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Section Three

AFRICA OVERVIEW



Africa is a continent which is ancient, alive, changing, challenging, and has an interesting and politically active history. Excavations suggest that man's earliest existence might have been here. Egyptian pharaohs, Hannibal, the Romans, and many other ancient civilizations and people have visited and conquered the continent. It was re-

garded for centuries as "the Dark Continent," because it was mysterious and isolated.

European explorers found the continent harsh and hostile, yet promoted slave traffic in West Africa to the Americas. The Arabs were also active in organized slave trade.

For centuries Europeans played a major role in the continent's politics. Recently, European influence has been diminished, and the local people are gaining power, but political stability is far from secure throughout the continent. This is part of the excitement of Africa. Hundreds of tribes live here, and it is not uncommon to find numerous tribes within a country. They speak their own languages and dialects, eat their own types of food, have their own tribal cultures and dress, and are very different from other tribes living within their own political boundaries.

As a result of political and military actions, the African continent has undergone many changes since World War II. Prior to that time there were only four independent countries: Liberia, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Union of South Africa. The remainder of the continent was made up of colonies of England, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, and Germany. The period of colonization had many effects on the Africa of today, including language and culture. For example, English is widely spoken in the former British colonies of Kenya and Uganda, and French is spoken in Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire. Many African nations have adopted a European language as their official tongue; however, dozens of tribal languages still exist.

Politically the continent is divided into two areas: the Arab states, located primarily in the northern Sahara Desert region; and "Black Africa," located below the Sahara Desert in the southern part of the continent. Currently there are more than 50 independent countries, most of which are republics governed by local population. Political independence has led to geographical confusion throughout Africa as nations discarded colonial names and formed various alliances. It's been a political and economic challenge with so many poor nations. To try to solve many of these problems, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was founded in 1963.

Africa is still an emerging continent. New countries and destinations will continue to open for your more adventuresome clients. It's a fabulous place to visit and experience an exciting and varied environment with spectacular scenery.

Description

Africa is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea and Europe on the north, the Atlantic Ocean on the west and south, and the Indian Ocean, Red Sea and the Middle East on the east.

Africa is large. Actually it is approximately 3.5

times larger than the United States and twice the size of Canada. As the world's second-largest continent in land mass, Africa stretches about 5,000 miles/8,047 km from north to south, and 4,700 miles/7,564 km at its widest point from west to east. The continent has a total area of 11,700,000 sq miles/30,420,000 sq km. Its basically narrow coastline is relatively smooth with few inlets and bays. Its four major islands are: Madeira, Canary, Cape Verde, and Madagascar.

The Equator bisects the continent nearly at its center, and most of the continent lies within the tropics. Most of Africa is a plateau lying more than 500 ft/152 m above sea level.

Deserts—Nearly two-fifths of Africa is desert. The three major deserts on the continent are the Sahara, Namib, and Kalahari. The world's largest desert, the Sahara, stretches across the northern part of the continent. The Namib Desert lies along the southwestern coast; and the Kalahari Desert occupies a large area of Botswana and South Africa.

Mountains—Several mountain ranges dot the continent, and include those found in the Rift Valley area, such as Mt. Kilimanjaro; the Atlas Mountain range in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia; the Drakensberg range of South Africa with peaks more than 10,000 ft/3,048 m above sea level; the Hoggar Mountains of southern Algeria, which reach 9,557 ft/2,913 m; and the Tibesti Massif in northern Chad.

Rivers—Some of the world's famous rivers are in Africa. The world's longest and most famous river, the Nile, flows 4,160 miles/6,695 km northward from the lakes of the Rift Valley to the Mediterranean Sea. The 2,600 mile/4,184 km long Niger River in west Africa flows from east and north through Mali, before swinging through a right angle and emerging as a large delta in the Atlantic Ocean. The Zaire or Congo River in west central Africa rises in Democratic Republic of the Congo, flowing north and west in a wide curve to the Atlantic. With its tributaries it drains approximately one-eighth of the entire continent. Another important river is the Zambezi, which rises in Zambia and flows 1,600 miles/2,575 km to the Indian Ocean. Its most famous site is Victoria Falls.

Lakes—Africa is also a continent with many lakes. The largest, Lake Victoria in East Africa, covers 26,828 sq miles/69,753 sq km, and is only second to Lake Superior as the largest fresh water lake in the world. Another very large lake is Lake Tanganyika, 420 miles/676 km in length and 5,000 ft/1,524 m deep.

Climates and Terrain—The continent of Africa has an extreme of climates and terrain. Because of this geographical variety, the continent is divided into three major areas running in a west-east direction, beginning at the top of the continent: northern, central, and southern.

Northern—The upper, northern third of Africa is desert, and Arabic is the principal language spoken. The north African countries have many things in common. Some of their similarities include:

- ∅ They have been visited, controlled, and governed by numerous peoples throughout the centuries.
- ∅ They are old and filled with historic sites, ruins, and fascinating culture.
- ∅ They are generally arid and fairly desolate.
- ∅ They are relatively sparsely populated.
- ∅ Tourist facilities and transportation are often not of world-class, western standards.

Central—The central part of Africa has a wide range of terrain and climate including jungles, savannas, tropical rain forests, mountains, and magnificent beaches. It even has snow topping some very high mountains, such as Mt. Kilimanjaro. The Equator passes through Kenya, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, and the Cameroons.

Southern—The lower third, or southern part of Africa, is similar to many parts of the U.S. and central Canada. There are swamps, plains, hills, mountains, waterfalls, rivers, gardens, farmland, and many other familiar geographic formations which remind your clients of their North American homes. But there is one major difference: they are in Africa with its spectacular sunsets, unique animals, and fabulous cultures.

Because Africa is so large and is difficult to summarize in a few paragraphs, a listing of some major topics about which your clients will have questions follows. Some of these topics include:

Animals—Wild, big-game animals are found literally throughout the continent from the western nation of Senegal to the southern portion of South Africa. Because of famine, drought, and poaching, some countries such as Mozambique, have few, if any, animals left.

Casinos—Casinos are found currently in Bo-

phuthatswana, Egypt, Cote d'Ivoire, Lesotho, Morocco, Senegal, Swaziland, and Togo. Take a coat and tie for entrance as some casinos are a bit more formal than others.

Communications—Telephones, telex and telegram facilities range from almost non-existent to excellent. Tell your clients that in many cases they should not expect U.S. or Canadian standards.

Culture—Much of the culture is based on ancient tradition and is varied, exciting, and must be experienced. Most of the local folk dances and festivals in this area of the world are seasonal, and you will need to check with individual tourist offices for specifics. The Muslim religious celebration, Ramadan, occurs at various times of the year in each Muslim country in northern Africa. Try to avoid sending your clients during this long celebration as it is not acceptable to eat and drink in public during the day, and service may not be up to normal standards.

Dress Standards—Much of this region is very religious and has extremely conservative dress standards. Notify your clients that while traveling North and West Africa, other than at the beach or hotel pool, skimpy clothing is generally not acceptable. Conservative dress is the rule: women should not wear shorts, short skirts, halter tops, etc., and men should not go shirtless unless positive they can. Also suggest they wear the coolest things they have, especially if traveling from April to October north of the Equator and November to March south of the Equator. Warmer clothing is required for winter travel and for evenings year round.

Food and Water—Your clients should assume it is not safe to eat the food or drink the water anywhere, except in South Africa. Sanitary conditions in most restaurants throughout, except South Africa, are not up to Western standards. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe (especially if eaten in a restaurant that caters to tourists), but they should always peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables, make sure meat is cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products, and stick with carbonated, bottled or boiled drinks.

Electrical Current—Electrical current is 220 volts throughout the entire continent. The European 2-pronged plug is accepted almost everywhere.

Entry Requirements—A valid passport and visa are necessary to travel to nearly every country in Africa. Some of the countries issue visas

upon arrival to clients holding valid U.S. and Canadian passports. It is advisable to check with each consulate/embassy prior to departure for current, updated entry requirements.

Language—French and English are the two principal European languages spoken and understood in most tourist areas throughout. A knowledge of French is advantageous in northern and western Africa, which was once French governed; English is popular throughout central and southern Africa, where the British settled.

Medical Facilities—There are adequate to excellent medical and dental facilities in the major cities. Those clients requiring special medicines or ones which are difficult to obtain are advised to take an adequate supply with them. Check with the individual embassies to see what accompanying documentation is required to take the medicine into the country.

Nightlife—Much of this area of the world knows how to party and enjoy its nightlife due to the French influence. Although a wide variety of nightlife can be found, such as discos, restaurants, etc., your clients should try to spend time in the local bars and restaurants which include entertainment. It can be quite lively. Also be sure they attend one of the numerous festivals, and some local folk cultural performances.

Politics—This entire region is subject to political unrest. It can happen while the client is in the country, often with no warning. Although it is generally very safe to travel throughout Africa, be sure you call the U.S. State Department's Hotline (202) 647-5225 to check on current conditions before sending clients to any country in Africa. Clients traveling this region should be notified that they should stay in the areas catering to tourists, should not travel at night any more than necessary, should not discuss politics unless positive the person listening is sympathetic with the client's own point of view, and should stay out of potentially dangerous places. Should these precautions be observed, the client should have a most rewarding experience.

Shopping—All destinations in Africa offer some kind of shopping ranging from very deluxe, quality, and expensive items to locally made handicrafts. No visit to this area is complete without visiting at least one souk (local, colorful market) or tribal market, where literally everything can be found. Bargaining is the general rule in the souks, tribal markets, and other places, but not in the more western-styled shops. Credit cards are often taken in the major shops, but some mer-

chants will add a hefty surcharge, up to 11 percent, if they are used.

TRIVIA QUIZ

Which countries are famous for its Mountain Gorillas?

Client Appeal

Every client will find the region hypnotic, spellbinding, and worth the effort made to visit with the difficulty being convincing many of them to go. Some of the realistic objections they might have include sanitation conditions, political and terrorist possibilities, language problems, etc. Those that go generally feel rewarded by the experience in myriad ways.

Tourist Season

Because of its massive size, there really is no perfect time to visit the entire continent. The northern part of Africa is primarily the Sahara Desert, where the temperatures, especially in the center of the desert, can exceed 130 F/54 C. The coastal region can be more temperate, due to the winds and a large body of water. The central part of the continent has a wide range of climate, including steaming jungles, dry savannas, and snow-covered mountains. South African climate is temperate, not unlike spring through fall in the central United States and Canada.

October is the optimal month to visit Africa, when the weather is much like North America's spring, with relatively little rain. See each unit for suggested times to visit.

Getting Around

Although Africa is one of the least known and visited continents because of its size, culture, and expense to visit, it does offer your clients many exciting options in terms of transportation. Your clients should experience as many types of transportation as possible to gain a great appreciation of this area. Some of the means available to visit the continent include air, cruises, trains, surface travel, and hot air balloons.

Air—Each country has at least one major international airport and adequate internal air service. The major airports for intercontinental travel include Casablanca (CAS), Cairo (CAI), Nairobi (NBO), Dakar (DKR), Lagos (LOS), and Johannesburg (JNB). South Africa, Zimbabwe,

Kenya, Egypt, and other countries have fairly good, reliable air service, but others do not. It is important to remind your clients to reconfirm their return or onward flights at least 72 hours prior to departure from each country and airport they are using. Much of Africa is not computerized, and flights can leave early, late, or not at all. Clients should be at the airport as early as possible, as once the boarding passes have been distributed, there is no recourse.

Cruises—Coastal countries often have ports, which offer excellent cruise stops. Some of the cruise destinations include Alexandria, Egypt (ALY); Mombasa, Kenya (MBA); and Durban (DUR) and Cape Town (CPT), South Africa. Regional cruises, such as around the Comoro Islands, Madagascar, Seychelles, and the east coast of Africa, offer your clients a great opportunity to see unique wildlife, birds, cultures, and truly spectacular tropical scenery. Cruise and yacht programs down the Nile River in Egypt are exciting and should be enjoyed. Suggest your clients take the most deluxe cruise or yacht program available to avoid possible inconveniences and stomach problems. Some of the major cruise and freighter companies offer exciting itineraries which visit various parts of the continent, such as Zanzibar. Some of these destinations are best seen by cruise, as one day is usually enough for most clients.

Trains—There is rail service throughout much of Africa, ranging from unmentionable to truly world class. Trains such as the Blue Train and Rovos Rail in South Africa are excellent. The rail service between Nairobi and Mombasa is historic, offers excellent animal viewing, and travels through countryside similar to the scenery found in the film, “Out of Africa.” The train between Dakar and Bamako is an experience to remember and should be suggested to extreme rail buff, allocentric clients. Egyptian train service, especially between Cairo and Luxor, is not world class, but adds to the Egyptian experience.

Surface Travel—Forget about renting a self-drive car for your clients in any country except South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Anywhere else is a duel with death. Chauffeur-driven cars with guides and escorted motorcoach tours are the best ways to see most of these

countries. Overland treks are popular. These relatively inexpensive treks spend up to several months traversing the continent, giving your clients a taste of the “real” Africa. Many of them require your clients to buy and cook the food, set up camp, wash dishes, and get the truck out of the mud.

In many parts of Africa, especially the northern, western, and central portions, taxis are a great way to go. There are two basic types of African taxis. First, there are taxis similar to those in North America. The procedure is to signal the taxi, climb in, tell the driver your destination, and pay when you arrive at your destination. Second, there are taxis which travel very rapidly from point A to point B, carrying a diverse, yet full load of people. This second type of taxi is boarded at a market or similar spot, departing when it is full, regardless of how many hours or days it takes. For a very small fee, your clients, and other occupants with tons of baggage, speed across the region nearly nonstop until the ultimate destination is reached. It’s a fabulous way to meet the people and experience rural Africa.

Note: A travel tip from a frequent world traveler, learned from desperation and near starvation, regarding these taxis follows. Suggest your clients pay for the entire taxi and not spend their entire trip waiting for it to fill up. Often the price is only a few dollars, so it is cheap to buy the unfilled places.

Hot Air Balloons—In parts of Africa, especially the eastern section, hot air balloons are an interesting alternative to see parts of the country. Expensive and worth the experience, hot air balloons should be pre-arranged for your clients to ensure their participation, provided weather cooperates. These usually silent balloons (noisy when the jet of fire ignites to inject heat into the balloons) offer your client a bird’s-eye view of terrain and animals.

Getting Around

Most of Africa is best seen on an escorted motorcoach tour or with a chauffeur-driven car and guide. See each country for specific suggestions on touring.

Groupings

To help you to learn the African countries more easily, the countries are grouped according to geographical location as shown below:

North Africa

Algeria
Chad
Djibouti
Egypt
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Libya
Mali
Mauritania
Morocco
Niger
Somalia
Sudan
Tunisia

West Africa

Benin
Burkina Faso
Cape Verde Islands
Cote d'Ivoire
Gambia
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Liberia
Nigeria
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Togo

Central Africa

Cameroon
Central African Republic
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Equatorial Guinea
Gabon
Republic of the Congo
Sao Tome and Principe

East Africa

Burundi
Kenya
Rwanda
Seychelles
Tanzania
Uganda

Southern Africa

Angola
Botswana
Comoros
Lesotho
Madagascar
Malawi
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Reunion
South Africa
Swaziland
Zambia
Zimbabwe