

# Petite Côte & Siné-Saloum Delta



Petite Côte means ‘small coast’ – a name that aptly describes this stretch of seashore, which is indeed short compared to the Grande Côte that leads north from Dakar. In terms of tourism, however, this sheltered shoreline is anything but petite. This is where the industry’s monetary hopes reside – in the concentration of seaside centres and classy hotels around Saly, the ever-expanding resort zone halfway down the coast from Dakar.

But there’s more to the Petite Côte than your average tour operator will show you. Just a few kilometres away from the built-up hotel zones, small fishing villages tempt with a real-life attitude and calmer beaches.

South of the twin villages Joal and Fadiout, where your footsteps resound to the crunching of seashells, the Saloum River cuts into the coast, opening up a vast maze of mangroves and marshes. This region is astoundingly rich in wildlife, with huge flocks of wading birds making for particularly spectacular sights. But it’s not all about nature – this region is also of strong historical interest. At the southern edge of Siné-Saloum, the ancient shell mound Diorom Boumag gives evidence of West Africa’s most ancient civilisations. Physical legacies of the area’s powerful empires, including the 17th-century kingdom of Cayor, are harder to find. But stay in a village, and local residents will be proud to relate the legendary stories of the illustrious leader Lat Dior and his fierce anticolonial struggle to you.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Meander along the coast and enjoy fishing-village life in **Toubab Dialao** (p178)
- Walk the wooden bridge from **Joal** to **Fadiout** (p184), the island where everything is made of shells
- Venture into the maze of mangrove creeks and forest islands that is the vast **Siné-Saloum Delta** (p185)
- Watch dozens of colourful fishing pirogues roll in with their glistening catch at **Mbour** (p183)
- Indulge in lazy beach life at **Saly** (p181), Senegal’s largest sea-resort zone



■ POPULATION: 2.3 MILLION

## PETITE CÔTE

This is where Senegal greets the Atlantic with kilometres of sandy coast. Safe swimming beaches attract large numbers of tourists, and cause the flashy holiday village of Saly to spill over its boundaries. If you like your holiday more low-key and your beach body slightly less exposed, the villages Toubab Dialao, Popenguine and La Somone in the north, as well as Mbodiène, Nianing, Joal and Fadiout in the south have white strands that still swing to the local rhythm.

### TOUBAB DIALAO

pop about 2000

A tiny fishing village, Toubab Dialao is a pretty hide-out close to Dakar, with beaches that aren't yet haunted by mass tourism. It's great for swimming, walks and horse riding. **Les Cavaliers de la Savane** (☎ 836 8776) offers guided tours on horseback to beginners and advanced riders in the surroundings of the village (two hours CFA10,000), and staff is very knowledgeable about the region. Senegal's famous dance school **L'École des Sables** (☎ 839 8090; www.jant-bi-acogny.com), run by famous dancer and choreographer Germaine Acogny, is situated a short drive along a dirt track out of town. International dance courses and rehearsals often take place here and can sometimes be witnessed. Even if deserted the school is well worth a visit. Its main space has a breathtaking view out to the sea, and is the perfect place to watch the sun set or see groups of flamingos land on the water.

### Sleeping & Eating

There are three auberges (small hotels) in the heart of Toubab Dialao that form a Tolkienesque village within the village. The trend was started by a Frenchman, Gérard, who owns the highly rated Sobobade, the hub of much activity in the village.

All the hotels have restaurants and most offer half-board options. In town, the small Senegalese eatery Niougop is unbeatable for ambience and taste.

**Sobobade** (☎/fax 836 0356; www.espacesobobade.com; dm per person CFA4000, s/d from CFA10,000/12,000) This characterful hotel is entirely decorated with seashells and overlooks the ocean from its position on a small cliff. The artistic decor

is complemented by workshops in dance, batik, percussion and sculpture, and you can hire bikes (two hours CFA5000) or go horse riding (two hours CFA10,000).

**La Source Ndiambalane** (☎ 836 1703; ndiambalane@sentoo.sn; d/tr CFA12,000/15,000) Next door to Sobobade, in the heart of town, this place continues the shell-art theme to such perfection that it looks almost like an extension of Sobobade.

**Auberge La Mimosa** (☎/fax 826 7326; mimosas@sentoo.com; d CFA10,000, 🚽) Just across from La Source, this auberge doesn't have a view but does have comfortable rooms and an Internet café, and serves excellent local fruit punches.

**Iris Hotel** (☎ 836 2969; www.irisotel.net; 🚽 📺 📶) Follow the dirt track out of town, and the multiple signposts, and you get to this place, the grandest address in town. Unashamedly upmarket, this hotel has luxurious, tastefully decorated rooms and a spectacular sea-view terrace.

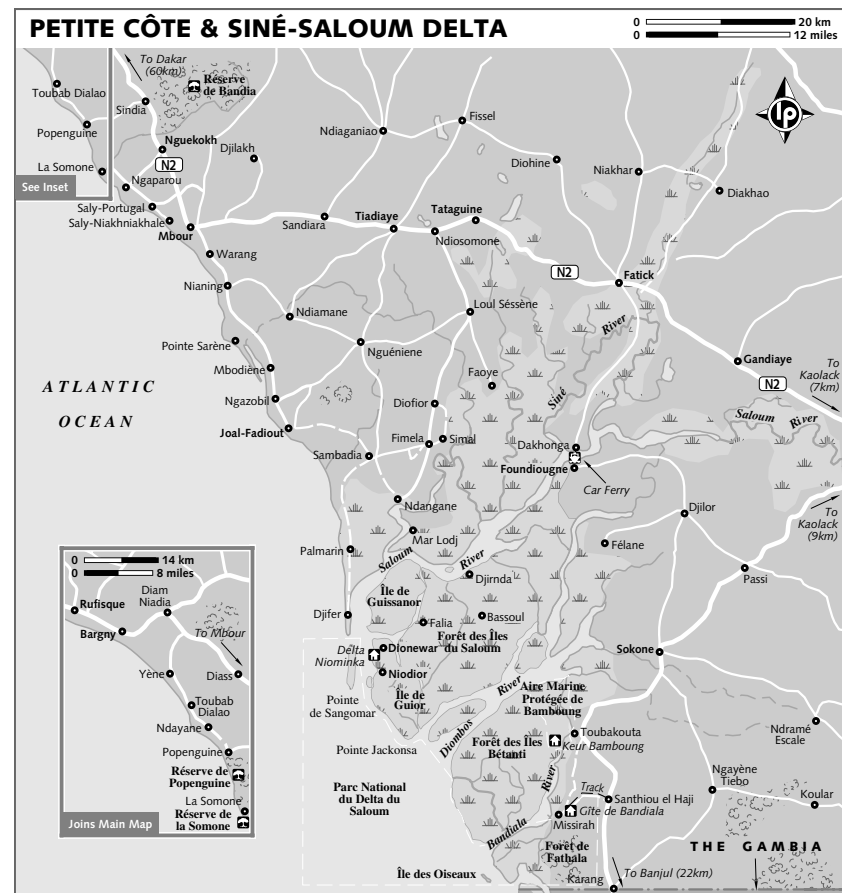
**L'Escale** (☎ 836 3595; meals around CFA4000; 🚽 11am-10pm) If you feel like something different, try this place, which sits a short walk off the main road between Yenne and Toubab Dialao. It has good food and a view. It has a good selection of European food (plus the usual assortment of local dishes) and a view. There are also a couple of rooms for stranded travellers – inquire about rates.

**Chez Paolo** (☎ 658 7594; pizzas from CFA3500-10,000; 🚽 11am-10pm) A bit further on, Paolo's is the place to enjoy a proper Italian pizza – phone first, and opening hours will be adapted to your presence.

For some solitude, head for one of the two *campements* (lodges) in Ndayane on the dirt track leading to Popenguine. **Terre d'Afrique** (☎ 957 7155; s/d CFA20,000/30,000) is one of them, yet the better option is the stunning **La Pierre de Lisse** (☎ 957 7148; pierredelisse@sentoo.sn; s/d CFA20,000/30,000), run by the friendly and knowledgeable Bab Mbengue, who's an excellent guide to the region.

### Getting There & Away

To get here from Dakar, take any transport headed for Mbour and get off at Diam Niadia junction. Minibuses run from here to Toubab Dialao (CFA300). Or go to Rufisque, take a taxi to garage de Yène and change there for a taxi to Toubab Dialao. A hire taxi from Dakar would cost around CFA15,000.



### RÉSERVE DE BANDIA

This small **wildlife reserve** (☎ 685 5886; admission adult/child CFA7000/3500; 🚽 8am-6pm) sits 65km from Dakar on the road to Mbour, about 5km south of Sindia. It's well managed and crowded with wildlife, including species indigenous to Senegal as well as rhinos, giraffes, buffaloes, ostriches and other animals more at home in East Africa. In that sense it's more of a zoo, but an amazingly beautiful one with not a cage in sight. And because of its compact size you're almost guaranteed animal sightings.

For those more interested in human tradition than beasts, the Serer burial mounds and giant baobab, once used to bury griots, may be an enticement to visit.

Walking isn't allowed here, but you can normally enter with your own car or hire taxi. During or shortly after the rainy season you may have to hire one of the reserve's own 4WDs (CFA30,000), as many routes will be impassable to smaller vehicles. Tours take two to three hours.

Even if you don't want to visit the park, the fantastic restaurant overlooking a pond is worth a visit. You can normally spot buffaloes, monkeys, birds and crocodiles from here, and the food is good too (dishes CFA4000 to CFA6000).

Across the Dakar-Mbour main road, the fantastic **Accrobaobab** (Xavier Larcher ☎ 637 1428; www.accro-baobab.com; adult/child CFA15,000/10,000) is where you can climb, glide and clamber your

way around mighty baobab trees – all with safety nets and trained staff. Huge fun.

## POPENGUINE

pop around 1700

This calm village has an ambience all of its own, perhaps because it's a famous Pentecostal pilgrimage site, ever since an apparition of the black Madonna was seen here in 1986 (check [www.sanctuaire-popenguine.sn](http://www.sanctuaire-popenguine.sn) for details on the annual event). A church built here in 1988, **Eglise Notre Dame de Délivrance**, is an impressive modern building featuring contemporary altar paintings, coloured-glass windows and a statue of the black Madonna.

Popenguine lies on the edge of a small **nature reserve** (see the boxed text, right) that is home to plenty of bird life.

## Sleeping & Eating

Popenguine's most original accommodation options are at the end of a dirt road that leads right through the village.

**Campement Ker Cupaam** (☎ 956 4951; dm/d CFA5000/12,000) Unbeatable for character. It's run by a boisterous environmental women's cooperative that looks after the nature reserve next door, and has a highly knowledgeable guide for ornithological tours on site. The food is as good as homecooked.

**Keur de Sable** (☎ 957 7164; s/d CFA7500/12,000, studio CFA25,000, house CFA20,000). Signposted as a cultural centre on the opposite side of the dirt road, this is mainly a guesthouse with accommodation in basic rooms or houses on the beachside. It's a young and vibrant place that runs a cosy cocktail bar and often has dance and music performances.

**Métisse Daguirane** (☎ 957 7153; s/d CFA16,850/18,850) is in the village centre; the biggest but not best place in town. **Campement Coupru Sur Mer** (☎ 957 7166; r incl breakfast CFA12,000) consists of four well-maintained huts with a kitchen corner in a shaded courtyard. The restaurant does good à la carte meals (CFA3500). **L'écho-Côtier** (☎ 637 8772; meals CFA5000) is a decent beach restaurant behind Keur de Sable.

Back towards the village, the friendly bar-restaurant **Balafon Café** (snacks around CFA2000, ☎ 11am-8pm) overlooks the sea. The rustic beach bar **Chez Ginette** (☎ 957 7110; ☎ Wed-Mon) near the town centre is the place to sip a beer while waves lap at your feet.

### TWITCHER TIPS: RÉSERVES DE POPENGUINE & DE LA SOMONE

Less known than Senegal's large national parks, these two tiny reserves are home to some 150 different species. The Réserve de Popenguine was declared a protected zone in 1986, after the blue rock-thrush was spotted here. Excursions to see this, and plenty of other species, can be organised by the Campement Keur Cupaam in Popenguine, whose women's collective looks after the reserve and also has resident ornithological guides from the National Parks Authority. The adjacent Réserve de la Somone is very different in character. It was created by the local community in 1999, and remains independently maintained. The park headquarters are situated at the edge of the reserve (ask locals to show you the way there), but for guided birding tours you are better off booking a combined tour at Popenguine, which has the better-trained staff. The protected zone of La Somone has a stunning lagoon where pelicans and flamingos are the most prominent feathered residents, though with a bit of patience you'll spot rarer species too. At Popenguine you'll pay CFA5000 for a half-day tour around both reserves.

## Getting There & Away

From Dakar, head for Mbour and get off at Sindia, from where infrequent bush taxis run to Popenguine for CFA300.

## LA SOMONE

pop around 13,000

Some 80km from Dakar, La Somone is the gentle medium between the mass tourism of Saly-Portugal and the village intimacy of Toubab-Dialao. The town sits right on a stunning lagoon, whose extraordinary landscape and rich bird life are protected (see the boxed text, above).

La Somone has many good accommodation choices – the following is only a tiny selection of what's on offer. All of the following places are on the main road in the heart of town.

The nicest place is **Canda** (☎ 958 5054; tening@sentoosn; d CFA18,500; ☎ ☎), a small family-style hotel with pretty rooms and Belgian beer on the drinks menu.

The **Hôtel Sorong** (☎ 958 5175; www.sorong.sn; s/d CFA21,000/30,000; ☎ ☎) is a low-key hotel with a good restaurant (meals around CFA5000, open lunch and dinner), and **Le Phenix** (☎ 957 7517; www.phenix-senegal.sn, in French; villa CFA40,000) has gleaming, spacious villas on the beach that accommodate families. **Le Bassari** (☎ 957 7464; d/tr/q CFA17,000/25,000/34,000) is a beach-view *campement* decorated with masks and artefacts. **Africa Queen** (☎ 957 7435; www.africaqueen.com; d CFA25,000; ☎ ☎) is an unremarkable resort hotel catering mainly to groups, while the luxurious **Club Baobab** (☎ 957 7402; h2131@accor.com), near the lagoon, only accepts independent travellers in the low season.

A recommended restaurant outside the hotels is the cute **Café Creole** (☎ 958 5191; sylvie.creole@hotmail.com; dishes CFA2500-3000; ☎ lunch & dinner), near the junction between Ngaparou and La Somone – the place for tasty Senegalese and European cuisine, with live music on Thursday evenings.

To get to La Somone take a Mbour-bound taxi; get off at Nguékohk where taxis leave for Ngaparou and La Somone (CFA300).

## SALY

pop around 20,000

The French call Saly Senegal's Côte d'Azur, and they're not far off. It's easy to forget you're in Africa in Saly. This is the sort of coastal holiday destination found all over the world: palm-lined beaches, dozens of big hotels, nightclubs, bars and souvenir shops. The main tourist strip is in Saly-Portugal. North of town, Saly-Niakhniakhale is only a short drive away, but has an entirely different character. Here you find small hotels and guesthouses in local *quartiers* (areas) and beaches where you can still see the sand between the people.

## Saly-Portugal

Depending on your personal taste, this is either Saly's 'burnt zone', as locals like to put it, or the fun part of town. It's certainly where you'll be headed to withdraw cash from either BICIS or SGBS near King Karaoke, and check your emails in one of several Internet cafés.

## ACTIVITIES

Saly is all about lazing at the beach, but if that gets too much, or rather too little, there's plenty on offer in the form of water sports,

fishing and excursions. Most of the hotels offer plenty of activities, ranging from sports fishing and jet skiing to pampering sessions in massage parlours.

## Fishing & Watersports

The hotel **Espadon** has one of the best fishing clubs in town. Also recommended are **Saly Fishing Club** (☎ 957 2862; www.salyfishingclub.com) at the Lamantin Beach Hotel and **Marlin Club** (☎ 957 2477; marlinclub@arc.sn) in the heart of Saly's tourist zone. **Diabar Plongee** (☎ 958 5049; diabarplongee@yahoo.fr), near La Somone, and Arcandia run a whole range of activities including diving and fishing.

## Beach-Buggy Tours

Riding along the Petite Côte in a big-wheeled beach buggy is a favourite with Saly tourists. Buggies (in French *quads*) can be hired at **Buggyland** (☎ 957 4917; buggyland@sentoosn), **Afriquad** (☎ 957 2293) and **Quadrousel** (☎ 957 0787; www.quadrousel.com), all found near the beach in Saly-Sud.

## Golf

**Golf de Saly** (☎ 957 2488; www.golfsaly.com) is Saly's best-known golf club, at the exit towards La Somone.

## SLEEPING

This is a tiny selection of the dozens of hotels and self-contained apartments in Saly. Most are in walking distance from one another, and close to the beach.

**Les Flamboyants** (☎ 957 0770; www.hotelsenegalflamboyant.com; s/d from CFA24,600/25,000; ☎ ☎) For Saly-Portugal, this is a nicely understated place. It's all about forged iron it seems, from the room furnishings to the tables of the green outdoor restaurant. The house cocktails are benign.

**Espadon** (☎ 957 1949; fax 957 2000; half board per person CFA36,600; ☎ ☎) This smoothly decorated place provides luxury with an African flavour. Accommodation is in spacious bungalows – each with its private, sunny terrace – that are tucked away in a lush garden. The attached fishing centre enjoys a good reputation.

**Lamantin Beach Hotel** (☎ 957 0777; www.lamantin.com; half board s/d/stc CFA82,000/131,000/210,000; ☎ ☎ ☎) This five-star establishment calls itself the paradise on earth, and if your idea of heaven involves being

pampered in a spa, relaxing in a *hammam* (bathhouse) or on a private beach, than you'll probably agree with them.

Also recommended:

**Les Bougainvillées** (☎ 957 2222; bougainvillesaly@sentoo.sn; r CFA41,200; 🍷 🍷 🍷) With comfortable bungalows set in a spacious garden, this is prettier than your standard resort hotel. It's near the Saly roundabout.

**Savana Saly** (☎ 939 5800; www.savana.sn; s/d CFA45,000/55,100) Not as refined as its Dakarois sister, but still a good top-end option.

**Royam** (☎ 957 2070; www.royam-senegal.com; 🍷 🍷 🍷) A classy four-star establishment; individual travellers are only accepted during the low season.

**Les Filaos** (☎ 957 1180; nffilaos@sentoo.sn; r per person CFA35,600) An enormous holiday complex made up of two parts: Les Calaos and the prettier Les Hibiscus.

## EATING & DRINKING

Saly-Portugal's restaurant scene leaves you spoilt for choice, though many serve similar fare. The following are among the most interesting ones.

**La Riviera** (☎ 957 0724; Place du Coursel; meals from CFA5000; 🍷 10am-11pm) A large swimming pool is the heart piece of this classy restaurant. It's the frequent site of concerts, shows and the bikini parades of aspiring Miss Sals. The European and African food served here is excellent, but doesn't come cheap.

**Le Marlin** (☎ 554 2808; Résidences du Port; meals from CFA6000; 🍷 10am-11pm) This refined eatery sits in one of Saly's biggest and brashiest entertainment complexes. The seafood here gets good reviews.

**El Pasé** (Saly junction; meals around CFA5000; 🍷 11am-11pm) This lively place is the right address for sumptuous Spanish meals and other European food in a relaxed environment.

**Le Manguier** (route de la Somone; dishes around CFA4000; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This tastefully decorated place is a gem, both for its excellent international cuisine and the pleasant courtyard where giant mango trees shade a collection of African masks and statues.

**Habana Café** (☎ 957 0724; Saly-Sud; dishes around CFA5000; 🍷 11am-midnight) This fairly new place is fast becoming one of Saly's mightiest magnets, thanks to its beautiful beach location, excellent service and its delicious French cuisine.

**Rolls Club** (☎ 631 1578) There are plenty of bars and clubs in Saly but this place, right in the heart of Saly's tourist zone, is the dance floor everybody heads to at some point of

the night. With a wide mix of musical styles (plenty of techno and R&B when we visited), its powerful sound system caters to almost every musical taste.

Self-caterers find all they need at **Supermarché Plein Sud** (☎ 957 3347).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Saly-Portugal's hotels are 3km off the main road, about 5km north of Mbour. There is no public transport, and taxis charge CFA1500 from the main road to the hotels and other facilities at the beachfront.

## Saly-Niakhniakhale

For a little bit of the 'real' Senegal just south of the big hotels, visit this borough, which begins at Les Cocotiers hotel and stretches south from there.

## SLEEPING

**Auberge Khady** (☎ /fax 957 2518; auberge\_khady@hotmail.com; s/d incl breakfast CFA13,800/20,700) This simple but vibrant place 200m from the sea is rightly highly rated. The terrace restaurant is brilliant, and gets lively with dance and music performances on Friday nights.

**Ferme de Saly** (☎ 957 5006; farmsaly@yahoo.fr; r per person CFA16,500) This place has gradually turned from a farm with rooms for rent into a *campement* with some farming activity. Slightly rundown huts sit on large, overgrown terrain, and most of the food in the beach restaurant is locally grown.

**Au Petit Jura** (☎ 957 3767; www.aupetitjura.ch; d CFA19,500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This pretty little retreat has spotless huts in a half-circle around a swimming pool. The beach is only steps away in this mostly quiet corner of Saly.

**Gîte Tolosa** (☎ 658 7197; apt CFA12,500; 🍷) This place is a bargain for self-caterers. Each of the basic, spacious apartments has a kitchen corner, and there are good weekly rates for those who stay longer. Get a 1st-floor room; they're much nicer.

**La Medina** (☎ 957 4993; lamedina@sentoo.sn; s/d 13,000/17,000; 🍷) This Mediterranean-style place stretches over three floors surrounding a green courtyard. It's a stunning oasis of peace in the heart of Saly village.

## EATING

Most of the hotels listed do food; the restaurants at Auberge Khady and Ferme de Saly are particularly recommended.

**Chez Poulo** (☎ 659 6331; dishes around CFA1000; 🍷 11am-midnight) A hugely popular eatery about 1km from Saly Village, in the heart of Saly-Niakhniakhale. It's small and informal, but has some of the best Senegalese and European food in the area, as well as local juices.

**Baracouda** (dishes around CFA2000; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Sits right where Saly-Niakhniakhale turns into Saly-Portugal. The perfect spot to enjoy a relaxed plate of *yassa poulet* (grilled chicken marinated in a thick onion-and-lemon sauce) before hitting the night scene.

## MBOUR

pop around 150,000

Five kilometres south of Saly, Mbour has a different vibe. The beach isn't so much a sunshine spot for tanning tourists as a place where hundreds of pirogues launch into the sea daily. This is a major fishing centre and the town's 200m-long beach market, plus all the surrounding marine-related commerce, is a sight to behold.

The *gare routière* (bus station) is near the exit towards Dakar, behind a wide gate. Mbour has a BICIS with ATM, several Internet cafés, a post office and hospital, all in the heart of town, near the port.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are a few places to stay scattered around town, all of them south of the fishing market.

**Village Petit Eden** (☎ 957 4477; www.petit-eden.de; d CFA17,000) This cosy place on the Route de Dakar is hugely popular with locals and independent travellers, and for good reason. Management is great, rooms are cosy and there's a good range of excursions on offer.

**Les Citronniers** (☎ 957 2457; dm/d CFA6000/15,000) This slightly run-down auberge in the heart of town has good-value rooms, friendly management and a restaurant that serves a mean *thieboudienne* (rice baked in a thick sauce of fish and vegetables).

**Le Bounty** (☎ /fax 957 2951; bounty@sentoo.sn; d CFA9500; 🍷) This long-standing favourite is packed with all sorts of kitsch knickknacks, and has rooms that try hard to look like apartments. The restaurant serves a good zebu steak and a variety of excursions can be arranged.

**Coco Beach** (☎ 957 1004; fax 957 1077; d CFA15,000; 🍷 🍷) This beach hotel is Mbour's biggest,

though not its best establishment. It's friendly and packed with activities, but the rooms disappoint.

**Hôtel Club Safari** (☎ 957 1991; fax 957 3838; s/d incl breakfast CFA16,000/20,000; 🍷 🍷) Five blocks south of Le Bounty, this seashell-decorated place has spacious, comfortable rooms set around a pool.

**Tama Lodge** (☎ /fax 957 0040; www.tamalodge.com; s CFA30,000-60,000, d CFA40,000-80,000) Right on the Plage des Cocotiers (Cocotiers Beach), Tama Lodge is something of a piece of art and, run by a fervent antique collector, as unique as a hotel can get – you sleep in modern mud huts surrounded by some amazing wooden sculptures. The restaurant serves imaginative variations of French and African cuisine – even chips taste somewhat refined here – and a dinner on the beach terrace by candlelight is a fine night out indeed. Half- and full-board options are also available.

**Le Kassoumaye** (☎ 957 3524; dishes CFA3000; 🍷 9am-11pm Thu-Tue) Good European fare can be found on the beach behind Le Bounty at this restaurant. Dishes are huge and there is an impressive range of desserts.

**Chez Paolo** (☎ 957 1310; dishes from CFA2000; 🍷 11am-11pm) Anyone in town can show you the way to this favourite local eatery, right on the main road. It may look unpretentious, but the Senegalese food here is divine – the high number of regular locals is proof to its popularity.

## WARANG

pop around 5000

Just outside Mbour lies the village of Warang, where a range of excellent, slightly secluded accommodation options invite travellers in search of solitude.

The white bungalows that sit in a well-kept garden at **Les Manguiers de Warang** (☎ 957 5174; lesmanguiers@sentoo.sn; s/d CFA13,500/16,000) are a cross between an African hut and a Mediterranean building. The fusion works, and you can even choose the mosquito-protected outdoor option on the rooftop.

Impressively located between the sea and a small lake, **Warang Hôtel** (☎ 957 2010; lewaranghotel@yahoo.fr; half board CFA19,500) offers good accommodation in simple huts.

Staying at **Mbégeel** (☎ 957 5177; www.mbegeel.com; hut CFA39,500, ste CFA59,000, house CFA98,000; 🍷 🍷) is something of an experience. The



place was handcrafted by owner Marie-Hélène Le Grand, who lovingly placed every piece of mosaic and mirror-glass into the floor and walls of the cosy huts, arranged soft lighting to enhance the themed interiors, and chose every table, chair and cushion in the green terrain.

**Domaine de Samba** (☎ 957 5217; www.domainede samba.com; d incl breakfast CFA21,615, villa CFA51,745; 📍 🚗 🚲 🏊) is a resort-style place with accommodation choices ranging from basic rooms to lush villas, and offers the whole pot of activities including horse riding, buggy tours and tennis. The cybercafé is definitely an asset.

### Getting There & Away

There's frequent public transport between Mbour and Dakar (minibus CFA1000, *sept-place* taxis CFA1300). Mbour–Joal transport is a little less regular (minibus CFA500, *sept-place* taxis CFA600). Hiring a taxi from Mbour to Warang is a timesaving option (CFA1000). Hire taxis cost around CFA15,000 from Dakar to Mbour or Warang, CFA20,000 all the way to Joal.

### NIANING

pop around 2000

The beach is beautiful anywhere along the Petite Côte, and sleepy Nianing is one of the quieter places along the coast, perfect if you like to dip your toes in without anyone stepping on them.

**Le Ben Tenier** (☎ 957 1420; bentenier@telecomplus.sn; r per person CFA8630) on the entry to Nianing represents excellent value. It's got a youthful ambience, with friendly, English-speaking management and large bungalows in a spacious garden. **Auberge des Coquillages** (☎ /fax 957 1428; tidiane@telecomplus.sn; s/d CFA26,000/28,100; 📍), a couple of blocks further along the main road, is much brighter and prettier but you pay for it, too. **Le Girafon** (☎ 957 5266; s/d CFA10,000/15,000) is another good option. It's a tiny *campement* in the heart of the village (just follow the signposts) with a relaxed family feel that also organises local excursions.

The restaurant scene is limited to tiny eateries. **Les Bourgain Villees** (☎ 957 5241) is a small family-run place on the main road, which serves simple African meals (around CFA1500) and also has some rooms for rent. Chez Annick and Chez Aicha are the recommended Senegalese restaurants in

town – the grilled fish (around CFA2000) at both is fantastic. The Franco-Senegalese place Le Nianing, in the heart of the village, presents itself as a little more upmarket and nearby L'Oasis, owned by a Sicilian expat, serves exquisite Italian food.

Nianing is on the main road between Mbour and Joal and all public transport stops here.

### MBODIÈNE

pop around 3000

The small village of Mbodiène is on the coast about halfway between Nianing and Joal. It sits right on a beautiful lagoon, perfect for bird-watching and bathing. The huge resort hotel **Laguna Beach** (☎ 957 8811; www.lagunabeach.sn; half board per person CFA27,500; 📍 🚗 🚲 🏊) seems strangely out of place in this tiny village, but offers accommodation in attractive, 2nd-floor bungalows and an impressive range of activities to those who like being pampered. Along a dirt road that follows the coast, the **Gîte d'Étape de la Fasna** (☎ 957 8817; fax 957 8815) was being completely renovated at the time of writing – the work being done on the spacious huts looked promising. Inquire for rates. A few metres further down, the highly recommended **Plein Soleil** (☎ /fax 957 8823; d/ste CFA21,000/35,000; 📍 🚗 🚲 🏊) is a relaxed, family-friendly place in a beautiful location. The welcoming owners also operate **La Maison de la Mer** (☎ 957 8813; d/ste CFA21,000/35,000), a cosy guesthouse right on the beach. Lovingly decorated and furnished with an extensive library, video collection and bar, this is one of the most homely places anywhere in Senegal. For a completely carefree holiday, you can book yourself in on the all-inclusive rate (singles/doubles CFA492,000/857,000) that contains everything from airport pick-up to activities, food and bottomless drinks.

### JOAL-FADIOUT

pop around 38,000

Follow the winding coastal road from Dakar 110km southwards and you reach the twin villages Joal and Fadiout. Joal, the birthplace of former president Léopold Senghor, is on the mainland. Its pretty sister Fadiout sits on a century-old island composed entirely of oyster and clamshells that's reached via a long wooden bridge from Joal. Everything is shells here – they are embedded

in houses and streets, as well as the shared Muslim and Christian cemetery, reached by another bridge crossing.

The citizens of Joal and Fadiout are proud of their religious tolerance: Christians and Muslims live in harmony, with Fadiout's impressive church and shrines to the Virgin Mary near an equally large mosque. Life seems peaceful and relaxed, particularly in Fadiout's maze of narrow alleyways; it's more tranquil the further you get from the colourful artisan market spreading along the roadside from the bridge into town.

There are plenty of pirogue trips on offer here, taking you to the cemetery; a nearby oyster cultivation; and a set of stilt-balanced granaries, modelled on ancient originals that were destroyed when a blaze tore through Fadiout. The trips make for a great day out; just don't let the guides near the Joal side of the bridge talk you into overpriced rides. You're better off relying on the badge-bearing employees of the Syndicat de Tourisme. Guides also hover around the bridge, or can be found at the Hôtel le Finio.

### Sleeping & Eating

#### JOAL

**Le Tourayre** (☎ 515 6064; s/d/tr CFA10,000/12,000/14,000) This relaxed little auberge on the riverside is a great budget option. Rooms are basic but good value, and you can leap straight from the brilliant terrace restaurant (meals CFA2900 to CFA3800) into a pirogue to Fadiout – useful to avoid the hustlers near the bridge. Ask the owner to arrange this for you.

**Hôtel de la Plage** (☎ 957 6677; hakim@yahoo.fr; d/tr CFA25,000/28,000; 📍 🚗) This fairly new place has bright, large rooms at reasonable rates, and a restaurant that's highly recommended (meals CFA5000).

**Relais 114** (☎ 957 6178; r incl breakfast with/without bathroom CFA10,000/7500) This colourful place is pretty run down, though the larger-than-life owner Mamadou Balde and his performing pelicans give some character. The rustic Senegalese meals are pretty good (CFA5000).

**Hôtel le Finio** (☎ /fax 957 6112; r per person CFA6500-9500) This is still Joal's best-known but not necessarily best address. The smallest rooms really don't have much breathing space.

**Le Sénégalois** (☎ /fax 957 6241; r CFA14,000) At the end of the bridge to Fadiout you find this bawdy bar that has a few clean but

overpriced rooms upstairs. Owner Olivier can also change money.

#### FADIOUT

**Campement les Paletuviers** (☎ /fax 957 6205; r per person CFA5000) Walk through the island's narrow alleyways to this no-frills *campement* with basic rooms and shared bathrooms.

### Getting There & Away

A minibus to/from Mbour is CFA600. If you're heading on down the coast, it costs CFA1000 from Joal to Palmarin. A *sept-place* taxi goes directly to Dakar most mornings (without changing at Mbour) for CFA1800.

## THE SINÉ-SALOUM DELTA

Even a stretch of the finest white beach doesn't last forever. About 60km south of Mbour the Petite Côte is cut by the mouth of the Saloum River, and sand strands give way to a maze of mangrove swamps and creeks. This is the 180,000-hectare zone of the Siné-Saloum Delta, one of Senegal's most beautiful areas. In the delta landscape, shimmering flat lands dotted with palm groves sit next to salt marshes and savannah woodlands, while the coastline is framed by lush greens, long sand banks and lagoons.

Part of the area is included in the Parc National du Delta du Saloum. You won't see large mammals here, apart from the occasional warthog and perhaps a sea cow in the lagoons, but the area abounds with several monkey species, including the rare red colobus, and the range of habitats makes it particularly good for birding.

### PALMARIN

pop around 5000

Some 20km south of Joal-Fadiout, Palmarin is an expansive area encompassing four villages, the place where the beaches of the Petite Côte merge with the labyrinthine creeks of the Siné-Saloum Delta. It's a breathtaking spot, where dots of bush grass and tall palm groves, salty plains and patches of gleaming water line the series of causeways leading south from Sambadia.

At the time of writing, the arrival of electricity to the villages was said to be imminent – be prepared though and bring a torch (flashlight).

## Sleeping & Eating

Palmarin's quickly multiplying *campements* are among the country's classiest, and nestle peacefully on the beach-bound end of sandy side roads. The area is best explored by pirogue or *charette* (horse-drawn cart) – all the *campements* organise reasonably priced tours.

**Royal Lodge** (☎ 949 1150; www.le-royal-lodge.com; Palmarin; s/d incl breakfast from CFA98,000/130,000) If you're blessed with a bottomless bank account then give this utterly luxurious place a try. Each of its stylish, warmly tinted and carefully crafted apartments comes with DVD, satellite TV and – wait for it – its own Jacuzzi. But the hotel's biggest asset, its lagoon pool with floating bar, is accessible to all who are at least rich enough to invest in a drink.

**Lodge des Collines de Niassam** (☎ 669 6343; www.niassam.com; half board per person CFA37,000-57,000; ♿ ♿) Who said that the hotel business couldn't be creative or sophisticated? This place offers accommodation in classy tree houses that cling to the mighty branches of baobabs, or sit on stilts in the shallow waters of the delta. The views are breathtaking, and the home-mixed fruity rums something to get addicted to. Very fine indeed.

**Yokam** (☎ 936 3974; yokam@teranga-horizon.com; per person incl breakfast CFA7000). This lively *campement* is run by a young and enthusiastic bunch; the bungalows, decorated in traditional straw-hut style, are comfy and spotless.

**Lodge de Diakhomor** (☎ 644 9491, 957 1256; www.lesenegal.info; half board s/d CFA23,000/41,000) With its red, mud-walled bungalows, this place feels like a cross between a medieval fort and a Fula village, and is apparently modelled on ancient local architecture. The decor is quite a sight and the restaurant (meals around CFA5000) excellent – and best of all, pirogue excursions, horse riding, bicycle and fishing trips are all included in the price.

**Djidjack** (☎ 949 9619; www.djidjack.com; d/q CFA20,000/30,000) Sitting in a wonderfully varied and lovingly maintained garden, this Swiss-owned *campement* offers accommodation in appealing large and uberlarge huts. Its heart piece – a huge *case à impluvium* housing a restaurant, bar and library – invites lingering. Camping costs CFA2000 per night.

**Campement Villageois de Sessene** (☎ 669 0365; r per person incl breakfast CFA6500) This large *campement* is perhaps not the prettiest, but it's run

by the local population, and if you wish to spend your holiday cash locally, this is the place to stay.

## Getting There & Away

Palmarin is most easily reached from Mbour, via Joal-Fadiout and Sambadia (where you may have to change). The fare from Joal to Sambadia is CFA500 in a Ndiaga Ndiaye, and from Sambadia to Palmarin it's CFA400.

## DJIFER

### pop around 2000

The fishing village of Djifer is 10km south of Palmarin on the tip of the peninsula separating the Atlantic Ocean from the Saloum River. It's a major jumping-off point for trips into the Siné-Saloum Delta. Most people only come here to get onto a pirogue and explore the region – there's little else that's attractive about Djifer itself. The town has a sewage problem, and the beaches are largely strewn with litter, though some efforts are being made to clear things up.

Palmarin's **Yokam** (☎ 936 3752; r per person CFA3000) has a second branch here, though a much more basic, slightly windblown affair. **La Pointe de Sangomar** (☎/fax 835 6191; d with/without bathroom CFA12,600/8600), a fairly run-down affair in the centre, though one with camping facilities.

Eating options are restricted to the *campements*, basic *gargottes* (small, simple, local-style eating houses) or self-catering.

## Getting There & Away

Djifer can be reached from Mbour, via Joal-Fadiout and Sambadia – see above for details. Another option is by pirogue to or from Ndangane (p188) or Foundiougne (p189).

If you're heading to Gambia, cramped, uncomfortable and notoriously unsafe pirogues occasionally go from Djifer to Banjul (CFA5000 per person). The trip takes about five hours, but may involve an overnight stop on a midway island. You have been warned! On arrival in Banjul go to the immigration office at the port to get your passport stamped.

Another option is a trip to beautiful Îles des Bétanti in the south of the Siné-Saloum

Delta. Pirogues leave from Djifer every afternoon (CFA1500, three to five hours). From there, you can then continue on to Banjul by public pirogue the next morning (CFA1500, three hours).

## AROUND DJIFER

Several islands of the Siné-Saloum Delta can be explored on day trips from Djifer. The closest is the pretty, deserted **Pointe de Sangomar** island, a great place for swimming, picnics or camping in solitude. Much more interesting, however, are the beautiful and tranquil islands **Guior** and **Guissanor** across the river mouth. The villages **Dionewar** and **Falia**, the oldest settlements on Guior, nestle right in the web of *bolongs* (creeks), and exploring the labyrinthine paths of the mangroves with a small pirogue or wandering through the forest of Dionewar are unmissable experiences.

In Dionewar you can spend the night in the luxury of the plush **Delta Niominka** (☎ 948 9935; www.deltaniominka.com; r per person incl breakfast CFA25,000), from where several pirogue excursions, as well as transport to and from Djifer can be arranged. Otherwise, it's usually possible to find a room with a welcoming local family.

Boat trips can be arranged directly by haggling with the pirogue owners at the port of Djifer, though you might as well use the services of the two *campements*. For half-day trips, you'll be charged about CFA20,000 to CFA25,000, up to twice that for the whole day. Make sure that the negotiated price includes the cost of the *petite* pirogue on the island and all local tourist taxes. There's a daily public boat that runs between Djifer and Dionewar (per person CFA500). It only goes once a day in each direction though, leaving Djifer around 3pm every day, and returning the morning of the next day. (Exact departure times depend on the tide).

## NDANGANE & MAR LODJ

### pop around 2500

Ndangane (ndan-gan) is on the northern side of the Siné-Saloum Delta, on a branch of the Saloum River. Once a sleepy backwater, this has now become a thriving tourist centre. Ndangane has two parts: the touristy area, where the tar road from Dakar ends by the boat jetty, and the village proper, a short distance to the west. From

either area, you can get boats across the river to the village of Mar Lodj (also spelt Mar Lothie), a peaceful haven cut off from mainland by the delta. Several local-style *campements* make this a great place to relax for a while. There's no bank here, but Internet connections are available at a couple of places along the road.

Fishing trips and bird-watching boat rides can be arranged at most of the hotels and *campements*, with pirogue trips to Mar Lodj and Île des Oiseaux costing about CFA10,000 a head, with a minimum of four. If you're in the mood for being hassled, head for the pirogue landing and you'll be pounced upon by eager pirogue owners offering you to take you to Mar Lodj. Note that several readers have reported trouble with these guys, overpriced journeys being the most harmless, actual swindles and trips to less exciting destinations as promised (for more cash) being more serious. You're likely to have an easier time booking trips through the hotels.

## Sleeping & Eating NDANGANE

Most of the accommodation and eating options are located around the end of the road to Fimela, which is also where most boat trips depart from.

**Le Barracuda** (Chez Mbacke; ☎ 6585794; s/d CFA9000/12,000) Cheap and very cheerful – this family-run place is right near the stretch of beach where you catch your pirogue for Mar Lodj.

**La Palangrotte** (☎ 949 9321; lapalang@sentoosn; s/d incl breakfast CFA9750/13,000) One of the best choices in Ndangane, no doubt. This place at the exit of town is not only very welcoming and well kept, but also invests 10% of all profits into local development projects. Apparently even Wolof courses are on offer.

**Le Cormoran** (☎/fax 949 9316; www.lecormoran.net; s/d/tr CFA13,000/19,000/24,000, all incl breakfast; ♿ ♿) Once a fishermen's favourite, this hospitable place now tries to attract more families into its spotless quarters. Not a bad choice by any means.

**Les Cordons Bleus** (☎ 949 9312; cordons-bleus@sentoosn; s/d/tr CFA25,000/32,000/42,000; ♿ ♿ ♿) Classy indeed, this establishment has a whole array of activities on offer, ranging from minigolf to a variety of excursions. The rooms are welcoming, too.

All the hotels do food and there are several restaurants.

**Le Petit Paradis** (dishes from CFA800; ☺ lunch & dinner) This place along the main mile serves cheap local and considerably more expensive international meals, all spiced up with inspiring conversation (in English) from the dignified and erudite owners.

**Le Baobab** (☎ 653 4073; dishes around CFA4000; ☺ 11am-10pm) Past Cordons Bleus, this is excellent for seafood and pizzas in a village-style setting.

**Le Tamarko** (dishes from CFA3000; ☺ 11am-10pm) Right opposite the pirogue landing to Mar Lodj, this is a good place to watch the coming and going and haggling and negotiating from a safe distance. The menu is varied, with a good selection of European meals.

Good, cheap local eateries include Le Picboeuf, which is usually packed – a good indicator of its popularity – and La Maroise.

Also recommended:

**Chez Madeleine** (☎ 949 9313; s/d incl breakfast CFA11,660/22,020; ☺) Not exactly thrilling, but decent value for money.

**Le Pélican du Saloum** (☎ 949 9320; snpelicant@sentoosn; half board CFA29,600) Part of the Senegal Hôtel chain, this is typical resort-hotel fare.

### MAR LODJ

There aren't vast differences in quality between the *campements* on Mar Lodj, just in quality and price. All places offer a pick-up by pirogue from Ndangane, though costs differ widely. Inquire beforehand. There's no electricity on Mar Lodj, but most *campements* either have solar panels or generators. It's still a good idea to bring a torch.

**Le Limboko** (☎ 641 2253) Definitely worth a visit. At the time of writing, accommodation was being redone and only the excellent restaurant was open (three-course meals CFA6000). The friendly owner Amadou 'Thomas' Ba, the local representative of the Syndicat d'Initiative, is full of useful info and advice, and speaks fluent German and English. Inquire about room rates.

**Campement Essamaye** (☎ 555 36 67; www.senegal.lia.com; r per person incl full board CFA17,500) This stunning place stands a good chance of being voted the friendliest on the island. It has simple, but welcoming rooms in a giant Casamance-style *case à impluvium* and excellent excursions on offer. Transport from Ndangane is included in the rate.

**Mbine Diam** (☎ 636 9199; s/d/tr CFA9000/16,000/21,000) One of the simplest *campements* on the island, reflected in the adequate prices.

**Le Bazouk** (☎ 820 4125; lebazouksaloum@sentoosn; per person CFA12,000) Slightly more welcoming than Mbine Diam, and has a free transfer to and from Ndangane twice daily.

**Nouvelle Vague** (☎ 634 0723; s/d/tr CFA15,600/23,200/25,800) Prices are a little steeper at this place but the accommodation is nicer, too. The transfer to Ndangane here costs CFA7500.

**Marsetal** (☎ 637 2531; s CFA20,000) On the other side of the island you find this upmarket spot. A short *calèche* (horse-drawn taxi) ride through the village takes you there from the main beach, or you can hire a direct pirogue from Ndangane.

### Getting There & Away

Take any bus between Kaolack and Mbour and get off at Ndiosomone, from where bush taxis shuttle back and forth to Ndangane. You can go directly by bush taxi from Dakar to Ndangane for CFA1800, and from Mbour bush taxis go via Sambadia and Fimela.

To reach Mar Lodj from Ndangane there's an occasional public boat charging CFA3000 one way. Otherwise, you have to charter. This can cost anything between CFA10,000 and 30,000 return.

You can charter a pirogue between Ndangane and Djifer for about CFA25,000. To or from Foundiougne is about CFA40,000.

### FIMELA & SIMAL

pop around 1500

The two villages Fimela and Simal lie just north of Ndangane, past the tourist trail in lush natural settings overlooking the Saloum River. **Le Domaine des Cajous** (☎ 513 6125; www.cajous.com; Fimela; s/d CFA10,000/15,000; ☺) has cosy bungalows and a welcoming restaurant with magnificent views across the river. In Simal, 2km from Dioffor, the **Gîte de Simal** (☎ 644 9491, 957 1256; www.lesenegal.info; half board s/d CFA21,000/37,000), part of the imaginative TPA chain, invites riverside lingering. Accommodation is in simple but pretty straw huts, with colourful, roofless toilets and showers attached. All activities such as *charette* tours and pirogue and fishing trips around the mangroves are included in the half-board rate.

There are fairly frequent bush taxis from Ndangane to Fimela (CFA200), from where you can hire a taxi to either place for about CFA1000 to CFA2000. Taxis from Fimela to Ndiosomone cost CFA400.

### FOUNDIOUGNE

pop around 5000

At the northwestern edge of the delta, where a ferry crosses the Saloum River, the onetime French colonial outpost of Foundiougne (foun-dune) attracts mainly keen anglers, and though it's perhaps not the prettiest corner of the delta, it's a good place to arrange pirogue trips. Most *campements* listed have boat tours on offer, and prices tend to be similar (pirogue day trips around CFA20,000 to CFA30,000, transfer to Djifer CFA40,000).

This area has notoriously bad drinking water – stick to bottled mineral.

### Sleeping

West from the ferry pier, there's a string of *campements*. They're numerous, but overall quality standards are pretty low.

**La Pirogue** (☎ 516 7102; per person CFA8000, half/full board CFA13,000/16,000) Tiny it may be, but it's the finest budget option by far. Rooms are pretty and spotless – not necessarily standard in Foundiougne – and breakfast is served with fresh bread baked on-site.

**Le Baobab sur Mer** (Chez Anne Marie; ☎ 948 1262; s/d/tr incl breakfast CFA8500/16,000/20,000) Right on the river, this place run by the boisterous Anne Marie is booming. The bar often gets lively in the evenings.

**Le Baobab sur Terre** (Chez Ismail; ☎ /fax 948 1108; s/d incl breakfast CFA6500/13,000) Opposite the other Baobab, this is the cheapest place in town. It is really very basic, but fair value, and the pirogue tours are recommended.

**Indiana Club** (☎ /fax 948 1213; www.indianclub.net; half/full board per person CFA15,000/19,000; ☺) A slight cowboy theme gives this place some curious character, and the restaurant serving European and Senegalese food has a good reputation. Add CFA5000 for air-con.

**Foundiougne Hôtel** (☎ 948 1212; fax 948 1310; s/d/tr CFA21,600/35,200/40,800, all incl breakfast; ☺) Proud to call itself a hotel, this place slaps on the costs. Rooms and meals are overpriced but the range of activities, including tennis, volleyball, horse riding, fishing and pirogue trips, is excellent.

Also recommended:

**Les Bolongs** (☎ /fax 948 1110; www.lesbolongs.com; r CFA10,000) Spacious bungalows sleeping one to four people sit in a lush garden.

**Saloum Saloum** (☎ 534 8370; saloumsaloum@sentoosn; s/d/tr CFA8500/16,000/19,000; ☺) This community-run place has decent rooms and sluggish service.

**Campement Ibou Fall** (☎ 544 4244; d CFA10,000) Basic rooms come with kitchen corner and fridge.

### Eating

Apart from the hotel restaurants and the *gargottes* grouped around the ferry pier and market, there's really only one other place worth mentioning.

**La Cloche** (☎ 544 4242; meals CFA3500) This Italian restaurant is right near the jetty. It takes deserved pride in the sparkling cleanliness of its kitchen, as well as its river view and fully fledged Italian menu.

### Getting There & Away

By road, Foundiougne is reached from Passi, which is on the potholed tarmac road between Kaolack and Sokone.

By minibus Kaolack–Foundiougne is CFA700. There aren't many direct buses, so you might have to change at Passi. Kaolack–Passi is CFA950, Passi–Foundiougne is CFA600.

Alternatively you can reach Foundiougne from Fatick. Take a bush taxi to Dakhonga, where you take a ferry across to Foundiougne.

Most *campements* can arrange pirogue transfers between Foundiougne and Ndangane, Djifer, Toubakouta or Missirah, but the boat journey is long (around four hours) and expensive (around CFA40,000).

#### THE FOUNDIOUGNE FERRY TIMETABLE

Foundiougne	Dakhonga
7.30am	8.30am
9.30am	10.30am
11.30am	12.30pm
3pm (except Wed)	3.30pm (except Wed)
5pm	6.30pm

The ferry fare is CFA100 per passenger; CFA1200 per vehicle. A ride across by pirogue (if the ferry isn't running) is negotiable, but at least CFA3000 for the boat.



## TOUBAKOUTA

pop around 9500

Nestled among mazes of mangroves, tropical forest and islands that float on myriad waterways, the tiny town of Toubakouta is easily one of the most beautiful spots of the Siné-Saloum Delta. It's an excellent base for excursions to the nearby Parc National du Delta du Saloum and the stunning Aire Marine Protégée de Bamboung (see the boxed text, p67), Senegal's only functioning area of protected sea.

The whole area teems with wildlife and sea birds, and watching flamingos, fish eagles, herons and egrets prepare to roost on the shore at nightfall is fascinating, even if you're not a keen bird-watcher.

Toubakouta has a couple of cybercafés, télécentres and a post office, but no bank. The Paletuviers Hôtel has cash-withdrawal facilities, though access is exclusively granted to guests.

### Sleeping

**Keur Bamboung** (☎ 510 8013; www.oceanium.org; half/full board CFA17,000/22,000) *Campements* rarely come more remote than this village-run ecolodge, stunningly located on the edge of a mangrove-lined island. And remote *campements* rarely come more lovingly done up. Its six individualised huts are all equipped with a water tank, solar-powered lights, impeccable bathroom and the most comfortable mattresses and sheets around. All profits go to the villages, which use it to

pay for the patrols of the marine reserve – so spend and feel good. Contact Keur Bamboung before arrival, and they arrange your pirogue pick-up from Toubakouta and 2km donkey-cart ride to the camp. Transport and all activities (mangrove walks, pirogue trips, canoeing, birding) are included in the price.

**Keur Youssou** (☎ /fax 948 7728; d/tr CFA12,000/15,000; 🍴) Rare are the budget places that offer such quality and comfort. The beautifully furnished rooms are a bargain, and the atmosphere friendly and relaxed.

**Les Coquillages du Niombatto** (☎ 645 3036; layoum@hotmail.com; d incl breakfast CFA12,500) Rooms are basic but impeccable, the restaurant gets good reviews and the management is incredibly forthcoming and knowledgeable.

**Hôtel Keur Saloum** (☎ 948 7715; www.keursaloum.com; half board s/d CFA36,000/58,000; 🍴 🚿) This is the pick of the top-range places. Tastefully decorated and comfortable bungalows sit in a large garden terrain, and the restaurant serves excellent meals (around CFA7000) on a terrace with a view. Once an anglers' favourite, it now increasingly attracts families, and has a wide range of excursions on offer.

**Hôtel les Palétuviers** (☎ 948 7776; www.paletuviers.com; half board s/d CFA47,000/63,000; 🍴 🚿) This expansive hotel offers a range of activities and likes to think of itself as a plush holiday haven – but the rooms disappoint, and the atmosphere isn't all that welcoming. The management also operates Île des Palétuviers on Îles des Bétanti, west of Toubakouta, and

Plage d'Or on the Senegalese side of Ginak Island.

Also recommended:

**Chez L'Épicer** (☎ 936 3424; assenghor@hotmail.com; d CFA12,500) Good-value rooms at the grocery store and fast-food place.

**Africa Strike** (☎ 948 7740; www.africastrike.com; r per person CFA15,000, half/full board CFA21,500/25,500; 🍴 🚿) A fishermen's favourite.

### Getting There & Away

Toubakouta is just off the main road between Kaolack and Karang (the Gambian border), about 70km from Kaolack. A bush taxi from Kaolack to Barra via Karang is CFA3000, but you won't get any discount for getting off early. It's cheaper to go by Ndiaga Ndiaye; the fare to Toubakouta is around CFA1300.

### PARC NATIONAL DU DELTA DU SALOUM

The **Parc National du Delta du Saloum** (admission CFA2000) is Senegal's second-largest national park. Its 76,000 hectares encompass the dry savannah woodland of the Forêt de Fathala, wide stretches of mangrove swamps, and a maritime part that stretches from the creeks surrounding the Îles des Bétanti all the way up to Pointe de Sangomar. The forest section of the reserve is much better looked after than the ocean area, and is rich in wildlife. Red colobus monkeys, colobus bays, patas, sylvicarpes, phacochers and hyenas all inhabit the woods, though you're unlikely to see the rarer species. The sea parts allow mainly for bird-watching, though sea turtles and dolphins can occasionally be spotted.

The main entrance to the park is in the village of Missirah, though the park headquarters are another 6km away. You pay your admission charge at the office of the **ecoguards** (☎ 936 3431; ☹ 9am-4pm), which is on your left as you enter the village from the north. The guards will show you around,

and take you to the park headquarters – they are professional guides, and their company a great help, as it's easy to get lost in the park. Note that the number is that of the local *télécentre*; you'll have to leave a message and arrange for them to call you back. It's usually easy enough to show up without prior notice.

Missirah itself is famous for the enormous *fromager* (kapok) tree on the banks of the river, variously estimated at between 200 and 1000 years old. It's also home to the peaceful and welcoming **Gîte de Bandiala** (☎ 948 7735; www.gite.bandiala.com; half/full board per person CFA15,400/21,100), which lies about 2km east of Missirah. A sand path turns off the main road just before you get to the village.

The *gîte* (small hotel) on the edge of the park is full of character and a great base for exploring this part of the delta. The friendly management can make suggestions for forest walks, and give guided tours. It also has a waterhole where monkeys, warthogs and other animals come to drink. Tours by pirogue on the nearby creeks and lagoons cost CFA5500 per person for half a day (minimum four people), and fishing can be arranged (two people CFA50,000).

### Getting There & Away

From Kaolack take any vehicle going along the main road towards Karang, get off at Santhiou el Haji (about 80km from Kaolack) and walk 8km west through the forest. Less strenuous would be to get off at Toubakouta and take a bush taxi for CFA400, if you can find one there. Public transport from Toubakouta is rare and only comes in the form of pick-up trucks – but if you ask around in town you will usually find someone willing to hire their car for the trip (around CFA5000).

Another option is to get a private taxi all the way from Kaolack – this will cost between CFA20,000 and CFA40,000.

### TWITCHER TIPS: BIRDING IN THE SOUTH OF THE SINÉ-SALOUM DELTA

Toubakouta offers enough bird life to have keen spotters stay here for days and return every year. It's mostly an area for sea birds and waders, though the nearby forest areas also house some other species, including hornbills and sunbirds. A good place to start a birding tour is Diorom Boumag, an impressive, man-made island that evolved from ancient seashell burying mounds, where giant baobabs have taken root. In their branches nestle numerous Senegalese parrots and rose-ringed parakeets. It's best to visit this place by pirogue in the late afternoon, and move further along the river to arrive around dusk at the Reposoir des Oiseaux, where you can watch swarms of pelicans, cormorants, egrets and plenty of other species prepare noisily for the night.

Île de Bamboung is much less visited, and a perfect place for independent travellers to observe birds in a peaceful environment.

A trip to Île des Oiseaux takes up an entire, thoroughly worthwhile, day. Near Îles des Bétanti in the south of Toubakouta, this small islet houses impressive colonies of Caspian storks, royal storks, herons, grey-headed gulls, slender-billed gulls and flamingos. With a bit of luck, you might even spot a sacred ibis.

Most of Toubakouta's hotels offer birding trips, the ones run by Hôtel Keur Saloum are particularly recommended. For trips to Île de Bamboung, the *campement* Keur Bamboung is your best option.

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