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# Moving to Burkina Faso

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## Introduction

Alright, seasoned mover, welcome! So, you've decided to swap your predictable pavements for the dusty roads and vibrant chaos of Burkina Faso? Excellent choice! Or possibly a slightly mad one, but who are we to judge? This isn't your standard relocation gig to Geneva or Singapore, and thank goodness, this isn't your standard, bland relocation guide telling you how to pack a box (we assume you've mastered that dark art already). Forget the generic fluff about 'managing expectations' or 'embracing culture shock' – you're past that. We're diving straight into the deep end, focusing *only* on the practical, peculiar, and occasionally perplexing specifics of setting up shop in the "Land of Honest Men."

If you're looking for a glossy tourist brochure waxing lyrical about stunning sunsets (which exist, by the way) or the deep philosophical meaning behind Mossi masks (also fascinating), you might find tidbits here and there. But primarily, we're here to talk about the stuff that actually keeps you up at night *before* you move, and the things that make you scratch your head *after* you arrive. Think: navigating visa requirements seemingly drafted during a fever dream, finding an apartment that doesn't require scuba gear during the rainy season, figuring out why your brand-new generator sounds like it's chewing rocks, and mastering the subtle art of the Ouagadougou traffic negotiation (hint: confidence is key, functioning brakes optional).

We'll skip the patronizing advice on 'how to make friends' and instead get down to brass tacks. Where do you find decent coffee? How do you pay your electricity bill without sacrificing your entire morning? What's the real deal with healthcare (spoiler: get *very* good insurance with evacuation)? Why is learning to say "Ça va?" with the right inflection more critical than conjugating French verbs perfectly? We'll tackle finding work (or navigating the unique challenges if you already have it), dealing with banking quirks where cash reigns supreme, and understanding why that tiny moped carrying a family of five *and* a goat seems perfectly normal here.

Let's be clear: Burkina Faso is a country of incredible warmth, resilience, and cultural depth. The music, the art (hello, FESPACO and SIAO!), the sheer friendliness of the people, and the taste of a cold Castel beer or a fresh roadside mango on a hot day are experiences you won't easily forget. But it's also a place facing real challenges. Infrastructure can be... whimsical. The Harmattan wind will coat everything you own in a fine layer of Saharan dust. And bureaucracy can sometimes feel like a competitive sport. We'll give you the unvarnished truth, hopefully with a chuckle or two along the way.

**Now, put down your packing tape for a second and listen up - this is**

**important.** Burkina Faso is currently experiencing significant security challenges, including political instability, crime, and the threat of terrorism, particularly in border regions but also extending elsewhere. This isn't us being dramatic; it's the reality on the ground. **Before you book flights, before you quit your job, before you even dream of shipping your beloved pot plants, you MUST consult your home country's current official travel advisories.** Read them thoroughly. Understand the risks. The situation is volatile and can change rapidly. Your safety is paramount, and ignoring official warnings would be, frankly, idiotic.

**Equally important disclaimer:** While we've packed this guide with the most practical, up-to-date info we could muster, things change. Visa regulations morph, import duties fluctuate, security protocols adapt, prices go up (rarely down), and the best place to find imported peanut butter might switch overnight. Treat this book as your well-informed, slightly sarcastic friend offering advice based on real experience – **it is NOT a substitute for checking official sources.** Always verify current rules, regulations, costs, and safety information with Burkinabé authorities, your embassy, your employer, and other relevant official channels. Think of this as your indispensable starting point, not the final word.

Right, enough serious talk. Ready to embrace the adventure, the challenges, and the unexpected joys of moving to Burkina Faso? Let's get started. *Allons-y!*

## CHAPTER ONE: Right Papers, Wrong Country? Nailing the Visa Game

Ah, the visa application. That delightful bureaucratic ballet known and loved by international movers everywhere. It's the official starting pistol for your relocation adventure, often accompanied by the faint scent of desperation, printer ink, and existential dread. You've likely navigated these murky waters before, perhaps for smoother seas like Canada or Germany. Well, buckle up, buttercup, because while the core concept remains - prove you're not arriving with nefarious intent or empty pockets - the journey towards securing your Burkinabé visa might have its own unique rhythm, possibly played on a balafon with a slightly unpredictable beat. Getting the paperwork right is paramount; ending up with the right papers for the wrong bureaucratic interpretation is a frustration best avoided.

First things first: unless you're planning a whirlwind reconnaissance trip disguised as tourism (maximum 90 days, usually), you're gunning for the Big Kahuna: the *Visa de Long Séjour*, or Long-Stay Visa. This is your golden ticket for anything longer than three months, be it work, study, joining family, or simply pursuing an intense passion for mangoes during the entire season. Forget any romantic notions you might have picked up elsewhere about waltzing in on a tourist visa and magically transforming it into a residency permit while sipping bissap juice. While stranger things might have happened in the annals of Burkinabé bureaucracy, relying on an in-country status change is like betting your entire relocation budget on a single spin of a rusty roulette wheel. The official, and vastly more sensible, route involves securing this long-stay visa *before* you even think about packing your anti-malarials.

Your quest begins not in Ouagadougou, but likely much closer to home, at the nearest Embassy or Consulate of Burkina Faso. Note the word "nearest," but also "correct." Embassies often have specific geographical jurisdictions. Applying to the embassy in Paris when you live in London might earn you little more than a polite (or perhaps not-so-polite) redirection. Do your homework and pinpoint the mission responsible for your region. Once located, prepare for interaction. This might range from surprisingly efficient email exchanges to navigating websites seemingly designed in 1998, or even the traditional art of the telephone call. Patience, persistence, and politeness are your watchwords here. Remember, you need something from them, and a charming approach often works better than frustrated demands, especially when dealing with potentially overloaded consular staff. Assume nothing is standard; requirements can sometimes differ slightly from one embassy to another, adding a frisson of excitement to the process. Start early. Very early. Processing times are less of a guarantee and more of a philosophical concept.

Now, let's talk treasure hunting, because assembling the required documents can feel a bit like that. You'll need the usual suspects, of course. Your passport, naturally, needs to be valid for at least six months *beyond* your intended stay – don't get caught out by an expiry date looming just after your visa would theoretically end. The visa application form itself can range from a straightforward questionnaire to a multi-page epic demanding details you'd forgotten you even knew. Fill it out neatly, completely, and truthfully. Errors or omissions are invitations for delay. Passport-sized photographs are standard, but check the specific requirements – background color (often white), size, pose (neutral expression usually preferred, so save the beaming smile for arrival). Sometimes they are surprisingly exacting on these.

Proof of purpose is where it gets interesting. If you're moving for work, you'll typically need an employment contract or a formal letter of invitation from your employer in Burkina Faso. This isn't just a casual "Yeah, Bob's coming to work with us" email; it needs to look official, potentially outlining your role, salary, and duration of employment. For students, it's an acceptance letter from the educational institution. If you're joining family, you'll need documentation proving the relationship and potentially the status of the family member already in Burkina Faso. The clearer and more comprehensive your proof of purpose, the smoother the ride. Ambiguity is the enemy.

Then comes the proof of sufficient funds. How much is sufficient? That's often the million CFA franc question. There might not be a publicly stated minimum bank balance. The goal is to convince the consular officer that you won't become a burden on the Burkinabé state the moment you land. Recent bank statements are usually required. If your employer is providing a salary and housing, highlighting this in the employment contract can strengthen your case. If you're self-funded, demonstrating a healthy balance and perhaps a regular income stream is wise. There's no magic number, but think 'comfortably solvent,' not 'surviving on instant noodles.'

Proof of accommodation can sometimes feel like a Catch-22. How can you have proof of accommodation before you have the visa to go there and find accommodation? For the visa application stage, this requirement might sometimes be satisfied by a letter from your employer stating they will provide initial housing, or perhaps a reservation for a hotel or serviced apartment for your first few weeks. A full year's lease is unlikely to be required at this point, but check with the specific embassy. They need to see you have a credible plan for where you'll initially lay your head.

One document stands out with stark, non-negotiable importance: the Yellow Fever Vaccination Certificate. This isn't a suggestion; it's a mandatory requirement for entry into Burkina Faso, and they *will* ask to see proof, often at the visa application stage and definitely upon arrival. Ensure your vaccination is up to date (most are now considered valid for life, but check the specifics on your certificate) and keep that little

yellow book safe – it’s arguably more important than your passport in certain checkpoints. Don't leave getting this vaccination to the last minute; allow time for it to become effective before you travel.

Depending on your nationality and the specific embassy's mood, you might also be asked for a police clearance certificate or criminal record check from your home country, possibly translated into French. This involves another layer of bureaucracy back home, so factor in the time needed to apply for and receive this document. Translation requirements can also pop up for other documents, like birth or marriage certificates if applying for dependent visas. Official translations are usually required, done by accredited translators. Sometimes, though less commonly required for Burkina Faso than some other destinations, you might hear whispers of needing documents legalized or apostilled. Clarify this directly with the embassy; don't assume based on experiences elsewhere.

Once you’ve gathered your precious documents, checked them thrice, and possibly made sacrifices to the photocopying gods, it’s time for submission. Find out the required method: mailing the complete package (use registered mail!), submitting via an online portal (less common, but check), or scheduling an appointment to apply in person. Pay the visa fee using the specified method – bank transfer, money order, cash in person – it varies. Keep proof of payment religiously. Then, the waiting begins. Processing times can fluctuate wildly, influenced by workload, staffing levels, public holidays in both countries, and perhaps the alignment of the planets. The embassy might give you an estimated timeframe, but treat it as aspirational. Gentle, polite follow-up inquiries after a reasonable period are acceptable; daily calls are not. Sometimes, an interview might be requested, usually to clarify aspects of your application.

Here's a crucial entanglement: the Work Permit, or *Permis de Travail*. While Chapter 6 delves into the joyous intricacies of obtaining the permit itself, you need to understand its relationship with the long-stay visa *now*. For most employment-based moves, your employer in Burkina Faso must typically initiate the work permit application process *before* you can successfully apply for your long-stay visa. The approval (or at least proof of application) for the work permit often becomes a required document for the visa. This creates a delightful chicken-and-egg scenario where your visa depends on a permit you can't get until you have a job offer, and the employer might be hesitant until they know you can get the visa. This interdependence underscores the importance of working closely with your employer and starting *both* processes well in advance. They need to navigate the bureaucracy on their end in Ouagadougou or Bobo-Dioulasso while you wrestle with the embassy in your home country. Communication is key.

Fast forward: imagine you've successfully navigated the labyrinth. The embassy has blessed your application, and a crisp *Visa de Long Séjour* sticker now adorns a page in

your passport. Victory! But the game isn't quite over. When you arrive at Ouagadougou International Airport (or potentially another port of entry), you'll face immigration control. Have your passport with the visa and your Yellow Fever certificate readily accessible. The immigration officer will inspect your documents, possibly ask a few questions about your purpose of stay, and hopefully grant you entry with a satisfying *thump* of the entry stamp. Ensure this stamp is correctly dated and legible; it marks the official start of your visa's validity period within the country. This arrival procedure is usually straightforward, but be prepared and have your key documents handy, not buried at the bottom of your luggage.

What about bringing the family? If your spouse, partner, or children are accompanying you, they will typically need their own long-stay visas, often applied for concurrently with yours. The process is similar, but additional documents will be required, such as marriage certificates and birth certificates (again, potentially needing translation and/or legalization - check!). Proof of funds requirements might be higher to cover dependents, unless the primary applicant's employment package explicitly covers family support. Students applying for university or researchers will have slightly different documentation needs focused on their academic program. Volunteers with registered NGOs often have a specific process facilitated by the organization. Each situation has nuances, reinforcing the need for tailored advice from the embassy.

Now, remember that crucial disclaimer we mentioned in the introduction? Let's reiterate it with feeling. Visa requirements are not carved in stone. They are more like guidelines sketched in the Sahel sand, subject to change with political winds, administrative adjustments, or sometimes, seemingly, just because it's Tuesday. The information here reflects the general process as commonly experienced, but it is absolutely, positively, fundamentally **essential** that you verify **everything** directly with the specific Burkinabé embassy or consulate handling your application. Check their official website (if it's functional and updated). Email them with clear, concise questions. If necessary, call them. Do not rely solely on this guide, blog posts from 2018, or advice from your cousin's friend who visited Ouaga once. Get the latest forms, the current fee schedule, the precise document checklist, and the expected processing times straight from the source. Doing otherwise is setting yourself up for potentially lengthy and expensive delays.

Think of the visa application not just as a hurdle, but as your first real taste of navigating Burkinabé systems. It demands patience, attention to detail, a degree of persistence, and sometimes, a sense of humor to keep you sane. When you finally hold that passport with the visa safely inside, take a moment to appreciate your bureaucratic triumph. You've conquered the first major administrative beast. You've proven your mettle (and your solvency, and your lack of a yellow fever infection). You have the right papers. Now, you're one significant step closer to actually getting on that plane and starting your life in Burkina Faso. The housing hunt, the generator saga, and the quest for reliable internet await, but you've officially passed Go.

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