AFRIQUE UNIE · TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Djibouti in 8 days: a day-by-day itinerary

A small country with vast landscapes, Djibouti can be explored in a week: the capital and its markets, the whale sharks of the Gulf of Tadjoura in winter, Lake Assal, the lowest point in Africa, the Day Forest in the Goda Mountains, then the smoking chimneys of Lake Abbe. Most of the country is at heightened vigilance, but all travel is advised against near the Eritrean border and on the road to Loyada, towards Somaliland: this route avoids them. Check your government's official travel advice before you leave.

Day by day

Day 1 · Djibouti City, the capital on the gulf (night : Djibouti)

On arrival in Djibouti, start with Menelik Square and the European quarter, with its white arcades and Moorish-style facades. Then walk towards the central market and the African quarter, where stalls of fruit, spices and fabrics mingle, and the Hamoudi Mosque. Late in the day, head to the seafront for the evening light over the gulf. If you have time, the Decan Refuge, south of the city, takes in rescued wild animals; do not continue beyond it towards Loyada, a road where all travel is advised against. It is hot even in winter: drink plenty and protect yourself from the sun.

Day 2 · Whale sharks and islands of the Gulf of Tadjoura (night : Djibouti)

The Gulf of Tadjoura is famous for the whale sharks that gather there during the winter, roughly from November to February, west of Arta and at the entrance to the Ghoubbet. A half-day boat trip lets you snorkel alongside them; choose an operator that keeps its distance and limits the number of swimmers. Out of season, or in the afternoon, take a trip to Moucha and Maskali islands, under an hour by boat from the capital, for their beaches and coral reefs. Avoid, however, the Seven Brothers archipelago to the north, which is restricted to supervised trips authorised by the authorities.

Day 3 · Lake Assal, then Tadjoura (night : Tadjoura)

Head west to Lake Assal, about two hours from the capital. On the way, the road overlooks the Ghoubbet, an almost enclosed bay where Devil's Island rises amid fields of black lava. At 155 metres below sea level, Lake Assal is the lowest point in Africa: its dazzling white salt crust contrasts with the turquoise water and the surrounding volcanoes. Walk on the salt in closed shoes, as the crystals are sharp, and avoid the hottest hours. Then continue along the northern shore of the gulf to Tadjoura, the country's oldest town, with its white houses and many mosques.

Day 4 · The Day Forest in the Goda Mountains (night : Camp in the Day Forest)

In the morning, wander around Tadjoura, along the harbour and among its white mosques, then climb into the Goda Mountains on a winding road: allow about an hour and a half by four-wheel drive. At around 1,500 metres, the Day Forest, a national park since 1939, is one of the few wooded areas in the country, with junipers, wild olive trees and boxwood. Hike with a local guide in search of the Djibouti spurfowl, a bird found nowhere else. Spend the night in a camp of traditional huts: it is much cooler than down below. Respect the military checkpoints in the area further north.

Day 5 · Back to Djibouti City (night : Djibouti)
Drive back down to Tadjoura, then return to the capital along the Ghoubbet road in about three hours, travelling only by day. If you would rather skip part of the drive, ask about boat services between Tadjoura and Djibouti, whose frequency varies. In the afternoon, rest or enjoy a beach near the capital. In the evening, try Yemeni-style grilled fish, a local speciality cooked in a clay oven. This is also the time to prepare the next day's expedition to Lake Abbe: book a driver and a guide who know the track, and take plenty of water.

Day 6 · The chimneys of Lake Abbe (night : Camp at Lake Abbe)
Leave early heading south-west: the paved road leads to Dikhil, then a track reaches the shores of Lake Abbe, four to five hours in all. The lake lies on the border with Ethiopia: stay on the Djiboutian shore with a local guide and do not approach the border. The landscape is unreal: dozens of limestone chimneys, some several tens of metres high, rise from a plain where fumaroles steam, while flamingos feed along the shore. Sleep at the camp facing the chimneys for the sunset and, above all, for dawn, when the steam rises in the low light.

Days 7-8 · Back to Djibouti and departure (night : Djibouti)
After sunrise over the chimneys, walk among the hot springs with your guide and watch Afar herders bringing their animals to the lakeshore. Then take the track and the Dikhil road back to Djibouti, arriving in the early afternoon. On the last day, enjoy a free morning for some final shopping at the market or a swim, before heading to the airport, very close to the city centre. If your flight leaves at night, which is common, you can keep your room or plan a boat trip that same morning.

Getting around

Public transport serves the natural sites poorly: hire a four-wheel drive with a driver, essential for the Day Forest and Lake Abbe, and travel with a local guide. The main roads are paved, but do not drive after dark, and military checkpoints control some roads, especially in the north. Boat trips are booked from the capital. Check the official travel advice before you leave and follow the instructions of the Djiboutian armed forces.

When to go

The best time is from November to February: temperatures are hot but bearable, the sea is pleasant, and it is whale shark season in the Gulf of Tadjoura. March and October are already hot. From May to September, the heat becomes extreme, often above 40 °C, with a dusty wind, and trips to Lake Assal or Lake Abbe become gruelling.

Practical information

Djibouti

Entry	Depends on your passport: visiterafriqueunie.com/en/visa/djibouti/
Yellow fever	Certificate required if arriving from a risk country
Malaria	throughout the country
Currency	Djiboutian franc (DJF)
Languages	French, Arabic, Somali, Afar
Plugs	type C, E · dialling code +253 · UTC+3
Emergencies	police 17 · ambulance 21 35 09 62 ou 21 35 27 12 ou 21 35 13 51 · fire 18

Departure checklist

Documents

☐ Passport valid for at least six months after your return, with blank pages
☐ Visa or e-visa (printed if required)
☐ International vaccination certificate (yellow fever if required)
☐ Travel insurance certificate and assistance number
☐ Paper and digital copies of your passport and bookings
☐ Tickets, bookings and addresses saved offline
☐ International driving permit if you are hiring a vehicle

Health

☐ Travel consultation done and vaccinations up to date
☐ Malaria tablets if your doctor recommends them
☐ First-aid kit: plasters, antiseptic, anti-diarrhoea tablets, rehydration salts
☐ Mosquito repellent suitable for the tropics
☐ Sunscreen, hat and sunglasses
☐ Personal medication and prescriptions

Money and connectivity

☐ Bank told, Visa or Mastercard (and a backup card)
☐ Cash in euros or dollars, recent notes in good condition
☐ eSIM or local SIM card sorted
☐ Plug adapter for the country
☐ Power bank and cables
☐ Offline maps downloaded
☐ Afrique Unie app installed

In the bag

☐ Light clothes that cover up (sun, mosquitoes, places of worship)
☐ A fleece for evenings, dawn safaris and altitude
☐ Walking shoes and sandals
☐ Head torch
☐ Water bottle (ideally with a filter)
☐ Small daypack and waterproof pouches
☐ Luggage padlock

Before you close the door

☐ Your government's travel advice reread
☐ Trip registered with your consular service (if it offers this)
☐ Itinerary and contacts left with someone close
☐ Online check-in done and baggage allowance checked

Notebook made from visiterafriqueunie.com/en/itineraries/djibouti-in-8-days/ · information checked in November 2026 against official sources. Entry, health and safety rules change: check them again before you leave (your country's official advice, the embassy of the country you visit).