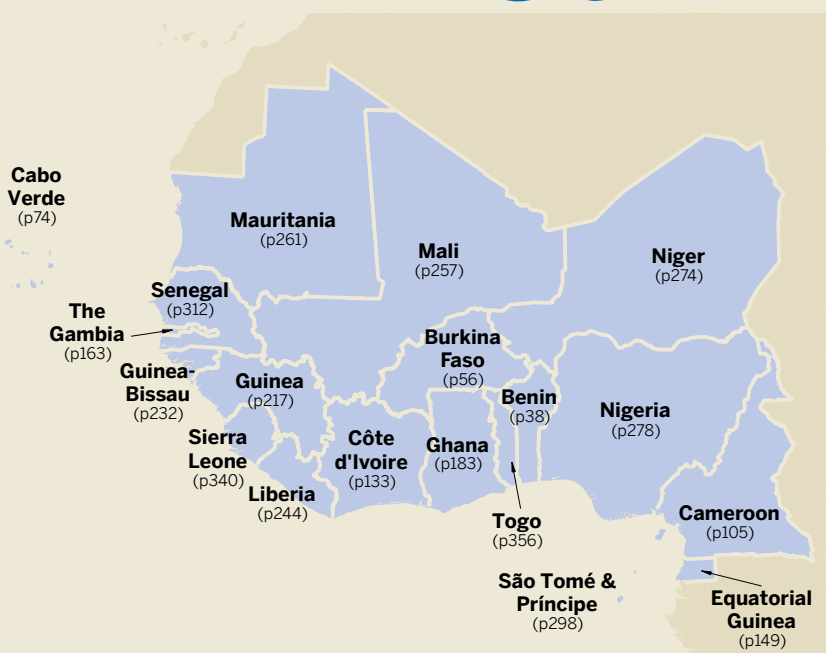




West Africa



Anthony Ham

Stuart Butler, Michael Grosberg, Nana Luckham,
Vesna Maric, Helen Ranger, Caroline Sieg, Helena Smith,
Regis St Louis, Paul Stiles

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Itineraries



2
WEEKS

Best of the West

West Africa's heartland takes in a beguiling mix of the region's dry-as-dust Sahel and its tropical coast. By following this route you'll get a taste for all that's good about the region.

If you're wondering why Francophone Africa gets under the skin, begin in cosmopolitan **Dakar** to sample the outstanding Musée Théodore Monod by day and the city's vibrant nightlife after dark. After excursions to the World Heritage-listed architecture of **Saint-Louis** and offshore to tranquil **Île de Gorée** (three days in total), fly to **Ouagadougou** (or Ouaga to its friends) in Burkina Faso. Ouaga has excellent places to stay and eat, as well as a happening cultural scene, and is worth a full day and night at least. Take a bus to languid **Bobo-Dioulasso** to hang out for a couple of days and then continue on to the otherworldly **Sindou Peaks**, one of West Africa's most remarkable landscapes, for two days' hiking. Travel through **Gaoua** in the heart of Lobi country then cross into northern Ghana for some of West Africa's best wildlife-watching at **Mole National Park**. Depending on how long you linger, there should be just enough time to stop off in **Kumasi** to absorb a little Ashanti culture en route to buzzing **Accra**.



Atlantic Odyssey

From Senegal to Benin, from the cusp of the Sahel in Dakar to the palm-fringed semi-tropics around Cotonou, West Africa's Atlantic coastline is one of the most varied and beautiful in Africa.

Senegal's capital **Dakar**, with its African sophistication and role as regional air hub, serves both as a starting point and a base for the first part of your journey. To the north, **Saint-Louis** is like stepping back into pre-colonial Africa. Other Senegalese excursions include enjoying some of Africa's best birdwatching in the **Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj** and drifting through the **Siné-Saloum Delta**. You could easily spend a week or more exploring it all, before returning to Dakar to fly to the islands of Cabo Verde. With their soulful musical soundtrack, unspoilt beaches, mountainous interior and laid-back locals, **Santiago**, **São Vicente** and **Santo Antão** are particularly beautiful and worth at least a week of your time. Returning to Dakar, head south to The Gambia, which may be small, but its beaches, especially those around **Serekunda**, make a good (English-speaking) rest stop for taking time out from the African road. From sleepy **Banjul**, consider flying to **Freetown** in Sierra Leone – the nearby beaches are beautiful and utterly undeveloped. Attractions such as **Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary**, with its fabulous wildlife concentrations, should not be missed.

With three weeks under your belt, you could continue along the coast through Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, but most travellers fly over them to agreeable **Accra** in Ghana. From there, excursions to the old coastal forts, **Cape Coast Castle** and stunning beaches at **Kokrobite**, **Busua** and **Dixcove** won't disappoint. Don't fail to detour north to **Kumasi** in the Ashanti heartland. After a week to 10 days in Ghana, there's plenty of onward transport to the fascinating markets and fine museum of **Lomé**, and don't miss an inland hiking detour around **Kpalimé**. Not far away is Benin, with **Ouidah**, the evocative former slaving port and home of voodoo, the history-rich town of **Abomey** and the stilt villages of **Ganvié** filling up your final week. **Cotonou** has all the steamy appeal of the tropics and is a fine place to rest at journey's end.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ULRICH HOLTMANN/GETTY IMAGES ©



Top: Fontainhas, Santo
Antão (p85), Cabo
Verde

Bottom: Voodoo
festival (p46), Benin

DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES ©





Unknown West Africa

These West African trails are some of the least travelled by tourists on earth. If having a beach all to yourself while sea turtles come ashore or venturing into the frontiers of African travel is your idea of a great trip, read on.

Begin in **Nouakchott**, the dry-as-dust capital of Mauritania, which has a wonderful fish market and a palpable sense of lying somewhere close to the end of the earth. An excursion north takes you along one of the planet's most deserted coastlines to the birdwatcher's paradise of **Parc National du Banc d'Arguin**. Three or four days after beginning your trip, head south via **Dakar** to catch the ferry to **Ziguinchor**, capital of Casamance, home to fine beaches, labyrinthine river systems and lush forests. Return to Dakar, then fly to **Bissau**, Guinea-Bissau's village-like capital. The **Arquipélago dos Bijagós** is isolated, rich in wildlife and like nowhere else on the coast – it could just be West Africa's most pristine slice of paradise.

With around 10 days behind you, you might just be ready for Guinea. **Conakry**, at once sassy and muscular, is worth experiencing for some of the region's best live music, before you truly drop off the map by tracking chimps at **Bossou** and trekking the **Fouta Djallon Highlands**.

After four or five days in Guinea, your next stop is Sierra Leone. Linger in **Freetown** and the nearby beaches, head inland to remote **Mt Bintumani** and the unknown gems of **Outamba-Kilimi National Park** and **Gola Rainforest National Park**. On your way to Liberia, stop at **Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary**. Begin your Liberian sojourn in **Monrovia** and don't miss **Sapo National Park**, the beaches of **Robertsport** and soulful **Harper**. Both Sierra Leone and Liberia should fill at least a week.

From Harper, it's a short hop across the border into Côte d'Ivoire and **Sassandra**, a glorious fishing village with great beaches. Security permitting, head north to the rainforests of chimpanzee-rich **Parc National de Taï**, then on to **Man** in the heart of Dan country. From there, make your way to **Yamoussoukro** and its improbable basilica. Considering where you've been, the end of the road at **Abidjan** will feel like visiting another planet.



Top: Rustic shelter
on Ilha de Bubaque
(p236), Guinea-Bissau
Bottom: Fisherman on
the beach at Freetown
(p341), Sierra Leone



ROBERTO NENONIN/SHUTTERSTOCK ©



Top: Bom Bom Resort (p308), Príncipe, São Tomé & Príncipe

Bottom: Street scene, Douala (p113), Cameroon



Gulf of Guinea

From Nigeria to the Republic of Congo, this route traverses West Africa's tropical south-east. It takes in frenetic urban Lagos, West Africa's tallest mountain, the pristine natural environment of São Tomé & Príncipe, and the world-class national parks of Equatorial Guinea.

Most visitors will encounter nothing but warmth and humour in their interactions with Nigerians. **Lagos** may be in-your-face, high-volume and logistically confronting, but it's also Africa's most energetic city, awash with a pulsating nightlife, clamorous markets and a resurgent arts scene. Historic **Abeokuta**, with its Yoruba shrines and sacred rock, **Osun Sacred Grove** and the Oba's Palace in **Benin City** are worthwhile stopovers en route to **Calabar** and its old colonial buildings, fish market and lovely setting. Close to Calabar, don't miss **Afi Mountain Drill Ranch**. Count on 10 days in Nigeria.

From here fly east to **Douala** in Cameroon. After longish detours to see the sea turtles at **Ebojé** and to climb **Mt Cameroon**, West Africa's highest peak, head for Bamen-da, gateway to the villages of the **Ring Road**, a deeply traditional part of Cameroon; Bafut is one of our favourite villages in the region. Later, head for **Fouban** for a slice of traditional West Africa, and a fascinating vision of the town's ancient and still-active sultanate. A week in Cameroon should give you a taste of the country's riches.

Return to Douala then fly out to **São Tomé & Príncipe**, one of West Africa's most beautiful destinations and an emerging ecotourism hot spot. From São Tomé, fly into **Malabo** in Equatorial Guinea, obtain a tourist permit and set out to see the colonial architecture, rainforest and wildlife on **Bioko Island**, and the fabulous beaches and national parks on the mainland at **Rio Muni**.



4
WEEKS

Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo & Benin

The four countries covered in this meandering route from Ouagadougou to Cotonou are West Africa in microcosm, and there's a perfect mix of wildlife, architecture, culture and beach indulgence to entice even the most jaded of travellers.

Begin in cool **Ouagadougou**, the Burkinabé capital, then head south for two of the region's most rewarding destinations – the elephant-rich **Réserve de Nazinga**, and **Tiébélé**, with its beautifully painted traditional houses. Cross into Ghana and do some craft shopping in **Bolgatanga**. While you're in the north, and after five days on the road, spend some time exploring **Amedzofe** and the jungly Avatime Hills where the hiking is outstanding; Tafi Atome and Tafi Abuipe with their ecotourism possibilities; and glorious Wli Falls.

As you make your way towards the coast, visit the Kejetia Market in **Kumasi** – West Africa's biggest – and the rainforest experience of **Kakum National Park**, with its canopy walk and great birdwatching. Charming **Elmina** is a lovely base for exploring the slave-era castles of Ghana's Cape Coast. After 10 days to two weeks in Ghana, cross into Togo.

Begin your Togolese time in the fascinating melting pot of **Lomé**, Togo's capital. On your way north, **Kpalimé** and **Atakpamé** are worth sampling as you head towards that gem of northern Togo, **Koutammakou**, one of West Africa's least-known treasures, with remote clay-and-straw fortresses set amid stunning scenery.

Cross the border into northern Benin and make for Natitingou, gateway to the spectacular **Atakora Mountains** and wildlife-rich **Parc National de la Pendjari**, home to West Africa's last big population of lions, as well as other wildlife. It doesn't take long to return to the coast, but stop off in **Abomey** on your way to sexy Cotonou, a good base for excursions to **Ganvié** and the beaches of the Route des Pêches, as well as the voodoo strongholds of **Lake Ahémé** and **Ouidah**. **Porto Novo** is Cotonou's tranquil alter ego, with superb architecture, good museums and a palpable tropical languor. **Cotonou** itself is one of West Africa's coolest cities and it's well connected by air to the rest of the region.

Map Legend

Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours

- Body surfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating

- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment

- Entertainment

Shopping

- Shopping

Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book



Helen Ranger

Equatorial Guinea Although born and brought up in the UK, Helen left in her early twenties to explore other shores. Cape Town was her home for many years but she now lives in Fez, Morocco. She has contributed to Lonely Planet's *Fez Encounter*, *South Africa*, *Lesotho & Swaziland*, *Cape Town*, *Africa* and *Morocco* guides. Follow her on Twitter: @helenranger @feziads @conciergmorocco and on Instagram: helenranger and conciergmorocco.



Caroline Sieg

Benin, Liberia, Togo Caroline began her career producing foreign-language textbooks before hopping over to travel publishing, first as a travel editor at Frommer's Travel in the US and later as a commissioning editor at Lonely Planet in London. She then managed and curated digital marketing content for diverse brands including Travelzoo and Art Basel. She's written about destinations across the globe. For Lonely Planet she's covered the US, Africa and Europe.



Helena Smith

Cameroon, Nigeria Helena is an award-winning writer and photographer covering travel and food – she has written guidebooks on destinations from Fiji to northern Norway. Helena is from Scotland but was partly brought up in Malawi, so Africa always feels like home. She also enjoys global travel in her multicultural home borough of Hackney and wrote, photographed and published *Inside Hackney*, the first guide to the borough (insidehackney.com).



Regis St Louis

Cabo Verde, The Gambia, Senegal Regis grew up in a small town in the American Midwest and developed an early fascination with foreign dialects and world cultures. Regis has contributed to more than 50 Lonely Planet titles, covering destinations across six continents. His travels have taken him from the mountains of Kamchatka to remote island villages in Melanesia, and to many grand urban landscapes. When not on the road, he lives in New Orleans. Follow him on www.

instagram.com/regisstlouis.



Paul Stiles

São Tomé & Príncipe When he was 21, Paul bought an old motorcycle in London and drove it to Tunisia. That did it for him. Since then he has explored around 60 countries, and covered many adventure destinations for Lonely Planet, including Morocco, Madagascar, São Tomé & Príncipe, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hawaii, Maui, and Kaua'i. In all things, he tries to follow the rocking chair rule: when making key life decisions, assume the perspective of an elderly person sitting in a rocking chair. Because some day that will be you.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Anthony Ham

Plan, Understand, Survival Guide Anthony is a freelance writer and photographer who specialises in Spain, East and Southern Africa, the Arctic and the Middle East. When he's not writing for Lonely Planet, Anthony writes about and photographs Spain, Africa and the Middle East for newspapers and magazines in Australia, the UK and US.



Stuart Butler

Guinea, Mali, Nigeria Stuart's earliest travel writing was all based on surfing and exploring little-known coastlines for waves. Today, as well as guidebooks, Stuart writes often about conservation and environmental issues (mainly in eastern and southern Africa), wildlife watching and hiking. He also works as a photographer and was a finalist in both the 2015 and 2016 Travel Photographer of the Year Awards. His website is at www.stuartbutlerjournalist.com.



Michael Grosberg

Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania Michael has worked on over 45 Lonely Planet guidebooks. Prior to his freelance writing career, other international work included development on the island of Rota in the western Pacific; South Africa where he investigated and wrote about political violence and helped train newly elected government representatives; and Quito, Ecuador, teaching.



Nana Luckham

Ghana, Sierra Leone Nana began writing about travel in 2006, after several years working as a United Nations press officer in New York. She has been all over the world for Lonely Planet including to Malawi, Zambia, Algeria, South Africa, Fiji and Tuvalu. She has also written features for lonelyplanet.com and for other leading publications. Currently based in London, she's lived in New York, France, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Australia.



Vesna Maric

Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire Vesna has been a Lonely Planet author for over a decade, covering places as far and wide as Bolivia, Algeria, Sicily, Cyprus, Barcelona, London and Croatia, among others. Her latest work has been updating the Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast chapters for the West Africa and Africa guides.

OVER MORE
PAGE WRITERS

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