* providers of practical tourist information.

VISAS

To obtain a Libyan visa, you'll need an invitation from a Libyan tour company; if you've organised your tour through a non-Libyan company, they'll arrange the invitation from their Libyan affiliates. The tour company will then send you a visa number. Make sure you have an Arabic-language confirmation to smooth the process with airlines, the embassy or immigration officials. You can collect your visa either from the Libyan embassy in your home country or at your entry point to Libya but specify which you prefer when making first contact with the tour company. The process generally takes two weeks, but allowing for a month is safer. Visas are valid for 30 days from the date of entry and you must enter Libya within 30 days of the visa being issued.

A further requirement of entry into Libya is that travellers must be in possession of a minimum of 500LD in foreign currency. Those who pay all travel expenses to their tour operator or agency in advance are exempt from this requirement.

Registration

All holders of tourist visas must register with the Libyan authorities at any *jawazzat* within seven days of arrival in the country. The process will invariably be completed by the tour company responsible for you during your stay and the fee is usually included in your overall tour cost.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Balancing the liberal and the conservative strands of Libyan society is an inexact science, but it's one that causes few difficulties for the overwhelming number of female visitors to Libya. In general, Libya is one of the easiest countries in the Middle East for women to travel in, largely because of Libyan government policies in relation to women. Since the revolution the government's policies have contributed to a less-misunderstood view of Western women than can be found in some other countries of the region. As a result, most female travellers have reported being treated with respect, with few incidents of unpleasant behaviour. When foreign visitors are introduced to Libyan men, men will in most circumstances shake hands with Western women.

The usual dress guidelines for the region apply in Libya; see p655 for details.

TRANSPORT IN LIBYA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For information on travelling to Libya from outside the Middle East, see p657.

Entering Libya

Coming into Libya, whether by air, sea or land, is generally a trouble-free process. If you are collecting your visa on arrival in Libya, try to ensure that your tour company has a representative waiting for you to reduce the time that they spend processing your visa.

Passport

When entering Libya, there is no longer any requirement that your passport details be translated into Arabic. Israeli citizens will not be issued with a visa under any circumstances, nor will those with Israeli stamps in their passport.

Air

Travellers will find that the Libyan capital and, to a lesser extent, Benghazi are well connected to other Middle Eastern cities by air.

For details on flights to Libya from outside the Middle East, see p657.

AIRLINES FLYING TO/FROM LIBYA

Afriqiyah Airways (airline code 8U; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3333647; www.afriqiyah.aero) Hub: Tripoli.

Air Malta (airline code KM; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350579; www.airmalta.com) Hub: Valetta.

Al-Buraq Air (airline code UZ; in Tripoli ☎ 021-4444811; www.buraqair.com) Hub: Tripoli.

Alitalia (airline code AZ; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350298; www.alitalia.com) Hub: Rome.

Austrian Airlines (airline code OS; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350242; www.aa.com) Hub: Vienna.

British Airways (airline code BA; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3351281; www.britishairways.com) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

Emirates (airline code EK; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350597; www.emirates.com) Hub: Dubai.

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines (airline code KL; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350018; www.klm.com) Hub: Amsterdam Schiphol Airport.

Libyan Arab Airlines (airline code LN; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3616738) Hub: Tripoli.

Lufthansa (airline code LH; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350375; www.lufthansa.com) Hub: Frankfurt.

Royal Jordanian (airline code RJ; in Tripoli ☎ 021-4442453; www.rja.com.jo) Hub: Amman.

Swiss International Airlines (airline code LX; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350022; www.swiss.com) Hub: Zurich.

FLIGHTS FROM LIBYA

Departures from Tripoli	Airline	One-way/return Fare (US\$)
Aleppo (via Benghazi)	Al-Buraq Air	150/275
Alexandria (via Benghazi)	EgyptAir	144/173
Amman	Royal Jordanian	140/275
	Libyan Arab Airlines	140/275
Beirut	Libyan Arab Airlines	140/240
Cairo	EgyptAir	144/173
(via Benghazi)	Libyan Arab Airlines	144/173
Damascus	Syrianair	150/275
	Al-Buraq Air	150/275
	Libyan Arab Airlines	150/275
Istanbul	Turkish Airlines	180/335
	Libyan Arab Airlines	180/335

Syrianair (airline code RB; in Tripoli ☎ 021-4446716; www.syriaair.com) Hub: Damascus.

Tunis Air (airline code TU; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3336303; www.tunisair.com) Hub: Tunis.

Turkish Airlines (airline code TK; in Tripoli ☎ 021-3351252; www.turkishairlines.com) Hub: Istanbul.

Land

BORDER CROSSINGS

The most commonly used land borders for travellers are the coastal frontiers with Tunisia (Ras al-Jedir) and Egypt (Amsaad). The land borders with Sudan, Chad and Algeria were, at the time of writing, closed to non-Libyans. The remote border crossing with Niger is open, although you should make sure that you have the necessary visas (valid for land arrivals) firmly ensconced in your passport – it is a long way to backtrack if there's some kind of problem.

Egypt

The Libyan–Egyptian border, 139km east of Tobruk at Amsaad and 12km west of Sallum in Egypt, is remote, often chaotic and, in summer, perishingly hot; bring your own water. Foreign travellers are often, embarrassingly, shepherded to the front of the queue. We've never heard of anyone turning down such an offer as a matter of principle.

Long-distance buses run from Benghazi to Alexandria (40LD to 50LD) and Cairo (50LD to 60LD). Shared taxis run from the taxi station in Tobruk all the way to the border (5LD). On the other side, shared taxis go to Sallum (E£3 to E£4) where you can get buses (E£12) or service taxis (E£15) to Marsa Matruh. **Al-Itihad al-Afriqi** (Map p472; ☎ 021-3342532; Sharia al-Ma'ari, Tripoli) has departures from Tripoli for Cairo (100LD, 36 hours); you'll need to book at least two days in advance.

Tours

For a full list of international tour companies who run tours to Libya and elsewhere, see p664.

GETTING AROUND

In this era of organised tours, getting around Libya couldn't be easier because all transport within the country will be organised by your tour company.

Air

Libya's domestic airline network is expanding rapidly with flights connecting Tripoli to Benghazi, Ghat, Houn, Lebreq (near Al-Bayda) and Sebha. There are also occasional flights to Ghadames with more regular flights planned. For details on prices and frequency, see the relevant city entries throughout this chapter. From Benghazi, there are also flights to Sebha and Al-Kufra (p484).

There are two airlines that fly domestically in Libya.

Al-Buraq Air (www.buraqair.com) Benghazi (☎ 061-2234469); Tripoli (☎ 021-3510016) Only operating a Tripoli–Benghazi route at the time of writing but it has plans for flights to Sebha and other Libyan destinations. It has a newer fleet than Libyan Arab Airlines, and is a little more expensive but more reliable. Operates from Tripoli's Metiga Airport.

Libyan Arab Airlines (☎ 021-3616738; Sharia Omar al-Mukhtar, Tripoli)

Bus & Shared Taxi

There are daily bus connections between the major cities, with services along the coast the most frequent. Many buses are air-conditioned, although the quality is variable. The routes are shadowed by shared taxis, which can take an age to fill.

Car & Motorcycle

If you do have your own vehicle, especially a 4WD, there are few limits on where you can go, however, the Tibesti region is one exception. You must be accompanied by at least one representative of the Libyan tour company who arranged your visa and who remains responsible for you for the duration of your stay.

Driving is on the right-hand side of the road, and Libyans generally drive as fast as they think they can get away with. For the record, all cars (including 4WDs) must stay on or below 100km/h on highways and 50km/h inside towns.

All road signs are in Arabic so familiarise yourself with the written Arabic names for your destination (see each town's individual listing throughout this chapter). Libyan roads are generally maintained in excellent condition and petrol is ridiculously cheap; you'll fill your tank for around 5LD. No matter how many times you have been waved through a checkpoint, never assume

that you will be. Always slow down or stop until you get the wave from your friendly machine-gun-toting soldier.

Tours

The following companies are among those that we either recommend or have been recommended to us by travellers.

Al-Muheet Tours (in Benghazi ☎ 061-9082084; www.almuheettours.net) The owner, Sami al-Ghibani, has a reputation for running an efficient and flexible company. Benghazi-based.

Destination Libye (in Tripoli ☎ 021-4779854; www.dlibye.com) Good company specialising in French-language tours.

Robban Tourism Services (in Tripoli ☎ 021-4441530; www.robban-tourism.com; off Sharia as-Sarim, Tripoli) Outstanding and professional small company with flexible itineraries and good guides. Hussein Founi should be your first port of call.

Sahara Link Travel (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3343209; saharalink@hotmail.com; Sharia Kuwait, Tripoli)

Shati Zuara Travel & Tourism (☎ 091315 8229; info@shati-zuara.de; www.shati-zuara.de) Very good Libyan company with its main base in Germany.

Sukra Travel & Tourism (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3340604; www.sukra-travel.com; Sharia Mohammed Megharief, Tripoli)

NO ANSWER, TRY AGAIN

Libya has numerous professionally run tour companies, although all of them suffer from an occasional inability to answer emails promptly. In fact, many of them don't answer emails at all. The actual visa process takes only a couple of weeks, but you are advised to start contacting tour companies long before that to take into account the incomprehensible periods of silence from the Libyan capital. This is a problem that particularly afflicts lone travellers but it's something of an established Libyan business practice in all fields. Be persistent, try following up with phone calls and, as a last resort, threaten to write to us if visa deadlines are approaching.

Taknes Co (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350526; fax 3350525; Funduq Bab al-Bahar, Tripoli) The owner is the helpful Ali Shebli. The postal address is PO Box 91218, Tripoli.

Wings Travel & Tours (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3331855; www.wingstours.com; Green Sq, Tripoli)

Winzrik Tourism Services (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3611123; www.winzrik.com; Sharia 7 November, Tripoli) Libya's largest and longest-standing tour company.

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