Burkina Faso

Location
The country is also known by the name of Upper Volta (13°00′N, 2°00′W) and is also a landlocked nation. There are 6 countries that surround this country that is located in West Africa. They include Cote d’Ivoire (southwest), Benin (southeast), Togo and Ghana (south), Mali (north) and Niger (east).

Geography
The size of this country is slightly larger than the state of Colorado. The country has a lot of plains and besides the northern part of the country, there are quite a lot of hills. The lowest part of the country is Mouhoun (Black Volta) River at 200 m and the highest part is Tena Kourou at 749 m. Some of the natural resources of the country include small deposits of gold, salt, pumice, phosphates, manganese, marble and limestone.

Climate
The climate of the area ranges from being hot and dry to rainy and humid. There are times when the wind is so strong that dust is blown all over the place. Locals have to cover themselves for protection from the dust. The country could get really hot, up 104°F which happens around late March to May. The rest of the year seems to be in the midst of the rainy season. The climate is quite tropical and winters are not that bad because it is warm.

History
Burkina Faso was once under French rule and has gained their independence from the country in 1960. The country has suffered under many military coups especially in the time period of the 1970s and 1980s. Many problems have arise since then because it is a country with a huge population but there are not enough jobs and resources to go around to all the people. Some have to leave the country in order to find work elsewhere, but since there have been political unrest in the neighboring countries, people cannot travel elsewhere for work. The current President is Blaise Compaore and he has not been able to resolve the economic problems of the country. Around the 1890’s they fought with France which was interested in their country and when they finally lost to them, they became a colony under French rule. They tried to rise against the French, such as during the Volta Bani War in 1915, but they were easily defeated by the French. There were more revolts after that and on March 1, 1919, they revolted again and set up the colony of Upper Volta under the direction of François Charles Alexis Édouard Hesling, who later became their first governor. Things were still unstable afterwards, and it was not until years after WWII that they gained independence but continued to be under the rule of military coups.

Important Dates
January 3 is Revolution Day, March 8 is Women’s Day, March 18 is the Prophet’s Birthday, May 1 is Ascension Day and Labor Day, August 5 is Independence Day, August 15 is Assumption Day, September 30 is end of Ramadan, and December 11 is National Day.

Population
This is also a country that is plagued by AIDS and as of July 2008, the current population is 15,264,735, but one also has to take into the account that they might be a good amount of
people who have died from AIDS. The current growth rate is 3.109%. Most people live up only to their 50s with females passing males by just a couple of years. It is said that 300,000 people are living with AIDS at a rate of 4.2%. And from those people, close to 30,000 people die from the disease. Bird flu was also a problem for the people in this country.

Currency
The currency that is used in this country is the CFA Franc (XOF). The conversion rate for 1 US Dollar = 428.914 CFA Franc BCEAO and 1 CFA Franc BCEAO (XOF) = 0.002331 US Dollar (USD).

Education
The educational is modeled very similar to France and courses are taught in French. The Burkinabe children start schooling at the age of 7 and it will take the 6 years to complete the primary education. After they have gone through those 6 years of primary education, they have to take a final exam at the end in order to graduate and get a certificate. Only with that certificate can students continue on to secondary education. After they decided to go onto secondary education, they have to go through 2 levels, which is similar to the US system of having junior high before high school. Whereas junior high in the states is 2 years, junior high in Burkina Faso is 4 years and again they have to pass an exam at the end of 4 years in order to move on. After they pass that exam and enter high school, which takes 3 years to complete, then they could graduate and move on to university studies. Other languages are studied in school, such as German and Spanish.

The literacy rate for the country is still very low with only 20% who could read and write. The same pattern is consistent with more males than females who are literate.

Language
The official language of the country is French but African languages are spoken more commonly by the people. The Sudanic dialect is the most popular.

Religion
The religion that is most common is Muslim but there are some who believe in other gods as well. Christianity, which was brought over by missionaries, makes up a small amount of the population. The country allows the free practice of any religion.

Agriculture
The country has a very weak agricultural sector in which what they produce is not enough to feed its own people. They have to look to imports in order to gather what they need. One product that they produce is cotton, but even with cotton, it is not enough to drive the economy. They have also produced other items such as sesame, ground nuts, cottonseed and cottonfiber. After the discovery of sugarcane, they were able to lift themselves from their status due to the demand of sugarcane. They also produce tobacco as well as cassava, sweet potatoes and cowpeas.

Trade
As mentioned before, this is a country that depends on imports in order to sustain themselves. Cotton is their only cash crop and the country has been lobbying with the World
Trade Organization in order to bring down the power of other competitors so that they could sell their cotton to make a profit for a country in which economic revenue has not been possible.

**Food**

Typical dishes include rice mixed in sauce, meat on skewers (brochettes), chicken and lots of vegetables and fruits. Meat is not eaten very often because it is expensive, so eggs and fish are very important in the diet. They also have a dessert that is similar to the donut in which you could buy off the streets. Beer is really cheap in this country hence it is consumed quite often.

**Landmarks**

It is definitely worth some time to visit the country’s capital, Ouagadougou, which has lots of places to shop and museums to go to. The park life is also very good to take a walk and enjoy the scenery. If you like to look at architecture, the city Bob Dioulasso is a place to visit and take a stroll at. In the city of Manega, you could find lots of poems written by an African poet in the area. Gorum Gorum has a camel market and if you want to see the sugarcane fields you would have to go to Banfora, where a waterfall can also be found. In Gaona, you could see the Lobi people who live in huts with ladders than can easily be pulled up if an enemy comes close. There are much artifacts from history that could be seen here.