



Basic Etiquette in Ghana

Overall, the Ghanaian culture is a blend of many different tribal cultures. Following general etiquette will prove to be beneficial during your visit.

Should you have any questions about etiquette during your time in Ghana, it is always best to error on the side of caution, and seek advice from your Program Director or those with whom you are working.

Greetings

When greeting a Ghanaian, it is expected that one says "hello" and shake hands. It is also typical for telephone conversations to start with a polite greeting and an inquiry into one's health and the health of one's family.

Many villages have a Chief and/or Queen Mother. You may be formally introduced to the village royalty early in your visit. Ask people in the village for the appropriate greeting and dress for this introduction. A gift may be appropriate, but it does not need to be elaborate – perhaps a small bottle of local whiskey.

If you are shaking hands with a large group of people start at the right and move left (counter clock wise). To casually touch an elder, however, is considered improper.

Day-to-Day Interactions

It is considered improper to point at someone with your index finger. When pointing to someone or something, it is polite to use all fingers of the hand.

Using the left hand to pass something or for eating is rude in the Ghanaian culture; one must use the right hand, or both hands.

When seeing guests out, it is considered polite to walk with them to their car or to the bus stop. To say goodbye at the door is thought of as a sign of inhospitality, unless one is clearly busy or cannot leave the house. It is also considered polite to offer water to guests.

Public displays of affection among men and women are frowned upon. This rule applies even to holding hands. Smoking in public is frowned upon, particularly for women.

Conservative skirt hemlines are appreciated. Please do not dress provocatively. Cover your arms and shoulders is expected if you are invited to church or an event.

Ghanaians have a different concept of personal space than Americans. Ghanaians will

stand much closer during conversation, and you may find someone almost leaning against you while waiting in line. The same holds true for space in trotros or buses. Body contact is not considered to be impolite and taking more space than others can be considered impolite.

The concept of time is much different in Ghana than you may be used to at home. Expect delays for social invitations and official meetings.

Respect

Respect is a very important aspect of the African culture. The idea of respect for one's elders is limitless. Not only must a child respect those that are older than him or her, but also the elders respect those who existed before them and now exist in the afterlife. There are many small customs that represent ways in which one can honor one's elders. One is that a young person may not sit in a chair while a more senior person is present. Also, a child is not permitted to call parents, grandparents, or any others holding those positions by their names. When children do converse with their elders, they are much more polite in their use of language.

Age and social status hierarchies influence many factors within the society, such as the arrangement of the houses and villages and the seating position at ceremonies. The oldest member of the family almost always leads the group, unless it has been proven that this elder is unfit in the customary fashions. The purpose of education seems to revolve around raising and cultivating brave, educated and respectful individuals.

Photographs

It is discouraged to photograph and film the local people without their consent. Most people are comfortable with being photographed, and when they have become your friend, it is perfectly fine. It is prohibited to use moving and still images from villages for commercial purposes such as advertisement.

Bargaining

As a tradition in Africa, buyers and sellers bargain for better prices. Make sure you bargain and do not feel obligated to buy products from articulate merchants. Bargaining gives volunteers a chance to interact and learn about the concept of their market economy. Try not to feel uncomfortable bargaining and have fun. The best way to bargain is to go to a few different stalls to get a feel for how much something should cost. If a vendor quotes a price that you feel is blatantly unfair, it is often because he or she expects the price to be bargained down, so try not to get too defensive. The most important thing to keep in mind is that bargaining gives you total power to decide how much something is worth to you!

Do not collect or buy wildlife products or items that are obviously very old and have significant cultural value

Religion

Christian, Muslim and traditional religions coexist throughout most of Ghana. These religions are central to daily life. Ceremonies in villages are almost always accompanied by a blessing by a minister or imam and most often by a libation honoring the ancestors. You will probably be asked about your religion when being introduced. Understand that religion is an important aspect of life in Ghana. If your views differ, it's best to refrain from debating.

Politics

As with your community, the community has its own politics. Stay away from local politics.