

Western Gambia



Where the lights of the glitzy tourist palaces fade out, the country's more intimate side reveals itself. South of the Atlantic resorts, small fishing villages line wide beaches, inviting visitors to experience local life.

Further inland, the clamorous junction town Brikama lures you to more distant destinations. Put in a stop before you jump on the next bush taxi – its dusty haze hides the homes of several renowned *griot* (West African praise singer) families. In tucked-away neighbourhoods, they can introduce you to the gentle trickle of *kora* (harp-lute) and *balafon* notes and teach you the classic songs that keep the secrets of Gambia's ancient history.

The north-bank villages of Jufureh and Albreda grant a very different view of past eras. Ever since Alex Haley's book *Roots* traced the author's ancestral lineage back to the Kinte family of Jufureh, the village has turned into a symbolic destination for those in search of answers to their past. Across the river, the crumbling walls of the ancient slaving station on James Island remain a stark reminder of the cruel trade in humans that once took place here.

Western Gambia opens itself to travellers in a way strikingly harmonious with its natural surroundings. All along the southern coast, stylish eco-lodges and wholesome community projects allow you to explore the region while keeping your footprint small. In Kartong a veritable eco-village is in the making, and further north, past a beekeeping project and organic farm, the Makasutu Wildlife Trust is working with 14 villages on the creation of a community reserve. Until it is completed, you can enjoy the same spirit at Abuko Nature Reserve, Gambia's finest and tiniest park, and on the adventure trails of Makasutu Culture Forest.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Count tail feathers at the tiny **Abuko Nature Reserve** (p122)
- Try your hand at weaving and woodcarving at **Tanji Village Museum** (p117)
- Enjoy an eco-glamorous day of hammock lounging, boat riding and yoga stretching on the beach in the tranquil river village of **Kartong** (p119)
- Imbibe the protective spirit on an eco-trail through **Makasutu Culture Forest** (p123)
- Watch the tides of time eat into the historical shores of **James Island** (p130)



