

Ghana

In Ghana life is public. People evacuate their homes and apartments every day to escape the stifling heat. And much like the kente cloth worn by market women, the disparate parts and peoples somehow mix and weave together into a cohesive whole. Ghana is home to a number of diverse peoples and cultures, all finding ways to coexist in a rapidly modernizing country. You'll see men and women in traditional clothes text messaging friends and suited businessmen taking offerings to tribal chiefs.

Compared to other countries in the area, Ghana is stable and prosperous, but this valuation is in part founded on hopes for the future. The country is often labelled 'Africa for beginners' and while you'll be welcomed by the people in a hot, sweaty clinch, the same way the sun grabs hold of you the second you go outside, getting around is by no means easy.

Ghana has no iconic calling card like Victoria Falls or Kilimanjaro, but one look at a map reveals a geographic blessing: hundreds of kilometres of coast shared by beautiful beaches, ruined European forts, the poignant reminders of the country's importance as a way station for African slaves, and the battered shacks of lively fishing villages. Accra is the commercial and cultural motor of the country, while Kumasi is the traditional home of the Ashanti, and is famous for its crafts. In the Volta region to the east, where the geography was given a facelift by the Akosombo dam, you can still find substantial swaths of forest crawling up mountains along the Togo border. And finally the north, which offers opportunities for wildlife viewing up close and personal, stretches across the horizon like an overcooked pancake to the Burkina Faso frontier.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 238,537 sq km
- **Capital** Accra
- **Country code** ☎ 233
- **Famous for** UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan; kente cloth; Ashanti culture
- **Languages** English, Twi, Ga and Ewe
- **Money** Cedi (see-dee); US\$1 = C9525; €1 = C11,761
- **Population** 21 million
- **Visa** US\$50 in advance or US\$100 upon arrival at airport



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Beachlife** (p354) Soak up the rays and Rasta vibe at a beach resort in Axim, Busua, Anomabu or Kokrobite.
- **Past Life** (p359 and p363) Tour the castles at Cape Coast and Elmina to learn about the history of slavery.
- **Wildlife** (p389) Engage in a staring contest with a bus-sized elephant in Mole National Park.
- **Hiplife** (p350) Take in Accra's club scene, the birthplace of some of the region's most popular music.
- **Village Life** (p370) Rough it in one of the community tourism projects like the stilt village at Nzeluza.

ITINERARIES

- **Two Weeks** Without private transportation two weeks is really only enough time to do the triangular route bounded by Accra, Takoradi to the west, and Kumasi at the top. Start in **Accra** (p339; three days), then head to the beach at **Anomabu** (p358; two nights), then on to **Cape Coast** (p359; three nights) with day trips to **Kakum** (p362) and **Elmina** (p363). If you want to mix things up take the night train from **Takoradi** (p365) to **Kumasi** (p377; three nights) to explore the surrounding area, then head back to Accra.
- **Four Weeks** With four weeks to spare, you can do all of the above plus throw in visits to the coastal resorts at **Busua** (p368) and **Axim** (p370) and also explore some of the north. If possible fly from **Accra** (p339) to **Tamale** (p386; one night) – if not take your time bussing it to **Kumasi** (p377) and then further north – and on to **Mole National Park** (p389) and **Larabanga** (p389; two nights). Continue west to **Wa** (p390; one night) and the hippo sanctuary at **Wechiau** (p391), if time permits, and return to Kumasi. From there you can head south to Accra and then visit the east: **Ada Foah** (p371; two nights), **Akosombo** (p372; one night), on to **Ho** (p373) and **Hohoe** (p376; three nights) and back to Accra. Alternatively, head directly to the coastal resorts of your choice from Kumasi.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Ghana has a tropical equatorial climate, which means that it's hot year-round with seasonal rains. In the humid southern coastal

HOW MUCH?

- **Handkerchief** C2000
- **Bottle of Fanta** C2500 at a local shop or gas station, C5000-10,000 at restaurants
- **Music CD** C90,000
- **Inner-city taxi** C8000
- **Coffin in the shape of a Mercedes** C5 million

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** C7000
- **1L of water** C6000
- **Bottle of Star beer** C5000
- **Souvenir t-shirt** C90,000
- **Beef kebab skewer** C3000

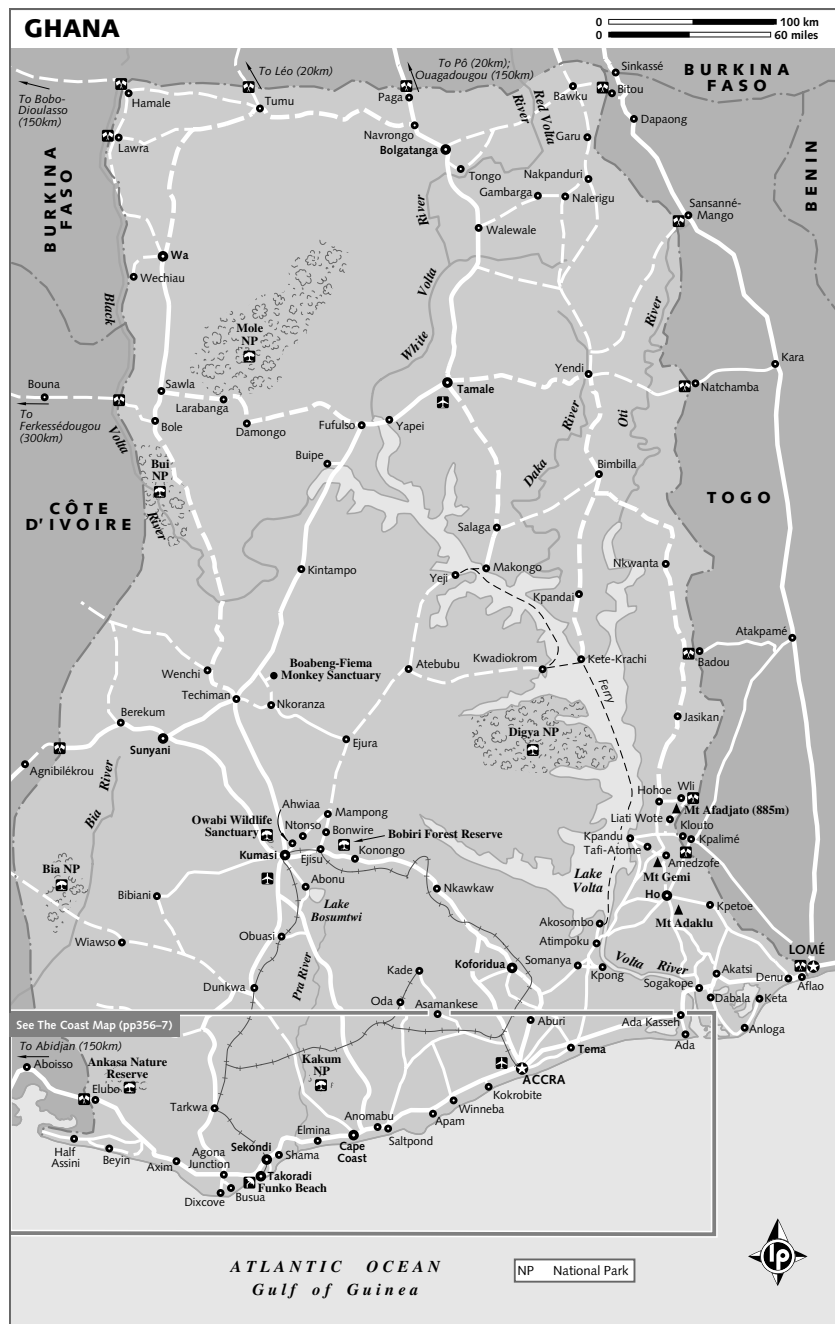
region, the rainy seasons are from April to June, and during September and October; the dry months, November to March or July and August, are easier for travelling.

Throughout the year, maximum temperatures are around 30°C, dropping three or four degrees during the brief respite between rainy seasons. The humidity is constantly high, at about 80%. In the central region, the rains are heavier and last longer. In the hotter and drier north, there is one rainy season, lasting from April to October. Midday temperatures rarely fall below 30°C, rising to 35°C and higher during December to March when the rasping harmattan wind blows in from the Sahara. At this time, dust particles hang heavily in the air, making it constantly hazy, and temperatures plummet at night.

The tourist high season is from June to August, which coincides with the summer vacation in the US. The country sees few tourists from September to December.

HISTORY

Present-day Ghana has been inhabited since at least 4000 BC, although little evidence remains of its early societies. Successive waves of migration from the north and east resulted in Ghana's present ethnographic composition. By the 13th century, a number of kingdoms had arisen, influenced by the Sahelian trading empires north of the region, such as that of Ancient



Ghana (which incorporated western Mali and present-day Senegal). Fuelled by gold (of which Ghana has substantial deposits), trading networks grew, stimulating the development of Akan kingdoms in the centre and south of present-day Ghana. The most powerful of these was that of the Ashanti, who by the 18th century had conquered most of the other kingdoms and taken control of trade routes to the coast. This brought them into contact, and often conflict, with the coastal Fanti, Ga and Ewe people – and with European traders.

The Portuguese arrived in the late 15th century, initially lured by the trade in gold and ivory. However, with the establishment of plantations in the Americas during the 16th century, slaves rapidly replaced gold as the principal export of the region. The fortunes to be earned in the slave trade attracted the Dutch, British and Danes in the late 16th century. The Akan kingdoms grew rich on the proceeds of delivering human cargoes to collection points in coastal forts built by the Europeans, among whom competition for trading concessions was fierce.

By the time slavery was outlawed in the early 19th century, the British had gained a dominant position on the coast. The Ashanti continued to try to expand their territory and protect their interests and the coastal Ga, Ewe and Fanti peoples came to rely on the British for protection. Conflict between the British and the Ashanti sparked a series of wars that culminated in 1874 with the sacking of Kumasi, the Ashanti capital. However, the Ashanti remained defiant and in 1896 the British launched another attack, and this time occupied Kumasi and exiled the Ashanti leader, Prempeh I, to the Seychelles. The British then established a protectorate over Ashantiland, which was expanded in 1901 to include the northern territories.

Under the British cocoa became the backbone of the economy, and in the 1920s the Gold Coast became the world's leading producer. By WWI, cocoa, gold and timber made the Gold Coast the most prosperous colony in Africa. By independence in 1957 the Gold Coast was also the world's leading producer of manganese. It had the best schools and the best civil service in West Africa, a cadre of enlightened lawyers and a thriving press.

Independence

In the late 1920s a number of political parties dedicated to regaining African independence sprang up. However, these parties were identified with the intelligentsia and failed to recognise the grievances and aspirations of most of the population. In response, Kwame Nkrumah, secretary-general of the country's leading political party, the United Gold Coast Convention, broke away in 1949 to form his own party, the Convention People's Party (CPP). With the slogan 'Self Government Now', it quickly became the voice of the masses.

A year later, exasperated by the slow progress towards self-government, Nkrumah called for a national strike. Seeking to contain the situation, the British responded by imprisoning him. While he was there, the CPP won the general election of 1951 and he was released to become leader of the government. Ghana finally gained its independence in March 1957; it was the first West African country to do so. At independence, Nkrumah cast aside the name Gold Coast in favour of that of the first great empire in West Africa, Ghana, famed for wealth and gold.

Much remained to be done to consolidate the new government's control over the country. Factional and regional interests surfaced and there was powerful opposition from some traditional chiefs. Repressive laws were passed in an attempt to contain this opposition, and the CPP became a party that dispensed patronage and encouraged corruption. Meanwhile, Nkrumah skilfully kept himself out of the fray and became one of the most powerful leaders to emerge from the African continent. He was handsome, charismatic and articulate, and his espousal of Pan-Africanism and his denunciations of imperialism and neocolonialism provided inspiration for other nationalist movements in the region.

Nkrumah borrowed heavily to finance grandiose schemes, the most ambitious of which was the Akosombo Dam. This project to dam the Volta River was to be financed by the World Bank, other international banks and Valco, a US aluminium company. However, Nkrumah, abandoned by other backers, was obliged to short-change his country by accepting Valco's offer of the dam in return for all the electricity it needed, virtually at cost (see p374).

With a steadily deteriorating economy, the expected private-sector demand never materialised, and the electrification and irrigation programmes were shelved for more than a decade.

In the end, unbridled corruption, reckless spending on ambitious schemes, his anti-Western stance and unpaid debts to Western creditors were Nkrumah's undoing. Worst of all, he alienated the army by setting up a private guard answerable only to him. In 1966, while the president was on a mission to Hanoi, the army ousted him in a coup. Exiled to Guinea, Nkrumah died of cancer six years later.

The Rawlings Era

Neither the military regime nor the civilian government, installed three years later and headed by Dr Kofi Busia, could overcome Ghana's corruption and debt problems. In 1972 there was another coup, headed by Colonel Acheampong, under whose inept leadership the economy worsened still further. As the cedi became increasingly worthless, food staples and other basic goods became scarce. In 1979, in the midst of serious food shortages and demonstrations against army affluence and military rule, a group of young revolutionaries seized power. Their leader was a charismatic, half-Scottish 32-year-old air-force flight lieutenant, Jerry Rawlings, who quickly became the darling of the masses.

As he had promised, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) handed over to a civilian government several months later, after general elections. But first some major 'house cleaning' was done, resulting in the sentencing and execution of some senior officers, including Acheampong, and the conviction of hundreds of other officers and businessmen. The new president, Hilla Limann, unable to halt the country's downward spiral and uneasy with Rawlings' enormous grassroots support, accused him of attempting to subvert constitutional rule. This provoked a second takeover by the AFRC in January 1982, and this time Rawlings stayed for two decades.

Although Rawlings never delivered on his promised left-wing radical revolution, under his colourful leadership life became better for most Ghanaians. He yielded to World Bank and IMF pressure and carried

out some tough free-market reforms, which included floating the cedi, removing price controls, raising payments to cocoa farmers and disposing of some unprofitable state enterprises. In return, the World Bank and the IMF rewarded Ghana amply with loans and funding. For a while, in the 1980s, Ghana was lauded as an economic success story, with an economic growth rate that was the highest in Africa.

In 1992, yielding to pressures from home and abroad, Rawlings announced a hastily organised referendum on a new constitution and lifted the 10-year ban on political parties. Opposition groups formed along traditional lines but divisions were deep. Without a united opposition front, Rawlings triumphed at the November 1992 presidential election, winning 60% of the vote. Humiliated, the main opposition parties withdrew from the following month's parliamentary elections, so Rawlings' National Democratic Congress (NDC) won and Rawlings was sworn in as president. Since 1992, Ghana has been a multiparty democracy with elections held every four years. Under the 1992 constitution, the government is headed by an elected president and a 200-member national assembly, which is also elected.

During the 1990s, Ghana made mixed progress. On the one hand, Rawlings seemed to have achieved a respectable democratic mandate, economic growth was maintained and Ghana continued to attract praise from the IMF. On the other hand, however, austerity measures, lack of improvement in social services, rising inflation, increasing corruption within the NDC and a hurried attempt by the government to launch an unpopular value-added tax in 1995 led to major civil unrest.

Rawlings' personal popularity was relatively unaffected and in December 1996 he was again elected as president. At much the same time, the appointment of Ghanaian Kofi Annan as UN secretary general boosted national morale. In 1998, in an effort to improve tax collection and spread the burden more equitably, VAT was successfully introduced. However, a drought in the late 1990s led to morale-sapping electricity and water rationing throughout the country, while a fall in the world price of cocoa and gold diminished Ghana's foreign-exchange earnings.

Ghana Today

Ghana is one of the few politically stable countries in the region. Observers however say the 2008 presidential election will be the true test of the country's democratic maturity. After eight years of Rawlings and the NDC – the constitution barred Rawlings from standing for a third term in the 2000 presidential elections – his nominated successor and former vice-president, Professor John Atta Mills, lost to Dr John Kufuor, leader of the well-established New Patriotic Party (NPP), which also won a slim majority in the parliamentary elections. Kufuor and the NPP won again in 2004, meaning that each party will have had eight years in power by the time the next national elections roll around. Some predict the election will be a referendum on the NPP's more economically liberal policies versus the NDC's more state-controlled or socialist approach.

Kufuor and the NPP inherited some tough economic and political challenges. Falling prices of gold and cocoa compounded by rampant corruption and stalled reforms in the 1990s caused a massive devaluation of the cedi and precipitated an economic crisis as Ghana entered the 21st century. One of the Kufuor's government first acts was to raise the price of fuel, previously heavily subsidised, and to loosen restrictions on the currency, allowing it to stabilise. Long-standing attempts to reduce Ghana's dependency on gold and cocoa have led to increasing interest in exports such as shea nut butter, tobacco, cotton and pineapples. Manganese, diamonds and bauxite are also mined for export.

Politically, Kufuor and the NPP have had to tread carefully; the party's slogan, 'So Far So Good', is perhaps an uncannily accurate reflection of the confidence they and the country hold. Rawlings was in power for nearly 20 years, and in many parts of the country the state is still synonymous with the NDC, which isn't surprising considering the fact that many local leaders are indebted to their positions through political patronage. Both parties continue to be criticised for practicing cronyism and only awarding lucrative government contracts to fellow party members.

For the past century there's been large-scale mining in Ghana, but Australian giant Newmont's recent billion-dollar investment

in two new mines in the middle of a forest preserve is not without controversy. With US\$75 million from the World Bank, Newmont says it hopes to show that mining and social development can go hand in hand; it points to the fact that thousands of displaced people were compensated, new job training was offered and new homes were built. However, in the end only 450 full-time jobs will be created and nearby Obuasi, where AngloGold Ashanti operates, looks like the prototypical squalid mining town and is a somewhat dismal example of how vast underground wealth doesn't necessarily translate into better lives for those who live nearby; only half of the homes have an indoor bathroom and 20% have running water.

Some economists and political observers see as a fundamental problem the relationship between the large mining concerns and the tribal chiefs who control 80% of the land and receive most of the money – in what are still called 'drink commissions' – for the related land concessions. Because the chiefs are under no legal obligation to distribute the funds in any particular way and because there is little transparency in the process, ordinary Ghanaians may not be benefiting from the sale of their country's abundant resources as much as they should. Others argue that the funds are used in at least a socially beneficial a way as they would if the national government were solely in charge.

Ghana's economy continues to grow and attract investment, and the outlook is better than in many other parts of Africa. That being said, in 2002 the per-capita income was an estimated US\$270 and Ghana is classified by the UN as a low-income, food-deficit country. To the average visitor from the US or Europe, most Ghanaians appear to live in terribly difficult conditions, and suffer from the consequences of poverty and unemployment. The majority of the very poor live in rural areas, and Northern Ghana is the poorest part of the country. The bulk of the country's labour force is employed in agriculture, which accounts for 37% of its GDP and 35% of its export earnings.

THE CULTURE The National Psyche

To the average Ghanaian, World Bank or IMF optimism or pessimism about their country's macroeconomic position seems

as relevant as the weather on the moon. Most people, apart from the residents of a handful of leafy residential neighbourhoods in Accra or Kumasi, live in fairly primitive conditions and aren't necessarily confident that their children's lives will look much different from their own.

Ask about the government's ability to make positive changes, and people will generally respond sceptically, no doubt a fairly common sentiment all over the world, but they do so without pointing to other social institutions that can or will do so in its place. On a local level, the church, the tribal chief or foreign NGOs supply the social safety net and many Ghanaians, not surprisingly, dream of emigrating to the US or Europe. Strike up a conversation and you'll often be told of relatives now living in New Jersey or Hamburg and how as soon as the speaker saves up enough money they plan to join them overseas.

Though the majority of foreigners living in Ghana work for international and religious development organisations devoted to good works, their relative prosperity and influence certainly rubs some people the wrong way. The average 'obroni' is viewed rightly or wrongly as a visitor from a more prosperous planet. Some Ghanaians who have lived abroad argue that real change will only come about when Ghanaian businessmen and politicians feel confident they are at least the equal of any Westerner who sits across from them in the boardroom or at the negotiating table.

Maybe the most famous and arguably the most important Ghanaian is Otunfu Osei II, the king of the Ashanti. He's considered at least as influential as the president, in part because he rules with no term limits and because of his relative youth; he's only in his 50s. Some Ghanaians living abroad send remittances to the king, some money comes from allowances paid by the government, and some of his wealth comes from taxes or tributes given by the people themselves.

Malaria, the leading cause of hospitalisation, is accepted as a fact of life. A hopeful sign of the government's commitment to dealing with the disease is the oft-aired TV commercial with a catchy jingle publicising the dangers of malaria and introducing a new drug to replace chloroquine. Ghana was the first country to receive a grant from

the Global Fund to fight AIDS – an estimated 3% of the population is infected.

Daily Life

The majority of Ghanaians work in agriculture, tending small subsistence plots, and the majority of these workers are women. The Ashanti, Ghana's richest and most self-confident culture, have a matrilineal social system and trace descent through the female line. Ashanti women are known for their independence, business acumen and influence in traditional politics. The *asantehene* (king) can have as many wives as he likes, although the present incumbent has just one. The Queen Mother, who can be the sister, niece, aunt or mother of the *asantehene*, exerts considerable power. She is the only person who can criticise the *asantehene*.

Funerals, rather than marriages or naming ceremonies, are the occasions that bring together family, townspeople and distant relatives. This is consistent with the ancestor-focused nature of Ashanti traditional religion. The streets of Ashanti towns teem with mourners and sympathisers wearing the distinctive funeral colours of black, red and shades of reddish brown. Expenditure is lavish and there's plenty of socialising and drinking.

Wealth is important in Ashanti culture; when Ashantis make money they build a fine house in their home town or village, however remote that may be. Many small Ashanti towns boast a few houses of a magnificence that is almost incongruous in simple villages ill served with basic facilities.

The extended family is the foundation of Ghanaian society. The Akan people are unusual in that they are matrilineal – you belong to your mother's clan. Clans are grouped under a chief, who in turn is answerable to a paramount chief, who is the political and spiritual head of his people.

Age, education and wealth are afforded great respect, and visitors are generally welcomed with friendliness. You'll probably be struck by how courteous Ghanaians are. Greetings are extremely important and an essential prelude to social interaction of any kind. It's usual to shake the hand of anyone you meet. The Ghanaian handshake involves a fairly limp grasp of the hand followed by a snap of your index finger with the index finger of the person whose hand

you're shaking. Religion is extremely important in Ghana; blasphemy or swearing of any sort is unacceptable.

Population

Ghana's population of 21 million makes it one of the most densely populated countries in West Africa. Of this, 44% are Akan, a grouping that includes the Ashanti (also called Asante), whose heartland is around Kumasi, and the Fanti, who fish the central coast and farm its near hinterland. The Nzema, linguistically close to the Akan, fish and farm in the southwest. Distant migrants from present-day Nigeria, the Ga are the indigenous people of Accra and Tema. The southern Volta region is home to the Ewe.

In the north, the Dagomba heartland is around Tamale and Yendi. Prominent neighbours are the Gonja in the centre, Konkomba and Mamprusi in the far northeast, and, around Navrongo, the Kasena. The Sisala and Lobi inhabit the far northwest.

For more details on the Ashanti and Ewe people, see p73 and p74.

SPORT

Not surprisingly, the qualification of the national team, the Black Stars, for the 2006 World Cup only increased the profile of football, already the country's most popular sport. Three of the country's most prominent players are: Michael Essien, who plays for Chelsea in Britain's Premier League; Prince Tagoe, who plays in Ghana; and Freddy Adu, who plays for DC United in the US professional league. Boxing is the second most popular sport, and fights are periodically held Friday and Saturday nights from November to April in the Accra Sports Stadium and the Azuma Complex in Accra. Ringside seats cost C100,000. There are three golf clubs in the country. Cricket, basketball and the NBA are also popular.

RELIGION

Churches of every imaginable Christian denomination are found in Ghana, some in the most far-flung, off-the-beaten-track villages. Christianity was introduced by European missionaries, who were also the first educators, and the link between religion and education persists. About 70% of Ghanaians are Christian; they're concentrated in the

south. Pentecostal and charismatic denominations are particularly active, as are the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches. About 15% of the population is Muslim; the majority are in the north, although there are also substantial Muslim minorities in southern cities such as Accra and Kumasi.

The rest of the people practice traditional religions, which generally include a belief in a supreme being as well as in spirits and lesser gods who inhabit the natural world. Ancestor veneration is an important part of traditional beliefs. Most people retain traditional beliefs alongside Christian or Muslim beliefs.

ARTS Music

TRADITIONAL

Certain types of music are customarily associated with specific social occasions and even more so with certain social and ethnic groups, even though similar musical instruments and types are found throughout Ghana. Some categories of music are exclusive to royalty and are performed only on state occasions, such as installation ceremonies and royal funerals or simply for the entertainment of the chief. This is more common in northern Ghana, where royal musicians perform at court weekly as a tribute to the chief.

MODERN

Some of the country's more successful exports, at least to other African countries and increasingly to other parts of the world, are the musical fusion genres of highlife and hiplife. The latter is a more recent invention that takes a page from the American hip-hop world.

Popular highlife recordings include those by ET Mensah, Nana Ampadu and The Sweet Talks. Ko Nimo, now in his late 60s, is Ghana's foremost exponent of acoustic guitar highlife (or palm-wine music) and still performs with his band, the Adadam Agofomma Group, throughout Ghana. Hiplife stars to look out for include VIP, Castro, Reggie Rockstone, Kojo Antwi, Ofori Amponsah, Genesis Gospel Singers, Daddy Lumba and George Darko.

Gospel music is also big in Ghana, as is reggae; gospel rap is an immensely popular fusion of styles. Founded by visionary Nana Danso Abiam, the Pan African Orchestra

has recorded an album of neoclassical, Afrocentric symphonic music.

It's a sign of the times that the Ghanaian song that is probably most familiar to Western ears is *Run* by singer Selassie – it was made famous as the theme music for *FIFA 2006*, a best-selling football video game with over 6 million units sold.

Arts & Crafts

Ghana has a rich artistic heritage. Objects are created not only for their aesthetic value but as symbols of ethnic identity or to commemorate historical or legendary events, to convey cultural values or to signify membership of a group. The Akan people of the southern and central regions are famous for their cloth, goldwork, woodcarving, chiefs' insignia (such as swords, umbrella tops and linguist staffs), pottery and bead-making.

TEXTILES

The Ashanti in particular are famous for their kente cloth, with its distinctive basket-work pattern. It was originally worn only by royalty and is still some of the most expensive material in Africa. The colour and design of the cloth worn is yet another way of indicating status and clan allegiance. Different cloth is worn depending on the occasion. It is traditionally worn by high-ranking men at ceremonies to display their wealth and status. Kente is woven on treadle looms, by men only, in long thin strips that are sewn together. Its intricate geometric patterns are full of symbolic meaning while its orange-yellow hues indicate wealth.

In contrast, *adinkra* cloth is worn primarily on solemn occasions by both men and women. The symbolic designs are printed in black on cotton cloth that is usually dark grey, dark red or white.

The Ewe people of the southeast, who claim to have originally passed on the method of kente weaving to the Ashantis, produce both the Ashanti kente and their own Ewe kente, which is even more intricately woven.

STOOLS

Akan stools are among the finest in West Africa and incorporate designs that are rich in cultural symbolism. There's an Ashanti saying: 'There are no secrets between a man and his stool', and when a chief dies his

people say 'The stool has fallen'. Ashanti stools are among the most elaborate in Africa. They are carved from a single piece of wood and the basic form is the same – a curved seat set on a central column with a flat base. Historically, certain designs, such as the seat supported upon the image of a leopard or elephant, were restricted to particular ranks within Ashanti society. The higher a person's status, the larger and more elaborate the stool.

Stools have a variety of functions and meanings. In official ceremonies, stools act as symbols of authority; on the death of their owner, consecrated stools are worshipped as homes to ancestral spirits; in most households, stools are articles of everyday use. A stool is the first gift of a father to his son, and the first gift bestowed by a man on his bride-to-be. Women's stools are different from men's. After death, the deceased is ritually washed upon a stool, which is then placed in the room for ancestral worship. Chiefs consider stools to be their supreme insignia. There are as many stool designs as there are chiefs, and the symbols are infinite.

OTHER OBJECTS

The *akuaba* doll is carved from wood and used as a household fetish to protect against infertility; these are easily identified by the extra-large round head. The Akan are skilled in the lost-wax method of metal casting, used to make exquisite brass objects, including weights used for measuring gold dust. Glass beads are made by grinding up glass of different colours and layering it in a mould to produce intricately coloured patterns. Around Bolgatanga in the north, fine basket weaving and leatherwork are traditional crafts. Drums and carved *owara* boards – the game of *owara* has various names throughout West Africa – are also specialities.

Cinema & TV

Miracle Films and HM are two Ghanaian film production companies. However, most of the films you'll see (on VanefSTC buses, in one of the few makeshift theatres or sold as bad pirated copies on the street) are Nigerian, or B-grade, straight-to-video movies from the US.

In 2005, the Oprah Winfrey-produced documentary *Emmanuelle's Gift* received a

limited release outside the country. The film chronicles a young, handicapped Ghanaian man's bicycle ride across the country and his attempt to address the problems faced by the two million people (or almost 10% of the population) with disabilities in Ghana.

There are four TV channels in Ghana; the government-owned channel is GTV. Most of the series are produced in Nigeria or South Africa, though *District Colonial Court*, a widely watched programme is Ghanaian. Strangely enough, one of the more popular shows is *The Promise*, a soap opera from the Philippines dubbed in English. TV, like the radio, turns religious on Sundays.

Literature

There's only a handful of fiction from Ghana available to Western readers. Highly recommended is the recently published, *The Prophet of Zongo Street* by Mohammed Naseehu Ali, a Ghanaian living in New York City; the stories explore life in the author's hometown of Kumasi and the dislocation of living in the West. *The Seasons of Beento Blackbird*, a novel by Akosua Busia (an actress who was in the film *The Color Purple*) and *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*, by Ama Ata Aidoo, also deal with how Africans come to terms with traditional culture in an increasingly cosmopolitan world.

The Two Hearts of Kwasi Boachi by Arthur Japin, based on a true story, is a novel about the 19th-century tragic exile of an Ashanti prince. *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* by Manu Herbstein, winner of 2002 Commonwealth Writers Prize for best first book, is a novelistic imagining of a young Ghanaian woman's tortured journey from slavery to freedom.

Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* are recommended. Both were written in the '60s and '70s before Armah gave up the trappings of literary success and moved to an island off the coast of Senegal.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

Ghana is about the size of Britain. It's generally flat or gently undulating, consisting of low-lying coastal plains punctuated by saline lagoons in the south, wooded hill ranges in the centre and a low plateau in the northern two-thirds. All of the country lies

below 1000m. Keta Lagoon east of Accra, near the Togolese border, is Ghana's largest lagoon. Dominating the eastern flank of the country is Lake Volta, formed when the Volta River was dammed in the mid-1960s. It's the world's largest artificial lake, about twice the size of Luxembourg. The highest hills are part of the Akwapim range in the east, which runs from just north of Accra, then east of Lake Volta and into Togo.

Wildlife

Ghana's national parks and reserves protect a variety of large mammals, including elephants, antelope species such as roan, kob, hartebeest, water buck, duiker and the endangered bongo, and primate species such as olive baboons, colobus and Mona monkeys and chimpanzees. The Black Volta River has a resident population of hippos; the best place to see them is at Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary (p391) near Wa. Nile crocodiles can be seen in various parts of the country but the crocodile ponds at Paga (p394) on the border with Burkina Faso are the best known. To see primates at close quarters, visit the sanctuaries at Boabeng-Fiema (p385) and Tafi-Atome (p375), where villagers have traditionally venerated and protected the resident populations of black-and-white colobus and Mona monkeys.

Forested areas contain numerous species of butterflies. Kakum National Park (p362), where some 400 species of butterflies have been recorded, and Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary (p385) are some of the best places to see them.

The Volta estuary and coastal areas west of Accra (such as Kokrobite and around Winneba) are important turtle-nesting sites for green, leather-back and Olive Ridley turtles.

Bird-watchers will find Ghana has much to offer. In forested areas, birds such as hornbills, turacos, African grey and Senegal parrots and the rare white-fronted guinea fowl can be seen. The coastal wetlands around the Volta estuary and coastal lagoons are important resting and feeding grounds for some 70 species of indigenous and migratory water birds.

National Parks & Reserves

Ghana has five national parks and nine protected areas. Mole National Park (p389) in the northwest of the country protects

COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION

Besides the big three sights of Mole, Kakum and Cape Coast Castle, tourism in Ghana is really driven by community-based ecotourism projects. There are over 30 dotted around the country, and they are the best ways to experience Ghana's natural attractions and traditional culture, while at the same time benefiting the local community. These projects are being established by traditional councils and district assemblies with the support of the Ghana Tourist Board and the Peace Corps and, most importantly, Ghana's Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC).

These projects are typically in small villages and have a visitors centre where you can arrange activities such as guided walks, village tours, bicycle hire and basic accommodation in a guesthouse or with families. Projects that are up and running include the Tafi-Atome (p375) and Boabeng-Fiema (p385) monkey sanctuaries, Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary (p391), Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary (p385), Mt Adaklu (p375), Liati Wote Waterfalls (p377) and Domama Rock Shrine (p363). For more details of these and other ecotourism sites, check out the NCRC website (www.ncrc.org.gh) or contact the regional tourist office.

savanna woodland and is the best place to see wildlife, including elephants, baboons and antelope species. Kakum National Park (p362), just inland of Cape Coast, is known for its canopy walkway and is a good place to see rainforest habitat and birdlife. The three remaining national parks, Bui, Bia and Digya, aren't set up for visitors and aren't feasible to visit without your own transport. Of the protected areas, Ankasa Nature Reserve (p371) near Elubo in the southwest is noted for its rainforest habitat and forest elephants. Owabi Wildlife Sanctuary (p384), near Kumasi, is one of several designated Ramsar wetlands conservation sites in Ghana.

FOOD & DRINK

A typical Ghanaian meal consists of a starch staple such as rice, *fufu* (mashed cassava, plantain or yam), *kenkey* or *banku* (fermented maize meal) eaten with a sauce or stew. Common sauces (called soups) include groundnut, *palaver* (made from greens) and light soup (egg and tomato sauce with fish or meat). Other menu regulars are fried rice with chicken or vegetables, *jollof* rice (the West African paella) and *red red*, bean stew with meat or fish, often served with fried plantains. The meat used is usually chicken, goat or beef; guinea fowl replaces chicken in the north of the country. Grass-cutter, a large rodent, is also popular. Fish, usually dried and smoked, is a common component of meals. *Omo tuo*, a special dish served only on Sunday, is mashed rice balls with a fish or meat soup.

Breakfast is usually iced *kenkey*, a sort of liquid porridge made from fermented maize,

with a hunk of bread, or bread and an omelette. Ghanaian bread is soft and white; varieties include sugar bread (very soft and sickly sweet), tea bread (less sweet), milk bread (slightly richer) and cinnamon bread.

Where To Eat

The cheapest food is sold at street stalls. Look out for women doling out rice, pasta and sauce from huge covered bowls set up on a wooden table. You can either eat it at the stall or take it away in a plastic bag or plantain-leaf parcel. Other food-stall staples include egg salad with rice, roast yam with spicy sauce, roast plantain with groundnuts, omelette in bread, and spicy kebabs. Inexpensive food is also available from chop bars, which serve up a selection of dishes, usually with daily specials. Cheap places to eat are also referred to as 'catering services' and 'canteens'.

In Accra and other major centres you'll find a variety of cuisines, commonly Lebanese, Chinese and West African, but also Italian, French and Indian. Western fast food is hugely popular and there are plenty of outlets in Accra and other centres in the south. Most restaurants offer a choice of Western and Ghanaian dishes.

Regardless of where you eat, service is slow – sometimes incredibly frustratingly slow. If you can it's almost always a good idea to order in advance and give an estimate of when you will return. The average wait for food after ordering at almost anywhere but the highest-end place in Accra is 30 minutes. An additional tax of 15% (12.5% for VAT and 2.5% for NHIL) is added to almost every bill.

Drinks

Cold water is sold everywhere in plastic sachets or plastic bags for about C250. The stuff in sachets (called 'pure water') has been filtered, whereas the stuff tied up in plastic bags (called 'ice water') is just ordinary water. Bottled water in 1.5L containers costs around C6000. A delicious home-made ginger ale is sold in some areas. As well as the usual brand-name soft drinks, bottled pure pineapple juice is available in some places. Generally, though, fresh fruit juice is difficult to find and expensive compared with the bottled drinks. Ghanaian tea is drunk from a huge mug with lots of evaporated milk and heaps of sugar.

Bars in Ghana are often referred to as a 'spot'. Decent, locally made beer is widely available. Popular brands include Star, Club, Gulder and Guinness.

Among home-brew alcoholic drinks, *pito* (millet beer) is the drink of choice in the north. Palm wine, which is more subtle, is the preferred tittle in the south. 'Tap before seven, drink before eleven' is the local saying. As the day grows older the wine becomes less refreshing, more sour – and more seriously alcoholic. *Akpeteshie* is a fiery local spirit.

ACCRA

☎ 021 / pop 2 million

Nobody loves Accra. Much like family, it's sometimes only best appreciated at a distance or after a long separation. With its back mostly turned to the Gulf of Guinea, taking little advantage of its waterfront location, Accra crawls up and over a modern landscape, gobbling up real estate and producing a chaotic lowrise skyline. As the writer Ryszard Kapuscinski wrote in *The Shadow of the Sun* (2001), it's like an 'overgrown small town that has reproduced itself many times over'. Originally a scattering of villages controlled by Ga chiefs, today it's a sprawling city that extends eastwards almost 25km to the neighbouring city of Tema. Its congested and pockmarked sidewalks, baking streets that in the midday heat can make a block feel like a kilometre, shanty towns and genteel leafy suburbia, chop bars and gourmet restaurants, hiplife and highlife, combine to make Accra at once exhausting and exhilarating.

ORIENTATION

The centre of Accra is bounded by a semi-circular road called Ring Rd West, Ring Rd Central and Ring Rd East. Its four major circles and interchanges are, from west to east, Lamptey, Nkrumah, Sankara and Danquah. Accra's jam-packed commercial heart is Makola Market. South of Makola, High St runs along the seafloor. West of the city centre are the shantytown areas of James Town and Ussher Town, bordered by Korle Lagoon. East of the city centre is the beachside suburb of La. North of Makola, the commercial district extends along Nkrumah Ave and Kojo Thompson Rd, two parallel north-south highways that connect High St with the Nkrumah Circle area. The district of Adabraka, south of Nkrumah Circle, is where you'll find budget hotels and inexpensive bars and restaurants. East of Adabraka, the leafy residential areas of Asylum Down and North Ridge have some good accommodation options, and this area is another popular base for travellers. Easily Accra's most happening area is Osu, south of Danquah Circle, which has lots of fast-food joints, restaurants, Internet centres and more expensive hotels. On the northern and eastern side of Ring Rd East are the upmarket residential areas of Cantonments, Labone and Airport, with embassies and upmarket hotels.

MAPS

The best map available outside Ghana is a 1:750,000 version of the country produced by International Travel Maps of Vancouver, Canada. In Accra, the Survey Offices (Giffard Rd) produces a series of four 1:500,000 maps (C65,000 each) that cover the entire country. Other maps available in Ghana include the KLM-Shell map (C80,000) with Accra on one side and, on the other, a rather out-of-date but adequate map of Ghana, and there's also the Tourist Map of Ghana (C80,000), which makes a nice souvenir. Both maps are available from bookshops at the major hotels and from the tourist office in Accra.

INFORMATION Bookshops

The University of Ghana in Legon (p353) has an excellent bookshop, although Accra traffic means it's a hassle to get there. A limited selection of foreign paperback novels, books on Ghana, magazines and newspapers

INFORMATION

- 37 Military Hospital.....1 C2
- Accra North Post Office.....(see 31)
- Alliance Française.....3 E1
- American Embassy.....31 E3
- (Administration).....4 E3
- Australian High Commission.....5 E3
- Beninese Embassy.....6 E2
- British High Commission.....7 D3
- Canadian High Commission.....8 D3
- Dutch Embassy.....9 D3
- EPP Books.....10 F3
- Experttravel & Tours.....(see 20)
- French Embassy.....11 D2
- Guinean Embassy.....12 E3
- Immigration Office (Visa Extensions).....13 D3
- Japanese Embassy.....14 E3
- Korle Bu Teaching Hospital.....15 B4
- Liberian Embassy.....16 E1
- Nigerian Embassy.....17 E3
- North Ridge Clinic.....18 D3
- Orion X.....20 E3
- Pavilion X.....(see 31)
- Standard Chartered Bank.....21 D3
- Togolese Embassy.....22 E3
- WEB Du Bois Memorial Centre for Pan African Culture.....23 E2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Osu Castle.....24 D4
- Timber Market.....25 C4

SLEEPING

- Hotel Shangri-La.....26 F1
- La Palm Royal Beach Hotel.....27 F4
- Labadi Beach Hotel.....28 F4

DRINKING

- Jazz Tone.....29 E1

ENTERTAINMENT

- Ghana Film Institute.....30 D2

SHOPPING

- Aid to Artisans Ghana (ATAG).....(see 31)
- House of Nyak.....(see 31)
- Kaneshie Market.....(see 33)
- Trade Fair Centre.....31 E3

TRANSPORT

- Hertz.....32 E2
- Kaneshie Motor Park.....32 B2
- KLM Office.....(see 19)
- VaneSTC Bus Station (Main Terminal).....34 C3
- Virgin Nigeria.....(see 27)

are available at bookshops at upmarket hotels and supermarkets in Osu.

Books for Less (Map p345; 17th Lane, Osu) Large selection of second-hand novels.

Cosmopolitan Books for Less (Map p345; 11th Lane, Osu) English-language paperback novels.

EPP Books (Map p340; Burma Camp Rd, Labadi) Random selection of non-fiction and novels and books on Ghana; opposite the Trade Fair.

Omari Bookshop (Map p340; Ring Rd East) Interesting books on Ghana plus a limited range of fiction.

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française (Map p340; ☎ 773134; alliance@ghana.com; Liberation Link, Airport Residential Area) Lectures and cultural events.

British Council (Map p342; ☎ 244744; Liberia Rd; www.britishcouncil.org/ghana) Air-con library open to the public. English newspapers and magazines, and lectures and cultural events.

Public Affairs Section, US Embassy (Map p342; ☎ 229179; African Liberation Sq) Off Independence Ave.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 193)

Fire (☎ 192)

Police (☎ 191)

Internet Access

All of the top-end hotels have small business centres but charge ridiculously high rates for Internet, usually around C2500 per minute. Several have wi-fi across, including the La Palm Royal Beach Hotel for US\$10 per day.

Busy Internet (Map p342; Ring Rd, Asylum Down; per hr C10,000; ☎ 24hr) Everything is modern and hi-tech at this popular and hip Internet cafe and entertainment centre.

Internet Café (Map p342) Across from the White Bell restaurant, on the left. There's another Internet Café on the second floor of a building across the street, on Akasanaoma Rd.

Mega Internet (Map p342; Ring Rd, Asylum Down; per hr C10,000; ☎ 4.30am-1.30am) Flat-screen computers, all office-related services.

Pavilion X (Map p340; ATAG complex, Trade Fair Centre) Modern office centre with high-speed Internet and flat-screen computers.

Osu Internet Café (Map p345; Mission St, Osu; per hr C7000; ☎ 24hr)

Sharpnet (Map p345; Ring Rd East, Osu; per hr C10,000; ☎ 24hr) Flat-screen computers, all office-related services.

Laundry

Public laundromats are few and far between. Midrange and top-end hotels tend to charge exorbitant rates. It's best to ask at a budget

hotel, where three kilos can be washed, dried and ironed for around C40,000.

Media

No Worries! The Indispensable Insiders' Guide to Accra, published by the North American Women's Association, is a mine of practical information about Accra. It's available from upmarket hotels and major supermarkets, though at C300,000 it's obviously geared towards resident expats.

Medical Services

Ask your embassy for a list of recommended doctors and specialists. The main public hospitals in Accra are included here. Pharmacies are everywhere, or try the supermarkets in Osu.

37 Military Hospital (Map p340; ☎ 776111; Liberation Ave) Near 37 Circle, recommended for traumatic injuries.

Korle Bu Teaching Hospital (Map p340; ☎ 665401; Guggisberg Ave, Korle Bu)

North Ridge Clinic (Map p340; ☎ 227328, 024-355366; Ring Rd Central) Near the KLM office at the eastern end of Ring Rd Central.

Ridge Hospital (Map p342; ☎ 228382; Castle Rd)

Trust Hospital (Map p345; ☎ 776787; Cantonments Rd, Osu) Recommended private hospital where you can see a general practitioner. Also has a laboratory if you need a medical test.

Money

The head offices of Barclays and Standard Chartered are both on High St and there are several branches, including one on Nkrumah Ave in Adabraka and Cantonments Rd in Osu. All the branches have ATMs. There is also a plethora of forexes around town, especially in the area around Makola Market and off Kojo Thompson Rd in Adabraka and along Cantonments Rd in Osu.

Afro Wings Ltd (Map p342; Farrar Ave) In the Trust Towers complex. Amex representative.

Forbes Forex Bureau (Map p345; Cantonment Rd, Osu)

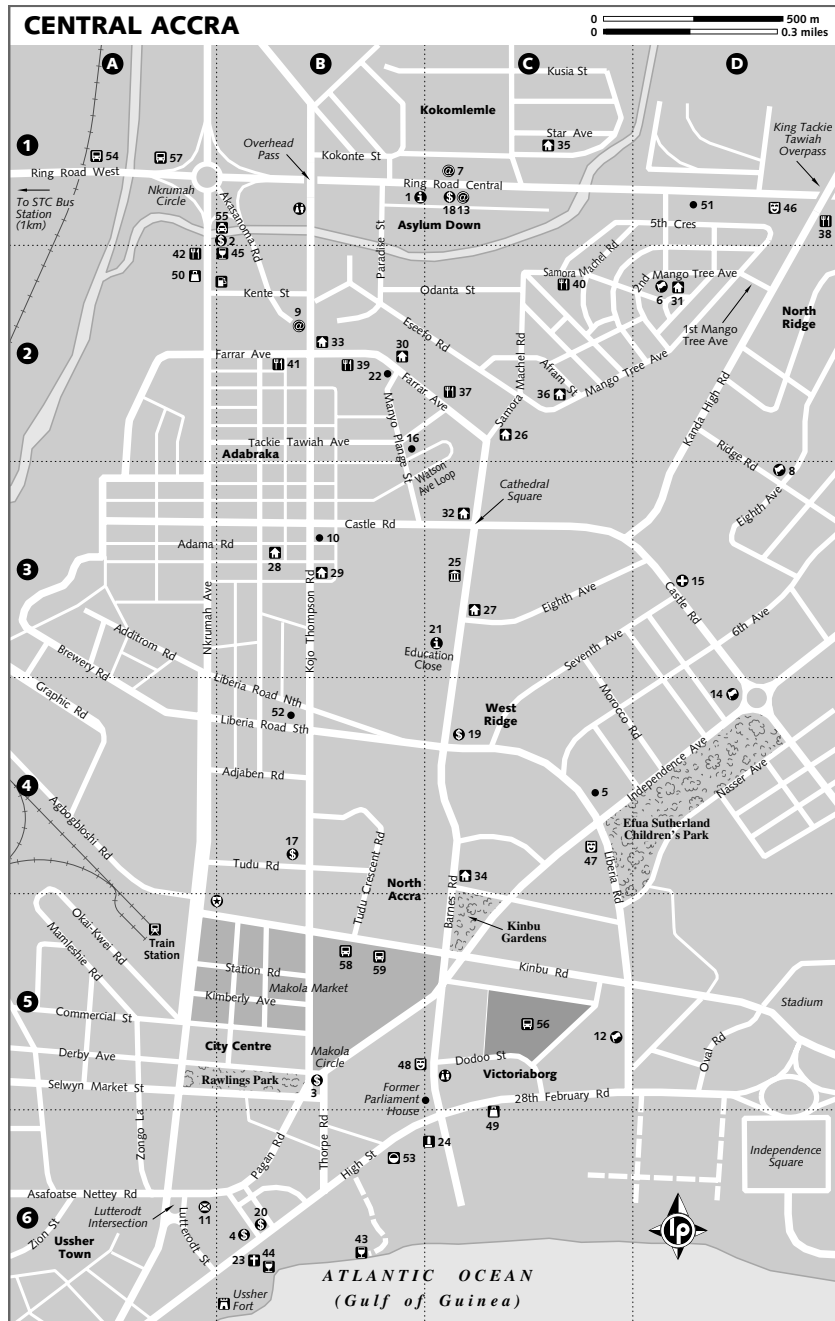
Jibrin Forex Bureau (Map p342; Kojo Thompson Ave, Adabraka)

Star Forex Bureau (Map p342; High St) For whatever reason this place in the entrance to the Centre for National Culture has some of the best rates in town.

Post

Accra North post office (Map p340; Nsawam Rd) Just north of Nkrumah Circle.

Main post office (Map p342; Ussher Town) On the Lutterodt intersection.



INFORMATION		Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park		DRINKING	
Accra Visitor's Centre	1 B1	Park	24 C6	Akuma Village	43 B6
Afro Wings Ltd	(see 37)	National Museum	25 C3	Champs Sports Bar	(see 35)
Barclays Bank	2 B1			Osekan	44 B6
Barclays Bank	3 B5	SLEEPING		Vienna City Entertainment Complex	45 B2
Barclays Bank (Head Office)	4 B6	Beverly Hills Hotel	26 C2		
British Council	5 C4	Calvary Methodist Church Guesthouse	27 C3	ENTERTAINMENT	
Burkina Faso Embassy	6 D2	Date Hotel	28 B3	Bass Line	46 D1
Busy Internet	7 C1	Hotel Avenida	29 B3	National Theatre	47 C4
Doscar Travel & Tours	(see 38)	Hotel President	30 B2	Rex Cinema	48 B5
German Embassy	8 D3	Korkdam Hotel	31 D2		
Internet Café	9 B2	Millenium Guesthouse	32 C3	SHOPPING	
Jibrin Forex Bureau	10 B3	Niagara Hotel	33 B2	Centre for National Culture	49 C6
Main Post Office	11 A6	Novotel Hotel	34 C4	Loom	50 A2
Malian Embassy	12 C5	Paloma Hotel & Restaurant	35 C1		
Mega Internet	13 C1	Times Square Lodge	36 C2	TRANSPORT	
Public Affairs (US Embassy)	14 D4			Alitalia Office	51 D1
Ridge Hospital	15 D3			Avis	(see 16)
Speedway Travel & Tours	16 B2	EATING		British Airways Office	52 B4
Standard Chartered Bank	17 B4	Choos Eatery	37 C2	Europcar	(see 34)
Standard Chartered Bank	18 C1	Edvy Restaurant	(see 25)	Labadi Lorry Station	53 B6
Standard Chartered Bank (Head Office)	19 C4	Le Petit Paris	38 D1	Neoplan Motor Park	54 A1
Star Forex Bureau	(see 49)	Orangery	39 B2	Taxi Station (for La, Osu & Airport)	55 B1
Tourist Office	21 C3	Spicy Chicken	40 C2	Tema Station	56 C5
WB Travel & Tours	22 B2	Trafix Courtyard Restaurant	(see 47)	Tro-Tro Park	57 A1
		White Bell	41 B2	Tudu Bus Station	58 B5
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Wok Inn	42 A2	VaneSTC Bus Station (to Ho and Aflao)	59 B5
Holy Trinity Cathedral	23 B6				

Telephone

There are plenty of card phones for direct dialling and every street corner seems to have a communication centre, but it's probably more convenient and cheaper (if you're calling within the country) to visit one of the informal calling tables – literally a phone on a table – that are everywhere.

Tourist Information

Accra Visitor's Centre (Map p342; ☎ 252186; bentsifi@ighmail.com) Near Mega Internet on Ring Rd Central. Has maps, and is reasonably helpful.

Tourist information counter (☎ 776171 ext 1314; Airport) A small counter in the international arrivals hall at the airport.

Tourist office (Map p342; ☎ 231817; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) This is 50m down Education Close, off Barnes Rd. Some leaflets are free, others are for sale. Can't help with lots of practical information.

Travel Agencies

Doscar Travel & Tours (Map p342; ☎ 239229; fax 248328; Sedco House, 5 Tabon St) Next to Le Petit Paris Café.

Experttravel & Tours (Map p342; ☎ 775498; fax 773937; Ring Rd East)

M&J Travel & Tours (Map p345; ☎ 773153; fax 774338; 11th Lane, Osu)

Speedway Travel & Tours (Map p342; ☎ 227744; fax 228799; Tackie Tawiah Ave)

WB Travel & Tours (Map p342; ☎ 245900; wbtravel@wwwplus.com; 29 Farrar Ave) Opposite Hotel President.

Visa Extensions

Immigration office (Map p340; ☎ 221667 ext 215; 🕒 8.30am-noon for applications) Near the Sankara interchange. You need two photos, a letter stating why you need an extension, and an onward ticket out of Ghana. Your passport is retained for the two weeks it takes to process the application.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Accra is not plagued by crime and in fact it is generally a safe city to visit. The biggest hazard you'll face as a pedestrian is making sure you don't step off the curb into a ditch or a sewer or another hazard that will cause an ankle sprain. When crossing the street, look both ways several times and keep an eye out for taxis and tro-tros being driven like Formula One race cars.

As in any big city, it makes sense to take the usual precautions against pickpockets, especially in busy areas such as the markets and bus stations. Other areas that it's worth taking care around are Independence Square, James Town and Nkrumah Circle. Petty theft and even the occasional mugging are real possibilities at some of the area

GHANA

GHANA

beaches, where you should avoid solitary strolls after dark.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

National Museum

This gently decaying **museum** (Map p342; ☎ 221633; Barnes Rd; adult/student C20,000/45,000; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun), set in shady grounds, has interesting displays on various aspects of Ghanaian culture and history. The displays on royal stools, state umbrellas, swords and linguist's staffs (*akyeamepoma*) are enlightening. There is some fine brass work, including weights used by Ashanti goldsmiths for measuring gold and the spoons they used for loading the scales with gold dust. There are informative displays explaining local iron-smelting techniques, the lost-wax method for casting metal sculptures and how glass beads are made. Smaller displays feature masks, drums, wooden statues and the artifacts of other African cultures, such as the Baoulé and Senoufo peoples.

In the museum grounds is a shady open-air restaurant (see p349).

Makola Market

There is no front door or welcoming sign to Accra's central market. It's a gradual transition from the usual sidewalks clogged with vendors hawking shoes and second-hand clothes to the market itself, which only becomes obvious once you can't take a step without tripping over a pile of Chinese-made locks or tube socks and you're sucked into the vortex of the swirling crowds. The food vendors have some of the most fascinating displays – pungent-smelling smoked fish, mountains of bread, painstakingly arranged piles of tomatoes and shallots, pyramids of rice, maize and millet, roast plantain and vast arrays of sweets, toffees and chewing gum. It's an intense – and perfectly safe – introduction into Ghanaian street life which by its sheer chaos forces you to keep your eyes, ears and even nose open and always aware. The goods sold here are for everyday household use and run the gamut from portable radios to underwire bras.

Independence Square & Osu Castle

As a symbol of a young country's ambitions, grandiose architectural follies are fairly common. **Independence (Black Star Square)** (Map p340) is exceptional only in

that there must be a better use of a large swath of beachfront property than a vast, baking expanse of concrete dominated by a ginormous McDonalds-like arch beneath which the Eternal Flame of African Liberation, lit by Nkrumah, still flickers. Opposite the arch, in the square, is the memorial to the Unknown Soldier.

The square can hold 30,000 people but it's almost always empty except for a sleeping guard or two who, if woken, may hit you up for some cedis. It marks the spot where, in colonial times, three ex-servicemen were shot while attempting to present grievances to the governor in a peaceful demonstration.

From the square, looking east along the coast towards La, you can see **Osu Castle** (Map p340). Built by the Danes around 1659 and originally called Christiansborg Castle, it's now the seat of government and is off limits to the public.

Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park

Pointing the way forward with arm outstretched, towering over a huge marble pile, is an effigy of Kwame Nkrumah, the founder of Ghana. About 250m west of the Arts Centre is this **park** (Map p342; High St; ☎ 10am-6pm) and final resting place laid out in the early 1990s as a gesture of rehabilitation. With the playing fountains, the swath of grass and the twin ranks of musicians at his feet, it's all on the monumental scale that he favoured and would have appreciated. There's also a small air-conditioned museum, with photos and artefacts from Nkrumah's life.

James Town & Ussher Town

The residents of James Town and Ussher Town, two of the oldest neighbourhoods in Accra, don't live in conditions remarkably different from those anywhere else in the city. However, because it's fairly concentrated and walkable it's a chance to witness how ordinary Ghanaians go about their everyday lives.

These aren't shantytowns like you'd find in Johannesburg or Nairobi, but the people are undoubtedly poor and it may feel uncomfortably voyeuristic just walking around on your own. While this is probably safe enough, it's recommended that you find a local to take you around to find the more interesting spots and because it's easy enough

to lose your way – negotiate a fee in advance. You should generally ask for permission before photographing people.

There are several boxing gyms – really nothing more than a makeshift ring in a concrete patio – that have nurtured a long line of neighbourhood kids who have become champions. For a great view of the city and the busy and colourful fishing harbour (haze and pollution permitting), climb to the top of the old **lighthouse** (Map p340; admission C3000) near James Fort.

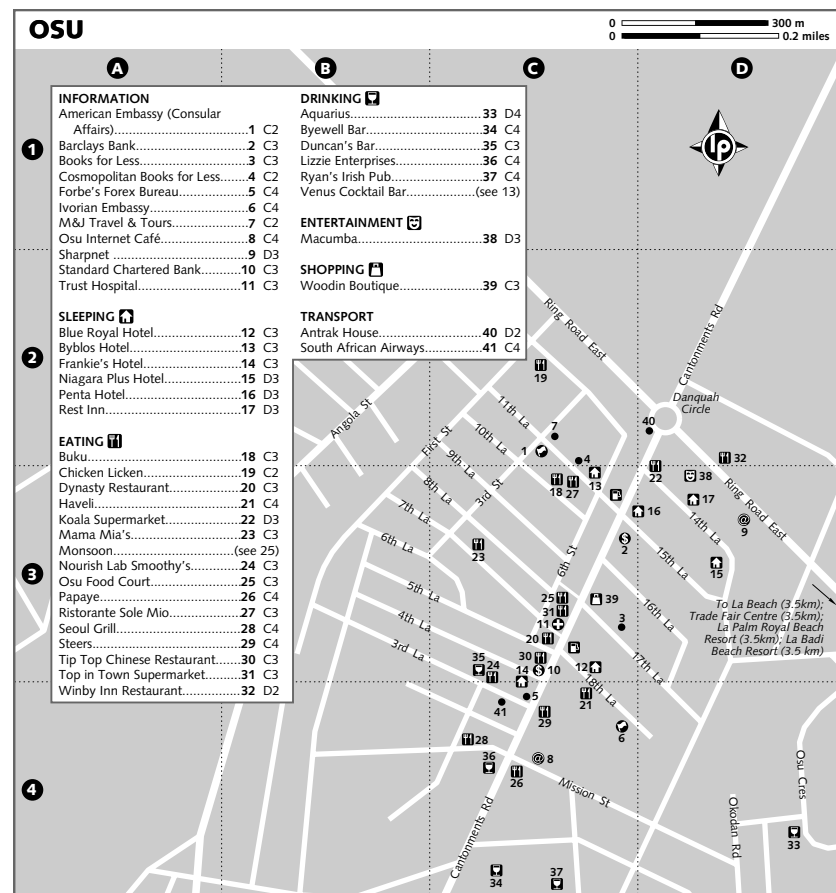
If you're walking back to the centre along Cleland Rd, which becomes High St, you could take a detour along Hansen Rd to see the **Timber Market** (Map p340; it's hard to find so you'll need to ask someone to

show you where it is). The fetish section is fascinating, with its animal skulls, live and dead reptiles, strange powders, charms, bells, shakers, leopard skins, teeth, porcupine quills and juju figurines.

Head on to the Holy Trinity Cathedral, opposite Barclays on High St, which has a shady garden and, inside, a magnificent wooden barrel-vaulted roof.

WEB Du Bois Memorial Centre for Pan African Culture

Dr Du Bois was an academic who championed civil rights and African unity. Towards the end of his life, he was invited to Ghana by Kwame Nkrumah to begin work on an encyclopaedia of Pan-Africanism.



This **centre** (Map p340; ☎ 776502; 1st Circular Rd, Cantonments; adult/child C20,000/10,000; 🕒 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri), where Du Bois spent the last two years of his life, houses a research library for students of Pan-Africanism and memorabilia from his life, including a photographic display of leading black personalities and political leaders. In the grounds is the burial place of Du Bois and his wife, built in the form of a traditional chief's compound.

Beaches

It's easy to forget that Accra includes kilometres of oceanfront real estate. While most is rocky and undeveloped, there are several sandy beaches. **La Pleasure Beach** (Map p340; admission C20,000), also known as Labadi Beach, is about 8km east of central Accra and easily reached by public transport. The well-guarded entrance is at the end of a short dirt track off the main road, just before the Labadi Beach Hotel. There's a lifeguard, as well as a few beachside eateries. Unfortunately since the swimming area is so narrow it's a little like fighting your way through a rugby scrum just to reach the water on weekends. Take a shared taxi or tro-tro (C1500) from Tema station, Nkrumah Circle, any of the stops along Ring Rd Central or Labadi lorry park on High St. Alternatively, charter a taxi for about C25,000.

At Coco Beach, about 7km further east towards Nungua, access to the beach is free or you can base yourself at the **New Coco Beach Hotel** (☎ 717237), which has a swimming pool, bar and restaurant and overlooks the shore. Take a taxi or tro-tro to Nungua and walk (about 20 minutes) or charter a taxi for the whole way.

SLEEPING

Most of the budget accommodation in the city isn't especially good value, though what you will find of it is generally clustered off Kwame Nkrumah and Kojo Thompson Rds in Adabraka. A few of the better-value hotels are on or near Farrar Ave in Asylum Down. While Osu is the most convenient place to base yourself, rooms there are US\$40 and up and aren't especially luxurious. There are several nice, business-style hotels near the airport. The closest you can get to beach or resort-style accommodation are the two top-end hotels at La Beach while the Novotel is the nicest place to stay in the city centre.

Adabraka

BUDGET

Date Hotel (Map p342; ☎ 228200; Adama Rd, Adabraka; r from C80,000) A long time favourite with budget travellers the Date Hotel is coasting on a now undeserved reputation. It's not so tranquil since the concrete courtyard is a drinking spot during the day and the fan rooms are bare-bare bones. Bring your own bath towel.

MIDRANGE

Calvary Methodist Church Guesthouse (Map p342; ☎ 234507; Barnes Rd, West Ridge; s/d C220,000; 📞 📺) Even the uneclesiastically inclined will find the rooms on the top floor of a building in this compound divine for the price. Each of the six rooms are spotless and modern and have small balconies.

Millennium Guesthouse (Map p342; ☎ 226738; r with shared/private bathroom C172,000/322,000; 📞 📺 📞) A small step down in value from the Calvary Methodist just down the street, the Millennium is on the grounds of the prominent cathedral of the same name. There are many more rooms here and they are equally well kept.

Hotel President (Map p342; ☎ 223343; Farrar Ave, Adabraka; r with fan/air-con from C140,000/180,000; 📞 📺) Despite a grandiose name and a convenient location, this purple multistorey hotel isn't fit for a head of state though less exalted people will find the quality of the rooms good – for Accra. The carpeting is a little ratty, there may be some wall crumbling, and there are no top sheets, but there is a front desk that will respond to problems – in time – and the air-con rooms are quite large.

Beverly Hills Hotel (Map p342; ☎ 224042; r C300,000; 📞 📺) More like down and out in Beverly Hills; you won't mistake this centrally located hotel for the Four Seasons, though its rooms are large and the furnishings are comfortable if mismatched. There's a pleasant courtyard restaurant out front.

Hotel Avenida (Map p342; ☎ 221354; 94 Koko Thompson Rd; r with fan/air-con C146,000/183,000; 📞 📺) The Avenida looks enticing from the outside, but is empty and a little dirty inside. The carpeted rooms are run down, the mattresses too soft, and the showers usually involve buckets. Last but not least, there's nothing really within convenient walking distance. But as far as Accra goes it's not bad for the price.

TOP END

Paloma Hotel (Map p342; ☎ 228700; paloma@africaonline.com.gh; Ring Rd Central; s/d US\$50/70; 📞 📺) A rare find in Accra, the Paloma pays attention to the details and the attractive rooms are simple but tastefully furnished. It's part of a complex popular with expats that includes a restaurant, courtyard café and bar (see p350). Well located for tro-tros to Osu or the city centre, on the northern side of busy Ring Rd Central.

Niagara Hotel (Map p342; ☎ 230118; fax 230119; Kojo Thompson Rd, Adabraka; s/d US\$66/88; 📞 📺) The plush leather couches in the lobby promise so much, but the rooms are a little disappointing at this price. While they're large and comfortable and have a painting or two they're a little frayed at the edges. On the hectic corner of Farrar and Kojo Thompson Rds. Offers car-hire services and has a good Lebanese restaurant.

Osu

MIDRANGE

Rest Inn (Map p345; ☎ 785543; www.therestinn.com; 14th Lane; r US\$45; 📞 📺) As far as Osu goes, this is as good value as you'll find. Right around the corner from the Koala supermarket, and behind the art gallery in front, are several small, clean and modern rooms.

Niagara Plus Hotel (Map p345; ☎ 772428; 14th Lane; s/d C460,000/598,000; 📞 📺) Under the same management as the Niagara in Adabraka, this friendly hotel is down a quiet lane about 200m from Cantonments Rd. Rooms are large and comfortable in this especially attractive whitewashed villa with a cobblestone courtyard.

Frankie's Hotel (Map p345; ☎ 773567; www.frankies-ghana.com; Cantonments Rd; s/d US\$65/85; 📞 📺 📞) Above the excellent eatery of the same name, Frankie's has little atmosphere though everything is immaculate, including the basic, modern rooms.

Blue Royal Hotel (Map p345; ☎ 783075; 18th Lane; s/d from US\$60/70; 📞 📺) The African paintings and crafts signals some attempt at decoration, which is rare thing indeed in Ghana. The rooms are modern and clean but still seems a tad overpriced. Has a third floor restaurant and bar.

Penta Hotel (Map p345; ☎ 774529; Cantonment Rd; s/d US\$60/70; 📞 📺) This hotel in the heart of the Osu craziness is professionally run though at the expense of warmth or char-

acter. The small, modern rooms aren't especially good value. Tycoon restaurant and Hemingway's Bar attached.

Byblos Hotel (Map p345; ☎ 782250; byblos.hotels@hotmail.com; 11th Lane; s/d US\$50/60; 📞 📺) The Byblos attracts a loyal following as much for the Venus cocktail bar attached to it as for its simple but clean rooms with cable and good TVs.

Asylum Down & North Ridge

BUDGET

Times Square Lodge (Map p342; ☎ 222694; cnr Mango Tree Ave & Afram Rd, Asylum Down; c D200,000; 📞) You might have to wake the front-desk staff and you might have to switch rooms till you find one with adequate water pressure and lights that work, but other than that this hotel in a quiet residential area is an adequate first-night choice.

Korkdam Hotel (Map p342; ☎ 226797; korkdam@africaonline; 2nd Mango Tree Ave, Asylum Down; s/d with fan C115,000/185,000, r with air-con C250,000; 📞) A slightly better choice than the next-door Lemon Lodge, the rooms are run down and the water pressure is lousy. Only a thin wall separates your cell from your neighbour's.

MIDRANGE

North Ridge Hotel (☎ 225809; nrhotel@hotmail.com.gh; s/d US\$50/60; 📞 📺) Easily the best value in this price range in the neighbourhood, the friendly North Ridge is a large building on a quiet residential street. The tile-floored rooms have some character even though the furniture is old.

City Centre, Airport Area & Elsewhere

TOP END

La Palm Royal Beach Hotel (Map p340; ☎ 771700; www.gbhghana.com; La Beach; r US\$200-350; 📞 📺 📞) God forbid there should ever be a disaster in Accra, but if there were everyone would probably go to the La Palm. A little like a city-state unto itself, complete with large conference centre, casino, several restaurants, a pool complex (the nicest in the city), a lounge with a big-screen TV, an ice-cream shop etc, almost every expat in town on the weekend heads here at some point. There are rooms of varying size and quality.

Novotel Hotel (Map p342; ☎ 667546; www.novotel.com; Barnes Rd, Accra North; r from US\$158; 📞 📺 📞) Stepping into the Novotel, is like crossing the threshold into another world. Right in the

crazy, chaotic heart of the city, it's a refuge of modernity and quiet, worth a stop at the pool or café if only to break up a day of sightseeing. All the rooms are modern and up to business-class quality; be sure to ask for one with a view.

Labadi Beach Hotel (Map p340; ☎ 772501; www.labadibeach.com; Labadi Bypass, La; s/d US\$185/200; 📶 📺 📺 📺) Queen Elizabeth and Tony Blair stayed here. That should be enough to guarantee a certain level of comfort, and the rooms here are a little more sumptuous than those at La Palm, though the pool area isn't as nice. It does have direct beach access and more old-world character than others in this price range.

Hotel Shangri-La (Map p340; ☎ 762590; www.shangri-la.gh.com; Liberation Ave, Airport Residential Area; r from US\$85; 📶 📺 📺 📺) Unless you have an early flight to catch there isn't much reason to stay out here past the airport. The low-slung Shangri-La does have a following with Ghanaians, and is decorated with traditional crafts, but it's looking a little worse for wear. The basic, bungalow rooms are set in a garden as is a nice swimming pool (nonguests C35,000). There is a restaurant and café.

Coco Beach

MIDRANGE

Akwaaba Beach Guesthouse (☎ 717742; www.akwaaba-beach.de; Nungua; r incl breakfast from US\$50; 📶 📺 📺) It's easy to forget you're only around 15km east of Accra at this wonderfully tranquil place with private beach access. The Akwaaba looks a little like a Mediterranean-style villa and has seven bright and attractive rooms. The spectacular penthouse studio is great value (US\$80).

New Coco Beach Hotel (☎ 717237; newcoco.beach@yahoo.com; Nungua; s/d US\$70/90; 📶 📺) This internationally owned hotel can't compete with the Akwaaba's charm and is standard and institutional where the former is creative and personal. Facilities include a gym and a swimming pool.

EATING

Accra has the best choice of restaurants in the country, and the food will seem like *haute cuisine* if you're returning to the city after time spent elsewhere in Ghana. Cedi savers can eat cheaply at chop bars and food stalls, especially around the transport terminals and major circles such as Nkrumah

and Danquah. Several good, inexpensive restaurants are on Farrar Ave in Asylum Down. Osu is China Town, Little Italy and your mall food court rolled into one long clogged road. Some of the upmarket restaurants where you'll spend at least C80,000 are found off the main road, down one of the residential streets.

Most of the midrange and all of the top-end hotels have restaurants and are especially recommended for breakfast splurges. The Ghanaian Village and Bali Hai at the La Palm Royal Beach Hotel deserve special mention.

If you're self-catering, for basic provisions such as biscuits, bread, margarine, bananas, tinned sardines and baked beans, there are plenty of food stalls and small shops around town. For imported goods, the supermarkets in Osu are best, especially **Koala Supermarket** (Map p345; Cantonments Rd), which might as well be called 'expat central', just off Danquah Circle at the top of Cantonments Rd. **Top in Town Supermarket** (Map p345; Cantonments Rd) is another.

Adabraka

Orangery (Map p342; Farrar Ave; mains C25,000-75,000) Part furniture shop, part charming restaurant, the Orangery is definitely the best restaurant in the neighbourhood. It's a pretty-looking place decorated with potted plants and specialising in sweet and savoury pancakes, muffins, waffles, and crepes. Non-breakfast specialities include moussaka (C45,000) and seafood bouillabaisse (C75,000). The curious can try the peanut-butter soup (C25,000).

White Bell (Map p342; Farrar Ave; mains C35,000) The 2nd-floor dining area catches some cooling breezes and is deservedly popular with those staying in the area. The White Bell serves up burgers, sandwiches and chicken and rice dishes. Music and dancing in the evening.

Choo's Eatery (Map p342; 2nd fl, Trust Bldg, Farrar Ave; mains C30,000) There aren't many eating options within walking distance of Adabraka and Asylum Down hotels, and Choo's is one of the better ones. Mostly a lunch spot for local business people, the open-air dining area gets a cool breeze and it has a large selection of Ghanaian dishes and burgers too (C20,000). There's a bar as well.

Wok Inn (Map p342; Nkrumah Ave; mains C35,000) Mostly a takeout place, this Chinese restau-

rant with an extensive menu of meat and noodle dishes a block from Nkrumah circle does have a small air-con dining room.

Edvy Restaurant (Map p342; Barnes Rd; mains C30,000; ☎ 9am-4pm) For a post-museum bite, sit at one of the trellis-covered tables in the grounds of the National Museum. The menu is a small selection of Ghanaian basics.

Trafix Courtyard Restaurant (Map p342; Independence Ave; mains C30,000) An outdoor eatery within the National Theatre complex grounds, Trafix gets lots of traffic at lunchtime. There's a selection of Ghanaian, Chinese and Western dishes.

Osu

Monsoon (Map p345; ☎ 782307; Oxford St; mains C100,000; 📶) There's few more incongruous locations than above a fast-food court for what could be Accra's most upscale restaurant. The décor is understated fancy, simple white and black and there is a more casual cigar lounge and sushi bar (sushi and sashimi C30,000 to C75,000) attached as well as tables outside on the patio for drinks. The menu includes interesting items like ostrich filet (C90,000), crocodile tail (C130,000) and warthog filet (C120,000). Reservations are recommended weekend nights, and you may get snooty looks if you're dressed for *tro-tros*.

Mama Mia's (Map p345; ☎ 264151; 7th Lane; pizza C65,000-90,000) Expats swear by the pizza here. From this author's own pizza survey of Accra, the thin-crust, wood-oven-cooked pies do indeed come out on top. The pleasant outdoor garden dining area makes everything taste better. Spaghetti and kid-friendly chicken fingers also served.

Buku (Map p345; 10th Lane; mains C35,000-90,000) African food *Bon Appetit* could love. Ghanaian, Nigerian, Togolese and Senegalese specials are lovingly prepared at Buku, where the stylish 2nd-floor open-air dining area is reason alone for coming. Cable TV here gets overseas sports.

Haveli (Map p345; 18th La; mains C50,000-80,000; 📶) There's no bells and whistles and in fact little decoration at this friendly Indian restaurant in the heart of Osu. It has a big menu serving Indian standards, all kinds of naan and good veggie dishes.

Dynasty Restaurant (Map p345; ☎ 775496; Cantonments Rd; mains C55,000-110,000; 📶) A fancy place as far as Accra restaurants go, the

Dynasty specialises in Peking cuisine, but the large menu includes specialities like frog legs (C62,000), lobster (C110,000) sea cucumbers and squid. Dim sum every Sunday afternoon.

Frankie's (Map p345; Cantonments Rd; mains C30,000-60,000) An Accra institution, this well-established place has a takeaway outlet, an ice-cream shop and a bakery and patisserie, while upstairs is an air-con restaurant. You can get burgers, pizzas and fried chicken, as well as salads, baguettes and sandwiches.

Ristorante Sole Mio (Map p345; 11th Lane; mains C70,000; 📶) 'Standard' describes this restaurant well; from the furnishings to the service to the menu of basic Italian fare, Sole Mio does nothing unusually well. The pasta dishes are the kind you make yourself at home but the fish and meat are better choices and there's a selection of wines.

Tip Top Chinese Restaurant (Map p345; Cantonment Rd; mains C35,000) A less expensive alternative to Dynasty, if you're craving Chinese food. Tip Top is in front of the Star World building, and has casual outdoor seating.

Seoul Grill (Map p345; Mission St; mains C60,000-180,000; 📶) One of the few Korean restaurants in Accra, the Seoul Grill does traditional barbeque at the table and sushi and sashimi and noodle dishes as well.

Winby Inn (Map p345; mains C75,000; 📶) This restaurant just off Danquah Circle shares a building with Egypt Air and is fairly elegant indoors, all white tablecloths and dim lighting. You can also eat more informally outside if the heat isn't a bother. The menu is a mix of Lebanese, continental, seafood and Ghanaian dishes, and good pizzas.

Chicken Lickin (Map p345; mains C40,000; 📶) A block from Ring Rd East in one direction and the American Embassy in the other, Winby is a step up from the fast-food joints on Cantonments Rd and is popular with lunching businesspeople. Menu includes chicken dishes, some Lebanese and Ghanaian standards.

Nourish Lab Smoothy's (Map p345; 3rd Lane; smoothies C20,000; ☎ 8am-10pm) In an ideal Accra there'd be a Nourish Lab Smoothy's every several blocks. These refreshing drinks, a combination of fruit and soft yogurt, aren't especially unusual in the US or Europe but throw in the oppressive heat and they're practically addictive here. Also serves iced-coffee drinks, sandwich wraps and salads.

Osu Food Court (Map p345; Cantonments Rd; ☎) A mini mall with Nando's, a South African chain doing spicy Portuguese-style chicken, a coffee shop and bakery, a pizza joint and a couple of fried-chicken places. Sit at the upstairs terrace bar and watch the mayhem in the street below.

Other fast-food options are **Papaye** (Map p345; Cantonments Rd) and **Steers** (Map p345; Cantonments Rd). Papaye provides a takeaway service and features what many claim to be the best charcoal-grilled chicken in Accra.

Asylum Down & North Ridge

Paloma Restaurant (Map p342; Ring Rd Central; mains C50,000; ☎) Part of the hotel and bar complex, the Paloma serves a variety of food, including pizzas, Lebanese and Ghanaian food, and has a garden bar and restaurant area. You can also eat inside in the bare, unlit dining room.

Le Petit Paris (Map p342; Kanda High Rd; croissants C12,000; ☎) An excellent spot for a morning coffee and croissant, Le Petit Paris is a simple bakery selling excellent baked goods. Grab a coffee for a nice sit-down breakfast.

Spicy Chicken (Map p342; Samora Machel Rd, Asylum Down) Fast food and fried chicken.

La & Coco Beach

Next Door Restaurant & Bar (mains C40,000) One of the few places to take advantage of Accra's seaside locale, Next Door is a large, popular place, especially on weekends. It has an eclectic menu but seafood is the speciality. Friday and Saturday nights it's a club with music and dancing. It's off the Tema road about 2km east of Labadi Beach Hotel; any tro-tro heading down this road to Teshie should be able to drop you here, or you can get a taxi.

DRINKING

Most drinking spots in Accra are nothing more than a few plastic tables and a Star beer sign. There's no shortage of these, though more congenial bars are fewer and farther between. Osu has the highest concentration, and includes restaurants that transform into lively bars with music and dancing at night, as well as a number of drinking-only establishments. Several other worthwhile spots are scattered throughout the city and all of the top-end hotels have comfortable and generally subdued bar scenes.

Osekan (Map p342; High St) Those in the know say there's no better place for a beer than Osekan. Spend a sunset nursing a cold Star at one of the cliffside tables and you'll probably agree. Spicy kebabs and other snacks are available. To get here, walk through the large, empty lot, down the steep steps to the bar.

Champs Sports Bar (Map p342; Ring Rd Central; ☎) Part of the Paloma Hotel complex, this expat-friendly pub beams in sports from abroad. Thursday is quiz night, Friday is karaoke night, Saturday is live music night and Sunday movie night. One of the few places that serves Mexican food in Accra.

Bywel Bar (Map p345; Cantonments Rd, Osu) Live music Thursday and Saturday nights transforms this otherwise cool hangout at the southern end of Cantonments Rd into a fun party.

Ryan's Irish Pub (Map p345; Osu; ☎) More Irish pub than an Irish pub, this large green-and-yellow colonial building off Cantonments Rd in the south of Osu serves draught Guinness and hearty food like ostrich filet (C80,000) and Irish beef stew (C60,000). Live music at the weekends.

Venus Cocktail Bar (Map p345; 11th Lane, Osu) This spot with a nice little bamboo bar, attached to the Byblos Hotel, is popular with Peace Corps types and other long-term volunteers.

Duncan's Bar (Map p345; 3rd Lane, Osu) Nothing more than a few plastic tables out on the street, Duncan's is nevertheless a popular drinking spot with locals.

Lizzie Enterprises Bar (Map p345; Cantonments Rd) While the name is more suitable for a massage parlour or a mechanics than a bar, Lizzie is just that and only that, at about a half-block of plastic tables.

Akuma Village (Map p342) A better drinking spot than hotel, the Akuma has ocean views, cool breezes and cheap beer. Live music Friday nights.

Aquarius (Map p345; Osu Crescent, Osu) This place is tucked down one of Osu's winding residential streets, and has German beer on tap, German food on the menu and pub games like pool, pinball and darts.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

Accra is Ghana's biggest city and the birthplace of highlife, hiplife and other hybrid music genres, so it's not surprising there's a lively club scene. Thursday, Friday and

Saturday are the big nights and although clubs open from about 8pm, the action rarely starts before 10pm or 11pm. Osu is where most of the trendiest clubs are but there are also some popular, inexpensive places around Nkrumah Circle. Most clubs have a cover charge.

Jazz Tone (Map p340; Third Close, Airport Residential Area) A popular place with good live jazz music.

Indigo (Map p345; Ring Rd East) Near Danquah Circle, this stylish place is housed in an old embassy building and attracts Accra's trendsetters. Friday and Saturday are the best nights.

Macumba (Map p345; Ring Rd East) One of Accra's nightlife institutions, Macumba is just off Danquah Circle and is popular with European discophiles.

Bass Line (Map p342; Ring Rd Central) Another good hip jazz club, the Bass Line just west of Kanda High Rd, gets smoky and stays open late.

Vienna City Entertainment Complex (Map p342; Kwame Nkrumah Ave) A massive bar, game room, and club in the heart of Adabraka near Nkrumah Circle.

Cinema

Every Tuesday is movie night at the Alliance Française (p341).

Surprisingly, one of the nicest places to watch a movie in Accra is the Busy Internet Café (p341), which shows recent Hollywood releases Thursday through Sunday nights from 6pm to 10.30pm. Champs Sports Bar (opposite) shows films on Sunday nights.

The **Ghana Film Institute** (Map p340; ☎ 763462), across from the French embassy, shows the latest Ghanaian films and foreign releases nightly, and the **Rex Cinema** (Map p342; Barnes Rd) shows recent Western films in English in the city centre.

Theatre

The Chinese-built **National Theatre** (Map p342; ☎ 666986; Liberia Rd) looks like the base for an enormous eternal flame. There are performances by West African playwrights – check the billboards for future activities. One regular weekly event is the Saturday afternoon Concert Party, a Ghanaian music hall or vaudeville, with sketches, songs and stand-up comedians. Even if you don't understand Twi, Twi humour needs no translation.

The British Council also offers regular concerts and exhibitions.

On Thursday to Sunday afternoons performances are often held at the Centre for National Culture (Arts Centre; below), including music, drumming, traditional dance and theatre. Check the chalkboard at the main entrance for what's on.

SHOPPING

The **Centre for National Culture** (Map p342; Arts Centre; ☎ 664099; 28th February Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm), a warren of stalls selling arts and crafts and known simply as the Arts Centre, is the place to shop in Accra and the most visited site in the country. Once you step on the grounds the level of aggressive hassling may make you want to keep your cedis in your pocket. If you don't mind the grabbing and the constant importuning calls to 'just have a look' and have the patience and wherewithal to bargain after the initial absurd offer, you can come away with good-quality handicrafts from all over Ghana, including batik, kente and other fabrics, beads, masks, woodcarvings, drums, brass and leatherwork. There's talk of altering the layout so that shop owners in the back don't feel compelled to high-jack tourists once they enter, and of trying to convince them that their hard-sell style is not the best in terms of getting foreigners to part with cash. The small **art gallery** (☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Fri), to the right as you enter, displays and sells paintings by local artists. There's also a small post office and a forex with good rates within the complex.

For altogether more sedate shopping the **Trade Fair Centre** (Map p340; off Burma Camp Rd, La) has several stores selling high-quality goods at fixed prices or try **Aid to Artisans Ghana** (Map p340; ATAG; ☎ 771325; atag@ataggh.com; Trade Fair Centre, off Burma Camp Rd, La; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat), an NGO that offers practical assistance to Ghanaian artisans for crafts and furniture. The **House of Nyak** (Map p340; Trade Fair Centre, off Burma Camp Rd, La) has a huge selection of textiles and batiks and tailors here can whip up a Western or traditional Ghanaian-style suit or dress for you in only a few days.

Woodin Boutique (Map p345; Cantonments Rd) in Osu is a chic and modern fabric shop that sells some of the most attractive textiles in the city. The **Loom** (Map p342; ☎ 224746; 117 Kwame Nkrumah Ave), 200m south of Nkrumah

Circle, sells moderately to expensively priced paintings as well as woodcarvings, fabrics and statues.

Look out for roadside stalls selling crafts, such as pottery and cane chairs near 37 Circle, tie-dye clothes, paintings, prints, shoes, leather bags and woodcarvings around Danquah Circle and along Cantonments Rd in Osu, and woodcarvings near La Beach.

Makola Market and the area around it particularly rich in fabrics, including batik and tie-dye. Zongo Lane, not far from the post office, has rows of small shops offering colourful prints. Expensive Dutch wax cloth is everywhere, but you can also find almost identical cloth made by Akosombo Textile Co that is almost as good and much cheaper. The market is also good for glass beads, and you'll find second-hand clothing everywhere, sold for a few cedis.

Accra's second major market, **Kaneshie Market** (Map p340; Winneba Rd) on the western side of the city, is also a good place to look for beads and textiles as well as basic goods and foodstuffs. Music CDs, some original, some bad copies – ask before buying – of Ghanaian and other African pop stars are sold around both markets, as are mostly poor-quality pirated knock-offs of Nigerian and Hollywood films. Shoes are another staple of Accra markets – for that matter anywhere in the country – though most come with names like 'Babidas' and upside-down swooshes which look eerily similar to another well-known trademark; better quality, handmade leather shoes are also sold.

On or near the Tema road in Teshie are several **coffin workshops**, where trippy-looking coffins are fashioned in the shape of lobsters, Mercedes, guns, aeroplanes – whatever is meaningful for the client. These surreal-looking final resting places have been produced for the last 35 years or so and take around two weeks to carve and paint.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Kotoka international airport (Map p340) is served by several major airlines, including Alitalia, British Airways, KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines, Lufthansa and South African Airways and the newly formed Ghana International Airways. There are several small private regional carriers, however, the age and quality of the planes may be suspect.

For a list of airline offices in Accra see p399.

Bus & Tro-tro

There are two VanefSTC bus stations in Accra. There are also two classes of bus: ordinary and luxury. The latter have air-con and are newer and more comfortable. The main **VanefSTC bus station** (☎ 227373) is just east of Lamptey Circle and serves destinations to the west and north. Buses leave hourly from early morning to early evening for both Kumasi (ordinary/luxury C46,000/65,000, four hours) and Takoradi (C38,000/50,000, four hours), and four times a day to Cape Coast (C25,000/38,000, three hours) and Tamale (C90,000/150,000, 12 hours). Other destinations include Wa, Bolga and Bawku with trips three days a week. There are fewer trips on all routes on Sundays. If you want to be assured of a seat on a bus leaving at a specific time it's probably best to purchase the ticket a day in advance.

The second, smaller VanefSTC terminal is next to Tudu Station, at the northern end of Makola Market. From there buses head east, serving Ho (C40,000, 3pm, four hours), Hohoe (ordinary/luxury C30,000/C48,000, 3½ hours, ☎ 3pm), Kpando (C28,000/45,000, ☎ 3pm) and Aflao (C45,000, four times a day), on the Togo border. Buses leaving from this station are generally much more unreliable and may leave hours after their scheduled departure time or simply not at all.

Private buses and tro-tros leave from four main motor parks. Those for Cape Coast, Takoradi and other destinations to the west leave from Kaneshie motor park, 500m northwest of Lamptey Circle. Neoplan motor park, 250m west of Nkrumah Circle, has buses to north points such as Kumasi and Tamale. From Tema station east of Makola market, tro-tros leave for local destinations as well as Tema and Aburi. From the chaotic **Tudu station** (Map p342; ☎ 662523) at the northeast corner of Makola Market, tro-tros leave for destinations such as Aflao, Ada, Keta, Hohoe and Akosombo. In addition, there's a small station tucked in behind Tema station from which tro-tros go to Ho and Hohoe. Kingdom Transport Services (KTS) runs shockingly comfortable minivans with leather seats and air-con to Ho (C45,000, two hours) from here.

Train

There are train services between Accra and both Kumasi and Takoradi but these take forever and are really only for train enthusiasts. For more details, see p402.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

When you step outside Accra's Kotoka international airport, you'll be set upon by drivers and quickly ushered to the taxi rank for the journey into central Accra. Drivers may claim a set fare but there isn't one, and depending on your negotiating abilities and patience the fare can range from C20,000 to C70,000. Anything under C40,000 for the city centre is fair. Tro-tros and shared taxis (around C5000) also leave from the small, well-organised station within the airport compound. From the city centre to the airport, a private taxi costs around C25,000. Alternatively, get a shared taxi from the taxi parks at Nkrumah Circle or Sankara Interchange or a tro-tro from Tema station.

Line Taxi & Tro-Tro

Line taxis and tro-tros travel on fixed runs from major landmarks or between major circles, such as Danquah, 37 and Nkrumah (usually just called 'Circle'). Fares are fixed and are typically about C1000. Major routes include Circle to Osu via Ring Rd; Circle to the central post office via Nkrumah Ave; Tudu station to Kokomlemle; 37 Circle to Osu; Makola Market to Osu; and Circle to the airport. Major shared taxi and local tro-tro parks include Tema station and the ones at Nkrumah Circle and 37 Circle. In addition, transport to La leaves from the taxi park at Nkrumah Circle or from Labadi lorry station on High St.

At the stations, tro-tros and shared taxis often have the destination written on a placard. Elsewhere, flag one down and shout your destination – if they're going your way, they'll stop and pick you up. For Nkrumah Circle, point the index finger of your right hand towards the ground and make a circular motion.

Private Taxi

Taking taxis in Accra is convenient but since there are no meters the unavoidable haggling can get tiring. You will probably first be quoted a ridiculous amount. If you reply

with an even more ridiculous lowball you should be able to find your way to something fair. Any ride within the city shouldn't cost more than C10,000. Rates rise slightly to around C15,000 to C20,000 at night.

Drivers don't seem to know the city well. When providing directions, include as many large landmarks as possible to pinpoint your destination.

AROUND ACCRA

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

Probably the country's premier university, the University of Ghana in Legon was founded in 1948 on the northern fringes of Accra and 14km from the city centre. Its **Balme Library** (☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) has a rich collection dating from the colonial era. Its botanical gardens are run down, but they're a pleasant place for a stroll. The university bookshop is probably the best in the country. Tro-tros (C6000) leave from Tema station in Accra or from the Sankara interchange.

ABURI BOTANICAL GARDENS & AKWAPIM HILLS

Built as the classic British hill station, a cool mountain retreat from the oppressive heat of the lowlands, Aburi still retains a hint of its former therapeutic appeal, at least as far as temperatures and views go. On clear days you can see Accra in the plains below, only 34km away. The entrance to the **botanical gardens** (adult/student C10,000/20,000; ☎ 8am-6pm), about 200m up from the tro-tro station, are framed by two rows of towering palm trees. The gardens themselves make for a peaceful stroll though they're not of the finely manicured variety. Established in 1890 with seedlings from all over the British Empire, they are home to an impressive variety of tropical and subtropical plants and trees. The oldest tree, more than 150 years old, is a huge kapok tree facing the headquarters building. It's the only indigenous one the British didn't cut down.

The botanical gardens are the obvious tourist focus, though it's really the surrounding beautiful Akwapim Hills that warrant anything more than a day trip out here. The area is one of the best places in the country to explore by pedal power thanks to the friendly and enthusiastic **Aburi Bike**

& **Hike Tours** (☎ 024-267390; www.ghanabike.com); the small office is on the second floor of a home at the southern entrance of the gardens. A mountain bike, helmet, backpack, maps and repair kit plus a shower on return will cost you a paltry C39,000. Day-long or overnight guided biking and hiking tours are also offered.

Sleeping & Eating

Aburi Botanical Gardens Resthouse (☎ 0876-22022; r C100,000, bungalows C200,000) Unfortunately the resthouse here probably hasn't changed much since the colonial days, and while the surroundings are leafy the rooms are run down. Some of the upstairs rooms have good views and therefore may be a better option than the bungalows.

The **Little Acre Hotel** (☎ 0876-22078; r C300,000; ☺), **May Lodge & Restaurant** (☎ 0876-22025; r C80,000) and **Sweet African Guesthouse** (r from C80,000) are all a little over 2km before Aburi on the road from Accra.

Rose Plot Restaurant (mains C30,000) is attached to the resthouse and prepares basic fare while the **Royal Botanical Gardens Restaurant** (mains C45,000) just down the hill has a better selection and pretty views.

Getting There & Away

Tro-tros to Aburi (C7000, 1½ hours) leave regularly from the far eastern end of Tema station, behind the Makola Market in Accra, though the wait can be a half-hour or longer. You may have to wait a while

for transport back to Accra on a Sunday. Regular shared taxis run north from Aburi to towns such as Mampong, Adukrom and Somanya, from where you can get connections to Kpong (for Akosombo and Ho) and Koforidua.

THE COAST

Stretching 500km from the Ivory Coast to Togo, the coastline is Ghana's premier attraction. It's dotted with wonderful palm-lined beaches and the imposing remains of European coastal forts that once serviced the gold and later the slave trade.

Tuesday and Friday are the primary market days in Elmina and Cape Coast, and Tuesday is also the traditional day off for fishermen.

KOKROBITE

☎ 027

This beach has developed an enthusiastic following. Those who swear by Kokrobite point to the long stretch of white sand, the laid-back backpacker-style accommodation and the fact that it couldn't feel further from the bustle of Accra, only 32km away. Others more tepidly say it's too close to the capital, the lodging isn't luxurious enough and there's not much else to do besides be lazy and soak up the sun. But no doubt this sleepy village will continue to welcome foreigners looking for a little R&R.

BE BEACHWISE

Ghana has around 500km of Atlantic coastline, an almost continuous palm-fringed, sandy stretch of beach. However, there's a sting to Ghana's tropical paradise beaches – offshore, the Atlantic has fierce currents and a ripping undertow and there are several drownings every year. Ask the locals for advice, respect what they tell you and stay well within your depth.

There's another sting – theft and the occasional muggings at knifepoint occur on and around beaches frequented by tourists. Most fishing villages along the coast are extremely poor and local people don't benefit from tourism, as resorts tend to be run by outsiders, so tourists are a tempting target for some elements in the community. It makes sense not to take any valuables onto the beach with you and to avoid being alone on isolated stretches. If you're walking along the beach or a coastal path, do what the locals do and take a guide with you – not only to show you the way but also as protection against possible muggings. As a way of helping to make a difference, try to patronise community-run businesses as far as possible.

Most beaches near settlements are working beaches from which the important business of fishing is carried out. They also function as the village toilet. If you don't want to feel a squelch underfoot, stick either to resort beaches, for which you usually pay a small fee, or to beaches away from settlements.

THE COASTAL FORTS

The chain of forts and castles (the terms are used interchangeably) along Ghana's coast is an extraordinary historical monument, unique in West Africa. Most of the forts were built during the 17th century by various European powers, including the British, Danes, Dutch, French, Germans, Portuguese and Swedes, who were vying for commercial dominance of the Gold Coast and the Gulf of Guinea. Competition was fierce and the forts changed hands like a game of musical chairs. By the end of the 18th century, there were 37 along the coastline. The forts were concentrated along this relatively short (around 500km) stretch of coast because access to the interior was relatively easy compared with the more swampy coastlines elsewhere along the West African coast, and because the rocky shore provided building material. They were fortified not against the locals, with whom they traded equitably, but against attack from other European traders.

The forts were originally established as trading posts to store goods bought to the coast, such as gold, ivory and spices. Later, as the slave trade took over, they were expanded into prisons for storing slaves ready for shipping. Slaves were packed into dark, overcrowded and unsanitary dungeons for weeks or months at a time. If you tour some of the forts, you'll leave with a deep impression of just how brutally the captives were treated. When a ship arrived, they were shackled and led out of the forts to waiting boats through the Door of No Return.

If your time is limited, make sure you visit at least Cape Coast Castle (p360), which houses a superb museum, and St George's Castle (p363) at Elmina, both of which are deservedly Unesco World Heritage sites. With a bit more time, you could also visit Fort Metal Cross (p368) at Dixcove, Fort Amsterdam (p358) at Abanze and Fort Princess Town (p369) at Princess Town, all of which are atmospheric and have great settings. Fort Good Hope (p356) at Senya Bereku and Fort Patience (p358) at Apan are also worth a look if you have time to spare; both overlook busy fishing harbours.

Most forts are open to the public, usually 9am to 5pm daily, and most charge an admission fee of around US\$0.70, apart from a few such as Cape Coast Castle and St George's Castle, which charge more. The admission fee usually includes a guided tour by the custodian. If you don't have any qualms about staying in a fort where slaves were held captive, Fort Good Hope, Fort Patience and Fort Princess Town offer very basic accommodation for around US\$4.

The renowned Academy of African Music & Arts (AAMAL), founded by legendary drummer Mustafa Tettey Addy, offers courses (from two hours to three months) in traditional African music, drumming and dance. It is a 20-minute walk along the beach. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons you can groove to the beat by listening to live music and drumming performances.

Theft and the occasional mugging, once a problem, has largely been eradicated since hotel owners have partnered with villagers to help patrol the beach. Still, it's not advised to walk on the beach with valuables at night.

Between August and March turtles nest on the beach

Sleeping & Eating

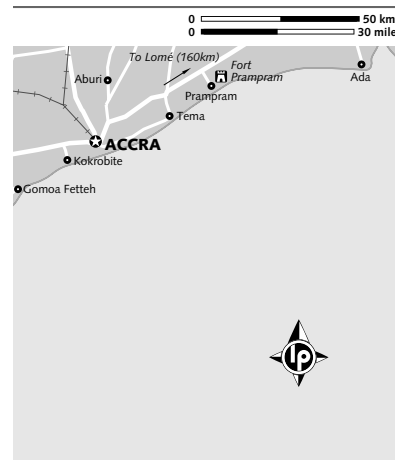
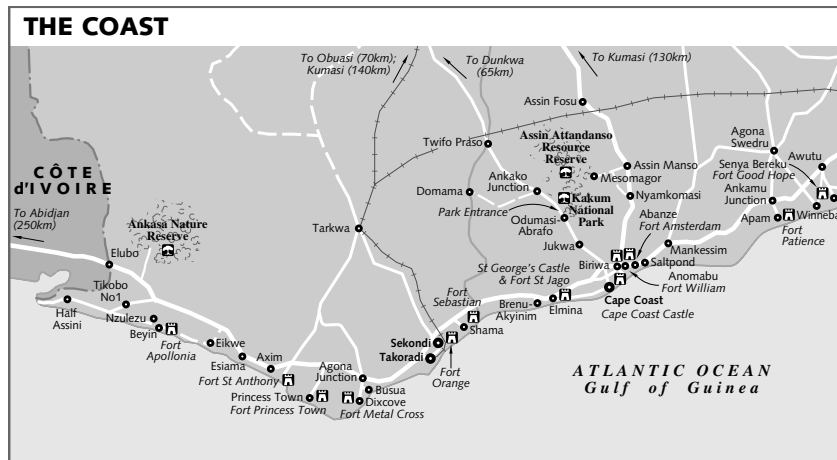
Just past the beach at AAMAL a huge concrete structure with an amphitheatre was going up at the time of research and is supposed to be functioning as a hotel by 2008.

Big Milly's Backyard (Wendy's; ☎ 607998; www.bigmilly.com; camping with own/rented tent C25,000/35,000,

s/d with shared bathroom C65,000/100,000, r with private bathroom C145,000; ☎) The Big Kahuna of Kokrobite, Big Milly's is something of an institution to West Africa overlanders and volunteers who all seem to consider the place their home away from home. The basic concrete and thatched roof cottages with shared bathrooms are fine though a little besides the point since most people spend their time whiling away the day and night at the 24 hour bar and restaurant or the beach, which extends almost to your front door. A beautiful Moroccan-style suite (US\$65) is available as well. Drumming, dancing and music happen most weekend nights.

Sobamba Coastal Resort (☎ 683084; r C180,000; ☎) A low key alternative to Big Milly's, friendly Sobamba has four basic tiled rooms with modern bathrooms. The attached bar/restaurant overlooks the beach and discounts are available for extended stays. Breakfast included.

Andy's Akwaaba Lodge (☎ 277261; www.akwaaba lodge.com; r with shared/private bathroom C70,000/130,000;



(P) This lodge is just across the dirt road from Sobamba. The five concrete rooms are basic but set in a pleasant, small grassy compound where you can camp with your own tent for C30,000. The restaurant serves up good German food.

Kokrobite Beach Resort (AAMAL; ☎ 380854; s/d C95,000/110,000; (P)) A beautiful 20-minute walk along the beach and up and over rocky outcroppings from Big Milly's – a road goes here as well – takes you to this rustic, seemingly abandoned resort famed for the attached music school. The large rooms are old but the warped wooden floors charming and there's a simple restaurant and bar on the premises.

Bojo Beach Resort (☎ 2325169; afamefuna14@hotmail.com; (P)) Future plans call for rooms, but at the time of research Bojo is a welcoming and professionally run day resort. Small boats shuttle guests across the freshwater lagoon to a beautiful stretch of sandy beach where you can order drinks and food and hire boogie or surf boards or just luxuriate in the quiet.

Franco's (Kokrobite Garden; pizza C50,000) An Italian restaurant behind Big Milly's, Franco's is especially popular for its pizzas; the chef reputedly rides his bicycle to Accra for fresh ingredients daily.

Getting There & Around

Tro-tros (C5500, 45 minutes) to Kokrobite go from the western end of Kaneshie motor park (Donsoman Station) in Accra. Depend-

ing on your ability to negotiate, a taxi from Accra will cost from C50,000 to C100,000.

GOMOA FETTEH & SENYA BEREKU

☎ 027

The main reason to visit Gomoa Fetteh, an attractive fishing village set on a hill on the coast between Accra and Winneba, is for its magnificent beaches. Senya Bereku, about 5km west, is the site of the impressive **Fort Good Hope** (admission US\$0.70), built by the Dutch in 1702. Originally intended for the gold trade, the fort was expanded in 1715 when it was converted into a slave prison. Well restored, it sits on the edge of a cliff above the beach and has good views. Shared taxis (US\$0.20) regularly ply between the villages or you could walk (with a guide).

Sleeping & Eating

White Sands Beach Club (☎ 550707; www.whitesandsbc.com; r US\$100; (P) ☎) The large, individually designed Moroccan-themed villas at the White Sands are some of the nicest accommodation in Ghana. They're located on a spectacular beach with three superb restaurants. Bear left as you enter Fetteh and follow the main road down through the village until you reach the resort gates.

Till's No 1 Hotel (☎ 559480; tillsbeach@yahoo.com; s/d US\$45/55; ☎) Though not as luxurious as the White Sands, Till's also occupies prime beachfront property and is an excellent, less-expensive alternative. This German-owned resort has comfortable rooms with

balconies and sea views and a veritable Olympics worth of equipment for water and other games. It's signposted as you enter Fetteh. Breakfast included.

Fort Good Hope (r with fan US\$7) Despite once holding slaves in its dungeon, this fort has been developed into a guesthouse. You can sleep here in basic rooms with shared bathrooms (bucket showers); it has a nice, breezy sitting area upstairs and a restaurant and bar on the premises.

Getting There & Away

From Kaneshie motor park in Accra, there are direct tro-tros to Senya Bereku (one hour). Tro-tros also ply the scenic but bumpy cross-country route between Winneba and Senya Bereku (40 minutes). For Gomoa Fetteh, take a Winneba-bound tro-tro from Accra and stop at Awutu junction on the main road, from where you can get a tro-tro direct to the village.

WINNEBA

☎ 0432

To Ghanaians, this town is synonymous with the University College of Education (UCEW), fishing and the famous Aboakyer festival (see p358). The town itself (the largest between Accra and Cape Coast) has little appeal and sees few foreigners. There is a good, undeveloped beach and a pleasant hotel within walking distance of it.

Near the now-defunct tourist centre on the outskirts of town, fishing boats pull in

from early morning to around midday, and dozens of fisherman haul in their nets while singing a rousing tune. A lovely, palm-fringed beach stretches west from here for a couple of kilometres, though the slope is steep and swimming isn't recommended. Inland of the beach, the lagoon is an important wetlands area for birds.

There's a Ghana Commercial Bank and a post office on Commercial St.

Sleeping & Eating

Lagoon Lodge (☎ 22435; s/d C80,000/C150,000; (P)) This lodge alone is almost reason enough to come to Winneba. It's rare in Ghana to find such a well-run, professional yet hospitable hotel and at budget prices no less. The Lagoon has 19 small, modern, perfectly kept rooms with enormous bathrooms and a pleasant courtyard restaurant (mains C30,000) and bar that catches a great breeze in the evenings. It's reached by heading down a winding track through the fields, signposted off the beach road past the turn-off to the (closed) Sir Charles Tourist Centre.

Ghana Armed Forces Resthouse (☎ 22208; r C60,000) After the Lagoon Lodge everything else is a very distance second, and as you'd expect from a place with military associations, this resthouse won't win any medals for design. It's strictly utilitarian concrete, though it's a peaceful enough setting on a hill overlooking the lagoon. Follow the road up past the UCEW South Campus and, where it forks, take the road on the right.

The Lagoon Lodge restaurant is the best place to eat, though for a change of pace there are several basic eateries serving cheap Ghanaian food on Commercial St and the road leading towards the UCEW South Campus.

Halo Halo is a typical spot for icy beers, though the food here gets mixed reviews and the music is loud. **Hut de Eric** (mains C30,000) at the highway junction is the most comfortable restaurant you'll find in the area; it's a modern, large pavilion with outdoor seating serving Ghanaian staples and grilled meats.

Getting There & Away

There's a bus station in Winneba town but the main transport hub is at the junction on the coastal road. Regular shared taxis (C2000) run between the junction and Winneba town. Tro-tros to Winneba leave from

DEER HUNTER

Held on the first weekend in May, the **Aboakyer** (Deer Hunt Festival) has been celebrated for over 300 years. The main event is a competitive hunt in which two Asafo (companies or guilds of men), the Tuofo and Dentsifo, hunt an antelope to sacrifice to Penkye Out, a tribal god. The first Asafo to capture one alive with their bare hands and return it to the *omanhene* (village chief) wins.

The Tuofo, in blue and white, are led by their captain, who carries a cutlass and rides a wooden horse; the Dentsifo dress in red and gold and their captain, borne in a chair, wears an iron helmet and carries a sword and cutlass. Early on the Saturday morning the young men don their traditional battle dress and go to the beach to purify themselves. Afterwards, they go on to the palace of the *omanhene* to greet the royal family and, finally, to the hunting grounds. The first man to catch an antelope alive rushes with his company to the *omanhene's* dais, singing and dancing along the way and hurling taunts at their opponents.

Next day the companies assemble before the Penkye Otu deity to question the oracle. The priest draws four parallel lines on the ground, in white clay, red clay, charcoal and salt. A stone is rolled down from the fetish. If it falls upon the white clay line, there will be a great drought. If it stops at the charcoal lines, this portends heavy rains. Landing on the salt line indicates that there will be plenty of food and fish, while settling upon the red line augurs war and strife. The hapless antelope is then sacrificed and cooked, the priest taking some of the hot soup with his bare hands and placing it on Penkye Otu. This offering is the *raison d'être* of the hunt and the festival concludes.

Kaneshie motor park in Accra (C8000, 1¼ hours) or from the Accra station in Cape Coast (C8000, 1½ hours). From the junction, plenty of transport runs in both directions.

APAM

☎ 0432

A lively fishing harbour and fantastic views from the ramparts of **Fort Patience** (admission C10,000), make Apam, 20km west of Winneba, worth a visit. The fort, built by the Dutch in 1697, is set on a hill overlooking the village and picturesque fishing harbour at one end of a wide sandy bay. Near the harbour is a great three-storey *posuban* (shrine), with mounted horsemen overlooked by a white-robed Jesus.

The fort also functions as a **guesthouse** (r C35,000). Very basic rooms with shared bathroom (bucket shower) are available. Simple meals can be prepared on request or there are food stalls along the main street.

Apam is about 9km south of Ankamu junction on the coastal road, from where regular shared taxis and tro-tros run down to the village. Any tro-tro running between Cape Coast and Winneba or Accra will be able to drop you at the junction.

ABANZE

The atmospheric **Fort Amsterdam** (admission US\$1.40; ☎ 9am-5pm), also known as Fort Kormantin, is clearly visible from the coastal road, about 32km northeast of Cape Coast.

It has a fantastic location high on a hill above Abanze village, and the views from the ramparts are wonderful. Established in 1598 by the Dutch, it was rebuilt by the English in 1645 as their first settlement along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea and named Fort York. When the Dutch recaptured it in 1665, they renamed it Fort Amsterdam as a stylish thumbing of the nose at the English who, the previous year and on the other side of the Atlantic, had taken possession of New Amsterdam and re-christened it New York. The fort is only partially restored, giving it a poignancy that many of the whitewashed castles elsewhere along the coast lack.

Transport going west to Cape Coast can drop you at Abanze. From Cape Coast, take a tro-tro (20 minutes) from Kotokuraba station as you head towards Mankessim and get off when you see the fort up on the hill to your right, just before Abanze. Returning to Cape Coast you may have to wait a while for an empty seat.

ANOMABU

☎ 042

As far as tourists are concerned, Anomabu means an excellent resort on a beautiful beach. However, residents of this very unpicturesque, cramped fishing village about 18km northeast of Cape Coast live in fairly makeshift squalor. Fort William, on the seafront in the centre of town, was built by the British in 1753 and is now an

unphotographable prison. More interesting are Anomabu's seven *posubans*. The easiest to find is Company No 3's, which features a collection of animals, and is about 50m from the main road, opposite the Ebenezer Hotel. The most spectacular shrine is the one in the form of a large painted ship; it's in the area just west of the fort.

Sleeping & Eating

Anomabu Beach Resort (☎ 91562; www.anomabu.digitafrica.com; camping own/rented tent US\$4/13, but without/with air-con US\$20/38; ☎) This is the perfect weekend getaway from Accra. One of the few places in Ghana to embrace low-key native architecture rather than big concrete eyesores, it has cosy bungalows set within a sandy and shady grove of coconut palms. But you'll spend most of your time lounging on the beautiful white-sand beach or chowing down on seafood at the exquisite wood pavilion restaurant. Rates are higher Friday and Saturday nights. A breakfast buffet is included. Nonguests can cross the beach from the road for C20,000.

Weda Lodge (☎ 806958; r with fan/air-con C245,000/305,000; ☎) For a bird's eye view of the ocean and town below, Weda Lodge, perched high at the top of a hill, is a nice alternative to the beach resort. There are spectacular views from some of the rooms and all are quite large and modern and nicely furnished. The Weda has a homey feel, from the friendly staff to the living room with TV and the cliffside garden. It's off the same road and within walking distance of the Anomabu Beach Resort.

Ebenezer Hotel (☎ 33673; s/d C57,000/80,000, r with air-con C200,000; ☎) There's no beach access or mountain views but the Ebenezer actually makes sense for the budget-minded. Its highway location means it's convenient for tro-tros and you can always commute to the beach at the Anomabu Beach Resort. Carpeted doubles are large and comfortable and even have small separate sitting rooms and balconies. Rooms are in the building behind the roadside restaurant and are quiet.

Getting There & Away

From Cape Coast, take a tro-tro (C5000, 15 minutes) from Kotokuraba station heading for Mankessim and ask to be dropped at the Ebenezer Rest Stop for Anomabu town or at the turn-off for the beach resort, which is

about 2km west of the Ebenezer. From the turn-off, it's about 500m to the resort gates. The main tro-tro and shared taxi stop in Anomabu is just east of the Ebenezer and plenty of vehicles run in both directions along the coastal road.

CAPE COAST

☎ 042

The centre of Cape Coast, the former British colonial capital, is lined with neglected buildings whose ages are irrelevant in this now-vibrant town and whose history – Cape Coast was the largest slave-trading centre in West Africa – only becomes apparent after a visit to the castle on the waterfront, one of the more interesting sights in Ghana. Today, Cape Coast is the capital of the Central Region, the home of one of the country's best universities and a logical base for trips to other destinations in the surrounding area, including Kakum National Park. Maybe the best time to truly appreciate the city is after dark, when small groups take to the sidewalks to escape the still baking heat and eat, chat, dance and often sleep under the stars.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Black Star Bookshop (Commercial St) A surprisingly good mix of high-quality contemporary fiction in English and a more obscure and random collection of nonfiction.

INTERNET ACCESS

Cornell Internet (Commercial St)

Ocean View Internet (Commercial St; ☎ 24hr) A few dozen computers. Printing, scanning, CD burning.

Odas Internet (Commercial St) Across the street from Cornell Internet.

MONEY

There aren't many forexes in town. Coastal Forex on Jackson St is reliable.

Barclays Bank (Commercial St) Can change travellers cheques and cash; has an ATM.

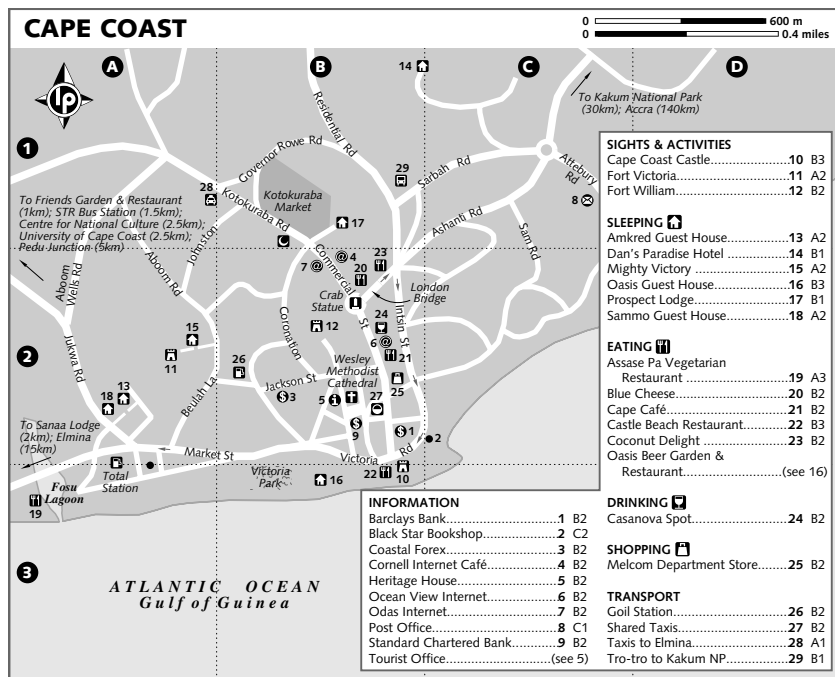
Standard Chartered Bank (Chapel Sq) Near the tourist office. Can change travellers cheques and cash; has an ATM.

POST

Post office (Attebury St)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 30265; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Even if there's someone around, the office isn't much help. On the 1st floor of Heritage House, a restored colonial-era building.



Sights

CAPE COAST CASTLE

This majestic **castle** (adult/student US\$7/4, still/video camera fee C5000/10,000; ☎ 9am-5pm) is in the heart of town overlooking the sea. First converted into a castle by the Dutch in 1637 and expanded by the Swedes in 1652, the castle changed hands five times over the 13 tumultuous years that followed until, in 1664, it was captured by the British. During the two centuries of British occupation, the castle was the headquarters for the colonial administration until the capital was moved to Accra in 1877. Extensively restored, the whitewashed castle now houses a superb museum. The introductory video shown at the museum is a little cheesy but the displays on the history of Ghana, the slave trade and the culture of the Akan people are excellent. The castle buildings, constructed around a trapezoidal courtyard facing the sea, and the dungeons below, provide a horrifying insight into the workings of a Gold Coast slaving fort. A guided tour is offered with your admission and should not be skipped; allow a minimum of an hour for the tour.

FORT WILLIAM & FORT VICTORIA

It's worth the short but steep hikes up to Fort William, which dates from 1820 and now functions as a lighthouse, and Fort Victoria, originally built in 1702 and heavily restored in the 19th century, for the spectacular views. The castle and the two forts originally formed a triangular lookout system between which signals could be passed. You can't go inside either of the forts.

Courses

African Footprint International (☎ 024-4615294; www.africanfootprint.dk) is an NGO that arranges dancing and drumming classes from 8am to noon Monday to Friday. Attached to the Cape Café is **Global Mamas** (www.globalmamas.org), a shop selling handmade batiks and clothes – it's connected to Women in Progress, a nonprofit group encouraging the growth of women-owned enterprises in Africa. It arranges batik workshops (four hours, C190,000), Ghanaian cuisine courses (three hours, C160,000) and drumming classes (three hours, C170,000).

Festivals & Events

Cape Coast's **Fetu Afahye Festival**, a raucous carnival, takes place on the first Saturday of September. The highlight is the slaughter of a cow for the gods of Oguaa (the traditional name for Cape Coast). The biennial **Panafest** celebration is held in Cape Coast.

Sleeping BUDGET

Oasis Guest House (☎ 35958; ali_d@gmx.da; s/d with shared bathroom C80,000/120,000, bungalows with private bathroom C200,000; ☎) Formerly only a restaurant and bar, Oasis has expanded into a fully fledged backpacker resort and the only beachfront place in Cape Coast. It has several comfortable rondavels set in a grassy compound; some are quite large and attractively designed with coloured tiles and linens. Dancing and drumming classes are held, and the restaurant and bar areas are some of the best places to meet other travellers in town.

Sammo Guest House (☎ 33242; Jukwa Rd; r C75,000) Backpackers flock to Sammos, a compound within walking distance of the city centre to the east. There are simple but clean fan rooms of various sizes, and a rooftop terrace restaurant popular for the sunset views and social scene. Food here is fine but service is slow.

Amkred Guest House (☎ 32868; r with fan/air-con C98,000/C119,000; ☎) The Amkred, down a lane behind Sammo, is less institutional and you're less likely to mix with other travellers. The carpeted rooms are a little frayed around the edges but they're comfortable enough. Guests can order food in advance. Smaller rooms are available for C76,000.

MIDRANGE

Prospect Lodge (☎ 31506; prospectlodge2005@hotmail.com; s/d US\$25/35; ☎) This new hotel is easily the nicest place in the city centre. You can't miss the green-and-yellow building perched on a hill up a steep driveway off Commercial St. Rooms here are small but modern and have cable TV. Also has a cosy restaurant (mains C40,000 to C60,000) and tables set up outside with good views of town.

Mighty Victory (☎ 30135; gh72@aol.com; Aboom Cl; s/d with fan C160,000/190,000, r with air-con C220,000; ☎) The Mighty Victory, set on a hill just below Fort Victoria, has a tranquil garden out front and is far removed from the noise of the centre. While the rooms have private bath-

rooms and are well kept they're not a big step up quality-wise from Sammo or Amkred. There's a simple indoor restaurant.

Dan's Paradise Hotel (☎ 32942; d with air-con C140,000; ☎) Like your uncle who wears a toupee and still goes to discos, Dan's Paradise won't admit it's getting old and take steps to slow down the inevitable wear and tear. Its dotage is further compounded by the remarkably chintzy décor. It's on the top of a steep hill off Sarbah Rd north of the Accra bus station. On Saturday nights it hosts a popular nightclub.

TOP END

Sanaa Lodge (☎ 32570; sanaalcape2@yahoo.com; uk; s/d US\$65/70; ☎) On a hill overlooking the beach near the westernmost entrance to town, the Sanaa Lodge, Cape Coast's most upscale hotel, enjoys a wonderfully tranquil location and rooms with all the modern amenities. The pool and poolside grill are worth the price alone.

Eating & Drinking

There are several hole-in-the-wall eateries and stalls selling street food around Kotokuraba Market, the intersection of Commercial St and Ashanti Rd and along Intsin St.

Oasis Beer Garden & Restaurant (mains C35,000) Part of the hotel compound of the same name, the Oasis is sometimes just that, a quiet place to eat, drink and while away a few hours, which you might have to do because the service can be lethargic. It has probably the largest and most eclectic menu in town serving everything from kebabs to grilled seafood and curry dishes and several tables are directly on the beach. Live music on Wednesday night, and Friday and Saturday nights the treehouse turns into a nightclub with local bands. There are cultural performances, dancing classes and beach bonfires on some weekend nights.

Castle Beach Restaurant (mains C30,000) There's no more pleasant spot to hang out and grab some food and drinks than this wooden pavilion overlooking the beach next to the Cape Coast Castle. Though your sandwiches, seafood or Ghanaian food may be slow in coming it's hard to be impatient with such cooling breezes and peaceful views.

Assase Pa Vegetarian Restaurant (mains C30,000) Assase Pa has a fantastic location, on a promontory overlooking the sea just across

the bridge over the lagoon. Has a varied menu that includes vegetarian versions of Ghanaian dishes. Most afternoons there are live-music and dance sessions at the practice ground next door.

Cape Café (mains C20,000) The centrally located Cape Café is a big, bare, empty dining room, hardly an inviting place to eat and you can count the Ghanaian dishes available on half a hand. The charitably inclined should keep in mind that proceeds from here and the batik shop on the premises go to help needy women in the community.

Coconut Delight (Ashanti Rd) This tiny chop bar, near London Bridge, does wonderful fresh fruit juices as well as snack food. A couple of doors along is another tiny place selling home-made ice cream.

The **Blue Cheese** (mains C20,000), opposite the crab statue and the **Cassanova Spot** (Commercial St) are popular bars that also serve basic food.

Getting There & Away

The VanefSTC bus station is in the Goil petrol station at Pedu junction, about 5km northwest of the town centre. There are buses twice a day to and from Accra (ordinary/luxury C25,000/38,000, three hours) and Takoradi (C12,000, one hour) and once a day to and from Kumasi (C65,000, four hours). Passenger taxis to Pedu junction leave from Commercial St, opposite the Cape Café.

There are two main motor parks in Cape Coast. The Accra bus station, at the junction of Sarbah and Residential Rds, serves long-distance routes, such as Accra and Kumasi. Kotokuraba station, on Governor Rowe Rd, near the market, serves destinations around Cape Coast, such as Abanze, Anomabu, Kakum National Park and Takoradi. Shared taxis to Elmina (C3700, 15 minutes) leave from the station on Commercial St, opposite the Cape Café.

KAKUM NATIONAL PARK

☎ 042

Gingerly sliding across a rope bridge at dizzying heights is not for the agoraphobic. But for an easily earned adrenaline rush, the canopy walkway at this **national park** (☎ 33278; admission C2000; ☞ 8am-4pm), 33km north of Cape Coast, shouldn't be missed. Of course the park is more than only this much-hyped attraction. Together with the neighbouring Assin Attandanso Resource Reserve,

it protects 357 sq km of diverse and dense vegetation, a mixture of true rainforest and semideciduous forest. It's home to 40 species of larger mammals (including elephants, colobus monkeys and antelopes), about 300 species of birds and a staggering 600 varieties of butterfly. The park is an important refuge for several endangered species, including forest elephants, bongos and yellow-backed duikers. However, don't come expecting great wildlife viewing, since you'll almost certainly be disappointed. Most of the wildlife understandably chooses to stay well away from the action areas. Your best shot to see any wildlife is to get here when the park opens at 8am or take a night hike.

The 350m rope and cable **canopy walkway** (adult/student C90,000/50,000) was constructed in 1996. It consists of seven viewing platforms linked by a circuit of narrow suspension bridges, along which you sway, 30m above the forest floor. It gives you a bird's-eye view of the forest, although as you bounce along it's hard to concentrate on anything except how flimsy the ropes seem and what a vast distance it is from the forest floor.

Although the hype can make it seem as if the walkway is the park, there are other activities. A guided hike costs C40,000/20,000 per hour for adults/students and is a good way to learn about the rainforest flora and its traditional uses. Guided night walks need to be arranged in advance; call ☎ 30265 or fax 33042. In the park's visitor centre, there's a superb, ecologically sensitive display.

An interesting alternative option is to visit the park from Mesomakor on its eastern outskirts. You can arrange guided walks and there's a good chance of seeing wildlife such as forest elephants. Mesomakor is also the home of the famous **Kukyekukyeku Bamboo Orchestra** and it may be possible to hear a performance. For details, contact the park or ask at the tourist office in Cape Coast.

Sleeping & Eating

Most people visit Kakum as a day trip from Cape Coast, but if you want to stay you can sleep on a tree platform at the camp site near the park headquarters for C80,000 per person; equipment hire (sleeping mat, sleeping bag, flashlight and mosquito net) costs C50,000. No camp fires are allowed. Simple homestay accommodation is also

available in Mesomakor, on the eastern outskirts of the park.

Hans Cottage Motel (☎ 33621; hcottage@yahoo.com; s/d with fan US\$10/15, s/d with air-con US\$20/30; ☎ ☞), on the road to Kakum, only 10km north of Cape Coast, feels like something your crazy uncle would cook up. But you can't argue with spending at least a few hours lounging in the two-storey wood pavilion restaurant perched over an artificial crocodile pond where birds and monkeys compete for your attention. Rooms are simple and clean. Any tro-tro heading along the Jukwa road towards Kakum can drop you at the hotel.

The **Kakum Rainforest Café** (mains C40,000) serves basic continental breakfast and Ghanaian dishes for lunch.

Getting There & Away

From Cape Coast, tro-tros (C6000, 45 minutes) that go past the entrance to the park leave from Kotokuraba station on Governor Rowe Rd. It's a five-minute walk from the main road to the park headquarters. Or, you could charter a taxi for about C150,000 round trip. To get to Mesomakor, take a tro-tro from Cape Coast to Nyamkomasi and a shared taxi from there to the village.

DOMAMA ROCK SHRINE

The real reason to make the journey out to the village of Domama, almost 34km northwest of Kakum National Park, is for the guided trek and canoe trip on the Pra River. A tour that includes a visit to a cool **natural rock formation** (☞ 8am-5pm) costs around C30,000; it takes about five hours on foot and three hours if you have your own transport. Simple accommodation (C40,000 for doubles with bucket showers and no electricity) and food is available at the guesthouse in Domama. Most visitors stay overnight so that they can get an early start in the morning. No tours are available on Wednesday, when it's taboo for the villagers to work.

From Cape Coast, take a tro-tro from Kotokoraba station to Ankako junction on the road to Twifo Praso, past the entrance to Kakum National Park. From Ankako, it's 17.5km down a bumpy but scenic dirt road to Domama village. Tro-tros run sporadically from the junction to Domama. Transport from Domama back to the junction can be a problem. A charter taxi from Cape Coast should cost around C225,000 round trip.

ELMINA

☎ 042 / pop 20,000

Much more picturesque than Cape Coast, its neighbour 15km to the east, the small town of Elmina is the site of St George's Castle, the oldest European structure still standing in sub-Saharan Africa, and a lively fishing harbour. On a narrow peninsula between the Atlantic Ocean and Benya Lagoon, Elmina has one of the best natural harbours on the coast, which was what attracted first the Portuguese and later the Dutch and the British. The name Elmina, known as Edina in the local language, is likely derived from Mina d'Ouro (Gold Mine), the Portuguese name for this stretch of the coast.

Sights

ST GEORGE'S CASTLE

It's an uncanny feeling to look at this imposing and even beautiful building and think about its lurid history. At the end of a rocky peninsula, **St George's Castle** (adult/student US\$7/4, still/video camera fee C5000/10,000; ☞ 9am-4.30pm) was built by the Portuguese in 1482, and captured by the Dutch in 1637. From then until they ceded it to the British in 1872, it served as the African headquarters of the Dutch West Indies Company. It was expanded when slaves replaced gold as the major object of commerce, and the storerooms were converted into dungeons. The informative tour takes you around the incredibly grim dungeons, punishment cells and the turret room where the British imprisoned the Ashanti king, Prempeh I, for four years. The Portuguese Catholic church, converted into slave auctioning rooms by the Protestant Dutch, now houses a museum with excellent displays on the history and culture of Elmina.

FORT ST JAGO

Facing the castle across the lagoon is the much smaller **Fort St Jago** (admission C10,000; ☞ 9am-5pm), also a Unesco World Heritage site, built by the Dutch between 1652 and 1662 to protect the castle. The views of the town and St George's Castle from the ramparts of this partial ruin are superb.

FISH MARKET

Watching the colourful pirogues pull in and out and listening to the cacophony of shouts at the crowded Mpoen port is like having front-row theatre seats. The vast fish

market on the lagoon side is also fascinating to wander around, particularly when the day's fishing catch is being unloaded in the afternoon.

DUTCH CEMETERY

There are a few interesting *posubans* in town and a well-kept Dutch cemetery. To get to the cemetery from the castle take a left turn over the bridge and follow the road around which takes you past some of the *posubans*.

Festivals & Events

Elmina's colourful **Bakatie Festival** takes place on the first Tuesday in July. It's a joyous harvest thanksgiving feast, and one of its highlights is watching the priest in the harbour waters casting a net to lift a ban on fishing in the lagoon.

The first Thursday in January is **Edina Buronya** time, a sort of Christmas signifying Ghanaian-Dutch friendship with fishing, drinking and slaughtering – of a lamb.

Sleeping

Coconut Grove Beach Resort (☎ 33650; www.cocnutgrovehotels.com.gh; s/d US\$92/110; (P) (S)) The resort of choice for various heads of state, this luxurious resort has a beachside location 4km west of Elmina and offers a variety of well-appointed rooms as well as a nine-hole golf course. Substantial discounts when reservations are made online.

Almond Tree Guesthouse (☎ 37365; www.almond3.com; r from C280,000; (P) (S)) You'll feel at home staying at this highly recommended guesthouse just past the Elmina beach resort. It has several large rooms with wicker furniture and yellow bed linen, and the ones with wood floors and balconies are especially attractive. The more expensive room has air-con. Breakfast included.

Coconut Grove Bridge House (☎ 34557; Liverpool St; d US\$30-50; (S)) Looking like a pirogue out of water amid the disorder and chaos opposite St George's Castle, this converted old mansion is a neat stone building that would blend in on a narrow London street. Run by the Coconut Grove Beach Resort, it has comfortable and modern rooms. Restaurant attached.

Elmina Beach Resort (☎ 33105; www.gbghghana.com; r from US\$72; (P) (S) (W) (A)) Bringing new meaning to the term 'white elephant', the

Elmina Beach Resort sprawls behind a walled compound about 2km east of the centre towards Cape Coast. Blandness and bad aesthetic decisions aside, the rooms are modern and clean and it has its own artificial swept beach above the real rocky one. Ocean view rooms are more expensive. The restaurants and lounges built to impress can't be offset by service no better than at budget hotels. Shuttle service to nearby Brenu beach.

Nyansapow Hotel (☎ 33955; Lime St; r C80,000) The only centrally located budget-priced hotel, the Nyansapow has a pleasant courtyard surrounded by simple and clean rooms with private bathrooms. It's signposted off the main road into town.

Eating

There are several basic eateries and food stalls near the harbour and Liverpool St.

Coconut Grove Bridge House (mains C50,000; (S)) There's no better place in Elmina to escape than this restaurant in front of the castle, part of the hotel of the same name. The menu includes Ghanaian standards and fresh-caught seafood like fried calamari. You can also sit on the small stone terrace outside overlooking the crazy boat action a few feet away.

Castle Restaurant (mains C35,000) This pleasant wood-floored restaurant is within the castle walls and serves Ghanaian dishes – slowly. Access it through a separate entrance in the wall to the left after you cross the bridge.

Gramsdel J (High St; mains C25,000) A bright red-and-yellow spot on the beach road about 1.5km from town on the way to the Elmina Beach Resort. Serves basic and cheap meals.

Getting There & Away

The main taxi and tro-tro station is outside the Wesley Methodist Cathedral. From here you can get tro-tros to Takoradi (C10,000) or passenger taxis to Cape Coast. In Cape Coast, shared taxis (C2700, 15 minutes) to Elmina leave from the station on Commercial St, a block north of Barclays Bank.

BRENU-AKYINIM

A fabulous stretch of sandy beach is the feature of the village of Brenu-Akyinim, about 10km west of Elmina. Part of the beach has been cordoned off to form the **Brenu Beach Resort** (☎ 36620; admission US\$0.50; r about US\$10), where the sand is clean and there's a good

restaurant and other facilities. A small fee is charged for admission to the resort. You can stay in basic rooms at the resort, or in the village for about US\$4. At the junction on the main road is a simple eatery called the Ocean Style Restaurant.

From Elmina or Cape Coast, take a tro-tro west towards Takoradi and ask to be let off at the junction for Brenu-Akyinim. From here you should be able to get a passenger taxi to the village (5km).

SHAMA

(☎ 031

Few foreigners stop in Shama, a ramshackle town where the Pra River joins the ocean, and even though you'll likely receive celebrity-like attention, it can be a tranquil place to experience typical fishing village life.

Originally built as lodge for Dutch traders in 1526, **Fort Sebastian** (admission C10,000) in Shama really didn't become Fort Sebastian until it was redesigned by the Portuguese in 1590. Later recaptured by the Dutch, then briefly by the British, then the Dutch again, today the fort stands guard over the town.

The colourful **fish market** is alive and bustling every day but Tuesday and there's a beautiful sandy beach nearby. Boatmen on the town side will ferry you across a little inlet for a small fee or take you on longer excursions up the river.

Another hotel too big for its britches, or at least it doesn't quite fit in with its surroundings, is the **Hotel Applause** (☎ 23941; r from C60,000) which has simple rooms with fans, bathrooms and balconies, and a rooftop restaurant with views that call for a little clapping.

Shama junction is about 18km east of Takoradi, off the main coastal road. The town is 4km south of the junction. Any vehicle travelling between Takoradi and Cape Coast or Elmina can drop you at the junction, from where there are regular shared taxis into Shama. Alternatively, you can get a tro-tro direct to Shama from the Cape Coast station in Takoradi.

SEKONDI-TAKORADI

(☎ 031

Takoradi is definitely the big sister of these twin cities. While it lacks any tourist sights and the beach is narrow, rocky or nonexistent, there are several good hotels and restau-

rants, and it's the transport hub west of Cape Coast. Takoradi was just a fishing village until it was chosen as Ghana's first deep-water seaport; since then it has prospered. Sekondi, the older of the two settlements, is about 10km northeast of Takoradi. The only reason you might venture into Sekondi is to take a quick look at Fort Orange, built by the Dutch in 1640 and now a lighthouse.

At the far (northeastern) end of John Sarbah Rd, across the Cape Coast road, is a wooded hill that is home to a quickly diminishing population of colobus and spotted monkeys.

Orientation

The heart of Takoradi is the busy Market Circle, around which you'll find the motor parks, most of the cheap hotels and eateries, and banks and forexes. The port is about 2km southeast of Market Circle. Near it is the train station and head offices of banks. West of the port area is a green residential area where you'll find many of the hotels, bordered to the south by a golf course and the beach.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

2-Gees Internet (Collins Rd)

Heaven's Gate Internet (Old Ashanti Rd; ☎ 7.30am-10pm)

JW Andrews Internet (John Sarbah Rd) Best connection in town.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Kenrich's Pharmacy (John Sarbah Rd)

MONEY

Barclays Bank (Market Circle) Southeastern side of the circle. Has an ATM.

Esam Forex Bureau (John Sarbah Rd)

Ghana Commercial Bank (Market Circle) Southeastern side of the circle. Has an ATM.

Idemahl Forex Bureau (Liberation Rd)

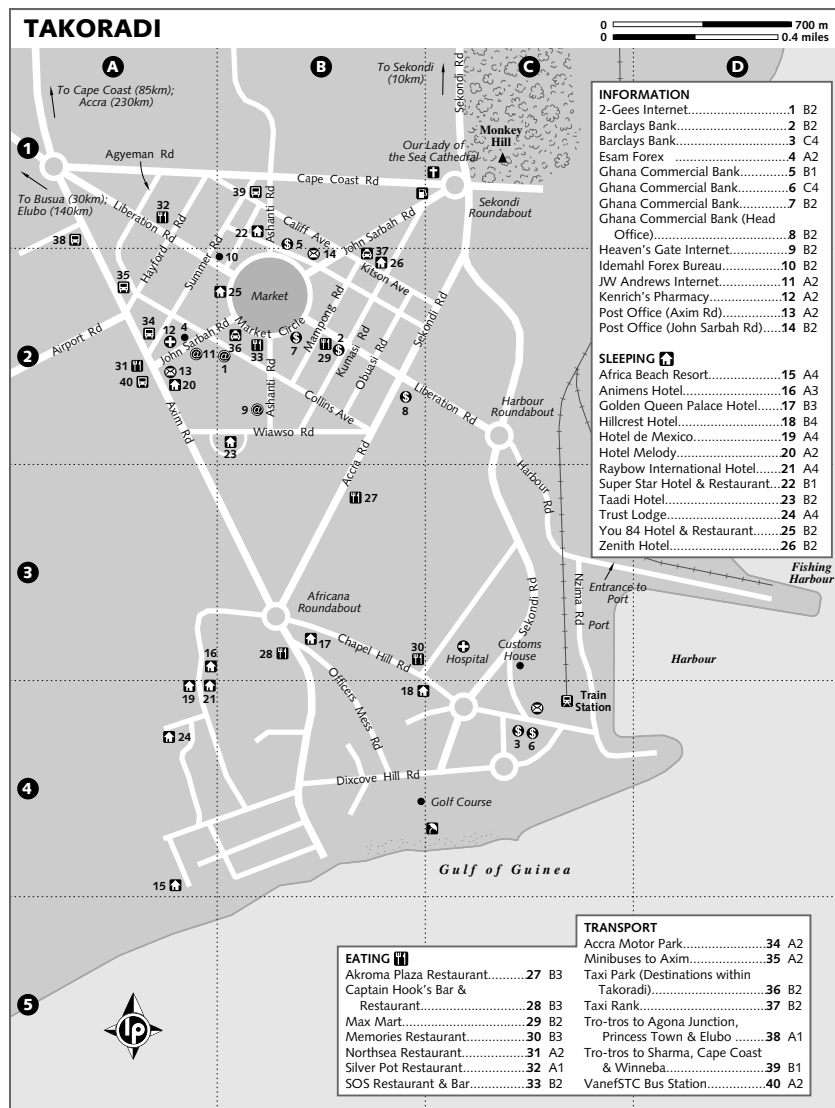
POST

Post office Axim Rd (Axim Rd); John Sarbah Rd (John Sarbah Rd)

Sleeping

BUDGET

Golden Queen Palace Hotel (☎ 23463; r from C130,000; (P) (S)) Right off the Axim Rd roundabout south of the centre, the Golden Queen is the only budget hotel in this quiet part of



town. Some of the rooms are actually too big and the concrete and lack of light aren't exactly pleasant.

You 84 Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 22945; Market Circle; d with fan/air-con C80,000/130,000) This intriguingly named hotel is upstairs on the western side of Market Circle. Despite the rather grand reception area, the rooms, some of

which open onto a balcony, are good value (private bathrooms).

Zenith Hotel (☎ 22359; Kitson Rd; r C80,000) A run-down colonial-era building east of Market Circle, the Zenith is nicely arranged around a central courtyard but the ratty and bare rooms are about what you'd expect at this price.

MIDRANGE

Taadi Hotel (☎ 31104; Wiawso Rd; r C180,000; P) Well located at the edge of central Takoradi, the Taadi stands out because of its friendly and attentive service. Some of the rooms even have sitting rooms, small balconies and cable TV.

Super Star Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 23105; Ashanti Rd; r with fan/air-con C165,000/216,000) This centrally located hotel is an oasis of air-conditioned calm amid the hot and dusty market area. It has clean, carpeted rooms and professional service though noise is a potential problem. There's a good modern restaurant on the ground floor, the best place to eat around the market area.

Animens Hotel (☎ 24676; r C200,000; P) This hotel on a quiet residential street next to the Raybow is a high-rise as far as Takoradi is concerned. Carpeted rooms are small but comfortable and sometimes get cable TV. A basic restaurant is attached.

Hotel de Mexico (r C250,000; P) Opposite the Animens and the Raybow and sharing their peaceful, residential setting, the Mexico is a low-slung concrete building with modern and clean rooms.

Hotel Melody (☎ 24109; Axim Rd; r C270,000; P) Though you can't beat the location as far as bus travel is concerned, spacious rooms at the Melody are no nicer than less expensive ones found elsewhere. There's a good restaurant.

TOP END

Hillcrest Hotel (☎ 22277; hillcrest@africaonline.com.gh; r US\$70; P) A favourite for foreign business travellers in the area, the Hillcrest has the nicest rooms – large, sunny and modern – in Takoradi and the most professional staff. Some rooms have big balconies looking out on the pool (nonguests C40,000) in the garden courtyard. A quality restaurant is attached.

Raybow International Hotel (☎ 25438; raybowhotel@yahoo.com; r C450,000; P) For those seeking modern comforts, the whitewashed Raybow compound is another good option. Each of the chalets has high-quality amenities and the charming bamboo-and-wicker restaurant serves some of the best food in town. Breakfast included.

Trust Lodge (☎ 23923; fax 23918; r US\$50; P) Better value than the two hotels closer to the beach, this low-slung building on a

quiet tree-lined street has large, comfortable and modern rooms and friendly, personable staff.

Africa Beach Resort (☎ 25148; africa_beach@yahoo.com; s/d US\$45/55; P) What it has going for it, a beachside location, is offset by the fact that there's not much of a beach here. Perched on a hill with the water below and relatively nice pool area means it's more like resort than anything else Takoradi has to offer. The decaying cottages have seen better days though. Live music Saturday nights in the bar and restaurant area.

Eating & Drinking

There are several good-value eateries and lively drinking spots along Axim Rd, around Market Circle and on Liberation Rd. **Max Mart** (Liberation Rd), only a block from the market, is an oasis, a modern, air-conditioned grocery store. See the previous Sleeping section for several recommended hotel restaurants.

Captain Hook's Bar & Restaurant (Africana Roundabout; mains C70,000-200,000) Not surprisingly seafood is the speciality at this nautically themed restaurant, probably the best and certainly the most expensive in Takoradi. Besides lobster, calamari and the like, pizza and European-style meat dishes round out the menu. The shady backyard beer garden is popular.

Akroma Plaza Restaurant (Accra Rd; mains C35,000) A cross between a large banquet hall and an institutional cafeteria, the Akroma Plaza is something of a local institution, especially on weekends when the vast dining room is at least partially filled as are some of the tables outside under the bamboo pavilions. Has a big menu with Ghanaian and continental dishes.

Memories Restaurant (Chapel Hill Rd; mains C30,000) Just down the road from the Hillcrest Hotel, Memories may look closed and abandoned from the outside but it's actually quite a pleasant little restaurant serving Chinese, Ghanaian and continental dishes plus pizza (C60,000) that can be recommended.

Silver Pot Restaurant (Liberation Rd; mains C25,000) One of the few places to eat comfortably in the market area, the Silver Pot is a clean and calm oasis good for a drink or meal of Ghanaian and continental cuisine.

Northsea Restaurant (Axim Rd; mains C60,000) Conveniently located next to the VanefSTC station and attached to the Mosden Hotel, the

Northsea looks like a diner that wants to be a dive bar. The booths are tearing at the seam and the air-con is weak though the menu is a respectable mix of seafood (C70,000), pizza (C45,000) and Ghanaian and continental food. Live jazz Friday nights.

SOS Restaurant & Bar (cnr Ashanti Rd & Market Circle; mains C20,000) A basic local's eatery serving snacks and drinks on the southern side of Market Circle, the SOS is notable only for its breezy upstairs balcony.

Getting There & Away

BUS & TRO-TRO

The **VanefSTC bus station** (☎ 23351; Axim Rd) is opposite the junction with John Sarbah Rd. It has regular departures for Accra (ordinary/luxury C38,000/C50,000, four hours) between 3am and 5.30pm. There are three buses per day to Kumasi (C65,000, six hours, 4am, 10am and 4pm); only two at 8am and 2pm on Sunday. The Accra bus can drop you at Pedu junction (for Cape Coast) or Anomabu, but you will have to pay the full Accra fare. If you're heading for Abidjan, it's possible to pick up the bus from Accra as it passes through but you'll need to arrange this in advance; it's easier get transport to Elubo and continue from there. There's also a Monday-morning bus to Tamale and Sunday-evening bus to Aflao.

Opposite the VanefSTC bus station is the Accra motor park, from where you can get OSA and City Express buses and GPRTU minibuses to Accra. At the top of Axim Rd, near the traffic circle, is a tro-tro park serving destinations west of Takoradi, including Agona junction (30 minutes, for Busua and Dixcove), Axim, Beyin and Elubo (three hours). This is also where you can get tro-tros and Peugeot taxis to Abidjan. Tro-tros to destinations east of Takoradi leave from the Cape Coast tro-tro station north of Market Circle. Destinations include Shama, Cape Coast and Winneba.

TRAIN

There are passenger trains from Takoradi to Kumasi and Accra. For more details, see p402.

BUSUA & DIXCOVE

☎ 031

These two fishing villages, only 30km or so west of Takoradi and an easy drive from

Accra, boast some of the nicest beaches in Ghana. Busua, the more developed of the two as far as tourism goes, is blessed with a long, sandy stretch and water ideal for swimming and even a little surfing. Now there's even more reason to head this way with the addition of two low-key bungalow hangouts near Dixcove.

Sights & Activities

On the shore of a rocky cove, Dixcove is an animated fishing village. Its natural harbour is deep enough for small ships to enter – one of the reasons why it became the site of the picturesque **Fort Metal Cross** (admission C10,000, camera fee C5000; ☎ 9am-5pm), which overlooks the port. Built in 1696 by the British, it got its name from the metal brand used on the slaves who passed through here. The post office in the first courtyard has been here since the British occupation and is still the only post office for the entire Busua-Dixcove area. From the ramparts there are magical views over the harbour and the village.

If you head east along the beach from Busua, after about 2km you'll reach the settlement of Butre, site of the ruined **Fort Batenstein**.

Dixcove is about 2km around the coast west of Busua, an undemanding 20- to 30-minute walk over the headland to the west. Locals warn against walking the track alone; follow their advice and take a local guide (for a small fee) and don't take any valuables with you. Alternatively, you can get a shared taxi back to Agona junction then another from there to Dixcove. There's no direct transport between Dixcove and Busua.

Sleeping

The more established accommodation is in Busua but two new resorts near Dixcove are extremely attractive options.

BUDGET

Ellis Hideout (☎ 290456; www.ellishideout.com; camping with own tent C25,000, dm C50,000, bungalows C180,000) Owned and operated by a Swedish family dedicated to drawing people in and making them never want to leave. A few minutes from Butre, separated by a short canoe ride, this beachfront mini-village has beautifully crafted bungalows with colourful tiled floors, and budget rooms with five beds in a small

room. A restaurant serves up good Ghanaian and continental dishes. You can arrange drumming classes and all manner of tours including crocodile safaris up the Butre river. There are discounts for students and volunteers.

Green Turtle Lodge (☎ 893566; www.greenturtlelodge.com; camping with own tent C25,000, dm C50,000, r with shared/private bathroom C100,000/200,000) Another new resort, equally committed to the environment and community, the Green Turtle uses solar power, recycles shower water and is built entirely from local, natural materials. It's on a palm-lined beach and has spacious, clean bungalows with showers open to the sun and stars. There's a restaurant, and the young British owners can organise day and overnight tours including hikes, canoe trips and surfing safaris. Green Turtle is 10km west of Dixcove near the village of Akwidaa. It discounts for students and volunteers.

Alaska Beach Club (rondavels with shared/private bathroom C85,000/C200,000; ☎) The oddly named Alaska (considering it's on a beach and it's always hot) is the best value in Busua. Each of the simple round huts with thatched roofs comes with a mosquito net and desk and the shared bathroom facilities are kept clean. The only hassle is that the beachside restaurant and bar attracts a fair number of hangers-on and tourist leeches. Rents surfboards and boogie boards.

MIDRANGE

African Rainbow Resort (☎ 32149; www.africanrainbow.net; s/d with fan US\$45/50, s/d with air-con US\$60/65; ☎) Certainly more charming than the Busua Beach Resort, this hotel across the street from the beach has large, clean rooms with balconies, plus a rooftop bar and lounge area, a nicely decorated restaurant and a ground-floor bar with pool table. Breakfast included.

Busua Beach Resort (☎ 21210; www.gbhghana.com; r from US\$50/60; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Though it gives white elephants a bad name, this large complex does boast a superb beachside location and all the amenities you'd expect, though architecturally it doesn't exactly blend in. The budget accommodation (room with fan US\$12) was being refurbished at the time of research. There's a beachside pavilion restaurant as well as one indoors, and a bar. Has the only (semi) reliable Internet access in Busua.

Eating

The three resorts in Busua have their own restaurants: the Alaska Beach Club is the most laid back and least expensive, the African Rainbow has the most welcoming dining area plus a rooftop, and the Busua Beach; well the service is slow and it's overpriced.

There's no shortage of locals who will catch and cook seafood for you upon request. Take a walk down the beach or simply hang out at the Alaska Beach Club and you'll likely be propositioned by an entrepreneurial chef or two. There are several makeshift restaurants set up along the beach as well, really nothing more than a sign and a table, but whatever eating option you choose, you should try to order around an hour in advance.

At the far western end of the beach at Busua is the Black Mamba Corner, a restaurant owned and operated by a German woman who lives on this rocky promontory set apart from the rest of town. Order well in advance for the seafood and pizza that's served. Walk to the end of the beach and look for the sign across the water. There is one round cottage on the property that comfortably sleeps four, available for C100,000.

Getting There & Away

Busua and Dixcove are each about 12km from the main coastal road. There's no direct transport to and from either Busua or Dixcove; you have to get to Agona junction on the main road and then take a tro-tro or shared taxi from there. From Takoradi, regular tro-tros (C6000, 45 minutes) leave for Agona junction from the station at the top of Axim Rd. From Agona junction there is frequent transport (C2500) to Busua and Dixcove. A private taxi between Busua and Takoradi will cost around C80,000.

PRINCESS TOWN

Despite the relative difficulty getting here, or perhaps because of it, Princess Town draws travellers to its abandoned beach and **Fort Princess Town** (admission C5000, still/video camera fee C5000/10,000; ☎ 9am-5pm), a castle perched magnificently at the top of a hill on the eastern edge of the village. Originally called Gross Friedrichsburg by the Prussians who built it in 1683, the partly restored fort is made from greyish local stone and this, together with the lush vegetation surrounding it,

makes it one of the most attractive forts on the coast. There are superb views from the ramparts over the sandy bay and towards Cape Three Points, Ghana's southernmost point. The fort's caretaker can help arrange excursions in the area, such as canoe trips on the nearby lagoon, and trips up the River Kpani to visit a palm-wine distillery.

The only accommodation in Princess Town is at the fort, where simple rooms with shared bathroom (bucket showers) cost C25,000; you can also camp with a tent for C15,000. At the start of the short trail up to the fort is a terrace bar and restaurant where you can get cold drinks and cheap seafood meals. Odds are you'll be approached by self-appointed guides, though they're not necessary.

The junction for Princess Town is about 15km west of Agona junction; any tro-tro heading west from Agona can drop you there. From here, it's about 18km to Princess Town along a scenic but rough dirt road. Shared taxis run reasonably regularly between the junction and the town. There are also direct tro-tros from Agona to Princess Town but they take forever to fill up.

AXIM

☎ 0342

Closer to Abidjan than Accra, Axim is just about the end of the road as far as Ghanaian beach resorts go, and it's this relative isolation plus an exceptional resort that makes the journey more than worthwhile. The town itself, the largest on the coast west of Takoradi, is fairly unexceptional except for the whitewashed **Fort St Anthony** (admission C10,000, camera fee C5000). It was built by the Portuguese in 1515, making it the second-oldest fort on the Ghanaian coast. From the top of the fort there are excellent views of the coastline in either direction. Though the official status of accommodation is a little ambiguous, the caretaker says a bed in the fort minus bathroom can be had for C45,000. Whales can be seen from October to March in the waters around Axim.

Sleeping & Eating

Axim Beach Hotel (☎ 22260; www.aximbeach.com; bungalows with fan/air-con US\$33/43, s/d with fan/air-con US\$8/16, budget r US\$6; 📞 📺 📺) This hotel, perched on a cliff with sea views a couple of kilometres east of the town centre, is one of

the nicest places to stay in all of Ghana. The traditional-style bungalows have a single flower placed on every immaculately made bed and even the bathrooms (private for the bungalows, shared for the rooms) are done lovingly with attention to detail. Two restaurants, one on top of the hill and the other on the fantastic beach below, serve excellent seafood, Ghanaian and continental food. Staff can arrange canoe trips to Princess Town and Cape Three Points, drumming and dancing courses, and tours to Nzulezu and Ankasa Nature Reserve. Hosts a full-moon party at the end of May.

Ankobra Beach Hotel (☎ 22400; ankobra_beach@hotmail.com; r US\$11, bungalows US\$25-29) The Ankobra is another highly recommended resort with an unbeatable location set within a grove of palms on a stunning beach. The bungalows don't have as much character as those at the Axim but they're comfortable and the restaurant is equally good. Activities such as canoe trips up the nearby Ankobra River and tours to Nzulezu and Ankasa can be arranged. Ankobra Beach is signposted off the main Elubo road, about 5km from the turn-off to Axim. From the main road, it's about 500m to the resort.

Getting There & Away

Axim is 69km west of Takoradi, off the main Elubo road, which bypasses it. Axim's motor park is in the centre of town, across from the football pitch in front of the fort. There are regular tro-tros to Takoradi (1½ hours), which can drop you at Agona junction (for Busua and Dixcove) or the Princess Town junction. Heading west, for Elubo and Ankasa you may have to get a tro-tro to Esiamia, a big transport hub on the coastal road about 10km from Axim, and get onward transport from there. To Beyin, you'll have to get a tro-tro to Eikwe and then transport on from there.

BEYIN & NZULEZU

About 65km west of Axim, is the village of Beyin. It's the site of Fort Apollonia, the last of the coastal forts west of Accra, and it's the departure point for visits to the Amansuri Lagoon and the stilt village of Nzulezu. This village is reached by canoe, which takes about an hour each way. At the Ghana Wildlife Society office on the outskirts of Beyin, you register and pay a fee of C40,000 per per-

son, which includes the canoe trip and entry to the village. (Contact the project manager Mr James Parker on ☎ 233 20 81 60 996, cell phone 233 31 92 310 or email him at pmckeown100@yahoo.co.uk.) There's no shade on the lagoon so the earlier in the day you leave the better, and take plenty of water and a hat with you.

You can stay overnight in Nzulezu in a tranquil room over the water for C35,000. Simple meals can be arranged. Let them know you want to stay over when you are arranging your trip.

Beyin is on a rough dirt road that leaves the main Elubo road about 20km west of Esiamia. From there it's about 15km to Eikwe and then the road follows the coast to Beyin. From Takoradi, you may be able to get a direct tro-tro from the station at the top of Axim Rd but it's probably quicker to get a tro-tro to Esiamia and then transport on from there. From Axim, there are a few tro-tros to Eikwe, from where you can get onward transport to Beyin. Alternatively, Axim Beach Resort and Ankobra Beach Hotel can charter a taxi to take you there and back for about C250,000. Heading to Elubo, you can get transport east from Beyin to Tikobo No 1 and onward transport from there.

ANKASA NATURE RESERVE

One of the few untouched tropical rainforests, this **reserve** (admission C25,000), near the border with Côte d'Ivoire offers reasonable wildlife-viewing opportunities, although facilities are very basic. Together with the neighbouring Nini-Suhien Reserve, Ankasa covers 490 sq km of wet rainforest. Mammals such as forest elephants, leopards, bongos and several monkey species have been identified and the area is particularly rich in birdlife, including parrots, hornbills and the rare white-fronted guinea fowl.

The park headquarters is at the main Ankasa Gate, where you pay the entrance fee and can arrange guided hikes including night-time ones. Overnight accommodation is available in the park in camps (C25,000) within walking distance of the main Ankasa Gate. You'll need to bring your own mosquito net or tent, sleeping bag and food.

Ankasa Gate is about 6km north of the main Elubo road, about 20km southeast of Elubo. Direct transport can be difficult so

it may be better to take any transport along the main road and ask to be dropped at the junction.

THE EAST

Once part of German Togoland and now known as the Volta region, appropriately enough since the huge lake of the same name dominates its geography, this part of the country offers the best opportunity for hiking. The three waterfalls at Wli, Tagbo and Amedofe are surrounded by some of the most beautiful countryside in Ghana.

VanefSTC buses leave from Accra's Tudu station north of Makola market for Aflao, Ho, Hohoe and Kpando daily, but, it's common for departure times for these destinations to be delayed significantly. Crossing to or from Togo will take you along the coastal highway and through the border at Aflao.

ADA

☎ 0968

Don't be confused by the fact that there are three Adas: Ada Kasseh at the junction on the main Accra to Aflao highway, Big Ada about 15km south and Ada Foah on the estuary. It's only Ada Foah, with its languorous air of decay, riverfront setting and superb beach, that is worth visiting. Turtles come ashore here to nest between November and February.

There's a small community-run **tourist centre** near the motor park in Ada Foah. Boat trips on the river can be arranged at the tourist centre or more expensively from the Manet Paradise Beach Hotel. Swim in the ocean, as there's a chance of picking up bilharzia in the estuary.

Sleeping & Eating

Manet Paradise Beach Hotel (☎ 22398; info@manetparadise.com; s/d US\$75/88; 📞) Easily the best place to stay in Ada, the Manet Paradise has an exquisite location near the mouth of the estuary about 1.5km east of the town centre and set amid palm-shaded, well-kept grounds. The rooms are modern but unspectacular. You can cool off in the nice pool and watersport activities are offered; it also has tennis courts. There's a nice restaurant and terrace bar that catches sunset views.

Estuary Beach Club (huts C85,000) Hard to get to, but worth the slog because of its location on an otherwise deserted stretch of beach, the Estuary has only a few simple huts but may expand in the future. Don't attempt the drive here in anything but a good 4WD, or it's over a half-hour walk from the Manet Paradise. Alternatively you can charter a boat here.

There are several basic guesthouses in and around the market area and just north of Ada Foah.

Getting There & Around

Any transport heading in either direction along the Accra to Aflao highway should be able to drop you at the junction, Ada Kasseh, from where regular passenger taxis run to Ada Foah (C2000). From Accra, tro-tros (C10,000, two hours) direct to Ada leave from Tudu station. To get to Ho from Ada, you'll need to change vehicles at Sogakope or, possibly, Akatsi junction. If you're headed to Akosombo, it's probably easiest to take any vehicle to Tema and change there.

From the lorry park in Ada Foah, private taxis go to the Manet Paradise.

KETA

☎ 0966

Birdwatchers will want to flock to Keta, one of the least toured parts of the country, and one of the last stops before reaching the Togolese border at Aflao. The Keta Lagoon, the largest in the country, is separated from the encroaching sea by a narrow strip of land and a sandy beach which in places is quite pretty. Keta itself seems to be in a perpetual state of ruin, at least in part because some of the town has in fact been washed away. You can visit the ruins of Fort Prinzenstein, built in 1784 by the Danes. Just on from the fort is the beach; other beaches are at Tegbi, Woe and Anloga on the road south of Keta.

Sleeping & Eating

Lorneh Lodge (☎ 42160; r from US\$25; 🚽 📺 📺) Several kilometres south of Keta near Tegbi on the ocean side of the road, the Lorneh has a row of concrete bungalows on a good swimming beach. Less expensive rooms are a few hundred metres away. There's a restaurant and Internet access.

Keta Beach Hotel (☎ 21288; r with fan/air-con C85,000/150,000) This once-popular place, on

the beachside of the road 2km south of Keta, has fairly run-down accommodation but a pleasant bar and restaurant area.

Abutia Lodge (☎ 22239; r from C75,000) On the edge of the lagoon in Woe, about 8km south of the Keta Beach Hotel and clearly sign-posted off the main road, this is a tranquil and laid-back place best appreciated for its garden setting and not for the low quality of its rooms. Meals can be provided.

Getting There & Away

Tro-tros to Keta leave from Tudu station in Accra (C20,000, three hours). From Ada, you may need to change vehicles in Sogakope and again at Dabala. From Ho, infrequent tro-tros head to Keta but it's quicker to go to Akatsi junction and on from there. East of Keta towards Aflao and the Togo border, the sea has encroached on the road. Occasionally 4WDs make the trip when the water is especially low; otherwise there are frequent boats across and onward transport from there. Although there is a motor park near the fort in Keta, the main transport hub is at Anloga, about 15km southwest. Tro-tros and shared taxis connect the settlements between Anloga and Keta.

AKOSOMBO

☎ 0251

Once a boom town housing thousands of workers building the dam that now holds back the world's largest artificial lake, known as Lake Volta, today Akosombo deserves a visit only to take in this engineering marvel, preferably from the vantage of a canoe or ferry on the Volta River. It's also the terminus for a passenger-boat service north to Yeji.

Akosombo is about 7km north of the Accra to Ho road, 2km before the dam and 6km before the port. There's a Ghana Commercial Bank, post office and small visitor centre on the main road near the motor park in town. A wider selection of accommodation and eating options are available in Atimpoku, to the south of Akosombo, where the Ho road crosses the Volta at the impressive Adome Suspension Bridge.

Sights & Activities

To view the dam, take a shared taxi to 'Mess' and get off at the foot of the drive to the Volta Lake Hotel; the lookout is halfway

up the drive. The Volta River Authority arranges tours of the dam (ask at the visitor centre or the Volta Hotel).

More like a booze cruise than the Love Boat, the infelicitously named *Dodi Princess* chugs out to nearby Dodi Island on Saturday, Sunday and holidays (adult/child C160,000/100,000); the price includes lunch and a drink. Leaving at around 11am, the trip takes five hours, with two hours on the island, but you can stay on board if you want. Contact the Volta Hotel for reservations. It leaves from a well-signposted jetty beyond the dam, before the port. Any shared taxi heading for the port from the motor park can drop you at the jetty.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Adomi Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 20095; r with fan/air-con C120,000/200,000) Overlooking Atimpoku roundabout opposite the suspension bridge, the Adomi has comfortable, modern rooms, some with cable TV. The terrace restaurant has especially good views.

Benkum Motel (☎ 20050; r C70,000) It's not as bad as it looks. This isn't exactly a compliment since the basic, fan-cooled rooms at this budget hotel in Atimpoku, south of the suspension bridge, are only a slight step up in quality from the crumbling building. Bathrooms are shared.

Zito Guesthouse (☎ 20474; r with fan/air-con C120,000/190,000) Still the only acceptable budget choice in Akosombo. Zito is up the hill from the motor park past the market, and has fairly spacious bare bones rooms. There's a small garden on the property.

MIDRANGE

Aylo's Bay (☎ 20901; www.aylosbay.com; r US\$30) Near the Volta Bridge and next to the Continental, this laid-back hotel has several small cottages on shady riverside frontage as well as a garden bar and restaurant. Canoe trips and all kinds of workshops can be arranged.

Akosombo Continental Hotel (☎ 20091; r US\$60; 🚽 📺) The Continental doesn't have the character of Aylo's Bay or the relative luxury of the Volta, but it does have an excellent riverfront location just beyond the suspension bridge, and bland but modern accommodation. There's a swimming pool and a good but moderately expensive restaurant.

TOP END

Volta Hotel (☎ 251731; s/d US\$95/105; 🚽 📺) Even without the panoramic views of the dam, the lake and the Akwamu highlands, the Volta Hotel is superb hotel just on its own merits: top-flight service, quality, modern rooms and a good restaurant. The bar has live music on most weekend nights. Look for signs to the hotel in town.

Eating

Street food in Akosombo and Atimpoku include specialities like fried shrimp sold in plastic bags and 'one man thousand' (minute-fried fish). In Akosombo town, try the Kokoo-Ase Spot near the motor park for a drink or bite to eat. Aylo's Bay and the Volta Hotel have good restaurants. The **Maritime Club** (Volta Transport Club; mains C35,000), about 500m beyond Akosombo port, has a relaxing bar and restaurant.

Getting There & Around

The main transport hub is at Kpong, on the Accra to Ho road 10km south of Atimpoku. Regular tro-tros travel between Kpong, Atimpoku and Akosombo. From Accra, tro-tros for Kpong/Akosombo (C30,000) leave from Tudu station. Alternatively, get any transport to Ho from Accra or to Accra or Kpong from Ho and get off at the suspension bridge at Atimpoku.

For details about the boat between Akosombo and Yeji, see p400.

Regular shared taxis leave the motor park in Akosombo for places in and around town. For the port, get one to 'Marine'.

HO

☎ 091

Capitals sometimes aren't all they're cracked up to be; provincial ones near the border with Togo...well, even more so. While Ho, about 75km northeast of Akosombo, is the political and administrative seat of the Volta region, its appeal lays solely in its proximity to other more interesting and attractive destinations in the region. The city's backdrop, a range of hills with the distinctive Mt Adaklu to the south, is pleasant enough, and there are a few good hotels, but it's Ho's status as a transport hub that makes it the obvious base for exploring this region.

Ho's streets are long and things are spread fairly far apart, although the VanefSTC

AKOSOMBO DAM

In 1915 an engineer, Albert Kison, realised that the Kwahu plateau was a rich bauxite deposit, that damming the Volta River at Akosombo could generate enough electricity for a huge foundry and that Tema could be converted into a deep-water port to export the aluminium. His conclusions gathered dust for 40 years until Nkrumah, keen to industrialise Ghana, picked up the idea. To finance the project, he had to accede to the harsh terms of Valco, the US company most interested in the project. Under these terms, in return for building the dam, Valco would receive over two-thirds of the electricity generated, at cost price, for its aluminium smelter at Tema for the foreseeable future.

The project proved so expensive that it was decided to import the necessary raw material for the foundry rather than to extract it from the Kwahu Plateau. Costs immediately escalated. Some 84,000 people had to be relocated – some of these people are still yet to be fully compensated today – and, at Tema, a new port and town had to be constructed. The dam was eventually inaugurated in 1966; a month later Nkrumah was gone, ousted by the military.

For years, the economy spiralled downward and Valco's savage terms allowed little potential for the country to earn money from power generation, realise the dam's potential for electrifying the country or irrigate nearby farmland. Only now, partly due to Valco's terms being renegotiated, is the country truly beginning to benefit, but the dam's full potential is still far from realised.

In 2005, after six of years of work funded by the Volta River Authority, the World Bank and the European Development Fund, the turbines at the dam were upgraded. Despite this work power outages throughout the country, including in Accra are by no means infrequent and while demand grows exponentially, the level of the lake continues to fall.

There's talk of a deal to harvest timber buried in the lake which is the cause of boating accidents and, maybe of more interest to potential investors, possibly worth tens of millions of dollars. Some also speculate that the lake is a treasure trove of other valuable minerals and even gold.

The dam is 124m high and 368m wide and can now generate (after upgrades) 1,012,000 KW. In theory there should be enough electricity to power most of Ghana plus export the remainder to Togo and Benin but ironically Ghana has even had to import power from Côte d'Ivoire during particularly severe droughts. Because of the earthquake risk, the dam is not built of solid concrete but has a central nucleus of clay covered by a layer of crushed rock and outer walls covered with huge boulders. Lake Volta, which flooded 850,000 hectares of land (7% of Ghana's land surface), stretches north from Akosombo for 402km.

bus station and main lorry park and the central market are next to one another, not too far from the Freedom Hotel.

Information

There's a small **tourist office** (☎ 26560) on the fourth floor of an office complex next to the Goil petrol station on the Accra road. Barclays Bank is just down the road from here and has an ATM. For Internet access, try the New Image centre just down the road from Mother's Inn, or the business centre at the Freedom Hotel or Chances Hotel.

Sleeping

Freedom Hotel (☎ 28158; www.freedomhotel-gh.com; r/chalets C250,000/450,000; 📞 📺 📺 📺) Because it's within walking distance of the market and lorry station, the Freedom Hotel on the Kpalimé road is the best choice in Ho.

The large and modern chalets are probably the best accommodation in town and the less expensive rooms in the main block are clean and well kept. There's a great pool and lounge area and bar out back. A restaurant is attached though the service is extremely slow. The best place in town to hang out is the rooftop lounge and bar with views over the road.

Chances Hotel (☎ 28344; r/chalets US\$40/48; 📞 📺 📺 📺) On the Accra road about 3km before the centre, Chances is Ho's most up-market hotel and worth the price if you get a room in one of the new annexes. The older rooms that surround a central courtyard are nothing special. There's a beautiful pool, a good restaurant (mains C40,000) and an Internet centre.

Fiave Lodge (r C70,000) On the Kpalimé road between the market and the Freedom Hotel,

this is a small family-run guesthouse with a few rooms of varying quality, some with their own bathrooms. Meals are available upon request.

Eating & Drinking

Around the motor park and the VanefSTC bus station on the main street are plenty of stalls selling tasty food. The Freedom and Chances hotels have the two best restaurants in Ho. Mother's Inn, on the southern outskirts of town just down the road from the Shell station, is a popular drinking spot and serves cheap, simple local food, as does Lord's Restaurant just off the main street near the junction with the Accra road, and the White House, a short way up the hill from the Hotel de Tarso.

Getting There & Away

Ho's busy main lorry park is well organised. From here, regular tro-tros run between Ho and Hohoe (two hours) throughout the day. Other destinations include Accra, Amedzofe, Akatsi and Keta.

VanefSTC runs one ridiculously early bus a day (C40,000, four hours) between Ho and Accra, leaving from the VanefSTC station on the main street in Ho at 4am. In Accra, buses for Ho leave from the smaller VanefSTC bus station near Tudu station. Tro-tros for Ho depart from the small terminal near Tema station.

Possibly the most comfortable public transport available in Ghana are the KTS minivans connecting Ho and Accra (C45,000, two hours). If only all the transportation in the country was like this... They leave when full from a little clearing on the left side of the Kpalimé road coming from the central market.

OSA has a daily bus from Ho to Kumasi via Koforidua, leaving from opposite the lorry park early in the morning.

AROUND HO Mt Adaklu

The views from the top of this impressive mountain, about 12km south of Ho, are spectacular. Surrounded by nine villages, the Adaklu area is part of a community-based tourism project. At the visitor centre in the village of Helekepe at the foot of the mountain, you pay a fee of US\$2 and are assigned a guide. It's a challenging two- to four-hour

climb return and you need appropriate footwear and plenty of water with you. There's a basic **guesthouse** (r US\$1.70) in Helekepe or you can camp on the mountain. Tro-tros leave sporadically (but not on Sunday) for Helekepe (30 minutes) from the motor park in Ho; another place to pick up transport is on the Adaklu road just south of the town. Finding return transport can be difficult.

Amedzofe

This mountain village is the main centre in the Avatime Hills, an area that offers breathtaking vistas, a waterfall, forests, cool climate and plenty of hiking opportunities. In Amedzofe there's a community-run **visitor centre** where you pay a flat fee of US\$2 and can arrange hikes. Popular hikes include a 45-minute walk to Amedzofe Falls and a 30-minute walk to the summit of Mt Gemi (611m), one of the highest mountains in the area, where there is a 3.5m iron cross and stunning views. There's basic accommodation at the **Sun Lodge** (r C70,000) where you can also hire mountain bikes or you can arrange a homestay for about C40,000. Sun Lodge also has a campsite directly facing Mt Gemi.

Infrequent tro-tros head for Amedzofe (one hour) from the motor park station in Ho but transport of any kind is unlikely on a Sunday. If you're planning to head to Amedzofe from Hohoe, note that the route between Fume and Amedzofe (about 8km) is passable by foot only.

Kpetoe

Kpetoe, a 15-minute tro-tro ride to the southeast of Ho, near the Togo border, is a major kente-weaving centre. The Ga-Adangbe people of this area claim to have introduced the art of kente weaving to the Ashanti. Two types of kente are woven: the Ashanti version and the Ewe version, which is more difficult to make.

Tafi-Atome Monkey Sanctuary

At Tafi-Atome, about 25km north of Ho, the villagers have created a sanctuary around the village to protect the sacred Mona monkeys that live in the surrounding forest. The monkeys are used to humans and roam around the village like teenagers just released from school in the early morning and late afternoon. Admission and a guided tour of the sanctuary costs around C30,000.

You can hire a bicycle to visit other sites in the area or stay for drumming, dancing and storytelling sessions in the evening. Basic accommodation and meals are available at the guesthouse (C40,000 per person) or at the homestays for a negotiated fee.

Tafi-Atome is about 5km west of Logba Alakpeti on the main road between Ho and Hohoe. Any tro-tro running between Ho and Hohoe can drop you at Logba Alakpeti, from where you can either walk or wait for transport – infrequent except on market day.

HOOE

☎ 0935

The sound of silence you hear in Hohoe is people going about their everyday lives. For whatever reason, maybe because fewer foreigners make it here, there are no shouts of 'obroni', which is a welcome relief from other parts of the country. In this pleasant district capital you're likely to elicit nothing more than a friendly nod or smile, and it's this pleasant, laid-back vibe, the nearby Wli Falls and several good hotels in town that make Hohoe a preferable base to Ho for exploring the Volta region. It's also a staging point for travel across the border into Togo and north to Tamale via Bimbilla and Yendi.

Orientation & Information

The action area of Hohoe (ho-we) is the Accra road, which becomes the road to Jasikan and Bimbilla as it heads north out of town. Along here, south to north, you'll find the motor park, market and **Ghana Tourism office** (Hohoe District Assembly building), a Mobil and Shell station, a Ghana Commercial Bank, Ghana Telecom and the post office. The road to Wli and the Togo border turns off the main road at the Bank of Ghana about 1km from the motor park; there's a Barclays Bank for changing money a short distance down this road. **Em-mason Internet** (☎ 9am-9.30pm) is just around the corner from the post office on your left on the road to the Taste Lodge.

Better than the tourist office is **Tourcare International** (☎ 44735732; tourcare@freighana.com) at Taste Lodge. They arrange day and overnight guided tours anywhere in the region.

Sleeping & Eating

Taste Lodge (☎ 22023; fax 22025; r from C180,000; 📍 📺) Highly recommended in part because of the friendly and helpful owner,

Florence Yaadra, this comfortable place has five rooms, all with their own small balconies opening onto a shady courtyard. A good restaurant is attached. To get to the Taste Lodge, walk north up the main street from the main lorry station for about 500m until you get to the post office and take the turn-off on the right. The Taste is just on the left, about 250m from the intersection.

Evergreen Lodge (☎ 22254; r C230,000; 📍 📺) The Evergreen, a short way off the road heading north from town to Bimbilla, has the nicest and most modern rooms in town but little character. A nice restaurant with cable TV is attached.

Pacific Guesthouse (☎ 22146; r C150,000; 📍 📺) Down the same dirt road past the Taste Lodge, the Pacific is also a warm and friendly place comfortable with foreign travellers. Cheaper fan rooms are available and there's a nice lounge area and bar. Breakfast is included and other meals can be arranged.

Geduld Hotel (☎ 22177; r C100,000; 📍 📺) It's a bit of a walk into town but the Geduld, located further down the same road as the Taste Lodge and Pacific Guesthouse, has pleasant rooms in a two-storey home and a garden bar and restaurant.

Matvin Hotel (☎ 22134; r with fan and shared/private bathroom C69,000/92,000, r with air-con and private bathroom C150,000; 📍 📺) This lonely complex on the northern outskirts of town, just before the Evergreen, possesses all the charm of a military checkpost. Several life-size human statues dot the unkempt grounds and the rooms of various shapes and sizes are uniformly bad choices.

Grand Hotel (☎ 22053; r from C60,000) The Grand is the cheapest option in town and also the most central across from the Bank of Ghana. Basic rooms (shared bathrooms) are set around a concrete central courtyard and restaurant.

At night, you'll find a selection of food stalls along the main street, especially around the post office. There are also several good-value chop bars (all closed on Sunday) and lively evening drinking spots on the road to the Taste Lodge, near the Pacific Guesthouse and in the area around the Grand Hotel.

Getting There & Away

VanefSTC buses leave Hohoe for Accra at the ungodly hour of 3am (C30,000, four hours) and from Accra at 3pm daily. Tro-

tros leave regularly throughout the day for Accra (C28,000, four hours), Ho (C15,000, one hour) and Akosombo (C20,000, 2½ hours). Tro-tros and shared taxis go to Wli Falls and the Togo border at Wli (C5000, 30 minutes). Heading north, tro-tros to Jasikan and Nkwanta (for Bimbilla and Tamale) leave from a stop on the Jasikan road, north of the post office. Tro-tros to Liatu Wote (see right) leave from Fodome station in front of the post office.

AROUND HOOE Wli (Agumatsa) Falls

Nowhere else in Ghana will you feel so far from Accra and so close to sublime nature, even if there are benches and an out-house nearby. After a scenic, undemanding 40-minute walk along a bubbling stream, it's hard not to gawk at the 40m-high cascade. Those aren't birds but an estimated half a million bats swirling around near the top of the horseshoe-shaped cliff. If the icy water isn't an obstacle you can swim in the shallow pool at the bottom of the falls. A hike to the upper falls is a more demanding 1½-hour climb and a guide is necessary.

These spectacular falls about 20km east of Hohoe are within the Agumatsa Wildlife Sanctuary. At the Wildlife Office in Wli (pronounced vlee) village, you pay a fee (adult/student C33,000/16,000, camera fee C3000); a guide is optional but not needed since it's fairly impossible to lose your way. Wli is an easy day trip from Hohoe, but if you want to stay overnight, you can camp near the falls (C15,000) or stay in Wli village at one of two hotels.

The **Waterfall Lodge** (☎ 0935-20057; www.gghanacamping.com; r C110,000), owned by Germans, is only a few hundred metres from the Wildlife Office, and is a great place to sleep after a day at the falls. There are only a few nice, modern rooms so do your best to make a reservation in advance, although this is difficult since the phone line rarely works. Tasty food is served indoors or in the pavilion on the lawn.

Wli Water Heights Hotel (☎ 833855; r C100,000) is past the turnoff for the falls and the Waterfall Lodge. It has comfortable and basic rooms and a restaurant, though it's not as well set up for travellers.

Regular tro-tros (40 minutes) and share taxis (C4500, 25 minutes) make the scenic

run between Wli and Hohoe throughout the day. If you're heading for Togo, the Ghanaian border post is on the eastern side of Wli (turn left at the T-junction as you enter the village). From there, it's a 10-minute walk to the Togolese side.

Liatu Wote & Mt Afadjato

This pretty village, 21km south of Hohoe, lies on the foothills of Ghana's highest mountain, Mt Afadjato (885m; nearby Aduadu peak is really the highest point in Ghana, but isn't considered a mountain because the height difference between the base and the peak is too small). Liatu Wote is part of another community-based ecotourism initiative – check in at the visitor centre when you arrive to pay your fees and arrange a hike. It's a reasonably challenging two-hour climb to the summit of Mt Afadjato, which offers stupendous views of Lake Volta and the countryside below. There are also a couple of easier walks, including to Tagbo Falls, a 45-minute hike from the village through coffee and cocoa fields. The surrounding forest is filled with fluttering butterflies. There's a small guesthouse and eatery in town. Tro-tros leave for Liatu Wote (one hour) from Fodome station in Hohoe.

THE CENTRE

This region is more than just the cultural heartland of the country and the historic centre of the Ashanti. Besides Kumasi, which is the historic seat of royalty, a major urban centre and the transport hub of the region, there are rural areas, villages and forests, handicrafts, butterflies and monkeys all within striking distance. Kumasi marks the tip of the triangle linking Takoradi and Accra in a popular travel circuit. There are several flights daily linking it with Accra.

KUMASI

☎ 051 / pop 1 million

Most people who spend time in Ghana hold a certain amount of affection for Kumasi. Once the capital of the rich and powerful Ashanti kingdom, today it's a bustling multi-ethnic metropolis. Founded in 1695, little remains of the original city that was razed by the British in 1874 during the Fourth Ashanti War. Unlike Accra, Kumasi, which

spills over a series of hills, has a clearly demarcated centre, ground zero being an enormous throbbing daily market. The demographic complexity of the city may not be obvious at first glance but the city is a patchwork of ethnic neighbourhoods. Almost half the residents are Muslims and almost half speak Hausa, a language originating in Nigeria; some speak Dagwamba, from the north near Tamale.

Orientation

Kumasi sprawls over a vast hilly area. The heart of town is Kejetia Circle, a vast traffic-clogged roundabout. On the eastern side of the circle is Kejetia Market, which spills over onto the roads around it. West of the circle is the vast Kejetia motor park, the city's main transport park. South of the circle, the parallel Guggisberg and Fuller Rds lead past the train station. The district of Adum, just south of the circle, is the modern commercial district, where you'll find the major banks and shops. The VanefSTC bus station is on the southern edge of this district, a 10-minute walk from Prempeh II Roundabout.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Easylink Internet (☎ 9am-11pm) Across from the Alliance Française.

Internet Link (Prempeh II Rd) Just down the street from Vic Baboo's Café.

Shell Internet (per hr C10,500; ☎ 7am-9pm) Entrance around back of station.

Unic Internet (per hr C6000; ☎ 7.30am-8.30pm) Next to the British Council.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Pharmacies are dotted around town.

Okomfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (Bantama Rd) A large complex near the National Culture Centre; Kumasi's main public hospital.

MONEY

All banks listed here change traveller's cheques and have ATMs. There are also several forexes for changing cash.

Barclays Bank head office (Prempeh II Roundabout)

Ecobank (Harper Rd)

Garden City Forex Bureau (Harper Rd) Has the best rates around.

Ghana Commercial Bank (Harper Rd)

Stanbic Bank (Harper Rd)

Standard Chartered Bank head office (Prempeh II Roundabout)

POST

Main post office (Stewart Ave; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Opposite the Armed Forces Museum. Poste restante shuts at 4.30pm.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 26243; ☎ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri) In the National Cultural Centre complex. Staff can help arrange guided tours of the city and surrounding villages.

Sights

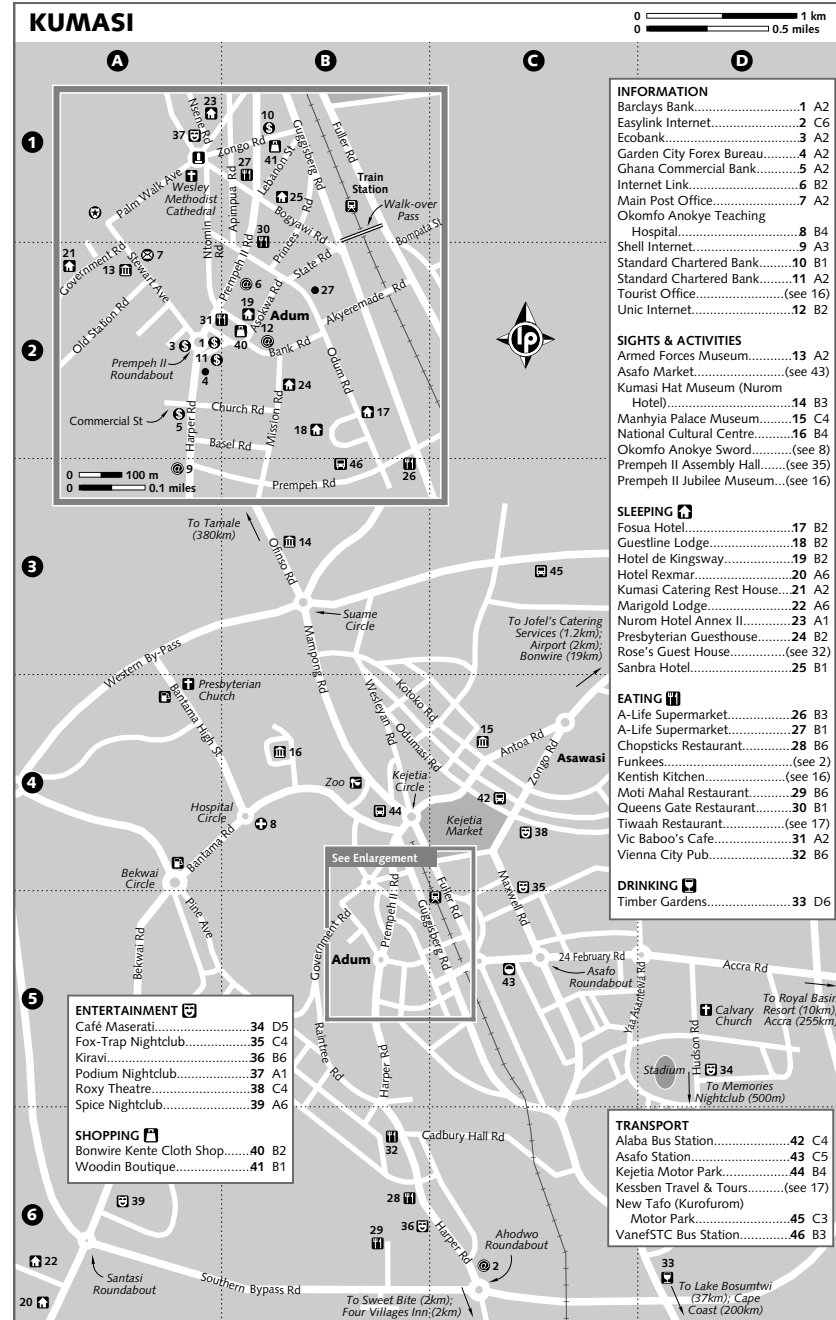
KEJETIA MARKET

From afar, the Kejetia Market looks like an alien mothership landed in the centre of Kumasi. Closer up, the rusting tin roofs of this huge market, often cited as the largest in West Africa, look like a circular shantytown. But once you take a breath and step down into its interior, it's infinitely disorienting but also throbbing with life and commerce. Watch your step, often over unused railroad tracks, in the narrow alleyways selling everything from foodstuffs, second-hand shoes, clothes and plastic knick-knacks to kente cloth, glass beads, Ashanti sandals, batik and bracelets. You may also see fetish items, such as vulture heads, parrot wings and dried chameleons.

Kente cloth, made locally, is a particularly good deal here. It's usually sold in standard lengths of 12m and price varies according to the composition of the material (cloth containing a mixture of cotton, silk and rayon is more expensive than all-cotton, for example) and weave (double weave is, naturally, more expensive than single). You can get cloth made up cheaply and expertly into whatever you want by dressmakers in the market.

NATIONAL CULTURAL CENTRE

This **complex** (admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm) is set within spacious grounds and includes a model Ashanti village; craft workshops where you can see brassworking, woodcarving, pottery making, batik cloth dyeing and kente cloth weaving; a gallery and crafts shop; the regional library; the tourism office; and the small Prempeh II Jubilee Museum. The craft workshops aren't always active, especially on Sunday, and it's all rather low-key, but the grounds are shady and it's an agreeable place to spend a few hours including lunch at the restaurant in the complex.



Prempeh II Jubilee Museum (adult/student C10,000/20,000; ☎ 2-5pm Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) may be small but the personalised tour included with admission is a fascinating introduction to Ashanti culture and history. Among the displays are artefacts relating to the Ashanti king Prempeh II including the king's war attire, ceremonial clothing, jewellery, protective amulets, personal equipment for bathing and dining, furniture, royal insignia and some fine brass weights for weighing gold. Constructed to resemble an Ashanti chief's house, it has a courtyard in front and walls adorned with traditional carved symbols. Among the museum's intriguing photos is a rare one of the famous Golden Stool. The museum also contains the fake golden stool handed over to the British in 1900.

MANHYIA PALACE MUSEUM

To get a feel for how a modern Ashanti ruler lives, visit Manhyia Palace and its **museum** (adult/student C20,000/10,000; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm) off Antoa Rd, up the hill north from Kejetia Circle. The palace was built by the British in 1925 to receive Prempeh I when he returned from a quarter of a century of exile in the Seychelles to resume residence in Kumasi. It was used by the Ashanti kings until 1974. On display is the original furniture, including Ashantiland's first TV, and various artefacts from the royals, including evocative photos of the time. More striking are the unnervingly lifelike, life-size wax models of the two kings and their mothers and of the most redoubtable queen mother, Yaa Asantewaa, who led the 1900 revolt against the British and who died in exile in the Seychelles.

Inquire here or at the tourist office if you'd like an appointment with the present *asantehene* (king), Otumfuo Opoku Ware II. If you're lucky enough to get an audience, etiquette demands presentation of a bottle or two of schnapps when meeting the royals. This curious custom is a legacy from the days when the Dutch traded with the Ashantis and would present the chiefs with schnapps as a token of goodwill.

OKOMFO ANOKYE SWORD

The Okomfo Anokye Teaching Hospital is the unlikely setting for this small **museum** (Bantama Rd; admission C10,000; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) housing the Okomfo Anokye Sword, an important Ashanti monument. The sword

has been in the ground for three centuries and has never been pulled out. According to Ashanti legend, it marks the spot where the Golden Stool descended from the sky to indicate where the Ashanti people should settle. The sword is a symbol of the unity and strength of the Ashanti people and if anyone ever pulls it out, their kingdom will collapse. It's housed in a small yellow building with red Ashanti symbols on the outside walls. If entering the hospital grounds from Bantama Rd, veer to the right so you avoid the smell of formaldehyde from the mortuary; it's behind Block C.

ARMED FORCES MUSEUM

Fort St George and its **museum** (adult/student C10,000/20,000; ☎ 8am-5pm Tue-Sat) on Stewart Ave deserve a visit for the extraordinary collection of booty amassed by the West Africa Frontier Force, forerunner of today's Ghanaian army, with items looted from the Germans in Togo during WWI and, in WWII, from the Italians in Eritrea and Ethiopia and from the Japanese in Burma. The fort, originally constructed by the Ashanti in 1820, was razed by the British in 1873 during the Fourth Ashanti War, and then rebuilt by them in 1896. The most interesting section relates to the British-Ashanti war of 1900, when the Ashanti, led by their queen mother, Yaa Asantewaa, temporarily besieged the fort, starving the British residents.

KUMASI HAT MUSEUM

The top floor of the Nurom Hotel on Ofinso Rd is a monument to one man's obsession with hats. The owner, Chief Nana Kofi Gyemfi II, has assembled an amazing personal collection of more than 2000 hats from all over the world. Beginning with his first headgear, back in 1928, he now has an astounding, if dusty, collection of fedoras, sombreros, boaters, bowlers and much more. To get to the hotel, take any tro-tro heading north from Kejetia Circle to Suame Roundabout or catch a taxi.

MAGAZINE AREA

Kumasi is made up of a collection of districts, each of which used to perform a specific role for the Ashanti king. The Magazine area in Suame district was originally where artillery was made; now, however, it's a vast used-car workshop where rusty old wrecks

are miraculously brought back to life. Piles and piles of rusting engine parts line the sides of the roads and the air is filled with the chinking sound of metal hitting metal. It's an amazing sight, worth a look as you pass through on your way north.

Festivals & Events

The 42-day cycle of the Ashanti religious calendar is marked by Adaye festivals, a public ceremony involving the *asantehene*. The tourist office has a list of exact dates. The **Odwira festival** is an important annual celebration. For more details, see the boxed text, below.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Guestline Lodge (☎ 23351; mahesh161us@yahoo.com; r C150,000-270,000; ☎ ☎) There's no better place in Kumasi for independent travellers on a budget. The VanefSTC station is a block away, there's Internet access and there's a relaxing and sunny courtyard where you can read and order meals to be

delivered from Vic Baboo's café, which is owned by the same friendly Indian family. Look first before deciding on a room since they vary in quality, size and appeal. Some are carpeted, some have tiles and others have concrete floors. Dorm rooms are available. It's a three-storey old white building with star decorations along the side.

Sanbra Hotel (☎ 31256; Bogyawi St; r C160,000-270,000; ☎ ☎) Even with the daytime chaos on this street, the Sanbra is easy to spot because of the flags from countries around the world flying from the first floor. Popular with Ghanaians because of its restaurant as much as for its clean but basic tiled-floor rooms; some of the more expensive rooms even have small balconies.

Hotel de Kingsway (☎ 26228; r with fan/air-con from C108,000/125,000) This slightly depressing hotel occupies most of an entire block in the centre of Kumasi. The old rooms and bathrooms are remarkably large.

Presbyterian Guesthouse (☎ 23879; Mission Rd; r C80,000; ☎) This two-storey colonial-style guesthouse is all deep wooden balconies

ADAE & ODWIRA FESTIVALS

On the day before Adaye, horn-blowers and drummers assemble at the chief's house and play until late at night. Early next morning, the chief's head musician goes to the stool house where the sacred stools are kept and he drums loudly. Eventually the chief arrives and he and his elders go into the stool house to ask their forefathers for guidance. Ritual food of mashed yam, eggs and chicken is then brought into the room; the chief places portions on each of the sacred stools inside. A sheep is sacrificed and the blood is smeared on the stools. The sheep is then roasted and offerings of meat are placed on each stool. The queen mother prepares *fufu* (mashed cassava, plantain or yam) and places some on the stools.

A bell is sounded, indicating that the spirits are eating. Gin or schnapps is poured over the stools and the rest is passed around. When the ritual is over, the chief retires to the courtyard and the merrymaking begins; drums beat and horns blast. The chief dons his traditional dress with regalia and sits in court, receiving the homage of his subjects. On some occasions, he is then borne in public in a palanquin shaded by a huge canopy, and accompanied by lesser chiefs.

On Monday, the path to the royal mausoleum is cleared. On Tuesday, the ban on eating the new yam is lifted and tubers are paraded through the streets while the chief sexton proceeds to the royal mausoleum with sheep and rum to invoke the Odwira spirit. He then returns to the chief and is blessed. Wednesday is a day of mourning and fasting. People wear sepia-coloured attire and red turbans and there's lots of drinking and drumming all day long. Thursday is for feasting. Ritual food, including yam *fufu*, is borne in a long procession from the royal house to a shrine where it's presented to the ancestors. That night, when the gong strikes, everyone must go indoors; no-one but the privileged few may see the procession of the dead, when the sacred stools are borne to the stream for their yearly ceremonial cleansing.

The climax is Friday, when the chief holds a great durbar, a grand meeting, at which all the sub chiefs and his subjects come to pay their respects. The highlight is a great procession of elegantly dressed chiefs, the principal ones being borne on palanquins and covered by multi-coloured umbrellas.

and high ceilings. The huge rooms are basic but quiet and you get use of a kitchen. It's possible to camp here if the rooms are full. One room with bathroom costs C150,000.

Nurom Hotel Annex II (☎ 32324; Nsene Rd; r C70,000) This hotel close to the Kejetia Market and lorry station can be noisy, and the rooms are only about as nice as at the Presbyterian, but it's clean and friendly.

MIDRANGE

Fosua Hotel (☎ 37382; www.fosuahotel.com; r C350,000; 📶 📺 📺) This is the highest quality place to stay in the city centre. Occupying the top floor of the Aseda Complex a block from the VanefSTC station, the rooms here are clean and comfortable though each has a strange, small-glassed in space facing out in lieu of a balcony. There's a forex bureau, travel agency, bar and restaurant in the same complex.

Marigold Lodge (☎ 38756; www.marigoldlodge.com; s/d incl breakfast C360,000/450,000; 📶 📺 📺) This lodge is in a quiet compound in the south of town. It has simple well-kept rooms with cable TV.

Kumasi Catering Rest House (☎ 26506; Government Rd; r with fan/air-con C200,000/450,000; 📺) This charming guesthouse set within shady grounds a short walk from the centre seems engaged in a single-handed attempt to bring '70s-style furniture back into fashion. The rooms are huge and the bathrooms need their own zip code. Also on site is a popular restaurant with a large menu (mains C35,000).

Rose's Guest House (☎ 32594; Harper Rd; r C300,000; 📺 📺) Within stumbling distance of the Vienna City Pub on the same grounds, Rose's offers several large and clean tiled-floor rooms. More expensive executive rooms have carpeting and cable TV.

TOP END

Hotel Rexmar (☎ 29111; rexmar@idngh.com; s/d incl breakfast US\$76/90; 📶 📺 📺) Considering the price, rooms at this low rise hotel complex south of the Ahodwo Circle, aren't exactly luxurious but you do get a private porch and access to one of Kumasi's nicest pools. There's a good restaurant attached.

Four Villages Inn (☎ 22682; www.fourvillages.com; Old Bekwai Rd; s/d US\$60/70; 📶 📺) Several kilometres south of the centre is this bed and breakfast, equally popular for its four comfortable individually designed rooms each with high ceilings and homey décor, as

for the guide and transport services offered. Throw in a garden, a terrace, an indoor atrium and breakfast with real brewed coffee and you'll feel like family.

Royal Basin Resort (☎ 60144; www.royalbasinresort.com; s/d US\$60/70; 📶 📺 📺) Next to the US Peace Corps compound 10km east of the city, the Royal Basin is nothing special in terms of design or furnishings but it has clean, modern simple rooms and the pool area (nonguests C35,000) in the back is a pleasant place to escape the heat. Restaurant attached.

Eating

For food stalls, good areas are near the train station, around Kejetia Circle and on the Hudson Rd side of the stadium. There are several small chop bars along Prempeh II Rd, including the aptly named Quick Bite Fast Food.

Vic Baboo's Cafe (Prempeh II Rd; mains C20,000-50,000; ☎ from 11am; 📶) Almost every foreigner in Kumasi ends up at this café on one of the busiest intersections. It has the biggest cocktail menu in the city, milkshakes, and Indian, Chinese and Ghanaian dishes plus sandwiches and pizza, with several veggie options. It also has ice cream, cashew nuts and popcorn. Last order taken around 9pm. There are plans to open an Internet café here.

Queens Gate Restaurant (Prempeh II Rd; mains C40,000) There's no better spot for people watching in Kumasi than the third floor balcony at the Queens Gate. The indoor dining room with big screen cable TV usually tuned to African soaps is equally pleasant and one of the few city centre dinner options. Everything from omelettes to soups, salads, burgers and Ghanaian dishes are served.

Sanbra Hotel Restaurant (Bogyawi Rd; mains C45,000; 📶) As far as the centre of Kumasi goes, this restaurant in the hotel of the same name deserves several Michelin stars. The waiters are uniformed and it has a huge menu with European, Chinese, Ghanaian, seafood, pizza, lobster, sandwiches etc.

Moti Mahal Restaurant (mains C40,000-90,000; 📶) One of the most expensive restaurants in Kumasi, with a large selection of Indian cuisine; because everything is a la carte the bill can add up. It's off the Southern Bypass Rd – some taxi drivers know where it is.

Vienna City Pub (Harper Rd; 📶) This place, formerly Ryan's Irish Pub, is home sweet home for many expats who can wash away their nostalgia with the pool table, foosball, darts, Guinness and other imported beers, wines and mixed drinks. Snacks, sandwiches and pizza (C40,000) too. On the grounds of Rose's Guest House.

Sweet Bite (Ahodwo Main Rd; mains C30,000-90,000; 📶) It's worth a trip out to Sweet Bite, several kilometres south of Ahodwo Circle, for good Lebanese food like shwarma, falafel, hummus and tabbouleh. Other options like burgers and seafood are on the menu.

Funkees (mains C35,000) This little place with outdoor seating is in the minimall across from the Alliance Française and is known for its woodfire pizza and kebabs. There's a good wine shop above the restaurant.

Tiawaah Restaurant (mains C30,000-65,000; 📶) You may catch the staff sleeping at this modern restaurant on the third floor of the Aseda Complex, a block from the VanefSTC station. It has a wide selection of Ghanaian, Chinese and continental cuisine. KPS World Enterprise Coffee Shop is on the second floor of the same complex.

Chopsticks Restaurant (Harper Rd; mains C35,000) Looking like the remains of a restaurant, Chopsticks is only a few outdoor tables with plastic chairs serving standard Chinese dishes and delicious large pizzas (C40,000).

Kentish Kitchen (mains C15,000-30,000; ☎ breakfast-6pm) Really only worth a visit if you're already at the National Cultural Centre complex, Kentish is a small outdoor eatery serving a small selection of basic Ghanaian fare.

SELF-CATERING

Self-caterers can find basic provisions at the food shops along Prempeh II Rd. The best supermarket is the A-Life chain, which has three stores in town, including a branch on Prempeh II Rd and another only two blocks from the STC station.

Drinking

Popular drinking spots include **Vienna City Pub**, especially on weekend nights; **Jofel's Catering Services** (Zongo Rd), which has live music on Saturday; **Vic Baboo's Café**, where foreign travellers go for its extensive cocktail menu; and **Timber Gardens**, at the junction of Lake Rd and Southern Bypass Rd, which is a lively outdoor spot for a drink or a bite to eat.

Entertainment

Several clubs still endure like the **Podium Nightclub** (Nsene Rd) in the centre, a nightclub on Wednesday to Saturday evening. The **Fox-Trap Nightclub** (Maxwell Rd), next to Prempeh Assembly Hall and attached to the studio of a local radio station, has a DJ and disco, and the classy **Kiravi** (Harper Rd) near Chopsticks is a disco Saturday nights. The DJ at **Café Maserati** (Hudson Rd) plays hip-hop and R&B on Wednesday and Friday nights, otherwise you can always get a drink at the outdoor tables, and **Memories Nightclub** is open Wednesday to Sunday nights as is **Spice Nightclub** (Bantama Rd) just north of the Santasi Roundabout.

For a real taste of local Kumasi head to the **Roxy Theatre**, an old cinema showing schlock near Zongo St in the Muslim section of the city.

Shopping

For high-quality locally produced textiles try the **Bonwire Kente Cloth Shop** (Bank Rd), a little hole-in-the-wall near Prempeh II Roundabout or **Woodin Boutique** a block from the train tracks and Kejetia Market.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Kumasi airport is on the northeastern outskirts of town, about 5km from the centre. Citilink and Antrak have flights between Kumasi and Accra twice a day (one way around C570,000). For information and reservations, go to the airport or to **Kessben Travel & Tours** (☎ 37350; kessbenlcc.co.uk) on the second floor of the Aseda Complex. Antrak and American Airlines share an office on Harper Rd though opening hours are unreliable.

BUS & TRO-TRO

The huge Kejetia motor park is the city's main transport hub, from where you can get tro-tros to most regional destinations as well as non-VanefSTC buses to Accra and other points south. Despite major renovations, the motor park is still confusing to navigate; try to look for signs with destinations posted. In addition, transport for Accra (again), Sunyani, Cape Coast, Takoradi and local destinations such as Lake Bosomtwe leave from Asafo station east of Asafo Roundabout.

Large buses to Tamale, Bolgatanga, Bawku and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) leave from

New Tafo (Kurofurom) station in Dichemso, about 2km north of Kejetia market. Smaller buses to Tamale (again) and destinations in the Upper West region leave from Alaba bus station off Zongo Rd, on the north-western side of the market. The **VanefSTC bus station** (☎ 24285) is on Prempeh Rd. Buses to Accra (ordinary/luxury C46,000/65,000, four hours) leave regularly between 3.30am and 5pm. VanefSTC buses also pass through Cape Coast (C65,000, four hours, ☎ 4am, 10am and 4pm) on their way to Takoradi (C65,000, five hours). There are two buses a day to Tamale (C90,000, eight hours, ☎ 7am and 5pm). There are less frequent services to Alfoa and Tema. STC services Ouagadougou (C195,000, ☎ 5pm Monday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday) from Kumasi. Includes an additional charge in CFAs.

TRAIN

For details of the train service to Takoradi and Accra, see p402.

Getting Around

Most taxi lines start at Kejetia motor park and across the street at the intersection of Prempeh II and Guggisberg Rds. From Ntomin Rd, shared taxis head south along Harper Rd, serving the areas of town beyond Ahodwo Roundabout. The standard fare is about C2000. A 'dropping' taxi normally costs about C8000 within town; to the airport around C20,000. Taxis are often reluctant to cross Kejetia Circle (because the traffic is so bad) so consider breaking a long journey into shorter stages.

To visit a number of villages surrounding Kumasi it makes sense to charter a taxi for a half day (C75,000) or full day (C200,000).

An alternative to hiring a taxi for the day, **Dodi Travel & Tours** (☎ 20421; www.dodighana.com; Hudson Rd, Kumasi) based at the Hotel de Texas, is a dependable place to hire a car. Small to medium vehicles are US\$55 per day.

AROUND KUMASI Craft Villages

Because of their proximity to Kumasi, the craft villages in the region offer a convenient if also touristy way to experience how some of Ghana's traditional workshops operate.

There are two villages just on the outskirts of Kumasi, on the Mampong road beyond Suame Roundabout. Pankrono, 8km away, is

a major pottery centre. One kilometre further is Ahwiaa, known for its woodcarving and an aggressive sales approach. Ntonso, 15km further, is the centre of *adinkra* cloth printing. Bonwire, 18km northeast of Kumasi, is the most famous of several nearby villages that specialise in weaving kente cloth. At the visitor centre here weavers demonstrate their craft and sell their wares.

Other less visited kente villages include Wonoo and Adanwomase, near Bonwire, and, further north, Bepoase. Several villages northwest of Kumasi on the Barekese road specialise in bead-making, including Asuofia and Pasoro.

The easiest way to visit these villages is probably to hire a private taxi (about US\$25 for a full day) with or without the additional services of one of the 'guides' who mostly hang out in front of Vic Baboo's Café. Some of these young men are sincere and knowledgeable, some aren't. **Nasir Abubakar** (☎ 0243-978270) is a freelance guide who comes recommended. You can also arrange a tour through the Kumasi tourist office. Less convenient, especially if you want to make a number of stops in one day, you can get a tro-tro from Kejetia motor park for the villages on the Mampong road or from Antoa station for Bonwire.

Owabi Wildlife Sanctuary

For butterflies and birds, maybe a Mona monkey or two, visit this small **sanctuary** (admission C20,000; ☎ 9am-5pm) 16km northwest of Kumasi, just off the Sunyani road. It's a pristine forest crossed with several footpaths around the Owabi reservoir. You have to be accompanied by a guide, which you can arrange at the entrance gate. Take a tro-tro from Kejetia motor park to Akropong on the Sunyani road, from where it's a 3km walk.

Ejisu

The small junction town of Ejisu, about 20km east of Kumasi on the Accra road, is home to the **Nana Yaa Asantewaa Museum** (admission C10,000; ☎ 9am-5pm), built in the form of a traditional queen mother's palace. It houses a fascinating display of artefacts from the life of Yaa Asantewaa, the queen mother and chief of Ejisu. She's most remembered for resisting British rule and for preventing the revered Golden Stool from falling into their hands. Also recommended

is a visit to the **shrine** (admission C10,000; ☎ 9am-5pm) at nearby Besease. This was the shrine Yaa Asantewaa consulted before launching her attack against the British. Inside is an excellent display on traditional Ashanti shrines. There are a number of other harder-to-get-to shrines in the area that see few tourists.

Regular tro-tros to Ejisu (30 minutes) leave from Asafo motor park in Kumasi. The museum is about 1.5km from the motor park in Ejisu and Besease is about 2km further along the Accra road. You can either walk or get a dropping taxi.

Lake Bosumtwi

For a break from the bustle and choking pollution of Kumasi, take a trip to tranquil Lake Bosumtwi, 38km southeast of Kumasi. A crater lake, it's ringed by lush green hills in which you can hike, visiting some of the 20 or so small villages around its perimeter. The lake is a popular weekend venue for Kumasi residents, who come here to relax, swim (the water is said to be bilharzia-free), fish and take boat trips. You can cycle around the lake's 30km circumference. One downside is the high level of hassle in Abonu, the lakeside village.

Not only is Bosumtwi the country's largest and deepest natural lake (86m deep in the centre), it's also sacred. The Ashanti believe that their souls come here after death to bid farewell to their god Twi. One interesting taboo is any form of dugout canoe, which is believed to alienate the lake spirit. Instead the fishermen head out on specially carved wooden planks, which they paddle either with their palms or with calabashes cupped in their hands.

SLEEPING & EATING

It's possible to stay in basic rooms in Abonu – you'll likely be accosted by locals offering you accommodation as soon as you set foot in town. If you ask the local chief for permission in advance you can camp beside the lake.

Lake Point Guesthouse (☎ 220054; r C170,000) This highly recommended guesthouse, owned by a Ghanaian and Austrian couple, is set on landscaped grounds that lead down to the lakeshore a few kilometres from Abona. The spacious and clean rooms are in freestanding bungalows. Bicycle tours and meals can be arranged.

Paradise Resort (☎ 20022; frontdesk@lakebosomtweresort.com; s/d US\$45/50; ☎) You're mostly paying extra for air-con and cable TV at this resort, also set on the lake's edge. The rooms are modern and have nice views and there's a restaurant and bar area on the lakefront.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Occasional tro-tros run direct to Abonu (C10,000) from Asafo motor park in Kumasi; alternatively, take a tro-tro to Kuntanase (C5000, 45 minutes) and a passenger taxi from there (C15,000, 15 minutes).

Bobiri Forest Reserve

This reserve protects a parcel of virgin, unlogged forest about 35km east of Kumasi. The main goal for visitors is **Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary** (admission C10,000), home to more than 300 species of butterfly and an arboretum. Even if you don't see any butterflies, this is a serene and beautiful place to relax. Guided walks of varying length are available or you can hike unaccompanied on some of the trails. The guesthouse at the sanctuary is better than many and each fan room with wood floors (C50,000) has a painted wall mural. Simple meals are available.

From Kumasi or Ejisu, take any vehicle going to Konongo or further south, and ask to be dropped at Kubease, from where Bobiri is a pleasant 3km walk.

BOABENG-FIEMA MONKEY SANCTUARY

This **sanctuary** (admission C40,000), a superb example of community-based conservation, is between the twin villages of Fiema and Boabeng, 165km north of Kumasi. The villagers have traditionally venerated and protected the black-and-white colobus and Mona monkeys that live in the surrounding forest, and in 1975 passed a law making it illegal to harm them. Maybe conscious of their status outside the law, the monkeys shamelessly roam the streets scavenging for food from the villagers.

You can go on guided walks through the forest and there's a simple, concrete six-room **guesthouse** (d C60,000) in Fiema; camping is also possible here.

From Kumasi, take a tro-tro to Techiman from Alaba station. From there, take a shared taxi to Nkoranza, 25km east. There

are regular passenger taxis from Nkoranza to Fiema, about 20km away.

YEJI

One of the main port towns on Lake Volta and the last stop for the Lake Volta ferry, Yeji is 216km northeast of Kumasi on the old Tamale road. There's nothing to keep you here but if you have to stay overnight, you can get basic accommodation in town for about C40,000.

Tro-tros run between Yeji and Antoa station in Kumasi (four hours). For Tamale, take the twice-daily ferry (45 minutes) across to Makongo on the east bank. Tro-tros run between Makongo and Tamale (five hours).

For details of the ferry service to Ako-sombo, see p400.

THE NORTH

This region, the largest in the country, rewards those with time and patience. It includes Mole National Park, the best place to see large wildlife in the country and several other community projects offering off-the-beaten-track experiences. The traditional round huts that most villagers live in, and the well-ordered geometric plots of cultivated land, are quite beautiful from the air but on the ground things are fairly flat, monotonous and sparsely vegetated. While it's generally drier than the south of the country there's still enough rainfall to make it the breadbasket of the country.

Antrak currently flies between Accra and Tamale, which saves you the long 611km car journey. Some overlanders cross over from Burkina Faso.

TAMALE

☎ 071

What distinguishes this hot, dusty regional capital from others of its ilk is that bicycles are everywhere and add another feature to the ubiquitous games of vehicular chicken. Tamale, 380km north of Kumasi, is the fourth-largest city in Ghana and the major transport hub for the north. It tends to be a stopover for travellers on their way to Mole or overland to Burkina Faso but the presence of several good-value hotels make it a good base to explore other spots in the

area. The water supply and electricity can be erratic.

The heart of town is the cramped and bustling central market and motor park, marked by the tall radio antenna near the VanefSTC bus station. The **National Cultural Centre**, off Salaga Rd, has an echoing auditorium where music and dance performances are occasionally put on; there are a bunch of craft shops around the back that rarely see shoppers.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Agric Internet Café (per hr C6000) Conveniently located close to several guesthouses.

CVL Internet (per hr C8000; ☎ 6am-10pm) On the second floor in the back of the building.

First Class Link Internet Café (Bolgatanga Rd)

Forsumel Internet Café (Salaga (Hospital Rd))

My.com Internet Café (☎ 8am-11.30pm) Directly across from Relax Lodge.

MONEY

Man Forex Bureau is one of the only ones in town although the exchange rate at the Gariba Lodge is better.

Barclays Bank (Salaga Rd) Near the Giddipass Restaurant. Has an ATM.

Standard Chartered Bank (Salaga Rd) Opposite the market. Has an ATM.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 24835; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) About 1.5km east of the centre, in the administration buildings.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

M&J Travel & Tours (☎ 26529) Next to offices for Uniglobe Travel & Tours and DHL, can book Antrak flights.

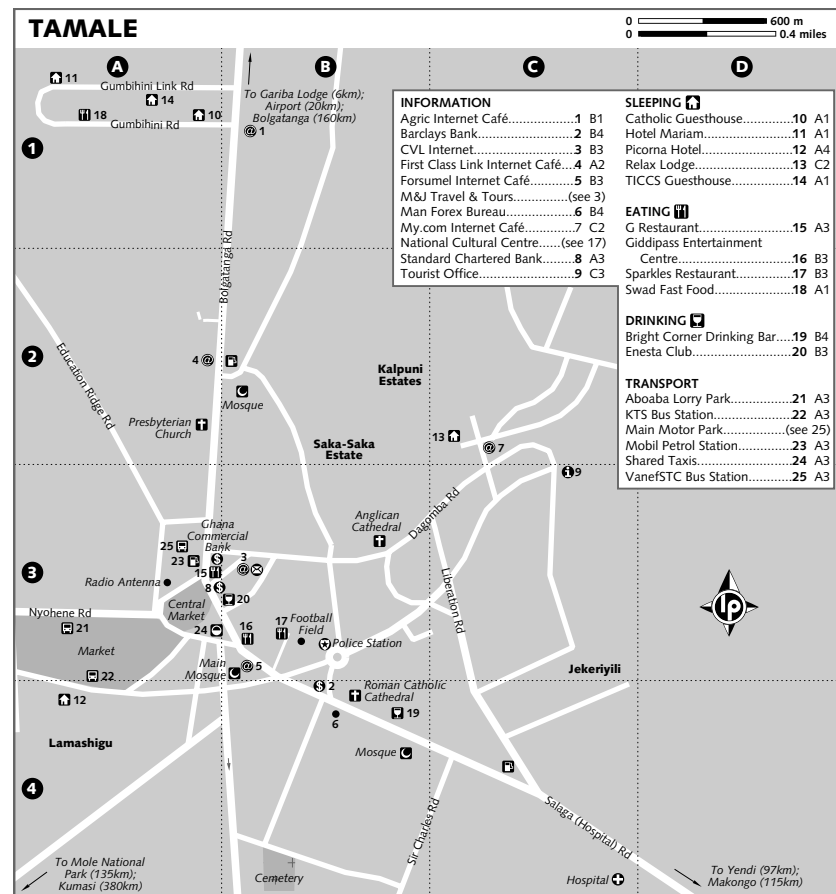
Festivals & Events

The **Dagomba Fire Festival** takes place in July. According to legend a chief lost his son and was overjoyed when he found him asleep under a tree. Angry that the tree had hidden his son, he punished it by having it burnt. On the night of the festival young men rush about with blazing torches.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Catholic Guesthouse (☎ 22265; Gumbihini Rd; r C70,000; ☎) This is the kind of find backpackers tell other backpackers about. There are no top sheets, no bath towels and no luxury, but who needs it at this price. The



air-con is powerful – that is when there are no brownouts. Rooms surround a leafy garden bar and lounge area. Breakfast and other meals are available on request. It's about 2.5km north of the centre.

TICCS Guesthouse (☎ 22914; www.ticcs.com/res.htm; Gumbihini Link Rd; r with fan C80,000, s/d with air-con C120,000/140,000; ☎) Good for groups and students, this guesthouse run by a Catholic institution has the feel of a summer camp. The concrete bungalows are clean and simple and guests have use of the living room, TV and kitchen. Breakfast is included and the recommended Jungle Bar is here.

Picorna Hotel (☎ 22672; picornahotelgh@yahoo.com; r C150,000; ☎) The Picorna is the best value in the centre, though the competition

isn't too fierce. Rooms are comfortable but run down and the whole place seems to be decaying before your very eyes. Also on the premises are a restaurant, a popular bar and nightclub, and an open-air cinema, active at the weekends.

TOP END

All hotels in this category are outside the centre, though they are easily reachable by private or line taxis.

Hotel Mariam (☎ 23548; www.mariamhotel.com.ph; Gumbihini Rd; r US\$50-80; ☎) A favourite with international aid workers and business travellers, the Mariam is the nicest place to stay in Tamale. The rooms are modern, clean and well kept, and there's a good

restaurant with a large menu, though service isn't particularly quick. Find it a few kilometres from the centre, up the same street as the TICCS Guesthouse.

Gariba Lodge (☎ 23041; gariba@africaonline.com.gh; Bolgatanga Rd; d US\$60-80; P ♻️) The most up-market hotel after the Mariam, the Gariba has clean basic rooms with cable TV but they don't seem worth the high price. Executive rooms have bathtub and sitting room. There's a garden compound and a restaurant serving spaghetti (C45,000), guinea-fowl stew (C40,000) and more. It's about 7km north of the town centre on Bolgatanga Rd.

Relax Lodge (☎ 24981; relaxlodge@hotmail.com; r from US\$50; P ♻️) The Relax Lodge, a few kilometres east, feels a little like the hotel time forgot. The furniture and buildings seems to be a mix of the worst of the '50s and '70s, and the least expensive rooms are bad value. The most expensive rooms (US\$80) are huge and worth the money if space is important. The restaurant serves Chinese, Indian, Ghanaian, pizza and sandwiches (C25,000 to C70,000) though service speed is glacial.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of food stalls around the market and along Salaga Rd where you can also sample *pito*, the local millet brew.

Swad Fast Food (☎ 23588; Gumbihini Rd; mains C20,000-80,000) Don't be fooled by the simple outdoor concrete patio, Swad is the place to eat in Tamale. You can dine here for a month and have a different meal every day; the menu includes Indian appetizers, ostrich in black pepper sauce (C45,000), pizza (C35,000), lobster thermidor (C80,000), breakfast and takeaway lunchboxes. Just around the corner from the Mariam Hotel.

Sparkles Restaurant (mains C25,000; ☎ 8am-8pm) This restaurant in the back of the National Cultural Centre behind the football field has a variety of Ghanaian and Chinese dishes and pizza (C40,000). It's a pleasant place to cool off with a drink as well.

G Restaurant (mains C25,000; ♻️) A petrol station may not be the loveliest of settings, but the Ghanaian food served here is good and it's conveniently located in the Goil parking lot directly across from the market. It's nothing more than a few tables in a clean, modern, fan-cooled room.

Jungle Bar (TICCS Guesthouse, Gumbihini Link Rd) There should be more places like this in

Ghana. The Jungle Bar, on the grounds of the TICCS Guesthouse, is on a leafy balcony with an all-wood bar, cable TV and comfy benches and is probably the nicest spot for a drink in Tamale. Serves kebabs, sloppy Joes and hot dogs (C15,000 to C50,000).

Giddipass Entertainment Centre (Crest Restaurant; Salaga Rd; mains C35,000) It's difficult to determine whether this rambling complex is being built or taken down. Make your way up the stairs to the small dining room for a reasonable selection of Ghanaian and Chinese food, though it can be hot and the service slow with a dash of slow thrown in. Pull up a chair to the rooftop terrace for a late-afternoon or evening beer.

Opposite the market, the **Enesta Club** (Salaga Rd), a large drinking and dancing spot, and the **Bright Corner Drinking Bar** (Salaga Rd) are popular on weekends.

Getting There & Away

The airport is about 20km north of town, on the road to Bolgatanga; a private taxi there costs about C40,000. Antrak flies between Tamale and Accra for US\$144 one way.

The VanefSTC bus station is just north of the central market, behind the Mobil petrol station. There are four buses daily to Accra (ordinary/luxury C90,000/150,000, 12 hours, ☎ air-con at 6.30am and 2pm) and two buses a day to Kumasi (C90,000, six hours, ☎ 6am and 4pm). There's also a Tuesday service to Cape Coast and Takoradi (C97,000, 12 hours, ☎ 9am).

OSA buses leave from the main motor park. The daily bus to Mole National Park (C30,000, four to six hours) leaves in theory at 2.30pm but in practice a lot later. Get to the bus station well before its scheduled departure time to be sure of a seat. There's also a daily service to Wa (C45,000, eight hours), leaving at 5.30am. The KTS bus station is opposite the Picorna Hotel; KTS has services to Accra, Kumasi, Sunyani and Takoradi.

Tro-tros leave the motor park during the day heading to Bolgatanga (C23,000, 2½ hours). For details of services to the Volta Region via Yendi and Bimbilla, see opposite.

Getting Around

You won't have to wait more than a few minutes for a line taxi running along the Bolgatanga road to take you into town from one of the hotels.

TAMALE TO HOHOE

Adventure-seekers and masochists – sometimes they're one and the same – will find the route between Tamale and the Volta Region via Yendi and Bimbilla is rough, and there are few facilities for travellers, but it offers a rewarding off-the-beaten-track experience and some magnificent scenery. This route can be done in either direction and takes a minimum of two days but if you've got time, it's worth breaking the journey up. Transport is generally infrequent so be prepared for long waits. Apart from a short tarred section just outside Tamale and again before Hohoe, the road is dirt and very bumpy.

Yendi

Home to the paramount Dagomba chief, the Ya-Na, Yendi is a traditional town notable for its palace and an interesting fusion of Moorish and Sahelian architectural styles. Most travellers stop here only briefly on their way somewhere else but Yendi, like Tamale, is a good place to see the Dagomba Fire Festival. The Greenwich meridian passes through here.

If you want to break up your journey here, you can stay at the **Yayaidi Guesthouse** (r C150,000; ♻️) which has basic rooms and meals upon request. Street food is available around the motor park and petrol station in Yendi.

Tro-tros and GPRU buses to Yendi (C11,000, two hours) leave regularly from the main motor park in Tamale, 97km to the east, and there's a 5am and noon OSA bus that covers the same route; at least one tro-tro heads daily from Yendi to Bimbilla.

Bimbilla

This flat, dusty district capital is about 100km from Yendi and a convenient place to break your journey. It too has an interesting palace, home to the chief. Just off the main drag, clearly signposted, is the **Hilltop Guesthouse** (r C50,000), where basic rooms come with shared bathrooms (bucket shower). Meals can be prepared for you here or at one of the basic eateries on the main road. The lorry station is on the southern edge of town. From here, there's a daily bus to Tamale via Yendi (four hours) and Accra via Hohoe (seven hours), although transport can be scarce on Monday. Tro-tros to Accra leave at around 11am but get there a little after 6.30am to be sure of a seat. **Nkwanta**, a pretty little village with a

scenic mountain backdrop, halfway between Bimbilla and Hohoe, is another possibility for breaking your journey.

LARABANGA

Whether it's a highlight or a frustrating experience, Larabanga is more than simply the turn-off to Mole National Park. Known mostly for its unusual looking mud-and-pole mosque, originally built in the 15th century (making it the oldest of its kind in Ghana), the village provides a good opportunity to see what traditional village life is like.

You can register for a guided tour (C10,000) of the mosque at the information post next to it, although you can't actually go inside. An additional small donation (C5000) to the imam is expected. In the village you'll see some fine examples of the mud-walled domestic compounds decorated with geometric two-tone patterns that are a feature of northern Ghana.

Look for the Salia Brothers in a small replica of the mosque doubling as a tourist office on the eastern outskirts of the village. They have established a community-based project where you can hire bicycles, binoculars, bird-identification kits and stay overnight in their small but well-maintained guesthouse (C40,000). Or you can sleep on the roof for star viewing. Meals are available on request. Some travellers have complained about other villagers who aggressively compete for their business and don't deliver on promises.

Transport from Larabanga is limited. To Tamale, there's the daily bus from Mole and a daily bus from Wa, both of which pass through town early in the day; heading east, there are two daily buses to Bole, in the early afternoon and a daily bus to Wa at around 9.30am. Tro-tros from the junction town of Sawla on the Kumasi to Wa road occasionally pass through on the way to Tamale. To get to Mole, you can walk (not advisable in the heat of the day), hire a bicycle or try to hitch (a long wait). There have been reports of robberies on this road, and so it's best to err on the side of caution when considering this route, especially alone or in the dark.

MOLE NATIONAL PARK

☎ 0717

It's not everywhere you can get up close and personal with bus-sized elephants. Face-to-face encounters with these beasts, plus roving

gangs of baboons, warthogs, water bucks and antelopes – 90 species of mammals in total – are possibilities at this **national park** (adult/student C40,000/25,000, still/video camera fee C5000/20,000), Ghana's largest at 4660 sq km and best as far as wildlife viewing goes. It consists for the most part of flat savanna, with gallery forests along the rivers and streams. There's one main escarpment, on which the motel and park headquarters are situated. More than 300 bird species have been recorded here. The best time for seeing wildlife is during the harmattan season from January to March, but it's worth a visit any time of the year, even if it's just to admire the green landscape during the rains (July to September).

The park entrance gate is about 4km north of the turn-off in Larabanga. The park headquarters and the motel are a further 2km into the park. Guided walks are offered twice daily, at 6.30am and 3.30pm, and cost C15,000 per person for one hour (the walks usually last two hours). The walks are excellent value – the guides are informed and you'll see plenty of wildlife at close quarters, although the electricity generator by the main waterhole spoils the ambience somewhat. You are not permitted to walk (or drive) in the park unless you're accompanied by an armed ranger. You are, however, allowed to walk unaccompanied along the road back to Larabanga – apparently the park isn't liable for people attacked outside its domain.

Sleeping & Eating

Mole Motel (☎ 22045; camping own/rented tent per person C20,000/C40,000, d C170,000, chalets C200,000; 🚽) A strictly utilitarian boxy structure that does nothing to take advantage of its location, the Mole Lodge could benefit from a little competition. But as for now there's nowhere else to stay within the park, which means you should try to book ahead since it gets busy in the dry season. The run-down rooms and indifferent service aside, the views overlooking a waterhole where animals gather is worth the sacrifice. Water and electricity are sometimes in short supply. The camp site is cheap and has even more spectacular views. Alternatively, you can stay in Larabanga and cycle into the park for the day.

If you're hungry, you can either chance the very slow service at the motel restaurant (meals around C40,000) or bring your own provisions.

Getting There & Away

The reserve is 135km west of Tamale, off the dirt road that connects Ffulso on the Kumasi to Tamale road with Sawla on the Kumasi to Wa road. The turn-off to the park is in Larabanga, 15km west of Damongo, a busy transport and market centre.

A daily OSA bus runs from Tamale (C40,000, four to six hours), leaving some time after 2.30pm, once it's packed to the gunwales, and arriving at the park motel around 7pm if all goes well. You really need to get your ticket a day in advance or early the morning of the departure to be assured a seat. The same bus returns to Tamale the next day, leaving the park at around 5.30am. The alternative is to take any early-morning bus from Tamale heading to Bole or Wa and get off at Larabanga, then walk, cycle or try to hitch (very difficult). Leaving Mole, your options are to take the OSA bus from the motel to Tamale or to make your way to Larabanga, from where there is infrequent transport in either direction.

WA

☎ 0756

Few visitors make it to Wa, in the far north-western corner of the country near the Burkina Faso border, but it's worth the slog getting here; not only as it's a departure point for visits to the Wechiau hippo sanctuary, but to check out the palace of the Wa Na (as the chief is called). This palace, found behind the post office and Ghana Telecom complex, was built in the traditional Sahelian mud-and-pole style and you can take a quick tour of the crumbling remains inside.

Also worth a look are the relatively new and impressive Great Mosque and, behind it, an older mud-and-pole mosque. First pay your respects (and a small donation) to the imam, who will expect you to sign his visitor's book.

About 5km past the Upland Hotel is the small village of Nakori, which has an impressive mud-and-pole mosque. There's no public transport; you'll have to either take a private taxi from the motor park or it makes a pleasant walk (allow a good hour one way from the Upland Hotel).

The **tourist office** (☎ 22431) is in the Admin Block near the fire station at the roundabout. On the main drag, near the roundabout, is the post office and Ghana Telecom. Further

down, on the same side, is the Ghana Commercial Bank.

Sleeping & Eating

Upland Hotel (☎ 22180; r C180,000; 🚽) About 3km west of the town centre is Wa's best hotel, not only for the DSTV in some of the rooms and reception area and the pleasant restaurant and garden area, but because the rooms are spacious and clean and the staff unusually helpful.

The other hotels, the **Seinu Hotel** (☎ 22010; r C55,000), **Numbu Hotel** (r C50,000) and **Hotel du Pond** (☎ 20018; r C80,000; 🚽) are all located near one another close to the market and are similar in quality and amenities (that is, basic and under-maintained).

There are plenty of food stalls and chop bars in and around the market area.

Getting There & Away

OSA has a daily service to and from Tamale (C55,000, seven hours, 🕒 4am) via Larabanga (for Mole National Park). If you're coming from Mole it's possible to catch the same bus passing through Larabanga at around 6am on the way to Wa. OSA buses leave from the empty lot next to the post office and Ghana Telecom. City Express has daily buses to Bolgatanga (C40,000, six hours) via Tumu. VanefSTC has services that pass through Kumasi on their way to Accra (C65,000, 🕒 2pm Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday). The VanefSTC and City Express buses leave from the main roundabout, opposite the police station. Other transport, includes GPRTU buses to Kumasi (C60,000) that leave daily around 6pm and arrive in Kumasi at dawn the following morning. Tro-tros to Bole, Sawla, Hamale, Lawra and Tumu leave from around the motor park. For Wechiau, tro-tros leave from within the motor park. If you're headed for Burkina Faso, border crossings can be reached via Hamale, Lawra and Tumu.

WECHIAU COMMUNITY HIPPO SANCTUARY

One of the more remote ecotourism projects in the country, this sanctuary along the Black Volta River, which marks the border with Côte d'Ivoire, is home to hippos as well as a variety of bird species. Basic guesthouse accommodation (pit toilet and bucket shower) is available and you can arrange canoe trips

to see the hippos; November through June is the best time to see these prehistoric-looking beasts. Meals can be prepared if you bring your own provisions. Wechiau village is reached by tro-tros (C6500, one hour, 46km) from the main lorry park in Wa. The sanctuary is about 20km from Wechiau. Transport uncertainties (roads sometimes become impassable in the rainy season from July to September) mean you really should plan to spend one night at the sanctuary itself rather than try to do it as a day trip from Wa.

BOLGATANGA

☎ 072

To truly appreciate Bolga, as it's known to locals, you probably have to leave Bolga for the surrounding villages. It's the capital of the Upper East Region and the major town between Tamale and the border with Burkina Faso but it's best considered as a base for exploring the surrounding area.

Bolga's market is known in Ghana as a centre for crafts, including textiles, leatherwork (sandals, handbags, wallets and day packs), multicoloured baskets woven from raffia prized throughout Ghana, and the famous Bolga straw hats. For baskets, you could also try the shop on Commercial Rd near the intersection with Bazaar Rd.

The small **museum** (admission C10,000; 🕒 9am-5pm), off Navrongo Rd behind the Catholic mission, has a small display on the ethnology and culture of the northeast.

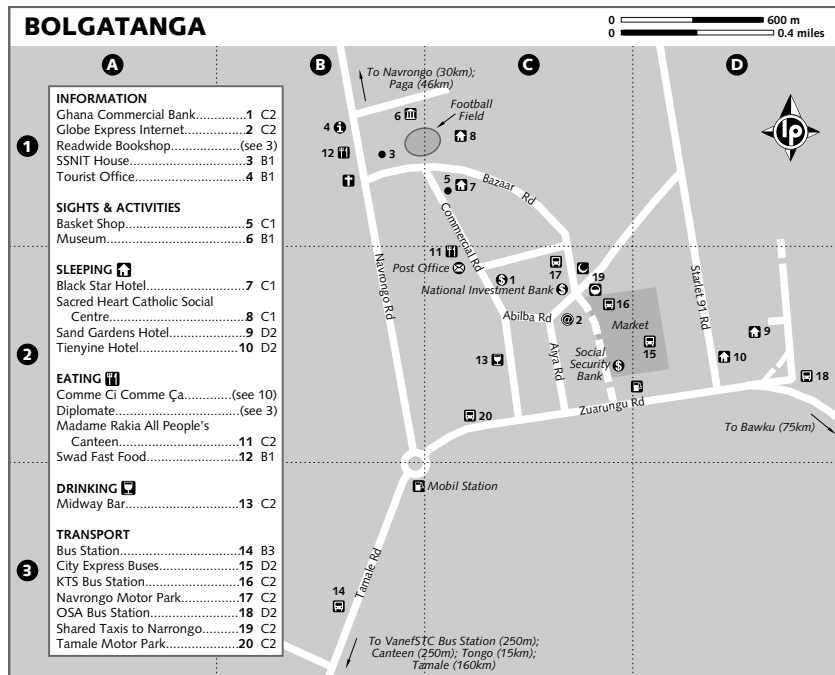
Information

There's a **tourist office** (☎ 23416; Navrongo Rd; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) across from SSNIT House. Your best bet for changing money is the Ghana Commercial Bank. Internet access is available at **Globe Express Internet** (Albilba Rd) and there is a bookshop, **Readwide Bookshop** (SSNIT House, Navrongo Rd).

A group of enterprising and enthusiastic boys, Joseph, Awal, Nick, Sumaila, Jessy and Musah (josephadugbire@yahoo.com) can be recommended as guides for Bolga and the surrounding area. Ask around or contact them in advance.

Sleeping

Tienyine Hotel (☎ 22355; Starlet 91 St; r C235,000; 🚽) This hotel has the most expensive and probably most modern rooms in Bolga. The bungalows are arranged traditionally in a



circular compound and have air-con and TV. Restaurant attached.

Sand Gardens Hotel (☎ 23464; r with fan C130,000, s/d with air-con C150,000/225,000; 🚻) Rooms surround a large dirt compound, part bar, part restaurant, sometimes loud, but the concrete bungalows are clean and comfortable. To find it head east down Zuarungu Rd until you reach the fire station and turn left down the dirt road.

Black Star Hotel (☎ 22346; fax 23650; Bazaar Rd; s/d with fan and shared bathroom C60,000/120,000, r with air-con and private bathroom C172,000; 🚻) This long-standing hotel can feel a little abandoned, especially if you have to search the concrete compound for someone to help you, but the rooms were probably once nicer than any in Bolga.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of food stalls on the stretch of Zuarungu Rd east of the intersection of Navrongo and Commercial Rds. There's a canteen at the VanefSTC bus station.

Swad Fast Food (Navrongo Rd; mains C35,000) Lovers of the Tamale Swad won't be disap-

pointed as this eatery has the same eclectic menu of Indian, Chinese, Ghanaian and continental dishes.

Comme Ci Comme Ça (Starlet 91 St; mains C30,000) This restaurant in the Tienyine Hotel compound is nothing more than a few plastic tables and chairs in a concrete patio. Chicken and beef dishes are delivered at a snail's pace.

Madam Rakia All People's Canteen (Commercial Rd; dishes C20,000) Nothing more than a basic canteen dishing up local staples like millet-based dishes just north of the post office.

Diplomate (cnr Bazaar & Navrongo Rds; mains C25,000) At SSNIT House, this popular restaurant has something of the look of an English tearoom. It's comfortable and pleasant and serves good solid Ghanaian food.

Midway Bar (Commercial Rd) For a drink, head for this lively outdoor bar facing the street with decent music and grilled meat.

Getting There & Away

Tro-tros to Tamale (C23,000, 2½ hours) leave from the motor park on Zuarungu Rd east of the intersection with Navrongo and

Tamale Rds. Tro-tros to Navrongo (C5000, 30 minutes) and buses to Kumasi and Accra leave from the Navrongo motor park on Bazaar Rd. Passenger taxis to Navrongo leave from the taxi station diagonally opposite the National Investment Bank. The VanefSTC bus station is on Tamale Rd, about 800m south of the intersection with Navrongo and Zuarungu Rds. From here, buses leave daily for Accra (C150,000, 15 hours) and Kumasi (C70,000, six hours). Behind the market, in the block between Zuarungu and Bazaar Rds, is a vast motor park. In the far northwest corner is the KTS bus station, with buses to Accra and Kumasi. In the southeast corner is the City Express bus station. From here, there's an early morning (5.30am) service to Wa via Tumu on Monday to Saturday.

If you're headed for Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, take a tro-tro to the border at Paga (C6000, 40 minutes). To cross into Togo, take a tro-tro from the motor park behind the market to Bawku from where you can catch vehicles to the border (30km) and on to Dapaong (Togo), 15km further east.

AROUND BOLGATANGA

A worthwhile side trip is to the **Tongo hills** southeast of Bolga, known for their balancing rock formations, panoramic views and the whistling sound the rocks make during the harmattan season. A popular goal is the village of **Tengzug**, about an hour's hike (a steep 4km) from **Tongo** village and 9km from Bolgatanga, above which are numerous sacred shrines. The most famous is the *ba'ar Tpmma'ab ua' nee* or Nana Tongo shrine. Tro-tros run regularly to Tongo (C5000) from the main motor park behind the market in Bolgatanga. Travellers can arrange homestays or even sleep on the roof of a traditional mud home. Beds are also available at the Tongo Community Centre.

The **Red Volta River Valley**, between Bolgatanga and Bawku, is potentially a fascinating area to explore, with opportunities for learning about the distinctive local culture and architecture, hiking, canoeing and wildlife viewing (it's a migration corridor for elephants and other wildlife).

GAMBARGA ESCARPMENT

Southeast of Bolga, the Gambarga Escarpment extends towards the Togolese border. Along it is **Gambarga**, ancient capital of the

Mamprusi kingdom; **Nalerigu**, the modern district capital; and **Nakpanduri**, the goal of most travellers to the area. A sleepy, unspoiled village of neatly thatched huts, perched on the edge of the escarpment, Nakpanduri has magnificent views and offers some fine hiking. You can stay at the **Government Rest House** (r C40,000), which has basic rooms.

Nakpanduri and the other towns along the escarpment can be difficult to get to by public transport. Your best bet is to do the journey in stages: from Bolga, get any transport heading to Tamale and drop at Walewale, where the road to Gambarga turns off the Tamale road. From there, you should be able to get a tro-tro to Nalerigu, and from there to Nakpanduri, but it may take a while.

NAVRONGO

From a traveller's perspective, the mostly shady and tranquil town of Navrongo, about 30km northwest of Bolgatanga and near the Burkina Faso border, is remarkable only for the **Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Cathedral**, which dates from 1906. It was constructed of *banco* (clay or mud) in the traditional Sahel style and colourful frescoes decorate the interior.

From December 17 to 18 in Sandema, a small village near Navrongo, is the **Feko festival** celebrating the people's resistance against slave traders from Nigeria and the northern region. Villagers put on buffalo antlers and others hunt them with bows and arrows. Naba Azantilow Ayeta, 100-plus years old and one of the oldest chiefs in all of West Africa, was installed here in 1931.

If you decide to stay overnight, try the **Hotel Mayaga** (☎ 22327; Sandama Rd; r C50,000), about 500m west of the bus station, off the road to Wa. The Catholic mission, near the cathedral, has a **guesthouse** (r C50,000) with clean, cool rooms with bathroom, but doesn't offer meals. The University of Development Studies (UDS), one of the tallest buildings in Navrongo also has a **guesthouse** (r C50,000). Stalls around the bus station have a small selection of street food or there are a couple of chop bars on the main drag.

Getting There & Away

Regular shared taxis during the day make the short journey to Paga (C4000, 15 minutes) for the border with Burkina Faso, and to Bolgatanga (C5000, 30 minutes). If you're

heading south, you're better off getting to Bolgatanga, which has much better transport connections. If you're heading west towards Tumu and Wa, the bus from Bolga to Wa passes through Navrongo but it's usually jam-packed by the time it reaches here, so it's better to pick it up from Bolga instead.

PAGA

Most people stopping in Paga are on their way to or from Burkina Faso but if you're in the general vicinity it's worth a visit even if you're not crossing borders. The town has become synonymous with its **crocodile ponds**, now part of a formally organised community ecotourism project. Chief Pond is visible from the road, about 1km from the main motor park towards the Burkinabé border, while Zenga Pond is signposted off the main road, just after the motor park. At Chief Pond, you'll find official guides and a good informative booklet on the ponds. It costs around C30,000 per person to see the crocs, plus a little extra for the crocs' chickens. More interesting, and highly recommended, is a tour of the chief's compound, the Paga Pio's Palace, a traditional homestead of the local Kasena people. There's no set fee for the tour but a donation is expected. You can also arrange bicycle tours by of villages in the surrounding area through Alhassan Village Tours, opposite Chief Pond. Alhassan offers the only accommodation in Paga; you can sleep on the roof of mud huts for a negotiated price and meals can be arranged.

You can take a guided tour of the remains of the Pikworo Slave camp and cemetery two kilometres west of Paga.

Regular shared taxis and tro-tros run between Paga and both Navrongo and Bolgatanga. From the motor park in Paga, you can either walk the 2km to the border post or you can pay the going rate for a private taxi.

GHANA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

In general, accommodation in Ghana is not especially good value, better suited to people on an expense account. For this book budget refers to rooms US\$30 and under, midrange US\$30 to US\$65 and top end US\$65 and up. In Accra especially, rooms under US\$40 are

generally not well kept or maintained and bring a bit of sticker shock for those reasonably expecting more for their money. Most rates around the country already include 15% tax (12.5% VAT and 2.5% NHIL) and many midrange and top end hotels include breakfast though this is usually a very basic coffee, eggs and toast.

Before putting down any money it's a good idea to make sure everything works; check the air-con, try the water, turn the TV on if that's important to you (it really doesn't make any sense to pay extra for the TV if there isn't cable), flip the light switches, and be sure there's a bath towel and soap before getting in the shower and toilet paper before you, well, you know.

You'll almost always be offered an air-con, deluxe or superior room first; ask if there are standard rooms available. Despite the heat, fan-cooled rooms are sometimes preferable since some air-cons are so loud as to make sleep near impossible. Unfortunately, owners and staff are usually indifferent and aren't in the habit of going out of their way to make your stay more comfortable.

Prices are generally higher in Accra than elsewhere in the country. Off the tourist trail there are few hotels and guesthouses, but it's usually possible to arrange to sleep on a floor or roof somewhere. Most of the ecotourism projects offer overnight stays in simple guesthouses or homestays. Along the coast, there are some nice beach resorts, many of which are within reach of a midrange budget. Camping is a possibility at some of these resorts and also at national parks and reserves. A few of the coastal forts offer extremely basic guesthouse accommodation.

Many Ghanaian hotels don't have single rooms as such but offer the choice of double or twin rooms. Double rooms have one double bed and can sleep one or two people; twin rooms are usually more expensive and have two single beds. Midrange and top-end hotels sometimes quote prices in US dollars but you can pay in cedis or US dollars.

ACTIVITIES

With its long coastline, one of the main things to do in Ghana is head to the beach where you can surf and boogie-board or simply do nothing, which should be considered an activity. However, ask before swimming since currents and undertow

PRACTICALITIES

- The national *Daily Graphic* is probably the best of the English-language newspapers available, with reasonably good coverage of Ghanaian, African and international news. The broadsheet *Ghanaian Times* is also worth picking up. There's a wide selection of tabloids, many of which feature lurid headlines.
- GTV is the national channel, available throughout the country. In Accra and Kumasi, you can also get TV3, which is very similar. GTV has nightly news in English at 7pm, and shows a selection of educational programmes, slapstick comedy shows (in Twi) and American soaps. On Sunday, sermons and gospel singing take centre stage. DSTV is the main satellite channel.
- Most radio programmes are at least partly in English. Talk radio rules here, and the shows make fascinating listening. The national radio (FM 95.7) has world news in English on the hour, every hour. Other popular stations include Joy FM (99.7), Luv FM (99.5; in Kumasi), Gold FM (90.5), Groove FM (106.3) and Vibe FM (91.9).
- Most electrical outlets are UK-style, with three square prongs, though adapters are easy to find.

make conditions unsafe. Good hiking can be found in the Volta Region around Ho (p373) and Hohoe (p376) in the east and in the Tongo Hills near Bolgatanga (p391) in the north. For drumming and dancing lessons, contact Big Milly's (p355) or the Academy of African Music & Arts (AAMAL; p354) in Kokrobite, the Oasis Guest House (p361) in Cape Coast, or almost any of the community-based tourism projects around the country.

BOOKS

Albert van Dantzig's *Forts and Castle of Ghana*, although first published in 1980, remains the definitive work on the early European coastal presence. The Ghana Museums & Monuments Board's *Castles & Forts of Ghana* has less text but some beautiful pictures. *Asante: The Making of a Nation* by Nana Otamakuro Adubofour, widely available in Kumasi, gives an insight into Ashanti history and culture. *Two Hearts of Kwasi Boachi* by Arthur Japin explores the experiences of two Ashanti brothers who were sent to be educated in Holland in the early 19th century.

African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade by Anne C Bailey reveals Africans' roles in slavery through oral accounts and the stories of elders; *Empires of Medieval West Africa: Ghana, Mali, and Songhay*, by C Conrad, relies on oral accounts and other scholars to tell the history of this era, which has had little written about it; *Kwame Nkrumah, The Father of African Nationalism* by David

Birmingham is a comprehensive biography of the first African statesman; *Onions Are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women* by Gracia Clark draws on years of field research studying the women who work in the Kumasi market.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most stores are open between 9am and 6pm Monday to Friday, with some from 9am to 2pm on Saturday. Very few stores are open on Sunday.

Banks are generally open daily from 8am to 3pm, and are closed on weekends. Most forex bureaus are open limited hours on Saturday. Major hotels have forex facilities open daily.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

One of Ghana's competitive advantages, as far as tourism in the region goes, is that it's a stable and generally peaceful democracy. Having said that, ethnic violence does sporadically flare up in the far northeast around Bawku. Take care of your valuables on the beaches west of Accra (see p354) and always try to be aware of your surroundings especially if you're walking alone at night. Otherwise, reckless tro-tro drivers, heat exhaustion and open sewers are probably the main hazards you will encounter.

DISCOUNT CARDS

With an international student card you can get discounts on admission to national parks, ecotourism projects and museums.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Ghanaian Embassies & Consulates

Ghana has embassies in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo. For details, see the relevant country chapter.

Elsewhere, diplomatic missions include the following:

Australia (☎ 02-9283 2961; Suite 1404, Level 14, 370 Pitt St, Sydney 2000)

Canada (☎ 613-236 0871; 1 Clemow Ave, The Glebe, Ottawa, Ont K1S 2A)

France (☎ 01 71 10 14 02; 8 Villa Saïd, 75116 Paris)

Germany (☎ 0228-35 20 01; Rheinalle 58, 53173 Bonn)

Japan (☎ 03-409 3861; Azabu, PO Box 16, Tokyo)

Netherlands (☎ 70-362 5371; Molenstraat 53, 2513 The Hague)

UK (☎ 020-8342 8686; 104 Highgate Hill, London N6 5HE)

USA Consulate (☎ 212-832 1300; 19 East 47th St, New York, NY 10017)

USA Embassy (☎ 202-686 4520; 3512 International Dr NW, Washington, DC 20008);

Embassies & Consulates in Ghana

All of the embassies and consulates listed are in Accra (area code ☎ 021). Most are open 8.30am to 3.30pm Monday through Friday.

Australia (Map p340; ☎ 777080; www.ghana.embassy.gov.au; 2 Second Rangoon Close, Cantonments) Australian High Commission.

Benin (Map p340; ☎ 774860; Switchback Lane, Cantonments)

Burkina Faso (Map p342; ☎ 221988; 2nd Mango Tree Ave, Asylum Down; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Canada (Map p340; ☎ 228555; fax 773792; 46 Independence Ave, Sankara interchange)

Côte d'Ivoire (Map p345; ☎ 774611; 9 18th Lane, Osu; ☎ 9am-2.30pm Mon-Thu)

Denmark (☎ 226972; 67 Isert Rd, 8th Ave Extension) Near World Bank office.

France (Map p340; ☎ 228571; www.ambafrance-gh.org; 12th Rd, Kanda) Off Liberation Ave.

Guinea (Map p340; ☎ 777921; 4th Norla St, Labone)

Germany (Map p342; ☎ 221311; geremb@ghana.com; 6 Ridge Rd, North Ridge)

Ireland (☎ 772866; 5th Circular Extension)

Japan (Map p340; ☎ 775616; fax 775951; 8 Josef Broz Tito Ave, Cantonments)

Liberia (Map p340; ☎ 775641; Odoikwao St, Airport Residential Area)

Mali (Map p342; ☎ 775160; Liberia Rd, West Ridge)

Netherlands (Map p340; ☎ 231991; nlgovacc@ncs.com.gh; 89 Liberation Ave, Sankara Circle)

Niger (Map p340; ☎ 224962; E104/3 Independence Ave, Ringway Estate)

Nigeria (Map p340; ☎ 776158; fax 774395; 5 Josef Broz Tito Ave, Cantonments)

Togo (Map p340; ☎ 777950; Togo House, Cantonments Circle, Cantonments)

UK (Map p340; ☎ 221665; fax 221745; 1 Osu Link, Ringway Estate) British High Commission.

USA (Map p345; ☎ 776601; www.usembassy.org.gh; cnr 10th La & 3rd St, Osu)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Ghana observes the Muslim festivals of Eid al-Fitr, at the end of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha, both of which are determined by the lunar calendar. See p818 for a table of Islamic holidays.

Ghana has many festivals and events, including Cape Coast's Fetu Afahye Festival (first Saturday of September; see p361), Elmina's Bakatue Festival (first Tuesday in July; see p364), the Fire Festival (p386) of the Dagomba people in Tamale and Yendi (dates vary according to the Muslim calendar), the Feko festival in Sandema (17 to 18 December; see p393) and various year-round Akan celebrations (p381) in Kumasi. Ghana's most famous festival, Aboakyer (Deer Hunt; see p358), is celebrated in Winneba on the first weekend in May. Accra's tourist office sells a booklet on festivals. Panafest is celebrated annually in Cape Coast, Accra and Kumasi.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays include the following:

New Year's Day 1 January

Independence Day 6 March

Easter March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Africa Day 25 May

Republic Day 1 July

Farmers' Day 1st Friday in December

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

There are Internet cafés in all major towns. Connection speeds vary but not surprisingly they tend to be slower outside the larger urban areas. Average rates per hour are C6000 to C10,000.

INTERNET RESOURCES

africaonline Ghana (www.africaonline.com/site/gh)

Starting point for general info about Ghana.

Daily Graphic (www.graphicghana.com) Homepage for Ghana's best daily newspaper.

Ghana Tourist Board (www.ghanatourism.org.gh, www.ghanatourism.gov.gh) An excellent resource for information on the country's attractions and festivals, and transport information.

Ghana.co.uk (www.ghana.co.uk) This UK-based site has plenty of good information about Ghana, from tourist attractions to history, culture and the latest news.

Ghanaweb (www.ghanaweb.com) This site has links to the major Ghanaian newspapers, including the *Daily Graphic*, as well as useful background information on the country.

Ghana Review International (www.ghanareview.com) All the latest news and politics from Ghana.

Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC; www.ncrc-ghana.org) Information on all of the community-based tourism projects in the country.

No Worries Ghana (www.noworriesghana.com) Listings and practical information from the North American Women's Association.

LANGUAGE

English is the official language. There are at least 75 local languages and dialects. The most widely spoken language is Twi, which belongs to the Akan language group and is spoken in different versions throughout most of the central and southern parts of the country. The Ashanti version of Twi is not only spoken throughout the Ashanti homeland but also serves as a lingua franca for much of the country and especially in Accra. Fanti is spoken along much of the coast to the west of Accra. Other prominent languages are Ga in the Accra-Tema area, Ewe in the southeast and Mole-Dagbani languages in the north. See the Language chapter for useful phrases in Ga (p872) and Twi (p876).

MONEY

The unit of currency is the cedi (C). There are C1000, C2000, C5000, C10,000 and C20,000 notes, as well as C100, C200, C250 and C500 coins. Prices in this chapter reflect the way prices are quoted in Ghana; that means all but some of the top-end hotels and park admission fees are given in cedis.

The best currencies to bring are US dollars, UK pounds or euros. Barclays and Standard Chartered Banks exchange cash and well-recognised brands of traveller's cheques such as American Express (Amex) or Thomas Cook without a commission.

Foreign-exchange (forex) bureaux are dotted around most major towns, though there

are fewer in the north. They usually offer a slightly better rate than the banks and stay open later. Higher denomination bills receive higher exchange rates. However, they don't generally change travellers cheques.

Bear in mind that you'll need something to put your wads of cedis in when you leave the bank or forex, as they won't fit in a money belt.

ATMs

Most Barclays and Standard Chartered Banks throughout the country have ATMs where you can get a cash advance in cedis (up to about C800,000 or US\$80) with Visa or MasterCard.

Credit Cards

Credit cards, generally only Visa and MasterCard, are accepted by major hotels and travel agencies.

Tippling

A service charge is rarely added to restaurant bills. A tip of 5% to 10% is normal in high-end restaurants and it's usually a good idea to add a few thousand cedis to the bill rather than wait for change.

STUDYING

Ghana is one of the more popular options for foreign students wishing to study in Africa, at least in part because courses are offered in English. Many universities in the US and Europe have collaborative programmes with University of Ghana Legon (p353; www.ug.edu.gh) in Accra, the University of Cape Coast (www.ucc.edu.gh), and development studies programmes in Tamale. The University for Development Studies (uds@ug.gn.apc.org) based in Tamale studies rural poverty and the environment combining academic work with practical hands-on training in rural communities. The Tamale Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies (TICCS; www.ticcs.com/index.htm) offers two Masters Degree programs – the MA in Cross-Cultural Development, and the MA in Cross-Cultural Ministry.

TELEPHONE

Every town and city has plenty of private 'communication centres' where you can make national and international calls and send and receive faxes. They're slightly more

expensive than calling from a card phone. Little streetside tables festooned with signs announcing which cell-phone providers they can call are everywhere, from Accra to small villages. These generally cost from C1500 to C2500 per minute and are the most convenient phoning option.

Several companies, most prominently Buzz, Areeba (formerly Spacefon) and One-Touch are in a race to become the dominant player in the Ghanaian cell-phone industry. Cell phones are becoming more and more common and are the best way to communicate within the country. Inquire in advance if your phone is compatible with one of these networks and buy a SIM card in Ghana (C60,000), or you can purchase a phone there. The south and centre of the country has adequate coverage; the north is serviced in spots but expect erratic service throughout in the near future.

TIME

Ghana is on Greenwich mean time and does not apply daylight-savings time.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The website of the **Ghana Tourist Board** (www.ghanatourism.gov.gh) has some useful information, or try the Ghanaian diplomatic mission in your country. Within Ghana, the tourist board has a network of offices in the major regional capitals. The amount of information available is limited. Opening hours tend to be somewhat erratic and most offices are closed on Saturday and Sunday.

The **Nature Conservation Research Centre** (NCRC; www.ncrc-ghana.org), one of the main players behind the country's burgeoning community-run tourism efforts has information on all of its projects.

VISAS

Everyone except nationals of Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States) countries needs a visa, which until recently could only be obtained before arriving in Ghana. Now, however, nationals of most countries can receive a tourist visa on arrival at the Kotaka airport in Accra for US\$100, though it's not a convenient option if you're arriving late at night. Visas allow a stay of 60 days and can be single or multiple entry. They must be used within three months of the date of issue.

You can get visas in many countries in West Africa (see p28) or elsewhere. Visa applications usually take three days to process, and four photos are required. You often also need an onward ticket. In the UK, single/multiple entry visas cost UK£30/40. In the USA, they cost US\$50/80.

Visa Extensions

If necessary, visas can be extended at the **immigration office** (Map p340; ☎ 021-221667 ext 215) in Accra near the Sankara interchange. Applications are accepted between 8.30am and noon Monday to Friday. You need two photos, a letter stating why you need an extension, and an onward ticket out of Ghana. Your passport is retained for the two weeks it takes to process the application.

Visas for Onward Travel

You need a visa for the following neighbouring countries.

BURKINA FASO

The embassy issues visas for three months on the same day if you get there early. You need three photos and it costs US\$40 or CFA15,000 (not payable in cedis).

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The embassy issues visas in 48 hours and you need two photos. A visa valid for up to a month costs US\$4 (payable in cedis) for Australians and Americans or US\$10 for British nationals.

TOGO

The embassy issues visas for one month on the same day. You need three photos and it costs US\$20. Alternatively, you can get a visa for the same price at the border at Aflao, but it's only valid for seven days.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Because there are plenty of women who work, study or volunteer in the country, Ghanaians in general are certainly not surprised to see foreign women travelling on their own or in groups. While women are less likely to receive semi-aggressive catcalls of 'obroni', they are more likely to be chatted up by solo young men whose intentions are usually perfectly friendly but who may be slow to respond to signals that their attention is unwanted.

WORK & VOLUNTEERING

There are probably at least as many international and religious aid and development organisations operating in Ghana as any country in the world. Take a look at any passing 4WD and odds are there's a decal on it with an acronym identifying it as the property of one of these. The US Peace Corps programme also has a significant presence.

Many organisations welcome volunteers for short-term to long-term stints. The list here is by no means comprehensive.

Cross Cultural Collaborative Inc (www.culturalcollaborative.org/Ghana.htm) Educational and nonprofit, promotes cultural exchange and understanding through the arts.

Cross Cultural Solutions (www.crossculturalsolutions.org) Volunteer programmes.

Experiential Learning International (www.eliabroad.com)

FLAME (Free Learning and Merit Education; www.flameghana.org) Arranges study opportunities in Ghana.

Kids Worldwide (www.kidsworldwide.org)

Travel Active (www.travelactive.nl) Dutch volunteer organisation.

Travellers Worldwide (www.travellersworldwide.com/04-ghana/04-ghana-about.htm)

Volunteer in Africa (www.volunteeringinafrica.org) Offers short- and long-term volunteer placements in health, education, environmental preservation and socioeconomic development.

TRANSPORT IN GHANA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Entering Ghana

In theory you need a yellow-fever vaccination certificate to enter Ghana, although it is rarely checked. It's more important to have it for onward travel to other countries.

Air

Ghana's only international airport is Kotaka international airport in Accra. The national carrier, Ghana Airways, was replaced by Ghana International Airways in late 2005. At the time of research it was only flying between London and Accra. Other airlines that regularly link Accra with Europe include Alitalia, British Airways, KLM and Lufthansa. South African Airways links Ghana with Perth in Australia, via Johannesburg. There are several other national carriers of African countries that service Accra plus several smaller, private African airlines. North

American Airlines has one nonstop flight a week between New York City and Accra. Charter flights from Europe, especially to and from Germany are becoming more frequent and are generally less expensive than flying with a major carrier.

Airlines servicing Ghana include the following:

Afriqiyah Airways (8U; ☎ 252465) Hub: Tripoli. Flights to Europe with stopover in Tripoli, Libya; office at Accra airport.

Air Ivoire (VU; ☎ 241461) Hub: Abidjan. Office at Accra airport.

Alitalia (Map p342; AZ; ☎ 239315; Ring Rd Central, Asylum Down, Accra) Hub: Rome.

American Airlines (www.aa.com)

Antrak (Map p345; ☎ 769458; Antrak House, Danquah Circle, Accra) Domestic airline that also flies to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso and Lagos, Nigeria.

British Airways (Map p342; BA; ☎ 240386; Kojo Thompson Rd, Adabraka, Accra) Hub: London Heathrow.

EgyptAir (MS; ☎ 773537; Ring Rd East, Osu, Accra) Hub: Cairo.

Emirates (EK; ☎ 238921; Meridian House, Ring Road Central, Accra) Hub: Dubai. Four flights a week connecting Accra and Dubai with a stopover in Lagos.

Ghana International Airways (GH; ☎ 221000; www.fly-ghana.com; Silver Star Tower, Airport City, PMB 78, Kotoka International Airport) Hub: Accra. At time of research only flew to London.

Ivory Coast Airways Office at Accra airport.

Kenya Airways (KQ; ☎ 444301) Hub: Nairobi. Office at Accra airport.

KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (Map p340; KL; ☎ 224020; Ring Rd Central, Accra) Hub: Amsterdam.

Lufthansa Airlines (LH; ☎ 243893; Fidelity House, Accra) Hub: Frankfurt. Off Ring Rd Central.

Slok Air International (☎ 3166206; No 3 Aviation Rd, Accra) Flies to Monrovia, Freetown, Banjul and Dakar; office at the airport.

South African Airways (Map p342; SA; ☎ 230722; Ring Rd Central, Asylum Down, Accra) Hub: Johannesburg.

Virgin Nigeria (Map p340; VK; ☎ 771700; www.virginigeria.com; La Palm Royal Beach Hotel, Accra) Hub: Lagos.

Land

Ghana has land borders with Côte d'Ivoire to the west, Burkina Faso to the north and west, and Togo to the east. The main border crossing into Côte d'Ivoire is at Elubo; there are less-travelled crossings between Sunyani and Agnibilékrou and between Bole and Ferkesédougou. Into Burkina the main crossing is at Paga, with other crossings at Tumu, Hamale and Lawra. The main crossing into Togo is at Aflao, just

outside Lomé. Note that Ghana's borders all close promptly at 6pm.

BURKINA FASO

Between Accra and Ouagadougou, the usual route is via Kumasi, Tamale, Bolgatanga, Paga and Pô. A direct VanefSTC bus runs to Ouagadougou from Accra (C260,000, 24 hours) once daily (except Sunday) and from Kumasi (C195,000, 20 hours) every Wednesday night. Though going the entire distance at once can be painful and most people do the trip in stages. From Bolgatanga, there are frequent tro-tros to the border at Paga (C10,000, 40 minutes), from where you can get onward transport to Pô, 15km beyond the border, and Ouagadougou.

You can also enter Burkina Faso from the northwest corner of Ghana, crossing between Tumu and Léo or from Hamale or Lawra and onto Bobo-Dioulasso. You can reach Tumu most easily from Bolgatanga, Hamale from Bolgatanga or Wa, and Lawra from Wa. However, traffic is relatively scarce on all these routes.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

VanefSTC buses run between Accra and Abidjan (C111,000, 12 hours) via Elubo once daily Monday to Friday, leaving in the early morning. The Ecowas Express, run by STIF, a company from Côte d'Ivoire, does three runs a week between Neoplan motor park in Accra and Abidjan. From Takoradi, Peugeot bush taxis make a daily trip to Abidjan. Otherwise, make your way to Elubo in stages, cross the border on foot and take onward transport from there.

Other less commonly used crossings are from Kumasi via Sunyani and Berekum to Agnibilékrou (you'll have to do this in short stages as there are no direct buses) and between Bole and Bouna to Ferkessédougou. However, on this route you have to cross the Black Volta River (the border) by canoe and readers report being at the mercy of dash-hungry border officials. Onward transport from Bouna to Ferkessédougou takes eight to 12 hours.

TOGO

Tro-tros and buses regularly ply the coastal road between Accra and Aflao (all about C30,000, three hours). VanefSTC buses leave from the smaller Tudu bus station in Accra

(C45,000, four times a day). The border at Aflao is open from 6am to 10pm daily but you should cross between 9am and 5pm if you need a Togolese visa at the border. Public transport from Ghana doesn't cross the border, which is only 2km from central Lomé. Other crossings are at Wli near Hohoe and between Ho and Kpalimé, though the former is strictly a pedestrian crossing and it's not easy to find onward transport from here. In the north, you can cross from Tamale via Yendi to Sansanné-Mango or Kara but transport is scarce on this route.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Two domestic airlines, **Citylink** (☎ 312001; www.citylink.com.gh) and **Antrak** Accra (☎ 21-765337; Antrak House, Danquah Circle); Kumasi (☎ 51-41296); Tamale (☎ 71-91075) operate in Ghana. Both have two flights daily between Accra and Kumasi (one way US\$60 to US\$80, 45 minutes), and Antrak has flights on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday between Accra and Tamale (one way US\$144, 1½ hours). Several travel agencies in Accra and Kumasi sell Citilink and Antrak tickets (see listings in their respective sections).

Boat

A passenger boat, the Yapei Queen, runs along Lake Volta between Akosombo and Yeji, stopping at the town of Kete-Krachi and a few villages along the way. The journey winds past beautiful hills and is an experience in itself as well as an alternative to the travails of road travel. In theory it leaves the port at Akosombo at 4pm on Monday and arrives in Yeji on Wednesday morning; in practice the departure and arrival times are more fluid. The southbound service leaves Yeji around 4pm on Wednesday and arrives in Akosombo on Friday morning. Tickets cost C100,000/C50,000 in 1st/2nd class, and food and drinks are available on board. If you want one of the two 1st-class cabins (recommended), you have to reserve at least two weeks in advance – call ☎ 0251-20686 in Akosombo to make a booking.

Bus

The best bus service in the country is provided by VanefSTC, the old State Transport Corporation now owned by Greyhound. Compared to other transport in the region it's fairly

reliable, though late departures are all too common. Expect significant delays leaving from the Tudu station in Accra and on any of the less regular routes. Buses link the major centres, including Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, Cape Coast, Tamale and Bolgatanga. Seats can generally be booked one day in advance, which is essential for long-haul routes especially during busy holiday periods. Other operators, which may have the only buses on some routes (such as between Tamale and Mole National Park), include OSA, Kingdom Transport Services (KTS), City Express and GPRTU. Where they share routes, fares are less than with VanefSTC, but the buses tend to be older and less comfortable.

You have to pay extra for luggage. On VanefSTC buses, your luggage is weighed and you're charged about C300 per kilogram. Avoid the flip-down aisle seats which can be real backbreakers on a long journey.

Car & Motorcycle

Driving is on the right in Ghana. Most main roads in Ghana are in quite good condition though there are some extensive stretches of severely potholed road between Kumasi and Tamale and between Accra and Aflao. Almost all secondary roads are unsealed. The frequent police checkpoints along the road are usually angling for a dash. Self-drive car rental is available in Accra and Kumasi but is not recommended unless you are used to driving the West African way.

An international driver's license and many foreign countries' licenses are recognised. Insurance is expensive.

FUEL

Petrol is a significant expense and should be taken into consideration when budgeting for transportation. At the time of research it cost around C7000 per litre but prices are particularly vulnerable to inflation. Petrol stations are easy to find throughout the country.

HIRE

Car hire with a driver is a good option if you have limited time; it costs anything from US\$70 to US\$100 per day. The estimated cost is generally payable in advance in cash or by major credit card. Rental companies in Accra include the following:

Avis (Map p342; ☎ 021-761751; avis@ghana.com; Speedway Travel & Tours, 5 Tackie Tawiah Ave)

Europcar (Map p342; ☎ 021-667546; Novotel Hotel, Barnes Rd)

Hertz (Map p340; ☎ 021-223389; Golden Tulip Hotel, Liberation Ave, Airport Residential Area)

Vicma Travel & Tours (☎ 021-232294; fax 234843; Liberia Rd North)

ROAD HAZARDS

Ghana's main road hazards are other Ghanaian drivers. Accidents and injuries or even fatalities are all too common; there were almost 15,000 accidents with 650 fatalities in 2004 alone. One of the contributing factors is that so many vehicles stop suddenly to pick up or drop off passengers. Poor roads are of course an issue, and unpaved and potholed roads threaten the condition of your vehicle.

ROAD RULES

Driving in Ghana is a little like driving in Rome with a strong dose of New York – it's crazy. There seem to be few rules except 'use your horn' and 'the most aggressive driver wins', if by win one means survives. Accra is challenging since besides other kamikaze drivers you have to avoid hitting pedestrians who liberally translate crosswalk and other safety guidelines. Timid drivers should probably give it a pass. Things are more subdued outside of Accra and Kumasi.

Taxis

Within towns and on some shorter routes between towns, shared taxis (called passenger or line taxis) are the usual form of transport. Line taxis run on fixed routes, along which they stop to pick up and drop off passengers. Passenger taxis run on routes between towns and will set you down wherever you want to go. Shared taxis are more expensive than tro-tros but still very cheap. If time is short it's always possible to pay for two or three seats rather than wait for the full load. Basically any taxi that stops for you and already has passengers is a line taxi.

Private or 'dropping' taxis don't have meters and rates are negotiable. It's best to ask a local in advance for the average cost between two points. You'll soon have a handle on what is fair and what is gouging. Taxis can be chartered for an agreed period of time from one hour to a day for a negotiable fee. Drivers will often try to renegotiate after a deal has been struck and

you've started moving, saying things like 'it's really not enough' or 'you just give xxx more.' Stick to your guns though and you will have no problems.

Most taxis don't have air-con, which is only really problematic if the windows don't open, which is not unusual. Doors also can be difficult to open.

Train

Ghana's railway links Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi. The rolling stock is good and, like so many tro-tros and buses, was imported second-hand from Germany. But the trains are much slower and no cheaper than motorised transport. There are daily passenger services in either direction between Accra and Kumasi (C40,000/C25,000 in 1st/2nd class, about 12 hours) and a nightly service between Accra and Takoradi, which costs about the same and takes at least 12 hours, but these are really only for masochists and train enthusiasts. However, the line between Kumasi and Takoradi is worth considering, both as a change from road transport and for the experience in itself. On this line, there are two trains daily, leaving at 6am and 8.30pm. Fares are C40,000/C25,000 in 1st/2nd class and on the night train this gets you either a two- or four-person sleeper. The journey in theory takes eight hours but it's usually more like 12 in practice, especially on the night train. No food is available

on the train, although you can get food at stops along the way.

Tro-tros

Tro-tro is a catch-all category that embraces any form of transport that's not a bus or taxi. They cover all major and many minor routes and, without them, Ghana would come to a standstill. Except on real backcountry routes, tro-tros are minibuses of all shapes, sizes and degrees of roadworthiness. They don't work to a set timetable, but leave when full, having squeezed in as many passengers as they can. The beauty of tro-tros is that you can pick them up anywhere along a route and they're extremely cheap (about US\$0.01 per kilometre). Most fares are under a dollar or two but frequently change by small amounts, and for that matter the fares on many routes are not given. For long journeys, though, buses are more comfortable and safer. Many tro-tro drivers demand a negotiable luggage fee though this seems to be applied fairly arbitrarily and is more commonly requested of foreigners than Ghanaians. If others don't have to pay then neither should you.

Most towns have an area where tro-tros and buses congregate, usually in or near the market. These are called lorry park or motor park (the terms are used interchangeably) or, quite often, station. You may hear the term tro-tro used, but taxis and minibuses are often just called 'cars'.