

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 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. Elephants, crocs, monkeys and antelopes can be found in Parc National De Fazao-Malfakassa, and the coast remains a favourite mating area for whales and nesting ground for marine turtles.

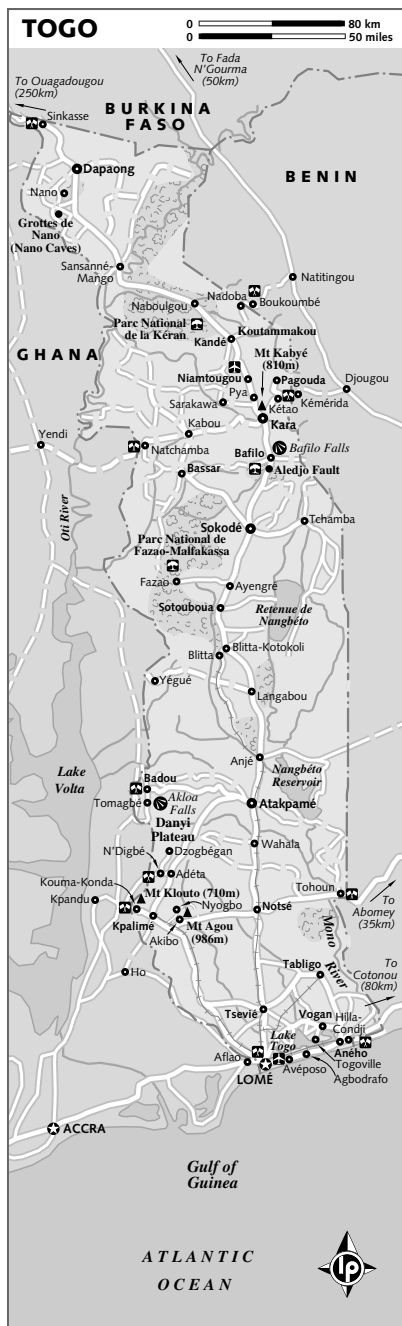
The end of mass tourism has also given the chance for independent outfits to make their mark: great little guesthouses are stealing the show from the once-grand hotels of the 1970s, passionate guides are working the ecotourism trend and an outstanding West African art collection has opened its doors 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 colourful celebrations for all. And if one thing can definitely bring all six million Togolese together, it is their conquering football (soccer) team, Les Éperviers.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 56,790 sq km
- **ATMs** In Lomé and Kara
- **Borders** Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana
- **Budget** US\$30 to US\$50 a day
- **Capital** Lomé
- **Language** French (official), Ewe, Mina, Kabye
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA457, €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 6.6 million
- **Seasons** Wet (May to October), dry (November to February)
- **Telephone** County code ☎ 228; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visa** CFA10,000 seven-day visa at border; 30-day extension of seven-day visa free





HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lomé** (p524) Hit the bars and restaurants to see the coastal capital in all its decaying glory.
- **Musée International du Golfe de Guinée** (p526) Marvel at the exquisite West African art displayed at this unique gallery.
- **Kpalimé** (p529) Hike in lush forested hills and take in the chilled vibe of coffee country.
- **Togolese gastronomy** (p523) Tuck into *fufu* sauce *arachide* (a yam paste served with a peanut and ground-nut sauce), *aloko* (fried plantain), *koliko* (yam chips) or grilled Nile perch and wash it down with a shot of *sodabe* (firewater distilled from palm wine).
- **Koutammakou** (p532) Seek out northern Togo's remote clay-and-straw fortresses, the *tata* compounds, amid stunning scenery.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Togo's climate ranges from tropical in the south to savannah in the north. Rain falls from May to October, with a dry spell in the south from mid-July to mid-September. Mid-February (after the harmattan lifts) to mid-April is the hottest period throughout the country, while November to February is the driest and best time to visit. Unsealed roads can be unpassable during the rains. Parc National Fazao-Malfakassa is usually open from December to May (depending on the rains).

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Spend a couple of days in Lomé (p524) checking out the sights. Make a day trip to the Friday market in Vogan (p528) or Lake Togo (p528) for a spot of relaxation before heading to the hills of Kpalimé (p529).
- **Two Weeks** Start off with week one in Lomé (p524) and Kpalimé (p529), then make your way to the vibrant Kabye town of Kara (p531) and make a day trip to the beautiful and intriguing Koutammakou country (p532).

HISTORY

Togo's name comes from *togodo*, which means 'behind the lake' in Ewe – a reference to Lake Togo. The country was once on the fringes of several great empires and, when the