



MOVING TO ABIDJAN

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WEST AFRICAN CAPITAL



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The first few months of relocation can be tough. Read on to make sure your move gets off to a great start.

I moved to Abidjan in August 2020, and despite careful research and planning, we got many things wrong and made mistakes we wish we could have avoided. Being the scout that I am, and taking my learnings in my stride, I thought I would jot down the lessons I learnt as useful information for newbies arriving in the +225.

COVID-19 and the elections

It will be very useful to google the history of Côte d'Ivoire to understand what happened here in 2011, which was basically a civil war.

According to Wikipedia: "The Second Ivorian Civil War broke out in March 2011 when the crisis in Ivory Coast escalated into full-scale military conflict between forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, the President of Ivory Coast since 2000, and supporters of the internationally recognized president-elect Alassane Ouattara. The catalyst for the conflict was a law quickly drafted by the government and approved in a referendum immediately before the elections of 2000, which required both parents of a presidential candidate to be born within Ivory Coast. This excluded the northern presidential candidate, Alassane Ouattara, from the race."

This sparked unprecedented violence and civil unrest. It was unsafe for people to be on the streets, many were killed, and people were rescued and evacuated from their rooftops.

We refer to this time as the 'événements,' and is a difficult subject for everyone to discuss. If ever you find yourself in a conversation regarding this difficult period, be mindful and respectful. People are still visibly emotional about it.



With this context in mind, everyone was a bit nervous about how the elections would pan out in 2020. Luckily, peace was maintained and President Alassane Ouattara was re-elected with 95% of the vote amid an opposition boycott. Ivorians and the international community alike breathed a sigh of relief.

The peaceful elections signalled to the international community that Ivory Coast continues to be stable and open for business. Abidjan is the biggest city in West Africa and has a buoyant economy largely based in agriculture.

On your to-do list

Your home

Your home is your refuge and important to get right as you spend 90% of your time in it. Since the elections and COVID-19, the housing market has been rising and rising.

Housing is expensive in Abidjan. Very rarely will you find accommodation close to the French or international schools for less than CFA1.2 million CFA. All prices are negotiable, but please remember to work with a proper registered agent. We have heard countless stories of people being crooked when taking transfer of houses. Negotiate with the landlord or agent what work needs to be done prior to taking ownership of the property.

Check for things like: cupboard space in the kitchen, and whether there are enough taps for a dishwasher/washing machine. Normally the washing machine



gets installed in a laundry room separate to the kitchen. People do have tumble-dryers, but again make sure there is enough space (and a plug) to have one installed.

Check the geysers and if hot water runs to all the bathrooms and kitchen. Check the DB board. For example, our DB board is split into two. Some switches are in the kitchen, but the main switch for electricity is in a steel box on the street. If there is a power cut, often we have to check the switch located outside rather than one on the DB board.

Another thing to look for is plug points in the house. As obvious as it sounds, each room must have a plug point, and the doors leading onto the balconies must all have keys. Check that the windows open and close properly and have mosquito netting installed on the windows, with burglar bars. Most houses are normally repainted with each new tenant.

Swimming pool

The swimming pool is normally taken care of by a pool man, a piscinist. Usually, the person who was taking care of the pool prior to your arrival will continue to do so when you move in. The same goes for the gardener.

Plants

You will find an array of beautiful plants on the side of the road for purchase. Prices vary, but mainly round the CFA2,000-3,000 CFA range for small plants. Roses are a bit more expensive – around CFA7,000 and palm trees and the like are pricier.

As it rains a lot in Abidjan, people cover their garden beds with pretty coloured stones. This also elevates the look of the garden. The stones are also sold on the side of the road for round CFA3,000 a bag.

There are boutiques that sell indoor plants, but they are more expensive.



Rain and flood zones

The “big rains” start from after Easter in April and run up to July. In Abidjan it really rains. If you look closely, you will see that many market umbrellas are covered in heavy duty plastic, and the gutters on the main roads are a metre deep.

When checking out your new neighbourhood ask: “Where did it flood in the rains last year?” and let the people talk. If you ask the question outright you may not get the real answer.

You must make sure your house isn't in a flood zone; and you must check that all the drainage on your new property is done correctly. Tide marks and lifted paint on walls and ceilings also give clues to where problematic areas once were the year before. This is a crucial point.

How rent and deposits work

If a month's rent for your new house is CFA1.2 million, this is how you budget the total cost before occupation:

CFA1.2 million deposit
CFA1.2 million for agency fee
CFA1.2 million x 2 for rent

So that is CFA1.2 m x 4 = CFA4.8 million you need to have ready to take occupation of the property.

Post and PO boxes

The water and electricity bill will always be delivered to your house. Other post, not so much. For this it is better to hire a PO box at your nearest Post Office, La Poste.



Car and papers

For all administrative tasks, it is much easier to hire what we call a “fixer”, someone who assists you in dealing with the Ivorian administration. We hired someone to help us purchase our car and deal with our driver’s licence papers. In the Ivory Coast, you are allowed to drive up to three months after the last date stamp in your passport, after which, you are required to obtain an Ivorian licence to avoid being fined.

Cars are very expensive in Abidjan. Don’t be surprised when you see the cost of a standard SUV starting at around CFA12 million. This is a very normal situation.

Adapting to everyday rhythm and climate

It is very hot in Abidjan, this will take time to adapt to. We try not to sleep with the AC running at night, but many people prefer to leave them on to get a good night’s sleep.

In our house, the AC is on most days. Moving from 17 to 20 degrees indoors to 35 degrees + outdoors all the time takes time getting used to. It is very humid, and just getting ready in the morning can leave you feeling sweaty and muggy!

Consider investing in a water fountain

There are a few water delivery services in Abidjan. We use [Olgane](#) and brought a water fountain when we moved. Water fountains are easy to find: [Gifi](#) have a good range at a reasonable price.



Family routine

Finding activities and things to do for the family to find a new routine was on the top of our list. There are various structures to consider, but this is how we did it in those first wobbly weeks on arriving here.

We hired a driver with a car who was able to take us around where we needed to be. We bought Orange sim cards, and at the same time set up our Orange Money accounts, which is a very handy service to have when in CI. We went to the Orange office at the Abidjan Mall, but apparently the one in Cap Sud shopping centre is much quicker and more efficient.

Next up we dealt with the internet and cable TV. We installed Orange internet. Lots of complexes have fibre, so this is also a good alternative depending where you live. Please don't be surprised if installing your internet and cable TV takes a few attempts. The cabling in the houses is normally poorly done and often to have good signal they may have to redo the job. My advice is just to be as patient as you can.

Kitchen appliances

We needed to purchase all our kitchen appliances on arrival. We went to an appliance shop, SOCIAM, based in Abidjan Mall. If you buy a few things there you can negotiate a discount like we did. Expect delivery to be a week later, and consider buying a wooden structure like a pallet to put your washing machine on to prevent it from leaking during a spin cycle. Keep all your slips for the guarantee in a safe place. Also consider buying electricity tension plugs for all plug points, as the electricity tension changes regularly, potentially blowing expensive appliances.

Curtains

Orca in Abidjan Mall have a wide range of curtains that are ready to hang. The



trick is to get your curtain rods hung by someone good – they may need to be adjusted, as often the windows are built up to 5cm crooked. A tailor is readily available to assist with hemming.

Mosquito nets

This was our biggest adventure. We found it very difficult to get a mosquito net made for our son's bed. In the end we did find someone who was able to build a wooden structure and sew the net on separately, but the ordeal was challenging.

People often say, "We sleep with the AC on at night so we don't need mosquito nets." My advice is for you is to sleep under nets. Malaria and Dengue run rife in Abidjan, and can be easily avoided, especially in children.

Green spaces and the weekends

Parc Ouattara

There is a lovely green space in Riviera 3, parc **Dominique Ouattara**, named after the Ivory Coast's current First Lady. With green space, trees, a skate area, a soccer area and a jungle gym, this is a lovely little park to visit with kids and isn't complicated to get to if you live in the area.



Bingerville

There is another lovely park to go to on a Sunday when the traffic isn't too bad. The **Bingerville Botanical Garden** boasts perfectly aligned palm trees and green grass for miles and miles! It's maintained beautifully and when wandering around you can really appreciate the the flora and the majestic size of the trees native to the Ivory Coast. It is just a stunning and wonderful place to have a lazy Sunday picnic.

Barbeque

We quite like to barbeque on the weekends. We think the best butcher in Abidjan is the butcher in the Cap Sud shopping centre. Meat from around the world, or locally produced, the meat from this butcher is very good and you won't be disappointed.

Orca and Gifi sell barbeques at a reasonable prices, and charcoal is easily available at the shops and garages.

Bakery

We like the bakery **Gateau et du Pain** in Riviera. With lovely cakes and viennoiseries, this little bakery has lovely goodies and sells ice cream as well. They can also do platters, but you must order a day in advance.

What to do with your kids

I am a very fussy person and can't leave my kids just anywhere. During those first few weeks when we arrived, we were recommended a new centre that had just opened called **P'tits Futès**. It is run by Canadian sisters and on secure property where the kids are well supervised. I recommend this structure, it is very well organised and professional.



There are sport activities organised in **Sol Beni**. I would recommend this for older kids from round the age of 10. Sol Beni at where the Ivory Coast Soccer team trains, and the grounds are large and have a wide range of activities.

Swimming lessons

I currently have my youngest going to lessons at the **Riviera Golf pool**. To my surprise they don't offer a "trial lesson", as you would expect. You are obligated to pay CFA20,000 for the month, and your child can join in twice a week, on a Wednesday afternoon or Saturday morning. The lessons are the best I have seen here so far. If I find better, I will most certainly update you!

The Golf Club

There are stages/camps organised at the golf range for kids. Very green, clean and outdoors, this was a favourite activity during the last school holiday.

Food and grocery shopping

You can find everything you need at Casino and Leader Price. Prices vary in terms of boxed and packaged things, but your grocery bill overall will be quite high in Abidjan. We are a family of four, and it is very easy to spend CFA150,000 on groceries weekly. The imported dairy products and fresh produce are the most expensive.



I like to do my big grocery shop at Cap Sud. Cleaning products, boxed cereal and biscuits are well priced and you can also get some things on promotion, which is also good.

There are boutique épicerie where you can find lovely things flown in from Europe or Lebanon. I know of people who also like the big **Carrefour** at Playce Shopping Centre and the **Super U** in Zone 4, but I am yet to visit myself. Abidjan is plastic conscious and only large recyclable bags are available for purchase at all tills.

Gluten free

Gluten-free in Abidjan is not without its challenges. I have been able to find a few gluten-free crackers in most **Casinos** and buy gluten-free bread at the **Monoprix** in the **Trade Centre Ivoire**. There is also a health store in the Cap Sud shopping centre which sells gluten free flours and pastas. They also have a wide range of essential oils and seeds.

Where to go and what to do

We have tried a few restaurants, which has been fun. Most good restaurants are clustered around Zone 4.

If you subscribe to **Baab.ci**, you can keep updated on what is happening in the city, along with new restaurants to try.

We enjoy going to Bassam every now and again during the weekends. If you are out in Bassam for the day, make sure to leave round 3pm to avoid the traffic on the way back.

There is a cinema, and the kids like their horse riding and golf, and swimming in the pool. We have also enjoyed bicycle tours and walks in the **Banco Forest**. Be sure to pack water bottles, sunscreen and mosquito spray wherever you go.



The Grand Bassam

If you are looking for a beach outing, the grand Bassam is a nice outing for the family. It's just over an hour out of the city. There are many places one can consider – many expats love [Assoyam](#), but we find it noisy and expensive.

We like [Boblin la Mer](#). It's bit quieter, the food is good, but there isn't a pool.

Assinie

Assinie is also a nice beach holiday destination with many options in terms of accommodation. We quite like [Zion Hotel](#), and the small boat ride across the lagoon – you'll find yourself right on the beach. Home to arguably the prettiest shell in the world, the sand dollar, (it's actually a sea urchin,) these beauties are the unofficial symbol of Assinie.

Medical care

Our doctor is [Dr Vanie](#), based in Marcory. He is good and appointments are easily attainable. If you need urgent medical care, [Clinic Farah](#) is where you need to go. My son recently broke his foot, and it was all taken care of at Clinic Farah. Most embassies offer a recommended list of medical professionals, but word of mouth is by far the best way to find the most trusted and reputable doctors.



Parlez-vous français?

French is the spoken language in CI. You can't do anything without it, so some basic French is necessary to survive in the +225. Consider some lessons or a language app like Duolingo.

As mentioned already, there is a weekly email in French keeping you up to date with what is happening in the city. Subscribe to Baab.ci and also get onto their WhatsApp listings.

Making friends and getting into WhatsApp groups

Everything here happens on a WhatsApp group, so subscribe to or ask to be invited to as many as you can. This is the quickest way to get a recommendation, information and an opinion.

Personally, I have found the expat vibe very friendly here. We are invited to gatherings often and there is none of this "inner circle" nonsense that I see in other countries.

I think it helps that local Ivorian culture is very party-oriented. People love to talk and chat, have a BBQ and "causer", as they say here.

This should set you off on your first 100 days. Do you have a question? Or need some further assistance? Join our [WhatsApp group](#) to see if we can help you.

