

"AFRICA FOR BEGINNERS"

Ghana is one of those countries known as "Africa for beginners," because there is no language barrier for anglophones and it is relatively stable. It is a deeply religious place: churches are packed on Sundays, clearing the streets of traffic for several hours. Ghanaians are absolutely soccer mad! Accra boasts a large, modern stadium that hosted the African Cup of Nations tournament and World Cup qualifying matches earlier this year. Even if soccer is not your sport, you can't help but be drawn into the excitement generated by thousands of cheering, singing and dancing fans.

The country also boasts many places to explore outside of Accra. Its west coast offers a number of beach resorts, where colonial forts act as a poignant reminder of the suffering caused by the slave trade on the former Gold Coast. A canopy walk in Kakum National Park, designed by a Canadian company, offers a bird's-eye view of a tropical rain forest. Kumasi, the second-largest city, in the heart of the country, is home to an immense, sprawling market. It provides a fascinating glimpse into how goods from the West are recycled into new items: used clothes into new garments, used tires into shoes, used oil filters into small oil cans. North of Kumasi, Mole National Park includes a budget safari, with animals such as elephants, warthogs and monkeys.

Ghana is an attractive posting for young families. Kindergarten and nursery schools in Accra are good. While there are few parks, most staff quarters have large yards and there is access to recreational facilities. Nannies, cooks and other domestic help are readily available. Although the school system is decent, older children may find Accra a bit dull. Spouses may also find employment possibilities limited, however there are plenty of volunteer opportunities.

The Canadian High Commission in Ghana is a medium-sized mission with about 16 Canada-based staff and 36 locally engaged staff. Dating back to 1957, CIDA's development assistance program here is the agency's longest-running, and one of its largest in Africa. CIDA currently contributes to Ghana's development and poverty reduction through investments in democratic governance and basic human needs, including water and food security. The mission's immigration section is growing and serves as a regional hub for 12 different countries. The administrative section offers consular services to the ever-rising number of Canadians in Ghana and Togo, and is kept busy with property maintenance and supporting

the mission's programs. The political, economic reporting and public affairs (PERPA) section is small, so the work is quite varied. This year, PERPA will concentrate on monitoring Ghana's general elections and following democratic developments. The trade section is managed by a Canadian officer in Senegal. Trade relations between Canada and Ghana are increasing, and there is real potential for Canada to increase its market share here.

Kwame Nkrumah, the country's first president, envisioned Ghana as the guiding light of African independence and solidarity—the Black Star, the lodestar of Africa. Fifty-one years later, it is leading the way for many other African countries. As a posting, Ghana will challenge your perceptions of Africa and provide you with a valuable opportunity to be part of Canada's growing partnership with this dynamic country.

Maria Lavelle is the PERPA program manager at the Canadian High Commission in Accra, Ghana. She has mastered the fine art of driving in Ghana.



A bead-seller makes a deal in a sprawling market in Kumasi.