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## THREE TO WATCH IN WEST AFRICA

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Living in West Africa is, as I've written before, a bit of a rollercoaster ride! Up, down, upside down and turnabout – except that this rollercoaster never comes to a gentle stop!

Gambia is, God forbid, looking at the prospect of internal conflict after, yet again, a disputed general election, and the incumbent refusing to give way. Nigeria, for a decade or more the focus of attention, the place to be and invest, has just had a full year of negative GDP growth, the currency is in free-fall, and the prospects for 2017 look, well, bleak. Benin, Nigeria's tiny neighbour, is dependent on the big boy next door for much of its economic activity. Nigeria has just banned the import by road of used cars (or did it withdraw the ban, difficult to tell which way is up sometimes!), which means that an entire industry in Cotonou, with several thousand jobs involved, no longer has any customers.

But citing again the fact that every negative has a positive, there are three countries that are on the up in West Africa, one of which has been “down” for many years.

Cote d'Ivoire experienced internal conflict for much of the last decade, and in the early months of this one, with severe damage caused by what became street to street fighting in Abidjan, the commercial capital. Six years after taking power in early 2011, after the terrible aftermath of the 2010 election, and after a peaceful re-election in 2016, President Alassane Ouattara and his colleagues in government have brought the country from years of conflict to being the fastest growing economy in the world, forecast by the IMF to experience 8% real GDP growth this year. 8%?!

That's actually the highest globally in percentage terms, no one in the developed world comes anywhere near it, it is higher than China and India, and the average for sub-Saharan Africa is just 2.9%.

OK, from a small base, but the momentum is there, and growth begets growth. Due to the years of conflict, the hotels in Abidjan got a bit “tired”, but refurbishment is underway, the Radisson Blu at the airport opened last year, and new hotels planned there include Azalaï and Mövenpick. A recent on-line press article states<sup>1</sup> that Cote d'Ivoire “may well be Africa's new economic powerhouse”.

Sorry Nigeria, must do better!

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<sup>1</sup> [http://allafrica.com/stories/201701110114.html?aa\\_source=nwsltr-nigeria-en](http://allafrica.com/stories/201701110114.html?aa_source=nwsltr-nigeria-en)



Two other countries in the region are up there with some of the highest growth rates globally, Ghana and Senegal. Neither have had the conflict that Cote d'Ivoire and other West African nations have experienced, but Ghana has been through a “sticky patch” recently, hit by the reduction in the world market prices of oil, gold and cocoa, a severe shortage of electric power, alleged poor governance at the centre, and a “wait and see attitude”, for the general elections held in December 2016 – which, unlike other countries, passed off peaceably (once again), and there are high hopes for economic recovery in 2017, with the IMF projecting 7.4 per cent real GDP growth. 7.4%?! Wow! Such high figures mean a greater likelihood that the hotel industry will receive greater demand, and that new projects in Accra, such as the Marriott in Airport City, will finally open.

Senegal has been kind of a “steady Eddy” in recent years, with average GDP growth in the last decade of around 4 to 4.5% - there was a dip to around 2% in 2011 due to poor agricultural output, and a lack of confidence building up to the early-2012 election (a recurring theme, no?!). But recent efforts to further diversify the economy (another recurring theme) are succeeding, with GDP growth projected at almost 7 per cent this year, after two years of 6%+. 7%?! Wow again!

Senegal's capital, Dakar, benefits from good road infrastructure, and good air access, to the rest of Africa, to Europe and to the USA. Like Abidjan, the hotel market there is a bit “French”, with several Accor properties, but that is changing, with a very successful Radisson Blu on the Corniche in the Fann district, and with a Hyatt and an(other) Azalaï (a hotel chain making huge strides in West Africa) under construction.

That same article says that Senegal has “.. long been a bastion of political stability in West Africa” – another essential, recurring theme, for investment and growth.

So, three to watch in West Africa – not just to watch, but to take advantage of the opportunities there!

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