



# Welcome to Ghana

Hailed as West Africa's golden child, Ghana deserves its place in the sun. One of Africa's great success stories, the country is reaping the benefits of a stable democracy in the form of fast paced development. And it shows: Ghana is suffused with the most incredible energy. With its welcoming beaches, gorgeous hinterland, rich culture, vibrant cities, diverse wildlife, easy transport and affable inhabitants, it's no wonder Ghana is sometimes labelled 'Africa for beginners'. It's easy to come here for a week or a month, but no trip can be complete without a visit to Ghana's coastal forts, poignant reminders of a page of history that defined our modern world. Travel north and you'll feel like you've arrived in a different country, with a different religion, geography and cultural practices. The beauty is that this diversity exists so harmoniously, a joy to experience and a wonder to behold in uncertain times.

## Ghana is known for History

**Cape Coast Castle** Tour this well-preserved slave fort for a haunting reminder of Ghana's role in the brutal transatlantic trade.

**St George's Castle** This Medieval castle and former slave fort was the first European building constructed in West Africa.

**National Museum** Exhibitions detail Ghana's cultural and archeological history.

**Manhyia Palace Museum** A small but fascinating set-up telling the story of the Ashanti kings.

## Beaches

**Bojo Beach** Nearby Accra, the white sands and chilled atmosphere are the perfect antidote to city life.

**Axim** Powder-soft sands, hidden bays, forest hikes and some of the best resorts in Ghana.

**Akwidaa & Cape Three Points** Sweeping beaches; trips through plantations and mangroves; and, in season, turtles nesting in the sand.

**Busua** Learn to ride the waves with a surf school, or simply enjoy the windswept beach views.

## Nature

**Mole National Park** Explore saffron savannah and deep green forest in search of elephant, buffalo and waterbuck.

**Kakum National Park** The 30m-high rope bridge will make you feel as if you're lost in the treetops.

**Wli Falls** Pass sweeping hills, dark forests and cool, clear streams to reach Ghana's highest falls.

**Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary** River safaris, birdwatching and nature walks, with all activities run by the friendly, traditional village.

## Money and Costs Currency

Ghana Cedi (C)

### Daily Costs

**Budget:** Less than C300

Dorm bed C45

Fried rice in chop bar C5

Star Beer C6

Accra to Tamale by bus C65

**Midrange:** C300–600

Hotel room with bathroom & air-con C150

Pizza C35

Drink in a bar C10

Accra to Tamale flight C242

**Top End:** More than C600

Room in lodge US\$150

Two-course meal C80

Cocktail C22

4WD with driver, US\$120 per day

## Bargaining

Bargaining is a way of life in Ghana and prices at craft stalls and in markets are definitely negotiable.

## Money

ATMs are virtually everywhere, with almost all accepting Visa (Stanbic's taking MasterCard and Maestro). Exchange bureaus are found in most major towns.

## Exchange Rates

Australia A\$1 - C5.5

Canada C\$1 - C6

Euro zone €1 - C8

US US\$1 - C12.30

UK UK£1 - C9

For current exchange rates see [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).

## Tipping

Tipping is not common in chop houses or cheap eateries, but is more expected in upscale venues (a tip of 10% to 15% should suffice). Porters or bag handlers at the airport and bus stations will often expect or ask for a tip. A cedi or two should be fine.

## Changing Money

The best currencies to bring are US dollars, UK pounds and euros, in that order. Foreignexchange bureaus give lower exchange rates for small US\$ denominations, so pack your \$50 and \$100 notes.

## Travellers Cheques

Barclays is the only bank to exchange travellers cheques; there is a maximum of US\$250 per transaction.

### Credit Cards

Midrange and top-end hotels tend to accept credit cards, but at a surcharge.

## Travel with Children

Aside from the daily struggle of getting them to swallow malaria tablets, travel with children in Ghana needn't be difficult. There are plenty of child-friendly restaurants in Accra, offering high chairs, kids' menus and even small play areas. Many of the larger hotels and beach resorts have a kids' pool and/or a playground and can provide cots or extra beds for children. Narrow, uneven pavements and open drains mean that Ghana is not remotely buggy friendly, so bring a sling or infant backpack if you're travelling with a baby or toddler. Nappies are available in supermarkets and general stores throughout Ghana, though designated baby-change facilities are a rarity. Ghanaian waters are rough, so it's best to stick to splashing in the surf, unless you are lucky enough to be at Lou Moon Lodge, which has a sheltered beach with calm water, perfect for swimming.

## Gay & Lesbian Travellers

Homosexuality is illegal in Ghana and attitudes towards gays and lesbians are for the most part conservative. In many instances same-sex couples will not be allowed to share a room.

## Travellers with Disabilities

There are few facilities for travellers with disabilities in Ghana, though more upmarket chain hotels sometimes offer lifts and wheelchair-friendly rooms. Download Lonely Planet's free Accessible Travel guide from <http://lptravel.to/AccessibleTravel>.

## Arriving in Destination

Kotoka International Airport (Accra) You'll be met with numerous offers from taxi drivers after exiting customs. A taxi from the airport to the city centre should cost no more than C30.

## Entry & Exit Formalities

You need a yellow-fever vaccination certificate to enter Ghana.

## Customs Regulations

You'll need a permit from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to bring/take out plants or plant products.

Absolute prohibitions include raw coffee, pornography and 'scandalous' or 'defamatory' literature.

Residents and nonresidents arriving in Ghana are permitted to carry up to US\$10,000

## Visas

Visas are required by everyone except Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States) nationals. Visas upon arrival are rarely issued.

### Further Information

Though it's technically possible to pick up a visa upon arrival, they only get granted in rare cases so it is highly advisable you get one ahead of travelling. Single-entry three-month visas (US\$60) and multiple-entry six-month visas (US\$100) are standard. You can get a visa extension at the Immigration Office in Accra near the Sankara Interchange.

### **Visas for Onward Travel**

Most nationalities need a visa for onward travel throughout West Africa.

#### **Burkina Faso**

The embassy issues visas for three months (C146), usually in 24 hours. You need three photos and a yellow-fever certificate. Three-month tourist visas are also available at the border at Dakola, costing CFA94,000.

#### **Côte d'Ivoire**

A three-month visa costs €50 and requires a hotel confirmation. See full list of requirements at [www.snedai.com](http://www.snedai.com).

#### **Togo**

The embassy issues visas for one month on the same day. Alternatively, you can get a visa at the border at Aflao (CFA15,000), but it's only valid for seven days and you'll need to extend it in Lomé.

## **Planning Tips What to Take**

Malaria tablets

Diarrhea medicine

Insect repellent

Hiking boots

Lightweight walking trousers

Binoculars

First-aid kit

Digital thermometer

## **What to Wear**

Ghanaians tend to dress more formally than Westerners. While shorts are fine in Accra, other big cities and tourist areas, you might feel more comfortable in a long skirt or trousers in more conservative areas, particularly in the north. Take long sleeves and trousers for the evening, as well as something smart if you want to visit some of Accra's fancier dining or drinking establishments.

## **Pre-Departure Checklist**

Organise your tourist visa in advance at your local Ghanaian diplomatic mission.

Check that your passport has at least six months validity after your intended departure date.

Make sure you've had the relevant vaccinations.

Start taking your antimalarial tablets.

Book your first night's accommodation.

Carry a Visa/Master card with you to use at local ATMs.

## Etiquette

Ghanaians are an affable lot and greetings are of paramount importance. You will always be welcomed, greeted and asked how you are and it is expected you do the same in return.

Humour is entrenched in Ghanaian culture and always the best way to deal with tricky situations.

In Muslim areas, remember not to pass food or shake hands with your left hand.

People will often try to get your attention by hissing or making a 'tsssss' sound – this may sound impolite to your ears but it's a perfectly acceptable way of doing things.

## History

Present-day Ghana has been inhabited since 4000 BC, filled by successive waves of migrants from the north and east. By the 13th century several kingdoms had developed, growing rich from the country's massive gold deposits and gradually expanding south along the Volta River to the coast.

## Power & Conflict

By the 16th century one of the kingdoms, the Ashanti, emerged as the dominant power, conquering tribes left, right and centre and taking control of trade routes to the coast. Its capital, Kumasi, became a sophisticated urban centre, with facilities and services equal to those in Europe at the time. And it wasn't long until the Europeans discovered this African kingdom. First the Portuguese came prospecting around the coast; the British, French, Dutch, Swedish and Danish soon followed. They all built forts by the sea and traded slaves, gold and other goods with the Ashanti.

But the slave trade was abolished in the 19th century, and with it went the Ashanti domination. By that time the British had taken over the Gold Coast, as the area had come to be known, and began muscling in on Ashanti turf. This sparked several wars between the two powers, culminating in the British ransacking of Kumasi in 1874. The British then established a protectorate over Ashanti territory, which they expanded in 1901 to include areas to the north. The Gold Coast was now a British colony.

## The Road to Independence

By the late 1920s the locals were itching for independence, and they set up political parties dedicated to this aim. However, parties like the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), formed in 1947, were too

elitist and detached from those they were meant to represent – the ordinary workers. So the UGCC's secretary-general, Kwame Nkrumah, broke away in 1948 and formed the Conventional People's Party (CPP), which became an overnight success. Nkrumah was impatient for change and called for a national strike in 1949. The British, anxious about his popularity, jailed him. Despite this, the CPP won the elections of 1951. Nkrumah was released and he became prime minister.

## Independence & the Nkrumah Years

When Ghana finally won its independence in March 1957, Nkrumah became the first president of an independent African nation. His speeches, which denounced imperialism and talked about a free, united Africa, made him the darling of the pan-African movement.

But back home Nkrumah was not popular among traditional chiefs and farmers, who were unimpressed with the idea of unity under his rule. Factionalism and regional interests created an opposition that Nkrumah tried to contain through repressive laws, and by turning Ghana into a one-party state.

Nkrumah, however, skilfully kept himself out of the fray and concentrated on building prestige projects, such as the Akosombo Dam and several universities and hospitals.

But things were starting to unravel. Nkrumah expanded his personal bodyguard into an entire regiment, while corruption and reckless spending drove the country into serious debt. Nkrumah, seemingly oblivious to his growing unpopularity, made the fatal mistake of going on a state visit to China in 1966. While he was away his regime was toppled in an army coup. Nkrumah died six years later in exile in Guinea.

Dr Kofi Busia headed a civilian government in 1969 but could do nothing to overcome corruption and debt problems. Colonel Acheampong replaced him in a 1972 coup, but few things changed under his tenure.

## The Rawlings Years

By 1979 Ghana was suffering food shortages and people were out on the streets demonstrating against the army fat cats. Enter Jerry Rawlings, a good-looking, charismatic, half-Scottish airforce pilot, who kept cigarettes behind his ear and spoke the language of the people. Nicknamed 'Junior Jesus', Rawlings captured the public's imagination with his calls for corrupt military rulers to be confronted and held accountable for Ghana's problems. The military jailed him for his insubordination, but his fellow junior officers freed him after they staged an uprising. Rawlings' Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) then handed over power to a civilian government (after a general election) and started a major 'house cleaning' operation – that is, executing and jailing senior officers.

The new president, Hilla Limann, was uneasy with Rawlings' huge popularity, and later accused him of trying to subvert constitutional rule. The AFRC toppled him in a coup in 1981, and this time Rawlings stayed in power for the next 15 years.

Although Rawlings never delivered his promised left-wing revolution, he improved the ailing economy after following the orders of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). During part of the 1980s, Ghana enjoyed Africa's highest economic growth rates.

# The Democratic Era

By 1992 Rawlings was under worldwide pressure to introduce democracy, so he lifted the 10-year ban on political parties and called a general election. However, the hopelessly divided opposition couldn't get their act together, and Rawlings won the 1992 elections freely and fairly, with 60% of the vote. Still licking their wounds, the opposition withdrew from the following month's parliamentary elections, giving Rawlings' newly formed National Democratic Congress (NDC) an easy victory. In 1996 he repeated this triumph in elections that were again considered free and fair. At much the same time, the appointment of Ghanaian Kofi Annan as UN secretary general boosted national morale.

After eight years of Rawlings and the NDC (the constitution barred Rawlings from standing for a third term in the 2000 presidential elections), his nominated successor and former vice-president, Professor John Atta Mills, lost to Dr John Kufuor, leader of the well-established New Patriotic Party (NPP). Some fun-loving members of Accra's growing middle class say his biggest legacy is the creation of the Accra Mall, a shiny shopping mall on the outskirts of town, complete with the country's first multiscreen cinema. Under the Kufuor administration, primary-school enrolment increased by 25% and many of Ghana's poor were granted access to free health care.

The 2008 election was widely regarded as a test of Ghana's ability to become a modern democracy. Atta Mills won by a slim margin and despite the tensions with NPP competitor Nana Akufo-Addo, the election passed without serious violence. After Atta Mills' unexpected death in July 2012, his Vice President, John Dramani Mahama, took hold of the reigns, and went on to win the 2012 general election.

## Stats

### Currency

Ghana Cedi (C)

### Language Spoken

English, plus several local languages, including Ga, Akan, Ewe and Twi.

Population 30 million

### Time

GMT

### Other Features Ghana Today

Once held up as an example of African growth, spurred on by the discovery of oil off the coast in 2007, Ghana has faltered since 2013. A growing public deficit, high inflation and a weakening currency forced



President John Dramani Mahama to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2015 for a bailout as world commodity prices took a nosedive.

While development continues apace in Accra, where wealthier Ghanaians and expats frequent an ever-expanding number of fancy restaurants and hotels, the picture is gloomy for most Ghanaians. Unemployment, public debt and corruption are high. In Accra's poorest suburbs or the rural parts of northern Ghana, development is a work in progress. People defecate in the open for lack of sanitation; school-aged children sell water sachets in the street and women still spend many hours fetching water at the village pump.

The December 2016 presidential elections saw opposition candidate Nana Akufo-Addo beat incumbent John Dramani Mahama, who conceded peacefully and immediately – a testament to Ghana's strong democratic traditions.

## People of Ghana

Ghana's population of 30 million makes it one of the most densely populated countries in West Africa. Of this, 44% are Akan, a grouping that includes the Ashanti (also called Asante), whose heartland is around Kumasi, and the Fanti, who fish the central coast and farm its hinterland. The Nzema, linguistically close to the Akan, fish and farm in the southwest. Distant migrants from present-day Nigeria, the Ga are the indigenous people of Accra and Tema. The southern Volta region is home to the Ewe.

In the north, the Dagomba heartland is around Tamale and Yendi. Prominent neighbours are the Gonja in the centre, Konkomba and Mamprusi in the far northeast, and, around Navrongo, the Kasena. The Sisala and Lobi inhabit the far northwest.

## Religion

Ghana is a deeply religious country and respect for religion permeates pretty much every aspect of life, from hilarious sideboards ('Jesus Loves Fashion', 'If God Says Yes Snack Bar') to preachers on public transport and street corners, ubiquitous religious celebrations such as funerals, and the wholesale takeover of Ghana's airwaves by God (and his workers) on Sunday.

You'll come across churches of every imaginable Christian denomination; even the smallest village can have two or three different churches. About 70% of Ghanaians are Christian. Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations are particularly active, as are the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches. If you can bear the length (three to four hours), attending a service is an enlightening experience, whatever your creed.

Christianity was introduced by European missionaries who were also the first educators, hence the link between religion and education persists.

About 15% of the population is Muslim; the majority are in the north, though there are also substantial Muslim minorities in southern cities such as Accra and Kumasi.

Many Ghanaians also have traditional beliefs, notably in spirits and forms of gods who inhabit the natural world. Ancestor veneration is an important part of this tradition. Many people retain traditional beliefs alongside Christian or Muslim beliefs.

## The Arts

### Music

There's no doubt about it, Ghana's got rhythm. Whichever part of the country you visit, Ghana's soundtrack will be a constant travel companion. From the age of three or four children are taught to dance: it's not unusual to see little kids copying the hip-grinding and ass-shaking that characterises the average Ghanaian party.

Traditional music doesn't have the popular following that it has in countries such as Burkina. It tends to be reserved for special occasions and associated with royalty.

Contemporary music, on the other hand, is thriving. Highlife, a mellow mix of big-band jazz, Christian hymns, brass band and sailor sonnets, hit Ghana in the 1920s, and popular recordings include those by ET Mensah, Nana Ampadu and the Sweet Talks. Accra trumpeter ET Mensah formed his first band in the 1930s and went on to be crowned the King of Highlife, later performing with Louis Armstrong in Ghana.

WWII brought American swing to Ghana's shores, prompting the first complex fusion of Western and African music. Hip-life, a hybrid of rhythmic African lyrics poured over imported American hip-hop beats, has now been ruling Ghana since the early 1990s.

Imported American hip-hop and Nigerian music closely compete for the number two spot after Highlife. Gospel music is also big, as is reggae.

### Textiles

Kente cloth, with its distinctive basketwork pattern in garish colours, is Ghana's signature cloth. Originally worn only by Ashanti royalty, it is still some of the most expensive material in Africa. The cloth can be single-, double- or triple-weaved and the colour and design of the cloth worn are still important indicators of status and clan allegiance.

Kente is woven on treadle looms, by men only, in long thin strips that are sewn together. Its intricate geometric patterns are full of symbolic meaning while its orange-yellow hues indicate wealth.

### Arts & Crafts

Ghana has a rich artistic heritage. Objects are created not only for their aesthetic value but as symbols of ethnic identity; to commemorate historical or legendary events; to convey cultural values; or to signify membership of a group.

The Akan people of the southern and central regions are famous for their cloth, goldwork, woodcarving, chiefs' insignia (such as swords, umbrella tops and linguist staffs), pottery and bead-making.

Around Bolgatanga in the north, fine basket weaving and leatherwork are traditional crafts. Drums and carved oware boards – the game of oware has various names throughout West Africa – are also specialities.

## Ghana Reads

Ghana is one of the most interesting places to be in Africa right now, and there are tremendous books exploring the country's history.

Ekow Eshun's *Black Gold of the Sun: Searching for Home in England and Africa* is an excellent account of the author's journey to reconcile his Ghanaian and British roots.

*In My Father's Land*, by Star Nyanbiba Hammond, is part autobiography, part novel, inspired by the author's move from England to Ghana at the age of eight.

Maya Angelou's *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* beautifully documents the author's emigration to Ghana. Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* tells the tale of a man getting to grips with the realities of post-independence Ghana.

Albert van Dantzig's *Forts and Castles of Ghana* remains the definitive work on the early European coastal presence.

Kwame Nkrumah, *The Father of African Nationalism*, by David Birmingham, is a comprehensive biography of the first African statesman; Nkrumah's own works give you an insight into the man and his beliefs.

Paul Nugent's *Big Men, Small Boys and Politics in Ghana* is a good account of the Rawlings era.

*My First Coup d'Etat: Memories from the Lost Decade of Africa*, by the current president, John Dramani Mahama, chronicles his coming of age during the post-independence years.

## Health & insurance

Get comprehensive travel insurance to cover theft, loss and medical problems, ambulances, emergency flights and more. Buy, extend and claim your worldwide travel insurance online anytime – even if you're already on the road!

### Before You Go

#### Recommended Vaccinations

Yellow Fever (certificate essential to enter the country)

Diphtheria

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis B

Measles

Meningococcal meningitis

Mumps

Rubella

Polio

Tetanus

Typhoid

### **Health Insurance**

Make sure you have comprehensive health insurance that covers the cost of any medical treatment and repatriation.

## **In Ghana**

### **Tap Water**

Stick to drinking bottled water in Ghana and try to avoid the sachets of water sold on the street – these are often contaminated.

### **Availability & Cost of Healthcare**

The most reliable and modern medical treatment is in Accra. Lister Hospital is a good choice. In Kumasi try County Hospital. A short consultation with a private doctor should cost around US\$25