

GHANA



History

The history of Ghana dates back to medieval times with the Ghana Empire of West Africa (4th-13th century). The ancestry of some present-day Ghanaians can be traced to medieval Ghana, particularly with ethnic groups found in the northern part of the country. The more contemporary history and formation of Ghana rests a great deal on the natural resources found in the country, namely gold.

Prior to European arrival in the 15th century, the Akan people, perhaps the most significant ethnic group in this region, comprised more than half the area's population. The Ashantis resided in the Akan region, which was abundant in natural resources, including gold, ivory, timber, and bauxite. By the close of the 15th century, the Akans had established a gold-mining and trading empire. The Portuguese first arrived in this area in 1471. Here, Portuguese discovered so much gold they named the area '*Elmina*,' which means the mine. In exchange for gold, ivory, spices, and artifacts, the local residents received guns, gunpowder, spirits, tobacco, and iron bars from the Portuguese. The Portuguese successfully managed this trading post for nearly a century until the Dutch arrived in 1598 and built forts in nearby towns and consequently captured Elmina Castle in 1637.

The early 16th century marked the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is estimated 20-40 million Africans were sent to the Americas as slaves from West Africa. The trans-Atlantic slave trade was lucrative for Europeans, but in 1807, the slave trade was deemed illegal by the British and others followed suit. To secure assets in the region, the British attempted to stake territory along the Gold Coast and in the Ashanti region where much of the country's gold could be found. Despite the efforts of the Ashanti over many decades, the British were able to colonize the Gold Coast and declare the Ashanti region a protectorate.

In 1922, the borders of the Gold Coast were defined. In the 1930s, nationalism among Ghanaians became more radical and an authentic nationalist movement began in the 1940s. After very important political efforts by the country to achieve their independence, in 1957 the British granted the Gold Coast independence and the Republic of Ghana became the first sub-Saharan country under

colonial rule to receive their independence. In 2007, Ghana celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence.

People

The population estimate for Ghana is 23 million. Females comprise 51 percent of the population. Accra, the capital, is the country's largest city with close to two million people, followed by Kumasi, whose population is between a half and one million people. Ghana's urban population is substantial at 49 percent. In 2006, life expectancy for Ghanaians was 59 years. The major ethnic divisions in Ghana include the *Akan* (49.1%), the *Mole-Dagomba* (16.5%), the *Ewe* (12.7%), and the *Ga-Dangme* (8%). English is the official language. However, there are hundreds of dialects spoken in the various regions of the country. Most Ghanaians belong to the *Akan* people and consequently speak *Fante* or *Twi*, the language most often taught to Peace Corps and other international volunteers.

In relation to religious beliefs, 45 percent of Ghanaians follow Traditionalists religious practices, 43 percent follow Christianity, and 12 percent practice Islam. Islam dominates religious beliefs in the northern part of Ghana as it has been practiced in this area for over 500 years. Christianity dominates in the south and central portions of Ghana. Christian denominations represented include Catholic, Presbyterian, and African Methodist Episcopal Zion.

Education

Ghana's past and present is marked by several educational initiatives and reforms all with the goal of providing and requiring education for as many youth and citizens as possible. The children of Ghana are required to attend 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education when teachers and facilities are available. The Ministry of Education also launched a program in 1997 with the goal of increasing girls' enrollment to equal boys and reducing the dropout rate among girls in primary school from 30 percent to 20 percent by 2005. Upon completing their basic education, students may enter senior secondary education where they finish a three-year course of core classes or technical classes, which prepare them for a university education. In 2004, The average adult literacy rate was 66.4 percent for males and 49.8 percent for females.

Geography

The Republic of Ghana is part of West Africa with the Gulf of Guinea forming its southern border. Ghana's neighboring countries are Cote d'Ivoire to the west, Togo to the east, and Burkina Faso to the north. The capital, Accra is located on the southeastern coast of Ghana. The country is approximately 92,100 square miles which is similar to the size of Illinois and Indiana combined. Ghana lies in close proximity with the Equator to the south. Similar to states in the United States, Ghana has ten administrative regions, which are the Greater Accra, the Eastern Region, the Central Region, the Northern Region, the Volta Region, the Brong Ahafo Region, the Western Region, the Ashanti Region, the Upper West Region, and the Upper East Region.

Ghana's landscape is particularly flat. The southern portion of the country is mostly



comprised of coastline and low-lying plains with the exception of the Akwapim Mountains, which can be seen from Accra. The majority of the central and northeastern part of the country is covered with large plateaus. This area is called the Volta Basin and serves as the major drainage system for the region. Much of the Volta Basin is submerged in Lake Volta, the world's largest man-made lake, which lies in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The outlying highlands are painted with tropical vegetation watered with rivers, natural lakes, cataracts, and many waterfalls. Wli Falls, located in the southeastern part of Ghana, is said to be West Africa's highest waterfall.

Climate

Because Ghana's is in close proximity to the equator, the climate is tropical. The daily temperature remains high throughout the country, with average temperatures between 78° and 84°F. The highest temperatures are experienced from November through January. The climate is somewhat different in the north where it is hot and dry compared to the south where it is hot and humid. In the south, there are two rainy seasons, from April-June and September-November. The coastal areas receive lighter rainfalls.

Economy

As Ghana is a developing country, job creation remains its most critical economic problem. Unemployment estimates for the country range from 8-11 percent and this figure is higher in rural areas. The labor force totals 11 million. Almost half of Ghanaians (47 percent) live on less than \$1 per day with 28.5 percent living below the country's poverty line. The average per capita income is US\$1,400-2,600. The agricultural industry contributes the most to the GDP at approximately 49.2 percent followed by the service industry, and then industrial production. Between 55-70 percent of the working population depends on agriculture to make a living. However, land for agriculture use is being lost to residential development. Major agricultural products are cocoa, rice, cassava, peanuts, corn, shea nuts, bananas, and timber. Cocoa and gold remain Ghana's most important and profitable exports. Ghana is Africa's second leading gold exporter only behind South Africa. Industries include mining, lumbering, light manufacturing, aluminum smelting, food processing, cement, and small commercial ship building. In 2006, Ghana signed a Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact to receive assistance to restore their agricultural sector.

Cuisine

Ghana's cuisine is very diverse across ethnic groups and regions of the country. Many dishes found in Ghana are common across several countries in West Africa, so a great deal of variations on recipes exist. Soups are the primary component in Ghanaian cuisine and are eaten with fufu (either pounded plantain and cassava or yam), kokonte (cassava meal cooked into a paste), banku (fermented corn dough), boiled yam, rice, bread, plantain, or cassava. The most common soups are light soup, palmnut soup, and groundnut (peanut) soup.

Other Ghanaian favorites include gari foto (eggs, onions, dried shrimp, tomatoes and gari), agushie (squash seed sauce, tomatoes and onions), omo tuo (mashed rice balls with groundnut soup), jollof rice, red-red (fried plantain and bean sauce), kenkey (boiled fermented corn dough) and fish, kelewele (deep fried and heavily spiced plantain) and shito (hot pepper sauce). In general, soups and sauces are prepared with either fish, goat, mutton or chicken.

Ghana: At-a-glance

Location: West Africa on the Gulf Guinea near the Equator.

Size: 92,100 square miles

Population: 23 million

Life Expectancy: 59 years

Adult Literacy Rate: 57.9 percent

Poverty Rate: 28.5 percent

Fertility Rate: 3.78 children born/per woman

Currency: Ghana cedi

Political system: Constitutional democracy

National President: John Kufuor (since 2001)

Official Language: English

Major exports: Gold, cocoa, timber

National Holiday: Independence Day, March 6th

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