

Ghana/Togo/Benin: Tribal Festivals and Voodoo Magic

Experience voodoo ceremonies and colourful festivals on this journey through three of the most interesting countries in West Africa. Visit the Kingdom of the Ashanti in Ghana, the fortified dwellings of the Tamberma in Togo and witness real voodoo ceremonies in Benin. Travel from tropical forests in the South to the savannah in the North and enjoy the West African hospitality. Join the Ashanti people to celebrate their magnificent Akwasidae Festival at the King's court.

Tour Highlights

- Lomé: Fetish market and Knife Dance
- Togoville: Colonial church and Voodoo priestess
- Grand Popo: Zangbeto ceremony
- Ouidah: Cradle of Voodoo and slave history
- Ganvié: Boat trip to the aquatic village
- Abomey: Royal palaces (UNESCO)
- Copargo: Traditional village of Tanéka-Béri
- Natitingou and Koutammakou: mud dwellings of the Somba and Tamberma
- Bangeli: Fire Dance
- Kintampo: Impressive waterfall
- Kumasi: Akwasidae Festival of the Ashanti King
- Elmina and Cape Coast: Slave fortresses

Day 1: Arrival at Lomé Airport

Meet and greet with your tour leader at Lomé International Airport and transfer to the hotel (10 km).

(-/-), Overnight stay in Lomé, Coco Beach Hotel or similar

Day 2: Lomé

After breakfast your tour leader will complete the welcome meeting before 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'll 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 stay in Lomé, Coco Beach Hotel or similar

Day 3: Lomé - Grand Popo

After a thirty minutes' drive we'll reach Lac Togo where we board a pirogue that takes us to Togoville. We'll 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. (approx. 60 km)

(B/D), overnight stay in Grand Popo, Awale Plage Hotel or similar

Day 4: Grand Popo - Ouidah

After a relaxing breakfast, we will drive 45 minutes to Ouidah where we will learn more about the 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.

This afternoon, 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. On return to the hotel there will be time to relax on the beach. (approx. 50 km)

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

Day 5: Ouidah - Abomey

We start our day departing Ouidah and driving 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. Later today, we'll continue two more hours towards the town of Abomey, formerly the capital of the Kingdom of Dahomey. In the early afternoon we'll visit the Royal Palaces of the pre-colonial kingdom of Dahomey. Today this UNESCO World Heritage site houses the Historical museum and a craft centre. (approx. 150 km)

(B/D), overnight stay in Abomey, Hotel Guédévy 1 or similar

Day 6: Abomey - Natitingou

This morning will be an early start to begin our journey towards Natitingou. Much of the day will be spent in the bus travelling. We will break up the first leg of this journey with a visit of the Dankoli fetish, a few kilometres out of the town of Savalou. This phallus-shaped tree-trunk stained with sacrificial blood is considered to be West Africa's most powerful fetish with hundreds of believers arriving every day from all over Benin and neighbouring countries. They make their requests to the gods hammering wooden pegs into the fetish, pouring palm-oil on to it and spitting specially made rum at the stake. If the wishes comes true, the person must return and make the necessary sacrifices. Otherwise he will face the

consequences.... This afternoon we'll make a stroll through Tanéka-Béri, one of the fascinating Yom villages spread around the scenic landscapes near Djougou. The Yom are closely related to the Somba and, like them, have kept their tribal traditions alive. Meet the fetish priests, dressed in a goatskin and the king of Tanéka-Béri. Towards evening we'll arrive at Natitingou.

(B/D), overnight stay in Natitingou, Hotel Tata Somba or similar

Day 7: Natitingou - Kara

This morning we continue our journey along the scenic Atacora mountains to explore the famous land of the Somba people. In the village of Koussoucoingou we'll visit one of their two-story fortified houses, which are often flanked by small altars, and we'll have the chance to meet the Somba people and learn about their traditions and daily lives. Later this morning we'll cross the border back into Togo, where we'll continue for a short while before stopping at a Tamberma village, beautifully set in Atacora Mountains. This chain of mountains starts in southeast Ghana and cuts through Togo and Benin. We visit a number of medieval-castle-like houses of this extraordinary tribal group. The cultural landscape of Koutammakou has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004. The last part of our drive is through the mountainous region where the Kabyé tribe lives. In the village of Tcharé we meet the renowned Kabyé blacksmiths and their wives who produce traditional pottery. This is the area where the country's former president Eyadéma Gnassingbé was born. Late in the afternoon we arrive at Kara where we spend the night. (approx. 180 km)

(B/D), overnight stay in Kara, Hotel Kara or similar

Day 8: Kara - Tamale

Today we drive further to the West and cross the regions inhabited by the Bassar and by the Dagomba people. At Bangeli we meet the Bassar who used to make iron following an old traditional procedure. You can still see an ancient clay blast furnace preserved in the village. Here you will attend the unique Fire Dance of the Bassar. We cross the Ghana border near Bangeli and follow a dirt road to Tamale, the largest town in Northern Ghana. (270 km)

(B/D), overnight stay in Tamale, Zozimli Hotel or similar

Day 9: Tamale - Kumasi

This morning we will drive to Kumasi. Heading south we cross the White Volta at Yapei and the Black Volta at Buipe. By noon we reach the Kintampo Falls where the Pumpu River falls about seventy metres down to create this waterfall. Near Techiman we reach the land of the Ashanti. There may be an opportunity to attend a traditional Ashanti funeral. They are usually held on Saturdays and are easy to see because of the distinctive red and black dress that all attendees are wearing. They come even from far to pay their last respects. Food, drinks, dances and drums accompany the deceased in the world of the ancestors. In the late afternoon we'll arrive at Kumasi, capital of the Ashanti Kingdom. (approx. 400 km)

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

Day 10: 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. 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 stay in Kumasi, Sunset or Miklin Hotel or similar

Day 11: Kumasi - Elmina - Cape Coast

Continuing south we arrive on the Atlantic coast. The drive is along oil palm and cocoa plantations. You may stop at points of interest through the journey to see how cocoa is cultivated and palm oil is produced. This afternoon we arrive at Elmina where we'll visit Elmina Castle, the oldest fortress on the Gold Coast. Strolling through the castle we'll also spend some time taking in the stunning views over the town and the busy life in the harbour. You'll have some free time which can be spent visiting the fish market or climbing up the steep hill to São Jago da Mina, the Dutch Conraadsburg, which rises high above the town. After the visit we continue to our overnight stop at Anomabo (approx. 230 km)

(B/D), overnight stay at Anomabo Beach Resort or similar

Day 12: Cape Coast - Accra

In the morning we head inland to visit Kakum National Park. There is a unique canopy walkway which offers a rare opportunity to see the rain forest at the canopy level. The canopy walkway consists of seven bridges, the highest being over 45 meters high. After visiting Kakum we drive back to the coast where we'll explore the Cape Coast Castle that has been designated as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1972. We'll become acquaint with the slave dungeons, the Door of no Return and the Historical Museum which is located inside Cape Coast Castle containing an interesting collection of art and cultural objects. In the afternoon we make our way to Accra. (190 km)

(B/D), overnight stay in Accra, Paloma Hotel or similar

Day 13: Accra - End of tour

After breakfast we explore Ghana's vibrant capital city. Our city tour includes Independence Square, also known as Black Star Square and Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park and Mausoleum, the final resting place of Ghana's first President and his wife. We'll take a drive through colonial James Town and see its impressive lighthouse. In a casket shop you'll meet some amazing creative Ghanaian coffin makers. Their coffins come in the shape of fish, airplanes, cars, Coca Cola and beer bottles or cell phones, each model has a correlation to the dead person's life. Our tour ends at the National Craft Centre where you can do some last minute shopping. We have use of dayrooms in the afternoon until the transfer to the airport for the flight home.

(B), Day use rooms

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