

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why choose Cameroon?

Cameroon is not the easiest country to move to if your definition of a smooth relocation is a government website that answers every question and a procedure that follows its own instructions. That does not make the country unliveable. It means a successful move depends on more than a visa and an optimistic spreadsheet. Yaoundé and Douala reward preparation, useful skills and genuine local relationships. They are less forgiving of plans that require predictable traffic, uninterrupted power and paperwork completed on the first attempt. The point is not to admire inconvenience. It is to know which inconveniences you can manage, and which ones would make your project unworkable.

That distinction matters from the beginning. Cameroon has several characteristics that can make it genuinely attractive for a long-term move: a strategic position in Central Africa, two official languages, a relatively diversified economy by regional standards, large urban markets, significant agricultural and natural resources, expanding digital services, a young population and direct connections with several African and European destinations. It also has infrastructure gaps, administrative friction, power and water interruptions, substantial regional inequalities, security problems in parts of the country and a business environment in which knowing the official rule is sometimes only the first half of the job.

You should therefore choose Cameroon because the realities of the country fit your project, not because somebody on social media showed you a large villa, tropical fruit and a monthly budget converted into euros or dollars. Cheap housing means little if it is three hours from your workplace in traffic. A profitable business idea means little if you have not investigated import procedures, electricity reliability, taxes, licensing and how customers actually pay. A beautiful neighbourhood means less when the access road becomes difficult after heavy rain. Expatriation works when the entire system fits together.

Cameroon's economy gives you opportunities, but it does not hand them to you gift-wrapped. The IMF's October 2026 assessment described an economy still growing but losing some momentum because of declining hydrocarbon production and delays in expanding electricity transmission capacity. Services have remained comparatively resilient. Inflation had eased to an average of about 2.6 percent through August 2026, although food-price pressure remained a risk. Those numbers matter because they show neither collapse nor miracle. They describe an economy with real activity, real constraints and very little patience for business models built on fantasy.

For you, the useful question is not simply whether Cameroon is « growing. » The useful question is where that growth exists, who can access it and whether your skills or capital solve an actual problem. An experienced engineer entering an infrastructure project, a specialist recruited by an international organisation, an entrepreneur with a strong local partner, a teacher hired by an international school and a European freelancer working for foreign clients are not participating in the same Cameroonian economy. They may live twenty minutes apart in Yaoundé and have completely different levels of financial security.

The labour market illustrates this divide particularly well. Cameroon has a large young population and substantial underemployment. Formal salaried employment represents only part of economic life. Informal trade, services, transport, repair work, agriculture and countless small businesses support a huge share of households. If you arrive expecting a labour market structured like France, Britain, Canada or Belgium, with most opportunities appearing on recognised recruitment websites and salary bands neatly displayed beside job descriptions, you will misunderstand what you are seeing.

Foreigners are generally better positioned when they bring specialised expertise, international contracts, investment capacity, professional networks or income earned outside the local economy. Arriving first and hoping to « find something » afterwards is a much riskier strategy. Local wages can be dramatically lower than the salaries newcomers imagine when they calculate their future life using European prices. Certain expatriate positions provide housing, transport, health insurance, school fees or other benefits precisely because those benefits would otherwise consume a considerable part of the employee's income.

This is one of the first illusions worth killing. Cameroon can be inexpensive when you live largely like a middle-income Cameroonian household. It can become surprisingly expensive when you attempt to reproduce an upper-middle-class European lifestyle in imported form. Imported groceries, international schools, private healthcare, air-conditioned housing, generators or backup power systems, secure compounds, frequent flights abroad, imported electronics and certain vehicles can turn the famous « low cost of living » into something considerably less spectacular.

There is no contradiction here. Local cassava, plantain, vegetables, fish and seasonal fruit can be affordable while imported cheese, breakfast cereals or specialised dietary products are expensive. A neighbourhood market and a high-end supermarket are serving different budgets. A local restaurant and a polished Douala establishment can exist on the same street while belonging to different economic planets. When newcomers complain that Cameroon is « not

as cheap as expected, » what they often mean is that an imported lifestyle is not locally priced.

Housing works the same way. You can find considerably more space for your money than in Paris, London or Geneva, but the rent advertised online rarely tells you the whole story. Access roads, water storage, power backup, drainage, security, mobile coverage, internet availability, proximity to schools and the length of the commute can matter more than the number of bedrooms. In some segments of the market, landlords may also request several months of rent in advance. Your monthly budget therefore tells only part of the story. Your cash-flow requirement at the moment you move in can be much larger.

SURVIVAL HACK: when comparing Cameroonian living costs with those of your home country, build two budgets rather than one. The first should represent the locally integrated version of your life: local food, realistic housing, local services and ordinary transport. The second should represent your actual comfort requirements, including imported products, private healthcare, backup electricity, international schooling if relevant, security and regular flights home. The difference between those two budgets is often where expatriation fantasies quietly die.

Yaoundé and Douala offer two distinct versions of urban Cameroon. Yaoundé is the political and administrative capital. Ministries, embassies, international organisations, public institutions and diplomatic networks shape much of the professional ecosystem. The city is hilly, sprawling and greener than many newcomers expect. Neighbourhood choice can completely alter your experience because road access and traffic patterns matter enormously. Living a few kilometres from your workplace does not automatically mean having a short commute. During heavy traffic, kilometres become an almost philosophical unit of measurement.

Douala is the commercial engine. The port, logistics, banking, trade, industry, corporate headquarters and a large share of private-sector activity give it a more aggressively economic rhythm. It is hotter, more humid and flatter than Yaoundé, and heavy rainfall can expose weaknesses in drainage and road infrastructure very quickly. Traffic congestion is not an occasional inconvenience. It is a planning variable. Where you live in relation to where you work can affect several hours of your week, your transport budget and your enthusiasm for humanity.

If you are moving for business, Douala may offer the denser commercial network. If your work involves ministries, embassies, diplomacy, public administration, NGOs or interna-

tional cooperation, Yaoundé may be more practical. That is not a rule carved into basalt. Many companies operate in both cities, remote work changes some calculations and personal circumstances matter. But choosing between the two purely according to rental photos is an impressively efficient way to create unnecessary misery.

Infrastructure is another area where realistic expectations matter more than sweeping judgments. Cameroon has international airports in Douala and Yaoundé, an important seaport in Douala, the deep-water port of Kribi, road links across Central Africa and rail connections serving parts of the country. Yet infrastructure quality is uneven. Major corridors can coexist with badly maintained local roads. A neighbourhood can have fibre internet while another location struggles with stable connectivity. A building can look modern while still requiring water tanks, voltage protection and alternative power arrangements.

Electricity deserves particular attention because shortages and transmission constraints have economic consequences far beyond the inconvenience of a dark living room. Businesses may use generators, inverters, batteries or solar systems as backups. Households often develop similar strategies according to income and location. If your work depends on uninterrupted connectivity, buying a laptop and asking for the Wi-Fi password is not a resilience plan.

INSIDER TIP: when viewing a home, do not merely ask whether electricity and water are « available. » Ask how often they fail, how long interruptions usually last, whether the building has water storage, whether water pressure reaches upper floors, what backup power exists, what that backup actually runs and who pays for the fuel or maintenance. A generator that powers one corridor light and the security gate is technically backup electricity. It is not necessarily the backup electricity you thought you were being promised.

Climate is another reason some people choose Cameroon, but even here one-country descriptions are misleading. Cameroon stretches from humid coastal and equatorial environments to highland areas and much drier northern zones. Yaoundé generally feels cooler and less oppressively humid than Douala because of its elevation. Douala's climate is hot, humid and intensely rainy. The western highlands can feel remarkably different from both cities, while northern Cameroon has far more pronounced dry and hot conditions.

This variety creates extraordinary agricultural and ecological diversity, but it also creates practical issues. Heavy rainfall affects roads and drainage. Humidity affects buildings, clothing, electronics and mould growth. Heat changes how you organise transport and exercise. Mos-

quito protection is not decorative travel advice. Malaria remains a serious health consideration. Climate should therefore influence where you live, the type of property you rent, the ventilation you require and even what equipment you bring.

Cameroon's geographical position is another genuine advantage. It sits at the hinge between West and Central Africa and borders Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo. For regional businesses, humanitarian organisations, researchers, logistics specialists and people whose work spans several African markets, this location can be useful.

But a map does not tell you whether a border is convenient, safe or practical to cross. Security conditions differ sharply around the country. The Far North continues to face risks linked to armed groups and cross-border insecurity. The North-West and South-West remain affected by the Anglophone conflict. Some border areas require heightened caution or should simply not form part of an ordinary newcomer's travel plans. You cannot take the relative normality of central Yaoundé or many parts of Douala and project it onto Cameroon as a whole.

This point is especially important because outsiders have a strange talent for replacing one oversimplification with another. Cameroon is neither a permanently dangerous war zone nor a uniformly safe destination. Both descriptions are useless. Risk is geographical, political and situational. Where you travel, when you travel, how visible you are, what events are occurring and whether you understand local advice matter more than a single national safety label.

AVOID THIS: do not plan exploratory road trips into unfamiliar regions simply because a route appears on Google Maps. Check current security information, ask people with recent local knowledge and understand that conditions can change faster than a printed guidebook. Curiosity is useful. Treating security warnings as evidence that you are more adventurous than other people is merely expensive stupidity with better branding.

Cameroon's linguistic environment is another unusual advantage. French and English are both official languages, although their practical use is geographically uneven and politically sensitive. French dominates much of Yaoundé, Douala and most of the country. English has deep institutional and cultural importance in the North-West and South-West and within Anglophone communities elsewhere. Cameroonian Pidgin English is also widely used in many contexts, while numerous indigenous languages remain part of everyday identity and family life.

An English-speaking newcomer should therefore not interpret « officially bilingual » as « I will never need French. » In Yaoundé especially, functional French can change your level of independence dramatically. It helps with landlords, administrations, taxi drivers, shops, healthcare, tradespeople and the hundreds of small interactions that determine whether you need assistance every time something goes wrong.

Likewise, French-speaking foreigners should not treat English-speaking Cameroon as a linguistic curiosity attached to an otherwise Francophone country. Language is connected to history, education, institutions and the political crisis affecting the Anglophone regions. Casual comments about French, English or national unity can carry meanings you did not intend.

UNSPOKEN RULE: listen before diagnosing the country. Cameroon contains regional, linguistic, ethnic, religious and class identities that outsiders often compress into a single idea of « Cameroonian culture. » People may share national references while having sharply different family histories, languages, political experiences and social expectations. Announcing what « Cameroonians are like » after three months in Bastos or Bonapriso is generally a reliable method of demonstrating how little of Cameroon you have actually encountered.

Religion is highly visible but similarly diverse. Christianity has a strong presence, Islam is especially important in northern regions and traditional belief systems continue to coexist with major religions in varied ways. Religious institutions may play social roles extending beyond worship, including education, healthcare, family networks and community support. Faith can therefore influence everyday life without making the entire country socially uniform.

For an expatriate, the practical rule is simple: do not assume that the social norms of your immediate professional circle represent those of the neighbourhood, region or family you are entering. A cosmopolitan corporate environment in Douala can feel socially liberal in ways that do not generalise outside that bubble. The same person may behave differently with colleagues, relatives, elders and members of their religious community. Context matters.

Relationships matter too, and not merely in the lazy sense that « Africa is about connections. » Every society runs partly on networks. Cameroon simply makes some of those networks more visible. Introductions, recommendations and personal trust can be important in finding housing, identifying reliable tradespeople, recruiting staff, locating competent professional services and navigating bureaucratic uncertainty.

This does not mean you should immediately start searching for someone who « knows someone at the ministry. » It means reputation and trust can carry practical weight. Building relationships slowly is safer than buying access from whoever approaches you with the confident declaration that they can arrange everything.

The distinction between a legitimate professional intermediary and a self-appointed fixer is important. Lawyers, accountants, relocation specialists, customs brokers, real-estate agents and consultants can perform useful functions. Someone who promises to bypass every procedure because his cousin works somewhere vaguely governmental belongs in another category entirely.

Cameroon can also appeal to entrepreneurs because unmet needs are visible almost everywhere. Logistics, agricultural transformation, digital services, training, healthcare, energy solutions, housing, maintenance, education and business services all contain opportunities. But visible need does not automatically equal a viable market. People need affordable electricity. That does not mean every household can purchase your imported solar system. Businesses need better software. That does not mean they will pay European subscription prices for it. Parents may want private education. That does not mean a new school can ignore licensing, staffing, land, curriculum and purchasing-power realities.

BUSINESS REALITY CHECK: start with demand, not admiration for your own concept. Speak with potential customers, local competitors, suppliers, accountants and sector specialists. Find out who pays, how they pay, how often they pay late, and whether the margins survive customs duties, transport, taxes, exchange restrictions and power outages. Cameroon does not lack outsiders convinced that nobody else has noticed the obvious business opportunity in front of them.

For remote workers and people receiving income from abroad, the equation is different. Cameroon can provide a relatively affordable base with access to large cities, domestic travel, regional connections and an active urban social environment. However, remote work requires attention to connectivity, electricity and tax residence. If your income comes from another country, do not assume this makes you administratively invisible. Immigration status and tax status are separate questions. You can earn every cent outside Cameroon and still acquire obligations inside Cameroon depending on your residence and circumstances.

Retirees face yet another calculation. Lower everyday costs, climate, social life and the possibility of employing household help can be attractive, but healthcare becomes central.

Cameroon has skilled doctors and good private facilities in major cities, yet the system is uneven, specialist availability varies and complex cases may require evacuation or treatment abroad. A retirement plan built on cheap rent but no serious private medical cover is not a retirement strategy. It is optimism wearing sandals.

Families must look beyond general affordability as well. Yaoundé and Douala have private and international schools, including institutions following foreign or bilingual curricula, but fees vary enormously. School location may determine where you live because a theoretically excellent school loses some charm when the child spends several hours each day in traffic. Parents should also examine healthcare, extracurricular activities, transport arrangements and how comfortable their children will be outside the protected expatriate environment.

Another reason to consider Cameroon is the richness of life beyond expatriate compounds. Food traditions, music, football, regional identities, markets, family networks, religious celebrations, humour and everyday social interaction provide far more texture than the usual expatriate narrative of visas, gated houses and restaurant recommendations. You will get much more from the country if you treat integration as learning rather than consumption.

That requires accepting that some things will remain uncomfortable. You may struggle with indirect communication when you want a clear answer. You may find administrative procedures inconsistent. You may dislike the role of hierarchy. You may encounter assumptions about wealth simply because you are foreign. You may become exhausted by negotiating prices, chasing documents or checking whether something has actually been done after being told repeatedly that it has.

None of those frustrations require romanticising the country or pretending inefficiency is cultural authenticity. They require understanding the difference between criticism and permanent comparison. You can acknowledge that a process is dysfunctional without spending every conversation announcing that your country does it better.

UNSPOKEN RULE: people quickly notice the foreigner who treats Cameroon as a defective version of somewhere else. They also notice the foreigner who performs exaggerated admiration for everything local because they desperately want to appear culturally enlightened. Neither creates much trust. Learn what works. Learn what does not. Adapt where adaptation makes sense. Keep boundaries where they matter.

So why choose Cameroon? Choose it if your professional activity has a convincing reason to be there. Choose it if Central Africa matters to your work or business. Choose it if you can

build a financial buffer large enough to absorb delays and unexpected costs. Choose it if you are capable of learning French when necessary rather than expecting the country to reorganise itself around your language. Choose it if you can live with systems that are sometimes inconsistent while still protecting yourself with contracts, receipts, copies and verification. Choose it if you are willing to develop local relationships without confusing relationships with shortcuts.

Do not choose it because somebody told you that you can « live like a king for €1,000 a month. » That sentence should already make you suspicious, partly because budgets depend on the household and partly because anybody using monarchy as a unit of personal finance deserves scrutiny.

Do not choose it because you believe moving to Africa will automatically produce a simpler life. Life may be cheaper in some areas. It is not necessarily simpler. In Cameroon, money can solve certain inconveniences, but organisation solves others. Backup systems matter. Local knowledge matters. Patience matters. Being able to recognise when somebody is giving you useful advice and when somebody is simply selling confidence matters even more.

And do not reject Cameroon merely because it is complicated. Complexity is not the same as dysfunction, just as convenience is not the same as quality of life. For the right person, with the right preparation and a realistic income model, Cameroon can provide professional opportunity, geographic reach, cultural depth and a daily life that is far more varied than the usual expatriation clichés suggest.

The useful question is therefore not « Is Cameroon a good country to move to? » It is: « Is the Cameroon that actually exists compatible with the life I intend to build? » That is the question this guide will keep answering, because the country you need to prepare for is not the one in the brochure, the embassy speech or the angry expat Facebook post. It is the one where you will actually have to find a house, get connected to electricity, negotiate a contract, reach a doctor, sit in traffic, pay your taxes, understand what somebody really meant by « tomorrow, » and eventually learn which problems deserve patience and which ones require you to get up and fix them yourself.

The practical test is to turn each attractive feature into a dependency question. If climate attracts you, how will you handle humidity, heat or heavy rain? If business opportunity attracts you, what permits, taxes, electricity backup and payment habits affect the model? If low living costs attract you, what happens once you add private healthcare, imported goods,

flights and schooling? Opportunity becomes useful only after you price the systems required to use it.

INSIDER TIP: keep a decision sheet with three columns: what attracts you, what it depends on, and what could make it fail. « Lower rent » depends on acceptable commute and infrastructure. « Regional business hub » depends on your sector and legal status. « Bilingual country » depends on which language you can actually use in administration and work. This simple exercise strips marketing language out of the move before marketing language strips money out of you.

If the answer still points toward Cameroon after those tests, that is a stronger reason to move than excitement alone. You are not looking for a country without contradictions. You are looking for a country whose contradictions you can manage without spending every day fighting the environment you chose.

Economic source note: the IMF's 1 October 2026 mission statement reported 3.5% growth in 2025, expected a slight slowdown in 2026 linked partly to hydrocarbons and electricity transmission, and reported average inflation of 2.6% through August 2026. These are IMF staff observations, not a household forecast for 2027. [Soi]

1.2 What to expect in practice

The first thing to understand about moving to Cameroon is that arrival is not the same as installation. Landing at Douala or Yaoundé with the correct visa gets you through the airport. It does not automatically give you a residence permit, a bank account, a reliable address, an internet connection, a tax position, a school place, a local driving solution or a functioning house. Those pieces arrive on different timelines, through different institutions, and sometimes through procedures that are clear on paper but uneven in practice. Your first month is therefore less a clean sequence than a collection of processes moving at different speeds.

Start with immigration because it controls everything else. Cameroon's e-Visa system is the official entry route for travellers who require a visa. In 2026, the Ministry of External Relations lists ordinary short-stay visas valid for up to six months at 100,000 CFA francs and express short-stay visas at 150,000 CFA francs. Ordinary long-stay visas valid for up to twelve months are listed at 150,000 CFA francs, while express long-stay visas are 200,000 CFA francs. Those are visa fees, not a magical all-inclusive subscription to legal life in Cameroon.

If you intend to reside rather than merely visit, the residence-permit question follows separately.

A useful way to compare two potential home bases is to conduct a test week rather than a sightseeing weekend. Stay in a neighbourhood you could actually afford, travel the route to your likely workplace during normal commuting hours, buy ordinary groceries, make a small mobile payment, and try working through a rainy afternoon. Record costs, delays and failed connections. Do not fill gaps in that record with reassuring assumptions. An apartment that photographs beautifully but requires costly daily transport is not necessarily the cheaper choice.

Build a dependency map before committing. If your residence application requires an address, your landlord wants proof of income, your bank wants local documentation and your employer expects a local account, ask each institution what alternative evidence it accepts and in what sequence. Obtain the answer in writing where possible. Circular paperwork can be managed; discovering it after paying six months' rent is a more expensive form of research.

This distinction is where newcomers regularly lose time. A long-stay visa authorises entry and stay within the terms granted, but your longer-term legal position may require additional immigration formalities. Residence permits carry their own stamp duties and categories. The applicable amount depends on your status and nationality, and the legal framework should be checked again immediately before your application because finance laws can amend fiscal charges. In the currently published tax framework, student permits, certain state-contract worker categories, African nationals and non-African nationals are not charged identically. Treat every quoted amount in a WhatsApp message as gossip until you have checked the official rule.

SURVIVAL HACK: create an immigration folder before you travel, both on paper and in encrypted digital form. Include your passport, visa approval, passport photographs, birth and marriage certificates where relevant, employment or business documents, proof of address, insurance documents, diplomas if your work requires them, police clearance if requested for your procedure, and several copies of everything. Cameroon is not the place to discover that the only certified copy of a document is in a drawer 5,000 kilometres away.

Expect the first practical bottleneck to be proof of address. Banks, mobile operators, immigration procedures, employers and service providers may all ask for some version of an address

document, while landlords may want financial proof or advance payment before they give you the lease that creates that address. This circularity is common in international relocation. Solve it by arranging credible temporary accommodation for long enough to complete your initial searches, and by asking each institution exactly which alternatives it accepts before you queue for anything.

Housing deserves more time than impatient newcomers usually give it. In Yaoundé and Douala, good properties can be found through agencies, personal networks, online listings and word of mouth, but the quality of information varies wildly. A listing may be genuine and still omit the detail that matters most: the access road, water pressure, drainage, generator arrangement, security at night, mobile signal or thirty extra minutes created by one badly placed junction. You cannot evaluate these from polished interior photographs.

Give yourself at least two to four weeks of temporary accommodation unless you already have a trusted local person inspecting properties for you. Longer can be sensible for families. View the same neighbourhood at different times. A calm road at 11 a.m. may become almost immobile at 6 p.m. A dry-season access route may behave differently after a heavy tropical downpour. Ask neighbours what happens during power cuts and water shortages. They have less incentive to sell you the fantasy.

Advance rent can create one of the largest initial cash shocks. Depending on the segment of the market and the landlord, requests for multiple months in advance are common enough that you should budget for them. Agency commissions and deposits may be additional. The fact that a demand is common does not automatically make every demand lawful, reasonable or negotiable, and you should insist on a written lease and receipts. Handing over a large cash sum because « that is how it works here » without documentation is not cultural adaptation. It is volunteering for an avoidable dispute.

Your first utility lesson will be redundancy. Electricity supply can be interrupted, voltage can fluctuate and the quality of the local distribution environment can differ street by street. If you work remotely, store medication that needs refrigeration or simply dislike having your working day decided by the grid, investigate backup power from the beginning. Inverters, batteries, generators and solar installations are not luxury curiosities in this context. They are infrastructure decisions.

The same applies to water. Do not ask only whether the building is connected. Ask whether there is a storage tank, the tank's capacity, how it is filled, what happens during supply interruptions and whether upper floors receive sufficient pressure. In some homes, the difference

between « there is water » and « water comes out when you need it » is a tank, a pump and somebody who remembered to maintain both.

Internet can be good enough for professional work, but you should never rely on a single connection if your income depends on being online. Fibre availability is neighbourhood-specific, fixed wireless solutions vary, and mobile data often serves as the practical backup. Test actual performance inside the property before signing a long lease. A landlord saying « fibre is in the area » can mean anything from « installed in this building » to « a technician once drove past carrying a spool of cable. »

Cash remains important, but mobile money is part of everyday financial life in a way newcomers from card-heavy economies often underestimate. Orange Money and MTN Mobile Money are used for person-to-person transfers, purchases and bill payments across a broad informal and formal network. Orange Money states that account opening is free and can be initiated through its app or USSD service, with valid identification needed for full use and higher limits. A bank account is not required simply to use the wallet. This matters because mobile money can become useful before your banking arrangements are fully settled.

Do not confuse convenience with carelessness. Mobile-money fraud exists. Never share a secret code or one-time confirmation code because somebody claiming to be an operator, agent, bank employee or helpful stranger asks for it. Verify the recipient number before sending. A wrong digit can turn generosity into archaeology. When paying rent, school fees or substantial invoices, use channels that leave a clear record and make sure the beneficiary identity matches what you expect.

Opening a bank account can be straightforward for a properly documented resident, but document requirements differ by institution and account type. Expect to be asked for identification, proof of address and information about your legal status and income. Compliance teams may also ask about the source of funds, especially for significant international transfers. This is normal anti-money-laundering procedure, not necessarily evidence that the bank has developed a personal vendetta against you.

The practical mistake is waiting until you urgently need the account. Start the process early, keep your foreign account functioning during the transition and retain at least two independent ways of accessing money. A single bank card blocked by an overenthusiastic fraud system can transform an ordinary Tuesday into a study of human dependence on financial infrastructure.

Traffic is another cost you need to calculate in hours rather than CFA francs. Douala is notorious for congestion, especially around key commercial corridors and during peak periods. Yaoundé has its own choke points, amplified by hills and road geometry. A five-kilometre commute can be acceptable or miserable depending on the route, time and weather. If you are choosing a home for a family, map school, work, healthcare and regular shopping together. Optimising only the rent is how people save money and lose their evenings.

Motorcycle taxis are important in many parts of Cameroon and can be indispensable outside certain central urban areas, but risk levels and local restrictions vary. Standard taxis and app-based services can be useful in major cities. Whatever you use, keep your phone secure, avoid displaying cash unnecessarily and agree on the practical terms of a ride when the fare is not clearly fixed. Your goal is not to win every negotiation. Your goal is to stop routine transport from becoming a daily argument.

Administrative time requires a different mindset. Some procedures now have online components, but do not assume that « digital » means fully remote. You may still need identity verification, original documents, biometric capture, physical collection or an office visit. Websites may work inconsistently, payment confirmation may take time and a file accepted electronically may still generate a request for another document. Build buffer days into anything linked to a deadline.

AVOID THIS: do not book an international flight, a lease signing, a school enrolment deadline and an immigration appointment on the assumption that every previous step will happen on the earliest possible date. That is how one delayed document starts knocking over the rest of your calendar like cheap furniture.

Healthcare should be organised before you need it. Major cities have private clinics, hospitals, laboratories and pharmacies, but the quality and scope of services vary. Identify a primary clinic, an emergency option and a pharmacy near your home during your first week. If you take regular medication, arrive with a lawful supply and documentation, then verify the local availability of the exact molecule and dosage. Brand names change. Formulations change. « They sell it in Africa » is not a medication continuity plan.

Your health insurance should cover more than the cheapest local consultation. Serious illness or trauma may require expensive private treatment, advanced diagnostics or medical evacuation. Read the exclusions for chronic illness, maternity, mental health, emergency evacuation and repatriation. If your insurer requires pre-authorisation before hospital admission,

know the emergency procedure in advance. Nobody should be discovering the claims hotline while sitting in an emergency department.

Integration takes longer than logistics. You can obtain a SIM card in hours, find an apartment in weeks and still take a year to understand when « yes » means yes, when it means « I have heard you, » when « tomorrow » is a firm promise and when it is simply a polite way of postponing conflict. Social interpretation is a skill, not a personality trait. You will get things wrong. The objective is to notice patterns instead of declaring every mismatch irrational.

In professional settings, hierarchy can matter. Titles can matter. Introductions can matter. A direct style that feels efficient in another country can sound unnecessarily aggressive here, especially when directed at an older person or somebody in authority. This does not mean becoming submissive. It means choosing the method most likely to get a result rather than performing your preferred communication style as if it were a constitutional right.

Time is similarly contextual. Some formal environments require punctuality. Social events may operate with far greater elasticity. Appointments can drift because transport, power cuts, competing obligations and different expectations all intervene. Your solution is not to become permanently late yourself. Confirm important meetings, allow travel margin and distinguish between situations where punctuality signals professionalism and situations where arriving exactly at the stated minute simply gives you more time to contemplate an empty room.

Hidden costs accumulate quickly during the first three months. Certified translations, document legalisation, transport between offices, passport photos, copies, agency fees, temporary accommodation, internet installation, backup power, household equipment, mosquito screens, deposits, school registration, private medical appointments and imported essentials can all sit outside the elegant spreadsheet you made before leaving. Add a contingency fund of at least several months of realistic expenses. If your financial plan survives only when nothing goes wrong, it is not a plan. It is a wish with columns.

The practical landing sequence is therefore simple in principle even when execution is messy. Secure lawful entry. Secure temporary accommodation. Get a local phone connection and mobile-money access. Confirm your immigration/residence path. Start the housing search. Establish healthcare and insurance routines. Open or prepare banking. Verify utilities before signing a long lease. Build backup power and connectivity if your work depends on them. Only then begin pretending you are settled.

Yaoundé usually rewards people whose lives revolve around government, diplomacy, development work, education or institutions. Douala rewards proximity planning because commercial life is intense and traffic can punish poor location choices. Outside both cities, administrative access, healthcare, banking, internet and transport may be less dense, while local relationships can become even more important. The country is not two cities with scenery attached. Your installation method must change with the place.

INSIDER TIP: during your first month, keep a running document called « How things actually work. » Write down the name of the office, the person you spoke to, the documents requested, the amount paid, the receipt number, the date, the next step and the phone number that genuinely answers. Bureaucracy becomes much less mysterious when you stop relying on memory and start building your own operating manual.

The central lesson is that Cameroon rewards preparation but still requires improvisation. You need both. Excessive rigidity will exhaust you. Excessive improvisation will expose you. The sweet spot is disciplined flexibility: know the rule, carry the documents, keep copies, budget for delay, verify information twice, and leave enough margin to adapt when the real process differs from the neat version somebody described over coffee.

The first months are where abstract preparation turns into practical dependencies. Immigration status affects work; proof of address affects banking and administration; housing affects internet, water and transport; healthcare arrangements matter before the first emergency rather than after it. Treat installation as a sequence rather than a pile of unrelated tasks, and keep enough time and cash buffer for one delayed step to stop pushing every other commitment off a cliff.

Yaoundé and Douala also create different landing problems. In Yaoundé, proximity to ministries, embassies and administrative offices can save repeated journeys; in Douala, proximity to work corridors, the port, industrial areas and major commercial districts can save hours in traffic. Temporary accommodation should therefore be chosen for access, not merely appearance. A photogenic apartment in the wrong place is still the wrong apartment.

The first month should be budgeted as an expensive month, even if Cameroon is cheaper than your home country. Temporary housing, taxis, SIM setup, deposits, furniture, school registration and document appointments arrive before your routines become efficient. Keep a separate arrival fund so you do not judge the long-term cost of living by the most chaotic thirty days.

Expect administrative information to come from several places. One office may ask for a document another did not mention, and online information may lag behind practice. Respond by documenting names, dates and instructions rather than arguing that the previous person said something different. Ask what will make the file complete now.

Expect landlords and agents to use practices that differ from your home market, including significant advance rent in some cases. Do not confuse common practice with legal obligation. Read the lease, verify ownership or authority and calculate the cash-flow cost before committing.

Expect transport to shape your social life. A meeting eight kilometres away may require more planning than the number suggests. Build travel buffers until you understand peak hours, rain and your neighbourhood's bottlenecks.

Expect your foreign status to be visible in some transactions. Prices may be quoted higher, assumptions about wealth may appear and people may offer special help you did not request. Stay polite, compare prices and learn normal ranges rather than treating every negotiation as hostility.

Expect adaptation to be uneven. One week you will feel completely competent; the next a utility problem will make you feel newly arrived. Progress is not linear. The useful measure is whether the same category of problem takes less time and emotion the second time it appears.

1.3 Quick cultural overview

Cameroon is culturally dense enough to punish anyone who arrives looking for a single national personality. More than 250 ethnic and linguistic communities are commonly identified, although exact counts vary depending on classification. French and English are the official languages, but daily communication also includes Cameroonian Pidgin English, Fulfulde and a large number of indigenous languages. Language here is not merely a tool. It can signal region, education, generation, class, political history and belonging.

In Yaoundé, French dominates most everyday interactions. In Douala, French is also central, but the city's commercial nature and population mix expose you to a wider blend of speech, including Pidgin and multiple local languages. English matters nationally because of the country's historical and constitutional structure, not because every public employee or taxi driver will comfortably use it with you. If you speak only English and settle in a largely Fran-

cophone environment, you can survive. You will simply outsource far too much of your independence.

Learning functional French is therefore one of the highest-return investments an English-speaking expatriate can make. You do not need literary elegance. You need to understand a lease discussion, describe a medical symptom, ask why a bill changed, negotiate a repair, read a form and recognise when a conversation has shifted from routine to problematic. Language competence reduces both friction and vulnerability.

Greetings are socially important. In many settings, launching directly into a request without greeting can feel abrupt or disrespectful. A simple « Bonjour, comment allez-vous? » before discussing your problem can change the texture of an interaction. This does not mean every conversation needs ceremonial theatre. It means acknowledging the person before the transaction. Humans, tragically, remain involved in administration.

Age and status often shape interaction. Respect for elders is significant across many communities, and professional hierarchy can be more visible than newcomers from flatter workplace cultures expect. Titles such as Doctor, Professor, Director, Maître or traditional and administrative titles may carry weight. Use the title you are given until invited to simplify. Becoming instantly casual because you believe first names create equality can look less progressive than simply socially clumsy.

Family networks matter deeply. The idea of family may extend beyond the nuclear household to cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws, village connections and people treated as kin through long-standing social bonds. Financial obligations can also extend through these networks. A colleague supporting siblings, parents or extended relatives may have responsibilities that are invisible if you interpret income through an individualistic lens.

This matters when managing staff or building friendships. Do not assume that an employee's « family emergency » means the same narrow set of relationships your home-country HR policy recognises. At the same time, do not abandon professional boundaries. Empathy and clear rules can coexist. If leave, advances, loans or emergency assistance are available, define how they work before every request becomes a moral negotiation.

Hospitality can be generous, but reciprocity is part of social life. If you are invited into a home, arriving with a small gift, drinks or something for the household is generally safer than appearing empty-handed, although the appropriate gesture depends on context. Observe whether shoes are removed, whether elders are greeted first and how food is offered. Refus-

ing everything repeatedly can be interpreted as distance. Accepting every drink in the name of integration can create other educational experiences. Balance survives again.

Food is a major cultural language. Cameroon has strong regional cuisines and no serious guide should reduce them to three national dishes. Ndolé, eru, achu, koki, grilled fish, soya, plantain, cassava, maize-based dishes, groundnut preparations and regional soups all tell you something about geography and identity. The useful expat habit is curiosity without performance. Ask what you are eating. Learn how it is prepared. Do not announce that you are « so African now » because you ate pepper voluntarily.

Religion is present in public and private life. Christianity is widespread, Islam is especially influential in northern regions, and indigenous religious traditions coexist with both. Churches and mosques can be powerful social institutions. Pentecostal and evangelical churches are particularly visible in many urban areas. Religious language may appear in ordinary conversation and professional life more often than secular Europeans expect.

If you are non-religious, you do not need to pretend otherwise, but aggressive declarations about religion are rarely useful. If you are religious, do not assume shared labels mean shared beliefs. A Cameroonian Catholic, Pentecostal Christian, Muslim or practitioner of traditional spirituality may inhabit a social and theological world quite different from the one associated with the same label in your country.

Gender norms vary by age, class, region, religion and urban environment, but traditional expectations remain influential. Women are highly visible in business, public administration, agriculture, education and professional life, yet domestic and caregiving expectations can remain unequal. A cosmopolitan workplace may coexist with conservative family expectations. Do not confuse professional visibility with the disappearance of gender pressure.

For women expatriates, everyday experience can range from completely ordinary professional interaction to unwanted attention, intrusive questions about marital status or assumptions about sexual availability. Boundaries work best when they are clear early. Overexplaining rarely improves them. For men, assumptions about money, relationships and masculinity can also shape interactions. Foreignness does not remove gender expectations. It sometimes adds a new layer of stereotypes on top.

LGBTQ+ travellers and residents must be particularly cautious. Same-sex sexual relations remain criminalised in Cameroon, and social hostility can be serious. This is not a subject where imported confidence is a substitute for legal awareness. Privacy, discretion and careful

assessment of whom you trust are practical safety measures. A cosmopolitan social setting does not cancel the law or broader social attitudes.

Communication often relies more heavily on context than highly literal cultures expect. A direct « no » can be avoided to preserve harmony or respect. Agreement may acknowledge your request without guaranteeing execution. Silence may indicate discomfort rather than consent. This can frustrate foreigners who believe clarity means saying everything explicitly. Your job is to learn how to ask follow-up questions without turning every ambiguity into an interrogation.

INSIDER TIP: replace « Can you do this tomorrow? » with questions that expose the actual process: « What still needs to happen before it can be ready? », « Who has to sign it? », « What time should I call to confirm before I come? » and « If it is not ready tomorrow, what is the next realistic date? » You are not being suspicious. You are turning politeness into operational information.

Conflict style also varies. Public confrontation, humiliation or raising your voice can damage cooperation even when you are factually right. A calm insistence backed by documents usually works better. This is particularly true with service workers and public employees who may have substantial discretion over how quickly your problem moves. Threatening to call your embassy because a photocopy is missing is not the display of power some newcomers imagine.

Money is simultaneously practical and socially charged. Cash remains common. Mobile money is ubiquitous. Requests for help, loans or contributions may arise within friendships and professional relationships. Foreigners are often assumed to have greater financial resources, sometimes accurately and sometimes absurdly. You need boundaries before emotion enters the conversation. Decide what you lend, what you give, what you never finance and whether you expect repayment.

AVOID THIS: do not try to prove that you are « not like other foreigners » by paying every request, accepting every inflated price or refusing to negotiate anything. You will not dismantle global inequality by overpaying for a sofa. You will merely become the person people call when they need someone who never checks an invoice.

Humour is important, but local humour does not always travel cleanly. Cameroonian conversation can be lively, teasing and highly contextual. Political jokes, ethnic stereotypes and

regional rivalries may circulate among people who understand the boundaries of the joke. Repeating the same joke as an outsider can land very differently. Familiarity is not a transferable licence.

Ethnic identity is part of social reality, but treating ethnicity as a shortcut for predicting behaviour is lazy and dangerous. People may identify strongly with a region or community while also participating in national, urban, professional and religious identities. Political discussions can activate these lines quickly. Ask questions respectfully, but do not interrogate every new acquaintance for a tribal classification as if you were completing anthropological customs paperwork.

The Francophone-Anglophone divide requires particular care. The Anglophone crisis is rooted in political, legal, educational and historical grievances, and years of violence have turned language into something far more serious than a preference. Do not reduce the conflict to « French speakers versus English speakers. » Learn enough history to understand why institutions, legal systems and schooling became central to the dispute.

Regional differences are enormous. Northern social norms may be more strongly influenced by Islam and Sahelian cultural patterns. Western highland communities have their own political and economic traditions. Coastal communities around Douala and the Littoral bring different histories again. Yaoundé's administrative culture reflects its role as capital and its surrounding Centre region. What feels normal in Bonapriso may not be normal in Maroua, Bafoussam, Bertoua or Kribi.

Dress accordingly. Urban professional clothing is generally conventional, with expectations depending on sector. Outside professional settings, style ranges widely, but context matters around religious spaces, formal ceremonies and conservative communities. Wearing whatever you want is legally and socially different from understanding the reaction it may produce. Adults are capable of holding both thoughts at once, despite decades of evidence to the contrary.

Ceremonies matter. Weddings, funerals, church events, traditional ceremonies and family gatherings can involve significant obligations of time, dress and financial contribution. Funerals in particular may be major social events with complex expectations. If invited, ask what is appropriate rather than improvising according to what funerals look like in your country.

National football culture is difficult to avoid and easier to enjoy than to explain. The Indomitable Lions carry enormous symbolic weight, and major matches can reshape schedules and

conversations. Music is equally central, from makossa and bikutsi to newer urban genres. These are not decorative « culture » sections separate from daily life. They are part of how people socialise, argue, celebrate and locate themselves generationally.

If you want to integrate, the goal is not to imitate. Forced mimicry is exhausting and usually visible. Learn greetings, names, basic language, major institutions, political sensitivities, food, local geography and the rhythm of ordinary social interaction. Accept invitations selectively. Build relationships beyond expatriate circles. Ask before photographing people or private events. Be interested without making everybody your cultural instructor.

UNSPOKEN RULE: respect is more convincing when it is quiet. You do not need to announce your respect for Cameroon every fifteen minutes. Show it by being prepared, by paying people correctly, by keeping your commitments, by learning the names of the people you deal with, by not treating domestic staff as invisible, and by avoiding the assumption that local complexity exists mainly for your personal enrichment.

The fastest path to cultural competence is therefore observation combined with participation. Spend time in ordinary places, not only expat venues. Listen to local radio. Read Cameroonian media from different perspectives. Learn how people discuss prices, family, politics and work when they are not explaining themselves to foreigners. Cultural integration is less about collecting facts than developing the ability to notice when context has changed.

Culture becomes useful when it helps you interpret behaviour without turning people into stereotypes. Language choice, greetings, hierarchy, family obligations, religion and regional identity can all change the meaning of an interaction. The practical skill is not memorising a national personality profile. It is learning to notice which code is operating in the room, asking when you are unsure and resisting the urge to turn one awkward encounter into a theory about thirty million people.

The social rhythm of Yaoundé and Douala overlaps, but the settings differ. Yaoundé's administrative and diplomatic networks can feel more formal in professional contexts, while Douala's commercial pace often produces a more visibly business-driven social environment. Neither city is culturally uniform. Neighbourhood, class, profession, language and family background can matter more than the city label, so integration depends on the circles you actually enter rather than the ones an expat forum describes.

1.4 Political environment & freedoms

Cameroon is formally a republic with a presidential system, a bicameral parliament, regional and local institutions, and a judiciary established by the Constitution. In practical political life, however, power remains heavily concentrated around the presidency and the governing establishment. Paul Biya, in office since 1982, was officially declared the winner of the October 12, 2025 presidential election with 53.66 percent of the vote, beginning an eighth term. Opposition candidate Issa Tchiroma Bakary rejected the result, and the post-election period included protests, arrests and deadly violence.

You need to understand this environment because political structure is not abstract background information. It affects the tone of public debate, the sensitivity of demonstrations, the behaviour of security forces, media freedom and the risks attached to activism. Most expatriates can live ordinary lives without engaging directly in politics. Problems begin when somebody assumes that being foreign creates immunity from local law or that political commentary online is consequence-free.

Political literacy is not the same as political activism. Before commenting publicly on a demonstration, election dispute or regional conflict, establish who is making the claim, what evidence supports it and whether reporting from the area is independent. A story circulating on a messaging app may be accurate, exaggerated or deliberately misleading. Cross-check the date and location rather than forwarding it because the headline sounds convincing. Publicly identifying individuals in sensitive circumstances can expose them to risks that you do not share.

For a newcomer, build a habit of following more than one outlet, including professional journalism and official statements, while recognising their different incentives. Keep discussions with colleagues and neighbours open-ended. Do not demand that people explain their political position to satisfy your curiosity. Discretion is not indifference; it is recognising that the personal consequences of speech are unevenly distributed.

The presidency is the central institution. Executive power is extensive, and long incumbency has shaped the administrative and political system around continuity. The Cameroon People's Democratic Movement remains dominant. Opposition parties operate, but competition takes place in an environment frequently criticised by rights organisations and opposition actors for restrictions, unequal access and pressure on dissent.

The 2025 presidential election matters because it demonstrated how quickly political tension can move from institutional procedure to street-level consequences. Protests and clashes occurred in several locations after the vote, and rights organisations documented excessive force, arrests and deaths. You do not need to become a Cameroon political specialist before moving. You do need to understand that election periods, opposition rallies and politically charged anniversaries can change the security environment with little benefit to a curious foreign bystander.

AVOID THIS: do not attend a demonstration because you think observing it will help you understand the country. Watch reporting from somewhere else. Crowds, police deployments and roadblocks are dynamic environments, and foreign status does not guarantee special treatment. If unrest develops, leave early rather than waiting to determine whether it is « serious enough. »

Parliament consists of the National Assembly and Senate, but executive influence remains substantial. Decentralisation has expanded institutional structures at regional and municipal level, yet the practical transfer of resources and authority is uneven. For an expatriate, this matters when dealing with land, local permits, business activity, sanitation, construction and neighbourhood matters. « The government » is not a single counter. Different levels of authority overlap, and the correct office can depend on the issue and location.

The legal system is particularly interesting because Cameroon inherited both civil-law and common-law traditions from its colonial history. French-inspired civil law dominates much of the country, while common-law traditions have historical importance in the Anglophone regions. The perceived erosion of Anglophone legal and educational institutions was one of the grievances that helped trigger the current Anglophone crisis. Treating the country's bilingual legal heritage as a curiosity misses the political weight attached to it.

Judicial independence and access to justice are regularly criticised by domestic and international observers. Cases can move slowly. Legal representation can be expensive relative to local incomes. Administrative enforcement may be inconsistent. Corruption concerns remain part of public discussion. None of this means contracts are useless. It means contracts are more useful when you conduct due diligence before signing rather than imagining litigation will efficiently repair a bad decision afterwards.

For property, employment and business agreements, use competent legal advice when the amount or risk justifies it. Verify ownership documents independently. Keep originals and

certified copies. Record payments. Do not use a friend's cousin as your only legal strategy because he once worked near a courthouse. Informality is attractive until the disagreement begins.

Press freedom is constrained. Reporters Without Borders ranked Cameroon 133rd of 180 countries in its 2026 World Press Freedom Index, down from 131st in 2025, and describes the environment for journalists as hostile and precarious despite a large and varied media landscape. The abduction and killing of journalist Martinez Zogo in 2023 remains a major symbol of the risks surrounding investigative journalism and corruption reporting.

For you, the consequence is not that you must avoid newspapers. Quite the opposite. Read several. But understand ownership, political alignment and risk. A vibrant media market does not automatically mean unrestricted journalism. State media, private television, radio, newspapers and digital outlets can frame the same event very differently. If a political claim matters to your security or business decision, confirm it through more than one source.

Freedom of expression exists within constraints that may feel unfamiliar to newcomers from liberal democracies. Political activists, journalists and opposition figures have faced arrest or restriction. Public-order and security laws can be applied broadly. Online speech is not automatically detached from these realities. Treat social-media commentary about senior political figures, security forces, separatist conflict or active investigations with caution.

INSIDER TIP: keep your public digital footprint boring on sensitive domestic politics unless your professional role explicitly requires engagement and you understand the legal implications. There is no prize for being the foreign resident with the most confident thread about a country's internal power struggle after four months of residence.

Freedom of assembly is also sensitive. Authorisation and public-order rules matter, and political gatherings can be restricted. Labour and civil-society organisations exist, but the operating environment can tighten around elections or contested issues. If your employer, university or NGO has security protocols, follow them even when they seem excessively cautious. Institutional security teams tend to have a larger information network than your group chat.

Corruption is a recurrent concern in public administration and business. Transparency and anti-corruption institutions exist, but perceptions of corruption remain high. The expatriate mistake is to jump from that fact to the assumption that every official expects a bribe. That is

both inaccurate and dangerous. Many transactions are completed normally. What you need is a procedure for dealing with ambiguity.

If somebody requests an unexplained payment, ask for the legal basis, official tariff and receipt. If the payment is legitimate, those questions should not be offensive. If somebody insists that a fee cannot be receipted, stop and verify. Paying an unofficial amount can create legal exposure and teaches intermediaries that you are an easy target. Refusing does not guarantee speed, but compliance does not guarantee success either.

The same discipline applies at police or roadside checks. Carry legally required identification and vehicle documents. Stay calm. Ask what rule is at issue. Do not physically resist. Do not make theatrical threats involving your embassy. If a serious dispute arises, contact appropriate legal or consular assistance. Your passport is evidence of nationality, not a magic card from a board game.

Political discussion in private social settings is common, and Cameroonians hold a wide range of opinions. Listen before assuming that criticism of the government, support for the government, Anglophone grievances, regional loyalties or views about opposition parties fit into a neat ideological map. People's positions may be shaped by employment, family history, region, security experience and distrust of several sides at once.

The security services have a visible role in politically sensitive periods and in conflict-affected regions. Checkpoints and identification controls may be routine in some areas and exceptional in others. Photographing military sites, police operations, checkpoints or sensitive infrastructure is a poor hobby. When in doubt, do not take the photo.

Foreigners working in journalism, human rights, humanitarian assistance, research or politically sensitive sectors face additional considerations. Accreditation, permits and organisational protocols may apply. Data collection involving conflict, ethnicity, displacement or political opinion can attract attention. Institutions should conduct risk assessments before staff enter affected regions. « Independent researcher » is not an invisibility cloak.

The Anglophone crisis also complicates the political environment. What began as protests by lawyers and teachers in 2016 over legal and educational grievances evolved into an armed separatist conflict. State security forces and separatist armed groups have both been accused of serious abuses. Civilian populations have borne the consequences through displacement, school disruption, kidnappings, killings and economic damage.

You must therefore separate political curiosity from operational necessity. If you have no compelling reason to enter a conflict-affected area, do not invent one. If your work requires it, rely on professional security advice, current local information and your organisation's protocols. Conditions vary by district and can change quickly.

The Far North presents a different security dynamic linked to Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province activity, cross-border insecurity and criminal violence. Again, national political descriptions do not explain local security. Cameroon's map contains several political realities at once.

For ordinary life in Yaoundé or Douala, the most useful political skill is calibrated discretion. You can read, discuss and learn without making yourself central to debates that are not yours. Avoid public confrontations with authorities. Keep documentation in order. Stay away from demonstrations. Monitor developments around elections and major political events. And understand that neutrality does not mean ignorance. The less you know, the more likely you are to wander into something avoidable.

UNSPOKEN RULE: being foreign can make people more curious about your opinion, not more entitled to hear it. You are allowed to answer, « I am still trying to understand the situation. » It is one of the rare phrases that becomes more intelligent the longer you live somewhere.

The practical conclusion is not that Cameroon is politically unliveable. Millions of people work, raise families, run businesses and organise ordinary lives within this system. The conclusion is that political space has boundaries, some of them formal and some enforced through power rather than elegant legal theory. If you recognise those boundaries, you can navigate daily life without turning political naïveté into a personal security problem.

Political institutions matter to expatriates mainly through their practical consequences: security conditions, public demonstrations, media restrictions, administrative decision-making and the way disputes are handled. The October 2025 election and its aftermath are part of the current context, but day-to-day risk still varies by place and activity. You do not need to become a political commentator. You do need to know when public events can affect movement, work, communications or personal safety.

Political life is experienced differently in the two main cities. Yaoundé is the seat of the presidency, ministries, parliament, diplomatic missions and central administration, so state institutions are physically embedded in everyday geography. Douala is economically dominant

and often the stage for commercial pressure and urban protest. In both cities, avoid assuming that a quiet week means politics is irrelevant; political tension can alter road access, policing and public gatherings quickly.

1.5 Social fractures & tensions

Cameroon's social tensions are not one problem with several labels. They are overlapping fractures produced by history, geography, language, inequality, conflict, demographic pressure and uneven access to public services. If you live only in a comfortable part of Yaoundé or Douala, you can ignore much of this for long periods. That does not mean it has disappeared. It means your postcode is functioning as a filter.

The most serious national fracture remains the conflict in the North-West and South-West regions. The roots lie in the country's colonial and post-independence history, the coexistence of Francophone and Anglophone legal and educational traditions, and long-standing grievances over representation and institutional marginalisation. Protests by lawyers and teachers in 2016 escalated after repression, and separatist armed groups later emerged demanding an independent state often referred to as Ambazonia.

The practical consequence of inequality is that a price rarely tells the entire story of access. A private clinic, school or reliable internet connection may exist in the same city as households for whom the service is financially unreachable. When estimating your own comfort, distinguish between what is available to someone on an international contract and what is typical for local residents. That distinction prevents a privileged expatriate experience from becoming an accidental description of the entire country.

It also matters when recruiting, renting or hiring domestic help. Agree pay, working hours, rest days, duties and changes in scope before work begins. Ask a qualified local professional which legal obligations apply to the arrangement. A friendly verbal agreement can still leave the person doing the work with no reliable recourse when expectations change. Respect begins with predictable terms, not with declarations of affection for the local culture.

Years of fighting have produced killings, kidnappings, displacement, school closures, economic damage and abuses attributed to both state forces and separatist groups. By June 2026, UNHCR-linked data estimated roughly 493,000 internally displaced people from the North-West and South-West. That figure alone should stop any attempt to treat the crisis as a linguistic disagreement that became slightly impolite.

For expatriates, the operational consequence is clear. Do not travel into affected zones casually. Do not assume that a main road is safe because it was safe last year. « Ghost town » days, lockdowns, checkpoints, armed activity and transport disruption can alter movement rapidly. If your work requires travel, use current security information, professional drivers and locally informed risk assessment. If your work does not require travel, tourism is not a compelling enough reason to test an insurgency.

The Far North faces another long-running crisis involving Boko Haram and other armed actors operating around the Lake Chad basin. Attacks, improvised explosive devices, raids and cross-border insecurity continue to affect communities. UNHCR's 2026 planning expected the security situation there to remain serious, with increasingly sophisticated tactics by non-state armed groups. The region also faces poverty, climatic stress and displacement, creating a humanitarian burden far removed from the daily concerns of an expatriate office in Douala.

Cameroon also hosts large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly people displaced from the Central African Republic and Nigeria. By mid-2026, UNHCR data recorded more than 400,000 refugees and over 20,000 asylum seekers in the country, alongside large internally displaced populations. This matters socially and economically because host communities are often already dealing with limited schools, healthcare, water and employment.

Regional inequality reinforces these pressures. Yaoundé and Douala concentrate institutions, private investment, specialised healthcare, universities and formal employment. Secondary cities such as Bafoussam, Garoua, Maroua, Bamenda, Bertoua and Ngaoundéré have their own economic roles, but access to infrastructure and services varies. Rural communities can face much greater distance to hospitals, administrative offices, banking services and reliable electricity.

The expatriate mistake is to interpret urban privilege as national normality. A foreign professional with private insurance, a 4x4, fibre internet, a generator and children in an international school is technically living in Cameroon but interacting with a narrow, expensive layer of its infrastructure. That life is real. It is simply not representative.

Urban poverty is visible in both major cities. Informal settlements can sit close to wealthy neighbourhoods. Drainage, waste collection, road access and housing quality differ sharply within short distances. Many households rely on informal work with unstable income. When food or fuel prices rise, the impact is immediate. If you employ domestic staff, drivers,

guards or other workers, understand that a salary which feels small within your household budget may support several people.

That awareness should lead to fair employment practice, not paternalism. Pay agreed wages on time. Clarify hours, rest days, leave and duties. Do not add endless tasks because the worker « is already here. » If you provide advances, bonuses, meals, transport or medical help, define them. Informal employment becomes abusive very easily when one side controls both income and housing or when expectations are never written down.

Youth unemployment and underemployment are major sources of frustration. Cameroon has a young population, but formal job creation has not kept pace with the aspirations produced by education and urbanisation. Many young people work in informal services, trade or small enterprises while seeking more stable employment. Migration abroad is a strong ambition for some, and foreigners may be treated as potential sources of jobs, visas, sponsorship or business connections.

You need to learn how to respond without becoming cynical. Most people who speak to you are not trying to use you. Some are. Set boundaries according to behaviour rather than turning every request into proof of a national character flaw. Declining a request respectfully is healthier than saying yes resentfully and then complaining that people keep asking.

Ethnic and regional identities can influence politics, business networks and social perception. Cameroon includes large communities such as the Bamileke, Beti, Bassa, Fulani and many others, but these categories are themselves internally diverse. Political discourse can sometimes mobilise ethnic suspicion, especially during tense periods. Avoid repeating inflammatory stereotypes even when you hear Cameroonians use them among themselves. Outsider participation rarely improves the conversation.

The 2025 election period revealed how political frustration, regional loyalties and distrust of institutions can interact. Post-election unrest included protests, arrests and deaths. The important lesson for daily life is that tensions can be latent for long periods and then become visible around a triggering event. Monitor local news before large political dates, not after you discover the road is blocked.

Religion creates another layer of difference, although Cameroon has a long history of religious coexistence. Christianity is dominant in much of the south and west, Islam is particularly important in the north, and traditional belief systems remain influential. Most daily interaction across religious lines is ordinary. Tension arises less from inevitable religious con-

flict than from the broader political, regional and security contexts in which communities live.

Economic class may shape your experience more directly than ethnicity or religion. Wealthier urban Cameroonians often use the same private schools, hospitals, restaurants, gyms and business networks as expatriates. A foreign newcomer can therefore mistakenly conclude that cultural integration has been achieved because everybody at dinner speaks fluent French or English and has travelled abroad. That is integration into a class network, which is useful but not the same thing as understanding the wider society.

SURVIVAL HACK: deliberately build three circles. Keep an international circle for people who understand the practical shock of relocation. Build a professional Cameroonian circle relevant to your work. Then build an ordinary local circle not based solely on what people can do for your career. If all your relationships exist inside one gated social ecosystem, your understanding of Cameroon will remain narrow no matter how many years pass.

Discrimination also exists in several directions. Cameroonians may experience discrimination based on region, ethnicity, language, class, disability, gender, sexuality or perceived political alignment. Foreigners may encounter racial curiosity, stereotyping or differential treatment based on nationality and skin colour. White foreigners can sometimes be assumed wealthy. Black foreigners from other African countries may be read through entirely different stereotypes. Diaspora returnees can face expectations and resentment that Europeans do not.

Do not flatten these experiences into the simplistic idea that foreigners are either universally privileged or universally targeted. Context changes everything. A European passport may create mobility and institutional advantages while visible foreignness raises prices or attracts attention. A West African resident may blend physically but face nationality-based prejudice. A Cameroonian returning after twenty years abroad may look local and still be treated as somebody who no longer understands the rules.

Gender and sexuality create especially unequal levels of safety. Women may face harassment and gendered expectations. LGBTQ+ people face both legal and social risks, with same-sex sexual relations criminalised. People with disabilities encounter significant accessibility barriers because pavements, public transport, buildings and administrative services are often not designed for independent access. A guide that describes « quality of life » without specifying whose life is discussing nothing useful.

Environmental stress adds another fracture. Flooding affects vulnerable urban and rural communities disproportionately. Informal neighbourhoods often have weaker drainage and more exposure to landslides or contaminated water. Climate variability affects agriculture and food prices. In the Far North, drought, extreme heat and floods intersect with insecurity. The same storm that delays an expatriate's car journey can destroy somebody else's home.

This does not require you to turn daily life into a permanent guilt exercise. Guilt is notoriously bad at fixing drainage. It requires perspective. Understand why people may respond strongly to fuel prices, school fees, rent increases or public-sector delays. Economic arguments that sound minor when expressed in euros may represent a large share of household income locally.

Social trust is also uneven. People often rely heavily on family, professional and community networks because formal systems do not always deliver consistently. This helps explain why introductions matter so much. A recommendation from someone trusted reduces uncertainty. Foreigners sometimes criticise this as nepotism while benefiting enthusiastically from the same mechanism when they need a reliable electrician at 9 p.m.

The risk is when networks become exclusionary or corrupt. Hiring only relatives, allocating opportunities through political connections or using unofficial influence to bypass rules can reinforce inequality. You cannot solve that system individually. You can decide how your own business or household operates: transparent recruitment, written expectations, fair pay and documented transactions reduce your contribution to the mess.

Relations between citizens and authorities can also be shaped by distrust. Police, tax offices, local administration and the justice system may be viewed with a mixture of necessity, caution and resignation. Do not interpret a Cameroonian colleague's reluctance to « just report it » according to the assumptions of a country where institutions are perceived differently. Ask what the realistic consequences are before giving advice.

INSIDER TIP: when somebody tells you a situation is politically, ethnically or regionally sensitive, do not immediately demand a complete explanation in public. Ask later, privately, from more than one person. Social fault lines are easiest to understand when nobody feels they are being forced to declare allegiance for your education.

The central challenge is to remain lucid without becoming paranoid. Cameroon's tensions are real. They do not define every interaction. Most daily life in Yaoundé and Douala consists

of work, school runs, traffic, shopping, family obligations, jokes, bills and the ordinary repetitive machinery of life. Conflict and inequality exist alongside normality, not in place of it.

Your responsibility is to know when the wider context matters. It matters when choosing regions to visit, discussing politics, hiring staff, evaluating security, interpreting language issues, deciding where to invest and understanding why a policy that looks reasonable in Yaoundé may be experienced differently elsewhere.

UNSPOKEN RULE: never mistake access for understanding. Being invited into affluent homes, government offices or expatriate circles gives you access to part of Cameroon. It does not give you a licence to summarise the country. The more seriously you take its internal differences, the less likely you are to become the foreigner confidently explaining Cameroon to Cameroonians after one rainy season.

Cameroon's major social fractures are not background trivia. The Anglophone conflict, insecurity in the Far North, regional inequality, displacement, youth underemployment and unequal access to services shape where people move, what families can afford and how institutions are trusted. These issues do not define every conversation, but they do explain why national averages often conceal radically different lived realities. A relocation decision should therefore be regional and local, not merely national.

Yaoundé and Douala absorb many of the country's inequalities in different ways. Both attract internal migrants, students, jobseekers and displaced households, which places pressure on housing, transport and informal employment. Douala's commercial wealth sits beside severe urban precarity; Yaoundé's administrative concentration does not eliminate peripheral poverty or infrastructure gaps. Read neighbourhoods carefully and avoid confusing visible affluence with a citywide standard of living.

Imagine that you arrive with a remote salary paid from Europe and choose between Yaoundé and Douala. On paper, both cities are affordable compared with Paris or London. In practice, the decision starts with your daily dependencies. In Yaoundé you may prioritise proximity to an embassy, ministry, international school or development organisation. In Douala you may care more about airport access, port-related business, private-sector clients and commercial networks. The rent figure alone is useless until you add commute, generator or inverter, water storage, security, internet redundancy and the cost of reaching the places you use five days a week.

Now add a partner who works locally. Your household suddenly belongs to two economies. One income may be indexed to international standards while the other follows the Cameroonian labour market. That difference can affect decisions about housing, domestic help, holidays and financial support to extended family. It can also create social awkwardness when friends or relatives assume that a foreign salary means unlimited liquidity. The solution is not secrecy. It is a household budget with boundaries decided before every request becomes a moral referendum.

If you have children, school changes the map again. A neighbourhood that looks ideal for adults can become absurd if the school route crosses the worst traffic every morning. Test the journey during actual school hours before signing a lease. Ask what time the school bus arrives, how long children remain in transport and what happens during heavy rain. An elegant house becomes less elegant when your child spends three hours a day seeing it only before sunrise and after dark.

The same exercise applies to healthcare. Identify your preferred clinic before choosing a home. Ask how long the journey takes at peak traffic, whether your insurer pays directly and where you would go for a serious emergency. If one family member has a chronic condition, specialist access may outweigh rent savings. Cameroon rewards people who calculate convenience as time and risk rather than square metres.

Social integration then complicates the financial picture in a useful way. If all your friends live forty minutes away, you may decline invitations and become isolated. If your neighbourhood has no walkable routine, every coffee, sport session or grocery trip requires transport. A cheap house on the edge of the city can create an expensive social life. Before moving permanently, spend several days living in the neighbourhood rather than visiting it for a viewing.

Your identity also changes how the same city feels. A visibly foreign resident may attract different pricing and attention than a person assumed to be Cameroonian. A Black European or North American may initially be read as local until accent or documents reveal otherwise. A mixed couple may receive curiosity in some settings and pressure in others. Women living alone, visibly queer people and people with disabilities all navigate different versions of the same streets. There is no universal expatriate experience to purchase.

The political and linguistic map sits underneath all of this. Cameroon's Francophone-Anglophone tension is not an abstract chapter from a history book. It shapes identity, education, media and regional security. You do not need to become a political expert before arrival, but you do need to understand why language can carry more weight than vocabulary. Treating

« English-speaking Cameroon » as a charming bilingual feature while ignoring the conflict is the kind of expatriate simplification that makes people stop taking you seriously.

A realistic decision therefore ends with a sentence more precise than « Cameroon is cheap and welcoming. » It might be: « Yaoundé works for us because one partner works with public institutions, the children have a suitable school within forty-five minutes, our insurance covers the clinics we can reach, our remote income survives the full annual budget and we are willing to learn French. » That is a reason to move. Everything else is mood lighting.

Run the move through five stress tests before you call the decision finished. First, test income. If your foreign salary falls by twenty percent or your local job ends, can you remain for six months without borrowing? If the answer is no, the country may still fit you, but the timing does not.

Second, test health. Assume one adult needs a specialist consultation every month and one child needs an emergency visit at night. Which providers would you use, how would you pay and how long would the journey take? A plan that works only while everyone is healthy is a holiday budget.

Third, test infrastructure. Imagine two days of unstable power and a water interruption during a work deadline. Can the house function? If remote income funds the move, internet and electricity are not household comforts. They are production infrastructure.

Fourth, test language. Spend one day trying to complete ordinary tasks without your bilingual colleague or partner. If every landlord, pharmacy or administrative interaction requires rescue, language learning becomes an operational priority rather than a cultural hobby.

Fifth, test social position. Are you comfortable being visibly foreign, being assumed wealthier than you are, or having personal questions arrive earlier than you expect? Can you set boundaries without becoming hostile? Expatriation is partly the experience of being interpreted by people using categories you did not choose.

Then test regional curiosity against security. You may move partly because Cameroon offers enormous ecological and cultural diversity. Accept from the start that some regions may not be appropriate for leisure travel during your residence. A country can be worth living in even when parts of its map require restraint.