

[Ghana] Black Star Rising

The West African country of Ghana is challenging perceptions, turning heads and taking its place as a guiding light of African independence and solidarity.
By Maria Lavelle

Surrounded by Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and the Gulf of Guinea, Ghana is an African success story in the making.

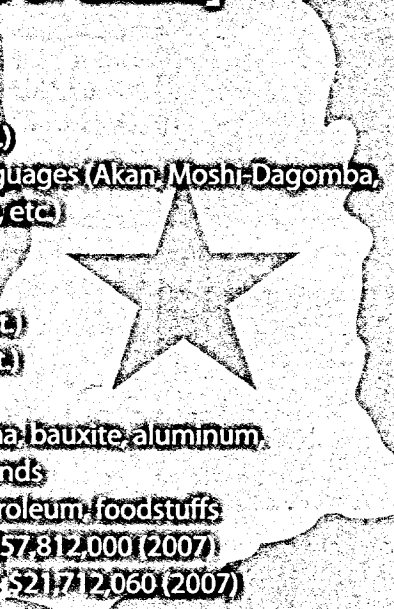
After gaining independence from the U.K. in 1957, Ghana endured three decades of military coups and economic crises. Following economic reforms in the mid-1980s and political reforms in the mid-90s, democracy firmly took root. This December, Ghana will hold its fifth consecutive multi-party election.

Ghana has one of the best-performing economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Agriculture is at the centre; the country is the world's second-largest cocoa producer. Mining—especially of gold, manganese ore and bauxite—is the next most important industry. Tourism ranks third, but its importance is expected to increase in the future. Ghana has recently discovered commercial quantities of oil off its west coast, and many Ghanaians hope this will be the key to future development. There is also a large Ghanaian diaspora, particularly in the U.S., U.K. and Canada. Remittances from those living abroad amount to more than \$4 billion annually.

In spite of its gains, many visitors to Ghana (particularly those who have not been to Africa before) are struck by the poverty that persists. While some Ghanaians drive Mercedes and live in large luxury

At a Glance [Republic of Ghana]

Capital: Accra
Independence: March 6, 1957
Population: 23 million (2007 est.)
Languages: English, African languages (Akan, Moshi, Dagomba, Ewe, Ga, Twi, Hausa, etc.)
Total area: 239,460 km²
GDP: \$15.97 billion (2007 est.)
GDP growth rate: 6.4% (2007 est.)
GDP (per capita): \$727 (2007 est.)
Currency: Ghana cedi (GHC)
Exports: gold, cocoa, timber, tuna, bauxite, aluminum, manganese ore, diamonds
Imports: capital equipment, petroleum, foodstuffs
Canadian exports to Ghana: \$157,312,000 (2007)
Canadian imports from Ghana: \$217,120,060 (2007)



homes, many eke out only a meagre existence. And although poverty rates are generally declining, this is unfortunately not the case for all regions of the country. The challenge for Ghana is to accelerate development while at the same time sharing its benefits more equitably.

CULTURE IN GHANA

Ghana has a rich mix of cultural influences. Traditional music and dances are performed at festivals year-round. Ghanaian highlife music (a unique style of dance music dating back to the 19th and early 20th centuries) and hiplife (which incorporates hip hop) fill the airwaves. Fashion designers incorporate colourful, finely woven kente cloth and centuries-old hand-stamped batik into the latest looks. The country encompasses many ethnic groups, and tribal chiefs, kings and queen mothers continue to play an important role in modern Ghana.

Funerals, rather than weddings or birthdays, are the key social events that bring family and community together in Ghana. Not a day goes by that you do not see people dressed in funeral clothing gathering to mourn the loss and celebrate the life of a deceased person. Funerals last several days and include music and dance. Parts of Ghana are known for elaborately carved wooden coffins depicting the dead person's profession. For example, a beer bottle might represent a bar owner, or a fishing boat a fisherman.



Traditional celebration