

# Libya

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NAME: Socialist People's Libyan  
Arab Jamahiriya  
CAPITAL: Tripoli  
LANGUAGE: Arabic, Italian, & English  
RELIGION: Sunni Muslim  
CURRENCY: Libyan Dinar

## Getting Started

### When to Visit

[Libya](#) has two distinct meteorological climates with the desert interior and the Mediterranean coast. Along the coast extremes are more approachable as summers (June-August) are hot, and often humid, with an average temperature that hangs around 90°F (30°C). Winters along the coast experience lower temperatures with an average of about 62°F (16-17°C). Springs and falls (autumns) vary as the seasons change; generally the fall experiences a slow and somewhat predictable fall in temperatures, but the springs are sporadic. With winds out of the south, the desert heat can quickly escalate the coast's temperatures as other days will experience rain.

The desert inland can be, and typically is very different. Days get very hot while at night the temperatures tend to plummet significantly. During summer days temperatures can reach as high as 122°F (50°C) and even on "cooler" days the temperature tends to reach 105°F (40°C). The hottest recorded temperature on earth was in [Libya](#) when the desert hit 136°F (58°C). Nights experience much lower temperatures in the summer, requiring a coat on most days and during the winter month's night temperatures are as low as freezing.

Due to these extremes from season to season and region to region, the best time to visit [Libya](#) generally tends to be in winter, when both the coasts and desert are accessible. For coastal sunbathers, spring and fall tend to be preferred. For everyone though, the only time to truly consider visiting is when political stability has climaxed and this varies from month to month and year to year.

A final point to consider before planning your travel is local holidays. Holidays can make travel either more attractive, such as for large festivals, or less attractive due to tourist site closings and more expensive transportation options, so make sure you look into this before booking your trip. One holiday to be aware of is Ramadan

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(ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which rotates every year compared to the Gregorian calendar) as this month tends to close shops, restaurants, and coffee shops.

## Weather

Although weather can be generalized based upon years past, for more up to date weather patterns and predicted future weather patterns, visit weather websites like [weather.com](http://weather.com); many local news sources also have information for international weather forecasts.

## Tours & Cruises

If you're looking for a pre-arranged trip, that involves little effort on your part, then you should consider going on an organized tour or cruise. Organized tours and cruises vary from all expenses included to only daily tours and perhaps hotels included in the price, but all the options below will help you arrange all the details so you don't have to worry about finding the best deal or right hotel.

[Experience It Tours](#): A tour company focusing on North Africa, Experience It Tours rarely gets a poor review from travelers.

## Guidebooks

If you are just traveling on business and have little free time or are already familiar with [Libya](#), you may not need anything more than this guide! However, if you need more detailed and up to date information, there is one guidebook available for travel in Libya.

[Lonely Planet](#): Great maps and updated often with comprehensive housing information, restaurants, & transportation options. Backpackers and adventurers love these guidebooks.

# Culture

## Personality, Culture, & Identity

[Libya](#) tends to gravitate to the news, or perhaps more accurately, the world tends to gravitate to Libya, now and in the past. Beginning with the time of Roman rule, the coasts were home to important trading, economic, and learning centers within the Roman Empire. Today, the country is in chaos as the people are still trying to find that which they seek. It is and always has been a country of extremes filled with people that may not always know what they want, but when they find it, they are persistent.

The people of [Libya](#) have almost always been divided from region to region, ethnicity to ethnicity, and political entity to political entity. The desert dwellers in the Sahara have prospered despite the unforgiving conditions, while the people of the coasts always used their resources to thrive. Each group has prospered due to each's willingness and ability to be opportunistic. This opportunistic attitude and competitiveness with other groups has made Libya what it is today.

[Libyans](#) generally view themselves by small family, tribal, or regional definitions. Historically, the people clung to their family and neighbors, having never truly been united as they are today, and this local pride has remained. Due to this, each individual may tell you that he or she identifies based on family, ethnicity, language, or region, but things are changing, especially with migration to cities. City dwellers are more likely to identify as a "Libyan," but the Berbers are likely to argue that they are not included in that definition and even many Arabs prefer to attach themselves to a regional, over a national, identity.

## History

For much of [Libya](#)'s early history, the land was occupied by the Berbers. These people were a group of loosely organized people who

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were later ruled by the Phoenicians, who were based in Carthage, located in modern day [Tunisia](#). After Carthage fell in 146 BC, the Romans took the [North African](#) coast and truly took full control in the region of modern day Libya in about 100 AD. The Romans soon had a strong hold on the Libyan coast and built one of their greatest cities there, Leptis Magna.

After Roman influence fell, the next great influence on the coast came in the 600s with the Arab invasion. The Arabs converted most of the locals to Islam, but didn't completely control the region as they settled in relatively small numbers. In the 1000s the Arabs arrived in larger numbers from neighboring [Egypt](#) and altered the region's culture and livelihood, while destroying much of the region.

In the 1500s the Ottoman [Turks](#) and Spanish fought to control the coast. The Spanish first took Tripolitania (Tripoli and the coastal region around it), but soon after the Ottoman Turks secured Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (modern day [Libya](#)'s eastern coast). The Ottomans did this with the help of pirates, who were given free reign over the coast. This quickly became a pirate coast, more commonly called the Barbary Coast. This rule continued until the late 1800s when the [European](#) powers and the [United States](#) wearied of the piracy and battled the pirates, ending their rule over the coast.

After the Ottoman rule ended, the coastal region was locally ruled as the deserts in the south essentially fell into chaos. For the most part, this ended with World War I (WWI) as the [Italians](#) and Ottomans fought and the Italians proved their superiority over the [Turks](#) by invading and taking what is today [Libya](#). After WWI the Italians expanded the size of their colony at the expense of both [Egypt](#) and [Tunisia](#). By the time World War II (WWII) broke out, Italy firmly held the region of modern day Libya and encouraged immigration to the region to secure it.

When WWII did break out, [Libya](#) became the base for both [Germany](#)'s and [Italy](#)'s [North African](#) campaign. Near the end of the war, the

region was taken over by the Brits, who invaded from [Egypt](#), which was held by the [Brits](#) at the time.

At the conclusion of WWII, [Libya](#) was divided between the [French](#) and [Brits](#), but was soon given independence. Near this same time, Israel was formed and the Libyans proved to join the Arab nations in protest of the formation of this state. This led to an exodus of both Jews and [Italians](#) who once lived in Libya. With the exodus of these people, the new country was left with very few educated people, nearly no healthcare, and a struggling economy.

In the 1960s oil finds were beginning to be exported, improving the economy, but most of the profits stayed in the hands of the government leadership and the Italians who remained behind in [Libya](#) as many people saw no benefit to this new source of income. This tension rose until 1969 when the government was overthrown.

The new leader after the coup was Muammar Gaddafi, who led the country from 1969 until his overthrow in 2011. Gaddafi began as a welcomed change as he used the country's oil money to improved infrastructure, education, and healthcare. He also worked with [European](#) countries and the [United States](#), but he quickly closed his country off and viewed violence as an effective solution to many domestic issues he was facing. He openly spoke out against Israel, began wars with Chad and [Egypt](#), and neglected the economy as freedoms ceased. In 2011 the people rose up and overthrew Gaddafi and his government.

Today the country's future is uncertain as violence is still widespread and a transitional government is attempting to control the country.

## **Dress & Behavior**

As a primarily Muslim country, there are a number of religious laws which should be obeyed by everyone in [Libya](#), including tourists.

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It is considered inappropriate for women to leave their hair uncovered, however this has almost entirely changed in [Libya](#), especially among foreigners. Women covering their heads will show great respect to their culture, however most Libyans understand if you don't cover your hair.

Both women and men are expected to cover their legs and shoulders; showing your knees can be offensive. 3/4 length pants, like Capris and short sleeve shirts are only looked down upon by strict Muslims, however wearing full length pants and long sleeves at all times is the best course of action. Staying at a seaside resort often times allows these rules to be ignored, but follow the example of locals in these places.

Islamic law forbids pork products and alcohol. Being a fairly liberal Muslim country, drinking alcohol is not completely unheard of by the locals, but public drinking or intoxication is strictly forbidden. Pork products are difficult to find in [Libya](#) since there is little market for pork. Avoiding these foods is easy due to its inaccessibility. To learn more about dining etiquette in Libya, continue reading below.

# Food

## Dining Etiquette

If you're lucky enough to be invited to a [Libyan's](#) home, dress conservatively as the people are generally conservative Muslims and showing legs or arms can be deemed inappropriate. Once you enter the house, remove your shoes and greet every person individually, beginning with the elders. Men will shake hands with other men, but women should be careful when and if they make physical contact with men. Among more conservative families women should not make physical contact with men so let the local women offer their hand first and only follow suit if they initiate this contact. Women should offer to help in the kitchen if you are dining in a local's home, but many times your host will turn down your offer.

Depending on the individual family or company you are dining with, men and women may eat separately, or if in a restaurant at different sides of the table, so let your host seat you. Some people may wash their hands prior to eating, but more commonly, after being seated a bowl of perfumed water will be passed around the table. This is more for symbolic cleansing than actual washing as you're expected to dip three fingers on your right hand into the water (your left hand should not be placed in the water). You may also find that the tables are low and the chairs non-existent, as sitting on the floor is common in [Libya](#).

Once seated, many locals will say a pre-meal prayer. Once you actually begin eating, the place setting will look similar to that of [Europe](#) as you'll have a spoon, fork, and plate. If you need to use your hand to eat, or even just in concern to holding your fork or spoon, only use your right hand.

You will most likely be offered more and more food and do accept a second helping as your host will view this as a compliment. Once you are finished, leave a small amount of food on your plate to show your host has provided more than enough. But as you finish, leave some

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room for dessert, as sweet pastries are common and although these are small, they can be filling. After or with dessert green tea will almost definitely be served, although coffee is also a common post-meal beverage.

## History & Influences

[Libyan](#) food, much like most [North African](#) food, is based on the traditional Berber diet and what ingredients were locally available. Dates from the desert are popular, while the more fertile coast has given the people grains, olives, garlic, and lemon. Additionally, many of the desert dwellers were animal herders so the country today still retains a base of dairy products.

The first major outside influence to [Libyan](#) cuisine came with the Arabs in the 600s. The Arabs brought with them a new diet and dietary laws, since they were Muslim. Once Islam was solidly entrenched in the region and knowledge of their dietary restrictions was settled, pork products were banned and alcohol became nearly non-existent. Additionally, the Arabs introduced a number of spices and ingredients from the [Middle East](#), many of which are still regularly used today.

In the 1500s many coastal cities were taken over by the Spanish. Following this the [Turks](#) took control of the coast and maintained this control over the coastal region for a couple centuries. The Spanish had little influence on the diet, but the Turks significantly altered [Libyan](#) cuisine. The food became more Turkish as spices and dishes were introduced. Most Libyan adaptations were primarily in the form of the more [Mediterranean](#) aspects of Turkish cuisine as those foods could be produced locally in Libya.

In about 1900 the [Italians](#) colonized the region and drew up what is essentially today's [Libyan](#) borders. The Italians most significant influence came with the increased the popularity of many ingredients, such as pasta, tomatoes, and onions.

Today, [Libya](#)'s cuisine is very similar to other [North African](#) countries' as *couscous* is still the base of their diet, but [Italy](#)'s influence can't be missed in the Libyan's heavy use of olive oil.

## Staple Foods

**Couscous:** semolina, which is a made of flour; typically served with a meat or vegetable stew spooned over it

**Olive Oil:** although not a true staple food is used in nearly every dish

## Regional Varieties & Specialties

**Asida:** a traditional dessert that consists of flour dough, typically with butter or honey

**Batatan Mubatana:** fried potato filled with meat and topped eggs and breadcrumbs

**Bazin:** dough ball covered with a spiced sauce, but the sauce can vary from meat- or fish-based to vegetable-based

## Drinks

The [Libyans](#) love tea and soda. The most common teas are dark, unfiltered teas and green tea; the latter is commonly served with food. The people also enjoy soda and mineral water, which seem to be consumed throughout the day.

As a primarily Muslim country alcohol has been outlawed in [Libya](#) for a number of years.

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# Practical Information

## Visas

Many foreign nationals need a visa to enter [Libya](#), however the requirements for citizens of different nationalities varies. To learn more about who need visas, what type of visa is needed, what requirements are needed to obtain a visa, and visa costs, please visit the [Official Website of Libya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) (currently down in English; it is also available in [Arabic](#)) or contact your nearest Libyan Embassy.

## Health & Insurance

Every part of the world has different health concerns and diseases, including [Libya](#). Before traveling, consult with a physician to learn more about your destination and what steps you can take to prevent illness. At the time of writing, Libya didn't have any health immunizations that are required prior to arrival, although a number of immunizations are strongly recommended.

Many health insurance providers don't cover health care that is provided outside your home country. Before going abroad check with your health insurance to see if they cover international care. If not, consider purchasing an international medical insurance option, preferably from a company that specializes in international medical insurance.

## Transportation

Unless you're on an organized tour or working with a travel agent, you will have to arrange some transportation. The below links can greatly help you start your planning, first by finding a flight to [Libya](#), then with domestic airlines and car rental agencies. If you don't know

where to begin, try the "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" to learn competitor's prices during your trip.

**Largest International Airlines:** [Air France](#), [American Airlines](#); [British Airways](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Southern Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Emirates](#); [KLM](#); [LAN](#); [Lufthansa](#); [Qantas](#); [Singapore Airlines](#); [United Airlines](#).

**Largest Libyan Airlines:** [Air Libya](#)

**Flight & Rental Car Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Farecast.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

## Housing

Housing options are numerous in most tourist destinations, but every individual seeks out something different when it comes to housing. The below links should help you get started, with low- to high-end hotels, hostels, and camping options.

**Popular International Hotel Conglomerates:** [Accor Group](#) (various price ranges); [Choice Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range); [Hilton](#) (various price ranges); [Hyatt](#) (high-end to resorts); [InterContinental Group](#) (mid- to high-price range); [Marriott Family](#) (various price ranges); [Starwood Hotels](#) (high-end); [Wyndham Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range).

**Hotel Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

**Hostels:** Although there are many hostel websites, some of the most popular and reputable include [hostels.com](#), [hostelworld.com](#), & [hostelbookers.com](#).

**Camping:** Camping is still a foreign concept in Libya, plus camping is not safe in most locations. The desert is unforgiving, violence is

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widespread, and there are political extremists outside the major cities so setting up a tent is not a good idea.

## Opening Hours, Expenses, & Tipping

Opening hours in [Libya](#) at local shops, restaurants, and stores vary. Some open earlier or later than 9:00 am, while they are just as varied for closing times. Most people eat lunch at about noon or early afternoon, while dinner begins after work. Restaurants don't begin to fill up in the evening until about 8:00 pm, although in tourist locations, restaurants and shops tend to be open all day to cater to the foreigners. Libya typically follows a Friday-Saturday weekend.

The one time of the year that shops and restaurants are closed more often than not is during Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which rotates every year compared to the Gregorian calendar), when fasting is required from sunrise to sunset. Due to this Islamic requirement, most shops close down and it can be difficult to find an open restaurant anywhere outside major hotels catering to tourists.

Many of [Libya's](#) tourist attractions aren't overly expensive, but the more well known sights can be quite expensive and some even require that you hire a guide for your tour, making prices add up quickly and at times more expensive than a low-end hotel or hostel. Hotels prices can range from 20 dinar (\$15) for a private room or hostel bed to well over 250 dinar (\$200) in business hotels or hotels catered to tourists. Food prices also vary greatly; street food can cost as little as 2-4 dinar (\$2-3), but eating in a nice hotel restaurant can cost up to 60 dinar (\$50). Transportation in Libya is also fairly reasonable (if it's running), particularly if you travel by bus (although safety is suspect); most flights are roughly equivalent to costs associated with a flight in [Europe](#) or [North America](#) at a similar distance.

Tipping is not common in [Libya](#). The only exception to this rule is in nice hotels and restaurants catered to foreigners, particularly. In these places tips are expected in the form of about 5-10% for a meal and

about 1 dinar (\$1) a bag for bell hops. If you hire a tour guide, tips are also expected, however the amount is at your discretion.

## Crime & Safety

[Libya](#) is a country of extremes, from religious extremists to political extremists. While few of these extremists target foreigners, they create an atmosphere in which violence can break out with little to no warning. This has been especially true since the revolution began in early 2011. There are also certain cities to entirely avoid due to this same extremism so before departing for Libya check with your country's foreign (State) department for any travel warnings to Libya.

Pick pocketing is not extremely common except on crowded public transportation, so use street smarts wherever you are in [Libya](#).

Another nuance to most tourists in [Libya](#) is from tourist touts and scams, so be careful whom you trust when it involves parting with your money. If anyone who gave you assistance asks for a tip, tip at your discretion; if they provided a service to you, it is expected you tip them, although this amount does not have to be large.

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