



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Tour Notes

Togo and Benin – Hidden Gems of West Africa

Tour Duration – 11 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●○ | Culture ●●●●● | History ●●●○○ | Wildlife ●●○○○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore the buzzing Togolese capital, Lome and take a stroll around the city's unique fetish markets
- ✓ Experience a traditional voodoo ceremony
- ✓ Visit the beach and the sombre 'Gate of No Return', the point from which slaves left Africa for the New World
- ✓ Take a boat to the stilt village of Ganvie
- ✓ Learn about the fascinating history of the kingdom of Dahomey at Abomey





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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Simple but comfortable hotel accommodation
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
Group Size: Maximum group size 12
Start Point: Lome – you can arrive any time on this day
End Point: Lome – you can depart any time after 1930hrs on day 11.
Transport: Minibus or 4WD
Countries Visited: Togo, Benin



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Togo and Benin – Hidden Gems of West Africa

Nested closely together in the heart of West Africa, offering such diverse cultures and traditions, each with distinct historical pasts and varied wildlife make a multi country tour of Togo and Benin the perfect way to experience West Africa. Our tour takes you off the main tourist route at every opportunity ensuring you experience life as a local in these wonderful countries. Mixing with the locals at every opportunity and experiencing daily life with your expert local guide, opens doors and experiences that will create memories that last a lifetime. There are so many positives to embrace here and blending everyday experiences with ancient cultural sites of interest, beautiful beaches, learning about the dark historical past and exceptional flora and fauna makes this the perfect trip of a lifetime

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrive Lome

Arrive in Lome and transfer to your hotel. For those arriving early in the day, the rest of the day is at leisure to explore. Overnight Sarakawa Hotel or similar. (D)

Lome

Togo's capital is a vibrant city situated on the coast, sitting right on the international border with Ghana and with a population of just under a million. Slightly dishevelled, it is quite an atmospheric little city and is now recovering from the civil disturbances suffered by the country in the 1990s. Its origins date back to the 18th century, when it was settled by the Ewe people, one of Togo's largest ethnic groups. Like many African cities it doesn't have too much in the way of formal sightseeing but there are a few things worth exploring - the Grand Marche with its exuberant businesswomen known as 'Nana Benz' who monopolise the sale of cloth in Togo. Not to be missed is the fetish market, where animal parts are sold for use in traditional medicines. This is not a great place for animal lovers, with heads and body parts of everything from sharks and crocodiles to gorillas on sale but offers a fascinating insight into a belief system very different from our own. Lome has a number of buildings which date from the German occupation, most noticeable of which is a rather bizarre looking 19th century Gothic style cathedral which looks rather out of place in a West African city.



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Day 2 – Lome

This morning we will begin a city tour with a visit to the lively and colourful grand Marché, or big market, with the Sacred Heart Cathedral in its midst. We then head to the fascinating- if rather gruesome- fetish market, where animal parts are sold for use in traditional medicines; Vodou healers and practitioners are on hand for consultations (please see the Notes section for more information). We then visit Artisans' village where we will see artisans weaving cloth, carving statues, making baskets, lampshades and sewing leather shoes besides much more. In the evening you can decide to rest at your hotel or if you prefer your guide can take you out into town to experience local nightlife. Overnight Sarakawa Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Day 3 – Lome to Ouidah (Benin) (approx. 2hr30m driving dependant on local conditions and border checks)

Today we leave Lome and head to Aneho, historically known as Little Popo. On arrival we take a pirogue across Lake Togo to Togoville on the north-eastern side of the lake. As we mix with the locals walking through the communities, we will visit the many active shrines learning their importance to the locals living here. Prior to setting off back to Aneho we also visit a shrine that commemorates the appearance of the Virgin Mary on Lake Togo in the late 1970s. After lunch we cross the border into Benin and arrive in Ouidah, a stronghold of voodoo and once an important slave port. The rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight Casa del Papa Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Day 4 – Ouidah – Cotonou (approx. 1 hour driving)

After breakfast we set off for our tour of Ouidah. We visit the python temple, where snakes are venerated as representations of gods, and head to the beach and the sombre 'Gate of No Return', the point from which slaves left Africa for the New World. You will also experience a private Voodoo Ceremony during your time at Segbe. After lunch we continue to Cotonou. The rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight Hotel Casa de Cielo or similar. (BLD)

Voodoo

Voodoo, or Vodoun as it is known here, is one of the most important religions in this part of West Africa. Forget what you may have seen on TV about it being a form of black magic – here it has the same legitimacy as any other belief system and has been adopted as an official religion by Benin. Voodoo is a complex and intricate way of seeing of the world, with literally hundreds of different gods responsible for various areas of daily life – some are benevolent, some less so, and in order to communicate with them and ask for favours local people will seek the assistance of followers, or adepts. There are numerous voodoo temples scattered around the coastal regions of both Benin and Togo, each headed by a priest who for a suitable donation will intercede on your behalf. Voodoo is not limited to the temples though and travelling around the region it is not unlikely that you will see some ceremony being carried out. Also, worth looking out for are the Egunguns – earthly manifestations of the dead who roam the streets in outlandish costumes, striking fear into the heart of local people. Sacrifice and blood are important within voodoo rituals, and any ceremony worth its salt is likely to involve a chicken being killed, its blood spilled onto a shrine in order to seal the pact. You're also likely to see fetishes dotted around villages – these are inanimate objects such as rocks or trees in which a spirit is believed to reside, often covered in candle wax, feathers, and blood where sacrifices have been made. Gaining some understanding of voodoo allows you a glimpse into a magical world where nothing is quite as it seems and is perhaps the most fascinating aspect of travelling here.



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Ouidah

Founded in the fifteenth century and made famous by Bruce Chatwin's novel, 'The Viceroy of Ouidah', Ouidah was once a centre for the slave trade in this part of West Africa and many of its buildings bear witness to a strong European influence. As well as a rather imposing and out of place cathedral, Afro-Brazilian architecture and crumbling colonial buildings, the Portuguese fort holds an interesting history museum which gives an insight into the past life of the town. Of equal interest is the Python Temple, where a collection of snakes is venerated as earthly representations of voodoo gods. A thought provoking excursion is the 3km walk along the 'Slave Route', where those boarding the boats across the Atlantic were herded like cattle to the shore. At the end on the beach lies the modern 'Gate of No Return', built in memory of the thousands who never made it back.

Day 5 – Cotonou – Porto-Novo - Cotonou

This morning we leave Cotonou and head to Porto-Novo, Benin's capital city. Our first stop is the Ethnographic Museum, which was established by the Dahomey Institute in 1957. The museum houses costumes, ceremonial masks, and drums as well as other historical artifacts. We also visit the Royal Palace, now known as the Honme Museum, which is housed in the walled compound of King Toffa who signed the first treaty with the French in 1863. Most of the displays here are from the period of King Toffa's reign and there is an excellent example of Alounloun, a traditional Beninese instrument used to play music called Adjogon. A stone throw away from Honme is the Da Silva Museum in a beautiful Afro-Brazilian house dating back to the 1870's. This eclectic museum is home to some wonderful Afro-Brazilian artefacts. Our last stop is the Great Mosque which offers excellent photographic opportunities and fascinating history. We head back to Cotonou for lunch before visiting the Dantokpa Marche, one of West Africa's largest outdoor markets. Covering over 20 hectares it sells everything you could imagine and is a major contributor to the Benin economy. Overnight Hotel Casa de Cielo or similar. (BLD)

Day 6 – Ganvie, the Venice of Western Africa and Agongointo (approx. 2hr30m)

Before heading to Abomey, we visit one of the most beautiful communities here in Benin at Ganvie. Known as the Venice of West Africa, a relaxed paced day and we may decide to try our hands at fishing under the tutelage of a local fisherman. If we are lucky and get a sizeable catch, then our lunch will be fresh fish grilled the local way. After lunch we set off to Abomey (approx. 2 hours' drive). On arrival visit the recently (1998) discovered underground dwellings of Agongointo - Zoungoudo just a few kilometers outside of Abomey. Discovered during road construction these underground dwellings are believed to date back to the 16th century during the reign of King Dakodonou the second King of Abomey. There are believed to be several hundred of these built 10 meters underground and they were used to protect locals from invaders in addition to offering the element of surprise for local warriors when attacking the enemy. Overnight SunCity Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Ganvie

On Lake Nokwe lies the stilt village of Ganvie, a settlement of 25,000 people isolated from the land and only accessible by boat. Legend has it that the Tofinou people fled here in the 18th century to escape the depredation of the more powerful Dahomeyans on the lookout for slaves, and that they were transported to their new home by crocodiles. Whatever the truth behind it, Ganvie is an interesting place to drift through in a boat, watching how people go about their daily lives on the water, stopping at local markets watching the fishermen casting their nets, and is far removed from the busy towns making this a real delight to explore. The market on the mainland is also worth a look, if only for the rather gruesome section dedicated to voodoo.



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Abomey

Once the capital of the powerful kingdom of Dahomey, Abomey gained a notorious reputation as the centre of a fierce civilisation, whose rulers preyed mercilessly on the surrounding tribes as they conquered neighbouring lands and captured slaves. During the 'Scramble for Africa' Dahomey put up strong resistance against the French colonial armies but in the end were no match for modern weapons, and the kingdom fell in 1892, its king Gbehanzin setting fire to the city. Abomey had been renowned for its palaces, and although many were lost, two still remain which give the visitor a fascinating insight into this once mighty nation. Now museums, they contain a number of interesting exhibits from earlier times, the most impressive of which is a throne which sits on top of human skulls. Also worth a look is the nearby temple whose walls are said to have been made with the blood of enemies.

Day 7 - Abomey – Natitingou (approx. 7 hours driving)

An early start as we dedicate the morning to a city tour of Abomey before we depart for Natitingou. Our first stop is the Royal Palace, where we gain an insight into the history and exploits of the warrior kings. The architecture is quite unique and though the palaces are no more inhabited, two of them are now in use as the Historical Museum of Abomey. The museum contains some 1050 relics of the Abomey kings which include Voodoo artefacts, some skulls, and banners of the royal family. After the tour we head towards Natitingou (approx. 7 hours drive). On arrival into Natitingou we check-in to the hotel. Overnight Tata Somba Hotel or similar. (BLD)

**lunch today is a packed lunch. Optional – can stop at one of the local vendors en route*

Day 8 - Tata Somba

Today visit Tata Somba village with the Ditamari people who live in this region of northwest Benin. The locals at Tata Somba are still living in traditional homesteads that have not changed in centuries with entire families staying in these remarkable buildings. The houses are built as fortresses to keep out intruders and wild animals. The Somba people are known for their traditional body scarring rituals which are given to children from 2 to 3 years of age. These marks are used to identify which tribe you belong to, and additional scarring is given later in life to indicate readiness for marriage, reaching puberty and after childbirth. After lunch visit the museum to learn more about the culture and life of the people in Benin. Next, we learn about the process of making shea butter processing from a local family before returning to our hotel. Overnight Tata Somba Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Day 9 – To Behicon via Parakou (approx. 2hr30m driving)

We leave Natitingou and head south towards Behicon. En route we find the ancient town of Parakou. Walk through this community meeting locals and the warrior men, and we have the opportunity to see a traditional Horse Dance, an energetic and unique dance, which only the finest warriors can perform. It showcases their triumphs over their enemies and at the same time honours their forefathers. From here we continue to Behicon enjoying lunch en route. On arrival check in to the hotel and the remainder of the day is at leisure. Overnight Hotel Princess or similar. (BLD)

Day 10 - Hike Mt Klouto and visit Kpalime food market (approx. 6hr30m driving)

This morning set off for Kpalime, crossing the border back into Togo. This afternoon we enjoy a leisurely hike of the stunning Mt Klouto. Afterwards visit the local food market to experience daily life before heading to your hotel. Overnight Parc Residence Hotel or similar. (BLD)





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Day 11 - Kpalime to Lome and Departure (approx. 2hr30m driving)

A relaxed breakfast this morning as we set off from Kpalime heading southwards to Lome. Today will mainly be a travel day and we will stop for lunch and to walk around some of the communities we pass through. Our aim is to reach Lome in the early afternoon where we can enjoy some last-minute shopping if needed or some relaxation time on the coast before our early evening meal after which we transfer you to the airport for your departure after a wonderful tour of Togo and Benin. (BLD)

Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
All accommodation
Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary
Bottled water in the vehicle
Visa support documentation if required
Transport throughout

Excluded:

International flights
Any airport taxes
Travel Insurance
Visas
Drinks
Items of a personal nature
Tips (discretionary)
Covid-19 test/s and related procedures, as required

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to Togo or Benin that we visit on this tour. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.





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Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore, please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis, please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

On this tour you can expect your room to have a private bathroom and when necessary, air-conditioning will be provided. In general, you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Service Standards

Please note that standards of service in much of Africa are not comparable to those of more developed countries, especially in the more off the beaten track locations. Service is often slow and lacks the same attention to detail, and your patience and understanding will be appreciated.

Food & Drinks

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements, you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs, and items of a personal nature such as laundry.



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Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch £10 / Dinner £10

Drinks

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general, you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £1 / Water £0.40

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is commonly recognised as a way of rewarding guides and drivers for good service. If you are happy with your guide and driver, please consider leaving a tip for them.

Tipping is generally only expected in the higher end restaurants, rather than the smaller local ones.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATMs are available in most towns in the region

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are not widely accepted except in high end hotels

Local Currency: Togo and Benin is the CFA

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Euro or US Dollar are easily exchanged

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on the advertised start and end dates of the tour. In addition, arrival and/or departure transfers will be provided in conjunction with any pre and/or post tour accommodation that has been booked through Undiscovered Destinations. In all other cases charges may apply for airport transfers. Please advise the date, time, and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.



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Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

At the time of writing British, US and Australian nationals require a visa for a tourist visit to Togo and Benin. For further details please visit the applicable website shown below.

British Nationals - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destinations nearest embassy or consulate.

Should you require any documentation to support a visa application, such as a letter of invitation, upon request this will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations after receipt of your balance payment.

As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages per country visited, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition, certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Africa, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice, and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis.



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The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

The Fetish Market in Lome

This is an authentic market for local people and is an important part of the Voodoo culture, but tourists are allowed to visit. However, some people may find it upsetting as there are the remains of many animals and birds on display, including some that are under threat. The animals are all said to have died of natural causes.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

The region experiences two distinct seasons and travel is possible all year. The dry season runs from October until April, and the wet season from May until September – these can change by a few weeks either side depending on climate variations. The rains, although heavy, usually take the form of short sharp bursts.

Clothing

West Africa is very warm and so light cotton clothes are generally a good idea. You should also bring a hat – the sun is very strong here, even in the winter. It might be a good idea to bring a light fleece in case of cooler evenings in the north, but this is usually not a problem. In general, shorts are acceptable, although there may be occasions when it is appropriate to wear long trousers. Long trousers also provide better protection against insects and are recommended for nature walks.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunised, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Sun cream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. We also recommend bringing a torch or a head torch for use in dimly lit areas or for any electricity outages which can occur from time to time.

Environmental Responsibility

We are committed to reducing our impact on the environment. On this tour single-use plastic bottles of water will not be handed out. Water will be provided from a large container. We kindly ask you to bring your own water bottles/flask with you on this trip. If you have any concerns, please contact us.

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended, as well as a pair of sandals for general travelling.



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Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and Togo and Benin is European continental type.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour, but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were prepared 23 January 2024.