

Burkina Faso

Unity-Progress-Justice”



The official flag of Burkina Faso



The rural countryside



Woman in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso

Location and Geography

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country in West Africa and is around 274,200 square kilometres in size. It is surrounded by six other nations: Mali to the north, Niger to the east, Benin to the southeast, Togo and Ghana to the south, and the Ivory Coast to the southwest. As of 2014, it had an estimated population of 17.3 million people. It is home to 42 people per square kilometer. The capital of Burkina Faso is Ouagadougou.

This country is made up of two types of land. Majority of the country is covered by a peneplain, with a few isolated hills. However, the southwest of the country is the opposite. It forms a sandstone massif and houses the highest peak in Burkina Faso—Mount Tenakourou. At an elevation of 749 meters (or 2,457 ft), Mount Tenakourou stands out in the relatively flat country which averages an altitude of 400 meters.



Mount Tenakourou

The country we know as Burkina Faso was formerly known as the Republic of Upper Volta up until 1984. It owes its former name to the three rivers which run across it. The Black Volta, the White Volta, and the Red Volta. The Black Volta is one of only two rivers which flows year round and is a primary source of water to many animals, and sadly, people.



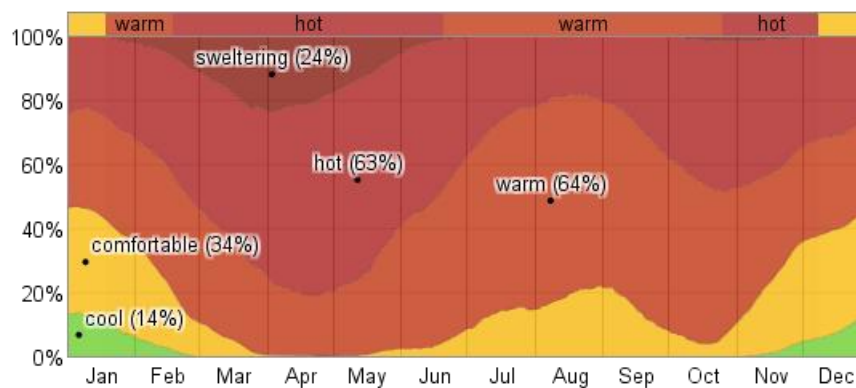
Natives canoeing in the Black Volta



Location of Burkina Faso

Climate and Environment

Burkina Faso has a primarily tropical climate but has two very distinct seasons—the rainy season and the dry season. During the rainy season, the country can see anywhere between 600-900 millimetres of rainfall. This season typically starts in May and ends in September, however, it tends to be much shorter in the north portion of the country. The dry season typically starts around mid-September and continues through until late April or early May. It is during this season that water shortages occur and many families find themselves walking very far to find an open spring or source of water. Over the course of a year, the temperature typically varies from 17°C to 40°C and is rarely below 15°C or above 42°C.



Climate Facts:



On average, the temperatures are always high



There is the most amount of rain in May, June, July, and September



On average, the warmest month is March



On average, the coolest month is August



September is the wettest month



October is the driest month

Government and Politics

Burkina Faso has had a fairly tumultuous and violent political and governmental history. Once a colony of France, it gained independence on August 5th, 1960. Formerly known as the Republic of Upper Volta until 1984, it was renamed Burkina Faso after the coup d'état between moderates in the CSP (Council of Popular Salvation) and the radicals (led by Cpt. Thomas Sankara). The internal political struggle and Sankara's leftist rhetoric led to his arrest and subsequent efforts to bring about his release, directed by Cpt. Blaise Compaoré. This release effort resulted in yet another military coup d'état on 4 August 1983.

The coup brought Sankara to power and his government began to implement a series of "revolutionary" programs which included mass-vaccinations, infrastructure improvements, the expansion of women's rights, encouragement of domestic agricultural consumption, and anti-desertification projects.

On October 15th 1987, Sankara along with twelve other officials were killed in a coup d'état organized by Blaise Compaoré, Sankara's former colleague and Burkina Faso's president until October 2014. After the coup and although Sankara was known to be dead, some CDRs mounted an armed resistance to the army for several days.

In more recent history, Burkina Faso has had tremendous issues with voter turnout due to a large rural population and lack of political freedom. Human rights organizations have long criticized the Compaoré administration.

In October 2014, of President Compaoré, facing mounting pressure and large protests, resigned after 27 years in office. Lt. Col. Isaac Zida said that he will lead the country during its transitional period before the planned 2015 presidential election, but there are concerns over his close ties to the former president. In November of that year, the opposition parties provided a new system for transitional authority and Michel Kafando was made transitional president.



President Compaoré in 2013



Michel Kafando, transition president of Burkina Faso

Culture

Burkina Faso, with its long history and wide variety of communities and ethnicities, has a very interesting mix of music, cuisine, and art.

Cuisine

Burkina Faso's cuisine takes inspiration from many influencers including English, Arabic, and Indian cuisine. Typical of West African cuisine, Burkina Faso's cuisine is based on staple items of food such as sorghum, millet, rice, maize, peanuts, potatoes, beans, yams, and okra. Protein can be found in many different kinds of nuts, chickens, chicken eggs and fish. Meat is considered a delicacy in the area. A typical Burkinabe beverage is Palm Wine, which is



produced from fermented palm sap. Zoom kom, or grain water, is the national drink of Burkina Faso and has a water and cereal base and is best drunk with ice cubes.

Kedjenou, a traditional chicken and vegetable meal

Art

Burkina Faso is rich in traditional arts and crafts. Often, these crafts are produced for the tourist industry—particularly in the capital, Ouagadougou.

Theatre plays a vital role in Burkinabe culture. Performances in Burkina Faso often combine colonial influences with traditional ceremonies. One of the most common types of performances include singing and drumming with a collection of performers dancing in colourful masks. With independence from France in 1960, a new style of theatre was born. It was inspired by forum theatre and aimed at educating and entertaining the rural population. Plays often portray traditional legends and moral lessons.



Traditional crafts

Sports



As with many African nations, the national sport of Burkina Faso is football (soccer). Their national team is currently ranked 71st in the world by FIFA. It is played both professionally and recreationally, with many children growing up playing the sport on various fields or in the streets with siblings and friends. Other popular sports in Burkina Faso include: cycling, rugby, handball, basketball, tennis, running, boxing and marital arts.

Various members of the Burkina Faso national football team

Clothing

Traditionally, woman in Burkina Faso wear a long cotton skirt wrapped at the waist. Men traditionally wear a cotton shirt and trousers. Many men choose to wear embroidered robes, showing a Muslim influence. People who live in urban centers tent to wear increasingly western style clothing. Farmers often wear cut of jeans. Clothing is brightly coloured and embroidered with tribal prints.

Religion

The precise statistics of the religions practiced in Burkina Faso are often hard to measure. This is due to the fact that Islam and Christianity are often practiced in tandem with traditional African religions. Most recent figures estimate that approximately 50 per cent of people are practicing Muslims, 20 per cent are practicing Christians and the remaining 30 per cent practice various traditional African religions. Unlike many western nations, atheism is virtually non-existent, with 99.6 per cent of the population identifying with some form or religion.



Bani Grand Mosque in Chiappinik



Women in typical, modern clothing

Language

Burkina Faso is an incredibly diverse and multilingual country. An estimated 69 languages are spoken in the country, with approximately 60 being indigenous. The traditional African language of Mossi is spoken by 40 per cent of the population. The official language of the country is French, which was introduced during the colonization by France. French is used in all government institutions, public services, administration and by the media.



Administration building in the capital city of Ouagadougou



Construction of rural public service center

Health, Education & Economy

Education

Education in Burkina Faso is divided into primary, secondary and higher education. High school costs 25,000 CFA (or 50 US dollars) per year, which is only affordable to the countries affluent. Male education is deemed more important than females, and therefore, their literacy rates are much higher. Due to many young girls having home obligations such as cooking, taking care of younger siblings, and fetching water (often miles away), they usually are forced to drop out at a very young age. These problems are often amplified in the many rural areas of the country.

The 2008 UN Development Program Report ranked Burkina Faso as the country with the lowest level of literacy in the world. In 1990, their literacy rate was only 12.8 per cent, which doubled in 2008 to 25.3 percent.



A well at the site of a new school built by an American charity organization

Health

In 2012, the average life expectancy was estimated at 57 for male and 59 for female. The under-five mortality rate and the infant mortality rate were respectively 102 and 66 per 1000 live births. In 2014, the median age of its inhabitants is 17 and the estimated population growth rate is 3.05 per cent.

In 2011, health expenditures was 6.5 per cent of GDP; the maternal mortality ratio was estimated at 300 deaths per 100000 live births and the physician density at 0.05/1000 population in 2010. In 2012, it was estimated that the adult HIV prevalence rate (ages 15–49) was 1.0 per cent. According to the 2011 UNAIDS Report, HIV prevalence is declining among pregnant women who attend antenatal clinics. According to a 2005 World Health Organization report, an estimated 72.5 per cent of Burkina Faso's girls and women have suffered female genital mutilation, administered according to traditional rituals.

Central government spending on health was 3 per cent in 2001. As of 2009, studies estimated there were as few as 10 physicians per 100,000 people. In addition, there were 41 nurses and 13 midwives per 100,000 people.

Economy

Agriculture represents 32 per cent of its GDP (gross domestic product) and occupies 80 per cent of the jobs in the country. In particular, in the south and southwest, commonly reared crops include sorghum, pearl millet, corn and peanuts. Rice and cotton is also sold to sustain the economy. A large part of the economic activity in Burkina Faso is funded by international aid.

Mining is also a crucial part of the economy. Gold, copper, iron, and manganese are mined all over the country and provide employment and much needed international aid.