

Calabar, formerly OLD CALABAR, town and port, capital of Cross River State, southeastern Nigeria. It lies along the **Calabar** River, 5 miles (8 km) upstream from that river's entrance into the Cross River estuary. Settled in the early 17th century by the Efik branch of the Ibibio people, the town became a centre for trade between white traders on the coast and natives farther inland. Fish, cassava, bananas, palm oil, and palm kernels were traded at **Calabar** for European manufactured goods, and the town also served as a major slave-trading depot. Duke Town and the other Efik settlements near **Calabar**--Creek Town, Henshaw Town, and Obutong (**Old Town**)--were forcibly united into the loosely knit state of **Old Calabar** by the Ekpe secret society, which was controlled by the towns' merchant houses.

By the mid-19th century, after the waning of the slave trade, **Old Calabar's** economy had become based on the export of palm oil and palm kernels. After the chiefs of Duke Town accepted British protection in 1884, the town, which was called **Old Calabar** until 1904, served as capital of the Oil Rivers Protectorate (1885-93), the Niger Coast Protectorate (1893-1900), and Southern Nigeria (1900-06) until the British administrative headquarters were moved to Lagos. It remained an important port (shipping ivory, timber, and beeswax, as well as palm produce) until it was eclipsed by Port Harcourt, terminus (1916) of the railroad, 90 miles (145 km) west.

The name **Old Calabar** (as distinguished from the port and river named New **Calabar**, 120 miles [193 km] west) was originally given by 15th-century Portuguese navigators to the African inhabitants of that part of the Gulf of Guinea coast. This region was the main source of the **Calabar** bean, a poisonous bean that, when ingested, markedly affects the nervous system.

The completion of roads from **Calabar** to Arochukwu, Ikom, and Mamfe (in Cameroon) and the **Calabar**-Itu-Expene highway (which provides easy access to the rest of Nigeria) has contributed to **Calabar's** importance as a port. Its natural harbour, which can accommodate vessels of 19.5-foot (6-metre) draft, exports palm produce, timber (mostly obeche), rubber, cocoa, copra, and piassava fibre. The town has a sawmill; rubber-, food-, and oil-palm-processing plants; a cement factory; and a boatbuilding industry. Wood carving is a traditional art of the Efik, and the town's artisans sculpt ebony artifacts for the tourist market in Lagos.

Calabar has long been an educational centre. Its first church school, established by the Reverend Hope Waddell of the Free Church of Scotland in 1846, helped influence the Ekpe secret society to pass a law (1850) prohibiting human sacrifice. **Calabar** now is the site of the University of **Calabar** (1975), a college of technology, a teacher-training college, and numerous secondary schools. It also has a television station. Pop. (1993 est.) 161,700.

