

AFRICA · ISLANDS · BEACHES · WILDLIFE · HIKING · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Sao Tome and Principe

Africa's second-smallest country is a pair of volcanic islands on the equator in the Gulf of Guinea, cloaked in rainforest and old cocoa plantations. Príncipe's beaches back directly onto jungle, the needle of Pico Cão Grande rises from São Tomé's wild south, and crumbling colonial roças recall a cocoa boom. The local motto, leve-leve ('easy, easy'), sets the pace.

i Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Sao Tome and Principe and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 10 December 2025.

CAPITAL São Tomé	CURRENCY São Tomé and Príncipe dobra (STN) £1 ≈ STN 29.16	LANGUAGE Portuguese, Forro	BEST TIME Jun-Sep
DAILY BUDGET £50-£250 ££ Moderate	PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	FLIGHT FROM LONDON 11h 30m via Lisbon ~£800-£1,300 return	TIME ZONE UTC+0 standard time

The country is two islands about 140 km apart in the Gulf of Guinea, some 250 km off the coast of Gabon. Most visitors spend five or six days on São Tomé, taking in the capital's pastel colonial streets, the cocoa estates (roças) of the interior, the Obô rainforest and the wild south around Pico Cão Grande and Ilhéu das Rolas, then fly to tiny Príncipe, a UNESCO biosphere reserve, for beaches and forest walks. A week to ten days works well, and the two islands feel distinct enough to justify both.

This is slow, small-scale travel: roads are narrow and potholed, accommodation ranges from simple guesthouses and converted roças to a few expensive eco-lodges on Príncipe, and things happen leve-leve. International flights are limited, mostly via Lisbon, so the islands cost more to reach than to stay in. Visitors are struck by the birdlife, with more than 20 endemic species, by how good the local chocolate is, and by how few other tourists they meet. It suits nature lovers, birders, hikers and anyone who wants Africa without the crowds.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

BEACH

Príncipe and Praia Banana

The smaller island is a UNESCO biosphere reserve where rainforest runs down to empty coves. Praia Banana, a crescent of golden sand backed by palms, is the most photographed; combine it with forest walks and boat trips.
- 2

NATURE

Pico Cão Grande

A needle-like volcanic plug rising more than 300 m above the rainforest of Obô Natural Park in the south. Admire it from the southern coast road, or hike through the forest to its base with a local guide.

3

HISTORY

Roça Agostinho Neto

Once one of the largest cocoa plantations, this vast roça has a grand avenue, a ruined colonial hospital and workers' quarters still lived in by labourers' descendants. It tells the story of colonial cocoa and its forced-labour system.

4

NATURE

Ilhéu das Rolas

A small island off São Tomé's southern tip, crossed by the equator, where a monument and a world map in tiles mark the line. Reach it by a short boat ride from Ponta Baleia, then snorkel or walk the forest paths.

5

WILDLIFE

Turtle nesting at Praia Jalé

Between roughly November and March, green, hawksbill, olive ridley and leatherback turtles nest on beaches in the far south. A small community ecolodge at Praia Jalé works with conservation groups on night-time nesting and hatching walks.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

São Tomé

≈ 70,000 people

The low-rise capital has faded Portuguese colonial buildings, a pink presidential palace, a national museum inside the Fort of São Sebastião and a lively market. The base for most excursions.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Trindade

≈ 16,000 people

An inland market town in the hills a few kilometres south-west of the capital and seat of Mé-Zóchi district; most visitors pass through on the way up to Roça Monte Café and Bom Sucesso.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Santana

≈ 10,000 people

An east-coast town south of the capital, close to small beaches and the islet of Santana; a quiet stop on the road towards São João dos Angolares and the south.

Population figures are rounded 2012 census figures for each town with its adjoining settlements. Outside the capital, the largest places are small towns; Neves, on the north-west coast, is almost the same size as Santana.

When to go to Sao Tome and Principe

Best time: **Jun–Sep**.

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

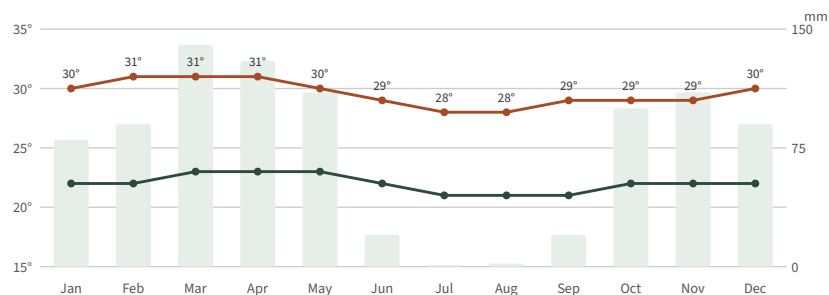
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in São Tomé

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jul	Independence Day Independence from Portugal in 1975 is celebrated on 12 July with parades, concerts and dancing in the capital, a good chance to see socopé and other traditional dances.
Aug	Auto de Floripes For the feast of São Lourenço in mid-August, the people of Santo António on Príncipe stage a day-long street drama of Charlemagne's knights battling the Moors, in costume and masks.

How much does Sao Tome and Principe cost?

SHOESTRING £50 per person / day ≈ STN 1,458 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £110 per person / day ≈ STN 3,208 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £250 per person / day ≈ STN 7,291 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

Calulu The national dish: smoked fish or chicken stewed with palm oil, okra, aubergine and a mix of local leaves and herbs, served with rice, banana or breadfruit.	Izaquente A rich, slow-cooked stew of the seeds of the African breadfruit tree with smoked fish, palm oil and spices, often made for special occasions.	São Tomé chocolate Cocoa from the islands' estates is made into intense dark bars by local producers such as Claudio Corallo, whose workshop in the capital offers tastings.
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Getting around

Yellow shared taxis and minibuses run along the main roads from the capital, but most visitors hire a car with a driver or join tours, especially for the rough road to the south. Short flights connect São Tomé and Príncipe; boats are irregular and slow. On Príncipe, lodges arrange airport transfers and guided trips, as there is very little public transport.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C F 230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 222 22 22 Fire: 112 Police: 113 or 222 22 22 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +239	TIME ZONE UTC+0 (standard time)
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water	DRIVING On the right

TIPPING

Tipping is not expected but appreciated: round up in cafés, leave around 10% for good restaurant service, and tip guides and drivers in euros or dobras.

ETIQUETTE

Greet people with 'bom dia' or 'boa tarde' before any request, accept that things move leve-leve, ask before photographing people, and dress modestly away from the beach.

MAIN AIRPORTS

São Tomé International Airport (TMS), São Tomé

Visas & entry for Sao Tome and Principe

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit São Tomé and Príncipe for tourism for a period of up to 15 days without a visa.

To stay longer (to work or study, for business travel or for other reasons), you must meet the São Tomé and Príncipe government's entry 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

Rabies

Tuberculosis

Yellow fever

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in São Tomé and Príncipe: 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 Sao Tome and Principe

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

Mon 21 Dec 2026

São Tomé Day

Fri 25 Dec 2026

Christmas Day

Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 4 Jan 2027	Day of King Amador
Wed 3 Feb 2027	Martyrs' Day
Fri 30 Apr 2027	Worker's Day (observed)
Sat 1 May 2027	Worker's Day
Mon 12 Jul 2027	Independence Day
Mon 6 Sep 2027	Armed Forces Day
Thu 30 Sep 2027	Agricultural Reform Day

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

Useful phrases in Portuguese

ENGLISH	PORTUGUESE	SAY IT
Hello	Olá	<i>oh-LAH</i>
Thank you	Obrigado / Obrigada	<i>oh-bree-GAH-doo / oh-bree-GAH-dah</i>
Please	Por favor	<i>poor fah-VOR</i>
Excuse me	Com licença	<i>kohn lee-SEN-sah</i>
How much is this?	Quanto custa?	<i>KWAN-too KOOS-tah</i>

Know before you go

The dobra is pegged to the euro, and euros in cash are widely accepted. Cards and ATMs for foreign cards are unreliable, so bring enough cash for your whole stay.

Book flights to Príncipe and lodge transfers well in advance: seats are limited, schedules change, and the few good hotels fill up in the June–September dry season.

Hire a local guide for Obô Natural Park and Pico Cão Grande: trails are unmarked, muddy and steep, and guides spot endemic birds you would otherwise miss.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.