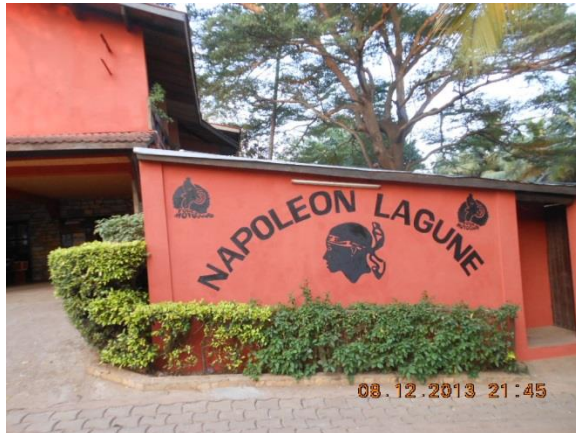
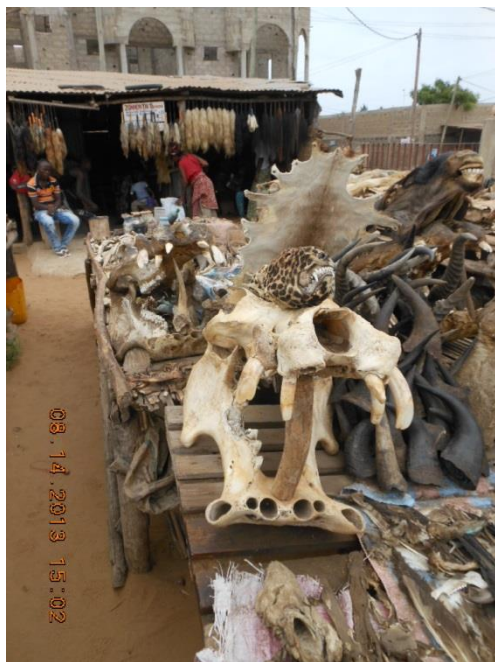


## Voodoo 2013

This covers our trip to Togo and Benin in August 2013. It was called The Cradle of Voodoo.



Our first hotel. Stay there only if you must.



Lots of dead animal body parts for sale. That's a hippo skull up front.



Victoria at the fetish market in Lomé.



Victoria at a reading with a voodoo practitioner. He wanted way too much money.



Voodoo paraphernalia



In Togo, Victoria with a sign that a voodoo ceremony will be held.



Another voodoo sign.



A meeting place for voodoo priests.



The first ceremony was a “fire dance” near Sokode, Togo. This was amazing. The man is eating a burning stick. He would hold the burning coals in his mouth for more than a minute. This is a flash photo. Light was limited to the fire. The video footage is far more impressive.





The men put burning sticks on their skin and held them there. They also placed below fire below feet, jumped in the fire and even sat down in it. Very impressive were two boys, about ten years of age who handled the fire. We watched as the main priest “passed his power” to them for protection. They were in training and have yet to finish the initiation. This demonstration defied the typical skeptic’s explanation for fire walking.

Here is a voodoo shrine at farmer's home. These are found everywhere.



A tree designated as a voodoo shrine. Again, they are found all over.



Cell phone numbers are written on the wall. Callers just point to the person they want to contact. Despite abject poverty that is endemic, cell phones are ubiquitous. Rather than accounts they buy prepaid cards.



A local king. There are over 360 of them in this area of Togo. They settle local issues without much support from the government.

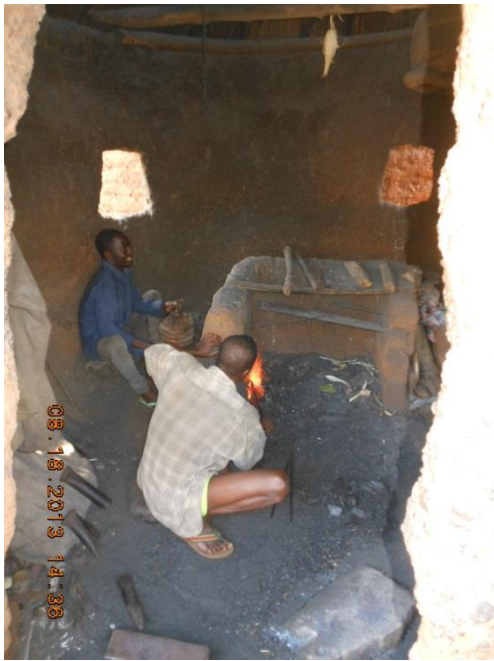




The border crossing from Togo to Benin



In a Bassar village that build clay houses



A local blacksmith. Note the hand bellows



Note the horned helmet. Villagers were quite aggressive in marketing their handicraft.



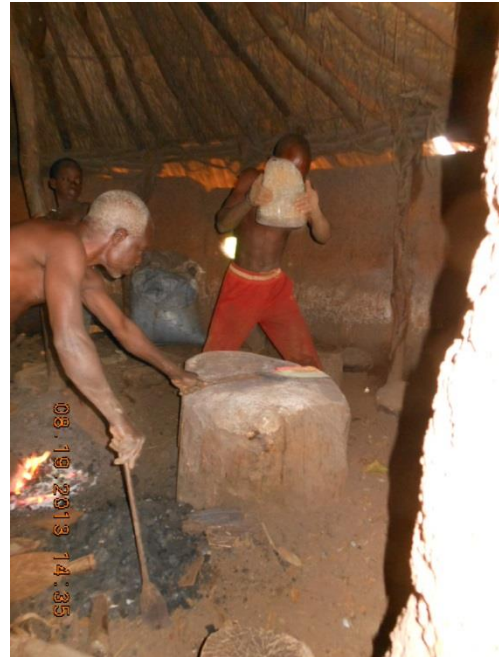




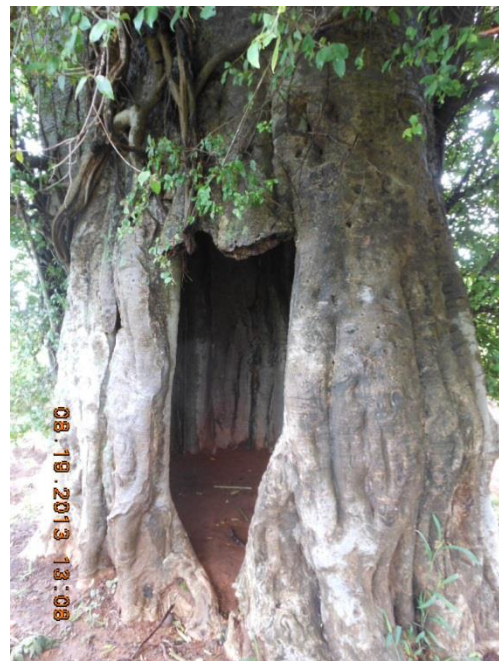
Another rural village in Benin. Note the voodoo symbols above the door. They are to force away evil spirits.



And small shrines next to the door.



Another blacksmith. Note they are using a rock to hammer the item.



A sacred Bau Bau tree that is hollowed out and where villagers go to commune with the spirits.



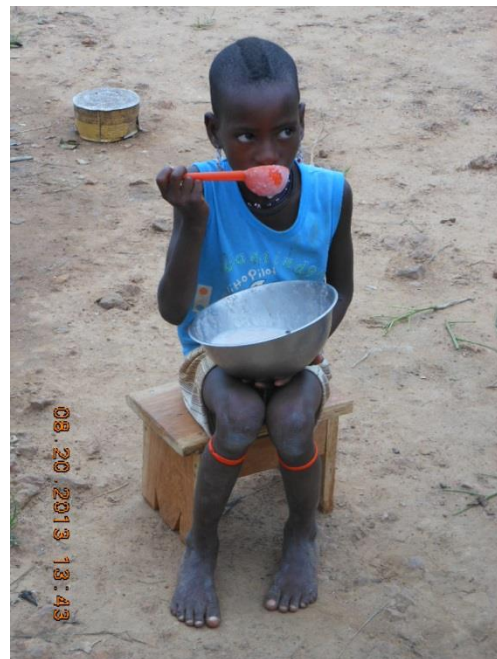
A young nomad mother with 3 week old baby. As is their custom she wanted the strangers to hold the baby. If a baby is born deformed, all run away and call a priest in to kill the child. The family must hold a special ceremony for the priest.



Food is scarce and this millet gruel the meal for the day - if lucky, twice.



The nomad's cattle. They follow the pasture land and build only temporary shelters.



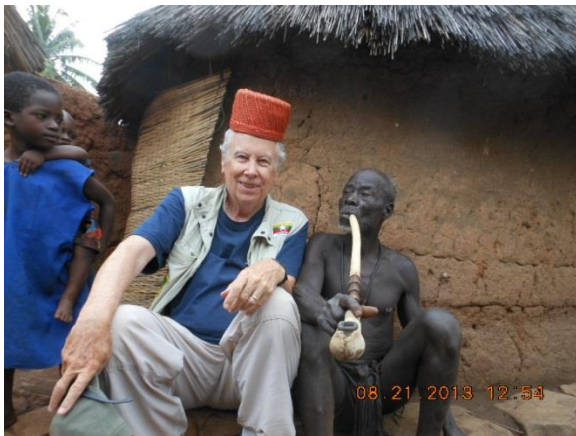




Tsohori is a major voodoo priest. He has actually appeared in travel brochures. He is secretly training his replacement, but no one knows who that is. They will learn when he dies. Each day he consults the spirits. Often he is contacted in dreams



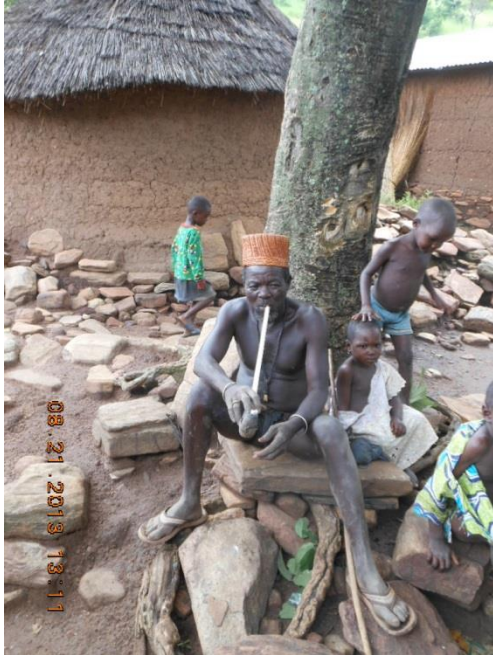
Scars are used as their identity card. Wherever they go people will know what tribe they are from. This girl has extensive scars indicating she is from a royal family. Almost everyone has small scars on their face. Due to infections, 2-3 percent of the children die from the practice.



He put his hat on me. The area is very poor and most leave as soon as they are old enough to go out on their own. We saw no one between 18 and 35 in the village.







This is another voodoo priest who is in training. Because he is not fully initiated he only uses his left and to shake a greeting.



Victoria at the first of three voodoo shrines near the fetish village of Dankoli. Pilgrims come here to ask for favors from the spirits and offer sacrifices when they are received.



Using palm oil to complete a request that took the form of a stake driven into the ground by the sacred tree. Alcohol was also sprayed on the trees and an offering promised.



It was at this site that Victoria had a chicken sacrificed to fulfill her request and promise. After she blessed the bird an attendant cut its throat and put the blood and feathers on the site. The video shows just how brutal the sacrifices are as the chicken did not die quickly or easily. Voodoo does require blood sacrifices for many ceremonies.





This is a granary at the Palace of Dassa. It is said that a tyrant king was thrown into it, but became a snake and slipped into the forest.



We attended several voodoo “mask ceremonies.” Here the embodied spirits of ancestors emerged from the forest and comes into the village. Several examples of spirits follow. Video is great. The spirits dancer and chase people. If touched it is believed that they will be knocked unconscious. Minders use sticks to keep the spirits away from people.







More examples of the dancing masks



The band. At times the drummers appeared to be in trance.



Note the stick. The minders have been initiated into the secret society that wears the masks of the spirits. The sticks are to guide the spirits so they don't touch anyone.





We attended more mask ceremonies at Cove, near the Nigerian border. There different ceremonies were happening that day. These masks were very different from the earlier ones.



The first was a major even with hundreds of villagers attending. The spirits distribute goodies to the crowd. Given the poverty level, that is a big deal.



This stack suddenly popped up behind Victoria



Another ceremony in Cove







Gelede mask ceremony with men pretending to be women but telling stories with moral implications.



And there was another Cove ceremony.



As a mask spirit came along side me.



We spent one night in Ganvie the stilted village built by Tofinou people fleeing the slave trade. It now houses more than 30,000 people.



They have floating markets and all transportation is via small boats.







A Bokono oracle at the lake. My wish was confirmed, but I'm still waiting.



His tools



At the voodoo Python Temple in Ouidah



I am being cleansed by the Python Spirit



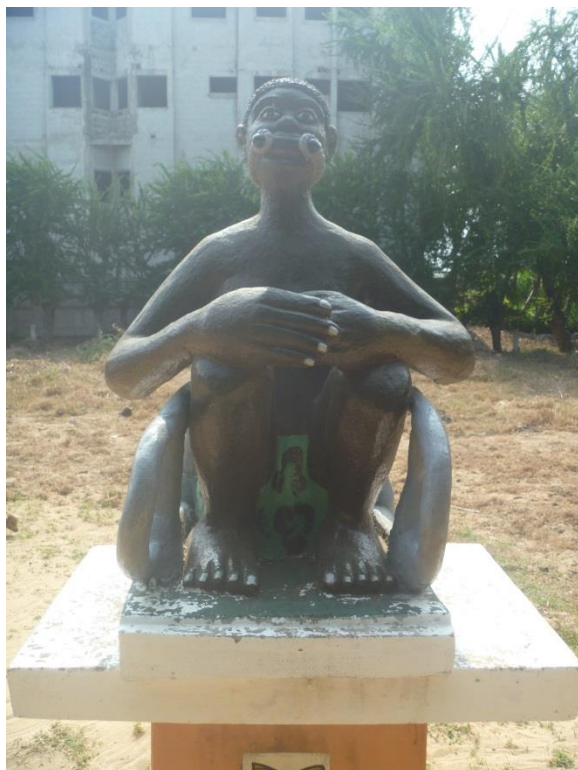
The old slave market outside the home of Francisco de Souza, known as the greatest slave trader. His descendants still benefit from his profits in human trafficking.



The road taken by slaves to the ships



The guardian of the mass grave for slaves that didn't survive – which was the vast number of them – meets Noah, our guide. This whole area has one of the most oppressive feelings to it that I have ever encountered.



This is the UNESCO memorial at “The Gate of No Return.” Most slaves shipped from here were headed to Brazil or the Caribbean.



It is one thing to discuss the slave trade academically, but another to visit these sites.



Voodoo played a large part in the lives of many of the slaves. Note the similarity of this statue at the memorial to the figures seen in the mask dances.





Victoria on a boat on the Mono River near Gran Popo.



Another mask dance, this by the Zangbeto people.



In a small fishing village we found the head of the household buries in his yard surrounded by voodoo shrines.



They then turn them over and the spirit has disappeared .



These dolls represent departed family members. It is a way to keep the spirits present while they are "traveling."





And various items appear. They claim its magic.



One of the things manifesting was a live crocodile. Here I am blessed by the spirit of that croc.



On the ocean shore I found this entire village bringing in a fishing net that was about a mile long. It took hours of exhausting effort, just as it has for centuries.



The reward was several buckets of fish, most 2-3 inches in length, which they then put out to dry. As with many areas of commerce, efforts in many Benin villages are incredibly labor intensive with very low reward.





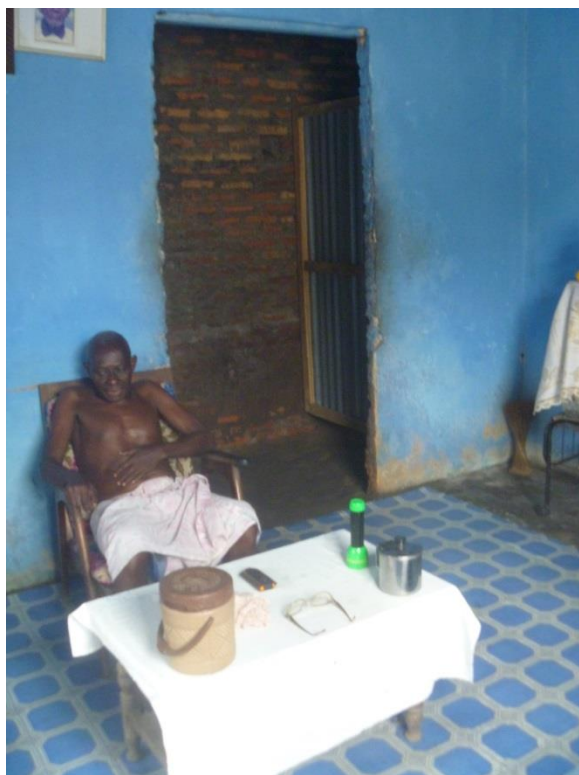
Voodoo symbol and shrine near a native healer on the Voodoo New Year's Day



Victoria with the healer. She says she could actually feel his power.



Victoria at his door.



This is a leading "Traditional Healer." He gets instructions for cures in his dreams. He has photos with other foreign healers.





Part of the shrine he uses



Another voodoo shrine.



Then we went to a voodoo ceremony in a small village outside Lomé.





One of two women that went into deep trance. She pranced about until after we left. At one point gunpowder was placed in both her hands and ignited with no visible effect on her. Extensive video of this is available.

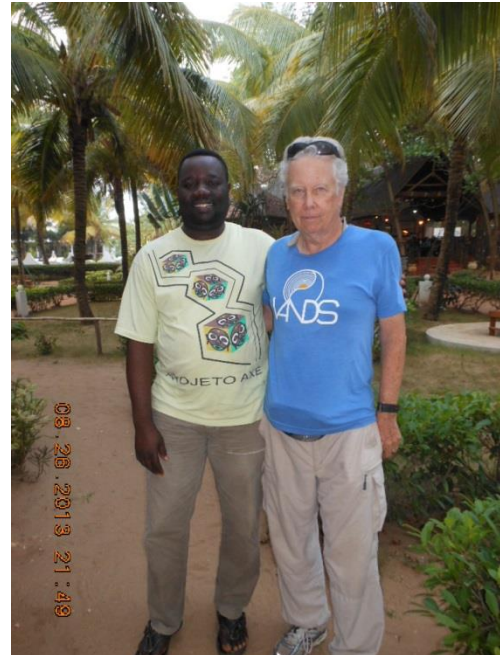


Voodoo spirit totems. The woman in trance repeatedly entered this building and poured milk on these statues as an offering to thirsty spirits.



As it was their New Year Day we came upon a huge celebration. Thousands of people were in attendance with hundreds of voodoo priests participating. Not all of the people appreciated our presence.





This is Noah Katcha, our guide throughout the trip. He is a deeply spiritual person with a great understanding of the integration of Christianity and Voodoo. He is highly recommended to anyone who wants to travel in any of the West African countries. He lives in Lomé, Togo and can be contacted there at TransAfrica ([www.transafrica.biz](http://www.transafrica.biz))

