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Pets : Ghana and Sri Lanka

This two lesson Topic includes audio interviews of children in Ghana and Sri Lanka, which encourage discussion on everything from what makes a good pet and how to care for your animal, to disputes with parents on the subject of whether to allow a pet in the house, and the ethics of keeping animals as pets in the first place.

Lesson 1 : Choosing a pet (Ghana)

Lesson 2 : Looking after pets (Sri Lanka)

Ghana



Modern day **Ghana** includes land which was once the Empire of Ashanti, one of the most influential states in sub-Saharan Africa before colonial rule. Later, the territory was the first place in sub-Saharan Africa where Europeans came to trade, first in gold, later in slaves. In 1854 Britain proclaimed the land as a crown colony, the Gold Coast. It remained so until 1957, when Ghana became the first black African nation in the region to achieve independence. The country is now a democracy, and often seen as a model for economic and political reform in Africa.

- **President** John Atta Mills (elected 2008)
- **Population:** 23.8 million (UN, 2009)
- **Capital:** Accra
- **Area:** 238,533 sq km (92,098 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** English, African languages including Akan, Ewe
- **Major religions:** Christianity, indigenous beliefs, Islam
- **Life expectancy:** 56 years (men), 57 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** Cedi
- **Main exports:** Gold, cocoa, timber, tuna, bauxite, aluminium, diamonds
- **GNI per capita:** US \$670 (World Bank, 2008)

Pets in Ghana

Ghana is a relatively prosperous country by African standards, but still poor in global terms, and as a result in many households, animals are kept primarily because they can provide food or labour. Dogs guard people and property, whilst cats are kept to kill mice and rats. However, as we hear in Lesson 1 Track 2, children often still get very attached to “pets” such as Josephine the mouser and Toxi the guard dog; Toxi even eats the same food as the family, indigenous Fufu, and Ground Nut Soup.

Especially in more prosperous and developed parts of Ghana, there is also a move towards keeping animals purely as pets. The WSPA [World Society for the Protection of Animals] is active here, sponsoring over 200 “Kindness Clubs” formed by Ghanaian school children, and the country also has its own active indigenous animal welfare society, the Ghana SPCA. As we hear in Lesson 1 Track 1, many Ghanaian children also keep and care for animals which they regard purely as pets, such as Poopi the monkey, and Oboni the hen. Leticia describes how she is determined to see Oboni grow to a ripe old age, rather than serving to provide dinner for the family.

Sri Lanka



Sri Lanka is an island in South Asia, located 31 km off the coast of India. The country’s history has reflected its close links with the subcontinent, as well as with South East Asia. The colonial European powers arrived on the island 1505; the Portuguese, the Dutch, and finally the British, ruled the territory (which was then known as Ceylon) until the country gained independence in February 1948.



Since independence, Ceylon (which was renamed “Sri Lanka” in 1972) has faced a perennial problem of attempting to reconcile two contrasting peoples: the Buddhist Sinhalese majority, and the Hindu Tamil minority in the northeast of the country. Tamil separatism began in the 1950s. By a decade later the situation had escalated, with ethnic riots and the rise of the armed group the Tamil Tigers; this eventually led to 25 years of civil war. The war lasted until May 2009, when the conflict finally appeared to be at an end - at least militarily - when government forces seized the last area controlled by Tamil Tiger rebels.

- Population: 20.2 million (UN, 2009)
- People: 73.94% Sinhalese, 12.7% Tamil, 7.1% Muslim, 5.5% Hill Tamil, and 1.5% other
- Languages: Sinhalese, Tamil, English
- Capital: Colombo (commercial), Sri Jayawardenepura (administrative)
- Area: 65,610 sq km (25,332 sq miles)
- Major languages: Sinhala, Tamil, English

- Major religions: Buddhism (70%), Hinduism (15%), Islam, Christianity
- Life expectancy: 70 years (men), 78 years (women) (UN)
- Monetary unit: Sri Lankan rupee
- Main exports: Clothing and textiles, tea, gems, rubber, coconuts
- GNI per capita: US \$1,780

Pets in Sri Lanka

Seventy percent of the population of Sri Lanka are Buddhists, and Buddhism is the prevailing ethos governing everything, including attitudes to keeping animals as pets. One of the principles of Buddhism is *metta*, meaning love for every single living thing. Animal owners cannot put their pets to sleep because it goes against one of the main precepts of Buddhism, “thou shall not kill”. And whilst children in Sri Lanka, as in Ghana, feel natural love and affection for their animals (Lesson 2 Track 1) many dogs and cats harbour scabies, fleas and other parasites. As a result, their parents are often less than happy about even allowing animals in the house (Lesson 2 Track 3), let alone allowing them to sleep in the children’s beds (Lesson 2 Track 2). As the child in Lesson 2 Track 4 explains, apart from any concerns about hygiene, the worries of the “elders” may also be due to wider Buddhist principals about how animals should not be kept caged, but allowed freedom as should all living creatures.