

AFRICA · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · HISTORY · CULTURE

★ *Somalia*

Somalia has the longest coastline of mainland Africa, and its rare visitors mostly head to Somaliland in the north: the painted cattle of Laas Geel, Berbera's coral-stone old town, Hargeisa's livestock market and the ruins of Zeila. Travel is complex and conditions change, so read the FCDO advice first and travel with a trusted local fixer.

 **The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to parts of Somalia.**
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 4 June 2026.

 CAPITAL Mogadishu	 CURRENCY Somali shilling (SOS) £1 ≈ SOS 762	 LANGUAGE Somali, Arabic English	 BEST TIME Dec–Feb
 DAILY BUDGET £45–£220 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, G 220V · UK plugs fit	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 12h 30m via Istanbul, Dubai or Nairobi ~£600–£1,000 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+3 standard time

Somalia curves around the Horn of Africa along the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, but its political map shapes any trip more than its geography. Somaliland in the north-west declared independence in 1991 and runs its own government and currency, though the UK and almost every other country do not recognise it; it receives most of the country's few tourists. A typical route starts in Hargeisa, visits the rock art of Laas Geel, then heads to the coast at Berbera, adding Zeila or the Golis mountains around Sheikh with more time. Mogadishu, the federal capital, sees very few leisure visitors.

There is little tourist infrastructure in the usual sense: a handful of decent hotels in Hargeisa and Berbera, guides arranged by phone, and an expectation that foreigners travel with a local fixer, often with an armed police escort outside Hargeisa. Costs build up through drivers and escorts rather than rooms or food. Hospitality is warm, sweet spiced tea and camel milk flow freely, and almost everything runs on mobile money. It suits seasoned travellers who are comfortable with conservative customs, close supervision and plans that can change at a day's notice.

Top 5 highlights

1

HISTORY

Laas Geel

Rock shelters outside Hargeisa painted with remarkably vivid cattle, people and dogs, thought to be at least 5,000 years old and among the best-preserved rock art in Africa. Permission, a guide and an escort are arranged in Hargeisa.

2

HISTORY

Berbera

Somaliland's main port has a crumbling old quarter of Ottoman-era coral-stone houses and mosques, a busy fish market and the long sandy beach at Batalaale. The coast is fiercely hot from June to September.

3

CULTURE

Hargeisa livestock market

Thousands of camels, goats and sheep change hands at this sprawling market, one of the largest in the Horn of Africa, as traders haggle over animals bound for the Gulf. Go early with a local guide and ask before photographing.

4

HISTORY

Zeila

One of the oldest ports on the Gulf of Aden, a medieval Islamic trading centre close to the Djibouti border. Its ruins include the ancient Masjid al-Qiblatayn and coral-stone houses, with offshore islands and mangroves nearby.

5

BEACH

Lido Beach, Mogadishu

Mogadishu's wide city beach, lined with seafood restaurants and crowded with families and swimmers on Friday afternoons; it is the capital's best-known leisure spot. Check the FCDO advice before considering any visit to Mogadishu.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Mogadishu

≈ 2.6 million people

The federal capital, once called the White Pearl of the Indian Ocean, has a long seafront, the Hamar Weyne old quarter and Lido Beach. Any visit needs careful planning; read the FCDO advice first.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Hargeisa

≈ 1 million people

Somaliland's capital and the usual entry point: a low-rise city with a huge livestock market, money changers behind stacks of banknotes and a MiG fighter jet war memorial in the centre.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Bosaso

≈ 500,000 people

Puntland's port on the Gulf of Aden has grown fast on livestock exports, fishing and trade; few travellers come, but it is the region's commercial hub and main air link.

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 Somalia

Best time: **Dec–Feb.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

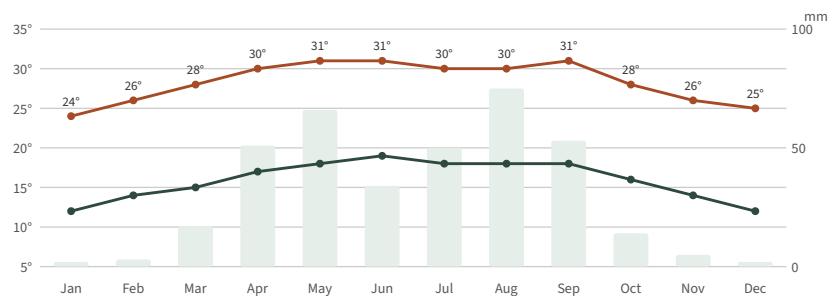
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Hargeisa

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Mar	Eid al-Fitr The end of Ramadan brings family feasts, new clothes and visits to relatives; many businesses close for several days and flights fill with returning diaspora.
May	Somaliland Independence Day Somaliland marks its 1991 declaration of independence on 18 May with parades, flags, music and speeches in Hargeisa and other towns.
Jul-Aug	Hargeisa International Book Fair Founded in 2008, this week of books, poetry, music and debate is one of the Horn of Africa's liveliest cultural events, with a different guest country each year.

How much does Somalia cost?

SHOESTRING £45 per person / day ≈ SOS 34,286 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £100 per person / day ≈ SOS 76,191 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £220 per person / day ≈ SOS 167,621 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
---	--	---

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Bariis iskukaris

Fragrant rice cooked with cumin, cardamom, cinnamon and raisins, served with goat or camel meat and often a banana on the side.

Canjeero

A spongy, slightly sour flatbread, also called laxoox, eaten at breakfast with ghee and sugar or alongside leftover stew.

Baasto

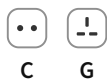
Pasta, a legacy of Italian colonial rule in the south, served with a spiced meat sauce, often with a banana eaten alongside.

Getting around

Local airlines link Hargeisa, Mogadishu, Garowe and Bosaso, and regional carriers connect via Addis Ababa and Dubai. In Somaliland, most visitors travel by hired car with a driver and fixer; foreigners leaving Hargeisa have typically been required to take an armed police escort, which hotels and fixers arrange. Shared minibuses run between towns but are rarely used by visitors. In cities, use drivers or taxis arranged by your hotel.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — UK plugs fit

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **999**

Fire: **555**

Police: **888**

These emergency numbers can be unreliable. The Somali Red Crescent operates a free number for all emergency services on **446**.

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

DIALLING CODE

+252

TIME ZONE

UTC+3 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Not traditionally expected, but drivers, fixers, guides and escorts should be tipped in US dollars at the end of a trip; round up in restaurants.

ETIQUETTE

Dress conservatively: long, loose clothes for men and women, with women covering their hair. Always ask before photographing people, never photograph military or government sites, and use your right hand.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Aden Adde International Airport (MGQ), Mogadishu; Egal International Airport (HGA), Hargeisa

Visas & entry for Somalia

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to enter Somalia, including Somaliland.

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

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

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

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

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)
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (date may shift)
Tue 15 Jun 2027	Ashura (date may shift)
Sat 26 Jun 2027	Independence Day
Thu 1 Jul 2027	Republic Day
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 Somali

ENGLISH	SOMALI	SAY IT
Hello	Iska warran	IS-ka WAR-ran
Thank you	Mahadsanid	ma-had-SA-nid
Please	Fadlan	FAD-lan
Excuse me	Iga raalli ahaw	i-ga RAA-li a-HAW
How much is this?	Waa imisa?	waa IM-i-sa

Know before you go

- Read the FCDO travel advice before planning anything, and check whether your insurer will cover you; many standard policies exclude Somalia, including Somaliland.
- Carry clean US dollar notes. Daily life runs on mobile money, Zaad in Somaliland and EVC Plus further south, and your fixer can help you set it up with a local SIM.
- Friday is the weekly day of rest, when offices and many shops close; arrange permissions, money changing and escorts for Laas Geel on other days.

