

AFRICA · DESERT · CULTURE · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · ARCHITECTURE · WILDLIFE

 Niger

The Air Mountains rise as dark massifs from the Sahara, Agadez's 27-metre mud-brick minaret has been a landmark for desert caravans for centuries, and West Africa's last wild giraffes browse the bush near Kouré. Niger is one of the least-visited countries on Earth, and much of it has long been covered by FCDO warnings, so check current advice closely before planning anything.

 **The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to Niger.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 29 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Niamey	 CURRENCY West African CFA franc (XOF) £1 ≈ FCFA 781	 LANGUAGE Hausa, Zarma French, Tamasheq	 BEST TIME Nov–Feb
 DAILY BUDGET £35–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, B, C, D, E, F 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 13h via Istanbul, Casablanca or Algiers ~£650–£1,100 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1 standard time

Niger is vast – five times the size of the UK – and around four-fifths of it lies in the Sahara. Its travel map has two halves. In the south-west, along the Niger River, are Niamey, the giraffes of Kouré and W National Park, shared with Benin and Burkina Faso. The north is Tuareg country: Agadez, an old caravan town whose centre is UNESCO-listed, and beyond it the Air Mountains and the dunes of the Ténéré. Between the two stretch the Hausa trading cities of Zinder, with its Sultan's palace, and Maradi.

Tourism to the northern desert, which drew adventurous travellers through the 1990s and early 2000s, collapsed after the Tuareg rebellion of 2007 and later kidnappings in the Sahel. Anyone considering a trip needs to start with the FCDO advice and specialist local operators. The rewards are some of Africa's most striking people and places: Wodaabe herders, Tuareg silversmiths, camel markets and immense, silent desert. Expect extreme heat from March to June, harmattan dust in winter, basic infrastructure and very few other visitors.

Top 5 highlights

1

ARCHITECTURE

Agadez old town

The 27-metre mud-brick minaret of the Grand Mosque, bristling with wooden beams, towers over a UNESCO-listed old town of earthen houses, Tuareg silversmiths and a camel market on the edge of the desert.

2

NATURE

Air Mountains

Dark granite and volcanic massifs rise above the Sahara north of Agadez, sheltering palm-fringed oases such as Timia, ancient rock art and Tuareg camel caravans. Part of a vast UNESCO-listed nature reserve.

3

NATURE

Ténéré Desert

East of the Air lies one of the Sahara's emptiest sand seas, crossed by salt caravans bound for Bilma. A metal sculpture marks where the Tree of Ténéré, once the world's most isolated tree, stood until 1973.

4

WILDLIFE

Kouré giraffe zone

About an hour south-east of Niamey, West Africa's last wild giraffes browse among farmers' fields, tracked by local guides. A rare conservation success: numbers have recovered from around 50 in the 1990s.

5

WILDLIFE

W National Park

Named after the W-shaped bends of the Niger, this park shared with Benin and Burkina Faso protects elephants, buffalo, hippos and rich birdlife in savannah woodland, within a UNESCO-listed cross-border complex.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Niamey

≈ 1.4 million people

A low-rise capital on the Niger River with a National Museum that doubles as a zoo and craft centre, a busy Grand Marché and sunset views from the Kennedy Bridge.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Zinder

≈ 740,000 people

Niger's colonial-era capital and an old Hausa trading city: visit the Sultan's palace and the Birni quarter, with its decorated mud-walled houses and lanes.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Maradi

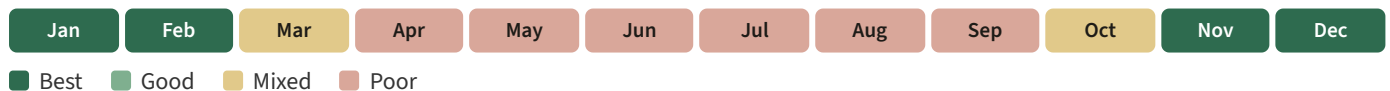
≈ 670,000 people

A busy commercial city near the Nigerian border and the economic heart of Hausa country; few sights, but its markets give a vivid sense of the trading south.

Figures are UN urban-area estimates; Niger's 2012 census counted Maradi's commune as slightly larger than Zinder's.

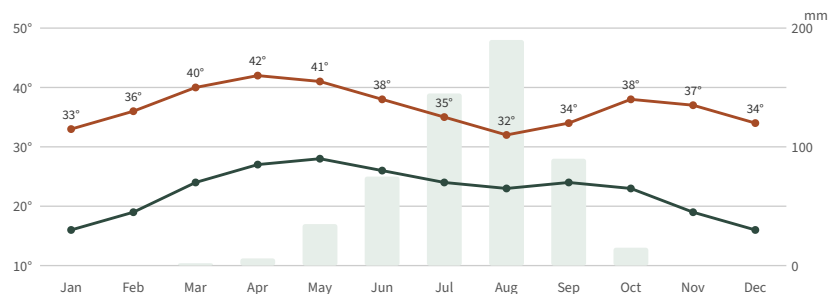
When to go to Niger

Best time: **Nov–Feb**.



Average climate in Niamey

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

May

Tabaski

Eid al-Adha is the year's biggest celebration: families buy and sacrifice a ram, dress in their finest clothes and visit relatives, and markets overflow in the days before.

How much does Niger cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ FCFA 27,328 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £80 per person / day ≈ FCFA 62,465 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £170 per person / day ≈ FCFA 132,737 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Tuwo

A stiff porridge of millet or sorghum, the staple of Hausa kitchens, served with miyan kuka, a slippery sauce made from dried baobab leaves.

Kilishi

Thin sheets of sun-dried beef coated in a spicy peanut and chilli paste, then roasted; Niger's famous fiery jerky.

Fura da nono

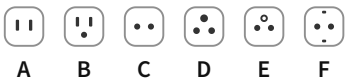
Balls of spiced millet dough crumbled into fermented milk, a cooling, filling drink-cum-meal sold by Fulani women in markets.

Getting around

Coach companies such as Rimbo link Niamey with Maradi, Zinder and Agadez along the main highways, and bush taxis serve smaller towns. Domestic flights are scarce and irregular. In Niamey, shared taxis follow set routes and motorbike taxis are everywhere; agree prices first. Desert travel has always meant a 4x4 and an experienced local driver-guide, so take local advice before any long journey.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — bring a UK-to-A/B/C/D/E/F adapter

DIALLING CODE

+227

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

TIPPING

Not expected in local eateries; leave around 10 per cent in better Niamey restaurants and tip guides, drivers and hotel porters.

ETIQUETTE

Take time over greetings and use your right hand. Accept the three rounds of Tuareg tea if offered – leaving early is rude – and always ask before photographing people.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Telephone: Ambulance: **15**

Fire: **18**

Police: **17**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONE

UTC+1 (standard time)

DRIVING

On the right

Visas & entry for Niger

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You will need a visa to enter Niger. You can apply for a visa from the Nigerien embassy in Geneva.

Visit the embassy website for application forms, payment, and more information on requirements.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Dengue Hepatitis B Measles Meningococcal disease Polio Rabies Tuberculosis Yellow fever

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required for all travellers (usually over 9 months or 1 year old). There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Niger: antimalarial tablets recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Niger

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 18 Dec 2026	National Day
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sat 6 Mar 2027	Laylat al-Qadr (date may shift)
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Sat 24 Apr 2027	National Concord Day
Sat 1 May 2027	International Labour Day

Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Day after Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (date may shift)
Mon 7 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (observed, estimated) (date may shift)
Mon 26 Jul 2027	Anniversary of the CNSP Coup
Tue 3 Aug 2027	Anniversary of the Proclamation of Independence
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Hausa

ENGLISH	HAUSA	SAY IT
Hello	Sannu	SAN-noo
Thank you	Na gode	nah GOH-day
Please	Don Allah	don al-LAH
Excuse me	Gafara dai	ga-FAH-ra dye
How much is this?	Nawa ne wannan?	NAH-wah neh WAN-nan

Know before you go

- Start with the FCDO travel advice and confirm your insurance will cover you; specialist local operators are the best source of on-the-ground information.
- Bring euros in cash to change into CFA francs: ATMs accepting foreign cards are rare outside Niamey, and card payments are uncommon.
- Pack a scarf and sunglasses for the harmattan, the dusty north-easterly wind that hazes the sky in the cool season, and drink only bottled or treated water.