

CHAD



If you would like to arrange a bespoke expedition to Chad, please [contact us](#) for more information.

Get to know the absolute definition of remote in Chad's desolate Tibesti region. Home to the Sahara's highest mountains, this isolated environment is dotted with impressive sand dunes, volcanic craters, striking canyons and incredible rock formations, hiding prehistoric rock art, intermittent oases and wadis sustaining nomadic settlements.

Supported by camels you'll explore the southern reaches of the Tibesti Massif and trek to the summit of the highest peak in the Sahara, the extinct Emi Koussi Volcano.

Aim

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The aim of this epic expedition is to reach the southern part of Chad's Tibesti massif and to trek to the summit of the Emi Koussi Volcano, the highest peak of the Sahara desert.

As a member of this unique expedition (supported by 4WD vehicles initially and then by camels) you'll follow in the footsteps of explorer Wilfred Thesiger through an ever-changing landscape of oases, pre-historical sites, volcanic craters and sand dunes that is home to the ancient Toubou people.

Highlights

- Emulate Wilfred Thesiger's classic, 1938 journey.
- Climb the extinct Emi Koussi volcano to its crater summit at 3445m.
- Explore one of the world's most desolate regions as part of a camel-supported caravan.
- Trek through dotted isolated oasis inhabited by the Toubou for thousands of years.
- Trek the canyons of Yi Yerra amid hot springs.
- Drive across the Sahara's most spectacular ancient oceans.

Why Go

The Tibesti plateau

The Tibesti plateau (Tibesti meaning 'place where the mountain people live') is a mountainous region mainly in Northern Chad that also extends just into southern Libya. The area we will be travelling through is of volcanic origin and temperatures can be very high although this will be mitigated by the altitude and the winter months. Flora and fauna, including the rhim gazelle, Addax, Fennec fox and Barbary sheep have adapted to the mountains, their ancestors used to a climate that was not always as harsh. Greater biodiversity existed in the past, as evidenced by scenes portrayed in rock and parietal art found throughout the range, which dates back several millennia. The isolation of the Tibesti sparks the cultural imagination in both art and literature.

The Toubou

The Toubou are an ancient tribe of people. They live mainly in northern Chad but are also found in southern Libya, northwest Sudan and northeast Niger. The majority of the 350,000 Toubou are concentrated around the Tibesti mountains region; they are semi-nomadic moderate Muslims and animal herders. Toubou society is clan-based with each clan 'owning' a certain amount of oases, pastures and wells. The two main clans are the Teda and the Daza. Your camel support team will be made of Teda clan members.

Emi Koussi

Reaching 3445m in elevation and rising 2300m above the surrounding sandstone plains, Emi Koussi is one of several shield volcanoes in the Tibesti massif and is the highest in the Sahara. The summit includes three craters formed by powerful eruptions in which can be found numerous lava domes, cinder cones and lava flows. Its main crater is 12km wide and 1.2km deep and the volcano's dark volcanic rock provide a sharp contrast to the surrounding light sandstone.

The sigier's Footsteps

Emi Koussi was climbed in September 1938 by Wilfred Thesiger and Idris Daud. In *Arabian Sands* (1959), Thesiger said of the climb;

"At last we saw, faint like a cloud upon the desert's edge, the dim outline of Emi Koussi, the crater summit of Tibesti. As we drew near it dominated our world, sharp blue at dawn, and black against the setting sun. We climbed it with difficulty, and stood at last upon the crater's rim, 11,125 feet above sea-level. Beneath us in the crater's floor was the vent, a great hole a thousand feet deep. To the north were range upon range of jagged peaks, rising from shadowed gorges, an awful scene of utter desolation. Everywhere the rocks were slowly crumbling away, eroded by sun and wind and storm. It was a sombre land, black and red and brown and grey."

The Plan

Secret Compass runs expeditions with framework itineraries, rather than guided tours with set daily plans. Read more about [Our Approach](#) here. The following is the outline plan for this epic Chad expedition – the 'substance' rather than the specifics. A fuller itinerary is provided in the Chad Expedition Handbook which is available on request or upon application to join the team.

Teammates arrive

All teammates fly into N'Djamena and meet at the team at a central hotel by 2200hrs on 4 Feb for a welcome meal. A briefing on the upcoming expedition will take place post breakfast the following day before meeting the guides and vehicles and taking care of some permit paperwork prior to beginning your journey north.

On expedition

This expedition begins with a five-day drive across the ever-changing desert on 4WD vehicles, to cover the distance to get to the trail head at the Tibesti plateau. Leaving from the capital N'Djamena you'll head north, skirting the depression of the Bahr el Ghazal (the sea of gazelles, a former affluent river of ancient Chad). You'll then tackle the dunes of the Erg of Djourab, the main obstacle for the commercial trades between Faya and the capital city. Among the palm groves of Faya-Largeau you'll need to negotiate your camels and cameleers with the local Toubou tribe exactly as Thesiger did over 60 years ago.

Your first two days of trekking will be supported by 4WD vehicles. This will enable exploration of the rich sand dunes and rock outcrops (tassilis) of the Ourti valley at the foot of Emi Koussi. You'll discover isolated nomadic encampments and be able to explore prehistoric rock engravings and paintings.

From the tiny settlement of Tigui you'll head off on a seven-day camel supported trek with your Toubou guides, through scenic 'gueltas' to climb to the summit of Emi Koussi, the highest peak in the Sahara. From the enormous (12x15km) volcanic caldera you'll get exceptional views across the whole of the Tibesti massif. Crossing the caldera you'll explore the 'petit trou au natron' before reaching the highest point of Emi Koussi at 3445m.

Goals achieved

From the summit you'll descend through the gorges of Yi Yerra and the revitalising waters of the thermal springs found there. You can soothe your aching muscles before rejoining your 4WD vehicles and drivers for a visit to the Gouro oasis on the return to N'Djamena.

Fitness

Secret Compass expeditions are achievable by anyone with a healthy lifestyle and a good level of general fitness. You should be willing to be part of a team working together to achieve the goal of the expedition. The biggest challenge on this expedition will be the hot climate.

Teammates who arrive without meeting the agreed minimum fitness requirements can jeopardise themselves and the expedition's goal so do take training seriously and arrive fit and ready to go.

Teammates must be comfortable with the following:

Minimum fitness requirements

- Trek: up to 25km per day across rocky, sandy terrain.
- Daily activity: up to 10hrs per day.
- Carry: up to 10kg in a day sack including water, layers and food.
- Swim: not required!
- Climate: very hot and dry, cooler nights.
- Age: 21+

Practicalities

Accommodation

Your first night will be in a comfortable hotel in N'Djamena. During the five-day drive to the Tibesti region you will be sleeping in tents. Every night on the trek, you will sleep under the stars. Each teammate will clean away the obvious stones and make a slight dip in the sand to help direct the winds over them.

Food

All your food on this expedition will be sourced in country. In towns you'll eat in local restaurants and cafés. On the expedition you'll have an Italian style cook so expect delicious and nourishing food. You may wish to bring your own snacks to supplement the food provided.

Transport

You'll be driven to and from the trailhead in 4WDs. You should be aware that due to the remote location of the Tibesti massif, this entails an approximately five-day drive in each direction. The trekking element of the journey will then be on foot, supported by either camels or 4WD vehicles. The vehicles will carry food and water supplies along with the camping equipment and will meet the team in camp each night.

Kit list

A full kit list will be supplied to applicants in the Expedition Handbook. If required Secret Compass will supply tents. Teammates should consider their kit in good time in case buying, hiring or shipping is required. Read your Handbook and factor into your packing (and training schedule) any additional space or weight as necessary. For this expedition, appropriate desert boots that are broken in and comfortable are of paramount importance. Ongoing foot care on expedition will be vital. As a Secret Compass team member you get discounts at a number of specialist stores, the details of which are provided upon booking.

Getting ready for departure

The [Get Ready](#) section clarifies what you need to consider in advance of departure. It has advice on things like fitness, flights, insurance and kit.

Included

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- Professional Secret Compass leader with full communications and medical kits.
- Specialist guides and instructors.
- Accommodation throughout.
- All food (snacks and meals) and soft drinks.
- Internal transport as outlined in itinerary.
- Special permits and permissions within Chad.

Not included

- International [flights](#)/ travel to and from Chad.
- [Travel insurance](#) (obligatory).
- Chad Visa if required.
- Tips to local guides (discretionary).
- Personal equipment (full kit list in the Handbook).

Exped FAQ

On application, potential teammates will receive a detailed Expedition Handbook. Here are some expedition-specific questions and our [general FAQ](#) will answer many other questions. Get in touch if your question remains unanswered.

Can I arrive a day late?

As The Plan outlines, there is a chain of transport to get teammates out to and back from the trailhead and so start and end dates are not flexible.

Can I charge all my electricals?

Outside of N'Djamena, no. Please ensure that you are self-sufficient in terms of charging your appliances by bringing things like spare batteries, lightweight solar panels or power packs to avoid frustration.

Do I need a visa?

Probably. A visa application advice document will be provided to teammates, with visas remaining teammates' responsibility.

Will there be toilets or showers?

There will be no toilets or showers available during the trek. You should be prepared to duck behind the nearest sand dune 'al-fresco' and limit yourself to wet-wipe washes. Toilet paper is generally burned. The water for this expedition is being carried by the support vehicles so there will not be enough to provide showers of any nature. Wet wipes are the way forward: you'll all be in the same position so don't worry about it.

Dietary requirements

Vegetarians and coeliacs can be catered for. Feel free to supplement the meals provided with your favourite trail snacks. Give as much details as possible when applying to help us best provision the team.

How fit do I need to be?

See our Fitness section in [Get Ready](#) and the Fitness above for expedition-specific fitness advice.

Photography

Due to cultural beliefs and traditions you will need to be very considerate in taking photos of local people, animals and their possessions. This does not mean you will not be allowed to take photos but, it is good custom to build a rapport with the person you wish to photograph and then to ask their permission before you do so. Further information will be given during your briefing in N'Djamena.

Will we carry all kit in the desert?

The team will be supported by 4WD vehicles and camels in the desert. Each team member will have to carry at least three litres of water per person per day, lunch supplies, personal kit (suncream, camera etc) and a share of the group emergency and communications kit.

Can we leave a flight bag anywhere?

You'll be able to leave a small bag in N'Djamena with any items you won't need during the trek. This will be at your own risk.

Will my camera work in the heat?

Cameras should not be that affected by the heat and dryness, but if it reaches over 45 degrees they might struggle. Your best bet is to keep your camera in its bag until you use it and don't keep in the direct sunlight for too long. The main problem is the sand itself. Grains can easily get into the lens systems, particularly compact cameras with zoom lenses.

Cameras with electronic lens covers are most at risk. The best cameras to use are sealed waterproof cameras which have no external working lenses so no sand can egress them. If using an SLR, then take care to prevent sand getting into a lens housing. Using Prime fixed focal length lenses can help. Take a small paintbrush, a puffer bottle or, even better, a compressed air canister (probably bought in-country if flying in) to blow away sand and grit from moving parts. Take care around the sensor and never wipe this if sand is on the sensor. Take particular care if the wind is blowing or the sand is very fine.

Will our mobiles work?

There should be signal in N'Djamena. It is very unlikely that you will have signal in the desert. Secret Compass will have satellite phones and radios for emergency communications only.

Do I need to cover up?

Both men and women should wear loose fitting long-sleeved shirts and long trousers which cover their knees and shoulders (and cleavage for women), especially in towns and cities. In the desert shorts are acceptable, although the Toubou will consider you quite strange for wearing them! Your guides are very experienced with varying cultures and quite relaxed about dress code, but local customs must be respected when meeting locals.

What's the currency in Chad?

The local currency is Central African Francs. Euros or USD can be exchanged for local currency at the hotel in N'Djamena. Debit/credit cards are not accepted and there are no ATMs. Please note there will be no access to money or ability to change currencies outside of the capital, so ensure you have sufficient change for personal spending (and recommended emergency fund \$100-200) before we leave N'Djamena. This expedition is all-inclusive so you won't need much money – only really if you want to buy some souvenirs on the way.

What desert boots do you recommend?

See further kit information in your Expedition Handbook but essentially, we recommend desert boots, in a brand that fits the shape of your foot. We recommend Alt-Berg desert boots if they suit your feet though shoe choice is personal choice.

Will we get to drive the 4WD vehicles?

No. Your guides will be in charge of driving at all times.

How can I find out more?

Apply for this expedition team using the button below to receive your Expedition Handbook with fuller details. View our [General FAQ](#) for useful tips. Secret Compass is then on hand to answer any questions or to firm up your place on the team.