



# GHANA TOGO & BENIN

## “VOODO FESTIVAL AND CULTURAL IMMERSIONS”

January 08 - January 22, 2025

Led by Tour Manager, Mohamed Halouani

Can be combined with Niger tour (January 22 - February 03, 2025) **AND** Nigeria tour (February 03 - February 12, 2025) **AND** Ivory Coast tour (February 12 - February 22, 2025)

Uncover three of West Africa's most colorful destinations on this special overland tour through Togo, Benin, and Ghana, each offering diverse cultures and traditions and their own distinct historical pasts. Venture off the main tourist trail to truly experience native life and blend in with the locals at every opportunity. Visit ancient cultural sites and colonial era structures, learn about the dark historical past of the slave trade, and appreciate the unspoiled natural rainforests and pristine beaches. A highlight of this adventure will be the rare opportunity to attend the colorful "Fête du Vodoun" Benin's national voodoo festival and witness lively dances and ceremonies.

Starting in the bustling city of Lomé, the capital of **Togo**, discover the Akodessewa Fetish Market, an integral component of Togolese culture.

Crossing into Ouidah, **Benin**, engage in the thriving cultural traditions of the colorful Fête du Vodoun (Voodoo Festival) and feel the energy of the lively dances. Next, visit one of Benin's most beautiful communities at Ganvie, known as the "Venice of West Africa." In Abomey, explore the 16th century underground dwellings of Agongointo-Zoungoudo, built to protect the locals from invaders or provide a hideout for surprise attacks against the enemy.

In **Ghana**, observe the Wli Waterfalls, the highest in West Africa surrounded by a lush, semi-deciduous forest. Visit the village of Tafi Atome, a community dedicated to protecting the endangered mona monkeys and spend a few days in Kumasi, an excellent base from which to indulge in the culture and discover some important UNESCO Sites. On the journey south towards the "Gold Coast" to the historic city of Elmina, stop in Assin Manso, once an important town for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Take part in an exciting rainforest canopy walk at Kakum National Park and learn how to create batik garments using traditional techniques. The last stop is Accra where the unique "Fantasy Coffins," are created. These burial masterpieces are designed in a variety of shapes according to the profession or clan of the deceased such as a car, cell phone, alligator, lion, etc. are created. Finally, wander the local animated market and explore Jamestown, one of the oldest suburbs in Accra to admire its historical structures that predate the colonial era including the 17<sup>th</sup> century Fort James.

Ihab Zaki  
Managing Director

Wednesday, January 08

Arrive in Lomé (**TOGO**)



Upon arrival in **Lomé**, the vibrant capital of Togo and the only African city that was once a colony of the Germans, British, and French, meet the local representative at the airport and transfer to the *Sarakawa Hotel or similar* for check-in and overnight.

**Note: Check-in time is 3:00 pm. If you arrive on January 07 or in the early morning of January 07, an extra hotel night will need to be booked.**

Thursday, January 09

Lomé - Aného - Ouidah (**BENIN**)



Begin the day with a city tour visiting the **National Museum of Togo**, which showcases ancient cultural and historical exhibits. Voodoo is an important part of the culture in Togo and a stop at the **Akodessewa Marché Fetiches**, the world's largest voodoo market, will provide a comprehensive understanding of this local tradition. The stalls sell dried animal parts and reptile skins, and most vendors double as soothsayers. Also make a quick stop at the **Artisans' Village** to see the skillful artisans weaving cloth, carving statues, weaving baskets, and much more. Travel overland to **Benin**, stopping along route at **Aného**, a former slave port and commercial center. From here, take a pirogue across **Lake Togo** to the historic voodoo town of **Togoville**, from where many vodouists were taken as slaves to Haiti. At **Maison Royal** (the chief's house) see the 19<sup>th</sup> century King's throne from where Chief Mlapa III signed a peace treaty giving what was then known as Togoland to Germany. Take a walk through the communities and visit the **shrine** commemorating the

appearance of the Virgin Mary on Lake Togo in the late 1970s. Once back on the mainland, it is about a two-hour drive to **Ouidah**, a major port city for shipping enslaved Africans from Benin, Togo, and other West African countries to the Americas. Today, it is regarded as the voodoo center of West Africa. Transfer to *Djegba Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Note: For travelers who are sensitive to the treatment of animals, it may be advisable to avoid visiting the fetish market.**

Friday, January 10

Ouidah (Voodoo Festival) - Cotonou



Every January 10th in Benin is a national celebration day known as "**Fête du Vodoun**" in honor of the traditional voodoo religion and the cults associated with it. Many ceremonies are held in Ouidah where thousands of adepts, traditional chiefs, and fetish priests gather. A highlight of the day will be an opportunity to take part in these **festivities** accompanied by spectacular colorful **dances**. Begin the city tour by visiting the historical **Museum of Ouidah**, which is housed in the old **Portuguese Fort**, to learn about the history of the region's past. See the "**Point of No Return**" where most slaves were kept while waiting to be shipped off to the Americas without any hope of returning. End the tour of Ouidah at the **Temple of Pythons**, a sacred shrine home to dozens of pythons that roam freely throughout the temple. In the afternoon, make the journey to **Cotonou** and transfer to *Casa de Cielo Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Saturday, January 11**  
**Cotonou (Porto-Novo)**



After a leisurely breakfast, begin the drive to **Porto-Novo** the capital city of Benin. The first stop will be the **Ethnographic Museum**, to see an excellent display of costumes, ceremonial masks, drums, and other historical artifacts from the region. The **Royal Palace**, now known as the **Honme Museum**, offers an in-depth overview into the private lives of the royal court. Nearby is the eclectic **Da Silva Museum** housed in a beautiful 19<sup>th</sup> century Afro-Brazilian home featuring some Afro-Brazilian artifacts. At the **Great Mosque**, learn the fascinating history about how this former church became a mosque. Return to **Cotonou** for lunch at a local restaurant, then spend time exploring **Dantokpa Marche**, one of West Africa's largest outdoor markets. The wax print section of the market is an excellent place to pick up fabric souvenirs. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Sunday, January 12**  
**Cotonou - Ganvie - Abomey**



Begin the day with a journey to Abomey, stopping to visit **Ganvie**, one of the most beautiful communities in Benin and where the inhabitants of the Tofinu ethnic group build their huts on teak stilts and cover the roofs with a thick layer of leaves. The village has managed to preserve its traditions and canoes are a major source of transportation. A local fisherman will provide the fresh catch of the day, which will be grilled using traditional methods. After enjoying this delicious lunch, explore the underground dwellings of **Agongointo-Zoungoudo**, believed to date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of King Dakodonou, the second king of Abomey. The dwellings were built to protect the locals from invaders. Upon arrival in **Abomey**, transfer to *Tennessee Hotel or similar*, the best available in the region, for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Monday, January 13**  
**Abomey - (TOGO) - Hohoe (GHANA)**



Spend the morning on a city tour of **Abomey**, the capital of the Dahomey kingdom from 1625 to 1900. The main attraction here are the **Royal Palaces** - or at least what is left of them. Constructed by 12 successive kings, these clusters of ancient buildings, terraces, and courtyards are surrounded by a 30 foot high wall, that could accommodate up to 8,000 people. The architecture is quite unique and though the palaces are no longer inhabited, two of them are now in use as the **Historical Museum of Abomey**. The museum contains some 1050 relics of the Abomey kings including Voodoo artifacts, skulls, and banners of the royal family. Some of the wall art depicts the bloody battles of the people of Abomey. After a chance to wander the **artisan's shop** next door, travel back across Togo and into **Ghana**, arriving in **Hohoe** before sunset. Transfer to *Wli Water Height Hotel or similar*, located close to the **Wli Falls** for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Tuesday, January 14**  
**Hohoe - Wli - Tafi Atome - Akosombo**



Spend the morning exploring the stunning **Wli Falls**, believed to be the highest in West Africa, and centered around a beautiful, lush area within the Agumatsa Wildlife Sanctuary in the **Volta** region of Ghana. Enjoy a hike through the thick semi-deciduous forest leading to the falls. Listen for the enormous colony of straw-colored fruit bats found on the adjacent cliffs. Return to the *hotel* for lunch and then check-out. The afternoon will be spent with the locals from the village of **Tafi Atome**, a wonderful community protecting a population of endangered mona monkeys. The local ethnic group here are Ewe and perceive the monkeys to be sacred messengers from the gods and have been protecting them and their habitat for over 200 years. See these beautiful primates up close on a **walking tour** through the surrounding forest while the local guide identifies the medicinal plants that grow here and explains how they are used to make traditional herbal remedies. Continue to **Akosombo** and transfer to *Afrikiko Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

*Note: For those who are feeling fit, an option to hike to the upper falls of the WLi Falls before lunch is available.*

**Wednesday, January 15**  
**Akosombo - Koforidua - Kumasi**



Begin the drive in the early morning to Kumasi, traveling through the stunning **Akuapem Hills** offering outstanding views across **Accra** and **Tema** in the distance. The **Aburi Botanical Gardens**, home to a variety of indigenous and exotic flora, are located at the top of the range. Stroll the gardens while the guide identifies the many trees and plants, some with medicinal properties, and describes how they benefit the locals. Visit **Aburi craft village** to see traditional carved African drums, sculptures, and other exceptional craftworks. Watch the skilled artisans at work while the guide explains the meaning and local beliefs connected to many of the sculptures that have been made in the same manner throughout history. Enjoy lunch at **Koforidua**, famous for its traditional bead market and an essential stop on the way to **Kumasi**. Kumasi is home of the Ashanti people, one of the most powerful nations in Africa until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the British annexed **Ashanti Country** to their Gold Coast colony. Today, Kumasi is a sprawling city with a fantastic **central market**, one of the largest in Africa. Upon arrival, transfer to *Noda Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Thursday, January 16**  
**Kumasi**



Enjoy a full day of culture and history on a city tour of Kumasi beginning with a visit to the **Manhyia Palace**, official residence of the King of the Ashantis. The **Palace Museum** offers a fascinating insight into the history of this powerful tribe and is extremely informative on the well documented Ashanti history and culture. Visit the **National Cultural Centre**, located in one of the oldest suburbs of Kumasi near **Bantama**. Wander the **craft market** and visit the **Prempeh II Jubilee Museum** for an

excellent overview of Ashanti history. A short distance from the palace is **Kejetia Market**, reportedly the largest outdoor market in West Africa. The market is a labyrinth of stalls nestled closely together, and a hive of activity - a great way to experience everyday life and pick up a few bargain souvenirs. After lunch at a local restaurant, stop at the **Okomfo Anokye Teaching Hospital**, to see the famous sword of Okomfo Anokye, a powerful priest born in 1600 in the eastern region of Ghana. Okomfo helped the Ashanti King, Osei Tutu I, defeat the powerful Denkyera tribe and is said to have driven the sword into the ground as a symbol of unity between the Ashanti's and Nzema tribes. The sword is still there to this day, defying all human strength to pull it out. Head to visit the **Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology**, established by Ghana's founding President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah in 1952. It is the leading university in the sub region for science and technology research with students from all over West Africa studying here. In the evening, head to the city and experience the **Kumasi nightlife** and enjoy the evening meal with a live highlife band, then return to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Friday, January 17**

**Kumasi (Ancient Villages)**



After breakfast, head to visit the **Asante traditional buildings**, the last material remains of the great Asante Empire and UNESCO World Heritage Site. There are 10 active shrines within the buildings that are made from bamboo, timber, and mud with thatched roofs. The walls are decorated with motifs that have traditional symbolic meanings attached to ancient Adinkra symbols. Visit the local **spiritual shrine**, where the great female warrior, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, used to fortify herself before going into battle. The journey through Ashanti history continues with a visit to the traditional villages of **Adanwomasie** and **Ntonso**. Adanwomasie is the birthplace of Ghana's rich colorful **Kente cloth** and produces some of the country's finest. Take a walk through the community and interact with the locals whose families have been weaving kente for generations, playing a significant role in the history of this beautiful cloth. Learn about the history behind the many designs and see skilled weavers outside their homes still using traditional looms that have not changed in design for centuries. After a chance to purchase quality Kente cloth, head to **Ntunso**, an ancient village, where **Adinkra cloth** and **symbols** originate. Carved from calabash shells, the Adinkra symbols are then printed onto traditional cloth using natural dyes made from the bark of local trees. Pre-dating Kente cloth, Adinkra cloth has been worn by the Ashanti's for more than four centuries. After lunch, head to visit the village of **Sokoban Krofrom**, where traditional brass casting has been the main source of income for the community for generations. A wide selection of items ranging from jewelry to traditional statues are made here. There will be a chance to see a demonstration of the ancient methods used to produce these wonderful brass pieces. Return to the *Hotel* for free evening at leisure, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Saturday, January 18**

**Kumasi - Gold Coast**



Begin the day with a drive south towards **Elmina**, stopping at **Assin Manso**, an important town along the African slave trade routes, along the way. The town surrounds the **Ndonkor Nsuo (Enslaved African River)**, the river where enslaved Africans were given a health check and bathed before being transported to **Cape Coast** for shipment to the Americas. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant overlooking the ocean and then head to visit the nearby **Cape Coast Castle**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The castle is a thought-provoking monument to a harrowing period in the region's history. Quality time will be spent in the afternoon on a journey touring the castle, which held more enslaved Africans captive than any other in West Africa. See the **dungeons** and the infamous "**Door of no return**" as well as the historical **museum** describing the entire history of the castle and Cape Coast itself. Upon arrival, transfer to *Ridge Royal Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Sunday, January 19**

**Elmina (Kakum National Park)**



Begin the day early and make your way to **Kakum National Park**, renowned for its world-famous rainforest **canopy walkway**. Marvel at the outstanding views that stretch for miles across this breathtaking rainforest from the viewing platforms. Return to the **park headquarters** for a highly informative overview of the park's flora and fauna. Over 40 different mammal species have been recorded within the park including forest elephants, leopards, and six primate species just to name a few. A short distance from Kakum and on the border of the forest is the **International Stingless Bee Project**. The nine species of stingless bees are paramount to Ghana's eco system and there will be a chance to see the hives and learn about their medicinal qualities. There will even be an opportunity to taste and buy quality stingless bee honey. Also visit the **butterfly garden**, where many of the forest butterfly species come to feed. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant run by a local organization that helps deprived children in the Cape Coast area improve their lives through education and advocacy. The afternoon will be dedicated to a true African art immersion with a traditional batik-making workshop with **Global Mamas**. This excellent organization empowers local women to learn artistic skills and sell their finished products in the fair-trade market, enabling them to support their families. There is no better way to get to know locals and hear about their daily life than by working side by side with them and making a traditional batik garment. Joining a local artisan in their workshop to learn the traditional techniques of batik making and production. Return to the city and spend some time wandering the local **fish market** and paying a visit to the boat builders. Almost all the fishing boats used in this bustling **fishing community** are traditional wooden boats and their design has not changed for centuries, nor have the tools and methods used to build them. Enjoy the sights of the many colorful fishing boats bringing their daily catch

into the harbor and take this opportunity to blend in with the locals. Visit the **Castle of St. George**, the oldest extant colonial building in sub-Saharan Africa dating back to 1482. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is steeped in history, playing a prominent role during the tragic transatlantic African slave trade era. There is an informative **museum** inside providing an excellent overview of its historical significance. Return to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Monday, January 20**  
**Elmina - Accra**



Enjoy a free morning at leisure and then enjoy lunch at a restaurant overlooking the beautiful **Gold Coast**, named so by Europeans due to the copious amounts of gold found in Ghana. Begin the drive back to Accra, traveling along a costal road and stop at the town of **Abandze** to visit the 17<sup>th</sup> century **Fort Amsterdam**, built by the British, but captured by the Dutch in 1665, hence its name. It is believed that the first slave prison on the Gold Coast was in the hollow southeast bastion of the fort. Upon arrival in Ghana's capital city, there may be time to visit the **Accra Mall** for an insight into modern day Ghana and to purchase some last-minute souvenirs. Transfer to *Alisa Hotel* or *similar* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Tuesday, January 21**  
**Accra (City Tour & Jamestown)**



Accra has maintained its unique identity despite the fast-paced development of this capital city currently underway. One great way to experience the local culture is at the **Makola Market**, to sample the street food many Ghanaians eat for breakfast. Ghana has exceptional local artisans, and it will be a real treat to see some of their finest pieces at the **Artist Alliance Gallery**, located along the beachfront. Visit a "**Fantasy Coffins**" workshop at **Teshie Nungua** for a chance to see how these unique works of art are made. The coffins usually depict the deceased person's profession or clan such as a car, airplane, animal, etc. In the afternoon, pass by **Black Star Square** to see the **Independence Arch** and the enclosed **flame of African liberation**. Nearby is the **Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park**, final resting place of Ghana's founder. Set in attractive gardens, there is an adjacent **museum**, featuring photos and artifacts providing a good insight into this incredible man's life. Head downtown to **Jamestown**, one of the oldest suburbs in Accra, for a walking tour. Learn about some of the historical structures that predate the colonial era including the 100-foot **lighthouse**, built by the British in 1871. See the attractive colorful **boats** that line the beach on the way to **Fort James**, built by the British as a trading post in 1673. Admire the **Brazilian stone houses**, built by freed slaves who resided in Brazil and made their way back to Africa. Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant in the heart of the community then return to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

**Wednesday, January 22**

**Accra - USA**

**OR continue to NIGER**



After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

**OR** join us on the exciting journeys to the **NIGER, NIGERIA, AND IVORY COAST**.

*Note: Standard check-out time is 11:00am. If you wish to extend your stay beyond this time or require a late check-out, an additional cost will be incurred.*

*"We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients."*

**Special tour remarks:**

- *Tourist infrastructure and facilities outside the cities are very limited & often quite primitive.*
- *Hotels may change at the last minute without prior notice due to reasons beyond our control.*
- *Hotels may not offer TWIN bedded rooms – only double occupancy with a Queen size bed.*
- *Air-conditioners in this part of the world do not cool a room to American standards of comfort.*
- *In the more remote areas, hotels may be very basic with few amenities, poor service, and possible equipment failure such as no hot water, broken faucets, clogged drains, inadequate a/c, etc.*
- *Mosquito-borne illnesses such as malaria are prevalent in these countries.*
- *Documentation of yellow fever immunization is required for travel to Ghana, Togo, and Benin.*
- *Brownouts or blackouts may occur or there may be limited electricity available.*
- *This trip involves long drives in hot weather over poorly maintained and very bumpy roads. Those with bad spines, knees or other medical conditions may find the drives uncomfortable.*
- *There are a lack of modern medical facilities and chronic health problems should be discussed with your physician before joining this tour.*
- *A high level of flexibility, tolerance, respect, open-mindedness, sense of adventure, and willingness to go with the flow if things change is expected while visiting these countries.*

**Tour Cost (Land Only): \$6,995.00**

*Prices are per person sharing in double*

**Single Supplement: \$895.00**

*Price based on group size minimum of 6 participants and maximum of 12 participants*

**Trip Grade: II Lodging Level: \*\*-\*\*\***

*Halouani completed his European Master's in linguistics and Hispanic studies at the Sorbonne University in Paris where he now resides. He has extensive knowledge on Islamic architecture and Eastern decorative elements, as well as archaeology and history.*

**About your Tour Lecturer, Mohamed Halouani...** Mr. Mohamed Halouani, a Tunisian native, transformed his profound passion for travel and history into a creative and diversified educational career, designing, and carrying out multiple archaeological and cultural trips for various institutions such as the Detroit Institute of Art, Textile Museum, American Museum of Natural History, and many more organizations. After having received his degrees in English and Spanish, Mr.



**Tour Includes:**

- Airport/hotel/airport transfers.
- Accommodation in hotels mentioned.
- All meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, L: Lunch and D: Dinner).
- Transportation in minibus with A/C or 4x4 vehicles.
- English speaking guide and local guides at the various villages.
- Entrance fees to all historical sites and museums.
- Bottled water on touring days.
- Escort of a tour manager (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).
- Gratuities to guides, drivers, hotel & restaurant staff, and porters (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).

**Tour does not include:**

- International Airfare USA/Lome & Accra/USA.
- **Visa: Ghana** (currently through Washington DC - \$100), **Togo** (currently e-visa - \$55.00 (multiple entry)), & **Benin** (currently e-visa - \$53.00) all subject to change.
- Beverages, with or without meals and meals not mentioned.
- Yellow Fever or any other required vaccines.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees, laundry, excess luggage, etc.).
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on tour dates.
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules or misconnections.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Gratuity to your tour Lecturer (optional).
- Travel protection insurance (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED).

**Trip Grade:**

**II Active** - Some hikes, slightly more demanding walks at or to sites, few elevations, comfortable, but busy schedule. Roads throughout this part of Africa are often poorly maintained and driving distances are long.

**Lodging Level:**

**\*\* Basic:** Comfortable yet on the Spartan side, usually small but generally with private facilities. Some such lodges and motel-styles need repairs, added cleaning, and improvements but they are suitable for one-night stays even if they lack western style amenities. (2 or 3 stars).

**\*\*\* Superior:** Lodges and hotels with additional amenities, refined service, and comfort level acceptable to western standards. (3 or 4 stars).

