

IVORY COAST by Fred Jacques

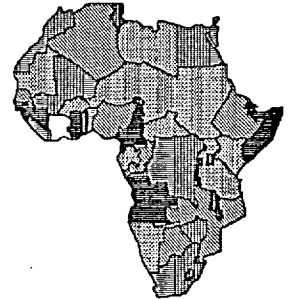
Having returned from a three-year assignment to Ivory Coast, I was pleasantly surprised when asked to write an article for *Liaison* about our stay in Africa. It is always a pleasure to share with others experiences that might help them to better prepare for the great adventure of going on a posting.

With baby Veronica in our arms, my wife Claire and I landed in Abidjan on a sultry day in June, 1985, the day before Canada Day. The oppressive humidity enveloped us when we stepped off the plane. This was our first taste of what the weather would be like during our stay in Ivory Coast. Once we recovered from the shock, we were greeted by the Commercial Counsellor and his wife, who had very kindly come to meet us. How surprised we were, on the road from the Port Bouet Airport to the Hotel Ivoire Cocody, at the sight of "Abidjan, the pearl of the lagoons." We hardly expected to see a modern city with an infrastructure comparable to North American standards. Accustomed to seeing Africa depicted either tragically or picturesquely, we had to admit that with its skyscrapers and expressways, Abidjan deserved the affectionate name "Little Manhattan", given it by its people. Yet there is more to Abidjan than this. It has the appearance of a Western city, but remains the open door to a country steeped in traditions, which, nonetheless, combine very well with modern things.

Like any other large city Abidjan has its share of problems such as pollution, overpopulation and vandalism. But alongside these negative aspects, new visitors will soon realize there is much to discover. Time and an open mind are essential for the explorer though. Too often we arrive abroad with pre-conceived ideas - nothing will spoil a posting more. Obviously, everyone has his own way of dealing with life abroad. Some prefer to isolate themselves, while others are more adventuresome. During our stay in Ivory Coast, we took the latter approach. Our attitude enabled us to form friendships with the people of the country, and gain a better understanding of their way of living. This required a good deal of time, but our efforts were well rewarded. Because of our diplomatic status, we were treated somewhat superficially at first. However, once the ice was broken, we soon saw the importance of knowing the people in order to appreciate the country.

Being in Ivory Coast gave us an opportunity to discover other nearby countries. I travelled to Burkina Faso, and Claire visited Benin and Togo. She returned delighted by her brief stay in those countries. On my part, travelling to Burkina gave me an opportunity to see a country where life is pleasant despite unfavourable climatic conditions - a country where the people are friendly and quite aware of the effort to better control their environment.

Having now returned to Ottawa, with our new family member, Fabienne, I often look back with pleasure on the opportunity I had to broaden my view of the world by living in a country with a culture and traditions different from ours. Above all, these three years in Ivory coast enabled us to see that in spite of its crises, famine and other problems, Africa is a continent worth discovering. But be prepared -- it can be very captivating!



Abidjan



BAULE, IVORY COAST
The horn formation and the sacrifice marks on both sides have the characteristics of the Yaoure subgroup of the Baule.

