

Togo

Once regarded as the pearl of West Africa for its scenic landscapes, elegant capital and affluent markets, Togo fell by the tourism wayside following the political turmoil of the 1990s and mid-2000s.

Two decades of visitors' neglect have taken their toll: national parks have been reclaimed by desperate farmers, information for travellers is virtually nonexistent, roads are in an appalling condition and getting around without your own transport requires the patience of a saint and the determination of a fighter.

But for those fond of travelling off the beaten track, Togo will prove a rewarding destination. It is as beautiful as ever, with a great diversity of landscapes, and wildlife that has clung on against all odds. Elephants, crocs, monkeys and antelopes can be found in Fazao-Malfakassa, and the coast remains a favourite mating area for whales and nesting ground for marine turtles.

The end of mass tourism has also given small, independent outfits a chance to make their mark: great little guesthouses are stealing the show from the once-grand hotels of the 1970s; passionate guides are working the ecotourism trend, and an outstanding West African art collection can now be seen at a gallery in Lomé.

Culturally, Togo is a melting pot. The fortified compounds of Koutammakou and the vertigo-inducing caves of Nano are a reminder that the country's ethnically diverse population didn't always get along. Nowadays however, voodoo, Muslim, Christian and traditional festivals crowd the calendar and are often joyful and colourful celebrations for all. And if one thing can definitely bring all five million Togolese together, it is their conquering football team, Les Éperviers.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 56,790 sq km
- **Capital** Lomé
- **Country code** ☎ 228
- **Famous for** Emmanuel Adebayor, Les Éperviers, the ruling Eyadéma family
- **Languages** French (official), Ewe, Mina, Kabyé
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA493; €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 5.1 million
- **Visa** CFA10,000 seven-day visa at border; one-month extension free; CFA10,000 for second month



HOW MUCH?

- **Pagne Ewe kente cloth** CFA8000
- **Butterfly walk** CFA5000
- **Koutammakou access** CFA1500
- **Taxi-moto** CFA200
- **National park entry** CFA13000

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of gas/petrol** CFA550
- **1L of bottled water** CFA500
- **Bottle of Flag beer** CFA350
- **Souvenir T-shirt** CFA2500
- **Street treat (cake/fruit)** CFA100

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lomé** (p774) The bars and restaurants show off the coastal capital in all its decaying glory.
- **Musée International du Golfe de Guinée** (p776) Wxquisite West African art is displayed at this unique gallery.
- **Kpalimé** (p785) Lush forested hills for hiking and taking in the chilled vibe of coffee country.
- **Togolese gastronomy** (p774) Any of Togo's numerous maquis offer a chance to enjoy *jufu sauce arachide*, *aloko*, *koliko* or grilled Nile perch, best washed down with a shot of *sodabe*.
- **Koutammakou** (p795) Northern Togo's remote clay-and-straw fortresses, the *tata* compounds, are set amidst stunning scenery.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Allow at least a week for exploring Lomé (p774) and its surrounds. Within easy reach of the coastal capital, the Friday market in Vogan (p784) is particularly interesting. Combine this trip with one to Lake Togo (p783).
- **Two Weeks** After investigating all that Lomé has to offer, head for Kpalimé (p785) at the heart of coffee country – a great place to go hiking. From there, you could head to the Akloa waterfalls outside Badou (p790), then to Parc National de Fazao-Malfakassa (p790) and as far as the vibrant Kabyé town of Kara (p792).

- **Three Weeks** For those with more time on their hands, Koutammakou (p795), home to the fascinating Tamberma people and their fortress-like *tatas*, is well worth a visit. And if Koutammakou piqued your curiosity, head to the once-inhabited caves in the cliffs of Mount Semoo (p799) close to the northern town of Dapaong (p797) on the BurkinaFaso border.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

This long, thin country stretches across six geographic zones and its climate ranges from tropical in the south to savannah in the north. Rain falls from May to October. In the south there's a dry spell from mid-July to mid-September. In the north there is no such interlude, but on the whole the north is more arid than the south. Mid-February (after the harmattan wind lifts) to mid-April is the hottest period; November to February is the driest.

The two dry seasons are the best time to visit, although the November-February season coincides with the harmattan and is a rotten time for photographers. Major roads are dependable throughout the year, but unsealed roads can be unpassable during and after the rains. See climate charts, p810.

HISTORY

Togo's name comes from *togodo*, which means 'behind the lake' in Ewe – a reference to the body of water now called Lake Togo. The region was once at the edge of several empires, including the Dahomey and Akan-Ashanti kingdoms in present-day Benin and Ghana respectively. It played a few bit parts in the Dahomey story: the Alladahanou from Tado, southeast of Sokodé, established kingdoms in what would become known as Dahomey; and Togo was the toppled Dahomeyan kings' refuge of choice.

With the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century, the power vacuum in Togo allowed the slave-traders to use the country as a conduit. The Mina – who had immigrated from the west along with the Guin (while the Ewe had arrived from the east) – became ruthless agents for the slave-traders.

Germans in Togoland

With the abolition of slavery, the Europeans turned their attention to trade in commodities – palm and coconut oils, cocoa, coffee