



Focus on GHANA School Program

"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, sojourner 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.

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. During the school 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.

Landing in Ghana

When you land at Accra International Airport in Ghana's Capital, you and your fellow AFSers will collect your baggage, pass through customs and be met by AFS Ghana staff and volunteers.

Arrival Orientation

Your time in Ghana can be a very different experience from life in your home country. AFS staff and volunteers will spend three to four days with you at the arrival orientation, to prepare you for your stay. Orientation topics will focus on Ghanaian society, culture, family, school, religion, festivals, safety and health issues. You will discuss your expectations and concerns with your fellow AFSers and experienced volunteers. You will also receive six hours of language lessons with emphasis on Twi and Dagbani. After the arrival orientation you will travel to your host family.

Living in Ghana

Lifestyle and Family Living

Ghanaians have been greatly influenced by European civilization, but the country is striving to maintain and promote its uniquely African culture. Family structure varies from one ethnic group to another. Some ethnic groups have a matriarchal family organization in which inheritance is passed down through the wife's family rather than through the husband's. In these ethnic groups, the chief responsibilities for the family fall on the women. Other ethnic groups have male-dominated family structures. All share a deep respect for elderly members of the family, and elders exercise a great deal of influence on family decisions. Ghanaians normally disregard their individual desires and ambitions for the sake of the family unit.

Ghanaian host families, like AFS host families worldwide, are volunteers. Some families are provided with small stipends to cover food expenses for an extra family member. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

The style of living can differ a lot from the city to small towns or villages. You will see different types of housing: elegant colonial houses with wide verandas surrounded by gardens, middle-range houses, bungalows, block of flats, but also poor shanty towns, made of sticks, palm fronds, sheets of iron, mud, anything owners could find.

Markets in Ghana are alive, big and busy. You can get most things there from oranges, tomatoes and beans, to haircuts. Market women sit under huge straw hats with babies strapped to their backs and skillfully balance loaded baskets on their heads, defying gravity.

At night, music is everywhere in local outdoor restaurants and nightclubs. Culture comes alive in the colorful annual festivals, serving to purify ancestral "stools" (sacred piece of furniture), cleanse communities of evil, venerate ancestors and supplicate the deities for prosperity and unity. With such vibrant traditions, it is no surprise that Ghana was the first African nation to win independence from colonial rule in 1957.

Dress and Appearance

Guests in Ghana should respect the people's concern for modesty and neatness. It is important to wear neat and well-ironed clothes at all times. You are respected when you wear neat and decent clothes. Clothing should be lightweight and conservative. Despite the warm climate, it is not appropriate to wear very short shorts or to expose much skin. Bring wash-and-wear clothes, preferably made of cotton or another light material, T-

shirts, blouses, knee length shorts and long pants, comfortable walking shoes, sneakers, a swimsuit, sunscreen and a towel. You should bring one nice outfit for dressier occasions: a shirt and tie with slacks for men, a blouse and slacks or a skirt for women.

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.

School Life

This program combines school life with cultural exploration and some community projects.

You will be placed in the next-to-last or last year of high school. There will be vacations in December and at festival times. Core subjects in Ghanaian secondary schools include English, Ghanaian languages, mathematics, agricultural and environmental studies, life skills, physical education, science and arts.

All schools require students to wear a school uniform. The number of students per class is usually 45-55. A regular class takes 45 minutes for a single session or hour and a half for a double class.

Teen Life

Teenagers in Ghana are very much influenced both by the traditions, which are very much alive in the country, and by western culture, through TV, movies, music and the Internet. They spend lot of time outdoors, swimming and playing soccer while dreaming of becoming international stars. They enjoy playing games such as *oware* (a board game) or *draft* (a card game). They like dancing, listening to music and playing musical instruments.

After school and on weekends, teenagers are expected to help at home with siblings, cooking, light work or washing and participating in a very social family life that includes extended family members or the whole community.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Ghana will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide 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 young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

A mid-stay orientation will give you the opportunity to evaluate your progress, learn about a different region of Ghana and share experiences with AFS staff, volunteers and fellow AFSers.

An interesting activity organized by AFS/IEP Ghana is a study tour for participants to other parts of the country. During this tour, participants get to know other interesting historical sites and to experience different aspects of the culture.

During the program, participants choose a community service project as an after-school activity. Projects include the study of traditional symbols and artifacts, proverbs, traditional songs and folklore, assisting in orphanages, participating in community projects, gender programs and HIV/AIDS awareness programs.

Before you return home, you will meet with other AFSers for about three days. This End-of-Stay orientation is about looking back at your exchange experience and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

Language

The major languages spoken are Twi, Fante, Ga, Hausa, Dagbani, Ewe and Nzema. English is the official language of Ghana, reflecting years of British colonization. The local languages are rich in proverbs, the use of which is taken to be a sign of wisdom. Euphemisms are very common, especially about events connected with death.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Ghana, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Ghana. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Travel to countries adjacent to Ghana is strongly discouraged as some are politically unstable and lack the healthcare facilities common in Ghana.

Spending Money

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility.

AFS recommends that about US\$1,000 in credit cards, traveler's checks and cash should cover a year's worth of spending money. Ghanaian young people are not used to carrying or spending large amounts of money. Ghanaians live modestly. It is wise to learn to spend as they do.

Safety and Support

Ghana is a relatively safe country, and you will do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your home country and follow the instructions of your host family.

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.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Ghana/IEP may have additional rules.

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 any 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.

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 of your host country, 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. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents. You will also need to bring two passport-sized photographs for the extension of your visa.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases 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 colors 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 those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key English words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the official language, but your effort in learning some basics of other languages will be highly appreciated as well.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Ghana, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Ghana and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Ghana. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Ghanaian. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Ghana will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Ghanaian people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Ghanaian:

- Cadbury, one of Britain's largest chocolate-makers, imports 90% of its cocoa from Ghana.
- Ghana's capital city of Accra boasts about 500 Internet cafés, roughly six times as many as London has.
- On December 17, 1996, the U.N. General Assembly appointed Kofi Annan of Ghana to a five-year term as Secretary-General, beginning January 1, 1997. He is now serving his second term, which will expire on December 31, 2006.
- Kofi is the Fanti tribe's name for a male child born on a Friday.
- Togo imports as much as 75% of its electricity from Ghana.
- On Sunday, August 4, 1974, Ghanaian traffic began driving on the right side of the road.

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16y to 18y, 6m	
Country data	Size	238,537 sq. km., 92,100 sq. mi.
	Population	18.9 million
	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://afsweb.afs.org/countryp.nsf/pages/ghana	

Ghanaian Proverbs

“Judge a man by how far he has come rather than how far he has gone.”

“It takes a whole village to raise a child.”

“When a man is wealthy, he may wear an old cloth.”

“It is a child who has never traveled who says that only his mother prepares tasty meals.”

“If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation).”

“Don't insult the crocodile until you cross the water.”

“There is no medicine to cure hatred.”

“The moon moves slowly, but it crosses the town.”

“By the time the fool has learned the game, the players have dispersed.”

“When you follow in the path of your father, you learn to walk like him”.

“One falsehood spoils a thousand truths.”

“Only the unwise pursue a project that has no goal or future.”

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>