

Africa DISCOVERY



GHANA, TOGO, BENIN
FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS

13 DAYS / 12 NIGHTS

Any date upon request

Minimum 2 – Maximum 16 participants



and learn about the great influence voodoo spirits still have on people.

*Heading inland from the forest to the savannah,
we discover the Taneke tribe on a rocky mountain,
then the Tamberma with their fairy-tale clay adobe castles
and finally, we enter the Ashanti kingdom in Kumasi forests.*

*We end our tour exploring the former Gold Coast, with the largest European castles in Africa; centuries
remain of gold and slave trade.*

*Indeed, the most complete and spectacular way to discover West Africa rich patrimony of Tribes, Kingdoms,
festivals and ceremonies*

For travellers who want to get acquainted with this unique region ... and love Africa!

What is Special about the trips



Akwasidae Festival (Ghana) Each year, in the Ashanti calendar certain days are dedicated to a very special celebration at the Royal Palace in Kumasi and this traditional ceremony takes place in one of the last African Kingdoms which has maintained its ancient rituals still alive.

During this celebration, the King sits under a spectacular colourful umbrella, is adorned in vivid cloth and massive centuries old jewellery (Ashanti gold jewellery and masks are considered masterpieces of African art) and he is surrounded by the Ashanti elders and advisors, all under the authority of the Royal Speaker who holds in his hands the symbols of power. In front of the King a narrow passage of dignitaries is also formed, representing all roles and positions of

power within the kingdom: sword and knife bearers, armed guards, carriers of beautiful ostrich feathers fans etc. The ceremony is then made up of a procession of royal court attendants bringing gifts, storytellers reciting the history of the Ashanti Kings, drummers & trumpeters playing horns of ivory. Corpulent dancers dressed in vivid red costumes perform an erotic dance. The mother queen also joins the ceremony accompanied by her attendants. We will witness and experience the splendour, the flavour and the atmosphere of one of last great African monarchs.



Egun masks (Benin) The Egun is a powerful mask secret society. Egun masks are the reincarnation of deceased people and feared for their aggressiveness unpredictable way of moving around. Intensively coloured, masks are covered with a multitude of pieces of cloth of many red shades. They emerge from the forest and form a procession moving down the streets of the village, leaping towards any foolish spectator who dares getting too close. And nobody wants to be touched by the Egun because any contacts carry the danger of contamination with the death. Better watch out! When masks arrive, they perform a kind of bull fight designed to scare the crowd but they are actually

greeted with bursts of laughter!

Participants to the tour will always attend the following events:

- an interesting voodoo ceremony
- a spectacular fire dance
- an “Ashanti funeral”: festive celebration that consecrates the return of the spirit of an ancestor.



ITINERARY:

DAY 1: Lome, Gulf of Guinea -TOGO
Arrival in **Lome** and transfer to the hotel.

Meals own arrangements
Overnight Hotel Sarakawa or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 2: Voodoo, from Lome to Agbodrafo (100 km – driving time 3 hr) - **TOGO**



Lomé, the vibrant capital of Togo, is the only African city which was a colony of the Germans, the British and the French. It is also one of the few capitals in the world bordering with another nation. These elements have led to the development of a unique identity reflected in the life style of its inhabitants and in the architecture of the town: Lomé is indeed a cross point for people, trade and cultures, a cosmopolitan city in small size. We will visit: the central market with its famous “Nana Benz”, women who control the market of the expensive “pagne” (=cloths) coming from Europe and sold all

over West Africa; the colonial buildings of the administrative quarter where the reminiscent of colonial time is still very present.

We will stop at the fetish market where an eclectic assortment of all the necessary ingredients for love potions and magical concoctions are to be found.

In a remote village we will join a Voodoo ceremony: the frenetic rhythm of the drums and the chants of the adepts call in the voodoo spirits who then take possession of some of the dancers. They fall into a deep trance: eyes rolling back, grimaces, convulsions, insensitivity to fire or pain. Sakpata, Heviesso, Mami Water are just some of the voodoo divinities who can manifest. In this narrow village, surrounded by the magic atmosphere of the ceremony, we will finally understand what people mean when they say: “In your Churches you pray God; in our voodoo shrines we become Gods!”

Meals B – L – D
Overnight Hotel du Lac or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 3: “Brazilian” city, from Agbodrafo to Ouidah (70 km – driving time 2 hr) - **TOGO & BENIN**
Benin border crossing (Hilla Kodji / Save Kodji)

Drive to Ouidah. Ouidah was conquered by the Dahomey Kingdom during the 18th century to become one of the main slave ports. Today Ouidah enjoys an Afro-Brazilian architecture with the python temple facing the Catholic Cathedral. The laid-back attitude of the locals blends in harmoniously with the thunder of the distant waves and the rhythm of the drums - a timeless atmosphere well described by Bruce Chatwin in his book "The Vice-Roy of Ouidah". By foot we visit the Python Temple and the Portuguese Fort, now a small but interesting museum on the history of Ouidah and the transatlantic slave trade. We end the visit following the “slave road” to the beach, the point of “no return” where slaves were shipped to the “new world”.

Meals B – L - D
Overnight Hotel Casa del Papa or similar, ocean front bungalows, wild beaches, swimming pool. (all bungalows ensuite with aircon)

DAY 4: Royal Palace, from Ouidah to Dassa (250 km – driving time 5 hr) - **BENIN**

Today is Sunday. Meeting with Celestial Church: interesting example of religious syncretism mixing voodoo and Christianity. We will meet the people, the priests, attending exorcism, prophesies and trances.

We cross Lake Nokwe with a motorized boat to reach Ganvié, the largest and most beautiful African village on stilts. The approximately 25,000 inhabitants of the Tofinou ethnic group build their wooden huts on teak stilts. Fishing is their main activity. Ganvié has managed to preserve its traditions and environment despite the long-lasting human presence in a closed setting; and the lake is not over-fished. Daily life unfolds in the dugout canoes that adults and children row with ease using brightly coloured paddles. Aboard these canoes men fish, women expose goods at the “floating market”, children go to school and play.

Once returned to the mainland we drive to Abomey where we visit the Royal Palace. The walls of the palace are decorated with bas-reliefs representing symbols of the ancient Dahomey kings. At the height of power the King has up to 4.000 wives living in the harem. Nowadays the royal palace is a museum, listed in the UNESCO World Heritage, it displays items belonging to the ancient kings: thrones, cult altars, statues, costumes and weapons. A Kingdom whose economy was for a long time based on the slave trade: a permanent state of war made it possible for the kings to capture thousands of prisoners whom then they sold as slaves. The royal army included a female battalion feared for its boldness and cruel war behaviour. In the centre of the royal courtyard we discover a temple built with a mixture of clay, gold dust kneaded with the blood of thousands human sacrifices. *We attend Egun dancing masks if applied*

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Jeko or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 5: Fetish hills, from Dassa to Natitingou (350 km – driving time 8 hr) – BENIN

Today is a long but intense day. First stop will be at Dankoli Fetish, a unique shrine for ancient animistic cults still practiced. Thousands of short sticks are pushed in and all around the fetish as testimony of the countless prayers for a good harvest, a happy wedding, an easy delivery, success at school etc. Once the prayers are answered, people

come back to sacrifice what they had promised. Fresh traces of sacrifice, palm alcohol and oil on the fetish are witnesses of the many prayers and requests been fulfilled.



In the afternoon we discover a few old Taneka villages located on a mountain with the same name. The villages are made up of round adobe huts covered with a conical roof protected on the top by a terra cotta pot. The upper part of the village is inhabited by the young initiated and by the fetish priests who only cover themselves with a goat skin and always carry a long pipe. This ethnic group has been living on an archaeological

site for centuries and it looks as if the first inhabitants (from Kabye tribe origins) moved to the mountain during the IXth century. Since then, other ethnic groups have joined thus forming melting-pot where despite the fact that each group kept its own cults and initiation rites, common religious and political institutions were defined.

As we wander around the villages along alleys bordered by rocks with ancient and mysterious carved marks, only witnesses of populations who in the past have lived in these places.

We may come across young initiated, wearing only with a cover sex and magical amulets, or elders fetiche priest wearing a skin. Taneka believe that in order to “become” a man, it is necessary to combine time, patience and many sacrifices. Initiation is a lifetime process until life itself becomes a rite of passage, therefore life should not be conditioned by a “before” and an “after” but rather as following a continuous path.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Tata Somba or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 6: Adobe castles, from Natitingou to Defale (100 km – 3 hr) – **BENIN & TOGO**



We enter the land of Somba & Tamberma who live in adobe fortified dwellings. The shape is like small medieval castles, they are one of the most beautiful examples of traditional African architecture. Their style impressed Le Corbusier vanguard architect that describe it as «sculptural architecture». In fact, the houses are built by hand, layer of clay after layer, adding round mud balls and shaping them as per the plan of the house. A kind of sensual gesture mixing strength, care and beauty. Large shrines- of phallic form - at

the entrance of their homes show their animistic believes. With the permission granted to us by the elders we enter their homes to better understand their way of life.

Actually their houses are projections of their cosmology - the ground floor, with its darkness, represents death and is the place of the ancestors; the second floor, open to the sky, represents life and is the place where grandmothers keep babies until they “find out” which ancestor has come back as the new life - only then the baby will be allowed to come down from the terrace.

All - family, food supplies and stock - are kept inside the fortified house, for safety reasons in case of attack by enemies. For centuries these populations have been seeking refuge on the Atakora Mountains to escape Muslim slave traders coming from the north.

Togo border

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Defalé or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 7: Fire Dance, from Defale to Sokode (120 km – 3 hr) – **TOGO**

Half a day easy walking to discover Kabye and Moba villages living on Defale mountains to experience a spontaneous and friendly welcome

Drive in the mountains will bring us to encounter the Kabye ethnic group. Kabye dwellings called «Soukala» are composed by several adobe huts joined by a wall - each dwelling is the domain of a patriarchal family. In the villages located at the top of the mountains, women are potters using an ancestral technique without the wheel while men are blacksmiths still working iron with heavy stones instead of hammers and anvil as in the early dawn of Iron Age. We follow the process of shaping a hoe.

In the evening, we arrive at the villages of Tem tribe to discover the fire dance. At the centre of the village a large fire lights up the silhouette of the participants. They dance to the hypnotic beat of the drums eventually leaping into the glowing embers, picking up burning coals, passing them over their bodies and even putting them in their mouths and swallowing them. all this without hurting

themselves or showing any sign of pain. It's difficult to explain such a performance. Is it matter of courage? Self-suggestion? Magic? Maybe it really is the fetishes that protect them from the fire.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Central or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 8: Rainforest, from Sokode to Kpalime (290 km – driving time 5 hr) – [TOGO](#)

We will head southwards, with a stop on the way in Atakpame, a typical African small town built on hills where all the products coming from the nearby forests can be found. Through their skilled work on small weaving looms, men of the region make the large brightly coloured fabric called “Kente”. From Atakpame we move to the tropical forests surrounding Kpalime, a town with a rich colonial past which is now an important cocoa and coffee trading market. Walk in the forest to discover the mysterious world of the tropical forest and so meet with the majesty profile of tropical trees and the sounds of tam. Under the guidance of a local entomologist, we will learn about butterflies and colourful insects.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Gess or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 9: Glass beads, from Kpalime to Koforidua (220 km – driving time 5 hr) – [TOGO - GHANA](#)

Ghana border crossing and continuation to the Volta Region.



Krobo tribe is known for its glass beads. Krobo people produce and wear glass beads for ceremonies and aesthetic purposes. We will visit an artisan community of beads producers and even experience the process of making our own bead. The craftsmen have been producing beads following the same long-lasting traditional technique for centuries. They use scrap glass that is grounded into a fine powder. The glass powder is then meticulously made into patterns and placed into hand-made clay moulds covered in kaolin. The beads are cooked then decorated, washed and eventually strung.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight New Capital View or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 10: Ashanti, from Koforidua to Kumasi (200 km – driving time 5 hr) – [GHANA](#)

Kumasi is the historical and spiritual capital of the old Ashanti Kingdom. The Ashanti people were one of the most powerful Kingdoms in Africa until the end of the 19th century, when the British annexed Ashanti Country to their Gold Coast colony. The tribute paid today to the Asantehene (=King) is the best evidence of their past splendour and strength. With nearly one million inhabitants, Kumasi is a sprawling town with a unique central market, one of the largest in Africa. Every kind of Ashanti craft (leather goods, pottery, Kente cloth) is found here, along with just about every kind of tropical fruit and vegetable.



The program includes a visit to the Ashanti Cultural Centre: a rich collection of Ashanti artefacts housed in a wonderful reproduction of an Ashanti house. In the afternoon we participate – if available – in a traditional Ashanti funeral, attended by mourners wearing beautifully red or black togas. We say “funerals” but it means a “festive” celebration: thanks to this ceremony the deceased return as an ancestor and will protect his family. Relatives and friends gather, socialize and celebrate his/her memory. The chief arrives surrounded

by his court under the shade of large umbrellas while drums give rhythm to the dancers whose intricate moves are highly symbolic in war and erotic meanings.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Miklin Hotel or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 11: Golden Kingdoms, Kumasi (transfers) – GHANA

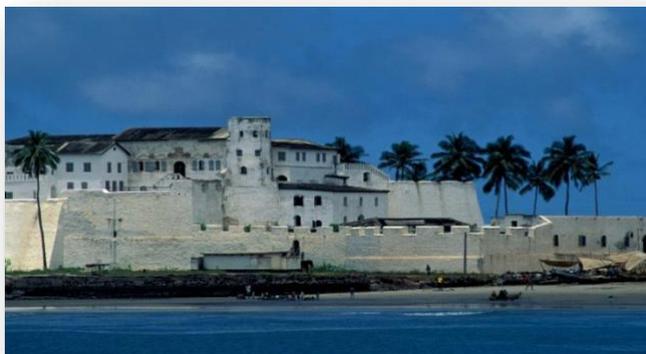
In the morning continuation of the tour of Kumasi, with the visit to the Royal Palace Museum hosting a unique collection of gold jewels worn by the Ashanti court. In the afternoon visit to a few Ashanti villages with traditional clothing and carving.

If the date coincides, the program will be modified to participate at the great event: **Akwasidae Festival**

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Miklin Hotel or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 12: Slaves’ Castles, from Kumasi to Anomabu (250 km – driving time 4 hr) – GHANA



Drive to the coast.

Elmina Castle, the oldest European building in Africa, erected by the Portuguese in the 15th century. At different times the castle has been used as a warehouse to trade gold, ivory, and eventually slaves. The castle we visit today is the result of successive extension works and is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The old Dutch Cemetery in Elmina goes back to 1806.

Outside the castle, there is a spectacular

fishing village with lots of large colourful fishing boats - every day these wooden large pirogues conducted by skilled fishermen across strong ocean waves and currents, “fighting” to earn a living. In the old town we will see the Posuban, the shrines of the ancient “Asafo companies” - the warriors who used to put their offerings on the large colourful statues. The alleys in the old town have a very lively atmosphere, bringing us back to a time when Elmina was a busy colonial town.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Anomabu Beach Resort or similar, Ocean front resort with comfortable bungalows on the beach. (all bungalows ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 13: Metropolis, from Anomabu to Accra (180 km – driving time 3 hr) – GHANA

Drive to Accra.

Accra, the capital of Ghana, has maintained its unique identity despite the fast-paced development currently underway in this intriguing African city. We explore the old quarter of James Town, inhabited by the local population known as the Ga. Our tour ends with the visit of a workshop where they are specialized in building fantasy coffins. These special handcrafted coffins can reflect any shape: fruits, animals, fish, cars, airplanes.... the only limit being imagination! Started in Africa, these flamboyant coffin designs are by now collected worldwide and exposed in museums.

End of tour 18h00

In the evening transfer to the airport for the flight out.

Meals B – L

Day-use Rooms in day-use till 18.00 hrs (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

TECHNICAL SHEET

- **VISAS:** Togo - two entries visa; Ghana & Benin - single entry visa
- **VACCINATIONS:** Yellow fever – compulsory; malaria prophylaxis - highly recommended.
- **MEALS:** lunch, picnic or at local restaurants (pre-selected menus); dinner at the hotel restaurant (pre-selected menu)
- **LUGGAGE:** due to the itinerary please contain the weight in 20 kg (45 Lbs), preferable use duffle bags..
- **TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Not included. Mandatory for medical assistance, repatriation, material and physical damages. We are not responsible for any material and physical damage during the tour
- **TRANSPORT:** microbus or minibus or 4x4 vehicles
- **ACCOMMODATIONS:** Twin rooms (two beds apart) are very limited. Please check the availability with TransAfrica when booking
- All our trips are designed to be flexible so that we can adapt to weather conditions, focus on the group's interests and take advantage of opportunities that arise once there.
- Considering the special nature of the journey, some parts may be modified due to unpredictable factors and are based on unarguable decisions of the local guide. Costs originating from such variations will be sole responsibility of the participants. Of course, the guide will do his/her utmost to adhere to the original program.
- Prices could change in case of major changes in services costs, beyond the organizer's will

- Personal and holiday insurance (compulsory)
- Tips for drivers, guides and hotel staff
- Costs related to delayed or lost luggage
- Any item of personal nature such as phone calls, laundry, etc.
- Whatever is not mentioned as included

TERMS OF PAYMENT

PAYMENT POLICY

A deposit of 30% is required at the time of confirmation and the balance is due not less than 60 days before the arrival of guests at the destination.

You must have trip cancel insurance to protect your investment for unforeseen circumstances. This is good for North America only.

[AgencyLink Home \(travelinsured.com\)](http://travelinsured.com)