

Central & Eastern Gambia



Gambia is made of river, with a few kilometres of savannah woodland, palm groves and crop fields on either side. You get the best view of this amazing stretch of the country on a boat tour. For most of the Gambia River's winding course, it's just you, the tranquil waters and green banks.

From Bintang Bolong to Tendaba, thick mangroves stretch out their airborne roots to oysters, providing shelter for clawless otters and nesting grounds for countless herons, ibises and other waders. Sometimes an African fish eagle will gaze proudly from a high branch, and European migrants chatter in the branches during the northern winter. The wide marshes and narrow creeks of the Baobolong wetlands are a magnificent culmination of this riverine beauty.

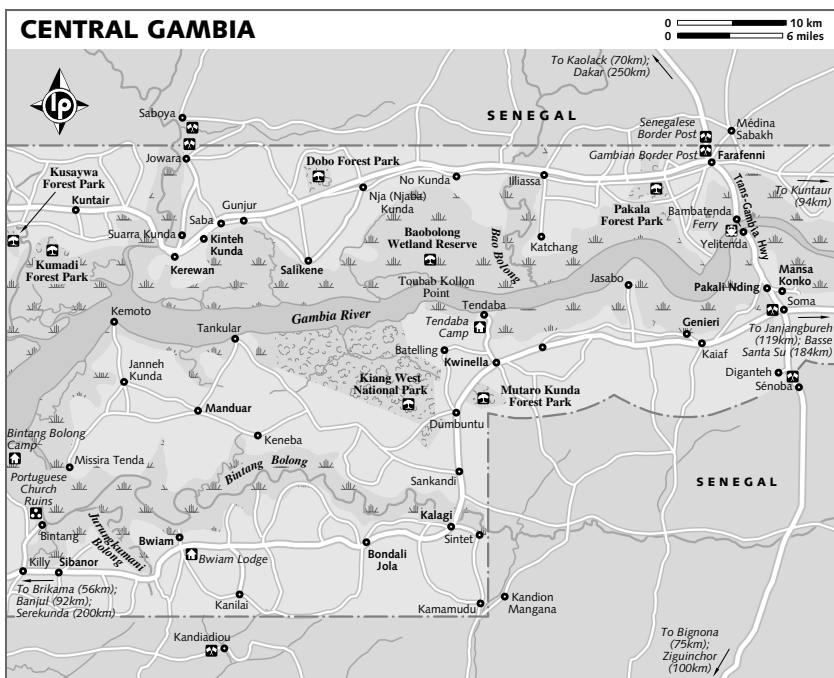
A little further north, the shoreline changes dramatically. Beyond the dusty junction town of Farafenni the sea ceases its saline grip on the waters, allowing lush, tropical greenery to thrive. Just after the rainy season, when the waters have swelled, this humble river takes on an almost Amazonian grandeur. Trees stand tall, their crowns shaking with the sudden leaps of baboons and colobus and vervet monkeys. As you near the River Gambia National Park, you might catch glimpses of the chimps of the Baboon Islands, and greet lazy hippos as you carry on eastwards towards the historical island town of Janjangbureh and the sprawling upcountry market of Basse Santa Su.

The ideal way of chugging to the country's far end is by a combination of road and river travel. That way, you get to immerse yourself in the culture of Gambia's more remote villages, as well as indulge in the 'behind-the-scenes' view from a privileged spot on the water.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Relax to the lapping of the waves and the calls of the birds at **Bintang Bolong** (p132), where huts stand on stilts in the river
- Count herons and hoot with the owls on a river cruise around **Baobolong Wetland Reserve** (p134)
- Follow in the footsteps of histories old and new at **Janjangbureh** (Georgetown; p140)
- Wake up to the calls of chimps and outclimb the monkeys in **River Gambia National Park** (p137)
- Think peaceful thoughts to the clicking of the metal boats at Traditions in **Basse Santa Su** (p144)





CENTRAL GAMBIA

BINTANG BOLONG

A large, meandering tributary of the Gambia River, Bintang Bolong rises in Senegal and joins the river about 50km upstream from Banjul. The banks of the tidal flow are lined with mangroves, and tucked away among the maze of shrubs near Bintang is **Bintang Bolong Lodge** (☎ 7043081, 9929362; www.bintang-bolong.com; Foni Bintang Karanai; r per person D400), an original camp that seems to grow from the mangroves surrounding it. Thirteen not very straight, not very sturdy but completely unique rooms sit on stilts right on the river – a location that equips them with the most majestic views across the water, birds and boats. A wind turbine in the village brings the energy that feeds the water pumps – which might mean occasional water shortages when the breeze fails to come in.

The lodge is a great starting point for boat trips (D800 per hour) or bus safaris (D3000 per day). There's also a crocodile pool where you can get close-up views of baby crocs, and

of course the rural life of Bintang to explore. The camp is closely tied into the local community, employing villagers and investing in schools, and community visits can easily be arranged.

Getting There & Away

Gelli-gellis (minibuses) leave daily from Brikama (D30, one hour). If you can't face the wait for the bus to fill up, you can hire a private taxi (around D2000). The driver needs to follow the main road east through the village of Somita, and at Killy turn left (north) along the dirt road to reach Bintang village and the lodge.

Otherwise, phone the lodge and arrange to be picked up. Pick-up can be arranged from Brikama (D750), Banjul or Serekunda (D1200), or Soma (D2000).

BWIAM

Until very recently, the trading town of Bwiam was a tiny Gambian village like any other, beautifully situated among plenty of tropical greenery. Today, it's a bustling rural centre, stretching in all directions. Visiting this cau-