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# Libyan Eclipse 2006



HIGHLIGHTS PACK

# Libyan Eclipse 2006

By Anthony Ham

Anthony's love affair with Libya began on his first visit in 2001, and by the time he'd finished Lonely Planet's guide to Libya a few months later, the country had won his heart. First drawn to the country by its isolation and by his experience elsewhere of the Arab hospitality that puts to shame media stereotyping about the region, Anthony quickly made numerous Libyan friends and set about pursuing his new passion with them – exploring the inexpressible beauty of the Sahara. A full-time writer and photographer, Anthony returns to Libya from his home in Madrid whenever he can and loves the fact that the world is finally discovering that Libya is so much more than Colonel Gaddafi.

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Eclipse predictions courtesy of Fred Espenak, NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center.

For more information on solar and lunar eclipses, see Fred Espenak's eclipse home page: <http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/eclipse.html>.

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## Destination Libya

Libya is everything you could want a Middle Eastern destination to be.

First and foremost, it’s a crossroads of history, continents and ancient empires, home to the Mediterranean’s richest store of Roman and Greek cities – Sabratha, Cyrene and, above all, Leptis Magna – each of which is overlaid by remnants of Byzantine splendour. It’s a place where history comes alive through the extraordinary monuments on its shores. Every corner of cosmopolitan Tripoli resonates with a different period of history. It’s where the Sahara meets the Mediterranean.

Libya is also home to the Middle East’s most exceptional and accessible desert scenery. The Sahara engulfs over 90% of the country, offering up vast sand seas the size of small European countries. Visit the enchanting oasis towns of Ghadames and Ghat where the caravans once showcased the riches of Africa. Marvel at palm-fringed lakes surrounded by sand dunes in the desert’s heart. Be bewitched by extinct volcanoes, such as Waw al-Namus, where black sand encircles multicoloured lakes. Go deeper into the desert and experience Jebel Acacus, one of the world’s finest open-air galleries of prehistoric rock art.

Until recently, Libya was the Middle East’s best-kept secret. Now riding an exciting wave of optimism and openness, Libya is a place that will live long in the memory.

As if all of that weren’t enough, Libya’s stunning re-emergence from decades of international isolation to become one of the world’s most exciting tourist destinations now comes with added spice – the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see a total solar eclipse under clear desert skies. On 29 March, the world is coming to Libya for this unique event and it’s not too late for you to join them.

Experience the enchanting salt-lake oasis of Umm al-Maa (p23), Idehan Ubari



DOUG MCKINLAY

### THE 29 MARCH ECLIPSE – WHY LIBYA?

The solar eclipse on 29 March is destined to pass through a number of countries, among them Turkey, Niger, Nigeria, Benin and Togo, as well as a thin sliver of Egypt, a remote slice of Chad and a tiny coastal portion of the Ivory Coast. So why choose Libya as the place to see it? Many reasons.

For a start, the eclipse will reach its longest duration (four minutes and seven seconds) over Libyan territory and will spend more time passing over Libya than over any other country. Perhaps most importantly of all, however, the eclipse-viewing sites in Libya are almost entirely in remote (yet accessible) stretches of the Sahara Desert, thereby almost guaranteeing clear skies. The oft-quoted figure by tour operators (and astronomers and meteorologists) is that the chances in Libya of an eclipse undiminished by clouds is as high as 95%. When it comes to peak eclipse viewing, that's about as close as you can get to a sure thing.

The only unknowable in all desert locations is the possibility of wind-blown sand, whose effects can range from mild discomfort to view-obscuring frustrations.

The corridor of places where the eclipse is best viewed (see the boxed text, p5) lie, for the most part, a long way from Libya's premier tourist sites (one notable exception is Waw al-Namus). For this reason we suggest you use the opportunity to spend a little more time in the country to explore its extraordinarily rich collection of historical and natural sights. For suggestions see the boxed text Ideal Eclipse Itineraries, p14.

## History

From 700 BC Lebdah (Leptis), Oea (Tripoli) and Sabratha formed links in a chain of safe Phoenician (Punic) ports stretching from the Levant to Spain.

On the advice of the Oracle of Delphi, in 631 BC Greek settlers established the city of Cyrene in the east of Libya. Within 200 years the Greeks had built four more cities of splendour as part of the Pentapolis (Five Cities), which included Ptolemais (Tolmeita) and Apollonia. But with Greek influence on the wane, the last Greek ruler, Ptolemy Apion, finally bequeathed the region of Cyrenaica to Rome in 75 BC.

Meanwhile in the west, the fall of the Punic capital at Carthage (in Tunisia) prompted Julius Caesar to formally annex Tripolitania

in 46 BC. The Pax Romana saw Tripolitania and Cyrenaica become prosperous Roman provinces – Tripolitania was a major source of Rome's olive oil. Such was Libya's importance that a Libyan, Septimus Severus, became Rome's emperor (r AD 193–211). A massive earthquake in AD 365 sealed the fate of the Libyan colonies.

### THE GARAMANTES EMPIRE OF THE FEZZAN

While Europe's empires were battling over the Mediterranean littoral, an enlightened and longer-surviving indigenous empire, the Garamantes, held sway over southern Libya.

A legendary, warlike and nomadic people, the Garamantes built sophisticated settlements and for centuries mastered the desert's most precious resource – water – by utilising hundreds of *foggara* (underground channels). The community, a loosely connected confederation of tribes centred on Garama (now Germa), is credited with introducing writing, horses, wheeled-transport and camels to the Sahara and also controlled many of the ancient caravan routes across the Sahara. By AD 500 the last of the Garamantes people disappeared from Garama and from history when underground water supplies dried up.

### ISLAMIC LIBYA

In AD 533 Byzantine armies captured Libya for Emperor Justinian. With tenuous and

unpopular Byzantine control over Libya restricted to a few poorly defended coastal strongholds, the Arab horsemen of the Islamic armies encountered little resistance and by 643 had taken Tripoli and Cyrenaica.

From 800 the Abbasid-appointed emirs of the Aghlabid dynasty took their custodianship of Libya seriously, repairing Roman irrigation systems, restoring order and bringing a measure of prosperity to the region.

After Libya's flirtation with Sunnism, the Shiite Fatimid rulers in Cairo sent two tribes from the Arabian Peninsula into the Maghreb. The Bani Salim settled in Libya, particularly in Cyrenaica, while the Bani Hilal, numbering up to 200,000 families, spread across North Africa. The destruction of Cyrene and Tripoli by this unstoppable mass migration was the most effective conquest Libya had seen. The Berber tribespeople were displaced from their traditional lands and the new settlers finally cemented the cultural and linguistic Arabisation of the region.

### OTTOMAN & ITALIAN RULE

The Ottomans occupied Tripoli in 1551. The soldiers sent by the sultan to support the Ottoman pasha (governor) grew power-

ful and calvary officer Ahmed Karamanli seized power in 1711. His Karamanli dynasty would last 124 years, ruling from Tripoli's Al-Saraya al-Hamra. The Ottoman Turks finally reined in their erstwhile protégés in 1835 and resumed direct control over much of Libya.

The Sanusi Movement, led by Islamic cleric Sayyid Mohammed Ali as-Sanusi, called on the Cyrenaican people to resist Ottoman rule. The Grand Sanusi established his headquarters at Al-Jaghhub (and then later Al-Kufra) while his *ikhwan* (followers) set up *zawiyas* (religious colleges or monasteries) across North Africa and brought some stability to regions not known for their submission to central authority.

With Ottoman control tenuous at best, the Italian government sensed an opportunity. On 3 October 1911 the Italians attacked Tripoli, claiming somewhat disingenuously to be liberating Libya from Ottoman rule. The Ottoman sultan had more important concerns and ceded Libya to the Italians.

In 1922 Mussolini announced the *Riconquista* of Libya. In response the legendary Sanusi sheikh Omar al-Mukhtar became the leader of the uprising against Italian rule in Cyrenaica. He was still

### FAST FACTS

- **Area** 1,759,540 sq km
- **Capital** Tripoli
- **Country code** ☎ 218
- **Languages** Arabic, Berber
- **Money** Libyan dinar
- **Official name** Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (GSPLA)
- **Population** 5,499,074

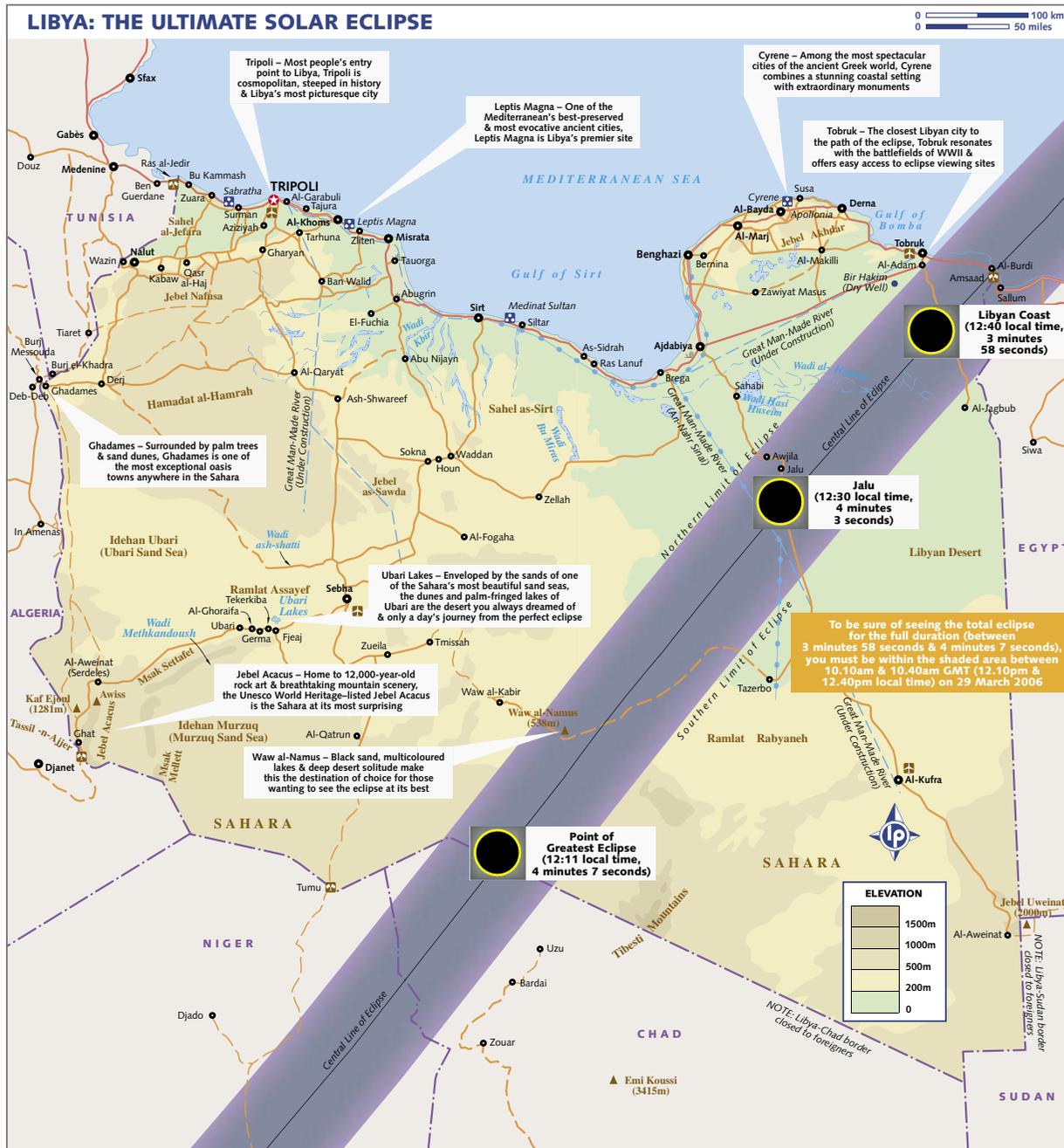
### THE BEST PLACES TO SEE THE ECLIPSE

When it comes to the prime viewing locations for the eclipse, our first choice would be close to Waw al-Namus because of the spectacular landscapes in the vicinity. If you're only coming to Libya to view the eclipse, the costs associated with reaching Waw al-Namus makes this the most expensive option, although, unlike most eclipse-only tours, it would at least allow you to see one of Libya's premier sites as an added bonus.

The area around Jalu is another popular site because it combines a desert landscape with a high probability of clear desert skies and accessibility from the rest of Libya – Jalu is five hours' travel south of Benghazi by good road. If you're viewing the eclipse here, remember, however, that only 20% of Libya is covered by sand dunes and that the path of the eclipse covers areas not renowned for their dune scenery. In this Jalu is no exception. You may be lucky depending on the selection of the site by the tour operator, but flat plains and low, scrubby sand hills are more likely than towering, curvaceous sand dunes with perfect ridgelines stretching to the horizon.

Another possibility is the region south of Tobruk, where no deep desert expedition is required. This is certainly the cheapest option (little transport is required to reach the eclipse-viewing sites) but the chances of cloudy skies, though low, are higher. Once you're a few hours away from the coast, the chance of clouds falls considerably.

Viewing the eclipse along the coast between Tobruk and the Egyptian border is also possible – the border point is very close to the site of longest duration for this part of Libya and some tours involve viewing the eclipse from cruise ships – although clouds are more likely here.



fighting at the age of 73, before being captured and hanged in Benghazi in front of his followers in 1931.

Italy's Libya policy plumbed new depths of oppression. More than 100,000 people ended up in concentration camps in eastern Libya where up to 80,000 died in squalid conditions. Some 95% of Libyan livestock was also killed. The wholesale massacring of civilians fleeing Al-Kufra was the final outrage of a ruthless occupation. A quarter of Libya's population died during the almost three decades of Italian occupation.

By 1934 Italian control extended into the Fezzan, and in 1938 to 1939 Mussolini sought to fully colonise Libya, introducing 30,000 Italian settlers, which brought their numbers to more than 100,000 (proportionally more

**THE PATH OF THE PERFECT ECLIPSE**

The places in Libya where the eclipse will be total – ie where the sun will be completely obscured by the moon – are marked on the map of Libya which appears in this guide, running roughly northeast from the Libya-Chad border to the coast where Libya meets Egypt. Within the area of total eclipse – ie the shaded area on the map – the longest duration of the eclipse will follow the line running through the centre of the shaded area. That means that if you take up a position along that central line, you will see the eclipse for the fullest possible duration of around four minutes, while if you find yourself in Awjila, for example, your eclipse experience will not last as long (between one and two minutes).

The eclipse will cross from Chad into Libya at just after 12:10pm local time on 29 March. At 12:11:18pm, the eclipse will, just a few kilometres inside Libyan territory, reach its longest duration of total eclipse: around four minutes and seven seconds. To reach the point of the longest eclipse is a major undertaking which few tour operators are contemplating. That is possibly because by the time the eclipse reaches the more accessible area around Waw al-Namus, the eclipse will still last for four minutes and six seconds.

The eclipse will spend almost 30 minutes passing across Libya and, as it moves across the country, the eclipse becomes shorter in duration. That said, by the time it reaches the Libyan coast – at around 12:40pm – it will still last a touch above three minutes and 58 seconds.

It is worth remembering also that the times mentioned here refer to the time of the total eclipse. The moments of partial eclipse – ie from when the moon commences its path across the sun (known as 1st contact) to the sun's disappearance (2nd contact), and from the sun's re-emergence (3rd contact) to the end of the eclipse (4th contact) – will begin more than an hour earlier and end similarly later than the times listed here.

### ECLIPSE TOURS – WHAT TO EXPECT

Libya is an extraordinary place that will reward those who go to see more than the eclipse, and the natural drama of the eclipse itself is almost certain to be unforgettable. Travel to Libya is only possible as part of an organised tour – for more information, see the boxed text *The Libyan Visa Shuffle*, p11.

There are almost as many possible variations on the eclipse tour to Libya as there are companies offering tours. Consequently, it's important to know what you're getting before setting out (and preferably before you make the reservation). Some operators are focusing solely on the eclipse, although the majority are offering tours that allow you to see more of what Libya has to offer – for our recommendations of making the most of your visit to Libya, see the boxed text *Ideal Eclipse Itineraries*, p14.

Given that the path of the eclipse moves across largely uninhabited areas, there is, however, one constant: you will be bussed or, on some of the more expensive tours, flown in to a site in the desert to view the eclipse.

In some cases – for example, where your eclipse-viewing site is close to Tobruk or, to a lesser extent, Jalu – the experience may involve a day trip from a base elsewhere. However, most operators with whom we spoke were planning or had begun construction of custom-built tent cities where you will sleep the night before and possibly the night after the eclipse. The advantages of this approach are obvious – travelling from a long distance away on the morning of the eclipse runs the risk of traffic congestion, transport breakdowns and other unforeseen impediments to reaching the eclipse-viewing site. Although there are exceptions – see the boxed text *Seeing the Eclipse in Style*, p22 – the downside is that the quality of the camps is likely to vary, from the simplest of Libyan army tents and portable toilets (or none at all) to well-equipped camp sites with as much comfort as is possible on a temporary site.

Beyond that do remember that Libya's tourist infrastructure will be stretched to its limit (see the boxed text *Libya, Are You Ready?*, p16) and plan accordingly – choosing an itinerary that involves sleeping at, or very near to, the site where you will be viewing the eclipse is essential to ensure that you don't find yourself stranded elsewhere at the precise moment of the eclipse.

Don't expect that you will be viewing the eclipse in ideal conditions of desert solitude. The locations for viewing the eclipse may be remote and rarely home to more than passing nomads, but on 29 March they will be inundated with tourists from around the world. If you are staying in a camp, allow plenty of time for selecting your viewing point to ensure an uninterrupted view.

than the French settlers in neighbouring Algeria).

With the onset of WWII, devastating fighting broke out in the area around Tobruk. By January 1943 Tripoli was in British hands and by February the last German and Italian soldiers were driven from Libya.

In November 1949 the UN General Assembly approved the formation of an independent state. On 24 December 1951 the independent United Kingdom of Libya, with King Idris as its monarch, was finally proclaimed by the National Assembly.

#### GADDAFI'S LIBYA

Libya's fortunes were transformed by the discovery of oil in 1959 at Zelten in Cyrena-

ica. By early 1960, 35 wells had been sunk nationwide and international oil companies clamoured to obtain exploration rights in Libya, much as they do today. Over the decade that followed, Libya was transformed from an economic backwater into one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

With regionwide political trends coalescing around the devastating 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the charisma of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, it came as no great surprise when a Revolutionary Command Council, led by a little-known but charismatic 27-year-old Mu'ammarr Gaddafi, seized power in Libya on 1 September 1969.

Riding on a wave of anti-imperialist anger, the new leader closed British and American

military bases, expanded the armed forces and closed all newspapers, churches and political parties. Some 30,000 Italian settlers were deported and their assets expropriated. The new government injected massive funds into agriculture and long-overdue development programmes with a concomitant rise in the standard of living of ordinary Libyans.

In the mid-1970s Colonel Gaddafi retreated into the desert for a period of reflection. He re-emerged clutching his Third Universal Theory, spelled out in *The Green Book*. Central to its philosophy was the aim of political participation by all Libyans rather than a representative system. Less savoury were the Revolutionary Committees who became famous for assassinating political opponents throughout Europe. Their takeover of the Libyan People's Bureau in 1984 confirmed Libya's increasing international isolation.

The US accused Libya of involvement in a string of terrorist attacks across Europe and on 15 April 1986, the US navy fired missiles into Tripoli and Benghazi. Up to 100 people were killed in Tripoli and around 30 in Benghazi. Two of Gaddafi's sons were injured and his adopted daughter, Hanna, was killed.

#### MU'AMMARR GADDAFI – MAN OR MYTH?

Libya's self-proclaimed 'Leader of the Masses' has been called just about every name under the sun. Ronald Reagan decided that the Libyan leader was a 'mad dog'. Yasser Arafat dubbed him the 'knight of the revolutionary phrases'. To trendy young Libyans in Tripoli, their leader is known simply as 'the man'.

Colonel Gaddafi was born in 1942 in the desert near Sirt to poor Bedouin parents. The future leader of the revolution was a serious, pious child who attended primary school in Sirt until the age of 14 and became the first member of his family to learn how to read and write. His childhood was a difficult one, with reports that he was ridiculed by his classmates because of his impoverished background.

Stung by these experiences, and caught up in the Arab nationalist fervour of the day, Gaddafi was politically active from an early age. After attending secondary school for a time in Sebha, he was expelled because of his political activities. In 1961 he organised a demonstration against Syria for breaking the unity agreement with Egypt and proceeded to a military academy in Benghazi, from which he graduated in 1965. In 1966 he went to England for further training – a difficult experience for the young Libyan and he quickly became embittered by the racial discrimination and prejudice he suffered.

Apart from his alternately eccentric and revolutionary behaviour, it is for his remarkable survival skills that Gaddafi will be most remembered. He is the world's third-longest serving leader (only Fidel Castro (Cuba) and Omar Bongo (Gabon) have presided over their countries for longer). His capacity to recover from bitter defeats (domestic opposition, the war with Chad and vilification by the West) and reinvent himself (eg as the saviour of Africa) is central to his endurance. As are, of course, his female bodyguards.

After Libyan agents were charged with the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie and the 1989 explosion of a French UTA airliner over the Sahara, UN sanctions came into effect. Finally, in early 1999, a deal was brokered and the suspects were handed over for trial by Scottish judges in The Hague. The sanctions, which had cost Libya over US\$30 billion in lost revenues and production capacities, were immediately lifted.

#### LIBYA TODAY

When Colonel Gaddafi's urbane, Western-educated and media-savvy son Seif al-Islam al-Gaddafi told the Davos 2005 World Economic Forum that 'the old times are finished', you could almost hear the collective sigh of relief from Libyans. Libya today is like a country awakening from a nightmare. Years of tortuous negotiations yielded a solution of sorts to the Lockerbie crisis with Libya agreeing to pay billions of dollars in compensation to families of the victims. Libya's announcement on 19 December 2003 that it would abandon its chemical and nuclear weapons programmes finally ended its international isolation. Suddenly, Libya was

the West's best friend, held up as an example to so-called rogue states across the region.

World leaders have since flocked to Libya, the US has announced plans to reopen its embassy in Tripoli and Western businesspeople are clamouring for lucrative oil contracts. The Libyan government has promised far-reaching economic reforms as part of its plans to overhaul Libya's moribund economy.

The only shadow over Libya's future is uncertainty over who will lead Libya after Colonel Gaddafi. Two of his sons – Seif al-Islam and Al-Saadi, who plays soccer for Perugia in

Italy – are the most likely candidates. Libyans prefer to hold fast to Colonel Gaddafi's public rejection of a dynasty and his statement that 'all Libyans will be president'.

### Culture

In some ways, Libyans are everything that Colonel Gaddafi isn't – reserved, famed for their tolerance, and discreet. They are open to outsiders, as devoid of hostility to the West as they are hospitable. Surprisingly knowledgeable about the world, they remain refreshingly untouched by it. You'll often hear Libyans say, 'we are a simple

people', which is true only to the extent that the old ways of decency and generosity survive. But above all, for the first time in decades, Libyans are optimistic, convinced that the future is theirs.

Life in Libya revolves around the family, a bond that took on added significance during the years of international isolation when Libyan society turned inwards in search of company and support. Grafted onto the immediate family are multiple layers of identity, among them extended family, tribe and village, with an overarching national component of which every Libyan is proud.

Perhaps more so than in any other Arab country, the role of women in Libya has many layers. Women enjoy legal equality with men, although Libya is still a deeply traditional society where men are the predominant players in public life and few women reach the summit of any industry.

Libyan society is undergoing rapid cultural change. The nuclear family, traditionally large, is being transformed as many Libyans, especially in urban areas, are opting for smaller families. Over 70% of people live in urban centres (some put the figure closer to 90%), in stark contrast to Libya's pre-oil days, when less than 25% lived in cities. Libya also has an overwhelmingly youthful population, with almost half of Libyans under 15 years of age.

Libya's demographic mix is remarkably homogenous – 97% are of Arab or Berber origin, with many claiming mixed Arab and Berber ancestry due to intermarrying between the two communities.

The Tuareg (singular: Targi) are the indigenous people of the Sahara, the bearers of a proud desert culture whose members stretch across international boundaries into Algeria, Niger, Mali and Mauritania. Libya's 17,000 Tuareg are concentrated in the southwestern desert, particularly in the oases around Ghadames and Ghat, and have strong historical cross-border links.

Southeastern Libya is home to another nomadic community, the Toubou, thought to number about 2600.

More than 95% of Libya's population is Sunni Muslim, adherents to the Maliki school of Quranic interpretation which preaches the primacy of the Quran (as opposed to later teachings) and tolerance.

### LEARNING ABOUT LIBYA

#### Websites

Libya is yet to fully embrace the Internet and good websites can be hard to find. These are some of the better ones:

- Libya Online ([www.libyaonline.com](http://www.libyaonline.com)) The most extensive directory devoted to Libyan society with a contemporary twist – everything from recipes to Libyan fashion.
- Libya Our Home ([http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dr\\_ibrahim\\_ighneiwa](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dr_ibrahim_ighneiwa)) An expansive range of links on Libya, with sections on history, the arts, sport, human rights and travel.
- Libyana ([www.libyana.org](http://www.libyana.org)) Another excellent site, devoted to Libyan arts, especially music and poetry.

#### Books

Finding high-quality reading matter on Libyan subjects is decidedly easier.

- Lonely Planet's *Libya* guide offers all you need to know about the country, while our updated *Middle East* guide (5th edition, available April 2006) includes a comprehensive chapter on Libya.
- *Difficult & Dangerous Roads: Hugh Clapperton's Travels in Sahara & Fezzan 1822-25*, by Hugh Clapperton, is a sometimes cranky, but highly readable account of Clapperton's journeys through the Libyan Sahara.
- *Libyan Sands: Travel in a Dead World*, by RA Bagnold, may only touch extremely briefly on Libyan soil, but there is no finer book evoking the Sahara's lure.
- *South from Barbary*, by Justin Marozzi, is an epic journey by camel from Ghadames to Al-Kufra and contains a wealth of historical detail.
- *African Rock Art*, by David Coulson and Alec Campbell, is a beautifully illustrated study with a section on Libya's rock art.
- *Libya: The Lost Cities of the Roman Empire*, by Robert Polidori et al, is unrivalled in its superb coverage of Libya's Greek and Roman sites, rich with detailed research and great photography.
- *The Green Book*, by Mu'ammarr Gaddafi, lays out the philosophical basis that underpins Colonel Gaddafi's Libya.
- *Libya and the West: From Independence to Lockerbie*, by respected analyst Geoff Simons, is one of the more up-to-date (2004) explorations of Libyan history.
- *Libya's Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction*, by Mansour O el-Kikhia, is a penetrating and readable account of Libya under Colonel Gaddafi.

### LIBYA'S ARAB POP IDOL

*Big Brother* may not have taken off in the Arab world, but *Superstar* – think *Pop Idol* or the Eurovision Song Contest beamed out of Beirut – certainly has. This 21-week epic, shown annually from August on the Lebanese satellite TV channel Future TV and voted for by a region-wide television audience, has rapidly become compulsory viewing; in Lebanon, the show captured 98% of the TV audience during the finals. Undaunted by Muslim clerics' condemnation of the show as an unIslamic pandering to Western culture, contestants quickly become national celebrities in their home countries – it's safe to say that when Ayman al-Aathar of Libya won the 2004 competition, Tripoli had never seen anything like it with rock-star-like adulation showered upon the winner upon his return to the country. The winner was even granted an audience with Colonel Gaddafi who was not, incidentally, a fan of such frivolities.

### Arts

Libya has a strong literary tradition that has always been highly politicised, whether during the long years of Italian occupation or under Colonel Gaddafi.

Libya's best-known writer throughout the Arab world is Ibrahim al-Kouni, whose works reveal a fascination with the desert. He has published eight volumes of short stories and a number of novels, including *The Magians* and *The Bleeding of the Stone*; the latter is a stirring ecological desert fable.

Libya's musical tradition revolves around traditional music forms, among them the celebratory *mriskaawi*, which came from Murzuq and forms the basis for the lyrics of many Libyan songs. *Malouf*, with its origins in Andalusia, is another popular form often performed on festive occasions.

Libya's best-known singer of modern music is Mohammed Hassan, whose music carries all the heartfelt passion of Arab music elsewhere; it is the subject matter (always Libyan topics), rather than the style, that marks him out as distinctively Libyan. Other well-known singers include Mohammed Sanini and Salmin Zarou.

### CHANGING MONEY IN LIBYA

The official unit of currency is the Libyan dinar. For changing cash, large denomination euros, US dollars or British pounds are the preferred currencies. No banks change travellers cheques – cash is king in Libya.

It's also now possible to obtain a cash advance on your Visa card (although not, at the time of writing, with any other card). The Masraf al-Tijara Watanmiya (Bank of Commerce & Development), with branches in Tripoli and Benghazi, is the only bank to do this.

The following were the official bank rates at the time of publication.

Country	Unit	Libyan dinar (LD)
Australia	A\$1	0.96
Canada	C\$1	1.17
Egypt	EE1	0.21
euro zone	€1	1.58
Japan	¥100	1.18
New Zealand	NZ\$1	0.90
UK	UK£1	2.32
USA	US\$1	1.22

### Environment

Libya is the fourth-largest country in Africa and over half the size of the EU. Northwestern Libya (Tripolitania) contains the fertile Sahel al-Jefara (Jefara Plain), along Tripoli's narrow strip of Mediterranean coast. The plain rises to the formerly volcanic hills of the Jebel Nafusa with an average elevation of 600m to 900m. The hills give way to a series of east-west depressions that lead into the Sahara.

In the Sahara, the *idehan* (sand seas) are interspersed with oases, lakes and wadis. The most dominant features of the Libyan Sahara include *hamada* (plateaus of rock scoured by wind erosion) and mountain ranges, such as the Jebel Acacus in the southwest and the larger massifs of the Tibesti along the border with Chad.

In Cyrenaica in the east, the low-lying terrain of the Sahara is separated from Libya's northeastern coastline by the fertile Jebel Akhdar (Green Mountains), which drop steeply into the Mediterranean from a height of around 600m.

In desert regions, there are still gazelles in remote areas, and nocturnal fennecs (small foxes with large ears) can be glimpsed if you're lucky, as can the occasional wolves. Lizards, snakes and scorpions are also quite common. The notoriously shy waddan – a large goatlike deer – can sometimes be seen hiding on the rocky ledges of the Jebel Acacus when few people are around.

Colonel Gaddafi's grand scheme to tap the vast reserves of water beneath the Sahara – the project is known as the Great Man-Made River – is keeping Libya's water crisis at bay, although the cost to the environment of doing so remains unclear. Libya's water reserves are expected to run out in around 50 years – at around the same time as the country's oil reserves.

Compounding concerns over the depletion of Libya's resources and the damage caused to the environment is the fact that Libya depends completely on fossil fuels for its power needs. Some new tourist developments are being designed with solar power as the energy source, but this doesn't go very far in terms of addressing Libya's energy imbalance.

Another major environmental problem for Libya is rubbish – lots of it. The fields littered with black plastic bags on the outskirts of most towns can somewhat diminish Libya's aesthetic appeal for many visitors.

### Getting There & Away

Major European and Middle Eastern airlines fly to Tripoli and, less often, Benghazi or Ghat. Alternatively, you can enter the country via Libya's land borders with Egypt and Tunisia or by sea on a cruise ship.

If you're collecting your visa on arrival in Libya, try to ensure that your tour company has a representative waiting for you to reduce the time they spend processing your visa.

Israeli citizens will not be issued with a visa under any circumstances, nor will those with Israeli stamps in their passport.

### Getting Around

In this era of organised tours, getting around Libya couldn't be easier because all transport within the country – air, chartered bus and 4WD – will be organised by your tour company.

### THE LIBYAN VISA SHUFFLE

Libya can only be visited as part of an organised tour. In short, visas for independent travel are simply not possible, the only exception being for those who receive a personal invitation to visit directly from an expat with residence in Libya. While independent travellers may prefer the chance to go it alone, remember that Libya is a vast country and on a tour you'll be able to cover so much more territory than you otherwise could. Remember also that organised groups can be as small as a party of one (although costs can be prohibitive) and with most tour companies you can design your own itinerary.

In order to obtain a Libyan visa, you will need to arrange an invitation from a Libyan tour company, or from a non-Libyan tour operator who will make the arrangements through their Libyan affiliates.

The tour company will then send you (or your non-Libyan tour operator) a visa number. Make sure you have an Arabic-language confirmation to smooth the process with airlines, the embassy or immigration officials. You can collect your visa either from the Libyan embassy in your home country or at your entry point to Libya, but specify which you prefer when making first contact with the tour company. The process generally takes two weeks, but allowing for a month is safer. Visas are valid for 30 days from the date of entry and you must enter Libya within 30 days of the visa being issued.

One peculiarity of dealing with Libyan tour operators directly is that the process can seem to be going along smoothly with prompt replies to your queries, only for there suddenly to be silence from the Libyan end of the line. With departure dates rapidly approaching, this can be a nerve-wracking experience, the only solution to which is dogged persistence – emails, even phone calls, just to ensure that your visa application is indeed on the right track.

A further requirement of entry into Libya is that travellers must be in possession of a minimum of 500LD in foreign currency. Those who pay all travel expenses to their tour operator or agency in advance are exempt from this requirement.

All holders of tourist visas must register with the Libyan authorities at any *jawazzat* (passport office) within seven days of arriving in the country.

It is also worth noting that the reasons for tight Libyan restrictions has less to do with government paranoia than the behaviour of tourists themselves. The organised-tour requirement was introduced after Western tourists were discovered leaving Libya with antiquities stolen from Libya's ancient sites, among them 12,000-year-old rock art chipped away from the mountains of the Jebel Acacus in Libya's southwest.

Libya's domestic airline network is expanding rapidly with flights connecting Tripoli to Benghazi, Ghat, Houn, Lebreq (near Al-Bayda) and Sebha. From Benghazi, there are also flights to Sebha and Al-Kufra. Expect, however, for these to be booked out months in advance before the eclipse.

### Eclipse Tour Operators

Any reputable tour operator organising tours to Libya is planning special eclipse tours, although most are combining the day of the eclipse with a longer week or two-week tour around Libya's sites.

Choosing between a Libyan and a non-Libyan company is a matter of personal choice. Libyan companies, many of which are extremely professional, are often cheaper

than non-Libyan companies – the latter can only operate through local affiliates, thereby adding an extra layer of cost – but a non-Libyan company will take away the hassle of organising your own visa (see the boxed text The Libyan Visa Shuffle, above, for details) and other bureaucratic difficulties in dealing directly with Libya yourself.

### NON-LIBYAN TOUR OPERATORS

**Bestway Tours & Safaris** ([www.bestway.com](http://www.bestway.com))

**Eclipse City** ([www.eclipse-city.com](http://www.eclipse-city.com))

**Eclipse of the Sun** ([www.eclipse-of-the-sun.com](http://www.eclipse-of-the-sun.com))

**Explore** ([www.explore.co.uk](http://www.explore.co.uk))

**Explorers** ([www.explorers.co.uk](http://www.explorers.co.uk))

**Innovations in Travel** ([www.innovationsintravel.com](http://www.innovationsintravel.com))

**Responsible Travel** ([www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com))

**SITA World Travel** ([www.eclipssetours.net/index.htm](http://www.eclipssetours.net/index.htm))

## LIBYAN TOUR OPERATORS

Although many Libyan operators have websites, few if any have been updated for the eclipse. The best approach is to contact the company directly to ask for more details.

**Al-Muheet Tours** (in Benghazi ☎ 061-9082084;

[www.almuheettours.net](http://www.almuheettours.net))

**Destination Libya** (in Tripoli ☎ 021-4779854;

[www.dlibye.com](http://www.dlibye.com))

**Robban Tourism Services** (in Tripoli ☎ 021-4441530;

[www.robban-tourism.com](http://www.robban-tourism.com))

**Sahara Link Travel** (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3343209;

[saharalink@hotmail.com](mailto:saharalink@hotmail.com))

**Shati Zuara Travel & Tourism** (☎ 0913158229;

[info@shati-zuara.de](mailto:info@shati-zuara.de))

**Sukra Travel & Tourism** (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3340604;

[www.sukra-travel.com](http://www.sukra-travel.com))

**Taknes Co** (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3350526; fax 3350525)

**Wings Travel & Tours** (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3331855;

[www.wingstours.com](http://www.wingstours.com))

**Winzrik Tourism Services** (in Tripoli ☎ 021-3611123;

[www.winzrik.com](http://www.winzrik.com))

## TRIPOLI & THE NORTHWEST

### TRIPOLI

☎ 021 / pop 1.15 million

Set on one of North Africa's best natural harbours, Tripoli (Al-Tarabulus in Arabic) exudes a distinctive Mediterranean charm infused with a decidedly Arab-Islamic flavour. Tripoli is Libya's largest and most cosmopolitan city and with such a rich mosaic of historical influences – from Roman ruins and artefacts to the Ottoman-era medina – Tripoli is a revelation for most travellers.

Tripoli has worn many guises throughout history. The Oea of Roman antiquity yielded to an Islamic city and by the end of the 17th century, Tripoli was Libya's only city of size with over 30,000 inhabitants. The disparate civilisations that have occupied Tripoli have all left their mark on this sophisticated modern city that beats with an ancient heart.

Tripoli is a long way from the path of the perfect eclipse (see the boxed text *The Perfect Eclipse*, p5). But it's most people's entry point for arriving in Libya and if you needed the eclipse as an excuse for coming to Libya, Tripoli may be just the first of many stunning Libyan discoveries.

### Sights

One of the finest collections of classical art in the Mediterranean is housed in Tripoli's **Jamahiriya Museum** (☎ 3330292; Martyrs Sq; adult/child 3/1LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Sun). Built in consultation with Unesco, it's extremely well designed and provides a comprehensive overview of all periods of Libyan history.

If time is limited, you may want to restrict yourself to those galleries that provide context to the places you're most likely to visit. Most of the galleries are located on the ground floor, which covers, among other subjects: **Saharan rock art** (Gallery 4); the **Garamantian empire** of Wadi al-Hayat (Gallery 5); artefacts from **Cyrene** and **Greek Libya** (Galleries 7 and 8); and the exceptional displays covering Roman **Leptis Magna** and **Sabrattha** (Gallery 9). On the 2nd floor, the sections on **Islamic architecture** (Galleries 15 to 19) and the **Libyan ethnographic exhibits** (Gallery 20), with some fine sections on Ghadames, are also excellent.

The museum once formed part of the 13,000-sq-metre **Al-Saraya al-Hamra** (Tripoli Castle or Red Castle; ☎ 3330292; Martyrs Sq; adult/child 3/1LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue-Sun), which represented the seat of power in Tripolitania from the 7th until the 20th centuries. Tripoli Castle has a separate entrance.

Tripoli's whitewashed **medina** is an evocative place where modern Libya barely encroaches. The first fortified wall around the medina was built in the 4th century, while further ramparts and reinforcements were added by subsequent occupiers to safeguard the city from seaborne attack. The layout follows the blueprint of the old Arab city and although much modified, its design has changed little. Most of the public buildings, houses and 38 mosques in the medina date from the Turkish period.

The **Arch of Marcus Aurelius**, the only intact remnant of the ancient Roman city of Oea, was completed in AD 163 to 164. It stood at the main crossroads of the Roman city and provided an entrance from the harbour. One reason for the preservation of the arch is that an ancient prophecy foretold terrible punishments for anyone who removed a stone.

The 19th-century **Gurgi Mosque**, the last mosque built in Tripoli under the Turks, has one of the most beautiful interiors in

the city with imported marble pillars from Italy, ceramic tilework from Tunisia and intricate stone carvings from Morocco.

Not far from the mosque, the **Old British Consulate** (Sharia Hara Kebir; admission 2LD, camera/video 2/5LD; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu) housed Her Majesty's representatives from the second half of the 18th century until 1940. In addition to diplomatic representation, the consul's representatives used their position to launch expeditions into the Sahara with an eye on lucrative trade routes. With a marble-paved courtyard and elegant Moorish archways, it's one of old Tripoli's most attractive buildings.

In the same area, the **Old French Consulate** (Zenghet el-Fransis; admission 2LD, camera/video 2/5LD; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu), dating from 1630, is set around a compact, high-walled courtyard complete with some fine tilework and wooden doors around the perimeter. Not far away, the 16th-century **Draghut Mosque** has elegantly rendered pillars and arches (15 in the prayer hall alone).

Just south of the Roman Column Crossroads, in the centre of the medina, the 19th-century **House of Yusuf Karamanli** (admission 2LD, camera/video 2/5LD; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu) has another fine courtyard and ethnographic exhibits from the period.

The largest mosque in the medina, with a beautiful octagonal minaret, the richly decorated **Ahmed Pasha Karamanli Mosque** was opened in the 1730s. The intricate carvings around the five doorways and 30 domes suggest a high level of Moroccan and Andalusian influence.

### Sleeping

**Buyut ash-Shabaab** (Central Youth Hostel; ☎ 4445171; fax 3330118; Sharia Amr ibn al-Ass; dm HI members/nonmembers 4/6LD) The location here is ideal and the shared bathrooms are fine, but otherwise this hostel is a pretty basic place.

**Funduq Bab al-Jadid** (☎ 3350670; fax 3350670; Sharia al-Corniche; s/d with private bathroom 30/40LD) With a good seafront location, this popular place is outstanding. It has small but spotless and well-appointed rooms.

**Funduq al-Andalus** (☎ 3343777; [www.andalushotel.com](http://www.andalushotel.com); Sharia al-Kindi; s/d 50/60LD) It can be hard to choose between the new private hotels springing up around Tripoli, but our favourite is Funduq al-Andalus, which is just the sort of place that Tripoli, and indeed Libya,

### HOTEL PRICES DURING THE ECLIPSE

At the time of writing, room prices at Libyan hotels for the weeks surrounding the eclipse were a closely guarded secret, although most hotels with whom we spoke agreed that prices would rise, temporarily, as a reflection of the unprecedented demand. While you're unlikely to see a hotel bill – tour operators pay the hotels directly – when calculating costs, remember that prices listed here may not apply come the last week in March 2006.

has been crying out for. It has all the necessary bells and whistles – satellite TV, mini-bar, air-conditioning – but the decoration is more stylish than most and the service is attentive. The location, a 10-minute walk to Martyrs Sq and the medina, is also ideal.

**Funduq al-Deyafa** (☎ 4448182; [diafatip@hotmail.com](mailto:diafatip@hotmail.com); Sharia al-Raza; s/d 40/50LD) A good choice in the same area as Funduq al-Andalus, Funduq al-Deyafa is friendly, although the rooms lack character. The bathtub in most rooms is also a plus. It's a well-run place that's worth every dinar.

**Funduq Tebah** (☎ 3333575; [www.tebah-ly.com](http://www.tebah-ly.com); Sharia al-Raza; s/d 40/50LD) Similarly impressive, this place has very tidy rooms with exactly the kind of attention to detail that government hotels lack.

**Funduq Bab al-Bahar** (☎ 3350676; fax 3350711; Sharia al-Corniche; s/d/ste 60/75/120LD) The Bab al-Bahar is anything but the five stars it claims to be. The rooms are fine and most afford terrific views over the town or Mediterranean, but the service is woeful. That notwithstanding, it's a favourite of tour groups and probably not bad value for money.

**Corinthia Bab Africa Hotel** (☎ 3351990; [tripoli@corinthia.com](mailto:tripoli@corinthia.com); Souq al-Thulatha; d €225-250, junior ste €275-450) A towering temple of glass and elegance, this is Libya's classiest hotel. The rooms are enormous and luxurious, the restaurants of the highest order and the service everything you'd expect for the price. The hotel has a business centre, conference facilities, two swimming pools, a gymnasium, an exclusive spa and plans for wi-fi Internet connection in every room. Credit cards are also accepted. All of which adds up to Libya's premier address.

### IDEAL ECLIPSE ITINERARIES

You could, of course, just go to Libya, see the eclipse and then return home, but that would be akin to visiting Paris for the first time without seeing the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre. The following suggestions should help in choosing your tour operator and itinerary.

#### One Week

With just one week to spare for your Libya sojourn, you'll be able to enjoy **Tripoli**. It deserves as much time as you can give it but one day would allow you to spend time exploring the medina and world-class museum, which are must-sees. Another day could be devoted to the ruins of **Leptis Magna**, which are beyond compare. Once you factor in the travelling time required to reach the **eclipse-viewing sites** in the country's east – a minimum of two days' travel to/from Tripoli – and a day at the eclipse site itself, your time is probably up. If you find yourself with an extra day to spare at the end, the ruins of **Sabratha** make an easy and infinitely rewarding day trip from the Libyan capital.

#### Two Weeks

Two weeks is really the minimum time required to get the most out of Libya. In addition to **Tripoli**, **Leptis Magna** and **Sabratha**, you could make a dash for **Ghadames**, allowing you to step back in time in one of the Sahara's most impressive oasis caravan towns. Unless you're travelling by chartered flight, it's a two- to three-day round-trip (including time in Ghadames itself) but worth every second. You could use the rest of your additional week heading for Libya's northeast en route to the eclipse, pausing for a night in pleasant **Benghazi** and taking a day to explore each of the ancient cities of **Cyrene** and **Apollonia**, with their evocative traces of Greek, Roman and Byzantine splendour. These ancient cities also have the advantage of being closer to the path of the perfect eclipse than the sites in Libya's west.

An alternative itinerary for those who prefer a mix of ancient cities and Sahara Desert immersion would be to spend two days in **Tripoli** and **Leptis Magna**, followed by a quick stop at the **qasrs of the Jebel Nafusa** en route to **Ghadames**, before launching into the **Sahara** – three days crossing the **Hamadat al-Hamrah** and the western reaches of the **Idehan Ubari (Ubari Sand Sea)**; two to three days amid the astonishing cathedral of stones that is the **Jebel Acacus**; a day or two around the picturesque **Ubari lakes** framed by sand dunes in the Idehan Ubari – and on to the corridor of eclipse sites further east.

#### Three or Four Weeks

An extra week or two would allow you to see the best there is to see in Libya without feeling that you're doing so at an unseemly rush. Combining both of the two-week itinerary alternatives would probably account for an extra week, but you could also squeeze a poignant detour to the former battlefields of **Tobruk** in the north (the closest Libyan city to the eclipse's path) and more time in **Wadi Methkandoush** or the less-frequented **Idehan Murzuq** in the south. **Waw al-Namus** – a remote volcanic crater deep in the Sahara's heart that seems to belong to another world – could be the perfect base for viewing the eclipse.

### Eating

Most of Tripoli's best and most atmospheric restaurants are in the medina.

**Athar Restaurant** (☎ 4447001; meals 17-20LD; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This excellent place, next to the Arch of Marcus Aurelius, has a wonderful location and some of the outdoor tables (almost impossible to snaffle on a warm evening) are among the most pleasant in Tripoli. The food is high quality and ranges from more traditional couscous or *tagen* (a

lightly spiced lamb dish with a tomato-and-paprika-based sauce) to mixed grills and fish. Visa cards are accepted.

**Mat'am ash-Sharq** (Mat'am al-Bourai; ☎ 0913157772; Sharia al-Halqa; meals from 10LD; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Above one of the liveliest thoroughfares in the medina, this bright and busy restaurant has basic décor, but excellent food. Its speciality is the delicious *rishda* (noodles with chickpeas and onions) and, for the more adventurous, *osban* (sheep's stomach filled with

liver, kidney and other meat, rice and herbs, and steamed or boiled in a sauce), which is a Libyan favourite.

**Mat'am Obaya** (Obaya Seafood Restaurant; ☎ 0925010736; Souq al-Turk 114; 🍴 lunch Sat-Thu) This is the sort of place that Lonely Planet authors hesitate to include in a book for fear that they can't get a table next time they visit. It's small with no pretensions to luxury, but there's no finer seafood in Libya and all of it's home-cooked. The stuffed calamari is the tastiest restaurant dish you'll find and the shola fish with sauce is not far behind. Expect to pay no more than 10LD for one of these main dishes, the octopus salad and a drink. Exceptional.

The area sprawling east of Martyrs Sq is awash with restaurants.

**Haj Hmad Restaurant** (☎ 0913136367; Sharia Haity; meals from 8LD; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Haj Hmad is a great place to enjoy traditional Libyan dishes heavy on internal organs, feet and heads. But there are plenty of nonoffal dishes (including fish and beans) to choose from and it's popular with locals – always a good sign.

For a totally different eating experience, head 5.5km east of the port along the road to Tajura where there's a ramshackle fish market. Choose the fish or other seafood that you want, buy it and then take it to one of the basic restaurants where they'll grill it for you for a small fee (around 1.50LD). The most pleasant place to eat your meal is **Seawaves Restaurant** (☎ 0925061406); you could also try **Mat'am Shira'a** (☎ 0913206971).

### LEPTIS MAGNA

Leptis Magna (Lebdah in Arabic) is the most impressive Roman city outside Rome and its evocative coastal location make this *the* must-see in Libya. Leptis Magna would have been a great place to live and is a testament to extravagance with abundant examples of lavish decoration, grand buildings of monumental stature, indulgent bath complexes and forums for entertainment. Regardless of whether Libya was having an eclipse, Leptis Magna on its own would be sufficient reason to start planning a visit to the country.

Visit the impressive ruins of the ancient theatre in Leptis Magna



JANE SWEENEY

## LIBYA, ARE YOU READY?

The eclipse – and the expected tenfold increase in tourist arrivals which is expected to accompany it – comes at the best of times and the worst of times for Libya.

In the past five years, Libya's profile as a tourist destination has been slowly building as the country has gradually opened up after decades of sanctions and international isolation. As Libya began its long road from pariah state to international acceptability, airlines began offering direct flights to Tripoli and tourist arrivals have grown steadily, although figures have rarely surpassed 20,000 visitors a year. The number of tour operators and hotels has also grown.

However, since Colonel Gaddafi's dramatic announcement in December 2003 that he was renouncing his programmes aimed to produce weapons of mass destruction, tourist arrivals in Libya have grown from a trickle to a steady stream increasing by between 50% and 100% annually. That the eclipse should come at such a time provides a massive boost to Libya's tourism industry and the wider Libyan economy, offering as it does the chance to showcase Libya's considerable charms to an increasingly less-sceptical world.

And yet, more than a few Libyans are concerned that the eclipse comes too soon for the country's tourism infrastructure to be able to cope. The projected one million visitors in one week in March 2006 does indeed pose a major challenge for a country more accustomed to dealing with between 80,000 and 100,000 visitors in an entire year. Problems include a dire shortage of hotel beds (often acute under normal conditions), tourist buses and other transport. The eclipse itself is less of a problem – tour operators are constructing tent cities in the desert along the line of the perfect eclipse – but with most international visitors arriving in Tripoli or Benghazi and requiring long-distance transport to the camps, some tour operators fear a chaos of double bookings and stranded travellers. More reputable operators with whom we spoke are, with a rueful eye on lost profits, restricting their bookings to their capacity to cope. But others, keen to cash in on the spectacular potential of the eclipse, are making wholesale bookings and hoping for the best.

Although there is no foolproof way of ensuring that you don't encounter problems, confirm your arrangements in advance more than once (eg call the hotels directly to ensure that you do indeed have a bed for the night) and get detailed itineraries from your tour operator. Choosing an itinerary with a strong desert component – sleeping on the sand and under the stars requires no advance reservation – also limits your exposure to double-booked hotels.

With plenty of advance warning of the eclipse – and hence time to prepare – it could just be that Libya pulls it off without a hitch. But as one Tripoli-based owner of a tour company told us, 'what a pity the eclipse didn't choose to come a few years later.'

Leptis Magna was founded by Punic settlers, but came into its own after it came under the Roman sphere of influence in 111 BC. The city was raised to prominence under Emperor Augustus (r 27 BC–AD 14) when the city was laid out in Roman style and adorned with monuments of grandeur. It soon became one of the leading ports in Africa, an entrepôt for the trade in exotic animals and locally grown olives. Leptis became Africa's premier Roman city during the reign of Leptis' favourite son, Septimius Severus, Rome's first African emperor who ruled the entire empire from AD 193 to 211.

The **Arch of Septimius Severus** is a grand introduction to the architectural opulence of Leptis. Built in AD 203 to mark the

emperor's visit to his native city, its Corinthian columns and relief carvings of the great events of the Severan era are breathtaking.

The arrival of water (via aqueduct) and marble in Leptis early in the 2nd century AD prompted Emperor Hadrian to commission the superb **Hadrianic Baths**, which became one of the social hubs of the city. The baths were opened in AD 137. The *natatio* contained an open-air swimming pool paved with marble and mosaics. Off the *natatio* was the grandest room of the baths complex and one of the most splendid in Leptis – the **frigidarium** (cold room). Eight massive cipolin columns nearly 9m high supported the vaulted roof, the floor was paved with marble and the roof adorned

with brilliant blue-and-turquoise mosaics. The niches around the walls once held more than 40 statues, some of which are in the museums in Leptis and Tripoli.

East of the **palaestra** (sports ground) and Hadrianic Baths is the **Nymphaeum** (Temple of Nymphs) with its superb façade of red-granite and cipolin columns.

Septimius Severus' audacious transformation of Leptis involved reconfiguring the heart of the city, moving it away from the old forum to the new one that bore his name. The open-air **Severan Forum** measured 100m by 60m and its floor was covered with marble. In the great tradition of Roman city squares, Septimius Severus' forum was once surrounded by colonnaded porticoes. On the façades between the arches were Gorgon heads, of which over 70 have been found.

The **Severan Basilica**, 92m long and 40m wide, ran along the northeastern side of the Severan Forum and served as the city's House of Justice. Begun by Septimius Severus and completed by his son Caracalla in AD 216, it contains extravagantly sculpted

pillars at either end honouring Liber Pater (Dionysius) and Hercules.

The **old forum** of Leptis Magna was the centre of Leptis from the 7th century BC until the early Roman era when it formed the monumental heart of the building projects by Emperor Augustus. Paved in AD 2, it was surrounded by colonnaded porticoes on three sides, contained three temples and was home to the **Curia** (Senate House; 2nd century AD).

The **port**, another key element of Septimius Severus' vision, contained a **lighthouse** that was once more than 35m high and may have rivalled the more-famous Pharos of Alexandria. The reason the buildings of the **eastern quay** are still relatively intact is that the port was hardly used. Soon after its construction, the harbour silted up and it is now covered by vegetation.

The **market** is one of the most unusual and attractive of the Leptis monuments, with two reconstructed octagonal halls where stalls were set up to sell the bounty of Leptis farmers and fabric merchants. First built in 9 to 8 BC,

## ECLIPSE SAFETY

The most important thing to remember about viewing the eclipse safely is that any period of looking directly at the sun – whether there is a solar eclipse or not – can be harmful to your eyes. The dangers include retinal burn (sometimes called 'eclipse blindness', which can be temporary or permanent), cataracts and accelerated ageing of the eye's outer layers. If your eyes are being damaged by the sun, you may not necessarily feel any discomfort at the time, only discovering later that your eyes have sustained potentially irreparable damage.

According to NASA, the only time when the sun can be viewed in safety is when it is completely obscured by the moon during a total solar eclipse. In other words, viewing the total eclipse is safe during the four minutes when the sun is hidden, but the periods when the sun is visible – even partially, with only 1% of the sun visible – are extremely dangerous to your sight.

The safest way to view the sun during the partial phases of the eclipse is through what is known as projection (such as a pinhole projector) or through the use of filters that contain a thin layer of chromium alloy or aluminium. A safe solar filter should allow through less than 0.003% of visible light. Shade Number 14 welding glasses provide that level of protection. Other possible means of protection include specially designed eclipse glasses (usually a cardboard frame with the required filtering material) or certain telescope filters. Sunglasses are not sufficient.

Do not count on any of these forms of protection being available in Libya, although some tour operators assured us that they would be provided.

For building your own pinhole projector or for more detailed information on viewing eclipses, the following websites are good places to start:

<http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/SEhelp/safety2.html>

[www.bbc.co.uk/science/space/solarsystem/sun/viewingtips.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/space/solarsystem/sun/viewingtips.shtml)

[www.eclipse99.com/safety.html](http://www.eclipse99.com/safety.html)

[www.perkins-observatory.org/eclipsesafety.html](http://www.perkins-observatory.org/eclipsesafety.html)

the market was rebuilt during the reign of Septimus Severus.

Leptis' **theatre** is one of the oldest stone theatres anywhere in the Roman world and is the second-largest surviving theatre in Africa after Sabratha. Begun in AD 1 to 2, its most striking feature is the stage with its façade of three semicircular recesses surrounded by three-tiered fluted columns dating from the era of Antoninus Pius (AD 138–61). The stage was adorned with hundreds of statues and sculptures that included portraits of emperors, gods and wealthy private citizens.

The evocative **amphitheatre** once held 16,000 people and was hollowed out of a hill, 1km east of the port in the 1st century AD. The **circus**, below the amphitheatre, dates from AD 162. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, it was home to chariot races attended by up to 25,000 people.

The **museum** is very well organised with labels in both English and Arabic. To see the museum properly, allow a minimum of two hours. Particularly fine galleries include

Rooms 4 to 7 (Roman triumphal arches with wonderful statues and busts from Leptis), Room 8 (artefacts from the Hadrianic Baths), Room 10 (theatre) and Room 11 (Severan Forum).

## SABRATHA

📍 024 / pop 102,037

The ruins of the ancient Roman city of Sabratha, 80km west of Tripoli, are among the highlights of any visit to Libya, especially as it is home to one of the finest theatres of antiquity.

Although Sabratha reveals strong traces of Greek and Punic rule, its golden age – sandwiched between two earthquakes – was unmistakably Roman. After the first earthquake, in the 1st century AD, the city's architects turned towards Rome for inspiration, resulting in the Roman character so strongly evident today. Sabratha's heyday was during the reigns of the four Roman emperors Antoninus Pius (AD 138–61), Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (AD 161–80), Lucius

Aelius Aurelius Commodus (AD 180–92) and Septimus Severus (AD 193–211). Although it never competed in significance or grandeur with Leptis Magna, it was given the coveted title of *colonia* (colony) in the 2nd century AD. Sabratha was destroyed in AD 365 by an earthquake.

Guides (50LD) are compulsory for entrance to the **ancient city** (📍 622214; admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; 🕒 8am–6.30pm).

The **Roman Museum** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; 🕒 8am–6pm Tue–Sun) contains some wonderful mosaics and frescoes. It's close to the site entrance. The nearby **Punic Museum** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; 🕒 8am–6pm Tue–Sun) probably appeals only to those with a specialist's interest in the city's earliest history.

Heading northwest into the monumental heart of Sabratha, the 24m-high **Mausoleum B** (Mausoleum of Bes) is one of the few remaining Punic structures in Sabratha. After passing through the 6th-century **Byzantine Gate**, pause at the elevated **Antonine Temple**, dedicated to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius. The temple offers superb views from the top.

The **Judicial Basilica** (Basilica of Apuleius of Madora or House of Justice) was originally built in the 1st century AD as a Roman court. Most of what remains dates from around AD 450 when the Byzantines converted it into a basilica.

Sabratha's Roman **forum** formed the centre-piece of the ancient city and served as a market and public meeting place where the news of the city was disseminated. Overlooking the forum is the 1st-century **Capitoleum**, also known as the Temple of Jupiter or Zeus, the principal temple of the city and the soapbox of choice for the great orators of the era.

On the northern side of the forum is the **Curia** (Senate House), which was the meeting place of the city's magistrates and senators. East of the Curia is the **Temple of Liber Pater** (Temple of Dionysius; 2nd century AD). Dedicated to one of the most revered gods of Roman Africa, it was second only to the Capitoleum in the hierarchy of temples in Roman Sabratha.

Immediately east of the Curia are the **Temple of Serapis** and the 6th-century **Basilica of Justinian**, one of the finest churches of Byzantine Sabratha. The buildings around the Basilica of Justinian date from the

1st century AD when the city was still primarily Punic in character.

East of Sabratha's centre is the outstanding **theatre**, the jewel in Sabratha's crown. Begun in AD 190 under the reign of Commodus and in use until AD 365, its auditorium once measured 95m in diameter. As such, it was the largest theatre in Africa. The three-tiered façade behind the stage is one of the most exceptional in the Roman world, with alcoves and 108 fluted Corinthian columns that rise over 20m above the stage and are adorned with exquisite carvings of Roman divinities. The front of the elevated stage is simply magnificent.

A pleasant hike off to the northeast takes you to the once-lavish **Baths of Oceanus** and the superb 1st-century **Temple of Isis**, one of Sabratha's finest and dedicated to the Egyptian goddess Isis, the protector of sailors.

## QASRS OF THE JEBEL NAFUSA

The barren Jebel Nafusa (Western Mountains) protect Libya's northeastern coast from the Sahara, which stretches away deep into the heart of Africa from the mountains' southern slopes. It's a land of rocky escarpments and stone villages clinging to outcrops high above the plains.

Although the scenery throughout the jebel is superb, the undoubted highlight is the otherworldly Berber architecture which rises up from the stones like something out of a *Star Wars* film set. Most of the fortified granary stores, known as *qasrs*, date from the 12th century and have stood the test of time remarkably well.

### Qasr al-Haj

The small village of Qasr al-Haj has one of Libya's most spectacular examples of Berber architecture. The circular and completely enclosed **fortified granary** (admission 2LD; 🕒 daylight hr) is an extraordinary structure that has stored the local harvests since the 12th century. The main courtyard is breathtaking with the walls completely surrounded by 114 cavelike rooms – exactly the same number as there are suras (chapters) in the Quran.

Constructed entirely from local rock, sun-dried mud brick and gypsum, the cool storage areas, sealed with doors made of palm trunks, warded off insects, thieves and inclement weather alike. Rooms below

Marvel at the exquisite carvings of Roman divinities at the well-preserved theatre of Sabratha



ground were used to preserve olive oil; the above-ground rooms customarily housed barley and wheat.

### Kabaw

The pleasant Berber town of Kabaw is set among rolling hills and is home to another superb *qasr*.

Known locally as the *ghurfas*, Qasr Kabaw is over 700 years old and one of the oldest in the region. Smaller and less uniform than the one at Qasr al-Haj, Qasr Kabaw is nonetheless captivating, with a wonderful medieval charm. None of the storage rooms remains in use and the gate is permanently left open.

In April every year – ie not long after the eclipse – Kabaw hosts the **Qasr Festival**. The festivities celebrate the unique heritage of the Berber people of the area, with particular emphasis on Berber folklore. Important local ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals and harvests, are re-enacted by people in traditional dress.

### Nalut

📍 0470 / pop 66,228

At the more-barren, western end of the Jebel Nafusa, the regional centre of Nalut boasts yet another exceptional Berber *qasr* and is a good place to break up the long journey from Ghadames to Tripoli.

Perched on a rocky bluff overlooking the western mountain valleys, **Qasr Nalut** (admission 1LD; 🕒 daylight hr) has the most captivating setting of any in Jebel Nafusa, surrounded by the uninhabited remains of the village that cling to the edge of the steep hillside.

Built in AD 1240, Qasr Nalut has the feel of a small, fortified village. Rather than facing onto an open courtyard, the rooms are tightly packed and overlook two narrow thoroughfares without any hint of uniformity. There were 400 chambers, the last of which were used in 1960.

Nalut's derelict **old town**, surrounding the *qasr*, has crumbling stone-and-gypsum houses and three old mosques. The 1312

**Alal'a Mosque** is the oldest and has low arches, a stone mihrab and a functioning well. Two old **olive oil presses** with their impressive huge circular platforms and crushing stones are also in the vicinity.

### GHADAMES

📍 0484 / pop 16,752

The Unesco World Heritage-listed old city of Ghadames has everything that you imagine a desert oasis to have – abundant palm groves, a wonderfully preserved, labyrinthine old town and a pace of life largely unchanged for centuries. It's an extraordinary place.

Like most of Libya's major tourist attractions, Ghadames is many desert miles distant from where the eclipse will be at its best. However, coming to Libya and not visiting Ghadames could just represent one of life's great missed opportunities.

### Sights

**Old Ghadames** (adult/child 3/1LD, camera/video 5/10LD) is another world of covered alleyways, whitewashed houses and extensive palm gardens irrigated by wells.

The old city of Ghadames comprised loosely configured concentric areas containing residential and commercial districts and covering around 10 hectares. The city was divided into seven 'streets', each the domain of a different subsection of the Bani Walid and Bani Wazid tribes. Each 'street' was essentially a self-contained town, with a mosque, houses, schools, markets and a small communal square for public events.

The designers of the **traditional houses** of Ghadames made maximum use of vertical space and visiting one is a must. Eye-catching with whitewashed walls and brightly painted interiors, all of the houses were connected. The rooftops were the domain of women in the same way that the public laneways below belonged to men. At least three of the old houses have been stunningly restored and opened to the public: **Dan Do Omer** (📞 62300; dandoomer731@yahoo.com); Dan Bero (ask at Dan Bero Coffee Shop) and Dan Magrumah. Talk to your guide about arranging a visit.

Apart from the houses, it's the overall experience – a town that time forgot, your way lit by shafts of natural light – that will live longest in the memory. Specific sights to watch out for include the distinctive **palm-trunk doors**; delightful **Tingazin Square**, at

once intimate and picturesque; and **Ghazar Square** with its alcove niches and encircling balcony. Take in the ancient **Yunis** and **Atik Mosques** in the main square, which also houses a niche, **Al-Kadus**, from where water was drawn and distributed across Ghadames. **Maziqh Square**, with its arched alcoves, is overlooked by two fine mosques.

**Ghadames Museum** (📞 62225; adult/child 3/1LD, camera/video 5/10LD; 🕒 9am-1.30pm Sat-Thu) has five sections devoted to everything from Roman artefacts to more-recent ethnographic displays. Highlights include the famous embroidered slippers of Ghadames; huge copper keys and padlocks, the like of which are still used in the old city; a large selection of folk medicines; old black-and-white photos of Ghadames; and Tuareg handicrafts.

### Sleeping

One solution to Ghadames' shortage of beds is the prevalence of villas – homes that operate like bed-and-breakfast places. All offer kitchen facilities and charge 20LD (including breakfast). These include **Villa Ab-dealmoula** (📞 62844; villa\_moula@yahoo.com), **Villa**

Explore the spectacular Berber architecture of the fortified granary store, Qasr Kabaw

ANTHONY HAM



### THE LURE OF THE LIBYAN SAHARA

Southern Libya is engulfed by the Sahara and is home to some of the most spectacular and diverse desert scenery anywhere in the world. The majestic dunes of the Idehan Murzuq and Idehan Ubari (Murzuq and Ubari Sand Seas) cover thousands of square kilometres, and deep valleys conceal idyllic, palm-fringed lakes. In the Jebel Acacus, breathtaking rock formations of the once-volcanic mountains rise starkly from the sands and conceal carvings and paintings dating back 12,000 years. Off to the southeast, Waw al-Namus is an astonishing volcano featuring stunning scenery amid a horizon that never seems to end.

With the exception of Waw al-Namus, the path of the eclipse on 29 March is far from some of the Libyan Desert's most alluring locations. But to see the moon pass across the sun in the emptiness of the Sahara and then set out in search of palm-fringed lakes, sand dunes and mountains of incomparable beauty and a volcanic crater like no other is one of the great African journeys.

**Tantawi** (☎ 62205) and **Red Villa** (☎ 0912133524; fax 021-4778225).

**Youth Hostel** (Buyut ash-Shabaab; ☎ 62023; dm HI members/nonmembers 3/5LD) Ghadames' youth hostel is basic, has small rooms and is plagued by problematic plumbing, but for this price you can hardly complain.

**Funduq Kasser El-Deawan** (☎ 63350; fax 041-634115; s/d/tr 30/40/50LD) Almost as far south as you can go in Ghadames (which isn't far), this new place is outstanding with its spacious, well-appointed rooms with satellite TV. There are plans for expansion.

**Al-Waha Hotel** (☎ 62569; fax 62568; s/d 30/40LD) Rooms here are simple and the bathrooms could do with an overhaul but it's comfortable and a favourite of tour companies.

**Winzrik Motel** (☎/fax 82485; camping/s/d 5/30/35LD) The closest hotel to the entrance to the old city, this comfortable place has spotlessly clean rooms that are better kept than other Winzrik hotels in Libya.

## Eating & Drinking

**Restaurant Awwal** (☎ 62429; meals 12-15LD; ☎ lunch & dinner) The only problem with the Awwal is that it's so good most of the other restaurants in town have closed. Its chicken and lamb dishes are great, as is the service. There's an enormous garden, which is an ideal place to pass a summer Ghadames evening. It's located at the main intersection.

The ultimate eating experience in Ghadames is lunch in one of the traditional houses of the old town. The most frequently prepared meal is the delicious *fitaat* (lentils, mutton and buckwheat pancakes cooked together in a tasty sauce in a low oven and

eaten from a communal bowl with the hands). Eating this wonderful meal amid an evocative atmosphere is a highlight. **Dan Do Omer** (☎ 62300; dandoomer731@yahoo.com) does this to perfection.

In the old city, it's hard to tear yourself away from the **Dan Bero Coffee Shop** (☎ 9am-midnight), which has a delightfully shady palm garden, friendly, laid-back owners and great tea and coffee. There is no finer place to pass a hot Ghadames afternoon.

## THE SAHARA

### SOUTH FROM GHADAMES

Tracks lead south across the Hamadat al-Hamrah, a featureless rocky plateau that separates northern Libya from the sand dunes and rocky mountain ranges of the south; all tour companies can arrange such expeditions.

The most popular route from Ghadames skirts the Algerian border all the way from Ghadames to Ghat, gateway to the exceptional Jebel Acacus. The journey takes a minimum of two to three days with the second day passing through the western reaches of the Idehan Ubari (Ubari Sand Sea) with its towering dunes.

### IDEHAN UBARI & THE UBARI LAKES

The Idehan Ubari (the eastern stretch of which is known as the Ramlat Dawada) is a dramatic sea of towering sand dunes, shadowed to the south by Wadi al-Hayat (Valley of Life). While elsewhere many oases of the Sahara have been consumed by

### SEEING THE ECLIPSE IN STYLE

Most of the tour operators organising eclipse tours to Libya operate on the same principle: camps in the desert custom-built for the event. One tour operator, however, stands out.

**Eclipse City** ([www.eclipse-city.com](http://www.eclipse-city.com)) brings together an obvious passion for eclipse viewing with experience in organising eclipse tours to remote places as inaccessible as Antarctica. One of the earliest companies to get started with selecting its viewing sites and obtaining the notoriously slow Libyan government permits, Eclipse City, working with their Libyan partners, Winzrik Tourism Services, have chosen three sites. The most impressive of their three camps – the other two are south of Jalu and south of Tobruk – is close to the majestic Waw al-Namus and boasts not only one of the longest eclipses possible (around four minutes six seconds) but also camps of unrivalled luxury. The tents come with toilets and air-conditioning, transport to the remote desert location is via charter plane, and entertainment has been laid on from lectures and cultural performances to hot-air balloon rides and desert expeditions.

### THE ROCK ART OF THE LIBYAN SAHARA

The rock art of the Jebel Acacus and Wadi Methkandoush have an almost whimsical beauty, combining a childlike understanding of the natural world with extremely skilful artistic ability. The local Tuareg believe that the ancient artists saw their art as a school for their descendants, a record of what they saw and how they lived.

The Sahara had a temperate climate from 10,000 BC until 2500 BC. The rock art spans the following periods, thereby depicting humankind's changing relationship with nature. The paintings and carvings you're likely to see fall into five distinct historical, and therefore stylistic, periods:

**Wild Fauna or Early Hunter Period** (10,000–6000 BC) Characterised by the portrayal of elephants, giraffes and Barbary sheep from the time when the Sahara was covered by the plentiful savanna.

**Round Head Period** (8000–6000 BC) Known for human figures with formless bodies and painted circular heads devoid of features; its later stages feature more-decorative figures adorned with headdresses and unusual clothing.

**Pastoral or Bovidian Period** (5500–2000 BC) Charts the gradual transition from temperate to arid climate with human figures shown in positions of dominance over the natural world (spears, domesticated cattle and ceremonies in keeping with more-settled communities).

**Horse Period** (1000 BC–AD 1) Horses and chariots reflect more-sophisticated transport and human movement and human figures are represented by two triangles with a circular head.

**Camel Period** (200 BC–present) Camels replace wild and domesticated cattle.

Please leave the paintings and carvings as you find them. That seemingly obvious point is lost on a small minority of travellers whose greed to take home the perfect gift has placed the rock art under threat. Wetting the rock to enhance a photograph can also cause irreparable damage.

sprawling towns, the salt lakes of the Idehan Ubari still provoke that sense of awe that only water in the desert can inspire.

There are at least 11 lakes in the area. Although many have dried up and most require longer expeditions, three pretty lakes – **Mavo**, dramatic **Gebraoun** and the enchanting **Umm al-Maa** (Mother of Water) – are easily accessible and majestically beautiful at sunset.

Swimming in the buoyant waters surrounded by sand dunes and palm trees is one of the great desert experiences; Gebraoun is the best lake to swim in due to the proximity of a freshwater well to wash off the sand. Camp Winzrik, on the northern shore of Lake Gebraoun, has some skis and a snowboard (5LD) available, so you can try the exhilaration of dune skiing.

One final point: if you're considering sleeping by the lake shore, remember that mosquitoes will ruin the experience – camp nearby in the sand for an undisturbed night's sleep.

### GHAT

☎ 0724 / pop 24,347

The ancient trading centre of Ghat is one of the most attractive of the Libyan oasis towns. There's an evocative mud-brick

medina in the heart of town and a superb setting: a backdrop of stunning sand dunes, the dark ridges of the Jebel Acacus to the east and the distant peaks of the Tassili-n-Ajjer (in Algeria) to the west. Although it never rivalled Ghadames in size, Ghat's strategic location as the only significant town in the region ensured that it played a critical role in the ebb and flow of Saharan conflicts and trade.

### Sights

Ghat's compact **medina** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD) is a fine example of an ancient Saharan town. It was built by the Garamantians in the 1st century BC as one in a chain of fortified oases that afforded protection to merchants as they crossed the desert in their caravans, but most of what's visible originated in the 12th century. Largely deserted, it has some haunting remnants of its former role as the lifeblood of the surrounding desert. There's an ancient **well**; crumbling **mud-brick houses** with **palm-trunk doors**; a 9th-century **mosque**; and a ziggurat-like **former congress building** where public meetings were held. Fine views can be had from a Turkish-Italian **fort** that rises above the town.

## Sleeping & Eating

Most visitors to Ghat stay in one of the camps – **Anay Camping** (☎ 2622; fax 2479), Rifa as-Sahara Camp, or Tuareg Camping – all of which have simple thatched huts, kitchens and charge 15LD per person including breakfast; you can also pitch a tent for 5LD.

## THE JEBEL ACACUS

The Jebel Acacus is an otherworldly landscape of dark basalt stone monoliths rising up from the sands of the central Sahara. This Unesco World Heritage-listed area is home to some wonderful scenery, which features a number of unique natural rock formations enhanced by the ever-shifting sands of the desert, not to mention prehistoric rock paintings and carvings including elephants, giraffes, wedding ceremonies and dancing human figures.

The possible routes for exploring the Acacus region are endless, although the most usual starting points are Ghat and Al-Aweinat. Places you won't want to miss

include the awe-inspiring 150m-high **Natural Arch**, the **Awiss** region, the fine rock art of **Wadi Anshal** and **Wadi Tanshal**, the relief of **Imenineh well**, and the prolific rock art of the beautiful **Wadi Tashwinat**.

## IDEHAN MURZUQ

For many travellers the Idehan Murzuq is the sand sea of which they have always dreamed, if only because it's less frequented than the Idehan Ubari. This incomprehensibly vast mountain range (over 35,000 sq km), made entirely of sand, is simply breathtaking with dunes rising hundreds of metres. The northern face of the sand sea rises up from the impossibly barren Murzuq Plateau; myriad wavelike ridges, sculpted by the wind, ascend to razor-sharp summits. From a distance during the heat of the day, the Idehan Murzuq shimmers pale yellow in the haze. As the sun lowers, the undulations in the midst of the dunes change into subtle yet magical plays of light and shadow.

Watch an awe-inspiring sunrise over the otherworldly landscape of the Jebel Acacus

DOUG MCKINLAY



## PHOTOGRAPHING THE ECLIPSE

Although it is not necessary to use an expensive or professional camera for taking good photographs of the eclipse, there are some basic guidelines which should be followed:

- Use reasonably fast film (eg 400 ASA)
- Do not use a flash
- Turn off your auto-focus and focus on infinity
- At the moments when the eclipse is partial, you must use a solar filter
- Remove your filter for the period of total eclipse (ie when the sun is totally obscured)
- Plan in advance whether you want the eclipse to fill the frame (for which you'll need a strong zoom lens) or whether you wish to include the landscape in your shot – depending on your decision, keep the necessary lenses on hand to allow quick changeovers
- If you're not shooting digital, make sure you have abundant film on hand – you will almost certainly take more photos than you planned
- Use a tripod to aid longer shutter speeds and to cope with the weight of zoom lenses during the minutes of the total eclipse
- Make sure the tripod is on sturdy ground and use a cable release to minimise possible camera shake
- For the purposes of practising taking photos of an eclipse, the light during the total eclipse is roughly equivalent to a night with a full moon

For more detailed advice on photographing the eclipse, selecting a safe solar filter and using telescopes, the following resources are recommended:

- <http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/SEhelp/eclipsePhoto.html>
- <http://www.eclipse-chasers.com/ecphot.htm>
- *The Cambridge Eclipse Photography Guide: How and Where to Observe and Photography Solar and Lunar Eclipses*, by Jay M. Pasachoff and Michael A. Covington; it may be 12 years old, but it's still the best technical guide around for photographing eclipses.

## WADI METHKANDOUSH

Wadi Methkandoush, accessible from both Germa (150km) and the Jebel Acacus, has one of the richest concentrations of **prehistoric rock carvings** in the world. Most of the carvings in the soft sandstone date back at least 12,000 years, making this one of the oldest rock-art sites in Libya. This open-air gallery contains hundreds of carvings of animals, including wild cattle, giraffes, hippopotamuses, elephants, ostriches and rhinoceroses.

## WAW AL-NAMUS

The extraordinary extinct and steep-sided volcanic crater of Waw al-Namus is a weird-and-wonderful place and one of the most remote destinations in the world. Better still, depending on the eclipse calculations you are using, Waw al-Namus falls either within or very close to the path of

the total eclipse. If we could choose one base for the eclipse on 29 March, we would choose Waw al-Namus.

Waw al-Namus is 300km southeast of where the paved road ends at Tmissah. The black-and-white volcanic sand is stunning, as are the three palm-fringed lakes in which the water is red, green and blue. The crater is 7km in circumference and the summit of the rocky mountain in the centre affords stunning views. Not for nothing is Waw al-Namus known as the Crater of the Mosquitoes, so bring repellent and don't even think of camping in the crater. Also be sure to use the existing tracks down into the crater to avoid scarring the landscape for others.

Visiting here is a major undertaking and involves a two-day round trip in reliable, well-equipped vehicles. The road east from Zueila goes as far as the tiny town of

Tmissah (76km). Thereafter, it is unsurfaced for about another 100km to Waw al-Kabir, an army camp with showers and basic meals. Beyond Waw al-Kabir are two army checkpoints, including one just before you arrive at Waw al-Namus; dropping off cigarettes and reading matter is much appreciated by the bored conscripts manning them. A permit is officially needed to visit Waw al-Namus, but this should be handled by your tour company and the price included in the overall cost of your tour.

You may be thinking that this is a lot of trouble and expense just to see a crater, but this is not a place you'll easily forget.

## EASTERN LIBYA

### BENGHAZI

☎ 061 / pop 650,629

Libya's second-largest city makes a comfortable base for exploring the ancient cities of eastern Libya and is a likely staging post en route to viewing the eclipse. The area around Benghazi is thought to be the site of the legendary garden of Hesperides, from the Greek myth of the golden apples, but its ancient sites were all but destroyed during WWII. As such, it lacks both the cosmopolitan charm of Tripoli and its obvious historical interest. However, its convenient location, pleasant climate and friendly people go some way towards compensating.

### Sights

Benghazi's **Old Town Hall** runs along the western side of **Freedom Square**. It's largely derelict but strong traces of its former elegance remain in its whitewashed Italianate façade, which has some lovely arched doorways and pillars. The balcony played host to its share of important orators, among them Mussolini, Field Marshal Rommel and King Idris.

The covered **Souq al-Jreed** stretches for more than a kilometre and, like any Middle Eastern market worth its salt, it offers just about anything you could want and plenty that you don't, including 'anything you want, one dinar'.

### Sleeping

**Buyut ash-Shabaab** (Youth Hostel; ☎ 2234101; dm Hl members/nonmembers 3/5LD) Benghazi's well-run

youth hostel, behind the sports stadium, is basic but most rooms are well maintained and there are a few family rooms. It's a popular place, so book ahead.

**Funduq an-Nadi Libya** (☎ 3372333; fax 3372334; Sharia Ahmed Rafiq al-Madawi; s/d 25/40LD) This place, 3km north of the centre, is excellent and has comfortable, quiet and spacious rooms with satellite TV.

**Funduq al-Fadheel** (☎ 9099795; elfadheelhotel@hotmail.com; Sharia el-Shatt; s with city/sea view 37/40LD, d/ste from 55/60LD) Built in 2003, this is one of the best hotels in Libya. The pleasant rooms are spacious, well appointed and come with facilities for which you'd pay triple the price elsewhere: balconies, a barber, laundry service, two restaurants (meals from 20LD to 25LD), swimming pool, large-screen TV, computers with wi-fi Internet (7.50LD per 24 hours) in all suites, and an Internet café. Service is professional and you can pay with Visa.

**Qaryat Qar Yunis as-Siyahe** (Qar Yunis Tourist Village; ☎ 9096903; www.tourist-village.com; Sharia Qar Yunis; s/d/ste incl breakfast from 27/38/60LD, chalet/apt/villa from 20/25/50LD) Six kilometres south of Benghazi, this enormous tourist village has a range of high-quality accommodation, from spacious hotel rooms (some with renovated bathrooms) to recently built villas by the beach. There's also a children's funfair. It's a terrific base for Cyrenaica.

**Funduq Uzu** (☎ 9095160; www.uzuhotel.com; Sharia al-Jezayir; s with/without lake view 60/50LD, d 75/65LD, ste 100-220LD) One of Benghazi's top hotels, Funduq Uzu has superbly appointed rooms with all the requisite bells and whistles. The buffet breakfasts are among the best in town.

**Funduq Tibesti** (☎ 9090017; fax 9098029; Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser; s with/without lake view from 80/75LD, d from 115/100LD, ste from 150LD) On the northern side of the harbour, this is another classy hotel with a luxurious ambience. Facilities include a patisserie, health club, three coffee shops and four restaurants. Visa card is accepted.

### Eating

**Mat'am al-Kabir** (☎ 9081692; Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser; meals 18LD; ☎ lunch & dinner) The friendly service and bright atmosphere complement the excellent banquet-style Turkish meals, which have all the usual accompaniments.

**Mat'am Gharnata** (☎ 9093509; Sharia Jamal Abdul Nasser; meals 15-17LD; ☎ lunch & dinner) The food

and service here are similarly good, with a banquet including five salads, fish and a choice of cakes.

**Mat'am Turki** (☎ 9091331; Sharia 23 July; sandwiches from 1LD, pizza 2-6LD, meals 12LD; ☎ 10am-1am) This newly opened place offers a bright and breezy mood and scrumptious Turkish food.

**Mat'am al-'Arabi** (☎ 9094468; Sharia Gulf of Sirt; meals 16.50LD; ☎ lunch & dinner Sat-Thu, dinner Fri) The upstairs eating area has a delightful ambience, with a mosaic floor, tented roof and soft lighting. This is one of Benghazi's finest restaurants, but it has an eminently reasonable price tag. Not surprisingly, it's popular with locals, tour groups and expats alike.

### CYRENE

☎ 084 / pop 43,376

The spectacular ancient city of Cyrene is one of the Mediterranean's most evocative ancient sites, combining coastal views with extraordinary Greek and Roman monuments.

Take in the majestic views from the ancient theatre in Cyrene



Founded by Greek settlers from the island of Thera (modern Santorini) in 631 BC, Cyrene was the pre-eminent city of the Greek world in the 4th century BC. It was renowned for its philosophers, astronomers, mathematicians and other scholars. After the change from Greek to Roman administration in 75 BC, Cyrene became an important Roman capital.

Visiting **Cyrene** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-6.30pm) requires a guide (50LD).

### Sights

The large, open **gymnasium** was originally built by the Greeks in the 2nd century BC as the major sporting building of Cyrene. In the second half of the 1st century AD, it was converted by the Romans into a forum (caesareum; Forum of the Caesars). The **Skyrota**, the main road through the Greek city, is still lined with impressive columns bearing graven images of Hermes and Heracles. The **House of Hesycheus** contains a fine mosaic of an angel alongside an inscription

implores God to protect the women and children of Cyrene.

The **agora** was the heart of ancient Cyrene, serving as a public square, a forum for orators, a market and a magnet for the powerful people of the day. Many civic and religious buildings were clustered around the agora, among them the **Temple of the Octagonal Bases** (2nd century AD), the striking **Naval Monument** (3rd century BC) and the unusual **Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore**, the scene of a riotous, women-only annual celebration. Outside the agora's southern wall is the **Capitoleum**, the customary temple to the Greek trinity of Zeus, Hera and Athena (or, if you were Roman, Jupiter, Juno and Minerva).

The rich collection of temples, baths and other public buildings in the **Sanctuary of Apollo** includes the 6th-century-BC **Temple of Apollo**, one of the earliest temples at Cyrene, preceded by the 22m-long **monumental altar** where animals were sacrificed. Adjacent is the **Temple of Artemis**, which may predate the Apollo temple. There are fine views down over the coastal plain from here.

Just west of the sanctuary is the spectacularly situated **theatre**, which could once seat 1000 spectators. It was originally constructed by the Greeks and probably dates from the 6th century BC, although it was much modified in subsequent centuries. The **Roman baths**, built in AD 98 to 99, contain some good mosaics and cipolin columns.

Up the hill from the rest of Cyrene is the famed 5th-century-BC **Temple of Zeus**, which was once larger than the Parthenon in Athens. Under the Romans it was used as a temple of Jupiter and it also served the Greek-Libyan hybrid deity Zeus Ammon.

Cyrene's **museum** (admission 3LD, guide 50LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Tue-Sun), south-east of the Temple of Zeus, has wonderful statues, sculptures and other artefacts that once adorned this extraordinary Graeco-Roman city.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Buyut ash-Shabaab** (☎ 637371; camping 5LD, dm HI members/nonmembers 3/5LD) The hostel is a stone's throw from the gate leading down to the ruins. It's clean, friendly and has been recommended by a number of travellers. The hot water is reliable.

**Cyrene Resort** (☎ 0851-64391; s/d with private bathroom 35/45LD) This former Winzrik Hotel,

2km northeast of the police station, is set in the fields around Cyrene. It has pleasant rooms and an excellent café and restaurant cut into one of the caves.

**Cave Restaurant** (☎ 635206; elbadertours@hotmail.com; meals from 15LD; ☎ lunch) Living up to its name, this is another cave restaurant. It's an atmospheric place offering tasty food, friendly young waiters and good views down towards the coast from the terrace.

### APOLLONIA

Another wonderful ancient Greek city, **Apollonia** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-7pm Oct-Apr) was the one-time port of Cyrene (which lies just 17km away). Apollonia came to rival Cyrene in significance in the late Roman period. Most of what remains today dates from the Byzantine era when Apollonia was known as the 'city of churches'.

Guides (50LD) are compulsory for visiting the site.

The ruins of Apollonia are strung out along a narrow strip of coastline and include the **Western Church** with its mixture of Roman and Byzantine columns. The marble floor of the **Central Church** is better preserved and some pillars bear traces of Byzantine crosses. Throughout the site, especially around the 2nd-century **Roman baths** and **gymnasium**, is strewn pottery from the Greek (black) and Roman (red) eras. Above the baths on the hill is the **Byzantine Duke's Palace**, once one of the biggest palaces in Cyrenaica, while northeast of here lies the **Eastern Church**, once the biggest church in Cyrenaica. Although this was among the earliest of the churches (5th century AD), some mosaics still remain. Remnants of the **port**, including cisterns, line the beach, while over the hill to the southeast is the plunging and picturesque **Greek theatre**.

**Apollonia Museum** (admission 3LD, camera/video 5/10LD; ☎ 8am-5pm Tue-Sun), in the adjacent village of Susa, is poorly labelled but includes the exquisite door frame from the Byzantine Duke's Palace and four mosaics found in the Eastern Church.

### TOBRUK

☎ 087 / pop 121,052

Tobruk was the scene of some of the most important WWII battles. Its main (and only) attraction is the war cemeteries – remember that Tobruk was fought over for its strategic significance, not its aesthetic beauty.

That said, the line of the perfect eclipse passes closer to Tobruk than to any other major Libyan city. As a coastal location, it is less likely to produce clear skies at the required moment. However, if you're not venturing deep into the Libyan desert to view the eclipse, Tobruk offers a more comfortable alternative.

### Sights

Tobruk's **WWII cemeteries** (admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu, 2-5pm Fri) are well maintained.

The **Knightsbridge (Acroma) Cemetery**, 20km west of town, is the largest in Tobruk. Contained within its walls are 3649 graves housing fallen soldiers from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the UK.

Between the Knightsbridge Cemetery and Tobruk is the former battlefield dressing station known as the **Australian (Fig Tree) Hospital**. The now-peaceful plains surrounding Tobruk were an ideal location for a hospital, with deep natural caves (now heavily silted up) and shelter offered by fig trees just a few kilometres from the front line. It was also connected by a ridge to the battlefields of Knightsbridge.

The **Tobruk (Commonwealth) War Cemetery**, 6km south of the harbour, also has an air

of simplicity and dignity and contains 2479 graves. The countries most represented include Australia, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK.

Most of the more than 300 soldiers buried in the **French Cemetery**, 8km south of the harbour, died in the Battle of Bir Hakim, 80km southeast of Tobruk, in May and June 1942.

The names of 6026 German soldiers are inscribed in mosaic slabs lining the inside walls of the **German Cemetery**, a forbidding sandstone fort 3.2km south of the harbour.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Funduq Qartaj** (☎ 623043; Ring Rd; tw with shared bathroom from 20LD, tw/tr with private bathroom 30/45LD) This is a fine choice, 2km northwest of the harbour. The tidy rooms are clustered in groups of three and open out onto a shared sitting room with TV.

**Funduq al-Masira** (☎ 625761; fax 625769; s/d with private bathroom 35/45LD) This concrete eyecore on the southwestern corner of the harbour also happens to be Tobruk's finest hotel. It has declined in recent years and suffers from a lack of competition. The rooms, with satellite TV, are ageing but should be comfortable for a few more years.

### LEARNING MORE ABOUT ECLIPSES

#### Websites

Internet resources for learning about eclipses are many, from homepages of eclipse-chasing enthusiasts to serious scientific endeavours. Some of our favourites:

- NASA Eclipse Home Page (<http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/eclipse.html>) Comprehensive site with sections on past and future eclipses, a map of the 29 March 2006 eclipse, some eclipse details for beginners and resources on viewing the eclipse in safety.
- Exploratorium ([www.exploratorium.edu/eclipse/](http://www.exploratorium.edu/eclipse/)) Another good site with everything from specific eclipse events to the basics of eclipse science.
- Mreclipse.com ([www.mreclipse.com/MrEclipse.html](http://www.mreclipse.com/MrEclipse.html)) Good links as well as quite detailed information on eclipses.
- Earthview ([www.earthview.com/default.htm](http://www.earthview.com/default.htm)) Handy eclipse tutorial, among other features.

#### Books

The following books may appeal to those wanting to enhance their eclipse experience with extensive background, or ideas on where to find the next eclipse.

- *Totality – Eclipses of the Sun* (Mark Littmann, Ken Willcox & Fred Espenak) The definitive guide to viewing eclipses covering everything from astronomy to eclipse minutiae.
- *Eclipses 2005-2017: A Handbook of Solar and Lunar Eclipses and Other Rare Astronomical Events* (Wolfgang Held) For those who've caught the eclipse bug in Libya.