

# Country Guide for

# ALGERIA



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## 1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

**Location:** North Africa, Mediterranean Coast.

Ministère du Tourisme et de l'Artisanat  
Rue des Frères Ziata, 16070 El Mouradia, Algiers, Algeria  
**Tel:** (2) 605 960 or 695 5152. Fax: (2) 590 0664 or 591 1315.

Office Algérien National du Tourisme  
126A bis rue Didouche Mourad, Algiers, Algeria  
**Tel:** (2) 742 985. Fax: (2) 747 049. E-mail: [info@algeria-tourism.org](mailto:info@algeria-tourism.org)

Embassy of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
54 Holland Park, London W11 3RS  
**Tel:** (020) 7221 7800. Fax: (020) 7221 0448. E-mail: [mail@admi.freemove.co.uk](mailto:mail@admi.freemove.co.uk)  
**Web site:** <http://www.consalglond.u-net.com/Embassy.htm>  
**Opening hours:** 0900-1700 Monday to Friday.

Algerian Consulate  
6 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5EW  
**Tel:** (020) 7589 6885. Fax: (020) 7589 7725. E-mail: [e.mail@consalglond.u-net.com](mailto:e.mail@consalglond.u-net.com)  
**Web site:** <http://www.consalglond.u-net.com>  
**Opening hours (for visa applications):** 0930-1200 (lodging applications) and 1600-1700 (visa collection) Tuesday to Friday.

British Embassy  
Résidence Cassiopée, Bâtiment B, 7 chemin des Glycines, 16000 Algiers-Gare, Algiers, Algeria  
**Tel:** (2) 230 068 or 230 092. Fax: (2) 230 067 or 230 069.

Embassy of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
and Cultural Affairs Office  
2118 Kalorama Road, NW, Washington, DC 20008  
**Tel:** (202) 265 2800. Fax: (202) 667 2174.

Embassy of the United States of America  
**Street address:** 4 chemin Cheikh Bachir El-Ibrahimi, Algiers, Algeria  
**Postal address:** BP 408, Alger-Gare 16000, Algiers, Algeria  
**Tel:** (2) 691 255 or 691 186 or 693 425. Fax: (2) 693 979. E-mail: [embalgus@cais.com](mailto:embalgus@cais.com)  
**Web site:** <http://www.algeria-us.org>

Embassy  
of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
435 Daly Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6H3  
**Tel:** (613) 789 8505. Fax: (613) 789 1406.  
**E-mail:** [ambalgott@sympatico.ca](mailto:ambalgott@sympatico.ca)  
**Web site:** <http://www.ambalgott.com>

Canadian Embassy  
**Street address:** 18 Mustapha Khalef Street, Ben Akmoum, Algiers, Algeria  
**Postal address:** PO Box 48, Algiers-Gare, 16000 Algiers, Algeria

**Tel:** (2) 914 951 or 914 960. **Fax:** (2) 914 973. **E-mail:** alger@dfait-maeci.gc.ca

**Country dialling code:** 213.

## 2 GENERAL

**Area:** 2,381,741 sq km (919,595 sq miles).

**Population:** 29,300,000 (1998).

**Population Density:** 12.3 per sq km.

**Capital:** Algiers (El Djezaïr). Population: 3,700,000 (1995).

**Geography:** Algeria is situated along the North African coast, bordered to the east by Tunisia and Libya, to the southeast by Niger, to the southwest by Mali, and to the west by Mauritania and Morocco. It is Africa's second-largest country, with 1200km (750 miles) of coastline. Along the coastal strip are the main towns, fertile land, beach resorts and 90% of the population. Further south lies the area of the Hauts Plateaux, mountains of up to 2000m (6600ft) covered in cedar, pine and cypress forests with broad arable plains dividing the plateaux. The remaining 85% of the country is the Sahara Desert in its various forms, sustaining only 500,000 people, many of whom are nomadic tribes with goat and camel herds. The oil and minerals boom has created new industrial centres like Hassi Messaoud, which have grown up within previously barely inhabited regions of the northern Sahara. The plains of gravel and sand in the deep south are interrupted by two mountain ranges: the dramatic Hoggar massif, rising to almost 3000m (9800ft), and the Tassili N'Ajjer or 'Plateau of Chasms'. Both have long been important centres of Tuareg culture.

**Government:** Republic. Gained independence from France in 1962. Head of State: President Abdelaziz Bouteflika since 1999. Head of Government: Prime Minister Ahmed Benbitour since 1999.

**Language:** The official language is Arabic, but French is still used for most official and business transactions. Berber (Amazigh) is spoken in the northern mountainous regions of the Kabylia and the Aures and also in the south. In general, English is spoken only in major business or tourist centres.

**Religion:** 99% of the population adhere to Islam.

**Time:** GMT + 1.

**Electricity:** 220 volts AC, 50Hz. The European 2-pin plug is standard.

### **Communications:**

**Telephone:** IDD is available. Country code: 213. Outgoing international code: 00. There are public telephones in all post offices, leading hotels and on many main streets.

**Mobile telephone:** GSM 900 network is operated by AMN. Coverage is limited to main towns. There are roaming agreements with France and Tunisia.

**Telegram:** These can be sent from any post office from 0800-1900. The main post office in Algiers has a 24-hour service.

**Post:** Mail posted in any of the main cities along the coast takes three to four days to reach Europe; posted elsewhere, it could take much longer. A letter delivery service operates Saturday to Thursday. Parcels sent by surface mail may take up to two months to reach Algeria. All parcels sent by air or surface mail are subject to long delays in customs. Post office hours: Generally 0800-1700 Saturday to Wednesday; 0800-1200 Thursday; but the main post office in Algiers (5 boulevard Mohamed Khémisti) is open around the clock.

**Press:** Daily newspapers are printed in Arabic or French. The main French-language dailies are Al Moudjahid, Al Watan, Liberté, Le Matin, Le Soir d'Algérie and Le Journal. Ach-Cha'ab, Al Khabar and Al Massa are the leading Arabic-language dailies. Another daily, Horizons, has an English section.

**BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies:** From time to time these change.

**BBC:**  
MHz17.7115.4012.106.005

**Voice of America:**  
MHz15.2511.979.7600.792

### 3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
<b>British</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Australian</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Canadian</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>USA</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>OtherEU</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Japanese</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes

**Restricted entry:** (a) Entry and transit is refused to holders of Israeli passports. (b) Those with Israeli stamps on their passports will have great difficulty entering Algeria. Nationals of Israel will automatically be refused entry.

**Note:** Currently, the government of Algeria requires all foreigners entering the country to exchange the equivalent of AD1000 in local currency, and documentary proof of legal exchange of currency is demanded on departure.

**PASSPORTS:** Valid passport required by all.

**VISAS:** Required by all except the following:

(a) nationals of Argentina, Benin, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, San Marino, Senegal, Seychelles, Slovenia, Syria, Vatican City, Yemen and Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) for stays of up to 3 months;

(b) transit passengers continuing their journey by the same or first connecting aircraft within 24 hours provided holding onward and return documentation and not leaving the airport.

**Note:** Children under 15 years of age travelling on their parents' passports do not need a visa, although a letter of authorisation is required from the parents or guardian.

**Types of visa and cost:** Tourist, Business and Transit. The cost varies according to nationality. For British passport holders, the costs are: Single-entry: £26; Multiple-entry: £32. Contact the Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy) for details; see address section.

**Validity:** Tourist: approximately 30 days. Transit: maximum 48 hours. Business: up to 90 days.

**Application to:** Consulate (see address section).

**Application requirements:** (a) Completed application form. (b) 3 passport-size photos. (c) Letter of invitation from an Algerian national or a hotel booking for a Tourist visa. (d) Letter from the sponsoring company for a Business visa.

**Working days required:** At least 3 days. Express service available. For some nationals it might take longer depending on whether the application needs to be referred to Algeria.

**Temporary residence:** Apply to the authorities in Algeria.

**Note:** Exit permits are required for alien residents and those who have stayed in Algeria for more than 3 months.

## 4 MONEY

**Currency:** Dinar (AD) = 100 centimes. Notes are in denominations of AD1000, 500, 200, 100 and 50. Coins are in denominations of AD50, 20, 10, 5 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5 and 1 centimes (limited circulation).

**Currency exchange:** In the past, difficulties have arisen when trying to exchange currency in Algeria, with only one national bank (La Banque d'Extérieure d'Algérie) able to exchange foreign currency at branches in major business centres. Difficulties are now decreasing and it is possible, for example, to exchange currency at some of the larger hotels. However, the facilities for currency exchange remain quite limited.

**Credit cards:** Very limited acceptance of Visa, American Express, Diners Club and MasterCard and only in urban areas. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services that may be available.

**Travellers cheques:** Only top-class (4-star and above) hotels and government-run craft (souvenir) shops accept these, and only in certain establishments. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars or French Francs.

**Currency restrictions:** Unlimited amounts of foreign currency (except for gold coins) may be imported, but must be declared. Visitors must fill in the currency declaration form and have the form stamped by customs on arrival (even if the customs officer does not ask to see the form). At Algiers airport this should be done at the special customs desk situated after Passport Control but before baggage claim and customs. Every time visitors exchange currency they will be given

a receipt and the amount exchanged will be entered onto this form. This form and the receipts must be surrendered on departure from Algeria. Visitors are required to produce their currency declaration forms when paying hotel bills to ensure that the Dinars being used to pay the bill have been legally changed from foreign currency. Visitors must change the equivalent of at least AD1000 on entry (AD500 for minors) and only amounts larger than AD500 can be reconverted into foreign currency on departure. Visitors wishing to purchase tickets in Algeria for international transportation (air/rail/bus/sea) must exchange foreign currency specifically for this purpose in excess of the AD1000 minimum obligatory exchange and produce the exchange receipt and currency declaration form when purchasing their tickets. The import and export of local currency is limited to AD50.

**Note:** Because of the very strict adherence of the authorities to these regulations, visitors are strongly advised not to be associated with the black market, which tends to concentrate on the French Franc and portable electronics.

**Banking hours:** 0800-1700 Sunday to Thursday.

## 5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be taken into Algeria by persons over 17 years of age without incurring customs duty:

200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 400g of tobacco; 1 litre of alcoholic beverages; 500ml of eau de cologne or 150ml of perfume.

**Prohibited Items:** Gold, firearms and narcotics may not be imported or exported. Jewellery may not be exported.

## 6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Mar 7-8 Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice). Mar 18 Islamic New Year. Apr 8 Ashoura. May 1 Labour Day. Jun 6 Mouloud (Birth of the Prophet). Jun 19 Revolutionary Readjustment. Jul 5 Independence Day. Nov 1 Anniversary of the Revolution. Dec 20-21 Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan). Jan 1 2002 New Year's Day. Feb 25-27 Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice). Mar 8 Islamic New Year. Mar 27 Ashoura. May 1 Labour Day. May 27 Mouloud (Birth of the Prophet). Jun 19 Revolutionary Readjustment. Jul 5 Independence Day. Nov 1 Anniversary of the Revolution. Dec 10-11 Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan).

**Note:** Muslim festivals are timed according to local sightings of various phases of the Moon and the dates given above are approximations. The Algerian observance of Ramadan (lasting one lunar month and culminating in the feast days of Eid al-Fitr) has recently relaxed, and restaurants and other business centres will be open during the day. However, in the towns and oases of the south where religious observance tends to be more orthodox, some difficulty might be had in finding eating places and getting transport during the daylight hours. For a more detailed description, see the World of Islam appendix.

## 7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
<b>Yellow Fever</b>	Yes	1
<b>Cholera</b>	No	No
<b>Typhoid and Polio</b>	Yes	-
<b>Malaria</b>	2	-
<b>Food and Drink</b>	3	-

**1:** A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required by travellers over one year of age arriving from endemic or infected areas.

**2:** Malaria risk is limited. The benign vivax strain has been reported in Ihrir (Illizi Department).

**3:** Mains water is normally chlorinated, and whilst relatively safe may cause mild abdominal upsets. Bottled water is available and is advised for the first few weeks of the stay. Drinking water outside main cities and towns is likely to be contaminated and sterilisation is considered essential. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Local meat, poultry, seafood, fruit and vegetables are generally considered safe to eat. Hepatitis A occurs.

**Health care:** Medical insurance is not always valid in Algeria and a medical insurance supplement with specific overseas coverage is recommended. Health care facilities are generally of a high standard in the north but more limited in the south. Doctors and hospitals usually ask for immediate cash payment for their services. Emergency cases will be dealt with free of charge.

Travel - International

**Note:** Foreign travellers should exercise caution when visiting Algeria, owing to the current political climate. They should not travel between the airport and the city in any form of public transport. For further information, consult a government travel advice department (see box at beginning of section for contact details).

**AIR:** Algeria's national airline is Air Algérie (AH). Other airlines serving Algeria are Balkan, Egyptair, Royal Air Maroc, Saudia, Syrian Arab Airlines and Tunis Air.

**Approximate flight time:** From London to Algiers is 2 hours 15 minutes.

**International airports:** Algiers (ALG) (Houari Boumediène) is 20km (12 miles) east of Algiers. Buses and trains operate to the city 0600-1900 (travel time - 30 minutes). Taxis are also available. Airport facilities include a bank and bureau de change (0730-2000), left luggage (0730-2200), shops, post office (0730-1900 Saturday to Thursday), tourist information, restaurants and car hire (Algérie Auto Tourisme).

Oran (ORN) (Es Senia) is 10km (6 miles) from the city. Taxis are available to the city. Airport facilities include a bank, limited catering and car hire.

Annaba (AAE) (El Mellah) is 12km (7.5 miles) from the city. A bus service departs to the city every 30 minutes. Coach service is available on request and taxis are also available. Airport facilities include a restaurant, bank and car-hire facilities.

Constantine (Ain El Bey) is 9km (6 miles) from the city. There are bus and taxi links with the city and limited airport facilities.

**SEA:** The main ports are Algiers, Annaba, Arzew, Béjaia, Oran and Skikda. Regular shipping lines serve Algiers from Mediterranean ports. The major shipping line is Entreprise Nationale de Transport Maritime de Voyageurs-Algérie Ferries (ENTMV). Algérie Ferries run services connecting Algeria to Marseille (France) and Alicante (Spain) (web site: <http://www.algerieferreries.com>).

**RAIL:** There is one daily train connecting Algiers with Tunis in Tunisia via Constantine and Annaba. A reservation is required for this route. First-class carriages are air-conditioned; the train also carries a buffet car and couchettes. Another daily train runs between Algiers and Marrakech in Morocco. Stops en route are Oran, Fès, Mèknes, Rabat and Casablanca. Reservations are required and a supplement is charged. Air-conditioned coaches and light refreshments/buffet car are available. At present, services are interrupted owing to the closure of the border between Algeria and Morocco and through trains are not operating.

**ROAD:** Owing to border closures, land crossings between Morocco and Algeria are not possible at present. The main road entry points are Maghnia (Morocco), Souk-Ahras, Tebessa and El Kala (Tunisia), Fort Thiriet (Libya), In Guezzam (Niger) and Bordj Mokhtar (Mali). There is a good network of paved roads in the coastal regions and paved roads connect the major towns in the northern Sahara. Further south, the only substantial stretches of paved roads are on the two trans-Saharan 'highways', one of which runs to the west through Reggane and up through Morocco to the coast, while the other runs through Tamanrasset and Djanet on its way to Ghardaia and Algiers. The precise route taken by trans-Saharan travellers often depends on the season. Please note that many desert 'roads' are up to 10km-wide (6-mile) ribbons of unimproved desert and are suitable only for well-maintained 4-wheel-drive vehicles. Coach: Services are run by SNTF (National Travel and Transport Company) with international routes to Tunisia and Morocco. Documentation: International Driving Permit required.

Travel - Internal

**AIR:** Air Algérie operates frequent services from Algiers domestic airport (adjacent to Algiers International) to the major business centres of Annaba, Constantine and Oran. Less frequent services run from Algiers, Oran, Constantine and Annaba to the other less important commercial centres and gateway oases such as Ghardaia (six hours from Algiers) and Ouargla, as well as important oil towns such as In Amenas and Hassi Messaoud. Services are generally reliable, but air travel to the far south may be subject to delay during the dry summer months because of sand storms. Despite this, air is by far the most practical means of transport to the far south for the visitor with limited resources of time; Djanet and Tamanrasset are the oasis gateways to the Tassili N'Ajjer and the Hoggar respectively.

**NOTE:** The London office of Air Algérie can provide a timetable of services and prices, make reservations and issue tickets. There is an Air Algérie office in every town which is served by the airline. Reservations and itineraries can be arranged from these offices, but as some of the more isolated offices are not connected by computer, fax or telex, reservations should be confirmed well in advance. Offices are very busy in the major towns.

**SEA:** Government ferries service the main coastal ports: Algiers, Annaba, Arzew, Béjaia, Djidjelli, Ghazaouet, Mostaganem, Oran and Skikda.

**RAIL:** There are 4000km (2500 miles) of railway in Algeria. Daily but fairly slow services operate in the northern part of the country between Algiers and Oran, Béjaia, Skikda, Annaba and

Constantine. The southern routes connect once a day from Annaba to Tebessa via Souk Ahras, Constantine with Touggourt via Biskra (twice a day) and Mohammadia with Bechar. Trains on the southern routes only carry second-class coaches.

**ROAD:** Road surfaces are reasonably good. All vehicles travelling in the desert should be in good mechanical condition, as breakdown facilities are virtually non-existent. Travellers must carry full supplies of water and petrol. Traffic drives on the right. Coach: Relatively inexpensive coaches link major towns. Services are regular but this mode of travel is not recommended for long journeys, such as travel to the south from the coastal strip. Services leave from the coach stations close to the centres of Algiers and Oran. Car hire: Can be arranged at the airport on arrival or in most towns. Many hotels can also arrange car hire. Documentation: An International Driving Permit is required. A carnet de passage may be required if one's own car is to be used. Cars are allowed entry for three months without duty. Insurance must be purchased at the border. Proof of ownership is essential.

**URBAN:** Municipal bus services operate in Algiers, its suburbs and the coastal area. Ten-journey carnets and daily, weekly or longer duration passes are available. There are also two public lifts and a funicular which lead up to the hill overlooking the old souk in Algiers. An underground system is planned. Taxi: All taxis are metered and are plentiful in most cities and major towns, though busy during the early evening in the main cities as many people use them to return home after work. The habit of sharing a taxi is widespread. The amount on the meter is the correct fare, but there are surcharges after dark. Travellers are advised not to use unlicensed taxis, as these are likely to be uninsured.

**JOURNEY TIMES:** The following chart gives approximate journey times (in hours and minutes) from Algiers to other major cities/towns in Algeria.

Air	Road
Constantine	0.454.00
Ghardaia	0.556.00
Oran	0.504.00
Tlemcen	1.006.00
Béjaia	0.453.00
Biskra	1.155.00
El Oued	1.256.00
Annaba	0.556.00
H. Messaoud	1.058.00

## 8 ACCOMMODATION

A brochure listing hotels, hotel tariffs, car hire prices, transfer (hotel/airport) charges and specially arranged tours is available from Air Algérie offices.

**HOTELS:** In general, good hotel accommodation in Algeria is limited. The business centres, and in particular Algiers, tend to have either extremely expensive luxury hotels or cheaper hotels primarily suited to the local population visiting on business or for social purposes. Oran and Algiers are full of the cheaper hotels, but they tend to be crowded and difficult to get into, even with a confirmed booking. For assurance on business, reserve rooms only at the best hotels. Grading: All hotels are subject to government regulations and are classified by a star rating: deluxe (5-star), second class (4/3-star) and tourist class (2/1-star).

**The Coast:** The hotels in the resorts along the Mediterranean coast have increased in number, and many are of a reasonably high standard. Often the good hotels in these resorts run their own nightclubs. Winter rates for coastal resorts apply from October 1 to May 31, and summer rates for the remainder of the year.

**The Oases:** Good hotels in the gateway oases of the mid-south such as Ghardaia and Ouargla are few and far between, and during the season (any time other than high summer, which runs from late June to early September) it is vital to book well in advance.

**The Far South:** Hotels in the very far south are extremely limited. In Tamanrasset, better-class hotels have been built since the oasis became a fashionable winter resort. Room availability is, however, limited.

**CAMPING/CARAVANNING:** Camping is free on common land or on the beaches but permission from the local authorities is necessary. Campsites with good facilities are found in Larhat, Ain el-Turk and Annaba.

**YOUTH HOSTELS:** There is a good network of youth hostels throughout the country offering accommodation at budget rates.

## 9 RESORTS & EXCURSIONS

**Note:** Foreign visitors should exercise caution when travelling in Algeria and should seek advice before departure.

**For the purposes of this section, the country has been divided into three regions:** The Coastal Strip, The Hauts Plateaux and The Sahara.

### The Coastal Strip

The capital, Algiers, has been a port since Roman times and many impressive ruins can still be seen, such as those at Djemila, Timgad and especially Tipasa (see below), which are all in good condition because of the dry desert climate. Algiers was commercialised by the French in the mid-19th century and much of the fabric of the city dates from this time. However, it still has a Maghreb feel to it, with many zig-zag alleyways, mosques, a casbah, medersas (study houses) and the beautiful Turkish houses and palaces much admired by Le Corbusier. The Bardo Ethnographic and Local Art Museum and the National Museum of Fine Arts are amongst the finest in North Africa.

Within easy reach of Algiers along the coast lie some fine resorts. Zeralda is a beach resort with a holiday village and a replica nomad village. Tipasa has exceptional Roman, Punic and Christian ruins, and a Numidian mausoleum. The Chiffa Gorges and Kabylia in the mountains provide more rural scenery. Fig and olive groves in summer become ski resorts in the winter.

To the east of Algiers, the Turquoise Coast offers rocky coves and long beaches within easy reach of the city, equipped with sports, cruise and watersports facilities. The Sidi Fredj peninsula has a marina, an open-air theatre and complete amenities including sporting facilities.

The western coast around Algeria's second city, Oran, has a similar range of beaches, historic remains and mosques. Along the coast from the city, which is primarily a business centre and an oil depot, there are a number of resorts, many with well-equipped hotels. Notable beaches include Ain El Turk, Les Andalouses, Canastel, Kristel, Mostaganem and Sablettes. Les Andalouses is the most developed and offers all types of watersports facilities and nightclub entertainment as well as first-class accommodation.

## The Hauts Plateaux

**Tlemcen:** Tlemcen was an important imperial city from the 12th to 16th centuries. It stands in the wooded foothills of the Tellian Atlas and is a pleasant retreat from the stifling heat of high summer. Sights include the Grand Mosque, the Mansourah Fortress and the Almohad ramparts.

**Constantine:** Constantine, to the east, is a natural citadel lying across the River Rhumel. Founded by the Carthaginians, who called it Cirta, it is the oldest continuously inhabited city in Algeria. Sights include the Ahmed Bey Palace (one of the most picturesque in the Maghreb) and the Djamma el-Kebir Mosque.

## The Sahara

The Sahara is the most striking and also most forbidding feature of the country. Relatively uninhabited, the area is drawing increasing numbers of winter tourists. Accommodation, though generally good value, is often scarce in oasis regions, and during the season it is advisable to book in advance. Air Algérie operates frequent flights from Algiers to Ghardaia, Djanet and Tamanrasset, as well as to several smaller towns, oases and oil settlements, but services can be delayed in high summer owing to adverse weather conditions. Roads are much improved, although summer sand storms and winter rains can make all but the major routes hazardous. The best way to enter the south is to cross the El Kautara Gorges to the south of Constantine. The sudden glimpse of the Sahara through the El Kautara Gorges is breathtaking. These gorges are said to separate the winter areas from the land of everlasting summer and are called Four Es Sahra ('the Sahara's mouth') by the inhabitants. Further down, most Algerian oases generally **defy the European cliché of a small patch of palms forever threatened by encroaching dunes:** they are often fairly large towns with highly organised, walled-in gardens with date palms, and mosques, shops and monuments. Favourite starting places for exploring the Sahara are Laghouat, a town with a geometric plan, or the M'Zab Valley, which has seven typical holy towns and is inhabited by a Muslim fundamentalist sect called the Mozabites. Each town is distinguished by a minaret with four spires, a striking characteristic of all Mozabite towns. The most famous among them is Ghardaia, coiled within a group of bare, ochre rocks. The streets, made of clay or paving stones, curl up through the blue and beige buildings towards the white obelisk of the minaret. Not far from Ghardaia, situated on a hill, is the holy town of Beni-Isguen, the four gates of which are constantly guarded. The special feature of this town is its permanent auction market. In the east of the M'Zab region is Ouargla, referred to as 'the golden key to the desert'. This town is well worth visiting for its malekite (an Islamic sect) minaret overlooking an expansive landscape. At the foot of the minaret lies the market square, the porticos of the souks and the terraced house roofs of the inhabitants. Further on is an oasis surrounded by palm trees and beyond that lie the beaches of the Sebkha. Deeper into the south lies the town of El Goléa, referred to as 'the pearl of the desert' or 'the enchanted oasis' because of its luxuriant vegetation and abundant water. The town is dominated by an old ksar (fort) whose ruins are well-preserved. Moving ever further south one comes to the Hoggar Mountains, an impressive, jagged range reaching as far as Libya and surrounded by desert on all sides. It consists of a plateau made of volcanic rock. Eroded cliffs and granite needles form fascinating shapes in pink, blue or black basalt. At the top of the Assekreu nestles the famous refuge of Charles de Foucault at 2800m (9259ft). Mount Tahat, which belongs to the Atakor Massif, can be seen in the distance, reaching 3000m (9921ft) at its highest point. The picturesque capital, Tamanrasset, situated at the heart of the Hoggar Mountains, is full of life and character and is an important stopping place for commercial traffic travelling to and from West Africa. Being a large town with many hotels and restaurants, tourists often stay in 'Tam' (as it is sometimes called) and use it as a base for touring the Hoggar Mountains (the Assekreu and Charles de Foucault's hermitage) or hiking in the open desert to the south and west in the company of camel drivers who carry their luggage. It is also a popular winter holiday resort and a centre for oil exploration and exploitation. It is

visited regularly by the camel caravans of les hommes bleus, blue-robed Touaregs, who are the ancient nomadic inhabitants of this wide region. They make their way around the inscrutable desert through an ancient knowledge of landmarks passed on from father to son. These nomads have a fair complexion, a blue veil over the lower half of their faces and are often very tall. The tiny oasis of Djanet, another watering hole for commercial traffic and trans-Saharan expeditions, can be found in the Tassili N'Ajjer, or 'Plateau of Chasms'. This is a vast volcanic plateau crossed by massive gorges gouged out by rivers which have long since dried out or gone underground. The Tassili conceals a whole group of entirely unique rupestrian paintings (rock paintings), which go back at least as far as the neolithic age. The paintings, depicting daily life, hunting scenes and herds of animals, have a striking beauty and reveal ways of life several thousand years old. They spread out over a 130,000 sq km surface (50,000 sq miles) and form an extraordinary open-air museum which has been miraculously conserved, owing to the pure quality of the air. Tours of the Tassili Plateau and the rupestrian paintings, as well as long-distance car treks in the Ténéré are available, lasting from one day to two weeks. These visits are organised by private agencies run by the Tuaregs and most of them offer a high-quality service. Tourists are collected at the airport (either Djanet or Tamanrasset) and the agency provides them with transportation (usually in 4-wheel-drive vehicles), mattresses and food, although travellers must bring their own sleeping bags.

## 10 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

**Horseracing:** Horseracing and football are popular. The northern coastline offers fishing, swimming and sailing, mainly in Algiers and Annaba.

## 11 SOCIAL PROFILE

**Food & Drink:** Algiers and popular coastal towns have a fair selection of good restaurants, serving mainly French and Italian-style food, though the spicy nature of the sauces sets the cuisine apart from its European counterparts. Even classic dishes will have an unmistakable Algerian quality. Fish dishes are exceptionally good. Menus generally feature a soup or salad to start, roast meat (lamb or beef) or fish as a main course and fresh fruit to finish. In the towns, stalls sell brochettes (kebabs) in French bread and covered in a spicy sauce (if desired). The range of foodstuffs in the south is more limited. Local cooking, which one might be served as a guest of a household, will often consist of roast meat (generally lamb), cous-cous with a vegetable sauce and fresh fruit to finish. Good quality food is reasonably priced. Drink: The sale of alcohol is not encouraged. Alcohol is only available in the more expensive restaurants and hotels and is generally not cheap. There are no licensing hours and hotel bars tend to stay open for as long as there is custom. Algeria produces some good wines but very few of them seem to be served in the country itself. If available try Medea, Mansourah and Mascara red wines and Medea, Mascara and Lismara rosés. The major hotels may have a reasonable cellar of European wines. All visitors are advised to respect Muslim attitudes to alcohol.

**Nightlife:** The main towns offer reasonable entertainment facilities, including hotel restaurants, nightclubs, discotheques, folk dancing and traditional music. In Oran and Algiers, some cinemas show French and English films.

**Shopping:** Possible souvenirs include leatherware, rugs, copper and brassware, local dresses and jewellery. Berber carpets are beautifully decorated, and from the Sahara comes finely-dyed basketwork and primitive-style pottery. Bargaining is customary in street markets and smaller

shops. The rue Didouche Mourad is the best shopping street in Algiers. There are two state-run craft centres with fixed prices. One is located at Algiers airport. Shopping hours: 0800-1200 and 1400-1900 Saturday to Thursday.

**Social Conventions:** Courtesy should be adopted with new acquaintances. The provision and acceptance of hospitality are as important a part of Algerian culture as elsewhere in the Arab world. In the main cities, the urban population lives at a frantic pace much akin to European urban dwellers, but in the south and in rural areas people are much more open and friendly. Algerian women have strict social and dress codes. Western women should respect Muslim tradition and cover themselves as much as possible or they may incite hostility. For more information, see the World of Islam appendix. Photography: Military installations and personnel should not be photographed. Visitors are advised to make sure there is nothing that could be of a governmental or military nature around their prospective photographic subject. Tipping: 10% is usual.

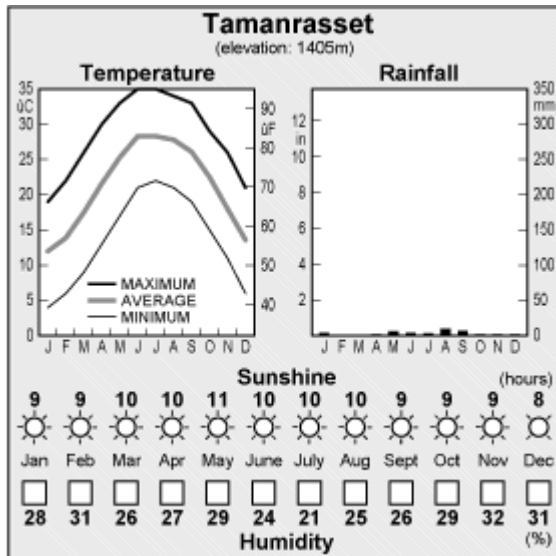
## 12 BUSINESS PROFILE

**Economy:** Petroleum and natural gas are the most important industries in Algeria and account for all but a small fraction of the country's exports. Most of the country is covered by the Sahara Desert, and despite investments in the agricultural sector (the main crops being wheat, potatoes, grapes, cereals and citrus fruits), Algeria is far from self-sufficient in foodstuffs and is vulnerable to drought. Most of the fertile land is located in the northern littoral region. The Government has recently completed the process of breaking up state agricultural co-operatives and turning the land over to its occupants. Minerals, principally iron ore and phosphates, are the other major export. The country's principal trading partners are France, Germany, Italy and Spain. From these, it imports most industrial equipment and consumer goods. The IMF and other Western donors have provided loans and aid packages conditional on liberalising economic reforms and the sale of state-owned industrial assets: the government has, by and large, been prepared to meet these.

**Business:** Suits should always be worn in winter months, shirt sleeves during the summer. Prior appointments are necessary for larger business firms. Businessmen generally speak Arabic or French and, as a great deal of bargaining is necessary, it is rarely convenient to carry out transactions through an interpreter. Patience is always important. Visitors are usually entertained in hotels or restaurants, where Algerian businessmen are seldom accompanied by their wives. Only rarely are visitors entertained at home. If visiting during Ramadan (and this should be avoided if possible) care should be taken to observe local custom in public places. (For a more detailed description, see the World of Islam appendix). The climate is best between October and May. Office hours: Generally 0800-1200 and 1300-1600 Saturday to Wednesday.

**Commercial Information:** The following organisation can offer advice: Chambre Nationale de Commerce et d'Industrie, 6 boulevard Amilcar Cabral, Palais Consulaire, Place des Martyrs, Algiers (tel: (2) 574 397; fax: (2) 577 025).

## 13 CLIMATE



Summer temperatures are high throughout the country, particularly in the south where it is both very dry and very hot. During this time road travel is difficult and air travel prone to delay because of sandstorms. Northern cities have high humidity, while those along the coast are cooled by sea breezes. In the winter, the oases of the far south are pleasant and attract many visitors. The desert temperature drops dramatically at night. North of the Sahara, temperatures are very mild from September to May and vary little between day and night. South of the Sahara, temperatures are pleasant from October to April, but there are great variations between day and night. Coastal towns are prone to storms from the sea. Rainfall is relatively low throughout the country and in the far south it is virtually unknown.

**Required clothing:** Cotton and linen lightweights for winter months and evenings in desert areas. Woollens and light rainwear are advised for the winter along the coast and the Hauts Plateaux. South of the Sahara, from mid-December to mid-January, temperatures drop and warm clothes are necessary both in the morning and the evening. A mountain sleeping bag is also required when camping.

## 14 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

**History:** The present borders of Algeria (as well as those of Tunisia and Libya) were determined when the region became part of the Ottoman Empire, at which time each of the countries was an administrative subdivision (vilayat). The coming of the Ottomans led to the Spanish losing the coastal strip which they had previously held for several centuries. It subsequently became a pirate base for attacking European fleets. The French launched a military attack in 1830 and occupied part of the littoral which became the embryo for their subsequent North African colonial empire. Pressure for independence began from within the country in the early 1950s with the formation of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). The civil war which followed from the French reluctance to concede independence pitted the FLN, backed by the bulk of the population against the French military, the pieds noirs (French settlers) and their Arab supporters (known as harkis). Even by the standards of the many wars of independence throughout that era, the Algerian one was characterised by particular brutality and is estimated to have led to one million

casualties. Independence was finally conceded in 1962 with an FLN-controlled government under Ahmed Ben Bella in charge. Ben Bella was subsequently deposed by the Minister of Defence, Houari Boumedienne, who ruled until his death in December 1978. Boumedienne's replacement was an army commander, Chadli Bendjedid, incidentally reflecting the continuing strong influence of the military on Algerian politics. The orthodox socialist policies initially adopted by the FLN were discarded from 1986 onwards with the revision of the National Charter to stress 'pragmatic socialism': in part, this was a response to the rise of Islamic influence, especially among the urban poor. Exactly how far this process had gone became apparent in June 1990 when multi-party municipal and local elections were held for the first time in June 1990. Although the FLN secured a majority, Islamic parties made a strong showing especially in the urban ghettos of Algiers and other cities. The most prominent of the new parties was the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS, Islamic Salvation Front) whose growing support has since changed the face of Algerian politics. In January 1992, the Government held a general election which resulted in a comprehensive victory for the FIS. However, the result was annulled immediately and a state of emergency was declared. Over the ensuing months, the military took complete control with the support and collaboration of a coterie of civil servants, military and intelligence officials, commonly known as 'Le Pouvoir' (literally 'The Power'). The regime's dominant figure over the next five years was General Liamine Zéroual, a senior army officer, who became defence minister and then president. Opposing 'Le Pouvoir' were FIS and increasingly, armed dissidents led by the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA). The stage was now set for a savage civil war which has consumed the country with a series of apparently random slaughters of, on the one hand, hundreds of civilians in isolated villages or alternatively, groups of foreign journalists or aid workers. There is compelling evidence that government-controlled units are involved in many of these killings as well as members of the militant Islamic factions. With extensive support from the French government, the regime has managed to keep effective control of the country. A number of polls have since been held in order to bolster the regime's legitimacy and prove to the international community that normal conditions apply. In the last few years, the decline in the number of armed attacks has declined as the security forces have made inroads into the guerrilla organisations; nonetheless, without tackling the basic causes, little will be resolved in the long term. At the beginning of 1999, Zéroual announced his intention to step down. A new presidential poll was arranged, but under such controlled conditions that those candidates who initially chose to oppose Abdelaziz Bouteflika, formerly Algeria's long-standing and respected foreign minister and the Pouvoir's appointee to replace Zéroual, eventually decided to boycott it. Bouteflika was thus elected unopposed.

**Government:** An executive president is directly elected for a five-year term. The bicameral legislature, which serves as the legislature, comprises the 380-seat national People's Assembly (al-Majlis al-Sha'abi al-Watani) whose members are directly elected for a five year term; and the 144-member National Council (al-Majlis al-Umma) with two-thirds elected by 'communal councils' and the remainder appointed by the president.

## 15 OVERVIEW

**Country Overview:** Algeria is situated along the North African coast, bordered by Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Morocco. Along the coastal strip are the main towns and beach resorts. The Sahara Desert covers 85% of the country. There are two mountain ranges: the dramatic Hoggar massif, rising to almost 3000m (9800ft), and the Tassili N'Ajjer or 'Plateau of Chasms'.

The capital city, Algiers, has been a port since Roman times and many impressive ruins can still be seen, such as those at Djemila and Tipaza.

Along the coast lie some fine resorts; Zeralda is a beach resort with a holiday village and a replica nomad village. Tipaza has exceptional Roman, Punic and Christian ruins.

The Sahara is one of the most striking features of the country. Relatively uninhabited, the area is drawing increasing numbers of winter tourists.

Local cooking often includes roast meat and cous-cous with a vegetable sauce.

Main towns offer reasonable entertainment facilities, including discotheques, folk dancing and traditional music.