



## Welcome to Ghana

"The friendly locals and beautiful landscape have left me with memories of Africa to treasure forever. Seeing majestic elephants and antelopes in their natural environment felt like an amazing privilege."

Ghana has often been regarded as one of the friendliest and most beautiful countries in Africa. Visitors have described it as vibrant, colourful and alive with the spirit of the Ghanaian people. A coastal country near the equatorial divide, Ghana's warm climate is offset by light ocean winds. Visitors can do a walking safari in Mole National Park, home to elephants, roving gangs of baboons, warthogs, waterbucks and antelopes. Ghana's largest park (at 4,660 km<sup>2</sup>) is the best as far as wildlife viewing goes, hosting over 90 species of mammal in total! When not mingling with Ghana's diverse wildlife, relax in the breezy coastal capital of Accra and have a swim in the clear water of the Gulf of Ghana.

## Know your History

Prior to European presence in Ghana, most Ghanaians had migrated from the ancient kingdoms of the western Sahel, which is now the area of present-day Mauritania and Mali. Much of the known history of Ghana derives from myths told by various tribes in the outlying areas.

### Gold

From the late 1400s through to 1957, Ghana was called the Gold Coast. The Portuguese who came to Ghana in the 15th century found so much gold between the rivers Ankobra and the Volta that they named the place Mina – meaning Mine. In 1481 King John II of Portugal sent Diego d'Azumbuja to build a castle, which was duly built the following year in Elmina. The aim was to trade in gold, ivory and slaves.

In 1598 the Dutch joined them, building forts at Komenda and Kormantsil. In 1637 they captured the castle from the Portuguese and that of Axim in 1642 (Fort St. Anthony). By the mid 18th century other European traders, namely the English, Danes, and Swedes, had joined in. As a result, the coastline became dotted with forts built by Dutch, British and Danish merchants. European merchants prospered immensely from the trade in gold and slaves.

### The slave trade

The volume of the slave trade in West Africa grew rapidly from its inception around 1500 to its peak in the 18th century. Philip Curtin, a leading authority on the African slave trade, estimates that roughly 6.3 million slaves were shipped from West Africa to North and South America, about 4.5 million of that number between 1701 and 1810. Perhaps 5,000 a year were shipped from the Gold

Coast alone. The demographic impact of the slave trade on West Africa was probably substantially greater than the number actually enslaved because a significant number of Africans perished during slaving raids or while in captivity awaiting trans-shipment. All nations with an interest in West Africa participated in the slave trade. Relations between the Europeans and the local populations were often strained and distrust led to frequent clashes. Disease also caused high losses among the Europeans engaged in the slave trade, but the profits realised from the trade continued to attract them.

The growth of anti slavery sentiment among Europeans made slow progress against vested African and European interests that were reaping profits from the traffic. Although individual clergymen condemned the slave trade as early as the 17th century, major Christian denominations did little to further early efforts at abolition. The Quakers, however, publicly declared themselves against slavery as early as 1727. Later in the century, the Danes stopped trading in slaves and Sweden and the Netherlands soon followed. Official disintegration of the slave trade did not take place until the 1860s as a result of continuing demand for slave labour in the New World.

## **1900s**

In 1957, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan country in colonial Africa to gain independence. Kwame Nkrumah, an African anti-colonial leader, was the founder and first president of the modern Ghanaian state. He was the first African head of state in the Pan-African Movement, an idea which he appropriated during his studies at Lincoln University in the United States, at the time when Marcus Garvey was becoming famous for his "Back to Africa" movement. Nkrumah was killed following a series of coups which ended with the ascension to power of Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings in 1981.

Rawlings' changes to Ghanaian government resulted in the suspension of the constitution in 1981 and the banning of political parties. A new constitution, restoring multiparty politics, was approved in 1992 and Rawlings was elected in free elections of that year and also in 1996. The constitution prohibited him from running for a third term. John Kufuor, the current president, is now in his second term. In 2007, Ghana celebrated 50 years of independence with its Golden Jubilee Celebration.

## **Tribal regions**

The most southern part of what is today Ghana was divided among a number of tribes, including the Fante, the Ga and the Ewes. To the north was the Ashanti Kingdom, which was formed in 1670. In certain periods it managed to dominate some coastal areas in what was broadly Fante land. The far north of Ghana was home to the empires of the cavalry based peoples of the Sahel, with first the Mali Empire and then the Fulani Empire controlling the area.

# **Money Talks**

Ghana enjoys one of the highest GDP per capita in Africa but remains somewhat dependent on international financial and technical assistance and is affected by the Ghanaian Diaspora.

## **Exports**

The domestic economy still revolves around subsistence agriculture, which amounts to 50% of GDP and 85% of Ghana's workforce, who are mostly small landholders. Ghana's main exports are gold, timber, cocoa, diamond, bauxite and manganese, but as recently as 2007, a light-oil rich oilfield was

discovered which promises to become a major factor in Ghana's economic standing.

Public sector wage increases and regional peacekeeping commitments have led to a continued inflationary deficit financing, depreciation of the cedi, which is Ghana's national currency, and rising public discontent with the country's austerity measures. To add to this, the World Bank has reported that Ghana's per capita income has barely doubled over the past 45 years, meaning miniscule economic growth. Despite all this, Ghana is still one of the more economically sound of the African nations.

## **Money**

In July 2007, Ghana began a re-denomination of the cedi (¢) into the Ghana cedi (GH¢), with a rate of 1GH¢ to 10,000¢. This made it the highest-valued currency unit in all the sovereign countries in Africa. The word "cedi" comes from the Akan word for cowry shell, which were once used in Ghana as currency. Each cedi is divided into 100 pesewas.

Cash is always the easiest thing to change, and it's recommended that you visit the bureau de change in Accra airport. The US dollar, pound & euro can all be readily changed, although older bills may not be accepted – so it's best to have new banknotes. Scottish and Irish banknotes are also not accepted. Traveller's cheques are not always accepted and if they are, it is normally only American Express, which must have a receipt or they are practically useless. Cash withdrawals using MasterCard from any Ghana Commercial Bank ATM is possible and Visa cards can be used to take money out in Accra, although they are not usually accepted for making general payments. Ghanaian cedis are not allowed out of the country, so that it is recommended to keep your excess at the end of your trip to a minimum.

# **Get Culture Savvy**

## **Textiles**

Perhaps the most visible, and most marketable, cultural contribution from modern Ghana is Kente cloth, which is widely recognised and valued for its colours and symbolism. Kente cloth is made by skilled Ghanaian weavers and the major weaving centres in and around Kumasi (Bonwire is known as the home of Kente, although areas of Volta Region also lay claim to the title) are full of weavers throwing their shuttles back and forth as they make long strips of Kente. These strips can then be sewn together to form the larger wraps which are worn by some Ghanaians, chiefs especially, and are purchased by tourists in Accra and Kumasi. The colours and patterns of the Kente are carefully chosen by the weaver and the wearer. Each symbol woven into the cloth has a special meaning within Ghanaian culture.

## **Kente**

Kente is one of the symbols of the Ghanaian chieftaincy, which remains strong throughout the south and central regions of the country, particularly in the areas populated by members of the culturally and politically dominant Ashanti tribe. The Ashanti's paramount chief, known as the Asantehene, is perhaps the most revered individual in the central part of the country. Like other Ghanaian chiefs, he wears bright Kente, gold bracelets, rings and amulets and is always accompanied by numerous ornate umbrellas, which are also a symbol of the chieftaincy itself. The most sacred symbol of the Ashanti people is the Golden Stool, a small golden throne in which the spirit of the people is said to reside. It is kept in safekeeping in Kumasi, the cultural capital of the Ashanti people and the seat of

the Asantehene's palace. Though the chieftaincy across Ghana has been weakened by allegations of corruption and cooperation with colonial oppression, it remains a very vital institution in Ghana.

## **Festivals**

Ghana is often described as a land of festivals. There are several rites and rituals that are performed throughout the year in various parts of the country. They cover the rites of passage of birth, childhood, puberty, marriage and death. To the majority of people, these celebrations are extremely important as they celebrate in their communities and families.

Many festivals include thrilling durbars of chiefs, when tribal leaders and queen mothers process in decorated palanquins, shaded by the traditional umbrellas, and supported by drummers and warriors discharging ancient muskets.

Panafest, one of the country's most important festivals, is held every summer. It celebrates Ghanaian roots and people from other African countries as well as the African-Americans with roots in Ghana visit the country and celebrate their heritage.

Accra's great harvest celebration, the Homowo Festival, is celebrated by the Ga people in the Greater Accra region. The word "Homowo" actually means "making fun of hunger". The traditional oral history describes a time long ago when the rains stopped and the sea closed its gates. A deadly famine spread throughout the southern Accra Plains, the home of the Ga people. When the harvest finally arrived and food became plentiful, the people were so happy that they celebrated with a festival that ridiculed hunger.

These are only two examples of the many events that contribute to Ghana's vibrant and colourful culture. Ghana is frequently described as a land of festivals, music, and traditional dances. There is hardly any community, clan, or tribe which lacks an occasion to celebrate annually.

## **Music & Dance**

There are three main types of music: ethnic or traditional music normally played during festivals and at funerals; "highlife" music, which is a blend of traditional and imported music; and choral music, which is performed in concert halls, churches, schools and colleges.

After independence, the Ghanaian music scene flourished, particularly the up-tempo, danceable style known as highlife, which is still played consistently at the local clubs and bars. Many Ghanaians are adept drummers, and it is not unusual to hear traditional drum ensembles play at social events or performances.

"Hiplife", another genre of music in Ghana, is now in stiff competition with the more established highlife for airplay on local radio stations and nightclubs. A movement that started in the mid 90s, hiplife is effectively a Ghanaian version of hip-hop rap music, with raps basically in the local dialects, Twi being the most prevalent. Hiplife in present day Ghana arguably represents youth culture in general. Slowly but surely hiplife is surpassing western music in terms of airplay, whereas 10 years ago the opposite was true. It is the most significant addition to Ghanaian culture in decades.

## **Holidays**

1st January - New Year's Day

6th March - Independence Day

Varies (Friday before Easter) - Good Friday

Varies (Monday after Easter) - Easter Monday

1st May - Labour Day

25th May - Africa Day

1st July - Republic Day

1st Shawwal (Islamic calendar) - Eid al Fitr (End of Ramadan)

10th Dhul Hijja (Islamic calendar) - Eid al Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice)

December - National Farmers' Day

25th December - Christmas

31st December - Revolution Day

## Learn the Lingo

As with many former African colonies, the official language of Ghana is the colonial language, in this case English. It is used for all government affairs, large scale business transactions, educational instruction and in national radio and television broadcasts. In fact, the Constitution of 1969 required that members of parliament speak, read and understand English. Though many incentives are being used to persuade Ghanaians to use the local language in business, government and education, English has not shown any decrease in use.

Nine languages have the status of government sponsored languages: Akan, Dagaare/Wale, Dagbane, Dangme, Ewe, Ga, Gonja, Kasem, and Nzema. These are further divided into branches. The Kwa group occupies the southern part of the country. Fante-Twi (a major Akan language), Ga, and Ewe are the most important languages spoken in this group, while three subdivisions of the Gur branch – Mole-Dagbane, Grusi, and Gurma – dominate the northern region.

Additionally, there are 26 recorded non-government sponsored languages and a myriad of dialects that further separate the Ghanaian tribes. Ethnologue, a database of world languages, lists a total of 79 languages spoken throughout Ghana.

## Lay of the Land

Ghana is situated in West Africa on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, just a few degrees north of the equator. The tropical country is bordered by the Côte d'Ivoire on the west, Burkina Faso on the north and Togo on the east.

There are five distinct geographical regions within Ghana's borders. The terrain consists mostly of low plains with the Kwahu Plateau in the south-central area. To the north lie three regions – the Ashanti Uplands, the Akwapim-Togo Ranges, and the Volta Basin. The 5th region, the high plains, occupies the northern and north-western sector of the country. Like most West African countries, Ghana has no natural harbours. Because strong surf pounds the shoreline, two artificial harbours were built at Takoradi and Tema to accommodate Ghana's shipping needs.

Additionally, a lush tropical rainforest belt, broken by heavily forested hills and many streams and rivers, extends northward from the shore, near the Côte d'Ivoire frontier. This area, known as the Ashanti, produces most of the country's cocoa, minerals and timber. North of this belt, the country varies from 91 to 396 m above sea level and is covered by low bush, park-like savannah and grassy plains.

Ghana is drained by a large number of streams and rivers. In addition to the coastal lagoons, there is the enormous Lake Volta, which is one of the world's largest artificially created lakes. It extends from the Akosombo Dam in south-eastern Ghana to the town of Yapei, 520 km to the north. The lake generates electricity, provides inland transportation and is a potentially valuable resource for

irrigation and fish farming.

In the wetter south and southwest areas of Ghana, the river and stream pattern is denser, but in the area north of the Kwahu Plateau, the pattern is much more open, making access to water more difficult. Several streams and rivers also dry up or experience reduced flow during the dry seasons of the year, while flooding during the rainy seasons is common.

## What's the Weather like?

The southern, coastal region of the country has a tropical climate, being hot and dry. Temperatures range between 30 to 35°C in the dry seasons and 21 to 27°C in the wet seasons. There are two rainy seasons, the first between April and June and the second from September to November. The northern half of the country only experiences one rainy season, which usually starts in May or June.

## Biodiversity

Ghana has three main bio-geographical zones: the south-western portion is within the Guineo-Congolian, the middle belt within the Guineo-Congolian / Sudanian transition zone and the northern tip of the country falls within the Sudanian zone. Despite a lack of information on the full biological resources in such areas as the marine and other aquatic ecosystems, huge amounts of surveying and research have been conducted to record: about 2,974 indigenous plant species, 504 species of fish, 728 kinds of birds, 225 varieties of mammals and 221 species of amphibians and reptiles. From these, very few are actually endemic – three species of frogs, one lizard, and 23 species of butterflies. This is believed to be because of its geographical positioning on the west coast, working as a corridor between countries further along the coast and the central area of Africa.

## Good Books

### Guidebooks

- Ghana. Philip Briggs. Bradt Travel Guides, 2004. ISBN 9781841620930
- West Africa, 6th Edition. Anthony Ham et al. Lonely Planet, 2006. ISBN 9781740597715
- The Rough Guide to West Africa, 4th Edition. Jim Hudgens & Richard Trillo. Rough Guides, 2003. ISBN 9781843531180
- Africa (Lonely Planet Healthy Travel). Isabelle Young. Lonely Planet, 2000. ISBN 9781864500509
- Community work Earthways: Simple Environmental Activities for Young Children. Carol Petrash & Donald Cook. Gryphon House, 1992. ISBN 9780876591567
- What Works: A Guide to Environmental Education and Communication Projects for Practitioners and Donors. Martha C. Monroe. New Society Publishers, 2000. ISBN 9780865714052
- If the World Were a Village. David J. Smith & Shelagh Armstrong. A & C Black, 2004. ISBN 9780713668803
- Where There Is No Doctor: Village Health Care Handbook. David Werner. Macmillan Education Ltd., 1993. ISBN 9780333516515
- The Diversity of Life (Penguin Press Science). Edward O. Wilson. Penguin, 2001. ISBN 9780140291612

## **FICTION / NON-FICTION**

- A Passage to Africa. George Alagiah. Time Warner Paperbacks, 2003. ISBN 9780751532142
- The Shadow of the Sun: My African Life. Ryszard Kapuscinski. Penguin, 2002. ISBN 9780140292626
- Adventures in Africa. Gianni Celati. University of Chicago, 2000. ISBN 9780226099552
- Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in England and Africa. Ekow Eshun. Penguin, 2006. ISBN 9780141010960
- The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence. Martin Meredith. Free Press, 2006. ISBN 9780743232227

## **TEACHING GUIDES**

- Essential Grammar in Use with Answers: A Self-study Reference and Practice Book for Elementary Students of English 2nd Edition. Raymond Murphy. Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN 9780521529327
- Essential Grammar in Use with Answers: A Self-study Reference and Practice Book for Intermediate Students of English 3rd Edition. Raymond Murphy. Cambridge University Press, 2004. ISBN 9780521532891
- Lessons from Nothing: Activities for Language Teaching with Limited Time and Resources (Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers). Bruce Marsland. Cambridge University Press, 1998. ISBN 9780521627658
- Games for Children (Resource Books for Teachers). Gordon Lewis & Gunther Benson. Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN 9780194372244
- Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching 2nd Edition. Diane Larsen-Freeman. Oxford University Press, 2000. 9780194355742

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