

Essential Facts and Figures

Currency: The New Ghana Cedi is the official currency, expressed as GHC. Notes: 50, 20, 10, 5 and 1 Ghana Cedis. Coins: 1 Ghana Cedi and 50, 20, 10, 5 and 1 pesewas.

Exchange rate: Check the Internet for actual rates

Time: Ghana straddles the Greenwich Meridian so it is on GMT all year round. There is no summer time.

Land Area: 238,500 sq km (92,100 sq miles).

Population: Estimates range from between 24-25 million

Capital: Accra.

International Airport: Kotoka International Airport in Accra.

Regions (and capitals): Greater Accra (Accra), Central (Cape Coast), Western (Sekondi/Takoradi), Ashanti (Kumasi), Eastern (Koforidua) Brong Ahafo (Sunyani), Volta (Ho), Northern (Tamale), Upper East (Bolgatanga), Upper West (Wa). See www.ghanadistricts.com

Cacao: Ghana is an important cacao producer in the world. It is second to the Ivory Coast, the largest producing nation.

Peace: Ghana is 1 of the most peaceful nations in Africa.

Politics: Ghana is a Republic and gained independence from Great Britain in 1957.

Religion: Freedom of Worship is a constitutional right in Ghana and there is virtually no conflict between Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists—the three main religions of Ghana.

Oil: Oil was discovered off the coast of Ghana in 2007 by Kosmos Energy (USA) and Tullow Oil (UK). First oil is produced by October 2010 from the Jubilee Field.

Economy: Inflation is one of the biggest challenges facing Ghana's economy. When the cost of fuel increases petty traders and all drivers increase their prices accordingly so it's not surprising to find the cost of basic living goods increasing every month or so.

Subsistence farming and cash crops are major sources of employment and income for Ghanaians. Cacao is without doubt the largest agricultural sector.

Gold and diamond mining are the single most important industries in the country in terms of employment and export income. Ghana's major exports are gold, cocoa, diamonds, bauxite (aluminum) and timber. Ghana is a member of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States).

Climate

Overview: In general, the temperature in the southern half of Ghana ranges between 21-32 degrees C. In the northern half of Ghana they range from about 21-35 degrees C in the cooler months (June-November) and 25-42 degrees C in the hotter months (December-May). The south of Ghana is more humid throughout the year. The far north of Ghana is classified as Sahelian and is extremely dry from November until May.

The Harmattan winds blow annually from the Sahara Desert throughout West Africa between November and March. Dust permeates and dries the atmosphere. Eye drops, inhalers or asthmatic meds, and perhaps even a handkerchief to cover your mouth if you should be traveling in the northern regions then will be useful.

In the southern half of Ghana the rainy season begins in May and can last through to October, sometimes with a short break in August/September. Humidity is obviously very high but temperatures are cooler than the first five months of the year and it's often cloudy. It can get deliciously cool at night during this time, especially around June/July.

In the northern half of Ghana the rainy season is starting as late as June and finishing in September. It is quite pleasant during this time. Although it rains, the humidity isn't uncomfortable, during this time when crops are growing high and the whole area turns green.

The wet seasons are not monsoonal, but rather heavy showers that come in short bursts. Ghana, however, is experiencing climate change by which long-established seasonal patterns are changing from year to year. The northern rainy season is becoming shorter with heavier downpours, unlike the lighter, more evenly paced seasons from millenniums past.

Topographically, Ghana is a fairly flat country with mountainous parts in the central and eastern areas of Ghana and a few spots in the northern half. The coast is characterized by lagoons and estuaries where rivers meet the ocean. Lake Volta is fed by the White and Black Volta rivers that flow from Burkina Faso through the Upper East and West Regions, then down through the Northern Region and into the northern part of Lake Volta, the largest man-made lake on earth.

It was the discovery of bauxite in the Eastern Region that prompted the construction of Akosombo Dam, the intention being to supply hydroelectricity to underpin the processing of bauxite into aluminum. Dr. Nkrumah commissioned Lake Volta's construction from 1966.

Language

English is the official language and is spoken almost everywhere. Even in the most remote villages you're likely to find at least one person who speaks it. And, while it's the official language, Ghanaian English has its idiosyncrasies.

Here are some fun phrases you'll hear every day: "**I'm coming**" is what people say when they mean "I'll see you later" or "I'll be back shortly" or "I have no intention of returning at all, but this is an easy way out." "**Akwaaba**" Akwaaba means "Welcome" in Twi and you'll hear this all over Ghana. It's almost synonymous with the notion of Ghana itself.

“Somehow”. This word is invoked to give a non-committal, evasive answer to a question that usually requires a specific response. Basically, if you don’t want to give a direct answer to something, you say “somehow”. It’s also a soft alternative to “no”.

“Obruni”

This word has become synonymous with the idea of “foreigner” and is shouted at you almost everywhere in the south of Ghana. It means “white person” and can understandably annoy non-Ghanaian, African or Asian visitors who get the Obruni treatment as much as any other foreigner. There is no ill intention behind this, Ghanaians are just pointing out the obvious as far as they’re concerned. It’s worth trying to look at this through their lens, a lens with no deep history of racism (despite the colonial past). Irony and political correctness are virtually nonexistent. Ghanaians generally speak to foreigners without filter or malice or double-meaning, which can actually be refreshing.

Ghanaian Languages

There are over 40 languages spoken across the country. The two most widely spoken languages are Twi and Hausa. Twi is the language of the Ashanti Region and is relatively simple. It’s part of the Akan group of languages and is spoken throughout parts of the Eastern Region, Western, Central and Brong Ahafo Regions. Fanti, which is spoken in the Central Region and parts of the Western Region, is also an Akan language quite similar to Twi. If you can speak one, you can get the other without too much trouble. Perhaps Twi has spread far due to internal migration and Kumasi being a major and central hub.

Day Names

The Ashanti culture has a tradition of giving a child the name of the day after which they were born. This has spread somewhat across Ghana. They are different for boys and girls and follow the names of the days.

Day of the week	Boy Name	Girl Name
Monday	Kojo	Adwoa
Tuesday	Kwabena or Kobina	Abena
Wednesday	Kweku	Ekua
Thursday	Yao	Aba
Friday	Kofi	Efua
Saturday	Kwame	Ama
Sunday	Kwesi	Akosua

Ghanaians read meaning into which day you were born, but have a perception that foreigners, or *obrunis*, are blessed and, thus, must be born on either Sunday or Monday—blessed days. So, you’ll hear people calling out to you along streets and in markets like this: “Akosua ‘bruni” or “Kwesi ‘bruni”, irrespective of the day you were actually born. It’s another version of “Obruni”. They’ll often call women “Adwoa” too.

Etiquette

Meeting and greeting: Ghanaians will spend the first few minutes shaking hands, asking after the other, then family, health and work, before getting down to the issue. No one ever responds in the negative and says they are not fine, even if they're clearly suffering. Ghanaians make the best of it, which appears to keep things moving and people smiling no matter what.

If you need to approach people to ask for help, first ask, "Hello, how are you?" and wait for a genuine response before asking, rather than walking up and saying, "How do you get to...?!" without first acknowledging the person. Overall, Ghanaians place great stock in greetings so it's a safe bet to always greet everyone when entering a room or vehicle and always return a greeting, wherever you are—especially when you enter an immigration office to extend your visa.

How to shake hands: Use right hands and, after the shake, you click your middle fingers together to make a snapping sound. It takes some practice but it is fun and worth getting the hang of. However, with elders or senior colleagues, shake western style without clicking.

Left hand no-no: An important custom is not to use your left hand for eating, handing over money, shaking another's hand or anything at all when interacting with others. It's considered dirty (the hand you wipe your bottom with). It's the same in many other cultures across the Globe.

Business Etiquette: While we stress that you try to be punctual for appointments, Ghanaians have a terrible reputation for being late. There is an expression "GMT" (Ghana Maybe Time) to describe this phenomenon.

Smoking: Ghanaians hardly smoke tobacco cigarettes, partly because the cost of a packet is expensive. There is a general cultural tendency to look down on those who do smoke as being somehow weak or flawed. While smoke from the widespread burning of plastic refuse seems to be tolerated, most Ghanaians detest inhaling another's cigarette smoke. If you do need to smoke, excuse yourself and stand away from gatherings or crowds.

Taking photos: Ghanaians like to look their best in photos so they may be unhappy if you try to photograph them looking dirty or doing dirty jobs. Please exercise discretion and ask someone before taking a close up or obviously "snapping" them. Incidentally, "snap" is the word used for "take" a photo. You will hear "snap me" many times from children.

Time and life: Forget everything you know about time and "how things work". Life in Ghana rocks to its own unpredictable rhythm and has its own way of working itself out—which can be exceedingly frustrating at times. Long waits for buses scheduled to leave hours earlier and slow responses to anything bureaucratic are normal. It's life. It will teach you to go with the flow. If you need to learn patience and inner calm, just come to Ghana and buy a ticket for anything with a start time. There's nothing you can do about it so the advice is to leave assumptions and presumptions at customs, and you're more likely to enjoy one of the friendliest nations on earth.

Food

Generally, the main dishes are heavy on the carbs—yam, plantain, cassava, rice—and light on greens, if at all. Ghanaians' favorite food is **fufu**, a sticky ball of pounded cassava, plantain, cocoyam or yam, served in a bowl of palm, light or ground nut soup, usually taken with goat meat, fish or chicken.

Other popular dishes:

Kenkey: hard fermented corn dough usually served with crushed tomatoes, chili pepper and fish. This is popular in Accra and along the coast to Takoradi.

Banku: soft and slightly fermented (or unfermented and called *Akple* in the Volta) corn dough served like Kenkey or with okro (okra) stew. This is popular all over Ghana.

Red Red: Fried plantain with beans in a thick tomato stew.

Events and Festivals Elmina- Cape Coast

Festivals are very significant occasions in the lives of most Ghanaians. Festivals generally mark past events and re-connect and strengthen the bond between the various ethnic groups and their ancestors. Others mark the beginning of new seasons in the traditional calendars of these ethnic groups. In recent times, festivals have become rallying grounds for communities to mobilize funds and other resources for development projects. These festivals reflect the rich and diverse culture of Ghana. Most of the festivals in Ghana are normally climaxed with durbars of chiefs and people. Local and national governments are also always represented at these festivals.

January

In Elmina, the **Edina Buronya Festival** welcomes the new year and is celebrated on the first Thursday of the new year. Edina is the traditional name of the area. Much like other cultures, it's a time to remember ancestors, to purify oneself for the coming year, and to make sacrifices to the gods. Libation is poured and there is much merriment throughout the town of Elmina with parades and drumming and dancing. It can get chaotic so make sure you have a good hold on your possessions.

July

One of the most colorful and exciting festivals is **Bakatue** in **Elmina** on the first Tuesday of July. Incidentally, Tuesday is the day of the week that fishing is banned by the Gods which is, no doubt, why it's held on this day—the sacred day. It celebrates the new season for fishing—fishing being the main activity of the people of this area. Again, this includes a durbar with local chiefs, but the most exciting part is the regatta in which hundreds of colorful canoes head out from Benya Lagoon around the Castle area.

Again, it gets chaotic so hold on to your bags.

PANAFEST: The single largest festival that brings Africans and people of African-descent together is the Pan-African Historic Theater Festival—PANAFEST—to celebrate the ideals of Pan-Africanism. It is a bi-annual festival and the next one is 2016. The festival celebrates African history, culture and civilization by Africans, people of African descent both on the continent and beyond. It takes place in the coastal towns of Cape Coast and Elmina which were the bases of the slave trade and activities include public lectures, workshops, symposia, drama, poetry, music and organized tours to the colonial landmarks in Ghana such as the Cape Coast and Elmina castles. Emancipation Day, which is celebrated annually in Ghana on 1st of August to mark the abolition of the slave trade, coincides with PANAFEST every two years. Most Africans in the Diaspora see PANAFEST as a home-coming festival or a period of re-connection with their roots.

September

The biggest annual festival in Cape Coast is **Fetu Afahye** (pronounced *Afasheh*). The procession takes place on the first Saturday of September but festivities take place all the week beforehand all over Cape Coast. The durbar: A parade of chiefs and warriors proceeds along the main road of Cape Coast from the castle back up to the centre of town on Saturday around mid-day. It's absolutely jam-packed during the procession so hold on to your possessions tightly here too. There will be a sacrifice of a cow during the procession so, again, you may want to skip that if ritual animal sacrifices are not your cup of tea. The festival celebrates the gathering of the "7 Asafo Companies"—the local warrior groups—and their relationship over centuries extending back before the arrival of Europeans.

How to Meet a Chief

There are certain rules that you need to observe when you're meeting a chief in any part of Ghana. Generally, when you are invited to greet a chief or the king, you have to move up towards him and stop a little before where he is seated, stop and bow. He may graciously invite you to come for a handshake. We do not speak directly to the chief in Ghana, so, communication at the palace is a three-way affair through a spokesman (linguist) who replicates the conversation. The linguist is called "Okyeame" in Twi, "Wulana" in Dagbani, and "Psiami" in Ewe.

Ghanaians revere their chiefs and other traditional institutions so be sure to observe protocol and not unwittingly offend the customs and norms of Ghanaians when you visit their palaces.

Obtaining a Visa to Enter Ghana

There are numerous conflicting stories in obtaining your visa to Ghana. Please check the Ghana Embassy or Consulate in your home country for information You can also check facts from www.ghanaimmigration.org

Single or Multiple Entry Visa?

If you're planning to stay in Ghana exclusively, then a single-entry visa will suffice for the duration of your stay. However, if you plan to leave Ghana and return again (some visitors travel around West Africa and return to Ghana), then apply for a multiple entry visa.