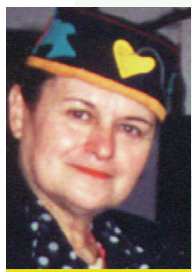




Africa Fashion is sweeping the world! Look who's sweeping the web!

by Muguette Goufrani



Akwaaba and Bonjour! Who would have thought when we launched Africa Travel Magazine 12 years ago, it would become such a popular resource for fashion. Try "Googling" for Africa Travel Fashions or many Africa topic sometime, and you'll notice our website at or near the top. Ditto for Yahoo and

MSN. According to Webtrends statistics month after month, we get more hits for fashion than any other topic - which tells us what attracts a growing majority of our readers. The Editor and I wear African attire almost daily at home or away, and we pay close heed to the simple effective ways Africans make a distinct fashion statement. To create a lasting impression and stand out from the humdrum, everyday world, consider *kanga* and *kikoi* fabrics in dazzling, eye catching colors. A *kanga* is a pure cotton, with a border wide enough to cover you comfortably. It often features a strong, central design or theme, such as fertility signs, mountains, landmarks, soccer stars or popular singers. Many African ladies wear a *kanga* over their skirts while working in the fields in order to control the dust. A *kanga* is a perfect family gift that is extremely popular throughout Africa thanks to its other option - multiple use as a matching or contrasting head wrap.

You may see a Swahili proverb on some *kanga* that is derived from the words "guinea fowl." Why? Because the original *kanga* were brightly colored Portuguese handkerchiefs intended for gentlemen traders and officials. These items were then sewn together by Africans to create a piece large enough to be worn head to toe - and called kangas because their brightness reminded Africans of guinea fowl. As village folks say, "kanga nenda na urembo, shani urembo na shani" - "the *kanga* struts in style. The *kanga* cloth is a lightweight loose weave fabric, it's versatile and easy to care for.

Kikoi

The *kikoi*, woven from the finest cotton grown in the region, is a rectangle of pure cotton with a work of art inspired by the vibrant colors of East African Coast. The traditional way of wearing *kikoi* is simply



wrapping it around the lower part of your body and tucking it in at the waist. Inspired by a multitude of colors and shapes, the *kikoi* are woven in thousands of different colors with hand made tassels at the two widths and have become the must have accessories for beach goers.

In Zanzibar, designers use these two popular options in a variety of ways. For example, in the photo at the top of the page I took while attending an ATA symposium, they carried the theme right through to the sun umbrellas that complimented their attire; What a statement they made in their welcoming greeting - Jambo Zanzibar! These cloths may have originated with what Arabs traders wore

during commerce along the East African Coast. Both varieties make a truly treasurable gift. Cameroon's celebrated designer Esterella makes effective use of the *kikoi* and *kanga* in her award winning fashions. We have had the pleasure of seeing on display on our two recent trips to that friendly West African country that's rich in resources and talented entrepreneurs such as Esterella (above left).

Nigeria's Queen of the Fashion Scene

We get to meet a lot of fascinating characters in the course of a lifetime - and one lady who has had a profound effect on our magazine's editorial flavor is Chief Margaret Bola Fabiyi of Lagos, Nigeria, who lit up our lives once again at an enchanted evening under the stars at La Palm Resort Hotel in Accra, Ghana. Her fashion show was the main event at a dinner hosted by the Nigeria Tourism Ministry. Chief Margaret is not afraid to break all barriers - with her bold West African panache and ability to combine traditional West African with unique clothing styles. Having witnessed many of her presentations - our Queen of the Fashion Scene just keeps getting better and better.



Photos: Top - Zanzibar girls give our ATA delegates a rousing welcome to the Ecotourism Symposium. Above - Esterella of Cameroon. Left - ATA delegates from USA wear colorful African garb at 31st World Congress in Accra, Ghana.