



Many journeys start in the colorful capital of Algiers. The city of more than two million has one of the best vistas in North Africa. Its tumble of houses and apartments blanket a rocky hillside overlooking the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean



People gather at a market in Ghardaïa, a town in the Sahara.

Sea. Not only is Algiers the center of Algerian politics, it is also the country's cultural hub, with many theaters, art galleries, and movie houses. The city offers an exciting mix of architecture, including French colonial neighborhoods from the 1800s and shiny, sun-catching domes on ancient mosques, Muslim houses of worship. People sometimes have to squeeze tightly through narrow alleys in the old district, the Kasbah, but they can stroll leisurely in the city's beautiful palm-fringed parks. The glittering Bay of Algiers provides a harbor for luxury yachts and sturdy freighters. Outdoor cafés are packed with businesspeople discussing their latest plans over tea. Kids run around everywhere, dashing out on errands or heading to school. The honks of car horns mingle with calls to prayer from mosque towers. The bustle of daily life is constant in Algiers.

A man works in his garden in Djanet, an oasis in southeastern Algeria. Most Algerians who live in the Sahara live in oases.



It is quieter in the farm country outside the capital. Some squat villages stand next to vineyards and vegetable gardens on the flatlands along the seacoast. Others sit on the high plateaus where sheep and goats bound over the rough terrain. Going higher into the Atlas Mountains, the wind sings a cold, hard song. On the far side of the peaks is the desert, with mile after mile of barren rock and shifting dunes. The journey south from Algiers takes travelers past ruins of ancient marble temples and once-gilded palaces all the way to remote oases, where water is more valuable than gold. In the desert, three-axle low-bed



Ruins still stand from the ancient city of Djemila, which the Romans founded about two thousand years ago. It is one of dozens of settlements the ancient Romans founded in what is now Algeria.

trailer trucks roar past lumbering camels. Freight is hauled along the long Trans-Sahara Highway all the way to the Niger border at I-n-Guezzâm.

Algeria has long been a crossroads of ideas, philosophies, dreams, and desires perfumed by the sweet scent of flowering jasmine and iris. Dirt-smudged oil field workers from dozens of countries mingle with nomadic herders. On city sidewalks, women in traditional clothing pass others wearing the latest European styles. Arabic, French, Tamazight, Chaouiâ, and Tamahaq swirl in a heady mix of languages.

The lively beat of the city, the vibrant combination of cultures, and a fascinatingly varied landscape make Algerians proud of all their country has to offer.

Land of Sun and Sand

ALGERIA BOASTS MANY DRAMATIC AND BEAUTIFUL landscapes, from the lovely Mediterranean coast to the steep Atlas Mountains to the immense Sahara Desert, with its shifting sand and searing sun.

Seven countries border Algeria. It shares its longest border—1,180 miles (1,900 kilometers)—with Morocco to the west. Western Sahara and Mauritania are also to the west; Mali and Niger lie to the south; and Libya and Tunisia to the east. The blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea lie to the north.

Algeria is the largest nation in Africa and the tenth-largest country in the world by area, covering 919,595 square miles (2,381,740 square kilometers). It is roughly 3.5 times the size of Texas.

Opposite: Some parts of the Sahara are sandy, while other parts are covered in rock or gravel.