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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 regarded 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 di-

vided 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 Botswana, 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.