

WEST AFRICA

Senegal, Gambia, Ghana, Togo & Benin

19 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

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, Senegal - Banjul, Gambia

Today we travel by road across the border to The Gambia.

The Gambia, officially the Islamic Republic of The Gambia, is mostly surrounded by Senegal with a short strip of its coastline bordered with the Atlantic Ocean at its western end. It is the smallest country in mainland Africa. The Gambia is situated on either side of the Gambia River, the nation's namesake, which flows through the centre of the Gambia and empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The Gambia shares historical roots with many other West African nations in the slave trade, which was the key factor in the placing and keeping of a colony on the Gambia River, first by the Portuguese, during which era it was known as A Gambia; later, on 25 May 1765, the Gambia was made a part of the British colony when the government formally assumed control, establishing the Province of Senegambia. On 18 February 1965, The Gambia gained independence from the United Kingdom.

Overnight in Banjul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Banjul Area Touring

Today we'll have tour of the city of Banjul, the National Museum, Albert Market, and to view the mixture of architecture and Mosques in this bustling capital. Then we head off to Serekunda (which means 'the home of the Sere family') market, which is the largest in town packed with local shops, merchants, craft sellers, street peddlers from all over West Africa and some Arab countries. Here you will see the batik tie and dye in action with an opportunity to buy some souvenirs, wood carvings or jewellery.

Continue to tour the Gambia River. We visit the bird sanctuaries and native villages in the creeks of the river. We visit the Mandingo villages near the southern Senegal border.

Overnight in Banjul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Southern Gambia

Today's excursion takes us away from the normal tourist track to the traditional settlements of the countryside on the south bank of The River Gambia. Stop to view the production of local arts like tie/dye making, salt processing, pottery, soap making also learn about the harvesting of oysters and the various stages of honey making.

We then continue to a riverside lodge for lunch, and relax before proceeding on a boat trip along the river. We will re-join the truck and make our way back to our hotel with a stop at the Brikama craft market (one of the oldest in Gambia) with some time for shopping.

Overnight in Banjul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Banjul Area

Due to air schedules, we will spend one more night in Banjul. Your Tour Leader will plan something for those who would like something to do today. Your Tour Leader will fill you in on your options once on the tour.

Overnight in Banjul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 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 10 Accra - Cape Coast & Elmina Castles

Today we depart for the Cape Coast; upon arrival we embark on a tour of the infamous Forts, Castles and Slave Dungeons of Ghana.

History will unfold the story of the slave trade which the impact is still felt beyond the shores of Africa today. Visit the Cape Coast Castle built by the Swedes in 1653 and was later taken over by the British. This castle also houses the West African Historical Museum established by the Smithsonian Institute in collaboration with the Ghanaian Government in 1994. Visit the Elmina Castle built by the Portuguese in 1482 and is also known as St. George's Castle. This castle was the first European structure built in Sub-Saharan Africa. The colourful harbour nestled below the Elmina Castle, full of pirogues preparing to go to sea offers one of West Africa's greatest photo opportunities.

Overnight in Elmina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Kakum National Park & Elmina Walking Tour

Early morning departure for a drive through the historic Denkyira Kingdom to Kakum National Park, one of West Africa's surviving tropical rain forests. Extending over 360sq km, Kakum is the home to over 40 large mammals and 400 bird species as well as many species of butterflies, flora and fauna. The most popular attraction is the canopy walkway, which is made up of seven bridges extending 330m, hanging 30m above the forest floor. Choose between a 2 km nature walk through this forest to discover the wide variety of exotic floral species and the medicinal values they offer or take a walk on the canopy walkway.

After lunch, embark on a guided walking tour of Elmina, which was the first point of European contact in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was once the most cosmopolitan city in Tropical Africa. Climb the Jago Hill to Fort Saint Jargo, which was used by the Dutch as a post to snatch the Elmina

Castle from the Portuguese.

Overnight in Elmina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Elmina - Kumasi: City Tour

After breakfast, drive through the forest zone to Kumasi, the seat of the Ashanti Empire to explore the legends of the famous Ashantis, whose legacies are still evident today with a stop at Assin Manso. We visit the site of "Donkor Nsuo", the former Slave River and market and the final transit point for a large number of enslaved Africans. This is the final resting place for two ancestors whose mortal remains were returned from the USA and Jamaica and re-interred there.

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 enjoy a drive through the city with monuments dedicated to the memory of the great Ashanti people. End the day's tour at the National Cultural Center, which features the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum and various studios of the brass makers, potters and batik makers.

Overnight in Kumasi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Kumasi Area Tour

We'll spend the day in and around Kumasi, taking in the Manhyia Palace Museum to obtain firsthand information on the legacies of the Ashanti kingdom. A regal history that dates back to 1700 is told with relics and artifacts.

We also visit 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 14 Kumasi - Volta Region

We depart early morning for scenic drive to a beautiful village located on the low course of the splendid Volta River. We will have the opportunity to pay a courtesy call on the paramount chief and elders amidst traditional drumming and dancing by the villages and also participate in a 'naming ceremony' whereby you will be given a traditional African name. Other activities include a demonstration of pottery making which is the main occupation of the women in the village.

Overnight in the Volta Region.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 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 Lomé: an ocean drive, market area, public buildings, main boulevards and the new International Museum of the Gulf of Guinea.

Overnight in Lomé.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Lomé, Togo - Ouidah, Benin - Cotonou

This morning we drive along the scenic Togo Lagoon from Lomé to the colonial town of Aneho, capital of the former German Togoland, where we exit Togo (border post Aneho).

After entering Benin (border post Hilla-Condji), 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's 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 17 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 18 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 19 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