

1,200-kilometre ribbon of mediterranean coastline crowns Algeria. Below it lie two ranges of the snow capped atlas mountains and, perhaps the greatest treasure of all, the vast Sahara.

Lying at the crossroads of the East and West, Algeria has existed as a seat of civilization since the beginning of time. The North African country witnessed successive invasions of Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks and finally the French. Each left their unique mark on Algeria and its people.

The Arabs had the greatest impact, bringing Islam in the 7th century. The French arrived in 1830 and remained until a bitter, 8-year struggle for liberation culminated in independence on July 5, 1962, with the birth of the Democratic People's Republic of Algeria.

Under the leadership of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the government is embarking on a program of tourist promotion and welcomes visitors to explore this diverse and suprising nation.

Much of the past may still be glimpsed in the gleaming white city of Algiers, founded more than a thousand years ago and the capital city for almost 500 years. Modern facades of European-style buildings face east to the blue Mediterranean. But this city grown up around an old Muslim town. The old city is dominated by fortress of the Casbah with its colourful souk (native market or bazaar) and labyrinth of crowded lanes and open stalls. In the maze of staircases, passages and croocked lanes, there are many old buildings with characteristic overhanging upper floors supported by wooden beams.

Mosques from the 11th and 17th centuries and Moorish palaces are reminders of earlier times.

Overlooking the city are the El Aurassi Hotel and historic Aldjazair Hotel, where the room in which Winston Churchill and Dwight Eisenhower met to plan the invasion of France during World War II is still preserved. The hotel, founded as the St. Georges in 1889, also has an exotic botanical garden.

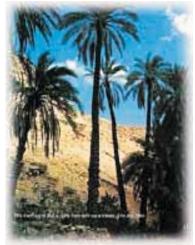
In the city, visitors may stay at the Sofitel Alger Hotel, a modern, 330-room facility overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Located close to the Hamma business centre and the Belcourt quarter, formerly home to the novelist Albert Camus, the hotel adjoins the Jardin d' Essai, created in 1832 and one of the six most beautiful botanical gardens in the world. Nearby are a shopping centre and the National Library, the largest in Africa.

The Sheraton Club Des Pins is a modern hotel on the shoreline at Algiers. The 4-Star Hilton Hotel offers 410 rooms and a full range of amenities in a suburban setting. The Mercure Hotel also provides excellent accommodations.

The relatively unspoiled shoreline is traversed by winding roads that link such luminous harbour cities as Bejaia and Skikda..

The slender steeples of the Tellian Atlas range reach to the sea.

Virgin crescents of sand nestle between rocky buttresses. Algeria's coastal region is the area of greatest cultivation, in part due to a climate tempered by the Mediterranean.



Fruit orchards and vegetables are abundant in this area, with the plateaus sufficiently well watered for the cultivation of cereals.

Tapping huge reserves of

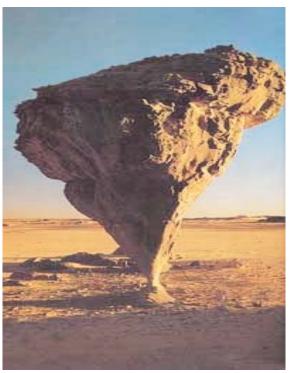
underground water, modern Algeria is greening the desert with the variety of crops.

Beyond the capital lies is a land of several distinct regions, each with its own character and attractions. Like Indonesia, the peoples of Algeria represent diversity in unity, representing different, subtly connected cultural zones. One sees a striking difference between the nomads in the Sahara, the sedentary farmers in the plateaus and the city dwellers in the nothern coastal region.

A thriving handicraft industry generates a rich variety of products, from its renowned carpets to sheet copperware and traditional Berber silverware. This is the land once traversed by legions of Rome.

The ancient Roman city of Timgad features many important Roman ruins. These archeological treasures are in excellent condition due to the low humidity; the Roman amphitheatre in the Timgad is still used for performances. Algerian museums display numerous exquisite mosaics and other artefacts.

Eighty-five percent of the nation-second largest in Africa-is made up of rugged mountain ranges. South of the coastal Tellian range is high plateau with fragrant forests of cedar and pine, eucalyptus and cork oaks. Beyond the Saharan Atlas Mountains is the gateway to the desert.



The Sahara is the largest desert in the world, considerably bigger than Brazil.

It spans 11 countries across North Africa, but it's widely held that Algeria offers best of the Sahara. The region is the country's center of wealth and is endowed with rich mineral resources, oil and gas. The word, Sahara, itself means desert in Arabic. The vast expanses of sand dunes, caressed by the wind into sensuous shapes and stark pyramids, are known as irq, oceans in Arabic.

The Sahara is a land of purity and stillness, of endless spaces and a brilliant sky. It is not all sand, harbouring open rocky spaces and spectacular mountain ranges, and it is anything but empty. It is home to more than a million Algerians, whose lives are a testimony to the adaptability of humanity.

The town of In Salah, for instance, is bisected by a creeping dune. As the

leading edge of the dune buries homes, others emerge from the trailing edge, to be re-occupied by the children and grandchildren of the original owners. The city of Ghardaia, designated by UNESCO as a world heritage site, is renowned for its teeming market.

The Sahara is home of the Tuareq nomads, cloaked in traditional blue and mythology, who have long traversed the trackless immensity of the Sahara.

Many now use their desert survival skills to guide visitors. Travel is by 4WD vehicles or on foot.

It's possible to get direct flights from Algiers and some European cities to Tamanrasset. This Tuareg city of 40,000 people, is the starting point for many desert expeditions. At 1,400 meters above sea level, it offers a mild temperature, charm and abundant places to eat and stay.

For many, the highlight of a Sahara visit is the vast Hoggar mountain range, three times the size of Java. Verdant waterfalls at the village of Tamekrest beckon. Adventurers can explore ancient rock paintings among the deep chasms and dramatic cliffs of Tassili N'Aijer, another UNESCO world heritage site. Residents of a less arid Sahara inked the stones 50 centuries before the pyramids of

> Egypt were built. Nearby is Djanet, one of the most beautiful oases of the south.

> The Hoggar Mountains themselves are gentle slopes in brown and yellow; stark spires that are remnants of the throats of volcanoes and peaks soaring to nearly 3,000 meters above sea level. Despite the region's best developed network of roads, travel might be slow because there are

many occasions to stop and view a land that is timeless, endless and constantly amazing.