

WEST AFRICAN CULTURAL TIPS

FAMILY

- **Embrace family involvement.** Family life is the bedrock for most West Africans. Families make decisions together. Families are a critical source of support.
- **Listen to stories and learn traditions respectfully.** Storytelling is a way to pass on history, culture, and traditions. It's important not to belittle traditional culture such as men's Boubou robes, favourite foods, festivals, songs and dance.
- **Be aware of the high importance placed on marriage and children.** Choosing not to marry or have children could be regarded as strange or looked down upon. Singles usually live with parents until they get married.

POWER

- **Understand that God or gods are respected and often feared.** This can lead to a fatalistic way of life when compared to Western culture. Time orientation is also different. Since people do not control the future, the focus tends to be to live for the moment.
- **Understand the power of hierarchy.** Most society is organised along hierarchical lines. Each person's place in society is determined by birth and the family's social status. Subtle condescension may be expected, but not desired. It is important to dress according to status, and dress may also elevate status.
- **Understand that men traditionally have significantly more power than women.** Traditionally there is separation of men and women.

HONOUR

- **Accept hospitality and be hospitable.** A guest should not need to ask for water. A host is to make the guest feel comfortable and welcome. For example, if hosting a Muslim for a meal, be aware of or discretely ask what may be served or if there are any food preferences.
- **Be inclusive. Multicultural community is the result of honouring different cultures.** Be interested in other cultures. Learn elements of other cultures out of respect. Share your culture. Life is a communal affair.
- **Accept that indirect communication is often used to preserve the honour of both the speaker and the listener.** For potentially sensitive questions, being discrete and asking them in more private settings may minimise the risk of shaming someone.

Be aware that family, power, and honour are traditionally valued above justice and truth.