

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



Mauritania

Mauritania is where the Sahara meets the Atlantic. In the Adrar, the old caravan town of Chinguetti guards family libraries of centuries-old manuscripts among the dunes, while on the coast the Banc d'Arguin shelters millions of migrating birds and fishermen who still work under sail. Few deserts on Earth see fewer visitors.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to parts of Mauritania.**
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 19 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Nouakchott	 CURRENCY Mauritanian ouguiya (MRU) £1 ≈ MRU 53.51	 LANGUAGE Hassaniya Arabic, French Pulaar, Soninke	 BEST TIME Nov–Feb
 DAILY BUDGET £35–£160 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, E, F 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 9h 30m via Paris, Casablanca or Istanbul ~£550–£950 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+0 standard time

Mauritania is a vast, thinly populated country bridging the Arab Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, with Moorish nomadic traditions in the north and Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof communities along the Senegal River. For travellers, it means the Adrar plateau: Atar as the base, the palm oasis of Terjit, the ancient ksour of Chinguetti and Ouadane, and the concentric rings of the Richat Structure, all explored by 4x4 or camel. A classic loop adds a ride on the Iron Ore Train between Choum and Nouadhibou, then heads down the coast via the Banc d'Arguin to Nouakchott. Overlanders also cross between Morocco and Senegal here.

Travel is all about the season: from November to February days are warm and nights cold in the desert, while summer brings fierce heat and sandstorms. Tourism infrastructure is minimal — simple auberges, tents and mattresses on the floor — and most visitors use a local agency with driver and guide. Costs are moderate, but 4x4 hire adds up, so groups share. Mauritania is an Islamic republic where alcohol is banned, and life revolves around family, prayer and endless glasses of sweet mint tea. People are surprised by the silence, the hospitality of nomad camps and how fresh the seafood is in Nouakchott.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

HISTORY
Chinguetti
A medieval caravan and pilgrimage stop, Chinguetti's UNESCO-listed stone old town is partly swallowed by dunes. Families still guard libraries of Islamic manuscripts, some many centuries old, and the square-towered Friday mosque is a national symbol.
- 2

NATURE
Richat Structure
Near Ouadane, the 40 km-wide Richat Structure, or 'Eye of the Sahara', is an eroded geological dome whose concentric rings are clearest from space, though crossing it by 4x4 still feels otherworldly.

3

ADVENTURE

Iron Ore Train

One of the world's longest trains hauls iron ore around 700 km from the Zouérat mines to Nouadhibou. Travellers board at Choum and ride in a basic passenger carriage or, dustily, on top of the ore in open wagons.

4

WILDLIFE

Banc d'Arguin National Park

A UNESCO-listed expanse of mudflats, islands and shallow sea where millions of migrant waders winter alongside flamingos and pelicans. Imraguen fishermen still work from wooden sailing boats called lanches, and trips to the bird islands go under sail.

5

CULTURE

Nouakchott fishing beach

Each late afternoon hundreds of brightly painted pirogues surge through the surf onto Nouakchott's fishing beach, where crews, porters and traders unload, haggle over and sort the catch amid great noise and colour.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Nouakchott

≈ 1.4 million people

A young capital, built from scratch around independence and now home to nearly a third of Mauritaniens; sights are few, but the fishing beach at dusk and the camel market are memorable.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Nouadhibou

≈ 174,000 people

Mauritania's fishing and iron-ore port sits on the Cap Blanc peninsula beside the Western Sahara border; it's the Iron Ore Train's terminus and a gateway to the Banc d'Arguin.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Kiffa

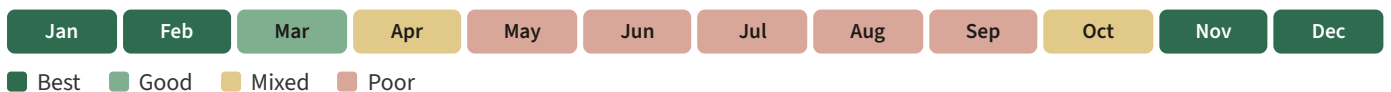
≈ 72,000 people

A market town on the long Route de l'Espoir to the east, famous for Kiffa beads, intricately patterned powder-glass beads traditionally made by local women.

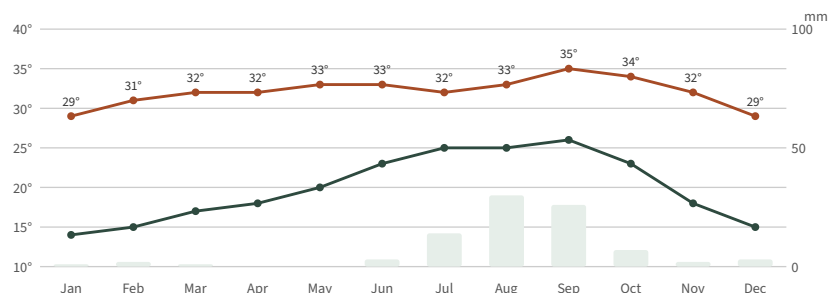
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Mauritania

Best time: **Nov–Feb.**

**Average climate in Nouakchott**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jul–Aug	Guetna During the summer date harvest, families from across Mauritania decamp to the Adrar's palm groves around Atar to feast on fresh dates, socialise and escape the city.
Nov–Dec	Festival of the Ancient Cities An annual cultural festival rotating between the old caravan towns of Chinguetti, Ouadane, Tichitt and Oualata, with camel races, poetry, music, crafts and traditional games.

How much does Mauritania cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ MRU 1,873 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £75 per person / day ≈ MRU 4,013 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £160 per person / day ≈ MRU 8,561 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

Thieboudienne Fish and rice cooked in a rich tomato sauce with cassava, carrot and cabbage — shared with neighbouring Senegal and eaten from a communal platter.	Méchoui Whole lamb or goat slow-roasted over embers or in a pit, pulled apart by hand at weddings, holidays and for honoured guests.	Atay (mint tea) Strong green tea with mint and plenty of sugar, poured from a height to raise a froth and served in three rounds over an hour or more.
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Getting around

Bush taxis and minibuses run between garages in Nouakchott and the main towns along paved highways to Atar, Nouadhibou and Rosso. For the Adrar's dunes and oases you need a 4x4 with driver, usually arranged through an agency in Atar. The Iron Ore Train links Choum and Nouadhibou. Police checkpoints are frequent: carry passport photocopies, known as fiches.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE C E F 220V — bring a UK-to-C/E/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 101 Fire: 118 Police: 117 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +222	TIME ZONE UTC+0 (standard time)
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water	DRIVING On the right

TIPPING

Not expected in cafés, but 5–10% is welcome in smarter Nouakchott restaurants. Drivers, cooks and guides on desert trips expect a tip at the end.

ETIQUETTE

Greet with 'as-salaam alaykum', dress conservatively and accept tea when offered. Eat and pass things with your right hand, and ask before photographing anyone, especially women.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Nouakchott–Oumtounsy International Airport (NKC), Nouakchott; Nouadhibou International Airport (NDB), Nouadhibou; Atar International Airport (ATR), Atar

Visas & entry for Mauritania

Shown for a British passport.

Visa on arrival

From 5 January 2025, it is no longer possible to obtain a visa on arrival in Mauritania. Before you travel, you must apply for an e-visa online via the website of the Mauritanian National Agency for the Population Register and Secure Titles (Agence Nationale du Registre des Populations et des Titres Sécurisés), who can be contacted via email (contact@anrpts.gov.mr) if you face any technical difficulties with your application.

E-visa fees must be paid on arrival in Mauritania in exact cash in Euros or US dollars. Change and receipts are not given. You should also print a copy of the e-visa and be ready to provide a copy on arrival in country. For information on visa lengths and fees, read guidance on the Mauritanian government's website (in French).

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

Meningococcal disease

Rabies

Tuberculosis

Yellow fever

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. 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 throughout the year in the southern provinces of Mauritania: antimalarial tablets recommended.
- There is a high risk of malaria in the northern provinces from July to October inclusive: antimalarial tablets recommended.
- There is a low risk of malaria in the northern provinces during the rest of the year: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

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

Public holidays in Mauritania

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

Sat 28 Nov 2026	Independence Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 25 May 2027	Africa Day
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (date may shift)
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 French

ENGLISH	FRENCH	SAY IT
Hello	Bonjour	bon-ZHOOR
Thank you	Merci	mair-SEE
Please	S'il vous plaît	seel voo PLAY
Excuse me	Excusez-moi	ex-kew-ZAY mwah
How much is this?	C'est combien ?	say kom-BYAN

Know before you go

Carry a stack of fiches — photocopies of your passport details — to hand over at the many police checkpoints; it speeds things up considerably.

Bring euros in cash to change in Nouakchott or Atar; ATMs are few and cards are rarely accepted outside the capital's bigger hotels.

Check the FCDO travel advice before planning desert routes, and travel in the Adrar with a reputable local agency, driver and guide.

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.