

IN THE MARITIME REGION OF

TOGO



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Welcome to Togo



Togo is divided into five regions: Savannah, Kara, Central, Plateau, and Maritime. During my visit to this West African country, I explored the Maritime Region extensively. This publication captures the highlights of that unforgettable journey. But before delving into my experiences, let's take a brief look back at the country's history to set the stage.



Before the Berlin Conference, the area now known as Togo lay between the Asante and Dahomey states. When European powers met in 1884 to partition Africa, they designated this area as Togoland and placed it under German protection. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the League of Nations divided Togoland—assigning the eastern portion to France and the western section to Britain.

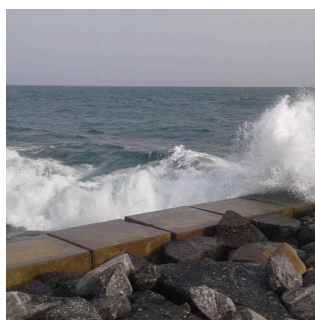
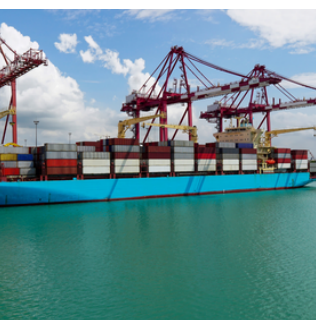


In 1946, both territories were placed under United Nations trusteeship. A decade later, British Togoland was integrated into the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), while French Togoland became an autonomous republic within the French Union. It eventually gained full independence in 1960.



Today, Togo is home to over 40 ethnic groups. Although French is the official language and serves as a lingua franca, each ethnic group maintains its own language. Among the most widely spoken indigenous tongues are Ewe and Kabiye.

Nearly half of the Togolese population is Christian—most of them Roman Catholic. Muslims make up about 14%, while more than 30% of the population continue to practice traditional ancestral religions.



National Museum



My journey through Togo's Maritime Region began at the National Museum in the *Quartier Administratif*—a perfect place to understand the country's roots. Inside, I explored the ethnographic section filled with artifacts dating back to the Stone Age: pottery, drums, and wooden masks that revealed the artistry and spirituality of Togolese communities.

I was fascinated by the exhibits on Voodoo and its peaceful coexistence with Christianity—a reflection of Togo's cultural balance and respect for tradition. The historical section, however, struck a heavier chord. Chains, shackles, and portraits of colonial governors told stories of pain and endurance.

Guided by a knowledgeable historian, the experience was both eye-opening and emotional. As I stepped out into the warm Togolese sun, I carried with me a deep appreciation for a nation that has turned its turbulent past into strength and resilience.

The museum set the tone for the rest of my journey—an adventure that would continue to reveal Togo's beauty, depth, and the quiet pride of its people.

Galerie Coin du Terroir



After spending a thoughtful morning at the National Museum of Togo—revisiting the past and tracing the country’s cultural evolution—I continued my journey to Galerie Coin du Terroir in Lomé. The transition felt natural: from preserved history to the vibrant pulse of living culture.

Founded in 2021 by Queenida Koko Eklou-Edorh, the gallery was created to celebrate, preserve, and promote Togolese craftsmanship. Inside, I found a rich display of paintings, sculptures, beadwork, textiles, and leather goods—each piece telling its own story of tradition and creativity. What stood out most was the gallery’s accessibility. With free entry and affordable items, it invites everyone, from locals to travelers, to experience art up close.

Situated along Avenue Nicolas Grunitzky, near the former city hall, Galerie Coin du Terroir isn’t just a place to view art—it’s a cultural hub where artists, entrepreneurs, and visitors connect. On Friday evenings, the space transforms during the popular “soirées terroir,” when music, dance, and local cuisine fill the air, turning the gallery into a living celebration of Togolese identity.

Grand Marché & Lomé Cathedral



The Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral is a striking jewel in Lomé, its neo-Gothic spires reaching skyward as a testament to Togo's history and architectural heritage. Built by Dutch missionaries in 1901, it draws visitors not just for faith, but for its sheer grandeur.

When I arrived, the doors were open to worshippers. I paused at the entrance, reading notices while exchanging warm French greetings with a few local women. Sunlight highlighted the intricate carvings on the cathedral's façade, setting the scene for what lay inside.

Nearby, Bebeto, a hawk-eyed tour guide, waited on a bench to share the cathedral's stories for a modest fee. He guided me through the history of Christianity in Togo during German colonial rule, weaving together faith, culture, and heritage.

Inside, the scent of incense mingled with polished wood, and sunlight streaming through stained glass painted the floors in shades of red, blue, and gold. Each corner seemed to whisper prayers of generations past, reminding me that architecture here is both art and memory.

Stepping outside, the cathedral opens onto the lively Grand Marché de Lomé. The calls of vendors, mingling aromas, and colorful fabrics create a vibrant contrast to the cathedral's solemnity. Most visitors, myself included, combine both in one visit, capturing the spiritual and cultural heartbeat of Lomé in a single afternoon.

Akodessewa Fetish Market



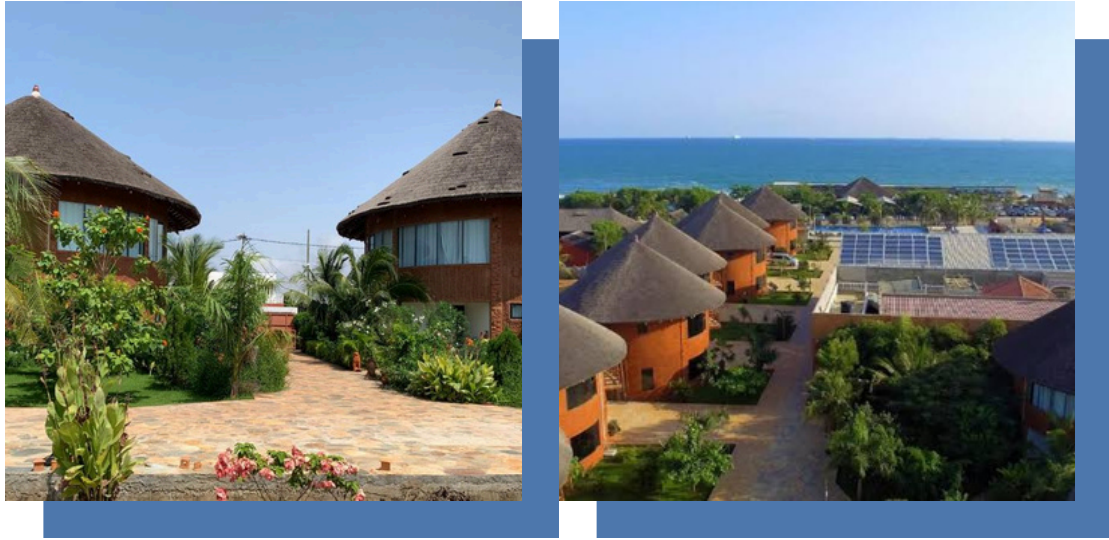
My tour guide introduced himself as Mark Dako, a descendant of King Dakodonou Danzo from the kingdom of Dahomey. Upon meeting him, we exchanged pleasantries with a casual fist bump. As we spoke, my eyes were drawn to the striking chain he wore—a chain that would soon make perfect sense.

I was visiting the Akodessewa Fetish Market in Lomé, Togo's capital. Popularly known as the Voodoo Market, it is a place that fascinates and unsettles in equal measure, with a maze of vendor stalls and shadowy chambers occupied by Voodoo priests.

As I wandered through the market, I witnessed someone purchasing a hyena skull. Nearby, another customer inspected tails of animals I could barely identify. Moments later, I spotted something eerily familiar—a spinal cord of a highly poisonous snake. My guide's chain came to mind; indeed, he wore the same item around his neck.

For tourists like me, the market's rhythm was puzzling, even surreal. For the traders, it was simply business as usual. Their clients—some appearing more at home than I could ever hope to be—consulted the next available Voodoo priest and purchased whatever he prescribed. These ingredients are believed to form remedies capable of curing diseases, providing protection, or offering spiritual immunity, a tradition rooted deep in Togo's cultural fabric.

Marcelo Beach Club



Upon arrival, I kicked back and ordered a cold coconut-lime-cucumber mocktail. From my lounge chair, I could feel the sheer power of the Atlantic. Has anyone else noticed how much rougher the Atlantic is compared to the Indian Ocean? The club's spacious restaurant was nearly empty, though a few patrons were enjoying cold drinks on the beach. Just a few yards away, a couple of women in two-piece bikinis basked in the sun on recliners as comfortable as mine.

During my stay in Lomé, I became a regular at Club Marcelo. Nestled off Rue du Monument in the upscale Baguida suburb, Marcelo features guest cottages, a bar, a restaurant, and wellness facilities. Its accommodation units are inspired by traditional Togolese houses, blending local heritage with modern comfort.

Togo's coastal strip, sandwiched between Ghana and Benin, stretches roughly fifty kilometers. From Aflao to Aného, the beach is lined with coconut trees swaying gently in the wind, creating a serene, tropical rhythm.

Sipping my mocktail, I felt the Atlantic breeze invigorate my senses. Gazing at the seemingly endless ocean, listening to its relentless waves, I found myself pondering its mysteries and the stories it must carry from distant shores.

Petit Brussel



After hours of reading and sipping coconut juice, I laced up my sneakers and joined fellow beachgoers for a game of basketball. The plan was to leave shortly thereafter, but the hotel's outdoor gym lured me in, tempting me to stay longer and burn a few extra calories.

It was my first experience working out in an open-air gym. The concept itself isn't new—it dates back to the fitness trails of Europe and North America in the 1960s and '70s. Later, designers of recreational spaces recognized the value of bringing gym facilities into parks and public spaces.

Recreational parks and beaches offer a sanctuary for those seeking a break from life's stresses. At Petit Brussel, I discovered the joy of combining fun with fitness. Staying in shape while traveling can be challenging—the holiday vibe and indulgent lifestyle often tempt you off course—but in Lomé, Petit Brussel made it effortless to exercise, unwind, and enjoy every moment of the holiday.

Beach Soccer



It was a hot afternoon, but the ocean breeze was both refreshing and invigorating. I was watching a beach soccer match between Zabaoth Academy and Arsenito FC. Catching a game by the sea was a new experience for me—and that was the beauty of it. Some spectators, myself included, were settled at a pitch-side bar, while others perched on the edges of fishing boats. From my spot at the Togo Star Beach Pub, I enjoyed the game in comfort while soaking in the seaside atmosphere.

I decided to support Zabaoth. Yes, I had to pick a side—neutrality kills the vibe. Their midfielder stood out: calm, composed, and collected, a voice of reason whenever a dangerously tackled player was tempted to retaliate. Arsenito's goalkeeper, meanwhile, was the captain and the glue that held his team together. Despite his leadership, he struggled to rein in a flopper—a teammate who spent more time throwing tantrums and faking injuries than actually playing.

I admired the referee. He knew how to assert authority, maintain order, and silence intimidation attempts from rowdy fans and pushy sponsors.

My team attacked relentlessly, but a mix of bad luck and the heroic saves of Arsenito's goalkeeper kept us scoreless. We lost the game.

Oyo Bar



Boasting some of the best cocktail makers in Lomé, 2 Février Hotel lives up to its reputation as the city’s premier cocktail lounge. As the only 5-star hotel in Togo, it is a magnet for top government officials, diplomats, and business tycoons. There’s almost always an important meeting underway, accompanied by fine dining and exquisite drinks.

The hotel’s name, February 2, holds historical significance: it marks the day former President Gnassingbé Eyadéma, father of the current president, survived a plane crash in 1974. A monument near Sarakawa commemorates the site of the crash.

While in Lomé, a visit to the hotel’s Oyo Bar is highly recommended. If you’d rather not take the elevator to the 27th floor, you can enjoy a drink at the Akwaba Bar, set poolside, or the Le Nil Bar, located in the lobby. Dining options within the hotel include two restaurants—Songhai and Namiélé—offering a range of culinary delights to complement the luxurious setting.

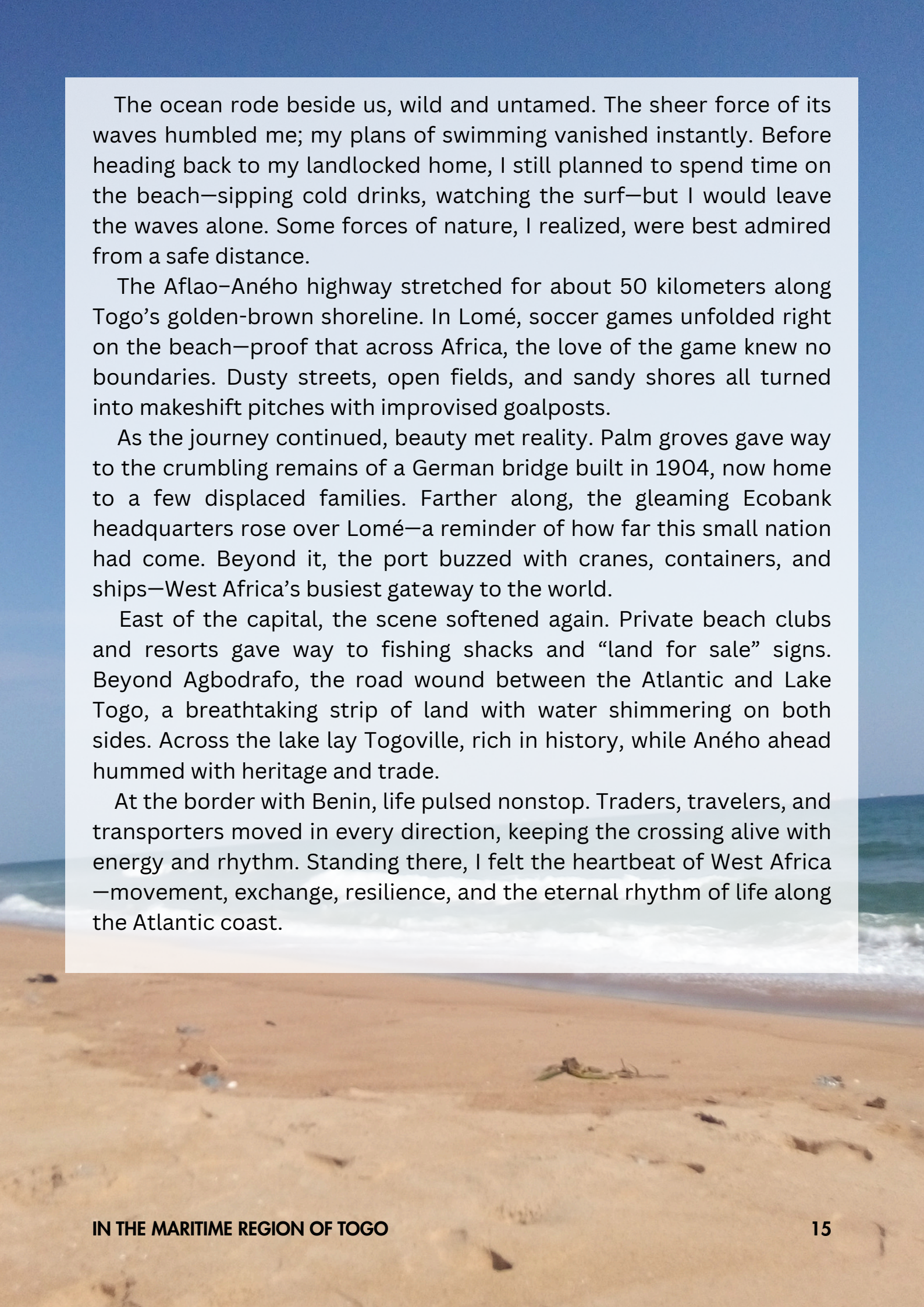
Aflao to Aného



This tour began at Aflao, Ghana's bustling border with Togo. The border post was a hive of activity—traders haggling, taxis honking, travelers weaving through one of West Africa's busiest crossings. Though it later marked an international frontier, Aflao had always been one community. Before the colonial powers arrived, this stretch of land lay between the Ashanti and Dahomey kingdoms, and its people—largely the Ewe—moved freely.

It was only after the Berlin Conference that the land became German Togoland, wedged between the British Gold Coast and French Dahomey. When Germany lost World War I, the territory was divided, splitting families and neighbors. The border at Aflao remained less a symbol of separation than a reminder of how colonial lines fractured one people.

Crossing into Lomé, Togo's capital, I was greeted by sunshine glinting off Boulevard du Mono—a palm-lined highway stretching along the coastline. From there, I squeezed into a weathered Renault taxi bound for Aného, at the Benin border. Wedged into the front seat, I rolled down the window to let the salty breeze rush in.



The ocean rode beside us, wild and untamed. The sheer force of its waves humbled me; my plans of swimming vanished instantly. Before heading back to my landlocked home, I still planned to spend time on the beach—sipping cold drinks, watching the surf—but I would leave the waves alone. Some forces of nature, I realized, were best admired from a safe distance.

The Aflao–Aného highway stretched for about 50 kilometers along Togo’s golden-brown shoreline. In Lomé, soccer games unfolded right on the beach—proof that across Africa, the love of the game knew no boundaries. Dusty streets, open fields, and sandy shores all turned into makeshift pitches with improvised goalposts.

As the journey continued, beauty met reality. Palm groves gave way to the crumbling remains of a German bridge built in 1904, now home to a few displaced families. Farther along, the gleaming Ecobank headquarters rose over Lomé—a reminder of how far this small nation had come. Beyond it, the port buzzed with cranes, containers, and ships—West Africa’s busiest gateway to the world.

East of the capital, the scene softened again. Private beach clubs and resorts gave way to fishing shacks and “land for sale” signs. Beyond Agbodrafo, the road wound between the Atlantic and Lake Togo, a breathtaking strip of land with water shimmering on both sides. Across the lake lay Togoville, rich in history, while Aného ahead hummed with heritage and trade.

At the border with Benin, life pulsed nonstop. Traders, travelers, and transporters moved in every direction, keeping the crossing alive with energy and rhythm. Standing there, I felt the heartbeat of West Africa—movement, exchange, resilience, and the eternal rhythm of life along the Atlantic coast.

Agbodrafo



I stood inside a house that once served as a warehouse for enslaved Africans, before they were shipped across the Atlantic. Built in the 1830s, this structure carries a chilling past. The first owner of the house was a European slave trader named John Henry Woods. Even today, some locals refer to it as Chez Woods. At a glance, the Afro-Brazilian-style residence tells a story of comfort and privilege. But beneath its floorboards lies a different world—a dark and airless space where victims were stripped of freedom and dignity.

As I descended into the basement, I could feel the weight of history pressing in. I tried to fit my six-foot frame into one of the tiny chambers where captives were once held. Standing upright was impossible. I had to crouch, sit, or kneel—positions that mirrored the inhuman conditions aboard the ships that crossed the Atlantic. For a moment, I could only imagine the torture and despair that must have filled this space.

Maison des Esclaves is located in Agbodrafo, about thirty kilometers from Lomé and twenty from Aného. Once called Porto Seguro—“Safe Harbor”—the town lies peacefully between the Atlantic Ocean and Lake Togo. Yet, behind that calm beauty is a haunting reminder of humanity’s darkest trade, silently preserved within the walls of this historic house.

Lake Togo & Togoville



We left Lomé, the capital of Togo, through Boulevard du Mono — a highway that hugs the country’s southern coastline. The taxi I boarded was headed to Aného, but this time, I didn’t travel the full distance. Instead, I got off in Agbodrafo. From there, I took a leisurely walk toward the nearby Lake Togo. As I often say, walking allows me to observe and absorb more.

My destination was Togoville, located on the opposite side of the lake. That meant finding a way to cross. At Hotel du Lac, visitors can take a private boat for about ten dollars each way — a scenic, comfortable ride. The public option costs just a fraction of that, roughly a tenth of a dollar, but local boat operators usually charge foreign tourists a bit more, often ten times the local rate.

Lake Togo is shallow, and its surface glimmers under the coastal sun. Here, boatmen use long poles to push their engineless, flat-bottomed



boats forward — a traditional method known as punting. Watching them move with such grace and control made the journey feel timeless, almost meditative.

This trip also offered a glimpse into the local fishing culture. Fishermen on Lake Togo set up traps that catch fish even in their absence — an ingenious technique that blends patience with skill. I wished I could join them for a hands-on experience, but time wasn't on my side.

Geographically, Lake Togo was formed through the natural expansion of a lagoon separated from the Atlantic Ocean by a sandbar. The lake drains into the ocean beneath a bridge that marks the gateway to Benin, Togo's eastern neighbor and an important trading partner.

Togoville itself turned out to be an intriguing blend of tradition and spirituality. I witnessed barter trade still thriving in the marketplace and learned about Voodoo doctrines and rituals deeply rooted in the community. I also visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Lake Togo, a place of spiritual significance to the Catholics.



