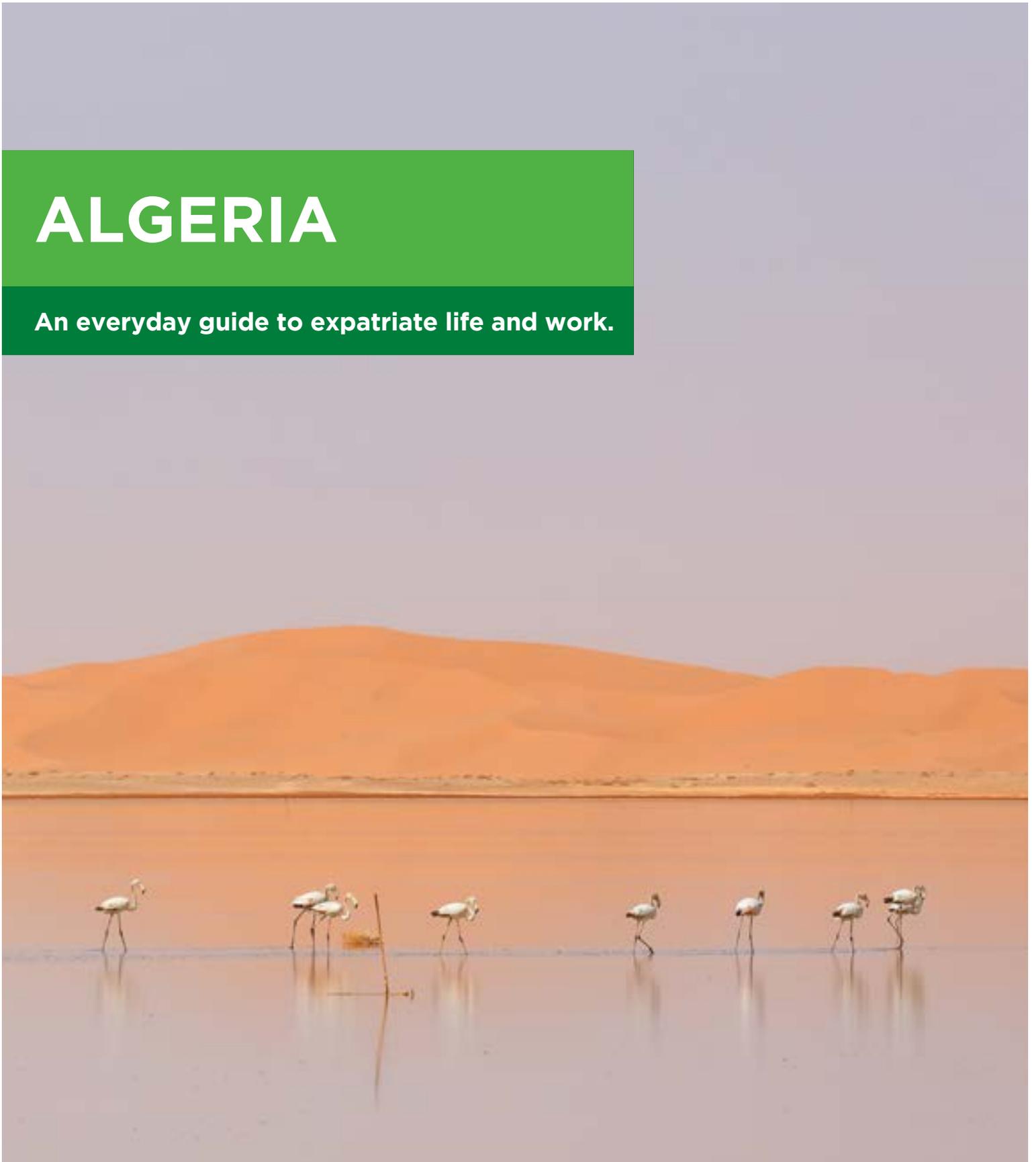


# ALGERIA

An everyday guide to expatriate life and work.



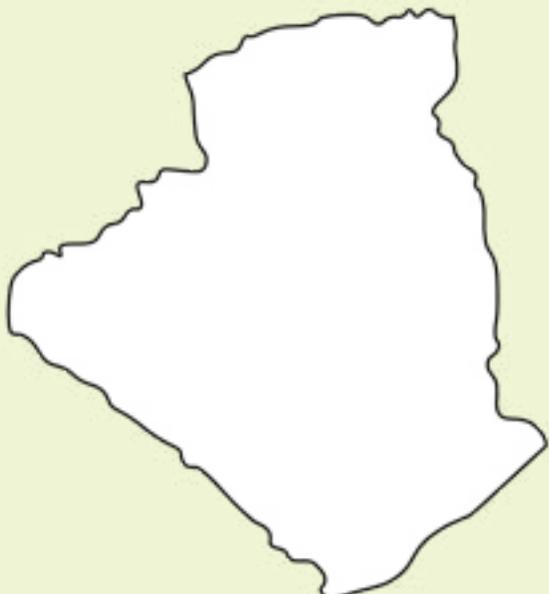
Together, all the way.®



# ALGERIA COUNTRY GUIDE

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### Quick facts

**Capital:** Algiers

**Population:** 40 million

**Major languages:** Algerian Arabic – a mixture of French and Arabic. Berber is also widely spoken as is French.

**Major religion:** Sunni Islam

**Currency:** Dinar

**Time zone:** GMT+1

**Emergency number:** 112 from a mobile.

**Electricity:** 230v 50hz. Algeria uses the European plug, type C.

**Drive on the:** Right

## Overview

Algeria is a fascinating country, remaining an authentic and untouched North African gem. While not a high-profile expat destination, it nonetheless enjoys close proximity to popular European tourist spots like Spain, Portugal and France.



Employment options are far ranging, with many contracted in the oil and gas industry while there are also opportunities in the finance, education and foreign aid sectors. Those with competency in the French language will have a big advantage.

Because of its colonial past, there's also a large French influence on its primarily Arabic culture, particularly in language and architecture. But while major cities like Algiers and Oran are quite liberal on the surface, social and religious conservatism still runs deep and one should be careful not to cause offence.

Security is a significant issue in some parts of Algeria, notably in the oil-producing regions and the southern Saharan areas. Employers should issue security briefings and expat insurance should include anti-terrorism cover. Certain parts of the country are not considered safe to visit, notably the border areas in the south and with Tunisia.

This guide will provide some useful insight into life in Algeria, covering everything from education, healthcare, employment and social etiquette, to business norms, banking, tax, communication and cost of living.



## Getting started

### Climate and weather



There's significant weather variation across the vast territories of Algeria. High temperatures bake its hot plains while flash floods and sandstorms can be dangerous and disruptive. The coastal northern regions enjoy a Mediterranean climate, with mild and wet winters balanced out by hot summers. The central part of the country has a continental feel, being both warmer and drier than the north. The huge Saharan area has a desert climate with extremely high summer temperatures that turn incredibly cold during winter nights.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.our-africa.org/algeria/climate-agriculture>



## Visas

The majority of foreign nationals require a visa to enter Algeria and there are essentially three main types of visa: tourist, business and work. While there are Algerian embassies in most major capitals around the world, there aren't many consulates. So be aware that a visa application may require a trip to one's capital or a postal/courier application.<sup>1</sup>

The work visa is more complex and needs documents from the Algerian Ministry of Labour, including the work contract and a work permit. Unfortunately, the work visa application can be a lengthy process.<sup>2</sup>

## Accommodations

Most expats in Algeria choose to rent. Accommodation comes in all shapes and sizes and is furnished more often than not, with security always being an important consideration. Studios, apartments and villas are all available and generally rented on a one-year basis. Paying a year's rent in advance is not unusual and agency fees will be charged on top of that. There are some real estate websites but without a knowledge of French and some understanding of the districts of Algiers, they would be difficult to use.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.algerian-consulate.org.uk/visas/visa-to-algeria>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.algerianembassy.org/consular-affairs/visa-instructions.html>

Those that work in the oilfields will be in fully secure company accommodation, generally with all utilities paid for. Those that wish to live in Algiers are more likely to have to rent on the open market, although foreigners will almost always need the support of their company or a good real estate agent.

## Schools

The Algerian state school and university systems are based on the French model. It's unlikely any expat children would join the system unless they were of Algerian heritage or at least were very proficient in French. English is only taught from middle school onwards.

There are two international schools in Algiers, the fairly new English-medium American International School (K-G6)<sup>3</sup> and the French-medium Lycée International Alexandre Dumas.<sup>4</sup> The latter also has a branch in Oran. Both schools are fee-paying and expensive. Expats working in the oilfields or beyond Algiers or Oran would be very unlikely to have their families with them at post for security and practical reasons.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aisalgiers.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.liad-alger.fr/joomla/>





## Culture

Algerian culture is a fascinating mix of African and Arab characteristics with a strong French influence due to its colonial past. Algiers and Oran can be seen as broadly liberal places to live. But much of this apparent liberalism is on the surface and it's important to remember that social and religious conservatism is the norm. Even in the urban areas the struggle between liberalism and conservative values can be quite visible.

Away from these two major cities, the way of life is indeed more conservative and expats from more liberal societies need to ensure they don't unintentionally give offence through what they say or do. The challenge is perhaps that because of the French architecture, language and ways of doing things, Algeria can simply appear more liberal than it really is.

## Language

The main languages of Algeria are Algerian Arabic, which is a dialect of Arabic, and Berber, with many people also speaking French. English is also rapidly growing in influence, but expats wanting to fully integrate into Algerian society should make an effort to learn Arabic or French.

## Social etiquette & Cultural faux pas

The social challenges of living in Algeria will vary from expat to expat. Those who have lived in Islamic societies before will be familiar with the challenges, while those who have not will need to be cautious in some of the areas listed below.

- While there is tolerance of other religions in Algeria, it is an Islamic country and discussion of any religious issues is best avoided.
- Politics is not generally a good topic of discussion, at least until one gets to know the people.
- Bare flesh on the beach or elsewhere is best avoided for both genders.
- Public displays of excessive affection are considered improper in Algeria. Unmarried cohabitation is frowned upon and expats that do it need to be discrete.
- Colonialism and the French legacy is also a very controversial topic and while the discussions can be interesting, again it is best to confine them to people one knows well.

## Eating

Algerian food can be delicious and revolves around rice, fresh fruit and vegetables, lamb and fish. Typical dishes include mechoui, a spicy lamb roasted over a fire and makroudh, a stuffed date or almond dipped in honey. Couscous also features prominently, and is often served with meat, vegetables and various spices.

Expats wanting a taste of home will find it at restaurants and steakhouses, including Italian, French and Indian cuisine, but they can be pricey and really only found in Algiers, and are still limited in number. Pork is not eaten in Algeria at all and shouldn't be requested in restaurants or shops. Outside Algiers, restaurants tend to be local and of the fast food type, except possibly in Oran.<sup>1</sup>

## Drinking

Drinking can be a controversial topic in Algeria as there

are increasingly many anti-alcohol sentiments in the country, even though there is a small wine industry around Oran. Within Algiers and Oran, as a general rule, there's no alcohol in cheaper establishments. Most upscale establishments do serve it but may not have it on the menu.

Outside Algiers, the situation varies from region to region and some areas are dry, so ask locally if travelling to smaller towns. There are a few shops that sell alcohol in Algiers and other towns but they tend to be discrete and hard to find. Many expats rely on duty-free shopping for their alcohol supplies.

## Holidays

As a Muslim nation, public holidays in Algeria are largely based on the Islamic calendar and coincide with important Muslim celebrations. The exact date of some public holidays varies each year as they are based on the sighting of the moon.<sup>2</sup>

New Year's Day - 1 January

May Day - 1 May

Eid al-Fitr - June

Eid al-Fitr - June/July

Independence Day - 5 July

Eid al-Adha - July/August

Eid al-Adha - July/August

Muharram - August/September

Day of Ashura - September/October

Anniversary of the Revolution - 1 November

The Prophet's Birthday - November/December



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.westernunion.com/blog/5-traditional-dishes-algeria/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.holiday-times.com/public-holidays-algeria/>

## Getting in touch

In the urban areas, connectivity is of reasonable quality both through mobile and landline and the internet. All three of these services are of lower quality in rural and regional areas. In remote areas, notably the Sahara region, satellite phones may be needed.

### Telephone

There are currently three national mobile phone operators in Algeria: Djezzy<sup>1</sup>, Mobilis<sup>2</sup> and Ooredoo<sup>3</sup>. SIM cards are available for foreigners on a pay-as-you-go basis but the process can be lengthy. A corporate phone is more desirable.

### Internet

The internet service provider is Algérie Télécom but the arrangement of a connection is complex and support is likely to be needed from one's company in order to subscribe. A pre-existing connection in rented accommodation may be a way to speed up this process.

### Postal services

The local postal service is not recommended for critical mail. Most major courier services operate locally and can be used for urgent documents.

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1 <http://www.djezzy.dz/>

2 <http://www.mobilis.dz/>

3 <http://www.ooredoo.dz>

## Transport

Within Algiers, there are two ways of traveling around the city. Taxis are plentiful and fairly cheap while the metro is modern and clean but with rather limited coverage of the city. Outside of Algiers, transport within towns is by taxi only and the safest option is to use taxis arranged by one's hotel or office as there may be some security risks.

The Société Nationale des Transports Ferroviaires, referred to as the SNTF, runs modern and efficient trains from Algiers to Oran and several other cities. Foreigners often use the trains as they're safer and faster than car travel, in particular for journeys to the south of Algeria. If planning to drive, it's best to arrange a local driver who is familiar with the local conditions. It's important to note that many embassies suggest that certain parts of Algeria are off limits to their citizens for security reasons, notably the border regions.<sup>1</sup>

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1 [www.sntf.dz](http://www.sntf.dz)

Due to the country's vast size and the many safety concerns, air travel is the safest method of traveling long distances. Air Algérie is the state airline and has a wide domestic network but the schedules are often subject to delays and cancellations.<sup>2</sup> The other local airline is Tassili Airlines which operates some domestic routes and offers energy sector charters.<sup>3</sup>

## Employment

### The job market

There's a wide range of areas where an expat can ply their trade in Algeria. The oil and gas-producing regions provide lucrative careers in the energy sector, while there are also opportunities for primary and high school teachers, English language teachers and university lecturers. A proficiency in French would benefit those looking to enter the country's upscale hospitality industry, as well as for expats applying for positions at Algiers's foreign banks and financial institutions. Lastly, diplomats and foreign aid workers can seek employment at the different UN stations and missions scattered throughout Algeria.

### Income tax

Algeria has a progressive income tax rate up to 35%, payable by all tax-resident foreigners and locals on money earned in Algeria and worldwide. There are double taxation agreements in place. Non-resident foreigners are taxed on Algerian income only. A resident is someone who lives in Algeria and whose main source of income is there.<sup>4</sup> There may be tax liabilities in the home country as well, so expats should consult a qualified tax consultant to assist them in this matter.

### Business etiquette

Algerian business structures are hierarchical and formal and all decisions can sometimes take a long time to be made and eventually implemented. Business revolves around personal relationships with people mattering more than numbers, so be prepared to develop and cultivate relationships.

Business is usually done in French, but above and beyond the language it's important to understand that much communication is indirect and opaque. The need to save face and not offend can make clear answers difficult to get. The fluidity of time in Algeria can also sometimes lead to a sense of frustration. Expats should not rush, show they're open and can be trusted and

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2 <https://airalgerie.dz/>

3 <http://www.tassiliairlines.dz/index.php?lang=fr>

4 <https://en.portal.santandertrade.com/establish-overseas/algeria/tax-system>

listen to people if they want to succeed in Algeria.

Appearances are important, so expats should dress formally, with business attire more Western in nature than Arabic. Women should ensure that their shoulders and legs are covered, but they're not expected to wear traditional attire, such as the abaya.

A handshake is the usual greeting in business circles. Men tend not to shake hands with women, but some women will offer a hand. In terms of gender, women do occupy some senior roles and it is generally not difficult for foreign professional women to operate in Algeria at all.

## Finance

### Currency

The official currency is the Algerian dinar (DZD).

Money comes in the following denominations:

- Notes: 100, 200, 500, 1,000 and 2,000 DZD
- Coins: 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200 DZD

Note that there are currency restrictions in Algeria on both arrival and departure and that Algerian dinars cannot be taken out of the country.

### Cost of living

Algeria is a relatively cheap place to live, especially if eating local food and avoiding upscale hotels and restaurants. Imported food is expensive, especially Western luxuries. Alcohol, where available, is also pricey. For context, Algiers is the 185th most expensive city in the world, according to the Mercer Index of 2016.<sup>5</sup>

The biggest expense will of course be housing and the factor that can increase the costs is the need to be in a secure area and have suitable security around the accommodation. School fees are also a significant cost, with most expats tending to send their children to private institutions.

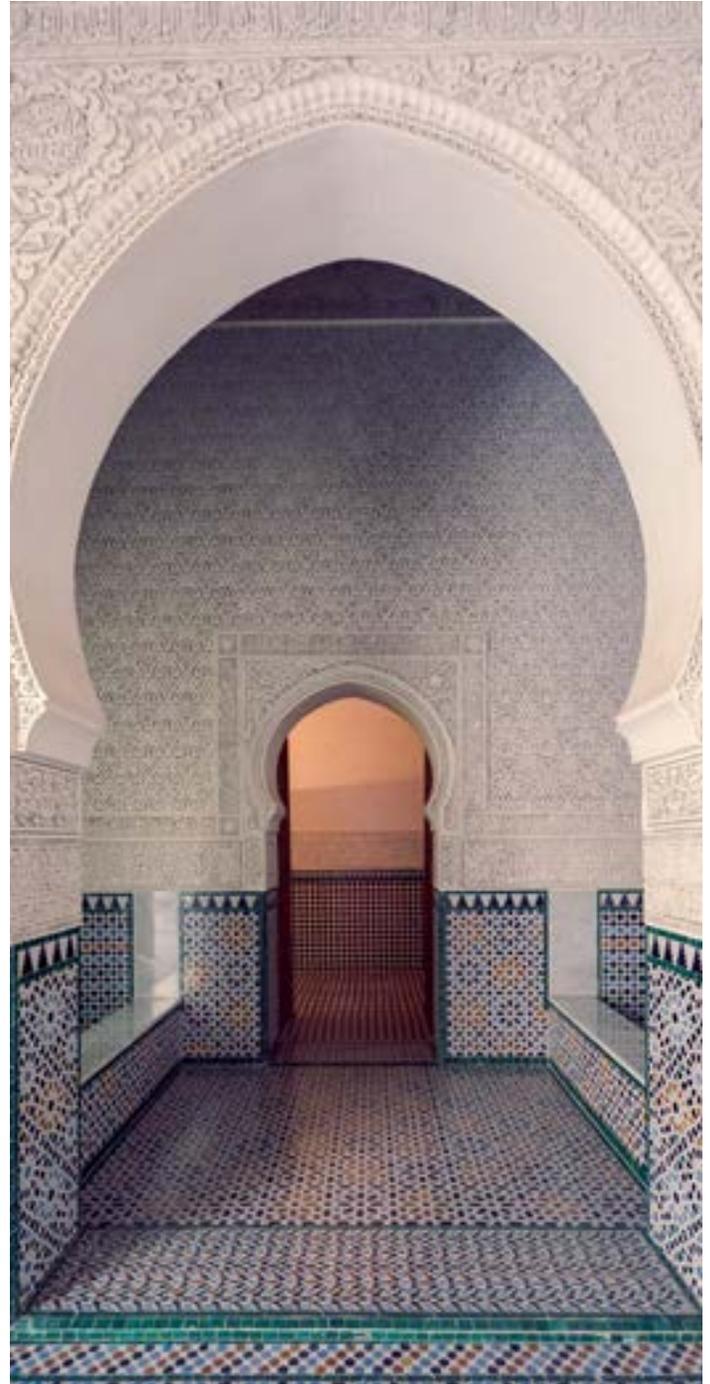
### Banking

The finance structure in Algeria is based on the French system. Although there are levels of bureaucracy to contend with, at least in the major cities, it's not difficult

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mercer.com/newsroom/2016-quality-of-living-survey.html>

to manage one's finances, with much of it now being done online. Credit and debit card use is growing but the default is still to use cash.

There are a number of banks in Algeria, including BNP and Societe Generale.<sup>6</sup> The process of identification and opening of an account is fairly straightforward once expats have their residence confirmed in Algeria. But it can still take some time. Employers may have a relationship with a specific bank which can help to expedite opening an account.



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.societegenerale.dz/>

remote areas. Costs of local emergency care and any medical repatriation to Europe or North America need to be covered by the insurance.

## Private medical insurance

All the expats working in Algeria under Algerian law do have compulsory affiliation to the Social Security system that gives the right to free healthcare in Algeria, in the same way that Algerian nationals have access to the service. However, as noted above, private medical cover is highly recommended for expats in Algeria.<sup>8</sup>

## Emergencies

The emergency number is 112 from a mobile, but operators may only speak French. Emergency response times may be slow, especially in more remote areas. Expats should also have their embassy's emergency number saved.

## Health Risks

The extreme heat in central and southern parts of the country can cause heatstroke and expats should ensure that they're hydrated at all times. Sand and dust storms can also be a health risk for those with preexisting respiratory conditions.

## Vaccinations

Importantly, a vaccination for yellow fever is required if entering from a yellow fever area.<sup>9</sup> Routine vaccinations are also suggested for measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, chickenpox and polio. Some other recommended vaccinations which change depending on where one's going include malaria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and rabies.

## Pharmacies

Pharmacies are a well-trusted source of medical advice, although French will usually be the medium of communication. They will tend to open in shifts over weekends and evenings so it's important to know which ones are open and when. It can be difficult to get prescription drugs of good quality in Algeria, especially beyond Algiers, so one should try bring medication for chronic medical conditions in large quantities. Copies of prescriptions are useful in case of immigration or customs queries over the importation of medication, as are French translations of any other medical documents or case notes.

## Health

While healthcare services are adequate in city areas, the rural and remote regional provision is less advanced. Expats need to ensure that they have effective private insurance in place, especially if they are working in

<sup>8</sup> <https://en.portal.santandertrade.com/establish-overseas/algeria/living-in-the-country>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/algeria/entry-requirements>