

Kulturfestivals in Westafrika – Programm

Day 1

ACCRA IN

Arrival in **Accra** (Ghana) and transfer to the hotel. Free time to relax.

Day 2

AFRICAN METROPOLIS

Accra city tour

Accra, the capital of Ghana, has maintained its unique identity despite the fast paced development currently underway in this intriguing African city.

On the agenda is a visit to the National Museum, one of the first works of independent Ghana. We explore the old quarter of James Town, inhabited by the autochthonous population known as the Ga.

Our last visit will be to people specialized in building fantasy coffins. These handcraft-coffins are in shape of fruits, animals, fish, cars, airplanes.... and the only limit is the intended occupant's imagination. Started in Africa, these flamboyant coffin designs are collected worldwide and exposed in museums.

Day 3

FETISH MARKET

Lome, city tour

Lome, the vibrant capital of Togo, is the only African city having been colonized by Germans, British and French. It is also one of the few capitals in the world to be on the border with another nation.

These elements have led to the development of a special identity reflected in the life style of its inhabitants and in the architecture of the town. Lome is a cross point for people, trade and cultures, a cosmopolitan city in small size.

We will pay special attention to:

The central market with its famous Nana Benz, women who have concentrated in their hands the market of expensive pagne (=cloths) coming from Europe and sold all over West Africa (it has been partially destroyed by a fire);

The colonial buildings in the administrative quarter with a flavor of colonial time;

The fetish market where one can find an eclectic assortment of all the necessary ingredients for love potions and magical concoctions.

Day 4

VOODOO

In a remote hidden village we will join a **Voodoo ceremony**: the frenetic rhythm of the drums and the chants of the adepts help calling in the voodoo spirit who then takes possession of

some of the dancers. They fall into a deep trance: eyes rolling back, grimaces, convulsions, insensitivity to fire or pain. In this narrow village, surrounded by the magic atmosphere of the ceremony, we will finally understand what people mean when they say: “In your Churches you pray God; in our voodoo shrine we become God!”

Drive to Ouidah. **Ouidah** was conquered by the Dahomey army during the 18th century to become one of the main slave ports. Today Ouidah enjoys an Afro-Portuguese architecture. The laid back attitude of the locals blends in harmoniously with the thunder of the distant waves and the rhythm of the drums. On foot we visit the Python Temple and the Portuguese Fort, now a museum on the history of Ouidah and the slave trade. We end our city tour by following the “slave road” to the beach, the point of “no return” where slaves used to board ships.

Day 5

ROYAL PALACE

We cross **Lake Nokwe** with a motorized boat to reach **Ganvie**, the largest and most beautiful African village on stilts. The approximately 25,000 inhabitants of the **Tofinou** ethnic group build their huts on teak stilts and cover the roofs with a thick layer of leaves. Fishing is their main activity. The village has managed to preserve its traditions and environment despite the long-lasting human presence in a closed setting; and the lake is not over-fished. Life unfolds each day around the canoes that men, women and children guide with ease using brightly colored poles. It is with these canoes that men fish, women deliver goods to the market and children go to school and play.

We move to **Abomey** where we visit the Royal Palace. The walls of the palace are decorated with bas-reliefs representing symbols of the ancient Dahomey kings. Now a museum listed on the Unesco World Heritage List, it displays items belonging to the ancient kings: thrones, cult altars, statues, costumes and weapons. In the middle of the royal courtyard there is a temple built with a mixture of clay, gold dust and human blood.

If applying, Egun dancing masks.

The Egungun is a very powerful masks secret society. Egun masks are the reincarnation of deceased people and are known and feared for their aggressiveness and their unpredictable way of moving around. Intensively coloured, masks are covered with a multitude of pieces of cloth of many red shades. They emerge from the forest and form a procession through the streets of the village, leaping towards any foolish spectator who dares getting too close. And nobody wants to be touched by the Egun because any contact carries the danger of death. Better watch out! When masks arrive they perform a kind of bull fight designed to scare the crowd but in truth they are actually greeted with bursts of laughter!

Day 6

FETISH HILL

We stop at the **Dankoli Fetish**, an important place for the Voodoo cult: thousands of little sticks are pushed in the fetish as testimony of the countless prayers for a good harvest, a happy wedding, an easy delivery, success at school etc.

In the afternoon we discover old **Taneka** villages located on a mountain with the same name. The villages are made up of round houses covered with a conical roof protected at the top by a

terra cotta pot. The upper part of the village is inhabited by the young initiated and by the fetish priests who only cover themselves with a goat skin and always carry a long pipe.

Day 7

FIRE DANCE

We enter the land of the **Somba & Tamberma** who live in fortified dwellings. Similar in form to medieval castles, they are one of the most beautiful examples of ancient African architecture. Their strong tradition beliefs are proved by the presence of big shrines – of phallic form – at the entrance of their homes. With the permission granted to us by the inhabitants we enter their homes to better understand their way of life.

In the evening, **fire dance**. At the centre of the village a large fire lights up the faces of the participants, they dance to the hypnotic beat of the drums eventually leaping into the glowing embers, picking up burning coals, passing them over their bodies and even putting them in their mouths ... all this without hurting themselves or showing any sign of pain. It's difficult to explain such a performance. Is it matter of courage? Self suggestion? Magic? Maybe it really is the fetishes that protect them from the fire.

Day 8

RAINFOREST

We will head southwards, with a stop on the way in **Atakpame**, a typical African town built on hills where all the products coming from the nearby forests can be found. Through their skilled work on small weaving looms, men of the region make the large brightly coloured fabric called "Kente".

From Atakpame we move to the **tropical forests** surrounding Kpalime, a town with a rich colonial past which is now an important trade center. Visit of the market and of the arts center.

At night, **walk in the forest** to discover the mysterious world of the tropical forest in the darkness and so meet with the majesty of the tropical trees, the sounds of tam-tams and the echoes of wild animals. Under the guidance of a local entomologist, we will learn about endemic butterflies and insects.

Day 9

GLASS BEADS

The area of **Krobo** is famous all around the world for its beads. Here they are produced and used for cults and aesthetic purposes. We will visit a factory specialized in the production of those beads and even follow the process of making one!

We reach Koforidua on time to visit the weely beads market. Great opportunity for shopping.

Day 10

ASHANTI

Kumasi is the historical and spiritual capital of the old Ashanti Kingdom. The tribute paid today to the Asantehene (=King) is the best evidence of their past splendour and strength. With nearly one million inhabitants, Kumasi is a sprawling city with a fantastic central market, one of the biggest in Africa. Every type of Ashanti craft (leather goods, pottery, Kente cloth) is found here, along with just about every kind of tropical fruit and vegetable.

In the afternoon we participate – if available – in a traditional Ashanti funeral, attended by mourners wearing beautifully red or black togas. We say “funerals” but it means a “festive” celebration: the deceased in fact is believed to be still with his/her family and through this ceremony he/she becomes an ancestor. Relatives and friends gather, socialize and celebrate his/her memory. The chief arrives surrounded by his court under the shade of large umbrellas while drums give rhythm to the dancers whose intricate moves are highly symbolic.

Day 11

GOLDEN KINGDOMS

In the morning continuation of the tour of Kumasi, with the visit of the Royal Palace Museum hosting a unique collection of gold jewels worn by the Ashanti court.

If applying, Akwasidae Festival.

In the Ashanti calendar certain days each year are set aside for a very special celebration at the Royal Palace in Kumasi and this traditional ceremony takes place in one of the last African Kingdoms which has maintained its ancient rituals still alive.

During this celebration, the King sits under a spectacular colorful umbrella, is adorned in vivid cloth and massive centuries old jewelry and is surrounded by the Ashanti elders and advisors. In front of the King a narrow passage of dignitaries is also formed, representing all roles and positions of power within the kingdom: sword and knife bearers, armed guards, carriers of beautiful ostrich feathers fans etc. The ceremony is then made up of a procession of royal court attendants bringing gifts, storytellers reciting the history of the Ashanti Kings, drummers & trumpeters playing horns of ivory. We will witness and experience the splendor, the flavor and the atmosphere of one of last great African monarchs of the forests.

Day 12

SLAVES' CASTLES

Elmina Castle is the oldest European building in Africa. At different times the castle has been used as a warehouse to trade gold, ivory, and eventually slaves. The castle we visit today is the result of successive extension works and is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site

Outside the castle is found a wonderful fishing village and its harbor full of large colorful fishing canoes. Every day these canoes are guided by skilled fishermen who face the strong ocean for a living.

The alleys in the old town have a lively atmosphere, going back to a time when Elmina was a wild colonial town.

Drive to Accra