

## Ivory Coast/Ghana/Togo/Benin: Cultures, Customs and Traditions

Do you want to get an insight into the lifestyles of the West African people?

Our 16-day journey to Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Benin offers you the unique opportunity to learn about the customs and manners of the different local tribes of West Africa. Enjoy unforgettable dances, mysterious ceremonies, and rites, from the Boloï and Goli mask dances in Ivory Coast, which are hard to beat in acrobatics, to authentic Voodoo and ancestral cult rituals in Togo and Benin. Meet the Asantehene, the king of the Ashanti in Ghana, when he receives the homage of his people at the colourful Akwasidae Festival. A cultural highlight of the trip! Marvel at the architectural landmarks such as the basilica in Yamoussoukro and imposing slave castles on the coast and uncover the fascinating jungle vegetation in Kakum. You complete your adventure tour with a boat ride to the remote stilt village of Ganvié, the true "Venice of Africa".

### Tour Highlights

- Grand Bassam: Colonial charm and beach
- Spectacular mask dances: Goli and Boloï
- Bamboo orchestra, Knife dance, Zangbeto
- Korhogo: Ancient mud architecture
- Yamoussoukro: Impressive basilica
- Kumasi: Akwasidae Festival
- Kakum: Canopy Walkway
- Elmina: Largest slave castle of Africa
- Togoville: Contrasting beliefs
- Ganvié: Largest stilt village of Africa
- Ouidah: Cradle of Voodoo

### Day 1: Arrival at Abidjan - Grand Bassam

Meet and greet with your local tour guide and transfer to the hotel at Grand Bassam (30 km).

(-/-), overnight at Grand Bassam, Hotel Etoile du Sud or similar

## **Day 2: Grand Bassam - Abidjan - Yamoussoukro**

Grand Bassam, some 30 km east of Abidjan, was the first Ivorian capital under French rule. Since 2012, it has been enlisted as World Heritage site as a typical colonial town with separate quarters for commerce, administration, housing for Europeans and housing for Africans. Your guide will show you the colonial-era buildings, most of them in different stages of decay, as well as the Governor's Palace, now housing the National Costume Museum. A quite interesting collection of traditional clothing, models of Ivorian architecture, fascinating old photographs and a quality selection of masks will provide you a good overview of the rich culture in the region you will visit. Later this morning, we depart on a new journey taking us to the economic capital Abidjan, for a long time the most modern and cosmopolitan city of the whole region. Passing the famous skyline of Le Plateau, Abidjan's financial district, and after a visit to the modern, elephant-shaped St. Paul's Cathedral, we cross the lagoon into the popular districts and northern outskirts of town. Around noon you leave Abidjan and drive on the only "real" highway of West Africa to Yamoussoukro. In the late afternoon visit the village of Kondeyaokro, where you will experience an unforgettable Goli mask dance by the Baoulé. (approx. 360 km)

(BF/D), overnight at Yamoussoukro, Hotel Le Rocher or similar

## **Day 3: Yamoussoukro - Korhogo**

After breakfast, we drive north past Bouaké, second-largest Ivorian city and until recently seat of the rebel government, to Korhogo, historic stronghold of the Senoufo people. Skilled farmers living in tight-knit communities, the Senoufo hold on to their pre-Islamic animistic beliefs, and their artisans are well known for their fascinating craftwork. In the vicinity of the city, we watch woodcarvers, beadmakers, potters and weavers at work. Attend a traditional „panther“ dance, the Boloï, in the evening, another splendid experience of local cultural heritage. Several young men in panther costumes entertain the crowd with incredible acrobatics to the sound of the tam-tam. (approx. 320 km)

(B/D), Overnight at Korhogo, Hotel Complexe Olympe or similar

## **Day 4: Korhogo - Odienné**

After breakfast, continue your journey via Boundiali, the country's cotton center, heading west to Odienné. This area is inhabited by animists and Muslims alike. En route, visit fetish houses in Niofouin and get an insight into the mystical world of animist Senoufo. From Boundiali make a detour to Kouto, where you will visit a small, beautiful 17th-century-built clay mosque in Sudanese-Sahel architecture style. Continue to Odienné, that you'll reach in the late afternoon. (approx. 335 Km)

(B/D), Overnight in Odienné, Hotel des Frontières or similar

## **Day 5: Odienné - Man**

Via Touba we embark on a road trip to Man, called “city of 18 mountains”, a reference to its scenic location at the base of lush green hills on the eastern edge of the Guinea highland. The whole region is rich in traditions, crafts and natural attractions. En route, passing the mountainous area inhabited by the Malinké and Dan people, where few Dan villages still practice the tradition of ritual stilt dances, we are lucky to witness another authentic and spectacular dance performance in which the whole community takes part: White dressed women sing and dance by the beat of the drums while young men perform acrobatic dances that evoke unforgettable emotions.

In the afternoon, you'll visit a waterfall and a sacred forest populated by a troupe of Campbell's monkeys. According to local tradition, a beautiful royal princess was once sacrificed to attract spirits of glamour and vigour to the empire. After her death, the princess turned into a monkey. Ever since, monkeys have been revered locally. (approx. 280 km)

(B/D), Overnight at Man, Hotel Les Cascades or similar

### **Day 6: Man - Yamoussoukro**

Our drive today takes us through remote areas and through the town of Daloa. En route, we stop at a cocoa plantation. Ivory Coast is the world's largest producer of cocoa beans. This afternoon we arrive at Yamoussoukro, the administrative capital of Côte d'Ivoire. Being the birthplace of former president Félix Houphouët-Boigny, this small agricultural town became the country's capital in 1983 and was rebuilt according to a master plan to glorify the president and his family and ancestors. Today, Yamoussoukro boasts a population of more than 250,000 and high-profile vanity projects like the stunning *Basilique de Notre Dame de la Paix* (bearing a deliberate resemblance to St. Peter's Basilica), six-lane highways bordered by more than 10,000 street lights or the seat of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Foundation. On our city tour, we soak up the special atmosphere of these places - the basilica, the conference halls and the stunning views over the surrounding urban landscape. (approx. 320 km)

(BF/D), overnight at Yamoussoukro, Hotel Le Rocher or similar

### **Day 7: Yamoussoukro - Abengourou**

Today you drive to the east of Ivory Coast through the towns of Dimbokro and Bongouanou. In Abengourou you will be introduced into the world of traditional masks of Ivory Coast in the small but very interesting museum Pierre et Marguerite Bieth. Afterwards you'll visit the "Royal Palace of Indinié", where you will learn a lot about the culture of the Agni. The Agni are originally from Ghana and, like the Ashanti, belong to the great ethnic group of the Akan. (approx. 245 km)

(B/D), overnight in Abengourou, Hotel Royaume or similar

### **Day 8: Abengourou - Kumasi**

Akwaaba, welcome to Ghana. On a bumpy dirt road through remote villages, you'll cross the border from the francophone Ivory Coast into anglophone Ghana. After completing the border formalities, a good tarred road leads over the cocoa town of Berekum and via Sunyani, capital of the recently restructured Bono region, to Kumasi. The journey takes you through areas of intensive agriculture that have pushed back the region's once lush rainforests. In the evening you'll reach the second largest city of Ghana in the heart of the Ashanti Kingdom, Kumasi. (approx. 300 km)

(B/D), overnight at Kumasi, Hotel Sunset or Miklin or similar

### **Day 9: Kumasi**

We start our day with a sightseeing tour in Ghana's second largest city. We visit the Cultural Center and meet the artists and explore Prempeh II Jubilee Museum and Manhyia Palace Museum. Today you witness the ceremony of the Akwasidae Festival, the cultural highlight of our trip. Ashanti people, dignitaries and chiefs pay their respect to the Asantehene, their king. Born Barima Kwaku Dua, the Ashanti chief celebrated 20 years on the throne in 2019. In the afternoon we explore bustling Kejetia Market, the largest open-air market in West Africa, selling all kinds of goods from clothes and jewellery to food and plastic items.

(B/D), overnight at Kumasi, Sunset or Miklin Hotel or similar

### **Day 10: Kumasi - Cape Coast**

From the heart of Ghana, you drive towards the coast today. En route, you'll visit the village of Mesomakor, situated on the eastern border of Kakum National Park. We'll spend the day meeting the local people of Mesomakor and visiting the village with its cocoa and oil palm plantations, cassava and yam fields to learn more about their farming processes. This afternoon we will see the Mesomakor Bamboo Orchestra at their musical best. They perform war dances, story dances, modern and creative dances. Later this afternoon we continue to our beach hotel. (approx. 240 km).

(B/D), Overnight at Anomabo or Biriwa Beach Hotel or similar

### **Day 11: Cape Coast - Accra**

This morning, we'll leave the coast heading inland to visit Kakum National Park. Founded in 1990, this nature reserve, covering an area of 360 km, boasts an excellent tourist infrastructure. Kakum is home to a diversity of plants, trees and animals and protects at least 40 mammal species including the extremely rare forest elephant, forest buffalo, bongo and giant forest hog. There is a canopy walkway some 45 m high consisting of seven narrow bridges suspended between seven huge trees. Here those with a good head for heights have the rare opportunity to see the lush rainforest at the canopy level. You can also take a guided nature walk to see the fascinating rain forest and learn more about the tropical plants and trees and their use in traditional medicine. Around noon you'll arrive at Elmina. Here you'll visit Elmina Castle, founded in 1482 by the Portuguese to protect their merchants and the gold-rich lands they had discovered. Along with Cape Coast Castle and Fort St. Jago, Elmina Castle was recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1972. From a bridge over the Benya River you can enjoy a stunning view of the busy life in the harbour of Elmina. Later this afternoon, we will drive to Accra. (approx. 230 km)

(B/D), Overnight at Accra, Hotel Paloma or similar

### **Day 12: Accra - Lomé**

After breakfast we explore Ghana's vibrant capital city. Our city tour includes Independence Square, dominated by the impressive Independence Arch with a black star on the top symbolising freedom and justice. We'll also see Kwame Nkrumah Memorial, Passing Ussher Fort where Kwame Nkrumah was imprisoned you'll drive through James Town, the old part of Accra, characterised by many colonial-era buildings and colourful markets. We should have time to visit the Art Centre Market where you have a last chance for shopping in Ghana. Later this afternoon we will begin the four hour journey to Lomé. After customs formalities we reach our hotel. (approx. 250 Km).

(B/D), Overnight at Lomé, Hotel Coco Beach or similar

### **Day 13: Lomé**

After breakfast we will explore Togo's bustling capital in the morning and visit the fascinating central market, the famed Grand Marché, one of West Africa's largest markets. We also discover the amazing fetish market, where a mix of ingredients of traditional medicines and charms is sold. Alongside with crocodile bones, monkey skulls and leopard skins you will see dried chameleon and birds. In the afternoon you will witness a stunning voodoo ceremony, a Knife Dance, in a small village near Lomé. Dancing to the hypnotic rhythm of the drum, the dancers cut themselves with knives without being hurt. Pure magic! (approx. 70 km)

(B/D), Overnight at Lomé, Hotel Coco Beach or similar

### **Day 14: Lomé - Togoville - Grand Popo - Ouidah**

After a thirty minutes' drive we reach Lac Togo where we board a pirogue that takes us to Togoville. We visit the town's impressive cathedral built during the German colonial period and explore the animistic quarter where we will be met by an extraordinary voodoo priestess. Arriving back at the other side of the lake, we'll drive for a short while before reaching the border of Benin. We clear immigrations and proceed to the nearby town of Grand Popo. This afternoon we will attend a spectacular Zangbeto ceremony. The Zangbeto masks resemble haystacks swirling around the ceremony place. They represent the traditional guardians of the night protecting the community against thieves and evil forces. After this stunning ceremony we'll continue on to Ouidah and hope to arrive at our accommodation in the early evening. (approx. 150 Km)

(B/D), overnight at Ouidah, Hotel Diaspora or similar

### **Day 15: Ouidah: Exkursion nach Ganvié**

After a relaxing breakfast, we will learn more about the infamous history of slavery and the mysterious rituals of voodoo. We visit the Python Temple dedicated to the ancient snake cult and, in the Sacred Forest, hear about the ideas Voodoo is based on. Then we will take a walk along the Slave Route, connecting the former slave market to the beach, where slave ships used to be loaded with their human freight. Landmarks remind us of the suffering the victims had to endure, hard to imagine in the scenery of peaceful palm groves stretching along the golden beach today. This afternoon, we will drive to Abomey-Calavi where we take a motorboat ride out to the stilt village of Ganvié, built right into the Lake Nokoué. This remarkable aquatic village of thatched roof houses has been called “the Venice of Africa”. It can only be reached by boat. During our two-hour ride we see fishermen casting their nets while white egrets are watching them attentively. The 35000 inhabitants of Ganvié make their living primarily from fishing. We'll return to Ouidah in the evening. (approx. 70 km)

(B/D), overnight at Ouidah, Hotel Diaspora or similar

### **Day 16: Ouidah - Cotonou - End of the Tour**

Today we have free time on the beach of Ouidah. Transfer to Cotonou will be arranged in the early afternoon. After a short sightseeing tour of Benin's vibrant economic capital, you'll be taken to Cadjehoun Airport where our trip ends.

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Please note that from time to time our itineraries may be amended.