



# Guinea-Bissau

📍 245 / POP 1.5 MILLION

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## Why Go?

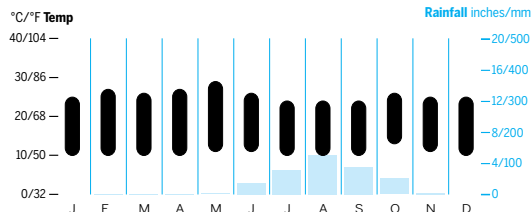
For a country that consistently elicits frowns from heads of state and news reporters, Guinea-Bissau will pull a smile from even the most world-weary traveller. The jokes here, like the music, are loud but tender. The bowls of grilled oysters are served with a lime sauce spicy enough to give a kick, but not so strong as to mask the bitterness. The buildings are battered and the faded colonial houses bowed by sagging balconies, but you'll see beauty alongside the decay.

Here, bare silver trees spring up like antler horns between swathes of elephant grass, and cashew sellers tease each other with an unmistakably Latin spirit. Board a boat for the Bijagós, where you can watch hippos lumber through lagoons full of fish and spot turtles nesting.

Despite painful wars, coups and cocaine hauls, Guinea-Bissau buzzes with joy, even when daily life is tough and the future bleak. There must be magic in that cashew juice.

## When to Go

### Bissau



## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Oysters on Quinhámel beach (p347)
- ➔ Dom Bifana (p344)
- ➔ Adega do Loureiro (p343)
- ➔ Berca do Rio (p347)

## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Ponta Anchaca (p346)
- ➔ Kasa Afrikana (p346)
- ➔ Pensão Creola (p341)

**Dec–Feb** The year's coolest months, when sea turtles emerge from their nests.

**Mar–Jul** Hot, humid and sweaty; travel with plenty of water and sun-screen.

**Aug–Oct** Batten down the hatches or dance in the rain; the rainwater will just keep fallin'.

## BISSAU

POP 450,000

In the early evening, the fading sunlight lends the crumbling colonial facades of Bissau Velho (Old Bissau) a touch of old-age glamour. Dozens of generators set the town trembling, and ignite the lights of stylish bars and restaurants that form something of a modern, indoor city in startling contrast with the worn exterior.

### Sights

**Bissau Velho** (Old Bissau), a stretch of narrow alleyways and derelict buildings, is 'guarded' by the **Fortaleza d'Amura** (off the southern end of Av Amílcar Cabral), an imposing fort that is not accessible to visitors. With its bombed-out roof and shrapnel-riddled neoclassical facade, the **former presidential palace** (Praça dos Heróis Nacionais) sends a powerful message about Guinea-Bissau's simmering conflicts. The rebuilt and brushed-up **Assembleia Ministério da Justiça**, by contrast, is an architectural expression of democratic hopes.

## Festivals & Events

### Carnaval

CARNIVAL

Bissau and Bubaque's Carnaval is the country's biggest party. It takes place every year in February or early March during the week leading up to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. Music, masks, drinking and dancing are the order of the day.

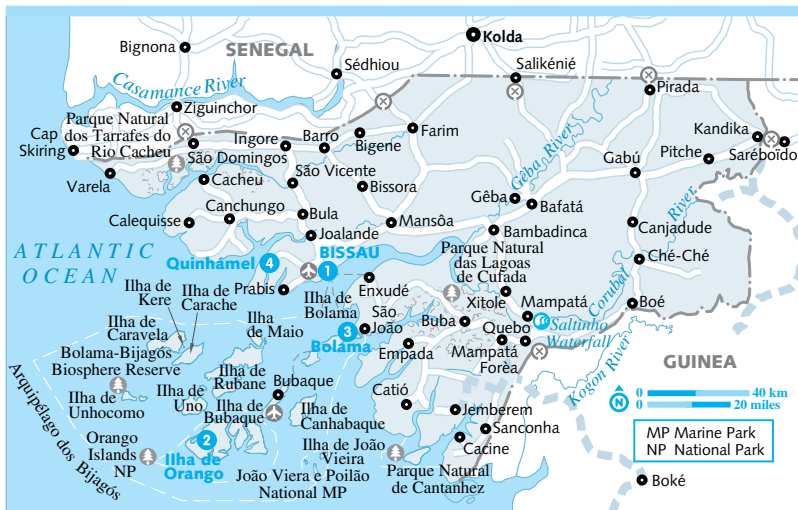
### Sleeping

Bissau has a mix of accommodation for most budgets.

### Pensão Creola

PENSIÃO \$

(☎ 6633031; www.pensaobissau.com; Ave Domingos Ramos; s/d from CFA15,000/18,000) Run by a knowledgeable Swiss-Guinean couple, this is Bissau's best budget stop. Rooms in the pretty colonial-style villa are ideal for groups, with two or three single beds and a shared bathroom. At the back of the house, single rooms with fans, showers and desks are housed in a wooden extension that backs onto the garden. There's 24-hour power, but, at the time of research, no wi-fi or air-con.



## Guinea-Bissau Highlights

**1** Dancing tango in cobbled streets by candlelight, after a dinner of *bacalau* (salted flakes of cod) and red wine at **Bissau Velho** (p341)

**2** Locking eyes with hippos as they emerge from the warm saltwater lagoons of **Ilha de Orango** (p346)

**3** Sitting on the steps of the abandoned town hall, with its crumbling Greek-

style pillars, on the island of **Bolama** (p346)

**4** Dipping oysters in hot lime sauce after a day in the water at **Quinhámel** (p347)