

GHANA

"My time in Ghana opened my eyes to another way of life, completely different from my growing up in the United States economically, culturally, socially. It truly was a shock, yet the kindness and generosity of the Ghanaian people and the revelation that there's a huge big world out there full of friends we haven't met yet was an experience I am truly thankful I had. "Because of my AFS trip to Ghana, I believe I am more aware of the world, more thankful for family, and more willing to try to 'make a difference' in the world. All this because I was willing to try something new, go someplace different, leave my comfort zone; AFS afforded the opportunity and Ghana provided the experience." Jean Mehochko, from the United States, 1977-1978

Western tourists seldom visit Ghana, yet it is one of the friendliest and most welcoming of West African nations. It was once a center for the slave trade (17th century forts built to defend the traders still stand along the coast), but in 1957 Ghana became the first black African nation to win independence from its colonists—in Ghana's case from the British, which is why English is still the official language among the nation's 52 tongues and hundreds of dialects spoken by 60 different ethnic groups. The capital, Accra, is sprawling and anonymous, like most large cities, but many Ghanaians live in small villages where the society is intensely family-focused and communal.

Community Service Program

AFS's Community Service program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in Ghana by living and working alongside its members in a community-based service organization. At the organization, you will be asked to pitch in and offer assistance in whatever capacity might be needed and to share the knowledge and experience you have gained from your home culture in the process. No one expects you to be an expert with all the answers to local problems or the ability to change local conditions. Rather, you are expected to be a willing participant in a process of mutual discovery. This experience will present you with innumerable learning opportunities both personally and professionally.

Worldwide, AFS Community Service program participants contribute their talents and energies to a variety of social programs that range from protecting the environment to teaching children or adults, from assisting the elderly and the disabled to defending human rights, from enhancing public health to helping local businesses become established.

Past participants in Ghana have worked in schools, orphanages and hospitals. Some participants also have been involved in environment, agriculture and human rights projects. However, all specifics—including assignments, orientations, logistics and activities—vary depending on the program cycle.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Ghana/Intercultural Exchange Programs (IEP) coordinates all AFS programs to Ghana. The office staff, together with local volunteers, provides support to participants. Each year, AFS Ghana hosts approximately 25 high school students and 50 community service participants.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Orientations

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Ghana will provide you with several others. AFS orientations offer participants a chance to meet for several days and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions also provide language training as well as new information and ways of looking at things, while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences while preparing them to handle their community service assignments.

Living in Ghana

Living arrangements

Some participants in AFS Community Service programs live with local families, sharing their daily lives, their meals and perhaps a host sibling's bedroom. Other participants live where their community service organization conducts its business. Still others live in rooms provided elsewhere by their local service organizations.

Diet and Meals

Ghanaian families enjoy eating together. The diet consists mainly of yams, cassava, maize, plantains and rice. Fish is also common. Ghanaians enjoy hot and spicy foods. Tropical fruit and vegetables supplement the diet.

The mainstays of Ghanaian cuisine are thick sauces, usually eaten with potatoes or rice. Fufu, the much-loved staple for most of West Africa, is a mashed ball made of cassava, yam, or plantain that has been cooked and pounded.

Other types of dishes usually served are *kenkey*—traditionally prepared by boiling balls of mixed portions of fermented cooked maize meal and raw maize dough wrapped in cornhusks; *banku*—fermented corn/cassava dough, cooked in hot water into a smooth whitish paste; or *gari*—made from fresh cassava that is grated after which the excess liquid is squeezed out. The remaining cassava is then fried over an open fire, on a broad metal pan. The resulting product is crisp, crunchy, stored easily and can be eaten with stew or soup and fish. In secondary schools, it is sometimes soaked with water, milk and sugar.

Streets and markets are filled with vendors of fresh food. A popular dessert is fried plantains seasoned with chili pepper and ginger that goes well with a refreshing drink made of corn called *askenkee*.

Ghana's most famous product is cocoa. It is one of the country's major exports and is used to make chocolate and cocoa butter.

Health Precautions

A yellow fever vaccination is required and cholera, hepatitis A and B, tetanus, typhoid and meningitis vaccinations are recommended, as well as anti-malarial medicines. In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Ghana (available from your government or easily obtained on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

It is advisable to wash fruits and vegetables very well before they are eaten. It is not advisable to buy cooked food from street vendors, but if you must, the food must be very hot and straight from the fire.

Safety and Support

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Ghanaian. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

Travel

AFS's Community Service programs allow participants to travel on their own through their host countries, typically for a week or more, to explore and absorb each country's cultural diversity.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices in your region and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. It is your responsibility to obtain your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

Program Prices

All participants are required to pay participation fee and do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website www.afscanada.org or contact us.

The program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

The Republic of Ghana lies in the tropics on the Guinea Coast of West Africa and is about the size of the United Kingdom. Ghana has 336 miles of coastline in the south and a few mountains and hills. Dense rainforest gives way to savanna and grassland in the north.

The weather in Ghana is generally sunny, and temperatures average 30°C/80°F. May and June are months of tropical rain. The Harmattan winds off the Sahara Desert reach Ghana during December and January, bringing hot days, cool nights and very low humidity.

Population

The population is 18.9 million. Accra is the capital of Ghana with almost 2 million people. The major ethnic groups in Ghana include the Akan 49.1%, Mole-Dagbani 16.5%, Ewe 12.7% and Ga-Dangme 8%.

Language

English is the official language. Several tribal languages are spoken widely including Akan (written Kwi), Moshi-Dagomba, Ewe and Ga.

Government

Ghana is a republic and practices parliamentary democracy. The Ghanaian flag was designed by Mrs. Theodosia Okoh, a Ghanaian, to replace the flag of the United Kingdom following independence in 1957 and consists of the colours red, gold and green in horizontal stripes with a five-pointed star in the center of the gold stripe. Red represents the blood of those who died in the country's struggle for independence; gold represents the mineral wealth of the country; green symbolizes the country's rich forest; and the black star stands for the lodestar or inspiration of African freedom.

Religion

Many of the major religions of the world are practiced in this country. About 62% of Ghanaians belong to a Christian denomination. The rest adhere to Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism or one of various indigenous religions.

Launching your AFS experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that if you prepare prior to leaving, you will have the best experience.

Make every effort to improve your English language skills before departure. Then, to familiarize yourself with life in Ghana, visit your local library or search the Internet. AFS International's website, AFS.org, provides links to websites for each participating country.

Although every participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Ghana. This veteran will be an excellent resource regarding living and working there. If you do not know a veteran, please contact your local AFS volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office.

In addition, AFS will provide you with essential information about your host country to prepare you for immersion in a new and exciting culture.

Finally, Ghanaians will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised how much they already know about your country's history and politics. Therefore, you will find it helpful to be informed about current events in your home community and country.

How to Apply?

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at www.afscanada.org. If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

Quick Facts

Country data	Size	238,537 sq. km, 92,100 sq. mi
	Population	20,244,154
	Official language	English
	Government	Constitutional democracy
	Currency	1 new cedi (C) = 100 pesewas

Useful websites	www.ghanaweb.com www.ghana-youth.com www.ghana.gov.gh
AFS Ghana website	http://www.afs.org/partners/gha/index.htm