

SIX HOURS

IN ACCRA



GEORGE BAGUMA




**The world is a book, and those who don't travel
read only one page.**

Augustine of Hippo

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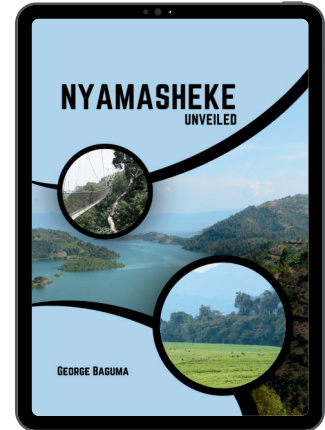
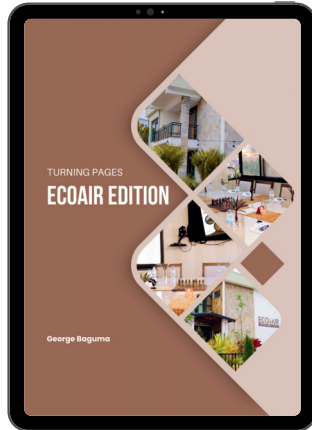
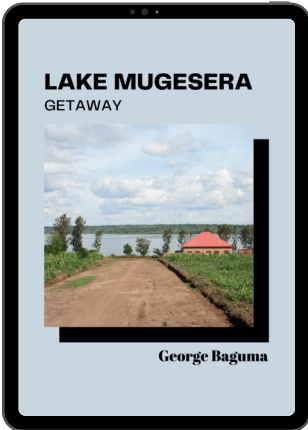
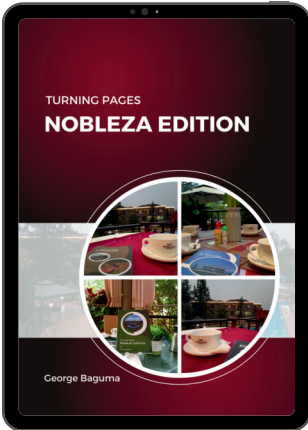
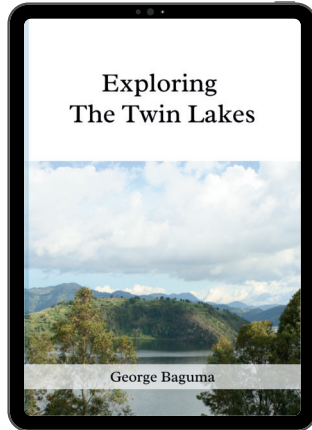
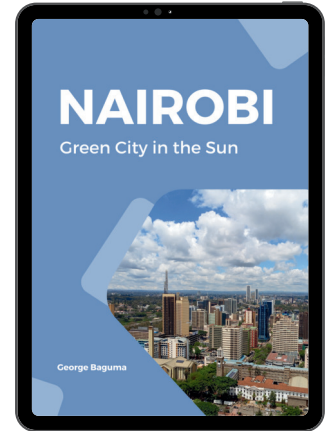
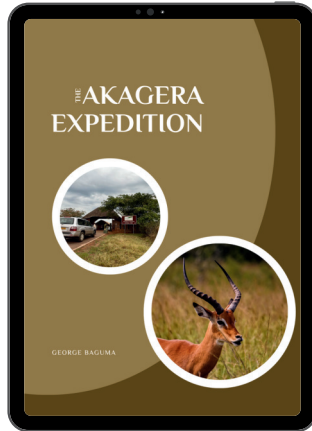
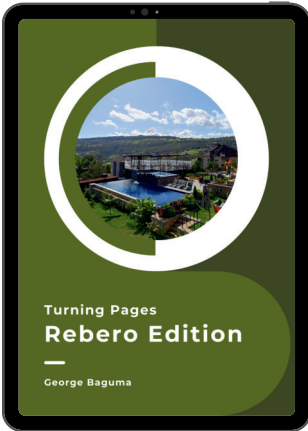
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INTRODUCTION

After downing a bowl of *Hausa koko* porridge at RockWoods African Restaurant, I strolled on Ring Road Central all the way to the Kwame Nkrumah Interchange. From the interchange, I dropped by Makola Market en route to the Black Star Gate.

Lunch break took place at Labadi Beach. When the tour resumed, I headed to a neighborhood known as Tudu, within the Accra Metropolitan District. While in the hood, I interacted with future soccer stars and gave them words of encouragement.

Between walking under the scorching sun and playing soccer on a dusty street, I traced the genesis of the spark that ignited Africa's independence struggle and the rebirth of Pan Africanism. The half-day tour was a great opportunity to revisit the past and put history into perspective.

This booklet sheds light on what transpired in the aftermath of the second World War and the ensuing momentum in the decolonization movements across Africa. In addition, the publication provides a glimpse into modern Accra as a tourist destination.





HELLO GHANA

Before occupying a front passenger seat of a shared cab, I spent a minute weighing other options. Buses were out of the question because they pick and drop passengers all over the place. As a result, they spend a whole day on the way. Initially, the plan was to squeeze my long frame into an 18-seater van, but limited legroom and small windows led to the consideration of another option. Although the express saloon car I finally chose costed me twice as much, it was comfortable and fast.

My entry-point was Aflao, a bustling border town located in Ketu South District, Volta Region. The other side of the frontier is in Lomé, the capital of Togo. I crossed into Ghana after an extensive tour of Togo's Maritime Region.

The Lomé - Accra highway is quite scenic. When we reached Volta River, I pretended to be pressed and kindly requested the driver to pull over. It's an old trick that works all the time. Having learned something about this river while in grade four, I felt the urge to take a closer look and snap a few photos.

I was guilty of gazing at the river and taking selfies instead of attending to a call of nature. However, I felt better when I saw my fellow passengers and the driver himself rushing to the bush to empty their bladders. They are the ones who needed the bathroom break I asked for.

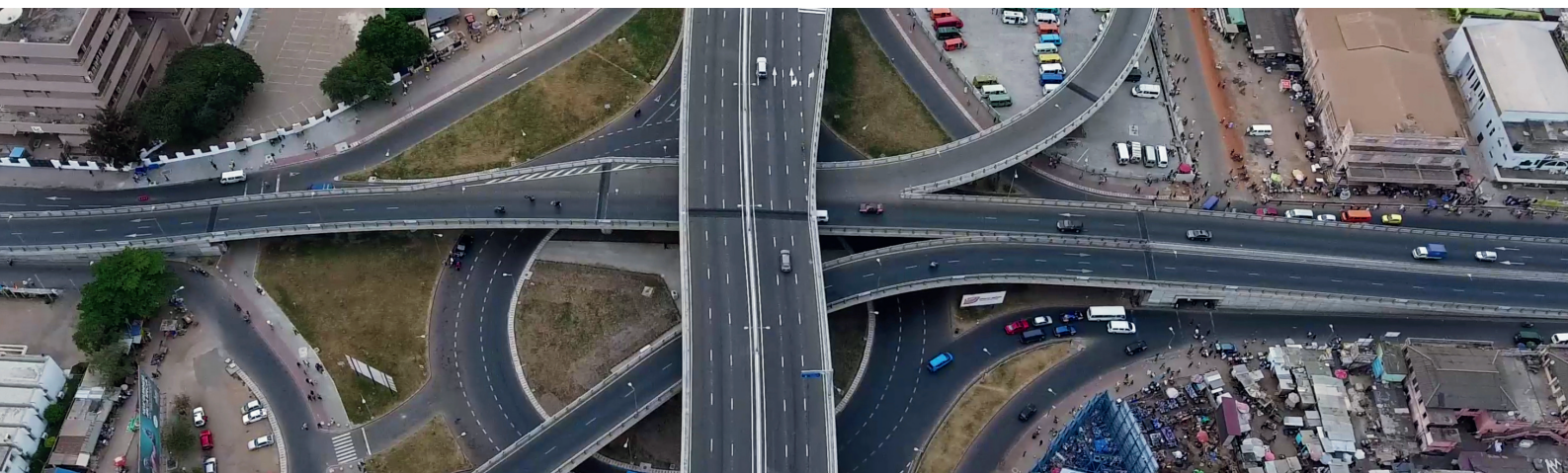
After a short photoshoot session, on the bank of the river I studied in the 1980s, we proceeded to Accra. Upon arrival, I was dropped on Ring Road Central. It is on this road where my self-guided tour of Accra was flagged off. As you are about to find out, I learned a lot during the six-hour tour.

KWAME NKRUMAH INTERCHANGE

I had breakfast at RockWoods African, on Ring Road Central. Then I spent a few minutes studying the map of Accra and fine-tuning my itinerary. A few minutes later, I walked out of the restaurant and disappeared into the streets of the city I wasn't familiar with. As I usually say, walking enables me to observe and absorb more. Besides, the simplest form of exercising brings money-can't-buy health benefits. Walking was the first thing I did in the capital of Ghana.

The streets of Accra are not as pedestrian-friendly as the ones I traverse back home. The absence of paved roadside walkways and suffocating congestion, not to mention West Africa's scorching heat, are to blame for the withering of walking flavor in this part of the world. Despite these unfavorable conditions, I covered about four kilometers on foot.

One step after another, I marched to the Kwame Nkrumah Interchange. Formerly known as the Kwame Nkrumah Circle, the interchange connects all four corners of the city and the rest of the country. Completed in 2016, this massive project enables smooth transits to and from Ring Road Central, Nsawam Road, Kwame Nkrumah Avenue and Ring Road West. Its implementation remodeled the old round about and unblocked clogged arteries.



TOWERING FIGURE

A giant statue of Kwame Nkrumah is erected inside the neighboring Kwame Nkrumah Water Park. I didn't have access to the park because the gate was locked, and the caretaker was nowhere to be found. However, I was able to see the interior and snap a few photos while tip-toeing on an elevated spot behind the fence.

After a close look at the imposing statue of the father of the nation, albeit from a heap of garbage abandoned outside the fence, I left the area. This time, I used Bolt's application to book a ride.

As the driver accelerated along Kwame Nkrumah Avenue, I reviewed my itinerary one more time and noticed one thing: The first president of Ghana left his footprints all over the country. His name will be mentioned quite often throughout this booklet.



MAKOLA MARKET



I exited the Kwame Nkrumah Interchange through the avenue named after the same towering figure in the history of Ghana. Initially, the plan was to visit the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park after a short break at the Kwame Nkrumah Water Park. You better get used to this name because, as mentioned on Page 7, it appears frequently in this publication.

Unfortunately, the memorial park was temporarily closed. Next on my list of sites to visit was the Black Star Gate. However, Makola Market happened to be along the way. Its location made it convenient to drop by en route to one of Accra's most popular landmarks.

As a tourist, going to the market was an opportunity to interact with residents of my host city. The experience enabled me to feel the vibe of the Ghanaian people and capture their spirit.

As expected, Makola Market was a hive of activity. I bypassed a cluster of stalls vending fruits and vegetables while ignoring aggressive retailers. Each one of them wanted a piece of my wallet. When I saw someone selling Black Stars' jerseys, I approached him and offered half of his asking price. After lengthy negotiations, we reached an agreement and money exchanged hands.

I have been a fan of the Ghanaian soccer national team for about two decades. It's therefore befitting to show my support by donning the team's jersey. Win, lose or draw, my unwavering affinity is undeniable. The first time I wore that jersey is the day Ghana defeated South Korea during the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

BLACK STAR SQUARE



When I left the bustling Makola Market, I headed to the Independence Monument on 28th February Road. This road derived its name from the date of the tragic Christiansborg Castle crossroads shooting. On February 28, 1948, three Ghanaian WWII ex-servicemen were shot dead by the British police Superintendent, namely Colin Imray. This happened during their peaceful march toward the Christiansborg Castle.

The plan was to present their petition to the colonial administrator, Sir Gerald Hallen Creasy. The shooting incident, that took the lives of Sergeant Adjetey, Corporal Attipoe and Private Odartey Lamptey, sparked widespread riots and added fuel to the struggle for independence.

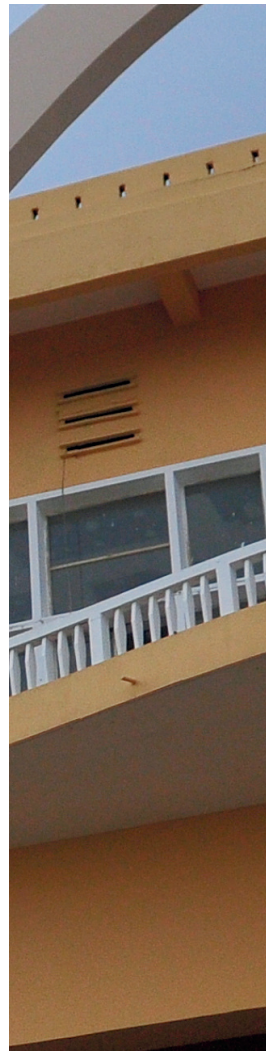
In 1957, Ghana became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence. Under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, the newly independent nation inspired freedom fighters in other African colonies and spearheaded the independence struggles all over the continent. Mr. Nkrumah, a strong proponent of Pan Africanism, extended a helping hand to comrades across Africa. His contribution to the decolonization efforts outside Ghana is undeniable.

L O D E S T A R O F F R E E D O M

After taking an interest in the history of Ghana, walking through the Black Star Gate was quite intriguing. The structure is built in the middle of a roundabout, on 28th February Road. As explained on Page 9, this road derived its name from the Christiansborg Castle crossroads shooting incident that took place on February 28, 1948. The tragedy sparked angry protests across the former British colony and stimulated the struggle for independence.

When I left the roundabout, I entered the Black Star Square. This is where Independence Day is celebrated annually. Every March 6, a parade commemorating Ghana's historic feat is staged with pomp and splendor.

The symbolic black star is the lodestar of freedom in Africa. As the first African country to gain independence, Ghana paved the way for the decolonization of the entire continent. The Black Star Square encompasses the Independence Arch and the monument erected to honor those whose blood wasn't shed in vain. When I crossed this site off my bucket list, I headed to Independence Beach.



INDEPENDENCE BEACH

Every beach in Accra is usually crowded on Sundays. However, I passed by Independence Beach before the arrival of most beach goers. As I strolled around, a number of hawkers did their best to persuade me to buy stuff I didn't even need. The more I ignored them, the harder they tried to attract my attention. Speaking of attention, one of them was selling Africa-themed necklaces that caught my eye.

I don't wear necklaces and similar accessories, but I have friends and family members who love anything that flaunts their African identity. I took a photo of the items and shared it with some of them, who in turn, placed their orders immediately. Like it was the case at Makola Market earlier, I offered half of the seller's asking price. When he turned down my offer, I walked away. He followed me, refusing to let go. After another round of negotiations, we reached an agreement. Again, money exchanged hands.

"Where is my receipt?" I asked him. "Where are you from?" He posed a question of his own instead of issuing the demanded piece of paper. Before I responded, he put the money in the pockets of his black leather jacket and disappeared. "Who wears a heavy jacket on such a hot day?" I wondered.



LABADI BEACH



After an encounter with a hawker at Independence Beach, I booked another ride and left the area. My destination was the popular Labadi Beach. En route to Labadi, my 24-year-old driver played a collection of hit songs by different African artists, including Sarkodie, Burna Boy and Tiwa Savage. At some point, I stretched my arm and reduced the volume. When his Spotify playlist reached *Unachezaje* by Diamond Platinumz, I asked my driver/DJ if he understood its lyrics. "I don't speak Tanzanian." He responded. "It's not Tanzanian, it's Swahili." I educated him. Our conversation revolved around contemporary Afro beats, which seemed to be his favorite topic.

Upon arrival, I paid an entrance fee of 20 Ghanaian Cedis (about USD 2). Then I walked in and sat down on a rooftop area of a restaurant known as Mac Bay. Outside the building, fully occupied tables were stuffed on the sand, underneath a cluster of colored umbrellas.

As I quenched my thirst while waiting for my lunch, a couple of singers offered to entertain me for a modest fee. I politely turned down their offer. Minutes later, a group of patrons from the nearest table paid them to perform. After their electrifying show, I felt the need to chip in something because I was part of the satisfied audience.

GHANAIAN CULINARY DELIGHTS

In the beginning of this memorable tour, I had breakfast at RockWoods African Restaurant, on Ring Road Central. My breakfast was served in a traditional bowl whose designer drew inspiration from Hausa art. Coincidentally, the content of the bowl in question was millet oatmeal known as *Hausa koko*.

Although culturally homogeneous, the Hausa people are scattered around West and Central Africa. More Hausa communities can be traced along the ancient Hajj and trade routes in the Horn of Africa and North Africa.

Energized by *Hausa koko*, I walked from the aforementioned restaurant to the Kwame Nkrumah Interchange. From there, I headed to the Black Star Square via Makola Market. Later on, I had lunch on the deck of Mac Bay Restaurant, within the premises of Labadi Beach.

My lunch, composed of fried plantain and a mixture of beans and black-eyed peas, was served on banana leaves. After the meal, I nursed some coconut juice while gazing at the splashing Atlantic waves.

Trying local delicacies enhances travel experiences. In addition, by consuming locally-grown food, tourists support farmers in their destinations. Learning to prepare meals the traditional way, while visiting another country, is also highly recommended.

Eating is the only activity every tourist indulges in. Although this tour lasted only six hours, I found time to visit restaurants twice. I wish I would have stayed for dinner, but I had to catch a 4 p.m. shuttle to the Volta Region.



AFRICAN FABRIC AND SYMBOLIC COLORS

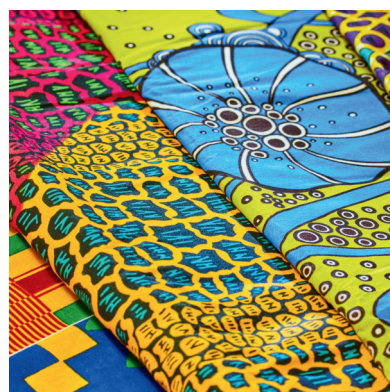
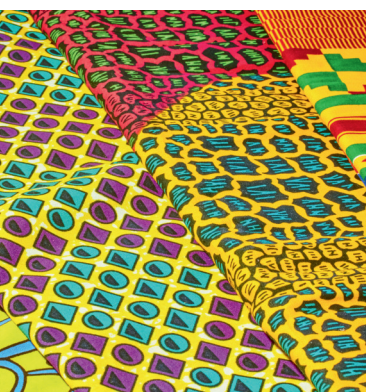
When I was a little kid, my friends and I used to play a game that required participants to identify flags of different African countries. Later on, I learned that colors embellishing each flag are symbolic. Decades down the line, I find myself paying attention to the flags of the countries I visit and try to attach meanings to their color schemes.

Recently, I found out that the shouting colors of the fabric used to make African attires have meanings too. There is more to the traditional African prints, also known as the Ankara, than simply decoration. Their patterns reflect peace, love, freedom and unity, to name but a few.

The iconic Afrocentric material, popularly known as *Kitenge* in East Africa, is gaining international recognition. *Kitenge* shirts, hats, backpacks, laptop bags, wallets and different accessories are common all over the region and beyond.

One of my favorite activities in African markets is to buy a piece of *kitenge* and watch a tailor transform it into a custom-made product of my choice. *Kitenge* can be sewn into anything. It stimulates creativity and satisfies the ever-evolving needs of fashion enthusiasts.

The Ghanaian *Kente* is one of the most popular fabrics in West Africa. It is also embraced by people of African descent around the world. While in Ghana, I saw how designers are adding a modern twist to the traditional *Kente*. The fusion of tradition and contemporary styles is magical.



GHANAIAN CEDI



While in Ghana, I paid for products and services in cash. Although Mobile Money transactions are popular in this West African country, my MTN Ghana line didn't have a corresponding MoMo account. Hotels, restaurants, supermarkets and other formal business establishments accept debit and credit cards. However, it is advisable to keep some cash in your pockets while visiting places, especially if you are not a registered Mobile Money user.

My VISA card was useless when I had to buy a jersey from a vendor doing business at Makola Market. Again, it was worthless when I purchased a handful of necklaces from a hawker selling random stuff to beach goers. Even the transport company that ferried me from the Volta Region didn't give me the option to pay electronically.

The Ghanaian Cedi was adopted in 1965, replacing the Ghanaian Pound. The latter was part of the British colonial monetary system. In 1967, the new cedi came without the image of Kwame Nkrumah, following his ousting through a *coup d'état*. Until the recent inflation, the cedi had been relatively stable.

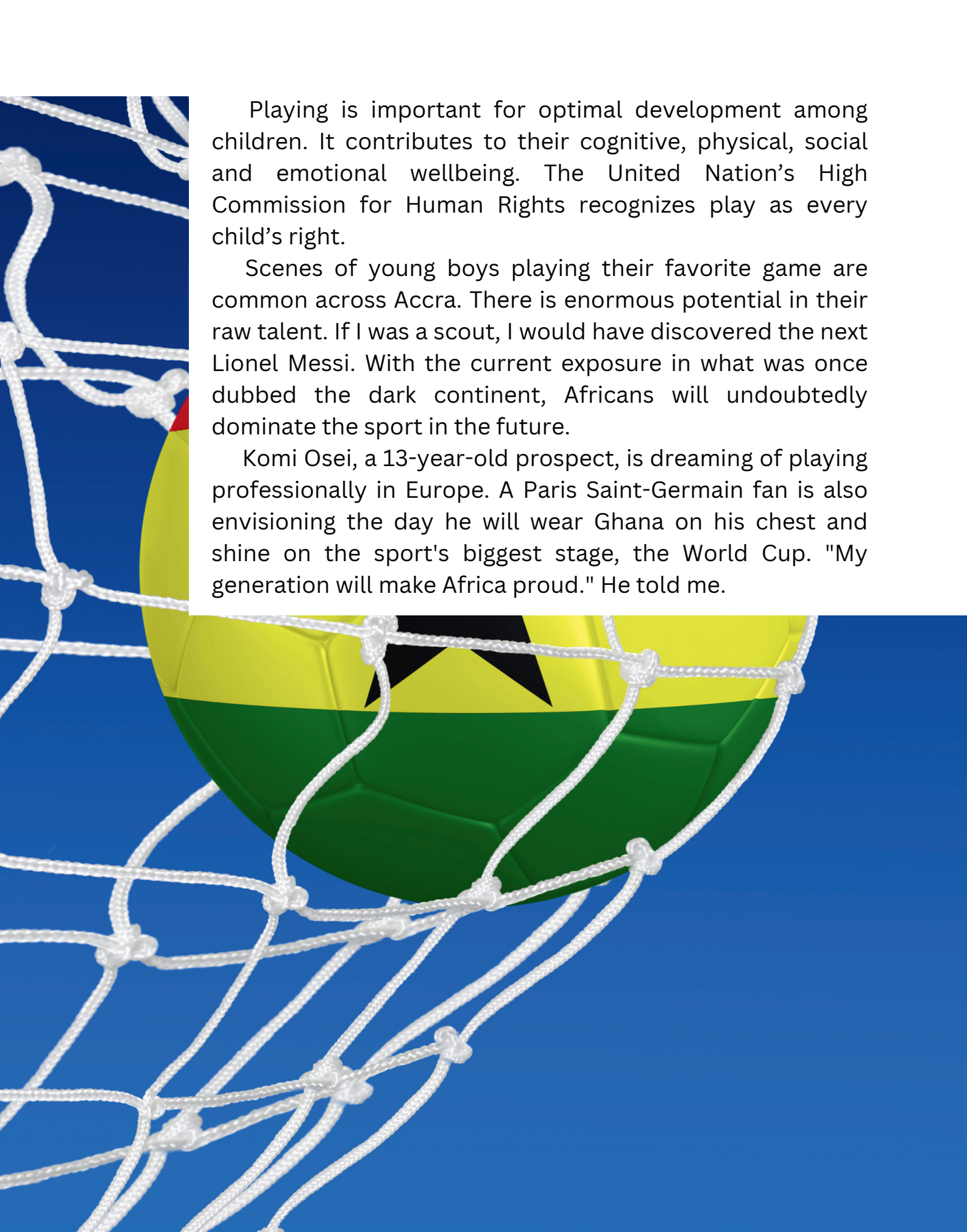
Cedi is an Akan word which means cowry shell. Akan is spoken in parts of Ghana and Ivory Coast. At some point before the colonial occupation, cowries were used as currency in parts of Africa and Indo-Pacific.

GHANAIAN KIDS DREAM BIG



After lunch, I headed to the streets of Tudu within the Accra Metropolitan District. I chose Tudu because that's where the Aflao-bound shuttle terminal is found. Aflao is a bustling town at the border with Togo. Although I wasn't done with Accra, I had to figure out how to get to Togo and, if need be, buy a ticket in advance.

When my exit plan was set, I took a walk around Tudu area and felt the heartbeat of the community. The first thing I noticed in the neighborhood is how popular soccer is among tender-aged boys. Soccer is the most popular sport in Africa. From grass pitches to dusty grounds of uneven surfaces, kids across the continent enjoy the game anywhere with or without shoes. In most cases, goal posts are improvised.



Playing is important for optimal development among children. It contributes to their cognitive, physical, social and emotional wellbeing. The United Nation's High Commission for Human Rights recognizes play as every child's right.

Scenes of young boys playing their favorite game are common across Accra. There is enormous potential in their raw talent. If I was a scout, I would have discovered the next Lionel Messi. With the current exposure in what was once dubbed the dark continent, Africans will undoubtedly dominate the sport in the future.

Komi Osei, a 13-year-old prospect, is dreaming of playing professionally in Europe. A Paris Saint-Germain fan is also envisioning the day he will wear Ghana on his chest and shine on the sport's biggest stage, the World Cup. "My generation will make Africa proud." He told me.

GOODBYE ACCRA



After six unforgettable hours in Accra, I left for Ketu South District aboard an 18-seater van. As the driver shifted gears, I reviewed my notes and liked what I was documenting. This booklet was already in the making.

The first page, titled Hello Ghana, was written in the said van. The rest of the pages were outlined along the way. When I was dropped at the border with Togo, the title of the publication you are reading had already been conceived.

It is impossible to tour Accra's major tourist attractions in six hours. I chose to visit the city on Sunday because traffic flows faster on the day of the Lord. Unfortunately, I made it to the Kwame Nkrumah Water Park when the caretaker had gone to church, leaving the gate locked. The Osu Castle was also closed, and so was the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park.

Despite the disappointments caused by temporary closures, I made the most out of the half-day tour. In the words of my music-blasting Bolt driver, Accra never disappoints.

Memories created in Ghana will be cherished for the rest of my life. As I always say, good things are meant to be shared. These recollections are no exception.


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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