

GHANA CULTURAL NOTES

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Ghana has a rich and complex history that you may know little about. It was the first African country to acquire independence from European rule, yet it has avoided many of the ethnic conflicts and resource wars that have plagued many countries in Africa. We encourage you to learn more about Ghana prior to departure. Here is [one resource](#) to begin that process.

FAMILY

Ghanaians are very family oriented. Family obligations will take precedent over everything else. The entire family shares the same honor, so people will always try to save face to protect their family name.

MANNERS

Ghanaians place great emphasis on politeness, hospitality, and formality. You may find that proper greetings and respect for one's elders hold greater importance in Ghana than they do in the U.S.

Greetings: It is important to take the time to greet people (acquaintances and close friends), shake hands with each member of the family or group, and ask about each other's health and families.

Age and social status: Ghanaians attach great respect to age and social status. If you are of traditional college age, many people that you meet will be older than you. You should keep this idea in mind when interacting with Ghanaians. For example, you should show much respect to your professors as they are presumably older than you and have special status as highly educated people.

Here are some tips from past participants about manners in Ghana

Don't eat and walk at the same time. While it is common here to do 'fast food' and take a bite of our pizza or drink a sip of our soda while we meander towards the table, it is considered rude in Ghana to not be fully seated before the meal is touched. The practice of eating and walking is more acceptable for Oborunis (foreigners) than Obibinis (Africans), but that is only because they

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expect us to follow our own cultural habits. Remember, when in Ghana, do as the Ghanaians do (to some extent).

When you have food in front of you, invite those around you to share in the meal...It's pleasant and polite, and it's a nice surprise to the Ghanaians that you invite to have a bite.

Do not drink to excess, if at all. It is considered foolish (meaning the true sense of the word: of a fool's behavior) to drink to the point of tipsy-ness or drunkenness. Ghanaians rarely drink, and if they do, it's almost always behind closed doors in the home.

If you don't understand something, ask! Ghanaians are wonderful people and love to share information with you. In addition, they will most likely be both impressed and surprised at how willing and interested you are in learning (whether it's about culture, place, recommendations, or anything else!)

That being said, do not challenge cultural practices outright if you do not agree with them. You are a visitor in Ghana. It is not your duty, nor place, to discriminate against the culture. You may, and will likely, see things that you disagree with, including corporal (physical) punishment to those who are misbehaving, the bribing of officials, discrimination against other African descendants, etc. This was very hard for me, to be honest. As a future psychologist and social worker (and as a humanitarian and "save the whales/trees/polar bears/children" kind of person) watching these things happen, well, it sucked, frankly. It is okay, and acceptable, to express your opinion, but remember that your opinion means no more or less than anyone else's, no matter how strongly you feel about it.

Don't do anything that your grandmother wouldn't like. Don't go walking around in short skirts and a low-cut shirt or be flamboyant in your romantic relationships, should you decide to have one there. Be polite.

TIME IS TIME

Time is different in Ghana. People are often late to many things, including important life events like weddings. You may notice this with some of your courses as well – students and professors showing up late. We suggest you still show up on time and roll with it should others arrive late.

YOUR RIGHT HAND

Always use your right hand to give or receive something. In Ghana, the left hand is seen as unclean as it is your "toilet hand." It is common to give money with your right hand and receive the bag/package with your right hand. If greeting someone with a handshake, always use your right hand.

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BARGAINING

Expect to bargain for many items you wish to purchase. The two largest markets in Accra, Madina and Accra Central are crowded streets with booths selling a variety of items. In order to get a good deal, you need to bargain. If you don't bargain, you will pay outrageous prices. Patience and skill is needed to learn the bargaining process. The American culture is very anti-bargaining, so don't worry if this takes some time for you to learn and become familiar with. Eventually you will pick it up!