Togo

Country Facts
Population: 6,019,877
Languages: French (official), Ewe, Mina, Dagomba and Kabye
Predominant Religions: Animist, Christian, Islamic
Time Zone: Greenwich Mean Time
Voltage Requirements: 220 volts
Telephone Codes: 228, country code

Introduction:
You'll find a slightly French twist to some things in Togo: You can buy baguettes, for example, in Lomé (the capital), and you can order them in French. But in general, the people who inhabit this tiny country on the coast of West Africa find most of their cultural expression closer to home. Togo offers sights and sounds that are truly West African: wonderful music, delicious spicy cuisine and friendly people.

Compassion in Togo:
Compassion International's work in Togo began in 2008, when local churches reached out to more than 500 children through partnership with Compassion to establish a Child Sponsorship Program. As of 2010, more than 3,000 children are registered and more than 1,700 children are sponsored in 14 child development centers.

Cultural Information:
- Greetings mean a lot to a Togolese. People are normally offended if not greeted at the first encounter in a day. Togolese greet either by shaking hands or giving a kiss on both cheeks (for the elite). The right hand is preferred when shaking hands.
- Togolese will go formal with elderly people, using their surnames and titles—‘Monsieur’, ‘Madame’, ‘Mademoiselle’, ‘Docteur,’ etc. to address them. Togolese will use ‘Vous’—meaning you—to address an elder or a formal acquaintance and ‘Tu’—meaning you—to address a colleague or informal acquaintance. Togolese do not greet elders with their hands in their pockets or on their waist.
- Togolese welcome people by saying “Woezon” or “Bon Arrivé”. People normally respond to this greeting by saying “Yoo” or “Merci” respectively.
- Public displays of affection between men and women are unacceptable in the Togo culture.
- In markets, particularly in the capital, you will notice elaborately dressed women known as “Nana Benz” or “Mama Benz” (a name derived from Mercedes Benz, their car of choice). Nana Benz are known to be the richest and most efficient businesspeople in Africa, monopolizing the sale of cloth and textiles from throughout the continent.
- Caucasian travelers are sure to hear children chanting, “Yovo, yovo, bonsoir!” Yovo means “white,” “stranger,” even “peeled orange.”
- Expect to pay to take photos, and always ask permission to photograph people, even in public settings.
• More than two-thirds of the population of Togo is under age 30.
• Lomé sits right on the border with Ghana. Before independence, part of eastern Ghana made up the British part of the colony of Togo. So some city streets end abruptly at a high chain-link fence topped with coils of barbed wire. The fence marks the “new” border.
• The Tamberna Valley, in northeastern Togo, features houses that resemble castles. Built with straw, clay and cob, the homes are all arranged in a circle for defense.

Dos and Don’ts:
• Do learn some French before you go.
• Do dress well if you’re going out for the evening in Lomé. Many places have a dress code.
• Don’t use your left hand for anything. It’s considered unclean.
• Do notice the marble at Lomé’s Hotel du 2 Fevrier. The beautiful stone was all mined locally near Gnaoulou. And while you’re at the hotel, do go up to the 35th floor for a great view of the capital.
• Do change dollars or traveler’s checks in Lomé before heading up-country. Foreign currency is difficult to change farther north. In Lomé, visit only official currency-exchange outlets; beware of street money changers. Lomé is notorious for its skilled shortchange artists and masters of sleight-of-hand.
• Do try to be in Lomé during Cultural Week (the second week in April), as this time offers excellent displays of traditional music and culture.
• Don’t linger outside the Presidential Palace, and don’t even think of taking a picture. In general, don’t take pictures of anything having to do with the military, no matter how tenuous the connection (including post offices).

Travel Tips

Personal Safety:
Travelers should keep themselves informed about conditions in the country. When visiting the beach in Lomé, it’s best to be accompanied by a local, and do not venture onto the beach after dark. For more information, contact your country’s travel-advisory agency ([www.state.gov/travel]).

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:
Local medical services are limited. Sanitary conditions in restaurants may pose problems for travelers. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products and assume the water is unsafe [stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks].

Don’t swim in freshwater streams and lakes; bilharzia, parasites that attack the liver, are present throughout the country. Bring insect repellent and any prescription medicine needed for the duration of the trip. The sun can be very strong, so use sunscreen liberally and wear a hat. Don’t forget to bring a pair of comfortable walking shoes.

Consult your doctor about obtaining malaria suppressants [widespread chloroquine-resistant strains have been confirmed] and vaccinations against yellow fever, cholera, hepatitis, typhoid, polio and meningitis.

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. Yellow fever, cholera, hepatitis, typhoid, polio, and meningitis vaccinations may be recommended, as well as anti-malarial medication.

Money:
Togo’s currency is the CFA franc, which was linked to the former French franc and now to the euro. It is used in seven other former French colonies in West Africa. There are ATMs in Lomé, but they are a relatively new feature in the country. You can also change money or traveler’s checks in banks and at your hotel.

Weather:
The two dry seasons are August and early September and November to April. Try to avoid the rainy seasons [May through July and late September and October]. Although they aren’t full-blown monsoons, it does rain enough to make things inconvenient. Year-round average highs are 78–87 F / 25–30 C and average lows are 65–75 F / 18–24 C. Central and northern Togo are generally warmer during the day and cooler at night than on the coast. Be prepared for wind-blown dust at any time of the year [dust is particularly noticeable in January and February], and be sure to bring a sweater for use in the evenings year-round.

Dress:
Clothing should be appropriate for warm weather. Jeans are acceptable for casual wear. Sandals or flip-flops are comfortable for this warm weather country.

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