

SENEGAL, BURKINA FASO, GHANA, TOGO & BENIN

'Our Full West African Odyssey'

20 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Dakar

Today we arrive in Dakar, the capital of Senegal.

Overnight in Dakar.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Dakar & Goree Island

This morning 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.

Back in Dakar, we have a tour of the city, 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 drive around the Corniche for scenic views of the rugged Atlantic coastline.

Overnight in Dakar.

Included Meal(s): 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.

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Saint-Louis & Djoudj National Bird Park

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 Djallon 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 Djoudj National Park, considered one of the most important bird sanctuaries on the planet. Situated on a

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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, Tukulors 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Gaoua - Loropeni - Banfora

Today we travel to Banfora, a major service centre renowned 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.

Included Meal(s): 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 Fabadougou. 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 Mosque and the old quarter of Kibidwe.

Overnight in Bobo-Dioulasso.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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 in climate, vegetation, scenery, and agriculture. We'll go from brown to green Africa, from savannah to jungle, from dry

to wet climate.

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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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. 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 known 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Banjul, Gambia - Accra: City Tour

This morning we fly 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. On arrival we'll commence our sightseeing program.

We will tour Accra and 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 drive past the Independence Arch and Black Star Square, Accra's ceremonial grounds, and view in the distance Christiansborg Castle.

Overnight in Accra.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Volta River, Ghana - Lome, Togo

Today we follow the coast dotted with Ewe villages, tranquil lagoons and tropical vegetation before we reach Togo and the capital Lome (we depart Ghana/enter Togo via the Afalo border post).

Lomé, with a population of 837,437 (metro population 1,570,283), is the capital and largest city of Togo. Located on the Gulf of Guinea, Lomé is the country's administrative and industrial center and its chief port. The city exports coffee, cocoa, copra, and palm kernels. It also has an oil refinery. The city was founded in the 19th century by German, British and African traders, becoming the capital of Togoland in 1897.

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.

Included Meal(s): 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 its 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Cotonou & Porto-Novo

Today we travel the short distance to Porto Novo, the capital of Benin and its second largest city of approximately 250,000 people -- a nice change of pace from the bustling Cotonou. Porto Novo, named by the Portuguese in the 1500s, is still today showing significant Portuguese influence. For its size, Porto Novo has an interesting culture and tourist attractions.

In addition to a panoramic tour of the city, we will visit the Musée Ethnographique de Porto Novo, an interesting museum that takes an intensive look into the past of Porto Novo's kings, displaying a good selection of fetishes, old Yourba king masks, costumes, and some musical instruments.

We also visit Palais Royal du Roi Toffa. This former residence of King Toffa is now officially called Musée Honmé. This well-maintained, rather simple, palace is a nice look into how African royalty really lived. 1883 was the year King Toffa signed the treaty with French, agreeing to hand over land. The kingdom of Porto Novo was one of the longest lasting in Africa, lasting up until 1976.

We also see the unique and perhaps most colourful building in West Africa -- the 19th century Brazilian style church now converted into a mosque.

Return to Cotonou.

Overnight in Cotonou.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Overnight in Cotonou.

Included Meal(s): 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!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast