

# Ghana independence day

## First sub-Saharan nation to attain independence

Every March 6, the Republic of Ghana and its people celebrate the anniversary of the country's independence from British colonial rule. On this day in 1957, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African nation to attain independence, a phenomenal development that later ushered in the period of the birth of nations on the African continent.

Ghana, until independence in 1957, was known as the Gold Coast. The country is named after one of the ancient Sudanic Empires that flourished between the fourth and 10th centuries. Three years after independence, Ghana became a republic with Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, leader of the Convention People's Party (CPP), as the first president. Under Dr. Nkrumah, Ghana made rapid and remarkable progress in education, industrial and infrastructural development and in the provision of social services.

At the same time, the country played a leading role in international affairs, particularly in the struggle for the liberation of dependent countries in Africa, and African unity. The country played an active role in a number of international organizations including the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the Commonwealth, the



**Leading to freedom:** In the capital Accra, Black Star Square (or Independence Square) commemorates the fact that Ghana was the first African nation south of the Sahara to gain independence. Right: Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (1909-72) was the first president of Ghana and an influential 20th-century advocate of Pan-Africanism. EMBASSY OF GHANA

Organization of African Unity (now African Union) and the Non-Aligned Movement. However, on Feb. 24, 1966, the Ghana Armed Forces, in cooperation

with the Police Service, overthrew the CPP government in a coup. Until 1991, there were a series of upheavals that ushered in a period of instability.

From 1991, Ghana returned to democratic rule.

Ghana is situated in West Africa and is bounded by Burkina Faso, Togo, the Atlantic Ocean



and Cote d'Ivoire. A narrow grassy plain stretches inland from the coast, widening in the east, while the south and west are covered by dense rain forest. To the north are forested hills beyond which is dry savannah and open woodland.

Ghana's coastline is dotted with sandy, palm-fringed beaches and lagoons.

The capital, Accra, features the Makola Market, a large and busy open-air market.

Kumasi is the historic capital of the Ashanti civilization, where ruins of the Manhyia Palace and the Royal Mausoleum burned down by Lord Baden-Powell may be examined.

In the northeast, the Boufoum Wildlife Sanctuary contains the spectacular Banfabiri Falls.

Mole National Park is recommended. Species of antelope, monkeys, lions and elephants can all be seen on guided excursions.

Local dishes include traditional soups (palmnut, groundnut), Kontomere and Okro stews that are normally accompanied by "fufu" (pounded cassava), "kenkey" or "gari."

In Accra and other major centers there are nightclubs combining a selection of Western pop music and spectacular Ghanaian music and dancing.

*This text is an edited excerpt from the official website of the Embassy of Ghana in Japan.*

## Ghana's unique site for natural tourism

At one time the coastal zone of West Africa was covered by 600,000 sq. km of continuous rain forest, but due to growing human populations, farming and logging the forest has shrunk by 72 percent to a series of isolated "islands" of forest. Kakum, named after the Kakum River whose headwaters lie within the park's boundaries, was originally set aside as a forest reserve in 1925. The Kakum River and its tributaries supply fresh water to Cape Coast and 133 other towns and villages.

In 1992 Kakum Forest Reserve was reclassified as a national park, and the adjacent Assin Attandanso as a resource reserve. The protected area covers 360 sq. km. Kakum is the first national park in Ghana created by local initiative as opposed to that created by the state agency responsible for wildlife. Fifty-two villages and an agricultural landscape consisting primarily of food crops and cocoa surround the park.

The forest in Kakum ranges from true rain forest — moist evergreen forest — to seasonally dry semi-deciduous Forest. It contains hundreds of species of herbaceous and woody plants. The forest is home to many endangered and rare mammals such as the Diana monkey, bongo, yellow-backed duiker and elephant.

### Canopy walkway

In March 1995, Kakum National Park became home to the only canopy walkway on the African continent. The walkway provides both tourists and researchers privileged access to

the rain forest's canopy. The 350-meter-long bridge connects seven treetops; it is constructed of wire rope, aluminum ladders, wooden planks and safety netting. In order to protect the trees, no nails or bolts pierce the bark. Up in the canopy you may see species of birds and insects that are almost impossible to find on the ground level. The canopy walkway is a joint effort between Ghana's Wildlife Department and Conservation International, a U.S.-based international non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to conserving ecosystems and biodiversity, with funding from USAID.

### Hidden connections

Kakum is a unique rainforest filled with opportunities to learn about the hidden connections that keep the forest, and those who use it, alive. Walking along the Kuntan trail, you can learn about the medicinal plants that are used locally to cure ailments. It is possible to make special arrangements for visits to Mesomakor village, which features traditional music and dancing, early morning and evening hikes, as well as forest elephant tracking. Searching for elephants, you may follow a path of footprints past their dung piles, or see mud lines on any ebony tree (locally known as "elephant comb") that was used as a scratching post. Amazingly, some plants can germinate only after passing through an elephant's gut! Some vital connections can be seen, such as a butterfly pollinating a flower, while others are invisible like the stable climate created within and



**Lofty heights:** The canopy walkway in the rain forest of Kakum National Park, 170 km from Accra, allows unprecedented access for bird watchers, botanists and ecotourists. EMBASSY OF GHANA

around the park by the forest.

Ghana's Kakum National Park is included on the Tentative List of the World Heritage site.

For more information, visit the

following sites: [whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1396](http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1396), [www.touringghana.com/ecotourism/index.asp](http://www.touringghana.com/ecotourism/index.asp), [www.ghanaecotourism.com](http://www.ghanaecotourism.com).

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