

Travel Visa and Health Information for Ghana

Because we're often asked about advice for traveling to Ghana, we offer a few informal tips we ourselves have found helpful.

Visa/Passport

Travel to Ghana by US citizens requires a visa and a valid passport. Visit the Ghana Embassy in Washington DC or view information on how to procure a visa at the Ghanaian Embassy in Washington, DC (<http://www.ghanaembassy.org/>).

Be sure to send a money order, cashier's check, or certified bank check made payable to the Embassy of Ghana with your application, rather than cash or a personal check.

The US Embassy in Accra, Ghana has a helpful website, including its location, hours of operation, and other information.

The US State Department has information on travel in Ghana, including travel warnings, if any, and other useful information.

Travelers' tips - General

We have found Ghana to be a relatively safe country, friendly to Americans, with helpful, welcoming people. English is the official language, although for most it's not their "first" language.

Ghanaians dress conservatively and neatly. One rarely sees shorts on men or women, halter tops, or short skirts. Adult men don't usually wear t-shirts unless working outdoors. Women walking in town, going to market, etc. wear skirts and dresses, or long pants. For travelers, capri pants are fine. Be a good guest and **avoid unwanted attention**--fit in.

That said, we offers these general precautions, most of which are just common sense.

-Travel in groups of at least two

-Discuss objectives for each day prior to breaking off into smaller groups

-Lock all passports and valuables in hotel safes and keep money in belt underneath clothing

-When in Axim, we have in a wallet a photocopy of passport, actual driver's license (easy to replace and good for official identification), emergency phone #'s, and

perhaps 50 cedis in cash. Carry the American Embassy phone # with you at all times.

-Travel only during the day if possible. Night travel in Ghana can be dangerous and should not be undertaken except in emergency.

-Have an in-country meeting place in case team members become separated.

-Avoid traveling during the rainy season. It's possible but more difficult.

-Have an emergency plan and exit strategy.

-Each team member should consider having insurance that covers injury, evacuation, and transportation if needed.

-Check if there are any State Department warnings for Ghana.

-We suggest you have a working cellphone with you, or buy one there. Cellphone use is ubiquitous in Ghana. They use a "scratch card" method for loading the phone with units. We find Vodafone best service in Axim area.

-Buses and tro-tro's are generally safe.

-Ghana uses 220 volt and British style plugs (three rectangular prongs). Plug adapters, from US style plug to British style, are available there but it's easier to bring with you. **Power converters** (converting from 110 to 220) are not easy to find. If you need, bring your own.

-Most people in Axim go to church or mosque. Even if you're not used to doing that, visiting a church is a nice cultural experience, introduces your presence in town, and gives the people a chance to welcome you.

Health

We have found the following resources helpful:

. The Center for Disease Control (CDC)

. The University of Washington Travel Service offers medical travel services

. Your local county health department may offer travel services/inoculations. It is advised to consult a travel clinic at least three months before travel commences (because of HepB shots, if needed).

Ghana **requires** all visitors to have a **yellow fever inoculation** prior to entry. You must show the certificate to Ghanaian immigration on arrival.

You probably will be tested for ebola on arrival in the airport (and departure).

Malaria prophylactic is not required, but **malaria is a serious threat** throughout Ghana and travelers are strongly advised to guard against it. We take the generic of malarone. We take and use insect repellent on neck, ankles.

There is a hospital in Axim.

For ordinary health situations, we usually take hand sanitizer, sunscreen, a small antibiotic cream, Ibuprofen or similar, prescription ciprofloxacin, anti-diarrhea medication, insect repellent, and "Gold Bond" or similar lotion. A simple First Aid kit with band aids, etc. is handy, although these items are available for sale in Axim. Carry your own **toilet paper** and be prepared for "modest" accommodations.

Women prone to vaginal infections, especially in hot humid climates, might consider taking along prescription fluconazole or something similar.

Money

We bring pristine \$100 US dollar bills and exchange them for Ghana cedis in the airport, before leaving for our destination. Bills that are torn or have writing on them may not be accepted.

When changing money, ask for at least some small bills and coins. Many establishments don't have small amounts on hand for change.

Generally speaking, one cannot use US\$\$ in ordinary situations, such as taxis, restaurants, stores etc. We carry a few small US bills just as emergency cash, thinking a taxi driver or such could exchange on the black market if needed, and therefore might be useful in an emergency situation. The "Oanda" website is a good place to find current exchange rates.

One **cannot exchange** US dollars (cash) for cedis in Axim.

Takoradi has a Forex exchange, but we find logistically it makes more sense to get cedis in the airport, which also is a Forex exchange.

Credit cards are not much use except in bigger hotels catering to Westerners. Axim Beach Hotel takes Visa for sure (maybe Mastercard, too).

Increasingly, one can use MasterCard or Visa credit cards in bank ATM machines, to withdraw Ghana cedis in cash, but not everywhere. **Ghana Commercial Bank in Axim** now accepts both MasterCard and Visa in their ATM machine. Of course, there's a charge by your credit card carrier. Also, the machine is often not working

for several days at a time, depending on electrical power outages. We do not rely on this but we have used it.

General safety/comfort tips

Two important facts: Ghana is on the equator (hot) and the electrical power often fails unscheduled and for uncertain duration (darkness). It's hot, and dehydration is a typical challenge for Americans. Think water, and carry water at all times.

Bring: Headlamp/flashlight, sunscreen, water bottles, good walking sandals, hat, cotton clothing, small notebook in plastic bag with a couple of ball point pens (some don't work in tropics), a few business cards.

A white handkerchief to wipe perspiration is handy and helps you fit in, because most Ghanaians carry one (more polite and tidier than wiping with shirt sleeve, etc.).

Drink only **bottled water** or other bottled drinks. "Auntie Vic's" store in Axim sells crates of bottled water. We buy in bulk and keep in our hotel room.

Gifts

We don't give gifts to individuals, normally. We do bring "gifts" for whatever group we're working with. For Axim Girls High School or the OLPC Children's Lab, for example, a gift might be computer mice (cord type---we don't introduce batteries), or solar-powered, scientific, non-graphing calculators, or small volume pendrives. For the library, maybe an inflatable globe of the world, or educational charts/posters, children's books, etc. Teachers always need chalk.

Travel Guides

The most complete travel guidebook is *Ghana* by Philip Briggs. Consult the newest edition.

The official website of Ghana Tourism (<http://www.touringghana.com/>) contains useful info.

For local information, The US Embassy's "local links" page ...

(http://ghana.usembassy.gov/local_links.html) is helpful.

