

Cultural Profile: Ghana

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Background

Ghana is the country of choice for this assignment. Located in the western part of Africa, it neighbors La Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Burkina Faso, and the Gulf of Guinea (Background information, n.d). Officially named the Republic of Ghana, it is one of the most progressive countries on the continent. Rich in many resources such as gold, cocoa, lumber, and most newly found oil, Ghana is well on its way to becoming a significant supplier in years to come (Background information, n.d). These resources make up a portion of the income, but agriculture is the primary driver of the economy, employing 40 percent of the working people of an estimated population of 25,199,609 (Background information, n.d). Product exports drive the economy, making up one-third of the gross domestic product (Background information, n.d).

The land covers 238,500 square kilometers (Background information, n.d). There are over a hundred ethnic groups and twenty-five languages spoken. The most popular ones are Akan, Ewe, Mole-Dagbane, Guan, and Ga-Adangbe (Ghana ethnic, n.d). Within these ethnic groups are subdivisions with similar cultural, heritage, history, language, and origins. Under British control for many years, English became the official language of Ghana.

Ghana is known as the Gold Coast and acknowledged as the first in the African nations to gain its independence under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah who was the first Prime Minister and President (Background information, n.d). The colors of the flag are Red, Yellow, and Green with a black star which became a significant symbol representing “black pride and power and a commitment to Pan-African unity” (Schwimmer, n.d). Others are the ceremonial sword, linguist’s staff, the chiefs’ stool, and the talking drum. The Kente cloth is the Ghanaian national cloth identifying the pride of its independence, “men drape it around their bodies and women wear it as a two-piece outfit” (Background information, n.d).

One of the staple dishes of Ghana is fufu; plantain pounded and mixed with cassava (Background information, n.d). Most dishes are spicy. Soups made from vegetables with some animal protein such as fish and a variety of hot peppers, are a favorite amongst the natives and often eaten with fufu. Restaurants are known to as ‘chop bars,’ they are hard to find outside of the business districts. Commonly seen along the roadsides are streetwalkers selling goods in the busiest parts of the country.

In the past, the order of social status replicated pre-colonial class systems. The three customary classes were the royals who “maintained exclusive rights to fill the central offices of the king,” the commoners, and slaves (Background information, n.d). Officials have political and economic privileges but do not include their families. Commoners received their status as a result of marriage into the royals. The ending of slavery presented free men with several rights including governance over agricultural land and power in lower political positions (Background information, n.d). Social status in modern Ghana today is measured by education and wealth.

Ghana Cultural Etiquette

When traveling to a foreign country, there are often cultural etiquette expectations, and this is no different in Ghana. The Ghanaian culture reflects high reverence for tolerance and respect for others as seen in the country's customs, etiquette and business protocol. According to cultural anthropologist Katja Cof, greetings are very important to the people of Ghana and time should be made to greet others both in personal and business exchanges properly. When a visitor enters a room, they should acknowledge everyone in the room starting with the eldest person working from right to left (Cof, 2015; Wilson, n.d.). The most common form of greeting is shaking hands with slight variations amongst ethnic groups. For a foreigner, the proper protocol is to shake hands and smile, while for a Ghanaian acknowledging another Ghanaian the right-hand is clasp as usual in a handshake, then the middle fingers are twisted and click for a loud snap (Ghana guide, n.d.). In

Ghanaian culture is custom to wait for a woman to first extend her hand for a handshake as practicing Muslims do not shake hands with the opposite sex, while Christians do (Ghana guide, n.d.). It is imperative not to cut a greeting short and rush into business in the Ghana culture; time should be taken to inquire first about the health, family, and job while maintaining eye contact during shopping at local vendors or attendance at a business meeting. (Cof, 2015; Ghana guide, n.d.).

Another cultural etiquette in Ghana is the “Right-hand rule” according to Katija Cof (2005), where the expectation is that the right hand be used for shaking hands, eating and giving and receiving items such as money or business cards. The practice of using the right-hand for everything derived from the method of using the left-hand to take care of bathroom related needs before toilet paper was available. Although toilet paper is available and used in Ghana presently, it is still a sign of disrespect to conduct business with the left hand, even small gestures such as waving with the left hand is taboo and forbidden. When presenting a business card, the option of using just the right-hand or both hands is acceptable just never the left-hand alone (Cof, 2015; Ghana guide, n.d.; Wilson, n.d.).

Other Ghana cultural nuances according to Cof (2015), includes foreigners should take the time to learn a few words such as good morning, good afternoon, good evening and how are you in the country’s conventional languages of Twi, GA or Dagbani. While sitting it is considered disrespectful to cross one’s leg, although crossing of the legs is frequent practice in European and American cultures, Ghana women do not cross their legs. Ghanaians also expect an elevated level of religious, political and ethnic tolerance and respect as it is inappropriate to make derogatory or insulting remarks about any of the diverse tribes, customs or religions. It is also frowned upon to use vulgarity or curse or use offensive words such as crazy, stupid or to tell someone to shut up (Cof, 2015; Wilson, n.d.). Ghana cultural don’t around meal time, and food includes talking while

eating, smelling or sniffing the food, wiping or blowing of one's nose during meal time, and eating before the eldest male at the table (Cof, 2015; Ghana Guide, n.d.).

Miscellaneous

Ghana is a patriarchal society. Francis Aneyibor (2016) a UN special correspondent described Ghana's patriarchal culture as men being the lead decision maker and the head of the household. The reinforcement of the patriarchal culture is identifiable in the attitudes, customs, values, and societal institutions that portray men as supreme. Men in Ghana has both visibly and subliminal dominance and subordination over female, children and any persons with nontraditional gender identity (Aneyibor, 2016). In recent years, Ghana has taken steps towards gender equality with legal and policy frameworks such as an affirmative action bill, national gender policy, and child and family welfare policy. These gender equality steps have led to the changes in the judicial system such as gender-based courts (Aneyibor, 2016).

Crime in Ghana appears to be moderate with a crime index of 47.42 with crime levels between 20 and 40 identified as low and high crime noted as between 60 and 80. The most significant crime area is corruption and bribery with a very high crime index of 80.36 (Crime in Accra, 2018). According to Iddi Yire (2017), Ghana's criminal justice system is undergoing significant reforms including the establishment of the Office of the Special Prosecutor to address the high rates of government corruption. Criminal justice improvements also include classifying and prosecuting corruption as a felony crime instead of its current state as a misdemeanor.

To enter Ghana, one needs a visa regardless of the reason; there are different protocol and types of visa including business, student, tourist and diplomatic (Mohrman, 2007). Visa processing time is between 15 minutes and ten business days depending on the means of processing, rush versus non-rush. The cost of a visa is between \$60 and \$100. The Yellow fever immunization is required to entire Ghana (Ghana consulate Huston, n.d.).

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