

West African Kingdoms: The Ultimate Tour
Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Gambia, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone

January 7- February 7, 2024
with Voodoo Festival & Masked Dance Ceremony



TOGO

Jan. 7: Arrive Lomé / Mercury Sarakawa (B)

You will be met at the airport by our tour leader and transferred to the hotel.

Jan 8, Day 2: Lomé / Mercury Sarakawa (B,L)

This morning we embark on an insightful city tour of Lomé, a city where tradition and modernism overlap. Discover this metropolis with its Musée National, Place de l'Indépendance, fishing harbor, and the Grand Marche - the realm of the famous "Nana Benz. "

Lunch at a local restaurant. After lunch, we visit the Art Street with its craft vendors, the Artisans' Village and culminate the day at the Marche des Féticheurs (fetish market) - the heart of voodoo cult. The evening at leisure; dinner on your own.

BENIN

Jan 9, Day 3: Lomé - Ouidah / Casa del Papa Beach Hotel and Spa (B, L, D)

Depart at 9 am for an excursion to Togoville, located on the north shore of Lake Togo. We drive 30 min to Aneho, where you embark on a local paddle boat to cross lake Togo into Togoville (a boatman paddles the boat). Visit the old German built cathedral, the colonial area and the traditional quarter of the town.

Lunch at a lake view restaurant and then drive two hours to Ouidah, considered the capital of voodoo (UNESCO Cultural Site, 1996).

Upon arrival, approx. 4 pm, we visit Temple of the Python, dedicated to the sacred Python, which is believed to give vitality and protection.

Transfer to hotel. Evening are independent. Buffet dinner at hotel restaurant.

Jan. 10, Day 4: Ouidah - Annual Voodoo Festival / Casa del Papa Beach Hotel & Spa (B,L,D)

Depart the hotel at 8:00 am driving 30 min to the voodoo priest's palace. The priest will come out of his palace at 8:30 am. The group will walk with Momo to meet the voodoo priest in his palace and follow him, touring the sacred points of the town performing purification ceremonies. The crowd, singers and masks dancers follow the priest as well. Thousands of voodoo believers gather to receive blessings from Quidah's voodoo chief. After the last purifying ceremony, the priest and the crowd head to the venue where speeches and dances take place. * This is a very special experience. You will gain understanding of what this voodoo festival means for the locals of Benin. Most people say that walking with the voodoo priest, with a group of locals singing, is probably the best part of the whole voodoo festival experience!

In 1996, the government of Benin decreed that Voodoo was an official religion, practiced by more than 60% of Benin's over 10 million residents. For millions of Beninese, voodoo is an integral part of everyday life. You cannot avoid the many voodoo dolls riddled with pins and nails. Quidah is the spiritual capital of voodoo and once a major slave-trading post.

*There are two hours of speeches by the Benin Government before the festivities begin. There is nothing we can do about that. While the speeches are going on, it's a great time to walk around and take photos of the arrival of dignitaries and voodoo displays.

We have reserved tourist seats which you can go to when you are ready (need a rest) or when the dances begin at approx. 12 noon. However, when the dances begin, most people stand up, so those in

tourist seats need to move to the front to be able to see what is going on. Your seat is reserved and you can come back to it as you wish. (There are three categories of seats: government and officials, local dignitaries and tourists.) This is the reason why the Benin Government is building an arena to give everyone the same view (maybe completed in 1-2 years).

The Annual Voodoo Festival takes place adjacent to the Door of No Return, a memorial concrete and bronze arch which stands on the beach, as a memorial to the enslaved Africans who were taken from the slave port of Ouidah to the Americas. Several artists and designers collaborated with the architect, Yves Ahouen-Gnimon, to realize the project.

The Voodoo Festival is one of Benin's most colorful and revered events. The celebrations begin when the supreme voodoo priest slaughters an animal, usually a goat, to honor the spirits. This is followed by singing, chanting, dancing, beating of drums and drinking of various spirits, generally gin. We will see followers of the various voodoo gods including the masked dances of the elaborately costumed Zangbetos and the trance dances of the Kokou (highly feared warrior undergods).

We may see a traditional Geleden mask dance of the FON Tribe. Performers wearing masks as well as marionettes will perform, dancing to traditional drums rhythms. The name 'Gelede' (or female power) derives from the name of a secret society of Yoruba origin, the largest ethnic group in West Africa, scattered between southern Nigeria and southern Benin. People attending the mask ceremony pay tribute to Yami the main deity of the village, the source of every good thing. The Gelede masks are used to ward off evil spirits which manifest themselves through calamities, or to solve ethnic conflicts, to moralize behaviors and to reassert important events among the community. The Gelede masks are also a way to send messages of compassion, solidarity, insult or joke. The man and the woman who distinguished themselves by their wisdom and loyalty to the group are the custodians of the masks. The Gelede masks are in fact female masks worn by men, implying that the ceremony and its meaning involves both the women and the men of the community.

Around the edges of the main performance area, groups from various voodoo temples perform their own rituals in smaller spaces. After attending the festival at the main venue, we may go to a few of these festival venues to see other authentic voodoo events.

We can stay at the Voodoo Festival until we are tired. Those who wish to leave the festival earlier will be driven by the driver while Momo remains with the rest of the group. Return to the hotel. Buffet dinner at the hotel restaurant.

Jan. 11, Day 5: Ouidah - Ganvie- Cotonou / Sofitel Marina Hotel (B,L,D)

Depart our hotel at 8:30 am to visit the historical Museum of Ouidah located in an old Portuguese fort built in 1721. This museum portrays Benin's role in the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Afterwards, we visit Ganvie, West Africa's largest stilt village. We drive 30 minutes to Abomey Calavi, where we cross Lake Nokoué by motorized covered boat (20 minutes), to Ganvie, commonly referred to as the Venice of West Africa.

The residents here are members of the Tofinou ethnic group. They live in huts built on teak stilts and get around in dugout canoes. We will observe the people of Ganvie going about their daily routine as vendors in dugout canoes make transactions with one another and with tourists. Try shopping amongst the local vendors in the floating market while enjoying a relaxing canoe ride on the waterways of this exotic 300-year-old village.

After the visit, we return to Abomey Calavi again by boat and drive 30 minutes to Cotonou where we have lunch.

We culminate the day with a stop at Cotonou's famous central market "Dan Togba," the fetish and traditional medicine market. Return to Cotonou hotel for overnight. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

Jan. 12, Day 6: Excursion to Novo Porto / Sofitel Marina Hotel (B,L)

This morning, we drive 20 km/ 1 hr to Porto Novo, the former capital of Benin, known for colonial buildings such as Brazilian-style Great Mosque, formerly a church. We visit several interesting museums and sites including:

Ethnographical Museum of Porto Novo This is an interesting museum that offers an intensive look at the past of Porto Novo's kings. It displays a good selection of fetishes, old Yourba king ceremonial masks, costumes, and some musical instruments.

Honmé Museum (Musée Honmé, Palais Royal du Roi Toffa). Former residence of King Toffa. This well maintained, rather simple palace is an insightful view into how Beninese royalty really lived. 1883 was the year King Toffa signed the treaty with France, agreeing to hand over land. The kingdom of Porto Novo was one of the longest lasting in Africa, lasting up until 1976.

Musée da Silva recounts Benin's history and celebrates Afro-Brazilian culture. Celebrating Afro-Brazilian influence on the city, this fairly new museum offers a lot of variety. The museum grounds consist of a traditional house, a small library, an open-air cinema showing French films.

Jardin Place Jean Bayol, a large plaza that contains a statue of the first King of Porto-Novo.

Celestial Church of Christ's Headquarters (Paroisse Mere de l'Eglise du Christianisme Celeste) is a Christian denomination, which has grown worldwide. The church was founded by S.B.J Oschoffa.

Lycee Behanzin (Behanzin high school) is the first secondary school of Benin. The school celebrated its centennial in 2015.

Great Mosque of Porto-Novo (Grande Mosquee de Porto-Novo). The mosque was established in 1925 with chapel architectural style.

The Zangbeto Temple: Zangbeto are the traditional voodoo guardians of the night in the Yoruba religion Zanbeto. They act as an unofficial police force and are highly regarded.

Adjarra Market, located 10 km north of Porto. Held every fourth day, this market is certainly one of the best in Benin. One can find unique types of tie-dyed fabric, amazing pottery, unusual musical instruments, various voodoo ornaments, and of course mainstream market items.

We will have lunch in a local restaurant before driving back to Cotonou. The rest of the day at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct,

BURKINA FASO

Jan. 13, Day 7: Cotonou-Ouagadougou / Hotel Lancaster (B)

Enjoy a leisure morning on your own. Suggest take snacks from the breakfast buffet or buy at the airport as timing doesn't allow for a lunch stop today.

At about 12 noon, we transfer to the airport for flight Air Burkina 558, departing at 3:55 p.m. and arriving in Ouagadougou at 4:25 p.m.

Upon arrival, transfer to our hotel. Dinner on your own at hotel restaurant, pay direct.

Jan. 14, Day 8: Ouagadougou / Hotel Lancaster (B,L)

This morning we'll visit the Grand Market and the crafts markets at the Artisans' Center, where you will find basketry, batik fabrics, wooden statues and masks, jewelry, leatherwork and bronze castings; and a short walk around the city.

Afterwards, visit the National Museum. We'll have lunch at a local restaurant.

This afternoon visit the Cathedral of Ouagadougou, the giant bronze statue of Ousmane Sembene-founder of Ouagadougou film festival, Monument of National Heros and the Monument of Cineaste built in 1987 in honor of African Film makers who come to FESPACO, the pan-African festival of cinema and television of Ouagadougou.

Return to the hotel; evening at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

SENEGAL

Jan. 15, Day 9: Fly to Dakar / Lamantine Resort & Spa (B,L,D)

Hotel will serve us breakfast at 5:15 am. We depart at 6 am, transfer to the airport for the flight Air Burkina 2J 527, dep 9 am, arriving Dakar 12:40 pm.

Upon arrival at the new Dakar airport, transfer to hotel in Saly Portugul (45 min drive). A stop for lunch at a local restaurant before arriving at the hotel. Rest of day at leisure. Buffet dinner at the hotel restaurant, open til 10:30 pm. This dinner always gets rave reviews from our clients.

Note: the drive from the airport into Dakar city would take 1.5 hrs and pass thru 3 toll booths. Lamantin Beach Hotel is a beautiful location. Enjoy the rest of the day at leisure.

Jan. 16, Day 10: Dakar Full Day Tour / Pullman Accor Dakar (B, L)

We depart our hotel and drive into Dakar city, approx. one hour, to start our tour with visits of the various markets: Kermel, Sandaga, and the handicraft market of Soumbedioune and the Tilen market famous for its medicinal herbs and its traditional healers.

Lunch at a local restaurant.

Next, visit the National Museum, the President's Palace and the Parliament House; the Central Market, French Cathedral, Monument of African Renaissance and the Great Mosque.

Transfer to the hotel. Evening at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

Jan. 17, Day 11: Goree Island / Pullman Accor Dakar (B, L)

We depart the hotel at 9 am to embark on a cruise to the historic island of Goree.

Just thirty minutes from Dakar Port, the ferryboat that arrives at Goree Island carries the heavy burden of 300 years slave trading in West Africa. The island ranks today among the classified monuments of the World Patrimony. We will visit the House of Slaves (Maison des Esclaves) and its "Door of No Return," a former prison for slave trade and said to be the final exit point of the slaves from Africa, now a museum and memorial.

We will also see the canons built by Portuguese navigators. Lunch at a restaurant on the island.

Return to Dakar and enjoy a drive through the picturesque district of Medina and the residential district of Fann.

Transfer to hotel. Evening at leisure; dinner on your own, pay direct.

[Jan. 18, Day 12: Drive to Saint-Louis / Hotel de la Residence \(B, L\)](#)

Depart at 8:00 am, heading north through the Sahel to the old colonial city of St. Louis, which was formerly the capital of French West Africa.

After a one-hour drive we stop at Lake Retba, also known as the “Pink Lake” located 30 km northeast of Dakar, north of Cap Vert Peninsula. This lake is considered an anomaly as it boasts one of the most rare natural phenomena in the world. The lake's pinkish hue is a result of the excessive amount of *Dunaliella salina* algae in the water that produces a red pigment used to absorb light, which in turn provides the algae with life-energy. The pink color is particularly visible during the dry season. The lake is also known for its abundantly high salt content.

You will see the “salt harvesters” with their colorful tackle, and interact with the Fulani ethnic groups living in the surrounding villages.

Next we stop at the Norflaye Turtle Conservation Farm. After the visit, we drive two hours to the town of Thies for lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch, we will drive to St Louis (3 hrs/155 miles north of Dakar).

Saint-Louis was founded in 1659 and named after the French King Louis XIV in the 1700s. It is the oldest city to be created by Europeans on the western coast of Africa and served as the capital of Senegal from 1872 to 1957. It played an important cultural and economic role in the whole of West Africa. A stroll around the Ville (as the cab drivers know it) quickly reveals the French colonial influence. Many of the buildings hold their old character with brightly colored buildings and beautiful balconies. The Island was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000.

On arrival check in to the hotel. Remainder of the day and evening at leisure. You may wish to This evening, explore the colonial quarters of St. Louis. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

[Jan. 19, Day 13: Excursion to Djoudj National Park / Hotel de la Residence \(B, L\)](#)

We depart at 7:00 a.m. for the 1.5-hour drive to Djoudj National Park (UNESCO World Heritage Site), the third largest pelican sanctuary in the world. It is known for its' large pelican migration and many other species of birds. We shall cruise in a spacious motorized open-air boat, for a 1.5-hour trip through the mangroves of the river to see where the pelicans hatch their eggs each year.

After the visit, we return to St. Louis for lunch at a local restaurant.

This afternoon, we visit the Langue de Barbarie Peninsula. We take a horse and buggy ride to Guet Ndar, the fishing village that is located on the Langue de Barberie and watch the fisherman bring in their catch. Local people carry the fish in baskets on their neck and on their heads. Women can be found smoking and drying fish next to the beach in vast cauldrons. Nearby very colorful pirogues are always under construction. It is possible to see nearly every stage from the first carvings to the final painting.

Transfer to hotel. Evening at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

[Jan. 20 Day 14: Saint Louis- Toubacouta / Hotel Keur Saloum \(B,L\)](#)

We depart at 7 am and drive to Toubacouta. After 3 hours drive we stop in the town of Touba to visit the holy mosque of Mouride Islamic brotherhood. After the visit, it is a 1.5 hr drive to Kaolack for lunch in a local restaurant. From Kaolack it is 1.5 hr drive to Toubacouta.

Upon arrival, approx. 4 pm, check into the hotel and have a bit of leisure time to rest.

Just before sunset, we embark on a motorized boat ride to explore Sine Saloum Delta (UNESCO World Heritage Site).

Evening is at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

THE GAMBIA

Jan. 21 Day 15: Drive Juffureh-James Island- Banjul / Kairaba Beach Resort (B,L)

We depart at 7 am and drive 30 minutes to the Gambia border. Border formalities may take about an hour on each side. You will step out of the vehicle and walk about five minutes across. There is now a digital passport and visa processing system at both borders.

After crossing the border, we drive one hour to the historic village of Juffureh and tour it.

Juffureh became famous in the 1970s following the film release of the bestselling book, "Roots" written by the African-American author Alex Haley, a descendant of Kunta Kinte. The film told the story of Kunta Kinte's capture in Juffureh by slave traders and his subsequent enslavement in America approximately 200 years ago.

Afterwards, it is a 30 minute motorized boat ride from Juffureh to James Island (aka Kunte Kinteh Island), the colonial period ruins of a slavery station and the 'Portuguese chapel' of San Domingo, which later came to be known as Sandi Munko Joyo. The boat is an open top (no awning or cabin), with an outboard engine. Nearby there are also the old ruins of Maurel Freres and the CFAO trading post. Visit the island.

Return to Juffureh by the same motorized boat and have lunch. Afterwards, we drive another hour to board the Barra /Banjul ferry which takes an hour to reach Banjul. Upon arrival in Banjul, we will drive 30 minutes to the hotel, at Senegambia Beach.

Evening at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

Jan. 22, Day 16: Makasutu Forest & Banjul / Kairaba Resort (B,L)

Departing at 8 am, we drive one hour south to Brikama where we turn to the east coast and continue 7 km into the Makasutu Forest.

Makasutu Forest, on an island facing the south bank of the Gambia River, is a tropical 1000-acre reserve encompassing five different eco systems, including gallery forest, savannah, mangroves, palm forest and wetland. Wildlife is plentiful with many bird species, baboons, vervet and red colobus monkeys and even the occasional odd mongoose.

On arrival, we begin with a nice stroll to the Baobab Restaurant, where we are greeted by the special guide from the Makasutu Forest reserve and given a brief history of the area. On the way, we will see some tree stumps carved into by sculptors. These are the remnants from the time when locals were chopping down trees.

After the talk, we hop aboard a pirogue, a traditional wooden boat, to experience nature as we cruise on the Gambia River through the mangroves lined with oyster shells. The boat ride will last a little over 1 hour. When we return, we'll then enjoy lunch at the Baobab Restaurant followed by some traditional entertainment.

Afterwards, we drive 30 minutes to Banjul for a city tour with a local Gambian guide.

Banjul is one of the best examples of urban Africa. The sand-blown streets play host to colorful markets and fading colonial buildings, and a sense of history permeates every district. The Gambian

capital may be one of Africa's smallest cities, but it has a big personality too soon forgotten by travelers.

Built in celebration of the 1992 military coup, a commemorative arch, Arch 22, is the country's tallest building. The Senegalese-designed gateway contains a small museum about the coup d'état and a cozy café. The real draw of the Arch is the view from the top-floor balconies.

Just outside the city lies the Tanbi Wetland Complex, established in 2001 as a protected wildlife area that spans more than 4,500 hectares. Nearly 80 percent of the reserve is made of numerous species of mangroves, but the natural vegetation also includes salt marshes, grass woodlands and bare flats.

Tidal creeks and lagoons cut through the reserve in a patchwork fashion, and locals make good use of the water by fishing for shrimp, diving for oysters and growing rice. Wildlife abounds throughout the site, including crocodiles, lizards, small monkeys, manatees and over 360 species of birds. We shall explore the wetlands a local guide who will also show us how to way to spot these creatures.

Visitors can also get up close and personal with Banjul's crocodiles at the Kachikally Museum and Crocodile Pool, used by locals for fertility rituals. About 80 Nile crocodiles call the pool home and some are allowed to freely roam around the grounds. Visitors can even touch some of the creatures and dip their feet in the sacred waters for a small fee.

The Royal Albert Market is the bustling heart of Banjul. Named after the husband of Queen Victoria, the market is an extensive emporium that comes alive with pungent aromas, lively scenes and the hum of shoppers and sellers haggling over prices on everything from vivid, shimmering fabrics and shining silver jewelry to fresh produce and the latest electronics. Packed to the brim, the market's labyrinth of alleys are a great place to immerse yourself in Gambian culture. Visitors should not hesitate to bargain; most goods can be purchased for just half the asking price!

Drive 30 minutes to Kairaba Beach Resort. Evening at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

SENEGAL

Jan. 23, Day 17: Banjul-Saly / Lamantin Beach Hotel (B, L, D)

Depart at 8 am driving 30 minutes to the Banjul Ferry terminal where we board a ferry for a one hour ride to Barra. We disembark at Barr and drive 30 minutes to the border town of Hamdallaye. There is an approx. 30 min wait on each side of the border, crossing from The Gambia back into Senegal. Then we drive two hours to Kaolack, stopping for lunch at about 1 pm.

Continue driving 2.5 hrs to Joal-Fadiouth, which is actually two small rural villages in the Thiès Region at the end of the Petite Côte of Senegal, south-east of Dakar. Joal lies on the mainland, while Fadiouth, linked by a bridge, lies on an island of clam shells, which are used in local architecture and crafts. We walk across the 900 mt long wooden bridge into the village of Fadiouth and enjoy a short walk in the village.

Continue to 1.5 hr drive to Saly Portugal. Transfer to hotel, arrival approx. 5 pm. Evening at leisure. Dinner at hotel restaurant.

GHANA

Jan. 24, Day 18: Saly/Dakar-Lome-Accra/ Movenpick Ambassador (B)

Early breakfast at the hotel will be arranged. At 6 AM, we transfer to the airport (one hour drive) to board flight Asky KP 053, departing 8:05 am, arriving Lomé 11:30 am, connect to flight to Accra Asky KP 022, dep 1250, arrive 13:30.

The rest of the afternoon/evening is at leisure; lunch and dinner on your own, pay direct.

Jan 25, Day 19: Accra/ Movenpick Ambassador Accra (B, L)

This morning we tour Accra, the capital city of Ghana, including National Museum, Osu Castle, Coffin builders at Teshi township, Makola central market, Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, WEB Dubois center and the arts & craft market.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Afternoon at leisure to enjoy hotel facilities.

Jan 26, Day 20: Drive Accra-Kumasi / Golden Bean Hotel (B, L)

Departing at 8 am, we drive approx. 4.5 hrs to the town of Ejisu, where we stop for lunch.

Afterwards, we visit the three craft villages in Ashanti: 30 min drive to Bonwire - the Kente weaving village, where you will see how the famous Ashanti traditional kente cloth is woven for Ashanti dignitaries using an amazing local technology; 30 min drive to Ntonso, home of the Adinkra Ashanti tribe wax stamp funeral clothing ateliers; 15 min drive to Ahwiaa, the wood carvers' village where you will see how African sculptures are carved. There is an opportunity to buy directly from the artisans who make each craft.

A one hour drive brings you to Kumasi. Transfer to our hotel.

Jan 27, Day 21: Kumasi / Golden Bean Hotel (B, L)

Depart at 8 am to visit of the Royal Palace Museum of the Ashanti Kingdom, Okumfor Anotchi Sword Museum and the Kumasi Cultural Center Museum.

Lunch at a local restaurant. This afternoon, visit the Kejetia Market, one of the largest markets in Africa. Transfer to hotel. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

Jan. 28, Day 22: Elmina / Coconut Grove Resort (B, L)

We depart at 730 am for the 5 hour drive to Elmina. Today we shall tour the infamous Forts, Castles and Slave Dungeons of Ghana and learn about the slave trade in West Africa.

After 3 hours driving, we stop to tour Assin Manso, the site of the "last bath" where slaves were taken for bathing before being shipped to the new world. It is also the burial place of two former slaves whose remains were returned to Ghana from the US and Jamaica.

Continuing, a 1.5 hour drive to the Cape Coast where we have lunch at an ocean view restaurant.

Afterwards, tour Cape Coast Castle. The largest of its kind, the Cape Coast Castle was built by the Swedes in 1653 and was later taken over by the British. Walk the path of slaves as your guide takes you through each section. This castle also houses the West African Historical Museum established by the Smithsonian Institute in collaboration with the Ghanaian Government in 1994. It is filled with artifacts, stories, photos and more.

Then, a 15 minute drive to Elmina. Time & energy permitting, we can visit the busy fish harbor and see the town's pursubans--Asafo tribal shrines (an idol used for traditional worship by the fishermen) located along the road to the fish harbor. Transfer to hotel. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

Jan. 29, Day 23: Kakoum National Park & Elmina Castle – Anoki Village / Maha Beach Resort (B, L)

Today is a full day with several interesting stops along the way.

We depart at 8 am and stop at the lively Elmina Fish Market for some fun photography. Then we drive 1 hour to visit Kakoum National Park which is famous for its amazing canopy walkway. This road, formerly very rough, has been newly paved. Our walking tour inside the park begins at 10 am.

The uniqueness of this park lies in the fact that it was established at the initiative of the local people and not by the State Department of wildlife who are responsible for wildlife preservation in Ghana. It is one of only 3 locations in Africa with a canopy walkway which is 350 metres (1,150 ft) long and connects seven tree tops which provides access to the forest. We will walk 2 hours in total including the climb up to the canopy 30 minutes on steps; not steep.

Departing the park at 12 noon, we drive 1 hour to Elmina and have lunch at a local restaurant.

Afterwards one hour tour of Elmina Castle. Built by the Portuguese in 1482, it is also known as St. George's Castle. This castle was the first European structure built in Sub-Saharan Africa and is the oldest castle in Ghana on the West African slave trade route. The colorful harbor nestled below the Elmina Castle, full of pirogues preparing to go to sea offers one of West Africa's greatest photo opportunities.

Continue about 2 hrs., a short bathroom stop in the picturesque Axim fishing village. You will see from the outside Fort San Antonio, the second oldest fort in Ghana built by the Portuguese in 1515.

Afterwards, we continue about 2 hrs. to Anokyi Village; arrival approx. 7 pm. Transfer to our hotel. Evening at leisure; dinner on your own, pay direct.

[Jan. 30, Day 24: Excursion: Nzulezu Stilt Village / Maha Beach Resort \(B, L\)](#)

We depart at 9 am driving about 30 minutes to the Beyin Visitors Center and walk approx. 5 min to the wooden pier, where we take a one-hour motorized boat trip to Nzulezu stilt village passing through a pristine series of marshes, swamp forest (the largest stand left in Ghana) and open pools rich with wildlife, including crocodiles, egret, heron and kingfishers. This natural area has been designated as an Important Bird Area based on criteria from Birdlife International. The ride is safe and lifejackets are available.

Nzulezu, located at the far western side of Ghana, near the border with Cote d'Ivoire, is one part of the Amasuri Wetland, a Ramsar site and the largest inland swamp forest in Ghana. Spectacular scenery of the 400-year old stilt propped water settlement of Nzulezu, a unique village built on stilts in Lake Tadane, which is home to hundreds of people in the Western Region.

Nzulezu is a Nzema word meaning 'surface of water.' The inhabitants of the village are said to have migrated from Walata, a city in the ancient Ghana Empire, the earliest of the Western Sudanese States. According to tradition, ancestors of the village were brought to their present place by a snail. The serene ambiance of the surrounding landscape, coupled with the general activities of life on stilts points to a dynamic relationship between man and nature. It is essentially one long pier, called Main Street by the locals, with buildings constructed on both sides. One side of the 'street' are living quarters while the other side of the street has businesses, the school, a community center and other commercial ventures. Village life is adapted to the unique environmental conditions, and all activities such as the pounding of fufu (a traditional meal), schooling, worship, baptisms and burials are carried out on the lake. It is said that the lake averts possible disasters such as fire outbreaks.

The people of Nzulezu still adhere to traditional norms and taboos. For instance, Thursday is a sacred day on the lake, and on this day, the villagers do not engage in any strenuous activity.

The Nzulezu stilt village is not connected to electricity, but there are a significant number of television poles attached to almost every home in the village. These are powered by car batteries. For source of light in the night villages use lantern, flash light or rechargeable lamps to move about. To the amazement of visitors, villagers carry on daily life as if they don't live on stilts.

Lunch at a local beach front restaurant. Then visit Apolonia Fort, one of the smaller of Ghana's many historic coastal forts. Located in a picturesque setting on the beach, it is newly restored.

Afterwards, return to the hotel. Enjoy the rest of the afternoon/evening at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

NOTES: We have included two visits to two different stilt villages. The first one we visit, Ganvie, is wealthier than the isolated Nzulezu. In Nzulezu you have an opportunity to walk around and have interactions with the residents. In Ganvie, you can only get off the boat to shop in one stilt building.

The beach adjacent to the visitor center was once the site of a sea turtle conservation project in cooperation with the Ghana Wildlife Society. The project's goal was to protect three endangered turtle species that nest on the beach. However, it is no longer in existence.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Jan 31, Day 25: Beyin-Grand Bassam- Abidjan / Azalai Marcory Estate Hotel (B, L)

We depart at 7 am and drive one hour to the Ghana/Ivorian Coast border. There is a stop at the border towns of Elubo (in Ghana) and Noe (in Cote d'Ivoire) to do the immigration formalities (approx. 2-3 hrs.). Then cross the border and drive another 2.5 hours to reach Grand Bassam.

Grand Bassam is the first capital of Cote d'Ivoire and remains an important seaside resort. The first trading houses were built here.

This afternoon we enjoy lunch at a local restaurant and visit the old quarter built by the French during time of colonization and tour the Museum of Costumes, the Wickerwork Center, the Ceramics/Crafts Center.

Drive 30 minutes to Abidjan and check-in to hotel. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

Feb 1, Day 26: Abidjan / Azalai Marcory Estate Hotel (B, L)

Departing at 8:00 am, we drive 30 minutes to the north-western part of town, Abobo, where Africa's largest outdoor laundrette (laundry) is located. Here you will witness an unforgettable spectacle, hundreds of Fanicos (washer men, no women), jam together in the middle of a stream to wash clothes. They work all day every day, frantically rubbing garments on huge stones held in place by old car vehicle tires then spreading the clothes over rocks and grass in a large drying area. Despite the look of confusion, they never get their clients clothes mixed or missing.

Afterwards 45 minutes or so depending on traffic to visit metropolitan Abidjan including Treichville, one of the areas where the masses live. We pass by a few colorful markets; then over one of the major bridges to Le Plateau, the high-rise commercial area where we stop for a visit to the National Museum of Abidjan. The museum focuses on Ivorian art showcasing statues, masks, jewelry, tools, carved doors, tom-toms and musical instruments from every region of the country.

Lunch at a local restaurant around Le Plateau. We can stop in Cocody, the upscale residential section and browse the Cocody arts and crafts market after lunch. Transfer to the hotel, approx. 1 hr. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

Feb. 2, Day 27: Day Excursion to Yamoussouko / Azalai Marcory Estate Hotel (B,L)

We depart at 8 am for a 3 hour drive to Yamoussoukoro, the second capital city of Cote d'Ivoire. We drive on a well-maintained roads and pass through villages where we see local vendors selling fruit

and meats. Three hours is the drive each way without stops, but we do have time to stop as the group wishes for photos, bathroom etc.

Yamoussoukro owes its good fortune as the birth place of Cote d'Ivoire's first president, Houphouët-Boigny who spent lavishly on his native village. Virtually no traditional African houses are left; Houphouët-Boigny replaced them with concrete middle class structures.

Félix Houphouët-Boigny, affectionately called Papa Houphouët or Le Vieux, was the first President of Ivory Coast, serving for more than three decades until his death. A tribal chief, he worked as a medical aide, union leader and planter before being elected to the French Parliament.

Upon arrival, we will visit the dazzling Basilica of Notre Dame de la Paix, the second largest cathedral in the world (1.5 hr tour).

Afterwards, view the Palace of the former president (exterior view only, government no longer permits tourists to enter) and see the sacred crocodiles in the palace moat. Then enjoy lunch in a local restaurant.

Next, a visit to "Foundation Felix Houphouet Boigny," a UNESCO World Heritage site. **Under renovation; we see the outside only.** Created in 1973 under the name of Foundation Félix Houphouët-Boigny, in 1997 it became the Foundation Félix Houphouët-Boigny for the search for peace. He is at the origin of the International Congress on Peace in the Minds of Men in 1989 and of the Yamoussoukro Declaration for Peace in 1997, both placed and organized under the auspices of UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organization.

On December 5, 1997 in Yamoussoukro, the keys to the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Foundation for the search for peace were handed over to Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO. This project is the culmination of ten years of work orchestrated by the architect Olivier-Clément Cacoub, for a budget of 35 billion CFA francs.

An effort has been made for access to current or historical information, to improve the efficiency of researchers. Thus, 8,800 square meters are devoted to equipment for the collection, storage and consultation of documents, books, computers and museums. The paper documents occupy one floor of the central building over 5,200 square meters of library including reading room, storage and meetings, administration, workshop for the restoration of works. IT occupies the 3,600 square meters of the lower floor. The Foundation, connected to the Internet, can organize discussions between researchers and distribute the digital documents of its collection; collect documents of interest to the Foundation, - physical or digital - then collect and manage the various donations. Permanent or temporary exhibitions are planned in the Peace Museum and, on the second floor of the main building, an exhibition hall of 530 square meters. Please note that the building was under renovations on our last visit to Yamoussoukro.

Return to Abidjan at approx. 6 pm. Evening at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

NOTE: The Basilica is a must see site for some folks, while others may not like the idea of 3 hr drive each way for today's excursion. If you do not wish to go on this excursion, you can feel safe remaining in Abidjan independently.

GUINEA

Feb. 3, Day 28: Fly to Conakry / hotel Palme Camayenne (B)

Enjoy a leisure morning. We depart at 11:30 am and transfer to the airport to board flight Air Senegal, departing Abidjan at 3 pm and arriving Conakry at 5:45 pm. (Suggest buy lunch at the airport).

Upon arrival, transfer to hotel. The Guinea airport is very slow and Conakry is one of the more traffic congested cities. We anticipate reaching the hotel at about 6:30 pm.

Enjoy an evening at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

Feb. 4, Day 29: Conakry / hotel Palme Camayenne (B,L)

At 9 am we embark on a city tour of Conakry visiting the Central Mosque, Sekou Toure's Mosoleum, fish market of Bolobineh, French Cathedral.

Lunch in a local restaurant. This afternoon at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

SIERRA LEONE

Feb. 5, Day 30: Drive to Freetown / Radisson Blu Hotel Mammy Yoko (B,L)

We depart at 7 am for the 6 hr drive to Freetown. Take some snacks from breakfast buffet. There are no decent restaurants along the way. There will be stops for bathroom breaks of course.

The border formalities by the Guinean and Sierra Leonean authorities, which may take 2 hrs.

Sandwiched between the Atlantic Ocean and the mountains, Freetown is the lively capital of Sierra Leone, steeped in history and culture. A British colony in the late 1700s, Freetown became the principal base for the suppression of the slave trade and 1200 freed slaves from Canada came here in 1792 to join the original settlers. With its rich history, stunning scenery and vibrant city center, Sierra Leone's charismatic capital is perfect to explore on foot.

There are countless beautiful beaches within a short drive from the city centre, and a journey to the hilltops that surround the city provides truly breathtaking views.

On arrival check into the hotel. Rest of afternoon is at leisure. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

Feb. 6, Day 31: Taccugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary/Radisson Blu Hotel Mammy Yoko (B, L, D)

Depart at 7:30 am to visit one of the few chimpanzee villages in the region and drive around the Freetown peninsular beaches of John Obey, Black Johnson, York, Kent. The drive is 3 hours round trip. The visit is 2 hours.

Return to Freetown at about 12:30 pm and lunch in a local restaurant.

This afternoon we embark on a tour of Freetown city center. We will visit: Victoria Park Market, Law Court building, the cotton tree (emblem of the city; more than 550 years old), Parliament Building, State House building, King Jimmy Market and the Arts Market at Big Wharf.

Enjoy our last meal together at a local restaurant.

Feb. 7, Day 32: Depart Freetown (B)

Check out of hotel by 12 noon. You can put luggage into hotel security if you have an afternoon departure. The beach and shops/restaurants are an easy walk from the hotel. Transfer to Lungi International Airport. The airport and Freetown are separated by the Sierra Leone River. We transfer by bus to the Lumley Beach Harbor (10 min) and then take a sea coach/ferry (1 hr crossing and 15 minutes from disembarkation to airport). The ferry ride can be a bit bumpy.

Price: \$13,350 per person based on min group size 8. Single room supplement: \$2680
Extra night hotel Lomé, privilege sea view room : \$175 per person twin share, \$297 single room

Transfer if not on day 1: \$50 per car.

Tour Includes:

Accommodations based on availability with daily breakfast:

Lomé: Mercury Sarakawa, privilege sea-view room <http://www.sarakawa-hotel.com/fr/hotel-togo>

Ouidah: Casa Del Papa Resort & Spa lagoon-facing rooms <http://casadelpapa.com/>

Cotonou: Sofitel Marina Hotel (if open) <https://sundukovy.com/en/sofitel-cotonou-benin/>

OR if Sofitel not open: Golden Tulip Le Diplomat <https://diplomate-cotonou.goldentulip.com/en-us>

Ougadougou: Hotel Lancaster Ouaga 2000, standard <https://lancasterouaga2000.com-hotel.website/>

Saly (near Dakar airport): Lamantin Beach Resort & Spa <http://www.leramantin.com/en/>

Dakar city center: Pullman Accor Dakar <https://all.accor.com/hotel/0563/index.en.shtml>

St. Louis: Hotel de la Residence, colonial style renovated by French owners

<http://www.hoteldelaresidence.com/>

The Gambia, Banjul: Kairaba Hotel standard room garden view <http://kairabahotel.com/>

Toubakouta: Hotel Keur Saloum superior river front bungalow room <http://keursaloum.com/>

Saly: Lamantin Beach Resort & Spa <http://www.leramantin.com/en/>

Accra: Movenpick Ambassador Accra, superior room

<https://www.movenpick.com/en/africa/ghana/accra/moevenpick-ambassador-hotel-accra.html>

Kumasi: Golden Bean Hotel <http://www.goldenbeanhotel.com/>

Elmina: Coconut Grove Resort <http://coconutgrovehotelsghana.com/beachhotel/>

Beyin: Maha Beach Resort standard sea view rooms <https://maaharesort.com/>

Abidjan: Azalai Hotel Marcory <https://www.azalai.com/azalahotelabidjan/>

Conakry: hotel Palme Camayenne <http://www.palmcamayenne.com/en/hotel-overview.html>

Freetown: Radisson Blu Hotel Mammy Yoko <https://www.radissonblu.com/en/hotel-freetown>

Meals: 27 Lunches, 6 Dinners. Bottled water 3 litres per day per person during drives & sightseeing.

Our Tour Leader: Mr Mohammed Traore (Momo) is from Bamako. He has been a guide and tour logistics organizer since 1998. He has been leading Original World tours since 2017. Besides being experienced and knowledgeable, he is a wonderful warm personality that our clients will enjoy getting to know.

Local guides: in certain cities as required by regulations. Momo will be giving enhanced talks before the group reaches a site and handles all arrangements to ensure a smooth trip.

Vehicle: Toyota Hiace 14 seats for 6-7 people; Toyota or Nissan Coaster, 25 seats for 8-12 people
Two Toyota Land Cruisers Prado for excursion to Taccugama village/outside Freetown

Entrance fees: All entrance fees for sites listed; and all activities listed

Airfares: Cotonou-Ougadougou, Dakar-Lomé-Accra; Abidjan-Conakry.

Does Not Include: Visas fees, tips to driver, guide, hotel porters, meals not listed, personal expenses such as laundry, phone calls, drinks even when meals are included.

NOTES:

Hotel star ratings listed on websites cannot be compared to the same rating of hotels in the US or Europe. A 5* here is not equal to a 5* in the US. There is no authority in West Africa that oversees the ratings. Hotel websites and various booking sites give differing ratings. We have removed any mention of star ratings. View the hotel websites to see the quality. In our opinion these are excellent quality and best available in some of the areas we visit.

Sequence of activities and time schedule subject to change.

Drive times stated do not include time spent touring en-route, bathroom stops or time at border crossings which are unpredictable. Security check points can take an extra 1-1.5 hours.

Flight schedules within the tour are subject to change.

Festival dates subject to cancellation or date reschedule by the local government