

Côte d'Ivoire

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

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

But it's really the modernity that sets Côte d'Ivoire apart from other West African nations. Abidjan is decidedly dog-eared these days, but its shimmering skyscrapers will still astound. Yamoussoukro is famous for its basilica, an astonishing replica of Rome's St Peter's, which epitomises the Houphouët-Boigny era and, in a way, Africa's current place in today's world, since the Big Man philosophy shows few signs of fading.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 322,465 sq km
- **ATMs** Found throughout the government-controlled south
- **Borders** All borders open, but only Ghana safe
- **Budget** US\$40 minimum daily in Abidjan, US\$15 to US\$20 elsewhere
- **Capital** Yamoussoukro
- **Languages** French, Mande, Malinké, Dan, Senoufo, Baoulé, Agni, Dioula
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA498
- **Population** 17.3 million
- **Seasons** Wet seasons: south (May to July and October to November), north (June to October)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 225; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visas** Required by all except citizens of the US and most West African countries; get one before you arrive



HIGHLIGHTS

- **West Coast beaches** (p309) Soak up the sun or search for wildlife at these rainforest-clad strands.
- **Parc National de Taï** (p309) Commune with chimpanzees on a safari expedition.
- **Yamoussoukro** (p310) Gaze up at the awe-inspiring basilica.
- **Grand Bassam** (p309) Wander through the town and enjoy the faded colonial charm.
- **Man** (p311) Experience live performances of exhilarating music and masked dance.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The south has two wet seasons: May through July and October through November. In the drier north, the wet season lasts from June to October. The south is very humid, with temperatures averaging 28°C. In the less-humid north, the average is 26°C from December to February, with midday maximums regularly above 35°C. Temperatures can drop to 10°C in the western highlands.

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

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Most short-term visitors limit themselves to Abidjan (p307), though you could also get up to see the vain-glory of Yamoussoukro (p310), or soak

HOW MUCH?

- **Small wooden statue** US\$3
- **100km bush-taxi ride** US\$3.60
- **Bottle of Youki** US\$0.60
- **Small Korhogo cloth wall hanging** US\$8
- **A night at a live music show** US\$10

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.10
- **1.5L of bottled water** US\$1
- **Bottle of Flag beer** US\$0.80
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$10
- **Plate of Alocó** US\$1

WARNING

Côte d'Ivoire remains unstable. A few people still travel to Abidjan and the nearby beaches, but seek up-to-the-minute information if you decide to join them.

up some sun in Grand Bassam (p309) or Assinie (p309).

- **One Week** With a week at your disposal you can see everything mentioned above at a comfortable pace, or instead enjoy a mix of surf, sand and simians around Sassandra (p309) and in Parc National de Taï (p309).
- **Two Weeks** Two weeks is enough time to see most of what we've detailed here in government-controlled territory, or, depending on the current security situation, the intrepid could attempt to secure permission to visit The North (p310), though this is not to be undertaken lightly.

HISTORY

Until the 1840s, the indigenous people of Côte d'Ivoire were protected from European colonialism by the inhospitable coastline. In this relative isolation, kingdoms such as the Krou, Senoufo, Lubi, Malinké and Akan flourished. When the French began a big push towards colonial exploitation, they met fierce resistance, but eventually took control, trading for ivory, and establishing coffee and cocoa plantations, which are still the backbone of the economy.

Born in 1905, Félix Houphouët-Boigny became the country's father of independence. A labour leader who turned his trade union into a pro-independence political party, he was elected to the French parliament and eventually became the first African to be a minister in a European government. When independence came in 1960, he was the obvious choice for president.

Houphouët-Boigny's policies, maintaining close economic ties with France and relying on agriculture, were wildly successful. Côte d'Ivoire was the world's largest producer of cocoa and the economy maintained 10% annual growth rate for 20 years. But it couldn't last. World recession, drought, collapsing prices on agricultural products and overlogging all contributed to Côte d'Ivoire's economic troubles. President Houphouët-Boigny

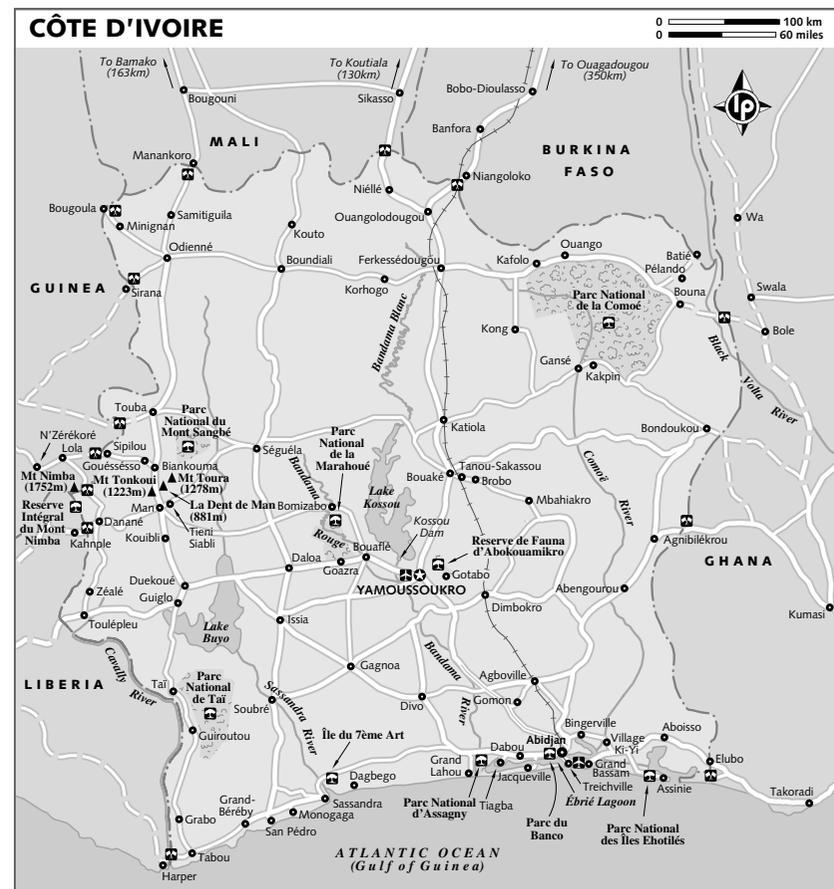
initiated hardship measures, which sparked civil unrest. The 1990 elections were open to other parties for the first time, but Houphouët-Boigny won easily. He died in 1993 after 33 years as the country's president.

His hand-picked successor, Henri Konan-Bédié, responded to the nation's problems by scapegoating immigrants (mostly those living in the north, from neighbouring Burkina Faso) who had been the backbone of the agricultural economy during the good years.

In December 1999, Côte d'Ivoire suffered its first coup. President Bédié was overthrown by forces loyal to General Robert Guéi, who promised free elections but in fact intensified Bédié's xenophobic policies of Ivoirité. While the country reeled from military rebellions

and civil unrest, Guéi had the supreme court declare popular Muslim candidate Alasanne Ouattara ineligible to run for president because his mother was from Burkina Faso (even though he had papers proving otherwise). Despite this, Laurent Gbagbo won the October 2000 presidential election. Guéi declared himself the official winner, but was chased from power by massive popular uprisings. The following two years of Gbagbo's presidency were marked by attempted coups and tensions.

On 19 September 2002, troops from the north gained control of much of the country. Initially the government agreed to a ceasefire with the rebels, who had the full backing of the mostly Muslim northern populace. But this truce was short-lived, and fighting over



the prime cocoa-growing areas resumed. France sent in troops to maintain the cease-fire boundaries, and Liberian militias took advantage of the crisis to seize parts of the western-border region, and began full-scale looting and pillaging.

In January 2003, President Gbagbo and leaders of the New Forces, as the rebels are now called, signed accords creating a 'government of national unity', with representatives of the rebels taking up places in a new cabinet. Curfews were lifted and French troops cleaned up the lawless western border, but the harmony was intermittent and neither side lived up to most of this or further peace agreements.

Côte d'Ivoire Today

By 2004 the country was less stable and more violent. UN peacekeepers arrived in March, but on 4 November Gbagbo broke the cease-fire and bombed rebel strongholds, including Bouaké. Two days later, jets struck a French military base killing nine French peacekeepers. The French destroyed the Ivorian air force in retaliation, and then all hell broke loose. Government soldiers clashed with peacekeepers, while state-run TV and radio whipped citizens into a frenzy, imploring them to take revenge against French soldiers and citizens. Most French citizens fled, and dozens of Ivoirians died in the clashes. The government called off the mayhem after a few days, but for many, the anti-French sentiment behind it lingers. Both sides settled back into the routine of peace deals brokered and broken, and violence still breaks out sporadically.

Elections called for October 2005 were cancelled, and Gbagbo declared he would remain president despite his constitutional mandate expiring. In December 2005, African mediators declared Charles Konan Banny an interim prime minister, and charged the respected economist with organising elections by October 2006, which also failed to happen. The government has made few serious efforts at compromise, and the rebels, having enriched themselves through extortion and black-market trade, have lost their moral authority. Côte d'Ivoire remains trapped in an untenable status quo.

CULTURE

Everyone in Côte d'Ivoire worries about the war and dreams of peace, but after riding a five-year rollercoaster many are losing hope.

Business owners are struggling or closing up shop, farmers are barely breaking even, and many people are giving up and getting out. People understand that, even when peace comes, there will still be problems.

Before the war, despite the economic wonders the country was famous for, the literacy rate was below 50% and life expectancy was only 45 years. No one is able to take statistics on such things these days, but, not surprisingly, things have deteriorated.

PEOPLE

Côte d'Ivoire has over 60 tribal groups. About 35% of the people are Christian and 40% Muslim; the rest practice traditional religions based on ancestral worship, which can be loosely termed animist.

ARTS & CRAFTS

The definitive Ivorian craft is Korhogo cloth, a coarse cotton painted with geometrical designs and fantastical animals. Also prized are Dan masks from the Man region and Senoufo wooden statues, masks and traditional musical instruments from the northeast.

ENVIRONMENT

Côte d'Ivoire used to be dense rainforest, but most of it was cleared during the agricultural boom, and what remains today is under attack from illegal logging. The largest tract is in Parc National de Tai. Several peaks in the west rise over 1000m, and a coastal lagoon with a unique ecosystem stretches 300km west from the Ghanaian border. The north is dry scrubland.

FOOD & DRINK

There are three staples in Ivorian cooking: rice, *fufu* and *attiéké*. *Fufu* is a dough of boiled yam, cassava or plantain, pounded into a sticky paste. *Attiéké* is grated cassava and has a couscous-like texture. They're invariably served with a sauce, such as sauce *arachide*, made with groundnuts (peanuts); sauce *graine*, a hot sauce made with palm-oil nuts; sauce *aubergine*, made with eggplant; or sauce *gombo* and sauce *djoumbré*, both with a base of okra. *Aloco*, a dish of ripe bananas fried with chilli in palm oil, is a popular street food. *Kedjenou* – chicken, or sometimes guinea-fowl, simmered with vegetables in a mild sauce and usually served in an attractive earthenware pot – is almost a national dish. The most popular places

to eat out are *maquis*, reasonably priced open-air restaurants, usually under thatch roofs, that grill meats each evening.

Youki Soda, a slightly sweeter version of tonic water, is a good thirst quencher. *Bandji* is the local palm wine, and is especially palatable when freshly tapped. Distilled, it makes a skull-shattering spirit known as *koutoukou*. The standard beer is Flag, but for a premium brew, call for a locally brewed Tuborg.

ABIDJAN

Abidjan, the country's capital in all but name, has always had a mixed reputation with travellers. On one hand, it's a glitzy, vibrant city of high-rise buildings, smart boutiques and chic Ivorian ladies clacking along in high heels on their way to restaurants of four-star Parisian quality – although the 'Paris of West Africa' moniker was a bit of an exaggeration, even during the boom years. On the other hand, there are the beggars, the street hawkers and now the gun-toting soldiers who seem to have slipped in from another world.

ORIENTATION

Abidjan spreads around the inlets of the Ébrié Lagoon. Le Plateau, with its boulevards and skyscrapers, is the hub of the business and government districts. It's nearly a ghost town at night. Across a finger of the lagoon, east of Le Plateau, is the exclusive residential district of Cocody. North of Cocody lies the residential and restaurant district of Les Deux Plateaux. South of Le Plateau, Treichville has a little of everything.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

Internet access is widely available in Abidjan.

Medical Services

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

Money

In addition to banks, most hotels and many Lebanese-owned stores, including Hayat supermarkets, change euros.

Bicici Bank (Ave Delafosse) Has an ATM.

SGBCI Bank (Ave Anoma) Has an ATM.

Post & Telephone

At the central post office, opposite Place de la République, post-restante letters cost US\$1.70 each to collect and are held for one month.

Rates for international phone calls are as low as US\$0.40 per minute at internet cafés.

Tourist Information

Côte d'Ivoire Tourisme (☎ 20-251610; Place de la République, Le Plateau) There's also an airport welcome centre.

Travel Agencies

Net Voyages Côte d'Ivoire (☎ 20-336121; info@voyager-en-afrique.com; Immeuble Borija, Ave Noguès, Le Plateau)

Osmosis Akan (☎ 07-801518; osmosisak@yahoo.fr; off Blvd Latrille, Les Deux Plateaux)

Prestige Voyages (☎ 22-417673; prestigevoyages@yahoo.fr; Rue des Jardins, Centre Commercial Louis Panis, Les Deux Plateaux)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime is a serious problem in Abidjan. Take a taxi after dark. Despite its reputation, Treichville is relatively safe up to 15th Ave, but, for the time being, Marcory and Adjamé are best avoided as much as possible since the chance of travellers getting mugged there remains high. Don't ever walk over the bridges between Treichville and Le Plateau. You might not even want to drive over Pont du Général de Gaulle during rush hour when many taxi passengers get robbed.

Getting around the city can be frustrating because police regularly stop vehicles, especially shared taxis, demanding bribes from the drivers, and sometimes passengers. Those presumed to be French often get a little extra hassle. If someone is picking you up at the airport, make sure the person holding the sign with your name is really who he says he is.

SIGHTS

The **Musée National** (☎ 20-222056; cnr Blvd Nangul Abrogoua & Av 13, Le Plateau; admission US\$1.80; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat) has over 20,000 dusty artefacts. The small **Musée Municipal d'Art Contemporain** (☎ 22-471686; off Route de M'Pouto, Riviera; admission free; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sat), beyond the Hôtel Golf, hosts thought-provoking works by contemporary Ivorian and other African artists. The tower of the **Cathédrale St-Paul** (Blvd Angoulvant; ☎ 8am-7pm) is a huge stylised figure of St Paul,

with the nave sweeping behind him like trailing robes. It's an impressive sight.

Stroll Le Plateau and you'll find some of the buildings are as breathtaking up close as from a distance. **La Pyramide** (cnr Ave Franchet d'Esperey & Rue Botreau-Roussel), designed by the Italian architect Olivieri, was the first daring structure. The shimmering **Ministry of Post & Telecommunications** (cnr Ave Marchand & Rue Lecoeur) is all curves.

SLEEPING

Hôtel International (☎ 21-240747; Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Treichville; s/d US\$22/32; 🏠) When they finish renovations, this hotel should be a pretty good option.

Hôtel Terminus (☎ 21-241577; Blvd Delafosse, Treichville; r US\$27; 🏠) Treichville's most comfortable option is in a good, busy location, though it's not great value.

Grand Hôtel (☎ 20-332109; Rue du Commerce, Le Plateau; r US\$45-81; 🏠) Good value and accommodating staff.

Hostellerie de la Licorne (☎ 22-410730; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateau; r US\$54-72; 🏠 🍷 🍷) Immaculate and friendly, the garden adds to the great ambience.

Ibis Marcori (☎ 21-756300; Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing; r US\$75-88; 🏠 🍷 🍷) Handy to the airport, it has become popular thanks to its location near a French military camp.

Hôtel Ivoire (☎ 22-408000; Blvd Latrille, Cocody; s/d \$54/100; 🏠 🍷 🍷) More than just a nearly empty hotel, the famous 750-room Ivoire is a monument to Abidjan's bygone glory. The complex has tennis courts, swimming pools, a cinema, casino, nightclub, sauna, bowling alley and more.

EATING

Le Plateau is superb for street food at lunchtime. Look around Cité Administrative and east of the Grande Mosquée.

Allocodrome (Rue Washington, Cocody; mains around US\$3.60; 🍷 dinner) This fantastic outdoor spot, with dozens of vendors grilling meats, sizzles until late.

Restaurant des Combattants (Ave Marchand, Le Plateau; mains US\$3.60-9; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) A huge colonial building featuring many African dishes not often found in sit-down restaurants.

Maquis Le Sole Plus (Ave 27, Treichville; mains US\$5-9; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The best fish in town.

La Cascade (Ave Chardy, Le Plateau; mains US\$18; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The French cuisine

at Cascade is superb, so the place is usually packed. A gushing waterfall and pond add to the ambience.

La Pagode Flottante (Blvd de Marseille, Zone 4; mains around \$US27; 🍷 lunch & dinner) High-priced but very tasty Vietnamese served on a barge on the lagoon. Eat indoors or out.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

With the young Ivorian elite spending freely on cocktails, **Butterfly** (off Blvd de Marseille, Zone 4) pulls off a New York vibe. There's live jazz in the garden on Thursday nights. **Scotch** (Rue Paul Langevin, Zone 4), the latest 'in' venue, sports a swimming pool in the courtyard. **Jamaica City** (opposite Prima Center, Zone 4) has cheap drinks, a fun atmosphere and excellent reggae bands. **Bar des Sports** (Rue du Commerce, Le Plateau) is a favourite watering hole for French expats and old-school Ivorian professionals.

Midnight (Blvd Delafosse, Treichville) is one of the oldest dance clubs in Abidjan, and one of many in this happening part of Treichville. You can sometimes dance to Afro-Cuban rhythms at **Place Vendôme** (Blvd de la République, Le Plateau).

SHOPPING

Marché de Treichville (Ave Victor Blaka) is an ugly Chinese-built building, but inside it's African to the core. **Marché de Cocody** (Blvd de France) has the usual tourist trinkets.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Most buses and bush taxis leave from the shambolic Gare Routière d'Adjamé, some 4km north of Le Plateau. For destinations east along the coast, such as Grand Bassam and the Ghanaian border, it's better to use Gare de Bassam at the corner of Rue 38 and Blvd Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, south of Treichville.

GETTING AROUND

Public buses and *woro-woro* (shared taxis) ply fixed routes, but it's tough to figure out the system, so it's easier to take a taxi. Taxis are reasonably priced, but drivers probably won't switch on their meter without prompting: tariff number 2 only applies midnight to 6am. At the airport you'll need to set a price, which shouldn't exceed \$US8 during the day. The fanciest hotels have free shuttles.

Taking a *bateau-bus* (boat-bus) between Le Plateau and Treichville offers a lovely perspective on the city.

The big car-rental companies are still here, but most journalists hire cars from **Mr Konan** (☎ 07-675508) who keeps his Mercedes in front of Hôtel Tiama. Expect to pay about US\$27 to US\$35 per day.

THE EASTERN COAST

The beaches east of Abidjan are still the playground of wealthy Ivorians and expats; there are just far fewer of them soaking up the sun these days.

GRAND BASSAM

Colonial glory fading in the salt air, and long stretches of beach lined with seafood restaurants are the main attractions at this once-popular getaway near Abidjan. The city is laid out on a long spit of land, with a quiet lagoon on one side and the turbulent Atlantic Ocean on the other. There are many beachfront hotels and restaurants, but a dramatic increase in petty crime and muggings means most people now weekend at Assinie.

A walk through town will take you past the **colonial buildings** the city is known for, some being restored while others are slowly falling apart. The **Musée National du Costume** (admission US\$1.80) in the former governor's palace has a nice little exhibit showing housing styles of various tribal groups. **Pirogue tours** of the lagoon and the mangrove swamps can be arranged with local boatmen.

The attractive *paillote* bar is the best part of **Auberge de la Plage du Parrain** (☎ 21-301541; r \$14.50). Lovely **Taverne la Bassamoise** (☎ 21-301062; r/bungalow incl breakfast \$45/52; 🏠 🍷 🍷) mixes African design with old-world charm, and adds tennis courts and a swimming pool.

Seafood-dining in *maquis* with views of the water (mostly the lagoon) is the mainstay of the dining scene.

Minibuses and bush taxis leave from the *gare routière* by the Place de Paix roundabout often to Abidjan (US\$0.90) and irregularly to Assinie (US\$2.70).

ASSINIE

Formerly the preserve of package tours from Europe, Assinie has little to do with Africa. Accommodation is largely top end, but **Blue Cargo** (☎ 07-539276; huts with shared bathroom US\$21; 🏠) has funky huts with fans on the lagoon. There is a swimming pool, and the *brochettes*

(kebabs) are fantastic. Take a bush taxi from Abidjan, and change cars in Grand Bassam.

THE WESTERN COAST

The western coast has some of the country's best beaches and seaside villages, with rainforest scenery and wildlife-filled parks running inland.

TIAGBA

Many of the houses in this fascinating village on the Ebrié Lagoon stand on stilts, and hiring a *pirogue* (traditional canoe) for a trip around town is well worth the hassle. **Hôtel Aux Pilotis de l'Ébiéyé** (☎ 07-182791; r US\$8) is on the mainland. It's also possible to stay in villagers' homes. One minibus a day leaves from Dabou (US\$1.80), out on the highway, in the afternoon and returns early the next morning.

SASSANDRA

Sassandra is the jumping-off point for a string of beaches to the west, some with good surfing, and an interesting fishing village in its own right. It's also the gateway to the **Île du 7ème Art**, 12km north. For US\$14 you can take a boat tour along the river (and possibly see hippos and manatees) and there are two simple rooms and a **bungalow** (☎ 22-424394; r US\$29) if you want to spend the night.

Hôtel la Côtière (☎ 34-720120; r with fan/air-con US\$11/18; 🏠) has small bungalows on the estuary and some delicious African fare (fish dishes cost US\$5.50). Other seaside hotels also serve good food and there are several *maquis* near the post office. West of town you can still find a few Robinson Crusoe-style huts, otherwise, talk to village chiefs about spending the night.

At Dagbebo, about 35km east, is **Best of Africa** (☎ 34-720606; www.bestofafrica.org; bungalows US\$72-108; 🏠 🍷), a gorgeous and luxurious resort with ultra-friendly owners.

Buses run four times daily to Abidjan (US\$7.50), while bush taxis and minibuses leave when full for San Pédro (US\$5.50). To get to the western beaches you'll need to hire a cab.

PARC NATIONAL DE TAÏ

Parc National de Taï (☎ 34-712353; www.parc-national-de-tai.org) protects one of the largest remaining virgin rainforests in West Africa. Thanks to

the World Wildlife Fund and other agencies, anti-poaching patrols have continued through the crisis. Though not fully operational, visits can be arranged. A two-day, all-inclusive expedition to visit habituated chimpanzees costs US\$117 per person, though cheaper options are available.

THE CENTRE

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

YAMOOUSSOUKRO

A capital city with no embassies, government ministries or significant commercial activity, Yamoussoukro is known mainly for its basilica and other overweening excesses, all pet projects of Félix Houphouët-Boigny who was born here. It's a sad, but interesting testament to Africa's greatest curse – the Big Boss who can get away with anything.

Sights

Bring your passport to enter the main attraction, the **Basilique de Notre Dame de la Paix** (Route de Daloa; admission US\$1.75; ☎ 8am–noon & 2–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 2–5pm Sun), which resembles St Peter's in Rome and is such a point of pride it was spared during the November 2004 riots. Walking around the interior can be overwhelming. The **presidential palace**, where Houphouët-Boigny is now buried, can only be viewed from afar. The lake's crocodiles are fed every day around 5pm. The **tourist office** (☎ 30-640814; Ave Houphouët-Boigny; ☎ 8am–noon, 3–6pm Mon–Fri) arranges Baoulé dancing performances in nearby villages for around US\$90.

Sleeping & Eating

Like an African village within the lively Habitat quarter, **Hôtel Sialou-Mo** (☎ 36-641364; r & pailotes US\$9–11) is a fun place to stay. Attractive *pailotes* with fans and bathrooms cost the same as the undistinguished, shower-only rooms in the main block. The city's better hotels were looted during the November 2004 riots, but Yamoussoukro's best, the **Hôtel Président** (☎ 30-641582; Route d'Abidjan; s/d/ste US\$56/65/117; ☎) has been fixed up. There's a golf course, nightclub, and the 14th-floor Restaurant Panoramique.

There is cheap and abundant street food at the *gare routière* and many lakefront *maquis*. French-owned **A la Bella Pizza** (Ave Houphouët-Boigny; mains US\$6–9; ☎ lunch & dinner) serves great pastas, crêpes and local fare, as well as its namesake pizzas.

Getting There & Away

Yamoussoukro is a major transport hub, and vehicles leave, mostly from Ave Houphouët-Boigny south of the lake, to Abidjan (US\$7), Bouaké (US\$6), Man (US\$9) and San Pédro (US\$11).

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

THE NORTH

The rebel-held half of Côte d'Ivoire, one of the most fascinating cultural destinations in West Africa, is suffering. The infrastructure is crumbling, jobs are scarce, and rag-tag soldiers shouldering Kalashnikovs are everywhere (keep plenty of coins handy). Even if you have all your papers in order, travel here is risky.

BOUAKÉ

Bouaké is the country's second-largest city and the capital of the New Forces. Even before the war there was little reason to come other than the **Le Carnaval de Bouaké**, previously held every March. You can't get here without a *laissez-passer* (travel permit) from the rebels, and they don't just hand them out to anyone. Despite all this, Bouaké is much safer than Abidjan.

Hôtel Printemps (☎ 07-845632; Rue de la BCAA; r US\$18–15; ☎) is safely inside the Moroccan-controlled UN compound. Visiting journalists often stay with **Madame Delon** (☎ 06-349749; US\$36–45; ☎), a well-known French woman who offers B&B-style accommodation and serves Bouaké's best French cuisine. The French-run **Pâtisserie les Palmiers** (Ave Gabriel Dadié; breakfast US\$2.70; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is unbeatable for breakfast and coffee, and the intimate, outdoor, thatched terrace at **Restaurant Black & White** (Ave Jacques Aka; mains US\$7.50–11; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue–Sun) is popular with rebel leaders for drinks at night. The area around the market abounds with cheap, simple stalls.

Most of the buses and bush taxis traveling to/from San Pédro (US\$14.50) and Abidjan (US\$12.50), both via Yamoussoukro (US\$6.50), leave from Gare Routière du Grand Marché.

MAN

Rich in traditional culture and natural attractions, the city of 18 mountains was once a travellers' mecca. Today it is falling apart due to neglect. The centrally located **Hôtel Leveneux** (☎ 33-791481; r US\$14; ☎) is in sorry shape, but it's the best place still operating. Everybody from rebel commanders to stranded legionnaires gather here for drinks on the terrace. Many simple *maquis* cluster around the centre, and **Pâtisserie la Brioché** (Rue du Commerce; croissants US\$0.40; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon–Sat) has amazing pastries.

UTB and CTM run several buses to Abidjan (US\$13) via Yamoussoukro (US\$9), and one a day to San Pédro (US\$11). Most taxis for N'zérékoré (Guinea) run via Sipilou, but check the security situation before attempting this route.

AROUND MAN

The lush green hills (now mostly cleared by illegal loggers) around Man cradle many traditional villages that used to do regular business staging dances. The nearest to Man is **Bloé**, where a Yacouba dance is performed by girls wearing old Goua masks. **Diourouzon** is one of the places where the famous child-juggling is performed (it's not as dangerous as it sounds, and children are caught with two arms). Arranging dances (this used to cost about US\$36) must be done with the chief in the morning to give the village enough time to prepare for a later performance.

La Dent de Man, 12km northeast of town, was a popular hike. Named for its molar shape, 'the Tooth of Man' is 881m high at the summit, and a round trip takes about four hours. The trail starts in the village of Zobale, where you'll pay a small village tax. Some 5km west of town is **La Cascade** (US\$0.60), a waterfall within a bamboo forest. Ask your guide to take you to see the monkeys nearby.

Don't leave Man without getting a *laissez-passer* (travel permit) from the rebel chief. He is no pushover; expect to be interrogated thoroughly.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Many hotels have shut down and most that remain are going to pot. Before the war, accommodation was generally expensive and poor value for money, but now places are so desperate for guests that you can bargain over the already-low rates in some four-star hotels. Note that there is no running water in the north.

ACTIVITIES

Several spots on the coast, most notably Dagbeho and Drewen, have decent surfing. Côte d'Ivoire also has a lot to offer bird-watchers.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Côte d'Ivoire can be visited safely, but overall it's still not a safe country. Violence is only sporadic, but the situation remains volatile and the possibility of further unrest can't be discounted. Generally, however, the biggest concern is crime. Poverty and unemployment are rampant, and there is no shortage of guns.

Security checkpoints are frequent in the north and south, particularly near the Zone of Confidence, the ceasefire line between the north and the south, and on the outskirts of cities. Soldiers inspect documents and frequently demand money or cigarettes.

PRACTICALITIES

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

These encounters can be friendly or tense. Either way, just remain calm, talk with them, and hand over what they ask for – usually CFA500.

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

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

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Côte d'Ivoire Embassies & Consulates

Côte d'Ivoire has embassies in the countries it borders. See the relevant chapters for details.

Belgium (☎ 02-661 34 50; 234 Ave Franklin-Roosevelt, Brussels 1050)

Canada (☎ 613-236 9919; www.ambaci-ottawa.org; 9 Marlborough Ave, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 8E6)

France (☎ 01-53 64 62 62; 02 Ave R-Poincaré, Paris 75116)

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

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

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

Embassies & Consulates in Côte d'Ivoire

The following are in Le Plateau unless otherwise indicated.

Burkina Faso (☎ 20-211501; Ave Terrasse de Fougères) Also a consulate in Bouaké.

Canada (☎ 20-300700; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/abidjan; Immeuble Trade Centre, 23 Ave Nogués) Assists Australian nationals.

France (☎ 20-200404; www.ambafrance-ci.org; 17 Rue Lecoeur)

Germany (☎ 22-442030; www.abidjan.diplo.de; 39 Blvd Hassan II, Cocody)

Ghana (☎ 22-410288; Rue des Jardins, Les Deux Plateaux)

Guinea (☎ 20-329494; Immeuble Crosson Duplessis, Ave Crosson Duplessis)

Liberia (☎ 20-324636; Immeuble Taleb, Ave Delafosse)

Mali (☎ 20-311570; Maison du Mali, Rue du Commerce) Also a consulate in Bouaké.

UK (☎ 20-226850; Immeuble les Harmonies, Blvd Carde) Operations have been suspended.

USA (☎ 22-494000; http://abidjan.usembassy.gov; Riviera Golf)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Cities and villages hold traditional ceremonies, but few adhere to a fixed calendar; you'll have to ask around. Many popular festivals are on hold during the crisis.

Fête du Dipri Held in Gomon, northwest of Abidjan, in March or April. An all-night and all-the-next-day religious ceremony where people go into trances.

Fête de l'Abissa Held in Grand Bassam in October or November. A week-long ceremony honouring the dead.

Fête des Harristes Held in Bregbo, 15km east of Abidjan, on 1 November. A born-again religious gathering.

Trepoint Mask Festival Held near Dagbego on 7 August and 31 December. A partnership between the Best of Africa resort and local villages.

HOLIDAYS

As well as religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106), these are the principal public holidays in Côte d'Ivoire:

1 January New Year's Day

1 May Labour Day

7 August Independence Day

15 November Fête de la Paix

25 December Christmas

INTERNET ACCESS

Most cities in government territory have cybercafés, though outside Abidjan connections can be slow and unreliable. Rates average US\$0.70 per hour.

MAPS

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

MONEY

Endeavour to bring a Visa card and euros, otherwise you'll find obtaining CFA costly and time-consuming in Abidjan, and nearly impossible most other places. You won't be able to pay with credit cards very often, but Sgbci and Bicici have ATMs in Abidjan, San Pédro and Yamoussoukro that reliably provide holders of Visa cards with CFA. Commission charged on travellers cheques varies significantly from bank to bank. There are no banks in rebel territory. Don't change on the black market unless a friend makes the introduction; there is a lot of counterfeit money floating around.

POST & TELEPHONE

You'll find there are good international phone connections at CI Telecom offices throughout

the south, but calls from private *télécentres* and cybercafés are cheaper. If you have a GSM mobile phone, you can buy a SIM card for as low as US\$9.

Postal services remain pretty reliable in Abidjan.

VISAS

All visitors, except US and the Ecowas community nationals, require visas and they must be bought before arrival.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be extended at **La Sureté Nationale** (Police de l'Air et des Frontieres, Blvd de la République, Immeuble Douane; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) near the main post office in Le Plateau in Abidjan. An extension, valid for up to three months, costs US\$36 (plus two photos) and is ready the same day if you apply early.

Visas for Onward Travel

Burkina Faso Three-month, single-/multiple-entry visas cost US\$45/54 and require two photos. They are usually issued the same day.

Ghana Four photos, US\$27 and 24 hours are required of most nationalities for one-month, single-entry visas.

Guinea One-month single-entry visas cost US\$57 for most nationalities, though you pay US\$100 if you're from the USA. You need three photos and visas might be ready the same day.

Liberia One-month, single-entry visas, issued the same day, cost US\$48 for most nationalities. Multiple-entry visas are good for a year and cost US\$100. You need two photos.

Mali For most nationalities, one-month single-entry visas cost US\$36; three-month multiple entry visas cost US\$72; and one-year multiple-entry visas cost US\$108. Americans are charged US\$100. Bring a photo and a letter detailing your reason for visiting Mali. You can pick up the visa within 24 hours.

TRANSPORT IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Côte d'Ivoire is a busy air hub, and you can reach most West African capitals and many other large cities elsewhere in Africa. Many airlines link Abidjan with Paris – only Air France and Air Ivoire fly nonstop – and prices can go as low as US\$800 return. SN Brussels has a nonstop connection from Brussels.

Land

At the time of research all borders were open, and buses and bush taxis continue to run, though this is subject to change, and only the crossing from Ghana is currently considered safe for travellers. Buses charge around US\$36 to Accra from Abidjan, plus US\$0.50 per kilogram for luggage. There will probably also be a whip-round at the border to cover bribes. Buy tickets a day in advance. It's quicker to take a bush taxi from the Gare de Bassam in Abidjan to the border, walk across and continue in another car.

GETTING AROUND

Locals aren't travelling as much as they used to, and consequently there is less transport available; however, all sizable towns – even those in the north – are still connected. Buses are more comfortable than taxis and minibuses, and have fixed departure times. However, with deteriorating roads and frequent security checkpoints, they are now much slower.

The only internal flights are between Abidjan and San Pédro with **Sophia Airlines** (☎ 34-713434; one-way/return US\$135/251).

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