

EXPLORE!



Cradle of Voodoo

14 days

Benin, Togo - Trip code BWA

Cradle of Voodoo

On this journey across Togo and Benin we discover tribal cultures, ancient voodoo traditions and colonial architecture. We witness traditional rituals, walk through the Atakora Mountains and stay in a stilt village. We also trek through pristine rainforest, meet the chiefs of the Bassari tribes, witness a fire-dance and a mask ceremony.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Voodoo** - A unique opportunity to witness the intriguing and esoteric rituals of West Africa.
- ★ **Tamberma** - Remote fortified dwellings in the Atakora mountains.
- ★ **Kloto** - Scenic highlands and walks in the tropical forest.
- ★ **Abomey** - The impressive Royal palace, a UNESCO Heritage site.
- ★ **Ganvie** - A remarkable stilt village on Lake Nokwe.
- ★ **Village Life** - Experience the diversity of cultures and traditions in West Africa.
- ★ **Lomé** - Togo's vibrant capital and the fetish market.

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Lome

Join trip in Lome, the lively capital of Togo. Depending on flight arrival times, there will be time to relax or enjoy a meal to get to know fellow travellers after this evening's welcome meeting.



Accommodation: Hotel Napoleon Lagune (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Lome city tour; Drive to Kpalime

This morning we will kick off this West African adventure with a guided tour of the city. Once an important landmark within West Africa's notorious slave trade, Togo was colonised in the 15th century and this can still be seen today in the faded European architecture and tree-lined boulevards. We'll visit the colourful market and Togo's famed fetish market where locals and voodoo priests alike, can source anything from good luck charms to animal skulls to aid their pursuit of bringing themselves good fortune and health.

This afternoon we will drive to Kpalime, Togo's 4th largest city which is surrounded by tropical forest. This area is Togo's biggest producer of artisanal items including pottery, weaved items and wood sculpture, and we'll visit the Centre of Artisans to see their work.



Accommodation: Auberge JP Nectar (or similar)



Simple Auberge



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Guided rainforest butterfly walk; fire dance in the evening

Today we will start with a half day, guided hike through the rainforest. Following well-marked tracks we will be hiking for five to six hours along with a butterfly expert to learn about the important and delicate eco-system in the forests surrounding Kpalime, where over 500 species of butterfly can be found.

Later this afternoon we head north to Sokode. On our drive we get a good insight into the country's culture as we visit local villages and experience the smells and sounds of the colourful markets. In the evening we witness a traditional Fire Dance. Dancing to the hypnotic beat of the drum, the dancers eventually leap into the glowing embers. They then pick up burning coals and pass them over their body and mouth without showing any pain or injury. Whether it is a matter of courage, magic or auto suggestion, witnessing these rituals is a real privilege and a truly interesting experience.



Accommodation: Hotel Central (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 4 - Drive to the Bassar region. Visit the clay houses and learn about the iron production

Today we drive further to the West and enter the region inhabited by the Bassar people. The Bassar live in traditional large clay houses with conical roofs and produce iron following an old traditional procedure. Strict rules have to be followed: only old women should provide the coal needed, which they collect from the mountains surrounding the villages. According to their belief, the iron would only melt under particular circumstances and if a strict code of conduct is observed. We also meet traditional chiefs who will talk to us about their role in the society.



Accommodation: Hotel Kara (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 5 - Visit the Kabye region and meet the Tamberma people in the Atakora mountains

We start our day visiting villages and markets in the Kabye region where we meet blacksmiths and women who produce traditional pottery. In the afternoon we reach the Atakora Mountains, a chain of mountains that starts in south east Ghana and cuts through Togo and Benin and have offered a refuge for the Tamberma people for generations. The Tamberma live in fortified dwelling and still hunt with bows and arrows and practice traditional initiation rituals. With phallic shaped fetishes adorning the entrance to their houses and surrounding wall representing the spirits of their ancestors, these isolated homesteads could feasibly hold out in a siege situation for some time and certainly represent some of the most beautiful examples of traditional African architecture left. We cross the Benin border late in the afternoon and arrive in Koussou where we spend the night.



Accommodation: Otammari Lodge (or similar)



Simple Hut



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 6 - Visit the Somba in traditional houses in the Atakora Mountains

We spend today walking in this remarkable region, discovering some of the villages in the Atakora mountains, cultures and traditions. We meet the Somba (this word means nude in the traditional language) whose traditions have not yet been changed by outsiders, due to their geographic isolation. Similar to the Tamberma architecture, the Somba architecture is characterised by dwellings that resemble a three storey castle. These beautiful fortifications are separated from the others depending on the ownership of fertile land.



Accommodation: Otammari Lodge (or similar)



Simple Hut



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner


DAY 7 - Drive to Natitingou; discover the town with its museum and market and then relax by the pool


Today we drive to Natitingou where we have time to discover the town or relax by the pool in the hotel. The town hosts a market and an interesting museum about the people living in the Atakora mountains. The museum is located in a French colonial house built in 1915. Our hotel this evening is built in the style of the Tamberma people, though it does have the modern feature of a swimming pool!



Accommodation: Hotel Tata Somba (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Swimming pool available

 Single room available


 Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch


DAY 8 - Walk on the Taneka plateau visiting the Yom people and the fetish village of Dankoli


This morning we meet the Fulani people, a pastoral community who are renowned for their beauty and their tattoos. We will visit a Fulani camp and spend time with them as they go about their day. We take a walk over the plateau of Taneka, to discover the ancient villages of the Yom. People live in round huts covered with conical roofs and decorated with terracotta vases. The upper part of the village is inhabited by fetish priests, dressed in a goatskin and their young initiates. The first settlement in the region dates back to the 9th Century A.D. when the Kabye people built the first village. In the afternoon we transfer to the South and stop at the fetish village of Dankoli which is the gateway to the voodoo world. They often accompany the rituals with the sacrifice of a goat, a chicken or a cow. We transfer to Dassa where we spend the night.




Accommodation: Hotel Jeco (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Swimming pool available

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch


DAY 9 - Visit the town of Dassa and then the Royal Palace of Abomey

We start our day at Dassa, which used to be the capital of an ancient kingdom in 1385. We then move to the town of Abomey, and visit the Royal Palace to discover the ornate majesty that was once the Dan-Homey dynasty. Now a museum, the Palace walls are still decorated with bas-reliefs representing the symbols of the Dahomey kings and its halls and rooms hold the thrones and altars, statues and arms of a kingdom that lived in a perpetual state of war and built its greatness on the slavery of its neighbours. In the centre of the royal courtyard is the House of Pearls, a temple built by king Glele to honour his father's spirit, the walls made from a mixture of clay and human blood!



Accommodation: Hotel TG Le Retour (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 10 - Beautiful Egun and Gelede mask ceremonies

This morning we are lucky enough to witness an Egun mask performance. According to the local tradition, people perform the rituals not only to represent but also to embody the spirits of the ancestors. Dressed in bright, colourful costumes, they emerge from the forest and form a procession through the village streets. This afternoon we also have the opportunity to visit a Gelede mask ceremony. A cult to the great divinity Oudua, the earth mother, Gelede is a cult, a secret society and a type of mask all at the same time. The brightly coloured masks represent the bridge between the society and the ordinary villagers and are comprised of a head with large eyes and sensual lips over which are an animated collection of characters and objects that tell stories, to the accompaniment of a choir and an excited audience. This is a really special day as we encounter contrasting ceremonies, both incredible but very different and memorable.



Accommodation: Hotel TG Le Retour (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 11 - Drive to incredible stilt village of Ganvie. Overnight in a stilt guesthouse

Today we reach Ganvie, the largest stilt village in Africa. Settled by the Tofinou people, fleeing the slave traders of the 16th century, the village today is an atmospheric setting of thatched huts, balanced on stilts of teak, where daily life is still very much conducted on the waters of the lake. Fishing is still the principal activity for the inhabitants and every day the men go about their business, whilst women deliver their goods to the floating market and children go to school and play from the backs of open pirogues. But even amidst this tranquil aquatic idyll voodoo plays its part and this evening we will meet a local Bokono oracle, a village soothsayer who guides the lives of these traditional people through the drums and dancing of voodoo's haunting rhythm.



Accommodation: Auberge Chez M Guesthouse (or similar)



Simple Guesthouse



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 12 - Visit Ouidah, the spiritual home of Voodoo; drive to Grand Popo

Returning to shore we make for the town of Ouidah, considered to be the spiritual home of voodoo. Once an infamous part of the old slave route, Ouidah was the site of one of the largest trading posts, supplying slaves to Europe and its outlying colonies. The echoes and ghosts of those infamous days still reverberate today, in its Afro-Portuguese architecture. We aim to spend some of our time here visiting the museum at the old Portuguese Fort and taking a walk along the slave route to the beach, where the unfortunate victims were loaded aboard the slave ships. We will also visit the remarkable Python Temple, where Ouidah's ancient snake cult is still very much in evidence. Snakes are still an important feature of many voodoo rituals, believed to be able to imbue vitality and protection. Later we head east to the shores of the Gulf of Benin at Grand Popo.



Accommodation: Awale Plage (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Zangbeto dancing mask ceremony and afternoon voodoo ceremony

We head out by boat this morning to attend our last mask ceremony, this special ritual is by the Zangbeto dancing mask and represents the spirit of divinities.

Heading west towards Lac Togo and the high grasses of the Savannah, today we have the privilege to attend a real Voodoo ceremony and to see traditional dancers falling into a deep trance at the hypnotic rhythm of drums. After the ceremony we meet a traditional healer who treat the patients with voodoo rites and herbs. We continue our drive to Lome.



Accommodation: Hotel Napoleon Lagune (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Trip ends in Lome

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.

For customers leaving on the early morning flight from Lome, it will be a very early start before breakfast is served, and for those leaving on late evening flights there may be an option to pay for a day room at €30 subject to availability at the hotel.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

This tour through the incredible countries of Togo and Benin has been created for travellers who want to get off the beaten track and visit a part of the world rarely touched by tourism. The colourful dresses, the drumming, the voodoo ceremonies and the friendly people are what bring these fascinating places to life.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 13
Lunch: 9
Dinner: 2



Transport

Bus
4WD
Boat



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Cook
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

1 nights simple auberge
1 nights simple guesthouse
9 nights standard hotel
2 nights simple hut

Trip information

Country information

Benin

Climate

The climates in Togo and Benin are mostly tropical with two main rainy seasons in the central and southern regions - May to June and September to November. This should not adversely affect the trip as the tour operates outside the main seasons. Average temperatures range from the mid to high 20s Centigrade, with little change at night. Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at <http://www.explore.co.uk/weather>. Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable. Up-to-date information on the weather worldwide can be found by following the BBC weather link on this page.

Time difference to GMT

+1

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Christian, Roman Catholic, Celestial Church of Christ, Methodist,

Language

French

Togo

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Time difference to GMT

0

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

The majority of the Togolese Republic have indigenous beliefs.

Language

French

Budgeting and packing

Clothing

Clothing should be lightweight but a warm jumper is also advisable, as nights can be cool. Don't forget your swim gear. Although we strongly advise against swimming in the ocean, some of the hotels have a swimming pool. A scarf is also recommended as protection against dust whilst driving in the drier areas.

Please note: Some areas we travel through have strong Muslim influences and people may be offended by shorts or revealing dresses, which can attract unwelcome attention. Therefore you should dress with respect for local sensibilities. Women should also cover their heads when entering a sanctuary, though in general, mosques are forbidden to non-Muslim.

Footwear

Lightweight walking/hiking boots with good ankle support, plus trainers or sandals for relaxing and travelling in.

Luggage

15Kg

Luggage: On tour

Take a tough soft bag or holdall (or rucksack with detachable frame) suitable to be carried by 4WD vehicle. Total allowance: 33lbs/ 15kg maximum (due to weight restrictions on our vehicle). Also take a day sack for items needed during any walks (20- 30 litre). The limit does not include your camera equipment.

Equipment

Bring as a minimum a sleeping sheet or lightweight sleeping bag. The Stilted village and simple huts provide mosquito nets (additional tents if required at the simple huts have sewn-in mosquito screens) so nets are not required. A torch, sunhat, sun cream and insect repellent are essential. Bottled water is readily available throughout the tour. Binoculars are useful for bird watching. Foam sleeping mats and eating utensils are provided. You may consider bringing swimwear for the occasional hotel pool. Please note that tents and sleeping mats will be provided as and when required.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly you should allow approx. £50 for gratuities for local staff.

Country Information

Benin

Food and drink

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 price

£6.00

Dinner price

£14.00

Beer price

£1.55

Water price

£1.50

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Communaute Financiere Africaine Franc (commonly known as CFA). The responsible authority is the Central Bank of the West African States.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

We suggest you take the majority of your spending money in mainly Euros cash. Take mixed denomination bills in good condition.

Where To Exchange

Your Tour leader will advise you where Euros cash can be exchanged.

ATM Availability

Limited to Lome and very unreliable.

Credit Card Acceptance

Credit cards are of little use in the rural areas visited on this trip, though take one along anyway as they can be used in bigger hotels and large shops in the cities. Be warned though that Mastercard is not currently accepted in Benin.

Travellers Cheques

It is very hard to change Travellers Cheques and we don't recommend them.

Togo

Food and drink

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.

Dinner price

£12.00 - 16.00

Beer price

£1.3

Water price

£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

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Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, 4WD, Boat

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click [here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click [here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

Benin: A single entry visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, US and Canadian citizens and must be obtained prior to departure, from your embassy of residence. You will need an accommodation letter from Explore which is provided within your confirmation pack. UK passports must be valid for a minimum period of six months from the date of exit from Benin. Togo: A multiple entry visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, US and Canadian citizens and must be obtained prior to departure, from your embassy of residence. You will need an accommodation letter from Explore which is provided within your confirmation pack. Your passport must be valid for a minimum period of one year from the date of exit from Togo. Togo visas can be obtained from the Togo Consulate in London in person. Please ensure you download the visa application form, required supporting documents guide and the visa tariff document from the Togolese Consulate website: <http://togoembassylondon.com/consulate/>, in order to complete your application. Please note that visa fees can only be made in cash, the exact amount only. Please enclose a pre-paid addressed registered delivery envelope large enough for your passport for postal returns. Benin visas can be obtained from the Benin Consulate in London either in person or by post (the consulate advise to use a courier company or registered delivery for postal applications). Information for visa applications, supporting documentation and a downloadable visa application form can be obtained from the Benin Consulate website: <http://beninconsulate.co.uk/>, in order to complete your application. Please note that credit and debit cards are not accepted. For postal applications please enclose a pre-paid addressed registered delivery envelope

large enough for your passport.

An E-visa for Benin can be obtained prior to departure via the e-visa website: <https://evisa.gouv.bj/en> for all nationalities. You will need to print a copy of your e-visa approval letter and present this with your passport and final documents at the border crossing. The approval letter can take 48 hours to approve if there are no queries on the application. We therefore advise for you to apply at least 5 working days prior to travelling. The e-visa validity starts from its date of issue and not when you arrive in the country, so please ensure you have enough validity left on the visa through to the end of the tour before you travel.

For both visas you will need to have four blank pages in your passport. In order for you to arrange your visas in time we recommend you to submit your visa applications at the earliest possible time of 2 months before the start date of the holiday as visas take at least 25 working days to process for both countries. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore 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. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Benin

Vaccinations

Although rarely checked, a Yellow Fever vaccination and certificate is a compulsory requirement for entry into Togo and Benin. We recommend protection against malaria, hepatitis A, diphtheria, tetanus, typhoid and polio. You may also want to take immunisation against meningococcal meningitis and cholera. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Take all your vaccination certificates with you as they may be requested on entry to any of the countries visited. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Togo

Vaccinations

Although rarely checked, a Yellow Fever vaccination and certificate is a compulsory requirement for entry into Togo and Benin. We recommend protection against malaria, hepatitis A, diphtheria, tetanus, typhoid and polio. You may also want to take immunisation against meningococcal meningitis. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Take all your vaccination certificates with you as they may be requested on entry to any of the countries visited. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.
