

Five Things I should have Packed for Ghana

Akwaaba!

I recently returned from the 2025 Ghana Field School. Here are five essential items I recommend you bring with you on your travels:

1. Your fanciest clothes and shoes to match.

Before you depart for Ghana, ensure your suitcase has space for your best outfit. One day you're touring a market, and the next you're suddenly standing in front of the President and Members of Parliament, hoping they don't notice the crease in your travel shirt. Think of it as insurance: if you never need it, great. But if you do, you'll be glad you packed something sharper than quick-



dry hiking pants. And even if politics never make it onto your itinerary, a polished outfit will still come in handy for group dinners, community celebrations, or that inevitable night when your peers decide to participate in Accra's nightlife. Bright colours are encouraged.

2. A camera and a watch.

Bring a digital camera and a simple watch, ideally one that doesn't double as a smartphone.

There is plenty of time to scroll Instagram when you retire to your hotel room for the evening.

While traveling through Ghana's diverse landscapes, you'll want to give your full attention to the view outside the bus window: lush forests, dry desert plains, brightly painted mosques, street

vendors selling the sweetest mangoes, and the tiniest baby goats running after their mothers like they own the road.

When you reach Mole National Park, a quality camera will be well worth the investment. In the mornings, elephants wander up to the motel pool as if checking in for a casual swim, before slowly making their way down to the river. The scene feels calm and almost unreal, but don't let yourself get too distracted. If you do, a group of baboons might suddenly appear and grab anything they can – food, clothes, or even your beer. That's when you'll be happy you have a camera to prove it really happened, and that you weren't too busy on your phone while a baboon ran off with your last clean socks.

3. A notebook prepared with phrases and greetings.

English is the official language of Ghana, but don't rely on it. Knowing a few local greetings and phrases will earn you bonus points with the locals. Ghana is home to over 80 different languages, including Twi, Ga, Ewe, and Frafra. During our travels through nine regions and more than 2,000 kilometers on the road, each community welcomed us in its own way, often with a smile, a nod, or a patient attempt to understand our mangled pronunciations. Even a simple “hello” or “thank you” in the local language will impress people, spark conversation, and might even help you bargain down those market prices in Kumasi, especially if the vendor can tell you studied your Twi.

4. A business card.

Ghana's business culture is vibrant and fast-growing, attracting professionals from around the world. Throughout our travels, we met CEOs of non-profits, university researchers, and even students from the United States. Accra's conference season kicked off at the end of our trip,

drawing industry experts and innovators, and highlighting just how global and connected Ghana's business and academic networks have become.

For example, we visited ASE Baskets in the Upper East Region. Their handmade baskets were already getting international attention, and just a few weeks later, they were showing their work at the Future Fabrics Expo in London. Our group didn't just admire the baskets; we bought so many that they had to be delivered to our hotel in a bag bigger than the motorcycle that brought them. A business card might seem small, but it's a great way to stay in touch, whether you want to work together in the future or just want someone to remember which group of students bought a third of their stock.

5. An extra piece of luggage

You'll definitely need it. At first, you might just pick up a few things: pretty textiles, a small basket, maybe some chocolate. Each purchase feels small, but soon your cedis are gone and your group



has spent \$1,000 at the market in one trip. Suddenly, your suitcase looks like it might burst. Then your classmate, who didn't bring an extra bag, asks for help carrying all the gifts he bought for his girlfriend. Cue the "oh crap" moment as you try to figure out how to get it all back to Canada. By the final night, packing feels less like a chore and more like a championship round of Tetris, as you wedge oversized baskets, rolled-up paintings, and pottery into your already bursting suitcases. An extra bag ensures you don't have to leave behind treasures you love and makes sure every souvenir makes it home with the group.