TOUR CODE

WF1

ADVENTURESABROAD

SENEGAL, BURKINA FASO, GHANA, TOGO & BENIN

'Our Full West African Odyssey'

20 days

Updated 22/11/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Dakar*

Today we arrive in Dakar, the capital of Senegal.

A NOTE ON SUITABILITY: This is a tour for the hardy! Though this trip is not "physical" as such, you must be prepared for some long days, poor roads, basic conditions, heat and dust. If you are uncertain of your suitability for this trip, please contact our Sales Department.

Overnight in Dakar. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Dakar & Goree Island*

This morning we take a tour of Dakar, the westernmost point on the African continent. Dakar is a dynamic and modern urban center with a strong French colonial flavour. Our city tour shows us the Independence Square, the Presidential Palace, the Cathedral and the Grand Mosque. We also visit the Dakar IFAN Museum with a rich ethnographic collection of masks, statues and other artifacts from all over West Africa. We finally drive around the Corniche for scenic views of the rugged Atlantic coastline.

At midday we take a short ferry ride to the nearby island of Goree. Discovered by the Portuguese, the island was disputed in the following 450 years between the Dutch, the British and the French and changed hands many times. Goree is a World Heritage site (UNESCO) and is infamous for being one of the main gathering and embarkation points for millions of enslaved Africans who were crammed into ships and sent to the Americas.

On the island we visit the chilling House of Slaves where captives were chained in tiny cells waiting to be shipped overseas. Our walk around the island also takes to the impressive fortress, the Catholic Church and the old colonial quarter. Goree boasts many former grand buildings from the 18th & 19th centuries and since there are no cars on the island, it is a beautiful place to unwind and wander among the historical remains away from Dakar's hustle and bustle.

Overnight in Dakar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Dakar - Saint-Louis*

This morning we head northward to historic Saint-Louis which, until 1958, was the capital of French-administered Mauritania and Senegal. En route we stop at the Rose Lake, a center of salt extraction where traditional methods are still in use. This is the finishing line of the demanding Paris-Dakar rally.

Tide-permitting, we may be able to travel some of today's journey "off-road" along the beach in 4X4 vehicles. Alternatively we will continue by bus.

We reach Saint-Louis at the end of the afternoon driving along a road bordered by large and impressive baobab trees.

The city of Saint-Louis is situated on an island at the mouth of the Senegal River and, like the island of Goree, is recognized as a World Heritage Site.

Overnight in Saint-Louis. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Saint-Louis - Djoudj National Bird Park - Saint-Louis*

Heading out early this morning, we drive to the Walo Delta of the Senegal River, a vast area of marshes and wetlands. This river has its source in the Fouta Djalon Mountains of Guinee (where the great Niger River also rises) and marks the border between Senegal and its northern neighbour, Mauritania.

Our destination this morning is the Djouj National Park, considered one of the most important bird sanctuaries on the planet. Situated on a major migratory route, this park is a paradise for bird enthusiasts and was awarded World Heritage status and a World Biosphere Reserve. Some of the world's greatest concentrations of white pelicans and other migratory birds can be seen here.
We board a motorized boat and cruise along the splendid waterways to observe the immensely rich birdlife. Various ethnic groups live along the Senegal River, notably Fulas, Tuculors and Moors.

In the afternoon we return to Saint-Louis for our city tour. We visit the Provincial Museum, the Faidherbe Square, the Central Mosque, and pass by the old Slave Market, a gum Arabic warehouse and countless colonial buildings painted in flaking pastels. At the height of the French period some 4,000 French nationals lived here. We finally drive through the lively fishing community of Guet Ndar and its huge wholesale fish market.

Overnight in Saint-Louis. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Saint-Louis - Dakar, Senegal - Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso*

Today we drive by road back to Dakar and connect with our flight to Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso and ancestral home of the Mossi people, the dominant ethnic group in the country. Burkina Faso is a landlocked country and one of the few places in Africa where the majority of people still cling to ancient animist beliefs and have not fully converted to Islam or Christianity. Despite it being the capital of one of the world's poorest countries, Ouaga is a surprisingly upbeat and friendly place.

Overnight in Ouagadougou. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Ouagadougou - Gaoua*

Our itinerary takes us into rural Burkina and Gaoua, the capital of the Poni Province and the cultural center of the Lobi homeland, arguably one of the best-preserved tribal areas of West Africa. Due to their past war-like practices, their secret societies and their fierce independent nature, the Lobis have retained much of their way of life.

After a tour of the Provincial Museum, we push deeper into remote bush to approach authentic communities, meet extended family units, and enter their traditional fortress-compounds.

Overnight in Gaoua. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Gaoua - Loropeni - Banfora*

Today we travel to Banfora, a major service centre renown for sugar cane cultivation.

En route we stop at the atmospheric archaeological ruins of Loropeni. Local features include pre-European stone ruins, about which little is known. One theory is that they formed the enclosure of the courtyard of a Kaan Iya (king or paramount ruler of the Kaan people) from antiquity. Loropeni is the best preserved example of a type of fortified settlement in a wide part of West Africa, linked to the tradition of gold mining, which seems to have persisted through at least seven centuries.

Overnight in Banfora. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Banfora - Bobo-Dioulasso*

This morning we have an excursion out of Banfora to see the refreshing Kerfiguela Falls and some strange rock formations, the Domes of Fabedougou. The region of Banfora is lush and well-forested in sharp contrast with the arid lands we've travelled thus far.

Later we continue to Bobo-Dioulasso. Despite being Burkina Faso's second largest city, Bobo is remarkably friendly and laid back. The southern part of Burkina offers a beautiful landscape of savannah and forest and is home to the most colourful tribal groups in the country: Bobos, Senoufos, Bwas and Lobis.

On arrival have a brief sightseeing tour of Bobo-Dioulasso, including the Provincial Museum, the public market, the Grande Mosquee and the old quarter of Kibidwe.

Overnight in Bobo-Dioulasso. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Bobo-Dioulasso - Ouagadougou*

Today we return to the capital and enjoy some sightseeing upon arrival, including a scenic drive around the city with stops at the Cathedral, the Craft Market and the National Museum.

Overnight in Ouagadougou. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - Tamale, Ghana*

Today we leave friendly Burkina Faso for Ghana, former British Colony and the only English speaking country in our West African journey. From Ouaga, we drive south through the Gurunsi countryside, an area rich in tribal culture. After the land border crossing formalities, we enter Ghana and experience right away a different cultural feeling.

We make a brief stop at the border town of Paga, home to the Kassena people, one of the various Gurunsi tribes now divided by colonial heritage, language and national identity.
After a visit to the sacred crocodiles, a totemic animal revered by the Kassenas, we drive to the town of Navrongo.

Navrongo was in the early 20th century an advanced bush missionary outpost. French Canadian missionaries developed one of the earliest mission schools in Northern Ghana and built with the help of the locals the first church in the region.

Kassena men erected the building using ancestral mud building techniques and the women decorated the chapel in the traditional Kassena style. The Navrongo church is now part of the tentative list of World Heritage UNESCO sites and of

the most beautiful examples of religious missionary buildings in Africa with its naïve style bas-reliefs of biblical scenes, its murals depicting rural life and its seductive Sudanese banco architecture.

After our lunch in the market town of Bolgatanga, we continue to Tamale to spend the night.

Overnight in Tamale. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Tamale - Kumasi*

Our drive today will take us into a different Africa as we travel from the Sahelian grasslands to the Guinean rainforest, an amazing and very drastic change change in climate, vegetation, scenery, and agriculture. We'll go from brown to green Africa, from savannah to jungle, from dry to wet clime.

En route to Kumasi we'll stop at the beautiful Kintampo waterfalls, set in a deep and lush canyon and we'll have lunch in the market town of the same name.

Overnight in Kumasi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Kumasi Area*

Kumasi comes as a shock, being the most dynamic marketplace in WA and the second largest city in Ghana with a population of almost three million. It is a vibrant commercial center, visited by traders from all over. Kumasi has quite a collection of British colonial buildings and it is the heart of the Ashanti culture.

We'll spend the day in and around Kumasi, taking in the Royal Palace and Museum, some of the craft villages of the surrounding lush countryside, and the ancient Ejisu Ashanti Shrine, a World Heritage Site.

We'll see the weaving of the famous Kente cloth, the making of the Adinkra, a type of fabric worn at funerals, and prized for its intricate hand printed symbols, and the work of woodcarvers --stools, fertility figures, drums, etc.

Overnight in Kumasi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Kumasi - Elmina*

This morning we drive all the way down from the green Ashanti Highlands to the superb Atlantic coast of Ghana. After the gold mining center of Obuasi, home to the Anglo-Ashanti mines, the ones that gave the former colony of Gold Coast its name, we reach the old town of Elmina, the oldest permanent European settlement in Sub-Saharan Africa.

When the Portuguese landed in Elmina they were offered a lot of gold by the local Fanti people and wrongfully thought that the gold mines were nearby. The fishing village became know as Elmina, or "The Mine."

Successively occupied by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, Elmina has remained to this day a busy fishing community with a unique legacy of colonial buildings, that includes its famous fort, an important shipping point in the tragic African slave trade.

The afternoon will be at leisure with time for R&R and to enjoy the beach, the sun, the ocean and the shade of the coconut trees.

Overnight in Elmina. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Elmina - Kakum National Park - Cape Coast Castle - Accra*

Before leaving Elmina this morning, we will proceed to Fort St George for a view and exterior photos. Our preferred fort for actually visiting is Cape Coast Castle, one of our stops later this afternoon.

Our next destination is Kakum National Park, a large stretch of tropical rainforest home to one of the rare canopy walks in Africa. We enjoy a 30 meter-high walkway that links large emergent old growth trees above the forest canopy.

From Kakum we drive down to Cape Coast to visit the Cape Coast Castle. Once a base for the slave trade, the castle continues to be a silent witness to the suffering of Africa. The whole tour is extremely poignant and crystallizes the African experience of slavery, partition, colonialism, racism, emancipation and human rights.

On to Accra, the large and vibrant capital of Ghana. Formed by the merger of the British Gold Coast and part of the German Togoland, English-speaking Ghana was the first country in colonial Africa to achieve independence in 1957.

Overnight in Accra. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Accra: City Tour*

Today we tour Accra ind its surrounds, including La Township to see uniquely designed special caskets at the Teshie and Nungua areas which reflect the beliefs of the people in life after death (ie, a bus driver may be buried in a bus, a waiter in a large beer bottle etc.) We also visit the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum Park and the National Museum for History and Ethnography. We drive past the Independence Arch and Black Star Square, Accra's ceremonial grounds, and view in the distance Christiansborg Castle. This afternoon, we'll stop at the city's arts and crafts market to try out our bargaining skills.

Overnight in Accra. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Accra, Ghana - Lome, Togo*

Today we follow the coastal Volta Region dotted with Ewe villages, tranquil lagoons and tropical vegetation before we reach Togo and the capital Lome. Upon arrival we will have a scenic drive of Lome: an ocean drive, market area, public buildings, main boulevards and the new International Museum of the Gulf of Guinea.

Overnight in Lome. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Lome, Togo - Ouidah, Benin - Cotonou*

This morning we drive along the scenic Togo Lagoon from Lome to the colonial town of Aneho, capital of the former German Togoland. After entering Benin, we drive to Ouidah, an important historical center and the cradle of the Voodoo religion. Ouidah offers a calm and relaxed atmosphere with its colonial buildings and it tropical atmosphere. Our Ouidah tour will include the Temple of Pythons and the Sacred forest, both important Voodoo Shrines as well as the Portuguese Fort now housing the History Museum. The exhibit focuses on the slave trade and Benin consequent cultural links with the Caribbean and the Americas

From the city center, we retrace part of the infamous slave route, passing a former slave market and numerous shrines and memorials erected by the African Diaspora of the New World. We travel all the way to the ocean and the Door of No Return.

After lunch we drive to Cotonou, the commercial capital of Benin.

Overnight in Cotonou. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Cotonou - Abomey - Cotonou*

When the French landed on the shores of the Slave Coast they faced a formidable force: the Kingdom of Dahomey. Like the Ashantis of Ghana the Dahomeys were a people on the rise. Young, ambitious and aggressive, they sought control of the slave trade and rose to power in the region.

Abomey still retain many remainders of its glorious past, and is now a World Heritage Site. We will tour two of the former palaces transformed into museums. Worth admiring are the works of artists and craftsmen who have carried on the traditions of their glorious ancestors.

We return to Cotonou to meet a voodoo priest and witness first hand the faith of his followers in a ceremony marked by percussions, chants and devotion.

Overnight in Cotonou. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Cotonou - Ganvie - Cotonou*

One of the highlights of any trip to West Africa is Ganvie, the African Venice. In ancient times people took refuge on Lake Nokoue from the attacks of the feared Dahomey warriors who were forbidden by a deep belief to fight on water. The Ganvie people over time developed this unique lake culture and way of life which have made them famous.

Our boat cruise takes us along tranquil waterways and fish farms to the lake community of Ganvie. We discover these curious built-on-stilts dwellings, small floating markets and different aspects of the local daily life.

Returning to "terra firma", we pay a visit to the Abomey-Calavi fetish market, the most authentic in the region and (hopefully) meet one of the officiating fetish priests before returning to Cotonou.

Ovenright in Cotonou. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Departure*

Departure from Cotonou.

* LAND ONLY PASSENGERS PLEASE NOTE: This tour ends in COTONOU. Though it may be tempting to book flights out of another West African gateway, we regret that we are unable to book one-way connecting flights from Cotonou to Accra, Dakar, Abidjan, etc.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.