

Grand Valley State University

Living and Learning Abroad

**A Student's Guide to Studying Abroad at the University of Cape
Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana**

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I wish to thank Rebecca Hambleton for her help and wonderful insights into life at UCC, as well as Amanda Mujais and Jackie Lohman for sharing with me their experiences in Ghana as they happened, and finally to my family--whose support throughout my travels abroad was more helpful than they could ever imagine.

Thank you.

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Akwaaba!

The inspiration for this project came from my study abroad experience at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in Cape Coast, Ghana during the Fall semester of 2008. While the Padnos International Center provides an orientation for students before leaving, the Centre of International Education at UCC provides Limited on-site orientation. The purpose of this guide, then, is to provide GVSU students with information that will assist them in making the transition to life in Ghana as manageable as possible.

Living in a developing country such as Ghana is an amazing experience, but much of it is not easy. The transitions and transformations a student goes through during his or her trip can be quite difficult at times, but what is learned from these experiences is invaluable. This guide is comprised of certain aspects of my trip to Ghana. Specifically, information I wish I had known before going.

The positive aspects of studying in Ghana far outweigh the difficulties involved. In fact, many of the difficulties are what make this trip so wonderful. With that said, while reading this guide you may feel that parts of it focus on many frustrating, difficult aspects of my trip (this is because they do). The wonderful parts of being in Ghana are for you to discover on your own (and trust me, you will). I am writing this to make the difficult times easier. This isn't a guide to all-things-Ghana; it is simply designed to give you a head start for your trip.

Some initial helpful hints

Be very patient. Be very flexible. Everything moves at a much slower pace than you are probably used to. So if you are a person who is always on the go, be prepared!

You can ask people anything. If you have a question about a situation you are in or some cultural question, then ask someone! Even if it that person happens to be a stranger. I found very few topics to ever be taboo, and I began to learn so much more once I realized I could ask anyone anything and they would probably help me out.

A guide to the guide

I mention "in town" quite a bit throughout this guide. When I say this, I am referring to Cape Coast proper, which is just a short taxi ride from campus.

When I write about the market, I am referring either to the market on campus near the science buildings, or to any markets in town or the villages around campus.

I may use some words from the local languages throughout this guide, so if you see a word you don't understand (like the title of this section) then you can refer to the language guide at the end of this packet.

I mention some of the Ghanaian friends I made while abroad, but for the purposes of this guide I have changed their names.

Finally, understand that I am a white male, so all of my experiences in Ghana are from that perspective. I was able to receive some insight into the female point of view, but apart from that the opinions expressed here are strictly my own.

The Rough Adjustment

Life in Ghana is very different from life at GVSU, and it took me a while to get used to it. I went through stages where I loved it, and the next day everything would bother me. The fluctuations then would get frustrating, and I would be mad at myself for feeling so unstable. It would also reach the point where I was simply upset at myself for being upset because I should have adjusted to the culture sooner. It was rough at times, but I look back at it now and see that it was an important part of the process of adjusting to the culture. Sometimes I would feel my days of adjusting were over, and the next day would be difficult again. Something I often yearned for during my adjustment time was for someone that had done it before to tell me everything was all right. It would have been so comforting to know that what I was going through was normal and that I should just forge on and eventually I will make the transition. Therefore, that is the advice I pass on to you. Many Grand Valley students before you have gone through this, and they all came out the other side intact. Trust me; it will all be worth it!

The Centre for International Education

The turnover rate for staff at the CIE is high, so you may be dealing with people who are new to the position. This means that working with them can get frustrating. They may not know exactly how to help you with everything right away because it may be the first time they are dealing with the issue you are presenting. Keep in mind that many of the CIE staff have never been abroad, so it will be hard for them to know what adjustments may be difficult for you. Nevertheless, that doesn't mean they won't try to help you! They really do care and want you to enjoy your time. The best advice I can give up front is just to be patient.

Extending your visitor's permit

You will get a stamp on your passport when you go through airport security upon your arrival. This is your visitor's permit and it is only valid for *60 days*. There is an immigration office in town, and you should go there to get your permit extended before it gets too close to the 60-day deadline. You will need a letter from the CIE as well as other information, so make sure you have everything you need. Do not be surprised if you have to go a few times before it all works out and your permit is renewed.

I confused the validity period of my visa with that of my visitor's permit, so I ended up being a few weeks late and had to pay a fine. I could have been in much more trouble if I had come across an officer on the street who asked for my permit, only to find it expired!

Money

The currency in Ghana is the Ghana Cedi (pronounced "seedy") which is equivalent to the American dollar through whatever the current exchange rate may be. The "cent" in Ghana is called the Pesewa. There was a re-denomination of the Cedi in 2007, so there may be some people who use the old denomination. For example, they may say something costs 10,000, but what they really mean is 1 Ghana Cedi; or they may ask you to pay 500 for some groundnuts, when the cost is actually 5 pesewas. With practice, the conversion will be instantaneous.

Exchanging money

I found it best to bring about half cash and half traveler's checks. The larger the bills you have, the better exchange rate you get, but it may only be a few percentage points difference.

If you are cashing traveler's checks then you have to go to a bank. Make sure to bring an ID with you (passport, ISIC card, etc.). The banks are usually crowded and I waited in line over an hour almost every time I went. I did get lucky a few times, I went when there was only a short line, but that definitely was not typical. You can also only cash a limited amount of money at a time (around \$250).

Exchanging cash is much easier than traveler's checks. You can go to a Foreign Exchange (Forex) Bureau in town. The exchange rate is better than the bank, and there is rarely a wait.

There are also ATMs at the banks that you can use. I never did this, but I understand that only a small fee is charged for withdrawing cash.

Food

Food is an interesting topic. I have an extremely strong stomach, and apparently, one lined with steel because apart from a few morning tummy aches I had no digestive problems. I ate pretty much everything, too! So please keep in mind that most people probably will get sick at some point from eating the food, so my experiences may be unique. In my opinion, though, it probably would be worth it to explore the food a bit, even if you do get sick from it.

The first meal I had was the night the CIE picked me up from the airport. We went to a restaurant called Papaye and had fried chicken with fried rice. Not exactly what I thought of as being an African dish! It is not a traditional food, but it is one that is eaten quite often. The local dishes can take some getting used to, but I would suggest giving each one multiple tries. Many of them tend to be quite spicy, too, so keep that in mind. I really did not like much of the local food, but by the time I left I could not decide what I wanted my last meal to be because I loved them all so much!

My favorite local dish was banku with groundnut soup. Banku is made from corn and cassava and is pounded into a sticky ball that looks something like a lump of thick mashed potatoes. It is usually eaten with a soup or stew. You eat it with your right hand (never use your left!) by picking up a chunk and

making it into a small bowl with your fingers. You then dip this into the soup and it is delicious. Well, at least I thought so!

I also enjoyed red-red which is a dish of fried plantains with beans and red palm-oil.

Chop bars

These are small restaurants that usually only have a few things on the menu. Very often, you eat on long benches next to low tables. Some chop bars will specialize in a certain dish like red-red or fried rice, but others will have a variety. Chop bars may not have menus, but often a painted sign near the entrance will list what dishes are “usually” offered. However, many times I asked for a dish that was advertised out front but was not available that day. Once again, be patient and flexible!

Street vendors

There are many people who sell food from stalls on the street (especially near taxi stations) and in the markets. The prices for food do not vary too much from vendor to vendor, with differences only being a few pesewas. Fresh fruit such as apples, coconut, oranges, pineapples, bananas and watermelon are common. Other foods include grilled spicy kebabs, grilled plantain with groundnuts, hard-boiled eggs with spicy relish, omlette sandwiches (usually only at night), bo-froot (a thick fried dough ball), egg rolls, fried yam, chicken and fried rice.

Restaurants

There are more tourist-oriented restaurants in town. These will be more expensive, but you can have foods like pizza and other Western dishes for an occasional treat.

Cooking yourself

It was fun for me to try to cook things myself, though I never was very good. Many students will cook for themselves and they will be more than willing to help you with getting started. It can be fun to go to the market and buy fresh ingredients to cook a meal, so that is definitely something to do while you are there.

Water and food sanitation

Expect to get sick. With all the new foods and different sanitation criteria, it is almost certain you will get sick from food at some point.

Be careful for dehydration—always keep drinking water.

Do not buy plastic satchels of water unless they appear to be mass manufactured—some people will just tie up tap water in plastic bags. You want the water you drink to be “pure.”

When buying fruit, you might want to avoid fruit that has already been peeled or cut. Vendors often use one knife all day long and are not responsible about cleaning it. I always bought my pineapple chopped by the vendors, but that may not have been the safest thing to do.

Washing hands

When at a restaurant or chop bar, you may be given a bowl and soap with which to wash your hands. You must only touch the soap and water with your right hand. You are usually also given a towel to dry off with.

“You are invited”

Whenever someone is eating, it is customary to tell those near you, “You are invited.” This is inviting those near to share in the food, but usually people just respond with, “Thank-you” or “Me da se” and do not accept the invitation.

Cultural Norms

The country is divided up into different regions (like states) each with unique ethnic groups. Each of these ethnic groups may have cultural norms that differ from each other, so keep in mind that everyone you meet may not originally be from the Cape Coast area. This also means that what I say may not apply to *all* Ghanaians.

Respect for elders

It is expected for people to show much respect for their elders. This includes carrying things for them and running simple tasks that an elder may ask.

Quite often students do not call professors or lecturers by name; it is always “sir” or “madam.” They will call them by name outside of class to peers, but never to the professor’s face.

Personal boundaries

Classrooms, markets and taxis tend to be quite crowded. Bumping and squeezing past people is normal. If you try to wait for it to clear up, you may be waiting a while. The best thing to do is just to head into it and push your way through. Everyone does it, so don’t feel bad.

My first big shock with how crowded things can be was during my first biology lab. The room was so jammed full of students that I thought I was at a concert. Then the lab started and we had to push our way through the crowd to visit the different stations involved in the lab. I was completely exhausted when it was finally over.

Taxi’s and tro-tros can be packed full of people, and most people seem not to feel it as an inconvenience. You will get used to practically sitting on top of other people if you do much travel by tro-tro. It seemed obtrusive to me at first, but after a while it seemed almost comforting to be next to people. It gave me a good chance to talk with new people, too.

Holding hands

Friends will hold hands, so if you see people holding hands it implies nothing about a romantic relationship. This includes heterosexual males. Friends will often hold hands when walking together, or will simply continue to hold hands after a greeting and have an entire conversation with hands clasped together.

Views on LGBT individuals

There may be resources for LGBT students, but society in general does not show much support for LGBT issues. UCC and GVSU have an agreement such that the CIE will be supportive and offer assistance, when needed, to students who are struggling with the differences in cultural expectations. Outside of that, though, you will want to rely on your own judgment as to how to address the topic.

Focus on family/community as a whole

There is a focus on the community such that everyone feels responsible for the well-being of the community. For example, if a child is misbehaving in the street, a stranger may reprimand the child if a parent is not around. This is completely acceptable, and even UCC students will scold children who are misbehaving in the surrounding villages.

This concern over the well-being of the community includes much concern over the well-being of other individuals. For me, this felt quite intrusive at first because I felt people were always wanting to know how I was doing and trying to help me too much. I felt my privacy was being invaded, but it was just those around me trying to care for me.

All of this leads to one major difference between Ghanaian culture and US culture: In Ghana, it is not seen as dangerous to "talk to strangers." Anyone and everyone will talk to you. This was difficult for me at first because I felt many people were trying to "scam" me in some way, but for the most part people just see you as a foreigner and want to help you.

An example of this was during my last few days in Ghana. I was in Accra by myself and got lost. I was trying to find my way to the hostel I was staying at, and I asked this man who passed me on the sidewalk. He actually went with me almost half-way through the city, riding in various tro-tros and taking short-cuts through markets until we reached a taxi station that had taxis going to where my hostel was located. This man went completely out of his way to help me find mine, and it is a perfect example of how helpful people can be to strangers.

Michael's many mothers

One day, my friend Michael took me to his home village near town and introduced me to his family. The confusing part was that he kept introducing me to women and saying each one was his mother. When we reached around five mothers, I had to have him explain it to me! It turns out he considered any sister of his father to be his mother, and any subsequent wife of his

father's he also considered his mother. Family is not defined as it is in the US, and these definitions of family may even vary between different Ghanaian ethnic groups.

Punctuality

Punctuality is definitely not a priority in Ghana. Given times are quite often approximate, and events usually will not start until well after the original scheduled time. This includes classes not usually starting on time. It may get to such an extreme that classes won't always begin during the first scheduled week. When I was at UCC, not all of my classes had officially met until after the third week of the semester! This is not ubiquitous among Ghanaians, though, and the importance of time management varies from region to region. For example, the chorus director whom I sang with was very strict about students being punctual and our concerts starting on time. He would get quite upset sometimes because so many students were late for events. This was nice for me because we could relate on this frustration.

Dinner with the Director

I was scheduled to have dinner at the house of the Director of the Centre for International Education one evening. The CIE said they would pick me up from the library around 6:00pm to take me to the house for dinner at 6:30pm. It was after 7:30pm before I was picked up. When we arrived at the house, dinner was not even ready, yet!

Biology quiz

One day I had a biology quiz that was originally scheduled at 12:30pm. We waited for some time, and around 1:15pm, a TA came in and told us the quiz was pushed back until 3:00pm. We came back at 3pm and waited, until finally we took the quiz around 4:30pm!

Greetings

Greeting someone is very important in the society. When you see someone you know it isn't good enough to simply wave hello from a distance. It is customary to walk over to them, shake hands and have a short conversation. Perhaps this is one reason why many students are constantly late for class!

Right hand rule

It is considered extremely rude to make gestures with your left hand. This specifically applies to eating, greetings, exchanging money or making any gesture towards someone.

Classroom

Education is priority

Being a student in Ghana is quite different than being a student in the United States. One big difference is that the vast majority of college students at UCC do not work, and if they do work, it is usually selling cell phone cards (units) to other students. When students are in school, the focus is on their studies. Yes, there are those who slack off in class and “chill” all day, but the vast majority of students spend their days studying. The library is open until 10:00pm or so, and it is common for many people to use the library until that time, even on the weekends. More common, though, is for students to use empty classrooms for studying either in groups or by themselves. Walking around campus at night, it is rare to find a classroom that does not have students studying in it.

Unreliable times/locations

Classrooms and meeting times are not set in stone as they are at Grand Valley. Very often, the class will meet at the original scheduled time the first day, but then decide on a new day/time to meet. This is one of the many reasons to *make friends with people in class* and have their phone numbers. Much information is passed strictly by word-of-mouth and you don't want to be left out.

Textbooks

Some classes may have books, but for the most part everything is photocopied. Usually before or after each class students will go to the science market and have photocopies made for the next class period. By the end of the semester, you may have many chapters worth of photocopies from various books. Some photocopy centers will even specialize in a specific class, so you can check there to see if anything new for the class has been put out. Once again, getting photocopies is easier if you have a friend in the class. The photocopies are cheap; usually only a few cents per page.

The bookstore on campus is outsourced to a separate book chain, and is very limited with regards to academic material. There is an African literature section with some books by African authors, but other than that the bookstore is quite unimpressive.

Class representatives

At the beginning of the semester the class assigns one student to be the “class rep.” Their responsibility is to act as a liaison between the professor and the students. Quite often, it is the class rep who will hand back papers, and who will mediate discussions in class. The class rep is a good person to get to know because of the connections with the lecturer.

Registration procedures

Registration is a complicated process, so pay attention to everything you are told. If you are lucky, someone from the CIE may take you around and help you with it. Registration involves visiting different departments and getting forms stamped and approved. You will get a printout of your registration, and

it would be a good idea to keep several copies of it. I never received a student ID, so I always used my registration to identify myself as a student.

Dress

Students tend to wear nicer, modest clothing to class. This often means pants and collared shirts, and possibly dresses for females. I wore shorts sometimes, but always felt really out of place whenever I did. I would suggest bringing a fair amount of “snappy-casual” clothing to wear to class. For females, they do wear shorts and skirts and other “cute” things when they are out at night or going to the club, but usually keep it modest for class.

Religion

There are many different Christian student groups on campus, and for many students it is important to be associated with one. I was often asked to join others in their fellowship, which I did. However, I did feel like I was always being pressured or recruited to join a particular group. I told people since I was only at UCC for a short time that I just wanted to get a survey of the different groups, and therefore was not interested in devoting my time to just one. Evangelism is very widespread, and you will often see students preaching on campus about various topics.

The churches are generally quite charismatic with very active singing, dancing, and adoration.

Muslim community

There is a Mosque on campus and others in surrounding villages, including one in town. Southern Ghana is dominated by Christianity, whereas there is a more Muslim influence in the North.

Transportation

Local travel

Sometimes it felt like the only vehicles on the roads were taxis, and this isn't too far from the truth. Taxis will constantly be honking their horns at you as they go by. This is their way of asking if you need a ride. While all the horn blasts can get annoying, it does make local transportation quite easy.

Dropping vs. regular fare

“Dropping” is the type of taxi ride that we have in the US, where you pay for a ride and you ride alone in the taxi to your destination. More often in Ghana you will want a regular fare which means the taxi will be filled with as many people as possible, often stopping on the side of the road to pick up more passengers. Riding in this type of taxi is more like riding a bus, in that it is on more-or-less a fixed route and you can get out whenever you feel like it. It is much cheaper to ride regular fare. For example, from

the Medical student hostel to campus cost 30 pesewas for regular fare, but was 2 Ghana cedis for dropping. Check to see if a taxi is dropping or regular fare before getting in, because taxis will often try to have you “take dropping” if they know you are a foreigner.

Taxi Stations, or taxi rings, are large open areas where taxis corral and fill up with passengers. Usually taxis going to specific destinations will be in the same area of the station every day and will have signs on them for their destination, quite often with the driver calling out for passengers. When you are walking through the station people will probably ask you where you are going. If you tell them, then they will point you in the direction of the appropriate tro-tro or taxi.

Long distance travel

Tro-tros—these are basically 12 to 15 passenger vans that were probably never meant to hold 12 to 15 passengers. There are two types of tro-tros, just as there are two types of taxis. Some tro-tros are assigned to stations and travel only between them, and others roam freely around town. You can either go to a lorry station to get a ticket for a long-distance tro-tro, or you can simply flag one down as it's going by. They can be dangerous to ride in because of the crammed quarters and speeding drivers, but they are the cheapest way to travel.

STC buses—these are large charter buses similar to Greyhound in the US. They have approximate departure times from their various stations, and they also usually used for long-distance travel.

Ford vans—there is a “Ford Van Station” in town that has large passenger vans with air-conditioning that travel between the large major cities. Ford Vans are the most expensive of the three travel options.

Phones

Phones are pay-as-you-go. There are vendors on the street who sit under umbrellas or behind kiosks that sell “credit” for your phone. You simply go up to a vendor and ask if they have credits for your network. They may be able to send them directly to your phone, or you will buy a card with a pin number on it that you text into your phone. The rates you get charged for calls may vary. In the fall of 2008, networks averaged around 5 minutes of international talk time for 1 US dollar. Texts were usually around 7 cents or so. The exact rate would vary. All incoming calls and texts are free, even if from outside of the country. This means your family can call or text your phone and it does not cost you anything.

There are two options for purchasing a phone:

Buy a phone

Phone networks may sell phones for purchase (some will have offices in town). Phones may range in price from as low as \$25, but may go for much higher. Be sure to keep all the paperwork on your phone

if you buy it from an actual network dealer. If something goes wrong with it, you may be able to get it replaced.

Buy a SIM card

You can bring your phone from home and replace the SIM card in your phone with a card from one of the Ghana networks. Be sure to check your phone before you leave to make sure your SIM card is removable and your phone is compatible with SIM cards from other networks.

Internet

The first thing to understand is that there is internet, but it is extremely slow and unreliable. Sometimes it will work fairly well and other times you will sit for long periods of time just waiting for a page to load. This was a source of big frustration for me until I learned to bring a book or something else to do while I was at an internet café. The network is especially bad if it rains, and random power outages and loss of internet connection can be maddening. Be sure to save what you are doing often!

Internet cafes

They charge a rate usually based on time. You buy time and are given an access number to use on a machine. They say that you can leave the café and the time left on your access number will remain until you use it again, but with my experience that was not the case.

UCC internet

As a UCC student, you are given 30 hours or so of internet to use at the ICT center located in the basement of the Library. This internet, while free, is probably the worst in terms of speed and reliability. Quite often you will go to use the net and those at the front desk will tell you, "The link is down." This is something you should expect, so try not to let it drive you crazy!

Personal computer

Wireless internet is beginning to catch on, and when I left in December of 2008, there were a few places on campus that had wireless. This means that if you bring a computer you could possibly use it—and you wouldn't be the only one. Not every student has a computer (in-fact, some had never even used one before coming to college), but it isn't *uncommon* for a student to have one.

Should you bring your computer? That decision is obviously up to you. I chose not to for a few reasons. One is the dirty and dusty atmosphere. I felt that there were major maintenance risks if I were to bring it. Also, there isn't much support for if something were to go wrong with my computer. I got by perfectly well without one, and actually enjoyed being forcibly separated from my dependence on computers and the internet.

Something I did find to be very useful was a flash drive. I used this to save any of my work throughout the semester. That way I could work on any project of mine no matter which café or what computer I used.

Living Arrangements

As an exchange student, you will more than likely be placed in a university hostel. This is a living center in which two students are in a room, and a kitchen and bathroom is shared between two adjacent rooms. The kitchen is basically just a room with a sink, because people tend to bring their own stove-tops; either electric or gas. There will probably be a shower, as well, but the water won't always be flowing. It is a good idea to invest in some buckets with handles so you can collect water if you notice the flow is getting weak. Neither the water nor electricity was off for more than a day or so while I was there, but I understand there have been long periods where one or both have been.

The rooms have beds, but you will need to bring your own sheets. It might not be a bad idea to bring a pillow from home if you can fit it, because the pillows they provide aren't the best.

Washing clothes is done by hand and then hung out to dry on lines behind your hostel. There are also "laundry services" which are basically women who travel to the hostel to wash clothes. You will have to work out the price for that with them. I always washed my own clothes because I actually enjoyed it, believe it or not!

Race

Treatment as a "white"

One of the hardest aspects for me was how my race affected the way people treated me. Many people (usually not students, but villagers) seem to give preferential treatment to the "obruni" (white person). Quite often I heard the phrase, "I am proud of you whites," or "It is my dream to marry a white." With these attitudes towards "white people," also comes some special treatment. I had a hard time trying to decide sometimes if people were doing things for me just to be kind, or because I was white. Such attitudes can be difficult to deal with, and race often became a topic of discussion for me.

Different shades of white

From what I noticed, many people are considered "white" in Ghana when they wouldn't be in the US. For example, there was a group of tourists visiting campus one day from Korea, and my friend Hannah pointed at them and said to me, "Look, it's your people! Are you going to say hello?" She considered most people that weren't African to be white.

“Obruni! How are you? I am fine, thank you!”

Obruni, even though it is the local word for white person, is often extended to include all non-African races. So if you consider yourself to be Asian, Indian, or something other than white, you may be called “white” by Ghanaians.

Safety**Guards on campus**

UCC is a closed campus, and all the road entrances are guarded to control people coming in and out. There are also guards who walk around campus. I always felt very safe on campus, even if I was out late at night. Keep in mind if you are out late at night that transportation becomes very limited after dark. Don't stay out too late until you know when the last taxis are running so you can get back to your hostel.

Authority figures can range from being extremely helpful to overly authoritative

The final exam for my biology class took place in one of the large lecture halls. Before exams, students are patted down by security to make sure they aren't bringing anything in to cheat with on the exam. Well, I had neglected to bring my identification, and the guard refused to let me in to take the exam! There happened to be another guard there whom I knew from the library, and she went into the hall and had the professor identify me as a student. It all worked out in the end, but this easily could have turned into a much larger problem.

Security checkpoints

While doing any long-distance travelling, it is a good idea to keep your passport and other papers on you. There are checkpoints along major roads where police check the condition of vehicles and to see if anything illegal is being transported. Sometimes they will check your papers, but as long as your permit is valid, then you are fine. It helps to have proof of your student status, as well, because you may get treated a little better if they know you aren't just a tourist. I was actually asked once to get out of the tro-tro at a checkpoint. I was nervous at first, but all they had me do was go over to the immigration officer. The tro-tro waited while the officer checked my papers, and then I was sent on my way.

Tourist Areas

There are many tourist areas in Ghana to check out. Student groups often take trips, so look out for signs on notice boards for group trip. You should also talk to your Ghanaian friends about travelling, because they may know of interesting places near their home towns you could visit. For example, my friend David and I took a trip to visit his family in the Eastern Region. While we were there, he showed

me an oil palm plantation and we were able to take a tour of it. Palm-oil is used in a lot of cooking and is a large industry in Ghana.

Visiting the capital city of **Accra** is a fun trip, especially if you make it on a market day and go to the huge markets that cover large portions of the city. There are also museums and other national monuments to visit.

Nzulezu is a cool village to the east of Cape Coast that is built over the water, entirely on stilts!

The **castles at Elmina and Cape Coast** are a must! They are quite easy to get to, and are an amazing and humbling experience to tour.

All the regional capitals are good travel spots. This includes (obviously) **Cape Coast**, but also **Takoradi** to the West and **Kumasi** to the North.

Volta region is in western Ghana, and it is very scenic. There are monkey sanctuaries, mountains, waterfalls, and many other nature-related sights. One of these is of course Lake Volta, which has the largest surface area of any reservoir in the world. If you can travel to the Volta Region and spend a few days there, you really could see a lot.

Kakum National Park is very close to Cape Coast, and has an awesome tree-top canopy walk.

Volunteer Opportunities

There are plenty of volunteer opportunities on campus and around town. The CIE can help you get in contact with places where you can volunteer. You may have to ask them several times before you finally are put in contact with the proper people. Be persistent!

Some volunteer opportunities include:

The campus hospital

Primary and secondary schools on campus

A local school for the blind and deaf

Global Momma's, a women's center in town

Gratis, a vocational training center for men and women

Language

There are dozens of languages in the country, each of which may have different dialects. The Central Region (of which Cape Coast is the capital) is a region dominated by the Fante people with its main language being Fante. Twi (pronounced more like "chwee") is the most widespread language in the country, understood by most Ghanaians. More than likely you will learn a mix of Twi and Fante.

There may be a language proficiency course offered by the university, so check with the CIE if it is available while you are there.

Accents, pidgin English and slang

It may be difficult to understand people at first, but you will get used to it. It is easier to learn if you try to use the slang yourself. The other students know that it is Ghanaian slang, so they really like it when you try to use it.

Learning the language

It took some time for my ears to get used to hearing a new language and at first, it all sounded like gibberish. I just kept trying to learn and eventually my ear caught on and I could understand words that people were saying. People were impressed when I would try to speak in the local language. I carried around a pocket-sized pad of paper and I used it only for Twi words and phrases. With the different dialects, there may be multiple ways of saying the same thing, so be aware of that if it seems overwhelming.

Helpful Words and Phrases

Obruni	white person	Ne	and
Akwaaba	welcome	Nanti ye	safe journey
Chalay	friend/mate	Enne	today
Me da ase	thank you	Enra	tomorrow
Wo ho te sen?	How are you?	Echina	yesterday
Eh te sen?	How are you?	Bohkoh	very well
Me ho ye	I am well	Me boh me ho mo dein	I'm trying my best
Eh ye	good	Mmache	good morning
Dah be	no	Mmaha	good afternoon
Me do wo	I love you	Mmadjo	good evening
Ye fre wo sen?	What is your name?	Me ba	I'm coming
Ye fre me...	My name is...	Siseeya	right now
Nsu	Water	Wo se sein?	What are you saying?
Eduane	food	Ne bisheeya	we will meet
Bra	come	Me ho en ye	I am not well
Ko	go	Me yare	I am sick
Me ko abaa	I'll go and come back	Adein?	Why?
Me powacho	please	Me ko sua de	I'm going to learn
Me en tiase	I don't understand	Ma ba	I'm coming
Wo ca Borofo ana?	Do you speak English?	Din	Name
Me sua twi	I'm learning Twi	Me din deh	My name is...
Ma mein	I am full	Wo din deh sein?	What is your name?
Ma bre	I am tired	Jare	bathe/shower
Si nyoma	wash clothes	Enumwrey	evening
Ka kra ka kra	small/little	Aye koo	welcome/greetings
Na won so eh?	and you, too?	Yaa yeh	(response)
Me pe (se)	I want (to)	eye sein?	how much?(quantity/cost)
Me pe	I like/enjoy	Baako	one
Wo firi hein?	Where are you from?	Mienu	two
Me firi...	I am from...	Miensa	three
Me toh..	I will buy...	Enang	four
Wei	this/that	Enoum	five
Paa	(general superlative)	Nsia	six
Wo ye den?	What are you doing?	Nsong	seven
Yen	us/we	Nwotwe	eight
Eh kom di me	I'm hungry	Nkrong	nine
Twen	wait	Edu	ten
Mesi	stop/drop (taxi)		
Wo ko hen?	Where are you going?		
Kasa	talk		