

Packing and preparing for Ghana

Mosquitos and bugs

- **Treated mosquito net** - insecticide treatment is necessary as the mosquitoes can bite you through the net. Nets can also be bought in Ghana. The net has to be fixed in a hook in the ceiling, making circular nets most practical.
- **Treated bed cover** to put between your sheet and the mattress to avoid bed bug bites. A blanket to cover yourself in the night could be useful, especially in the autumn semester.
- **Silk sleeping bag** for any travels, as they are lightweight and cool.
- **Mosquito repellent**; recommended is a **strong repellent** containing DEET. Repellents can also be bought in Cape Coast.

Health products

- **All the vaccinations required and recommended** for entry, must be taken, start at least one month before scheduled departure, for Norwegians see fhi.no. **Bring your yellow fever vaccination card with you – they may ask for it at the airport!**
- **Cholera drinking vaccine**: not required but it can help **with the first challenges in getting used to new food and new bacteria cultures.**
- **Multi-vitamins**: your immune system will be constantly fighting various viruses and bacteria making proper sleep and a healthy and well balanced diet (you will be treated to very good food at the study centre) is therefore crucial. However, to give it an extra boost you may want to bring with you some multi-vitamins and vitamin C for a boost.
- **Antibacterial liquid for hands, and “anti-itch” cream for bites**
- **Condoms**: they can be bought at pharmacies, but brands cost roughly the same, they don't weight much, and quality guaranteed if bought at home.
- **Thermometer**: if you fall sick a fever is a very common and telling symptom, but in the heat it may be hard to detect, which is where a thermometer may come in handy.

Heat

- Ghana is hot in the spring term and very humid by the coast, you easily feel sticky and one tip is to apply **baby powder** – can be bought there.

- Heat can get you quite sweaty and you will notice everyone bringing **handkerchiefs** with them for wiping off sweat.
- Bring plenty of underwear as the heat may require you to change several times a day.

Clothes

- **Lightweight** cotton and linen clothes, and one/a couple of sweaters for cooler days in the autumn semester
- People dress quite **formally** in Ghana, especially for school and work, and some of your nicer shirts, skirts and trousers will serve you well.
- Some **rougher clothes** for travels in local transport and hikes in the rainforest are recommended.
- Dress code is not particularly conservative, but miniskirts and shorts will add to an already considerable amount of attention and could be considered inappropriate in certain contexts and would be better left at home. Bring some shorts for the beach. Look at how other people dress and try to not deviate too far from the “norms” out of respect for the country you are in.
- **Jeans**; they are heavy to carry, slow to dry, warm to wear, and very challenging to wash by hand, so do not bring all your pairs, however, you will see them worn a lot, they are a good neutral choice and reliable, so bring a pair. .
- **Shoes**; bring one pair of covered shoes for fieldtrips.

Toiletries

- Most brands (Dove, Nivea, Omo, Colgate etc.) are available so no need to bring large quantities of toothpaste, shower soap or detergent, unless you have some specific needs. Therefore bring only **travel size** of what you need for the first week so you can find supplies there and they will also be useful to bring with you on shorter weekend trips. However, **dental floss** was very hard to find in Cape Coast, and in Accra it was more expensive than in Norway, so bring enough.
- **Hair products** (including shampoo/conditioner) for Caucasian hair and facial products are harder to come by and would be worth bringing sufficient quantities for your entire stay.
- **Sunscreen** is also hard to find and you should bring enough and high SPF (at least 30 or more for beach days!). You will be studying on a beach, and although the

classroom is of course in the shade, previous students have experienced the need for several bottles of high SPF sunscreen under the strong equatorial sun. Sunscreen can be found in Accra, but supply is erratic and the quality is not the best.

- **Towel.** Do bring your own, maybe even two. They can be bought, but may take you a while to locate, good ones will cost, and new towels take some washes to work well, therefore it is worth the space to bring from home and then leave them when you go as you then have some space for all the nice fabric and local clothing you can buy.

Electronics

- Ghana has UK plugs, so bring an **adapter** for this. Can also be bought very cheap in Cape Coast.
- If you have an **old phone** that still works, bring it, and perhaps use it, that way you have a back up if one gets lost or stolen. SIM cards are cheap and international calls are not so expensive, hence a mobile phone with Ghanaian number is strongly recommended even just for interacting and coordinating while you are there.
- Bring a CD to format your computer if you get viruses, they flourish in internet cafes.
- The electricity in Ghana fluctuates and you may want to look into some form of **protection** for your valuable and more sensitive electronics (like PCs) to avoid damage (which is often not covered by your insurance if it is caused by fluctuating electricity).
- A torch will be handy in case of “light off”, which occasionally happen.

Jewellery

- Do not bring your silver, gold and gems. The crime rates are relatively low in Ghana, but thefts do happen and fancy jewellery will only increase the risk, and so will carrying a bag at dark, so leave it at home and put a minimum in your pockets or consider a belt for carrying valuables under your clothes. There are so many nice **local** necklaces, earrings, and bracelets to find in local markets you will not lack accessories and you will have nice gifts, which are easy to bring home.

General Advice and Information

Culture

People are **warm and friendly** and your experience there will be greatly improved if you **accept some of the invitations** to people's houses, church service, dinners, weddings, funerals, christenings, and other celebrations as you will get a feel of the local life and make good friends. Occasions such as wedding and funerals are not as private as we are used to in the West, but a public event where the more the merrier. Note that this is not a request for leaving your **common sense** at home. An invitation to a stranger's house presented to a young woman is best to decline also here, or at least not to go to alone, but perhaps meet again in a public place and with enough money for a taxi home. This is something you should always have on you; **back up for taxi home**.

Handshakes are done on every meeting and extended greetings in the local language are very common; so do try to pick up on the most common phrases, as this is a small investment with large returns. While on the use of hands, **never use your left hand** for anything, and if your right hand is dirty, offer your wrist, or apologise for using your left hand. The left hand is considered unclean, and giving or receiving items with your left hand is considered rude.

African time: things take a very long time in Ghana. This is partly cultural, but also to do with the incredible slowness caused by poor infrastructure and considerable bureaucracy. Everything takes longer than you think and nothing will move faster with anger or aggression, therefore a polite behaviour with smiles and a lot of patience is needed. As a rule of thumb, accomplishing one or two things outside your daily schedule in one day actually makes for an efficient and successful day. Please try not to let this relaxed attitude towards time frustrate you too much, as it will not change anything apart from making your time in Ghana less wonderful than it could have been.

Religion

Ghana is quite a religious country, about 80% Christian and 10% Muslim, but may feel 150% Christian at times. People name everything from taxis to barber shops to their children, with God, Jesus, Grace, Lord or something along those lines, and people go to church and bible study several times a week. A Ghanaian **church event** is something not to be missed and

people will be more than happy to take you. They dress up and so should you in the nicest clothes you have and the service may last from 2 to 4 hours, and sometimes end with food.

Food and drinks

The food has a lot of chilli, but dishes such as Redred (beans in palm oil with friend plantain) and generally plantain in all varieties, as well as Omo Tuo (rice balls in peanut sauce with fish or meat) are some favourites. Chilli goes by the name of pepe, and shito (a spoon of black sauce made mostly by chilli) is placed on top of almost any meal unless you tell them not to. The food is generally carbohydrates in various forms (fufu, kenkey, banku, the latter two fermented and sour) or yams (large root, kind of similar to potatoe) with a tomato or groundnut (their name for peanut) based stew with meats all eaten with your right hand. Most meals contain meat in some form so vegetarians may have a hard time. Make sure to eat enough salt, since you sweat a lot, and this will make you loose a lot of minerals.

Alcohol

Alcohol is available and is also served in pubs (called spots in Ghana) and clubs, but is not drunk in such amounts as in for example Norway and we would not recommend it either, both for safety and to ensure respectful behaviour. Locally made alcohol exists.

Living standard

In general the standard of living is much lower than in the West. Proper hygiene is however followed by everyone and people and food are just as clean, if not, cleaner than at home. Ghana is, after all, a developing country and you will easily notice this. Some advice follows:

- **Bring toilet paper** with you at all times. You will only find toilet paper in nicer hotels and restaurants and in your hostel. Some toilets are western; some are not, meaning they are basically a hole in the ground with a bucket to flush down with.
- **Bucket showers.** Showers very rarely have hot water in them, and may sometimes not have any water at all. When you go to people's houses you may find a bucket with water you are meant to pour on you with a smaller cup, this takes a little bit of practice but after a while one bucket can give you 1 to even 3 full showers (3-in times of water shortage) with shampooed and conditioned hair leaving you just as clean as a shower from above.

Female travellers

Bring pads to last you the first month. Sanitary pads are easily available, but **tampons** are harder to come by in Cape Coast (but more easily in Accra), therefore you may want to bring with you sufficient amount for your entire stay. Be prepared that the change in climate may cause your period cycle to change; it could become more heavy and frequent or stop for a while and this reaction to a new environment is very common.

As a foreign girl you will get a lot of attention from the opposite sex. Even if you happen to be of a darker skin tone they will pick up on the accent, and the lighter and more blonde you are the more immediate attention you will receive. Some of this attention comes from genuine hospitality, some is opportunistic but friendly attempts of charming you, while some are fuelled by a desire for a foreign residency through marriage, or just for money. Sometimes hard to separate, but all can be answered with a **smile, but a decisive no** and continue walking as if you know where you are going (even if you don't). A ring on your finger or saying that your fiancé, boyfriend, or husband is waiting for you may also help. The interaction between men and women is different in this part of the world and also Ghanaian women are confronted with quite persistent attention from men and are very good at giving very negative feedback. Just use your common sense and this will present you with few problems, a lot of laughs, and maybe some new cool friends.

Final advice to everyone

You are soon off for an exciting adventure, do not worry about anything as things do sort themselves out somehow, and try to make the most of your time there with an open mind and a positive attitude and you will learn a whole lot!