AFRIQUE UNIE · TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Benin in 9 days: a day-by-day itinerary

Southern Benin is easy to explore over short distances and holds the essentials: the energy of Cotonou, the stilt village of Ganvie, the Afro-Brazilian heritage of Porto-Novo, the memory of the kingdom of Dahomey in Abomey, the Slave Route and voodoo temples of Ouidah, then the lagoons of Grand-Popo. This nine-day route deliberately stays in the south: the north of the country, including Pendjari National Park, is currently formally advised against.

Day by day

Days 1-2 · Cotonou, Dantokpa and the seafront (night : Cotonou)
Cotonou is the country's economic capital and a good introduction. Dive into Dantokpa market, one of the largest in West Africa, where you can find everything from fabric to fetishes, ideally with a guide so as not to get lost. The next day, look at the large murals and statues that have transformed some neighbourhoods in recent years, including the imposing Amazon statue, then seek out the city's contemporary art exhibitions, which change often: ask locally. Late in the day, head to Fidjrossè beach for sunset and grilled fish. To get around, zemidjans, motorbike taxis, are everywhere: insist on a helmet.

Day 3 · Ganvie, the lake city (night : Cotonou)
About twenty kilometres north of Cotonou, the Abomey-Calavi jetty is the departure point for pirogues to Ganvie. This stilt village, built on Lake Nokoué by people who once fled slave raids, is home to thousands of residents who live from fishing. The crossing takes about half an hour, gliding between the acadjas, brushwood enclosures that act as fish traps, to the floating market where women sell from their boats. Go in the morning, when activity is at its peak, and always ask before photographing residents. Buy your tickets at the official counter at the jetty.

Day 4 · Porto-Novo, the Afro-Brazilian capital (night : Porto-Novo or Cotonou)
About an hour's drive east, depending on traffic, brings you to Porto-Novo, the administrative capital, with a far more peaceful pace than Cotonou. The city has kept fine Afro-Brazilian houses, built by former slaves who returned from Brazil in the nineteenth century, and a great mosque designed in the style of a baroque church. Visit the Da Silva Museum, devoted to this history, the Honmè Museum, a former royal palace, and the botanical garden, a sacred forest in the heart of the city. In the evening, return to Cotonou or stay overnight to enjoy the calm. It is also a good place to try Yoruba cooking, which is widespread here.

Day 5 · Abomey and the royal palaces of Dahomey (night : Abomey)
Allow two and a half to three hours' drive north to Abomey, the former capital of the kingdom of Dahomey. The UNESCO-listed royal palaces form a vast complex of earthen walls decorated with bas-reliefs telling the story of the kings and their armies, including the famous Amazons. Major museum works have been carried out in recent years: check what is open at the time of your visit. Then stroll through town to meet the appliqué weavers, who keep up the tradition of the royal hangings, and the blacksmiths. Spend the night here so you can set off calmly the next day.

Days 6-7 · Ouidah, memory and voodoo (night : Ouidah)
Head back down to the coast: Abomey and Ouidah are two and a half to three hours apart by road. On the first day, follow the four kilometres of the Slave Route on foot or by bike, from the auction square to the Door of No Return on the beach, a deeply moving walk. The next day, visit the Python Temple, opposite the basilica, the sacred forest of Kpassè and the Portuguese fort, then ask about the new museums devoted to the memory of slavery, which have been opening in stages. Every early January, Ouidah hosts the national voodoo celebrations: an exceptional moment, but accommodation fills up fast.

Days 8-9 · Lake Ahémé and Grand-Popo, then home (night : Grand-Popo)
An hour's drive west brings you to Grand-Popo, a large fishing village between lagoon and ocean, not far from the Togolese border. Make a detour via Lake Ahémé and the village of Possotomé, known for its mineral spring and pirogue trips with the fishermen. In Grand-Popo, hire a pirogue to go down the lagoon to the Bouche du Roy, where the Mono River meets the sea, among mangroves and villages. Swimming in the ocean is dangerous because of the currents. On the last day, allow an hour and a half to two hours' drive to Cotonou airport, leaving early if your flight is during the day.

Getting around

The simplest solution is a car with a driver for the whole trip: distances are short, but roads are busy and driving is unpredictable. In town, zemidjans are fast and cheap, as long as you insist on a helmet. Shared taxis and minibuses link Cotonou, Porto-Novo, Ouidah and Abomey on a small budget. Do not drive at night. The north of the country, in particular the Pendjari and W national parks and their surroundings, is formally advised against by France: this route stays in the south, but check your government's official travel advice before you leave.

When to go

The dry season, from November to February or March, is the best time, despite the harmattan that sometimes hazes the sky in December and January. In early January, the voodoo celebrations draw crowds to Ouidah: book early. The south has two rainy seasons, the main one from April to July and a shorter one in September and October, with humid heat and muddy tracks.

Practical information

Benin

Entry	Depends on your passport: visiterafriqueunie.com/en/visa/benin/
Yellow fever	Certificate required from all travellers
Malaria	throughout the country
Currency	West African CFA franc (XOF)
Languages	French, Fon
Plugs	type C, E · dialling code +229 · UTC+1
Emergencies	police 117 · ambulance 118 · fire 118

Departure checklist

Documents

☐ Passport valid for at least six months after your return, with blank pages
☐ Visa or e-visa (printed if required)
☐ International vaccination certificate (yellow fever if required)
☐ Travel insurance certificate and assistance number
☐ Paper and digital copies of your passport and bookings
☐ Tickets, bookings and addresses saved offline
☐ International driving permit if you are hiring a vehicle

Health

☐ Travel consultation done and vaccinations up to date
☐ Malaria tablets if your doctor recommends them
☐ First-aid kit: plasters, antiseptic, anti-diarrhoea tablets, rehydration salts
☐ Mosquito repellent suitable for the tropics
☐ Sunscreen, hat and sunglasses
☐ Personal medication and prescriptions

Money and connectivity

☐ Bank told, Visa or Mastercard (and a backup card)
☐ Cash in euros or dollars, recent notes in good condition
☐ eSIM or local SIM card sorted
☐ Plug adapter for the country
☐ Power bank and cables
☐ Offline maps downloaded
☐ Afrique Unie app installed

In the bag

☐ Light clothes that cover up (sun, mosquitoes, places of worship)
☐ A fleece for evenings, dawn safaris and altitude
☐ Walking shoes and sandals
☐ Head torch
☐ Water bottle (ideally with a filter)
☐ Small daypack and waterproof pouches
☐ Luggage padlock

Before you close the door

☐ Your government's travel advice reread
☐ Trip registered with your consular service (if it offers this)
☐ Itinerary and contacts left with someone close
☐ Online check-in done and baggage allowance checked

Notebook made from visiterafriqueunie.com/en/itineraries/benin-in-9-days/ · information checked in November 2026 against official sources. Entry, health and safety rules change: check them again before you leave (your country's official advice, the embassy of the country you visit).