

AFRICA · DIVING · DESERT · WILDLIFE · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · ADVENTURE



Djibouti

Djibouti is a small, fiercely hot country at the mouth of the Red Sea, where Lake Assal's salt flats lie 155 metres below sea level and steam rises from the limestone chimneys of Lac Abbé. Between November and February, juvenile whale sharks gather in the Gulf of Tadjoura, offering some of the most reliable encounters anywhere.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to parts of Djibouti.**
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 27 July 2026.

 CAPITAL Djibouti City	 CURRENCY Djiboutian franc (DJF) £1 ≈ DJF 237	 LANGUAGE Somali, Afar French, Arabic	 BEST TIME Nov–Feb
 DAILY BUDGET £65–£300 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type C, E 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 10h 30m via Istanbul, Addis Ababa or Dubai ~£650–£1,050 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+3 standard time

Djibouti sits where the Great Rift Valley meets the sea, and its landscapes look geologically raw: black lava fields, the turquoise salt lake of Assal, the fumaroles of Lac Abbé and the volcanic shores of the Ghoubbet. Almost every trip is based in Djibouti City, with day or overnight 4x4 excursions west to Assal and the Ghoubbet, south-west to Lac Abbé, and boat trips to the reefs and mangroves of Moucha and Maskali islands. A week covers the essentials; the forested Goda Mountains and the whitewashed old port of Tadjoura across the gulf reward a longer stay.

This is not a budget destination. A large foreign military presence and a small tourist industry keep hotel and car-hire prices high, and most excursions need a 4x4 and driver, so costs add up quickly for solo travellers; joining a group tour helps. Outside the capital, facilities are basic — campements with huts and shared washrooms are the norm. Afternoons slow down as many residents chew khat, and from May to September the heat becomes extreme. Visitors are often surprised by how French the capital still feels, from the baguettes to the cafés of the European quarter.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

WILDLIFE

Whale sharks in the Gulf of Tadjoura

From roughly November to February, juvenile whale sharks feed on plankton near Arta Plage at the western end of the gulf. Licensed boats from Djibouti City take snorkellers out; numbers vary from year to year, so allow more than one day.
- 2

NATURE

Lake Assal

Africa's lowest point, a startlingly blue rift lake fringed by a crust of white salt, 155 metres below sea level. Float in some of the saltiest water on earth, but bring sandals: the salt crystals are razor-sharp.

3

NATURE

Lac Abbé

A remote salt lake on the Ethiopian border, where hundreds of limestone chimneys up to about 50 metres tall vent steam across a lunar plain. Stay overnight at the Asboley campement for sunrise, when flamingos feed and Afar herders bring camels to drink.

4

BEACH

Moucha and Maskali islands

Two low coral islands a short boat ride from Djibouti City, with mangroves, sandy beaches and good snorkelling on the fringing reefs. Popular with residents at weekends, they make an easy day trip with lunch included.

5

NATURE

Day Forest National Park

High in the Goda Mountains above Tadjoura, Djibouti's only significant forest of juniper and wild olive survives at around 1,500 metres. It is cooler than the coast and home to the critically endangered Djibouti francolin, found nowhere else.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Djibouti City

≈ 770,000 people

Home to most of the population, the capital mixes a colonial European quarter, a busy African market and modern container ports; it is the base for nearly every excursion and dive trip.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Ali Sabieh

≈ 45,000 people

A southern town near the Ethiopian border and the railway to Addis Ababa, set among rust-coloured mountains; few visitors stop, but the drive there shows Djibouti's arid interior.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Obock

≈ 30,000 people

The first French foothold in the region, now a quiet port on the northern shore of the Gulf of Tadjoura, with nearby reefs and the Sept Frères islands within reach of liveaboard dive trips.

Figures are from the 2024 census. Obock's total has nearly tripled since 2009 and may include nearby refugee settlements; Dikhil, at about 28,000, is of similar size.

When to go to Djibouti

Best time: **Nov–Feb.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

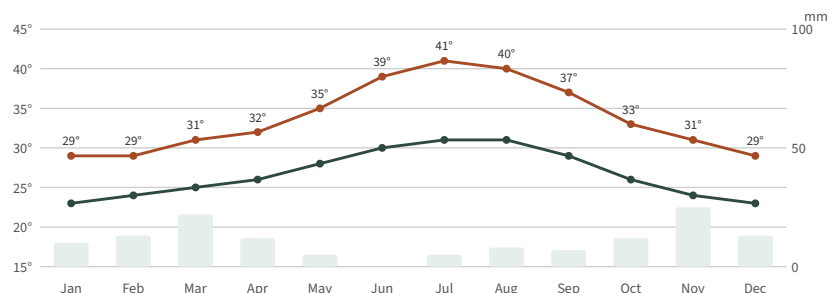
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Djibouti City

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Eid al-Fitr The end of Ramadan brings prayers, family feasts and new clothes; the date moves about 11 days earlier each year, falling in early March in 2027 and late February in 2028.
Jun	Independence Day On 27 June Djibouti marks independence from France in 1977 with parades, music and flags across the capital, though it falls at the height of the hot season.

How much does Djibouti cost?

SHOESTRING £65 per person / day ≈ DJF 15,437 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £150 per person / day ≈ DJF 35,624 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £300 per person / day ≈ DJF 71,247 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

Skoudehkaris Often called the national dish: rice cooked with lamb or goat, tomato, onion and warm spices, served on generous shared platters.	Poisson yéménite Fish split open, brushed with spices and baked against the wall of a clay oven, served with flatbread at Yemeni-run restaurants in the capital.	Laxoox A spongy, slightly sour Somali flatbread, similar to Ethiopian injera, eaten at breakfast with butter, sugar and sweet tea or alongside stews.
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Getting around

Public transport is of little practical use to visitors outside Djibouti City, where minibuses and shared taxis cover the main roads. Most travellers hire a 4x4 with driver or join an organised excursion for Lake Assal, Lac Abbé and the Day Forest, since roads beyond the main highways are rough. Boats from the capital serve Moucha and the whale-shark grounds, and a paved road continues around the gulf to Tadjoura.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C E 220V — bring a UK-to-C/E adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 21 35 09 62 or 21 35 27 12 Fire: 18 Police: 17 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +253	TIME ZONE UTC+3 (standard time)
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water	DRIVING On the right

TIPPING

Tipping is not deeply ingrained, but guides, drivers and boat crews expect something; in restaurants, rounding up or leaving around 5–10% is appreciated.

ETIQUETTE

Djibouti is a conservative Muslim country: dress modestly away from beaches, ask before photographing people, and never photograph ports, military bases or government buildings.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Djibouti–Ambouli International Airport (JIB), Djibouti City

Visas & entry for Djibouti

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to enter Djibouti.

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

Chikungunya Dengue Hepatitis B Measles Polio Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Djibouti: 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 Djibouti

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

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Tue 5 Jan 2027	Isra' and Mi'raj (date may shift)
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)

Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr Holiday (date may shift)
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sat 15 May 2027	Day of Arafah (date may shift)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha Holiday (date may shift)
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (date may shift)
Sun 27 Jun 2027	Independence Day
Mon 28 Jun 2027	Independence Day Holiday
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet Muhammad'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 French

ENGLISH	FRENCH	SAY IT
Hello	Bonjour	<i>bon-ZHOOR</i>
Thank you	Merci	<i>mair-SEE</i>
Please	S'il vous plaît	<i>seel voo PLAY</i>
Excuse me	Excusez-moi	<i>ex-KOO-zay MWAH</i>
How much is this?	C'est combien ?	<i>say kom-BYAN?</i>

Know before you go

Bring enough euros or US dollars in cash: ATMs and card payments are largely limited to the capital, and remote campements are cash-only.

For whale sharks, choose an operator that limits boat numbers, keeps swimmers a few metres from the animals and bans touching or flash photography.

Daytime temperatures from May to September are punishing, so even in winter plan desert excursions around early starts and carry far more water than you think you need.

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.