

## **West African Kingdoms: The Ultimate Tour**

**Ivory Coast-Ghana-Togo-Benin- Burkina Faso-Senegal- Gambia-Guinee- Sierra Leone**

**November 1 – December 2, 2023**

*With Abissa Festival & Golden Masked Dance Ceremony*



## C ÔTE D'IVOIRE

Nov 1 Day 1 Arrive Abidjan / Azalai Hotel Marcory Estate

Transfer to hotel. Arrive 12 noon or later. Early morning arrival extra cost for immediate check-in.

Nov 2 Day 2 Excursion to Grand Bassam - **Attend Abissa N'Zima Festival** / Azalai Hotel Marcory Estate (B,L)

Depart at 9 am for the 30 minute drive to 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.

On arrival, we 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.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

This afternoon we attend the last day of the week-long Abissa N'zima Festival, 4:30-6:30 pm.

During the festival, this sleepy colonial town fills up with N'zima who travel from far to participate in the celebrations. Abissa is the pre-eminent festival in the N'zima calendar. It is a time of brutal honesty, renewal and forgiveness. It is a celebration of the ancient N'zima culture, history, royalty, and religion. It is also a time when the entire community comes together. During Abissa, the beat of the cosmic drum releases the N'zima from their customary restraints and allows them to speak candidly to their leaders and to one another. Airing truths during Abissa allows the truth-tellers to forgive and those who have strayed from the proper path to be forgiven. It is a time of collective catharsis that leads to renewal and a spiritual re-birth of the entire community. There will be dances, music and rituals.

Afterwards, dinner at a local restaurant. Return to Abidjan.

Nov 3 Day 3 Abidjan / Azalai Hotel Marcory Estate B,L)

We start with a visit to the north-western part of town, Abobo, where Africa's largest outdoor laundrette 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.

We continue 45 minutes or so depending on traffic, to visit to 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.

Nov 4 Day 4 Day Excursion to Yamoussouko/ Azalai Hotel Marcory Estate (B,L)

We depart at 8:30 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 Basilica of "Notre Dame de la Paix," the second largest cathedral in the world. 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. After lunch,

Next, a visit to "Foundations 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.

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

**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.

## GHANA

Nov 5 Day 5 Abidjan-Beyin (Nzulezu Stilt Village) / Maha Beach Resort (B,L)

We depart at 7 am for the 4 hour drive to Ghana. There is a stop at the border towns of Noe and Elubo to do the immigration formalities (approx. 1-2 hrs).

Transfer to our hotel, 1 hour drive. Lunch at a hotel restaurant. Afterwards, we drive about 15 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.

**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.

After the boat excursion, drive 15 minutes to our resort and enjoy the evening at leisure.

#### Nov 6 Day 6 Beyin - Elmina / Coconut Grove Resort (B,L)

Depart 8 am for a 3 hour drive to Elmina, a UNESCO World Heritage site in the southwest of Ghana.

En-route, after about 1.5 hrs, a short stop to visit the picturesque Axim fishing village and its Fort San Antonio, the second oldest fort in Ghana built by the Portuguese in 1515.

Afterwards, we continue, about 2 hrs drive, to Elmina. Lunch in local restaurant.

After lunch we begin our tour of Castles and Slave Dungeons of Ghana and learn about the slave trade in West Africa, with a visit to 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.

After our visit to the castle, we enjoy a leisurely walk around the Elmina Lagoon, a working fishing village and a walk around the town where you will see Fort St. Jago, built in 1637, on a hilltop overlooking the village (UNESCO World Heritage Site).

#### Nov 7, Day 7: Elmina – Excursion to Kakoum National Park / Coconut Grove Resort (B,L)

This morning, we depart at 8 am driving one hour to Kakoum National Park, located in the coastal environs of the Central Region of Ghana which covers an area of 375 square kilometres (145 sq mi).

Established in 1931 as a reserve, it was gazetted as a national park only in 1992 after an initial survey of avifauna was conducted. The area is covered with tropical forest. 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. Visit will take 2 hrs.

Afterwards, we drive 30 minutes for lunch at a restaurant on the Cape Coast.

A 10 min walk brings us the Cape Coast Castle. The largest of its kind, this 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.

Return to Elmina, drive 15 minutes. Transfer to hotel.

**Nov 8, Day 8: Elmina-Kumasi / Golden Bean hotel (B,L)**

Depart at 9 am and drive 1 hr 10 min to visit Assin Manso, the site of the "last bath." The site served as a slave market and this is 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.

Continue 3 hours to Kumasi, the seat of the Ashanti Empire; lunch en-route.

**Nov 9, Day 9 Tour Kumasi / Golden Bean hotel (B,L)**

Today is devoted to visiting the three craft villages in Ashanti (one hour drive from Kumasi): Ahwiaa - the wood carvers' village where you will see how African sculptures are carved; Ntonso, home of the Adinkra Ashanti tribe wax stamp funeral clothing ateliers; and 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. There is an opportunity to buy directly from the artisans who make each craft.

On the return to Kumasi, visit the Kejetia Central Market, one of the largest markets in West Africa.

**Nov 10, Day 10: Drive to Accra / Movenpick Hotel (B,L)**

Depart the hotel at 8 am for the 5 hour drive to Accra, the capital city of Ghana. After hotel check-in, lunch at a local restaurant. The rest of the afternoon and evening at leisure.

## **TOGO**

**Nov 11, Day 11: Accra - Lomé / Mercure Sarakawa (B,L)**

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

Afterwards, depart for the 3 hour drive to Lomé, capital of Togo. Lunch en-route at Sogakope Beach Restaurant.

At the Ghanaian/Togo border, there are two border formalities: Ghana exit (approx. 1 hour) and Togo entry (approx. 30 min). Distance is short but we can expect police stops along the way which will slow us down.

Transfer to hotel. Evening at leisure.

**Nov 12, Day 12: Lomé / Mercure 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 Musee National, Place de l'Independence, fishing harbor, and the Grand Marche - the realm of the famous "Nana Benz. "

Lunch at a local restaurant.

Visit the Art Street with its craft vendors, the Artisans' Village and the Marche des Feticheurs (fetish market) - the heart of voodoo cult.

**BENIN**

**Nov 13, Day 13: Drive Lomé – Togo Ville - Quidah / Casa del Papa Beach Hotel & Spa (B,L)**

Depart at 8 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.

We'll have lunch at a lake view restaurant. After lunch, we drive 1 hour to the Togo/Benin border town of Illacondji, passing through the historic town of Aneho. Togo and Benin immigration procedures may take (1.5 hrs).

And then drive about one hour to Quidah. Transfer to hotel. Evening at leisure.

**Nov 14, Day 14: Ouidah / Casa Del Papa Resort & Spa (B,L)**

Departing at 9 am, we tour the historic town of Ouidah, considered the capital of voodoo (UNESCO Cultural Site, 1996). It was also once a major slave trading post.

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 seeing the many voodoo dolls riddled with pins and nails during our tour of Benin.

We visit the temple dedicated to the sacred Python, which is believed to give vitality and protection. We may attend morning worship prayers with locals of the village (pending its' occurrence).

The locals will consult their God's (divination) table to pray for their visitors (the group). Prayers are usually for protection against danger, annoyances, good luck, good health and prosperity. It includes singing, dancing and drinking of spirit (GIN) and sacrificing animals (chicken mostly) Each visitor will be asked to say their wishes to the local priest in the temple before prayers begin.

After our voodoo experience, we will visit Fort St. John the Baptist of Ouidah. Built in 1721, it was the last of three European forts built in that town to tap the slave trade of the Slave Coast. Following the legal abolition of the slave trade early in the 19th century, the Portuguese fort lay abandoned most of the time until it was permanently reoccupied in 1865. The fort now serves as a museum, the historical Museum of Ouidah. This museum portrays Benin's role in the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Next, we visit the Port of No Return; a monument built by the Benin Government to commemorate the Africans that were taken from the Dahomey Empire during the Slave Trade.

Lunch at a local restaurant in Ouidah. Transfer to the hotel. Rest of afternoon/evening at leisure at the resort. Dinner on your own, pay direct.

**Nov 15, Day 15: Ouidah-Ganvie Village-Porto Novo-Cotonou / Golden Tulip Le Diplomat (B,L)**



Depart at 8 am. We drive one hour to Abomey Calavi, where we will cross Lake Nokoué by motorized covered boat (20 minutes), to visit Ganvie (the second largest stilt village in West Africa), 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 dug-out canoes. You 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 on 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. Lunch at a local restaurant (approx. 12:30-1:30 pm).

After lunch, we drive 20 km/approx. 30 min 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 (all sites mentioned are time-permitting):

**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.

Returning to Quidah, we culminate the day with a stop at Cotonou's famous central market "Dan Togba," the fetish and traditional medicine market. It stays open until sunset, about 7 pm.

Transfer to the hotel. Evening at leisure, dinner on your own.

**Nov 16, Day 16: Excursion to Abomey / Golden Tulip Le Diplomat (B,L)**

Depart at 7:30 am this morning for a 3 hour drive to Coveh village, where we will attend a traditional **Geleden mask dance of the FON Tribe**. Dance is part of voodoo tradition. Performers wearing masks as well as marionettes will perform, dancing to traditional drums rhythms for approx. 1.5 hours.

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.

After dance, we drive about 30 minutes to the ancient Kingdom of Abomey for lunch at the Auberge Abomey restaurant. Then return to Cotonou, 3 hours drive, arriving approx. 6 pm.

## BURKINA FASO

Nov 17, Day 17 Fly to Ouagadougou, Capital of Burkina Faso / Hotel Laico Ouaga 2000 (B,D)

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 12 noon, we must transfer to the airport for flight Air Burkina 558, departing at 3:20 pm, arriving in Ouagadougou at 4:50 p.m.) Upon arrival, transfer to our hotel. The evening is at leisure. Dinner on at hotel restaurant.

Nov 18, Day 18: Ouagadougou / Hotel Laico Ouaga 2000 (B,L)

This morning we'll visit the National Museum and afterwards 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.

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.

## SENEGAL

Nov 19, Day 19: Ouagadougou-Dakar /Lamantin Beach Hotel (B,L,D)

This morning we need to depart the hotel at 6:45 am. Transfer to the airport for the flight, Air Burkina 514, dep 9:10 am, arriving Dakar 12 noon.

Upon arrival at the new Dakar airport, we will go first to a fine African restaurant for lunch in Saly (1 hr drive) before transfer to the resort in Saly Portudal. The rest of the afternoon at leisure. Buffet dinner at the hotel, open til 10:30 pm.

Lamantin Beach Hotel is a beautiful location and the dinner always gets rave reviews from our clients. **Note:** the drive from the airport all the way into Dakar city would take 1.5 hours and pass thru 3 toll booths.

Nov 20, Day 20: Dakar / Pullman Accor (B,L)



Depart at 9 am. We head into the city, approx. one hour drive, and start our tour with visits of the National Museum, the President's Palace and the Parliament House, the French Cathedral, Monument of African Renaissance and the Grand Mosque.

Lunch at a local restaurant and then visit the various markets: Kermel, Sandaga, the handicraft market of Soumbédioune and the Tilen market famous for its medicinal herbs and its traditional healers.

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

**Nov 21, Day 21: Goree Island / Pullman Accor (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.

**Nov 22, Day 22: Drive to St. Louis / Hotel de la Residence (B,L)**

Depart at 8 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 2 hours to the town of Thies for lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch, we will drive to Saint 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 many brightly colored buildings and beautiful balconies to be seen all around the Island. The Island was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000.

On arrival, check in to the hotel. This evening, explore the colonial quarters of St. Louis.

**Nov 23, Day 23: Excursion to Djoudj National Park / Hotel de la Residence (B,L)**

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

Disembark and return to St. Louis for lunch. 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.

Enjoy additional strolling around the colonial town or leisure time at the hotel. Dinner on your own.

#### **Nov 24, Day 24: Drive to Toubacouta / Kairaba Hotel Keur Saloum (B,L)**

This morning we depart at 7:00 am. 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**

#### **Nov 25, Day 25: 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 Juyo. 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.

#### **Nov 26, Day 26: Makasutu Forest & Banjul / Kairaba Beach Resort (B,L)**

Depart at 8 am this morning driving 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 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.

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 Africa's smallest cities, but it has a big personality not soon forgotten by travelers.

Built in celebration of the 1994 military coup, Arch 22 is the country's tallest building. The Senegalese-designed gateway contains a small museum about the coup d'etat and a cozy cafe, but the real draw 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. The best way to spot these creatures and explore the wetlands is to hire a local guide from the center of Banjul.

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 roam freely 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**

Nov 27, Day 27: 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 Barra 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.

## **GUINEA**

**Nov 28, Day 28: Fly to Conakry, capital city of Guinea /hotel Palme Camayenne (B)**

We depart at 12 noon and transfer to the airport to board flight Air Senegal departing Dakar at 4 pm and arriving Conakry at 5:15 pm.

Upon arrival, transfer to hotel. The Guinea airport is very slow and Conakry is one of the more traffic congested cities. Don't be surprised, though Guinea became a democratic country only five years ago, the roads are full of pot holes. We anticipate reaching the hotel at 6:30 pm. Enjoy an evening at leisure.

**Nov 29, Day 29: Conakry / hotel Palme Camayenne (B,L)**

We'll depart at 9 am on a city tour of Conakry: Central Mosque, Sekou Toure's Mausoleum, fish market of Bolobineh, and the French Cathedral. Lunch at a local restaurant.

Enjoy the rest of the afternoon at leisure. Dinner on your own.

## **SIERRA LEONE**

**Nov 30, Day 30: Drive to Freetown / Radisson Blu Hotel Mammy Yoko 5\* (B, L)**

We depart at 7 am for the 6 hr drive to Freetown. Take some snacks from breakfast buffet as 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 center, 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.

**Dec 1, 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.

Dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight at Radisson Blu Hotel Mammy Yoko

#### Dec 2, 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. At 2 pm, 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:** \$13,250 per person based on min 8 people; Single Room Supplement: \$2585

- All our single rooms are of the same dimension as double and twin rooms. The difference is the beds. Single and double rooms have one king size bed while twin rooms have two queen size beds or two twin beds.
- Hotel star ratings listed here cannot be compared to the same rating of hotels in the US or Europe. There is no authority in West Africa that oversees the ratings. Hotel websites and various booking sites give differing ratings. We include these only to give you a sense of the quality of hotels. Please note a 5\* here is not equal to a 5\* in the US.

**Extra night Abidjan:** \$135 per person twin share; Single Room: \$208

**Transfer if not on day 1:** \$45 per car

**Extra night Freetown:** \$135 per person twin share; Single Room: \$182

**Transfer if not on day 1:** \$45 per car

#### **Includes:**

##### Accommodations with daily breakfast

Abidjan: Azalai Hotel Marcory, standard room <https://www.azalai.com/azalaihoteLabidjan/>

Beyin: Maha Beach Resort, sea view or executive chalets <https://maaharesort.com/>

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

Kumasi: Golden Bean Hotel 4\* deluxe room <http://www.goldenbeanhotel.com/>

Accra: Movenpick Accra, deluxe room

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

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

Ouidah: Casa Del Papa Resort & Spa, sea view <http://casadelpapa.com/>

Cotonou: 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 Hotel, Garden deluxe <https://www.leramantin.com/en/>

Dakar city center: Pullman Accor Dakar, standard <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/>

Banjul: Kairaba Hotel, premium suite <http://kairabahotel.com/>

Toubakouta: Hotel Keur Saloum, superior bungalow <http://keursaloum.com/>

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

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

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

**Meals:** 33 Breakfasts, 29 Lunches, 4 Dinners. Bottled water during drives and sightseeing.

**Guide:** One Professional Tour leader/Guide accompanies the tour throughout. Plus local English speaking guides during sightseeing, as required, in Quidah, Freetown, Saint Louis, Ganvie, Juffureh and James Island, Jan jan Bureh.

**Our Tour Leader:** Mr Mohammed Traore (Momo) has been working with Original World since 2018. He is from Bamako and has 25 years experience as a guide and 16 years as a tour logistics organizer. Traveling in West Africa, there are bound to be situation that require an adjustment of our itinerary. Momo is adept at solving issues and finding solutions rapidly. Besides being experienced and knowledgeable, he is a wonderful warm personality that our clients will enjoy getting to know.

**Local guides:** There will be local guides in each city 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.

**Entrance fees:** All entrance fees into all sights listed; River cruise & boat rides.

**Airfares within the tour:** Cotonou to Ouagadougou, Ouagadougou to Dakar & Dakar to Conakry.

### **Vehicles**

We will change vehicles at each of the land border crossings which avoids delays when using vehicles from the country we are entering.

Toyota Land Cruiser Prado, 7 seats for 2 people

Toyota HIACE ac mini bus, 14 seat for 4-7 people

Toyota or Nissan Coaster, 30 seats for 8-12 people

Toyota Land Cruiser Prado (4 people per car) for excursions to Taccugama village

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

### **NOTES**

Hotel star ratings listed here 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 are subject to change.

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

We do not have the option to personally select the local guides. They will provide minimal basic information. Some might be better than others, but do not expect highly educated, sophisticated guides. It is required by the government tourism departments to hire them.