
IVORY COAST: AT THE HEART OF WEST AFRICA (Discovery)

11 DAYS / 10 NIGHTS

**Scheduled departure dates from Abidjan in 2019:
Jan. 26th, Mar 2nd, Apr 13th, Nov 9th, Dec 28th**

And any date upon request.

Minimum 2 – Maximum 16 participants

*A journey to a country that only very recently has again become accessible to travellers.
An itinerary for real "pioneers" wanting to discover multi-faced Africa:
from liana bridges to cathedrals, from tribal masks to initiation dances,
from tribal chiefs to sacred monkeys, from traditional hunters' villages to the skyline of Abidjan,
from savannah to forests and the Ocean wild beaches.
Every day will be filled with surprises and will take you to genuine, vibrant
and colourful traditional ceremonies.
For travellers who like unfiltered journeys in Africa*



ITINERARY:

DAY 1: Abidjan – IVORY COAST (Saturday)

Arrival in **Abidjan** and transfer to the hotel.

Meals own arrangements

Overnight Hotel Azalai or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon; swimming-pool)

DAY 2: Abidjan, the African metropolis: skyscrapers & lagoons (Sunday)

(the city tour will be scheduled in according with timetable of domestic flight to Bouaké)

If we look beyond the lagoon, the "plateau" (the City District) is growing very fast, not horizontally as in most African towns but vertically, with its large modern buildings and skyscrapers. Not much land is available and the little available has to be continually extorted from the waters of the Ebrié Lagoon. The modern City District is defined to the west by the harbour and its endless queues of people waiting for a ferry, and to the east by the incredible silhouette of Saints Peter & Paul Cathedral. When we admire the skyline, only the Statue of Liberty seems to be missing, however this is Black Africa, not Manhattan!

The visit begins with a short ferry trip for a general view of the "plateau", a waters perspective. Then from the extremely lively market of Treichville we move to the peaceful and quiet "Cocody", an elegant residential area hosting the Prime Minister's office and some white colonial buildings. We proceed to the new quarter of Youpugon, not far from the Banco River forest and the "Fanico", the famous clothes washers.

Transfer to the airport, picnic before the domestic flight to **Bouake**. Arrival and transfer to the hotel.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Mon Afrik or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon; swimming-pool).

DAY 3: From the Akan lineage to Sudanese architecture (Monday)

In the morning we meet **the Baulé**, a tribe of the Akan lineage originating from Ghana. The Baulé share with their cousins, the Ashanti of Ghana, a complex social hierarchy but they also have expanded their cultural traditions by taking cues from their neighbours. Their complex craftsmanship shows this rich heritage: fine statues representing the world of spirits, sculpted weaving-loom pulleys and beautiful masks. Visit of some villages.

We attend the dance of **Goli masks**. It can be performed both for entertainment and for the funeral of a person of high rank. The round-shaped "lunar" Goli wooden mask is surmounted by two horns. The Baulé tribe adopted this ritual from their neighbours, the Wan tribe, after 1900. Celebrating peace and joy, the participants will sing, dance and drink palm wine.

Goli mask on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6og4QI9CICc>

In the afternoon we drive to the north, leaving the main road for a track taking us to the old town of **Kong**. The landscape changes: Kong is in fact located in sub-Saharan Sahel, a dry savannah with trees such as the baobab.

The origins of Kong date back to the XII century. This ancient kingdom emerged as a trading center when the merchants from the Mali Empire began trading in the territory of the Senufo people. Tradition wants Kong to be the place which gave its origins to the Mandé ethnic group, merchants known all over West Africa as "Diola". The Diola transformed Kong into an important trading point, halfway between the Sahara salt caravans and the exports from the southern forests (cola nuts, gold and slaves). The mosque of Kong is the best example of traditional Sudanese architecture in the country.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Auberge de Kong or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon)

DAY 4: Iron Age (Tuesday)

Drive to **Ferkessedougou**, main crossway to Mali and Burkina Faso. Its development started in 1895 when the first part of the Abidjan-Niger Railway was completed and Ferkessedougou became its southern

terminal. Today the town is known as a cattle trading center of Zebu cows and its market is worth a stop. From Ferkessedougou we drive to a remote village to witness the old technique of **iron melting** carried out by some old blacksmith, a very rare example of traditional iron metallurgy in Africa. This "tribal technology" will bring us back to the first **Iron Age** in Africa, referring to a period of time in the prehistory and protohistory of the Old World (Afro-Eurasia) when the dominant tool making material was iron. The iron ore comes from some local mines in the form of deep pits and it is milled manually. The traditional "adobe bellows furnace" is loaded with layers of charcoal and layers of ore then the fire is set - we can now leave the furnace since the fusion will take till the following morning. Iron smelting techniques are secret and always associated to taboos and initiations. The blacksmith is endogamous, meaning that only those born into blacksmith families are eligible for the long apprenticeship into the craft. They are feared by the tribe since they possess obscure magical powers, are in contact with evil spirits, are capable to transform stones into iron and are able to transform a solid piece of iron into liquid and again into solids of different shapes. They are considered "masters of the fire", capable of calling upon the "spirits of the earth" with their powerful hammers. Due to their scaring magical powers, blacksmiths often have to live outside of the villages. They are a highly powerful cast: the fabrication of iron tools and iron weapons in fact allows extensive agriculture, efficient hunting and successful warfare. Arrival in the evening to our comfortable hotel in Korhogo where we will spend two nights.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Olympe or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon; swimming pool).

Day 5 The Panther Dance (Wednesday)

In the morning return to the village of the traditional smelting to see the result of the fusion. The sealed base of the clay furnace will be broken to extract the iron bloom and the blacksmith will pound part of it. Afterwards, with the aid of a bellows, he will heat the metal powder obtained until it melts in a crucible and he will pour it into a mould. The metal is later heated once again and hammered on the forge to the required shape, which finally will be polished from imperfections and bumps. We have witnessed the whole process leading to the creation of an object. Traditional iron metallurgy is a rare example of an ancient "tribal technology". For more than 80 years it was believed that this technique had disappeared ... up to the discovery of this village!

The town of **Korhogo** is a must for any traveller visiting Ivory Coast northern regions. Its history dates back to the XIII century and today it is the capital of **the Senufo**, the tribe that has produced some of the greatest artworks of Africa, in almost every field: sculpture, weaving, painting and blacksmiths. Visit of the interesting craft market to discover wooden sculptures and textiles with the traditional Senufo patterns. It is these patterns that have inspired modern artists like Pablo Picasso who also personally travelled to Senufo country to meet and exchange experiences with local artists.

The Senufo are renowned for their complex initiation rites. Poro, the initiation of young men, is a long process which takes 21 years to be completed. It is the passage from youth to adulthood and it consists in learning the social and religious secrets that turn a young boy into a genuine Senufo man.

Their most spectacular mask dances is the **Boloy**, or panther dance, performed by initiated – we will attend it later in the afternoon.

Panther dance on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OAD5Lj2Jo>

We stay two days in the Korhogo region and if in this period a traditional funeral occurs, we will not miss the opportunity to look at the sacred masks dance performed during this special ceremony.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Olympe or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon; swimming pool).

DAY 6: The virgins' dance (Thursday)

We will leave the main road to discover the village of Niofoin with its clay granaries, decorated with symbolic bas-reliefs, and with a unique sacred house boasting a tall conical roof. The house has painted decorations and sacred objects from the animistic cults since they are still practiced by Senufo people.

Later in the day, encounter with the unmistakable Fulani nomads, constantly in search of pastures for their herds of zebu. **The Fulani** can be easily recognized by their conical straw huts, the walking stick they always carry over their shoulders, the water bottle hanging around their neck, the machete in their hands and their proud posture. These nomads seem to come from nowhere and head nowhere. Accustomed as they are to a hard life and to its simple joys, they look perfectly fine with the little they carry. They are the true gentlemen of these endless savannahs. Visit of a village, mostly inhabited by women and children. We will be invited into their huts to see old family photos, dowry presents etc. Women wear beautiful coloured fabrics and, around their necks and in their hair, very special tribal jewellery (Baltic amber, pearls of Bohemia, old Venetian "murrines", stones, buttons and any other plastic object they may like).

Late in the afternoon we attend the dance of the **virgin girls** - called **Ngoro**, performed by the **Senoufo** and part of the Poro Initiation. The young initiates spend months together in secluded sacred groves where they learn the social and religious secrets that turn a man into a genuine Senoufo. After seven years there is a big celebration for those who have undergone all stages of initiation, in particular the dance of the virgin girls is performed at the end of the first stage of initiation.

Meals B – L - D

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

DAY 7: Sacred warriors (Friday)

In the region of Odienne we will meet **the Malinké**, descendants of the old Mali Empire. The history of this ethnic group includes **Samory Touré**, a leader and slave hunter who became famous for his war against the French colonial army which was able to defeat him only after many years of fighting. His army included the **Dozo** (initiated hunters) reputed for their courage and mystic powers. Although there are no longer wars to fight, this lineage continues to get unabated respect and their mystic powers are still passed on through a long initiation process. Today they are considered a sort of local police, guardian angels watching over villages, mediators of disputes and of course great healers. Brave and with a perfect knowledge of the territory, they are employed by the government to secure the northern borders of the country.

We will encounter the Dozo and walk in the savannah with them - dressed in their traditional costumes made of "bogolan" fabric and carrying their shotguns covered with amulets. They will give us an interesting introduction to traditional herbal medicines and will take us to a sacred site where, to the growing rhythm of tam-tams, they will dance and give proof of their strength.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Les Frontières or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon; swimming-pool)

DAY 8: Acrobatic masks (Saturday)

The day is dedicated to the encounter with **the Yacuba**, also known as the Dan.

We visit villages built on hillsides and characterized by big round huts with thatched roofs - some of the houses are decorated with frescos made by women during ceremonial periods.

Amid scented branches of coffee plantation and at the foot of an enormous Iroko tree, we visit a large pond inhabited by venerated catfish, custodians of ancestors. Soon the echoes of tam-tams and the shouts of the initiated tell the masks that it is time to leave the sacred forest ... so they appear and offer us unforgettable emotions.

Yacuba dances by YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdFswalN9ek>

We move southwards and when Mount Tonkpi with its "tooth" comes into view, we know we are close to our destination: **Man** was developed at the foot of 18 extremely green mountains and is the capital of the **We and Guéré** ethnic groups.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Les Cascades or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon; swimming-pool)

DAY 9: Liana bridges (Sunday)

The **rainforest** that stretches between the Ivory Coast and Liberia is famous for its long liana bridges, the origin of which is shrouded in mystery – tradition says they are secretly built by young initiated men over the course of only one night! The crossing is not difficult provided taboos are respected and no heavy load or babies are carried along.

In a nearby tiny village, **masks** will emerge from the forest towards us. In the cosmogony of the **Guéré people**, there is a creator god that communicates with humans only through its intermediaries, the masks: during the mask dance the distance between the human and the spirit worlds disappears, the cosmic and the social orders are restored, and gratitude is expressed to the gods and the ancestors.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Les Cascades or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon; swimming-pool)

DAY 10: A basilica in the savannah (Monday)

We continue our journey across immense plantations of rubber, cocoa and coffee trees, dotted only by tiny villages. We enjoy the fragrance of the cocoa tree pods – the Ivory Coast is the world's main producer of cocoa – and we learn about the techniques of cultivation, harvesting and processing.

In the afternoon arrival in **Yamoussoukro**, the country's capital since 1983. It is the native village of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, the first President of the Ivory Coast and one of the greatest independence **leader**. He implemented agricultural developments which created a wealthy middle class of planters and farmers. Economic success attracts immigrants from neighbouring Sahel countries and western foreign investors, thus making the Ivory Coast the giant economy of French speaking West Africa. In Yamoussoukro, the formal political capital, and in Abidjan, the economical capital, the Ivorian dream of the 1970s and 1980s has come true: the dream of a country that has managed to rival European capitals in terms of architecture and size of buildings. With the death of Houphouët-Boigny, the town of Yamoussoukro has remained the formal capital however the president, ministries, government and administration are all in Abidjan. After a period of crisis that degenerated in a long civil war, the Ivory Coast has again found peace and stability, and it has achieved one of the fastest economic booms in Africa with a spectacular 8.2% growth of its Gross Domestic Product.

A "child" of the economic boom of 1980s is the **Basilica of Notre Dame de la Paix** (Our Lady of Peace). According to the 1989 Guinness Book of Records, its width of 150 m. made it the largest Christian religious building in the world (Saint Peter's in Rome is "only" 115 m. wide). And with its 7,763 square meters of stained glass it also boasts the biggest stained glass section in the world. Its architecture was inspired by St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and today the Basilica is still a fervent place of worship in Catholic Africa.

In Yamoussoukro cars drive in wide boulevards constantly trying to avoid big pot holes and free roaming chickens! During the visit our attention will also be caught by the huge government buildings, the lofty 14-floor high hotels and the artificial lake which is inhabited by caimans. And yet, among all this, what mostly strikes our imagination is the feeling of emptiness, the nothingness that surrounds what has become a bygone dream.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Le Président or similar (all rooms ensuite and with aircon; swimming-pool)

DAY 11: Gran Bassam, old colonial atmosphere (Tuesday)

We drive south towards Abidjan and arrive at the **Ebrié Lagoon** on the Atlantic Ocean. **Grand Bassam** is an old town built on a sand bank between the lagoon and the ocean. It was the former capital of the French Ivory Coast colony and now is a maritime leisure resort for the Abidjanese. Thanks to its calm avenues shaded by tall trees, large bougainvillea and well preserved colonial buildings, Grand Bassam has a magic atmosphere. The old post office is a jewel of French colonial architecture. The Costume Museum, in the former governor's palace, with its large outer staircase is a true architectural gem and its

unique collection of tribal costumes, masks, ornaments and ethnographic photographs gives an interesting perception of the country history and culture.

Continuation to **Abidjan**. Some day-use rooms are available and later transfer to the airport for the flight out. End of our services.

Meals B – L
Day-use rooms Hotel Onomo

EXTENSION, ON REQUEST

Assinie: Between Ocean and Lagoon

Less than one hour drive from Abidjan, between the wild Assinie Mafia Beach and the Aby Lagoon, lays the Coucoue Lodge. Indeed the best way to end one's experience of the Cote d'Ivoire: beach, swimming-pool, golf, tennis, outboard excursions, or... just relax.

Comfortable bungalows, good international cuisine, 2 restaurants, 2 swimming pools, free outboard boat to the private beach on the sand strip between the ocean and the lagoon. www.coucoue-lodge.com

Technical sheet

- **VISAS:** Ivory Coast - single entry visa. It is possible to obtain an E-visa authorisation directly online at <https://snedai.com/visa-biometrique>
- **VACCINATIONS:** Yellow fever – compulsory; malaria prophylaxis - highly recommended.
- **ACCOMMODATION** in standard rooms, as per itinerary. TWIN ROOMS (WITH 2 BEDS) ARE NOT AVAILABLE
- **MEALS:** lunch, picnic or at local restaurants (tourist menus); dinner at the hotel restaurant (tourist menu)
- **LUGGAGE:** max 20 kg and in duffle bags.
- **TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Not included. Mandatory for medical assistance, repatriation, material and physical damages.
- **MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION:** microbus or minibus or 4x4 vehicles, domestic flight Abidjan - Bouaké
- 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
- In the event of cancellations, changes or delay in the schedule of the domestic flight, the organizers shall not be held responsible for any change, delays or disagreements and the costs that they may incur. It is understood that the organizers will do their utmost to find solutions to any problems inherent the journey