

Adapted Content from Peace Corps Ghana Handbook

People and Culture

Ghana currently has a population approaching 25 million people, with an estimated annual population growth of 2 percent. Of that figure, approximately 42 percent are under the age of 14. Life expectancy is approximately 57 years.

Like many African countries, Ghana has flourishing cultural, religious, and language diversity. The major ethnic group (44 percent) is the Akan, of which the Ashanti and Fanti are the most widely known. These largely southern groups are joined by the Ga (8 percent) and Ewe (13 percent) along the coastal areas. In the northern part of the country, the largest ethnic group is the Moshi-Dagomba (16 percent). Across the entire country, however, are many smaller distinct ethnic populations with separate languages and traditions.

The southern half of the country is largely Christian (24 percent), while the northern half is primarily Muslim (30 percent). In addition, there are many people who maintain strong indigenous practices (38 percent). Within the Christian tradition, the evangelical and Pentecostal churches are experiencing the fastest growth. There is also a relatively new and strong Mormon presence. In addition, there are a few local indigenous churches that are a fusion of Christian and Animist beliefs.

Ghanaians have a well-deserved reputation for being open people. Welcoming visitors is a point of cultural identity. Hosting visitors is the ultimate expression of Ghanaian culture. Acknowledging the presence of another human being by greeting them honors their existence. You will be expected to take on this practice. Indeed, your ability to greet and to form relationships will be a significant factor in your success. Especially in the local communities, visitors will be welcomed into families and quickly be made to feel at home.

General Information About Ghana

www.countrywatch.com

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in the capital of Ghana to how to convert from the dollar to the Ghanaian currency. Just click on Ghana and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

Visit this site for general travel advice about almost any country in the world.

www.state.gov

The State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Ghana and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

www.undp-gha.org/

This is the webpage for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Ghana

www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm

This includes links to all the official sites for governments worldwide.

www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm

This online world atlas includes maps and geographical information, and each country page contains links to other sites, such as the Library of Congress, that contain comprehensive historical, social, and political background.

www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp

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This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states of the U.N.

www.worldinformation.com

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries around the world.

Recommended Books

Aidoo, Ama Ata. *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*. New York, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1995.

Amamoo, J.G. *The New Ghana: The Birth of a Nation*. Lincoln, Neb.: Authors Choice Press, 2000.

Birmingham, David. *Kwame Nkrumah: Father Of African Nationalism*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press; Rev. edition, 1998.

Cole, Catherine M. *Ghana's Concert Party Theater*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Briggs, Phillip. *Ghana: The Bradt Travel Guide, 3rd Edition*. Chalfont St. Peter: Bradt Travel Guides,

Gaines, James. *12 Days in Ghana: Reunions, Revelations & Reflections*. Bloomington, Ind.: Authorhouse, 2002.

McCaskie, T. C. *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850-1950*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2001.

McFarland, Daniel Miles. *Historical Dictionary of Ghana*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, third edition, 2005.

McKissack, Patricia. *The Royal Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay: Life in Medieval Africa*. Henry Holt and Co. (BYR) (1995).

Mikell, Gwendolin. *Cocoa and Chaos in Ghana*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press; Reprint edition, 1991.

Otoo, David. *Authentic African Cuisine from Ghana*, 1st Edition. East Orange, NJ: Sankofa Books, 1997.

Geography and Climate

Ghana, located on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, extends about 450 miles from north to south, and 250 miles from east to west (roughly the size of Oregon). Geographically, the country can be divided into three zones: the southern narrow coastal strip of savanna; a broad tropical rain forest extending 150-200 miles north; and the northern savanna area.

Lake Volta, formed by the construction of the Akosombo Dam, is the largest man-made lake in the world and is an important geographical feature of the country.

The climate of Ghana is tropical, with two main seasons—the dry season from November through March and the rainy season from May through August. It is hot and comparatively dry along the southeast coast. It is hot and humid in the southwest and dry in the north. During the dry season, the Harmattan affects the northern regions with days of continual cool air, haze, and fine dust.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

While some Ghanaian may dress in seemingly worn or old clothes, this is due to economics rather than by choice. The likelihood is that they are wearing their “best.” A foreigner wearing ragged, un-mended clothing is likely to be considered an affront.

Ghanaians are very meticulous about their dress in the workplace and wear their good clothes. They are particular about their personal hygiene (a real accomplishment in communities of mud-brick houses and no running water), and cleanliness is a sign of respect. Shorts are acceptable around the resort, but volunteers should avoid wearing them in the community (particularly females). Above-the-knee length skirts are seen in the cities, but not in small communities. For Ghanaians, tops with “spaghetti-string” straps are only appropriate at the beach.

Maintaining Your Health

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The adage “An ounce of prevention ...” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Ghana is to take the following preventive measures:

Waterborne disease: Assume that only boiled water or bottled water that has been both filtered and treated with iodine or chlorine is safe to drink. Very little of the water in Africa is potable,

whether it comes out of the tap or from the village well. Even in restaurants and on airplanes, there are no guarantees. Bottled carbonated beverages are safe, as are tea or coffee (if prepared with boiling water). Do not forget that ice cubes may contaminate your bottled or canned beverage. Freezing water does not purify it. Even brushing your teeth with tap water can be a source of contamination.

Food-related disease: Safe foods are those, which are recently prepared, thoroughly cooked, and not subsequently left out where flies can re-contaminate the food. Uncooked foods that cannot be peeled or soaked should be considered unsafe. Avoid salads. Un-boiled milk or unprocessed cheese may harbor tuberculosis or other bacterial disease. Always wash your hands, especially before eating.

Diarrhea: Although travel is great, diarrhea is not. If you get diarrhea, be sure to drink a lot of fluids to avoid dehydration. Juice, broth, or oral rehydration solutions are best. Avoid coffee, milk products, and alcohol when you have diarrhea. If you are able to eat, choose a light diet of foods, such as rice, bread, and broth. As a general rule, it is better not to use any medication unless provided by a doctor. These medications may slow down the frequency of stools, but importantly, they can prolong the recovery period as well. Fortunately, most cases of diarrhea resolve themselves in a few days with rest and fluids. You should contact a medical professional if you have bloody diarrhea, fever, become dehydrated, or have significant diarrhea lasting longer than three to five days.

Malaria: The risk of getting malaria can be significantly reduced if certain preventive strategies are used. The use of mosquito nets and screens is essential in reducing the risk of mosquito bites. Other measures are the use of protective clothing and insect repellents.

The regular and continuous use of anti-malaria drugs is a key element in the prevention of malaria. In Ghana, chloroquine-resistant *Plasmodium falciparum* is an important cause of malaria infection. As a result, all volunteers should be on a medication regimen. The final decision as to the particular anti-malaria drug you will take will be made after taking into account side effects and your medical history.

Once you and your doctor select your malaria prophylactic regimen, you must take it throughout your volunteer service.

Keep in mind that no single or combined malaria prophylactic regimen is 100 percent effective. Avoidance of mosquito bites is imperative! By using bed nets and insect repellent you will greatly reduce your risk of exposure to mosquito bites. In fact, you cannot get malaria, filaria, dengue fever, and a host of other diseases if you do not get insect bites.

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Even though there is an increasingly open homosexual community in Ghana, particularly in Accra, most Ghanaians feel that homosexuality is immoral and depraved behavior. Being sensible about revealing one's sexual orientation is advisable.

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

As a Volunteer in Ghana, you may frequently be asked if you believe in God. Because Ghana is predominantly a Christian and Muslim country, people may not understand what it means to be Jewish, Buddhist, or Hindu. Unlike the United States, religion and prayer are built into all official ceremonies and meetings. Interestingly, many educated Ghanaians do not believe in traditional, indigenous beliefs and frown upon others being interested in such topics. If you do not participate in organized religion in the U.S. it is alright to discuss this with Ghanaians. They will be quite intrigued if you do not believe in God. Some people may find this nearly impossible.

Safety

- Leave valuable objects in the U.S.
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Limit alcohol consumption