

Welcome to West Africa

West Africa has cachet and soul. Home to African landscapes of our imaginations and inhabited by an astonishing diversity of traditional peoples, this is Africa as it once was.

African Landscapes

From the Sahara to tropical rainforests, from volcanic outcrops to stony depressions in the desert's heart, West Africa is an extraordinary sweep of iconic African terrain. There are many West African views that will define your journey: an oasis-like clearing in the heart of a rainforest; a gloriously deserted arc of sand along a gloriously deserted coastline; and improbably shaped rocky outcrops in the heart of the Sahel. And through it all run two of Africa's longest rivers, the Congo and the Niger.

African Peoples

The mosaic of peoples who inhabit West Africa is one of the region's most beguiling characteristics. The sheer number of peoples who call the region home will take your breath away. Drawing in a little nearer, you'll discover that traditions survive in West Africa like nowhere else on the continent, revealing themselves in fabulous festivals, irresistible music and the mysterious world of masks and secret societies. These are peoples whose histories are epic and whose daily struggles are similarly so. West Africa is in-your-face, full-volume Lagos or the quiet solitude of an indigo-clad nomad – not to mention everything in between.

A Musical Soundtrack

West Africa's musical tradition is one of extraordinary depth and richness. Youssou N'Dour, Tinariwen and other musicians may have been 'discovered' in recent decades, but the region's music is so much more than mere performance. The *griots* of ancient African empires bestowed upon West Africa's musicians the gift of storytelling as much as the power to entertain. They do both exceptionally well and their ability to make you dance or learn something new about the region may just rank among your most memorable travel experiences.

Secret Wildlife

You wouldn't come to West Africa looking for an East African-style safari. If you did, you'd be disappointed, unless, of course, you head for the wildlife-rich national parks of Gabon and Republic of Congo; there are few finer places to see gorillas on the planet. Elsewhere there's more to West Africa's wildlife than initially meets the eye (which may not be much) if you know where to look, including elephants, primates, big cats, pygmy hippos and some of the world's best birdwatching. And unlike East or Southern Africa, you're likely to have whatever you find all to yourself.



Why I Love West Africa

By Anthony Ham, Writer

On my first journey into West Africa, I felt like I was visiting another planet, and I loved it. It was the cooling sand beneath my feet as I shared a campfire with Tuareg nomads in the Sahara, or a dawn glimpse of paradise at a bend in the river deep in the Cameroonian rain-forest. It was dancing the night away in the bars of Bamako or Dakar, or the silence of the Sahelian night. And no matter how many times I return, I never lose that sense of having wandered into some kind of otherworldly African fairy tale.

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