

Greetings from Ghana #16  
Looking at the Past

While I have not had a chance to visit many places in the eleven months I have been here, I have made it to a few places.

If you travel west from Accra and follow the coast long enough you get to Princess Town. It



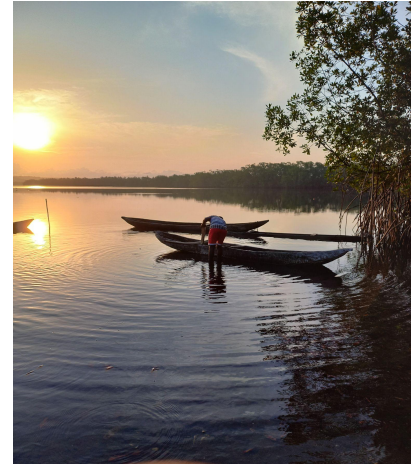
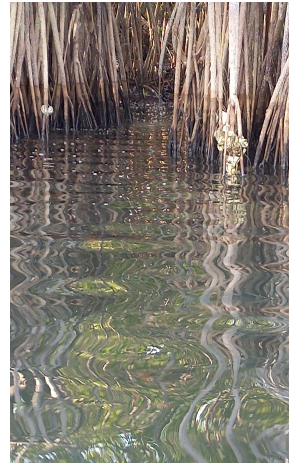
is home to a fort built in 1683 and you can stay in the Brandenburg-built, Fort Gross Friedrichsburg overnight. There are five rooms available. It costs about \$3.50 a night, per person. For that you get a room and a double twin bed (kinda like a king) with a mosquito net. It comes with a pillow and a top sheet as well. The beach is pristine and the water is quite nice as



the beach slopes gently and it is quite easy to enjoy an easy swim and a beach bonfire.

The town also has the Akeatekyi Crocodile Lagoon that you can traverse in a dugout canoe and you can also hire a fetish priestess to call for the crocodiles to come from the water.

There are mangroves that surround the lagoon and monkeys inhabit the groves. No one is allowed on the lagoon on Wednesdays and pregnant women are not allowed to be on it.



The town is home to about 700 people and while it is pristine in many ways it falls well outside of traffic. It is a destination resort that does no advertising. The fort is lucky to have twenty guests a week and according to the manager. The fort is “maintained” by the government and according to the manager the official in charge shows up once a quarter, takes the money earned and puts it into his mobile money account and leaves. The fort receives no structural maintenance and it shows.

When we were there we were told that since the road to the fort was washed out (pretty much) that we could safely leave the car at the bottom of the drive. Wrong. No one told us how poor the residents are. A local 9 year-old tried to pry open the trunk and unable to open it broke the front passenger window to access the inside and then got scared and ran away.

The village policeman said that it was a sensitive subject and he could not get involved. The local assemblyman’s assistant said that they have had problems with this child and the parents say they cannot control him. The parents refused to deal with the child and refuse to have him sent to treatment.. So while enjoying a run down historic fort and a pristine beach with a very

strong voodoo lagoon. . . we also ran up about \$600 in car repairs and discovered a town that is being held back by the antics of an adolescent. It was really a shame.



About two hours from Accra is the Shia Hills Reserve. It is a plains area that is bordered by 5 granite hills and is the ancient grounds of the Se' people. The British could not pronounce that name so they changed it to Shai. As you pull into the reserve grounds you notice that "the locals" are fairly indifferent to you. But if you leave your car and windows are open you will come back to find things missing.



Antelope, zebra, monkeys, and baboons populate the 51 square kilometer area that was home to the Se' tribe for about 900 years before they were forced off their land in 1892 by the British for not paying taxes to the crown.

There are several hills that you can climb, the easiest being Mogo Hill. To make it easy for tourists, ropes have been set up so you climb up and kinda repel going down. For centuries the Se' people used this hill for their annual Dipo Festival, held sometime between March and May. It is still held here.



Dipo Festival is the tribe's puberty ritual for girls and signifies their transition to women. Before going through the rites the girls have to take tests and go through an examination to prove they are still virgins. If the girl is not virginal she is ostracized and so is the boy or man who has deflowered her.

Once the girls have been accepted into the ritual their heads are shaved and they are dressed with cloth that goes from their waist to their knees by a

special ritual mother and paraded in front of the tribe signifying their beginning into the transition of womanhood. The following day the chief priest will wash the girl's feet with fresh blood from a goat provided by the girl's parents. This is to drive away any spirit of barrenness so that she will be fertile when married.

When you climb to the top of the hill you find a large cave that is used to house the girls for a week as they are given training on cooking, housekeeping, childbirth, nurturing, and they are taught the Klama dance that they will perform on the last day of the ritual.



There are several flat areas on the granite hill that have had circular depressions made into the rock. These are the cooking stations used by the girls. These are where they will build their fires.



The special mothers will also school the girls in seduction and how their husbands will be expected to be treated.

When their schooling is finished, the entire tribe will gather for a celebration where the women will be dressed in rich kente cloth and adorned with beads around their neck, arms and waist. They sing and dance to the drumming of the final stage of the ritual. This festival brings honour to the family. And if a young man sees a girl he likes he can begin investigating her family for his marriage proposal.

The hills also contain a couple of caves where the chiefs would gather and one even has an outcropping that was used as the King's throne. Where the warriors and bodyguards of old would scamper up the rock facing of a natural chimney, there is now an aluminum ladder attached so that you can climb all the way up and emerge from inside the cave at the top of the hill.



Baboons sit on the highway that borders the preserve. People stop and feed them despite the park's request not to.

There is a hippo preserve I want to visit up north. But that is a destination, not a short jaunt like Shai Hills.

If mellow is more to your liking, I am going birding this Saturday. More soon