

Cameroon

If a list were made of possible attractions that an African country might hold, then Cameroon would surely come close to the top. Sitting at the crossroads of West and Central Africa, it is one of the most culturally diverse countries on the continent. From ancient tribal kingdoms in the west to 'pygmy' villages in the south and Muslim pastoralists in the north, Cameroon has a rich tapestry of indigenous cultures.

Those interested in the natural world will be well rewarded. Parc National de Waza is one of the best in the region, with abundant mammal and birdlife, and large herds of elephants gathering at water holes in the dry season. The rainforest at Korup is thought to be the oldest on the continent, and is certainly one of the most biologically diverse. Cameroon's rainforests stretch east and south into the Congo basin, a truly wild area to tempt the most adventurous.

Trekkers will be attracted by Mt Cameroon, the highest peak in West Africa. A still-active volcano, it rises almost straight from the sea in a spectacular manner. The Mandara Mountains in the north are a complete contrast – dry and rocky, home to isolated villagers eking out a living. And if all this adventure leaves you exhausted, there are some fine palm-fringed beaches, complete with fantastic seafood, where you can recharge your batteries. Put all these elements together, throw in a lively soundtrack of home-grown *makossa* music, and you'll just find yourself wondering how this country has been overlooked by travellers for so long.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 475,442 sq km
- **Capital** Yaoundé
- **Country code** 237
- **Famous for** International footballing success
- **Languages** French, English, Bamiléké, Fulfude, Fulani and Ewondo
- **Money** Central African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA564.55; €1 = CFA681.77
- **Population** 16.4 million
- **Visa** Arrange in advance, US\$60



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Mt Cameroon** (p192) Don your hiking boots to climb the mist-shrouded slopes of West Africa's highest peak.
- **Kribi** (p217) Chill on the white beaches and practise your French with the locals over grilled fish.
- **Ring Road** (p198) Explore the cool green scenery and rolling countryside near Bamenda.
- **Mandara Mountains** (p211) Head into the remote landscape and trek from village to village.
- **Parc National de Waza** (p213) Watch elephants at the waterholes of one of the region's best national parks.

ITINERARIES

Travel in Cameroon can be slow, especially off main routes, including in the Ring Road area and in the far north around Maroua. Allow plenty of time and keep your schedule flexible.

- **One Week** With just a week of travel, starting from either Douala (p184) or Yaoundé (p179), head to Limbe (p188) for a night or two to get your bearings. Then – if you have a bit of an adventurous bent – head either to Mt Cameroon (p192) or to Korup National Park (p195) for a few days exploring (in the dry season only), finishing again in Douala. Alternatively, if you're more interested in culture and history, go from Douala to Foumban (p203) (via Bafoussam, p201). After a night there, head to the Ring Road area (p198), ideally fitting in a day in Bafou (p201) and another on the stretch between Sagba (p199) and Kumbo (p199). Finish back in Douala or Yaoundé.
- **Two or Three Weeks** With two weeks, spend the first week exploring the Ring Road area (p198) and visiting Foumban (p203). Then you could head to Yaoundé (p179), from where you can fly north to Maroua (p208) and venture into the Mandara Mountains (p211) for a few days trekking. With three weeks or more, you would have time to go from Yaoundé to N'Gaoundéré (p205) by train, and from there to make your way north by road to Maroua – either flying or returning by road and train to Yaoundé or Douala.

HOW MUCH?

- **Ingredients for juju fetish** CFA500
- **100km bus ride** CFA850
- **Moto-taxi ride across town** CFA100
- **Bottle of palm wine** CFA1000
- **Carved mask** CFA15,000

LONELY PLANET INDEX

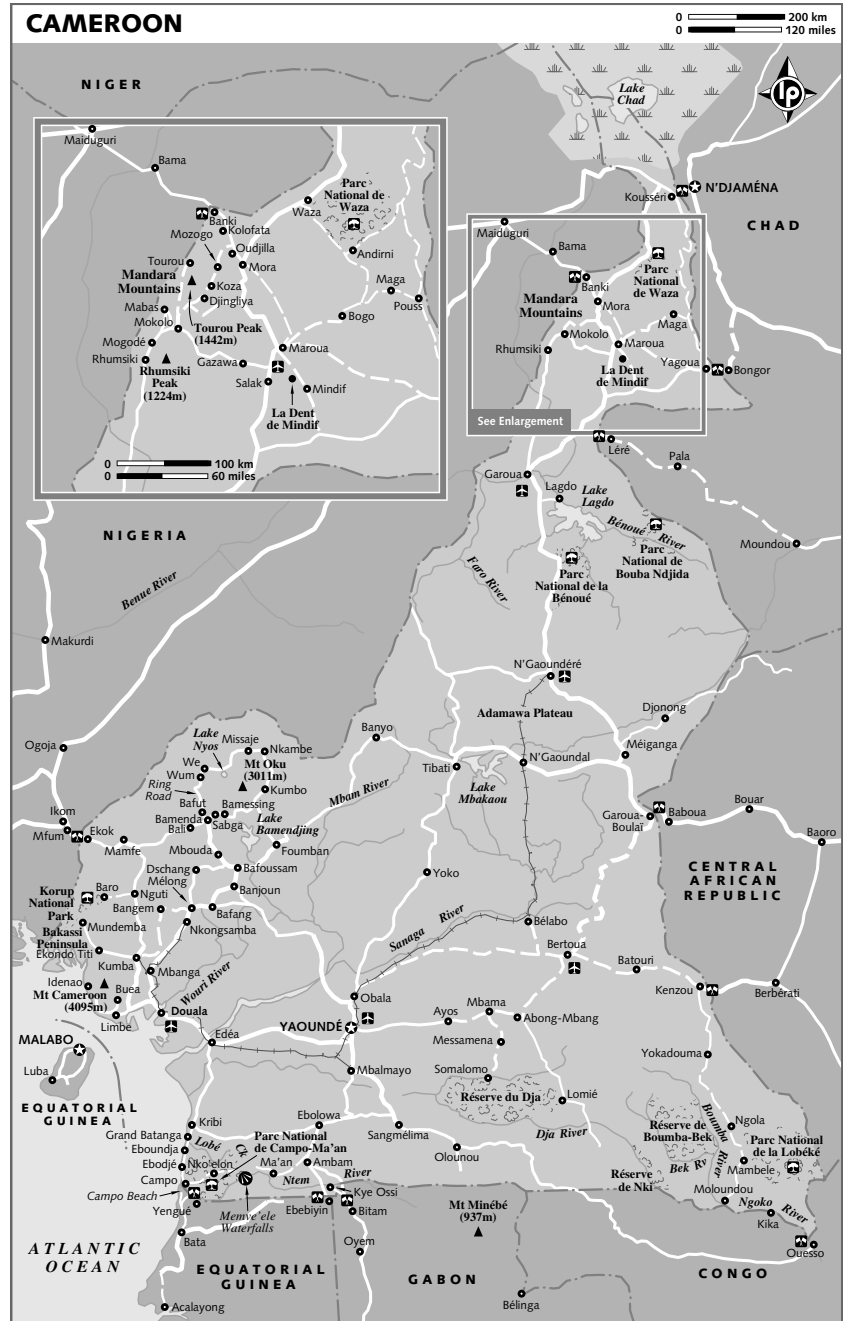
- **1L of petrol** CFA315
- **1.5L of bottled water** CFA450
- **Bottle of '33' beer** CFA600
- **Souvenir football shirt** CFA3500
- **Stick of brochettes** CFA100

- **One Month** With a month or more you'll have time to expand this itinerary, perhaps starting with a night or two in Limbe (p188), followed by a climb of Mt Cameroon (p192) or a visit to Korup (p195), before making your way up to Bamenda (p196) and the Ring Road area (p198). During the dry season, you could then go from Kumbo (p199) on the Ring Road direct to Foumban (p203); otherwise head to Foumban via Bafoussam (p201). From here, make your way to Yaoundé (p179) to rest up for a day or two, before heading north by train to N'Gaoundéré (p205) and beyond. Spend the remainder of the time exploring northern Cameroon (p205).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The north has a single wet season from April/May to September/October. The hottest months here are March to May, when temperatures can soar to 40°C, although it's a dry (and therefore generally bearable) heat. The south has a humid, equatorial climate, with rain scattered throughout the year and almost continual high humidity. The main wet season here is June to October, when secondary roads often become impassable. From March to June are the light rains.

Throughout Cameroon, November to February are the driest months, though dust from harmattan winds greatly restricts visibility. These are the best months to visit,



although you'll have harmattan haze during much of this time (which is not good for photography). The worst months are between July and October, when it's raining almost everywhere and many roads are impassable.

HISTORY

Early Cultures

As far back as 8000 BC, the area that is now Cameroon was a meeting-point of cultures. In the south the original inhabitants were various ethno-linguistic groups of short stature, collectively known as 'Pygmies'. About 2000 years ago, they gradually started to be displaced by Bantu peoples moving southeast from present-day Nigeria and the Sahel region, although large communities do still remain.

In Cameroon's extreme north, near Kousséri and Lake Chad, the most significant early culture was that of the Sao people, who migrated from the Nile Valley. They are known for the pottery and bronze-work they created, before being absorbed by the powerful state of Kanem-Borno around the 8th or 9th century.

In the early 15th century another important migration occurred, when the Fulani (pastoral nomads from Senegal) began to move eastwards. By the late 16th century, they dominated much of north central Cameroon, adding further to the area's cultural heterogeneity.

European Intrusions & Colonisation

In 1472 Portuguese explorers sailed up the Wouri River, naming it Rio dos Camarões (River of Prawns) and christening the country in a single stroke. Over the next two centuries, coastal Cameroon became an important port of call for Dutch, Portuguese and British slave-traders. However, the first permanent European settlements were not established until the mid-19th century, when British missionaries arrived in protest against the slave trade. In 1845 British missionary Alfred Saker founded a settlement in Douala, shortly followed by one at Victoria (now Limbe).

British influence was curtailed in 1884, when Germany signed a treaty with the well-organised chiefdoms of Douala and the central Bamileké Plateau – although for the local inhabitants the agreement meant

little more than a shift from one form of colonial exploitation to another.

After WWI the German protectorate of Kamerun was carved up between France and Britain – a linguistic and administrative division that marked the start of a fault line still evident in the politics of modern Cameroon. Local revolts in French-controlled Cameroon in the 1950s were brutally suppressed, but the momentum throughout Africa for throwing off the shackles of colonial rule soon took hold.

Independence & Federalism

Self-government was granted in French Cameroon in 1958, followed quickly by independence on 1 January 1960. Ahmadou Ahidjo, leader of the Union Camerounaise (UC) independence party and prime minister of the autonomous regions from 1958, became president of the newly independent state. He held this position until resigning in 1982, ensuring longevity in the interim through the cultivation of expedient alliances, brutal repression and regional favouritism. In October 1961, the southern section of British-mandated Cameroon (the area around Bamenda) voted to join the newly independent Cameroon Republic in a referendum, while the northern portion voted to join Nigeria. During the next decade, Ahidjo strove to promote nationalism and a sense of Cameroonian identity. As part of these efforts, in 1972 the government sponsored a referendum that overwhelmingly approved the dissolution of the British-French federal structure in favour of the unitary United Republic of Cameroon – a move which is bitterly resented in Anglophone Cameroon to this day.

In 1982, Ahidjo's hand-picked successor, Paul Biya, quickly distanced himself from his former mentor, accusing Ahidjo of sponsoring a number of coups against the new government. Ahidjo fled to France and was sentenced to death *in absentia*, although his reputation has since been restored. In reality, Biya owed much to his predecessor, including a capacity for cracking down hard on real and imagined opponents, and preserving a fragile balance of vested interests.

In addition to repressive measures, Biya was initially able to weather the storms that plagued his government because the

economy was booming. Prior to 1985, per capita GNP was one of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, due largely to plentiful natural resources (oil, cocoa and coffee) and favourable commodity prices. When these markets collapsed and prices plunged, Cameroon's economy went into freefall. It has never really recovered and the shock-waves are still being felt by the country in today's globalised economy.

In 1986 Cameroon made a rare appearance in world headlines when 2000 people were killed by an eruption of poisonous gases from Lake Nyos in the northwest. International sympathy distracted attention from a clampdown on calls for genuine political pluralism, and Biya rode a further wave of international attention following the national football team's stunning performance at the 1990 World Cup.

Elections & Emergencies

The clamour for freedom couldn't go ignored indefinitely. In 1991 Biya was forced to legalise opposition parties and multiparty elections were grudgingly held the following year – the first for 25 years. The Cameroonian Democratic People's Movement – led by Biya – hung on to power, despite widespread allegations of vote-rigging and intimidation. The main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) boycotted subsequent parliamentary elections amid claims that their presidential candidate had been denied a legitimate victory – claims backed up by many international observers. That the SDF were the dominant Anglophone party rang alarm bells among the political elite.

In the 1990s, Biya's uneasy rule was often at an arm's length, as the president spent increasing amounts of time in France. At home, Cameroon lurched on in its customary state of uneasy stability and political stagnation. A small war with Nigeria over ownership of the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula flared up in 1994 and again in 1996, deflecting attention from domestic problems. In December 1999 further domestic clampdowns followed the shock (if short-lived) declaration of independence for Anglophone Cameroon by the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) on Buea radio, again exposing the country's deep political problems.

Cameroon Today

In October 2004, with the opposition movement fractured, presidential elections returned Biya to power, for his 'second' seven-year term – the constitutional limit. International observers again complained that the process lacked credibility, in part due to the number of dead people who apparently turned up to vote for the status quo.

The economy continues to face severe difficulties. In 2004, Transparency International rated Cameroon 129th out of 146 countries on its corruption index, and corruption remains a cancer that gnaws away at the foundations of the country. Cameroon's failure to qualify for the World Bank's debt relief programme in the same year was blamed primarily on institutionalised corruption.

Cameroon's hard currency reserves have recently received a fillip from transit fees for Chad's oil pipeline, which terminates at Kribi (controversially chosen over Anglophone Limbe, which has its own oil refinery). While this has boosted the country's GDP on paper, the benefits have been slow to trickle down to the populace at large, and have had no impact on job creation, one of Cameroon's most pressing problems. While many officials have continued to grow fat on state revenues, over 50% of Cameroonians have complained that they have had to pay bribes to get government services. Until this malaise is seriously addressed and genuine political openness is permitted, Cameroon will continue to limp along for the foreseeable future.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Cameroon is home to around 280 distinct ethno-linguistic groups. The dominant groups are the Bamileké (around Bafoussam, and in Douala and Yaoundé), the Fulani (Foulbé or Fula) in the north and northwest, and Tikar communities north-east of Fomban. In the south and east are various so-called 'Pygmy' tribes, primarily Baka. The south and west are the most populous parts of the country.

Most Cameroonians are involved in agriculture, and the country is a major regional exporter of food, as well as being the seaport for Chad and Central African

Republic. While Cameroonians often have a reputation as hustlers, it's a skill they often need to navigate a faltering economy and corrupt bureaucracy.

Daily Life

Traditional social structures dominate life. Local chiefs (known as *fon* in the west, or *lamido* in the north) still wield considerable influence, and when travelling in places that don't receive many tourists, it's polite to announce your presence. You'll also need to get the chief's permission to enter tribal lands, including various mountains and crater lakes. In many cases, a small gift is expected – a bottle of whisky is common currency.

There's a distinct cultural and political gap between the Francophone and Anglophone parts of Cameroon, albeit one felt predominantly by the Anglophone minority. The country is far from being truly bilingual, and Anglophones complain of discrimination in education (most universities lecture in French only) and in the workplace. The siting of the Chad oil pipeline was a particular bone of contention – rather than having it terminate in Anglophone Limbe, which has an oil refinery, it was directed to Kribi, in President Biya's home province, in what some activists claim was a deliberate act of marginalisation.

'PYGMIES'

The term 'Pygmies' has long been used by outsiders to refer to a diverse group of people – many of whom are short in stature – living in the forested areas of southeast Cameroon and Central Africa. Traditionally, these people have lived by hunting and gathering wild forest resources which they either use themselves or trade in exchange for cultivated foods. Although 'Pygmy' is used generically, the 'Pygmies' do not view themselves as one culture (nor do they identify themselves as Pygmies). Rather, they belong to various distinct ethno-linguistic groups. In Cameroon, the most numerous are the Baka. Other groups include the Kola, the Medzan, the Aka and the Bofi.

Since early in the 1st millennium, these peoples and their traditional way of life have been under threat – first by Bantu groups, who forced them to consolidate and withdraw as they migrated southeastwards through traditional Pygmy areas; later by colonial masters, who forced the Pygmies into more easily 'managed' roadside settlements where they were often exploited; and, more recently, by forces such as multinational logging companies, mining interests, and government policies to encourage a more sedentary lifestyle. Now, while most Pygmies remain at least partially nomadic, many live in interdependent relationships with neighbouring Bantu farming peoples, although their exploitation continues.

Most Pygmies follow traditional religions, which typically centre around a powerful forest spirit, with the forest viewed as mother, father and guardian. Among the Baka, this forest god is known as Jengi – which is also the name given to celebrations marking the rite of passage of young Baka men into adulthood.

SPORT

Cameroon exploded onto the world's sporting consciousness at the 1990 World Cup, when the national football team, the Indomitable Lions, became the first African side to reach the quarterfinals, led by the legendary Roger Milla, the oldest player to score in the World Cup.

Football is truly the national obsession, and the one thing that unites the country. Every other Cameroonian male seems to own a copy of the team's strip, and go into any bar and there'll be a match playing on TV. When Cameroon narrowly failed to qualify for the 2006 World Cup, the country's grief was almost tangible. Nevertheless, the Lions hold a proud record in the continent-wide Cup of Nations, winning the trophy four times – most recently in 2002. Cameroon's (and Africa's) current top player is the revered Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o.

RELIGION

Christianity is the most followed religion in Cameroon, with its adherents making up around 40% of the population. About a quarter of Cameroonians are Muslim, which is the predominant faith in the north. The remainder of the population follow indigenous religions, including the Kirdi – fiercely non-Muslim animists in the north – and the

spirit faith of the Baka. Even where Christianity dominates it's often influenced by traditional practices, and many town markets have dedicated sections for fetishes and witchcraft.

ARTS Literature

In addition to Mongo Beti (see p48), well-known literary figures include Kenjo Jumban, whose novel *The White Man of God* deals with the country's colonial experience, and Ferdinand Oyono, who's *House-boy* and *The Old Man and the Medal* also deal with colonial themes. *The Crown of Thorns* by the prolific Linus Asong is well worth reading for insights into tribal society in northwestern Cameroon.

Music

You'll hear music everywhere you go in Cameroon, pouring out of the radio, or with its videos distracting your receptionist as you check in to a hotel. Manu Dibango is the king of *makossa*, a fusion of highlife and soul that sprang from the clubs of Douala. He brought international fame to Cameroon in the 1980s with his hit *Soul Makossa*. Moni Bilé is another great exponent of the style. In competition is the more danceable *bikutsi* style, originally from Yaoundé. With its martial rhythms and often sexually charged lyrics, it's guaranteed to get the hips moving – listen out for Les Têtes Brulées.

Craftwork

In a country so rich in forests, it comes as no surprise that wood carving makes up a significant proportion of traditional arts and crafts. The northwestern highlands area is known for its carved masks. These are usually representations of animals, and it's often believed that the wearer of the mask can transform himself and take on the animal's characteristics and powers. Stylised representations of spiders, which symbolise wisdom, are common on carvings from the Grassfields area, especially on items belonging to the chief.

Cameroon also produces some highly detailed bronze- and brass-work (including figurative art and pipes), particularly in Tikar areas north and east of Foumban. Carved wooden stools are generally round,

except around Douala, where you'll see rectangular stools similar to those found elsewhere along the West African coast.

The areas around Bali and Bamessing (both near Bamenda), and Foumban, are rich in high-quality clay, and some of Cameroon's finest ceramic work originates here.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

Cameroon is as diverse geographically as it is culturally. The south of the country is made up of low-lying coastal plain, covered by swathes of equatorial rainforest extending east towards the Central African Republic and the Congo Basin. Heading north, the sparsely populated Adamawa Plateau divides the country in two. Beyond this, the country begins to dry out, into a rolling landscape dotted with rocky escarpments. These are fringed to the west by the barren, but beautiful, Mandara Mountains, which make up the northern extent of a chain of volcanic mountains that form a natural border with Nigeria down to the Atlantic coast, often punctuated with stunning crater lakes. Most are now extinct, but one active volcano remains in Mt Cameroon – at 4095m the highest peak in West Africa.

Wildlife

Cameroon's rainforests, especially those in the rich volcanic mountains bordering Nigeria, enjoy exceptional biodiversity. In 2005, British scientists from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew surveyed over 2400 plant species in the Kupe-Bakossi region, with a tenth of them completely new to science – making this Africa's top location for plant biodiversity. The range of animal species is no less spectacular. Cameroon's forests host populations of lowland gorillas and chimpanzees, as well being home to the drill – the most endangered primate species in Africa – which is restricted to Cameroon and Nigeria.

Larger mammal species include reasonable populations of elephants, buffaloes and lions, which are best observed at Parc National de Waza in the dry season. Elephants and buffaloes also still exist in reasonably healthy numbers in the rainforests, but these are rarely seen, due to the dense vegetation. Bénoué and Bouba Ndjida parks, near Garoua, also host populations of large

animals – including a small number of black rhinos – but wildlife concentrations are not as high as in Waza.

Waza is the main wildlife-viewing park and the only one readily accessible to visitors. Korup National Park has the best visitor facilities of Cameroon's protected rainforest areas, but rainy season access can be a problem. In the east the rainforest holds no less diversity – Dja has been declared a World Heritage Site – but infrastructure is practically nonexistent, and a visit is for only the most adventurous.

Environmental Issues

Dense forests cover about 22 million hectares in southern and eastern Cameroon, forming one of Africa's largest forest areas. Like many in Africa, Cameroon's government has had only limited success in balancing the interests of commercial logging and environmental protection. Timber exploitation is big business, and it's no surprise that the most common bank note – the CFA1000 – shows heavy machinery cutting down the forests. The bushmeat trade, once a subsistence activity, follows the driving of roads into the forest. Urban demand for bushmeat is massive, and it's thought that Yaoundé and Douala have the largest consumption of bushmeat in West Africa. New logging roads also act as conduits for HIV infection, with truckers bringing the disease into local communities.

Against this backdrop there are a few bright spots. The Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), in collaboration with the government, has expanded Cameroon's network of protected areas. In addition to benefiting the forest, these efforts are also focused on lessening the impact of commercial logging on the Baka and other communities that depend on the forests for

their livelihood. The most notable progress in recent years has come in the southeast, where Lobéké – formerly a forest reserve and heavily damaged by logging activity – was awarded national-park status, with Boumba-Bek and Nki reserves following soon after. In the south, the Réserve de Campo has also been gazetted as a national park – largely to ensure adequate environmental and community protection for areas through which the Chad–Cameroon oil pipeline passes. In Limbe, the once nightmarish zoo is now run in conjunction with the pioneering conservation organisation, Pandrillus, rehabilitating captured primates and educating locals about environmental issues.

FOOD & DRINK

Cameroonian cuisine is wide ranging. The staple dish is some variety of sauce with meat or fish, flavoured with pepper and served up with a plate of heavy bland starch – usually rice (*riz*) or *fufu*, a generic term for mashed yam, corn, plantain or couscous. Plantains may also be fried into delicious chips, or dishes accompanied with *batons* of steamed manioc, also called *feuilles*. One of the most popular sauces is *ndole*, made with bitter leaves similar to spinach and flavoured with smoked fish.

Cameroonians eat huge quantities of fish. This is most popularly bought off the street from women cooking them over charcoal grills, and comes with a starch accompaniment, all topped with a chilli or peanut sauce. It's quite common to order your fish and then retire to a nearby bar and have the dish delivered to your table. Grilled meats (*brochettes* or *suya*) are equally ubiquitous, although this time the grilling is done by men.

For sit-down meals there are chop houses, often with just a table and bench, which serve food throughout the day, but

there are usually only one or two dishes on offer. Major towns will have at least one restaurant where you can get Western-style cuisine, with Chinese and Lebanese dishes also commonly available.

Breakfast usually consists of coffee and bread – the French colonial influence means that you should never be too far away from somewhere selling baguettes and some sweet pastries. *Beignet* – sweet fried dough – is a popular street snack to eat on the hoof first thing in the morning.

Beer is available everywhere and drunk at any time, even in the Muslim north. Castel and 33 are the most popular brands – billboards for the latter make handy road signs on bus trips – announcing when you're '33'km from your destination. Guinness is also consumed in huge quantities. Palm wine is popular in the south and west – don't be fooled by its innocuous milky demeanour, it's lethal stuff.

Mineral water is sold in all major towns, with Tangui being the most commonly encountered brand.

YAOUNDÉ

pop 1.1 million

Yaoundé is unique among West African capitals thanks to its green and hilly setting. Sat at an altitude of 750m, this gives the city a slightly more pleasant air than sweaty Douala. If its rival to the south is livelier, Yaoundé is better placed for travellers – anyone heading from north to south will pass through, and it's a good place to pick up onward visas, to rest from the road, and to recharge your batteries.

ORIENTATION

Its hilly geography means that Yaoundé's street plan has evolved without any discernible pattern, and it can take a while to get your bearings. The focal point of the lower-lying Centre Ville is Place Ahmadou Ahidjo. From here, Blvd du 20 Mai runs northwest to the landmark Hilton hotel and the administrative district (Quartier du Lac). North from here, the road winds uphill to Carrefour (Rond-point) Nlongkak, a major roundabout. About 1.5km further up is Carrefour Bastos and the upscale Bastos residential quarter, where many embassies

are located, as well as some good restaurants. Overlooking town to the northwest, about 5km from the centre, is cool and green Mt Fèbé, with a Benedictine monastery and museum at the top, a hotel on its slopes, and wide views over the city.

INFORMATION

Cultural Centres

British Council (Map p180; ☎ 220 3172; Ave Charles de Gaulle)

Centre Culturel Français (Map p182; ☎ 222 0944; Ave Ahidjo)

Internet Access

Expect to pay CFA400 to CFA500 per hour for Internet access.

ADT Cybercafé (Map p182; Rue de Narvik, Bastos)

Cometé Internet (Map p182; Rue de Narvik) One of several near the US embassy.

Espresso House (Map p180; Carrefour Bastos; per 30 min CFA1000) Has broadband.

Medical Services

Pharmacie Bastos (Map p180; ☎ 220 6555; Carrefour Bastos) A well-stocked pharmacy.

Polyclinique André Fouda (☎ 222 6612) For medical emergencies; in Elié-Essono southeast of Carrefour Nlongkak.

Money

As always in Cameroon, travellers cheques are problematic to change in banks.

Bicéc (Map p182) Near Place Ahmadou Ahidjo.

Crédit Lyonnais (Map p182) Near Place Ahmadou Ahidjo.

Express Exchange (Map p182; Ave Kennedy) Changes travellers cheques and US dollars.

SGBC Ave Monseigneur Vogt (Map p182; Ave Monseigneur Vogt); Ave de Gaulle (Map p180; Ave de Gaulle) Have ATMs.

Post

Central Post Office (Map p182; Place Ahmadou Ahidjo; ☎ 7.30am–3.30pm Mon–Fri, 7.30am–noon Saturday) With another branch on Ave Foch (Map p182).

Travel Agencies

Inter-Voyages (Map p182; ☎ 222 0361, 223 1005) One block north of the US embassy.

Safar Tours (Map p182; ☎ 222 8703; safar@safartours.com; Blvd du 20 Mai) At the Hilton.

Visa Extensions

Ministry of Immigration (Map p182; ☎ 222 2413; Ave Mdug-Fouda Ada) Issues visa extensions. Bring one photo plus CFA15,000.

BEER MONEY

If there's one thing Cameroonians love as much as football, it's drinking beer: the country has one of the highest rates of alcohol consumption in Africa. Competition between breweries is fierce, and this recently spilled over into a series of promotional offers, luring punters with free prizes hidden under the tops of beer bottles. Cars, phones or just more free booze were all on offer. More promotional bottle tops were produced than the population of Cameroon, to the extent that for a short time the tops became an unofficial form of currency – the value of a free beer being roughly equivalent to a taxi fare. Even the traffic police got in on the game, accepting bottle tops instead of the usual bribes for minor infractions.

YAOUNDÉ

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Democratic Republic of Congo Embassy.....	6 C1
Ecofac Office (For Réserve du Dia).....	7 B1
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French Embassy.....	9 C6
Gabonese Embassy.....	10 C1
German Embassy.....	11 C1
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TO

To Hôtel Mont Fébé (3.5km); Musée d'Art Camerounais (4km)	A
To Palais Présidentiel (2km)	C
To Gare Routière d'Etoudi (3km); Bafoussam (290km); Bamenda (370km)	D
To Polyclinique André Fouda (700m)	E
To Central Voyages (1km); Guaranti Express (1km); Agences de M'van (1km); Nsimalen Airport (18km); Eholowa (168km); Douala (245km); Kribi (290km); Limbe (315km); Bertoua (340km); Kumba (385km); Batouri (430km)	F
To Quartier Damase Musée Afhemi (6km)	G

See Central Yaoundé Map (p182)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Yaoundé is more relaxed than Douala, but there's still a small risk of street crime. Be particularly wary around the central market, and don't carry too many valuables with you. Take a taxi if you're out at night.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Musée d'Art Camerounais

This **museum** (Quartier Fébé; donation requested; ☎ 3-6pm Thu, Sat & Sun) forms part of Yaoundé's Benedictine monastery in the lea of Mt Fébé. It has a wonderful collection of masks, bronzes, wooden bas-reliefs and pottery. Look out for the brass sculpture of the 'Great Maternal Figure', from the area northeast of Foumban – similar sculpture is still produced at Foumban's Village des Artisans (p204). The museum has a really handy English/French guidebook (CFA2000) available at the entrance. The monastery's chapel (underneath the main church) is decorated with Cameroonian textiles and crafts, and *kora* are sometimes used to accompany the singing at Mass (11am Sunday). Take a shared taxi to Bastos and then change for Mt Fébé; chartered taxis from the city centre cost CFA2000.

Musée National

Disappointing in comparison to the Musée d'Art Camerounais, this **museum** (Map p182; off Ave Marchand; CFA1000; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) is small and dusty, counting masks and sculptures from across Cameroon in its exhibits. Some effort is being made to improve labelling, so it might be worth a look in the future.

Musée Afhemi

This **museum** (☎ 994 4656; Quartier Nsimeyong; CFA3000; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun) is actually in a private residence, but it's more of a gallery than a home. The collection of Cameroonian and regional artwork reflects the owner's eclectic tastes. Call in advance to arrange a tour in English and, possibly, lunch. It's 6km southeast of the centre.

Mvog-Betsi Zoo

This **zoo** (Mvog-Betsi; CFA2000, camera CFA500; ☎ 9am-6pm daily) is one of the better ones in West Africa. Co-run by the UK-based **Cameroon Wildlife Aid Fund** (CWAFF, www.cwaff.org) it has a sizeable collection of native primates, including gorillas, chimps and drills, mainly

rescued from poachers and the bushmeat trade. Well worth a visit, the zoo also houses a few lions, hyenas and a smattering of birds, snakes and lizards. A shared taxi to Mvog-Betsi should cost CFA200.

Open-Air Mass

Although it's not put on for tourists, the Ewondo-language open-air mass outside the Paroisse de N'Djong Melen in Quartier Melen attracts many visitors. It's well worth a visit, but put on your Sunday best like everyone else. It begins at 9.30am on Sunday and features drums, dancing and a women's chorus. It's on the western side of town, and reached by shared taxi.

SLEEPING Budget

Foyer International de l'Église Presbytérienne (Map p180; ☎ 985 236 mobile; off Rue Joseph Essono Balla; m CFA3000, tw CFA5000, tent CFA2000;) Favoured by overlanders, this no-frills guesthouse is tucked behind the water towers looming over Nlongkak. Rooms and (communal) facilities are simple but clean, and the grounds have enough trees to laze under or kick a ball between. It's unsigned – look for the orange brick building trying to appear grand.

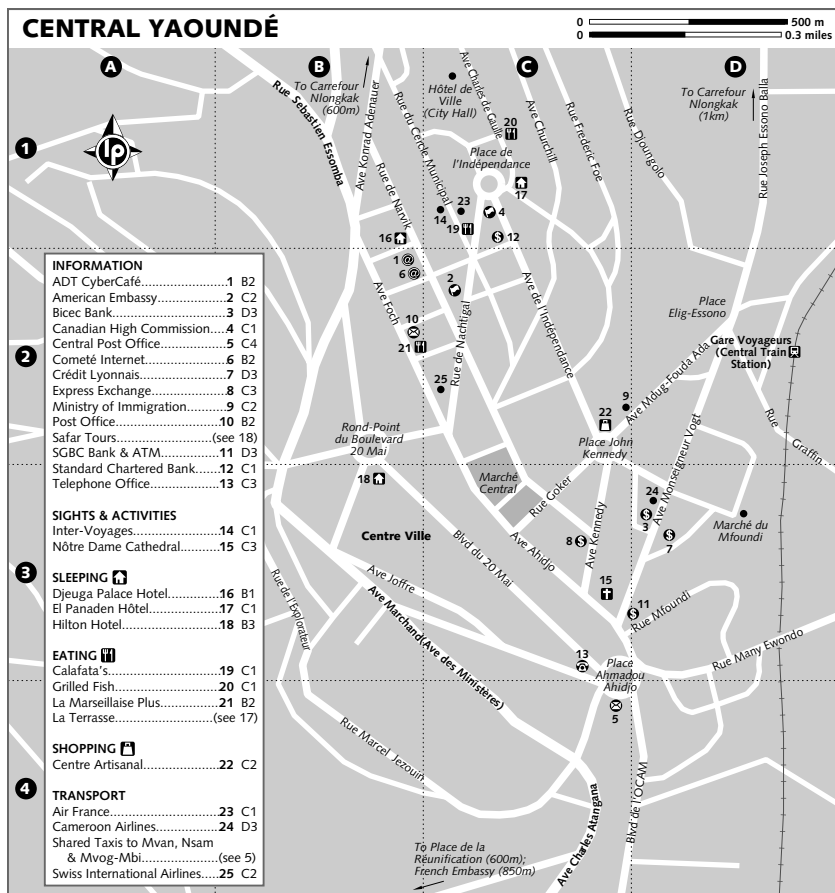
Ideal Hotel (Map p180; ☎ 220 9852; Carrefour Nlongkak; r CFA6000-8000;) Tucked behind a six-storey building on lively Rond Point Nlongkak. Some rooms are a bit dark, but balconies make up for this, and the hotel is a well-located budget option, particularly if you're in town hunting for visas.

Hotel Palmier (Map p180; ☎ 220 4593; Nlongkak; r CFA6800;) In a lively area with a thronging market street outside, this hotel seems to define the word threadbare – check for missing tiles and broken air-con. It's a shame, as rooms are otherwise large and decent, and the carved statues and artwork show that they've made the effort elsewhere.

Sun Star Hotel (Map p180; ☎ 951 3327; Quartier Eij-Edjoa; r CFA7500;) Better maintained than the Palmier, this is a low-slung place with a terrace bar out the front. Rooms are fine, but could do with a dust. Single female travellers might not feel comfortable here at night.

Midrange

El Panaden Hotel (Map p182; ☎ 222 2765; elpanaden@yahoo.fr; Place de l'Indépendance; r CFA15,500-28,000;) This centrally located hotel is



an old traveller's favourite. Helpful staff complement clean and generously sized rooms, most with balconies. La Terrasse bar next door is a handy late night stagger away.

Sipowa Hotel (Map p180; ☎ 221 9571; contact@sipowahotel.com; opposite Saudi Embassy, Bastos; r CFA15,000-30,000, ste CFA35,000; 🏠) A clean, if slightly clinical, option. Small rooms here are good value and the suites are well-appointed with fridge and squashy sofas. Security shouldn't be a problem – even the windows have bars.

Sim's Hotel (Map p180; ☎ 220 5375; Carrefour Bastos; r CFA13,000-25,000) One of the cheaper options in Bastos, this hotel tries to straddle the budget/midrange divide but doesn't quite succeed

in being either. Rooms are a bit dark and dreary, and all have seen better days.

Hôtel Laginaque (p180; ☎ 221 0554; mang wachuisse@yahoo.fr; Carrefour Bastos; r CFA20,000-35,000; 🏠) Just off the main road, this place has soft beds in very comfortable rooms, some with good views over the city. The management could be more efficient; room service makes up for the lack of restaurant, but order in good time.

Hotel Azur (Map p180; ☎ 221 1639; hotalric@icnet.cm; Bastos; r CFA35,000-45,000; 🏠) A modern hotel in a quiet and secluded location. The cheaper rooms feel a bit pinched for the price, but the more expensive rooms are big enough to get lost in. Most have balconies, and those at the back have gorgeous views over the hills.

Top End

Hôtel Mont Fébé (☎ 221 4002; Mont Fébé; r CFA48,000-56,000; 🏠 🚗 🚶) High on the slopes of Mont Fébé, this hotel has commanding views over Yaoundé. It's a cool getaway from the frenetic city, with well-turned out rooms (many with balcony), bar and a restaurant with a good poolside buffet. The hotel also operates a shuttle bus to the airport for guests.

Djeuga Palace Hotel (Map p182; ☎ 222 6469; www.djeuga-palace.com; Rue de Narvik; r from CFA72,000; 🏠 🚗 🚶) Yaoundé's newest four-star offering, the Djeuga Palace is well-located and steals some thunder from the international chains in town. Rooms are spacious and tastefully decorated, with good views, and there's the expected complement of swanky bars and restaurants, and a small pool.

EATING

La Terrasse (Map p182; Place de l'Indépendance; mains from CFA3000; ☎ 7am-midnight) Ever popular, the laid-back atmosphere here is accentuated by mellow live music every evening. Dishes are a mix of Cameroonian and continental standards, but choose the draught beer over the bottles, it's a lot cheaper. As we went to press, rumours were that the restaurant was moving to Ave Churchill.

Chez Wou (Map p180; Rue Joseph Mballa Eloum-den; mains from CFA4000; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of Yaoundé's older Chinese restaurants, this has nice tables set under a wide porch, and a comprehensive menu. The starters (from CFA2000) are worth picking at.

Globus (Map p180; Carrefour Nlongkak; dishes from CFA700; ☎ 7am-11pm) A good watering hole as well as a restaurant, Globus has Cameroonian dishes and a few trusty standards like chicken with rice. The big draw is the location: raised above Nlongkak, it's great for watching the world go by, and catching some gorgeous sunsets.

Snack Time (Map p180; Carrefour Bastos; mains from CFA2700; ☎ 10am-11pm) This bright place serves up a menu straight from an American diner, with a few Lebanese and Italian dishes thrown in for good measure. The bean burritos (CFA3000) are real winners, and the vegetarian pasta a treat for those suffering from a surfeit of meaty Cameroonian stews.

La Forêt Dense (Map p180; Rue Joseph Mballa Eloum-den; meals from CFA5500) This is a pricey place, with traditional Cameroonian dishes in an upscale setting. If you've ever wondered

what crocodile *mbongo* tastes like, this is the place to find out.

Le Buffet (Map p180; Carrefour Nlongkak; mains from CFA500; ☎ 11am-9pm) The name gives this place away – there's a long, heated servery where you can help yourself to various stews, chicken, fish and as much rice and plantain as you can eat.

Quick Eats

La Marseillais Plus (Map p182; Ave Foch; ☎ 12-3pm & 7-10pm) If it weren't for the posters of President Biya, this would be a good approximation of a provincial French café. Good breakfast, sandwiches and snacks.

Calafatas (Map p182; Rue Nachtigal; pastries from CFA200; ☎ 8am-6pm) People cross the city to get their pastries from Calafatas, and you should too. Although it's open all day, all the best choices are gone by late morning, leaving little but baguettes.

Around Carrefours Bastos and Nlongkak you can find grills serving *suya* throughout the day. On Place de l'Indépendance, near El Panaden Hotel, there are women grilling delicious fish, served with chilli or peanut sauce from CFA1000.

DRINKING

The best bars are in Carrefours Bastos and Nlongkak, most with open-air seating facing the street – great for people-watching. Globus and La Terrasse (see left) serve equally well as places for a beer as a meal. Solo female travellers might find the atmosphere in some uneasy once the sun dips. It's difficult to recommend anywhere in particular – there are plenty, so just follow your nose to find one you like.

SHOPPING

Yaoundé isn't a great place for lots of souvenir shopping.

Centre Artisanal (Place John Kennedy) This large government-run establishment is a good place to get an idea of what handicrafts are available in Cameroon, although prices are a little high. Wood carving figures highly in what's on offer

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air For international flight connections to Yaoundé see p224. **Cameroon Airlines** (Map p182; ☎ 223 0304; Ave Monseigneur Vogt) operate a daily

flight from Douala to Yaoundé (CFA65,000, 45 minutes). Other internal flights are to N'Gaoundéré, Garoua and Bertoua – all allegedly several times a week, but check with the airline, as timetables are a mix of fact and fiction.

Bus

To Douala, Central Voyages and Guaranti Express have services (CFA3800, three hours) leaving regularly during the day. The former has a 'prestige' service costing CFA7500. Its office is south of the centre in Mvog-Mbi; unlike most companies, you can book 1st-class tickets a day before and they leave on time. Guaranti Express is recommended for Limbe (CFA5000, five hours), Bamenda (CFA5000, six hours), Bafoussam (CFA2500, three hours) and Kumba (CFA4000, four hours). Its office is in Quartier Nsam, 3km south of the centre.

Otherwise, all other transport for Kribi, Bertoua, Batouri and other destinations in southern, central and eastern Cameroon, departs from Blvd de l'Ocam, 3km south of Place Ahmadou Ahidjo (direct taxi drivers to Agences de Mvan). For Kribi (CFA3000, 3½ hours) look for La Kribienne or Jako Voyages, running throughout the day. For Bertoua and points east, the main line is Alliance Voyages, departing early daily to Batouri (CFA6000, at least eight hours). There is also plentiful transport from here to Ebolowa, Limbe, Buea and Kumba.

Transport to Bafoussam (CFA3000, five hours) and points north, departs from Gare Routière d'Etoudi, 5km north of Centre Ville, and is where most agencies have their offices; the best one is Binam. You can find vehicles to Bamenda here – though it's often quicker to get something to Bafoussam and another vehicle from there to Bamenda. Transport to Bamenda also departs from Gare Routière d'Obili on the western edge of town.

Train

There is a daily train to N'Gaoundéré, departing at around 6pm from (☎ 223 50 03). For more information on train travel see p228.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

A taxi to Nsimalen Airport from central Yaoundé (40 minutes) should cost CFA3000 to CFA4000. There is no public transport.

Taxi

Shared taxis are the only public transport option. There are no minibuses and surprisingly, Yaoundé doesn't permit *mototaxis*. Fares are set at CFA175 for short to medium length rides – flag them down on the street and shout out the name of the *quartier*, *rond-point* or landmark near to where you wish to go; the driver will sound his horn if he's not going your way. Charter taxis start from CFA1000.

DOUALA & THE SOUTHWEST

Cameroon's lush southwest and Littoral provinces are the most fertile parts of the country. Everywhere you go there is a riot of vegetation and a colourful selection of produce in the markets. For visitors the region is similarly bountiful with attractions. Douala, the country's pulsing economic heart, is the most popular gateway to Cameroon, and from here it's a short hop to the lazy beaches of Limbe and Kribi. The more energetic can hike up Mt Cameroon, or head further afield to the ancient rainforests of Korup National Park.

DOUALA

pop 1.7 million

Yaoundé might be Cameroon's capital, but Douala thinks the title is claimed unfairly. Founded during the German colonial period (and initially christened 'Kamerunstadt'), this sticky, hectic port is actually the largest city in the country, and main air hub. Douala has little in the way of tourist attractions and a brief visit doesn't do much to show off its charms – you're more likely to be struck by the bad roads and bad air – but give it some time and you may begin to appreciate the city's good restaurants, lively nightlife and decaying tropical ambience.

Orientation

Akwa district, at the heart of Douala, is bisected by Blvd de la Liberté, where you'll find many hotels, Internet cafés, banks and restaurants. South of here, along and near Rue Joss in Bonanjo, is the administrative quarter, with airline offices, government buildings and the central post office.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Places open and close with the drop of a hat. The following are reliable:

Cyberaljo (per 3 hrs CFA1000) Near Cinema Wouri.

Cyberbao (Blvd de la Liberté; per hr CFA400)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Pharmacie du Centre (Blvd de la Liberté)

Pharmacie de Douala (Blvd Ahidjo)

MONEY

Hôtel Akwa Palace has plenty of touts outside for changing cash out of hours. Be on your guard.

Bicec (Blvd de la Liberté, Akwa) Recommended for changing money; the Akwa branch has an ATM.

Crédit Lyonnais Bonanjo (Rue Joss); Akwa (Rue Sylvani) Recommended for changing money.

Ecobank (Blvd de la Liberté) With ATM.

Hotel Hila (☎ 342 1586; Blvd de l'Unité; s/d CFA10,000-12,000/15,000; ☎) Ideally located for the Yaoundé bus agencies, the Hila sits on a very busy road, so get a room at the back if you can. Rooms are a little threadbare, but fair value for the price. A deposit of CFA20,000 is required on checking in.

SGBC (Rue Joss) With ATM.

Standard Chartered Bank (Akwa) Recommended for changing money.

POST

Central Post Office (Rue Joss)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Saga Voyages (☎ 342 3317; Rue Joss) A well-organised, professional agency.

Trans Africa Tours (☎ 342 8307; Blvd de la Liberté, near Rondpoint Deido) Good for flight connections within Africa.

Dangers & Annoyances

Douala has a poor reputation for muggings and you need to be streetwise. Taxis are always a good idea after dark, and leave your valuables in your hotel. The beggars near the Hôtel Akwa Palace can sometimes be aggressive.

Sights & Activities

The trick with Douala is not to anticipate formal attractions – getting into the city's vibe is what's needed here. You can best do this at any of the clamorous markets, most notably the sprawling **Marché de Lagos** (nr Rue de New Bell & Rue Congo Pariso). All human life seems to be here, but watch out for pickpockets.

If it's too much, relax at one of Douala's pools. The best is at **Hôtel Akwa Palace** (Blvd de la Liberté; nonguests CFA4000); alternatively try

the **Hotel Beausejour Mirabel** (Rue Joffre; nonguests CFA1500); both are in Akwa.

Sleeping BUDGET

Centre d'Accueil Missionnaire (☎ 342 2797, progemis.douala@camnet.cm; Rue Franceville; r with/without shower CFA7000/8000; ☎ ☎ ☎) Sat back from Douala's frantic main drag, this is a real oasis. There are clean twin rooms, a pleasant veranda and a pool to cool off in. Part of the Catholic Mission, it's poorly signed – it's next to the pink Axa building.

Église Évangélique de Cameroun (☎ 342 3611; eec@wagne.net; Rue Alfred Saker; s/d/tr CFA6500/8000/11,000) This is an adequate option as church missions go, but it's a bit tired and in need of love. Rooms are basic for the money, with shared bathroom facilities; there's also a kitchen.

Hotel Hila (☎ 342 1586; Blvd de l'Unité; s/d CFA10,000-12,000/15,000; ☎) Ideally located for the Yaoundé bus agencies, the Hila sits on a very busy road, so get a room at the back if you can. Rooms are a little threadbare, but fair value for the price. A deposit of CFA20,000 is required on checking in.

MIDRANGE

Foyer du Marin (☎ 342 2794; douala@seemannsmission.org; Rue Gallieni; s/d CFA15,000/28,000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Otherwise known as the German Seaman's Mission, tidy comfortable rooms are kept ship-shape for visiting sailors – and other travellers – coming into port. It's equally popular as a drinking spot with Douala's expat community, who visit for the nightly sausage and meat grill from 7pm. You can play pool or swim in the watery one, and pick up something to read at the eclectic multilingual book exchange. Douala's bargain, it's regularly full, so advance booking is essential.

Parfait Garden (☎ 342 6357; hotel.parfait-garden@globalnet2.net; Blvd de la Liberté; r from CFA35,000; ☎) Rooms here are spacious and plush. There's a nice bar and restaurant, and the liveried bell boys inject a little class.

Piano Hotel (☎ 343 0825; piano_hotel@yahoo.fr; Rue Drouot Akwa Bonamouti; r CFA27,500-31,500; ☎ ☎) Rooms here are clean and comfortable, but with the hotel coming straight out of the business traveller model, there's not much character. Still, it's a reliable option; pricier rooms have both bathtub and balcony.

DOUALA

INFORMATION		EATING 🍴	
1 American Consulate.....	1 B5	Delice.....	32 D3
2 Bicec Bank.....	2 D3	Foyer du Marin.....	(see 25)
3 British Consulate.....	3 D3	Grilled Fish & Beer.....	33 F1
4 Central Post Office.....	4 B5	Harrolds.....	34 D3
Commercial Bank of Cameroon (CBC).....	5 B5	Méditerranée Restaurant.....	35 C3
Crédit Lyonnais.....	6 B5	Saga African Restaurant.....	36 D3
Crédit Lyonnais.....	7 D3	Street Food.....	37 D3
Cyberaljo.....	8 D4		
Cyberbao.....	9 D2	ENTERTAINMENT 🎬	
Ecobank.....	10 D3	Wouri Cinema.....	38 C4
Equatorial Guinean Consulate.....	11 A6		
Express Exchange.....	12 C3	TRANSPORT	
French Consulate.....	13 A5	Air France.....	39 B5
Nigerian Consulate.....	14 D2	Alliance Express.....	40 E4
Pharmacie de Douala.....	15 D4	Cameron Airlines.....	41 B5
Pharmacie du Centre.....	16 C3	Centrale Voyages.....	42 E4
Police Station.....	17 E2	Confort Voyages.....	43 E4
Saga Voyages.....	18 C5	Guaranti Express.....	44 E4
SGBC Bank.....	19 B5	Kenya Airways.....	(see 46)
Standard Chartered Bank.....	20 D3	Shared Taxis to Gare Routière Bonabéri.....	45 F1
Trans Africa Tours.....	21 E2	Swiss International Airlines.....	46 B4
		Virgin Nigeria.....	47 B4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			
Marché de Lagos.....	22 E6		
SLEEPING 🛏			
Centre d'Accueil Missionnaire.....	23 D3		
Eglise Evangélique de Cameroon.....	24 C3		
Foyer du Marin.....	25 C4		
Hotel Akwa Palace.....	26 D3		
Hotel Beausejour Mirabel.....	27 C3		
Hotel Hila.....	28 F4		
Hotel le Nde.....	29 E2		
Parfait Garden.....	30 D3		
Piano Hotel.....	31 D2		

Hotel le Nde (☎ 342 7034, Blvd de le Liberté; s/d CFA18,000/21,000; 🏠) The royal crest and Union Jack above the door try to make this hotel a place that is forever England. Rooms are tidy and decent, doing much to dispel the boarding school gloom of the lobby and corridors.

Hotel Beausejour Mirabel (☎ 342 3885; info@beausejour-mirabel.com; Rue Joffre; CFA25,000-27,000; 🏠 🚿) This hotel's bright exterior puts forward a warm welcome. The corner location can make the interior seem like it's all corridors, but at the end of them you'll find large tidy rooms with balconies. Non-residents can use the pool for CFA1500 per day.

Hôtel Akwa Palace (☎ 342 2601; akwa.palace@camnet.cm; Blvd de le Liberté; s/d CFA38,000/45,000; 🏠 🚿 🛏 🍴) There are two parts to this hotel. In the older annexe you get very large, airy rooms at midrange prices, while enjoying all the top-end facilities of the newer (Pullman) section, where rooms weigh in at CFA95,000. In the lobby you can find a travel agent, car hire, shops and a bar-restaurant. Plus there's a decent pool to cool off in.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of good restaurants along Blvd de le Liberté, selling a spectrum of international cuisine.

Méditerranée Restaurant (Blvd de la Liberté; mains from CFA2500; 🕒 8am-midnight) With an open terrace – but still cleverly sheltered from the busy road – the Méditerranée is perennially popular. As the name suggests, the menu has a good mix of Greek, Italian and Lebanese dishes. Curiously, the restaurant also has a newsagent selling international papers.

Foyer du Marin (Rue Gallieni; kebabs from CFA1000; 🕒 7-10pm) The nightly grill at this hotel is worth making a diversion for. They serve great kebabs, chicken and – best of all – juicy German sausage. It's a Douala expat institution.

Saga African Restaurant (Blvd de la Liberté; mains from CFA1200; 🕒 noon-10pm) Opposite the Parfait Garden Hotel, the Saga offers up an interesting mix of continental dishes and some local classics such as *ndole*. It's a nicely decked out place, with a bar out the front and a restaurant behind.

Delice (Blvd de la Liberté; snacks from CFA500; 🕒 7am-9.30pm) A great early morning stop

for pastries and a shot of coffee; there are also some good toasted sandwiches. The 'delice' surely refers to the cool air-con and comfy seating.

Harrolds (Blvd de la Liberté; snacks from CFA500; ☎ noon-10pm) A handy place for a quick bite or lunch on the run – sit down with a draught beer or eat on the hoof. The tasty shwarmas are CFA1500.

STREET EATS

Grilled fish & beer (Rue de la Joie; fish from CFA1000; ☎ 10am-late) This street of bars off Blvd del la Réunification is punctuated at regular intervals by women with stalls selling grilled fish. Order the catch of the day, then retire to a drinking hole to sink a cold one while your meal is barbecuing. It's served to your table with plantains or *baton* – delicious!

Street Food stalls (Rue Joffre; meals from CFA800; ☎ 10am-9pm) This market street has plenty of options for filling Cameroonian food – mostly simple stalls with little more than a bench and table. Food is served throughout the day, fresh and tasty.

Entertainment

Douala is known for its nightlife, which is far more charged than Yaoundé. Asking locals is the best way to find the current hotspots, but when we visited, **Rue de la Joie** (near Rond-Point Deïdo) was one of the happening streets, with bars and nightclubs dancing until dawn on the weekend.

Shopping

Centre Artisanal de Douala (Marché des Fleurs, Ave Charles de Gaulle) This is a good place to stock up on Cameroonian handicrafts, including carvings, metal and leather work and fabrics. Bargain hard.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Douala is the main entry point for international flights into Cameroon. The airport can be pretty chaotic, with plenty of hustlers, so brace yourself when you get off the plane. For connections see p224. **Cameroon Airlines** (☎ 342 2525; off Rue de Trieste) flies daily to Yaoundé (CFA65,000, 45 minutes) and Garoua (CFA125,000, three hours), and three times a week to N'Gaoundéré, sometimes stopping at Maroua, according to the pilot's whim.

BUS

There are two main transport hubs. In central Douala, bus agencies including Centrale Voyages, Confort Voyages, Alliance Express and Guaranti Express all have depots along Blvd de l'Unité, and run services primarily to Yaoundé (CFA3800, three hours) and Limbe (CFA2000, three hours) throughout the day. Centrale Voyages also has a 'prestige service' to Yaoundé with comfier seats and drinks and snacks provided (CFA7500).

For other destinations, agency and non-agency transport uses the sprawling Bonabéri *gare routière*, 6km north of the city centre across the Wouri River bridge. Typical minibus fares include Limbe (CFA1000, 90 minutes) Bamenda (CFA5000, seven hours), Bafoussam (CFA4000, five hours) and Foumban (CFA4500, six hours).

If you arrive via Bonabéri, there will be charter taxis waiting to take you to town. Otherwise, walk out to the main road and get a share taxi to Rond-point Deïdo (CFA150), where you'll need to get another shared taxi to wherever you're going. Charter taxis from the centre to Bonabéri generally charge CFA3000. At Rond-point Deïdo you can sometimes find shared taxis going all the way to Limbe (CFA1500, 70 minutes).

TRAIN

There's a twice-daily service to Yaoundé but, as it's typically around two hours longer than taking the bus, it's little used by travellers. Tickets cost CFA3000 to CFA6700 depending on the class. A daily service runs to Kumba, but is poorly maintained and painfully slow.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Chartered taxis from Akwa or Bonanjo to the airport cost CFA2500 (CFA3000 at night).

TAXI

Shared taxis anywhere in town cost CFA150; charters cost from CFA1000. A short ride on a *moto-taxi* (locally called 'bendskins') costs CFA100.

LIMBE

pop 50,000

The easy-going port of Limbe is the hub of the Anglophone Littoral Province. The

British missionary, Alfred Saker, founded the town in 1857, initially naming it after Queen Victoria. The town sits in the shadow of Mt Cameroon, surrounded by banana and coconut plantations. These days Limbe is best known as a weekend getaway from Douala, with people coming to enjoy the languid air and fresh seafood. If you're doing the same, arrive early to arrange accommodation or book in advance. On a very clear day you can look out across the bay to Equatorial Guinea's distant Bioko Island.

Information

The banks change money, but don't rely on travellers cheques.

Bicec (Ahidjo Rd)

Bifunde Computer Centre (Bota Rd; per hr CFA800)

Very fast Internet access.

Computer World (Banley St; per hr CFA400; ☎ closed Sun)

Fako Tourist Board (☎ 333 2861; Banley St;

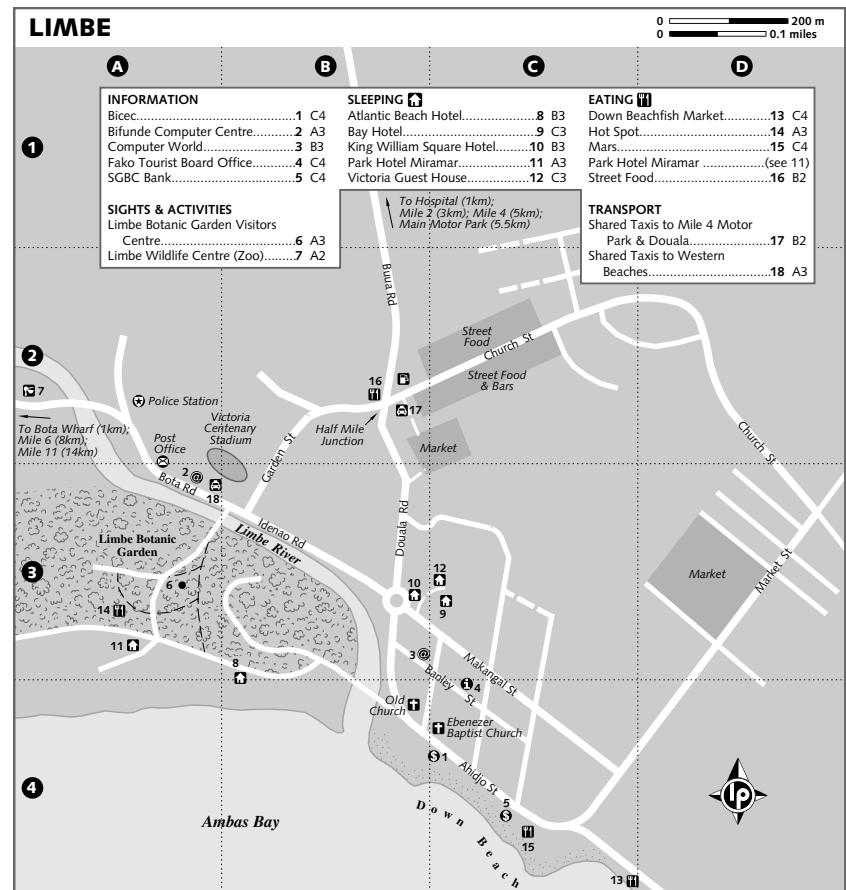
☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) A very helpful office which can arrange local tours, hotels and bookings with the Mt Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation.

SGBC (Beach Rd) Has an ATM.

Sights & Activities

LIMBE WILDLIFE CENTRE

Most zoos in Africa are depressing places, but this **wildlife centre** (www.limbewildlife.org; CFA3000; ☎ 9am-5pm) is a shining exception. Jointly run by the Ministry of the Environment



and the primate charity Pandrillus, it contains rescued chimpanzees, gorillas, drills and other primates – all housed in large enclosures – with heaps of information about local conservation issues. Staff are well-informed, and are heavily involved with community education. Interested visitors may even ‘adopt’ a primate, to help pay for their care, from CFA20,000 per year.

LIMBE BOTANIC GARDENS

These **gardens** (www.mbcclimbe.org; CFA1000, camera CFA2000; ☎ 8am-6pm) are a pleasant place to while away an afternoon. There’s a small visitors centre and an area with Commonwealth War Graves. Those with particular botanic interests will profit from hiring a knowledgeable guide for CFA1000.

Sleeping

Park Hotel Miramar (☎ 332 2332; Botanic Garden Rd; s/d CFA13,650/18,400, camping CFA5000; 📞 🚰 🚿) Individual chalets are the order of the day here, but don’t let that summon images of a plain holiday camp. With a terrace right on the water, there’s a relaxing, almost languid air here that makes this Limbe’s most popular hotel. All prices include breakfast.

Bay Hotel (☎ 773 3609 mobile; off Makangal Street; r CFA7000-7000, ste10,000) Ignore the peeling paint, this old colonial building has wide verandas and airy rooms to catch the best of the sea breeze. A tidy choice, the huge suites are an absolute steal at the price.

Victoria Guest House Hotel (☎ 333 2446; off Makangal Street; r with fan CFA6000-9000, air-con CFA12,000-16,000; 📞) Fine in a pinch, this budget option has adequate accommodation. You’ll feel more content in its cheaper rooms than paying the midrange price tag – especially compared with what else is on offer in town.

King William Square Hotel (☎ 333 2529; Makangal Street; s/d CFA10,000/11,500-12,500; 📞) The third of the cluster of hotels in this area, the King William is a solid, if undistinguished place. Look at more than one room – Limbe’s damp atmosphere seems to have taken hold in a few.

Atlantic Beach Hotel (☎ 332 2689; r CFA16,500-23,500; 📞 🚰 🚿) Near Limbe Bridge, this hotel’s days as town’s top dog are sadly over, and there’s an air of past glory here. Rooms are fine but overpriced, and only those overlooking the bay, with their stunning sea views, really justify the price tag.

Bizarrely, the more expensive rooms come with two breakfasts, even if you’re travelling solo.

Eating

You can find good street food around Half-Mile Junction, along with a good selection of grocery shops and bakeries.

Mars (Ahidjo Rd; mains from CFA2000) This decent place has the usual range of Cameroonian dishes, but come here for the seafood and the terrace sticking out into the bay – a great place for a sundowner.

Down Beach Fish Market (Down Beach; dishes from CFA1000) You’ll find this cluster of shacks where the fishing boats haul up on the beach, grilling the day’s catch. Soak up your beer with fish, crab or sticks of delicious *crevettes*. Dish of the day doesn’t come any fresher than this.

Hot Spot (off Botanic Garden Rd; mains from CFA2000) On a low hill, there are great views here overlooking the water, and good meals to boot. Take a torch for the walk home at night.

Park Hotel Miramar (Botanic Garden Rd; mains from CFA2800) A perennial favourite, this hotel restaurant serves great seafood, and the ever-changing menu of the day always seems to have something tempting on offer. The bar serves good, if expensive, cocktails.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Ferries run every Monday and Thursday from Limbe to Calabar (p647) in Nigeria (CFA35,000, 10 hours), departing around 11pm and returning on Tuesday and Friday at 6pm. Operator **Destiny** (☎ 755 3435 mobile) sell tickets on the day of departure at Bota Wharf, 1km west of town, from where the ferry also departs. You give up your passport on boarding, which is returned when you reach Nigerian immigration. There is no food or drink for sale on the ferry and seats are in short supply, so board early if possible. It’s possible to change CFA for Nigerian naira at Bota Wharf.

Ferries no longer operate to Malabo in Equatorial Guinea, although you can arrange a speedboat (popularly called ‘stick-boats’) from Bota Wharf for around CFA65,000. The trip takes four hours, but the boats have poor safety records and frequently sink, so cannot be recommended. If you must take one, invest in a life jacket.

BUS & TAXI

The main motor park is at Mile 4, about 5km from town on the Buea road. When arriving, you’ll be dropped here, and will need to take a share taxi to Half Mile Junction in the centre of Limbe (CFA100). Minibuses depart throughout the day from Mile 4 to Buea (CFA500, 25 minutes), Douala (CFA1000, 90 minutes) and Kumba (CFA1500, 2½ hours). Share taxis also depart to Douala (CFA1500, 70 minutes) and Buea (CFA750, 20 minutes) from Half-Mile Junction. Chartering a taxi to Douala costs around CFA9000.

To Yaoundé, Guaranti Express and Patience, both on the Buea road (Mile 2), have one departure each around 8am daily (CFA5000, five hours). Guaranti Express also has a service to Bamenda (CFA4000, around 8 hours).

Shared taxis to the beaches at Mile 6 (CFA100, 10 minutes) and Mile 11 (CFA150, 15 minutes) depart from Idenao Road near the stadium. To Mile 11 they can take a while to fill – expect to pay CFA2500 for a charter.

AROUND LIMBE

Beaches

Beaches of dark brown volcanic sand stretch north from Limbe. The best are at Mile 8 (especially at Batoke village) and Mile 11. There’s also a beach at Mile 6, although it isn’t quite as nice, and inquisitive monkeys can be a problem here. Take local advice before swimming – currents are strong and can produce dangerous riptides. On the road just before Mile 11 you can see the lava flow from Mt Cameroon’s 1999 eruption. Take transport heading for Mile 11.

SLEEPING

All of these places are near the beach, but none have rooms on the water. There’s no accommodation north of Mile 11.

Fini Hotel (☎ 333 2576; fini@finihotel.com; Mile 6 Rd; r CFA18,000-35,000; bungalow CFA25,000-80,000; 📞 🚰 🚿) The fanciest option in the Limbe area, with rooms in all shapes and sizes. Those in the main hotel are the best, but if there are several of you then the self-contained bungalows could be the bargain of your trip.

Coast Beach Hotel (☎ 333 2927; Mile 6 Rd; r CFA20,000-25,000, ste CFA40,000; 📞 🚰 🚿) Although

there’s not quite as much beach here as the hotel’s name suggests, some rooms are so close to the sea that you can almost dip your toes in from the balcony. Rooms are comfy, many with separate sitting room attached.

BUEA

On the lower slopes of Mt Cameroon, Buea (pronounced *boy-ah*) is a large sprawling town, and the starting point for climbing the mountain. The rise in altitude gives Buea a much cooler air than sticky Limbe. From 1901, it was briefly the German colonial capital. The climate is well suited to growing tea, and the Tole Tea Plantation south of the town is a major local employer.

Information

Express Exchange (Molyko Rd) A very useful branch that changes euros, dollars and travellers cheques.

Mt Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation (☎ 332 2038; mountceo@yahoo.uk; Buea Market; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7am-noon weekends) Can arrange tours of the Tole Tea Plantation.

Nigerian Consulate (☎ 332 2528; Nigeria Consulate Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Convenient for visas for onward travel.

Sleeping & Eating

Paramount Hotel (☎ 382 2074; Molyko Rd; s/d with cold water CFA7000/10,000, with hot water CFA14,000/17,000; 📞 🚰 🚿) This hotel should be credited for trying to bring some upscale pomp to Buea; for the most part it pulls it off. Rooms are comfortable and clean, and come with TV; the budget options are a little simpler.

Parliamentarian Flats (☎ 332 2459; Nigeria Consulate Rd; s/d CFA5000/10,000; 📞) There’s a stripped-down feeling at this hotel, although rooms are good value for the price. There are no showers, but if you’ve slogged up Mount Cameroon you’ll appreciate the deep baths – and the hot water heater to help fill them.

Presbyterian Church Synod Office (☎ 332 2336; Market Rd; s/d with shared bathroom CFA2500/4000, private bathroom CFA3000/5000, camping CFA1000; 📞) As church missions go, this one is a gem. Conveniently located and kept spotless, rooms are comfy, with a tidy communal sitting room and cooking facilities.

There are several cheap eating places on Molyko Road around the Paramount Hotel.

Getting There & Away

The motor park for onward transport is at Mile 17, about 6km from town along the Limbe Road. Minibuses run throughout the day to Limbe (CFA500, 25 minutes), and less frequently to Douala (CFA1400, two hours) and Kumba (CFA1500, two hours). A shared taxi from Mile 17 to Buea Market is CFA150.

MT CAMEROON

Known locally as *Mongo-mo-Ndemi* (Mountain of Thunder) by the Bakweri people, Mt Cameroon is West Africa's highest peak at 4095m. It is an active volcano and it's thought that a fleet of Phoenician explorers witnessed an eruption in 450 BC. The

last eruption was in 2000. Scientifically, it's of great interest for its endemic plants and birds, and for the unique climatic conditions that make it a biodiversity hotspot.

November to April is the main climbing season. Although it's possible to climb the mountain year-round, you won't get much in the way of views during the rainy season. Late spring offers the best views – if not to the valley below, then at least for glimpses of the stars at night.

Routes

There are several routes to the top and numerous trails on the mountain's lower slopes. None require technical equipment, but warm clothes are essential near the

summit and waterproof gear is a must. The quickest is the 'Guinness Route', a straight up-and-down climb that can be easily done in 1½ days, though it's quite steep in parts. Along this route are three poorly maintained huts (at 1875m, 2860m and 3740m), with plank beds and little else.

It's better to take at least two nights on the mountain, to experience its ecosystems and explore less-travelled routes; if you have the time, there are also set hikes of five days and more. One popular two-night, three-day combination ascends via the Mann Spring route and descends via the Guinness Route. With more time, it's possible to descend via Musingile on the mountain's northern side, and from there go through the forest to Koto (northeast of Idenao). Alternatively, the steep Radio Station route ascends from Bonakanda village through scrub and grassland to a hunter's camp at Nitele, and on to the summit from there.

Otherwise you'll need camping equipment, and for all routes you should be self-sufficient with food and water. The only water points on the mountain are at Hut 1 on the Guinness Route, and at Mann Spring.

Guides & Permits

Treks are arranged in Buea through the very professional **Mount Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation** (☎ 332 2038; mountceo@yahoo.uk; Buea Market; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7am-noon weekends). The organisation works closely with the 12 villages around the mountain, employing many villagers as guides and porters. All trekkers pay a flat 'stakeholder fee' of CFA3000, which goes into a village development fund and is used for community projects such as improving electricity and water supply. The organisation's office also has a small shop selling locally produced handicrafts.

Guides, well trained in the local flora and fauna, cost CFA6000 per day (maximum five trekkers per guide), and porters CFA5000 per day. Equipment can also be hired on a daily basis, including tents (CFA5000), sleeping bags (CFA2000), sleeping mats (CFA300) and raincoats (CFA300). Expect to spend around CFA2000 per day on food for the trek – Buea market has a decent selection of basics.

It's usually possible to arrive in Buea in the morning and arrange everything on the spot to start trekking in the afternoon, but it's advisable to make advance bookings – particularly if you need to hire equipment. Treks can also be booked through the Fako Tourist Board in Limbe (p189) who act as agents for the Mount Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation. The organisation can also arrange day hikes, and tours of Buea and the Tole Tea Plantation.

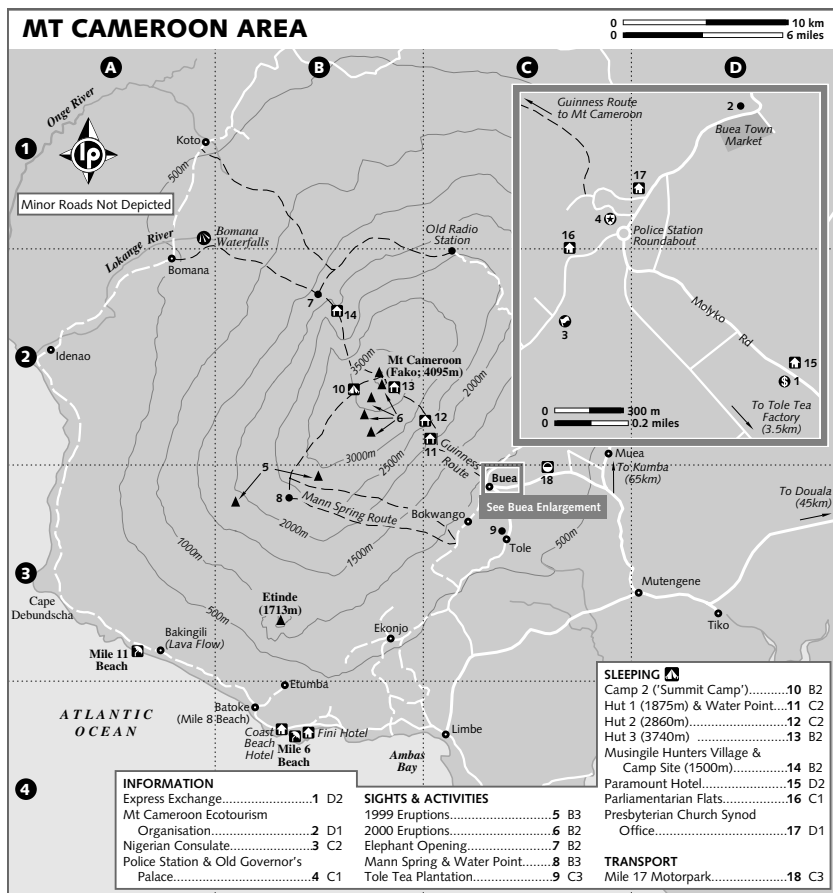
Mt Etinde

Small but steep Mt Etinde (also known as Petit Mt Cameroon), a 1713m sub-peak on Mt Cameroon's southern slopes, is an extinct volcano and is actually geologically older than its larger neighbour. Climbs can be arranged through the Mt Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation, either at its office in Buea (p191) or, at the Fako Tourist Board in Limbe (p189). It costs CFA6000 per guide plus a CFA3000 per person 'stakeholder' fee, and CFA1000 to CFA2000 for the local chief, whose permission you need to climb. You'll also need to bring a bottle of whisky along for the ancestral spirits.

It's possible to walk from Limbe to the mountain, in which case you should allow one long day for the entire trip. Otherwise take a shared taxi to Batoke, from where you can charter a taxi to either Ekonjo or Etumba (Etome), two villages at the mountain's base. From either of these, the ascent should take about half a day. The idea with the whisky is that half is poured out at the summit as a libation for the spirits, while

RACE OF HOPE

The Mt Cameroon Race, or 'Race of Hope', has been held annually around the last weekend of January since 1973, attracting an international group of competitors and many spectators. During a gruelling mountain marathon of 40km, competitors use the Guinness Route to reach the summit. Considerably faster than the leisurely trek most people opt for, winners usually finish in a staggering 4½ hours for men, and 5½ hours for women. For more information contact Fako Tourist Board in Limbe or the **Fédération Camerounaise d'Athlétisme** (☎ 222 4744) in Yaoundé.



the other half is consumed, which can make for a fun walk down! Bring along insect repellent, sturdy shoes and waterproofs, along with whatever food and water you will need. Clarify before starting who is supplying food for the guide.

KUMBA

The Anglophone town, Kumba, is an important transport junction and the site of one of Cameroon's largest markets. It's a major cocoa-producing area, with workers coming from across the country to harvest the crop. About 5km northwest is the gorgeous Barombi Mbo crater lake. Kumba is a huge, sprawling place, so you may need a shared taxi (CFA100) to get around.

Barombi Mbo Lake

This beautiful spot makes a lovely side trip from Kumba. Steep, heavily wooded slopes surround the lake. There is a CFA200 entrance fee, and a small restaurant which is currently open during the dry season only. Although there are plans to build a small hotel, for now you can camp and enjoy the serene calm all to yourself. It's sometimes possible to hire canoes from the local fishermen, and paddle out to the villages on the opposite side of the lake.

To reach Barombi Mbo, take any shared taxi (CFA300) from the western side of Kumba towards 'Upstation' and ask the driver to drop you at the junction, about 3km from town. From here, it's about 2km further and a pleasant walk up a track – a new road should be finished during the life of this book. Otherwise, you can hire a taxi for the whole way.

Sleeping & Eating

Kanton Hotel (☎ 335 4382; Buea Rd; r CFA6000-8000; 📍) Centrally located, too much concrete gives this hotel a slightly brutal feel, reflected in rooms that aren't bad but aren't overly comfy either. Still, it's clean and the attached restaurant is good. Cheaper rooms have fan only.

Golden Bull Hotel (☎ 744 8324 mobile; Mundemba Rd; r CFA3000-5000, camping CFA 2000; 📍) A short taxi ride from the southwest motor park is this decent budget choice. Rooms are large (and many are rented by the hour) but the showers are cold, along with the beers in the bar.

Metropole Hotel (☎ 335 4064; off Customary Court Rd; r CFA8000-11,000; 📍) With huge well-kept rooms, this place is the closest that Kumba gets to a midrange hotel. There's a restaurant, but order early – it closes just in time for dinner.

Getting There & Away BUS

Tonton Express and Mondial Express have depots on Commonwealth Ave near the market, and run regular daily services to Yaoundé (CFA4500, six hours), Douala (CFA2000, two hours), Bamenda (CFA4000, around six hours), Bafoussam (CFA2000, three hours), Limbe (CFA1500, 2½ hours) and Buea (CFA1500, two hours). Tonton Express has the most departures, but get there early.

Non-agency transport to Douala, Limbe and Buea departs from the Buea Rd motor park on the southeastern edge of town.

Transport to Ekondo Titi (where you can find vehicles to Mundemba and Korup National Park) goes from Mundemba Rd motor park, and costs CFA2500 in the dry season. Fares double during the rains, and the 2½ hour journey can triple in duration.

TRAIN

There's a train four times daily between Douala and Kumba, though it's faster to take the bus from Douala to Mbanga, then the train from there to Kumba (CFA400, one to 1½ hours). Trains pass Mbanga every few hours from about 9am to 4pm.

MANENGOUBA LAKES

The beautiful Manengouba Crater Lakes are set in a grassy caldera southeast of Bangem town. The lakes, known locally as Man Lake and Woman Lake, are the subject of various local superstitions. Camping and swimming is permitted at Woman Lake, but not at Man Lake. A visit costs CFA1000, which you're supposed to pay at the police station in Bangem (get a receipt), though it's often easier to just pay the guy near the lakes who will approach you to collect it.

The lakes are about three hours uphill on foot from Bangem; locals will point the way. Once you reach the rim, you'll need to hike through the caldera, past grazing cattle and Fulani herdsmen, to reach the lakes on the far side. The whole area is paradise for hikers.

The most direct way from Kumba to Bangem is via Tombel, but the road becomes atrocious at even a hint of rain, so it's faster to go first to Melong (about half-way between Kumba and Bafoussam), from where it's just CFA1500 and 45 minutes in a shared taxi to Bangem. At Melong, Hotel La Forêt has basic rooms.

KORUP NATIONAL PARK

Korup protects an exceptionally biologically diverse patch of rainforest, reported to be one of the oldest and richest in Africa. Within its 1259 sq km are more than 300 species of birds, 50 species of large mammals, more than 620 species of trees and over 100 medicinal plants. The vegetation is very dense and – apart from monkeys – you're unlikely to see many animals, but visiting is a superb way to experience a rainforest ecosystem. Korup is also the easiest of Cameroon's protected rainforest areas to reach, and the one with the most developed infrastructure. There are more than 100km of marked walking trails within the park, and knowledgeable guides who often work with field researchers. Two days is the ideal length for a visit.

The starting point for a visit is Mundemba village, about 8km before the park gate. There's an **Information Centre** (☎ 710 9175; 🕒 7.30am-5.30pm Nov-May, 7.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30-8.30am & 4.30-5.30pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep). Phoning ahead of your visit is strongly advised to discuss your requirements with the tourist officer. Park fees of CFA5000 per day are paid at the centre, where you must also hire a guide (CFA4000 per day, plus CFA1000 per night). Porters can also be arranged (CFA2000 per day plus CFA1000 per night, maximum load 25kg), as can rental of sleeping bags, foam mats and cookware. Pay all fees direct to the tourist officer, and ignore requests from anyone else for extra 'stakeholder' fees. Bring plenty of insect repellent.

Sleeping & Eating

There are three camp sites (CFA3000 per person) in the park's southern section: Iriba Inene, about 2km from the entrance; Rengo (9km); and Chimpanzee (10km). Each has simple huts with wooden beds and mosquito screens, water for drinking and bathing, and a cooking area. You'll need to bring your own food, and a sleeping mat. You're not expected to supply food for guides and

porters, but it's best to clarify this before setting off. Basic supplies are available in Mundemba.

Sure to Sure Guesthouse (☎ 754 5009, r CFA5000-6000) At the southern end of Mundemba, this place has simple rooms with fan.

Martha's Sure serves good basic 'meat sauce and rice' dishes and the like for around CFA500.

Getting There & Away

There's usually at least one taxi brousse daily in the dry season between Mundemba and Ekondo Titi (CFA1800, two hours), from where you arrange transport to Kumba. Rainy season transport is more ad hoc, takes longer and costs more.

From Mundemba to the park gate at Mana Footbridge, you can either walk, or go with a park vehicle (CFA8000 per vehicle return, 10 people maximum including guide and porters). An amazing suspension bridge crosses the Mana River here – almost worth the park entrance fee alone.

If you have the money, a great way to depart or arrive in Korup is by boat (carrying six people) along the Mana River. Staff can arrange pick-ups or drop-offs from as far south as Idenao, through the disputed Bakassi Peninsula area (CFA250,000 one way). The boat can also be rented for shorter excursions along the river to explore the mangrove swamps (CFA90,000 for three hours) or visit nearby Pelican Island (CFA150,000). All boat trips need to be arranged in advance through the Korup Information Centre.

There's another entrance to Korup at Baro, west of Nguti, which can be reached by taxi brousse from Mamfe during the dry season.

MAMFE

On the bank of the Cross River, Mamfe is the last major town before the Nigerian border at Ekok, 60km further west. Together with nearby Kembong village, it's also a regional centre for witchcraft and traditional medicine.

There's no bank at the border, so you'll need to ask at shops in Mamfe or at the market if you're looking for Nigerian naira. Bicec bank in Mamfe is occasionally willing to change cash euros (no travellers cheques), but shouldn't be relied upon.

If you're heading to Nigeria, it's worth stopping by the Office for Immigration and

Emigration to make friends with the officer and ask for more names at Ekok. It's in the town centre between the main roundabout and Bayang Garage; locals can point you in the right direction.

Sleeping & Eating

Data Club Guest House (☎ 334 1399; r from CFA10,000; 🏠) Easily the best lodging in Mamfe, on the northeastern edge of town, it also has a decent restaurant.

African City Hotel (r CFA5000) For something cheaper, but a lot more basic, try this place near the motor park.

There are several places to eat near the motor park, and there are also *suya* and fish vendors scattered around town during the evening.

Getting There & Away

Transport connections in all directions are good, but the roads are not. Travelling during the rains can be a horrible, devilish experience. The main motor park is 500m southwest of Mamfe's central intersection.

Transport goes throughout the day to the border at Ekok, 60km away. The main lines are Ali Baba and Tonton Express, and the price is CFA1500 in the dry season, though this can reach CFA4000 during the rains, when you'll frequently have to get out and push. A better alternative is to take a pirogue down Cross River, direct to Ekok.

The mountainous road from Mamfe to Bamenda (around CFA9000) is beautiful, but has perilous drop-offs and is only an option in the dry season. It's better to take the longer southern route via Kumba (CFA5000, six hours) and travel on from there.

There's usually at least one vehicle daily between Mamfe and Nguti (for Korup National Park), although there's almost no traffic from Nguti into the park

NORTH-WEST PROVINCE

The Anglophone North-West Province is one of the country's most rewarding areas for travellers. Its green hills provide a cool contrast to the sticky coast, and are covered with a patchwork of local chiefdoms and traditional practices, including witchcraft.

A tour of the Ring Road through the beautiful Grassfields area should be a highlight of any trip to Cameroon, but bring an extra layer of clothing – evenings at altitude can verge on the chilly, especially between October and February.

BAMENDA

pop 235,000

The capital of North-West Province is a slightly unkempt sprawling place, tumbling down a hill at over 1000m altitude. While not holding any particular drawcards for travellers in itself, it has decent amenities and is a good jumping-off point for exploring the countryside nearby, most notably the Ring Road circuit. Bamenda is the centre of political opposition to President Biya.

Orientation

Most transport arriving in Bamenda will drop you at Upstation, overlooking Bamenda town proper. From here the road winds steeply down to Nkwen District, which has a good market, follows Cow St and Sonac St and eventually reaches City Chemist's Roundabout and the main drag – the aptly named Commercial Ave. Another important spot for getting your bearings is Hospital Roundabout, which leads on to Ntarikon Motor Park and the road to Bafut.

Information

Express Exchange (City Chemist's Roundabout) Changes travellers cheques as well as US dollars cash and euros.

Maryland Cybercafé (Commercial Ave; per hr CFA300)

Also has Internet phone for CFA250 per minute.

Polyclinic (Bali Rd)

SCBC Bank (Commercial Ave) Has an ATM.

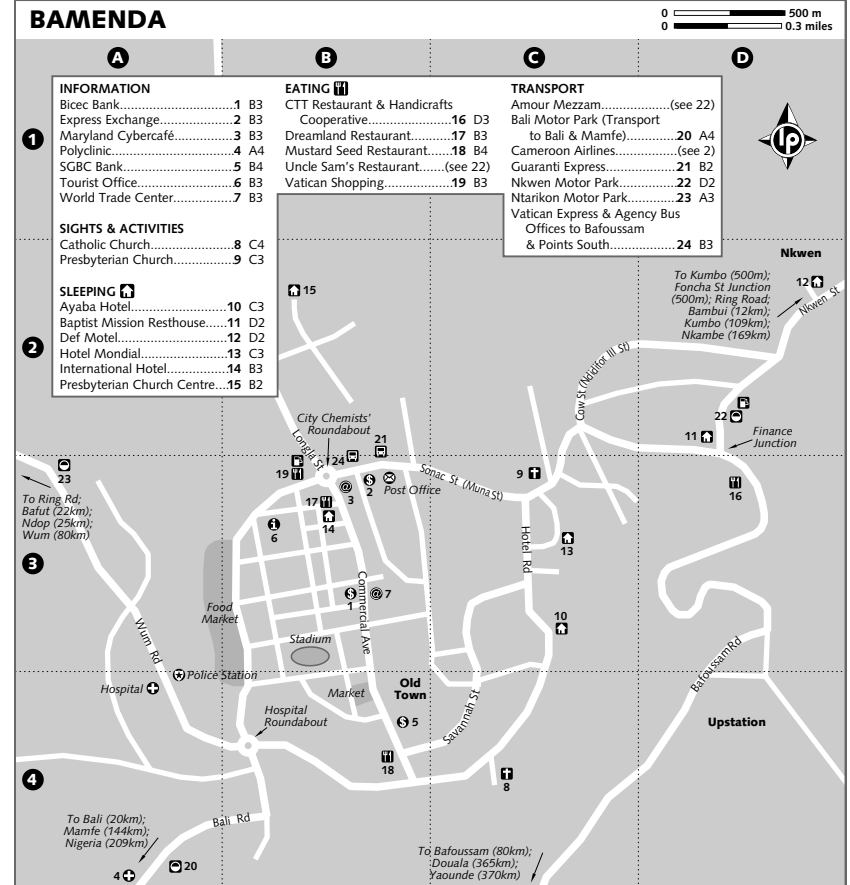
Tourist office (☎ 336 1395) Can provide basic maps and dates of local festivals.

World Trade Center (Commercial Ave; per hr CFA3000) Internet access.

Sleeping

Presbyterian Church Centre (☎ 336 4070; off Longla St; dm CFA4000, r CFA6000; 🏠) Hidden away from the bustle of the centre, this is a good budget option. Private rooms are self-contained, but even the four-bed dorms have sinks. The generous grounds are a good place to relax.

Baptist Mission Resthouse (☎ 336 1285; Finance Junction; dm CFA2500; 🏠) A bit far from



Bamenda's centre but, aside from that, this is a great cheap place to lay your head. Rooms are immaculate, with spotless shared bathroom facilities proving that cleanliness is indeed next to godliness.

Def Motel (☎ 366 3748; off Nkwen St; r CFA6000-10,000) Right in the middle of the lively Nkwen district, this place is decent value. Prices increase as you go up each floor – those climbing all the stairs get rewarded with a TV and hot water heater.

International Hotel (☎ 336 2527; off Commercial Ave; r CFA15,000-18,000) This multistorey option fits solidly into the Cameroonian businessman's class. Usually busy, rooms are big and come with balconies, while the restaurant serves a great breakfast. The higher

tariff gets you a TV and 'guaranteed' hot water.

Hotel Mondial (☎ 336 1832; off Hotel Rd; s/d CFA12,500/14,000; 🏠) The Hotel Mondial feels a little more modern than its equivalents elsewhere in Bamenda – positively plush even. Comfortable rooms come with water heater and satellite TV – and there are a few decent cheaper options without (CFA7500), for those with slimmer budgets.

Ayaba Hotel (☎ 336 1356; ayabahotel@refinedct.net; Upstation; r from CFA18,000; 🏠 🏠 🏠) Near the Hotel Mondial, and looking over Bamenda town, the Ayaba is trying hard to recapture its glory days as the Bamenda's top hotel. Rooms are fine, if not spectacular for the price, but the restaurant has a decent menu.

Eating

Mustard Seed Restaurant (Commercial Ave; mains from CFA800; ☎ 8am-10pm) This joint serves decent local – the usual Cameroonian standards plus a local speciality, *amajama* (meat sauce with chopped huckleberry leaf). There are plenty of similar options along this stretch of Commercial Ave, and across the road on Savannah St.

Dreamland Restaurant (Commercial Ave; mains from CFA1300; ☎ 7am-11pm) A fancy dining option this, dishing up excellent value food for such swish surroundings. Choose from a good selection of local and international dishes (and a large wine list), or graze on the salad buffet from 7pm to 9pm every Friday (CFA2000 including two drinks).

CTT Restaurant & Handicrafts Cooperative (near Finance Junction, upstation; mains from CFA1000; ☎ 8am-9pm) The restaurant here has a range of average Cameroonian and standard Western meals, including *ndole* and pepper soup, but a bigger draw are the great views over Bamenda to the distant mountains, and the cooling breeze as the building hangs over the side of the hill. Regional handicrafts – lots of wood carving and masks – are on sale in an adjoining building.

Uncle Sam's Restaurant (mains from CFA1000; ☎ 10am-11pm) Handily located next to Nkwen Motor Park, this is a reliable joint with a brightly painted red-and-blue façade.

Vatican Shopping (City Chemists' Roundabout) Well-stocked for self-caterers.

Getting There & Away

Most agency offices for points south are on Sonac St. To Yaoundé (CFA5000, six hours), Vatican Express and Guaranti Express are the best. The same agencies operate daily services to Douala (CFA5000, seven hours). Sonac St is also the departure point for Bafoussam (CFA1200, 90 minutes), from where you'll find more transport heading south.

Nkwen Motor Park has transport to the east stretch of the Ring Road including Ndop (CFA1000, 90 minutes) and Kumbo (CFA3000, five hours). Amour Mezzam Express has the most departures. The west stretch of the Ring Road is served by Ntarikon Motor Park, with minibuses to Wum (CFA2000, two hours). Transport also leaves for Bafut from here (CFA300, 20 minutes). Shared taxis to the farther motor parks shouldn't cost more than CFA150.

AROUND BAMENDA Bali

Bali is about 20km southwest of Bamenda, and makes a good day excursion. Along with Bafut and Kumbo, it's one of the most important traditional kingdoms in the area. It's possible to visit the *fon's* palace, and have an audience with the *fon* himself – although it's not as interesting as the one in Bafut (p201). There's also an artisan centre, and an impressive *lela* (end-of-year festival) in late December, with traditional dancing and more. Shared taxis run frequently between Bamenda and Bali (CFA250, 15 minutes).

RING ROAD

The Ring Road is a circular 367km route through the heart of Cameroon's north-western highlands, better known as the Grassfields. It's a particularly scenic part of the country, with rolling hills and mountains, lakes and waterfalls, and traditional kingdoms. The cattle-herding Fulani are dominant in the Grassfields, while the temperate and often rainy climate also means that swathes of the countryside

are given over to tea plantations. Some of Cameroon's most fascinating artwork also originates from the area, and it's possible to buy direct from artist's cooperatives.

There's very little in the way of organised tourism here, but the potential for hiking is huge. You could easily spend a couple of weeks trekking or cycling. Camping is generally safe, but always ask the permission of the local chief. For those heading east (anti-clockwise) by vehicle, the road is decent from Bamenda via Kumbo to Nkambe. Downed bridges mean that it's not currently possible to continue from here on to Wum by vehicle, although the rough tracks shouldn't stop hikers. From Wum, a rough dirt road leads south to Bafut, from where it's a short skip back to Bamenda. Transport links along the Ring Road are reasonable, but not always particularly frequent, usually leaving in the early morning.

Kumbo is the Ring Road's largest town, and apart from here (and to a lesser extent Nkambe), there's little infrastructure in the area, and nowhere to change money, so stock up on CFA before leaving Bamenda.

Sabga, Bamesing & Ndop

From Bamenda, the eastern section of the Ring Road climbs quickly into some gorgeous mountain scenery. Stretching from the villages of Sabga to Ndop, this is one of the most beautiful stretches in the whole region, lush and green, particularly at the end of the rains. This section of the Ring Road makes an ideal day trip from Bamenda if you're short on time.

At Sabga, it's worth breaking your trip to climb Sabga Hill on the eastern side of the village. Ask to be dropped off about 500m after the village by the 10% gradient sign. It takes about 20 minutes to climb the hill (120m), where upon you'll be rewarded with glittering views over the mountains to the Mbam Massif, taking in pretty villages, red earth roads and a handful of waterfalls. There's a path of sorts, but it can be slippery under foot in places.

From Sabga, the route continues to Bamesing, which stretches along the road without ever quite settling into a single village. Bamesing is a good place to buy handicrafts, and there are several cooperatives along the road that sell carved wood. The **Prespot Centre** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) has

fascinating tours of their pottery centre, where you can watch the whole process, from digging the clay from the local riverbed, to firing the finished articles. There's a small shop, but zero hard sell. The centre is badly signed 1km off the main road, so ask for directions.

The tar road from Bamenda finishes at Ndop, after which it's dirt roads all the way to Nkambe. Ndop is a thriving market town, large enough to have a petrol station and post office, and has the only sleeping options on this stretch of the Ring Road. Try the **Ndop Guest Home Hotel** (r CFA7000) which has self-contained rooms with their own water heater. Further from the main road is **Green Valley Resort** (☎ 336 3400; r CFA5000), with decent rooms and secure parking, but a meagre restaurant. There are several chop houses around the market area. Amour Mezzam, on the north side of Ndop, has daily minibuses to Bamenda (CFA1000, 90 minutes).

A two-hour drive north of Ndop is the dreary hamlet of Jakiri, which serves as a junction for the rough but stunning road southwest to Foumban. The **Trans-Afrique Hotel** (r CFA4000) will do in a pinch of you get stuck here waiting for transport.

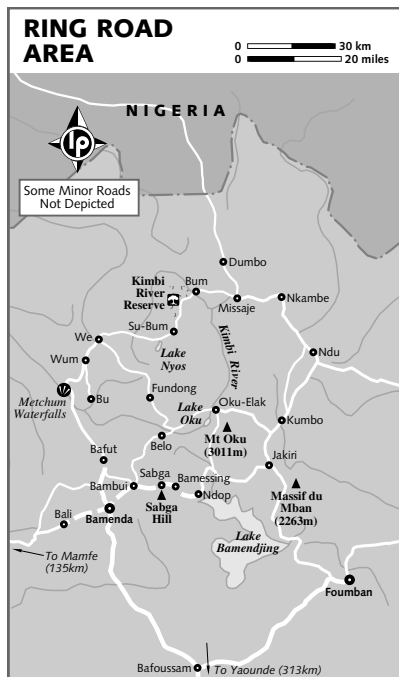
Kumbo

Sitting at a cool 2000m altitude, Kumbo is the largest town in the Grassfields. It's home to the Banso people, one of the major traditional kingdoms in the northwest. In mid-November, Kumbo hosts a horse racing festival, with cultural activities and markets. A huge Catholic cathedral dominates the town centre, at the junction leading west to Oku. You can also visit the *fon's* palace; there's no set fee, but CFA1000 to CFA2000 is expected for whoever shows you in. It's also worth visiting the market, especially the section devoted to traditional medicine.

Kumbo is an important junction town with a relaxed air – a good place to base yourself for exploring the Ring Road in more depth. There are plenty of bars and cheap eats, along with a post office and an Internet café opposite the cathedral. Lolika Handicrafts Training Centre, near the market, is good for souvenir shopping.

SLEEPING & EATING

Merryland Hotel (☎ 348 1077; s/d CFA4000/5000; P) A good budget option just off the road from



CLIMBING MT OKU

Mt Oku (3011m), in the centre of the Ring Road area, is Cameroon's second-highest mountain. Although not nearly as popular as Mt Cameroon, it makes a rugged but satisfying climb. On its western slope is a crater lake, which is considered sacred, and the mountain is a centre for witchcraft. More mundanely, the Oku area is known for its honey.

The starting point for the climb is the village of Oku-Elak, reached by taxi brousse from Kumbo (CFA1000). Once there, you'll need to first go to the *fon's* palace to get permission. There's no charge, but it's not a bad idea to bring a bottle of whisky or some other gift. The people at the palace will also help you to arrange a guide; expect to pay between CFA2000 and CFA5000. If you get stuck for the night, there's basic accommodation in Oku-Elak.

The climb itself takes about six hours return, and includes some steep, rough sections. You'll need a good windproof jacket, as well as sufficient water. It's possible to descend via the mountain's western side, finishing near Belo, from where there's sporadic transport south to Bambui, and then to Bamenda. There is basic accommodation in Belo.

Bamenda. Most, but not all, rooms have a water heater – pick one of these to take the edge off damp Kumbo days, but beware the ridiculously squashy mattresses.

Fomo 92 (☎ 348 1616; s/d CFA7500/8500) Just north of the cathedral, there are lots of stairs and corridors in this hotel, which seems to tumble down the hill, but all paths lead to comfy carpeted rooms. It's nicely presented and has a decent restaurant to boot.

Ring Road Travellers Inn (☎ 348 1480; r with shared/private bathroom CFA3000/5000) Right on the town square, this place could hardly be better located. Rooms are basic though, and the management was extremely reluctant to show us the rooms with shared bathrooms. Draw your own conclusions.

BB91 (mains from CFA1200; ☎ 10am–11pm) Next to the cathedral, this restaurant-bar has a good ambience. The meat with sauce and perfumed rice is a reliable and tasty standard.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Amour Mezzam Express, south of the market, runs daily to Bamenda (CFA3000, five hours), stopping at all points along the way and occasionally to Yaoundé (CFA8000, 24 hours via Foumban). Minibuses also run north to Nkambe (CFA2000, two hours) from just north of the square and to Oku (CFA1200, one hour), the latter leaves from Oku Rd, past the petrol station.

Nkambe & Missaje

Nkambe is the only town of any size between Kumbo and Wum. Like Kumbo, it is at altitude and has a cool climate. The road from Kumbo passes through open grass-

land and large tea plantations, centred on the village of Ndu. Heading north along to Nkambe, the earth road steadily deteriorates in quality. Nkambe has a reasonable selection of amenities for travellers.

Millennium Hotel (s/d CFA5000/10,000) is at the end of a very long (1.5km) road at the southern end of town. Doubles are big and decent, but make the singles look disappointing in comparison. A taxi here from town will set you back a steep CFA1000. There's a restaurant and 'occasional' nightclub.

Otherwise try the **Holy War Complex** (r with shared/private bathroom CFA1500/3000), a rock-bottom option with an irresistible name – the Holy War chain seem to own half the shops on this stretch of the Ring Road. Rooms aren't great, but at least they're cheap. Minibuses run from Nkambe to Bamenda most days (CFA5000, 10 hours).

At Missaje, about 20km west of Nkambe, the driveable road ends, and you'll need to continue on foot or mountain bike if you want to complete the circuit (it's all downhill from Nkambe to Wum). Allow a full day on foot between Missaje and We (13km northeast of Wum) – that's assuming you don't get lost, but it's better to bring provisions to last two days. For much of this stretch the road is nothing more than a rough track, and you might need to hire a Fulani herdsman to accompany you and point out the way, although many speak only Fulfulde. If you get stuck in Missaje, the only place to stay is in one of the very unappealing rooms behind the local bar.

Wum

This is the only town of any size along the western side of the Ring Road, and the end of public transport if you're travelling in a clockwise direction. About 20km south of Wum are the lovely Metchum Falls. The waterfalls are not visible from the road, so you'll need to ask someone to point out the spot. Don't lean on the makeshift rail, as several visitors plunged to their deaths here some years ago.

There are several undistinguished guest-houses in Wum, the best of which is probably **Morning Star Hotel** (r about CFA4000), with a restaurant. It's at the southern end of town along the main road.

Symbol of Unity has daily buses between Wum and Bamenda (CFA2000, two hours). It's possible to go in a loop from Wum to We (13km north) and from there turn south back to Bamenda via Fundong and Belo. In Fundong, there's inexpensive accommodation at Tourist Home Hotel. Guaranti Express usually has a minibus daily between Fundong and Bamenda.

North of We, the road takes another downturn in quality. Continuing northeast, you'll reach Lake Nyos, just off the Ring Road, south of the eponymous village. This volcanic crater lake gained notoriety in 1986 when it was the site of a natural gas eruption, which resulted in around 1700 deaths. Some local conspiracy theories still blame the disaster on Western misadventure. The seldom-visited Kimbi River Reserve is just north of Nyos, though you'll need your own vehicle to explore, and a tent if you plan to overnight. Public transport is infrequent on this stretch of the Ring Road.

Bafut

About 20km north of Bamenda is the large Tikar community of Bafut, traditionally the most powerful of the Grassfields kingdoms. The *fon's* palace here is home to a 700-year-old dynasty and is a fascinating insight into traditional culture. In late December, Bafut holds a huge four-day celebration to mark the end of the year's ancestor worship with masked dancing and drumming. Bafut also holds a large market every eight days (every 'country Sunday').

The **palace compound** (admission CFA1000, camera fee CFA1500, museum CFA2000) has numerous buildings, including the houses of the *fon's* 150-

or-so wives (not all of whom are presently in residence), and the sacred Achum building, which is off-limits to everyone except the *fon* and his close advisors. The Achum is also a focus for several secret societies, which still play an important role in Tikar society. Its roof is rethatched every April in a large grasscutting festival. In front of the palace compound are several stones marking the burial sites of nobles who died while serving the *fon*, and the Takombang House which holds the *fon's* ceremonial drum.

The imposing colonial building above the palace is now a museum. It holds many interesting (and slightly scary) carvings, traditional costumes and weapons. Leopards, pythons, elephants and buffaloes are well-represented, as these are symbols of the *fon* – according to traditional belief, the *fon* can turn himself into these animals, acquiring their particular protective characteristics. Look out for the wooden statues of the first Europeans (German explorers) to visit the Tikar kingdom.

There's no accommodation at Bafut, but there are a couple of very basic eateries by the town square. About 5km from the palace along the Bamenda road is **Savanna Botanic Gardens** (Saboga; ☎ 336 3870; r CFA7000), which has adequate self-contained rooms and a restaurant.

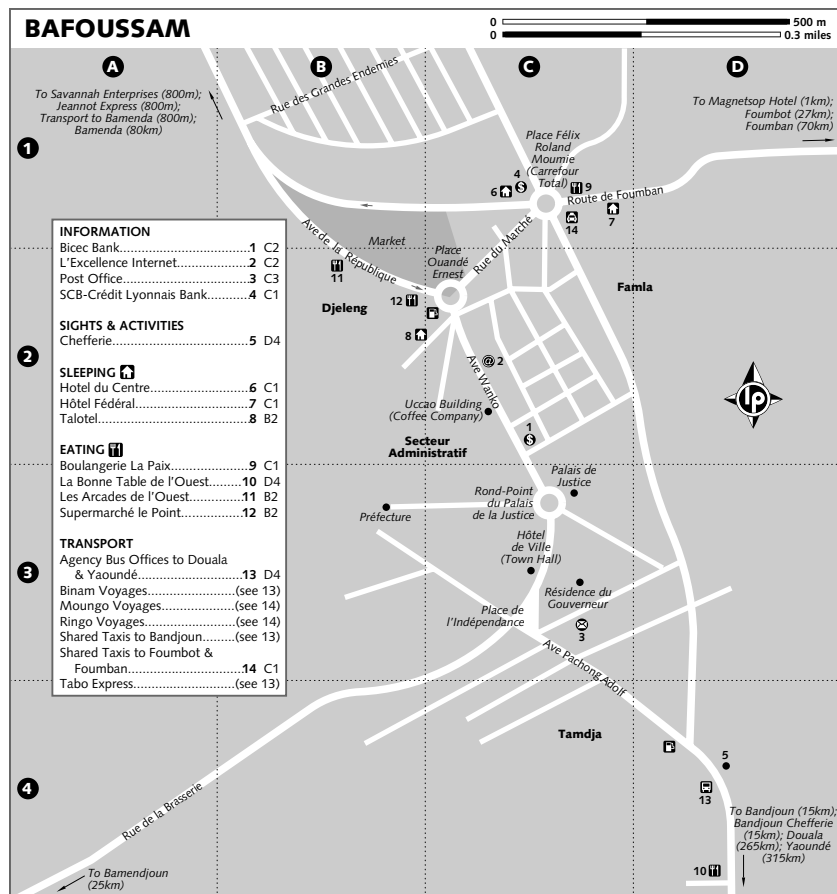
A shared taxi to Bamenda is CFA300 (20 minutes). A daily minibus north to Wum passes through Bafut, but transport is easier to arrange in Bamenda.

WEST PROVINCE

The Bamiléké people dominate Cameroon's Francophone West Province. Local traditions play an important role in day-to-day life: chiefs rule from distinctive *chefferies* (chiefs' compounds) with their triangular pointed gateways, and ancestor veneration sits alongside evangelical Christianity. Bafoussam is the commercial centre of the agriculturally rich highlands. In the east, the mainly Muslim town of Foumban is a centre for local handicrafts.

BAFOUSSAM

A thriving business centre, Bafoussam is a Bamiléké stronghold in the middle of a coffee- and cocoa-producing area. The



suggests, and a useful landmark, the rooms here are bright and airy. They have balconies too, but choose one away from the noisy road. Some tidy negotiations can bring this hotel comfortably into the budget category.

Magnetsop Hotel (☎ 344 3061; Route de Fouban; r CFA10,000-15,000; Ⓟ) The paint was still wet when we visited this new place on the edge of town. Rooms are comfy and clean, the management helpful and the local street food is great.

Talotel (☎ 344 4185; hoteltalotel@camnet.cm; Place Ouandé Ernest; s/d CFA25,000/30,000; Ⓟ) Slightly grand, this is Bafoussam's top-of-the-range hotel. It's popular with business travellers looking for comfort at the end of the road – and when they arrive they even get to soak in a tub for their woes.

Eating

Rue de Marché and Route de Fouban are good for street food and cheap eats.

La Bonne Table de l'Ouest (off Route de Douala; mains from CFA1500; ☎ 10am-11pm) At the southern end of town along the main highway, this restaurant is excellent value, with a pleasant atmosphere and local and Western cuisine.

Boulangerie La Paix (pastries from CFA150; ☎ 8am-10pm) This patisserie sells good bread and sticky sweet treats in the mornings, and acts as a handy general food shop during the rest of the day. **Supermarché le Point** (Ave de la République), at the opposite end of Rue de Marché, fulfils the same function.

Les Arcades de l'Ouest (off Ave de la République; ☎ 9am-late) Opposite the market, this is good for cheap Cameroonian food. Wash it down with copious amounts of beer deep into the night. There's occasional live music on weekends.

Getting There & Away

Binam Voyages, Tabo Express and other agency buses to Yaoundé (CFA2500, three hours) and Douala (CFA4000, five hours) have their offices at the southern end of town along the main road. Shared taxis to Bandjoun (CFA300, 15 minutes) also leave from here throughout the day.

Transport to Bamenda leaves from the Bamenda Rd, 2km north of the centre (CFA150 in a shared taxi). Agencies include Savannah Enterprises and Jeannot Express and take 90 minutes (CFA1200).

Minibuses to Fouban (CFA800, one hour) depart from near the petrol station, downhill from Carrefour Total, along with shared taxis. Agency vehicles doing this route include Moungo Voyages and Ringo Voyages. Many nonagency vehicles only go as far as Foubot (CFA500, 30 minutes), where you'll need to change to reach Fouban (CFA500, 45 minutes).

FOUMBAN

Predominantly Muslim, Fouban is a great contrast to the rest of southwestern Cameroon. If you're heading north, this is the first place you'll hear the call to prayer. Home to the Bamoun people, it's also a great centre for Cameroonian handicrafts. Tabaski (see p818) is a great time to be in Fouban, when horse races and parades mark the end of Ramadan.

The Grand Marché is a warren of narrow stalls and alleys, which is great fun to explore and leads out to a square where the Grande Mosquée faces the palace. Wednesday and Saturday are the biggest market days. CPAC bank on the southern side of the market may change euros in cash if you're lucky, but it's best to do your changing in Bafoussam.

Sights & Activities

PALAIS ROYAL (ROYAL PALACE)

Unlike the Bamiléké, who are grouped by allegiance to the chief in whose chiefdom they cultivate land, the Bamoun show allegiance to a sultan, who is part of a dynasty dating to 1394. The **palace** (admission incl museum CFA2000, camera fee CFA1500; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) was built in the early 20th century by the 16th sultan, Ibrahim Njoya, and modelled on the German governor's palace in Buea. Njoya developed his own alphabet, Shumon, which is still taught today, one of only a handful of indigenous West African alphabets. Njoya also authored *Histoires et Coutumes Bamoun*, which continues to be one of the main repositories of knowledge about Bamoun traditions, and started his own religion in an effort to combine Christian, Islamic and animist beliefs.

The palace has a fascinating and well-organised museum containing previous sultans' possessions, including royal gowns, musical instruments, war garments and jewellery. A trophy calabash decorated

town has outgrown its farming routes too quickly, and there is little of great interest for travellers as a result. There is, however, a large **chefferie** (admission CFA2000; www.museum.cam.org; ☎ 10am-5pm), about 15km south at Bandjoun. The **chefferie's** main building is an excellent example of traditional Bamiléké architecture, with its square base, tall conical roof, and carved pillars resembling totem poles. It's primarily used for meetings, but there's an interesting museum attached. The **chefferie** is in Dja near the Yaoundé intersection, about 15 minutes walk from the main road.

There's also a less-interesting **chefferie** in Bafoussam, just off the main road at the southern end of town.

Information

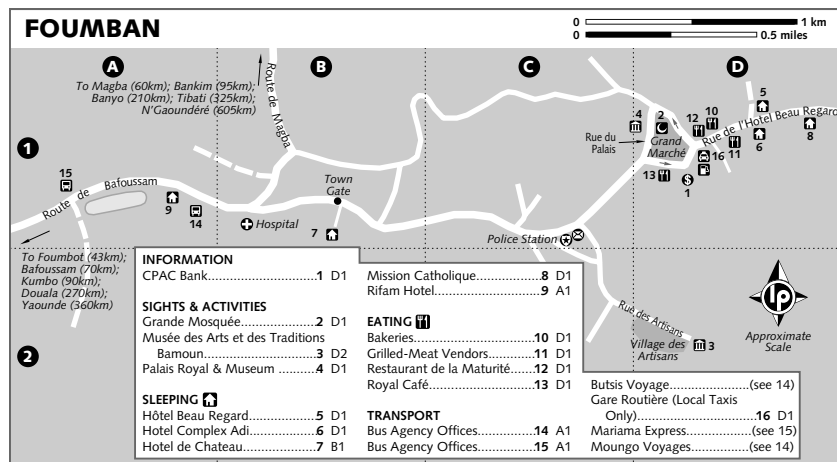
For changing cash try **Bicex** (Ave Wankou) at the southern end of the street, or **SBC-Crédit Lyonnais** (near Carrefour Total) along the Fouban road – a good landmark; as always, travellers cheques are a hassle.

For web access, call into **L'Excellence Internet** (per hr CFA400).

Sleeping

Hôtel Fédéral (☎ 344 1309; Route de Fouban; r CFA6000-9000) Good value, and with a decent bar to boot, rooms here are neat and tidy. Take one at the back, choosing the balconied options over those with no external window.

Hotel du Centre (☎ 344 2079; Carrefour Total; s/d CFA12,000/15,000) As well-located as the name



with human jawbones is the most macabre exhibit. Sadly, everything is labelled in French, and English-speaking guides are in short supply.

A statue of Njoya stands proudly halfway between the palace and the Grande Mosquée.

VILLAGE DES ARTISANS

A long street packed with workshops, about 1.5km south of the market, this place seems to produce more handicrafts than the rest of Cameroon combined. As such, it's an ideal place to pick up just about anything, from woodcarvings and leatherwork to life-size bronze statues of royal lions. The village is one of the few places in the country where you can expect some tourist hustle – don't be afraid to haggle.

At the end of the road, the small **Musée des Arts et des Traditions Bamoun** (admission CFA1000; ☎ 9am-5pm) houses the private collection of Mosé Yeyap, a wealthy Bamoun during Ibrahim Njoya's time, who collected art and historical artefacts. Tours are in French and are included in the admission.

Sleeping

Hôtel Beau Regarde (☎ 348 2183; Rue de l'Hotel Beau Regarde; r with shared bathroom CFA3000-4000, with private bathroom CFA6000) Thirty years ago this would have been a cracking hotel, with its grand wood panelling and once-tidy rooms. With a bit of care it could be again, but meanwhile it's a decent cheap option with

a lively bar. Rooms at the back overlook the town to good effect.

Hotel Complexe Adi (☎ 743 1181 mobile; Rue de l'Hotel Beau Regarde; r CFA7000-9000) One of the nicer budget options in Fouban, rooms here are simple but good value. Eat in the restaurant, or enjoy the grilled meat from vendors just a stone's throw away.

Mission Catholique (Rue de l'Hotel Beau Regarde; dm CFA2500) Head here if you're out of options – it's pretty spartan and you'll have to ask to be brought water. If you ask even more nicely, they might let you pitch a tent.

Hotel de Chateau (☎ 348 3155; off Route de Bafoussam; s/d CFA8000/12,000) A lack of hot water makes this place feel a bit over-priced, but the rooms are fair and for your money you also get to take in some lovely sunsets from the veranda.

Rifam Hotel (☎ 348 2878; Route de Bafoussam; s/d CFA15,000/25,000; ☎) Near the bus agency offices, this hotel is easily Fouban's plushiest. The doubles are huge and come with balconies large enough to play football on. Very comfortable, with satellite TV and deep baths.

Eating

The area just east of the *gare routière* is good for grilled meat; go to the nearby bakeries to make up a quick sandwich. The streets along the Grand Marché are also good for quick eats on the hoof.

Royal Café (meals from CFA2000; ☎ 8am-10pm) On the southern side of the Grand Marché,

this has good meals and a patio with views. It's down a flight of steps and is easy to miss; look for the white building and red signboard.

Restaurant de la Maturité (meals from CFA2000; ☎ 8am-10pm) Opposite the *gare routière* at the eastern end of the market, is this other decent option, with good salads and omelettes.

Getting There & Away

All agencies running transport to Bafoussam (CFA800, one hour) have their offices on Route de Bafoussam at the entrance to town, west of the town gate and about 3km from the market (CFA100 in a shared taxi). Moungo Voyages and Butsis Voyage have a few daily direct departures to Yaoundé (CFA4500, six hours); otherwise you'll need to change vehicles in Bafoussam. Non-agency minibuses departs from the *gare routière* near the market.

Transport between Fouban and Kumbo (CFA3000, around six hours) runs all year, although travel times vary according to the rains. Although the road is very poor, it's easily one of the most beautiful in the country, skirting along the edge of the spectacular Mbam Massif. Ask for Mariama Express.

It's also possible during the dry season to find vehicles going northeast to Banyo, from where you can continue to N'Gaoundéré via Tibati; you should allow several days for this journey (see p207 for more).

NORTH & EXTREME NORTH PROVINCES

Travelling to Cameroon's northern provinces can feel like visiting a different country. Separated from the south by the Adamawa Plateau, the north is a land where rolling grassland gives way to barren rocky outcrops of striking beauty, dotted with picturesque villages. The sense of difference is heightened by access issues – roads to the south are barely existent, so getting there means taking an overnight train or hopping on an internal flight. The north is also where you'll find most of Cameroon's Muslim population, herding cattle or cultivating millet and other crops. For tourists,

the north is one of Cameroon's most popular destinations and it's highly rewarding if you're able to get off the beaten track.

N'GAOUNDÉRE

Leafy N'Gaoundéré is the terminus of Cameroon's main railway line and the first major town in northern Cameroon. It makes a relaxing stop, particularly if you've taken the overnight train, and at an altitude of 1100m the evenings are pleasantly cool.

Some parts of N'Gaoundéré have bad reputations for safety at night, including the area around the stadium, and north of the cathedral. If in doubt, take a *moto-taxi*.

Information

The **Ministry of Tourism Office** (☎ 225 1138; Ave Ahidjo) is worth visiting for information on the surrounding area.

Bicéc and Crédit Lyonnais, in the town centre, change cash and possibly travellers cheques.

The most reliable Internet in town is found at **Complexe Lin Business Center** (Rue De la Grande Mosquée; per hr CFA300), although you might need to queue.

Sights

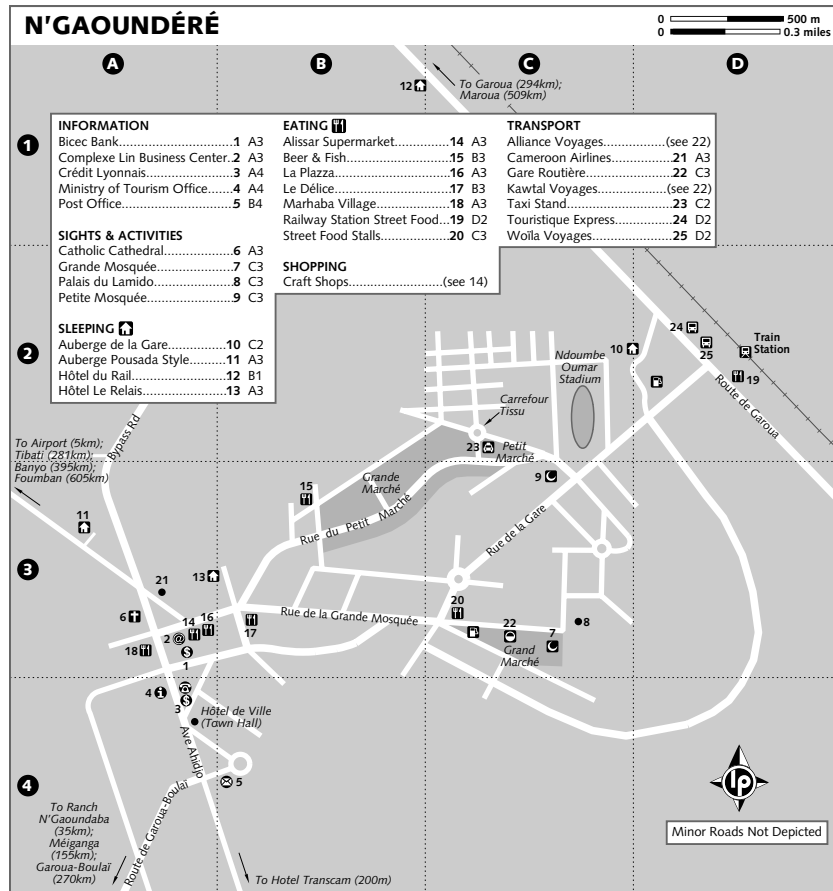
PALAIS DU LAMIDO

This **palace** (☎ 9am-5pm; admission CFA2000, guide CFA1000, photo fee CFA1000) is where the local chief (also known as the *lamido*) resides with his numerous wives. Although the exterior isn't hugely appealing, the traditional buildings inside are more rewarding. Next door is the Grande Mosquée. Among other things at the Palais, you can see where the *lamido* holds court and conducts marriages, and where the royal barber plies his trade (the present *lamido* apparently follows a rigorous twice-weekly barbering routine). Friday (especially) and Sunday are the best days to visit, as you'll be able to see many nobles from the surrounding area who come to pay their respects, and the procession from the palace to the mosque for midday prayers.

Sleeping

N'Gaoundéré's cool climate renders air-con unnecessary in hotels.

Hôtel Transcam (☎ 225 1252; r CFA25,000-35,000) N'Gaoundéré's best hotel, with fine, well-kept rooms and a posh restaurant. More



expensive rooms have nicer décor but not much else in terms of facilities. It's in a quiet setting, 1.5km southwest of the centre.

Auberge Pousada Style (☎ 225 1703; r CFA4000-5000) A basic but friendly resthouse. There was a reassuringly clean smell of bleach throughout when we visited. Take a *moto-taxi* late at night in this area.

Auberge de la Gare (☎ 225 2217; r CFA5000-7000) Rooms here are basic but reasonably clean and tidy. It's convenient for the train station and bus agencies, and has an attached restaurant.

Hôtel Le Relais (☎ 225 1138; r without/with TV CFA9000/12,000) Well located, near the intersection of Rue du Petit Marché and Rue de la Grande Mosquée, rooms here are clean,

if sometimes a little musty. All are good-sized, the more expensive ones are even larger. There's a small bar.

Hôtel du Rail (☎ 225 1013; Rue de Garoua; r from CFA13,500) This is a good place with large rooms, but, although it's handy for the train station, it's some way from the action in town. Luckily there's a restaurant, and (French-language) TV in all rooms.

Ranch de N'Gaoundaba (☎ 225 2469; Route de Meiganga; s/d CFA9000/12,000, ste from CFA20,000, camping CFA2000) Staying at this lovely old stone hunting lodge, 35km southeast of N'Gaoundéré, is almost like a mini-break in itself. Accommodation is in *boukarous* overlooking a crater lake. There is horse riding on offer and plenty of hiking and

bird watching opportunities in the surrounding countryside. There's a good restaurant and the bar mixes a mean gin and tonic. If you're using public transport to get here, the ranch is about a 3km walk off the main road. The ranch is only open from November to May.

Eating

The best street food is easily found at the row of shops, stalls and bars opposite the train station, and is worth the detour even if you don't have a train to catch. A generic row of **bars** (fish from CFA1000; ☎ 10am-late) runs behind Rue Petit Marché, interspersed with women grilling fish over coals. Order the fish, then sink a beer waiting for your meal to arrive – a recipe for a great Cameroonian evening.

La Piazza (Rue de la Grande Mosquée; meals from CFA3000; ☎ 9am-midnight) Something of an N'Gaoundéré institution, this place has dining inside or outdoors, live music every evening and serves cold draught beer from the thatched bar. The Lebanese and pasta dishes are excellent, but don't miss the perennially popular Sunday buffet from noon (CFA5000).

Marhaba Village (mains from CFA1200; ☎ 9am-11pm) An open-air restaurant, with a snack bar and a more formal eating area. Its central location makes it a good place to hang out and people-watch.

Le Délice (meals from CFA1500; ☎ 9am-11pm) A friendly place off the western end of Rue de la Grande Mosquée, this is one of several in the immediate area serving Western and Cameroonian dishes.

Alissar supermarket is well-stocked for essentials and imported goods. The main market is the Petit Marché; the Grand Marché only sells vegetables.

Shopping

For reasonably priced, quality crafts, try the shops next to Alissar supermarket. For textiles, go to Carrefour Tissu.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Cameroon Airlines (☎ 225 1295; Route de Fouban) has flights most days, connecting N'Gaoundéré with Garoua, Maroua, Yaoundé and Douala. The airport is about 5km west of town (CFA1000 in a taxi).

BUS

For Garoua (CFA3500, five hours) and Maroua (CFA6000, eight hours), Touristique Express and Woila Voyages are best, with several buses daily from about 6am. Both have depots near the train station.

The adventurous, with plenty of stamina and time, can consider going southeast to Garoua-Boulaï (CFA4000, 12 hours). Kawtal Voyages operates a service most days from the *gare routière* by the Grande Mosquée. The travel time is approximate, the vehicles are battered and you should think twice before attempting this during the rains.

Only marginally less strenuous is the road southwest to Fouban. Kawtal Voyages also operate this route, as far as Banyo (CFA5000, around 10 hours). Otherwise, travel as far as Tibati with Alliance Voyages and change there. There are a couple of basic auberges at Banyo, from where it's a six hour ride to Fouban. The roads are particularly bad all along this route, switching between broken tar and rough earth. The route from N'Gaoundéré to Yaoundé via Yoko is rarely used.

TRAIN

The train is the best budget option if you're heading to Yaoundé, or to eastern Cameroon via Bêlabo. Tickets are bought on the day of departure from the town's futuristic concrete train station; the train leaves every evening at 6.30pm – see p228 for further details.

Getting Around

N'Gaoundéré is spread out, making *moto-taxis* (CFA100) the main way of getting around. They're beefy Honda bikes instead of the weedy Chinese numbers found elsewhere in Cameroon, so hold on tight. Yellow taxis can be found at the Petit Marché and *gare routière*.

GAROUA

On the Benue River, the port-town Garoua is the commercial hub of the north. There's little to hold the interest of travellers, but, as it's a transport junction, you might find yourself passing through. Garoua has a large Chadian population, direct flights to N'Djaména (see p208) and a **Chadian Consulate** (☎ 227 3128) that occasionally issues visas.

Sleeping & Eating

Auberge Hiala Village (☎ 227 2407; r CFA5000-7000; (P) (☺)) Near the port, this has decent self-contained rooms, and is probably the best bet in the lower price bracket. There's a good bar and restaurant.

Relais St-Hubert (☎ 227 3033; Rue d'Yves Plumey; boukarous CFA18,000-23,000, r in the 'Grand Bâtiment' CFA25,000; (☺) (☎)) A grander option, stay either in the pleasant *boukarous* or the *Grand Bâtiment* (main hotel building). There's a restaurant, and nonguests can use the pool after buying a drink.

Super Restaurant (Route de Maroua; mains from CFA1000; (☺) 9am-11pm) A breezy place in a busy location. The local food is good, and is best washed down with the delicious fruit juices.

Getting There & Away

Cameroon Airlines (☎ 227 1055; Rue Centrale) flights connect Garoua daily with Douala (CFA125,000, two hours) and Yaoundé (CFA125,000, 90 minutes) – the airline's most reliable routes. Flights stop at N'Gaoundéré and Maroua according to the pilot's whim, usually twice a week. There is also a flight to N'Djaména in Chad every Tuesday (CFA155,000, 90 minutes). The airport is 5km northwest of the centre.

Woila Voyages and Touristique Express have several buses daily to Maroua (CFA2500, 2½ hours) and N'Gaoundéré (CFA3500, five hours), departing from their depots near the market. Touristique Express can also book tickets for the N'Gaoundéré–Yaoundé train. *Moto-taxis* are the main way to get around town (CFA100).

MAROUA

pop 214,000

Dusty Maroua, Cameroon's northern-most major town, is popular with travellers. It's a good starting point for exploring the nearby Mandara Mountains, or to catch your breath before tackling the nearby borders with Chad and Nigeria. Neem trees line the streets, and there's an easy-going feel in the air. With its good range of accommodation and facilities, you can easily spend a little longer here than you had anticipated.

Information

INTERNET

Braouz (near Relais de la Porte Mayo; per hr CFA750) The fastest, most reliable connections.

Marouanet (Rue Mobil; per hr CFA400) A cheaper, but slower, option.

MONEY

Maroua's banks can be reluctant to change even cash euros.

Bicéc (Route de Maga)

CCA Bureau de Change (Route de Djougou) Worth trying if the main banks won't help you change money.

SGBC (Route de Djougou) Has an ATM.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Meskine Hospital (off Garoua Rd) Try this hospital, west of town, for emergencies.

POST

Post office (Ave de Kakataré)

TOUR OPERATORS

There are numerous operators who can arrange trekking in the Mandara Mountains, visits to Parc National de Waza and can hire 4WDs with drivers. Better ones include the following:

Extrême Nord Safaris (☎ 229 3356; deliteri@hotmail.com)

Porte Mayo Voyages (☎ 984 1573 mobile; Pont Rouge) Based in Relais de la Porte Mayo (opposite).

Fagus Voyages (☎ 986 1871 mobile; www.fagusvoyages.com)

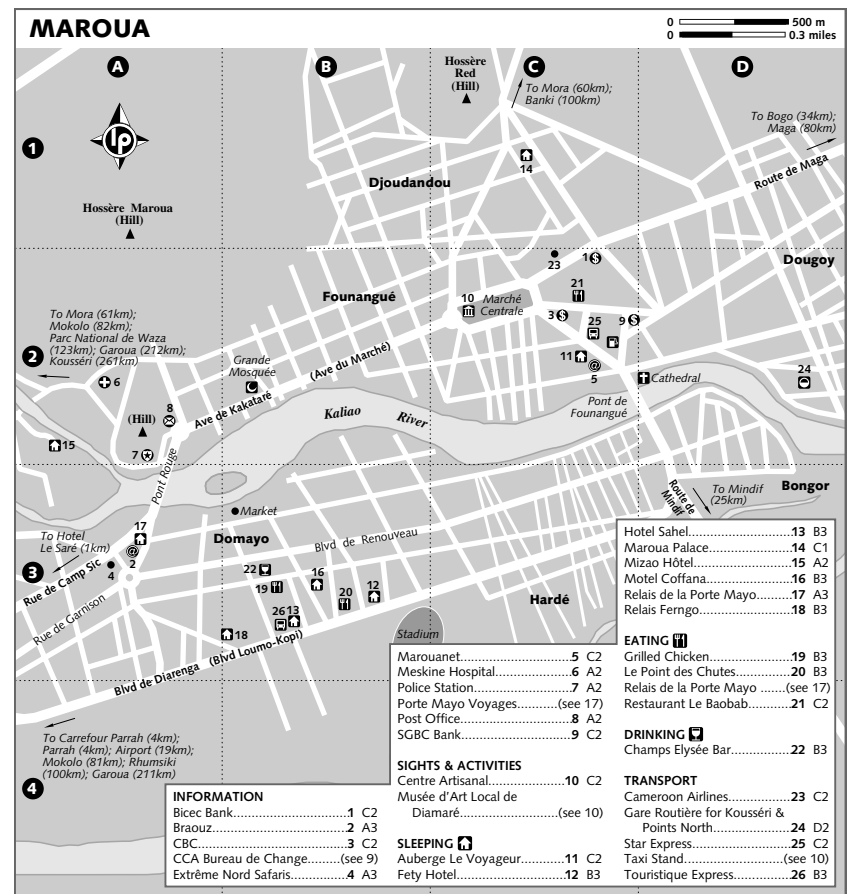
Sights

Maroua's **Marché Centrale** (☺ daily) is worth a visit – it's at its busiest every Monday when people from the surrounding region converge on the town to sell their wares. You can pick up some good local crafts here, or go to the **Centre Artisanal** at the end of the market. The leatherwork, tanned locally, is particularly good, as are the woven baskets.

The **Musée d'Art Local de Diamaré** (Marché Centrale; admission CFA500; (☺) 9am-6pm) is mildly diverting. It's small and cluttered, but has a few good pieces describing the diverse local cultures.

Sleeping BUDGET

Relais Ferngo (☎ 229 2153; off Blvd de Diarenga; r CFA6000; (P) (☺)) This is a delightful budget choice. Simply furnished but quite spottish *boukarous* sit between shady trees, ideal for whiling away the hours. It's well-located for buses and is near some great *suya* stalls.



Auberge le Voyageur (☎ 229 2100; Rue Mobil; r CFA525-8500; (☺)) This standard-issue hotel is handy for the town centre. Some rooms are a bit dreary, and you need to pay extra to get air-con. It's nothing special, but is still a decent option.

Motel Coffana (☎ 970 9643 mobile; off Blvd de Diarenga; r CFA6000-10,000; (P) (☺)) You'll find nicely turned out *boukarous* here, freshly painted and welcoming. Cheaper rooms in the main block have fan only, but are airy enough with their high ceilings.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Relais de la Porte Mayo (☎ 229 2692; Pont Rouge; s/d CFA13,900/15,000; apt CFA17,500 (☺) (☎)) There's a lovely relaxed ambience at this French-run

establishment, with well-planted grounds and freshly uniformed staff. Rooms in *boukarous* are well presented, but sometimes a little small for the price. The restaurant-bar is good, and there's a fancy souvenir shop-con-boutique.

Fety Hotel (☎ 229 2913; fetymatos@yahoo.fr; Blvd de Diarenga; s/d CFA10,000/12,000; (P) (☺)) This hotel, opposite Stade Lamido, happily straddles the budget/midrange divide. The hotel and rooms alike are pleasantly spacious, and there's a useful bar and restaurant.

Hotel le Saré (☎ 229 1294; www.hotelesare.com; Quartier Pitoire; r from CFA15,000; (P) (☺) (☎)) Set amid quiet seclusion, this is a classy place in large, shady grounds, which hide sculptures by local artists, a pool and, rather bizarrely,

two pet ostriches. Rooms are tidy, and come in a variety of shapes and sizes – as do the tariffs, which change according to the day of the week and time of year.

TOP END

Hotel Sahel (☎ 229 2960; Blvd de Diarenga; s CFA14,500-18,000, d CFA21,500; 📞 📺) This whitewashed modern hotel is a lot bigger than the exterior initially promises. The rooms are good and there are lots of outside sitting areas to lose yourself in a book, or a drink from the posh bar. Check out the traditional beehive-houses in front of reception.

Maroua Palace (☎ 229 3164; Centre Ville; s/d CFA20,000/22,000; 📞 📺) If you need to be in the centre of town, you might try this option. It's modern and has comfortable rooms and facilities – but struggles to find much of a personality beyond its slightly dour exterior.

Mizao Hôtel (☎ 229 1300; Quartier Sonel; s/d CFA22,600/27,000; 📞 📺 📺) The design and décor of this hotel has a hint of the 1970s student dormitory, but it's none the worse for it. It's a perfectly fine choice, but you can find yourself waiting a while for a taxi to take you into town.

Eating

Le Point des Chutes (off Blvd de Diarenga; meals from CFA1500; ☎ 8am-11pm) Just off the main drag, this small one-room outfit does great breakfasts for CFA1000, plus generously portioned Cameroonian standards and freshly-squeezed fruit juice to die for.

Restaurant Le Baobab (near Marché Centrale; dishes from CFA2000; ☎ 7am-11pm) This pleasant spot has outdoor seating under thatch, a good atmosphere and good food. Check what's available – the lunchtime menu can be a bit limited.

Relais de la Porte Mayo (dishes from CFA4500; ☎ 7am-11pm) For good, upscale dining, this is Maroua's best option, and is very popular with the local French community. The restaurant has great French and Italian options, while there's a cheaper snack-menu available from the bar.

Grilled Chicken (dishes from CFA1000; ☎ 10am-mid-night) Opposite the Champs Elysée Bar, this place does fantastic whole chickens, cooked over coals and served up with bread and a green salad (ask them not to put any sugar in the dressing though). As it's Muslim-run

there's no alcohol, but they'll happily bring your meal to you if you prefer to sit in the bar next door.

Several other stalls on Blvd de Renouveau offer up *brochettes*, *suya* and grilled fish, all of which can be eaten in the bar of your choice in the same way.

Drinking

Bars line Blvd de Renouveau – there are plenty to choose from. They're all of a muchness – listen out for music you might like, a football match on the TV, or whichever vibe takes your fancy.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Cameroon Airlines (☎ 229 2019; Route de Maga) has flights three or four times a week to Yaoundé and Douala (both around CFA89,500), sometimes via Garoua. A board outside the office announces the next departure. The airport is 20km south of town along the Garoua road (CFA3000 in a chartered taxi, if you can find one).

BUS

Touristique Express (Blvd de Diarenga) has the best services for Garoua (CFA2500, 2½ hours) and N'Gaoundéré (CFA6000; eight hours). There are several buses daily to both, mostly in the mornings from about 6am. You can also book tickets for the N'Gaoundéré–Yaoundé train here at the same time. Several other agencies operate the N'Gaoundéré route, with depots on the same road; Star Express in the centre is also good.

Plentiful transport to Mokolo (CFA1000, 90 minutes) and less frequently to Rhumsiki (CFA2000, around three hours) departs from Carrefour Parrah in Djarangol at the southern end of town.

Transport to Kousséri for the Chad border (CFA3500, five hours) departs from the *gare routière* on Maroua's eastern edge. Minibuses to Banki for the Nigerian border (CFA2000, two hours) also depart from here.

Getting Around

There are very few taxis in Maroua – even to the airport – so you'll need to hop on the back of a *moto-taxi*. Most destinations in town are a flat CFA100.

MANDARA MOUNTAINS

The Mandara Mountains, running west of Maroua to the Nigerian border, define one of the most enjoyable areas in Cameroon, and they're rich in tribal culture, natural wonders and beautiful scenery. Grassland gives way to a jumble of conical peaks, Monument Valley-style crags and hidden valleys, all sprinkled with thatched huts and boys herding animals. It's a very picturesque and varied landscape, alternately rugged and rolling, but never less than inviting. It's no surprise that the area offers Cameroon's best trekking.

There are many fascinating villages, including Rhumsiki, with its striking mountain scenery; Djingliya and Koza, set against steep terraced hillsides; Tourou, known for the calabash hats worn by local women; Maga, with its unique domed houses made entirely of clay; and Mora, which has a particularly notable weekly market. Hiking between villages is one of the best ways to appreciate the scenery and culture alike.

Rhumsiki is the main entrance point for visitors to the Mandara Mountains, and is the one place where there is a tangible feeling of a tourist scene, with over-attentive children and 'impromptu' traditional dances – although, being Cameroon, the idea of mass tourism is something of a relative term.

There is accommodation in Rhumsiki, Mokolo, Mora, Waza, Maga and a few other villages, but no infrastructure otherwise. Roads are rough and public transport infrequent, so if you're travelling independently allow plenty of time and plan to be self-sufficient with food and water. Local minibuses usually set off around 6am. *Moto-taxis* are sometimes the only option for getting around.

For those with limited time, travel agencies in Maroua can organise visits, although it's just as easy to arrange things on the spot in Rhumsiki or Mokolo, which will ensure that more of the money you spend is pumped directly into the local economy. Expect to pay around CFA30,000 per day (plus petrol) for a vehicle with driver. Petrol is available in Maroua, Mokolo and Mora, although prices frequently rise during the rains due to transportation problems. Change enough CFA to see you through before leaving Maroua.

One popular circuit goes from Maroua to Mora (with possible detours to Parc National de Waza and to Oudjilla), and then southwest via Koza, Djingliya and Mokolo to Rhumsiki, finishing back in Maroua. This can easily be broken down into two- or three-day treks, giving a great taste of the region.

Mokolo

Mokolo, centre of the Mafa people, is about 80km west of Maroua along a bitumen road. There's not much here, but it's an important transport hub.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Touristique le Flamboyant (☎ 229 5585; r CFA12,000-14,000; 📞) Near the Total petrol station, this is the most comfortable place in town, with clean *boukarous* and a nice restaurant.

Metcheme Bar (r CFA3000) This bar has some grubby rooms in an annexe with shared bathroom. As budget options go, it's passable for a night's stay.

Restaurant L'Incomparable (meals from CFA1000) By the market, this place doesn't quite live up to its name, but serves up reasonable food nonetheless. For something fancier to eat, head to Le Flamboyant.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most transport departs from the market, in the town centre. Tsanaga Voyages go several

MARKET DAY

Getting to and from villages in northern Cameroon (and elsewhere) via public transport is always easier on market day, as there are many more vehicles. Some local market days are as follows:

Town	Market day
Bogo	Thursday
Koza	Sunday
Maroua	Monday
Mogodé (north of Rhumsiki)	Friday
Mokolo	Wednesday
Mora	Sunday
Pouss (northeast of Maga)	Tuesday
Rhumsiki	Sunday
Tourou	Thursday

times a day to Maroua (CFA800, one hour). Transport onward to Rhumsiki is much less frequent; your best bet is the bus from Maroua which passes through mid-morning. Otherwise, it's a bumpy 55km ride by *moto-taxi*. There's a daily bus to Koza (CFA1500, two hours).

Rhumsiki

Rhumsiki is on all the tourist itineraries, and it's setting tells the reason why – the village is framed by dramatic columns and whalebacks of rock set amid quite beautiful hill country. Just outside Rhumsiki is the much-photographed Rhumsiki Peak.

You'll get fair bit of attention in the village, with people after your custom. Plenty of people will offer their services as guides – get a recommendation if you can. Hiking rates start at about CFA10,000 per day, including simple meals, accommodation in local homes, camping (with your own tent or on mats in the open) and a guide. If you're self-sufficient, it's perfectly feasible to strike out on your own.

Most routes are between half a day and four days, and some cross briefly into Nigeria, just 3km away; no visa is necessary as long as you don't continue further into the country.

One thing worth doing in Rhumsiki is to have your fortune told by the local *feticheur*, who will divine your future by looking into his bucket of crabs. If you feel over-run, it's easy to leave the village behind and strike out into the countryside by foot.

SLEEPING & EATING

Except as noted, all places are along the main road, listed here in the order you reach them when arriving from Mokolo. All arrange trekking.

Kirdi Bar (camping per person CFA1000, r per person CFA2500-5000) Kirdi Bar is a good shoestring choice. No-frills *boukarous* have bucket showers, and there are meals for about CFA2500, including decent pizzas. The manager is a good source of information on the area, and organises well-regarded treks, as well as *moto* hire. It's at the town entrance, to the left of the road.

Auberge Le Kapsiki (☎ 229 3356; s/d CFA5000/75000) The *boukarous*-style accommodation here is spartan but adequate. There's also a good restaurant with meals costing from

about CFA2500. As well as the usual hikes, the auberge also arranges horse trekking.

Auberge Le Petit Paris (☎ 229 5173; r CFA10,000-20,000) More *boukarous* are the order of the day here. They're clean and tidy, and there's a restaurant. Alternatively, dine at Le Caserole, opposite.

La Maison de l'Amitié (☎ 229 2113; r CFA8500-12,000) This place is a nice option, with comfortable, modern *boukarous* and a restaurant. It's at the far end of town, about 150m off the main road.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Transport to and from Rhumsiki is best on Sunday, Monday and Wednesday – get up early for the 6am starts, but always check what's running the day before travel. There's a minibus most days to Maroua (CFA2000, around three hours), passing through Mokolo. Except on market day, transport dries up by around 2pm. A *moto-taxi* to Mokolo costs around CFA2500; rucksacks are better balanced between the handlebars than on your back.

Djingliya & Koza

Djingliya, 15km north of Mokolo, is a tiny village perched on a hill with good views over the surrounding terraced countryside. Société Cooperative Artisanale de Djingliya sells local crafts, and offers basic rooms with bucket bath for CFA3000; meals can also be arranged. Ask the caretaker for a tour of a typical local housing compound. Vehicles between Mokolo and Koza will drop you off, or take a *moto-taxi* from Mokolo.

Koza, 4km further north, marks the end of the scenic uphill route from Mokolo; from here to Mora the terrain levels out. There's nowhere to sleep, but places to eat.

There's at least one vehicle daily in each direction between Koza and Mokolo. On Monday there's also an early morning minibus vehicle direct to Maroua returning in the afternoon (CFA1500, two hours). A *moto-taxi* to Mokolo costs around CFA750.

Mora

Mora is in the heartland of the Wandala (Mandara) people and is the last settlement of any size before reaching the Nigerian border. Try to time your visit for the large Sunday market, one of the best tastes of

local culture in the region. About 11km west is Oudjilla, a touristy Podoko village. Apart from the scenery, the main attraction is the **compound** (saré; donation CFA1000) of the village chief and his many wives.

Auberge Mora Massif (camping per person CFA1000, r CFA3000) is the best place in Mora. There's fair rooms in the main building, but better *boukarous*. The restaurant serves simple starchy dishes. It's 400m west of the main junction.

Campement Sanga de Podoko (r CFA4000) has acceptable *boukarous* rooms, and there's a bar and restaurant. It's east of the main road near the Total petrol station.

Minibuses go daily between Mora and Maroua (CFA800, one hour). The main way to reach Oudjilla is by *moto-taxi*.

PARC NATIONAL DE WAZA

Waza (admission CFA5000, plus CFA2000 per vehicle, camera fee CFA2000; ☎ 6am-6pm 15 Nov-15 May) is the most accessible of Cameroon's national parks and the best for viewing wildlife. While it can't compare with East African parks, you're likely to see elephants, hippos, giraffes, antelopes and – with luck – lions. Late March to April is the best time for viewing, as the animals congregate at water holes before the rains. Waza is also notable for its particularly rich birdlife. The park is closed during the rainy season.

A guide (CFA3000 per day) is obligatory in each vehicle. Walking isn't permitted.

Sleeping

Waza can easily be done as a day trip from Maroua if you start early (bring a packed lunch). Otherwise, there are three places to stay near the park entrance.

Campement de Waza (☎ 229 1646, 229 1165 in Maroua, 765 7717 or 765 7558 in Waza; s/d CFA14,800/16,000; ☎) This is the most luxurious option here, with accommodation in reasonably comfortable *boukarous* and an attached restaurant. There are a few cheaper rooms with fan only. It's on a small hill about 700m from the park entrance, on the opposite side of the main road.

Centre d'Accueil de Waza (☎ 229 2207; camping per person CFA2500, r CFA7000) This simple place at the park entrance has accommodation in no-frills two-person *boukarous* with shared toilet facilities. Meals can be arranged (CFA2000) and it has a small kitchen.

GIC-FAC Café-Restaurant du Ilme Millénaire (r around CFA4000) The local women's group has a few very simple rooms in a basic guest-house. Meals can be arranged. It's just off the main road along the park access road.

There's also basic accommodation in Waza village, just north of the park entrance.

Getting There & Away

The park entrance is signposted and lies about 400m off the main highway. Unless you have your own wheels, the best way to visit is to hire a vehicle in Maroua (about CFA30,000 per day plus petrol). See p208 for listings of tour operators. A 4WD vehicle is recommended.

Accessing the park by public transport is difficult – any bus between Maroua and Kousséri should be able to drop you at the park turnoff, but after that you'll be reliant on hitching a lift into the park itself, which is likely to involve a long wait.

During the dry season, it's possible to drive through the park and exit at Andirni, about 45km southeast of Waza village. The road from Andirni to Maroua via Bogo is only partially paved, and is sometimes impassable during the wet season.

EAST PROVINCE

Cameroon's remote east is wild and untamed. Seldom visited by travellers, it's very much a destination for those with plenty of time and the stamina to back up an appetite for adventure. There's little infrastructure and travel throughout is slow and rugged, although the landscape is archetypal Central Africa: dense green forest and red laterite earth roads. The rainforest is the main attraction – Cameroon's sweep of the Congo Basin, which takes in Parc National de la Lobéké, Boumba-Bek and Nki forest reserves, and the Reserve du Dja. While a few towns have experienced a boom in the last decade, development has exposed real fault lines in the area, with the country's natural bounty colliding with uncontrolled logging, HIV infection and the bushmeat trade.

GAROUA-BOULAI

If you're looking for a picture of a rough African frontier town, Garoua-Boulai is it. On the Central African Republic (CAR)

border, it's a place of bars, trucks and prostitutes. The town's unwanted claim to fame is its alarmingly high HIV infection rate.

There are several unappealing and not recommended *auberges* with rooms for about CFA2000. Better is the **Mission Catholique** (dm for a donation, r about CFA5000) with dorm beds and a few rooms. It's near the military checkpoint coming from the north.

The road is in tolerable condition from Garoua-Boulai to N'Gaoundéré during the dry season, there's one bus daily (CFA4000, 12 hours) and many police checkpoints. Ask around before travelling – sporadic banditry persists along the CAR border, although you're equally likely to get robbed by the police.

Vehicles go several times daily on a fair road to Bertoua. For details on getting to CAR, see p225; the border is on the edge of town next to the motor park.

BERTOUA

The capital of East Province, Bertoua is a genuine boomtown, born out of logging and mining. Here you'll find all the facilities lacking elsewhere in the region – bitumen roads, banks and even a choice of what to eat in the evening.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Mansa (☎ 224 1650; Mokolo II; r CFA25,000; 🍴) The Mansa is Bertoua's best place, complete with a restaurant, and is worth a splurge if you've been lost in the forest.

Hôtel Montagnia, near the *gare routière*, and Hôtel Mirage, near the main post office, both have basic rooms for around CFA6000.

Café Moderne (meals from CFA500) is found at the *gare routière*. Other similarly inexpensive places include Grille de la Ménagère (near the Orange phone mast) and Chez Odette, just off the road near La King textile store.

Getting There & Away

Cameron Airlines flies every Monday, Wednesday and Friday between Bertoua and Douala (CFA75,000, two hours), sometimes stopping at Yaoundé.

To Yaoundé, the main lines are Alliance Voyages and Djerem Express (CFA5000, about seven hours); most transport uses the southern route via Abong-Mbang and

Ayos. The road is unpaved to Ayos (bad in the rains), and bitumen from there to Yaoundé.

Minibuses go daily to Garoua-Boulai, and on to N'Gaoundéré (CFA7500, one day); the road is paved as far as Garoua-Boulai. There's also daily transport to Batouri (CFA1200, three hours), along a reasonable road, and to Bélabo (CFA1000, one hour), where you can catch the Yaoundé-N'Gaoundéré train.

Most transport departs from the main *gare routière* near the market. Alliance Voyages' office is just west of here.

BÉLABO

The halfway point on the Yaoundé-N'Gaoundéré train line, Bélabo is the rail entry point for the east. There's not much to the place except a pumping station for the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline. Bélabo has an edgy feel to it, and unfortunately taking the train means hanging around at the station at midnight, when the train arrives (from both directions), assuming it's on time. On arrival, hire a taxi or *moto* to take you to your hotel; walking alone isn't safe. If you're departing Bélabo with a 1st-class train ticket, you can wait in the VIP lounge, rather than out on the street.

About 25km west of town, off the road to Nanga Eboko, is the privately run Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue Centre (donations welcome), which offers sanctuary to about 20 chimpanzees and promotes local education efforts.

For accommodation, try **La Girafe** (r from CFA8000) on the edge of town. There are a couple of cheaper places, including the very basic **Hôtel de l'Est** (r from CFA2000). The best food is at Mama Etémé, behind the health clinic.

Transport goes several times daily along the paved road between Bertoua and Bélabo (CFA1000, one hour). To get to the chimpanzee centre, you'll need to charter a taxi or *moto*.

BATOURI

Batouri, 90km east of Bertoua on a poor road, is a useful enough place to break your journey if you're going to the southeastern forest reserves. For those going to CAR, it's the last town of any size before Berbérati across the border.

Budget accommodation is available at **Auberge Coopérant** (☎ 226 2300; r CFA5000) in the town centre. **Hôtel Belle Etoile** (☎ 226 2518; r CFA10,000) is a step up, with **Hôtel Mont Pandi** (☎ 226 2577, r CFA11,000; 🍴) an even better bet if you're in need of a treat; there's a restaurant attached.

There are several buses daily to Bertoua, with the first leaving at about 8am, and usually at least one bus daily to Yaoundé. Local agencies include Atlantic Voyages and Naral Voyages. To Yokadouma, there's daily transport departing in the morning; allow half a day, more in the wet season. There is also transport at least once daily to Kenzou and the CAR border, departing Batouri at about 5am.

YOKADOUMA

Logging has brought Yokadouma a fast-paced Wild West feel, with its attendant bushmeat markets and displaced 'Pygmies'. The **WWF branch office** can help with arranging visits to Parc National de la Lobéké, and Boumba-Bek and Nki forest reserves.

The best place to stay is **L'Éléphant** (☎ 224 2877; r from CFA8000; 🍴). Otherwise, there are numerous cheaper and more basic choices, including Auberge Libertate.

All transport departs early. To Moloundou, apart from hitching a ride in a comfortable Land Cruiser, the best bet is Alliance Voyages, with one bus daily in the dry season (CFA5000, about eight hours). During the wet season, the journey can take several days.

MOLOUNDOU

You'll need to pass through this border town if you're heading for Réserve de Nki or Ouessou (Congo).

There are two basic places to stay, **La Forestière** (r from CFA3000) and **Jardin du Rose** (r from CFA3000).

Alliance Voyages has one bus daily in the dry season to/from Yokadouma (CFA5000, about eight hours).

RÉSERVE DE BIOSPHERE DU DJA

The Réserve de Biosphère du Dja, as recognised by Unesco, protects about 526,000 hectares of primary rainforest. As with Lobéké and the other southeastern forest reserves, visiting here is a serious undertaking, and you'll need to be completely self-

sufficient. Although there are few people in the reserve area, there are Baka communities around its borders, particularly along the old road rimming Dja's northern edge.

The reserve is managed by **Ecofac** (Map p180; ☎ 220 9472; www.ecofac.org; Bastos) in Yaoundé, and you should visit their offices for information and to arrange a visit.

The best starting point for a visit is Somalomo village, on the reserve's north edge. There's a training centre here with basic rooms for CFA5000 per night. Accommodation must be arranged in advance, along with meals (unless you plan to be self-sufficient). There's no food other than basic foodstuffs available in Somalomo. You'll also need a good water filter. Guides (CFA3000 per day) are obligatory and can be arranged at Somalomo, as can porters (CFA2000 per day).

The main route from Somalomo into the reserve is a 30km hike south to Bouamir, where you can camp at the site of an old research base and then hike out again along the same path. Allow close to a week for a visit from Yaoundé, including a day each way to/from Somalomo, a day's hike in and out to Bouamir, and several days' camping in the forest. You'll need your own tent. At Bouamir, you're likely to see buffaloes and many birds, including the rare *Picathartes oreas* (grey-necked rockfowl), which nests here in May and June.

It's also possible to enter Dja from Lomié, to the east, although guides aren't as well organised there as in Somalomo. Also, because of heavy poaching in the reserve's eastern section, it's more difficult to see animals. The best time to visit Dja is during the drier season between December and February, although visits are possible into June.

LOBÉKÉ, BOUMBA-BEK & NKI

These three designated areas protect large sections of southeastern Cameroon's rainforests. They are also the focus of a joint initiative between the Cameroon government and the WWF to halt timber exploitation and poaching, and to protect the forests as well as local Baka communities (who depend on the forests for their livelihood) against further threat. Lobéké, with more than 2000 sq km, was declared a national park in 2001. It is part of the Sangha

A GUEST IN THE RAINFOREST

If you plan to visit the southeastern reserves, here are a few tips:

- Budget a minimum of a week for a visit; travel from Yaoundé takes at least two days each way.
- Be prepared to be totally self-sufficient for food, drink and lodging. A good water purifier/filter is essential.
- Be sure all your vaccines and immunisations are up to date, take precautions for malaria and travel with a good first-aid kit.
- Bring a mosquito net and plenty of insect repellent, and wear clothing that covers your arms and legs, and a hat.
- Snake bites are a risk; wear sturdy, high-topped boots, and long trousers.
- Given the lack of infrastructure, you'll probably need to request assistance from conservation project staff, which they are usually more than willing to give. Keep in mind, however, that their primary responsibility is the protection of nature.
- Tread lightly; be patient; and wait for the rainforest to come to you.

Tri-National Park area, encompassing Dzanga-Sangha National Park (CAR), and Nouabalé-Ndoki Forest Reserve (Congo). Boumba-Bek and Nki are forest reserves, though they're slated to achieve national park status in the near future within a single 7500 sq km protected area.

Lobéké is the most accessible of the three areas, but all are difficult to reach, and you should only contemplate coming here if you have lots of time, as well as the patience and endurance necessary for discovering the rainforest. December to March are the best times to visit – the dry weather means better accessibility and lighter vegetation, which can increase your chances of spotting wildlife.

Lobéké

Lobéké has large populations of forest elephants, chimpanzees and gorillas, although the dense vegetation means that sightings can be hard to come by. The best option is to use some of the *miradors* (viewing platforms) which have been constructed in more open areas, and let the wildlife come to you.

A visit to Lobéké starts in Yokadouma. Park fees (CFA5000 per person per day) and guide fees (CFA3000 per guide per day) are payable at the Ministry of Finance office; get a receipt to show at the park gate. You should also check in at the WWF office to get current information on accessibility and logistics. WWF can often help with transport (CFA3000) into the park through

their sub-office at Mambele, 160km south of Yokadouma. You'll need to be self-sufficient for food in the park.

If you get caught in Mambele for the night, there's accommodation at Le Bon Samariten, which has basic rooms for about CFA2000. You can also find food and bottled water in town.

Boumba-Bek & Nki

Réserve de Nki – the most pristine of the three areas – is accessed via Moloundou, then by boat westwards along the Dja River, and finally on foot into the forest. WWF project staff can assist with boat arrangements; plan on about CFA150,000 per five-person boat.

Boumba-Bek can be accessed via Ngola (north of Mambele on the Yokadouma road), from where you head west by vehicle and foot to reach the Boumba River and the reserve.

If you get to either of these forest reserves, you'll be as remote in deepest Cameroon as it's possible to get.

SOUTH PROVINCE

South Province is Cameroon at its most equatorial, with rampant vegetation and thick rainforest, hidden 'Pygmy' villages and pristine beaches facing the white waves of the Atlantic. Visitors here can rough it in the jungle, explore some of the country's

newest national parks looking for wildlife, or break for the border and continue the adventure south, in neighbouring Gabon or Equatorial Guinea. For those who prefer a more relaxing time, the sand and surf at Kribi – a quick and easy hop from both Yaoundé and Douala – offers an ideal solution for easing the aches of the road.

KRIBI

It's easy to see why Kribi is Cameroon's most popular beach resort. Its proximity to the country's two main cities make it an ideal weekend getaway for government ministers, tourists and expats alike, who are all attracted to the sweep of white sandy beaches fringed with palm trees. They're ideal for lazing around on, but you should take care when swimming – the oceanic waters can have strong currents and rip tides, so check locally before plunging in. After a quick dip, you can tuck in to Cameroon's best and freshest seafood.

Most of Kribi's hotels (usually with their own beach fronts) start at the southern end of town. There are also a few attractive

beaches to the north, including at Londji, about 15km from Kribi, but not so many accommodation options. Pre-booking is a good idea for weekends and holidays, when the town fills up quickly; during the rest of the week, however, Kribi can be quite sleepy. Camping on the beach is not advised, and you should exercise caution walking on the beaches alone at night.

Information

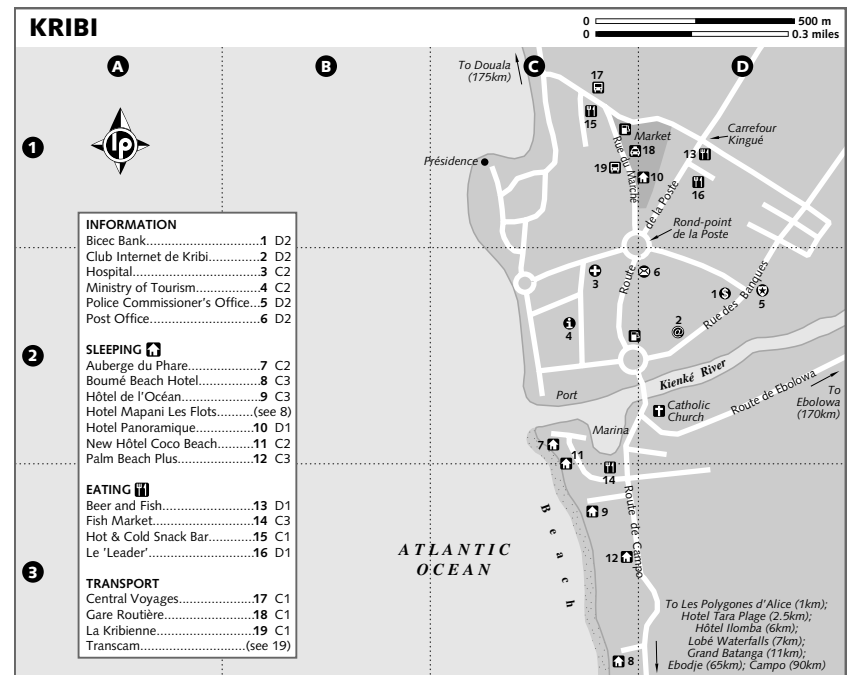
Stock up on CFA before coming to Kribi. **Bicéc bank** (Rue des Banques) will only change cash euros under duress. **Club Internet de Kribi** (Rue des Banques; per hr CFA500) has the most reliable Internet connections. The **Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 346 1080) is occasionally useful, and may help with trips to Campo-Ma'an.

Sleeping

If you're visiting in the rainy season, it's always worth asking for a discount.

BUDGET

Hotel Panoramique (☎ 346 1773; hotelpanoramique@yahoo.fr; Rue du Marché; r CFA6000-14,000; 🚽) Away



from the beach, but handy for town amenities, rooms come in all shapes and sizes at this decent budget option. Prices vary according to size and whether or not you choose air-con.

Auberge du Phare (☎ 346 1106; off Route de Campo; r without/with air-con CFA12,000/16,000-25,000; (P) (♿)) A long-standing favourite, this has a good beachside location, a great restaurant and is conveniently placed for the town centre. Cheaper rooms are a little spartan and don't face the sea, but the rest are good, with lots of wood-panelling. The hotel is usually closed in October, so call ahead.

Hotel Tara Plage (☎ 346 2038; Route de Campo; r without/with air-con CFA12,000/CFA16,000; (P) (♿)) A popular beachside option with a mellow vibe. A good place to get away from town, and luckily the restaurant serves great food. Frequently full, advance booking is recommended.

MIDRANGE

New Coco Beach Hôtel (☎ 346 1584; off Route de Campo; s/d/tr CFA25,000/32,000/46,000; (P) (♿)) Small, but very nicely formed and run with a little Gallic flare, this hotel is popular with families. The seven rooms are beautifully turned out, and there's a good restaurant. It's no problem that the swimming pool is only big enough for kids – the sea is just metres away

Hôtel de l'Océan (☎ 346 1635; off Route de Campo; r CFA20,000-24,000; (P) (♿)) This hotel wins the prize for the being the closest to the beach in Kribi – if the rooms were any nearer the sea you'd have to swim to breakfast. Rooms are cute but simple, and spotlessly kept, and there's a nice veranda restaurant-bar for sundowners.

Palm Beach Plus (☎ 346 1447; hotelpb@iccn.net.cm; Route de Campo; s/d CFA32,000/37,000; (P) (♿)) A large complex strung out along the beach, this place has all the amenities and comfort you could want, but the atmosphere is a bit bland. The huge new annexe being built next door may improve things, and will certainly increase the likelihood of a sea view.

Boumé Beach Hotel (☎ 346 1620; off Route de Campo; r CFA20,000; (P) (♿)) Another decent beachside hotel, with nice airy rooms. Breakfast is included in the tariff.

Hotel Mapani Les Flots (☎ 346 1779; manapani80@yahoo.fr; Route de Campo; r CFA15,000-20,000; (P) (♿)) Next door to the Boumé

Beach Hotel. The cheapest rooms are a bit small for the price, but the CFA20,000 options have four beds in two rooms – excellent value if you're in a group.

Les Polygones d'Alice (☎ 346 1504; Route de Campo; r CFA25,000; (P) (♿)) This hotel stands out for its octagonal shape and an exterior apparently covered in white bathroom tiles. But look past that and you'll find exceedingly comfortable and modern rooms, and the obligatory beachside restaurant.

Hotel Ilomba (☎ 346 1744; Route de Campo; s/d CFA25,000/30,000; (P) (♿)) Some way out of Kribi, this is quite the loveliest hotel in the area. Well-furnished and tastefully decorated rooms are in *boukarous*; mosquito nets are even included, a rarity in Cameroon. The hotel's Baobab Restaurant serves up a good variety of dishes, and there's a lazy beachside bar too. The Ilomba is just a short walk along the beach from the Lobé Waterfalls (opposite).

Eating

All the beach hotels have restaurants, and are the nicest dining options in Kribi. Expect to pay from CFA3000 per meal; seafood is an obvious feature on menus.

Fish Market (meals from CFA1000; ☎ 10am-5pm Wednesday & Saturday) Held twice weekly at the marina, this market has a separate section where the day's catch is cooked over coals. From crab and lobster to massive barracuda, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better, and tastier, selection of seafood anywhere else in Cameroon.

Beer and Fish (meals from CFA1000; ☎ 10am-late) When the fish market is closed, head for Carrefour Kingué, where you'll find plenty of fish stands lined up in front of the bars – order your food and sink a beer while it's grilled and brought to your table.

Hot & Cold Snack Bar (snacks & fast food CFA500-1500; ☎ 8am-10pm) Opposite Central Voyages bus office, this is clean, efficient and reasonably priced. The menu includes really good filled baguettes, omelettes, chicken and chips and the like.

Le 'Leader' (meals CFA1000-2000) If you've had your fill of seafood, Le 'Leader' is an authentic Cameroonian place, serving up *ndole* with *fufu* and other local standards. There's a good atmosphere and plenty of drinking; it's just south of Carrefour Kingué, down an unpaved side road.

Getting There & Away

Bus agencies have offices on Rue du Marché in the town centre. Nonagency transport leaves from the main *gare routière*, on the same street.

To Douala (CFA1800, three hours), Central Voyages is best, with buses throughout the day from about 5.30am.

To Campo, Transcam and La Kribienne have several buses daily (CFA2000, three hours). All agencies have daily buses to Yaoundé (CFA3000, 3½ hours). Ebolowa transport (CFA3500, four hours) only runs November to May due to the poor roads.

If you don't fancy the long walk along the beach to Lobé Waterfalls, you can charter a taxi (CFA2000) or hop on the back of a *moto-taxi* (CFA500). There's little public transport, so pay extra to the driver to wait for you.

AROUND KRIBI Lobé Waterfalls

Besides the beaches, Kribi's main attraction is the Lobé Waterfalls (Chutes de la Lobé), 8km south of the town. Set in a very pretty location in a curved bay, the waterfalls are one of the few in the world that plunge directly into the sea. There's a small restaurant serving grilled fish and drinks. Touts will approach you offering pirogue trips upstream to a 'Pygmy village', which is disappointing, but the boat trip itself is an enjoyable and scenic slice of river and forest. Expect to pay around CFA5000 for a 90-minute round-trip, or just opt for a 10 minute trip past the rapids to the larger falls behind.

EBOLOWA

Ebolowa, capital of Ntem district, is a bustling place, and a possible stopping point en route between Yaoundé and Equatorial Guinea or Gabon. It's main attraction is the artificial Municipal Lake in the centre of town.

The best accommodation is at **Hôtel Porte Jaune** (☎ 228 4339; Route de Yaoundé; r CFA10,000) in the town centre, with decent rooms and meals – although the management can be funny about two people of the same sex sharing a room. Of a similar standard is **Hôtel Le Ranch** (☎ 228 3532; Centre Ville; r CFA8000-12,000) near the police station. There are several cheaper, undistinguished *auberges* near the main roundabout, including **Hôtel Âne Rouge** (Place Ans 2000; r CFA4000).

During the dry season, there's at least one vehicle daily along the rough road between Ebolowa and Kribi. There are also several vehicles daily to Yaoundé (CFA3000, three hours).

Several vehicles, including those of Arc-en-Ciel, depart in the morning for Ambam (CFA1000, one hour). From there you can find transport towards Ebebiyin (Equatorial Guinea) or Bitam (Gabon). If you get stuck in Ambam, **Hôtel La Couronne** (r CFA10,000-15,000) is fair quality, or try the more basic **Auberge de l'Amitié** (r CFA4000).

CAMPO

Campo is the last town before the Equatorial Guinea border. It is a jumping off point for visiting Parc National de Campo Ma'an, as well as a community tourism project in nearby Ebodjé. The best accommodation is at **Auberge Bon Course** (r CFA5000) at Bon Course Supermarché at the main junction. There are three simple but decent rooms, and meals are available.

A small fishing village 25km north of Campo, Ebodjé is home to a sea turtle conservation project run by the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV). Accommodation is in local homes – costs are CFA2000 per person for accommodation, CFA2000 per meal, and CFA1000 per person environmental protection fee. A proportion of all fees goes into the village development fund. Locals have also been trained as guides to the area. It's a good low-key way to get away from the standard tourist sites and gain an insight into Cameroonian village life. You'll need to bring your own water or filter, mosquito net and sleeping sheet.

Getting There & Away

There are daily minibuses between Campo and Kribi (CFA1500) which also stop at Ebodjé. *Moto-taxis* to Campo Beach (for Equatorial Guinea) cost CFA500. For information on crossing the border, see p225. Taxis to Ebodjé from Campo cost CFA500.

PARC NATIONAL DE CAMPO-MA'AN

Campo is the starting point for visiting the Parc National de Campo-Ma'an (2608 sq km), which protects rainforest, many plants and various animals, including buffaloes, elephants and mandrills. The animals are

rarely seen because of the dense vegetation, but the park is being developed by WWF as an ecotourism destination, with plans for canopy walks and river trips on the drawing board. Before planning a trip, check with the **WWF office** (Map p180; ☎ 221 6267; www.wwfcameroon.org; Bastos) in Yaoundé to see what progress is being made.

Currently there's little infrastructure in place and you'll need your own 4WD to get here. The CFA5000 entry fee can be paid at the tourist office in Campo; get a receipt to show at the park entrance at the village of Nko'elon. Staff at the office can also help you arrange a guide (obligatory, CFA3000 per day). You'll need to be self-sufficient with equipment and supplies. The road between Campo and Ma'an (west of the park) is being rehabilitated. For now it's only possible to drive as far as Memve'ele Waterfalls, just outside the park's eastern boundary.

CAMEROON DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Cameroon has a fairly decent range of accommodation. In the budget range, basic auberges are the order of the day. Expect a no-frills room with a narrow double bed and attached bathroom, usually with a cold-water shower only, and either a ceiling fan or air-con. Some church missions take travellers and can be excellent value, as they are usually clean, cheap and well run. Most larger towns have at least a couple of comfortable midrange options, sometimes a bit faded, but with better fixtures, more reliable

PRACTICALITIES

- The *Cameroon Tribune* is the government-owned bilingual daily. The thrice-weekly *Le Messager* (French) is the main independent newspaper.
- Most broadcast programming is government-run and in French, through Cameroon Radio-TV Corporation (CRTV). TVs at top-end hotels often have CNN or French news stations.
- Electricity supply is 220V and plugs are of the European two-round-pin variety.
- Cameroon uses the metric system.

hot water and French satellite TV. Outside Yaoundé and Douala, international standard top-end accommodation is hard to find.

Most hotels quote prices per room, a practice followed in the text – genuine single and twin rooms are the exception rather than the norm. Breakfast is rarely included in the tariff. Throughout this chapter, we've considered budget accommodation as costing up to CFA12,000, midrange CFA12,000 to 40,000, and top end from CFA40,000 and up.

Camping is not generally recommended, except in the remote countryside. You should always ask permission from the village headman before pitching a tent.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking is a big drawcard in Cameroon. The two most popular areas are Mt Cameroon near the coast (p192) and the Mandara Mountains in the north (p211). It's possible to organise treks with guides in both areas. On Mt Cameroon you'll either camp or stay in mountain huts; in the Mandara Mountains you generally stay with villagers. The Ring Road near Bamenda also offers great hiking possibilities, but there's nothing organised so you'll need to be self-sufficient.

BOOKS

Cameroon with Egbert by Dervla Murphy is another outing with the trusted travel writer, here with a recalcitrant horse – the eponymous Egbert – and teenage daughter in tow. Great to get you in the mood for a trip

An Innocent Anthropologist by Nigel Barley speaks of the culture clash that can ensue between an anthropologist and 'his' subjects – here the Dowayo of northern Cameroon. It's very engagingly written.

Gerald Durrell's *A Zoo in My Luggage* and *The Bafut Beagles* are two gloriously told accounts of the naturalist's animal collecting trips to Cameroon in the 1950s and '60s.

Culture and Customs of Cameroon, by John Mukum Mbaku, is an academic but still highly accessible ethnological guide to Cameroon – a must-read for those wanting to really get under the skin of the country.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are officially open from 7.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday. Businesses are open from 7.30am or 8am until

6pm or 6.30pm Monday to Friday, generally with a one- to two-hour break sometime between noon and 3pm. Most are also open from 8am to 1pm (sometimes later) on Saturday. Banks are open from 7.30am or 8am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday.

CUSTOMS

There are no limits on importing currency or on exporting CFA to other Central African CFA countries (Chad, CAR, Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon). When departing the Central African CFA zone, you are permitted to export a maximum of CFA25,000.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Cameroon is generally a safe country to travel around in. Parts of Yaoundé and Douala, like big cities the world over, carry bad reputations for casual street crime. Be particularly wary around bus and train stations, and outside banks and expensive hotels. By day you're unlikely to encounter any problems, but taking a taxi at night is often recommended. The same caution should also be applied late at night in N'Gaoundéré and Bafoussam. Avoid carrying valuables on the street.

Travel to the Bakassi Peninsula, disputed between Cameroon and Nigeria, should be avoided (check in advance if you're planning on taking a boat from Kourp National Park to Idenao). Some parts of the north and east – most notably the area bordering the Central African Republic – are prone to armed banditry. Minibuses sometimes travel in convoys to avoid problems, although some Cameroonians complain this is more so police can earn an extra 'protection fee' as much as to prevent trouble.

Corruption is a large problem in Cameroon. The form most often encountered by travellers is at the interminable roadside police checkpoints. Although most attention is focused on locals, always keep your passport (or certified copy – see the boxed text, right) and vaccination certificate (*carte jaune*) handy. Police often seek out the most minor infraction, and aren't above inventing a few themselves. Those with their own vehicles may be asked to show their complete service history and ownership papers. Always remember to smile and be patient and polite, and most 'problems' will quickly

IDENTIFY YOURSELF

In Cameroon it is a legal requirement to always carry identification. If you're not happy with always keeping your passport on you – understandable if going out at night in Yaoundé or Douala – it's possible to get an officially certified copy. Photocopy the title and visa pages (with your entry stamp) of your passport, and go to the main police office in any large town during office hours and ask to be 'legalised'. The process is quick and easy, leaving you with a passport copy with enough official stamps to satisfy even the surliest of checkpoint police. The certification costs CFA1000.

evaporate without having to put your hand in your pocket.

For all this, the most serious problem you are likely to encounter in Cameroon is through dangerous driving. Minibus drivers in particular pay little heed to road safety or speed limits, which can make for nervous travelling – see p226 for more information.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Cameroon Embassies & Consulates

In West Africa, Cameroon has embassies in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal. Check the appropriate country chapter. Embassies and consulates for other countries include the following:

Australia (☎ 02-9876 4544; www.cameroonconsul.com; 65 Bingara Rd, Beecroft, NSW)

Belgium (☎ 02-345 1870; Ave Brughmann 131-133, Brussels)

Canada (☎ 613-236 1522; 170 Clemow Ave, Ottawa, Ontario)

Central African Republic (☎ 611687; Ave de la France, Bangui)

Chad (☎ 512894; Rue des Poids Lourds, N'Djaména)

Congo (☎ 833404; Rue Général Bayardelle, Brazzaville)

Equatorial Guinea (☎ 2263; 19, Calle Rey Boncoro, Malabo)

Ethiopia (☎ 448116; Bole Rd, Addis Ababa)

France (☎ 01-47 43 98 33; Rue d'Auteuil, 75016 Paris)

Gabon (☎ 732910, 732800; Blvd Léon Mba, Libreville)

Germany (☎ 0228-356 038; Rheinallee 76, Bonn)

Italy (☎ 06-4429 1285, 3558 2234; Via Syracusea 4/6, Rome)

Netherlands (☎ 70-346 9715; www.cameroon-embassy.nl; Amalstraat 14, The Hague)

Switzerland (☎ 022-736 2022; 6 Rue Dunant, Geneva)

UK (☎ 020-7727 0771; www.cameroon.embassy homepage.com; 84 Holland Park, London)

USA (☎ 202-265 8790; www.ambacam-usa.org; 2349 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Cameroon

The following embassies and consulates are in Yaoundé, except as noted. Australians and New Zealanders should contact the Canadian embassy in an emergency. Opening hours noted are for visa applications.

Canada (Map p182; ☎ 223 2311; Immeuble Stamatades, Ave de l'Indépendance, Centre Ville)

Central African Republic (Map p180; ☎ 220 5155; Rue 1863, Bastos; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Chad Garoua (☎ 227 3128); Yaoundé (Map p180; ☎ 221 0624; Rue Joseph Mballa Eloumnden, Bastos; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 1-3.30pm Mon-Fri)

Congo (Map p180; ☎ 221 2458; Rue 1815, Bastos; ☎ 8am-noon Mon-Fri)

Democratic Republic of Congo (Map p180; ☎ 220 5103; Blvd de l'URSS, Bastos; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri)

Equatorial Guinea Douala (☎ 342 2729; Rue Koloko; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri); Yaoundé (Map p180; ☎ 221 0804; Rue 1805, Bastos; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

France Douala (☎ 342 6250; Ave des Cocotiers, Bonanjo); Yaoundé (Map p180; ☎ 223 6399; Rue Joseph Atemengué, near Place de la Réunification)

Gabon (Map p180; ☎ 220 2966; Rue 1816, Bastos; ☎ 9.30am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Germany (Map p180; ☎ 221 0056; Ave de Gaulle, Centre Ville)

Liberia (Map p180; ☎ 221 1296; Blvd de l'URSS, Bastos)

Nigeria Buea (☎ 332 2528; Nigeria Consulate Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri); Douala (☎ 343 2168; Blvd de la Liberté); Yaoundé (Map p180; ☎ 221 3509; Rue Joseph Mballa Eloumnden, Bastos; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri). Visas not issued in Douala.

UK Douala (☎ 342 3612; Immeuble Standard Chartered, Blvd de la Liberté); Yaoundé (Map p180; ☎ 222 0796; Ave Churchill, Centre Ville)

USA Douala (☎ 342 0303; Immeuble Flatters, off Ave de Gaulle, Bonanjo); Yaoundé (Map p182; ☎ 223 0512; Rue de Nachtigal, Centre Ville)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Tabaski (p819) is the biggest festival celebrated in Cameroon. If you're in the country at the time, head for Foumban, which holds the largest celebration, with a great procession led by the Bamoun sultan (p203). Every February, Cameroonian and international athletes gather for the Race of Hope to the summit of Mt Cameroon (p193), attracting crowds of spectators.

Finally, it's always worth checking if the national football team is playing when you're in Cameroon – there'll be impromptu festivals in bars across the country if they score the winning goal.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays include the following:

New Year's Day 1 January

Youth Day 11 February

Easter March/April

Labour Day 1 May

National Day 20 May

Assumption Day 15 August

Christmas Day 25 December

Islamic holidays are also observed throughout Cameroon (see p818).

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access can be found in any town of a reasonable size, usually with pretty good connections. Costs average CFA300 to CFA600 per hour, and most places can also burn photo CDs.

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.cameroon.fifa.com All things to do with Cameroonian football, in French.

www.cameroononline.org A Cameroonian news portal website.

www.ecofac.org A Central African conservation organisation, heavily involved with projects in Cameroon.

www.mbcclimbe.org A useful online tourism guide to the Limbe and Mt Cameroon area.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Central African CFA franc, which is pegged to the same exchange rate as the West African CFA (p171), but is not interchangeable. Bring your money in euros, as other currencies can be hard to change even in the cities, and attract poor exchange rates and high commissions. The main banks for changing money are Bicec, SGBC, Crédit Lyonnais and Standard Chartered Bank. Always stock up on CFA when you can, as foreign exchange can be difficult in small towns.

Deciding which form to bring your money in can be tricky in Cameroon. This is a country where cash is king. Although the major banks will frequently advertise the fact that they change travellers cheques, this isn't always the case in reality. You'll need to bring the original purchase receipts

for the cheques, and be prepared to take around a 5% hit on commission. Even then, there's no guarantee the bank will accept the cheques – most cashiers tend to look with extreme distaste at anything other than euros cash. A new chain of private moneychangers, Express Exchange, is the traveller's saviour, with their readiness to change cheques and US dollars cash; there are branches in Yaoundé, Douala, Bamenda and Buea, with further plans for expansion.

Most towns now have at least one ATM, always tied to the Visa network. SGBC is usually the most reliable when using foreign cards. Banks won't generally offer cash advances on credit cards. Western Union have branches throughout Cameroon for international money transfers; the fee is only paid by the person sending the money.

There's no black market to speak of in Cameroon, but you can often find men with bundles of cash outside major hotels willing to change cash quickly. This can be convenient out of business hours, but the usual caveats on changing money on the street apply. Large denomination notes attract better rates.

POST

Yaoundé and Douala have reliable poste restante services at their central post offices, with letters held for about two weeks (CFA200 per each letter collected). International post is fairly reliable for letters, but international couriers should be preferred for packages – there are branches in all large towns.

TELEPHONE

International calls cost around CFA1000 per minute at IntelCam centres at post offices. Receiving an incoming call also attracts a small fee. Much cheaper are Internet phone calls, increasingly offered by Internet cafés – expect to pay around CFA250 per minute worldwide, although you often won't get much privacy. For calls within Cameroon, the quickest option is to use a street-side phone stand – usually a lady sitting at a table under a sun umbrella with a mobile phone. National calls are normally CFA150 per minute.

Mobile phones are everywhere in Cameroon, which has two GSM networks – MTN and Orange. A local sim card costs

from CFA5000, depending on the amount of credit purchased.

VISAS

All visitors to Cameroon require visas. Prices range from around US\$60 for a one-month single-entry visa, to around US\$110 for a three-month multiple-entry visa. Issuing time varies from 24 hours to a week. Applications made in West Africa are generally straightforward, applications at embassies in Europe and the USA often require a confirmed flight ticket, hotel reservation and proof of funds for the trip (a copy of a recent bank statement should suffice).

Visa Extensions

You can obtain visa extensions at the **Ministry of Immigration** (Map p182; Ave Mdug-Fouda Ada) in Yaoundé, where one photo plus CFA15,000 is required.

Visas for onward travel

For contact details of embassies and consulates in Cameroon, see opposite. Visas listed below are obtained in Yaoundé unless noted, and costs may vary according to nationality.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

A one-month single-entry visa costs CFA35,000, requires two photos, and is processed within 24 hours.

CHAD

A one-month single-entry visas costs CFA30,000, requires two photos and a passport photocopy, and is issued on the same day (for morning applications). Visas are sometimes also issued at the consulate in Garoua (see p207).

CONGO

One-month single-entry visas for Congo cost CFA70,000, require two photos, and are issued in 24 hours.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

While they don't share a border, Cameroon is a popular place for overlanders to get DRC visas. A one-month single-entry visa costs CFA45,000, requires three photos and a passport photocopy, and is issued on the same day.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

One-month single-entry visas cost CFA37,000 for most nationalities, and require two photos and a passport photocopy. Applications are processed in 24 hours, and may also be made at the consulate in Douala.

GABON

A one-month visa for Gabon costs CFA37,000, requires one photo and takes one day to issue.

NIGERIA

A one-month single-entry visa costs CFA52,500 and takes 24 hours to process at the Yaoundé embassy, with two photos, a passport photocopy, proof of funds and letter of invitation from a Nigerian resident or business required (see p668). The consulate in Buea (p191) is a better place to apply, waiving the proof of funds, and issuing the same visa for CFA39,000 in a couple of hours. The Douala consulate only accepts applications from residents of Cameroon.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Women can expect few problems in the north. In the south, especially in Franco-phone coastal areas, you may encounter hissing or comments, but rarely anything threatening. For more information, see p828. Tampons are available in Douala, Yaoundé and occasionally in larger towns.

TRANSPORT IN CAMEROON

GETTING THERE & AWAY Entering Cameroon

A valid yellow fever certificate is required for all those entering Cameroon, even if arriving by air from a country where the disease is not endemic.

Air

Douala is Cameroon's air hub, with daily flights to Europe and connections to all neighbouring countries. Intercontinental carriers include Cameroon Airlines (the national airline), Air France, KLM and Swiss. See p188 for regional airline listings. There are also international airports at Yaoundé (with connections several times weekly to

DEPARTURE TAX

A departure tax of CFA10,000 is charged for all flights leaving Cameroon. Domestic flights incur a departure tax of CFA2500.

Europe), and Garoua (which currently has no intercontinental flights), but the airline offices following are all in Douala.

Air France (AF; ☎ 342 1555; Place du Gouvernement) Hub: Paris.

Cameroon Airlines (UY; ☎ 342 3222; Ave Charles de Gaulle) Hub: Douala.

Kenya Airways (KQ; ☎ 343 4725; off Rue Joss) Hub: Nairobi.

Swiss International Airlines (LX; ☎ 342 2929; Rue Joss) Hub: Zurich.

Virgin Nigeria (VK; ☎ 342 7628; Rue Joss) Hub: Lagos.

AFRICA

Cameroon Airlines flights connect Douala and Yaoundé three or four times weekly with N'Djaména in Chad (there is also a weekly flight from Garoua), Lagos (Nigeria) and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), and once or twice weekly with Cotonou (Benin), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Dakar (Senegal), Bamako (Mali), Conakry (Guinea), Bangui (CAR), Nairobi (Kenya) and Johannesburg (South Africa).

Other regional connections to/from Douala include daily to Lagos on Virgin Nigeria or Bellview; five times weekly with Libreville on Air Gabon and weekly to Brazzaville (Congo) on Toumai Air. Kenya Airways flies twice weekly between Douala (weekly via Yaoundé) and Nairobi. Royal Air Maroc has a weekly service to Casablanca, and Ethiopian fly thrice weekly to Addis Ababa.

Some sample regional one-way fares are: Douala-Lagos on Virgin Nigeria (CFA172,000), Douala-Nairobi on Kenya Airways (CFA536,000) and Douala-Addis Ababa on Ethiopian (CFA537,000).

EUROPE & NORTH AMERICA

Return fares between Cameroon and Europe are usually CFA550,000 or more. Cameroon Airlines and Air France have daily flights between Paris and Douala, and fly several times weekly between Paris and Yaoundé. It should be noted that in recent years, the French authorities have sometimes banned

Cameroon Airlines flights due to safety concerns. Swiss has flights twice weekly between Zürich and Douala, and goes weekly to and from Yaoundé. Another option is Royal Air Maroc, with flights connecting Douala with many European capitals via Casablanca. All connections to and from North America are via Europe.

Land

With the exception of Nigeria, all of Cameroon's neighbours use the Central African CFA, so when crossing most of these borders you won't need to switch currencies.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

There are two main crossing points, each guaranteeing bumpy rides on poor roads – fun work in the rainy season. The standard route is via Garoua-Boulai, which literally straddles the border (p213). It's the best route if you're travelling from north Cameroon. Semiregular buses and trucks go from Garoua-Boulai to Bangui, taking two days with an overnight in Bouar.

An alternate, and equally rough, route is to go to Batouri further south (p214). Once in Batouri, there's usually one vehicle daily at dawn to Kénzou. At the border, you'll need to walk across and catch a vehicle on the other side to Berbérati.

CHAD

Minibuses run daily from Maroua to Kousséri, from where *moto-taxis* will take you the 10-minute ride to the border at Nguelé. A bridge marks the border. Travelers and locals alike can get hit hard by corrupt officials here – Chadian immigration usually insist on an arrival or departure 'tax' of around CFA3000, while on the Cameroon side yellow-fever certificates are scrutinised for perceived infractions to attract a 'fine'. From Nguelé, it's a short hop by minibus to N'Djaména (CFA300, 15 minutes).

A more obscure crossing is possible into southern Chad, via the towns of Bongor or Léré, and through a combination of taxis brousses and, in the case of Bongor, a pirogue (dugout canoe) across the Logone River – one for the adventurers.

CONGO

The overland route to Congo is strictly for the hardcore – it's a long, rough jour-

ney through dense rainforest on rutted dirt tracks, best tackled in the dry season. The nearest town to the border on the Cameroonian side is Yokadouma (p215). From here, take any transport going to Moloundou, and on to the border crossing at Sokambo (near Ouesso) on the Ngoko River. Pirogues carry you across the river into Congo; there is also a ferry which can carry motorbikes and cars. Expect greedy officials to have their hands out here. There is onward transport to Pokola, where you must register with the Congolese police. From Pokola there is a barge (which can carry vehicles) to Brazzaville about three times a month, which takes around one week depending on the height of the river. A logging road from Pokola to Brazzaville is apparently under construction.

The Congo border has frequently been closed in recent years, so check in advance – it's a long trip back if no one will let you through.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA & GABON

The main border crossings into Equatorial Guinea and Gabon are a few kilometres from each other, and are accessible from the Cameroonian town of Amban. In Amban the road splits, the easterly route heading for Bitam and Libreville (Gabon) and the westerly route heading for Ebebiyin and Bata (Equatorial Guinea).

For Gabon, taxis brousses go from Amban to Aban Minkoo (CFA500, 45 minutes), where a bridge across the Ntem River leads into Gabon. Immigration is at the town of Bitam, a further 30km away (CFA500, 30 minutes). From Bitam, there are regular buses to Libreville. The road quality on this route is good, sealed all the way from Yaoundé to Libreville (barring a dirt stretch from Mitzic to Njolé, currently being upgraded).

For Equatorial Guinea, take a *taxi brousse* to the border at Kye Ossi (CFA1000, one hour). Getting stamped out of Cameroon is no problem, but officials on the other side may hit you for '*un cadeau*'. From Kye Ossi, it is a short taxi ride to Ebebiyin (CFA500, 10 minutes), where you can arrange onward transport to Bata (try to cross the border early to make the connection).

There is also a border crossing into Equatorial Guinea on the coast near Campo, but

it is frequently closed and should not be relied on. If it is open, *moto-taxis* make the short hop to Campo Beach, from where pirogues quickly cross the Ntem River into Equatorial Guinea. Once across the river and stamped in, there's generally at least one pick-up daily to Bata.

NIGERIA

There are two main border crossings into Nigeria, one each in the south and north. The busier is at Ekok, 60km west of Mamfe. There's frequent transport in the dry season between Mamfe and Ekok, alternatively pirogues ply the river between the two (see p196). Immigration procedures are pretty relaxed if your papers are in order. Once over the border, catch a shared taxi from the Nigerian border village of Mfum to Ikom (N50, 30 minutes), from where you can arrange transport to Calabar. On the Cameroonian side the road is in poor condition during the dry season and is quite atrocious once the rains hit.

In the north, it's straightforward to travel from Maroua to Maiduguri. Minibuses run daily from Maroua to the border at Banki. There are frequent police checkpoints on this road. Banki is a dusty village straddling the border; Cameroonian immigration is opposite the bus stand, and there are plenty of moneychangers. Border formalities are no nonsense. On the Nigerian side, a short N20 *moto-taxi* ride will take you to the bus stand, where you can catch a minibus or bush taxi to Maiduguri (N370 or N500 respectively, 2½ hours).

Sea

EQUATORIAL GUINEA & GABON

There are no organised passenger services by boat to Equatorial Guinea or Gabon, although ad hoc transport can sometimes be arranged to Malabo from Limbe (p190). It might be worth checking at Douala port if there are any ships sailing to Libreville that will accept passengers.

NIGERIA

A twice-weekly ferry sails from Limbe to Calabar on Mondays and Thursdays, and in the opposite direction every Tuesday and Friday – see p190. There is an occasional service from Douala, but no timetable – ask at the Douala port. These services stay clear

of the disputed Bakassi Peninsula between the two countries. 'Stick boats' – fast speed boats – also run this route, often piloted by smugglers. Although cheaper than the ferry, they have poor safety records and what you save on the fare you'll shell out on bribes to Nigerian immigration and navy officials.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Cameroon Airlines flights connect Yaoundé and Douala daily, and go three times weekly to Garoua, Maroua N'Gaoundéré and Bertoua from both major cities. There are also occasional flights to Bafoussam. Of all these, the flights between the two main cities, and to Garoua are the most reliable – Cameroon Airlines timetables are a moveable feast, and schedules are often written on blackboards outside the offices for good reason. The harmattan can make the service to the north prone to cancellation. Always reconfirm your flight before attempting to travel. Sample one-way fares include Douala to N'Gaoundéré (CFA125,000) and Yaoundé to Maroua (CFA89,500).

Bus

Agency (*agences de voyages*) buses run along all major and many minor routes in Cameroon. The major exception is across the Adamawa Plateau between Yaoundé and N'Gaoundéré, to cross which the train

is the best option (p228). On the busier intercity routes, vehicles are often large and reasonably comfortable; otherwise expect minivans or 30-seater 'Coastal' buses. The main agencies operating in the south and west include Central Voyages, Guarantee Express (with a variety of spellings), Vatican Express and Mondial Express. In northern Cameroon, Touristique Express is reliable. Alliance Voyages battle it out on the poor eastern roads.

Each agency has its own office in the towns it serves, and arrivals and departures are from this office, rather than from the main motor park or *gare routière*. When you're ready to travel, the best thing to do is ask staff at your hotel which agency is best for your destination, and get a taxi to take you to that agency – all drivers know the agency offices. For main routes, such as Douala to Yaoundé, agency buses often adhere to a schedule, and leave approximately when they say they will. They also generally abide by the one-person-per-seat rule. It's a good idea to arrive at the agency office at least one hour prior to the anticipated departure to get a decent seat. On routes without many vehicles, try to book a seat the night before.

In addition to the agencies, there are nonagency vehicles – usually minivans or small Peugeots – that service the same routes, as well as off-the-beaten-track destinations that the agencies don't reach. These vehicles are also known as *clandos*, and usually charge about the same price as the agencies, but tend to be more overcrowded and leave when full. If you have a choice, it's better to go with an agency, as vehicles tend to be in marginally better condition and you'll probably have fewer hassles at police checkpoints.

On some shorter routes, there are also taxis brousses – basically the same as *clandos*, but a bit more 'official'. Taxis brousses and *clandos* use the main, and invariably chaotic, *gare routière* for departures/arrivals. In many towns, there will be several *gares routières*, so you'll need to find the one for the direction in which you're travelling – they're often named after their main destination. Whenever you get there, it's likely you'll have a wait, although transport is almost always best and quickest in the early morning.

If you're transiting through a city (from Limbe to Kribi via Douala for example), you'll need to catch local transport to get you from the agency office or *gare routière* of your incoming bus, to the agency office for your connecting bus. If you know your way around, shared taxis are cheapest, but generally, and especially if your luggage is unwieldy, it's better to charter a taxi. For more details, see below.

Major routes are sealed, including Douala–Yaoundé–Bafoussam–Bamenda, Douala–Limbe, Bafoussam–Foumban, and N'Gaoundéré–Kousséri. Otherwise, much of the country's road network is unpaved – secondary routes are quite often an endurance test during the rains.

Car & Motorcycle

A small but significant number of people bring their own vehicle to Cameroon, usually as part of a larger trans-Africa trip. If you're prepared for the rigours of driving on African roads (see p845), then Cameroon shouldn't bring too many surprises. The main problem you'll encounter is likely to be the vast number of police checkpoints, many of whom will be curious to look inside a foreign vehicle. Don't be surprised if you're asked to show lots of paperwork. There are also frequent official toll points on many roads – usually costing CFA500. Look for the officials wearing orange uniforms. During the rainy season, some roads (notably on the Ring Road and in the south and east) operate rain gates to prevent large vehicles – which can include many 4WDs – passing.

Taxi

Shared taxis are the main form of local transport for getting around within a town – even in a city like Yaoundé there are no local buses. Stand on the roadside in the direction you want to go and shout out your destination when a shared taxi passes. If the driver is going your way, he'll toot the horn. Once you get the hang of it, it's a great system. The standard fare is a bargain CFA150, more for far-flung destinations or after 10pm.

While the vast majority of shared-taxi rides are without incident, there have been a few cases of robberies in Douala and Yaoundé, and it pays to keep your wits about you. If you're female, avoid getting

ROAD HAZARDS

"Drivers! Your vehicle is a means of freedom, not of death!" warns a sign at one bus station in Cameroon – and with good reason. Road accidents are probably the biggest safety risk you'll meet while travelling in the country. Speeds are high, drivers are often tired from long hours at the wheel, and overtaking on blind corners is a badge of honour.

Avoid night travel, try not to get vehicles which are loaded so high on top that their balance is off, and try to stick with reputable agencies. It's also a good idea not to sit in the front seat next to the driver – not only is this the 'death seat' in the event of a crash, but you'll avoid the frightening temptation to keep glancing at the odometer to see what speed you're hurtling along at.

in a vehicle with only men as passengers, especially at night.

To charter a taxi for yourself (*taxi course* or *depo*), the base rate for town rides is CFA1000. If there aren't already other passengers in the taxi, make it clear to the driver whether you want a *depo*, or not. Note that at motor parks (*gares routières*), most taxis waiting for incoming buses are for hire only, so if you take them you'll pay charter prices.

Motorcycle taxis (*moto-taxis* or *motos*) are also a popular way of getting around town in much of Cameroon, particularly in the north. They charge CFA100 within town, more at night or for anything away from the central area. Just hail the driver and tell him your destination. In some areas (eg around Maroua), *motos* are also used for longer journeys when there is no vehicle transport. This is fun for the first few kilometres, but gets uncomfortable for the long haul. If you've got a rucksack, ask the driver to put it between his handlebars, rather than unbalancing yourself by keeping it on your back.

Train

Cameroon's rail system (Camrail) operates three main lines: Yaoundé to N'Gaoundéré, Yaoundé to Douala, and Douala to Kumba. In practice, only the first is of interest to travellers, as it's the main way to get between the southern and northern halves of the country. The other routes are quicker by road.

Trains go daily in each direction, departing Yaoundé at 6pm, and N'Gaoundéré at

7pm. Arrivals are about 11am the next morning if all goes according to schedule, which it often doesn't. It's not unknown for the train to jump the rails, which can turn the overnight trip to three days. At least you'll get to see the scenery en route.

For seating, there's a choice of comfortable 1st class *couchettes* (sleeping compartments) for CFA25,000/28,000 per person in a four-/two-bed cabin; 1st-class airline-style seats (CFA17,000); and crowded 2nd-class benches (CFA10,000). The *couchettes* are the only recommendable option, in part because you'll be in an enclosed cabin. Seats in 1st and 2nd class are in open wagons, with no way to secure your bag. Even in *couchettes*, be alert for thieves.

The train has a restaurant car where you can buy surprisingly good meals (dinner CFA2500, breakfast CFA1000). If you're in 1st class, someone will come and take your order and deliver to your *courette*. At every station stop, people will offer street food at the windows.

Couchettes can be reserved 24 hours in advance, but are paid for on the day of travel, which is useful as, if the train is delayed, you'll have some flexibility to change your plans. You'll need to purchase the ticket no later than about 9am on the morning of departure, as thereafter all unpurchased seats are put back up for sale. If you're going from north to south, Touristique Express in Maroua and Garoua also sell advance train tickets at their depots.