AfriLabs | AFRILABS ANNUAL GATHERING | Cotonou 2026 | Benin A World of Wonders | MINISTÈRE DE LA TRANSFORMATION DIGITALE ET DE L'INNOVATION RÉPUBLIQUE DU BÉNIN

AfriLabs Annual Gathering 2026

Travel Guide

Cotonou, Benin Republic

Table of Content

- Welcome Note
- Registration & Tickets
- About Cotonou, Republic of Benin
- Venue – Sofitel Cotonou Marina Hotel & Spa
- Cultural Tips
- Visa & Immigration
- Important Travel Advise
- Getting Around Cotonou
- Things to Bring Along
- In Case of Emergency
- AfriLabs Delegate Support
- Cultural & Ecosystem Tour
- Partner Hotels

Welcome to the 11th AfriLabs Annual Gathering (AAG) 2026!

Africa's premier gathering of innovation leaders returns with a new milestone as we welcome you to **Cotonou, Benin Republic,** the first Francophone country to host the AfriLabs Annual Gathering.

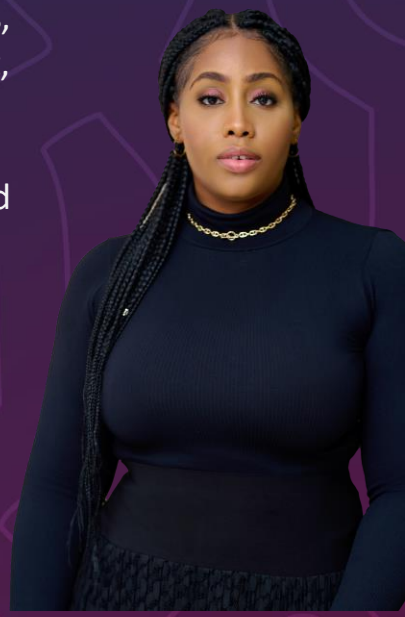
Hosted by the **Ministry of Digital Transformation and Innovation of the Republic of Benin**, AAG 2026 will convene innovation hubs, startups, entrepreneurs, investors, policymakers, development partners, corporates, academia, creatives, and ecosystem builders from across Africa and beyond to shape the continent's innovation future.

Date: 18–20 November 2026
Theme: Africa's Innovation Era: Building Sustainable Institutions for Global Influence and Continental Impact

Over three exciting days, delegates can look forward to inspiring keynote sessions, ministerial dialogues, investment forums, startup showcases, interactive workshops, networking opportunities, exhibitions, cultural experiences, the AfriLabs Gala Night, Soirée, and a curated **Benin Ecosystem Innovation Tour.**

We are delighted to welcome you to Benin Republic and hope this guide helps you prepare for an enjoyable, safe, and memorable experience.

With Excitement
Jennifer Okeke- Ojiudu
Senior Ecosystem Engagement Manager



AfriLabs | AFRILABS ANNUAL GATHERING | Cotonou 2026 | Benin A World of Wonders | MINISTÈRE DE LA TRANSFORMATION DIGITALE ET DE L'INNOVATION RÉPUBLIQUE DU BÉNIN

Registration & Tickets

Ticket Tiers:

Nile: $300
Zambezi: $200
Kagera: $100

Early Bird – 25% off all ticket categories:
From 31 August 2026 (end date to be confirmed).
Summer Sale – 20% off Nile & Zambezi tickets: 1 – 15 September 2026.
Standard/Event Pricing: From 16 September 2026 until the event.

Purchase your ticket and access the benefits for each ticket category
www.afrilabsgathering.com/tickets/

Contact: events@afrilabs.com

About Cotonou, Republic of Benin

Located along the Atlantic coast, **Cotonou** is the economic and commercial capital of Benin Republic and one of West Africa's fastest-growing centres for business, trade, entrepreneurship, and innovation. The city offers a unique blend of modern infrastructure, vibrant markets, beautiful beaches, rich cultural heritage, and a rapidly expanding technology ecosystem.

Benin Republic is increasingly recognised for its commitment to digital transformation, startup development, and innovation-driven economic growth, making Cotonou an ideal destination for Africa's largest innovation gathering.

Key Facts

- **Country:** Republic of Benin
- **Capital City:** Porto-Novo
- **Economic Capital:** Cotonou
- **Official Language:** French
- **Other Widely Spoken Languages:** Fon, Yoruba, English, Bariba, Dendi, Mina and several indigenous languages
- **Currency:** West African CFA Franc (XOF)
- **Time Zone:** West Africa Time (WAT | UTC+1)
- **Country Code:** +229
- **Climate in November:** Warm tropical weather (approximately **24°C–32°C**) with lower rainfall and pleasant evenings
- **Electricity:** 220–230V, 50Hz
- **Plug Types:** Type C and Type E
- **Driving Side:** Right-hand side

Venue – Sofitel Cotonou Marina Hotel & Spa

Cultural Tips

Cultural Tips

The people of Benin Republic are known for their warmth, hospitality, and strong sense of community.
Visitors will find locals welcoming and willing to assist whenever possible.

Language

French is the official language and is used in government offices, airports, hotels, banks, restaurants, and most businesses. While English is spoken in many international hotels and within the innovation ecosystem, learning a few basic French expressions can make your stay even more enjoyable.

Conference Sessions

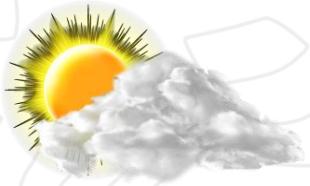
Business Casual or Conference Chic

AfriLabs Soirée:

Sophisticated Casual

Gala Night:

Extravagantly African



November is generally warm, so lightweight clothing is recommended during the day, while a light jacket is useful in air-conditioned venues or during evening activities.

Safety

Cotonou is generally considered one of the safer cities in West Africa for visitors. As with any international destination, remain aware of your surroundings, avoid displaying valuables in public, use licensed taxis or trusted ride-hailing services, and keep copies of your important travel documents.

Did You Know?

Benin Republic is the **first Francophone country** to host the AfriLabs Annual Gathering, reflecting AfriLabs' commitment to strengthening collaboration across both Anglophone and Francophone innovation ecosystems.

Visa & Immigration

Benin Republic has simplified its entry process through an electronic visa (e-Visa) system, making travel convenient for international visitors. Delegates are encouraged to check the latest visa requirements well in advance of their departure and apply early to avoid delays.

Do I Need a Visa?

Visa requirements vary depending on your nationality. **Citizens of ECOWAS Member States and all African countries may enter Benin visa-free for stays of up to 90 days**, subject to prevailing immigration regulations. Travelers from other countries are generally required to obtain a Benin e-Visa before travelling.

To check whether your country is visa-exempt, view the official list of countries with visa waiver agreements here. If you require a visa, you can submit your application through the official Benin e-Visa portal https://evisa.bj/. Delegates are encouraged to apply at least 7 days before departure to allow sufficient processing time.

Applying for a Benin e-Visa

The Benin e-Visa application is completed online. Applicants are generally required to provide:

- A valid passport with at least **six (6) months' validity** beyond the date of entry
- A recent passport-sized photograph
- A completed online visa application form
- Proof of accommodation (hotel reservation or invitation letter)
- Return or onward flight ticket
- Payment of the applicable visa fee

Once approved, the e-Visa is issued electronically and should be printed or saved on a mobile device for presentation upon arrival.

Immigration on Arrival

Upon arrival at **Cadjehoun International Airport (COO)** in Cotonou, travellers may be required to present:

- Valid passport
- Approved e-Visa (where applicable)
- Return or onward ticket
- Hotel reservation or accommodation details
- Invitation letter (if requested)
- Proof of sufficient funds for the duration of stay
- Yellow Fever Vaccination Certificate (where applicable)

Immigration officers may ask a few routine questions regarding the purpose of your visit and the duration of your stay, it is part of the process, ensure you cooperate with them.

Invitation Letters

Registered delegates who require an official invitation letter to support their visa application may request one through the AAG 2026 registration portal or by contacting the AfriLabs Events Team.

Please note that an invitation letter **does not guarantee visa approval**. The issuance of visas remains the sole responsibility of the Government of Benin and its diplomatic missions.

Important Travel Advice

- Apply for your visa as early as possible.
- Ensure your passport has at least **two blank visa pages**.
- Carry both printed and digital copies of your travel documents.
- Keep your passport, visa, and other important documents with you at all times during your journey.
- Check that your passport remains valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date from Benin.

Official Visa Portal

For the latest visa requirements and to submit your application,

visit **https://www.beninevisa.com/**

Note: Once you secure your AAG ticket, kindly ensure that you fill out the attached form for necessary visa application support. You can contact **events@afrilabs.com** for further enquiry.

Travelling To Republic of Benin Via Road

Recommended Routes

- Nigeria: Lagos → Badagry → Seme–Krake Border → Cotonou.
- Ghana: Accra → Aflao Border → Lomé, Togo → Cotonou.
- Togo: Lomé → Hillacondji Border → Grand-Popo → Cotonou.

Travel Tips

- Use recognised transport operators and official border crossings.
- Allow extra time for immigration, customs, and road delays.
- Check current border conditions and travel advisories before departure.
- Keep your AAG registration confirmation, accommodation details, and travel documents accessible.

Note: For AAG travel assistance: events@afrilabs.com.

Getting Around Cotonou

Getting around Cotonou is convenient, with several transportation options available for delegates.

- **Ride-hailing Apps:** **Yango** and **Gozem** are the safest and most convenient ways to travel around the city. Both offer reliable, affordable rides and cashless payment options.
- **Taxis:** Licensed taxis are widely available at the airport, hotels, and major attractions. Agree on the fare before your journey if the taxi is not metered.
- **Motorcycle Taxis (Zémidjans):** A fast and inexpensive way to navigate traffic, though they are recommended only for short trips.
- **Conference Shuttle:** Complimentary shuttle services will operate between the official conference hotels and the event venue during AAG 2026. The schedule will be shared with registered delegates.
- **Airport Transfers:** Cadjehoun International Airport (COO) is approximately 15–20 minutes from most major hotels. Delegates may use conference shuttles, hotel transfers, ride-hailing apps, or licensed airport taxis.

Travel Tip: For a safe and hassle-free experience, AfriLabs recommends using the conference shuttle service, **Yango**, or **Gozem** throughout your stay in Cotonou.

Note: Nile ticket holders and participants staying in partner hotels, get a complementary airport pick up

Things to Bring Along

To ensure a smooth and comfortable stay in Benin Republic, we recommend packing the following essentials for AAG 2026.

Travel Essentials

- Valid passport (minimum **6 months validity**)
- Benin e-Visa (if required)
- Flight itinerary and return ticket
- Hotel booking confirmation
- AAG 2026 ticket
- Invitation letter (if applicable)
- Travel insurance documents
- Printed and digital copies of important travel documents

Health & Personal Care

- Prescription medications (with a doctor's prescription if necessary)
- Basic first-aid kit
- Mosquito repellent
- Hand sanitizer and personal toiletries
- Reusable water bottle

Travel Tip:

Keep your passport, visa, vaccination certificate, and other important documents in your carry-on luggage, and save digital copies on your phone or cloud storage for easy access in case of loss or emergency.

Things to Bring Along

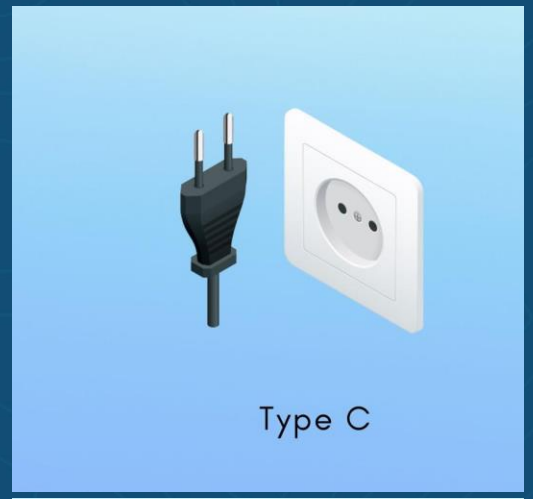
To ensure a smooth and comfortable stay in Benin Republic, we recommend packing the following essentials for AAG 2026.

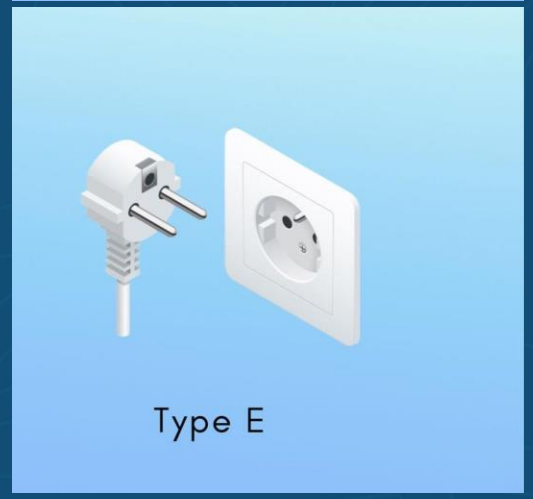
Money & Payments

- Cash payment is widely accepted, always keep small denominations of cash for taxis, markets, and tips
- Some cash in **West African CFA Franc (XOF)** or USD/EUR for exchange
- Make provision for ATM withdrawals in Benin to have enough cash for payment

Tech & Connectivity

- Mobile phone (preferably unlocked for a local SIM card)
- Laptop and charger
- Power bank
- Chargers for all electronic devices
- Universal travel adapter (**Type C & Type E plugs**, 220–230V, 50Hz)
- Portable Wi-Fi or MiFi device (optional)





In Case of Emergency

Your safety and well-being are important to us. In the event of an emergency during your stay in Benin Republic, remain calm and contact the appropriate emergency service or the AfriLabs Events Team for assistance.

Emergency Contacts

- **Police:** 117
- **Ambulance:** 112
- **Fire Service:** 118

Please verify these numbers upon arrival, as local emergency services may provide additional regional contacts.

Embassy & Consular Support

We recommend saving the contact details of your country's embassy or consulate in Benin before you travel. If your country does not have diplomatic representation in Benin, identify the nearest accredited embassy that can provide consular assistance in case of a lost passport or other emergencies.

Health & Medical Assistance

If you require medical attention:

- Visit the nearest hospital or healthcare facility.
- Carry your travel medical insurance details and identification at all times.
- If you have any existing medical conditions or allergies, inform your travel companions and accommodation provider.

You can send an email to the Afrilabs team via **events@afrilabs.com** for any emergency or share your food allergy, if any.

AfriLabs Delegate Support

During AAG 2026, the AfriLabs Events Team will operate a dedicated **Delegate Help Desk** to assist with:

- Travel and logistics support
- Medical emergencies
- Lost and found
- Venue information
- General event enquiries

The Help Desk contact numbers and WhatsApp support line will be shared with all registered delegates before the event.

Travel Tip

Before travelling, share your itinerary, hotel details, and emergency contact information with a family member or trusted colleague, and keep both printed and digital copies of your important travel documents readily accessible.

Cultural & Ecosystem Tour

Benin Republic offers a unique blend of history, culture, nature, and innovation. Whether you have a few hours or an extra day before or after AAG 2026, here are some must-visit attractions and experiences.

Explore Benin's Rich History

Ouidah – One of West Africa's most historic towns, known for the ***Door of No Return, the Slave Route, and the Sacred Forest***. Located about **45 km (1 hour)** from Cotonou.

Fondation Zinsou Museum – Discover contemporary African art and Benin's rich cultural heritage through world-class exhibitions.

Visit Ganvié – The "Lake Village"

Take a boat tour to **Ganvié**, Africa's largest lake village, where thousands of people live in stilt houses built over **Lake Nokoué**.

This UNESCO-recognized cultural site offers a fascinating glimpse into Benin's history and way of life.

Relax at Fidjrossè Beach

Enjoy the Atlantic coastline at **Fidjrossè Beach**, one of Cotonou's most popular beaches, perfect for relaxing, dining, or watching the sunset after a day of conference activities.

Shop at Arts and Crafts Market (Gbégamey)

Experience one of West Africa's largest open-air markets, where you can shop for traditional fabrics, handcrafted souvenirs, spices, jewellery, artwork, and local products.

Cultural & Ecosystem Tour

Discover Benin's Innovation Ecosystem

Join the **Benin Innovation & Cultural Experience**, where delegates will visit leading innovation hubs, startup communities, and entrepreneurship support organisations to learn about Benin's growing digital economy and connect with local innovators.

Experience Beninese Cuisine

Taste authentic local dishes such as:

- Amiwo (tomato cornmeal)
- Pâte with traditional sauces
- Grilled fish and seafood
- Wagashi (local cheese)
- Akassa
- Fresh tropical fruits and juices

Experience Beninese Culture

Immerse yourself in Benin's vibrant culture through traditional music, dance, local craftsmanship, and art. If your visit coincides with a cultural festival or evening performance, it's an excellent opportunity to experience the country's rich heritage.

Partner Hotels – Sofitel

Classic
Starting from: 284 USD per night

Boulevard de la Marina, Cotonou, Benin

Contact information

Email : HB845@sofitel.com

Tel. : +229 0120900461

Website: https://sofitel.accor.com/

Partner Hotels – Novotel

Classic
Starting from 274 USD Per Night

Address: Boulevard de la Marina, 08 BP 0929 0 COTONOU

Contact information

Email : h1826-sl@accor.com

Tel. : +22921305662
https://all.accor.com/

Partner Hotels – Ibis

Classic
Starting from: 93 USD per night

Address: Boulevard de la Marina, 08 BP 0929, 08 BP 0929 COTONOU, Benin

Contact information

Email : h6681@accor.com

Tel. : +229-580657011+229-21305677

Maison Rouge Cotonou Hotel Guest House

Classic and superior rooms
Starting from 119,000 FCFA (VAT included) / 210 USD (VAT included)

Contact information

www.maison-rouge-cotonou.com

Email : contact@maison-rouge-cotonou.com

Tel. : +229 01 21 30 09 01

Cell phone : +229 01 65 12 69 89 / 01 97 97 61 88

La Maison de Canelya

Small, Classic, Classic with Balcony, Large and Premium Rooms

Starting from: **26,855 FCFA (€41) per night** — Breakfast included

Address: Cotonou, Benin

Room options:

- Small Room — 26,855 FCFA / €41
- Classic Room — 30,130 FCFA / €46
- Classic Room with Balcony — 35,370 FCFA / €54
- Large Room — 45,195 FCFA / €69
- Premium Room — 56,985 FCFA / €87

Contact information

Website / Room Gallery

Tel. +229 01 61 30 13 13

WhatsApp: +229 61 30 13 13

AfriLabs
AFRILABS ANNUAL GATHERING
Cotonou 2026
benin
A World of Wonders
MINISTÈRE DE LA TRANSFORMATION DIGITALE ET DE L'INNOVATION
RÉPUBLIQUE DU BÉNIN
afrilabsgathering.com