

Sudan

Sudan is the largest, yet one of the least visited, countries in Africa. Although various ongoing conflicts mean much of this vast nation remains off limits, the northeast is one of the safest places in the world, and the easing of travel restrictions is opening up new swathes of territory to explore in the lovely south, where Africa transitions into the tropics. The pyramids and other ancient sites littering the northern deserts may pale compared to the best Egypt has on offer, but you can usually experience these without another person in sight – and this sense of discovery often repeats itself in the towns, too, since Sudan's tourist trail is still no more than a trickle. And while the solitude is a top draw, visitors invariably agree that the Sudanese are among the friendliest and most hospitable people on earth, with a natural generosity that belies their poverty, and this alone makes any trip worthwhile. Whether you rush through on a Cairo to Cape Town trip, or spend a slow month soaking up the history and hospitality, visiting Sudan is an eye-opening and rewarding experience.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 2.5 million sq km
- **ATMs** Only work with local accounts
- **Borders** Egypt and Ethiopia open; crossing to Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Libya and Uganda not recommended; Eritrea closed but likely to reopen; Chad closed
- **Budget** US\$20 to US\$30 a day
- **Capital** Khartoum
- **Languages** Arabic, English, over 100 regional languages
- **Money** Sudanese dinar; US\$1 = SDD200
- **Population** 41 million
- **Seasons** Rainy season in north (July to September), Red Sea coast (October to December) and south (April to November)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 249, international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +3
- **Visas** Best bought in Cairo (Egypt), or with the help of a Khartoum travel agent



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Begrawiya** (p205) Sudan's best-preserved pyramids, in a stunning desert location.
- **Wadi Halfa to Dongola** (p206) Remote country with many rewards.
- **Kassala** (p207) Dramatic mountains and diverse markets.
- **Omdurman** (p203) Khartoum's more traditional twin is home to the largest *souq* in the country and some whirling dervishes.
- **Nuba Mountains** (p208) New frontier for tourism in Sudan.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Sudan's climate ranges from hot and dry in the north to humid and tropical in the equatorial south. September to April is the best time to visit. Northern temperatures can exceed 40°C year-round, but peak from April to July. The heaviest rains (rarely more than 150mm in Khartoum) in July and August (Port Sudan's meagre rainy season is October to December) present few problems for travel in the north, though wreak havoc on roads in the Nuba Mountains. Fierce dust storms (the *haboob*) blow occasionally from July to August and November to January. In the slightly cooler south it rains year-round, but April to November is the wettest time.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Three days is plenty of time to visit Khartoum (p201) and get out to the Meroe Sites (p205).
- **One Week** After seeing Khartoum and the Meroe Sites, head north for the pyramids and other ruins, making sure not to miss those near Karima (p207). Then travel east for some Red Sea scuba diving out of Port Sudan (p209) or south to explore the surprisingly green Nuba Mountains (p208), where few other tourists tread.

HISTORY

Modern Sudan is situated on the site of the ancient civilisation of Nubia, which predates Pharaonic Egypt. For centuries sovereignty was shuttled back and forth between the Egyptians, indigenous empires such as Kush, and a succession of independent Christian kingdoms.

After the 14th century AD the Mamelukes (Turkish rulers in Egypt) breached the formidable Nubian defences and established the dominance of Islam. By the 16th century

WARNING

The south remains volatile despite the peace deals, and there's no end in sight to the violence in Darfur to the west. West-erners have been targeted in both places. Tribal fighting has flared around Dilling in the Nuba Mountains and some fear it could spread.

the kingdom of Funj had become a powerful Muslim state and Sennar, 200km south of present-day Khartoum, was one of the great cultural centres of the Islamic world.

Colonialism & Revolt

In 1821 the viceroy of Egypt, Mohammed Ali, conquered northern Sudan and opened the south to trade, with catastrophic results. Within a few decades British interests were also directed towards Sudan, aiming to control the Nile, contain French expansion from the west and draw the south into a British-East African federation. The European intrusion, and in particular the Christian missionary zeal that accompanied it, was resented by many Muslim Sudanese.

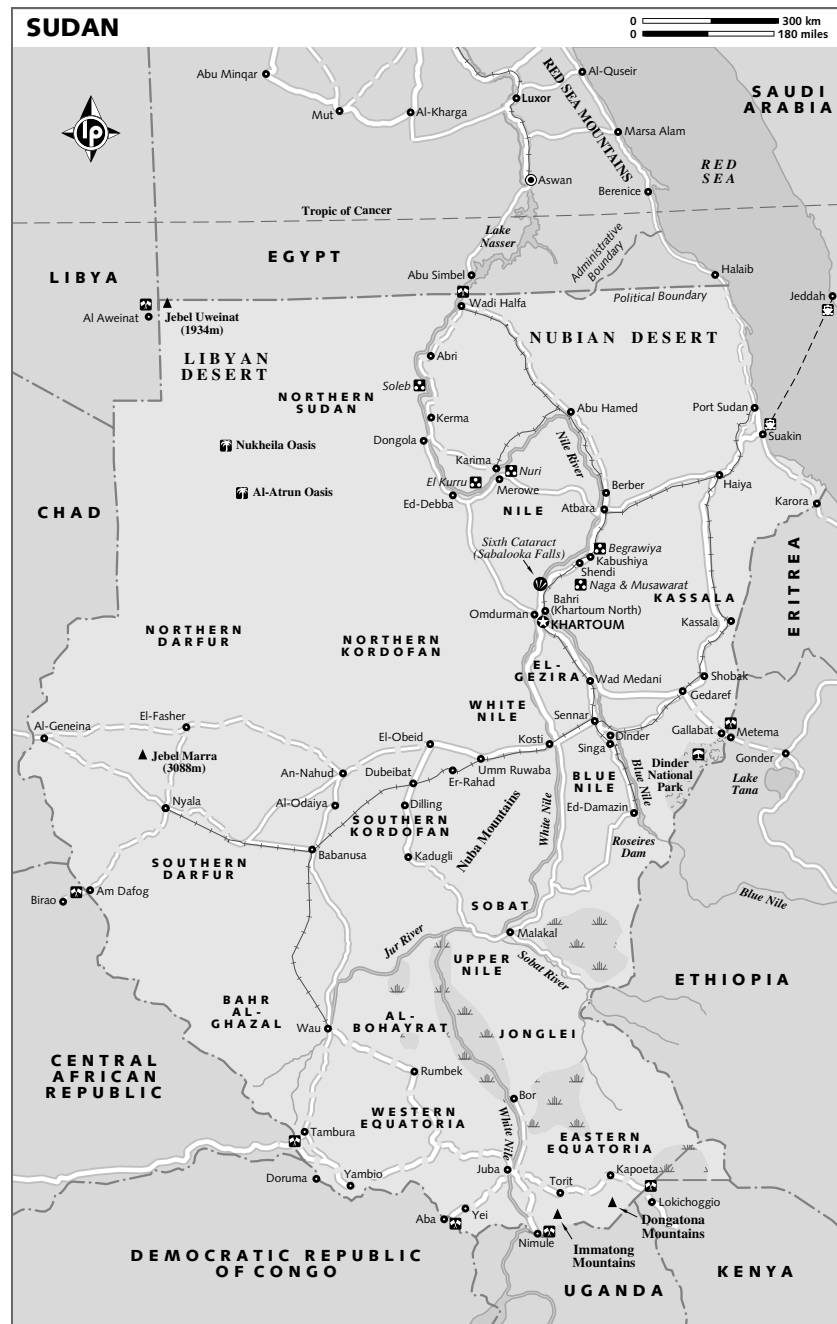
The revolution came in 1881, when one Mohammed Ahmed proclaimed himself to be the Mahdi – the person who, according to Muslim tradition, would rid the world of evil. Four years later he rid Khartoum of General Gordon, the British-appointed governor, and the Mahdists ruled Sudan until 1898, when

HOW MUCH?

- **Small food-covering basket** US\$3.40
- **100km bus ride** US\$0.50
- **Jebbana (spiced coffee)** US\$0.50
- **One hour internet** US\$0.50
- **Falafel** US\$0.50

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.40
- **1.5L of bottled water** US\$0.80
- **Bottle of beer** Priceless
- **Dagger** US\$19
- **Plate of legemat (doughnut holes)** US\$0.30



they were defeated outside Omdurman by Lord Kitchener and his Anglo-Egyptian army. The British then imposed the Condominium Agreement, effectively making Sudan a British colony.

Independence & Revolt

Sudan achieved independence in 1956, but in a forerunner of things to come, General Ibrahim Abboud summarily dismissed the winners of the first post-independence elections. Ever since, flirtations with democracy and military coups have been regular features of the Sudanese political landscape. So has war in the mostly non-Muslim south, which revolted after its demands for autonomy were rejected.

In 1969 Colonel Jaafar Nimeiri assumed power and held it for 16 years, surviving several coup attempts, and making numerous twists and turns in policy to outflank opponents and keep aid donors happy. Most importantly, by signing the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement to grant the southern provinces a measure of autonomy he quelled the civil war for more than a decade.

...And More Revolt

In 1983 Nimeiri scrapped the autonomy accord and imposed *sharia* (Islamic law) over the whole country. Exactly what he hoped to achieve by this is unclear, but the effect on the southern population was entirely predictable, and hostilities recommenced almost immediately. Army commander John Garang deserted to form the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which quickly took control of much of the south.

Nimeiri was deposed in 1985 and replaced first by a Transitional Military Council, then, after elections the next year, Sadiq al-Mahdi became prime minister. In July 1989 power was seized by the current president, Lieutenant General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir; however, Hassan al-Turabi, fundamentalist leader of the National Islamic Front (NIF), was widely seen as the man with real power.

The government's brand of belligerent fundamentalism, border disputes with half its neighbours and possible complicity in a 1995 assassination attempt on Egypt's president soon cost Sudan all its regional friends.

1999: Infighting (& Revolt)

The year 1999 was something of a watershed in Sudanese politics: in December, just when

the country's domestic and international situation seemed to be improving, President al-Bashir dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution and imposed a three-month state of emergency; all as part of an internal power struggle with Al-Turabi. The subsequent elections in December 2000 were boycotted by opposition parties, giving al-Bashir an easy win, and in 2001 Al-Turabi and several members of his party were arrested after signing an agreement with the SPLA.

By 2002 things were looking up again – the economy had stabilised and a ceasefire was called after President al-Bashir and SPLA leader John Garang met in Nairobi – but it seems good news in Sudan is always followed by bad. In February 2003 black African rebels in the western Darfur region rose up against the government they accused of oppression and neglect. The army's heavy-handed response, assisted by pro-government Arab militias (the Janjaweed), escalated to what many have called genocide. The government's scorched-earth campaign killed some 200,000 Sudanese and uprooted millions more.

Sudan Today (An End to Revolt?)

While Darfur spun out of control, peace crept forward in the south, and in January 2005 a deal was signed ending Africa's longest civil war. It included accords on sharing power and wealth (including equal distribution of oil export revenue), and six years of southern autonomy followed by a referendum on independence. In July the beloved Garang became the first vice president in a power-sharing government, and president of the south, but was killed less than a month later in a helicopter crash. Garang's No.2, Salva Kiir, took his place and has earned praise.

By the middle of 2006 Sudan was at a crossroads. While a Darfuri peace accord with some rebel factions was signed in May, the killing got worse and al-Bashir, fearing they will arrest people on war-crimes charges, has refused to allow UN peacekeepers to replace the small and ineffective African Union force. Meanwhile foot-dragging on the implementation of key elements of the peace agreement threatens to derail the peace in the south.

CULTURE

Although there are differing perspectives on the issue, the reunification of north and south is on everybody's mind. Northerners

hope peace will bring back 'the old and nice days' when the economy was strong, while southerners talk of a 'new Sudan'. The more practical minded in both halves are dreaming of dinar: peace brings many new business opportunities.

Sharia is not as strictly enforced as it once was. Alcohol is pretty easy to find (foreigners are usually spared the 40 lashes Sudanese get when caught with it), and there is much more of a sense of ease in the air. As one Sudanese man put it, there are 'a lot more beautiful women on the streets of Khartoum these days'.

PEOPLE

Sudan's 41 million people are divided into hundreds of ethnic groups. Some 75% of Sudan's population, including around two million nomads, live in rural areas, and agriculture still employs 80% of the workforce. About 70% of the population is Muslim (Sunni, mostly), although the south is dominated by traditional animists (25%) and Christians (around 5%). Despite their differences, hospitality is a key concept for all Sudanese, and wherever you go you'll constantly find people paying for things for you, sharing meals or even inviting you to stay in their homes!

ENVIRONMENT

Northern and western Sudan are vast, desolate areas of desert that support little life, and Nubia in the northeast is semidesert. Except for a few mountain ranges, the country is largely flat.

FOOD & DRINK

Sudanese food isn't particularly varied – the staples are *fuul* (stewed brown beans) and *ta'amiya*, known elsewhere as falafel. Outside the larger towns you'll find little else.

Meat dishes include *kibda* (liver), shish kebabs and *shwarma*, hunks of chicken or lamb sliced fresh from the classic roasting spit. Along the Nile you can find excellent fresh perch.

Tea is the favourite drink, served as *shai saada* (black, sometimes spiced), *shai bi-laban* (with milk) or *shai bi-nana* (with mint). Also common is *qahwa turkiya* (Turkish coffee) and *jebbana* (spiced coffee), served in distinctive clay or metal pots and spiked with cardamom, cinnamon or ginger. Local fruit juices are usually made with untreated water/ice.

KHARTOUM

pop 4.5 million

Built where the two Niles meet, Khartoum is one of the more modern cities in Central Africa, with paved roads, high-rise buildings and all the services you might want or need. Some travellers consider it nothing but a dusty, congested and joyless (nightlife is nearly nonexistent) stopover. But those looking to uncover its culture will appreciate what they find when they start walking around. Besides, its people are hospitable, the riverside setting is attractive and it's one of the safest cities in Africa – so for one reason or another most people end up liking it here.

ORIENTATION

Three cities sit at the confluence of the White and Blue Niles: Khartoum, Bahri (Khartoum North) and Omdurman, each separated by an arm of the river. You'll find anything you need in central Khartoum; continuing south, the city gets more upscale and international.

INFORMATION

The **Sudanese-French Bank** (Map p204; al-Quasar St) and **Bank of Khartoum** (Map p204; al-Barlman St) do foreign exchange. So do Alamon Exchange and UAExchange (multiple locations), which are also agents for Traveler money transfers. **Blue Nile Mashreg Bank** (Map p204; al-Barlman St) handles Western Union.

Al-Faisal Hospital (Map p204; ☎ 83789555; al-Isbitalya St) has a 24-hour casualty centre.

The **post office** (Map p204; al-Khalifa St) has an EMS service at the back, and **DHL** (Map p204; ☎ 83777500; al-Nijomi St) is not far away.

For orders in English, try the **New Bookshop** (Map p204; al-Ziber Basha) and **Central Bookshop** (Map p204; al-Jamhuriya St).

Cultural Centres

British Council (Map p204; ☎ 83780817; Abo Sin St)

French Cultural Centre (Map p204; ☎ 83798035; Ali Dinar St)

German Kulturzentrum (Map p204; ☎ 83777833; al-Mak Nimir St)

Internet Access

Azza Business Center (Map p204; Sayyid Abdul al-

Rahman St; per hr SDD100; ☎ 9am-9pm Sat-Thu; ☎)

Khartoum Internet Club (Map p204; al-Quasar St; per hr SDD200; ☎ 9am-10pm; ☎)

Net Gate (Map p204; 2nd fl, al-Sharif al-Hindi St; per hr SDD100; ☎ 8am-10pm) Located at the back of the building.

Travel Agents

Air Handling (Map p204; ☎ 83770692; al-Jamhuriya St)
Khartoum Travel & Tourism (Map p204; ☎ 83772962; al-Jamhuriya St)

SIGHTS

The **National Museum** (Map p202; al-Nil St; admission SDD100; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm, closed noon-3pm Fri & Mon) has some fine exhibits, notably the Pharaonic stone carvings and the stunning Christian frescoes. The masks, drums, boats and other cultural curiosities in the superb **Ethnographical Museum** (Map p204; al-Jamia St; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Tue-Sun, closed noon-3pm Fri)

show just how diverse Sudan is. The mostly unlabelled taxidermied animals in the **Natural History Museum** (Map p204; al-Jamia St; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Tue-Sun, closed noon-3pm Fri) do so in their own way. The **Republican Palace Museum** (Map p204; al-Jamia St; admission SDD50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Wed & Fri-Sun) is a hall of heroes, of sorts, with mementos such as presidential limos and General Gordon's piano.

The confluence of the **Blue** and **White Niles**, best seen from the White Nile Bridge (Map p202), is a languid high point of the world's longest river. You can actually see the different colours of each Nile flowing side by side before blending further downstream. For an original perspective, try the fast-moving Ferris wheel in the **Al-Mogran Family Park** (Map p202;

al-Nil St; admission SDD150; ☎ 10am-11pm) or rent a motorboat (US\$50 per hour) from the Blue Nile Sailing Club (below).

The traditional Muslim city of **Omdurman** (Map p202), founded by the Mahdi in the 1880s, is a big attraction; the famous **Omdurman souq** (Map p202) – the largest in the country – has an amazing variety of wares. The **camel market** (Souq Moowaileh) on the far western edge of the city is equally spectacular, especially on Saturday, but there is no public transport. The rocket-topped **Mahdi's Tomb** (Map p202; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon & Fri) is worth making the effort to see, though foreigners aren't always allowed inside. The original was destroyed on Kitchener's orders by General Gordon's nephew 'Monkey', who, somewhat unsportingly, threw the Mahdi's ashes into the Nile! The Mahdi's successor lived across the street and the 1887 **Khalifa's House Museum** (Map p202; admission SDD100; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Sun) showcases the history of the Mahdi era.

Every Friday afternoon you can see the **Halgt Zikr**, where a colourful local troupe of whirling dervishes stir up the dust in worship of Allah at Omdurman's **Hamed el-Nil Mosque** (Map p202). Things start at 4pm, but don't really get going until about 5.30pm (5pm in winter), and they don't dance during Ramadan. Over in **Bahri** (Map p202; take a minibus for Haeyosif and get off at Souq Seta), traditional **Nuba wrestlers** go through their paces at roughly the same time. They're both very friendly occasions.

The **Acropole Hotel** (Map p204; ☎ 83772860; al-Ziber Basha St) runs a four-hour Friday **city tour**. If there are free seats, nonguests can join for SDD2500.

SLEEPING

Blue Nile Sailing Club (Map p204; ☎ 012296014; al-Nil St; camp site per person US\$3, motorcycle/car US\$2/5) Most overlanders pitch their tents here, where the office is in Kitchener's old gunboat, **Melik**.

1000 Nights Hotel (Map p204; ☎ 0912-3-52477; al-Sharif al-Hindi St; dm SDD1000) One of Khartoum's cleanest and friendliest **lokandas** (basic lodge), with many two-bed rooms.

Wadi Halfa Hotel (Map p204; ☎ 83776054; Hashm Baeh St; dm SDD1000) The Wadi Halfa is just as good as 1000 Nights. Like most **lokandas**, it's signed only in Arabic, but unusually, it even has a couple of singles.

Khartoum Youth Hostel (Map p202; ☎ 83480385; info@sudanesezha.net; Sharia 47; dm SDD2500-3500; ☎) In

a quiet compound in Khartoum 2, near many restaurants, Khartoum's HI-affiliated hostel was getting spruced up during our visit and should be quite nice when it reopens. Some rooms have just two beds.

Al-Nakhil Hotel (Map p204; ☎ 83786709; al-Sharif al-Hindi St; s/d SDD3500/5000; ☎) Scruffier than the two **lokandas** above, but with private bathroom and air-conditioning.

Central Hotel (Map p204; ☎ 83772949; Abdul al-Munami Mhammad St; s/d/t SDD7000/9000/11,000; ☎) Rooms are spiffier than you'd expect from the reception and stairwell, but except for the balconies, they're pretty plain.

Inamm Hotel (Map p204; ☎ 83786635; off Tayyar Izz al-Din; s/d US\$52/60; ☎) The best value in the class (satellite TV, hot water, refrigerator), Inamm Hotel is favoured by Sudanese business travellers, though many of the similar places nearby will lower their prices at the drop of a hat.

Bougainvilla Guesthouse (☎ 83222104; www.bougainvillaguesthouse.com; Block 21; s/d without bathroom SDD11,000/15,500, d with bathroom SDD20,000; ☎) A Norwegian-owned hotel in the upscale Riyadh neighbourhood with a rooftop restaurant that they hope to make a rooftop bar. Breakfast and airport pickup included.

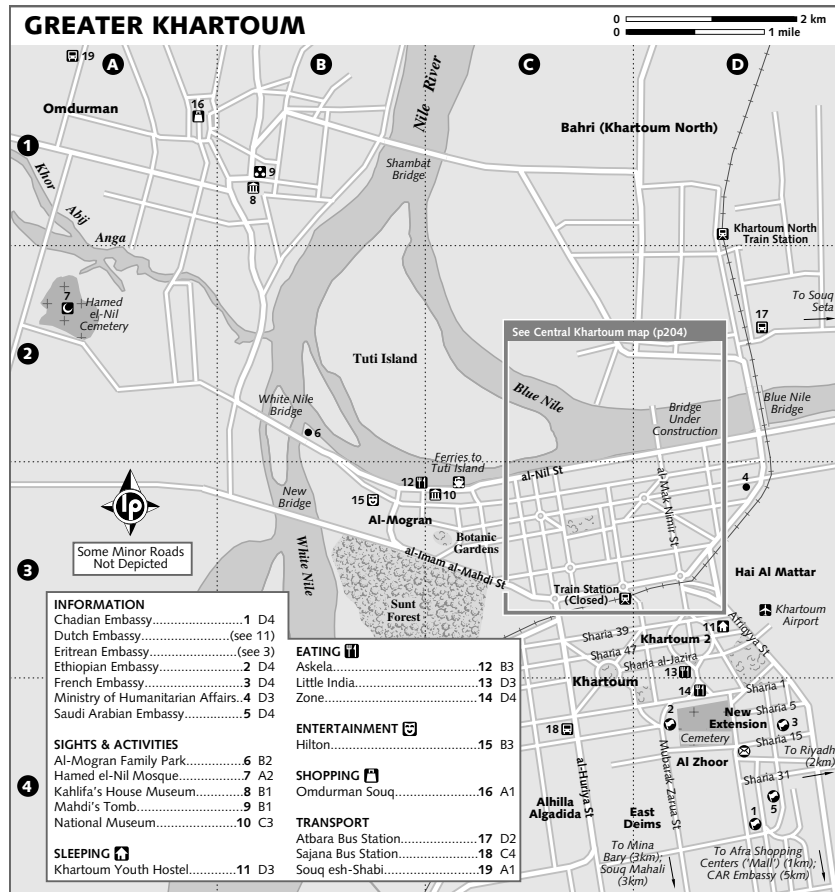
Acropole Hotel (Map p204; ☎ 83772860; www.acropolekhartoum.com; al-Ziber Basha St; s/d/t US\$140/215/290; ☎) The first choice of journalists lacks the four-star flash and facilities of the Hilton and Grand Holiday Villa, but it is second to none in service and the Pagoulatos family knows everything about Sudan. All meals, city tours and many other extras are included in the price. In some cases, two rooms share a bathroom.

EATING

The many informal, cheap joints south of Al-Kabir Mosque (Map p204) serve the staples for SDD100 per plate, and plenty of larger restaurants throughout the city centre also serve kebabs, burgers and **shwarma** for around SDD100 to SDD300. As a rule they're all pretty much of a muchness.

Lem Prost (Map p202; Sayyid Abdul al-Rahman St; shish kebabs SDD300; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) One of several popular night-time barbecue joints in this area.

Zone (Map p202; Sharia 1, Khartoum 2; tr scoop ice cream SDD400; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri-Wed) Join Sudan's well-heeled inside this traffic circle garden for drinks and snacks.





Little India (Map p202; al-Jazeera St, Khartoum 2; mains SDD700-3500; breakfast, lunch & dinner) Expensive, but wonderful Indian, Thai and continental cuisine.

al-Hafawa (Map p204; al-Barlman St; large pizza SDD1000-1700; breakfast, lunch & dinner) Far from a slice of Italy, this parkside pizzeria is still pleasant.

Askela (Map p202; al-Nil St; mains up to SDD2200; breakfast, lunch & dinner) A large riverside restaurant opposite the National Museum.

ENTERTAINMENT

Afra Shopping Centers ('Mall', Afriqyyah St) With its bowling alley, fun fair and movie theatre, this is the most entertaining place in the city.

Askela (Map p202; al-Nil St) Features children's theatre on Thursday nights (8pm to 10pm) and comedy for adults on Tuesdays.

Hotels provide the bulk of entertainment in the city centre. At the **Meridien** (Map p204; Sayyid Abd al-Rahman St) the Ethiopian dance show (Friday, Sunday and sometimes Tuesday; SDD2500) gets pretty risqué by Sudanese standards. The **Hilton** (Map p202; al-Jamia St) has Sudanese music (SDD1500 minimum tab) from Wednesday to Friday. Both shows run from 9pm to 11pm.

Shell Sultan (Map p204; Sayyid Abd al-Rahman St; pipes SDD150; dinner) A great place for a pre- or post-dinner smoke.

SHOPPING

There is a cluster of good souvenir shops (Map p204) near the tip of al-Quasar St (Map p204), though it's more enjoyable, and usually cheaper, to shop at the Omdurman souq (Map p202). The mainstays of Sudanese souvenirs are ebony, ivory and crocodile skins, all of which should be avoided.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

See p211 for flight information to destinations throughout Africa and the rest of the world.

Bus

Most road transport departs from one of four bus stations. Almost everything rolling south, east and west, including El-Obeid, Gederaf, Kassala and Port Sudan, goes from the modern and chaotic *mina bary* (land port) near Souq Mahali (Map p202) in southern Khartoum. The Sajana bus station (Map p202) serves Dongola and Wadi Halfa; Karima and Merowe buses use Omdurman's Souq esh-Shabi (Map p202); and the Atbara Bus Station (Map p202) is in Bahri.

GETTING AROUND

Buses (SDD40 to SDD80) and minibuses (SDD100) cover most points in Khartoum and run very early to very late. See the Central Khartoum map (Map p204) for major departure points.

Taxi prices (and if they have no passengers the minibuses work like taxis and often cost less) are negotiable: expect to pay around SDD400 to SDD500 for journeys within the city centre and SDD800 to destinations within greater Khartoum. For shorter trips (except in

central Khartoum) there are also motorised rickshaws, which should cost no more than SDD300.

The short ride by taxi from Khartoum airport (Map p202) to the city centre is unofficially fixed at SDD2500, though you can sometimes bargain this down. Better yet, try sharing the ride.

AROUND KHARTOUM

MEROE SITES

The ancient royal cemetery of **Begrawiya** (which many people call Meroe) is one of Sudan's most spectacular sights. The Meroitic Pharaohs thrived from 592 BC until overrun by the Abyssinians in AD 350. Although nothing here compares with better-known sites in Egypt, the clusters of narrow pyramids blanketing the sand-swept hills are quite a sight and some well-preserved hieroglyphics can still be seen in the tombs' antechambers. You can also visit the remains of the **Royal City** across the highway, where the so-called Roman bath is the top attraction.

Two other Meroitic sites, **Naga** (admission SDD2500) and **Musawarat** (admission SDD2500), lie 35km off the highway south of Shendi, and are about the same distance from each other. Naga's Lion Temple has wonderful exterior carvings, while the crumbling foundations in Musawarat's Great Enclosure let you imagine how this former pilgrimage site once looked.

If you want to catch the sunset over the pyramids, you can sleep in the desert (head towards the mountains) or splash out at a pair of luxury lodgings about 4km away. The **Meroe Tented Camp** (83487961; www.italytoursudan.com; s/d ind 2 meals SDD35,000/42,500) has 10 comfy walk-in tents on concrete slabs with private toilets nearby, while **Apedemak Hotel** (0912 288214; blueskytours@yahoo.com; s/d ind 2 meals SDD17,000/27,000) is more solid, but just as cosy. Both have thatched-roof restaurants with dinner costing SDD8000 and SDD2000 per person respectively.

These ruins are easily visited from Khartoum. If you hire a car and driver (starting at about SDD35,000 plus fuel), you can visit the Sixth Cataract (Sabalooka Falls), too. A pick-up truck in Shendi should cost around half that. Begrawiya is just 700m off the highway and easily reached by public transport: take an Atbara bus (SDD2300) from Bahri and ask

to be let out at Al-Ahram ('Pyramids'). Coming back, flag down vehicles heading south; you'll probably have to change in Shendi.

NORTHERN SUDAN

WADI HALFA

Founded by a handful of Nubian families from the original Halfa (now buried under Lake Nasser) who resisted the government's forced relocation, Wadi Halfa is where the ferry to Egypt docks.

The biggest difference between the dozen or so rough **lokandas** (dm SDD500 to SDD700) are the names – snag the first bed you can find when the ferry is in town because they fill fast.

Most transport runs in line with the ferry, though the weekly plane from Khartoum (SDD29,000, 1½ hours) comes on Friday (if it comes at all), but might change back to Wednesday. You can get off the boat and right on a bus to Khartoum (SDD6500, 24 hours) or take the train (sleeper/1st/2nd/3rd class 24,000/8000/6500/5500, 36 to 50 hours) on Wednesday. From Khartoum, these both leave on Monday morning.

WADI HALFA TO DONGOLA

Hundreds of historic sites and some striking desert and river scenery line this 400km stretch of the Nile, while the many villages offer a fascinating taste of Nubian life. Travel can be tough through here, but it's the highlight of Sudan for many visitors.

The first significant town is **Abri** (market day is Monday), the base for visiting **Sai Island**, 10km south, which, with a temple from Egypt's Middle Kingdom, a medieval church and an Ottoman fort among the many ruins, is something of a synopsis of ancient Sudanese history. None are in good condition, but walking between them is fun. **El-Fager** (dm SDD500), Abri's only *lokanda*, is not so clean.

A little further south, easily reached by boat from Wawa, **Soleb** is not only one of the few west-bank sites in good enough condition to warrant a visit, it is the only one easy to reach without your own transport. It was built in the 14th century BC by Amenhotep III, the same Pharaoh who gave us Luxor in Egypt, and the design and carvings are similar. To enter you need to buy an SDD2500 permit in Wadi Halfa or Dongola, or hope the guard is in a good mood.

Kerma (market day Sunday) was an important trade centre during Egypt's Middle Kingdom and is presumed to have been the capital of the first Kingdom of Kush. Around 2400 BC Kerma's kings built two giant mud-brick temples, known as **deffufas** (admission SDD2500). The western *deffufa*, a 15-minute *boksi* (Toyota pick-up; plural *bokasi*) ride and 15-minute walk away from town, stood about 19m high and stretched 50m long. Today it has crumbled into an oddly appealing form and you can still climb to the top. A museum was under construction at the site at the time of writing and a bit of ancient road can be seen 2km east. Few people visit the smaller eastern *deffufa*, about 3km away; and many locals don't even know that it exists, which makes finding it difficult. The **Kerma Hotel** (dm SDD500) is a pretty grim *lokanda*, but the town's Nile-side restaurants sort of compensate.

There is a bus that runs from Wadi Halfa to Abri (SDD1500, six hours) on Wednesday, otherwise you need to rely on the various trucks that head south. After Abri, many *bokasi* connect the villages so you can get around pretty easily, though not necessarily quickly.

DONGOLA

Famous for its palm groves, the relaxed little town of Dongola is full of character and boasts good amenities. The east-bank ruins of the **Temple of Kawa**, which are mostly buried under sand, are about 4km south of the bus station (which is where, if you're being official, you buy the SDD2500 permit). It's a pleasant walk.

Most hotels and restaurants are clustered together on the main road, near the market. **Lord Hotel** (☎ 0241-8-22405; dm SDD500) and **Haifa Hotel** (☎ 0241-8-23573; dm SDD700) are two appropriately priced *lokandas*. **Olla Hotel** (☎ 0241-8-21848; r SDD3000; 🍽️), a block off the main road, is almost as scruffy as Lord, but it's got air-conditioning. **Al-Moltaga** (mains SDD100-1500; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner), decorated with coloured lights, stands out for both good food and sometimes offering rice and macaroni besides the standards.

Most transport, including *bokasi* to Kerma (SDD700, two hours) and Karima (SDD2500, four hours), departs from across the river, though buses to Khartoum (SDD4000, eight hours) leave from town.

KARIMA

Karima is an exceptionally ordinary town, but the area's interesting ancient sites means it gets a steady trickle of visitors. **Jebel Barkal**, the mountain hanging on the city's south side, was sacred ground for the Egyptians at the time of the 18th-dynasty Pharaohs and has some well-preserved **pyramids** and a **temple complex** around it. It costs SDD2500 to enter the **Temple of Mut**, but otherwise the sites are free. The **museum** (admission SDD500; 🕒 8am-3pm Sat-Thu) is pretty good.

There are also some delightfully dilapidated pyramids (among the largest in Sudan) across the river at **Nuri** (not to be confused with the nearby village of Nuri). Nuri tickets (SDD2500) are sold at Jebel Barkal, but there's rarely anyone to collect them. Take a minibus (SDD100, 30 minutes) from the city of Meroe, across the river. Currently it's reached only by ferry, but a bridge should be finished soon. **El Kurru** (admission SDD2500), 20km south of Karima, has twin tombs cut into the rock with wonderful paintings. Minibuses (SDD100, 30 minutes) leave from Karima.

The lovely and expensive **Nubian Rest-House** (☎ 83487961; www.italtoursudan.com; s/d ind 2 meals SDD35,000/42,500) sits at the foot of Jebel Barkal. **Al Nasser** (☎ 0231-8-20319; dm SDD500) is the best of the city's *lokandas*. Most of Karima's restaurants fill a block on a nearby street. There is a tiny internet café using mobile phones to get online just east of the restaurants.

There are frequent *bokasi* to Dongola (SDD2500, four hours) and Atbara (SDD3000, seven hours). One bus leaves every morning for Khartoum (SDD2500, seven hours), though there is more frequent transport from Meroe.

ATBARA

pop 110,000

Atbara was the scene of the first battle between Kitchener's advancing troops and the Mahdists, but you'd have trouble finding any modern Britons who would fight over it. These days the town is basically a transport hub for those heading to or from the north.

The bright and friendly **Nile Hotel** (☎ 0211-8-22111; s/d SDD3000/6000, plus satellite TV SDD1500; 🍽️) has smart, clean rooms, decent food (SDD1300 for the set dinner) and hot water in the shared showers. Closer to the town centre, **Harar Hotel** (☎ 0917-5-09753; dm SDD500) is your usual *lokanda*.

There are many buses to Khartoum (SDD2300, four hours) and several through the desert to Port Sudan (SDD4000, 10 hours), plus *bokasi* to Karima (SDD3000, seven hours). The weekly train to/from Wadi Halfa passes through town and a bus (SDD6000, 20 hours) goes on Thursday.

EASTERN SUDAN

KASSALA

pop 420,000

Kassala is a city known for the many tribes represented in the *souqs*, but your attention surely will be drawn to the melting granite of the Taka Mountains behind it. The authorities won't even let you into the city if your travel permit isn't in perfect order, though they no longer seem to care if you climb the peaks: but get local advice first, there are still rebels in the area and a landmine risk well beyond the city. There are famous **camel races** annually in September or October.

The colourful **Toteel Hotel** (☎ 0411-8-24297; dm/r SDD600/3500; 🍽️) is a good budget option. Nearby, **El-Safa Hotel** (☎ 0411-8-22711; r SDD3000-5000; 🍽️) has a range of rooms with amenities from shared bathroom and fan to satellite TV and fridge. The recently renovated **Sahiron Hotel** (☎ 0411-8-27707; d/t SDD6500/7500, chalet SDD15,000; 🍽️) has the best-appointed rooms.

Cheap eats abound around town, but UN personnel and well-heeled locals gravitate to **Shamadour Restaurant** (dishes SDD100-2400; 🍳 breakfast Sat-Thu, lunch & dinner daily; 🍽️) for burgers, pasta dishes and many chicken choices. Have a post-hike coffee or *shisha* at **Toteel Park** (SDD50; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) at the rocky base of the mountains southeast of town.

Minibuses (SDD50) and taxis (SDD500) shuttle from town to Souq esh-Shabi (about 6km), where the buses to Port Sudan (SDD3500, six hours) and Khartoum (SDD4700, seven hours) arrive and depart.

PORT SUDAN

pop 475,000

Sudan's only major industrial port is the base for some of the Red Sea's best diving (see p209). **Port Sudan Tourism** (☎ 0311-8-22927; www.portsudantourism.com) can put you in touch with local captains. On land, watching ships unload in the port is about as exciting as it gets in this sprawling but surprisingly laid-back

city, though strolling the streets reveals some scattered colonial buildings. All the services you might need are here, including foreign exchange and fast internet access, but despite its prosperity, power and water are unreliable.

Sleeping & Eating

There are plenty of *lokandas* around the market with facilities ranging from basic to bomb site.

Marhaba Hotel (☎ 0311-8-24585; dm SDD700) Its three-bed rooms are above average.

Zahran Hotel (☎ 0311-8-23820; s/d SDD1500/2500) Across the road from the Marhaba, this friendly hotel, with big en suites, is a bit scruffy but still offers the best value in the city.

Ranya Hotel (☎ 0311-8-25742; r without bathroom with/without TV SDD5000/6500, s/d SDD10,000/12,000; ☺) An older property, but a better choice than others in this class.

Hilton (☎ 0311-8-39800; s/d US\$180/210, ste from US\$270; ☺ ☑ ☒) This four-star facility has harbour views and all the mod cons, including a gym.

The area around the local bus station teems with brightly lit, cheap restaurants and juice bars, giving it a fairground atmosphere at night. The restaurants along the waterfront, which do a good range of meat and fish dishes for a few bucks, also bustle after dark. The global dinner buffet at the Hilton (buffet SDD5300) is truly decadent.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses (SDD250, 45 minutes) for Suakin leave from the city centre. The major bus companies serving Kassala (SDD3500, six hours) and Khartoum (SDD9000, 13 hours) have offices in the city centre and at the bus station (Souq esh-Shabi). Buses for Atbara (SDD4000, 10 hours) have their own bus station nearby. Minibuses (SDD50) from the city centre drop you nearly 1km away from the main bus station, so consider a taxi (SDD400).

The train to Atbara (1st/2nd class SDD4300/3300) departs sometime around the 8th of each month, and there are daily flights to/from Khartoum (SDD21,000, one hour). Sudan Airways' Saturday flight to Cairo stops in Port Sudan on the way.

SUAKIN

Suakin was Sudan's only port before the construction of Port Sudan, once handling the thousands of pilgrims bound for Mecca and

slaves bound for Jeddah and Cairo. Abandoned in the 1930s, it became an intriguing ghost town, full of crumbling **coral buildings**. The **ruins** (admission SDD1000; ☎ 6am-5pm), connected to the mainland by a short causeway, are fascinating to explore, and the 'modern' town also has a delightfully sleepy feel to it. Suakin is best visited as a day trip from Port Sudan.

SOUTH OF KHARTOUM

EL-OBEID

pop 410,000

El-Obeid has long been a prosperous market centre and today over half the world's supply of gum arabic passes through. The **Kordofan Museum** has some intriguing displays, including old weapons and massive pottery, but has been closed since the money for a planned renovation disappeared, and its future is uncertain. This leaves the nearby tan and red **El-Obeid Cathedral** as the town's only attraction, and it's usually closed.

The **John Hotel** (☎ 0611-8-22282; r with fan/air-con SDD4000/8000; ☺) in the town centre is simple, but cheery, with plenty of plastic flowers. Toilets are shared. The **Kordofan Hotel** (☎ 0611-8-23020; s/d without bathroom SDD8000/10,000, r with bathroom SD12,500; ☺) is tops in town, but it feels institutional. If you're looking for a *lokanda* (most priced around SDD500 per bed) wander west of the *souq* until you find an acceptable one; this may take a while as they are all quite grim.

Surri Restaurant (dishes SDD200-1500; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) in a big green building at the southwest corner of the main *souq* has the biggest menu in town, with chicken, beef macaroni and some fun fruity drinks. The **Kordofan Hotel** (☎ 0611-8-23020) promises pizza (SDD1200 to SDD1500) but rarely comes through.

Most of the many buses to Khartoum (SDD4700, seven hours), including some overnighters, depart from the central bus station, but a few older ones use Salahin Station, the departure point for Kadugli (SDD2200, five hours), on the southern highway.

NUBA MOUNTAINS

Smack in the heart of the country, the Scotland-sized Nuba Mountains are, in a sense, a gateway to sub-Saharan Africa. The Nuba people, 60-some related tribes and subtribes with as many

differences as similarities, were made famous by the photographs of Leni Riefenstahl. During the autumn harvest, generally November to February, you might get to see some of the Nuba's famous festivals (called Sebir), which usually include wrestling and dancing.

Parts of the area have recently opened up to intrepid travelers, though there are still several difficulties and dangers, particularly the unexploded ordnance and landmines left behind after the war – get local advice (or find a guide) before leaving any road, and don't climb to the tops of hills. Most villages do not welcome visitors, so you will probably not be allowed to spend the night if you just show up. *Bokasi* connect towns along the highway to some nearby villages, but beyond this you'll need to rely on the occasional truck or walk and bike, as most locals do.

Kadugli, home of the UN peacekeepers and a who's who of NGOs, is the best base for exploring Nuba. (There are interesting villages around Dilling, too.) The surrounding peaks have been cleared of mines and it has the most public transport. The simple **South Kordofan Lokanda** (☎ 0631-8-22119; dm/d SDD600/2000) has bucket showers, but good mattresses. The unnamed café known as the **Egyptian Restaurant** (dishes SDD300-800; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) features tasty lentil soup, lasagna, jelly and other welcome breaks from the usual. Buses sometimes go direct to Khartoum, but it's faster to switch rides in El-Obeid.

SUDAN DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Due to the influx of oil and aid workers, prices have risen sharply over the past few years and you rarely get good value for your money.

The most basic places to stay are called *lokandas*, with beds in shared rooms or courtyards, though you can take all the beds in a room if you want privacy. It's best to pack a sleep sheet if you will be using them. Women are often not welcome in *lokandas*.

In many cheap and midrange places you'll be asked to register with the police before checking in – whatever time you arrive!

ACTIVITIES

With many sharks, manta rays and incredible visibility, Sudan's Red Sea dive sites are as good as Egypt's, but without the crowds.

Most people use live-aboard operations, but there are captains in Port Sudan.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banking hours are 9am to 12.30pm, while most government, airline and similar offices are usually closed by 3pm. Most local shops stay open late, but might close briefly between 1pm and 5pm. Few places open on Friday. Breakfast, which most people take between 9am and 10am, is a Sudanese institution – don't be surprised if that vital functionary isn't at his desk.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

While there are still many no-go areas (see the boxed text, p198), the rest of Sudan is a very safe place – one of the safest in Africa, in fact. Crime is almost unheard of – almost: watch your wallet in crowds and lock your luggage in hotels.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Sudan Embassies & Consulates

Sudan maintains diplomatic representation in all neighbouring countries. See the appropriate chapter for details.

Canada (☎ 613-235 4000; 354 Stewart St, Ottawa)

France (☎ 01 42 25 55 71; www.ambassade-du-soudan.org; 11 rue Alfred Dehodencq, Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-890 6980; www.botschaftsudan.de; Kurfürstendamm 151, Berlin)

Netherlands (☎ 070-360 5300; Laan Copes van Cattenburch 81, The Hague)

PRACTICALITIES

- Sudan uses mostly British weights and measures, but distances are measured in kilometres.
- Electricity is 230V/50Hz and plugs usually have two round pins.
- There are several private English-language daily newspapers, such as *Khartoum Monitor* and the *Citizen*, but press freedom is limited.
- Satellite TV is so common that few people watch the three government-owned stations.
- Both the government-owned Omdurman Radio (95FM) and BBC World Service (95FM) occasionally broadcast news in English.

UK (☎ 020-7839 8080; www.sudan-embassy.co.uk; 3 Cleveland Row, St James's, London)

USA (☎ 202-338 8565; www.sudanembassy.org; 2210 Massachusetts Ave, Washington DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Sudan

Canada (Map p204; ☎ 83563670; Afriqiyah St)

Central African Republic (☎ 0922-8-15860; off Medani Rd, El-Maamoura)

Chad (Map p202; ☎ 83471084; Sharia 59, New Extension)

Democratic Republic of Congo (☎ 0912-4-91470; Salaman St, Riyadh)

Egypt (Map p204; ☎ 83772190; al-Jamhuriya St)

Eritrea (Map p202; ☎ 83483834; off Sharia 15, New Extension)

Ethiopia (Map p202; ☎ 83471156; off Mubarak Zarua St, Khartoum 2)

France (Map p202; ☎ 83471082; off Sharia 15, New Extension)

Germany (Map p204; ☎ 83745055; al-Baladyya St)

Kenya (☎ 83472583; Riyadh)

Libya (☎ 83222085; Mashtel St, Riyadh)

Netherlands (Map p202; ☎ 83471200; Sharia 47, Khartoum 2)

Saudi Arabia (Map p202; ☎ 83472583; Sharia 33, New Extension)

Uganda (Map p204; ☎ 83797869; Abu Qarga St)

UK (Map p204; ☎ 83777105; al-Baladyya St)

USA (Map p204; ☎ 83774701; Ali Abdul al-Latif St)

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106), following are the principal public holidays in Sudan:

1 January Independence Day

30 June Revolution Day

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet cafés in Khartoum offer fast connection for a good price. Reliable access is available in Port Sudan and, increasingly, in smaller towns, though these are more expensive.

MONEY

Sudanese money can be confusing when you first arrive. Although banknotes are in dinars, prices are almost always quoted in the old Sudanese pounds (1 dinar = S£10). Assume that the real price is minus a zero. Just to confuse matters further, some people drop the thousands, so '10 pounds' means S£10,000, ie SDD1000. In addition to this, the government has announced a new currency (also to be called the pound), but has not said when it will begin or what the rate will be compared

to the dinar – expect even more dancing with zeroes.

Private exchange offices have the same rates as banks, but longer hours. US dollars are the easiest to change (outside Khartoum you'll be hard pressed to change anything else), though euros, British pounds and most Middle Eastern currencies are widely accepted in Khartoum and Port Sudan. The only way to change Egyptian pounds and Ethiopian Birr is on the black market, which is easy at the borders and a little risky in Khartoum.

Money can be wired to Khartoum and Port Sudan (even from the US and Britain, though this could always change because of sanctions) with Western Union and Travelex. Credit cards and travellers cheques are useless.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photo permits are obligatory for foreigners. Get one from Khartoum's **Ministry of Tourism & Wildlife** (Map p204; ☎ 83773711; Abu Sinn St). It's free, but you need a passport photo and copies of your passport and visa. The permit expressly forbids sensitive sites, including bridges, 'slum areas, beggars and other defaming subjects'. Travellers have been arrested for taking photos of the confluence of the Blue and White Niles from the main bridge to Omdurman, but it's OK from Al-Mogran Family Park.

POST & TELEPHONE

Mail in and out of Sudan, like the poste restante services throughout the country, is unreliable.

Private telephone centres are found all over the country, and many in big cities offer Net2phone service (as low as SDD30 per minute) for international calls. If you have a GSM mobile phone, you can buy a SIM card with Mobitel for SDD3000, which is good for one month and includes about 30 minutes of local calls: incoming calls are free. Mobile area codes are 011, 091 and 092. Add 01 to land lines when calling from a mobile.

TOURS

Most of Sudan's tour operators work out of Khartoum, including these reliable ones:

Globtours (☎ 0912-2-53484; globtours_sudan@yahoo.com) Specialises in the Nile archaeological sites.

Italian Tourism Company (☎ 83487961; www.italtoursudan.com) European owned.

Kush Travel (☎ 0912-8-74080; waleed_kush19@yahoo.com) Tours to the north and the Nuba Mountains.

VISAS & DOCUMENTS

Everyone except Egyptians needs a visa (most people pay US\$160, and if there is evidence of travel to Israel you will be denied) and getting one could be the worst part of your trip. Except in Cairo, where visas are often issued in a day or two (but not for Americans and Britons), you should expect a wait of at least two weeks and probably more (you should see the twinkle in the eye of the official in Addis Ababa when he tells you it will take one month!) and there is no guarantee it will ever come.

If you won't be in Egypt, it helps to let an agent (see Tours, opposite, for recommendations) arrange it. Most of the time they will get you a counter visa: they arrange everything at the Ministry of Interior in Khartoum and you pick it up at the airport. This service will likely cost around US\$150 and if you are lucky can take as little as two days. The other option, used primarily by those crossing overland since it costs more, is an invitation visa, in which you are sent a number that you give the embassy or consulate, which *should* speed up the normal process. With either option, there is a good chance something will go wrong along the way, so get started as early as possible.

Registration

You have to register within three days of arrival in Khartoum, Port Sudan, Gallabat or Wadi Halfa. In Khartoum, go to the **Aliens Registration Office** (Map p204; al-Tayyar Murad St; ☎ 9am-3pm); the process costs SDD8700 and you need one photo and photocopies of your passport and visa (there's a copier in the building). If you registered on entry at a land border (which only costs SDD6600), you need to do it again in Khartoum, but you don't have to pay again. In many towns you will need to register with the police; this is free.

Travel Permits

A travel permit is required for most journeys outside Khartoum, excepting northern destinations. Take two photos, a copy of your passport and SDD8700 to the **Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs** (Map p202; al-Ziber Basha St) and expect to wait a day or two. Carry photocopies of this permit along with copies of your passport and visa to give to police.

Visa Extensions

Visa extensions are issued at the **Aliens Registration Office** (Map p204; al-Tayyar Murad; ☎ 9am-3pm) in

Khartoum. You need one photo and varying amounts of money and patience to get your extra 30 days.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following neighbouring countries are available from embassies in Khartoum.

Central African Republic A one-month visa costs SDD13,500; you'll need two photos and it takes two days.

Chad The embassy was closed at the time of research, but should reopen soon.

Democratic Republic of Congo A one-month visa costs SDD15,000; you'll need two photos and the visa is ready in two days.

Egypt This consulate is not the most organised place – arrive early to beat the worst queues. Most people pay SDD7500 and you'll need two photos. The visa is ready the same day. It's easier to get a tourist visa on arrival (which most but not all nationalities can do), especially if you're flying.

Eritrea One-month visas cost US\$40 and are ready in three days, or pay an extra \$10 for same-day service. You need two photos and a copy of your passport.

Ethiopia Three-month visas cost US\$20 and require two photos. You can pick it up the same day.

Kenya A single-entry visa valid for three months costs US\$50 and is issued the same day. You need one photo and photocopies of your passport and plane ticket.

Libya Applications must go through a Libyan travel agent, but you can pick up the visa here.

Saudi Arabia Visa applications are handled by travel agents (many of which surround the embassy), which can get you a transit visa in two days (perhaps one day if you go very early). You need two photos, a letter of introduction from your embassy and US\$100.

Uganda Single-entry visas valid for up to three months cost US\$30 and are ready in two days. You need two photos and a letter of invitation from someone in Uganda, though this last requirement is sometimes waived.

VOLUNTEERING

The London-based **Sudan Volunteer Programme** (SVP; ☎ 020-7485 8619; www.svp-uk.com) sends people to Sudan to teach English. Volunteers must pay for their own travel, but SVP arranges subsistence, accommodation and some health insurance.

TRANSPORT IN SUDAN

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air Khartoum is well connected to Africa and the world. **Sudan Airways** (Map p204; ☎ 83787103) has frequent flights to north and east Africa

DEPARTURE TAX

The airport departure tax for international flights is SDD3500.

and the Middle East, though its competitors usually have similar prices and better service. African airlines connecting Khartoum to their capitals include **EgyptAir** (Map p204; ☎ 83780064), **Kenya Airways** (Map p204; ☎ 83781080) and **Ethiopian Airlines** (Map p204; ☎ 83762088). **Lufthansa** (☎ 83771322) and **British Airways** (Map p204; ☎ 83774579) fly to North America through Europe, while **Emirates** (Map p204; ☎ 83799473) and **Gulf Air** (Map p204; ☎ 83762381) go worldwide via the Middle East.

Land & Sea

Sudan shares borders with many countries, but there are few crossing options. The south is slowly opening up, but overland travel to the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Uganda remains dangerous and difficult. Libya is also risky, and, because of that country's travel regulations, would be impractical anyway. The Chadian border is officially closed.

EGYPT

The roads between Sudan and Egypt are for cargo traffic only, but you can take the weekly passenger ferry on Lake Nasser from Wadi Halfa to the port near Aswan in Egypt. It heads north at about 5pm on Wednesday (though if the train is delayed, the ferry waits), returning on Monday. The journey takes around 17 hours plus immigration time, and costs SDD13,900/8700 in 1st/2nd class. First-class passengers share two-bunk cabins, whereas in 2nd class you fight for seats with hundreds of others. You can buy tickets in Wadi Halfa (☎ 0251-8-22256) and Khartoum (☎ 85333807).

Vehicles go on the Thursday cargo ferry, which takes two or three days. **Mazar Mahir** (☎ 0122-3-80740), who has an office in Wadi Halfa and meets the boat on his bicycle, has a good reputation for speeding people through the paperwork.

ERITREA

The crossing between Kassala and Teseney has reopened.

ETHIOPIA

From Gederaf take a pick-up to the border town of Gallabat (SDD1500, five to six hours) and walk over the bridge to Metema, where buses go direct to Gondor (30 Birr, seven hours) or, if you miss the bus, you can reach Gondor by changing vehicles in Shihedi.

SAUDI ARABIA

Regular ferry services run between Suakin and Jeddah (1st/2nd class US\$115/100, 13 hours). Tickets are available through travel agents in Khartoum and Port Sudan.

GETTING AROUND**Air**

Half a dozen airlines connect Khartoum to all large Sudanese cities. **Sudan Airways** (Map p204; ☎ 83787103; al-Baladaya St; ✈ 8am-6pm Sat-Thu, 9-11am Fri) has the most flights, and, along with **Air West** (Map p204; ☎ 83742513; al-Barlman St), the fewest problems with cancellations and overbookings; though neither company will win a reliability award. There's a domestic airport tax of SDD1500.

Local Transport

Sudan is undergoing a road-building frenzy and all significant towns northeast of El-Obeid will probably be linked by paved roads within the lifetime of this book. Fast comfortable buses, which already link Khartoum to Port Sudan, El-Obeid and Atbara, will replace most of the *bokasi* that bounce over the desert tracks. It's best to buy bus tickets a day in advance. Bus prices quoted in this chapter are for the fastest service available.

Train

The only remaining practical passenger service is the Khartoum to Wadi Halfa run, though there is a monthly train from Atbara to Port Sudan and a western line to Nyala. Sleepers and 1st-class seats are expensive but comfortable; 2nd class is bearable and in 3rd class you really get what you paid for!

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