

# Destination

## The Gambia & Senegal

Among all the random border constructs that trouble the African continent, the country-within-a-country set-up of Senegal and Gambia is perhaps the most puzzling. A fleeting glance at the West African map forces the question of why those two nations are just that – an anglophone sliver wedged into a vast, francophone side of land. There's a lot that links the two countries (a lot more than citizens of either usually like to admit). Wolof is the main tongue in both and the sandy beaches that embrace the Atlantic with smile-shaped bays merely surge at the idea of human-made borders.

While national identities are clearly defined and often fiercely opposed, other, more ancient civilisations have washed over territories of both nations and tie their people closely together. On either side of the Senegal–Gambia border, *griots* (West African praise singers) will treat you to their epic narrations of the exploits of 13th-century hero Soundiata Keita and the historical battles of the Kaabu Empire, accompanying their poetry with hypnotic patterns trickling from a *kora* (lute-harp). In both Dakar and Banjul, glittering nightclub crowds gyrate seductive hips to the toe-tripping beats of *mbalax*, while the chants of devout Muslims ring eerily through the night. Sound contradictory? Not in Senegal and Gambia. Culture here is shaped from a patchwork of enticing paradoxes, logic slips through your fingers like fine sand and reality stubbornly defies rational reasoning. As people move through the cities, they seem to at once perform journeys through time and space. A hard-nosed businessman may calmly swap his designer suit for a billowing *boubou* and kneel down in the middle of the street for his Friday prayer. You'll find feminist fighters wedged in polygamous marriages, where they've carved out niches of astonishing freedom. And even the staunchest defenders of cold logic might secretly wear protective charms, like backups for the possible power failures of reason.

But the sharpest contrasts are, sadly, the economic ones, and even the shortest trip through Dakar impresses those on you. While a small percentage of the nation is driving skyward in flashy 4WDs, most people are left to cough up the clouds of dust in their wake. The polished cocktail bars, top-brand boutiques and luxury hotels all have their local clientele, but those who weigh up the luxury of bread for breakfast versus a bus ticket to town remain far more numerous. And yet it's hard to escape the sense of endless possibility as you walk Dakar's hustler-ridden streets – the sense that, one day, the creative energy currently invested in designing clever con jobs and pushy souvenir-selling strategies may be applied to shaping the foundations of a few new businesses.

In Senegal, in particular, the environment seems fertile, as the country is not only stable, but is also one of Africa's few nations where real political debate seems possible. In 2008 the nation proved the maturity of its democracy once again when the opposition's alliance won major cities in local elections and the government accepted that 'slap on the wrist' thoughtfully. All across Dakar those dramatic results were noisily debated alongside football scores, marital issues and celebrity gossip in tiny *tanganas* (roadside cafes) and over strongly brewed *ataaya* tea in the sand-strewn backstreets of the capital's lively neighbourhoods. In Gambia, where the idea that a government might grant an inch to oppositional voices is a pretty alien one, people held

**'Move away from the main tourist centres and, along with the persistent grains of Sahel sand, you'll take memories of thought-provoking encounters home with you.'**

their breath after Senegal's unexpected results. Where Senegal's rulers have been eager to portray themselves as democracy-favouring, France-friendly, intellectually gifted rulers, Gambia's leader, Yahya Jammeh, has modelled himself on his idea of a legendary West African hero. Since his coup d'état in 1994, he has ruled the nation like a one-man show, clamping down on critics, boosting the secret service and trying to impress the nation with his big gowns, kingly cane, ebony prayer beads and claims of magic powers. As a result, people are more wary of expressing political opinions and you might not be able to engage people in Gambia in keen political and religious sparring matches as quickly as in Senegal.

Still, in both countries, your travels are likely to be safe ones and, though you'll certainly cross paths with a few tricksters and indefatigable touts, real hospitality will prove a more enduring companion. Move away from the main tourist centres and, along with the persistent grains of Sahel sand, you'll take memories of thought-provoking encounters home with you.

# Getting Started

Whether it's a lazy beach holiday you're after or a solitary tour around remote villages, myriad mangrove swamps and savannah plains, you'll be well served in Gambia and Senegal.

For a brief stay in the built-up tourist zones – such as the Atlantic resorts in The Gambia, and Saly and Cap Skiring in Senegal – you won't need much advance preparation, especially if you travel with an organised tour.

Independent travellers and those intending to venture far off the beaten track should spend a good amount of time crouched over maps and travel guidebooks – if you know where you're hoping to stay, many of the isolated lodgings upcountry can help you with transport if you contact them in advance. The Senegalese Casamance is a particularly exciting area for tours around tiny islands and white beaches, and a visit here is easily combined with a Gambia holiday – just don't let the language difference scare you.

The budget you need to plan for depends largely on where in the region you're headed. Prepare for European prices on a city holiday to Dakar. Upcountry, accommodation and food are much cheaper, but transport costs may increase, particularly if you plan to travel by boat. Despite the price tag, weaving your way through creeks and river paths may well be the most amazing thing you'll do on your trip.

## WHEN TO GO

By far the most popular tourist season in Gambia and Senegal is the period from November to February, when conditions are dry and relatively cool. This is also the best time to watch wildlife and birds (including many European migratory species) in the countries' many national parks, and the season you're guaranteed best access to all regions, as the absence of rain makes even the remotest dirt road reasonably accessible. And if you want to party, the urban centre of Dakar is a great place to spend Christmas and New Year.

Several of Senegal's famous dance and music festivals, however, tend to take place between April and June, when temperatures are higher and the climate is still dry.

The wet season (late June to late September) is the time keen hobby fishers come here to participate in deep-sea outings offered by specialist providers.

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- your vaccination certificate with a yellow-fever stamp – you never know when you might have to show it
- making copies of all official documents – it will make getting any necessary replacements much easier
- a torch (flashlight) – many remote places don't have electricity, and power cuts are frequent even in the urban zones
- binoculars – even those with no ornithological inclination whatsoever are likely to be converted in this region
- a set of smart clothes – don't be outshone by the impeccably dressed locals
- a warm jersey – January nights in Dakar can get wool-sweater chilly
- an unlocked mobile phone in which you can insert a local SIM card – the easiest way of being reached while abroad

### VISITS DURING RAMADAN

Ramadan, the holy month of the Islamic calendar, is a time of religious contemplation dedicated to prayer and the study of the Koran. Most importantly, it's the fasting month – Muslims are not allowed to eat, drink, smoke or have sex from dawn until dusk.

The Ramadan fast completely changes the rhythm of life in the Muslim world. Many people wake around 5am for an early breakfast before sunrise, and some businesses cancel the usual lunch break and finish around 4.30pm.

For travelling, this isn't the ideal time. Many restaurants, bars and nightclubs close for the 30 days and there won't be many live concerts, as music and other worldly pleasures are frowned upon for its duration. The combination of heat and collective hunger also means rising tempers, especially towards the late afternoon. A Ramadan traffic jam before dusk is always a scene of loud arguments and occasional fist fights.

As a non-Muslim you won't be expected to fast, and most people won't take offence if you eat in their presence. Just bear in mind that most others around you are running on empty stomachs, and be considerate of their needs. If you use the services of a driver, allow for prayer stops and try to get back before the break of the fast. If that's impossible, make sure you put in a stop when the prayer is called after dusk, allowing him to take in a hot drink and a bite to eat. The fast is usually broken with a handful of dates, so you can offer the driver some if you're running late and want to show your appreciation. Generally, be patient with the occasional show of grumpiness. If you want to know what it's like, try to live the Ramadan rhythm for a while. You'll understand what most of the locals are experiencing.

Most other tourists avoid it. The rains wash away some of the roads, rendering certain journeys upcountry impossible. Malaria is widespread, the humidity can become stifling and many national parks (and a few hotels) shut down. But there's a positive side to this, too. Everything is greener, you get to experience some awesome tropical storms, and independent travellers will enjoy the absence of large tourist groups as well as price reductions of up to 50%.

October and November are again fairly dry, though very hot. If you can take the temperatures, this is a great time to come. You can still enjoy the sight of lush greens, swelling rivers and large waterfalls while staying dry yourself. The beaches aren't packed yet and you're bound to find a hotel room.

Since you're travelling to a predominantly Muslim region, it's worth checking the lunar calendar, particularly for the dates of the fasting month of Ramadan (see the boxed text, above). Though it's perfectly possible to visit during Ramadan, and the month's special ambience is an experience in itself, many restaurants close and the entertainment scene goes into hibernation.

### COSTS & MONEY

Gambia and Senegal are expensive destinations compared with other African countries. Shoestringers can get by on a budget of around US\$40 per day, but that means battered minibuses, cheap hostels, street food and leaving Dakar on the earliest bush taxi you find. Spending US\$40 to US\$100 allows for some creature comforts. With US\$100 you'll be at ease, though it takes around US\$400 for almost unlimited access to the luxuries available.

Locally produced items (including food and beer) are much cheaper than in Europe or America, but as soon as you head for the supermarket for some French yoghurt or a box of cornflakes, you pay at least twice the amount you would at home.

All around the region, you can get a generous platter of rice and sauce in a local-style restaurant for US\$4 or even less, but a three-course meal for two at the smart restaurants of Dakar or the coastal resorts of Gambia will set you back US\$40 or more. In between, you get the whole range of quality and cost.

See Climate Charts (p261) for more information.

Hotel prices vary enormously between the urban centres and upcountry villages. In Dakar even staying in a bug-infested hostel might set you back US\$30, while the same amount will get you a spacious double room in a *campement* (hostel accommodation in bungalows) in rural Senegal or Gambia.

On average allow US\$40 to US\$100 for midrange hotels; top-notch establishments go for anything from US\$150 to far, far above. Couples can save on accommodation costs, as double rooms often cost only 25% more than singles and might even go for the same price. In most hotels, children sharing with their parents stay free of charge up to the age of two and are charged around 50% of the full price between two and 10.

It's in transport that differences in costs are most notable. Bush taxis (minibuses or *sept-places*) are fairly cheap (around US\$4 per 100km) but rough, slow and unsafe. For more comfort, you have to hire your own transport – around US\$60 to US\$100 per day for a private taxi, and US\$120 or more per day for a 4WD with driver.

## TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

There's plenty on offer in Senegal and Gambia for anyone wishing to travel in an ecofriendly, community-supportive way. Gambia has a particularly impressive infrastructure for eco-travel, patiently grown via organisations such as ASSET (see the boxed text, p104) and a couple of private investors. It boasts some of the most luxurious and fully developed eco-lodges in the whole of West Africa, excellent birdwatching opportunities, and a number of fascinating community projects that open their doors to visitors. In Senegal, the best options for travelling responsibly are found in the Casamance and Siné-Saloum regions, where you can stay in pretty community *campements* tucked away on river edges or hide from the world in remote eco-lodges. For more information on planning a holiday that's not only enjoyable but also leaves a positive impact, see Responsible Travel, p68, and check our GreenDex (p319), which indicates recommended destinations.

### HOW MUCH?

French bread D10/CFA175

Newspaper D10/CFA200

Internet 1hr D30/CFA300

Soft drink D30/CFA350

Sandwich D75/CFA1500

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

Very few travel books have been published about the region, but you can still read your way into the countries' culture through a whole range of related topics.

The most famous work relating to The Gambia is probably *Roots*, by Alex Haley, which was written in 1976. A mix of fiction and historical fact, this hugely influential book describes the African-American author's search for his African origins.

For historical insights into the region, give Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior of Africa* a try. The classic tome details the author's expeditions through Gambia and Senegal to the Niger River in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. His descriptions of the musical performances by *griots* (West African praise singers) could still apply to their timeless art today.

Finally translated, Fatou Diome's *The Belly of the Atlantic* (2008) is a beautiful novel that grants an intimate insight into complex issues surrounding emigration.

The stunning art book *Senegal Behind Glass* (1994), by Anne-Marie Bouttianaux-Ndiaye, contains reproductions of beautiful *sous-verre* paintings (see p53), from historical to contemporary examples, giving artistic insights into the country's religion, culture and arts scene.

*A Saint in the City* (2003), by Allen and Mary Roberts, takes a similar approach, discussing aspects of Senegalese culture through the images of Senegal's great Sufi leader Cheikh Amadou Bamba (see p205) that you'll find painted on houses, walls and taxis.

# TOP PICKS



## TOP FESTIVALS

It's hard to come to Senegal and not find a festival in full swing. The country has a fantastically vibrant arts and music scene, as well as a population that loves a good party. Gambia is barely keeping up, though it also has a couple of events that mustn't be missed.

- Kartong Festival (p266), Kartong, March/April
- Kaay Fecc (p164), Dakar, June
- Dak'Art Biennale (p163), Dakar, every two years in May
- International Roots Festival (p266), throughout Gambia, every two years in June
- Saint-Louis International Jazz Festival (p213), Saint-Louis, May
- Les Blues du Fleuve (p265), Podor, dates vary
- Regards sur Courts (p178), Gorée, May

## TOP RIVER SPOTS

Between them, Senegal and Gambia have three major waterways, each with tucked-away river camps and old trading towns.

- Tranquil Podor (p224)
- Vast Parc National de Niokolo-Koba (p230)
- Classic Saint-Louis (p210)
- Stunning Pointe St George (p244)
- Lush River Gambia National Park (p137)
- Mangrove-lined Niomoune (p245)
- Island-set Janjangbureh (Georgetown; p140)

## TOP BIRDWATCHING SITES

Senegal and Gambia are among the world's major birdwatching destinations, and you never have to venture far to get some shiny feathers in front of your binoculars. See also p70.

- Abuko Nature Reserve (p122)
- Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj (p221)
- Baobolong Wetland Reserve (p134)
- Réserve de Popenguine (p186)
- La Langue de Barbarie (p219)
- Tanji River Bird Reserve (p116)
- Pointe St George (p244)
- Toubakouta (p198)
- Marakissa (p126)

Most works on Senegal are written in French. If you're familiar with the language, *Sénégal* (2005), Christian Saglio's musings on the country, is a great choice. The former head of Dakar's Institut Français has spent the greater part of his life in Senegal, where, among other things, he helped conceive the fabulous network of *campements villageois* (traditional-style village lodgings; see p243) in Casamance in the 1970s.

For an easy-to-read and entertaining account of travels around West Africa's music scene, try Mark Hudson's *Our Grandmother's Drum*. The amusing *Music in My Head*, by the same author, describes the power, influence and everyday realities of modern African music, and is set in a mythical city that is instantly recognisable as Dakar.

Overland travellers to the region must read *Sahara Overland – A Route & Planning Guide*, by Chris Scott, which covers every tiny detail you might

The website [www.wootico.com](http://www.wootico.com) is a brilliant resource on cultural events and top destinations in Senegal.

need to know. First published by Trailblazer in 1999, it can be ‘upgraded’ at Scott’s website ([www.sahara-overland.com](http://www.sahara-overland.com)).

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Access Gambia** ([www.accessgambia.com](http://www.accessgambia.com)) Seemingly bigger than the country itself, this comprehensive site contains pretty much everything, from information on hotels to music clips, maps and telephone listings.

**ASSET** ([www.asset-gambia.com](http://www.asset-gambia.com)) The home page of the Gambian Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism lists plenty of interesting small businesses, from juice pressers and hotels to fashion designers and taxi drivers. The perfect guide for responsible travel off the beaten track.

**Au-Senegal** ([www.au-senegal.com](http://www.au-senegal.com)) Information overload – no detail of practical information, cultural/historical background or news has been left out. You can book hotels online, get the latest updates on the political situation and much, much more.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Up-to-date information on travelling to the region and links to other good travel resources.

**Senegalaisement** ([www.senegalaisement.com](http://www.senegalaisement.com)) Quite disorganised and very opinionated, this French site contains very detailed historical, cultural and practical information on even the smallest destination in Senegal.

**Wow** ([www.wow.gm](http://www.wow.gm)) The place to read and comment on news from Gambia.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### GAMBIA – COASTAL COMFORTS TO RURAL REMOTENESS

One to Two Weeks

The Gambia's compact size makes it an ideal destination for a one- or two-week visit. From Banjul airport, head for the **Atlantic coast** (p97), where you'll find the biggest choice of places to stay. Spend a couple of days at the beaches, and take the occasional day trip to the surrounding areas once the glamour of sea and sun alone has worn off. The busy market of **Serekunda** (p97) is close by, arts lovers will enjoy the proximity of **Tunbung Arts Village** (p118) and **Tanji Village Museum** (p117), while anyone interested in 'green options' will find plenty of choice in **Gunjur** (p119) and **Kartong** (p119). Spend the night in one of the fabulous eco-lodges there, then visit the bustling junction town of **Brikama** (p124) and the bee farm in **Sifoe** (p127). Carry on to **Makasutu** (p123), visit the Culture Forest and then head back to the coast.

**Abuko Nature Reserve** (p122), Gambia's smallest stretch of protected nature, is only a short drive away from the coast. A trip here can be combined with a meal at **Lamin Lodge** (p122), a creaking wooden restaurant that nestles in the mangroves.

The small and dusty capital of **Banjul** (p89) sits roughly 20km from the coastal resorts, and tempts with a lively market and colonial architecture. Take the ferry to the north bank for a visit to **Jufureh** (p129), then spend the night on beautiful **Ginak Island** (p128).

If you have two weeks, take a journey upcountry. A river trip to **Janjangbureh** (p140) is an absolute treat. Take the road to **Bintang Bolong** (p132), then combine driving and boat trips to Janjangbureh, taking in **Wassu** (p137) and the **River Gambia National Park** (p137) on the way. Put in a day trip to **Basse Santa Su** (p144) before the long journey home.

This itinerary travels the entire country, taking you to all the major sites, from the beaches and fishing villages of the Atlantic coast to the most important national parks – **Ginak Island** in the west and **River Gambia National Park** in the east. Approximate return distance is 1000km.



**Travel north from Dakar to Saint-Louis' nearby national parks for birdwatching, then south past the dunes of Lompoul and along the Petite Côte, ending up in the Siné-Saloum Delta. Starting and ending in Dakar, this tour is around 1050km.**

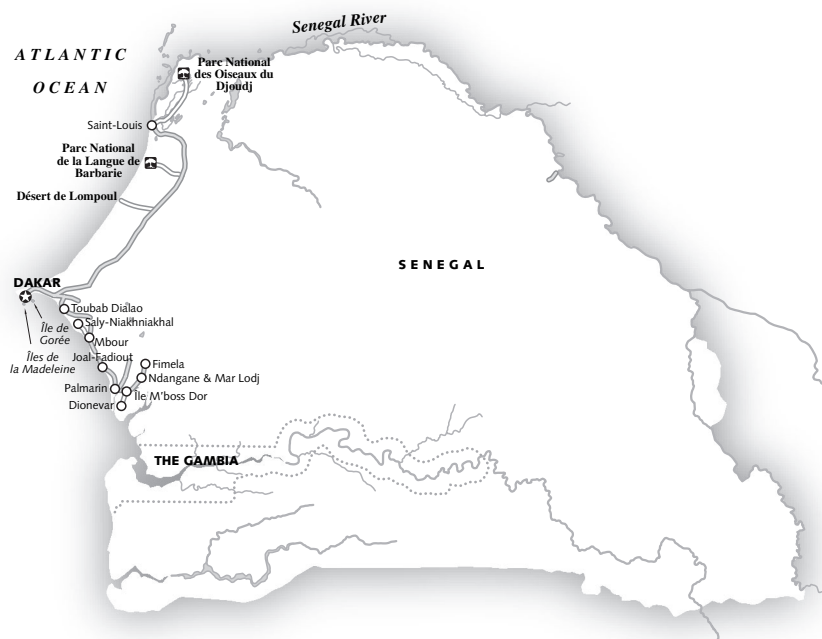
## THE MANY FACES OF SENEGAL'S COAST

**Two to Three Weeks**

Most flights go to **Dakar** (p150), where you're plunged straight into the city's exciting nightlife, arts and restaurant scenes, and maze of markets. Prepare your escape with day trips to peaceful **Île de Gorée** (p177) and **Îles de la Madeleine** (p179).

Next, head north to historical **Saint-Louis** (p210) and from here day-trip to **Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj** (p221) and **Parc National de la Langue de Barbarie** (p220).

Return south, taking in the **Désert de Lompoul** (p203) on your way to the Petite Côte. Stop at the chilled-out fishing village of **Toubab Dialao** (p184), before following the shoreline south to **Mbour** (p190). Be awed by the sounds and smells of the town's giant fish market, then discover the quieter side of the resort zone of Saly by booking a room in **Saly-Niakhniakhal** (p190). Past the seashell town of **Joal-Fadiout** (p192), take the laterite route to **Palmarin** (p193), the stunning entry port to the Siné-Saloum Delta region. Spend a romantic night on nearby **Île M'boss Dor** (p193) or **Dionewar** (p194). Back on the mainland, follow the dirt road via Sambadia to **Ndangane** (p195), where you can cross via pirogue to the tranquil, bird-rich island of **Mar Lodj** (p195). A star-studded stay at **Fimela** (p196) crowns the journey.



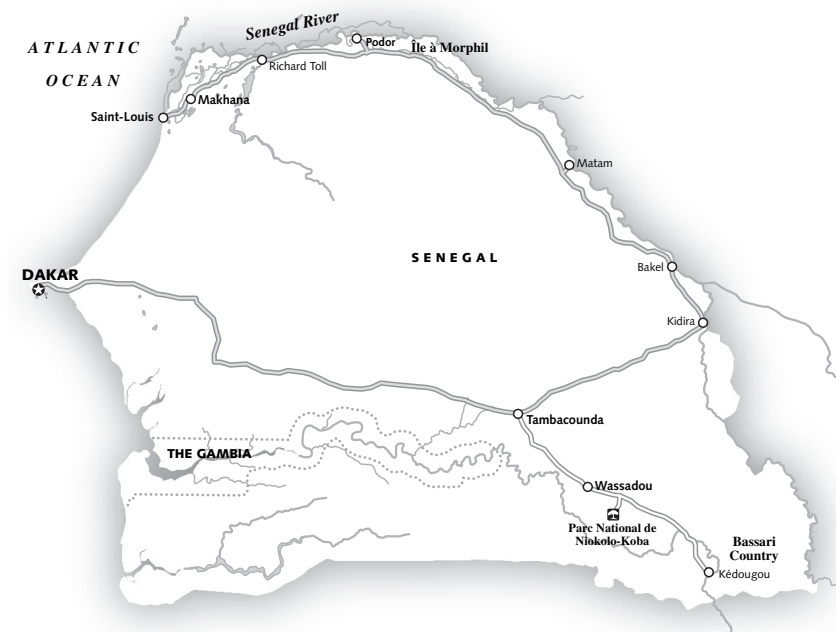
## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### THE SENEGAL RIVER ROUTE

This historical itinerary follows the Senegal River, the country's national border with Mauritania, tracing the route of French colonial incursion. Start in **Saint-Louis** (p210), the ancient capital of French West Africa, where you can learn about the town's unique history and culture on guided city tours and through independent exploration. From here you can either take the classic *Bou El Mogdad* upriver to Podor, or mirror the ship's journey on a trip by road. Past the industrial monument of **Makhana** (p222), the town of **Richard Toll** (p223) is the place to taste delicious dairy products and visit the sugar factory. Stay for a while in **Podor** (p224), visit the ancient fort, the old photographer and the newly renovated quay, then head off on an off-road journey around the **Île à Morphil** (p225), where classic Omani mosques, stunning savannah countryside and Tukulor villages line the bumpy dirt roads. Further along you'll reach **Matam** (p225), a place to meet the local community, and **Bakel** (p225), framed by gentle hills and a windswept shoreline. A short hop south and you reach **Kidira** (p234) at the Malian border. You can return to Dakar via **Tambacounda** (p227), but if you've still got a few days, first head to **Wassadou** (p229), where you can arrange your tour to the **Parc National de Niokolo-Koba** (p230). Once you've reached **Kédougou** (p231) and **Bassari country** (p231), you may feel like never going home, especially as you've got a 700km journey to **Dakar** ahead of you.

### Two to Three Weeks

This takes you along the rarely travelled road following the Senegal River, past the ancient forts of Podor, Matam and Bakel. You'll visit Senegal's largest national park and hike through the hills of Bassari country. Starting in Saint-Louis and finishing in Dakar, this tour is about 1800km.



**This is a perfect holiday – a tour around Gambia’s developed coastline, combined with either a circuit of Senegal’s stunning Delta or Saloum Delta or the diverse scenery of the beautiful Casamance. Starting and finishing at the Atlantic coast, it’s around 1500km, depending on which route you take.**

## STRADDLING BORDERS

**Two to Three Weeks**

Combining trips to Gambia with excursions to the Senegalese regions across the border is becoming increasingly popular – an easy way of experiencing the best of two worlds. You’ll arrive at Banjul, and spend your first days at the **Atlantic coast resorts** (p97). Take your pick from day excursions (see the Gambia itinerary, p19), and prepare your bags for the trip via the Karang border crossing to **Toubakouta** (p198) and the beautifully secluded eco-camp of **Bamboung** (p198). **Missirah** (p199) and the adjacent **Forêt de Fathala** (p194) are a short hop to the south. North of Toubakouta, the community of **Sokone** (p197) opens its doors to visitors. Circumvent the Delta to rejoin it on the western side, where **Fimela** (p196) has the most stunning lodge of all, and **Simal** (p196) in the mangroves has roosty, traditional huts for intrepid visitors.

Even less travelled, and still more attractive, is the Gambia–Casamance route. Start as above, but instead of heading north to Toubakouta, go to **Brikama** (p124), from where you’ll find transport to **Kafountine** (p251) and **Abéné** (p253). Before reaching those chilled-out villages, put in a detour to secluded **Niafourang** (p254), temptingly close to **Kartong** (p119) in Gambia (ensure you’ve all the legal stamps to cross). Take the road southwards to **Ziguinchor** (p238), the capital of the Casamance, possibly taking in the community stays of **Koubalan** and **Dioubour** (p249) on the way. Take the straight route to **Oussouye** (p243), put in a day of kayaking and cycling, then speed down to **Cap Skiring** (p246) and stay still for a bit, spread-eagled on the widest, whitest beaches of the region.

ATLANTIC  
OCEAN



## TAILORED TRIPS

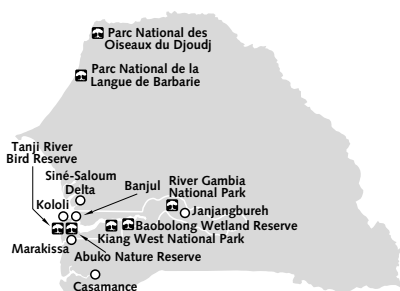
### AS THE CROW FLIES

Senegal and Gambia are among the best destinations for birdwatching in West Africa.

In Gambia the chirping of hundreds of species greets you before you've even left your hotel, in the backyards of the Senegambia Beach Hotel in **Kololi** (p107) or the Corinthia Atlantic Hotel in **Banjul** (p94). The **Abuko Nature Reserve** (p122) and the **Tanbi Wetland Complex** (p94) are more 'regular' birdwatching sites, complete with guides and hides.

On the south coast, the **Tanji River Bird Reserve** (p116) is a great place to spot a variety of waders. Inland, **Marakissa** (p126) attracts a huge diversity of species, being set between river and forest. **Baobolong Wetland Reserve** (p134) is a playground for herons, egrets and owls, and **Kiang West National Park** (p135) attracts huge numbers but is hard to explore. In **Janjangbureh** (p140) try a stay at Bird Safari Camp, great for variety with its forest-river location, and take a trip towards **River Gambia National Park** (p137), where you can cruise past weavers and herons perched on small islands.

In Senegal, the *bolongs* (creeks) of the **Siné-Saloum Delta** (p193) and the **Casamance** (p235) are birdwatchers' dream destinations, with hundreds of sea birds and waders nesting on river islets and circling above mangrove forests. Other highlights are the **Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj** (p221), the world's third-largest bird sanctuary, and the stunning peninsula of **Parc National de la Langue de Barbarie** (p220).



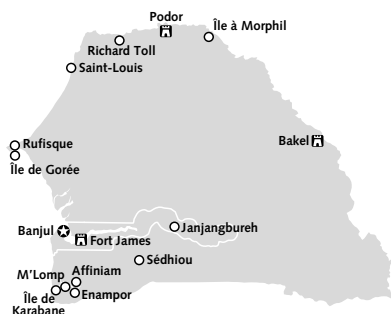
### ARCHITECTURAL GEMS

Trace the history of colonisation by following the architectural 'monuments' of Gambia and Senegal. If it's local culture you're after, check out the different building styles of the countries' various regions.

For colonial impact, **Île de Gorée** (p177) and **Saint-Louis** (p210), with their partly preserved French buildings, are must-sees. **Rufisque** (p182) and **Banjul** (p89) have similar colonial houses, though in a less well-kept state.

Along the Senegal River, the Folie de Baron Roger in **Richard Toll** (p223) is a monument to the grand aspirations of colonialism, as are the Faïdherbian forts of **Podor** (p224) and **Bakel** (p225). On **Île à Morphil** (p225), the Sudanese architecture of the Omarian mosques is a reminder of local resistance to colonisation.

In Gambia, the British **Fort James** (p130) is partly preserved, and **Janjangbureh** (p140) has a couple of crumbling colonial warehouses. In Casamance, you can sleep in the old governor's house and mission on **Île de Karabane** (p245), visit the old fort and administrative buildings of the former colonial capital **Sédhiou** (p254), and admire the *cases à étages* (two-storey mud buildings) in **M'Lomp** (p244) and the *cases à impluvium* (round mud houses) in **Enampor** (p243) and **Affiniam** (p250).



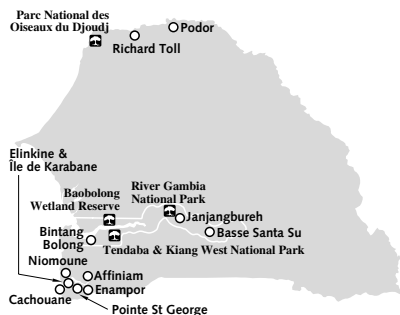
## THE BEST RIVER SPOTS

There's something special about a tranquil journey up a major waterway. Cut through by three large rivers, the region offers plenty of choice.

Great spots on the Gambia River include the rickety mangrove cabins of **Bintang Bolong** (p132) and, further north, **Tendaba Camp** (p133), perfectly located near the **Baobolong Wetland Reserve** (p134) and **Kiang West National Park** (p135), which teem with birds. Further east, where the lush vegetation starts, **River Gambia National Park** (p137) is a dream spot, great for hippo, chimpanzee, and baboon spotting. A little further eastwards, you reach the pretty island town of **Janjangbureh** (p140), and the market centre of **Basse Santa Su** (p144), where you can cross the stream in a metal tub.

A tour along the Casamance River takes you to numerous secluded community *campements* (hostels). Pirogues leave from Ziguinchor, and can take you to **Enampor** (p243) and **Affiniam** (p250). **Elinkine** (p245) is a centre for pirogue tours, from where you can easily connect to the stunningly beautiful **Pointe St George** (p244), historical **Île de Karabane** (p245), mangrove-framed **Niomoune** (p245) on the north bank and **Cachouane** (p249) near the river mouth.

In the far north of Senegal, the best river trip is done aboard the historic boat *Bou El Mogdad* (see p215), which stops at **Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj** (p221), **Richard Toll** (p223) and **Podor** (p224).



## TRAVELLING GREEN

In Gambia you'll find some of the most fully developed and luxurious options for sustainable travel. Sandele Eco-Retreat in **Kartong** (p121) and Footsteps Eco Lodge in **Gunjur** (p119) combine eco-awareness and comfort in an amazing package. At the **Makasutu Culture Forest** and **Ballabu Conservation Project** (p123) you'll find Gambia's most exclusive eco-lodge, and an inspiring example of community-based conservation. For outings, visit the beekeepers' association in **Sifoe** (p127) and the **Gambia Is Good Farmyard** (p126).

In Senegal, the Océanium uses village-run *campements* to finance the Marine Protected Area of **Bamboung** (p198) and **Pointe St George** (p244). Along the lush banks of the Casamance River, numerous tucked-away *campements villageois* (traditional-style village lodgings) enable basic community stays, notably in **Koubalan** (p249) and **Affiniam** (p250). The **Campement Villageois d'Elinkine** (p245), the cute guest houses at **Cachouane** (p249) and **Niomoune** (p245), and the *campement* at **Dioubour** (p249) are privately managed, but invest in the community they're based in. The setting of Tilibo Horizons in **Niafourang** (p254) is particularly stunning and the owners also offer tours with a sustainable edge, as does the managing association of Fadidi Niombato at **Sokone** (p197). We were completely besotted by the children's project of the Village d'Outouka in **Kafountine** (p253). Right up north, the Maison Guillaume Foy contributes to responsible tourism development in **Podor** (p224), and the village of **Makhana** (p222) raises community income by organising visits to the historical pumping station.



# On the Road



## KATHARINA LOBECK KANE Author

Keeping family life in Dakar (p150) above chaos level can take so much time and energy that the country's biggest rewards – the beaches, mangroves and deserted river spots – don't get to see as much of me as I'd like. Researching this book was a great way of seeking out even the most distant corners of Senegal and Gambia: steering boats through meandering deltas, being awed by the village wrestling matches in honour of the king of Oussouye (p243) and helping to plant a million mangroves together with village kids in the Casamance (p235). And how great to know that Dakar was always there, waiting for my return with its rough embrace, pushing me gently back into an ever-changing restaurant, fashion and party scene, and having me road-test the city's offerings for children under my daughter's critical guidance.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ever since the seductive tremor of a Fula flute first lured Katharina to West Africa in 1997, she hasn't been able to spend more than a few months without a stint in Africa. A year of PhD research in Guinea was followed by work visits to dozens of countries on the continent, usually clutching a camera and a voice recorder, to dig up gems from local music scenes. When London threw her out in 2005, she moved to Senegal. Katharina currently works as a writer, radio producer and presenter, and projects manager. Unless Berlin or Cologne have embraced her, you'll find her in Dakar.

## MY FAVOURITE TRIP

Travelling for me has always been about music. Dakar, with its dazzling live-music scene (p172), is hard to leave if you love music. In May Saint-Louis holds its spectacular jazz festival (p60). Podor (p224) is the place to hear Fula music, perhaps during Baaba Maal's Festival du Fleuve. For the really

rootsy stuff, Salémata (p233), with its vibrant Basari culture, and Kartong (p119), site of a bustling festival, are my destinations of choice. Ziguinchor in Casamance is best visited during its carnival (p240), and Abéné (p253) during its reggae-fuelled New Year's festival. Brikama is the place to indulge in some masterful kora playing (p125).



