

Ghana

Hailed as West Africa's golden child, Ghana deserves its place in the sun. Its beaches are buttered with thick white sand and its savannahs are blessed with the footprints of elephants – no wonder travellers can't get enough.

Often labelled Africa's greatest success story, Ghana's green-gold-and-red flag has been flying high since 1957. The country stands proudly as a beacon of hope on the rocky West African coastline. The wind of change that once swept through Ghana is now a soft, salty breeze; it cools the air and kisses the coastline, still haunted by the legacy of the slave trade.

Linking the dry, dusty north with the spectacular seascape of the south, Accra is where the music comes alive. Laced with laughter, hip-life music permeates cocktail bars, swish clubs and restaurants. Let the hot sun hug you and the beat get under your skin; follow it as it draws you into its relentless rhythm.

Travel to the crashing waterfalls of the east and the world-class waves of the west; past mud-and-stick mosques and crumbling colonial architecture. Don't miss Mole National Park, where sunburnt savannahs host populations of elephants, antelopes and monkeys. At the end of a long, hot day, slip into the night and take a peek at the inky sky: we bet you the stars will be out.

There's a good reason they call Ghana 'Africa for beginners': you'll never want your trip to end.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 231,000 sq km
- **ATMs** In Accra and large towns
- **Borders** Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo
- **Budget** Accra US\$50 to US\$70, elsewhere US\$30 to US\$50
- **Capital** Accra
- **Languages** English, Akan, Dagbani
- **Money** Cedi; US\$1 = C1.43, €1 = C2.05
- **Population** 23 million
- **Seasons** Hot and humid year-round with rains June to August and September to October
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 233; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visa** Arrange in advance; US\$80



HOW MUCH?

- **Purse made from recycled water sachets** US\$3.50
- **Elephant safari** US\$0.50
- **Taxi ride across Accra** US\$4
- **Hip-life album** US\$4
- **Barbecued bat** US\$0.70

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.50
- **1.5L bottled water** US\$1
- **Bottle of Star beer** US\$1.40
- **Souvenir football shirt** US\$5.60
- **Plate of jollof rice** US\$1.40

HIGHLIGHTS

- **The coast** (p347) Dance and take drumming lessons on the beaches of Kokrobite and Anomabu. Then head out west in search of surf and sea turtles at Busua, Akwidaa Beach and Axim.
- **Ghosts of the slave trade** (p347 and p349) Tour the castles of Cape Coast and Elmina to learn about the history of slavery.
- **Mole National Park** (p355) Join the world's most inexpensive safari.
- **The east** (p355) Go hiking, take a boat trip and climb waterfalls in the former German Togoland.
- **Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary** (p355) Spot hippos and Islamic architecture in this little-visited corner of Ghana.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Ghana has a tropical equatorial climate, which means that it's hot year-round, with seasonal rains. In the humid southern coastal region, the rainy seasons are from April to June and during September and October; the dry months, November to March, July and August, are easier for travelling. The rains are less intense in the drier north, which borders Burkina Faso. Throughout the year, maximum temperatures are around 30°C, dropping three or four degrees during the brief respite between rainy seasons. Humidity is constantly high, at about 80%.

ITINERARIES

- **Two Weeks** Begin in Accra (p341; two nights), then fly up north (you could travel by road, but it will rob you of a night) to Tamale (p354; two nights), then on to Larabanga (p354; one night) and Mole (p355; two nights) to lock eyes with an elephant. Then head down south to Kumasi (p350; two nights) to pay a visit to the nearby Ashanti villages, before continuing back to Accra (one night). Then check out the beaches of Anomabu (p347; two nights) or Kokrobite (p347), before returning to the capital to catch your flight home. Alternatively, you could head straight to Kumasi (p350; two nights) from Accra, then travel to Cape Coast (p347; three nights) to explore Kakum and the surrounding area. You could then move further west to Busua (p349; two nights) and Akwidaa Beach (p349; three nights) before returning to Accra.
- **One Month** With a month to spare, you can do all of the above plus throw in visits to the east. If possible, fly from Accra to Tamale (p354) – if not, take your time bussing it to Kumasi (p350) and then further north – and then travel to Mole National Park (p355) and Larabanga (p354). Continue west to the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary (p355).

HISTORY

Present-day Ghana has been inhabited since 4000 BC, filled by successive waves of migrants from the north and east. By the 13th century several kingdoms had developed, growing rich from the country's massive gold deposits and gradually expanding south along the Volta River to the coast.

Power & Conflict

By the 16th century one of the kingdoms, the Ashanti, emerged as the dominant power, conquering tribes left, right and centre and taking control of trade routes to the coast. Its capital, Kumasi, became a sophisticated urban centre, with facilities and services equal to those in Europe at the time. And it wasn't long until the Europeans discovered this African kingdom. First the Portuguese came sniffing around the coast, and then came the British, French, Dutch, Swedish and Danish. They all built forts by the sea