



# Versatility in Hospitality Industry around the Globe A Case Study on Culture and Cuisine Benin

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**Abstract:** Benin, officially Republic of Benin, French République du Bénin, formerly (until 1975) Dahomey or (1975–90) People’s Republic of Benin, country of western Africa. It consists of a narrow wedge of territory extending northward for about 420 miles (675 kilometers) from the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean, on which it has a 75-mile seacoast, to the Niger River, which forms part of Benin’s northern border with Niger. Benin is bordered to the northwest by Burkina Faso, to the east by Nigeria, and to the west by Togo. The official capital is Porto-Novo, but Cotonou is Benin’s largest city, its chief port, and its de facto administrative capital. Benin was a French colony from the late 19th century until 1960. Prior to colonial rule, part of the territory that is now Benin consisted of powerful, independent kingdoms, including various Bariba kingdoms in the north and in the south the kingdoms of Porto-Novo and Dahomey (Dan-ho-me, “on the belly of Dan;” Dan was a rival king on whose grave Dahomey royal compound was built). In the late 19th century French colonizers making inroads from the coastal region into the interior borrowed the name of the defeated Dahomey kingdom for the entire territory that is now Benin; the current name derives from the bight of Benin. The Voodoo Festival is celebrated annually in Ouidah on Jan. 10. This is an opportunity for the dignitaries and followers of voodoo to express their faith in their gods in the eyes of the public. This celebration of traditional religions is often marked by folk dances, colorful ceremonies. This day is also a national holiday in Benin.[2]

**Keywords:** Cuisine, Benin

## I. INTRODUCTION



As a political unit, Benin was created by the French colonial conquest at the end of the 19th century. In the precolonial period, the territory comprised a multiplicity of independent states, differing in language and culture. The south was occupied mainly by Ewe-speaking peoples, who traced their traditional origins to the town of Tado (in modern Togo). During the 16th and 17th centuries, the most powerful state in this area was the kingdom of Allada (Ardra), but in the 18th and 19th centuries its place was taken by Dahomey. In the north, the largest group was the Bariba, the most important state being the kingdom of Nikki, which formed part of a confederacy including other Bariba states located in what is today Nigeria. The Samba, in the northwest, did not form a kingdom.[ 1]

## II. CULTURE

French colonial rule and subsequent close ties with France have left a deep impact on all aspects of cultural life, especially among the educated segments of the population and in the southern cities. Each ethnic group also has its own centuries-old tradition, which itself often mixes with the French influence. These cultural traditions are clustered in two distinct regions, the largely Muslim north and the largely animist and Christian south.[ 1]



In Cotonou one finds many kinds of commercial enterprises, often with a French flavor, such as restaurants, cafés, and discotheques. Diplomats of foreign governments and many of Benin’s elite live in newer residential sections. There are several movie theaters and several hotels that provide entertainment. Most other towns have modern sections on a smaller scale.

Two things have influenced Benin’s culture more than anything else: voodoo and slavery. Some 60 percent of Beninese follow the voodoo religion – with many cultural aspects and religious syncretism spilling over into other aspects of culture as well. As a tourist in Benin, it is impossible to avoid the herbal medicines and creepy fetishes sold in the markets, the roadside shrines, the statues of voodoo gods and the festivals and ceremonies that take place, particularly around Ouidah, voodoo’s spiritual home.

The West African slave trade may have ceased many centuries ago, but its legacy can be observed today in unexpected ways. As well as the slave forts and chilling Door of No Return, there is a town that stands in the middle of a lake, and the impressive, fortress-like compounds of the Somba people – both of which were created as a way to defend the tribes against kidnap by slave raiders. Here are a few of our top ways to experience culture in Benin. [ ]



The multilingual character of Beninese society is characterized by the number of languages spoken, ethno-linguistic diversity, stratification of language use (whereby French is used officially and other languages used in other spheres of activity), and by the fact that many Beninese are polyglots [2]

### III. CUISINE

Drinking is part of the welcoming stage when anyone enters a home in Benin. Drinks are immediately served and you are expected (but not obligated) to take a sip as a respect to the host. In remote areas, the drinks are served in a calabash bowl and passed around to share. It might feel creepy or uncomfortable to share a bowl with multiple people but it’s part of the customs especially when visiting villages. Calabash bowls are also used to serve food in [ 2]



This is Benin #1 alcoholic liquor. It's made with fermented Palm tree sap that is infused with local fruits and herbs. It's the Beninese version of Vodka and it can be found practically in any town in Benin. Sodabi is what the locals pull out when you are invited over and is also the most requested and used liquor during many religious activities especially Voodoo. It's often sold on the street but certain bars carry it as it has become commercialized . It's a 60% proof alcohol and is cheap to buy ( a liter cost about \$3! ) [ 3 ]



Tchapalo is fermented corn that is distilled and bottled before selling. It's usually processed in a wooden jar with lemongrass. This method of fermentation gives it a very unique earthy and woody flavor. It contains a very small alcohol content however, kids can be seen consuming it in Benin. It's a beverage that is very refreshing and cheap to buy. It can be found on the streets and it's served cold so the fermentation doesn't continue and turns into a higher alcoholic beverage. [4]



This is Benin national Beer - as well as the cheapest Beer to buy. The breweries are located in Cotonou (in the South of Benin) and Parakou (North of Benin). The taste is very similar to Amstel light or Heineken.[ 3 ]





Bissap juice is a non alcoholic drink made with dried hibiscus flower which is boiled with sugar and other herbs. In the Caribbean countries, it is known as Sorrel. It looks like cranberry juice but with a very floral note. It's high in Vitamin C and is very delicious and refreshing. Some sellers make pops out of them or it can be consumed as a juice. It's usually infused with vanilla beans or lemongrass for an extra added touch of flavor[.3]



Beninese cuisine is known in Africa for its exotic ingredients[citation needed] and flavorful dishes. Beninese cuisine involves many fresh meals served with a variety of sauces. Meat is usually quite expensive, and meals are generally light on meat and generous on vegetable fat. In southern Benin cuisine, the most common ingredient is corn, often used to prepare dough which is mainly served with peanut- or tomato-based sauces. Fish and chicken are the most common meats used in southern Beninese cuisine, but beef, pork, goat and bush rat are also consumed. Meats are often fried in palm or peanut oil. Rice, beans, tomatoes and couscous are also significant staple foods. Fruits are common in this region, including mandarin oranges, oranges, bananas, kiwifruit, avocados, pineapples and peanuts. Yams are the main staple in northern Benin, and are also often served with peanut- or tomato-based sauces. The population in the northern provinces uses beef and pork meat which is also fried in palm or peanut oil or cooked in sauces. Cheese is also frequently used in some dishes. Couscous, rice and beans are also commonly eaten, along with fruits such as mangos, oranges, and avocados.

Dahomey fish stew is a Beninese dish consisting of filets taken from firm, low-fat fish that are rolled in flour and fried in oil until golden brown. They are then combined with cooked onions and tomatoes and left to simmer until the dish is served, preferably with rice.

The dish is named after Dahomey, which is how Benin was known in the early 1970s, when the first recipe for this stew was published.[ 5]



Yovo doko is typical Beninese street food that is considered a national dessert. These sweet fritters consist of flour, water, yeast, and sugar. The dough is deep-fried until a golden crust develops on the exterior, while the inside remains soft and tender.

Yovo doko fritters are traditionally topped with powdered sugar and consumed any time of the day. The name of the dish is literally translated to *European pastry*, because yovo doko is very similar to the French *beignet*, a popular type of fritter made from deep-fried choux pastry.[ 6]



#### IV. SUMMARY

Beninese cuisine is known in Africa for its exotic ingredients and flavorful dishes. Beninese cuisine involves many fresh meals served with a variety of sauces. Meat is usually quite expensive, and meals are generally light on meat and generous on vegetable fat.

Discovering the culture in Benin is the highlight of any holiday to this West African nation. Benin's culture remains deeply influenced by the legacy of the slave trade as well as by voodoo – the national religion. Explore festivals, fetishes, markets and palaces to gain a greater insight into this fascinating culture.[3]

#### V. CONCLUSION

The historical kingdom of Benin was established in the forested region of West Africa in the 1200s C.E. According to history, the Edo people of southern Nigeria founded Benin.

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Benin's culture is as rich and diverse as its landscape. With strong religious roots to inform most of the traditions, Benin's culture is certainly one of the most unique and interesting in Africa. Music is of utmost importance in the country. [2]

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