



Togo

Country Facts

History

Archaeological findings discovered in the coastal area prove that the region of present-day Togo was already inhabited by pygmies before the Christian era. Between the 11th and 16th centuries major migratory movements took place in this area. The Ewe people were the first group to move into the region coming from what now is Benin. They named the region Togo, "to" meaning lake and "go" meaning banks or shore in Ewe language. The Guin, Tyokossi, Kuande, Fanti and Mani immigrated from the west. In 1473 the Portuguese reached the coast of Togo while searching for the sea route to India. They established the trade in gold, ivory and spices, their initial interest being limited to plain trade. However, when the Europeans started to need a cheap source of labour for their plantations in the Americas slave trade became a lucrative business in Togo. From the 16th century to the 18th century present-day Togo was a major trading centre for slaves earning Togo and the surrounding region the name "The Slave Coast". The fortunes to be earned in slave trade attracted the Dutch, Danes, British and French. When Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807, palm oil and cotton replaced the slaves. However, the income from the sales of the new products was not the same. In 1884, Germany's representative in Togoland Gustav Nachtigal, signed a treaty in Togoville with king Mlapa III making the region a German protectorate. At the beginning of the 20th century Togoland became a German colony. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the country was divided between France and Britain by the League of Nations in 1919. After a referendum British-Togoland was incorporated into Ghana in 1957. French-Togoland became an autonomous republic in 1956 and gained independence on April 27, 1960. The division of Togoland splitting the Ewe homeland is still a source of discontent.

The first elections held in 1958 were won by the Ewe Sylvanus Olympio. After the full independence from France in 1960 he became the country's first president. However, three years later on January 13, 1963 he was overthrown and killed in a coup. For four years the country was ruled by an unstable multiparty government, until in 1967 the Kabiyé Gnassingbé Eyadéma came to power in a nonviolent coup. He dominated Togo's political scene for decades until his sudden death in 2005. Being a despotic ruler he committed crimes against humanity on a vast scale. A day after his death, the military installed his son, Faure Gnassingbe to serve out his term. Under intense international pressure he resigned a few days later. On April 24, 2005 presidential elections were held, and Faure Gnassingbé won with more than 60% of the votes. The opposition and international observers claimed the elections were marred by manipulation and electoral fraud. As a result, riots broke out which killed hundreds of people, and thousands of refugees fled to the neighbouring countries. Faure Gnassingbé was re-elected in 2010, 2015 and 2020 and remains in power until today.

Population

Current estimates put the population at about 8.6 million (in 2020), divided among 40 ethnic groups. The two largest are the Ewe (about 40%) in the south and the Kabiye (about 23%) in the central regions and in the north. Other groups include the Akebou (approximately 13%), Tem, Gurma and Yoruba, as well as Mina, Mossi, Aia and Akan. The Kotokoli and Tchamba live in the central areas. Europeans and people from neighbouring countries total about 1% of Togo's population.

Religions

About half of the population have traditional animist beliefs, mostly Ga and Yoruba faiths. Voodoo remains strong in the southeast. About 30% of Togo's population is Christian, 20% of them are Catholic. Protestants make up most of the rest. Sunni Muslims comprise about 20%, mainly Fula and Haussa. There are small Jewish communities in the coastal areas.

Languages

French is the official language of the country. The most important local languages are Ewe in the south and Kabiye in the north. The local languages are generally divided into Kwa and Gur languages. A total of at least 39 languages and dialects are spoken in Togo. Due to trade relations with the neighbouring countries and intensive migration the languages of other West African countries are also spoken, including Akan which is the principal native language of Ghana, and Yoruba, widely spoken in Nigeria.

Plant Life and Wildlife

Plant Life

In the northern regions of Togo (Oti plain, northern slopes of the Togo Mountains) there is dry savannah characterized by grassland with well-dispersed trees and shrubs. The most striking tree of the dry savannah is the strange-looking baobab (*Adansonia digitata*), also known as monkey-bread tree. Everywhere in Africa it is considered sacred. Every part of the tree is useful. The fibres of the bark are woven into mats, the pulp of the fruit is rich in vitamins and provides a refreshing juice, the calcium-rich young leaves are used in cooking and the roots are employed to make traditional medicine. In December and January the Red Silk Cotton Tree is in full bloom and presents a striking blaze of crimson. Another typical tree of the savannah is tall evergreen mango tree.

In the southern part of the Togo Mountains, on the plateaus and rolling hills of Terre de Barre the dry savannah yields to moist savannah interspersed with woodland and forests. Ribbons of dense gallery forests occur along the rivers.

The southern coastal plain is characterized by mangrove swamps and many coconut trees. In the west of Togo, close to the border with Ghana, rainforests cover a small area. Between Lomé and Kpalimé large teak plantations dominate the landscape.

A number of exotic fruits are grown, such as banana, mango, papaya and citrus fruits. Togo's principal agricultural products are rice, maize, cassava and millet, as well as yams which is used to make fufu, the popular Togolese dish. The leading cash crops, which are exported, are coffee, cocoa and rubber.

Wildlife

Much of Togo's wildlife is threatened by deforestation, poaching, overpopulation and converting land to agriculture. As a result, many species have been severely decimated in Togo or have already become extinct. The country boasts three wildlife parks, the largest and most game-rich of them is Kéran National Park near the town of Kara in the north of Togo. Kéran National Park is home to kob antelope, warthog, grey duiker, elephant, hippo and other mammal species. The other parks are Forêt de Fazao and Fazao-Malfacassa-National Park and Fosse aux Lions which host typical mammals of the savanna such as kob antelope and other antelope species, elephant, leopard, hyena, porcupine and buffalo. However, all wildlife reserves are threatened by poaching. There are crocodiles and hippos in the Mono River.

Togo is a country with great birding potential. Its avifauna includes a total of 663 species, of which four are endangered. Among Togo's most common bird species there is a number of different weaverbirds and storks. The mangrove forests host different species of ibis, heron, egret, kingfisher and many others.

Geography

Togo is one of the smallest countries in Africa and has a total area of 56.785 square km. It stretches inland for over 550 kilometers from the Gulf of Guinea up towards its northernmost neighbour, Burkina

Faso. The country is only 150 kilometers wide at the broadest point. It includes 56 km of Atlantic coastline on the Gulf of Benin. Togo is bordered by Ghana to the west and Benin to the east.

The low-lying coastal plain runs only a few kilometers inland of the Atlantic coastline. It is dominated by wide sandy beaches and mangrove swamps. In the north to this narrow coastal strip is bordered by the Terre de barre also known as Ouatchi Plateau, a low area of rolling hills from which another plateau rises gradually to the central mountains. At its highest this region is about 500 meters above sea level. This sandstone plateau is crossed from southwest to northeast by the Togo Mountains reaching into Benin where it is known as the Atakora Mountains. North of the mountain range lies another sandstone plateau through which the Oti River flows

Togo's highest peak, Mt. Agou, is located at the southern edge of the Togo Mountains near the town of Kpalime, rising to a height of 986 meters. The longest river in the country is the Mono, with a length of about 400 km.

Economy

Togo's economy is predominantly agricultural, with approximately two-thirds of its workers engaged in subsistence farming. The country's principal agricultural products are yams, cassava, maize, millet, groundnuts and sorghum.

Togo has one of the largest phosphate deposits in the world, which is the country's leading export item.

There are also significant deposits of iron, manganese, limestone, dolomite and marble. . The leading cash crops, which are exported, are cotton, coffee, tea and cocoa (Togo is a member of the International Cocoa Organization). Like other cotton-producing countries in West Africa, Togo suffers from the fall in world cotton prices and the subsidy support that the US and Europe give to their own farmers.

Industry is considerably less important than agriculture to Togo's economy. The main industries are cement manufacturing and food processing based mainly on sugar, palm and groundnut oil, coffee and crops. The beer industry plays an important role in the country's economy, it is exported to Benin, Gabon, Mali, Niger and Guinea.

The EU is Togo's leading trade partner.