

CULTURAL FACTS

- Benin's culture is as rich and diverse as its landscape. With strong religious roots to inform most of the traditions. Benin's culture is certainly one of the most unique in Africa. The 2013 census records over 68 languages spoken in Benin, making it one of Africa's most linguistically diverse countries. French is the country's official language, while Fon, Yom and Yoruba have the status of being national languages. The census indicates that Fon is the most widely spoken first language.
- Benin was once part of a great African Kingdom, concentrated in city states along the Atlantic ocean. It was here that the infamous slave trade occurred, as slave ships docked here to collect slaves before heading to various destinations, including the Caribbean and the Americas. The Kingdom of Dahomey prospered in the area starting in the 18th century. In later years, the kingdom's power began to wane due to the international ban on the slave trade. Such conditions allowed the French to take over in 1892 and impose colonial rule that lasted until 1958.
- Cotton has been one of Benin's biggest drivers towards economic growth, contributing to 40% of the GDP and 80% of exports. Benin is predominately a rural society and more than 70% of the population depends on employment in the agricultural sector.
- Many Beninese citizens are named based on their birthday, particularly in the southern most part of the country, the residents of Benin follow a naming strategy utilized by the Akan people. Akan names are given based on the day of the week the child was born.
- Before being colonized, Benin was a strong nation with a large military force. The Dahomey Amazons were well respected female warriors. They went by two names: Ahosi which means the "king's wives" and Mino which means "our mothers." These female soldiers went through extremely rigorous training, some starting as young as 8 years old.

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- The Pendjeri National park (part of Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger) has the largest elephant population in West Africa. The park has more than 3800 elephants, as well as a population of critically endangered West African lions.
- La Porte du Non-Retour (The Door of No Return) in the city of Ouidah, visitors can walk a path dedicated to the country's tragic history of slave trade. The 4 kilometer track is now filled with monuments to this dark time in Benin's past. The Door of No Return is a memorial arch located in the House of Slaves Museum at the end of this historical trail. It marks the last destination of many Africans before being exported for the slave trade.
- Religious affiliations of the Beninese people are about 15 percent Muslim, and 15 percent are Christian, mostly Roman Catholic. The rest of the population follows indigenous belief systems, such as Vodun.
- Beninese people from the rural areas of the country do not like to be photographed. They believe that a photograph can be used to cast a spell or a curse.
- In Benin snakes are treated with reverence. On the outskirts of Ouidah, you can visit the Temple of Pythons, dedicated to the sacred animal. In 1717, following a war between the kingdoms of Danxome and Hoveda, the defeated king of Ouidah took refuge in the forest to escape the warriors who pursued him. He was protected by the pythons who attacked the mercenaries of the Danxome Kingdom, and he was saved. In honor of his protectors, the pythons, he erected at Ouidah three huts and a totem. If you travel there today you can explore the temple, inhabited by pythons of all sizes, snaking freely through the halls and alleys.