

KEY FACTS

Official name: République du Bénin
(Republic of Benin)

Head of State: President Boni Yayi
(from 2006; re-elected 13 Mar 2011)

Head of government: Prime Minister
Pascal Koupakpi (from 28 May 2011)

Ruling party: Forces Cauri pour un
Bénin Emergent (FCBE) (Cauri
Forces for an Emerging Benin)
(elected 2007; re-elected 30 Apr 2011)

Area: 112,622 square km

Population: 9.35 million
(2012)* (8,849,892; 2010, census
figure)

Capital: Cotonou (seat of
government); Porto-Novo
(administrative)

Official language: French

Currency: CFA franc (CFAf) = 100
centimes (Communauté Financière
Africaine (African Financial
Community) franc).

Exchange rate: CFAf495.02 per US\$
(Jul 2013)

GDP per capita: US\$794 (2012)*

GDP real growth: 3.85% (2012)*

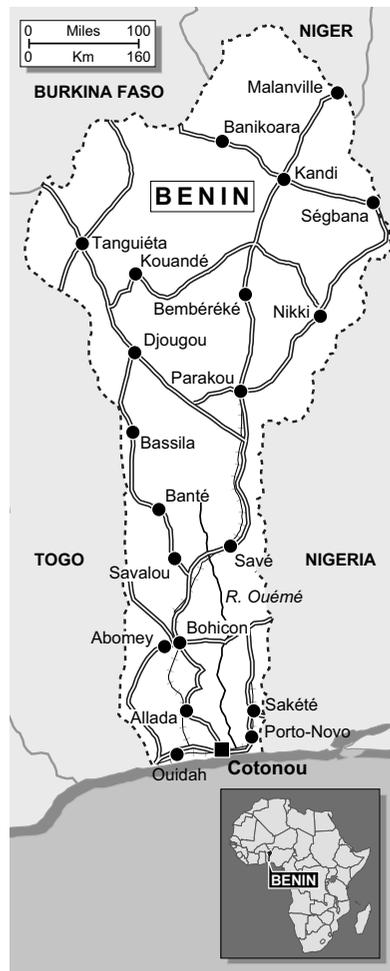
GDP: US\$7.43 billion (2012)*

Inflation: 6.75% (2012)*

Balance of trade: -US\$493.60
million (2010)*

* estimated figure

Benin



Benin's economic activity began to recover in 2011, after having come under severe pressure in 2009 and 2010 from the combined effects of the global economic crisis and the floods that hit the country, killing more than 60 people and displacing some 120,000. The growth rate of the real economy increased from 2.6 per cent in 2010 to 3.5 per cent in 2011, then to 3.6 per cent in 2012. The recovery in growth has been the result of combined efforts to revive agriculture and repair the infrastructure after the floods of 2010. The country has also benefited from good rainfall. These elements of positive growth were partially offset by the impact of a sharp increase in January 2012 in the price

of adulterated petrol called *kpayo*. *kpayo* is smuggled in from Nigeria and is widely used, particularly in Cotonou. The lifting of fuel subsidies in Nigeria led to the price rise in Benin. The economic outlook for 2013 and 2014 is positive and should confirm growth recovery, supported by good results from the 2012/13 cotton season and recovery in port activities.

An important growth factor will be, reported the *African Economic Outlook 2013* (AEO), published jointly by the African Development Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the maintenance of macroeconomic stability by sustaining progress in the country's reform of public finances and in its administrative modernisation in 2013 and 2014. Benin is planning to further mobilise its domestic resources; to make public spending consistent with its poverty-reduction strategy; and to improve the country's business climate in order to help develop the private sector. The government, which has stated its determination to put an end to illegal trading in petroleum products, is expected to take corrective measures to offset the impact of the short-term rise in prices likely to result from this action, in particular on the most vulnerable sections of the population. On the social front, the government needs to maintain its efforts through its 2011–15 growth and poverty-reduction strategy (GPRS), as the country is suffering from persistent poverty and serious backlogs in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. More than 36 per cent of the Beninese population are still living below the poverty line.

Benin has strong agricultural potential, an opening to the sea and a small amount of raw materials (limestone, sand, granite and timber). Its limited exploitation of these assets has, however, prevented the country from initiating needed structural changes in its economy. To achieve better management of its natural resources Benin still needs to overcome several structural constraints, namely poor water management, inadequate agricultural modernisation, and antiquated infrastructure and services associated with the exploitation of these resources.

For structural transformation and continued growth, Benin faces two main challenges: first, to implement its strategic plan for the revival of the agricultural sector – the Plan Stratégique de Relance du Secteur Agricole (PSRSA) (Strategic Plan to Revive the Agricultural Sector) – which is expected to further diversify the economy and increase processing of agricultural products; second, to transform Benin from being a transit country to becoming a logistics and export hub, in particular thanks to an integrated and efficient infrastructure and transport services system.

Despite progress made in improving basic social services, the social situation is still marked by persistent poverty. Poverty has remained a major concern in Benin, where 36.2 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line in 2011. Poverty is increasingly concentrated in cities, as the country's high urbanisation rate has not been supported by an urban-management plan.

Health

Health in the country is marked by high morbidity, predominance of endemic and epidemic diseases and acute respiratory infections. There has been some improvement, however, in moving towards Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 4 and 5 on reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, respectively. Such progress will nonetheless be insufficient to meet these MDGs by 2015.

In the area of combating priority diseases, the country is continuing its efforts, in particular through programmes to fight malaria and HIV/Aids. The HIV/Aids prevalence amongst pregnant women was stabilised below 2 per cent in 2011, heralding that MDG 6 may be met. Nonetheless, frequent breaks in the supply of antiretroviral drugs and reagents are putting continuity of progress in this area at risk. Lifting the constraints weighing on the health sector therefore constitutes a major challenge for the country. These are mainly bad construction planning, inadequate infrastructure and equipment upkeep, and a decline in human and financial resources.

Education

Education has made significant progress in terms of access and enrolment. The gross enrolment rate in primary schools increased from 110.6 per cent in 2010 to 111.5 per cent in 2011. The number of pupils in lower secondary school rose sharply and the number of students has nearly doubled in recent years.

Unfortunately, this quantitative progress has not come with improvement in quality and efficiency. The system has been stagnating in the rate of completion of primary education at around 64 per cent over the past five years, against the 88 per cent target, making it unlikely that Benin will reach MDG 2 on achieving universal primary education. In addition, the percentage of repeaters in primary education is still rising as a result of recurrent strikes and of under-equipped classrooms. Five years into the implementation of its ten-year development plan for the education sector, Benin will upgrade the plan.

Risk assessment

Politics	Fair
Economy	Fair
Regional stability	Poor

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1960 Gained independence from France as the Republic of Dahomey. Hubert Maga, was elected president.

1963 Maga was overthrown by General Christophe Soglo leading a military *coup d'état*.

1965 Soglo declared himself head of state.

1967 A military coup deposed Soglo.

1969 Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Émile de Souza became president.

1970 Elections were scheduled but failed to take place due to irreconcilable differences between politicians of the north and south. Instead, a three-man presidential council was formed, with a two-year rotating presidency for each.

1972 Maga, the first president, was replaced, without incident, by Justin

Ahomadegbé. Major Mathieu Kérékou led a *coup d'état*; he installed an 11-man government and declared Dahomey a Marxist-Leninist state.

1975 The Republic of Dahomey was renamed The People's Republic of Benin. 1990 With the country bankrupt and on the brink of social collapse, President Kérékou handed power to a national conference. The government abandoned Marxism-Leninism and committed itself to political and economic reform.

1991 Nicéphore Soglo became president and introduced sweeping austerity measures.

1995 Parties opposed to the president won a majority in the National Assembly in the legislative elections.

1996 Kérékou became president and Adrien Houngbédji, leader of the Parti du Renouveau Démocratique (PRD) (Party of Democratic Renewal), assumed the role of prime minister.

1998 Houngbédji resigned, a new government was formed without a post of prime minister.

1999 After National Assembly elections, the Parti de la Renaissance du Benin (PRB) (Benin Renaissance Party), led by former president Soglo's wife, Rosine, emerged as the largest single opposition party.

Adrien Houngbédji (PRD) was elected president of the new Assembly.

2001 President Kérékou was re-elected for his last five-year term.

2002 The first municipal elections were held.

2003 A large coalition of parties backing President Kérékou won the National Assembly elections.

2004 An International Development Association (IDA) credit of US\$45 million was approved to assist Benin in expanding

KEY INDICATORS

Benin

	Unit	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	m	9.13	*9.38	8.85	*9.91	*9.35
Gross domestic product (GDP)	US\$bn	6.72	6.59	6.60	7.30	*7.43
GDP per capita	US\$	736	766	741	802	*794
GDP real growth	%	4.2	3.8	2.6	3.1	*3.8
Inflation	%	8.0	2.2	2.1	2.8	*6.7
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	1,282.2	*1,224.6	*1,281.5	–	–
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	1,889.7	*1,737.8	*1,775.2	–	–
Balance of trade	US\$m	-607.5	*-513.2	*-493.6	–	–
Current account	US\$m	-618.6	*-755.8	*-617.8	-729.0	-724.0
Total reserves minus gold	US\$m	1,263.4	1,229.8	1,200.1	–	713.0
Foreign exchange	US\$m	1,259.9	1,148.5	1,120.1	–	633.0
Exchange rate	per US\$	418.59	472.19	495.28	466.82	505.65
* estimated figure						

electrification and restructuring its power sector. Benin and Nigeria agreed to redefining their mutual border.

2005 The International Court of Justice (ICJ) awarded Niger most of the river islands that had been disputed along the Niger/Benin border.

2006 Boni Yayi won presidential elections. Benin assumed control of nine islands in the Niger River in accordance with the 2005 ICJ ruling settling the border dispute; Niger received the large island of Lete and several others. President Boni's coalition, Forces Cauri pour un Bénin Emergent (FCBE) (Cauri Forces for an Emerging Benin), won parliamentary elections.

2008 Unreliable voter lists delayed local elections; four million registered voters had had their names omitted. At the Community of the Sahelian-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) Executive Council meeting in Cotonou, an investment guarantee agency was launched to provide funds for infrastructure projects.

2009 The European Union banned all air carriers from Benin from flying into its airspace, due to safety fears.

2010 The World Bank agreed to fund the US\$258 million refurbishment of the 998.8km West African coastal corridor road, which runs through Benin from Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) to Lagos (Nigeria). Benin celebrated 50 years of independence. Severe flooding killed 60 people and displaced around 120,000. Emergency relief was supplied for over 680,000 people affected by the devastation. A national census was held.

2011 The date of the presidential elections was postponed by one week, following complaints that the electoral role was not yet ready, with over one million voters still to be registered. The elections took place in March and 14 candidates took part. Incumbent Yayi Boni won 53.18 per cent and his closest rival Adrien Houngbédji 35.66 per cent. In parliamentary elections held in April, the ruling FCBE won 41 seats (out of 83), increasing its number by six seats and cutting the opposition's combined total to 42; the Union Fait la Nation (UFN) (Unite the Nation) won 30 seats and six other political parties each won two seats. In May Pascal Koupacki was named prime minister and a new government was appointed.

2012 President Yayi Boni was elected as Chairman of the African Union on 29 January. On 18 July, the agricultural minister announced that Benin would invest US\$1.86 million to boost the production of palm nuts by 63 per cent (505,000 tonnes) by 2014.

2013 A cholera outbreak was reported in south Benin, with 129 confirmed cases as

of 2 October. The number of cases is expected to rise.

Political structure

Constitution

The 1990 constitution provides for multi-party politics and a president to be directly elected by popular vote. Presidential candidates cannot be aged over 70. No provision is made for a prime minister; the president is head of government.

Independence date

1 August 1960

Form of state

Republic

The executive

The president is directly elected by popular vote for a five-year term and has ultimate power and control.

National legislature

The directly elected Assemblée Nationale (National Assembly) has 83 members elected for a four-year term.

Legal system

The legal system is based on French civil law and customary law.

Last elections

30 April 2011 (parliamentary); 13 March 2011 (presidential)

Results: Parliamentary: Forces Cauri pour un Bénin Emergent (FCBE) (Cauri Forces for an Emerging Benin) won 41 seats (out of 83), Union Fait la Nation (UFN) (Unite the Nation) 30, Alliance Amana two, Alliance G13 Baobab two, Alliance Cauris 2 two, Force Espoir–Union pour la Relève (FE-UPR) (Hope Force–Union for Relief) two, Alliance Force dans l'Unité (AFU) (Strength in Unity Alliance) two, Union pour le Bénin (Union for Benin) two. Presidential: Yayi Boni won 53.18 per cent of the vote, Adrien Houngbédji 35.66 per cent, Abdoulaye Bio-Tchané 6.29 per cent; 11 other candidates won less than 1 per cent each.

Next elections

2016 (presidential and parliamentary).

Political parties

There are over 100 registered parties in Benin, but only a handful are represented in parliament.

Ruling party

Forces Cauri pour un Bénin Emergent (FCBE) (Cauri Forces for an Emerging Benin) (elected 2007; re-elected 30 Apr 2011)

Main opposition party

Union Fait la Nation (UFN) (Unite the Nation)

Population

9.35 million (2012)*(8,849,892; 2010, census figure)

Approximately 46 per cent of the total population is under 15 years.

Last census: February 2002: 6,769,914

Population density: 51 inhabitants per square km. Urban population 42 per cent (2010 Unicef).

Annual growth rate: 3.1 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

Ethnic make-up

African (99 per cent) (42 ethnic groups, most important being Fon, Adja, Yoruba, Bariba), European (1 per cent).

Religions

Animists (70 per cent), Christians (15 per cent) and Muslims (15 per cent).

Education

Annual expenditure on education is 3–3.5 per cent of GDP of which over 55 per cent is spent on primary education.

Literacy rate: 40 per cent adult rate; 56 per cent youth rate (15–24) (Unesco 2005).

Enrolment rate: 99 per cent gross primary enrolment, of relevant age group (including repeaters); 20 per cent net secondary enrolment (UN HDR)

Pupils per teacher: 52 in primary schools.

Health

HIV/Aids

In 2005, around half of sex workers tested positive for HIV, and provided a pool of infection allowing an increase in potential cases of HIV/Aids. In 2009, there were an estimated 60,000 people living with HIV.

HIV prevalence: 1.2 per cent aged 15–49 in 2009 (Unicef 2012)

Life expectancy: 56 years, 2010 (Unicef 2012)

Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate: 5.3 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef 2012)

Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000): 90 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012); 23 per cent of children aged under five were malnourished (World Bank).

Welfare

The National Social Security fund provides for general workers and farmers who have made contributions. The fund is supervised by the Ministry of Labour although its assets are autonomous and administered by trustees. Every employer must provide a contribution for each worker to cover disability and family allowances. Old age pension benefits are accrued by workers contributions to the fund.

Main cities

Cotonou (seat of government, estimated population 779,314 in 2012), Abomey-Calavi (452,811), Porto-Novo (administrative capital, 267,191), Djougou (237,040), Parakou (206,667), Bohicon (149,271), Kandi (128,172), Lokossa (106,081).

Languages spoken

French; African languages (Yoruba, Bariba and Fon) are widely used in everyday life.

Official language/s

French

Media

Benin is considered one of the most liberal media markets in Africa.

Press

Dailies: In French, *Fraternite* (www.fraternite-info.com), *Le Matinal En Ligne* (www.actubenin.com) and *Le Nation* (www.gouv.bj/presse/lanation), is a government publication.

Weeklies: In French *La Gazette du Golfe* with political debate.

Business: The *Le Magazine de l'Entreprise* (www.creationentreprise.org), is a magazine of regional business affairs.

Periodicals: In French, a fortnightly publication includes the government information bureau's *Journal Officiel de la République du Bénin*.

Broadcasting

The state-owned Office des Radiodiffusion et Télévision du Bénin (ORTB) broadcasts radio and television services.

Radio: Radio is the prime medium for public news and information and phone-in programmes are popular. The ORTB broadcasts Radio Benin (www.ortb.net, site under construction), in French, English and 18 local languages. Commercial stations include Golfe FM (www.eit.to), the pan-African Radio Africa No 1 (www.africa1.com) and Radio Planete (www.planetefm.com); Radio Maranatha (www.eit.to) and Radio Immaculee Conception (www.immacolata.com/fibenaftr) are religious stations.

Television: Fewer residents watch TV than listen to radio. ORTB operated Television Nationale. Internet TV is provided Espace Informatique et Telecommunications (EIT) including Canal Sat Horizons (www.eit.to), LBC (www.lbcgroup.tv) and Future Television (www.future.com.lb). Television LC2 International (www.lc2international.tv) is a satellite station.

National news agency: Agence Benin-Press (ABP)

Economy

Benin suffered some devastating floods in 2010 that damaged infrastructures and destroyed both cash and food crops; they also adversely affected agriculture, trade and the informal sector. A US\$50 million loan was obtained from the World Bank in 2011, for an environment management project to alleviate not only the damage but also prevent future destruction.

The principal component of the economy is the service sector, which constitutes over 45 per cent of GDP; of which, trade is the

major constituent (almost 20 per cent), followed by government services (11 per cent), education and healthcare. Industry constitutes around 20 per cent of GDP (of which manufacturing is 8 per cent), with textile manufacturing as the leading industry.

Agriculture represents 25 per cent of GDP, while forestry, livestock and fisheries constitute a further 10 per cent. However, the single largest component of the economy is cotton and as world prices rose in 2011, the value of Benin's exports of cotton rose by 22.3 per cent. Other agricultural cash crops include palm oil, coffee and cocoa. Cultivation for domestic consumption includes among other produce, wheat, yams, legumes, groundnuts and pineapples.

In July 2009 the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) allocated US\$500,000 to aid Benin in developing the cultivation of rice, which when under full production could bring in revenue of US\$55 million. It was estimated that Benin imported 11 million tonnes of rice in 2010, a commodity that has risen sharply since 2008.

GDP growth was 2.7 per cent in 2008, a fall from 5.0 per cent in 2007 as global trade fell and imports, particularly petroleum and foodstuffs, rose in price. The reconstruction of the agricultural sector and infrastructures was expected to result in GDP growth of 3.5 per cent in 2011.

In 2011, the UN Human Development Index (HDI) ranked Benin 167 (out of 187) for national development in health, education and income. Since 2000, Benin's progress has grown overall, but has not matched the improvement of other Sub-Saharan African countries. In 2010, 57.4 per cent of the population experienced at least one indicator of poverty. Foreign remittances in 2008 amounted to US\$251 million, a fall from the US\$282 million in 2007, which reflects the lack of opportunity for workers overseas during the economic crisis. Foreign remittances in 2009–10 were estimated to average US\$150 million.

Corruption and the informal sector also hamper government control of the economy. Smuggling, including of people, between Benin and Nigeria, is rife and it has been estimated that the informal sector accounts for over 45 per cent of gross national income.

Benin is a member of Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine (UEMOA) (West African Economic and Monetary Union (WEAMU)), and its monetary policy is set by the Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO) (Central Bank of West African States) using the CFA franc (Communauté Financière Africaine franc).

External trade

Benin is a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO); through its membership of Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine (UEMOA) (West African Economic and Monetary Union (WEAMU)) operates using the CFA franc (Communauté Financière Africaine franc). It has liberal trade agreements with other members, while the union has a trade agreement with the US.

Benin acts as a transit country for goods from Nigeria to Togo and its landlocked neighbours Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali.

Imports

Principal imports are refined oil and petroleum products, rice, foodstuffs, tobacco and capital goods.

Main sources: France (typically over 20 per cent of total), Ghana (less than 10 per cent), Côte d'Ivoire (less than 10 per cent).

Exports

Principal exports are cotton, palm oil, shea butter, coffee and cocoa.

Main destinations: China (typically over 30 of total), Indonesia (less than 10 per cent), India (less than 10 per cent).

Agriculture

The agricultural sector is the most important economic sector. Total agricultural land is 11.1 million hectares of which 5.0 per cent is pasture and 22 per cent arable.

Cotton is the principal cash crop and foreign exchange earner, farmed mainly on large industrial plantations. It is also important to the rural economy as it supports almost half of rural households.

Other cash crops include palm oil, coffee, sugar, cocoa, karité nuts and tobacco. Subsistence farming (mainly collectivised) shows low productivity but the country is virtually self-sufficient in food. Livestock farming is particularly important in the north. The principal food crops are yams, cassava, sorghum, beans, millet, maize and rice.

Fishing is confined mainly to inland waters and augments local food supplies.

Industry and manufacturing

The industrial sector is small-scale, contributing 8.4 per cent to GDP and employing 6 per cent of the workforce.

Manufacturing activity is centred on processing primary products (palm oil, fats, sugar, beverages, cotton) for export, and the manufacture of consumer goods and construction materials for home consumption.

Cement production and oil refining are the main heavy industries.

The government has encouraged foreign investment in canning, paper processing, glass manufacturing, salt processing,

agribusiness, pharmaceuticals, clothing, palm oil, building materials and chemicals.

In 2000, the cottonseed oil plant at Bohicon was extended and modernised, raising capacity to 12,000 tonnes of oil, and a sugar producing enterprise, which had been closed since 1990, was reopened.

Tourism

'Land of mystery' is the epithet given to Benin by its tourism ministry. As a country, it offers traditional African culture, ancient historic monuments and artefacts, plus a wealth of wildlife to entertain visitors. The government is investing in development to improve the tourist infrastructure and market beach, cultural and eco-tourism.

The tourism industry constitutes around 7 per cent of GDP, earning an average of US\$673 million in 2008–09. The annual contribution jumped from US\$540 million in 2007 to a record high of US\$710 million in 2008, just before the global economic crisis cut visitor numbers. However, the contribution in 2011 is estimated at another record, of US\$716 million.

Around 6 per cent of the working population is engaged in tourism; foreign exchange earnings are typically US\$342–376 million per annum.

The Fishing Road project, sited along the coast between the capital Cotonou and the historic town of Ouidah, will be the largest tourist development ever undertaken in Benin, of 10-years duration. In 2008, the UAE-based Dubai World Africa began to invest not only in the Fishing Road project, helping with the purchase of 32km of seafront and ancillary land, but also by providing specialists in wildlife management to ecology experts to evaluate Benin's national parks.

Mining

The mining sector accounts for 5.5 per cent of GDP and employs 3 per cent of the workforce.

Activity is confined to extraction of limestone for the local cement industry, and marble. There is a limestone quarry at Onigbolo. There are known reserves of phosphate, chromite, uranium, low grade iron ore, marble and gold. The government has awarded a number of gold exploration licences to foreign investors. Under Beninese law, all mineral resources belong to the state, which grants exclusive rights for exploration, development and mining activities.

Hydrocarbons

Proven oil reserves were eight million barrels in 2008, although there has been no production since 2003. All petroleum products are imported to meet domestic

needs, which was 21,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 2008.

Proven gas reserves were 1.1 billion cubic metres in 2008; domestic consumption is negligible. Consumption of natural gas is expected to begin following the completion of the section of the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP) from Nigeria's Escravos gas field to Benin. Although the pipeline supplies natural gas to Ghana, a spur line to Benin is still awaiting completion.

Energy

Total installed generating capacity was 59MW in 2007, producing over 120 million kilowatt hours.

Only 22 per cent of the population has access to electricity, the majority of these located in urban areas; rural populations rely on traditional fuels such as biomass and wood. Around 30 per cent of the energy mix is provided by hydropower. The joint Benin-Togo hydroelectric power project, producing 60MW, on the river Mono has been fully operational since the building of the Nangbeto Dam. Electricity is also imported from the hydroelectric Akosombo Dam in Ghana.

In 2008 the 32MW Takoradi, light fuel oil (LFO), power plant in Ghana was dismantled and transported to Benin, where it was broken down into three parts and distributed between three cities providing much-needed boosts to local power generation.

Communauté Electrique de Bénin (CEB) (Electricity Community of Benin) is a joint Benin-Togo entity responsible for developing electricity infrastructure within and between each country. In 2008 it began an upgrade of transmission lines to include fibre optics allowing residents access to telecommunications.

Financial markets

Stock exchange

AfriBourse (Bourse Régionale des Valeurs Mobilières) (BRVM)

Banking and insurance

Central bank

Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest

Main financial centre

Cotonou and Parakou

Time

GMT plus one hour

Geography

Benin is a narrow stretch of territory 700km long running north/south. The country has an Atlantic coastline of about 100km, flanked by Nigeria to the east and Togo to the west. In the north it is bordered by Burkina Faso and Niger.

Hemisphere

Northern

Climate

Equatorial in the south with average day-time temperatures reaching 30–38 degrees Celsius (C). Main dry season from January–March. Rainy seasons from May–July and from September–December. Very humid in coastal areas. The north is tropical with more extreme temperatures, and single dry and rainy seasons. Length of rainy seasons varies with location but it is generally very wet from July–October.

Entry requirements

Passports

Required by all except nationals of certain African countries who have identification documents.

Visa

Required by all, except for nationals of Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) countries. For the latest requirements and to apply, contact the local embassy or representative.

Currency advice/regulations

There are no restrictions on import of local or foreign currency, but amounts of foreign currency must be declared on arrival.

Foreign currency exports are allowed up to the equivalent of CFAf500.

Health (for visitors)

Mandatory precautions

Yellow fever and cholera vaccination certificates required.

Advisable precautions

Inoculations and boosters should be current for cholera, tetanus, polio, hepatitis A, diphtheria, typhoid and yellow fever. There may be a need for vaccinations for tuberculosis, hepatitis B and meningitis. Malaria prophylaxis, which also provides protection for hepatitis B and yellow fever, include mosquito repellents, nets and clothing that cover the body after dark. There is a risk of rabies.

Other diseases that require preventative measures, such as condoms, are HIV/Aids and hepatitis B; to avoid bilharzia, avoid exposure to fresh water and use only well-maintained, chlorinated swimming pools.

Use only bottled or boiled water for drinks, washing teeth and making ice. Eat only well cooked meals, preferably served hot; vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled. Dairy products are unpasteurised and should be avoided. There is a shortage of routine medications, including sun-screens, and visitors should take all necessary medicines with them. A first aid kit that includes disposable syringes, is a reasonable precaution. Healthcare is not to Western standards and medical insurance, including emergency evacuation, is necessary.

Hotels

Available in all main towns. Better class accommodation is found only in and around Cotonou. Advance booking is advisable. Service charge usually included in bill, otherwise 10 per cent tip.

Credit cards

Access, Mastercard, Visa accepted on limited basis. Some banks may advance cash on Visa cards, check with card company.

Public holidays (national)**Fixed dates**

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 10 Jan (Traditional Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 1 Aug (Independence Day), 15 Aug (Assumption Day), 26 Oct (Armed Forces Day), 1 Nov (All Saints' Day), 30 Nov (National Day), 25 Dec (Christmas Day).

Variable dates

Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Eid al Adha, Eid al Fitr, Birth of the Prophet.

Islamic year 1435 (5 Nov 2013–24 Oct 2014):

The Islamic year contains 354 or 355 days, with the result that Muslim feasts advance by 10–12 days against the Gregorian calendar. Dates of feasts vary according to the sighting of the new moon, so cannot be forecast exactly.

Working hours**Banking**

Mon–Fri: 0800–1100, 1500–1700.

Business

Mon–Fri: 0800–1230, 1530–1900. (Sat) 0900–1300.

Government

Mon–Fri: 0800–1230, 1500–1830.

Shops

Mon–Sat: 0830–1300, 1600–1930; (Sun) 0800–1200. Shops that open Sun mainly close Mon am.

Electricity supply

Electricity supply 220V AC 50 cycles.

Getting there**Air**

International airport/s: Cotonou-Cadjehoun (COO), 6km west of city; taxi and limousine service (15–20 minutes to city centre), restaurant, business centre, 24 hours medical facility.

Airport tax: None

Surface

Road: There are routes from Burkina Faso, Togo, Nigeria and Niger.

Rail: A line linking Niger to Benin is under construction.

Water: Shipping lines from Marseille (France) and Lagos (Nigeria).

Main port/s: Porto Novo, Cotonou

Getting about**National transport**

Air: Regular services between Cotonou, Parakou, Natitingou, Kandi and Djougou.

Road: Good main roads in south connecting towns to Cotonou and Porto Novo.

Mainly laterite, but the main coast road, which connects Lagos with Accra, is surfaced, and the road north from Cotonou is surfaced to Savalou.

In northern areas some roads are only passable in dry season.

Buses: Bus services link towns on these main routes.

Rail: There is only one operation railway line going north from Cotonou to Bohicon, Savé and Parakou. Facilities are limited.

City transport

Taxis: Fixed charge within towns, but advisable to negotiate fares in advance. Tipping is optional.

Car hire

Available in Cotonou. Chauffeur-driven services are recommended. Insurance/liability position should be checked. International driving licence required.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international direct dialling code (IDD) for Benin is +229, followed by subscriber's number.

Chambers of Commerce

Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Avenue Général de Gaulle, PO Box 31, Cotonou (tel: 312-081; fax: 313-299; e-mail: ccib@bow.intnet.bj).

Banking

Bank of Africa Bénin (BOA), BP 08-0879, Ave Pape Jean Paul II, Cotonou (tel: 313-228; fax: 313-117).

Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, BP 325, Ave Jean Paul II, Cotonou (tel: 312-466/7; fax: 312-465).

Banque Internationale du Bénin (BIBE) BP 03-2098, Carrefour des 3 Banques, Cotonou (tel: 315-549; fax: 312-365).

Continental Bank Bénin, 01 BP, Avenue Pope Jean Paul II, 2020 Cotonou (tel: 312-424, 313-393; fax: 315177).

Ecobank Bénin, BP 1280, Rue du Gouverneur Bayol, 01 Cotonou (tel: 314-023, 313-069; fax: 313-385, 313-718).

Financial Bank Bénin (FBB), BP 2700, Rue du Commandant Decoeur, Cotonou (tel: 313-100, 313-103, 313-104; fax: 313-102).

Central bank

Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, PO Box 325, Avenue Jean Paul II, Cotonou (tel: 312-466; fax: 312-465; e-mail: webmaster@bceao.int).

Stock exchange

Afribourse (Bourse Régionale des Valeurs Mobilières) (BRVM)
www.brvm.org

Travel information

Transports Aériens du Bénin (tel: 314-797).

National tourist organisation offices

Office National du Tourisme et de l'Hôtellerie (ONATHO), BP 89, Cotonou (tel: 315-402).

Ministries

Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Administrative Reform (tel: 313-112).

Ministry of Public Works and Transport, PO Box 16, Cotonou, Benin (tel: 313-380).

State Ministry of Government Co-ordination, Planning, Development and Employment Promotion (tel: 301-553).

Other useful addresses

Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice), 01 BP 2031, Cotonou (tel: 350 188; fax: 350 556; email: africanice@cgiar.org).

Agence Bénin-Presse, BP 120, Cotonou.

Benin Embassy (USA), 2737 Cathedral Avenue, NW, Washington DC 20008 (tel: 232-6656; fax: 265-1996).

Import/Export Alimentation de Bénin, BP 53, Cotonou.

Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique, BP 323, Cotonou (tel: 314-101/103).

Mission de Co-opération et d'Action Culturelle, BP 476, Cotonou (tel: 300-824).

Mission Permanente d'Aide et de Co-opération, BP 476, Cotonou (administrators aid from France).

Organisation Commune Bénin-Niger des Chemins de fer et des Transports (OCBN) (Benin Railways), PO Box 16, Cotonou, Benin (tel: 313-380).

Société Nationale d'Équipement, BP 2042, Cotonou (deals with capital goods).

Société Nationale de Commercialisation et d'Exportation du Bénin (Sonaceb), BP 933, Cotonou (tel: 312-822).

Société Nationale de Commercialisation des Produits Pétroliers (Sonacop), BP 245, Cotonou (tel: 312-290).

Société Nationale d'Importation du Bénin, BP 2042, Cotonou.

Nations of the World: A Political, Economic and Business Handbook

Syndicat National des Commerçants et Industriels Africains du Bénin, BP 367, Cotonou.

National news agency: Agence Bénin-Pressé (ABP)

01 BP 72 Cotonou (tel: 2131-2655; fax: 2131-1326; internet: www.gouv.bj/presse/abp).

Internet sites

Africa Business Network:
<http://www.ifc.org/abn>

AllAfrica.com: <http://www.allafrica.com>

African Development Bank:
<http://www.afdb.org>

Africa Online:
<http://www.africaonline.com>

Benin: <http://www.guide-benin>.

Embassy in Paris:
<http://www.ambassade-benin.org>

General tourist information:
<http://www.africaguide.com/>

Mbendi AfroPaedia (information on companies, countries, industries and stock exchanges in Africa): <http://mbendi.co.za>

Mission to the UN:
<http://www.un.int/benin>