**Liz’s 15 Minute Guide to Tamale**

**Meeting people:**  Before conducting any type of business with anyone, you should greet him or her. English is fine, but you can quickly learn a couple Dagbani greetings. Generally, if someone greets you in Dagbani, you are pretty safe saying “naah”. Make sure to make it a nice, long “naaah”, as a short, brusque “nah” is slightly rude. The most difficult aspect of Dagbani greetings is that they depend on the time of day. Generally, “Dasiba” changes to “Ante re” at noon, and then to “Anunwula” as sun-down approaches. Few will give you a hard time unless your timing is very off, eg. “Dasiba” at 5pm. The words are often slurred; see pronunciation in the box below. By the way, when they call “Saliminga”, they are talking to you, white person.

**Basic Dagbani Greetings**

**Morning:**

**1:** Dasiba *Good morning (pr- dasba)*

**2:** Naah *nobody really knows what this means, just keep saying it*

**Afternoon:**

**1:** Ante re *Good afternoon (pr- anti ray)*

**2:** Naah *see above*

**Evening:**

**1:** Anunwula *Good evening (pr- annola)*

**2:** Naah *see above*

**Other :**

**1:** N Goram *I don’t know what this one means…*

**2:** Naah *see above*

**1**: Kaula *How are you?*

**2:** Alaafee *In health.*

**Using the right hand**

The population in Tamale is roughly half Muslim and half Christian. To be safe, try to always follow the practice of using only your right hand to interact with others. (In Islam, the left hand is the “unclean” hand, used for, among other things, cleaning yourself after using the bathroom.) Always eat with your right hand, wave with your right hand, hand things to people with your right hand, accept things with your right hand, and offer your right hand when shaking hands (if your right hand is dirty from eating, offer your wrist for the person to grasp.) You are allowed to wave with your left hand if you are driving a moto. Most people in Tamale itself are understanding of foreigners who forget this, but if you travel to villages, following this custom will become more important.

**Social Interactions**

People in Ghana are very friendly and—in Tamale especially—very interested in foreigners. Expect to be approached by many people of all ages and genders. The type of interactions they are looking for will vary, from simply saying hello (young children like to practice English this way) to smothering solicitations to be friends and trade contact information. See the Saliminga Hello! Flowchart for help in dealing with constant greetings.

Ghana is generally formal. Referring to women as “Madam” and men as “Sir” or “boss” is polite. It also helps establish a level of formality and respect that can be useful in social interacts; more on that later.

In Northern Ghana, Christian naming conventions are similar to Western conventions, with a given name listed first and a family name listed second. Muslim people have two or three names: one or two given names, plus the name of their father. One of the given names will be a Muslim name; a person may have a second, Dagbani name.

**Giddipass Boys:**  There is a group of young Ghanaian men in Tamale who enjoy meeting and dating foreigners, particularly volunteers who are in Tamale for short periods. These men often hang around Giddipass and Sparkles, where foreigners new in town often stop. These men can be quite aggressive, and you should not feel any obligation to be polite to them if they approach you inappropriately. The following is an actual conversation with one of them:

GP Boy: Would you like to sit down and have a drink?

Me: No, thank you.

GP Boy: Well, how about we just go home and fuck then?

Me: No, thank you. Go away.

These names are not consistently in the same order; the first name is not always the given name. It is perfectly acceptable to call a person by either their given name or parent name. To show respect, preface it with “Mr.” or “Madam”. In some cases, a person may have a preferred name, so feel free to ask.

**Women visiting Tamale:** Women should expect to be approached by many men. These men will typically ask your name, tell you theirs, and then ask to be your friend. How can you say no? After you have promised friendship, they will want to know how they can find you again, and ask for your phone number or where you stay. Be very cautious about giving out this information. If you give your number they will call you multiple times; if they know where you live, they will come by uninvited. It is okay to make up excuses not to give your number; saying your husband doesn’t like it is the most effective. If anyone asks, you should always be married to a strong, jealous man who lives in Ghana.

**Crime in Tamale**

Tamale is generally a safe place, but foreigners are often targeted in robberies and purse-snatchings; robberies have occurred with knives, bricks, machetes, and even guns. It is inadvisable to walk alone after dark with valuables, and you should avoid walking at all after 11pm or so. The areas near the teak forests are particularly risky as they offer an easy escape for thieves; you should never walk near the intersection of Gumani Road with Bolga Road, across from Barclays, after dark. In general, use good judgment, consider whether there are other people around, and be alert.

**Tip:** If you find a taxi driver who gives you reasonable rates, and is willing to work in the evening, take his number so you can call and ask him to pick you up if you need to travel at night.

**The Saliminga Hello! Flowchart**

Do you know the person?

Say hello. It will be fine.

Is it a child?

Did you already say hello?

Smile and keep walking

Are you far enough away to pretend you didn’t hear?

Is he or she talking Dagbani?

Is it a man?

Is he old?

Is he busy?

Do you speak another language?

Start speaking it; pretend you don’t English. Does he understand the language you are speaking?

**Sorry Oh!**

Yes

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

No

No

No

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

No

No

No

No

No

**START**

**Shopping in Tamale**

Shopping to feed yourself can be a challenge in Tamale. There are several small grocery stores, but their offerings are limited and you should be aware that the stocked items change; just because there is flour there today doesn’t mean it will be there next week, or next month. Local ingredients can also be seasonal. While these changes can be frustrating, they also offer opportunities to experiment with new cooking ingredients.

The Tamale market is big enough to get lost in, but small enough to find your way out eventually, and can make for a fun afternoon of exploration. It is a good place to buy fabric, which you can take to the tailor to have made into a variety of clothes at a low cost. Print fabric is about 2 cedi per yard for 4 yards; batik is more expensive, about 4 cedi per yard.

**Eating on the Street**

Fried Cheese: Small pieces of cow’s cheese fried in palm oil. Make a good snack.

Kebabs: Tough but tasty, and served with onion. Make sure you don’t get liver or tripe.

Coconut: You can buy shards or the whole thing, water included. Good for dessert.

Fried plantain: Large pieces may be served with stew; small pieces may be fried with spices.

Yam chips: Fried pieces of yam, usually served with spicy fish sauce.

Egg Sandwich: Fried egg with veggies on bread

Fruit: Varies by season, but you can consistently get bananas, oranges and pricey apples

Popcorn: It comes with sugar or salt, so ask which it is before you buy

Most Recommended Restaurants and Clubs:

**Mike’s:** The gathering place of the jaded, long-term expats who like to differentiate themselves from the short-term volunteers. Mike’s serves a good variety of drinks, nice Lebanese food, and pizza. There is no menu, so just ask what they have. It’s behind Barclays on Gumani Road.

**Desert Rose:** A bit hard to get to, but has great burgers. It also has nice tilapia, and good guacamole when avocados are around. It is off of Jisonayilli; follow the small white signs.

**Luxury:** Ghanaian food and pasta. I go for the dessert though, which includes apple pie and brownies. It is near the intersection of Jisonayilli and Bolga Road.

**Giddipass:** This downtown bar and restaurant is a popular dance spot on weekends, but it’s rooftop terrace is nice for an afternoon beer too.

**Savanna:** Near the new stadium. Nice place for outdoor drinks; not really a dinner spot.

**Swad:** A large variety of food, including Indian. On stadium road off of Bolga Road.

**Sparkles:** The first stop for newly arrived expats. It’s a good place to meet people, but the food and drink offerings are unremarkable.

**Royal Night Club:** There is only one real club in Tamale, and this is it. It is also pretty much the only place open after midnight. It is advisable to have some alcohol before you come here.

**Ghanian Foods**

Ghanaian foods, including soups, are usually eaten with the hand (the right hand!) People will tease you good naturedly, but accommodate you, if you ask for utensils. To eat the doughy starches served with soup, tear a piece of the starch, mop up some soup, and shovel it in your mouth. Here are a few common foods I recommend trying:

Fufu: Pounded cassava. Of the doughy starches, this is usually the most accessible to newcomers. Try it with groundnut soup for a good introduction to Ghanaian food.

Banku: Fermented and pounded corn doughy starch. Usually served with fish.

TZ: Pounded rice doughy starch, usually served with soups.

Jollof rice: Rice cooked in a pepper and tomato stew. It usually contains vegetables, fish and pasta, and sometimes chicken or beef.

Red-Red: Beans stewed in a spicy pepper and tomato sauce, served with fried plantain. Another newcomer favorite.

Wacce: Rice and beans, with various degrees of fishy flavor added. It’s good with stew sauce and gari; meat or egg will be extra.

**Things to do:**

There isn’t much to do in Tamale—you will have to be creative and come up with your own activities. (Or just drink every weekend.) Here are some of the limited options:

**Sunday Frisbee:**  Every Sunday at 4:30, people (mostly expats) meet at the VRA field to play ultimate Frisbee. Anyone is welcome to come; just show up. It is a good way to meet people, and the Frisbee players often go out to dinner after the game.

**Tour de Tamale:** Tamale is a nice place to bike, since the traffic is sparser than in Accra, and there are “bike lanes” along the major roads in town.

**Trip to Paga:** A few hours north of Tamale, Paga is right on the border of Ghana and Burkina Faso. There are docile crocodiles there that you can be photographed petting. Take a guide to stay safe, and bring some cash—you will need to buy a couple white fowl to lure the crocodiles in. Afterwards, head up to the border to the duty free shop, where you can buy any flavor of Absolute tax-free.

**Trip to Kintampo Falls:**  This isn’t really worth a day trip, but if you are passing through Kintampo anyway, the falls make a nice stop for a picnic. You can wade in the pools below the falls, which are quite pretty.

**Stadium Events:** Tamale’s new stadium often has football matches or concerts. Ask Ghanaians; they know how to find about the schedules.