

# Ghana

My name is Heidi in the United States but here in Ghana I am known as Auntie Efua, which means a Friday born female. I have been in Accra six months and just finished first semester at the University of Ghana at Legon. Ghana is a wonderful place. The most outstanding feature here is the people. You will notice the heat and it will feel oppressive but when you see how Ghanaians take the heat with a grain of salt and are always polite, it will not seem so bad. Ghanaians will ask how you are doing every time they see you and really genuinely want to know how your health is. There is a high level of entrepreneurship and craftsmanship here. Everyone sells everything here. Hand carved doors, water, dressmaking, and toilet paper; there is nothing in America that cannot be found here, except for Starbucks and McDonalds. The university campus climate is a select section of the population. Most of the students here come from middle and upper class backgrounds. They have ipods, laptops and wear jeans and most have servants at home. It is refreshing to be able to see and interact with all sections of society, since most of America's perceptions of Africa are generally of poverty, disease and wild animals. Most of the education is the same as in the States but beyond the university the social education you receive expands not only what you know but also the means by which you obtain your education. The ability to know through evidence that Ghanaians have mansions and hovels, internet café's and palm trees. Although I am an older adult returning to school I have found my days here at Legon are completely different from my days as a student at California State University Dominguez Hills.

## A Typical Week Day

Ghanaians get up very early every day so Volta Hall comes to life around five am needless to say my American rhythms have adjusted. I wake at 5:45, take my B-12, calcium, vitamin C, garlic, Echinacea, golden seal vitamins, put on my sweats, get my water. My roommate and I exercise on the stairs in Volta Hall. We normally will go up and down the stairs ten times and I have hopes of getting up to fifty before I leave to come back to the states. A few of the American students have joined the women's track team here and so are up at the same time. Next we go for a long one-hour exploration walk around the campus. Legon is five miles by five miles and we have yet to cover it all. All buildings are white or cream with black wood trim and red clay tile roofing. On my walks I have found the vice chancellors home, the botanical gardens and the pool that is being built. By seven the sun is beaming and walking on the roads becomes crowded so I make my way back to Volta Hall. There are rolling blackouts here. Just as in the States, Ghana struggles with its consumption. As I make my way up the stairs I pray that the water pumps have power so I am not doing a bucket watch.

If I see many ladies carrying buckets of water up and down the stairs then the water is not on however the buckets must be looked at carefully so as not to confuse them for laundry. A lot of students take their laundry downstairs, in buckets, and wash around the big tanks of water since the clotheslines are right next to them. If the water is on then I rush to my room and gather my shower stuff. There are four bathrooms per floor each with three showers, three toilets and two sinks. I have rarely had to wait since bathroom rush hour is over by the time I get back. In my first few months here if the water were not on I would get my bucket and trudge down the stairs and get in line at one of the five water tanks. My thirty-four year old soon to be thirty-five year old body urged me to find a better way to cope. Now sitting on my balcony is one sixty-gallon trashcan, fifteen to twenty Dasani water bottles and six buckets kept constantly filled with water. So after a regular or bucket shower, I come back to my room, dress and listen to the morning news. By this time it should be a little bit past eight and so I make my bed, sweep, take out the trash and or mop. I find cleaning easier to do in the cool mornings rather than after a full day of ninety-degree weather. Plus there is a part of me that wants to make sure CSU students are distinguished from those *other* California students who the Ghanaians students claim always have dirty rooms.

If it is Monday also known as Lariumday or Wednesday then I grab my water and head on out because I have Twi class all the way at the front of school. Passing through the porter's lodge Uncle Ben gives his customary greeting and ever present smile as I give him my key to be placed in the P28 cubbyhole. For breakfast I will go across the road to my favorite aborobae wura or pineapple seller in the Sociology, History and English quad for my 4,000 cedi (40 cent) fresh cut pineapple or outside the front gate I will go to one of the many kube wuras and make them laugh at my Twi efforts and say "Me pa kube baaku den den." which literally translates to "I want coconut one hard hard." In Twi the adjective comes after the noun it is describing and to repeat the adjective creates the stress or the "very" we would say. I also found out that the coconut is believed to have medicinal properties that keep the immune system healthy. I don't know how true it is but I have not had a cold or malaria yet! (Knock on wood.) Since coconut is one of my favorites I eat it at least three times a week and it keeps me going until dinner all for only 2,500 cedi or 25 cent.

Off to the UC EAP office where Twi class is held. This is the hardest class for me. I get very nervous speaking in front of class and wouldn't you know the class is small enough that everyone is called upon. Thank goodness our teacher is the kindest and funniest professor. After Twi either I will go to the book store, hang out until the next class or go upstairs to the International Programs office for my one hour of free internet. Most classes are one or two hours depending upon the size of the class. Some classes are core classes which means the same as our general education classes, meaning they are crowded because everyone has to take them. For example everyone here has to take two African studies classes and you can choose from Dance, Music, Drama and Language. Then there are

the major classes in your discipline. Traditional African Religion was huge last semester. There were 430 students enrolled in that course so we had to get to class at 1:00 in order to have a seat for 2:30. This class was difficult because socially there were way too many people to have full participation so it was basically two hours worth of lecture. Secondly the benches were very hard. And lastly, most of the country subscribes to the two major revealed religions Christian and Islam which have interpreted ATR as “witchcraft” and “black magic” so some students were not very engaged which was disappointing because part of understanding and engaging in another culture is learning about their concept(s) of God and the supporting system which is utilized to organize his and her life. I dropped the class but would sit in periodically to audit but my roommate stayed so we were able to discuss the material. Most of my classes centered on my first major, African Literature and were small with no more than 20 students.

I am not much of a lunch person but for the few times I would eat in the middle of the day I saw that fufu was very popular with Ghanaians but I knew it was way too much for me to eat and I would end up falling asleep. So I stuck with Hot Pot's 10,000 (1 dollar) plate of fried chicken, fried rice and coleslaw. Fried rice here is like fries in California. Incidentally, fries are called chips here due to the English influence.

On market days my roommate and I take the Accra tro-tro (like an independent MTA) to go to Max Mart, which is the local supermarket comparable to Ralphs or Albertsons in the States. The prices are relatively very high; meaning related to my student budget of 50,000 per day, I have to shop wisely. You can get everything you want; it has a deli, butcher and meat counter, fresh bakery and produce. Some produce is imported but most of us stay away from it. Mushrooms that normally cost three dollars will be twenty-two dollars, broccoli will be fourteen dollars per kilo and iceberg lettuce will be four dollars a head. Like I said stay away from Max Marts produce. The best alternative is to go to the vegetable stand right across the street. It is cheaper and you can bargain, plus regular customers get a dash (free gift or gratuity for patronizing them), which is usually an extra orange or bunch of carrots. I don't buy too much at either place because when the blackouts come they are usually for twelve hours and happen twice a week. The government has provided a schedule, which is posted in the porters lodge so you can plan accordingly. Most students eat out but I like to cook and have a variety, although I think it is cheaper to eat out. The local hangout eatery is Bonjour. It is a gas station but serves pizza, chicken, ice cream and beer. On Tuesdays, I go for their two-for-one pizza deal.

Usually after classes are over for the day, I will go to the internet café above Legon Hall. They are the cheapest; you can get 2 hours for 10,000 cedi (1 dollar) but always ask first before you pay if whatever messenger service you use is up and running. Internet service is slow but not so slow that you can paint your nails, sometimes it is the service and sometimes it is that particular computer, so

either I move to another computer, go to another café or come back later. Most days I log on to the internet after five p.m. Ghana time since it will be after 9 a.m. in the morning in California and I can catch my friends and family online. This is also my cue to put on mosquito repellent since they come out at dusk. A lot of students have gotten malaria and they look and feel like death warmed over, so don't forget the mosquito repellent.

Dinner really depends on how tired I am. Heat and humidity is constant here and are very draining. By the time 3 p.m. rolls around, I am done. Some days I stop in at Hot Pot or Rich Love and get "take away" which is the equivalent to "take out" or I eat in at the Volta Hall dining room when I feel like having Ghanaian food or I will cook on the balcony in our dorm. After dinner I will go back to the internet, take another shower or do my class readings and hang out and talk. I make my phone calls to the states between ten and twelve at night. Then, I head off to bed to start a new day all over again.