Ghana

Country Facts
Population: 23,832,495
Languages: English; more than 50 tribal languages, including Dagbani, Fante, Twi, Ewe and Ga
Predominant Religions: Animist, Christian, Islam
Time Zone: Greenwich Mean Time
Voltage Requirements: 220 volts
Telephone Codes: 233, country code

Introduction:
Ghana, called West Africa’s Gold Coast during the colonial era, is better known for its lovely beaches, lively nightlife, good roads, variety of landscapes and friendly people than for dramatic scenery or wild animals. However, these assets make Ghana a safe and fascinating introduction to West Africa.

Although it was once a center of the slave trade, Ghana became the first modern African country to win its independence — giving it a head start in nation-building. Ghana’s people are well-educated, and it has good schools, a thriving journalistic press and one of the highest economic growth rates on the continent. Moreover, Ghana has managed not merely to retain a strong sense of national identity and pride but actually to boost its economy and infrastructure.

Ghana is home to a fascinating variety of historical and cultural sites, the best known of which — ironically — are the European built castles and forts along the coast. Other notable sights include Boabeng-Fiema, with its troops of colobus and mona monkeys, and the sacred crocodiles of Paga, whose caretakers feed them by hand.

Compassion in Ghana:
Compassion International’s work in Ghana began in 2005. As of 2010 more than 20,780 children participate in more than 95 child development centers. Compassion partners with churches around the country to help them provide the children of Ghana with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

Cultural Information:
- The word “Ghana” may as well be synonymous with “friendly,” as the country’s people are some of the most hospitable in the world. The average tourist will have little difficulty adjusting to the country’s local customs. Most residents will overwhelm you with kindness. If you ask directions from passersby, they will more likely than not escort you to your destination.
- Greetings are very important to Ghanaians. You may offend someone if you do not greet them. Ghanaians normally greet by shaking hands using the right hand. [The left hand is unacceptable — think right hand above the waist, left hand below.]
- When greeting an elder, please be formal; use their surnames and titles — Mr., Mrs., Dr., Rev., — when appropriate. If you use a first name, preface the greeting with “uncle” or “brother” for older men, and “aunty” or “sister” for older women.
- It is polite to take off your hat in the company of a chief or any other elder. Also, Ghanaians do not put their hands into their pockets when greeting elders.
- Ghanaians welcome people by saying akwaaba. People normally respond to this greeting by saying medase, or “thank you.”
- Public displays of affection between men and women are unacceptable in Ghanaian culture.
- Traveling around Accra, Ghana’s capital city, is usually safe during the day. Visitors should be accompanied by Ghanaians when they venture out in the evenings. Accra is a heavily populated area with lots of people, cars and houses. There are many traffic jams. Don’t be surprised to see young men and women selling items on the streets of Accra.
- The majority of Ghanaians are Christian — 63 percent — while 16 percent are Muslim and 21 percent have indigenous beliefs. Ghanaian Christians have Sunday services that are usually marked with long hours of prayers, dancing and long sermons.
- The main forms of transportation in Ghana are taxis and trotos — minibuses that seat 15 or more. In hiring taxis you will need to ask the driver before you get in if he’s willing to take you to your destination.

Dos and Don’ts:
- Do greet people properly. In Ghana, “Morning” is the standard greeting in the early part of the day. The local reply is “Morning, morning,” which is answered by “Fine morning.”
- Don’t wear any military clothing or sportswear with a camouflage design — it’s illegal.
- Don’t wear shorts except for at sporting events, beach resorts or other places that are used to Western clothing.
- Do take your own toilet paper, as it is not always available at local hotels (but is sold in shops all around Ghana).
- Don’t photograph sensitive areas (that is, bridges, airports, any government structure and so forth), and always ask before taking someone’s photograph.
- Do shake hands when greeting and leaving people.
- Don’t expect everything to be open on Sunday.
- Do take off your hat in the company of any elder.

Travel Tips

Personal Safety:
Crime against tourists is not a major problem countrywide, though incidents are definitely on the increase in Accra. There, petty theft such as purse snatching and pickpocketing is associated with crowded places such as markets and on public transportation. Mugging is a risk after dark, when you are advised against walking in the capital, although other cities are pretty safe by night. You may want to settle bills in cash rather than using a credit card — travelers have reported cases of credit card fraud after departing Ghana.
Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, social security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Do not take more cash than you reasonably require for that day. Use the room safe or hotel safe to secure valuables as well as additional cash. Secure cash in multiple locations—wallet, various pockets, money belts. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Maintain a close awareness of your purse, wallet, backpack, etc. as well as the people around you. It’s a good idea to keep one hand or arm in constant contact with these items especially in areas of high people traffic. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car, or any other location, even if the vehicle is being watched by Compassion staff or Compassion-hired contractors. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don’t take safety & security for granted.

Health:
Sanitary conditions in most restaurants may pose problems for travelers. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe (especially if it’s included on a package tour). Peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products, and assume the tap water is unsafe. [Stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks, and avoid iced drinks.]

Skin infections are common — even the smallest wound should be disinfected and covered with a bandage. Do not swim in freshwater streams or lagoons. They may be infested with bilharzia, a parasite that attacks the liver. The sun can be very strong, so use sunscreen liberally and wear a hat. Before you go, see a doctor about malaria suppressants. Bring plenty of insect repellent. A yellow fever vaccination is required for entry into the country.

There are adequate medical and dental facilities in Accra and Kumasi and small clinics throughout the rest of the country. Supplies may be limited, however, so bring all prescription medicine needed for the trip.

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC [www.cdc.gov] or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations. Hepatitis and typhoid vaccinations may be recommended, as well as anti-malarial medication.

Money:
The unit of currency is the Ghanaian cedi (GHC). Hard currency (U.S. dollars, euros or pounds sterling) can be changed into local currency at most banks and hotels, but may be difficult to exchange in smaller towns and in rural areas. Traveler’s checks are less widely accepted than cash but can be changed into cedi at some banks, often at a slightly inferior rate. Visa is the most widely accepted credit card and can be used to make cash withdrawals at some ATMs and to pay up-market hotel bills in Accra, but it is unlikely to be much use outside the capital.

In July 2007, the cedi was redenominated. The country is still adapting to this change, and visitors are likely to find many locals still talk in terms of tens of thousands of “old” cedi.
Weather:
Since Ghana is only a few degrees north of the equator, the only seasonal changes are distinct wet and dry seasons. December through February is the dry season, when day temperatures are in the 80s-90s F / 27-36 C and nights in the 70s F / 18-26 C. [Another dry season occurs in July and August, but it’s hotter.] April through June is the rainiest period.

A dry northeast wind, known as the Harmattan, blows almost continuously in January and February. The eastern coastal belt is warm and comparatively dry, the southwest corner has the highest humidity and rainfall, and the north is frequently hot and dry. Bring an umbrella or windbreaker during the rainy season.

Dress:
Ghana has a warm, sweaty climate year-round, so light clothing is ideal in most circumstances. But do bear in mind that dress codes tend toward the conservative, so casual clothes should not be too skimpy. One windbreaker or sweater should be adequate for the rare chilly (or, more likely on the coast, windy) night. Wear long sleeves, pants and socks after sunset to ward against mosquito bites, and spread repellent on any exposed parts of your body. A hat and sunscreen is recommended as a defense against sunburn.

All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.