

Senegal

Couched between the arid desert lands of the north and lush tropical forests in the south, Senegal boasts a vast array of sights, sounds and flavours. The capital, Dakar, is a dizzying introduction to the country. Perched on the tip of a peninsula, this city is composed elegance and street hustler rolled into one. Its busy streets, vibrant markets and glittering nightlife sit next to tranquil Île de Gorée and the beaches of Yoff and N'Gor. In the north of Senegal, the historical capital of Saint-Louis, the first French settlement in West Africa, tempts with historical architecture and proximity to two beautiful national parks.

Most visitors head to Senegal for its beaches, and for good reason. Along the Petite Côte and Cap Skiring, wide strips of sand greet the Atlantic. 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 in Senegal.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 197,000 sq km
- **ATMs** In all major towns
- **Borders** The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Mauritania; all borders open from dawn to dusk
- **Budget** US\$60 to US\$80 per day
- **Capital** Dakar
- **Languages** French, Wolof, Malinke, Pulaar (Fulfulde), Diola
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = CFA463, €1 = CFA656
- **Population** 12.9 million
- **Seasons** Dry (November to May), wet (June to October)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 221; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visa** Required by all except nationals of Canada, the EU, Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States), Israel, Japan, Norway, South Africa and the USA



HOW MUCH?

- **Soft drink** US\$1.10
- **Newspaper** US\$0.45
- **Sandwich** US\$2.60
- **French bread** US\$0.40
- **One hour internet** US\$0.65

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.30 (and rising)
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.85
- **Bottle of Flag** US\$2.20
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$6.50 to US\$10.90
- **Shwarma (kebab)** US\$2.20

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Casamance** (p497) Weave your way via tiny villages to Senegal's best beaches on Cap Skiring.
- **Saint-Louis** (p493) Follow in the footsteps of history in West Africa's first French settlement.
- **Dakar** (p484) Spend sleepless nights touring the capital's vibrant nightclubs, bars and concerts.
- **Siné-Saloum** (p492) Wind through the mangroves of the Siné-Saloum Delta in a *pirogue*.
- **Île de Gorée** (p491) Contemplate history and breathe in the atmosphere of this ancient slaving station and peaceful island.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Senegal's main tourist season lasts from November to February, the dry, cool season, when Dakar's average daytime maximums are around 24°C (75°F). Most music festivals take place in December and between March and June.

July to late September is hot and humid. Some national parks are inaccessible or even closed during the wet season, but it's also the time everything is lush and green, and many hotels reduce their prices by up to 50%.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Spend a couple of days tasting the urban life of Dakar (p484) and the calm of Île de Gorée (p491). Head north to Saint-Louis (p493), the Parc Na-

tional des Oiseaux du Djoudj (p496) and Parc National de la Langue de Barbarie (p496).

- **Two Weeks** Start as above, then head from Dakar south to the Petite Côte. Enjoy the beaches of Saly (p492) and surrounding villages, then check out the fish market of Mbour (p492) and the seashell town Joal-Fadiout (p492). Palmarin (p492) is the stunning entry port to the Siné-Saloum Delta. Discover also Ndangane (p492), Mar Lodj (p492) and Toubakouta (p493) – other beautiful delta spots.

HISTORY

Senegal was part of several West African empires, including the Empire of Ghana (8th century), and the Djolof kingdom, in the area between the Senegal River and Dakar (13th and 14th centuries). In the early 16th century, Portuguese traders made contact with coastal kingdoms, and became the first in a long line of 'interested' foreigners: soon the British, French and Dutch jostled for control of strategic points for the trade in slaves and goods. In 1659, the French built a trading station at Saint-Louis; the town later became the capital of French West Africa.

Dakar, home to tiny fishing villages, was chosen as capital of the Senegalese territory, and as early as 1848 Senegal had a deputy in the French parliament.

Independence

In the run-up to independence in 1960, Senegal joined French Sudan (present-day Mali) to form the Mali Federation. It lasted all of two months, and in August 1960, Senegal became a republic. Its first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, a socialist and poet of international stature, commanded respect in Senegal and abroad. His economic management, however, didn't match his way with words. At the end of 1980, he voluntarily stepped down and was replaced by Abdou Diouf, who soon faced a string of mounting crises.

The early 1980s saw the start of an ongoing separatist rebellion in the southern region of Casamance. Seven years later a minor incident on the Mauritanian border led to riots and deportations in both countries, as well as a three-year suspension of diplomatic relations and hundreds of casualties. Tensions mounted in