



Côte d'Ivoire

Country Facts

History

Almost nothing is known about life in present-day Ivory Coast in prehistoric times. The area has probably been nearly uninhabited over a long period because the dense rain forest covering the southern half of the country made it difficult for human beings to settle. But there is archaeological evidence that people have lived here some thousands of years before our time. Before the advent of colonisation the north of country had belonged to the Sudanic empires of Mali and Songhai. At the peak of their power their realms extended from the Atlantic Ocean of present-day Senegal to Niger and Nigeria. In the 15th century Ivory Coast became the destination of the European explorers. In 1471 1473 the Portuguese reached the coast of Benin while searching for the sea route to India. They established trade of gold, ivory and spices with the Africans and set up first trading posts in present-day Ivory Coast like San Pedro or Fresco. However, they did not build fortified trading posts. In the 17th century more and more French and Dutch ships began sailing along the Coast of West Africa. Although the French had built a settlement on the West African coast as early as 1659 at St. Louis, their participation in West Africa did not increase substantially until later in the 19th century. At that time especially the Dutch, but also the British and the Portuguese were involved in the slave trade on Ivory Coast. Slave trade was abolished in this area in 1820. At the same time, while the slave trade was flourishing on the coast, some important kingdoms like Kong, Bornu and Kabadougou were established in the north. The north of the country was earlier inhabited than the coastal areas. The peaceful Senufo, who were not interested in extending their settlement area, had migrated to northern Ivory Coast. In the 16th century the region was invaded by the Abron, a tribe from the Akan group, who previously had inhabited the area of Kumassi in present-day Ghana and in the 18th century the Baoulé, another Akan group, extended their hegemony under their queen Abla Pokou to the east and the center of the region. At the same time, other Akan groups migrated to the coast. In the mid-nineteenth century the French could finally establish themselves firmly in Ivory Coast by signing trade agreements with the local kings along the coast. They set up coffee plantations and started trading. Throughout the early years of French control in the region, they had to defend their territory against the British in the south and against Samory Toure's army, a Guinean Malinké chief, offering greatest resistance in the north. On March 10, 1893 Ivory Coast was made a French colony, and Captain Binger was appointed governor. Grand Bassam became its capital, but only for 6 years. When a yellow fever epidemic broke out in 1899, the capital was moved to Bingerville. 34 years later it was again transferred to Abidjan for economic reasons. In 1904 Ivory Coast became part of French West Africa, a federation of French colonial territories in West Africa, with a governor general based in Dakar. Their economic activities were mostly concentrated on the south of the country, where they established coffee, cococa, oil palm and rubber plantations and where forest exploitation and wood processing was flourishing. They imposed a system of forced labor and as labourers of Ivory Coast were insufficient large numbers of workers were recruited from Upper Volta to work in the south. The situation of the forced labourers became even worse under the Vichy regime, when forced labour was intensified and racial laws were adopted. In 1943/44 the country saw a change, after the Vichy regime had had to surrender and members of Gen. Charles De Gaulle's provisional government had assumed control of all French West Africa. The Brazzaville conference in 1944 paved the way for the abolition of forced labour, more autonomy for the Africans and the right to organize trade unions, reforms which were realized in 1946. Houphouët-Boigny, the future "Father of the nation" established, in cooperation with the colonial

administration, the African Agricultural Union whose aim it was to protect their interests against those of European planters. One year later, he became representative in the Constituent Assembly in Paris. After a few years of repression following Houphouët-Boigny's participation in the implementation of the reforms he contributed considerably to the country's struggle for independence in the 1950s.

As a result of a referendum giving the opportunity to choose between full independence and free association of autonomous republics, Ivory Coast became an autonomous republic within the French Community in December 1958. Two years later, on 7 August 1960, Ivory Coast became independent and in November of the same year Houphouët-Boigny was elected first president of the young republic. This was the beginning of the Houphouët-Boigny era which ended with his death in 1993 after having served as president for 33 years. The Father of the nation led the country to a rapid economic progress in the 1960s and 1970s reaching a peak growth in the 1970s when the exportation of coffee, cocoa, palm oil and other products was booming. This success became known as the "Ivorian miracle" which brought prosperity and the possibility of improving the infrastructure of the country: Hospitals and schools were built, everyone had access to education. However, a sharp drop in the prices of coffee and cocoa at the beginning of the 1980s put an end to this development and led to an economic crisis in the country. The resulting high unemployment rate, the decline in living conditions and Houphouët-Boigny's failure to introduce appropriate reforms led to demonstrations and the formation of a political opposition under the leadership of Laurent Gbagbo. Instead of tackling the problems Houphouët-Boigny moved the country's capital from Abidjan to his hometown of Yamoussoukro in 1983 and built the world's largest basilica there - an expensive prestige object which, as he claims, he paid out of his own pocket. In 1990 the state was practically bankrupt. Nonetheless, he won the elections held in the same year. Houphouët-Boigny's era ended only with his death in 1993. At the time of his death, he was the longest-serving leader in Africa. According to the Constitution, he was succeeded by his deputy Henri Konan Bédié. His rule was characterized by the introduction of "Ivorianité", which declared the ethnic groups in the north of the country not to be „real“ Ivorians and required presidential candidates to have been born of two Ivorian parents. This concept aimed at his rival Alassane Ouattara whose father was rumoured to have been born in Burkina Faso. The two main opposition parties, the Rally of the Republicans (RDR) and the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), decided to boycott the election in 1995 and Bédié won the election with 96% of the vote. He was overthrown on Christmas Eve, 1999 by General Robert Guéï and Bédié fled to Togo. The military junta was led by Guéï who allowed elections to be held the following year, which were won by the opposition candidate Laurent Gbagbo. Gbagbo became president on October 26, 2000. Guéï refused to recognize the result. On September 19, 2002 a failed coup d'état led to a rebellion in the north and subsequently to a civil war which divided the country in two. Due to the intervention of France and the resulting agreement the situation was stabilized temporarily, but the rebellion continued in the north. The United Nations sent a peacekeeping force of more than 6,000 troops to Ivory Coast to supervise the disarmament of rebel forces. Tensions between Ivory Coast and France increased in November 2004, after Ivorian air strikes killed 9 French peacekeepers. In response, French forces destroyed all airplanes of the Ivorian Air Force at Yamoussoukro airport. This led to violent protests against French nationals and thousands of them have had to be evacuated. An arms embargo and additional sanctions were imposed on Ivory Coast. In March 2007, after difficult negotiations under the mediation of Burkinabe president Blaise Compaoré, the two sides, Gbagbo and the rebel leader Guillaume Soro, signed an agreement to hold elections. However, the tensions continued and the elections were delayed until 2010. Alassane Ouattara was declared the victor of the elections, but Gbagbo refused to accept the result. The civil war flared up again and could only be ended after Gbagbo's arrest on April 11, 2011. Alassane Ouattara became president of Ivory Coast on May 6, 2011.

Population

Ivory Coast has an estimated population of about 22 million (estimation of 2013). They are divided into the following four major ethnic groups: Akan, Gur, Kru and Mandé, which are again sub-divided into more than 60 smaller ethnic groups. The Akan group is the largest, constituting more than 30 % of the total population. The traditionally matrilineal Akan people are believed to have migrated to Ivory Coast in the 17th century from what is today the Republic of Ghana, originally they probably come from the Sahara

desert and Sahel region of West Africa. They comprise the following subgroups: Agni (about 14 %) and Abron in the east of the country, Baoulé (about 23%) in the center and the Akan tribes living on the coast, comprising the small tribes of Abidji, Attié, Alladian, Ebrié and others. The voltaic Gur in the north-east of Ivory Coast are one of the oldest peoples in the region. They are divided into three main sub-groups: Senufo (about 15 %), living in an area spanning from southern Mali and the extreme western corner of Burkina Faso to the north of Ivory Coast and Koulango/Lorhon, closely related to the Senufo, in the north-east along the border with Mali and Burkina Faso and in Bondoukou. The third sub-group are the traditionally living Lobi in the Bouna region. The Kru are an ethnic group who live along the border with Liberia. They are divided into two major groups, the most prominent being the patrilineal Bété (about 13% of the total population) in the south-west of the country near the towns of Gagnoa and Daloa. The fourth large ethnic group in Ivory Coast are the Mandé in the north-west and in the northern part and in the center of the country. They are divided into the northern Mandé, comprising Malinké, Bamana and Dioula and the southern Mandé including Dan (Yacouba), Toura, Goura and other tribes. The most prominent group of the northern Mandé are the Malinké people. The Dan or Yacouba are the main tribal grouping within the Southern Mandé cluster. About one-fourth of the total population are immigrants from the neighbouring countries, especially from Burkina Faso and Mali.

Religions

There are Christians, Muslims and Animists in Ivory Coast. An estimated 35 - 40% of the population are Christians. The Muslims make up about the same percentage. Animists represent about 25 % of the population. These numbers are only estimates, because there are no reliable statistics and many of the animist people retain traditional beliefs alongside Christian and Muslim religion at the same time. Islam dominates the north of the country, while the south is mainly inhabited by Christians. The majority of the Christians are Catholics. Animism is prominent among the Bété and the Akan. The great majority of Muslims in Ivory Coast are Sunnis. Ivory Coast is a secular country, guaranteeing religious freedom to all. There is a large level of acceptance of the various religions amongst each other.

Languages

French is the official language of Ivory Coast, and it is spoken by about 70% of the population. French is taught in schools and serves as a lingua franca. But a total of more than 60 different languages and dialects are spoken on the territory of Ivory Coast. These languages belong to the Niger-Congo family and are divided into two branches of this family: the Volta-Congo languages in the east and in the south of the country, comprising the Gur languages in the north-east, the Kru languages in the south-west, the Kwa languages in the south-east and the senufo language in the north-east. The other branch includes the Mandé languages in the north and north-west, comprising the Dioula language, which has an important role as a vehicular language all over West Africa and which is one of the most widely spoken languages in Ivory Coast.

Plant Life and Wildlife

Plant life

The vegetation of Ivory Coast can be divided into two major zones: the tropical rain forest and mangrove swamps in the intertidal zone of the tropical coastline in the south, and savannah woodland that gives way to dry savannah grasslands in the north. Some gallery forests grow along the rivers. The original rainforests once stretched across one third of the country, the southern part of Ivory Coast was almost completely covered with forest. However, due to the introduction of vast plantations and wide-scale deforestation the vegetation has changed considerably over the past century. About 6 % of the Ivorian territory were officially declared nature reserves or national parks, among them Tai National Park, one of the last major remnants of the primary tropical forest of West Africa. The country's oldest national park is Banco National Park located in the town of Abidjan along the northern highway featuring tropical rare woods like genuine mahogany.

The rain forest is dominated by tall tropical trees like mahogany (Khaya), different species of ficus and albizia trees, Iroko trees (*Chlorophora excelsa* or *Milicia excelsa*), Bediwuna or African Elemi (*Canarium schweinfurthii*), silk cotton trees with their impressive buttress-roots (*Ceiba pentandra*), *Azelia*, a genus in the subfamily *Caesalpinioideae* of the family *Fabaceae* (legumes) and a large number of other tropical wood like Samba, (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*), Framiré (*Terminalia ivorensis*), Amazakoué (*Guibourtia ehie*) or Limba (*Terminalia superba*). Epiphytes, such as bromeliads and orchids grow on many trees in the rainforest.

The forest gives way in the north to the drier flatlands of the savannah, dominated by distinctive baobabs (*Adansonia digitata*), karité trees (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) and mango trees (*Mangifera indica*). Different species of acacia are also widespread in this region.

The red silk cotton tree (*Bombax ceiba*) is also found in the dry savannah. This tree is native to tropical Asia and has beautiful red to Coconut trees and mangroves are among the most characteristic plants of the coastal plains.

A wide variety of agricultural plants grow in Ivory Coast, among them oil palms. This plant is native to Guinea and is one of the most important economic species of palm family. Leafs and branches are used to make roofs, red palm oil is extracted from the pulp of the fruit and white oil from the kernel. They are both used in the food industry. Red oil mixed with cocoa pod ashes is used to produce soap and palm wine is very popular beverage. Another crop is the coconut tree (*Cocos nucifera*). The oil and milk derived from it are commonly used in cooking or in the production of soaps and cosmetics. Among the useful plants there are rubber trees which are cultivated in the south of the country as well as coffee and cocoa. Ivory Coast is the world's biggest exporter of cocoa and also an important producer of coffee. A number of exotic fruits are grown: pineapple, citrus fruits, banana, guava and avocado.

Many plant species are used in the traditional medicine..

Wildlife

Ivory Coast, whose name reflects the major trade which occurred in this area, established several national parks for the protection of the pachyderms. The country has a total of 8 national parks, two of them are UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Taï National Park and Comoé National Park. The Taï Forest reserve was created in 1926 and promoted to National Park status in 1972. Ten years later it was added to the list of Natural World Heritage Sites. The dense primary forest of Taï protects the rare African forest elephant as well as a number of other seriously endangered species like the pygmy hippopotamus, the western lowland bongo antelope and the West African chimpanzee. The park is home to a total of more than 40 mammal species, among them several primates like mona monkey, Diana monkey, lesser spot-nosed monkey and olive colobus monkey. Other mammal species which occur in the park are the forest hog, the water chevrotain, the giant pangolin as well as different species of duiker. On the park's territory there is also a chimpanzee project which is committed to new knowledge and research of the chimpanzees of the Taï National Park, who share 98.6 percent of their DNA with humans. The Comoé National Park is located in the savannah zone in the north-east of the country. It was named after the Comoé River, one of the largest rivers of Ivory Coast. With the surface of 11.500 km², it is not only the largest park of Ivory Coast, but also one of the largest protected areas in West Africa. It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage in 1983 and on the List of the World Heritage in Danger in 2003. The property contains around 135 species of mammals including different species of antelope, leopard, elephant, various species of primates and lion. However, during the surveys done since 2008, no signs of lions have been found anymore. Both parks are threatened by illegal activities inside the site, such as poaching and have suffered critical alteration and disturbance from the civil war. Other National Parks in Ivory Coast are the Marahoué Park in the center of the country, Mont Sangbé and Mont Péko in the west, Azagny and Ile Ehotilé in the south and the oldest national park and with the surface of only 30km² the smallest park of the country, Parc National de Banco, the green lung in the north of the mega-city of Abidjan. It is believed to be the habitat of a dozen of chimpanzees, and there are other primates like mona monkeys which can sometimes be seen at the park entrance.

Due to its different zones of vegetation Ivory Coast is home to a particularly rich diversity of wildlife, especially of mammal species; however, they can be seen only in national parks and nature reserves

because the loss of their natural habitats has caused a dramatic decline in population. This affects species like primates, hippos, including the rare pygmy hippos, buffalo, elephant, warthog, a number of antelope species, rodents, as well as leopard and lion.

Ivory Coast is a country with great birding potential. 742 species have been recorded. Especially in the lagoons and swamps in the south a large number of water birds are easily sighted. Among the country's bird species are: various egret and heron species including black-headed heron, great egret and cattle egret, spur-headed plover, white-headed and black-headed lapwing, African jacana, black-winged stilt, a variety of kingfisher, bee-eater and hornbill species. At least 230 species have been recorded in Tai National Park, including a lot of species typical of primary forest like the white-breasted guineafowl or Ghana cuckooshrike. The park houses different turaco and hornbill species.

Fish species in the Atlantic ocean include barracuda, grouper, snapper, different species of shark, stingray and tuna. The Ivory Coast boasts some of the best blue marlin fishing in the eastern Atlantic. Among other marine animals lobster, crayfish, octopus, mussel and marine gastropods can be found. In the rivers occur catfish, tilapia and many other species.

Geography

The country spans an area of 322,461 km² (124,500 sq mi) and borders Liberia and Guinea in the west, Mali and Burkina Faso in the north, Ghana in the east, and the Gulf of Guinea (Atlantic Ocean) in the south. Its coastline measuring more than 500 km is marked by lagoons and swamps like the Ebrié lagoon. Abidjan, the largest city of Ivory Coast, lies on Ebrié lagoon. The southern region, especially the southwest, is covered with dense tropical moist forest. In the north of the coastline a vast plateau rises to almost 500 m elevation in the north. This plateau is the largest agricultural area of the country. The west is determined by the Upper Guinea threshold, with peaks rising up to more than 1000 m. The highest elevation is Mount Nimba at 1,752 metres. It is located at the borders of Guinea, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. Northern Ivory Coast is part of the West Sudanian Savanna ecoregion. The terrain is mostly flat to undulating plain dotted with inselbergs. The largest rivers are the Comoé River (about 1160 km) and the Bandama River (1050 km), followed by the Cavally River (about 700 km), which makes up part of the border between Ivory Coast and Liberia. Another main river is the Sassandra River with a length of some 650 km. Ivory Coast has no important natural lakes, its largest lake is the artificial Lake Kossou, created in 1973 by damming the Bandama River in the center of the country near Yamoussoukro. It has a total surface of 1898 km² which makes it one of the largest man-made lakes in the world. Other artificial lakes in Ivory Coast are Lake Ayamé and Lake Buyo.

Economy

In the aftermath of independence, Ivory Coast experienced a period of strong economic growth which became known as the "Ivorian miracle". It had the third largest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa, behind South Africa and Nigeria.

About two third of the Ivorian people are engaged in some form of agricultural activity with substantial employment and income from agricultural exports. A majority of the population remains dependent on smallholder cash crop production like maize, yams, millet, manioc, plantain, fruits and vegetables. Rice is the main staple food for many Ivorians, therefore rice cultivation has been increasing rapidly in recent years. Agricultural products make up to 70 percent of the total export revenue. Principal exports are cocoa and coffee. Ivory Coast is the world's largest exporter of cocoa. About 20% of the working population is employed in the cocoa production. Coffee is also an important export good, Ivory Coast being the seventh largest coffee producer in the world. An estimated 6 million people depend on the production of these two crops. The country also exports palm oil, sugar cane, rubber, coconuts, tropical fruits, kola nuts, cashew nuts and cotton.

The export of tropical wood remains another main source of revenue. although it constitutes a major ecological problem.

The prominent natural resources of Ivory Coast are gold, diamonds, petroleum and gas.

Unlike neighbouring countries, however, Ivory Coast's industry is well developed with a large number of small and medium-sized businesses. It accounts for about 29% of GDP. The development of processing

industries has been significant. These include food processing plants, like coffee-and cocoa-bean processing plants, palm oil mills and fish canning factories. Oil refineries play an important role, Ivory Coast is known more as an oil-refining country than an oil-producing one. Before the civil war Ivory Coast boasted a significant tourism industry. Civil war has emptied beachside villages and led to a breakdown of the industry. Ivory Coast's tourism sector has a large potential for increasing. First measures were taken to to revive the tourism industry.