—A visit to Togo

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surprisingly comfortable room, with bath and radio (no television), we decided to read up on what the Tourism folks wanted us to know about the country.

We discovered that Togo is a long, narrow country, 360 miles long, and never more than 100 miles across. It is bordered on the North by Upper Volta, on the Left by Ghana, and on the right by Benin.

There are about 2.6 million people in Togo, with Lome, the capital city having a population of about 400,000. To the north, Lama- Kara has a population of about 19,200, and is the expanding industrial sector.

There are thousands of small villages in the country, and although the official language is French, there are over 50 dialects in use. Ewe is the largest langue segment, and the Kabye language dominates in the North.

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Bright and early in the morning, we boarded a mini-bus for the trip upcountry with the first stop at the Kloto Crafts Center and the town of Kpalime. We observed youngsters learning the craft of weaving. The intricate colors of woven Kente cloth were on the hand looms.

Palm wine is the most popular drink—we watched it being made by simply cutting a square in a fallen palm tree, applying fire to the cutout hole, and allowing the juice to drip into a container. It is ready to drink at this point. If allowed to ferment and the undergo distillation, it becomes a potent (about 190 proof) gin with a taste akin to "white lightnin"

Then came one of the high points of the trip. We were to overnight in the town of Badou, near the Ghana border. In fact, there is a grid which supplies electricity to that section of Togo, based in Ghana.

Accommodations were at the Abuta Hotel, which is a bit primitive by Western standards. There was no hot water—but none was needed. The menu featured food indigenous to the region—which was tasty.

It is here too that a can of "Off" or some similar insect spray is vitally necessary, for any light attracts a wide array of bugs.

Decided to go out into the village to mingle with the people and try to get a glimpse of what we suspected was the real African life.

Walking along one of the main thoroughfares, we were immediately struck by the friendliness of the people. Everyone had a "bon soir" and a smile, since it was obvious that we were visitors.

Several youngsters dogged our footsteps, with the cry, "beek, you have beek?" Had no idea what they meant, until one of the French-speaking members of our group explained—they were asking about Bic ball-point pens.

Under the new regime in Togo, education of youngsters is all important. Parents MUST send their children to school until they are at least 15. If they show the proper inclination and ability, the government sponsors their college education, on the condition that they return to work for the government for 4 years following the granting of their degrees.

Thus explodes myth number one — that Africans are mainly illiterate. In every village you see, there are two buildings prominent— the school, and the dispensary, or hospital in the larger areas.

Next noticed the clothing worn by many of the Africans. While many clung to traditional garb, especially the women, there was an abundance of Western garb, T-shirts, slacks, etc. Was told that used clothing which has been renovated by such agencies as the Goodwill or Salvation Army, eventually wind up in African markets.

So, you soon don't even raise an eyebrow when you see a youngster sporting a shirt proclaiming how he loves N.Y. It is now nearing the dinner hour, and as we walked through the streets, we could see fires being lighted as the evening meal was being prepared.

Stopped by a local package-goods store to pick up some beer, and amazingly enough, it was ice cold and delicious. The cost — about 300 CFA ($1). The kids trailing us now launched into what we found was a neat gimmick.

"May I have your address?" is the query from the kids. Feeling a bit flattered, you comply—scrawling your name and number on whatever paper is handy. Then comes the kicker:

"Would you give me the money to buy a stamp so that I can write to you?" This thoroughly deflates you, but also makes you feel just a wee bit proud of the ingenuity displayed by the youngsters. ——

The evening's activities included a look at some of the traditional dancing. Thus it was that we went to a clearing near Badou, where the villagers were gathered in a circle.

A place was set aside for the chief, who occupies the same sort of position as a mayor or county commissioner in this country. After certain amenities are performed, drummers took up position and began the insistent throbbing beat African drummers are known for.

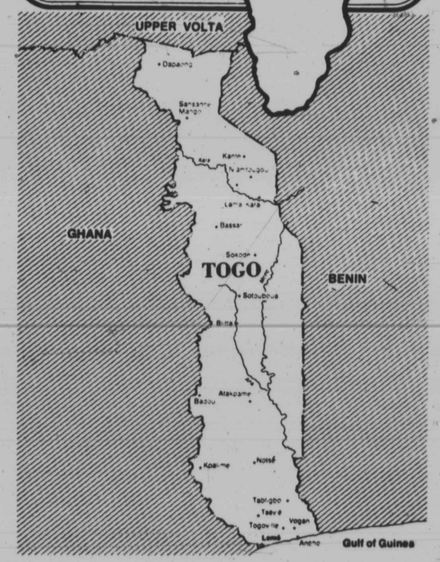
The infectious beat brought about a call and response from the gathered audience while individuals went through gyrations in the center—dancing an intricate series of movements in time to the music.

This was not limited by age, for the very old took part as well as some pre-teen youngsters who were loudly encouraged by the on-lookers.

And it was here that another myth exploded for me. American jazz drummers do not have to take a back seat to African drummers as I had thought for years.

Although the sound achieved by African drummers is exquisite, it takes four or five men, each producing a different rhythm, the whole being blended into the total sound.

This is achieved in American jazz by a single drummer, who must play snares, tom toms, cymbals, bells, bass drum, etc—all by himself. While he may not have the sophisticated polyrhythms achieved by the Africans—he is infinitely more skilled. We seriously doubt if an African drummer could master all of the things our jazz drummers achieve. ——

Another myth is that Africans look down at American blacks. We found this not to be true. In fact, most Africans consider American blacks wealthy. We'll explain in Part Two, next month.

Population:	2,410,000
Land Area:	21,600 square miles
Largest Cities:	Lomé (capital), Sokodé, Atakpamé, Aného
Languages:	French (official), Ewe (south), Kabyé (north), many dialects
Religions:	Animist, Christian, Islamic
Form of Government:	Republic
Major Exports:	Phosphates, cocoa, coffee