

Breaking News... Breaking News...  
**Abibiman Kuo**  
 (Not for 'Black Nation Group')  
 is planning a not to be missed...  
**TRIP TO GHANA**  
 Finally...  
**Announcing!**  
**Trip date:**  
**October 19-26, 2008**  
 Traveling from Birmingham to Accra  
 Full cost of Trip: £825  
 (incl returns flight, accommodation, ground transport @ 8:30)  
 Deposit: £200 by May 3  
 Full payment: by August 1  
**Book your place today!**  
 Please contact any of the following members of Abibiman: Jennifer Howe on 0121 553 0945  
 Sharon Brown on 07951 905313 or  
 Joy Roxborough on 07746 156343  
 Abibiman Kuo is a Black History focus group of NTCG SAM West Midlands Forum

# Ghana

## A Trip Report by Joy Roxborough

photos compiled by Jennifer Howe

Ghana is a country of contrasts: the historic and contemporary, affluence and poverty, the mystic and the divine. A week was not enough to pack everything in but enough to give the five of us who set off on the trip from Birmingham on October 19 a thirst to go back for more.

Our group was five women, including three of us from Abibiman Kuo. We stopped off in Amsterdam for five hours (sure won't do that again!) and finally arrived in Ghana at 19:20 hours. Pastor Edmund, a native of Ghana then visiting from the UK, Brother Hogarth, a Jamaican now residing in Ghana and Tony Talburt from 'Black Boys Can', who played a great part in organizing the trip met us at the airport. These 3 men were our guides throughout our stay in Ghana.

Different aspects of the trip would have stood out to each member of the group. Those of us who have visited Jamaica agreed that Ghana reminded us very much of the Caribbean island. In fact, I often forgot that I was in Ghana until I overheard someone speaking and the accent reminded me of where I was. For Jennifer, Ghana reminded her of Jamaica in so many ways except that she felt that most of the people she met seemed more courteous than in Jamaica, although, she said, "In Ghana, they never let a wrong or misunderstanding go until it is resolved, whether they agree or disagree."

We had quite an adventure on our overnight trip from the capital, Accra, to Ghana's second city, Kumasi. Our van broke down on the way, leaving us stranded for a while and delaying us considerably. The delay meant that we traveled back in the night the following day, something which our guide, Tony, was reluctant to do. For me, the night driving was not as bad as he seemed to suggest it might be—the truth is when you've survived a night trip on public transport from Kingston to Montego Bay, anything else is a doddle!

Jennifer said, "On our way, we saw several mud huts close up. They appeared to be small houses with the outer walls covered in mud, and as night fell small oil bottles containing cloth wicks was seen giving light outside houses along the roadside. At the roadside, too, people were buying and selling all kinds of commodities, including snails, well into the late evening."

In terms of cultural norms, Jennifer said, “We were told that in Ghana men were sometimes seen walking hand in hand with each other which is a natural thing in their culture, a sign of friendship, but I never saw any of this.”

We were told too that Ghanaians were very laid back people. They didn’t rush like people do in Britain, but nothing prepared us for the pace at which they actually operated. I didn’t mind—I was after all on holiday—but it did get rather irritating when we always had to wait no less than half an hour to be served in restaurants. I don’t joke when I’m hungry! It became a standing joke to refer to timescales as British or Ghanaian. *I have to wait five minutes? Do you mean a British five minutes or a Ghanaian five minutes?*

One of the highlights of the trip was our visit to Bask Academy. The children there prepared an elaborate African cultural celebration of dances and drama for us. We even had to participate when they came and coaxed us from our seats. Embarrassing though it was—you’ve got to have the hip rhythms to even look like you’re trying to dance beside them—it was great fun.

Jennifer has most of this, as well as other aspects of the trip, on video. We plan to arrange viewing some time in the New Year, if anyone is interested.

I was really touched by the presentations of the t-shirts, which they gave to each of us. We were not expecting anything from them. We were the ones who went bearing gifts. But as their head teacher told us, you don’t go to an African home without leaving with something, however small it may be. I will always treasure that t-shirt as a heart felt gesture of appreciation.

We visited some of the classes at Bask Academy and sat in with the children for a few minutes. They stood when their teachers entered the room and also when we entered. They sat attentively and listened to their lessons. And they clapped a delightful little rhythm of congratulations whenever anyone answered a question correctly.

We visited a second school with Brother Hogarth. This school had no roof on it but the children still came to learn. They came to school early and cleaned up their school grounds, fetched their water and sat quietly in their classrooms waiting for the teaching day to begin. We presented them with a donation of money that we had collected from our churches to help with the replacement of the roof.

The Cape Coast experience was also one to be remembered. We visited the dungeons where slaves were kept while they awaited their fate. It was moving to descend into the dark and grimy cavernous interiors and catch a glimpse of the hell our ancestors endured. We saw the tiny tracts along the floors that were meant to carry their excrement and our guide pointed out the foot or so high mark on the wall where the excrement reached in reality. We saw the tiny holes high up on the walls where food was thrown down to them—in the filth, no doubt—and even being in the place could not adequately provide us with a real picture of the magnitude of the horror they actually endured. I believe that God **must** have been

grieved to know that people built a church in his name right on top of the dungeons at the same time that these atrocities took place.

We went through the gate of no return, which was a point of finality for the slaves as they were torn from their homeland, most never to return. I couldn't help but note the battering waves on the rocks below us that seemed so symbolic of the violence of that era. Some would probably say it was the spirit of the ancestors still fighting on. Who knows? But poignant it was. I wanted to sit and drink it in—see if I could truly walk in my imagination in the footsteps of my ancestors. Unfortunately, we had to leave all too soon and no doubt, I will return to the gate of no return when next I am in Ghana.

In much the same way as Jamaica is, Ghana is very much a Christian oriented country. Sole trade businesses often use biblically inspired phrases to name their enterprises. For instance, an iron welding business called Zion Iron. We passed many places with *Hallelujah* or *Glory* or *Jesus is Lord* and such the like written on them in large colourful letters.

In contrast, Pastor Edmund pointed out some little pots outside some of the houses with brown mounds of something in them—I'm not quite sure what the brown was. He said that these represented gods that some people apparently still worshipped. Unless you knew what they were they were quite inconspicuous. There was a large one in the village square of one of the places we visited and to the uninformed it would simply appear as some sort of botanical decoration.

We could certainly write a book about everything that happened in Ghana. But this is just a short report. Much of it was one of those things where you just had to be there. Maybe this will inspire some of you to visit and form your own impressions. But it's best to make it two weeks at least, more if you are able.

## A selection of photos from the Ghana trip



Some members of the group in Osu Ringway, Accra.  
Left to right: Jennifer, Melanie, Joy and Marlene.



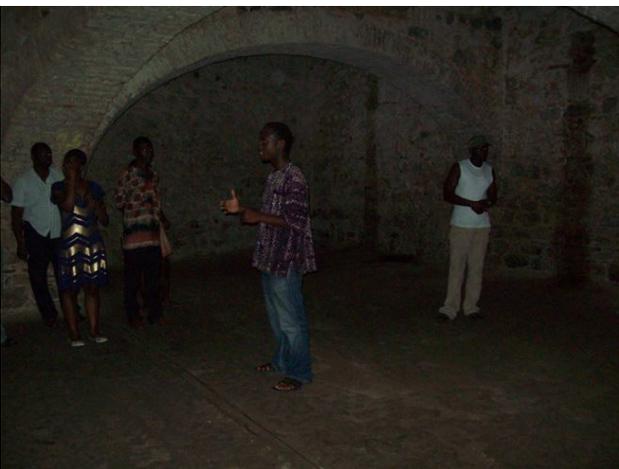
Children dancers from the Bask Academy Okpoi-Gonno, Spintex Rd., Accra, performing a welcome dance.



National memorial to Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first President, in the Memorial Park in Central Accra.



Women dancing in a church in Aventa, Ghana.



Scene inside one of the dungeons where the slaves were kept at Cape Coast Castle, Cape Coast.



The Door of No Return through which the slaves passed to go down to the slave slips, Cape Coast.