

# Senegal

Couched between the arid desert lands of the north and lush tropical forests in the south, Senegal boasts a stunning array of sights, sounds and flavours. The capital, Dakar, alone hands you the country in a capsule. Perched on the tip of a beach-lined peninsula, this dizzying city is composed elegance and street hustle rolled into one. Its busy streets, vibrant markets and glittering nightlife will easily draw you into their relentless rhythm, but the escape route is always open – be it to the meditative calm of the historical Île de Gorée or the sands of Yoff and N’Gor. And if Dakar’s sensory overload really gets too much, the calm sway of architectural beauty Saint-Louis, the first French settlement in West Africa, boasts a vibrant urban culture without the inner-city bustle.

Most visitors head to Senegal for its beaches, and for good reason. North and south of Dakar, wide strips of white sand invite swimming and sunbathing, whether in the built-up resort zones, where a lazy day at the beach can be followed by a cocktail trail at night, or in one of the coast’s charming fishing villages, whose beaches are dotted with hundreds of colourful wooden pirogues. At the wide deltas of the Casamance and Saloum Rivers, the straight coastline is broken up into a maze of thick mangroves, tiny creeks, wide lagoons and shimmering plains. A pirogue trip through these striking zones reveals hundreds of bird species, from the gleaming wings of tiny kingfishers to the proud poise of pink flamingos. Whether you want to mingle with the trendsetters of urban Africa or be alone with your thoughts and the sounds of nature, you’ll find your place here.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 196,192 sq km
- **Capital** Dakar
- **Country code** ☎ 221
- **Famous for** Its vibrant music scene, Dakar’s urban culture, colonial houses
- **Languages** Wolof, Fula, Diola, Serer and French
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA493; €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 11.1 million
- **Visa** Not needed for citizens of the EU, Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States), Canada, Norway, South Africa, Japan, Israel, the USA and some other (mainly African) countries. For all others, one- to three-month visas cost US\$15 to US\$20



**HOW MUCH?**

- **Soft drink** CFA500
- **Newspaper** CFA200
- **Sandwich** CFA1200
- **French bread** CFA175
- **One hour's internet access** CFA300

**LONELY PLANET INDEX**

- **1L of petrol/gas** CFA600
- **1L of bottled water** CFA1000
- **Bottle of Flag beer** CFA1000
- **Souvenir T-shirt** CFA3000-5000
- **Shwarma** CFA1000

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- **The Casamance** (p725) Tiny villages dot the way to Senegal's best beaches in Cap Skiring.
- **Saint-Louis** (p707) West Africa's first French settlement.
- **Dakar** (p676) A vibrant nightclub, bar and concert scene in the capital.
- **Siné-Saloum** (p701) Pirogue rides through the mangroves of the Siné-Saloum Delta.
- **Bassari Country** (p717) Green hills and tiny villages.

**ITINERARIES**

- **One week** Spend a couple of days tasting the nightlife, arts and restaurant scene of Dakar (p676). From here, take day trips to the peaceful Île de Gorée (p693) and Îles de la Madeleine (p694). Head north to visit the historical town of Saint-Louis (p707). Put in a spot of bird watching at the Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj (p712) and Parc National de la Langue de Barbarie (p712). On your way back to Dakar, take in the Desert de Lompoul (p707).
- **Two weeks** Start as above, then head from Dakar south to the Petite Côte. Check out the community projects and beaches of Toubab Dialao (p696) and Popenguine (p697) before following the shoreline further south to Mbour (p700) and the unique seashell town of Joal-Fadiout (p701), if you like your beach life local, or Saly (p698), if you're more at home

in a holiday-resort zone. From Mbour, trace the coastal road beyond to Palmarin (p701), the stunning entry port to the region of the Siné-Saloum Delta, then head via Ndangane (p702) and Mar Lodj (p702) to Toubakouta (p703), one of the prettiest spots in the delta.

- **One month** Follow the two-week itinerary as described, then cross The Gambia from Toubakouta to reach the Casamance. Take the route towards Ziguinchor, with side trips to Affiniam (p729) and Koubalan (p729). Spend a couple of days in Ziguinchor (p721), the region's relaxed capital. Head west towards Oussouye (p725) and go kayaking, hiking and biking to places including Enampor (p725), with its stunning *campement villageois* (village 'camps' or guest houses). From Oussouye, pass via M'Lomp (p725) and visit its traditional *cases étages* (two-storey mud-brick houses), then carry on towards Elinkine (p726) and take a pirogue to Île de Karabane (p726). Take another pirogue to Cachouane (p729) and go on a long hike through tropical lands to Diembéring (p728). Cap Skiring (p727), with its stunning beaches, lies only a short stretch further south.
- **Six weeks** In six weeks, you can visit pretty much the entire country. Continue from the Casamance towards Tambacounda (p715) and the Parc National du Niokolo-Koba (p716). Keep going south towards Kedougou (p718) and the Bassari Country (p717). After visits to remote plateaus, waterfalls and forests, it's along the track back to Dakar. Stop at Kaolack (p706), Thiès (p704) or the holy town of Touba (p705) before re-entering the capital. Alternatively, if you have lots of time, the long river route via Bakel (p714), Matam (p714), Podor (p713) and the amazing Île à Morphil (p713) is Senegal's hidden treasure. Via Saint-Louis, you return to Dakar.

**CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO**

Senegal's main tourist season is from November to February, during the dry season and the 'coolest' months. Dakar's average daytime maximums are around 24°C (75°F) from January to March. It's also the best time to spot wildlife (particularly migratory birds). If you are the partying kind, the urban centre of Dakar is a great place to spend Christmas