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Lagos at leisure

msafiri's comprehensive guide to exploring Nigeria's former capital

WORDS: NANA OCRAN

Lagos...

You can take a romantic, business or political view of Nigeria's commercial centre, but this mega-metropolis, which has been compared with New York in terms of its energy (and perhaps also for the traffic and yellow-hued taxis of both cities), goes under many guises. It's a creative hub for Nigerian literary, visual, poetic and lyrical artists – the likes of musician Fela Kuti, writer and photographer Teju Cole and Nobel Prize winning playwright Wole Soyinka. It's also an entrepreneur's paradise, where business goes on 24/7. Whatever your preference, be it hard work or hard play, this city – which is essentially split between the Mainland, Greater Lagos, Lagos Island, Victoria Island and the under construction Eko Atlantic City – has endless opportunities for you to experience all the dynamism of an alpha West African burg.



COURTESY OF LAGOSPHOTO

SHOPPING

Whether you're a big or small spender, Lagos has everything to offer, from global or homegrown brand items in stand-alone or by-appointment boutiques, to street market experiences or mega-malls where you can shop, eat and catch a film in some of the bigger outlets.

As the largest mall in Lagos, The Palms in Lekki occupies 11 acres and counting. City Plaza on Mainland Ikeja and Silverbird Galleria in Victoria Island are two other stand-out retail emporiums.

However, the open-air markets are where you can truly practise your bartering skills if you're purchasing fabric, footwear, fresh food, art, crafts or jewellery. A roll call of the best open places includes the sprawling Lekki Market (also known as Elushi or Beach Market), which is split into three sections: fresh produce, real or fake branded items and handicrafts.

Fabrics are the best thing about Balogan Market where lace and wax ankara are stacked high and wide at various stalls, and where slick tailors tout for business. Now online, Balogan offers an Amazon-style service for those too busy to actually get to the location.

In Ikeja, indoor and outdoor stalls at Computer Village do a roaring trade for those looking for desktop and laptop services, must-have chargers, software uploads and all manner of old and new hardware.

If you're leaning towards luxury, worth visiting is Temple Muse in Victoria Island. Run by brothers Avinash and Kabir Wadhvani, this gorgeously lush flagship store stocks renowned global brands in fashion, accessories, home, gifts, art and design. Also in Victoria Island, Polo Luxury takes its brands equally seriously, offering heritage items such as Breguet, Cartier and Rolex watches as well as Montblanc pens and leather goods among other global brand names.

Ikoyi is where you'll find the persistently popular Quintessence store – a favourite for African-inspired gifts, books, an in-house gallery of sculptural work by local artisans and an indoor and outdoor cafe. Nearby, The Jazz Hole is a crime to miss out on if you're in Lagos. Long established as the mainstay of Nigerian

and other African music, it's a much loved record store, bookshop, cafe, rehearsal and performance space all rolled into one. There's no doubt that Lagos is relentlessly busy and highly audible, so for calming health and beauty products, the relatively new ORÍKI outlet in Victoria Island offers botanically based, ethically sourced African luxury skin products for men and women, as well as spa treatments.

EATING & DRINKING

There's no doubt that Lagos is a cosmopolitan city and nowhere is this better demonstrated than in its food culture with plenty of cuisines to try from around the globe.

Fairly new to the scene is Ocean Basket (www.oceanbasket.com). A South African franchise, it serves up platters of fresh seafood from its three outlets across the city.

In Victoria Island, the Art Café is an excellent coffee, tea and pastries choice. A great venue for chilling out surrounded by reasonably priced arts and crafts. Vast views of the Lagos Lagoon can be had at the Sky Restaurant on the 12th floor of the Eko Hotel (www.ekohotels.com). Wonderful for sipping cocktails while you take in the vista at night, the restaurant also serves a variety of Asian fusion dishes. Got a sweet tooth? Head over to the Ice Cream Factory in Lekki (www.icf-lagos.com) for waffles, cakes, ice-cream, cheesecake and sundaes. It's like kids' central at the weekends, but be prepared to queue for your treats pretty much any day of the week.

For the best in jollof, egusi and all manner of Nigerian dishes, the perennial favourites are Terra Kulture buffet restaurant (www.terrakulture.com), Yellow Chilli (www.yellowchilling.com), Jevnik (www.jevnik.com), Bogobiri in Ikoyi and Otres in Lekki, where grassroots dishes are best experienced with another favourite – the sweet and non-alcoholic Chapman cocktail.

ACCOMMODATION

Eko Hotels & Suites

For a top end choice of where to stay while in Lagos, the Eko Hotels & Suites has

NIGERIAN FOOD GLOSSARY

BANGA SOUP

A thick beef soup made with palm oil, bitter leaf, palm fruits and pounded yam.

YAM POTTAGE

Like a smoother, heavier version of mashed potatoes.

NKWOBÌ

Usually a cow foot stew, cooked with spicy palm oil.

EDIKIAKONG (OR EDIKANG IKONG)

A thick vegetable soup made with meat and generous helpings of pumpkin and water leaves.

AFANG

Soup made from shredded water leaves and flavoured with stock and smoked fish, meat and crayfish.

EGUSI

A stew made with ground melon seeds, okra and beef, goat, fish or shrimp.



© SEATTLE GLOBALIST



ECHIZONA CHIKE-JUDENZE

Green space is hard to come by in Lagos so one natural stop is the **Lekki Conservation Centre**. One of the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) projects, it has strategically placed, raised walkways where you can spy crocodiles, monkeys, tropical birds, snakes and giant rats.



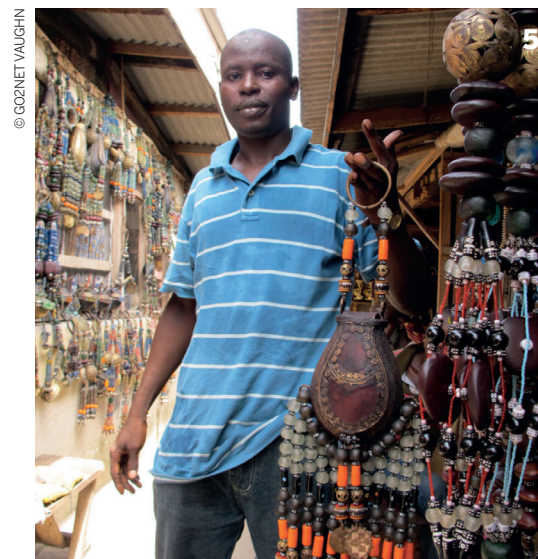
EKO HOTELS & SUITES SKY BAR



BOGOBIRI



G@TTO GIALLO



© GOZNET VAUGHN

- 1 Balogun market trader
- 2 Trader peeling oranges
- 3 Eko Hotels & Suites Sky Bar
- 4 Bogobiri House executive room
- 5 Glass bead wall hangings
- 6 Lekki Market buyers and sellers

to be right up there in terms of size and extravagance. Like a leisure and lifestyle dominion that's been planted on Victoria Island, its twelve storeys house 824 rooms spread across four hotels – each with a choice of city and sea views.

► WWW.EKOHOTELS.COM.

► CONTACT INFO@EKOHOTELS.COM FOR ACCOMMODATION RATES.

The Wheatbaker Hotel

Close to the Ikoyi Golf Club, the high-end Wheatbaker Hotel is not just a good choice for luxurious and comfy sleeping, it's often the most sought after place for high-level business meetings as well as after work chillaxing for drinks and conversation.

► WWW.LEGACYHOTELS.CO.ZA

► CONTACT INFO@LEGACYHOTELS.COM FOR ACCOMMODATION RATES.

Clear Essence California Spa and Wellness Resort

If pampering fused with quiet contemplation is what you're seeking in this city, then Clear Essence California Spa and Wellness Resort offers just such a rare commodity. Surrounded by a modestly sized garden, it's a venue for long or short stays, as well as for drop-in spa treatments that feature aromatherapy immersion and citrus rejuvenation among other soothing treatments. 18 guest rooms make this the boutique choice for those who want to retreat from the buzzing Lagos grid.

► WWW.CLEARESSENCECALIFORNIASPA.COM

► ROOMS START FROM AROUND N46,000.

Bogobiri House

If we're placing these choices in order, budget doesn't really do justice to this venue. Bogobiri House is essentially one of the most easy going and chilled out guesthouses in Lagos. With a specifically funky and grassroots Afrocentric vibe its decor features a healthy amount of heritage and homegrown materials in its 16 well-designed rooms. A hub for the promotion and appreciation of art, music and local knowledge, it's a prime meeting place, music venue and cultural stopping point – not least due to the fact that it's also home to the contemporary Nimbus Art Gallery.

► WWW.BOGOBIRI.COM

► ROOMS START FROM AROUND N32,000.

CHAPMAN COCKTAIL

This bright red, easy-to-make cocktail is a Lagos staple. A blend of sweet and bitter flavours it often comes served in a large tumbler or dimpled beer mug with cubes of ice, a straw and cucumber, lime and even bananas as garnish. Here's a recipe:

- ½ cup grenadine syrup
- A few dashes of Angostura Aromatic Bitters • 35cl Fanta Orange • 35cl Sprite
- ½ an orange • ½ a lemon
- Ice cubes. Start with the ice cubes first, then add the other ingredients layer by layer, stir with a straw and add any garnishes.



- 1 Clear Essence California Spa Suite
- 2 Generous portions at Otres restaurant
- 3 OC Ukeje in *Confusion Na Wa*, a 2013 Nigerian dark comedy drama film
- 4 Oriki's botanically based luxury skincare products
- 5 Oriki's product showroom and spa, Victoria Island
- 6 Artefacts from Quintessence
- 7 Nimbus Gallery at Bogobiri



Events, arts, culture, festivals

Events worth making time for in your social calendar...

MAY

Lagos Black Heritage Festival

The annual LBHF is a cultural event to showcase the diverse creativity in traditional and contemporary dance, drama and music of Africa. It's celebrated at Freedom Park.

WWW.LAGOSBLACKHERITAGEFESTIVAL.COM

Nigerian International Book Fair

A week-long Lagos event in early May for authors, publishers and avid readers.

WWW.NIBFNG.ORG

African and Africa-inspired photographers.

Muson Festival of Classical Music

The renowned Musical Society of Nigeria hosts the annual music festival that has included diverse performers from the world of jazz, classical, opera and traditional African music. It usually takes place for two weeks from mid October.

WWW.MUSON.ORG

NOVEMBER

Lagos Jazz Series

This annual 3-5 day event takes place in various venues around the city and features old and new jazz, blues, hip, life and afrobeat.

WWW.LAGOSJAZZSERIES.COM

National Art Competition

Every year, the African Artists' Foundation hosts the National Art Competition in Lagos to showcase emerging talent in painting, sculpture, photography, mixed media, installation and video art.

WWW.AFRICANARTISTS.ORG

SEPTEMBER

Lights, Camera, Africa

Usually taking place in late September until early October in line with Nigeria's Independence Day celebrations, this festival celebrates the best and most original films coming out of Africa – from documentaries to brand new features.

OCTOBER

Felabration

Annual week-long celebration of the music (and birthday) of Nigeria's biggest musical icon, Fela Kuti. A range of artists in various indoor and outdoor Lagos venues pay homage to the musician and activist by performing many of his songs.

WWW.FELABRATION.NET

LagosPhoto

Month-long international festival of art and photography starts in late October and features the work of

DECEMBER

Freedom Park festivities

Stage plays, spoken word and live music are all part of the festive activities held at Freedom Park on Lagos Island. Details about specific events and timings will be posted on the website and on social media closer to the Christmas season.

WWW.LAGOSFREEDOMPARK.COM ►

Do's & don'ts

A few general pointers during your stay...

- ✓ Although tipping is optional in Nigeria, get used to giving a 'dash' to anyone who has helped you out in any way from shopping or cleaning to carrying luggage.
- ✓ Always try to carry coins or small notes around with you should you need to tip at any time.
- ✓ It's easier not to use credit cards. Cash is the favoured option.
- ✓ Do be prepared to bargain for most of the things you buy.
- ✓ Change money at your hotel for better rates.
- ✗ Don't use an unlicensed taxi as not all enterprising Lagosians know where they're going.



Live music venues

A few of the must-stop places in Lagos for traditional, retro or contemporary music have to be the **New Afrika Shrine**, the Ikeja-located spiritual home to Fela Kuti; **Bogobiri** (www.bogobiri.com), where live music is programmed on a weekly or monthly basis; **Freedom Park** (www.lagosfreedompark.com), where the monthly outdoor Afropolitan Vibes and other larger scale music or annual events such as the **Black Heritage Festival** take place; and **The Jazz Hole** record store on Lagos Island.



WUNIKA MUKAN
Brand Director for the
African Artists' Foundation
(AAF)

"My father is from Plateau State and my mother is from Lagos Island. My sister and I attended school in the United States but always returned home for the holidays. I returned to Lagos in 2010 to live and work full time.

"There are many places to chill in Lagos and take a load off. The Art Café is a favourite, along with Freedom Park, the Wheatbaker Hotel and the beach. If I want to let off steam I always feel refreshed after leaving the New Afrika Shrine, and if you need a more physical release the city has a few really good gyms, cycling and yoga clubs.

"If I had a personal dream for myself it would be to create television content based on life as a contemporary African woman and also to work directly with the government in providing grants for the creative industry in Lagos."

Lagos is... an intense adventure, full of endless opportunities, contradictions, characters and treasures.

DID YOU KNOW?

Freedom Park in Lagos Island was once the site of Broad Street Prison. Its current performance area is built over a former execution site.

In 2015 Lagos was said to have an unofficial, estimated population of **21 million** – that's a growth of 15 million since 1991. ▶

Far left: Nneka playing at Bogobiri House
Left: The Jazz Hole



Spaces for art

A few years ago Lagos seemed to be acutely lacking in *bona fide* museum and art gallery spaces. Although there's still scope for more of these cultural venues, a relatively new growth in annual, international art festivals and new uses of indoor and outdoor spaces means more and more places are becoming fully fledged members of the city's art scene:

African Artists' Foundation

The umbrella organisation behind the annual Lagos Photo and National Art Competition (NAC)
WWW.AFRICANARTISTS.ORG

Art21Lagos

A modern and dynamic art space inside the Eko Hotels & Suites.
WWW.ART21LAGOS.COM

CCA, Lagos

Founded by curator Bisi Silva, CCA, Lagos is a must-visit gallery, arts hub and home to the experimental Video Arts Network (VAN Lagos).
WWW.CCALAGOS.ORG

The Lifehouse Lagos

WWW.THELIFHOUSELAGOS.COM
A Victoria Island spot for chilling out and appreciating art, film, live music and various events. It's the organisation behind the annual Lights,

Camera, Africa festival.

Nike Art Gallery

A huge space owned by Nike Davies-Okundaye and filled with paintings, batik, indigo, beadwork and sculptures.
WWW.NIKEART.COM

Nimbus Gallery

Contemporary art upstairs at Bogobiri Guesthouse.
WWW.BOGOBI.COM/NIMBUS.PHP

Omenka Gallery

A fine art gallery that also showcases the work of late modernist artist Ben Enwonwu.
WWW.OMENKAGALLERY.COM

Rele Gallery

A modern space for art salons and installations.
WWW.RELE.CO

Terra Kulture

A cultural space for education, languages and theatre, with an upstairs gallery space.
WWW.TERRAKULTURE.COM



ORODE RYAN-OKPU

Founder of Otres Restaurant

"I'm not from Lagos, I'm originally from Itsekiri, Delta State. In terms of Nigerian food, I'd say the best thing about it is the spices and the ability to make a variety of meals from one simple ingredient or produce. For example, yam will make a yam pottage, fried yam, boiled, roasted, pounded or ukodo. On the Otres menu our popular dishes include banga soup, which is a winner. People also love our chicken nkwoobi, edi kiakong, beans, afang and our famous Otres vegetable soup".

Lagos is... land for all.



DAMOLA 'WILDEYE' OGUNDELE

CEO and founder of Asiri cultural magazine

"I was born in Lagos in the 1980s. Great times then I must say. The city can be crazy, but you just need to know how to go with the flow. When I want to relax I just stay at home with a good book and a bottle of white wine. That's heaven for me. Otherwise I go to the movies around three times a week. Aside from that you can always find me at Freedom Park or Bogobiri. If I had one Lagos dream for myself it would be to have the city twice as developed as it is right now."

Lagos is... a jungle paradise.

Top right: African Artists' Foundation (AAF) exterior
Opposite: Nollywood movie shot – Nigerian actress Hilda Dokubo (2nd L) and Nigerian actor Wole Ojo (L) talk with the chief operator on the shooting of the movie *The CEO* on 13 September 2015 in Lagos. With a budget of more than US\$1 million and with a pan-African casting, *The CEO* is a far cry from the shoestring productions that characterise the bulk of Nollywood's output

WISE WORDS

BUKKA	roadside restaurant
CHOP	food or to eat
DASH	tip
EKO	traditional word for Lagos
GIDI	Lagos (also Las Gidi)
KEKE MARWA	motor-taxi tricycle
GO-SLOW	traffic jam
MOLUE	big yellow bus
NAIJA	anything Nigerian
NO WAHALA	no problem
OKADA	motorbike taxi
OYINBO	white person or foreigner



FLORIAN PLAUCHEUR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Nollywood

Depending on what you read or who you talk to, Nigeria's Lagos-founded film industry is a high-output, US\$250 million-plus a year powerhouse that's either sandwiched between Hollywood and Bollywood – or capable of eclipsing both enterprises. In any case, Nollywood's niche output that started from the straight-to-video 1990s style of guerilla movie-making has systematically evolved to become globally respected as an easy-to-stream entity that has spawned big name stars including **Genevieve Nnaji**, **Ramsey Nouah**, **Richard Mofe Damijo**, **Weruche Opia**, **Wale Ojo**, **Desmond Wright**, **OC Ukeje** and films such as **When Love Happens**, **Confusion Na Wa**, **Flower Girl** and the pioneering **Living in Bondage** from 1992. ▶

FAST FACTS

Even veteran visitors and Lagos residents will have some sort of salutary tale about the importance of **security** during your stay. Not to forget that this is a vibrant, friendly city, it's also a highly populated one so it's worth taking a bit of advice on a few things, including arriving in town and day to day spending or negotiating your way from the Mainland to the Island.

Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Ikeja is about 22km northwest of Lagos. It can take about two hours to get to it from central Lagos during rush hour.

Taxi services by **Metro Taxis** (www.metrotaxing.com) and **Red Cab** (www.redcabonline.com) are reliable options.

The **Naira** is the Nigerian currency and is made up of 100 kobo (k). They are circulated in notes of denomination 1000, 500, 200, 10 and 5.

The **electric generator** is a regular part of life. Power cuts are common so be aware of the effects on sensitive PC equipment.

There is no central emergency service number. You should call **Police (199)**, **Fire or Ambulance Service (999)**, **speaking clock (191)**.

Before travelling to Nigeria you should have vaccinations against **hepatitis A, malaria, diphtheria, typhoid and yellow fever** – although these requirements can change at short notice.

Phones and sim cards are sold everywhere in Lagos – from hotels to street stalls and local shops.

Visitor visas for Nigeria are usually valid for three months.



FUNKE SHONEKAN
Social Media Expert

"I'm from Abeokuta, Ogun State, but I live in Victoria Island, Lagos State. I own and manage two businesses: Young Adult Professionals & Entrepreneurs (YAP&E – Twitter: @yapande) and FunKey events, a bespoke events company. The biggest business challenge is maintaining the right full-time staff, although as of now the main triumph has been taking the YAP&E brand to host a networking event in London and showcasing YAP&E as the only African representative at the European Economic Summit in Amsterdam.

"To relax in Lagos I go to the Wheatbaker Spa for massages, and to let off steam, I do supreme technique boxing.

"If I had a personal Lagos-related dream it would be to build and establish an International FunKey Events Training Academy where we can equip and train people to international standards, with high-level skills and product knowledge in the hospitality industry."

Lagos is... a vibrant state where you can create opportunities from nothing.

Left: Dancers from the Pantsula Dance Crew, photographed by Chris Saunders, courtesy of the LagosPhoto Festival



REMI VAUGHAN-RICHARDS
Filmmaker

"I was born at the Lagos Maternity Hospital. My father was British and my mother was Nigerian. I was sent to boarding school in London when I was 12, then went to study art at Middlesex University and the RCA in London. Apart from holidays I never really came back except to bury my parents (in Lagos). I decided to return 11 years ago because I felt one of us (out of my siblings) had to look after our parents' legacy – my father was one of the prominent British tropical modernist architects who came to Lagos in 1955 and my mother was also a prominent Lagosian. We have an incredible house that needed my attention, so I felt compelled by a sense of duty that I think often comes from being the eldest. Also as a filmmaker I wanted to tell our Nigerian stories and felt there was so much to do here to portray an alternative Africa and Nigeria.

"For my creativity, just being in Lagos and seeing the hustle and bustle and the constant drama and theatre that you encounter every day does it for me.

"To relax I normally go to Illashe beach with friends. I love the fact that within the city you can take a 25-minute boat ride and you are by the ocean. I used to love going to Bar beach, which was the only public area left in Lagos to people-watch all walks of life and eat fish any time of day or night but that has been land filled, destined to be a playground for the uber rich. So, apart from that there are so many clubs and bars, although they are not my scene."

Lagos is... like a wild animal that you think you have tamed then suddenly she will turn around and bite you. She's also like a timeworn madam; she's seen it all, done it all... nothing can surprise her and you don't mess with her.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Third Mainland Bridge that links the Mainland with Lagos Island is, at around 11.8km, the longest bridge in Africa.

Of the **36 states** in Nigeria, Lagos is actually the smallest in terms of area. 🌐