

FRENCH LINK ABROAD

DJIBOUTI, EAST AFRICA,
Former French colony

A CITY STATE WITH A DESERT HINTERLAND, Djibouti lies in northeast Africa on the strait joining the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Djibouti's strategic location near one of the world's busiest shipping lanes and close proximity to the Arabian oilfields make the port of Djibouti a busy refueling station on the Red Sea.

Name of Country: Republic of Djibouti
Formerly known as French Territory of the Afars and Issas, French Somaliland.

Size: Approximately 8,950 sq miles. (23,200 square kilometres)

Population: 600,000 (estimated) 250,000 in its capital, Djibouti. The rural people are mostly nomadic.

Language: French and arabic are the official languages. Somali and Afar are also spoken.

Currency: Djiboutian Franc. (DF)

Religion: 94% Muslim. 6% Christian.

Climate: The country is described as being one of the hottest spots on earth. Djibouti only receives an estimated 5 inches of rain annually. Due to the extreme climate, nearly 90% of the country is desert wasteland. Although the country is very dry, it does suffer flash floods every few years.

Time zone: 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

Brief History: Islam came to the area in the 9th century. France acquired a port in 1862 and established the colony of French Somaliland in 1888. In the 1950's and 1970's, the Afar tribe and Europeans voted to remain French, while the Issas (Somalis) voted for independence. In September of 1977, the territory became the Republic of Djibouti. The new state - one party only from 1981 to 1992 - suffered drought and ethnic unrest but the political tensions have now been resolved. The present 65-member Chamber of Deputies and a President are elected by universal adult suffrage - respectively for five and six years. France finances one-third of government expenditure, but Djibouti also receives aid from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Geography: Djibouti is a low-lying desert - below sea level in two basins - but rising to 6,768 ft (2062 m) in the North. It has no permanent crops, no forests or woodlands and only 9% of the land is used for meadows and pastures.

Tourism: Flying over Lake Assal, a crust of gypsum and salt flanked with black lava is an unforgettable experience. The daily milking of dromedary camels is also popular with tourists.

Celebrity: Arthur Rimbaud worked in Djibouti in 1880. The famed poet sold arms, ivory, coffee and slaves. There, he acquired a fatal disease and returned to Marseille where he died at the age of 37.

