

Cameroon, Africa in miniature

ON 20 MAY, CAMEROON WILL CELEBRATE ITS NATIONAL DAY.

Nanda Jagusiak interviews the Ambassador of Cameroon, H.E. Mrs. Odette Melono.



1. You are the only female Cameroonian Ambassador serving abroad currently and also the first ever to serve in the Netherlands. What are your objectives as Ambassador?

Actually I am currently the only female Cameroonian Ambassador serving abroad since 2008 and first in The Netherlands but not the first ever. Madame Isabelle Bassong was Cameroon's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Communities from 1988 until 2006.

There was also Madame Simone Marie who represented Cameroon in the United Nations from 1982-86. Although I am currently the only female ambassador, I draw my inspiration from these great ladies who were female pioneers in Cameroon Diplomacy.

My objectives are to represent Cameroon in the best way possible and to help to build a stronger relationship with the Kingdom of the Netherlands. I am also trying to invite

the people of the Netherlands to discover the amazing beauty and tourism attractions in my country.

2. What are your experiences living in the Netherlands?

Living here since 2008 has been great fun because I have the opportunity to represent my country as well as enjoy the hospitality and admire the spirit of determination and hard work.

It has also been an exciting experience working with the Cameroonian population in the Netherlands. Without any prejudice I am proud and grateful to have been warmly welcomed by them. There are a few hundred Cameroonians living here and I must say I am proud of the hardworking Cameroonian community in The Netherlands and Luxembourg since I am also Ambassador of Luxembourg.

3. Where does the name Cameroon come from?

Cameroon owes its name to a Portuguese navigator called Fernando Pô, who arrived in Cameroon in 1472. When he landed on one of our rivers, the river Wouri, Fernando Pô was amazed at the amount of prawns (in Dutch garnalen) in the river, so much so that he named the river Rio dos Camaroës, which means River of Prawns. Cameroon was born from the word Camaroës. So you can say Cameroon has a historical attachment to Portugal for her name.

4. Why is Cameroon referred to as "Africa in Miniature" or "All Africa in One"?

What that means is that you can

find almost every aspect of Africa in just one country. Cameroon offers all the diversity of Africa—in climate, culture, tourism, race, beauty, geography, etc within its borders. We are also called "the melting pot of Africa" and "Africa in microcosm".

5. How is the economic situation in Cameroon at the moment? Which are the key investment sectors?

Cameroon's economy expanded by 4.7% in 2012. The IMF estimates that our economy will grow by 6.5 percent by 2018. We maintain our long-stated goal to be an emerging market economy by 2035.

I would like to state that Cameroon has abundant natural resources. We are the agricultural nucleus of the CEMAC region. For potential investors, there are several investment opportunities in Cameroon in the Agriculture and forestry, Energy, Mining, infrastructure, Transport, Telecommunications sectors etc. My government enacted a new investment code in April 2013 given new tax incentives and exemptions on VAT and duties.

6. How is the economic relation between The Netherlands and Cameroon?

Cameroon has a reasonable economic relation with The Netherlands. There are several Dutch investors currently in Cameroon interested in our very broad investment opportunities. On 3 April, 2014, I held an informative meeting on doing Business in Cameroon with the Netherlands African Business Council (NABC) in collaboration with OLAF Trading. Occasionally we plan business trips to

Cameroon.

7. Why should people invest in Cameroon?

Peace is one of Cameroon's best advantages. We are a peaceful country. Our population has a high literacy rate and thus forms a ready-made labor force. Cameroon has 65% fertile agricultural land and the economy is growing fast. Cameroonians are friendly and hospitable.

8. Why are the official languages in Cameroon French and English?

From 1884, Germany colonized Cameroon up till her defeat in World War I in 1918. When the League of Nations was created in 1919, Cameroon was seized from Germany in 1922, then partitioned and handed to France and Britain to be separately administered as mandated territories. As such, Cameroon adopted both languages.

9. Since Cameroon is one of the older countries in Africa, I believe many sites have been labeled as World Heritage Sites. Which are the most important sites to visit?

That is a very interesting question. Cameroon is one of the richest, most beautiful countries in Africa with heart stopping touristic attractions. We have three World heritage sites and many more awaiting the status.

I can think of the 3000 years old man made Rupestral Engravings of Bidzar, an archaeological site displaying around 500 engraved figures in Northern Cameroon discovered in 1933. It is an area of beautifully engraved marble flagstones covering

an area of about 130 sq km. Another architectural heritage site is Diy-Gid-Biy which has a collection of more than 300 years old stone monuments covering 25 square kilometers in the Mandara Mountains in the Far North region. There is also the Dja Faunal Reserve covering 5,260 square kilometres ...a World Heritage Site since 1987 with over 1,500 plants, over 107 mammals and more than 320 bird species. Please note that 90% of the Dja Reserve is still undisturbed.

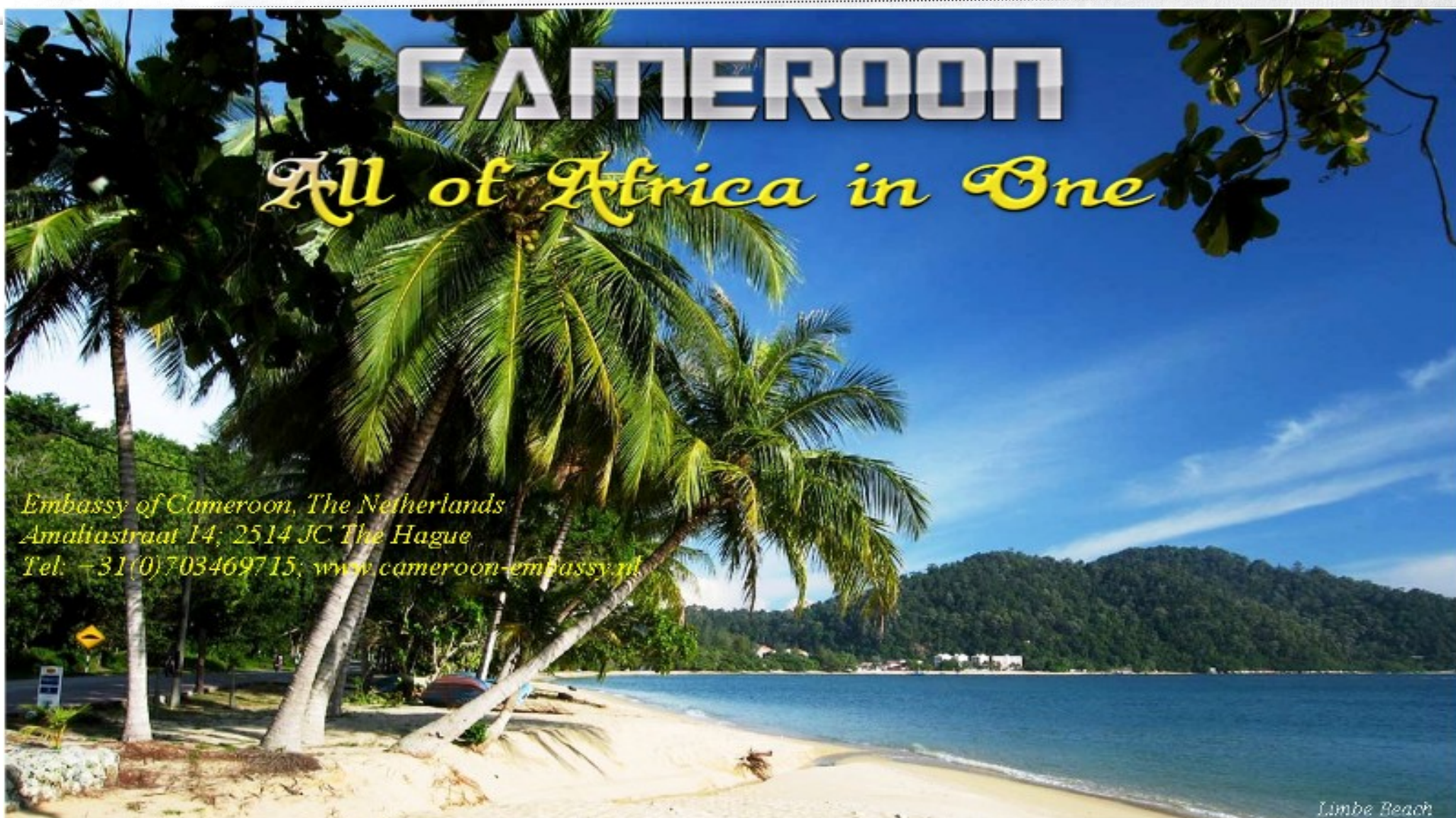
Other important sites are: - the Baful Chiefdom of architectural and religious importance with 50 terracotta structures in the North West region; - the Archeological Remains of Shum Laka under the shelter of a huge rock of 1200 sq m in the North West region; - Korup National Park in the South West Region with 1700 plant species, 410 bird species representing 53 families, 480 butterflies species, 82 reptilian species and 161 species of mammals; - Mount Cameroon, the highest active volcano in West and Central Africa; - Waza National Park... the most accessible and rewarding wildlife viewing experience of Cameroon, etc.

10. What is your favorite sport?

Football. I support the Indomitable Lions of Cameroon and I am proud Cameroon is in the World Cup in Brazil.

11. If you can describe your country in one sentence, what would you say to our readers?

Cameroon is a Land of Promise. It is all Africa in one. I invite everyone to come and discover.



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