

## Togo with children sample journey

*A lot of people think Africa is a country. But it isn't! It's a continent, just like Europe, but much bigger. There are more than 50 countries in Africa and one of them is called Togo. It is about twice the size of Belgium. It's a nice country to spend a holiday, since almost everything is different in Togo compared to Europe and the Americas.*

*The people are called Togolese, in French that is Togolais. They are from different ethnic groups. They are of the opinion that they do not look a lot like one another and that the color of their skin is different, like one is brown while the other is black, but in my opinion they all look alike. They laugh a lot. Maybe they are very cheerful, because the sun shines almost every day. I know that would make me happy!*



*Togo is a narrow country. In the North you can travel to Burkina Faso, in the East it borders Benin, in the South you'll find the Atlantic Ocean and the neighboring country in the West is called Ghana.*

*Would you like me to tell about what you can see in Togo? Well, there is the beach and that's a great place to see the fishermen at work. And there are a lot of villages in Togo, where people master the art of handicraft. Such as weavers villages,*

*and villages where oil is being produced out of the nuts of a palm tree. It is called palm oil and the color is red. And there are beautiful houses. They have a brownish color and are handmade of clay, like a kind of mud. Every year again the walls need to be plastered, because the rains flushes part of the mud away. That is a lot of work. Isn't it strange to build houses, that will be destroyed by the rain? It is like an igloo melting in the sun. I'll ask our guide why people build houses like that! Anyway, there are two-story mud-built houses too!*

*There is a butterfly forest in Togo, where you can go for a walk with a man, who shows the butterflies and tells about the plants. And there is another forest, where you can see all kinds of wild animals, like zebras, gazelles, wildebeests and even elephants. You can do a tour through this forest on the back of a pickup truck, with the ranger. It's really cool!*

*Oh, I almost forget to say that you can do a trip on the Mono river in a wooden boat. But you are not allowed to set foot on the other shore, since that is another country, called Benin.*

*Will you be joining me on an expedition through Togo?*

### In short

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## Day to day itinerary

### Day 1: journey to Lomé

For a while already we have been preparing our trip through Togo. Today we'll finally go to the airport for our flight to Lomé. That is the capital of Togo. Our guide and driver will be picking us up from the airport in Lomé. They are the Africans, who will be accompanying us to show us the country. They know their way around and speak the language, and they will explain us about Togo and local life. They will also help us and take care of us. From the airport they'll bring us to the hotel, where we will be spending our first night here. I am feeling quite excited!

*night in: Lomé*

### Day 2: Lomé - Agbodrafo

In the morning there's time to get used a bit to being in Togo. It is warm and wherever I look, I see dark-skinned people. Some people look at us, maybe because they do not see white-skinned children every day. I am guessing that they are curious, just like we are.

They all have dark brown eyes and black curly hair. It is been said that their skin is thicker than ours. Shall I dare to touch someone, to feel if it is true?

Mom and dad have to exchange money. We cannot pay here with Euros and Dollars. We need Francs CFA, just like in several other African countries. 650 CFA's is the equivalent of about one Euro. We even get 10,000 CFA bills, so we are very rich now!

Lomé is a big city. We will not be able to see the entire city, but we are going to visit the museum, and learn a bit about the country.

In the afternoon we will travel to Agbodrafo. It is just a short drive to get there. In the past it was called Porto Seguro, which is Portuguese and it means Safe Heaven. Tomorrow I'll tell you why.

*night in: Agbodrafo*



### Day 3: Agbodrafo - Aklakou

Yesterday I promised to explain why Agbodrafo was called Safe Heaven in the past. In town, there is an old house, which is now a museum. Long ago an English man called Wood lived in that house. He allowed slave traders to hide their slaves in his house, underneath the living room floor.



Do you know what a slave is? It is someone who has to work, against his will and without being paid for his work. Long ago some tribes in Togo would steal people of other tribes to sell them to slave traders. The slave traders brought them abroad, for instance to the Americas and sold them for a lot of money.

We are going to take a look in Mister Wood's house to see what it was like for the slaves to spend time underneath the living room's floor,

where they had to wait for the boat. And we are going for a walk. It is the last way the slaves walked in Togo before they embarked. It leads along a fishermen's village, all the way to a well, where the slaves had to wash away all their African impurities, before they were allowed on the boat. I don't think the slaves enjoyed that walk, but I do, because it is nice here. I am glad that slavery is now forbidden!



We will be going on a boat tour too, on Lake Togo to go to Togoville, where Togo and Germany long ago signed a paper that was important for the history of Togo. Our driver will meet us there and together we'll continue to Aklakou, where we will spend the night. Before we are going to sleep, we'll visit the evening market, which is held when it is dark.

O, I forgot to tell you that we went to see the fishermen on the beach this morning. That was fun!

*night in: Aklakou*

#### Day 4: Aklakou and surroundings

After breakfast we are going to a village, where people make baskets. The kind of woven baskets. They are made of the leaf of palm trees. We will be visiting the courtyard of a basket maker's family. He makes very big baskets. I probably fit in! Shall I ask him if he can help me make a small one? The size I can take home to show my friends at school.

Maybe we can take a look at the Mono river. We are pretty close and there



should be a village on the riverbank. The people of that village make oil out of the nuts of a palm tree. It

is called palm oil and it is said to be red. I want to see that myself.

Later on we can have lunch in the forest, in the shade of the trees.

In the afternoon we will return to Aklakou, because there is lots to see

there too. We will be visiting an open air bakery and a brewery. I'm not

allowed to drink spirits, but maybe mom and dad will take a sip. The smell

is pretty strong, I'm wondering if they like it.

And we will go to see some idols. These are puppet like statues that are part of the voodoo

religion. You can see them in a lot of places, not only in Aklakou. The disciples of the voodoo

religion come to these idols to make offerings and to ask for help. For

instance when they are ill or have family problems. Before they come to see the idol they go to a voodoo priest or a voodoo king to ask for advice.

They can talk to the gods to find out what is going on and how it can be

solved. Once they know what they have to do, they go visit an idol to do

their sacrifices. That is why it sometimes looks a bit strange, with lots of

things lying around the idol. These are the sacrifices that were made. You

can't touch them, just look. There is also a temple in Aklakou, that is where you'll find the voodoo

priest. It looks quite different from a church or a mosque. I feel a bit excited, but I don't need to

be worried, because our guide is a member of this church. And he is very nice!

*night in: Aklakou*



#### Day 5: Aklakou - Kpalimé area

We will be traveling a bit of a distance today. It's not bad at all, because there is lots to see. The landscape is very different from what I'm used to and it is changing all the time. We are going to the Northwest; which is towards the top left if you take a look at the map. We'll see coffee



plantations and cacao trees, which fruit pits are being used to make chocolate. Those fruits should be delicious. I hope they are ready to be eaten! Did you know that coffee beans grown on bushes? I had no idea about it.

There are waterfalls in this part of Togo, but we won't be visiting them

today. We are heading towards a village in the forests and first we will be

visiting Kpalimé, where a lot of beautiful things are made, by hand. And after that we'll be going

to that village, where we will be sleeping in Mister Papillon's hostel. Papillon is the French word

for butterfly. I'm wondering why this man is called butterfly!

*night in: Kpalimé area*

#### Day 6: Kpalimé area

I found out, why the man is called like that: it is because he knows a lot about butterflies! He is going to take us into the forest to look for them.

There are a lot of different butterflies in this area. He also knows a lot

about trees and plants. Did you know that some plants and the bark of

certain trees can be used as a dye? And that some plants can be used as a natural medicine to cure you when you are ill?



Pineapples grow here too. I never even wondered about how they grow. That's because we buy them in the supermarket or at the greengrocery.

Misses Papillon, that is Mister Papillon's wife, will be cooking our lunch. People say she cooks very nice sauces. I'm looking forward to it! I have to admit I am not used to eating hot meals twice a day, but our guide explained that it is very important to eat well. That is because my body is not used to the temperatures and the dust. I need to take care of myself by eating and sleeping well. I give it my best, but every evening there is so much to think about, because of all that I see in Togo. Like how the children live here. And what they eat. And that it is really different back home. I never really realised the luxury of our life. Mom and dad have been telling me of course, but I did not believe them, I thought it was common. Now I see that it is not that common for the people here and that I have a lot to be grateful for. But, it is not yet time to go to sleep!

We'll be going to a waterfall. It's a short walk to get there. I hope we can swim there too. I'll take my towel and swimwear. Just in case!

*night in: Kpalimé area*

### Day 7: Kpalimé area - Danyi Plateau

We are leaving the forest to travel further into the mountains, all the way to the top, which is called the plateau. But first we are going to the biggest waterfall in the entire country. For a swim and a picnic. Later on we'll continue to the plateau. We'll be driving through a lot of villages and we can stop whenever we want. We will for sure stop in Dzogbedan to visit the monastery, where the monks make all kinds of things, such as jams, which are for sale in their shop. They also sell little bottles of oils and coffee.



Tonight we will be sleeping in a place where we can see the surrounding hills.

*night at: Danyi Plateau*

### Day 8: Danyi Plateau

We have the day off and can do whatever we like. Play on the field in front of our rooms, visit the village, take a walk or just take it easy. Our guide and driver are around, in case we need them.

*night at: Danyi Plateau*

### Day 9: Danyi Plateau - Kara

We are continuing the journey. All the way to Kara in the North. Kara is also called Togo's second capital. The president even has a second palace in Kara. It is a long journey to get there. The closer we get, the more rocks we see. We stop along the way, for lunch for instance. Maybe we can find a sauce with wagasi. It is a kind of cheese, made by the Fulani women. The Fulani are the herders. They live in several African countries. Sometimes you can see them walking with their cattle, searching for food and water for the animals.



Today we'll pass a weaver's village. They make long pieces of cloth. I hope they are at work so we can take a look.

Tonight we will be sleeping in Kara. It almost feels strange to be in a big city, but maybe there will be a hotel with a swimming pool.

*night in: Kara*

### Day 10: Kara - Tamberma Country

Do you know what we are going to do this morning? We're going on a safari. We will be going to a big forest to search for wildlife. A forest like that is called a National Park. We need to get up early, because that is the best time to see the animals. When it gets warmer they go to sleep, in the shade of the trees and bushes and it will be hard to see them. We are going on the back of a

pickup truck, with the ranger. He is going to tell us about the animals. He knows a lot about them and about where they like to go in the forest. You can see zebras and gazelles and wildebeests. I am not sure yet, what they look like, but I hope to see one. And there is also a buffalo, it is huge! Long ago elephants lived in Togo. They had all left, but they brought back a few. Maybe we'll see them too. Isn't it exciting?



By the way did you know that you need to have permission to visit this park? I thought it would be just like going to a zoo and buying your ticket at the entrance. But it is not like that. Here you can only buy your ticket after you have been given permission to visit. I'm glad our guide took care of that!

After the park visit we are going to a blacksmith's village. Blacksmiths are people who transform metal. First they heat the metal and then they beat it to change the shape. Usually the beating is done with large hammers, but in this village they use heavy stones. Some of these stones weigh as much as 20 kilos, which is really heavy. I cannot lift them. I wonder if dad is strong enough to do this work.

In the afternoon we'll continue our journey to Tamberma Country. It is not really another country. It is called Tamberma valley also. It is here where we can see those very special two story mud-houses. Tomorrow we are going to visit them!

*night in: Tamberma Country*

### Day 11: Tamberma Country

We spent the night in huts. That is because we are not in a hotel, but in a camp. It looks a bit like how the local people live, but these huts are made of concrete. Did you know that people take bucket showers here? You use a bowl to take water from the bucket and to pour it on your body. It is not easy to wash the soap from your body, luckily we can help each other. The houses in this valley are very special. You know what is so strange, you would think that nowadays these people would use concrete to build their houses, because you can buy it in Togo too. But they don't. If you are of this tribe, you should have a real tata.



That is how these houses are being called: tata. Young men can live in another kind of house before they get married. But if they want to get married, they need to build their own tata. Otherwise they will not have created a safe place for their family. Maybe the parents of the girl will not allow them to get married if they don't have their own tata.

If we are lucky someone might be building a new tata. If so we can go take a look. It is said that mud balls are being thrown to the bricklayer, who catches them and uses them to build the walls.

Later on we will be visiting the tata of a local family. All of the rooms are round and you need to bend over and sometimes climb a bit to get from one room to the other. The bedrooms are on the rooftop. They don't have doors, just round holes, through which the people climb in and out. And there are granaries on the rooftop too, in which the millet is being stored. It is a kind of cereal. A medicine man lives nearby. Let's go and see if he is at home. There is a lot to see at his house. All kinds of stuff and plants, which he uses to heal people. It looks a bit strange. I've never seen anything like it in our doctor's office!

*night in: Tamberma Country*

### Day 12: Tamberma Country - Bassar

I knew there are a lot of different ethnic groups in Togo, but I didn't know they all have their own festivities too. Today we are going to Bassar. The men in Bassar do fire dances. Once a year they have a festival with fire dances. I would love to see it, but I guess chances are rare that it would be



today. But it is not that bad, there is more to see here. Like the ancient blast-furnaces. These are large ovens made of mud, which were used to melt iron. To visit them we need to ask the King of Bassar for permission. So we are going to visit the King. We take off our shoes at the entrance of his round palace. That is how it works here. It is a way of paying respect to someone. And on top of that all the dirt of the streets stays outside.



It is a bumpy road that leads to the furnaces. Not all kinds of vehicles can get there. Sometimes people travel by motor. By the way, motors are being used as taxis as well in Togo. They are called zems. After rainfall it may not even be possible to get to the furnaces with a fourwheel-drive.

Do you know what else the region of Bassar is known for? For its yams. Have you ever eaten them? It's really nice. It tastes like sweet potatoes. You can make fries of it too and the local children like them a lot.

I hope we can see the furnaces. And fire dancing would be awesome! No, not to do it myself, but to watch!

*night in: Bassar*

### Day 13: Bassar - Lomé

We have travelled a long way to the North of the country and today we will be driving all the way back to Lomé. It is going to be a long journey. I'll grab my chance to take some rest and to think about all that we have seen and done. And about all that I have learned in Togo. Life is really



different here. I guess I'll often be thinking about it when I'm back home. Today I still have the chance to look at the people and the country and all the vehicles on the road. Like the very old cars and minibuses that are fully loaded. They break down easily. Sometimes in the middle of the road. The driver and his assistant have to repair the car or find someone else to do it, since there is no road assistance in Togo.

When we arrive in Lomé later today I'll go for a swim. I'll really appreciate it after the long day on the road!

*night in: Lomé*

### Day 14: Lomé - departure

It is our last day in Togo. It is a pity, but I am also looking forward to going home. Tonight we'll be taking the plane. That is why we will have to pack our bags. If we have a bit of place left, we can go to one of the handicraft markets to buy some of the beautiful souvenirs for my friends at home.

Or we can go to a restaurant on the beach and go for a swim. And I am going to listen well for the sounds of the ice-cream vendors horn. I had not yet told you about it, but the ice-cream vendors have bicycle shops. The ice-creams are sold in little plastic bags. You bite the corner off and suck out the ice-cream. You need to pay the vendor with coins. They hardly ever have change. I have been saving up small money, so I can use it today!

Tonight we'll be transferred to the airport, where we'll be saying goodbye to our guide and driver.

*night in: -*



### Day 15: homecoming

Early this morning our plane has landed. We are almost home. Soon I can tell my friends about all our experiences. Shall I ask if I can tell about our trip through Togo at school?