

# History

## PREHISTORY & EARLY SOCIETIES

The earliest evidence of human settlements in The Gambia and Senegal dates from around AD 500. In eastern Gambia, stone circles, such as the famous Wassu group, and shell mounds used for burial are evidence of the region's early inhabitants. A stunning example of early shell mounds is the Diorom Boumag near Toubakouta.

As the 1st millennium AD progressed, trade increased between the regions north and south of the Sahara. Goods transported across the desert included salt, gold, silver, ivory and slaves. Some settlements on the edge of the desert took advantage of the trade (eventually controlling it) and grew in size, wealth and power. Some of these settlements became city-states, and a few developed into powerful confederations with hierarchical structures, in which society was divided into groups such as rulers, administrators, traders, artisans, artists, commoners and captives.

## KINGDOMS & EMPIRES

Precolonial history in West Africa is the story of the rise and fall of powerful empires, whose social structures and ethnic make-up determine life in the region today. The power of these often-wealthy states depended on the control of the trans-Saharan trade, and many a battle was fought to ascertain strategic positions.

The first major state established in the region was the Empire of Ghana. Founded in the 5th century AD, it flourished between the 8th and 11th centuries, covering much of what is now eastern Senegal and western Mali. The vast empire was eventually destroyed; in the late 11th century Berbers from the Almoravid empire (Mauritania and Morocco) moved into the region, bringing Islam. The Tekrur empire of northern Senegal, established by the Tukolor (a branch of the Fula ethnic group) and which thrived in the 9th and 10th centuries, was quickly Islamised and became an ally of the Almoravids in fighting the Ghanaian forces.

In the 13th century Sunjata Keita, the illustrious leader of the Malinké people, built the greatest West African kingdom of all – the Mali empire. By the 14th century its territory stretched from the Atlantic coast, encompassing the modern-day countries of Gambia and Senegal, across to today's Niger and Nigeria. It became a major centre of finance and Islamic learning, and was very wealthy. Evidence of this wealth was displayed when Mansa Musa, the then emperor of Mali, went on a pilgrimage to Mecca in the early 14th century: he took with him an entourage of 60,000 people and showered his hosts with gifts of gold.

### THE GAMBIA

The Gambia's official name always includes 'The', but this is often omitted in everyday situations. In this book we have usually omitted 'The' for reasons of clarity and to ensure a smooth-flowing text.

Ancient seashell mounds, which were traditional burial sites, can be found in mangrove swamps in Gambia and Senegal. More than 120 graves were found in the large manmade shell island of Diorom Boumag near Toubakouta, Senegal, which dates to between AD 730 and 1370.

Mali's influence began to wane in the mid-15th century, when it was eclipsed by the more powerful Songhai empire. Around the same time, in today's Senegal, the Wolof people established the empire of Jolof, which spread north and west to dominate the adjacent Tekrur and Serer kingdoms. However, in the mid-16th century the Jolof empire divided into a loose confederation of several separate kingdoms, including the Walo along the Senegal River and the Cayor north of the Cap Vert peninsula. This division was largely due to the growing power of the coastal states, including the kingdoms of Siné and Saloum in the area between the Saloum River and the present-day towns of Thiès and Kaolack.

Meanwhile, in northern Senegal, the Tekrur empire was invaded in the early 16th century by Fula people, under the leadership of Koli Tengela Ba. The new kingdom, Fouta Toro, expanded over the next century along the Senegal River and southwards into modern-day Guinea.

The disintegration of the Mali empire caused another migratory movement – that of the Malinké towards the valley of the Gambia River. The Malinké brought Islam with them, and became known as the Mandinka.

## FIRST EUROPEAN INCURSIONS

Meanwhile, in Europe, interest in West Africa was growing. Much of the gold transported across the Sahara eventually reached the courts and treasuries of countries such as England, France, Spain and Portugal, and by the 14th century the financial stability of these European powers depended greatly on this supply. Along with the gold came hazy reports of the wealthy empires south of the Sahara, but at this time no European had ever visited the region. (It's been suggested that the metaphorical use of Timbuktu to describe faraway places dates from this time.)

In the early 15th century Prince Henry of Portugal (known as Henry the Navigator) encouraged explorers to sail down the coast of West Africa, hoping to bypass the Arab and Muslim domination of the trans-Saharan gold trade and reach the source by sea. In 1443, Portuguese ships reached the mouth of the Senegal River, and a year later they landed on the coast of Senegal at a peninsula they named Cabo Verde, meaning Green Cape. (It is now called Cap Vert, and is the site of Dakar; it is not to be confused with the Cape Verde Islands, some 600km west in the Atlantic.) The Portuguese made contact with local chiefs on the mainland and established a trading station on Île de Gorée, a short distance off the coast.

In a series of voyages, the Portuguese pushed further around the West African coast. By 1500 they had established trading stations on the coast and some distance upstream along the Senegal and Gambia Rivers, from which slaves and commodities such as gold were shipped back to Europe.

The Senegal and Gambia Rivers, along with the Saloum and Casamance Rivers, provided major routes into the interior of Africa, and grew in strategic importance. Explorers such as Scotsman Mungo Park and Frenchman René Caillé set forth in search of Timbuktu and its fabled riches along these waterways. As the years passed, the French, English and Dutch fought with the Portuguese for control of these rivers and the resulting trade, which was predominantly in slaves.

*Ethnic Groups of the Senegambia* by Patience Sonko-Godwin describes in great detail the stories of the main peoples of Gambia and Senegal, tracing their histories back to the era of the great West African empires or earlier. This small paperback is available locally.

## TIMELINE 11th century

The Tukolor empire of Tekrur spans the Senegal River valley

## 12th–14th centuries

The Wolof people establish the Jolof empire

## 1455

The Portuguese establish trading stations along the Gambia River

## 1588

The Dutch turn the trading station on Île de Gorée into a major slave port

## THE SLAVE TRADE

Over the following centuries, West Africa's fate depended on developments in an entirely different part of the globe – the so-called New World, which included South America, the Caribbean and the south of what became the USA. Portugal had established settlements in Brazil by 1530, which grew into large commercial sugar estates between 1575 and 1600. Their expansion led to a demand for labourers, which the Portuguese met by importing slaves from West Africa – a development that was to have huge and serious repercussions throughout the continent.

Although local slavery had existed in West Africa for many centuries, the Portuguese developed the trade on a massive scale. By the 16th century other European powers became active in the trade. The French had been defying the Portuguese monopoly for some time and between 1500 and 1530 they captured hundreds of Portuguese vessels with their human cargo. England joined the trade in the mid-16th century and in 1617 Dutch traders took over the settlement on Île de Gorée. The French established La Compagnie du Cap Vert et Sénégal in 1633, one of several trading companies and the one responsible for their slave trade until 1791. In 1659 the French developed a trading station at Saint-Louis at the mouth of the Senegal River, and in 1677 took Gorée from the Dutch.

By the 1650s Portugal had been largely ousted from the coasts of present-day Gambia and Senegal. There was strong competition between the remaining traders, with frequent skirmishes over slaving stations. Fort James, on an island near the mouth of the Gambia River, was controlled by Latvian, French and Dutch traders, plus several independent 'privateers' (pirates), and changed hands eight times in 60 years before finally being secured by the English.

As the plantation economies in the New World expanded, the demand for slaves grew massively and a triangular trans-Atlantic trade route developed. Slaves were transported to the Americas, the raw materials they produced were taken to Europe, and finished goods were brought from Europe to Africa to be exchanged once again for slaves. European traders encouraged African chiefs in the coastal areas to invade neighbouring tribes and take captives, and their subsequent raids caused profound social and political change in the kingdoms of Fouta Toro, Walo and Cayor.

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, up to 20 million Africans were captured as slaves. Between a quarter and a half of this number died soon after capture, mostly during transportation, due to poor conditions and the length of the journey. Of the approximately 10 million slaves who reached the Americas, around 50% died within a few years as a result of malnourishment and inhuman working and living conditions. These figures are hotly debated by historians, as exact figures are impossible to gauge. But the debate sometimes obscures the main issue: whatever the numbers, the slave trade was undeniably cruel and inhuman, and its legacy in West Africa and many other parts of the world is still felt today.

## THE EXPANSION OF ISLAMIC INFLUENCE

As European influences grew and their control of trade tightened, the power of the old empires declined, resulting in instability among the local population. Islam filled the vacuum. Muslim faith had been introduced to

West Africa as early as the 10th century, yet had for a long time remained the religion of the wealthy and the rulers, who tolerated the practice of traditional faiths among their subjects. Elements of ancient African religion gradually found their way into West African Islam, and this mixture characterises religious practice in the region today.

The Islamic practice that has expanded in today's Senegal and Gambia takes the form of Sufism, a belief system that emphasises mystical and spiritual attributes. It also allows for the influence of holy men called marabouts, many of whom are credited with having divine powers and the ability to communicate with Allah. With the rise of Islam, the marabouts became influential figures and counterforces to the European powers, whose worst fear was a universal spread of Islam.

Islamic expansionism led to two centuries of holy wars (jihads) fought under the leadership of marabouts against the 'nonbelievers' of the region. The most famous of these wars were led by the illustrious El Hajj Omar Tall, who created a vast Islamic empire that stretched from Timbuktu (in present-day Mali) to western Senegal. Tall was a Tukolor warrior who had fought under the marabout Suliman Bal against the descendants of Koli Tengela Ba in the Fouta Toro kingdom in the 1770s. In 1820 he undertook the haj (pilgrimage to Mecca), where he was initiated into the Tijaniya brotherhood. On his return, he began building his empire.

## EUROPEAN EXPANSION

Although El Hajj Omar Tall's empire was vast, it didn't reach the coast; this region was firmly controlled by the French who now owned large settlements, notably Gorée and Saint-Louis. As the Portuguese had done before them, French settlers intermarried with the local population, and by the 1790s the considerable mixed-race population formed a veritable bourgeoisie. Saint-Louis is particularly famous for the *signares*, mixed-race women who married white traders, and to this day the town has a large mixed-race population.

Britain imposed a ban on slavery in 1807, and while Napoleon officially abolished the trade in 1815, it wasn't until 1848 that it finally stopped. This was also the time of the Napoleonic Wars (1799–1815) and tensions between Britain and France were high. The slavery ban gave Britain a good excuse to attack the old enemy – French ships off the coasts of Gambia and Senegal were frequently chased and captured by the British navy, and slaves were freed and resettled.

In 1816 Britain bought an island on the south side of the mouth of the Gambia River from a local chief. The local name was Banjul Island (meaning bamboo), but the British built a fort there and renamed it Bathurst. They declared the Gambia River and the area now known as The Gambia a British protectorate in 1820. The Gambia was administered from the British colony of Sierra Leone, further along the West African coast, which had been established as a haven for freed slaves in 1787. In 1826 Fort Bullen was built on the northern bank of the Gambia River, and in 1828 another fort was built about 200km upstream from the river mouth; this became Georgetown.

While the British built forts, the French introduced Catholic missions. However, with the slave trade at an end the colonists were forced to look for

The comprehensive website <http://webworld.unesco.org/goree> covers the history of Senegal's Île de Gorée, and includes a virtual tour of its infamous Maison des Esclaves.

'The considerable mixed-race population formed a veritable bourgeoisie'

1659

The French found Saint-Louis on a strategic island in northern Senegal

1889

Present boundaries of The Gambia set by agreement between Britain and France

1894

Following the Berlin Conference, Gambia becomes a British colony

1895

Senegal becomes part of the Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF; French West Africa)

new sources of wealth. In 1829 the British planted groundnuts (peanuts) along the Gambia River, in the hope that exports of this crop would provide an income for the fledgling protectorate.

Meanwhile the Royal Order, a French decree introduced in 1840, created administrative structures in France's West African colonies. Towns became self-governing communes with residents enjoying the same rights as their equals in France. Influence spread from Saint-Louis along the Senegal River and the governor, Baron Jacques Roger, tried to establish groundnut plantations and settlements (most notably at Richard Toll, where the ruins of his chateau can still be seen).

In the 1850s his successor, Louis Faidherbe, took a more direct approach by simply invading the lands of the Wolof (who until then had been uneasy allies of the French). He established large plantations and introduced forced labour. From the French point of view, this method was effective – he made the forces of Omar Tall, who posed a threat from the north and east, Faidherbe established a chain of forts along the Senegal River (including Bakel, Matam, Podor and Kayes), which remain today. On the peninsula opposite Île de Gorée, Faidherbe established a settlement which was named after a local chief and later became Dakar.

The 19th century saw the egalitarian principles inspired by the French Revolution of 1789 gain prominence, and the inhabitants of Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque and Dakar were awarded French citizenship in 1887.

## THE MARABOUTS

Omar Tall's forces were finally defeated by the French in 1864, but his missionary zeal inspired followers to keep fighting jihads, the so-called Marabout Wars, for another three decades. By this time, the Wolof had fervently embraced Islam and now fought fiercely against French expansionism. Notable battles included those between the French army and the Cayor Wolof, led by Lat Dior, when the French built a railway line between Dakar and Saint-Louis. The last significant Wolof battle was in 1889 at Yang-Yang (near present-day Linguère, in Senegal), where the army of Albouy Ndiaye was defeated by the French. Eventually, superior French firepower, along with a divided marabout army, allowed the French to gain control of most of Senegal and Mali.

The British in Gambia experienced similar Marabout Wars, as local followers of Omar Tall attempted to overthrow their traditional Mandinka rulers. Some of the fiercest fighting took place in western Gambia, near the British outpost of Bathurst. When the Fula entered the fray from the north, the British and French became involved in some extremely touchy diplomatic incidents. The colonial powers finally decided to cooperate to overthrow the marabouts, although limited resistance by the tenacious leader Fodi Kabba continued into the early 1900s.

The final thorn in the French colonials' side was another marabout called Amadou Bamba. By 1887 he had gained a large following, and was exiled by the French until 1907. Today, Bamba remains an iconic figure, and the brotherhood he founded – the Mouride Brotherhood – is a major cultural, economic and political force in modern Senegal. (See p197 for more details.)

## THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

The term 'Scramble for Africa' refers to the late-1870s 'land-grabbing' by several European powers, including France, Britain and Germany, which played out their battle for dominance in Europe on African soil. The scramble was triggered in 1879 when King Leopold of Belgium claimed the Congo (which later became Zaire, and recently was renamed Congo). France responded by establishing a territory in the neighbouring area, which became known as French Congo (now Congo) and Gabon. Meanwhile, the British were increasing their influence in East Africa, as part of a strategy to control the headwaters of the Nile. Germany's leader, Otto von Bismarck, also wanted 'a place in the sun' and claimed various parts of Africa, including territories that later became Togo and Cameroon.

In 1883 Britain staked a claim to much of East Africa and to territories in West Africa – such as Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana) and Nigeria. The claims of the European powers were settled at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, when most of Africa was split neatly into colonies. In 1895 France established Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF; French West Africa), comprising most of the Sahel belt, which stretched eastwards from Senegal to parts of the Sahara and North African territories.

## THE GAMBIA FALLS TO BRITAIN

Although Gambia was a British protectorate from 1820 and became a full British colony in 1886, the decision makers in London didn't really want this sliver of land surrounded by French territory. Attempts were made to exchange Gambia for land elsewhere – a common practice among the colonial powers of the time – but no matter how much the British talked up the qualities of the territory, no-one was interested. Thus Britain was lumbered with Gambia, and the little colony was almost forgotten as events in other parts of Africa and India dominated British colonial policy in the first half of the 20th century. Little wealth came out of Gambia and as a result very little 'development' was attempted – administration was limited to a few British district commissioners and the local chiefs they appointed.

In the 1950s Gambia's groundnut plantations were improved as a way to increase export earnings, and some other agricultural schemes were set up. There was little in the way of services, and by the early 1960s Gambia had fewer than 50 primary schools and only a handful of doctors. While the rest of West Africa was gaining independence, this seemed unlikely for Gambia; there was hardly any local political infrastructure and Britain was against the move. A federation with Senegal, which had just gained independence from France, was considered but came to nothing.

Around this time David Jawara, a Mandinka from the upcountry provinces, founded the People's Progressive Party (PPP). It was the first party to attract mass support from rural Mandinka Muslims, the overwhelming majority of Gambia's population. To prepare for at least partial self-government, a Gambian parliament – the House of Representatives – was instituted and elections were held in 1962, with prompt victory by Jawara's PPP.

'Little wealth came out of Gambia and as a result very little "development" was attempted'

Donald Cruise O'Brien's book *The Mourides of Senegal* is one of the most comprehensive discussions of the origins of the powerful Senegalese brotherhoods. Though published in the 1980s, it's largely still relevant to an understanding of the force of religion in Senegal today.

1960

Senegal gains independence under President Léopold Senghor

1965

The Gambia becomes independent with David Jawara as prime minister

1970

The Gambia becomes a republic following a referendum; Jawara is elected as president and changes his first name to Dawda

1981

Abdou Diouf becomes president of Senegal

## FRANCE GRABS SENEGAL

The territory of Senegal formed part of the AOF. Saint-Louis, the first French settlement in West Africa, initially became capital of the entire region, before administration was shifted to Dakar in 1902 (although Saint-Louis remained capital of Senegal).

While the four largest towns (Dakar, Gorée, Saint-Louis and Rufisque) had been seen as part of France, and had sent delegates to the French National Assembly in Paris, these delegates had usually been white or of mixed race. In 1914 the colony sent the first black delegate – Blaise Diagne. That same year, the first political party in West Africa was established, and several Senegalese intellectuals went to France to study. Among them was Léopold Senghor; he became the first African secondary-school teacher in France. During this period, he began writing poems and founded *Présence Africaine*, a magazine promoting the values of African culture.

After WWII France continued to regard its overseas possessions (including Senegal, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire) as territories that were part of the mother country, rather than mere colonies. Though the French National Assembly in Paris was still the political centre, each territory was also granted its own assembly. Senghor returned from France and became the elected candidate in Dakar. At first he was regarded as an unlikely choice: as well as being young, Catholic and a member of the minority Serer group, he spoke little Wolof, was married to a white French woman and was somewhat aloof from his people. He was, however, remarkably astute, and went on to become one of Africa's most influential 20th-century politicians.

Despite initially being perceived as out of touch with his constituents, Senghor became known as a man of the people. He introduced social reforms such as the abolition of forced labour and improvements in education. In 1948 he founded the Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais. Meanwhile, the marabouts had become increasingly involved in politics, and through the 1950s Senghor made several deals with leading figures. He allowed them partial autonomy and control of the lucrative groundnut economy in return for their public support, which ensured safe votes from their followers in the rural areas.

## FRANCE'S AFRICAN TERRITORIES – INDEPENDENCE OR FEDERATION?

In the 1950s the potential independence of France's African colonies became a major issue. Senghor was in favour of autonomy, but promoted the idea of a strong federal union of all French territories in Africa, to prevent them from being Balkanised – divided, weakened and at war with one another. His rival was Côte d'Ivoire's leader, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, who wanted French West Africa divided; Houphouët-Boigny feared that within a federal union the richer territories (such as Côte d'Ivoire) would have to subsidise the poorer ones.

In the late 1950s Senghor gained support from French Sudan (present-day Mali), Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso) and Dahomey (present-day Benin) to form a single union, the Mali Federation. But in 1958 General Charles de Gaulle came to power in France and offered

the overseas territories a stark choice: complete independence and a total break from France; or limited self-government within a union still controlled by France.

## DE GAULLE'S SWITCH – INDEPENDENCE FOR SENEGAL

Upper Volta and Dahomey withdrew from the Mali Federation under pressure from both France and Côte d'Ivoire, leaving Senegal and Mali as the only members. In 1959 these two countries demanded complete independence, not as individual countries, but as an independent union. De Gaulle realised he stood to lose more than he might gain and switched tack suddenly. On 20 June 1960 Senegal and Mali, while remaining within the French union, became a completely independent federation. Only two months later, the Senegal-Mali union broke up. French West Africa had become nine separate republics.

Senghor became the first president of Senegal and, after initial problems with students and the labour unions, he managed to consolidate his position; throughout the 1970s, his party, now renamed Parti Socialiste (PS), remained in power. In 1980, after 20 years as president, he did what no other African head of state had done before – voluntarily stepped down. His hand-picked successor, Prime Minister Abdou Diouf, took over on 1 January 1981.

## THROWING OFF THE BRITISH YOKE

In 1965 The Gambia became independent, with David Jawara as prime minister, although Britain's Queen Elizabeth II remained titular head of state. Bathurst, now renamed Banjul, became the country's capital. Although the tiny nation appeared to have no viable economic future, two events occurred that enabled it to survive and even prosper. For a decade after independence, the world price for groundnuts increased significantly, raising the country's GNP almost threefold. The second event had an even more resounding effect – Gambia became a tourist destination. In 1966 the number of tourists visiting Gambia was recorded as 300. By the end of the 1960s, this number had risen to several thousand; by 1976 it had reached 25,000 per year.

Economic growth translated into political confidence. In 1970 The Gambia became a fully independent republic. Prime Minister Jawara became president and changed his name from David to Dawda. Opposition parties were tolerated, and there was a relatively free press. Still, the PPP was deeply conservative and Jawara's opponents accused his government of benign neglect and financial corruption, claiming that the president, ministers and other PPP politicians retained power through a complex web of largesse and patronage, rather than through any genuine level of public support.

## THE DIOUF ERA

In 1980 and 1981 Dawda Jawara's leadership was threatened by two attempted coups. Both times, he clung onto power, thanks to military help from the Senegalese army. Senegalese president Abdou Diouf sent in troops and, after a considerable amount of bloodshed, Jawara's leadership was ensured. This cooperation was acknowledged and formalised when the Senegambia Confederation was established in early 1982.

During WWI 13,339 Senegalese *tirailleurs* (soldiers) were recruited to fight in the French army against Germany. Many of these *tirailleurs* perished for their supposed 'motherland'. Sembène Ousmane's moving film, *Camp de Thiaroye*, tells of an uprising of returned *tirailleurs*, whose request of due payment was violently quenched by the French.

'The world price for groundnuts increased significantly, raising the country's GNP almost threefold'

1981

Five hundred people are killed in The Gambia when Senegalese troops are called in to suppress a coup

1982

The Gambia and Senegal form a loose confederation called Senegambia, which collapses seven years later

1989

In Senegal, the separatist Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) gains momentum

1989

Conflict erupts between Senegal and Mauritania over grazing rights



In 1983 Diouf's PS won Senegal's national elections with over 83% of the vote. Yet only two years later, he felt his position was at risk when his major opponent, Abdoulaye Wade, attempted to unite various opposition parties. The result: Diouf banned the organisation. In 1988 Wade contested the presidency, but when violence erupted during the campaign Wade was arrested and charged with intent to subvert the government. Diouf won the election with 73% of the vote against Wade's 26%, but rumours of rigging were rampant. Wade was given a one-year suspended sentence and left for France.

By this time the Senegambia Confederation was in trouble and, in 1989, it was dissolved completely. But while Diouf was contending with this break-up and calls for political reform, he had two other major problems to deal with: one was a dispute with Mauritania, and the other was the separatist movement in the southern region of Casamance.

There had been periodic calls for independence in Casamance for many years, but they came to a head in 1989, when rebels from the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) started attacking government installations (see p229 for further details).

Abdoulaye Wade returned from political exile in 1990. In response to his return, huge crowds took to the streets chanting for *sopi* (change). In an attempt at appeasement, Wade was made minister of state. He later resigned his position to stand against Diouf in the presidential election, and though Diouf won with 58% against Wade's 32%, Wade's popularity was on the rise. Yet in the following parliamentary elections, Diouf's PS still won over two-thirds of the seats. This led to violent protests in many parts of the country, particularly in Casamance where anti-Diouf feeling still ran high. Large numbers of troops were once again sent into the region. After long negotiations, another ceasefire was declared in June 1993 and further talks saw full peace return to Casamance – at least for the time being.

Antigovernment protest continued in other parts of the country, and Diouf responded with unpopular austerity measures. In 1993 Wade was arrested again. He was accused of conspiracy and was tried in March 1994 on charges relating to the murder of a state official. Charges were dismissed in 1995, and Wade was released and reinstated in government.

### THE 1980S: GAMBIAN DISCONTENTS

The coup attempts of 1980 and 1981, staged by factions of the army, were major signs of discontent over the PPP's grip on Gambia. When both were thwarted with the help of Senegalese troops, Jawara acknowledged this debt by announcing that Gambian and Senegalese armed forces would be fully integrated. In 1982 the Senegambia Confederation came into effect. Under this agreement Senegal would provide military protection for Gambia (in other words, for Jawara), while Gambia made some noncommittal noises about an eventual united Senegambian country.

The confederation, however, lacked popular support. The Gambian Mandinka who formed the PPP's power base saw it as a Wolof takeover. Smuggling was another problem: high customs duties in Senegal made some imported goods there more expensive, while prices for groundnuts in the two countries varied.

The 1980s saw mounting discontent towards Jawara and his government, though this didn't endanger his victory in the 1982 and 1987 elections. Yet at the end of the 1980s, the tide began to turn. Groundnut prices continued to fall, and agricultural subsidies and spending on public services were cut as part of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) restructure. The government made few attempts to alleviate this situation, and was seen by many Gambians as being too far removed from the everyday problems faced by the populace.

In the political arena, there were a couple more coup attempts made, allegedly with support from Senegalese opposition figures, and in 1989 the Senegambia Confederation was dissolved. Both Gambia and Senegal imposed severe border restrictions, and tensions ran high well into 1990. After a year, relations between the countries improved again, and a treaty of friendship and cooperation was signed in 1991.

### TIME UP FOR JAWARA

Despite their many obvious failures, President Jawara and the PPP were re-elected for a sixth term in April 1992. To the outside world Jawara appeared to remain popular. It came as a surprise, therefore, when on 22 July 1994 a protest by soldiers over late salaries and harsh treatment by Nigerian officers (during peacekeeping duties in Liberia and Sierra Leone) turned into a coup d'état. The coup leader was Yahya Jammeh, a young lieutenant.

A new military government was hastily formed, headed by the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC). It was composed of senior military officers, most of whom had trained in Britain and the USA, and civilian ministers who had served under Jawara's government. Jammeh initially promised that the AFPRC would be back in the barracks within a few months, but in October 1994 he announced he would stay in power at least until 1998.

Despite international pressure, Jammeh was unrepentant. Although still only 29 years old and completely inexperienced, he remained firmly at the helm and from the start implemented a leadership style marked by stark hostility towards journalists and members of the opposition.

Following a decline in tourist numbers throughout the '90s, Jammeh pragmatically switched tack in 1995 and announced elections would be held the following year. In response to this in March 1995, the British Foreign Office advised tourists that Gambia was safe again, and tourism picked up.

### JAMMEH TAKES CHARGE

Jammeh and the AFPRC remained in control and a new constitution ushering in the Second Republic was introduced in 1996.

Presidential elections were held in the same year, and four candidates competed for the post. Yahya Jammeh was one of them, representing the APRC (the former AFPRC, now neatly renamed the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction). He emerged as the clear winner with 56% of the vote, completing his smooth transition from minor army officer to head of state in just over two years.

In January 1997 the APRC also dominated the election for Gambia's national assembly, consolidating President Jammeh's hold on power. His

*African Civilization*  
Revisited: *From Antiquity to Modern Times* (1990) is only one of many accessible works on African history by the influential writer Basil Davidson.

'After long negotiations, another ceasefire was declared in June 1993 and further talks saw full peace return to Casamance'

1994

After a military coup in Gambia, Yahya Jammeh becomes the new president

2000

At least 12 people are shot dead in Gambia during student demonstrations against the alleged torture and murder of a student

2000

Abdoulaye Wade becomes president of Senegal in democratic elections

2002

Some 1863 passengers are killed when the Senegalese ferry *MS Joala* capsizes

'Claims of corruption, embezzlement of public funds and human-rights violations appeared in several international magazines'

opponents claimed the election and the constitution were manipulated to disadvantage the fledgling opposition parties. Despite these claims and other complaints from within the country and abroad, President Jammeh appeared to remain popular with the Gambian people. Most saw him as a fresh new force, keen to sweep away the lethargy and corruption of the old days. To consolidate this support, Jammeh announced a series of impressive schemes to rebuild the country's infrastructure and economy. A new airport was constructed and a national TV station opened. New clinics and schools were promised for the upcountry provinces.

But in the Gambian parliament, opposition members continued to question the new president's rule, and claims of corruption, embezzlement of public funds and human-rights violations appeared in several international magazines. Jammeh responded by intimidating political opponents and media organisations that dared to criticise – a reaction that characterises his rule to this day. Meanwhile, Jammeh quietly focused on building his personal fortune, acquiring a series of properties and businesses (including the Kairaba Hotel at Kololi and the Sindola Hotel near Kanilai), and becoming one of the richest men in Gambia.

In October 2001 Jammeh won his second five-year term as president, taking 53% of the vote against second-placed Ousainou Darboe's 33%. International observers proclaimed the elections to be free and fair, but Darboe's United Democratic Party (UDP) accused Jammeh of rigging the result. In response the UDP boycotted parliamentary elections held in January 2002. As a result, Jammeh's APRC won comfortably, with more than two-thirds of seats not even contested.

### WADE'S SOPI CAMPAIGN

Senegal's political situation was similar to that of Gambia's when, in 1998, when the PS won parliamentary polls in a landslide, also amid accusations of election fraud. It was clear that opposition to Diouf's leadership was growing, partly fuelled by worries over the ongoing rebellion in the Casamance region. The pressure on Diouf was mounting and, in February 2000, he finally gave up his seat of power when Wade's spectacular *sopi* campaign gained him a historic victory.

If Senegal and the rest of the world were stunned by the electoral defeat of an African incumbent of such long standing, even more unusual was Diouf's acceptance of the result and the peaceful transfer of power. The people of Senegal were rightly proud of this affirmation of the strength of democracy in their country and, in January 2001, more than 90% voted for a new constitution which allowed the formation of opposition parties, gave enhanced status to the prime minister, and reduced the president's term of office from seven years to five.

### SENEGAL TODAY

After such a monumental shift in the balance of power, change in Senegal was disappointingly slow. Another peace accord between separatist forces and the government, signed in 2001, failed to quench uprisings entirely, as divisions and leadership changes within the rebel movement fuelled renewed insurgences among some factions. In 2002 the country (and Casamance in particular) suffered a huge tragedy when the MS *Joola*, the

ferry connecting Dakar and the Casamance capital, Ziguinchor, capsized due to dangerous overloading, leaving almost 2000 people dead. The shock of the tragedy prompted the government to look seriously into issues of security in transport and at public events. It is also thought that Wade's subsequent dismissal of his entire government was related to their handling of the catastrophe.

In 2004 there was finally good news from the Casamance, when yet another peace deal between the MFDC and Wade's government started showing results. The situation in southern Senegal began to calm down. However, the president's controversial decision to arrest former prime minister Idrissa Seck sparked clashes between Seck's supporters and police and sent the country into a flurry of political debate. The former prime minister was accused of undermining state security and embezzling funds while working as mayor of the commune Thiès. In February 2006 Seck was released and all charges were dropped, probably in order to strengthen the Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS; Senegalese Democratic Party) in good time before the next presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007.

### THE GAMBIA TODAY

While Senegal began to prepare for a peaceful election campaign, signs from Gambia were increasingly worrying.

Jammeh's government had always had an uneasy relationship with the press, but things reached an all-time low when, in December 2004, prominent journalist Deyda Hydera was assassinated only days after expressing his opposition to a controversial media law that granted the government powers to jail journalists accused of libel. Following the murder, an increasing climate of repression developed.

In December 2005 Senegal-Gambia relations suffered a new low, when Gambia decided to double the charges of the ferry service used by most Senegalese truck drivers to transport goods between the Casamance and northern Senegal. Senegal's drivers retaliated by blocking the borders and circumventing Gambia altogether. The economic effects were dramatic for both countries. Several attempts by Wade to resolve the issue were blocked by Gambia's head of state, and it was only when Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo brokered talks in October 2005 that tariffs were reduced to their former level and the borders were reopened.

In March 2006 international observers were once again alerted to the political situation in Gambia, when several high-ranking military officers were arrested on claims of an attempted coup d'état – one of several such claims made by Jammeh during his time in power. Occurring only a few months before the presidential polls, this was widely interpreted as a way of 'cleansing' the government of rivals, and seems indicative of the way elections might be handled in future.

The name Senegal is thought to be derived from the Wolof term '*sunu gal*', meaning 'boat'.

2004

New Gambian law allows the jailing of journalists found guilty of libel; days later a critic of the law is shot dead

2004

A peace deal is reached between the Senegalese government and the separatist forces of the MFDC in Casamance

2005

Senegal's former prime minister Idrissa Seck is jailed, to be released a few months later

2006

Gambia's government says a planned military coup has been foiled

# The Culture

## THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

Skimming any glossy holiday brochure about Senegal, you'll sooner or later stumble across the term *teranga*, meaning 'hospitality'. Senegal takes great pride in being the 'Land of Teranga', the national football team is called 'Lions of Teranga', and plenty of hotels and restaurants have adopted the name. Much of this is promotional hype, but as these things go, it's indeed rooted in that proverbial kernel of truth. The same goes for Gambia's colourful descriptions as the 'Smiling Coast'. In both countries, people tend to be open and welcoming towards visitors, and a stranded stranger will quickly be lent a helping hand, be invited for meals or offered a bed for the night.

However, in busy tourist areas it can be hard to tell the difference between true hospitality and a 'con job', devised to trick you into some unplanned spending. Tourism, and the power of the tourist dollar, has gradually eroded some of the original codes of conduct, and not every offer of *teranga* might come from the heart. The further you get away from the resort zones, the more 'real' society gets, and you can relax your shoulders and practise your rudimentary Wolof, Mandinka or French – people will be keen to teach you their language.

In Senegal and Gambia, conversation is the key to local culture, and the key to conversation is a great sense of humour and a quick-witted tongue. Especially in Senegal, people love talking, teasing, and testing you out, and the better you slide into the conversational game, the easier you'll get around. Someone mocks your habits? Don't tense up, retaliate with a clever remark, and you're likely to be on your way to an entertaining evening. You've gathered the courage to try your first feeble *mbalax* dance steps, and your humble attempts at 'going local' are greeted with noisy amusement? Don't blush and hide in the corner – join in the hilarity and keep copying the gyrating hips around you. People don't mean harm, and the ability to laugh at yourself is just as important an item to bring with you as your malaria pills and T-shirts.

Having mastered the art of conversation, there's only one other crucial ground rule: don't hurry. If you're on holiday, you're likely to be positively inclined towards the idea of turtle's pace; if you're on business, the slow speed of society can be frustrating – if you keep fighting it. Senegal and Gambia are governed by a great paradox of time – the more you relax, the quicker you'll get things done. Fit into the rhythm of the temporal tide, and you won't have quite such a rocky ride.

## DAILY LIFE

### The Extended Family

Visitors to Africa are often struck by the staggering size of most families, and the importance parental ties play in a person's life. While in the Western world the nuclear family is the usual unit of reference, in most African cultures individuals are closely tied to their extended family, including uncles, aunts, and distant cousins. This network widens even more in polygamous families, which still account for the majority of marriages in Senegal and Gambia (see p40).

Unmarried children, particularly women, stay at their parents' home until they wed, which is when men found their own household, and women join that of their husband. Marrying is an expensive business,

and many men don't have the necessary means at their disposal to take this step until they are in their mid-20s. It's therefore not unusual (nor discreditable) for men of this age to still occupy a room in their parents' house. It's also common for a man who enjoys greater financial success than his parents to invite them to move into his home, thus bringing the whole big family back together.

In case of a divorce, the woman often rejoins her family, bringing her children with her. Single women, single-mother households or even the households of young female students that are common in the Western world are virtually unheard of in Gambia and Senegal.

Relationships between family members are clearly defined and govern a person's responsibilities towards another relative, his or her rights over someone else, and the respect one owes a next of kin. Generally, elder relatives are to be treated with the greatest deference, and aunts and uncles are to be respected like one's own mother and father. Children are expected to help in the house, and will interrupt recreation to run some errands for a family member.

Having to fulfil the expectations of a large group of relatives is an enormous responsibility – just ask any emigrant from Senegal or Gambia who lives abroad (many families in the region have at least one family member who has emigrated to Europe or America). The meagre earnings of an expatriate in the West never belong to him or her alone, but are to be shared with those who have stayed at home. This puts enormous strains on the émigré, and many are reluctant to return home as they feel they can't fulfil financial expectations.

On the other hand, family solidarity means that elderly people will always be looked after by kin, and children are raised in a family environment even if both parents work. Also, there is no alienation between generations, as the young and old are in permanent contact with one another.

These traditional family relations remain unchanged in rural regions more than in cities. However, as many young men leave their villages to seek work in the cities or abroad, some rural communities show a worrying absence of men.

## Education

One of the much-hyped UN Millennium Goals for global development stated that by 2010, every child in the world should have access to education, at least at primary level. This seems a big ask in Gambia

Anyone who has ever travelled by battered bush taxi and been entertained by the lively conversations of the local passengers will love Moussa Touré's hilarious movie *TGV*, which is set in one such clapped-out vehicle.

### JOKING COUSINS

Did this young man really just call his elder an uncivilised, bean-eating descendant of a lowlife? And how on earth did he get away with the insult? Just when you thought you understood the hierarchies of respect in Senegal and Gambia, along comes the 'joking cousin' and turns everything upside-down. All across West Africa, this social practice of mockery binds family members, such as cross cousins, and entire ethnic groups into an entertaining bond that allows, and even requires them to trade insults – offence taking is not allowed. And so you'll come across a Fula mocking the habits of his Serer neighbour, a member of the Ndiaye family dissing a stranger called Diop – no matter that he just met him – and a Diallo calling his brother-in-law of the Ba clan his slave. This sanctioned rudeness is hilarious and people get fantastically creative with their insults. Far more than just a game, these relationships can be a way of easing any real tension between neighbouring ethnic groups, and can thus prevent conflict. As a traveller, you can make a deep impression and ease your way into the culture by participating in the exchange – but it means 'adopting' a Senegalese family yourself first, otherwise you're just insulting people.

## CODES OF INTERACTION

### Greetings

Extended greetings are an important part of social interaction and many doors will open for you if you are capable of exchanging simple greeting phrases in the local language. Even a few words make a big difference. (Some basic words and phrases are provided on p305.)

Most areas are Islamic, and upon entering someone's home, announce your arrival with a confident '*Salaam aleikum*' (peace be with you), and your presence will be acknowledged with '*Aleikum salaam*' (and peace be with you).

This is followed by inquiries about your health, the health of your family, the state of your affairs and those of your children. You're never expected to give an honest answer at this point. In Gambia things are always fine; in Senegal the response is always '*Ça va*'. Never mind the real troubles that might be plaguing you – these can be mentioned later in the conversation.

Although it's not necessary for foreigners to go through the whole routine, it's important to use greetings whenever possible. Even if you're just changing money, negotiating a taxi fee or asking directions, precede your request with a simple, 'Hello, how are you? Can you help me please?', rather than plunging right in.

### Shaking Hands

You'll shake a lot of hands during your stay. Particularly for men it's important to shake hands with other men when entering and leaving a gathering. In social settings you are expected to go around the room, greet everyone and shake hands with those present, even if it takes a few minutes. Local women don't always greet their male peers with handshakes, and some Muslim elders prefer not to shake hands with women. Don't take offence if someone leaves your outstretched arm unanswered – they're probably following religious principles.

### Deference

In traditional societies, older people, those of superior social status and trained professionals are treated with deference. Thus, when you're travelling and you meet people in authority such as immigration officers, police and village chiefs, it is very important to be polite. Officials are normally courteous, but manners, patience and a friendly smile are essential to ensure a pleasant exchange. Undermining an official's authority or insulting their ego will only tie you up in red tape. When visiting small villages, it's polite to go and see the chief to announce yourself and ask for permission before setting up camp or wandering through the village. You will rarely be refused.

Eye contact is usually avoided, especially between men and women in the Sahel: if a local doesn't look you in the eye during a conversation, often they're being polite, not cold.

and Senegal. Both countries have state education systems established by their colonial powers, and in theory, primary education is available to all children. In reality, it's family income, rather than academic availability, that determines which children go to school and for how long. Low-income families may not be able to afford school fees or extra items such as uniforms and books (especially if children wish to go beyond primary school). Those who find themselves in the most drastic circumstances may also keep their children from entering school, as their help is needed to generate income. The lack of government funds for education compounds the problem. Classes are often large, sometimes holding up to 100 pupils in spaces intended for half the amount; teachers are underpaid; and resources, such as books, paper and pens usually need to be shared.

Boys generally continue their education to higher levels than girls. While numbers are fairly equal during the early years of primary school,

### Giving Money

As a foreigner travelling to Africa, you're usually regarded as a rich person, and though you might be struggling to pay the bills at home, you are comparatively wealthy in a society where many live well under the headline. You're likely to be met with frequent demands for money, and need to decide when to give and when to decline a request. Don't give upon any request. Some can be outright scams, and you don't want to establish yourself as a money-giver from the outset. But do be generous, especially if eliciting services. If you've been offered food or a bed for the night, you should repay the kindness, either by contributing food, or by handing the host some money when it's time for goodbyes. Just consider what you'd have paid for a similar meal or hotel room, and judge the amount you give from there.

Giving money is usually done discreetly, and sometimes without discussing amounts or even demanding payment upfront. If people help you out, they will usually expect to be paid something at the end. Consider if someone has had to pay their own transport to meet you – you should give them the amount before they go back home.

Especially in city areas, you're likely to see a lot of beggars. Dakar's streets in particular are full of *talibe* – boy students sent out to beg by their religious teachers – or street kids. You'll probably feel embarrassed by their demands, and certainly can't give to everyone. But giving loose change occasionally isn't a bad thing. In Islamic culture, making small gifts to the poor is part of religious practice, and you'll see plenty of locals who own a lot less spare some change, especially on Friday, the holy day.

If you visit families or remote villages, tobacco, tea and perfume are appreciated, as are kola nuts.

### Dress

Especially on Fridays, the most important day of the week in Muslim countries, and on public holidays, you'll find the streets filled with people in shimmering, embroidered garments, often of stunning elegance. These billowing robes are called *boubous*. A *grand boubou* for men consists of a flowing robe that reaches to the ground. It's worn with baggy trousers and a shirt underneath. A woman's *boubou* is similar, though often more colourful, and worn with a wraparound skirt and matching headscarf. *Boubous* can be as simple or elaborate as occasion requires; one worn for a celebration such as a wedding should dazzle in the sunlight and rustle when you walk – it'll probably be made from a beaten, waxed, tie-dyed fabric.

In general, people in Gambia and Senegal place immense importance on appearance, and try to dress in the best clothes they can. Unless combined with a matching, tailored top, a wraparound skirt or sarong, so favoured by Western women travelling to Africa, is usually only worn around the house by local women. Travellers turning up in tatty clothes, shorts and simple T-shirts are frowned upon, especially in rural areas.

few girls complete their primary exams, and even fewer carry on to secondary level. This is largely due to family values. If there's not enough money to send every child to school, education is thought to benefit boys more, while the girls are valued in the home. At secondary or university level, girls often drop out if they are getting married or having children.

However, in both Gambia and Senegal several government initiatives try to redress the balance. In Gambia, efforts have been made to increase the number of schools, as well as proposals to offer free schooling to girls. In Senegal, there has been an additional focus on the preschool age, with a countrywide programme of building state-funded nurseries.

Despite recent initiatives, literacy rates in Gambia and Senegal remain low. Official figures from 2003 show Senegal has a literacy rate of 40.2%; Gambia's is 40.1%. For girls, rates are usually 15% to 20% lower than for boys.

Bitter irony: the valley of the Senegal River, where the French colonialists were strongly opposed by the armies of El Hajj Omar Tall, is today a region where entire male communities of villages have emigrated to France.



## POLYGAMOUS MARRIAGES

When singer Youssou N'Dour married a second wife in 2006, in the private, hushed-up fashion that governs all of his personal affairs, he set Senegal's paparazzi machine in motion, the way only he can. In the following months, the debate about polygamy took up plenty of column space in Senegal's glossies. Young women were dismayed at the iconic singer's move, having seen his monogamous status as an influential example. The defenders of polygamy (mainly men) rejoiced, welcoming Youssou back into the more traditional fold.

The Holy Quran, which guides the lives of the vast Muslim majority of Gambia and Senegal, allows men to take up to four wives, normally on the condition that they can provide equally for and love all of them. And that's really the crux of the issue – can one equally love four women? Most women would say no, pointing an accusing finger at the many men who bring a pretty young wife into the family home once they've 'tired' of their first, aging, spouse.

Western women generally find it inconceivable to share their husband with another wife and, though Africa's women are generally resigned to this reality, few welcome it with joy, secretly praying that their partner will proudly spell the word 'monogamy' when asked about his choice at the civil wedding.

To the men who might dream of such rights, a word of warning: managing a polygamous household can be hard work. Wives can be jealous of one another, and resentment is often spread from the mothers to their children. All of this means a family home where tensions brew easily, and it's the head of the house who is expected to calm escalating situations.

## Weddings

On a weekend stroll around the streets of Dakar, or any city in Senegal and Gambia, you are bound to pass groups of elegant women, decked out in their finest *boubous* and most delicate heels. They may be gathered in front of a house on rows of plastic chairs, or around amplifiers that carry the latest *mbalax* tunes or the sounds of a griot. These are wedding parties. There's always a wedding on somewhere, and the celebrations are mainly women's business. They meet and chat, dance and laugh, cook, serve food from huge pots, and eat, while the men go about the more serious business of 'tying the marriage' at the mosque. In the Muslim cultures of Senegal and Gambia, weddings are at least as much about the families as about the couple itself. The male relatives of the groom will offer kola nuts to the parents of the bride, demanding her in marriage. If the offer is accepted, they will convene at the mosque around 5pm, while the bride and groom remains elsewhere. Muslim religious marriages are sometimes performed without the husband-to-be. In fact, it's possible for parents to marry their son who is residing in Europe from home – a phone call will tell him about his new status.

Among the Tukulor, it's common for cousins to be married to one another, although incidences of this tradition are beginning to decline, particularly in urban settings, where children increasingly demand a choice in the arrangement of their marriage.

Gifts are important at weddings in the region and can become costly for the families involved. The groom's family should shower the bride and her parents with money, rolls of fabric and household items to display their social and economic status. The exchange of gifts is also a means of financial redistribution. If you receive large presents on your big day, you're supposed to double the expense when it's the donor's turn to celebrate. Women often form 'party circles', attending each other's weddings and keeping close track of the value of gifts.

For most of the day, the bride will wear a relatively simple dress, though especially in urban settings, she will change into the rustling folds of a

white wedding dress for the reception, which is a Western-style celebration complete with wedding cake, drinks and music mainly attended by the younger generations. The elderly relatives remain in one of the houses, celebrating separately.

## POPULATION

When travelling around The Gambia and Senegal, the different architecture, dress and customs make it easy to recognise that the countries' national boundaries are arbitrary, decided purely on a colonial drawing board. The territory was previously home to several indigenous empires that rose and fell throughout the centuries. To this day, the cultural and social practices that emerged in their wake, together with the ethnic groups associated with those empires, determine life in the region.

## Ethnic Groups of The Gambia & Senegal

### WOLOF

The Wolof, who are usually Muslim, are the dominant ethnic group of the region, accounting for 16% of the population in The Gambia and 43% in Senegal. Their language has become the lingua franca in both countries. Wolof culture was largely defined during the days of the 14th-century Jolof empire, which later split into several smaller kingdoms, including those of Walo and Cayor. Today, the Wolof are particularly concentrated in the regions of those ancient empires, notably in the central area to the north and east of Dakar, and along the coast. Traditionally farmers and traders, the Wolof today control a great deal of commerce, especially in Senegal. Smaller ethnic groups may sometimes complain about an increasing 'Wolofisation' of their culture, via music and language, yet few are the people that aren't glad for a unifying local tongue, or those that refuse the fever of the *mbalax*, a Wolof rhythm.

### MANDINKA & MALINKÉ

The Mandinka live mainly in Gambia, where they constitute 42% of the population. Some are also at home in the Senegalese regions bordering The Gambia (such as the Casamance). The Mandinka form part of the Mande cultural groups, that also include the Malinké and Bambara in Mali. All Mande groups once belonged to the vast 13th-century Mali empire that spanned West Africa. Today, Mande surnames still tell of the social standing each family held in the days of their great ruler, Sunjata Keita. The Mande dialect of Gambia's Mandinka differs strongly from the Malinké spoken in Mali. The Mandinka are thought to have migrated to the Gambia region between the 13th and early 16th centuries, and to have brought Islam with them. The origin of the popular Mande kora instrument is believed to lie with the Gambian Mandinka.

### FULA

The Fula (also known as Peul, Fulbe or Fulani) are an ethnic group consisting of various subgroups spread across West Africa, as far east as Sudan and as far south as Ghana and Nigeria. In Gambia around 18% of the population is Fula; in Senegal 24%. Their language, Pulaar (or Fulfulde), is the strongest unifying factor of the diverse groups that make up the Fula.

Traditionally the Fula were nomadic cattle herders, and the constant search for grazing land partly explains their wide dispersal across the region. The early adoption of Islam by some Fula branches also contributed to their dispersal. Converts spread the religion throughout West Africa

'The countries' national boundaries are arbitrary, decided purely on a colonial drawing board'

and created several Muslim theocracies in northern Nigeria and Guinea. While most Fula groups have been sedentary for centuries, the majority maintain a strong attachment to cattle, and the presence of large cowherds is usually a sign of Fula residence.

In Senegal, Fula groups are mainly found around the Haute Casamance and Kedougou, as well as in Fouta Toro in the north, where the Tukolor, a sub-branch of the Fula is the dominant community.

### Tukolor

The Tukolor people, constituting around 10% of the population in Senegal, are a culturally distinctive branch of the Fula. Their cultural roots date back to the Tekkur empire, a 9th-century kingdom that occupied a large area in the Senegal River zone (the Fouta Toro region). This is still where the largest concentration of Tukolor live. The Tukolor embraced Islam early, in the 10th or 11th century, when the religion was first carried south across the Sahara from Morocco, and played a major role in spreading the religion to other ethnic groups. The most famous Tukolor leader, El Hajj Omar Tall, built a vast Islamic empire in the mid-19th century that reached as far as Segou in Mali.

### SERER

The Serer, representing around 14% of Senegal's population, are concentrated in the Siné-Saloum region of Senegal, in central Senegal, and just across the border in northwest Gambia. They are thought to have migrated from southern Senegal in the 16th century and in some areas they have intermarried with the Mandinka or Wolof people, or adopted their languages. The Serer refused Islamisation for a long time; their 11th-century refusal to succumb to the north African Almoravids led them to migrate to the regions of Baol, Siné and Saloum, where they established important small kingdoms. Today, many Serer have adopted Christian or Muslim faith, and their region is renowned for the peaceful cohabitation of both religious communities.

### DIOLA

The Diola (also spelt Jola) live in southern Senegal, in the Casamance area, and in southwestern Senegal, from where they spread as far as Guinea-Bissau. In Gambia, around 10% of the population are Diola, compared with 5% in Senegal. The Diola preserve a strong spirit of independence, partly inspired by their differences from their neighbours. They are one of the few ethnic groups in the region whose society is not hierarchical but segmented and flexible, and they have largely rejected Islam, preferring either their own traditional beliefs or conversion to Christianity.

Due to the lack of a tradition in oral history present among the more hierarchically organised groups, their origins are slightly obscure. It is thought that they probably lived in the area for many centuries; their territory used to reach as far as the Gambia River but they were pushed south with the 13th- and 16th-century Mandinka migration.

### SERAHULI

The Serahuli live in the eastern part of Senegal and far eastern Gambia. Almost exclusively Muslim, they are also known as Soninke, and live in several other countries in the Sahel including Mali and Burkina Faso. Soninke is also the Mandinka word for 'king', and the battles of the late 19th century between traditional Serahuli rulers and Islamic leaders were often called the Soninke-Marabout Wars. The origins of the Serahuli are

### BUKUT: A DIOLA MASKING TRADITION *John Graham*

The Diola people, who live in the Casamance region of Senegal and the southwestern parts of Gambia, have a long history of using masks made from plant fibre in a male initiation ceremony called the Bukut.

The Bukut takes place every 20 to 25 years and involves the gaining of knowledge and social status by a generation of young Diola men. Preparations for the Bukut start months in advance, as the celebrations entail huge feasts involving the sacrifice of many cattle. It is during these preparations that mothers compose songs that are sung by the initiated during a ritual involving the passing of cloth called Buyeet. Each youth has his own song, which will not be sung again in public until his death.

Distinctive woven-cane masks called Ejumbi, which have tubular eyes and are surmounted by a pair of massive cattle horns, are worn by some initiates when they return from the sacred forest. Not all initiates wear these masks – only those who are believed to possess special powers of clairvoyance. Other types of mask include the Fulundim, a cloth mask decorated with mirrors, beads, buttons and cowries, and the Gatombol, an abstract costume of plant material.

The masks are created by the initiates with the help of tribal elders and have retained their traditional form, although their construction can now incorporate the use of enamel paint and plastic fringing.

Though it has adapted to Christianity and Islam, the Bukut represents Diola identity and is still considered a very important event.

unclear. They may have migrated to this area after the break-up of the ancient Songhaï empire in present-day Mali at the end of the 15th century. Another theory has it that they have been in the region for longer, and are the descendants of the original Ghana Empire.

### OTHER GROUPS

Minor groups in Senegal include the Bassari and the Bédik, largely animist or Christian, who live in the remote southeastern part of Senegal and have maintained a very strong, individual culture known for its impressive masked dances and initiation ceremonies.

The Lebu, Senegal's famous fishermen, are another distinct group, living almost exclusively around Yoff outside Dakar and along the coast. In Gambia, the Aku people (p44) are similar to the Krio found in other parts of West Africa.

Both Senegal and Gambia have significant Mauritanian and Lebanese communities, which are often involved in trade.

### Social Structures

Most of the ancient West African empires were based on a clearly defined hierarchical system. Senegal's main cultural group the Wolof, as well as the Tukolor and Mandinka groups, are organised by such a pyramidal structure. Though economic success, education or relations abroad contribute, these traditional systems define social interaction to a large extent, and family surnames still largely reflect a person's place in society.

At the top of the pecking order sit the 'freeborn', ancient families of nobles and warriors that formed the traditional ruling elite. Slightly lower, though still freeborn, are farmers and traders. Lower down the scale are the artisans – blacksmiths, leather workers, woodcarvers and griots – occupational groups whose status is defined by their traditional profession. Though a child bearing a blacksmith's surname may never work metal, he is still a blacksmith by birth and in theory has the 'right' to exercise his parent's métier.

The Ceddo, Senegal's ancient dreadlocked, alcohol-drinking, grigri-wearing warriors – both fearless and fearsome – have a solid place in popular mythology. They represent precolonial strength and pre-Islamic ignorance. Their images are used in paintings, the classic griot song 'Ceddo' tells their story, and Sembene Ousmane has treated the subject in a film of the same name.

'The Siné-Saloum region is renowned for the peaceful cohabitation of both Christian and Muslim communities'

### THE AKU

In The Gambia the Aku are a small but significant ethnic group, mostly descendants of freed slaves brought to the country in the early 19th century when the British established a protectorate here. Some came from plantations in the Americas, while others were released from slave ships leaving West Africa. Many also came from Sierra Leone, where a similar group of freed slaves settled (usually referred to as Krio people). The Aku language – a mix of 18th-century English and various indigenous tongues – is also similar to the Krio and pidgin spoken in other former British West African colonies.

Today there are still strong links between the Aku and Krio (sometimes the terms are used interchangeably) with many families having members in both Gambia and Sierra Leone. During the recent civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, many Krio refugees settled in Banjul.

The Aku are mostly Christian and generally have names of British origin, such as Johnson or Thompson. Traditional Aku houses have steep tin roofs, gable windows and clapboard walls, a design thought to have originated in the southern states of the USA. They can still be seen in the old part of Banjul.

In colonial times, the administration often chose their civil servants among the Aku. The distinction between the former civil servants and other locals has its legacy in prejudices that prevail today.

At the bottom of the hierarchy were the captives, originally taken in wars or bought from traders, but kept in this position for many generations. Although this status no longer officially exists, many descendants of former captives still work as tenant farmers for the families of their former masters.

This is only a rough outline of a balanced system that is much more complex. Social status only explains part of a person's role in society, and supposedly inferior groups such as griots (*gewel* in Wolof, *gawlo* in Fula, and *jali* in Mande), have been able to exercise great influence, despite their relatively low rank. In song and poetry, griots recite oral tradition and maintain the histories of a particular family, village or clan, often going back for many centuries. Their praise song once confirmed the position and power of a ruler, and griots were historically also consulted as political advisers. Still today, you'll see people lavish gifts on griots in exchange for praise songs, and the most famous singers – those most capable of evoking nostalgia and pride in their listener by reciting his reputed ancestry – can sometimes achieve greater wealth than the person they are actually 'serving'. For more information about griots, see p54.

### RELIGION

In both Senegal and Gambia, Islam is the dominant religion – about 90% of the population is Muslim. The Wolof, Tukulor, Fula and Mandinka people are almost exclusively Muslim, while the Christian faith is most widespread among the Diola and to a lesser extent the Serer. Traditional religious forms (sometimes called animism) are most commonly practised in the predominantly Christian areas, and are often loosely combined with Christianity. Islam in Senegal and Gambia is also infused with elements of traditional religious practice.

### Islam

Muslims across the world are united in their faith in God (Allah) and Mohammed, his Prophet. While some elements of religious practice, such as the submission to the Five Pillars of Islam (see opposite) and the study of the Holy Quran, are observed across the Islamic world, others differ

from one Islamic culture to the next, depending on the religion's history in each region. Islam reached The Gambia and Senegal when the Almoravids (Berber warriors) conquered parts of today's northern Senegal in the 11th century. Regional practice evolved over the following centuries, and was refined in the 19th century, with the spread of the Muslim Sufi brotherhoods (*confréries*). These brotherhoods follow the teachings of spiritual leaders called marabouts, who are deeply revered by the people, and hold enormous political and economic power. An understanding of Senegal's Muslim brotherhoods and their influence over society and culture is essential to gain an understanding of Senegal itself.

### MARABOUTS & BROTHERHOODS

Take a tour around Dakar and you are bound to notice the images of two veiled men, one dressed in white the other in black, painted on numerous walls, cars and shop signs. They are the portraits of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the 19th-century founder of the Mouride brotherhood, and Cheikh Ibra Fall, his illustrious follower and spiritual leader of the Baye Fall, a branch of Mouridism. *Télécentres* (privately owned telephone bureaux) and tailor shops are named after them, their names are written broadly across bush taxis and a vast number of pop songs, from *mbalax* to hip-hop, praise these two revered leaders.

While orthodox Islam holds that every believer is directly in touch with Allah, Muslim faith in Senegal and Gambia is more commonly channelled via saintly intermediaries (marabouts) who are ascribed divine powers and provide a link between God and the common populace. The concept of the marabout-led brotherhood was brought to Senegal from Morocco, where a spiritual leader is known as a *cheikh* or *caliph*, terms that are also used in Senegal. The earliest brotherhood established south of the Sahara was the 16th-century Qadiriya, which encouraged charity and humility and attracted followers throughout the northern Sahel. Today, most Qadiriya followers are Mandinka Muslims.

The Morocco-based Tijaniya brotherhood was introduced to Senegal by El Hajj Omar Tall in the mid-19th century, and remains powerful today, with large and important mosques in the towns of Tivaouane and Kaolack. Later in the 19th century, a smaller brotherhood called the Layen broke away from the Tijaniya under a marabout called Saidi Limamou Laye. Most Layen are Lebu people, who inhabit the town of Yoff, where you find the famous Layen Mausoleum.

With more than two million followers the Mouridiya, established by Cheikh Amadou Bamba, is by far the most important brotherhood (see the boxed text, p197), and its power has consistently grown since the mid-19th century. The rise of Mouridism is closely connected to colonial expansion,

'Muslim faith is more commonly channelled via saintly intermediaries (marabouts)'

'Supposedly inferior groups such as griots have been able to exercise great influence, despite their relatively low rank'

### THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

The five pillars of Islam are the basic tenets guiding Muslims in their daily lives:

**Shahada** (the profession of faith) 'There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet' is the fundamental tenet of Islam.

**Salat** (prayer) Muslims must face Mecca and pray five times a day.

**Zakat** (alms) Muslims must give a portion of their income to the poor and needy.

**Sawm** (fasting) Ramadan is the month on the Muslim calendar when all Muslims must abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and sex from dawn to dusk.

**Haj** (pilgrimage) It is the duty of every Muslim who is fit and can afford it to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once.

and popular resistance to the measures imposed by the French. Colonial administration weakened, or completely disabled traditional structures of governance, rendering chiefs powerless and leaving their subjects without respect-worthy leaders. The evolving structures of the brotherhoods were remarkably close to the societal organisation that had been lost, which made them extremely attractive to a population that sought to preserve its autonomy and oppose the colonial power.

For many years Cheikh Amadou Bamba was merely a humble marabout, not more renowned than any other religious leaders of his time. Part of his remarkable rise to fame is due to the total adherence of his most famous *talibe* (student), Cheikh Ibra Fall. He was wholly devoted to the marabout, and demonstrated his profound commitment less through religious study than through hard, physical labour. 'Lamp' Fall, as he is often called, publicly renounced Quranic study, and refused the Ramadan fast, stating that in order to serve God, he required all his time and bodily force to work hard. He soon gathered his own, growing group of followers, the Baye Fall. Baye Fall adepts are traditionally recognisable by their long dreadlocks, heavy leather amulets containing pictures of their marabout, and patchwork clothing (though not all follow the dress code), and to this day, the Baye Fall tend to be the hardest workers in the region of Touba, building mosques and preparing fields for cultivation.

As the Mourides and Baye Fall gained in popularity, the French began to fear their impact, and forced Bamba into exile. His return from in 1907 is still celebrated by the annual Magal pilgrimage to Touba.

#### ISLAMIC HOLIDAYS

Below are the most important Islamic holidays, when commercial life in Gambia and Senegal comes to a stop:

**Eid al-Moulid** Birthday of the Prophet Mohammed.

**Grand Magal** Celebrated in the Senegalese town of Touba on the anniversary of the return from exile of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the founder of the Mouride Islamic Brotherhood.

**Korité** (Eid al-Fitr) Celebrates the eagerly anticipated end of Ramadan, the month of the Muslim holy fast.

**Tabaski** (Eid al-Kebir) Commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son on God's command. God rewarded Abraham by replacing the child with a ram, and Muslims across the world remember this by sacrificing a sheep.

**Tamkharit** The beginning of the Muslim New Year (though it's celebrated about 10 days later).

Since the Islamic calendar is based on 12 lunar months, Islamic holidays always fall about 11 days earlier than in the previous year. The exact dates depend on what hour the moon is seen, and by whom. To determine the exact beginning of the Ramadan fast, Muslims across the world are in theory supposed to take their cue from the astronomers at Mecca. Yet sometimes the spiritual leaders of the Senegalese brotherhoods determine the start of Ramadan a day before or after Mecca has spoken, and their followers will usually follow their announcement. This subsequently means that holidays such as Korité are celebrated one day by half the population, the next by the other, resulting in effect in a two-day holiday.

Forthcoming dates for major Muslim events (clouds withstanding):

Event	2006	2007	2008
Ramadan begins	24 Sep	13 Sep	2 Sep
Korité	24 Oct	13 Oct	2 Oct
Tabaski	31 Dec	20 Dec	9 Dec
Tamkharit	31 Jan	20 Jan	10 Jan
Eid al-Moulid	11 Apr	31 Mar	20 Mar

Today the Mourides, together with the ensemble of other brotherhoods, hold considerable power in politics and economics, particularly in Senegal. About a quarter of the population follow the words of the marabout of the Mourides – words that can thus easily decide the outcome of an election. The Mouride leaders also largely control the profitable groundnut trade, and their immense wealth swells further thanks to the donations they receive from their followers.

#### Christianity & Traditional Religions

Missionary zeal in Africa, the close companion of colonial expansionism, reached its high point in the mid-19th century, when the French and British established Catholic missions across their annexed territories. However, their impact wasn't as strong as desired, as Islam had already been successfully introduced to the region.

The roughly 10% of Christians in The Gambia and Senegal belong mainly to the Roman Catholic church; Pentecostal and Protestant churches also have minor followings. The Diola in Senegal's Casamance region constitute the largest Christian community. Along with the Bassari and Bédik of the Kedougou region, they are also the main group that still follows traditional religions, though these are often combined with Christian practice.

There are hundreds of traditional religions in West Africa, and while there are no written scriptures, beliefs and traditions have long been handed down by oral transmission. For outsiders, these beliefs and traditions can be complex and difficult to penetrate, as their practice commonly involves a high degree of secrecy. There are several factors common to these beliefs, although their descriptions here provide only an overview and are very simplified.

Almost all traditional religions are animist; that is, based on the attribution of life or consciousness to natural objects or phenomena. A certain tree, mountain, river or stone may be sacred, because it represents a spirit, or is home to a spirit, or simply is a spirit. Instead of 'spirit', some authorities use 'deity' or 'god'. The number of deities each religion accepts can vary, as can the phenomena that represent them.

Several traditional religions accept the existence of a supreme being or creator, a factor that largely facilitated the combination of Christianity, Islam and animist practices. In many African religions ancestors play a particularly strong role. Their principal function is to protect the community or family and they may, on occasion, show their pleasure or displeasure at the acts of their successors. Droughts, bad harvest or epidemic diseases can thus be interpreted as adversary acts of ancestral spirits. Many traditional religions hold that the ancestors are the real owners of the land, and while it can be enjoyed and used during the lifetime of descendants, it cannot be sold. Communication with ancestors or deities may take the form of prayer, offerings or sacrifice, possibly with the assistance of a holy man (or occasionally a holy woman).

'Fetishes' are an important feature of traditional religions. These are sacred objects (or charms) that can take many forms. The most common charms found throughout West Africa are small leather amulets – many containing a sacred object – worn around the neck, arm or waist. These are called grigri and are used to ward off evil or to bring good luck. Grigri are also worn by West African Muslims, for whom the amulet is empowered by a verse from the Quran enclosed in the leather wrap. This is only one example of the myriad connections between traditional religions and Islam or Christianity.

'There are hundreds of traditional religions in West Africa and traditions have long been handed down by oral transmission'



## WOMEN IN GAMBIA & SENEGAL

The societies of Senegal and Gambia are predominantly Muslim and patriarchal, which means that women enjoy limited autonomy. Rare are women who live on their own – a woman usually only leaves her parental home to join that of her husband. Harshly put, this means that submission to her parents is immediately replaced by submission to her partner, and a woman's degree of independence depends largely on the open-mindedness of her spouse.

But this is only part of the story. Women have found various ways to assert themselves; women's cooperatives (*groupements de femmes* in Senegal) provide one arena in which women can affirm their identity. These associations function on the basis of a refined economic system – every associate pays a contribution, the sum of which is regularly given to one member who needs it most, perhaps to resolve a financial tight spot, prepare for a wedding or send a child to school. The cooperatives are often involved in community work, and can have an impressive impact. In the Senegalese Casamance region, for instance, one women's collective succeeded in persuading the local authority to tarmac the road to the local hospital, allowing for much safer journeys to the maternity unit. In some areas, these cooperatives have also played an important role in combating female circumcision – a practice that is still widespread in both Senegal and Gambia.

Although the majority of married women look after the house and children, many women in Senegal and Gambia do work, and some achieve high ranks in the political, economic or artistic arena. Even those who remain at home often engage in some form of commerce – perhaps a small street stall, or importing and selling jewellery and fabric – to boost their financial means.

Female confidence is also asserted in dress and make-up. Women tend to dress with an elegance that is hard to match. The dance floors of Dakar in particular are usually packed with stunningly (and daringly) clothed *disquettes* (stylish young girls), while the presence of successful, cosmopolitan businesswomen in their mid-40s (often referred to as *dirianké*) is amplified by billowing *boubous* and jingling gold jewellery. And breathtaking looks go hand in hand with a whole universe of uniquely female knowledge – that of the art of seduction. From tinkling, scented waist beads and arousing mixes of perfume, incense and soaps to culinary secrets, Senegalese women have an expansive and creative repertoire of how to prevent a husband from straying.

## MEDIA The Gambia

Concerns about the freedom of press and safety of journalists in The Gambia have grown intensely recently. In 2004 a new press law was passed, giving the state powers to detain journalists if found guilty of libel. On 16 December 2004, only a few days after the law was instated, one of its main critics, the prominent journalist Deyda Hydara (editor of the independent newspaper the *Point* and correspondent of Agence France-Presse), was gunned down in Banjul while driving his car home. Investigations revealed that the journalist was under surveillance by the secret service at the time of the murder, yet the Gambian government has not allowed any independent investigations to take place. Quite the contrary: president Yahya Jammeh openly sent out further warnings to journalists expressing opinions contrary to governmental policy, and the reporters of the nation live in fear.

Senegal's most comprehensive cultural e-magazine, containing articles, dates of festivals and dozens of links, can be found at [www.au-senegal.com/ciclo](http://www.au-senegal.com/ciclo) (in French).

## Senegal

Senegal isn't exactly a haven of independent, investigative journalism, but its range of print publications, private and state radios and two TV channels enjoy relative freedom of expression, with radio being a particularly lively and interesting medium. On 17 October 2005, the country's popular radio station Sud FM was closed after broadcasting an interview with a leader of the rebel movement in the Casamance. However, there were immediate protests, and the ban was lifted the same day.

## SPORT Football

There's no better time to get a break in Dakar's eternally gridlocked streets than when the national football (soccer) team is playing a televised match. The entire country will be grouped around TV sets, and businesses come to a virtual standstill. There's no worse time to sit in Dakar traffic than the moment after a victory – joyful masses will take to the streets, drowning the town in the national colours. Both Senegal and Gambia are football crazy – like most African nations – but the fever is more pronounced in Senegal, as the national team enjoys international renown ever since it balled its way into the quarter finals of the World Cup in 2002, having beaten the world champions France 1:0 in the opening match.

Most boys dream of becoming football stars and practise their kicks on improvised football grounds on the road, or, if they're lucky, on an actual terrain.

Larger towns and cities have stadiums where matches take place, most notably the Independence Stadium in Bakau near Banjul, and the Léopold Sédar Senghor Stadium on the northern side of Dakar. Games against sides from neighbouring countries are advertised and draw huge audiences.

## Wrestling

Traditional wrestling (*la lutte* in French) is a hugely popular spectator sport in both Senegal and Gambia. In Senegal, it's mostly practised by the Serer and Diola, and you'll often find matches advertised around the Siné-Saloum and Casamance regions. If you do, go and watch. It's fascinating. In villages, you'll find the dust-filled terrain lit by oil lamps, while the repetitive wail of griots, wildly distorted by clattering amplifiers, tears the air. Groups of wrestlers, invariably dressed in a tied loincloth and wearing protective charms around arms and waist, warm up and prepare for their fights. An evening consists of a string of matches, culminating in the encounter of the most renowned fighters. Wrestlers will circle one another cautiously, carefully preparing the next rapid move. The winner is the one who manages to pin his opponent to the ground, shoulderblades touching the floor. He'll celebrate by performing a dance to furious drumming and the griots' praise song.

Matches can be held any time of year, but reach a peak in November and December. Senegal's most famous annual encounter takes place on 1 January in the national stadium. Urban settings are great, but if you can, try to see wrestling in rural surroundings for the full sensory experience.

## ARTS Music

The music of Senegal and Gambia alone is worth the money of a plane ticket. Senegal is home to some of Africa's most famous musicians, including singers such as Youssou N'Dour, Baaba Maal and Ismael Lô.

'The repetitive wail of griots, wildly distorted by clattering amplifiers, tears the air'

Gambia's star has slightly faded in recent years, though the country produced some amazing groups in the post-independence years including the Super Eagles. The beat to get people dancing in both countries is the fiery *mbalax* rhythm, originally created in Senegal though popular throughout the entire region. See p54 for a more detailed discussion.

### Painting & Sculpture

Judging by the amount of gaudy, spray-painted canvasses on sale in the tourist centres of Gambia and Senegal, the countries seem to be veritable hothouses of visual artists. Well, not quite. Much of this stuff is quickly churned out, and squarely aimed at tourists. The really good stuff is much harder to find, but it's there all the same. Senegal, in particular, has a vibrant contemporary arts scene.

The tradition of sculpture in Senegal and Gambia is primarily rooted in the creation of wooden statues and masks originally produced for ritual purposes, and today for sale en masse in tourist markets and boutiques. Some of these figures can be fascinating (Dakar's IFAN museum and Banjul's national museum have some good examples on display), but the countries have also produced some amazing contemporary sculptors.

The Senegalese sculptor Ousmane Sow, one of Africa's best-known artists, is still the reference in this field. He is famous for his gigantic stone sculptures, which are particularly lifelike. Younger artists include Gabriel Kemzo, whose beautiful metal works are on display around Île de Gorée, and Seni Awa Camara, who sells fantastical clay sculptures on the local market in Bignona, Casamance.

Senegal has brought forth some excellent painters, including well-known artists such as Claire Goby, Souleymane Keita and Kambel Dieng. Besides canvas painting, the country is particularly renowned for its unique tradition of glass painting (*sous-verre*; below).

And don't forget to keep your eyes open for the everyday art that gives Dakar its particular character. The city's bush taxis are draped in decorative writings and images. Reproductions of the portraits of Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibra Fall adorn walls around town, adding spots of colour to ragged buildings.

#### SOUS-VERRE – THE SENEGALESE ART OF GLASS PAINTING

Enter Moussa Sakho's charmingly chaotic atelier at the Institut Français in Dakar, and you're greeted by a group of smiling faces looking out from a surface of colourfully painted glass. Moussa Sakho is one of the leading contemporary artists of *sous-verre*, Senegal's distinctive art of reverse-glass painting. In this special technique, images are drawn onto the back of a glass surface, which lends them radiance and protection.

The origins of this tradition aren't entirely clear, but the practice reached an early highpoint in the late 19th century, and its spread is thought to be connected with the expansion of Islam. Islamic imagery was initially the most prominent theme of the *sous-verres*, something which didn't please the French administration. Colonial governor William Ponty famously forbade their creation, fearing that their wide distribution would aid the expansion of Islam. But his decree didn't have the intended result. Quite the contrary – fearing for the few religious works they possessed, painters started copying the works, and the art of *sous-verre* entered its most prolific phase; it was now considered a counter-colonial force.

The most popular *sous-verres* today portray contemporary styles, fashions, and the minutiae of daily life in Senegal. To find good-quality *sous-verre*, you have to look past the tourist stalls. Moussa Sakho's workshop is a good place to start. Other artists of renown include Babacar Lô, Andy Dolly, Séa Diallo, Mbida and Gora Mbengue.

Gifted photographer Mama Casset has created a series of memorable portraits depicting early-20th-century Senegalese styles. The booklet *Mama Casset*, published by Revue Noire, is in French, but the collection of images speaks for itself.

### OUMOU SY

When it comes to charting a fashionable course from ancient African cultures to downtown Dakar, few can do it with as much grace as Oumou Sy. If you're looking for an African haute couture, she's it. This ambitious lady has been one of the first to infuse universal wear with a healthy dose of Afrocentric styles. Musical instruments, calabash gourds, scrap materials and original prints all find their way into her daring catwalk creations. And there's more. Her design school, Leydi, has been the place many a young designer first learnt to wield scissors and thread, and the Carnival and International Fashion Week in Dakar she helped initiate are the places to see their imaginative cuts on display. And here's what really betrays the businesswoman in her: with the creation of her Web-connected cultural centre, Metissacana, she was also the person to launch cybercafé culture across Dakar.

### Textile & Fashion Design

Classic techniques of textile design in Senegal and The Gambia include wax printing, tie-dye and *bazin* (dyed fabrics that are beaten to a shine with wooden clubs). You'll be able to admire *bazins* on any Friday in town, when people head to the mosque in their finest *boubous*. Watching traditional weavers at work is fascinating. They produce slim strips of roughly woven cloth on long and narrow looms, which are erected on footpaths in the artisans' quarters. The strips are then sown together to make a *pagne* (a length of colourful cloth worn as a skirt).

Contemporary artists and fashion designers take these traditional crafts in new directions. Senegalese artist Rackie Diankha has exhibited her fabulous oeuvres of textile internationally, and Baboucar Fall and Toimbo Laurens are shaping new directions in batik printing in Gambia.

Fashion conscious Senegal is also home to some of Africa's most renowned designers. Best known internationally is Oumou Sy, whose stunning Afrocentric creations have been exhibited in many international fashion shows. But there's a whole new generation of designers snapping at her heels. Colle Ardo Sow, nicknamed 'Queen of Woven Cloth', is fast becoming a reference, having given the humble *pagne* a new place of pride in modern cuts.

Another leading designer is Angélique Dhiedhiou, whose label Toolah proposes a new, contemporary elegance rooted in African styles. Her collections of stylish, wearable clothes combine shimmering woven cloth, silk and beads. The young label Sigil takes Afro-fashion to a cool street level, and is even affordable to the young generation it's intended for. You can purchase Sigel designs at its boutiques in Dakar.

### Literature

#### THE GAMBIA

Along with many countries of the Sahel, Gambia's literary tradition is partly based upon the family histories and epic poems told over the centuries by the griots (see Music of Senegal & Gambia, p54).

In more recent times, especially since independence, a number of contemporary writers have emerged, although compared with many other West African countries, Gambia does not have a major literary output. Gambia's best-known novelist is William Conton.

Conton's 1960s classic *The African* is a semi-autobiographical tale of an African student in Britain who experiences confusion and unhappiness there. He returns to his homeland, where he gets involved in nationalist politics and finally becomes president, still suffering from pangs of alienation and self-doubt. Published at a time when many former colonies were

For information on the creative underground in Senegal and Gambia, check [www.greeneyezdesign.com](http://www.greeneyezdesign.com), a comprehensive website featuring a number of emerging artists.

gaining independence, this book was an influential bestseller in many parts of Africa.

Whereas Conton has his roots in the colonial era, author Ebou Dibba is seen as part of the new Gambian generation, even though his first and best-known novel *Chaff on the Wind* (1986) is set in the pre-independence period. This book follows the fortunes of two rural boys – one keen and studious, the other looking only for a good time – who come to work in the capital city, both eventually suffering at the hands of fate, despite their attempts to control their own destinies. His most recent work is *Alhaji* (The Horse), published in 1992.

Another new-generation writer is Tijan Salleh. Primarily known as a poet – his main collection is *Kora Land*, published in 1989 – he has also written essays and short stories. His style has been described as blunt, abrasive, radical and confrontational. Common themes include the debunking of political hypocrisy and despair at the corruption and poverty endemic in African society.

### SENEGAL

Senegal is one of the West African countries with the most prolific literary output; however, most works are published in French, and only a small number of works have been translated in other languages.

Filmmaker Ousmane Sembène was initially a writer, and is still among the country's best-known authors. His classic *God's Bits of Wood* (1970) is widely acclaimed. It tells of the struggles of strikers on the Dakar-Bamako train line in the late 1940s, and describes the emergence of a grassroots political consciousness in pre-independence Africa.

Senegal's most influential writer is probably Léopold Senghor, the country's first president. Studying in France during the 1930s, he coined the term 'negritude', which emphasised black African ideas and culture, countering the colonial policy of 'assimilation'. Naturally, these beliefs influenced Senghor's own political thought.

The most famous female author is Mariama Ba, whose short but incisive novel *So Long a Letter* was first published in 1980 and won the Noma Award for publishing in Africa. It's one of the most sensitive, intimate and beautiful contemplations of female lives in a polygamous society. Her second novel, *The Scarlet Song*, is much lesser known, though equally outstanding. It's a tragic story about a failing marriage between a Senegalese man and a French woman.

Another woman writer is Aminata Sow-Fall. Her 1986 novel *The Beggars' Strike* is an ironic story highlighting the differences between rich and poor, and it questions the power of the political elite – two recurring themes in modern Senegalese literature.

The novel *An Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane has almost achieved the status of a Senegalese classic. It's a deeply philosophical discussion of issues of colonisation and religion, and the social transformations of early-20th-century Senegal.

Young author Fatou Diome's debut novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* became an unexpected bestseller in 2004. The book, a brilliant treatment of the topic of emigration, sold thousands of copies in the Francophone world, and has since been translated into German. Perhaps her success will persuade publishing houses to work on an English translation, too.

### Cinema

Senegal is one of the most prolific nations in African cinema, and while the scene was in its prime in the years following independence, today there's a

resurgence of young filmmakers emerging against all financial odds, taking new approaches and addressing new themes. The doyen of Senegalese cinema is Ousmane Sembene. Born in 1923, he studied film in Russia, after hustling his way through '50s France as a seaman, dockworker and builder. He has used cinema to shed a critical eye onto Senegalese society, history and culture from his first 1962 realisation *Borom Saret* – a moving black-and-white tale about an inner-city horse-cart driver – through to the 2006 release *Moolaade*, which broaches the sensitive subject of female circumcision.

The illustrious filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambety surprised the movie world with daring, experimental works such as his 'Senegalese road movie' *Touki Bouki*, a surreal 1973 story of a young Dakar couple, and the 1992 oeuvre *Hyenas*.

Contemporary talents include Joseph Kamaka Gaye, whose acclaimed work *Karmen Gei* sets the classic story of *Carmen* in a Senegalese context. Dakar's annual Festival International du Film de Quartier (p156) is the place to spot the future big names.

### Architecture

The story of West Africa's ancient empires isn't easily traced by architectural styles, as the powerful rulers didn't enshrine their memory in monumental building work as did their counterparts in Europe. But what survives to this day are the contrasting architectures of ordinary housings, which differ greatly from region to region. In the north, the *banco* (mudbrick) constructions of Tukulor houses have much in common with Sudanese architecture. In the same region there are late-19th-century mosques, organic shapes built from mudbricks by the followers of El Hajj Omar Tall. The Kedougou region is home to the round stone huts typical of the Bassari, while in the area of Siné-Saloum, huts are made from thatch and mud.

Besides African building work, Senegal also has many examples of European architecture, some dating back to the Portuguese era.

The islands of Gorée and Saint-Louis, and the Senegal River settlements of Richard Toll, Podor, Matam and Bakel, are virtual time capsules of 18th- and 19th-century French architecture. Many of the buildings have seen better days, but some of the houses on Gorée and in Saint-Louis have been beautifully restored. The impact of Breton settlers on Île de Carabane at the remote mouth of the Casamance River is still plain to see in its large church and mission (now a hotel). In Gambia, Banjul is home to wide avenues of grand homes once occupied by the colonial elite, while, nearby stand small unpretentious Aku-style homes, some still occupied by the descendants of freed-slave families who moved to Banjul from Sierra Leone in the early 1800s. Fortifications were also important to the European colonists, and not far from Banjul you can see the remains of Fort James (James Island) and Fort Bullen (Barra).

For contemporary architecture, visit Arch 22 and Banjul Airport, both designed by Senegalese architect Pierre Goudiaby.

'The illustrious filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambety surprised the movie world with daring, experimental works'

*Karmen Gei* sets the story of *Carmen* in a Senegalese context. Only the censored version of this controversial movie was shown in Senegal, as it portrayed a rape scene in a sacred Baye Fall setting.

# Music of The Gambia & Senegal

You don't have to search hard to find music in Senegal and Gambia – just step into a taxi and commence your search. The driver of your battered Peugeot is likely to have his stereo fully turned up, sweetening his endless tours around Dakar's sand-blown tarmac with the latest Youssou N'Dour or some homemade hip-hop. On a weekend, he'll probably pass several aching sound systems that carry the distorted voice of a griot or some local reggae through the bustling boroughs, entertaining radiant wedding parties or enticing tea-sipping youngsters to dance. If you're in Dakar, ask the driver to steer his cab straight into the impossibly crammed streets of Marché Sandaga, where scratchy stereos compete for attention, and where impatient car horns, clicking heels, rustling *boubous* (robes), shouts of bartering, and calls to prayer from the mosque mingle into a unique hymn to urban Dakar. This heaving downtown market is also home to several tiny stalls, stacked sky-high with cassettes and CDs that shift the latest local music releases to an eagerly waiting public – works they've probably just copied in the backrooms of their boutique. When it comes to music, no-one teaches West Africans anything. You'll be the one keen to learn the seductive hip swing of *mbalax* or the sensual sway of the latest zouk (a style of dance music, originally from Guadeloupe, that mixes African and Latin-American rhythms).

## A POTTED HISTORY OF GAMBIAN & SENEGALESE MUSIC

Even the most contemporary Senegalese and Gambian music trends evoke ancient roots, with its proud poise and soaring voice. The history of modern music in the region begins several centuries ago – in the days of the 13th-century Mali empire of the Malinké, the 15th-century Jolof empire established by the Wolof, and other influential kingdoms of pre-colonial Africa. The epic of Sunjata Keita, illustrious founder of the Mali empire, famously recounts the important role of his griot Bala Fasseke, and explains the establishment of a social hierarchy, in which musicians had a clearly defined place. Along with blacksmiths, woodcarvers and other artisans, griots occupied the place in society of professional groups, ranked lower than the 'freeborn' families of rulers and traders, and above the slaves. 'Griot' is a French word – local terms for this social group are *jali* in Mande, *gewel* in Wolof, and *gawlo* in Fula.

Griots are born musicians; they're born with the right to sing the praises of their rulers, act as political advisers, recite genealogies and, importantly, memorise and spread the region's oral history and pass it on to future generations. This is how the stories of Africa's ancient kingdoms have survived the centuries. It's also how the griots' classic repertoire has been transmitted from one generation to the next. Any accomplished griot today can still transport his listeners into past times, instilling pride in their family heritage – a gift that an appreciative audience awards with generous gifts of money or cloth.

One of the Mande griots' most famous instruments is the kora, icon of African music throughout the world; and its history is especially important in Gambia. This tiny country became a centre of kora playing when

Malinké groups settled in the region after the gradual collapse of the mighty Mali empire. Today Gambia proudly boasts a wide variety of kora styles, notably the dry patterns of the eastern regions around Bansang and Basse, and the softer style more common in the west of the country.

Take a time-machine ride from the precolonial era to the 1960s and you land directly on a swinging Cuban dance floor – right in the heart of Dakar. Cuban music was incredibly influential in the '60s and was first played in cosmopolitan dance clubs, such as the Miami in Dakar, to the affluent French and Senegalese elite. First brought over from France's fashionable dance floors, it quickly struck a chord with the Senegalese population. After all, Cuban rhythms were a 'New World' adaptation of musical styles originally brought to the Americas from Africa. Having now returned to their source, they once again became infused with African flavours.

Independence brought a whole new national consciousness, which left its traces in the music of the region. Inspired young musicians, notably Ibra Kasse and his Star Band, started to transform the imported Cuban beats, by infusing them with a uniquely Senegalese twist. Salsa sections were increasingly broken up with bursts of frenetic drumming, drawn from traditional ceremonies. Dancers went crazy on the floor, rotating hips, thrusting groins and spinning legs, spurring the drummers on to even faster playing. There was no going back. In this polyrhythmic marriage Senegal had found its own beat – the *mbalax*.

The birth of *mbalax* is mainly associated with one name, Youssou N'Dour, who proudly dons the epithet 'King of Mbalax'. In the late '70s, he was a young kid singing with the Etoile de Dakar, an offshoot of the Star Band. It was this group that took the novel Senegalese-Cuban sounds to a whole new immensely trendy level. The band's style of *mbalax* proved irresistible and launched N'Dour into superstardom. Its popularity hasn't abated to this day. *Mbalax* continues to evolve as it's combined with new sounds. Today the music is getting even faster yet its core sound, the rolling drumbeat called by the *sabar* and *tama* drums, hasn't changed.

If you enter any Gambian music shop today, you'll find about the same selection of music as in Senegal: Youssou N'Dour, Youssou N'Dour, Youssou N'Dour and a range of other Senegalese *mbalax* singers. Local artists are almost absent, with the exception of Jalibah Kouyateh and Tata Dindin Jobarteh. Other than that, popular Gambian music is largely ruled by Senegalese *mbalax*. But this hasn't always been the case. In the late '60s, the Afro-funky Super Eagles ruled the stages, and made a huge impact in Senegal, where they exerted a formative influence on the emerging *mbalax* scene. It's a contribution that has largely been forgotten today, together with most of Gambia's once flourishing artistic scene, which is now a shadow of its former vibrant self. Gambia's young generation has chosen an entirely different route – that of reggae. The lazy beat blasts from improvised sound systems around the country, each echoing bash proving that the nation's nickname 'Little Jamaica' is entirely deserved.

In Senegal, reggae is competing with a vibrant local hip-hop scene for youth attention. Senegalese hip-hop has been made famous worldwide by groups such as Positive Black Soul and Daara J, who sneer at the permanently overdressed, glittering *mbalax* audiences gathered in style at concerts of the likes of the R&B-influenced Viviane N'Dour, the street-wise Omar Pene and a host of excellent young singers. In the 30th year of his career, Youssou N'Dour is still unrivalled in popularity – neither the soft-voiced Thione Seck, Youssou's eternal challenger in Senegal, nor the nasally voiced Baaba Maal, the better-known name abroad, have ever been able to topple him from his throne.

Mark Hudson's book *The Music in My Head* is an entertaining introduction to the world-music industry; it places the spotlight on the scenes of Gambia and Senegal.

*Sunjata: Gambian Versions of the Mande Epic* by Bamba Suso and Banna Kanute tells the story of the 13th-century ruler of the Mali empire in the words of two renowned Gambian griots. A great place to learn about history and Gambian kora styles at the same time.



## TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Boundaries between traditional and modern music styles are fluid. During the day an artist (probably a griot) can recite the story of Sunjata and his warriors with soaring voice in a way that brings their tales of heroism truly to life. Yet in the evening, you might easily encounter the same artist backed by a full electric ensemble, experimenting with a kora-funk crossover. The difference between traditional and modern is perhaps best defined by context, rather than style. Music that's played for social occasions, such as weddings or naming ceremonies, is usually considered traditional, while a nightclub setting demands modernity and the scream of an amplified kora riff.

Established families often have their own griots, who perform praise songs and recite genealogies at celebrations and are usually showered with crumpled CFA or dalasi notes in return. But there's more to the traditional music of the region than the refined songs of the griots alone. Every ethnic group has its own rhythms, dances and instruments, and a tour around Gambia and Senegal will reveal the spectacular array of what's around – ranging from the flute and fiddle troupes of the Fula herders to stunning polyphonic Serer songs and the sky-high leaps that accompany Wolof *sabar* drumming. If you're serious about experiencing the region's variety of traditional music, head for the tiny villages. The best chance to see such music is at a family celebration, and if you approach the local wedding party respectfully, your presence is unlikely to offend.

Particularly spectacular are the masked dances and songs of the Bassari and Diola. These are mainly performed for initiation ceremonies, and the stunningly decorated dancers usually represent supernatural spirits that either protect or try to harm the newly circumcised boys. Masked shows have survived only in the non-Islamic regions of the country. Their deep connection to traditional religion, the spiritual associations of the drum and the representation of non-Islamic spirits via masks makes them incompatible with Muslim faith. There are some exceptions to this rule though: the dance of the Kankurang of the Malinké – where a spirit is represented by a rustling, grass-covered mask – has found its way into the region's Islamic culture, just as the protective amulets worn by followers of traditional religions are now worn by most Muslims.

## Traditional Instruments

### DRUMS

The *tama* drum of the Wolof has gained much attention through its use in *mbalax*. The tiny size of this double-headed tension drum belies the frenzy it can cause among dancers. Watch out for the *tamak*at – the player of the drum – at any Youssou N'Dour gig. Once he gets up and starts pounding the stretched drum skin with a stick, women leap up from their chairs and dance until their shiny *pagnes* (skirts) and headscarves unravel.

Another Wolof drum is the *sabar*. This tall, thin drum is played in an ensemble and forms the clanging basis of the *mbalax* beat.

The ubiquitous *djembe* is probably the most popular of all African drums, and has an appeal that has reached beyond Africa and deep into Europe. The *djembe*-like *bougarabou* stems from the Casamance region.

There are plenty of drumming courses available all across Gambia and Senegal. **Batafon Arts** (☎ 4392517; www.batafonarts.co.uk) in Kololi enjoys a good reputation, and Kafountine and Abéné in the Casamance are Senegal's favourite destinations for aspiring *djembe* players, with plenty of informal drumming courses. In Dakar, try the **Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor** (Map p152; Rue 10, Dakar).

The stories of West Africa's great empires are kept alive to this day in the songs of the griots. The song 'Kelefa', for instance, tells the story of the ancient empire of Kaabu, while 'Tara' praises the heroism of El Hajj Omar Tall.

Famous Senegalese drummers:

**Assane Thiam** Youssou's famous *tama* player.

**Doudou N'Diaye Rose** Most renowned *bougarabou* player, who has spawned a diaspora of equally gifted sons.

**Mbaye Dieye Faye** Youssou N'Dour's equally famous *sabar* player.

### STRINGED INSTRUMENTS

A variety of stringed instruments ranges from the Mandinka single-string *moolo* (plucked lute) and the *riti* (bowed fiddle) to the 21-string kora. The harp-lute kora is the classic instrument of the griots, and is arguably one of the most sophisticated instruments in sub-Saharan Africa. With its delicate tumble of shimmering notes, it has captured the souls of many listeners abroad, and been incorporated in a wide array of crossover works, ranging from jazz to Western classical music and even hip-hop.

Another important instrument of the griots is the *xalam* (a Wolof word pronounced kha-lam). It is known by a variety of names, including *konting* in Mandinka and *hoddu* in Fula, and has from three to five strings that are plucked to produce a dry, guitarlike sound; it's believed the banjo evolved from the *xalam*.

The best place to learn the kora playing is in Brikama, a dusty town in Gambia (see the boxed text, p124), where the famous griot families of Dembo Konté and Malamini reside.

Famous kora players:

**Amadou Bansang Jobarteh** The doyen of Gambia's dry, eastern style.

**Dembo Konté** One of the Brikama masters; has gained fame for his kora duets with the Casamance-born Kausu Kuyateh.

**Jali Nyama Suso** Outstanding Gambian kora player who wrote his country's national anthem.

**Lamine Konté** A kora player from the Casamance; one of Senegal's best.

**Malamini Jobarteh** Another member of the famous Brikama clan; his sons Pa and Tata Dindin Jobarteh are among Gambia's most popular musicians today.

### WIND INSTRUMENTS

The Fula flute, with its husky call, is West Africa's most famous wind instrument. Flute musicians combine singing with playing sharp trills and tumbling descending patterns. The Fula flute stems from the Fouta Jallon in Guinea, but many flute players (*nyamakala*) have moved to Gambia and southern Senegal, where they often perform their hilarious, acrobatic shows for the entertainment of hotel guests. To learn the instrument properly, you should really go to Guinea. Otherwise, try Brikama (the Konté family can point you in the right direction; reach them on ☎ 7710015), or the Théâtre Daniel Sorano in Dakar.

Famous Fula flautists:

**Ali Wague** Based in Paris; plays on dozens of West African albums.

**Issa Diao** The flautist of Dakar's Théâtre National du Sénégal.

### XYLOPHONES

The wooden *balafon*, whose dry tone is accompanied by the gentle buzz of vibrating gourds attached to each slab, is another typical griot instrument. It's most widespread in Guinea, but Malinké griots play it all across Gambia and Senegal. To take xylophone courses, try **Batafon Arts** (☎ 4392517; www.batafonarts.co.uk) in Kololi or, again, in Brikama.

El Hadj Sory Kouyate is a famous Guinean *balafon* player. His double CD, *Guinée: Anthologie du Balafon Mandingue*, is a great way to experience *balafon* music.

The children's film *Kirikou* may be created by a French cartoonist, but Senegalese star Youssou N'Dour created the music, and a member of the rap group PBS Radical provided Kirikou's voice. In the clever and cheeky *Kirikou*, West African children have found their first locally grounded cartoon hero.

## POP MUSIC

Senegal's pop scene is thriving – find yourself in the epicentre of an exploding *mbalax* dance floor and you'll see how passionately people feel about their music. Dakar's contemporary music scene is fantastically varied. Anything, from hip-hop to reggae, salsa, folk, jazz and pop is available – all homemade and spiced with potent local flavours. The glitzy Senegalese scene compares to that of The Gambia the same way the two capitals do; the former is a vibrant party queen, the latter a sleepy backwater, only occasionally rippled by the bass drop of a reggae beat.

## Dance Orchestras

In the 1970s, the pop-music scene in Senegal was dominated by large bands, complete with multipart horn sections, bass and rhythm guitar, and several singers and dancers. These mighty beasts are usually referred to as 'dance orchestras', an apt name considering their football-team size. The most famous of these, Orchestra Baobab, was the undisputed leader of the Senegalese scene throughout the '70s, before a young generation snatched its audiences away with cheek and a healthy dose of rebellious innovation. Right now the grand Baobab is living its second spring. It reformed in 2001 and now tours regularly, luring audiences worldwide on the dance floors, thanks to the members' inimitable grandfather charm.

The father of the Senegalese dance orchestra style, however, is an artist who is lesser known today. Ibra Kasse was a reputed tyrant when it came to working with talented musicians, and was the leader of a fantastically gifted group called the Star Band de Dakar. In the line-up were Pape Seck and the illustrious Gambian-born lead singer Labah Sosseh. When the star band divided into glittering pieces Etoile de Dakar emerged, proving the rocket shooter for Senegalese uberstar Youssou N'Dour.

## Salsa

In the '60s the Senegalese scene was all about Cuban music. It was about conga rhythms and Spanish lyrics so perfectly reproduced that they almost passed for the original. And today Cuban bands still draw huge audiences – mainly among the middle-aged middle class. Just put a record of 'El Guantanamero' on in any classy club, and the couples will start turning on the dance floor. Internationally, the most famous band is currently the all-star orchestra Africando. In Senegal itself the charming orchestra Pape Fall & l'African Salsa tends to steal the crowds.

## Mbalax

*Mbalax* is the heart and soul of Senegalese music – and the legs, thighs, hips and backsides, too. Several Gambian artists of the '60s created the fiery beat from a mixture of Cuban beats and traditional *sabar* drumming. *Mbalax* was made famous by Youssou N'Dour, who is still the unrivalled leader of the scene. He is also one of the biggest names in world music, a shrewd businessman, a cultural icon – and then some.

Since its inception, *mbalax* has evolved by adapting to changing fashions, without ever losing its essence. One example of the genre's versatility is the *mbalax* by impeccably suited-and-tied Thione Seck, who has married the beat with Indian-style vocals. In 1974, Senegal's 'street kid' Omar Pene and his band Super Diamono were the first to replace the congas of a standard *mbalax* outfit with a drum kit – a move that has been copied by every artist since.

Youssou N'Dour's sister-in-law Viviane N'Dour is one of Senegal's major style icons, mixing sexy *mbalax* beats with breathy, R&B-inspired

vocals. Emerging *mbalax* artists causing havoc on the region's dance floors include Abdou Guité Seck, Ablaye Mbaye, Aliou Mbaye N'Der and Titi.

## Afro-Jazz, Folk & Fusion

Senegal has a long tradition of jazz, usually called 'Afro' in the country itself. In the '80s, the group Xalam, which proposed a unique African-flavoured rock, went to such heights as to play support for the Rolling Stones. In Senegal itself, they never achieved nearly as much fame, though singer Souleymane Faye is still a renowned solo performer. Around the same time, the band of brothers known as Touré Kunda set out from its Casamance home to conquer the world – with some success. The new sound was embraced first by France, where the band went all the way into the national charts. Touré Kunda was one of the few Afro-jazz bands also appreciated at home – something most groups of the scene can only dream of. The many folk performers Senegal has produced – including artists such as the Frères Guisse, Daby Balde and Diogal Sakho – face a similar situation: the Western world loves them; the locals find them bland.

Although Baaba Maal's acoustic works are sometimes classed as folk, it's hard to categorise his music. He has produced a spectacularly varied catalogue, toying with hip-hop and dance beats among plenty of other styles. And Cheikh Lô, another well-known name in the West, stormed onto the scene with a moving blend of Latin rhythms, subtle hints of *mbalax* and praise lyrics to the Cheikh Amadou Bamba, spiritual leader of the Baye Fall.

## Hip-Hop & Reggae

Senegal has the most exciting hip-hop scene in West Africa, or the second-largest Francophone hip-hop scene worldwide. Since the mid-'80s, when the brash young trio PBS (Positive Black Soul) stormed the international scene, Sene-rap has simply refused to disappear. Dakar's kids have coupled the American beats with local rhymes and sounds, turning the music into a powerful tool of voicing discontent. The scene enjoyed a revival in 2004, when Daara J sold unexpected numbers of records, shifting the global spotlight right onto the urban youth culture of Senegal. Other leading hip-hop artists in Senegal include the witty Pee Froiss, soul-voiced Carlou D, and the slick crew Chronik 2H.

Gambia is more Kingston than New York, a country where reggae artists such as Egalitarian, Rebellion the Recaller and Dancehall Masters transfer Jamaican swagger into a Gambian context.

## RESOURCES

### Music Magazines

**fRoots** (www.frootsmag.com) Monthly magazine, a good source for reviews and articles that look beneath the surface of the music scene.

**Songlines** (www.songlines.co.uk) Quarterly, with a large reviews sections and a good variety of features.

### Music Shops

The following Western stores stock West African music:

**Blue Moon** (☎ 03-9415 1157; fax 9415 1220; 54 Johnston St, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065) Try this address in Australia.

**Stern's** (☎ 020-7387 5550; fax 7388 2756; 74 Warren St, London W1P 5PA, UK) The best place in Britain for African music.

**Stern's** (☎ 212-964 5455; fax 964 5955; 71 Warren St, New York, NY 10007, USA) The best place in the USA for African music.

The most comprehensive website discussing releases of African urban music is www.africanhiphop.com. The related www.senerap.com tells you all about the Dakar scene.

Find out all about Gambia's vibrant reggae scene on www.onegambia.com, which comes complete with its own radio station, West Coast Radio.

Senegal is one of Africa's most vibrant hip-hop nations, with globally successful groups such as Daara J, PBS and Pee Froiss. If you're in the country, don't miss the annual hip-hop awards ceremony, featuring concerts by rappers from all across West Africa.

# Environment

## THE LAND

The Gambia and Senegal lie within the Sahel, the semidesert or savannah region that forms a broad band across Africa between the Sahara desert to the north and the forested countries of the south. The landscape is largely flat, the only peaks looking out over the land in Senegal's far southeastern corner.

## The Gambia

The shape and position of Gambia epitomise the absurdity of the national boundaries carved by the European colonial powers at the end of the 20th century. About 300km long, but averaging only 35km wide, The Gambia, at only 11,300 sq km, is Africa's smallest country and is entirely surrounded by Senegal, with the small exception of an 80km coastline. This makes it half the size of Wales.

The country's territory, and its very existence, is determined by the Gambia River, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean, dividing Gambia's coastline into northern and southern sections. Banjul, the capital, is on the southern side of the mouth of the Gambia River. West of Banjul, on the Atlantic coast, are the holiday resorts of Bakau, Fajara, Kotu and Kololi. These constantly expanding tourist towns range in character from the more traditionally Gambian to generic sun-and-sea fare, and together form the centre of Gambia's tourist industry. Nearby is the town of Serekunda – a hub of commercial activity. Further up the river are many more villages, but the only towns of any size are Farafenni, Georgetown and Basse Santa Su.

Gambia has no hills or mountains or any other major topographical features. In fact, the country is so flat that the Gambia River drops less than 10m in around 450km between the far eastern border of the country near Fatoto and the mouth of the river at Banjul. The majority of travellers head directly to the 80km coastline in the west, where most of the tourist industry is concentrated. Upcountry, national parks such as the Baobolong Wetland Reserve and Kiang West are major attractions.

## Senegal

Senegal is Africa's westernmost country. The continent's western tip, Pointe des Almadies, lies just north of Dakar. The country comprises an area of just under 200,000 sq km, which compares in size to England and Scotland combined.

Senegal is largely flat, with a natural vegetation of dry savannah woodland. The country's western border, some 600km in length, is marked

## CANNONBALL RUN

The boundaries of Gambia largely follow the course of the Gambia River. From about 50km upstream, every meander of the river is echoed by a precise twist or turn in the borders, which run parallel to the river, less than 20km to the north and south. Local legend tells that the border was established by a British gunship sailing up the river and firing cannonballs as far as possible onto each bank. The points where the balls fell were then joined up to become the border. While this may not be strictly true, Gambia was initially established as a protectorate, and in the 19th century protection could be most easily administered by gunship.

## HARMATTAN HAZE

The harmattan is a dry wind that blows from the north, usually from December to February. During this period the skies of most West African countries are grey from Sahara sand carried by the wind, and even when the wind stops blowing, skies remain hazy until the first rains fall. The effects are more noticeable away from the coast, and generally travel isn't too badly affected. Photographers can expect hazy results, while people with contact lenses should be prepared for problems.

by the shore of the Atlantic Ocean. About halfway down the coast, the large Cap Vert peninsula juts out west into the ocean and at the tip of its triangle lies Dakar, one of the largest cities in West Africa.

To the north of the Cap Vert peninsula, the coast faces northwest and is known as the Grande Côte (Great Coast), stretching unbroken almost to Senegal's border with Mauritania. South of the peninsula, the Petite Côte (Small Coast) faces southwest, an orientation that makes weather conditions more agreeable and the beaches safer, which is why it has become Senegal's prime tourist spot.

Senegal has four major rivers, which all flow east to west from the Fouta Jallon highlands in neighbouring Guinea to the Atlantic Ocean. In the north, the Senegal River flows through arid lands, and forms the border with Mauritania. Saint-Louis, the old capital, is at this river's mouth. In southeastern Senegal, the Gambia River flows through Senegal's only mountainous area – the lands surrounding Kedougou – and through the adjacent Parc National de Niokolo-Koba before entering Gambia itself. In the far south is the Casamance River, which irrigates the lush Casamance region. Tropical forests make this fertile zone one of Senegal's most stunning natural areas. Senegal's most beautiful beaches are also here, around Cap Skiring. The Saloum River enters the ocean via a large delta to the south of the Petite Côte. This is a zone of labyrinthine mangrove swamps, salty plains, lagoons, small creeks and river islands.

## WILDLIFE Animals

Senegal and Gambia aren't the kinds of countries that tempt tourists with huge safari parks. There is some wildlife to be seen, but it's much more humble than the herds of zebras and giraffes you can observe in other parts of Africa.

However, if the region can't show off with mighty elephants or rhinos, it beats most other destinations when it comes to birds. The Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj in Senegal, for instance, is the world's third-largest bird sanctuary, while tiny Gambia attracts large numbers of bird-watchers with hundreds of species and a well-organised system of birding tours. See p71 for more information.

Mammals are more a pleasant sideline of tourism to the region than a reason for travelling here. Popular and easily recognised animal species in forested areas include baboons and three types of monkeys (vervet, patas and red colobus). Abuko Nature Reserve in Gambia is one of the best places to see these monkey species. Chimpanzee populations occur naturally in Senegal's Parc National de Niokolo-Koba and also inhabit the River Gambia National Park, their northernmost outpost in Africa.

In the forested areas you also may see oribi and duikers (small members of the antelope family). In the drier grassland areas antelope species include kobs, roans, waterbucks and derby elands. The best place to see

The website [www.chimprehab.com](http://www.chimprehab.com) gives excellent background information on the chimpanzee rehabilitation project in River Gambia National Park. You can even adopt your own chimp.

these is in Niokolo-Koba; in most other parts of Senegal and Gambia they are rare or extinct. Other animals found in this type of habitat include warthogs.

Niokolo-Koba is home to a few 'classic' African animals, including imported lions and elephants, but your chances of spotting them are minimal. The Réserve de Bandia (southeast of Dakar) has a whole range of large mammals, including rhinos, buffalos and giraffes, but these are not indigenous to Senegal and have been brought here as a tourist attraction.

Hyenas are relatively numerous in Niokolo-Koba and parts of the Siné-Saloum Delta. In the park, you might be lucky enough to spot them, but around the delta you'll probably only hear their distinctive cries at night and see their tracks in the morning.

You'll also be able to see hippos (p138) in the Gambia River, but beware: this peaceful-looking creature can be very aggressive, so don't get too close. Creeks and lagoons are also home to other mammals, including manatees (sea cows), while dolphins can sometimes be seen where large rivers enter the sea. Another river inhabitant in Senegal and Gambia is the crocodile, both the more common Nile species and the very rare dwarf crocodile.

Other reptiles to watch out for (but that shouldn't inspire bush paranoia) are snakes. Gambia and Senegal have their complement of both venomous and harmless snakes (including pythons, cobras and mambas), but most fear humans and you'll be lucky to even see one. One snake worth a special mention is the puff adder, which reaches about 1m in length and, like all reptiles, enjoys sunning itself. Take care when hiking in bush areas, especially in the early morning when this snake is at its most lethargic and most likely to be lazing in open areas. Other reptiles include lizards (such as the large monitor lizard), geckos and tortoises.

### Plants

Vegetation in the Sahel region consists primarily of well-dispersed trees and low scrub. Only the southern Casamance region, which receives more rainfall and is traversed by the Casamance River, could be defined as

#### THE VERSATILE BAOBAB

The mighty baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) is probably Africa's most characteristic tree and an instantly recognisable symbol of the continent. Its thick, sturdy trunk and stunted rootlike branches are featured on countless postcards, logos and even fashion designs. Baobabs grow in most parts of Gambia and Senegal; the flat savannah lands between Dakar and Kaolack in particular are richly covered with baobabs of all sizes and ages.

In many cultures, legend has it that a displeased deity plucked a tree in anger and thrust it back into the ground upside down – hence the thick, sprawling branches. Despite the alleged misdemeanours of its ancestor, the baobab is held in high regard by local people. Its wizened appearance, combined with an ability to survive great droughts and live for many hundreds of years, means the baobab is often deemed to be sacred and is believed to have magical powers. Very old trees develop cavities, and in ancient times these were sometimes used as burial places for griots, the praise singers and oral historians common to many West African societies.

The baobab has many practical uses too. The hollow trunk can hold rainwater, which may have percolated in from cracks higher up in the tree, forming a useful reservoir in times of drought. The tree's large pods (sometimes called 'monkey bread') contain seeds encased in a sherbetlike substance that can be eaten or made into a drink, and the leaves of the baobab can be chopped, boiled and made into a sauce. They can also be dried and ground into a paste to use as a poultice for skin infections and sore joints.

### MANGROVES

The mangrove, a tropical evergreen plant, is typically found in the tidal mud flats and inlets of areas such as the Siné-Saloum Delta and the mouth of the Casamance – zones where large rivers spill into the ocean. It plays a vital role for both the local population and wildlife and has a fascinating reproductive system, perfectly adapted to its watery environment. It is one of very few plants that thrive in salt water, and this allows rapid colonisation of areas where no other plant would have a chance.

Two types of mangrove – the white and red mangrove – can be seen and easily identified. The latter is most prominent and is easily recognised by its leathery leaves and dense tangle of stiltlike buttress roots. The seeds germinate in the fruit while still hanging on the tree, growing a long stem called a 'radical'. When the fruit drops, the radical lodges in the mud and becomes a ready-made root for the new seedling.

The white mangrove is less common and found mainly on ground that is only covered by water when there are particularly high tides. It does not have stilt roots; its most recognisable characteristic is its breathing roots, which have circular pores and grow out of the mud from the base of the tree.

Mangrove trees catch silt, vegetation and other floating debris in their root systems, including their own falling leaves. As this mire becomes waterlogged and consolidated, it forms an ideal breeding ground for young mangroves. In this way, the mangrove creates new land. As the stands expand on the seaward side, the older growth on the landward side gradually gets further from the water. Eventually the trees die, leaving behind a rich soil perfect for cultivation.

The mangrove has many other uses. Oysters and shellfish cling to the roots as the tide comes in. When the tide retreats, they are left exposed and are easily gathered by local people.

woodland, while its vast networks of estuaries and mangroves also make a welcome change from the typical Sahel landscape – parts of northern Senegal come very close to being desert.

Trees characteristic of the Sahel include various flat-topped species of acacia, which usually have small thorny leaves. Other notable species include the baobab (see the boxed text, opposite) and the kapok, which is also known as the *Bombax* or silk-cotton tree. The kapok's most recognisable features are its yellowish bark, large podlike fruit and exposed roots, which form a maze around the base of the trunk. In Senegal this tree is called the *fromager* (from *fromage*, the French word for cheese) because the wood of the trunk is so soft and light. It is used in some areas to make the base of pirogues (traditional canoes) after being saturated, straightened and dried to the required shape. (For more information on pirogue building, see the boxed text, p154.)

In Gambia and southern Senegal many villages are built around an ancient kapok tree because the trees are believed to have special significance, harbouring spirits who protect the inhabitants from bad luck. The men of the village use the tree as a *bantaba* (meeting place), and the exposed roots often make comfortable benches.

The palm is another common tree of the region. Species include the doum palm, which grows to about 15m in height and produces an orange fruit called a drupe; the Senegal date palm, which grows to about 8m and produces small red berries; and the coconut palm, which can grow to 35m.

The dry, sparse landscape of the Sahel is interrupted by ribbons of dense gallery forest that occur along watercourses, most notably along the Gambia and Casamance Rivers. Gallery forest is quite similar to rainforest but is fed primarily by ground water, so many of the vines and epiphytes that are characteristic of rainforest are absent.

If you're considering purchasing a *djembe* drum, think twice. The *dimb* tree used to manufacture this much-loved percussion instrument has almost become extinct in the region, due to the staggering increase in European demand for *djembes*.



## NATIONAL PARKS

The best time to visit the national parks of Senegal and Gambia is during the dry season (from November to February), when they are accessible and rich in bird life. The national parks and reserves listed in the table are the main ones in Senegal and Gambia, but there are numerous other small forest parks and community reserves. The Abuko Nature Reserve in Gambia is a good place to find out about Gambia's protected areas; in Senegal, try the **Océanium** (☎ 822 2441; www.oceanium.org; Rte de la Corniche-Est) in Dakar.

### The Gambia

Six national parks and reserves cover 3.7% of the national land area of The Gambia, and it has several forest parks. The national parks and reserves are administered by the Department of Parks & Wildlife Management and have been set aside to protect representative samples of main habitat types and their associated fauna.

The forest parks have been established to preserve existing forest or provide renewable timber stocks.

All the parks and reserves listed here (except River Gambia National Park) are open to the public and between them provide a good cross-section of the different types of habitat in the country.

Abuko Nature Reserve is Gambia's oldest protected area. It covers 105 hectares in western Gambia near the holiday resorts on the Atlantic coast and is well toured. The reserve protects a large tract of gallery forest and is particularly noted for its bird and monkey populations.

Baobolong Wetland Reserve is on the northern bank of the Gambia River in central Gambia, opposite Kiang West National Park. Its 22,000 hectares stretch inland almost to the Senegal border. This wetland was designated as Gambia's first Ramsar site (the convention on wetlands of international importance).

On the southern bank of the Gambia River, Kiang West National Park comprises 11,000 hectares dominated by dry woodland vegetation, with areas of mangrove and mud flats.

River Gambia National Park is more commonly known as Baboon Island. This 580-hectare park covers five midriver islands near Georgetown in eastern Gambia and was established mainly as a rehabilitation sanctuary for chimpanzees. Visitors are not permitted to enter the islands, but it's possible to take boat tours around the islands, and with some luck you can spot the chimps from there.

Niuni National Park is in the northwest of Gambia, contiguous with the Parc National du Delta du Saloum in neighbouring Senegal, and incorporates the coastal island of Ginak. It covers 5000 hectares and features dry woodland, sand dunes, mangroves, salt marshes and lagoons.

Other, smaller reserves include the Tanji River Bird Reserve, the Tanbi Wetland Complex.

### Senegal

Senegal has six national parks, and several other areas where natural habitats are protected. The most popular parks are Parc National de Niokolo-Koba (the country's largest) in southeast Senegal, with a wide range of habitat types and large numbers of birds and mammals; Parc National du Delta du Saloum, an area of coastal lagoons, mangroves, sandy islands and a section of dry woodland in the coastal area just north of Guinea; Îles de la Madeleine, a couple of small islands near Dakar;

For comprehensive information on Gambia's nature reserves, or to volunteer at the Abuko Nature Reserve near Banjul, check www.darwingambia.gm.

## NATIONAL PARKS OF THE GAMBIA & SENEGAL

Park	Features	Activities
Abuko Nature Reserve (p122)	gallery forest: bushbucks, monkeys, crocodiles, turacos	walks, bird-watching trail with hides
Aire Marine Protégée de Bamboung (p67)	mangrove swamps, savannah woodland: sea birds, waders, warthogs, hyenas	walks through mangroves, pirogue tours
Baobolong Wetland Reserve (p131)	wetland, marshes: herons, egrets, sunbirds manatees	pirogue tours
Bijilo Forest Park (p103)	woodland: monkeys, birds	guided walks
Kiang West National Park (p131)	mangrove creeks, woodland: bushbucks, birds of prey, warthogs	pirogue tours, guided walks
Parc National des Îles de la Madeleine (p170)	islet, rock pool: black kites, cormorants, dolphins, turtles	pirogue tours, swimming
Parc National de la Langue de Barbarie (p214)	sandbank, river: sea birds, waders	pirogue & kayak tours, walks, swimming
*Parc National de Niokolo-Koba (p223)	savannah woodland & gallery forest: porcupines, lions, hyenas, monkeys, elephants	guided 4WD tours, hides at waterholes
*Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj (p214)	woodland, creeks, mud flats: sea birds, waders, crocodiles	pirogue tours
Réserve de Popenguine (p180)	gallery forest: sea birds, sunbirds, rollers, birds of prey	guided walks through forest & lagoon
River Gambia National Park (p138)	islands, woodland: chimpanzees, hippos, birds	pirogue tours
Tanji River Bird Reserve (p117)	woodland, islands: Caspian terns, turtles	walks, pirogue tours

\* denotes a World Heritage-listed site

Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj and Parc National de la Langue de Barbarie, near Saint-Louis in northern Senegal, both especially noted for their bird life. The Parc National de Basse-Casamance, an area of forest and mangrove in the Casamance region, has been closed for years because of rebel activity.

Other protected areas include the Ferlo wildlife reserves in the north-central part of Senegal, the Réserve de Bandia near the Petite Côte, the community-run Réserves de Popenguine and de la Somone, and the Aire Marine Protégée de Bamboung.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The main environmental issues currently faced by Gambia and Senegal are overfishing, deforestation, desertification and coastal erosion.

## Coastal Erosion

Coastal erosion has gone from being an unsightly inconvenience to a very serious problem, particularly in Gambia. Driven by the ever-increasing need for sand as a building material, illegal mining on the coast has soared massively.

The result is rather ironic: the very attraction that made Gambia a tourist destination – the wide sandy beaches of the Atlantic coast – also poses the greatest long-term threat to the businesses upon which so many Gambians survive. In order to accommodate those hordes, developers have dug thousands of tonnes of sand out of the coastline to be used in the construction of roads, hotels, resorts and just about any other of the building sites you see on Kairaba Ave and elsewhere.

The problem reached a climax in the late '90s, when some beaches around Cape St Mary and Kololi literally started disappearing. A US\$20 million beach rejuvenation project, using Dutch technology to trap sand near the shore as it was washed in on the tide, brought some temporary relief. Yet sand mining continued apace, and only a few years after the beaches had been 'sprayed back on', they are once again diminishing at a rapid pace.

Senegal faces similar issues. Due to the country's longer coastline, however, the problems have taken longer to show, though they can now no longer be ignored. The areas near Malika and Rufisque in the north of the Cap Vert peninsula are the ones most hit by illegal mining. Endless lines of trucks collect full loads of sand every day. The results are now becoming obvious, with lines of trees and the first tourist venues being claimed by the sea.

In another bitter twist, the sand mined isn't even particularly suitable for building, as its high salt content ruins the metal skeletons of concrete constructions.

## Overfishing

Overfishing off the coast of Senegal and Gambia is becoming a major environmental and economic issue. For many centuries local fishermen have harvested the seas off the Atlantic coast but, until the middle of the 20th century, fishing was a sustainable industry. However, since this time, there has been a significant increase in demand (from a growing local population and to supply the export market) and a big increase in the number of boats engaged in fishing.

Fish stocks near the coast have not kept up with the increased catches, so the boats have to go further out to sea to find new fishing areas. As these areas in turn become depleted, the fishermen have to go further still, sometimes spending many days at sea. The extra money spent on petrol eats into the earnings from the catch, reducing profit margins and contributing to increased poverty levels.

Unsustainable fishing methods exacerbate the problem. Netting the fish in the traditional way is seen as too slow, so in some areas the fishermen also use dynamite, simply throwing the explosive into a shoal of fish and collecting the dead ones that float to the surface. Apart from being an abhorrent practice, only a quarter of the fish killed are 'caught' – the rest sink.

Adding to the problem are large factory ships from Europe and East Asia that operate in the fishing grounds off the coast of Gambia and Senegal. These ships use large nets and highly efficient methods, landing catches far beyond the ability of local fishermen. Most of these factory ships have negotiated fishing rights with the governments of Gambia or

Dakar's U-shaped Plage de Hann, once one of the most stunning palm-lined beaches of the world, is now one of Senegal's biggest environmental catastrophes, ever since the industrial area behind the beach expanded massively and factories started dumping their sewage and waste directly into the sea.

## AIRE MARINE PROTÉGÉE DE BAMBOUNG

Observing the colourfully painted pirogues of the Lebou, Serer or Diola fishermen going out to sea, it's hard to imagine that these small, pretty boats could be contributing to overfishing. To combat the problem, Senegal has established a number of protected sea zones, but only one of them, the Aire Marine Protégée du Bamboung (AMP; Maritime Reserve of Bamboung), near Toubakouta, has proven effective. There's a simple reason for this. The protected area is primarily managed and supervised by the 14 villages located on the periphery. These local communities are also the primary beneficiaries of the project.

Every day, motorised pirogues patrol the strikingly beautiful area of tidal mangrove swamps, *bolongs* (small creeks) and wood savannah, preventing attempts at illegal fishing, whether by the large hotels nearby, who take tourists on angling excursions, or by local fishermen.

The results have been overwhelming. Fish species such as the *thiof*, Senegal's most emblematic fish, have started recovering from a point of near extinction. The proliferation of this and other fish has given such a boost to the ecosystem that the area has become home to rare animals such as the sea cow, and attracted far greater numbers of birds including the goliath heron, pink-backed pelican, flamingo and pied kingfisher.

But the boat patrols that keep watch over the zone are hugely expensive and cannot be paid for by the villages or grants alone. This is how Bamboung became home to one of Senegal's most fully realised ecolodges, the *campement* Keur Bamboung, at the southern edge of the reserve.

Great care has been taken to prevent tourism from upsetting this new-found natural balance. With solar power, a water-filtering system and small vegetable gardens, the humble camp tries to remain as respectfully integrated in its surroundings as possible. It's a base for walks or pirogue tours through thick mangrove forests, bird-watching excursions or early-morning trips to a drinking pool for wild boars. At night, the cackle of hyenas accompanies the dreams of visitors, and during the day it's the monkeys that have a laugh at the 'intruders'.

Most importantly, all the profits of the *campement* go directly to the villages, which then use the money to finance the ongoing protection of the reserve.

Senegal and provide a vital source of income for the country. However, the frequency with which ships exceed their agreed quotas, or fish without any licence at all, is so great that the UN has entered the argument. But UN or no UN, making a living from the sea for the local fishermen in their traditional boats has become increasingly precarious.

## Deforestation

Away from the coast, deforestation is another major environmental issue faced by both Gambia and Senegal. Woodland is partly cleared to match a growing demand for farmland, but trees are also felled to make firewood and charcoal, much of which is used to smoke fish. On a larger scale, wooded areas are cleared to make room for cash crops, notably groundnuts (peanuts). In Gambia, one of the major causes of deforestation is bushfires started by local farmers to promote new growth for livestock, to control pests such as the tsetse fly, and to flush out wild animals for hunting.

Whatever the reason, this clearing of natural woodland leads to soil erosion, and eventually the reduction of cultivable areas. More immediately, the loss of woodland also means reduced water catchment and a decrease in the availability of traditional building materials, foodstuffs and medicines. The destruction of wooded areas also leads to the loss of vital habitats for many of the region's bird and animal species.

In Gambia, this type of situation is being addressed by the Central Division Forestry Project (CDFP), which aims to manage the remaining natural woodland. Rather than fencing off the forest and keeping the locals out, the resident community reaps the benefits from helping to sustain the

woodland. For example dead wood can be used for timber, fruits and edible leaves can be collected, and grasses can be harvested for thatch. These products can be used by the local people or sold, but all the activities take place without destroying the forest itself. In this way the local people see the forest as a source of income or employment, both now and in the future, and have a real incentive to protect and manage it in a sustainable way.

### The Groundnut Economy

It may be a humble plant, but the groundnut is one of the principal sources of revenue for both Senegal and Gambia.

Groundnuts were introduced into Senegal in the early 19th century and, by 1860, the Senegal River area was lined with large plantations, established under the governance of Louis Faidherbe. By the early 20th century, groundnuts had become a major cash crop in Senegal and Gambia, and this situation remained unchanged through the colonial period and the first decades of independence.

Today in Senegal, the annual groundnut production is around 600,000 tonnes, which represents about 20% of export earnings. Groundnut plantations cover about one million hectares (around 40% of the country's arable land) and the industry employs about a million people. The main groundnut-growing region is east of Dakar, around the towns of Diourbel, Touba and Kaolack (sometimes called the 'groundnut triangle'). These are centres of the powerful Muslim brotherhoods whose marabouts dominate much of Senegal's political and economic life. Gambia is even more reliant on groundnuts, which make up more than 80% of total exports but account for only 27% of foreign earnings.

Although groundnuts contribute to the economy, the large plantations have a devastating effect on the environment. The crop absorbs nutrients from the soil but replaces very little, and other parts of the crop (such as leaves and stems) are used as animal fodder rather than ploughed back into the ground after harvest. When the crop is harvested, the whole plant – roots and all – is picked, leaving the loose, dry soil exposed and subject to erosion by wind, rain, or goats that come to feed on any discarded remnants. Particularly in areas with marginal rainfall, the soil is soon exhausted or simply blown away and new plantations have to be established in other areas. The abandoned fields are slow to recover and the erosion continues.

Grassland, bush or other natural vegetation has to be cleared as new plantations are established, limiting habitats for wildlife and cattle-grazing land for pastoralists. This has become a major issue in central Senegal, where groundnut farmers expand with government approval ever eastward into grazing reserves supposedly set aside for seminomadic people such as the pastoral Fula.

### Maka Diama Dam

The Maka Diama Dam was built across the Senegal River estuary in the late 1980s. The dam's principal purpose was to stop salt water coming upstream (the Senegal River is tidal). This way, more land on the riverbank could be irrigated for crop-growing, as rainfall in the area has always been unreliable and insufficient. While this may have been an admirable reason, crops now grown include groundnuts, which quickly exhaust nutrients in the soil and ultimately lead to erosion. The Maka Diama Dam has created several other problems. Following the decrease in salinity, thick water weeds now cover the surface of many channels and creeks along this stretch of the main river. These cut out light and reduce oxygen

Océanium is Senegal's fantastically active environmental agency; its website, [www.oceanium.org](http://www.oceanium.org), contains plenty of general information and even allows you to book ecofriendly diving holidays.

### RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Tourism relies on rich cultural traditions and natural resources such as healthy wildlife populations and clean rivers, but quite often does little to maintain, sustain or restore them and may even degrade them. Travellers intending to minimise the negative impact of their holiday often choose companies that promote so-called ecotourism.

However, there are no watertight definitions for this term, and some travel companies claim to be practising 'ecotourism' just because they do things outdoors.

In reality activities such as desert driving, hiking, camping, boating, wildlife-watching and sight-seeing trips to remote and fragile areas can be more environmentally or culturally harmful than a conventional holiday in a developed resort.

The growing number of 'ecolodges' is equally unregulated. Some are genuinely ecofriendly, with solar panels, compost toilets and water-filtering systems, while others adopt the term simply because of token acts, such as using biodegradable soap to wash the sheets.

If you would like to support tour companies with a good environmental record, look beyond the glossy brochures and vague 'ecofriendly' claims and ask what they are doing to protect or support the environment.

This includes not only animals and plants but, most importantly, the local community. Tourism can have an extremely damaging effect on traditional social structures and cultural practices; responsible tourism involves respecting existing lifestyles rather than interfering, and supporting initiatives that benefit and involve the local population, rather than channelling precious tourist dollars into a company's overseas account.

The following are some suggestions for responsible travel:

- Support local enterprise where possible by patronising locally owned hotels, restaurants, tour companies and shops.
- Don't buy items made from endangered species.
- Ask permission before photographing people. If they refuse, respect their wishes.
- Dress conservatively and, in particular, cover your legs.
- Stay in community-run hotels, such as the *campements villageois* in the Casamance.
- Stay in environmentally friendly hotels, and ask specific questions about ecofriendly practices before making your choice.
- Don't eat young *thiof* (a type of fish), which frequently features on menus in Senegal – you'll be contributing to the gradual extinction of the species.
- Don't participate in hunting activities organised by big hotels – despite their claims, many of them don't only go shooting in the legal zones.
- Be economical in your use of water and electricity – although you won't necessarily feel the cuts in these resources if you're staying in a tourist zone, the local population will.
- Don't buy a *djembe* (drum), as this will contribute to deforestation.

A number of organisations offer online advice on how to travel responsibly.

The British organisation **Tourism Concern** ([www.tourismconcern.org.uk](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk); membership per yr UK£24) runs numerous educational campaigns that you can support (and benefit from) by becoming a member.

To find out more about tour operators that are involved in responsible travel, check the website [www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com).

In Gambia, the Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism (ASSET) has been awarded first prize in poverty reduction from the First Choice Responsible Tourism Awards for its support of small, local businesses. Check the website for businesses you might want to support during your travels.

In Senegal, the **Océanium** (☎ 822 24 41; [www.oceanium.org](http://www.oceanium.org); Rte de la Corniche-Est, Dakar) does amazing work in furthering environmentally friendly tourism, which includes running an ecolodge and responsible-diving courses.

levels, decreasing fish populations – a real disaster for local people who rely on fish for food or small-scale trade, and also for the many thousands of birds who feed in this area. On top of all this, the new freshwater areas now harbour malarial mosquitoes and the snails that carry schistosomes, so local people have to deal with an increase in these diseases, both of which are potentially fatal.

### **Community-Based Conservation**

Africa's national parks, so treasured by tourists and environmentalists, haven't always been so appreciated by the people living in their proximity. And their creation not only upset the hunters and poachers, but in some cases also led to the forced removal of villagers who had inhabited those areas for a long time, disrupting their lifestyles and traditions and endangering their livelihood. But views of conservation are gradually beginning to change, and local populations are increasingly being involved in the planning and management of nature reserves. This change in tack is mainly due to the recognition that parks only flourish in the long term if the local communities participate in the process and can share in the benefits.

Such community-run schemes allow the local populace to continue living in a traditional manner, while also deriving an income from the jobs that wildlife tourism creates.

In Senegal's Parc National de Niokolo-Koba, local men from the surrounding villages have been trained as tourist guides, while in Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj various projects instigated by European conservation organisations ensure that park staff cooperates with local people in the surrounding villages. The tiny Réserve de Popenguine in Senegal is mainly maintained by a local women's cooperative that runs a small *campement* on the edge of the reserve and is largely self-financing. And a few kilometres further south, the Réserve de la Somone has been set up and is entirely run by the local community.

In Gambia, some of the most encouraging work has been done by the German-funded Central Division Forestry Project, which has created protected forests, employed villagers as tourist guides, and run ambitious educational programmes about the threat of deforestation. At Kiang West and Niimi National Parks, community groups have been established to give the local people a voice in the park management structure – ideally so they can benefit from the sustainable use of natural resources within the park.

For information on responsible tourism and how to minimise its impact on the environment, see p69.



# Birds of The Gambia & Senegal

The Gambia and Senegal are important sites for a diverse range of birds in West Africa. The region is at an ecological crossroads between the rich fauna of equatorial Africa, the arid vastness of the Sahara, the bulk of continental Africa and the Atlantic coast. This important transition zone, especially vital for migratory birds, supports a mosaic of habitats in which some 660 species of birds have been recorded.

The bird diversity of Gambia reaches a concentration that seems out of all proportion to the tiny size of the country itself. Over 560 species have been recorded – just 80 fewer than in Senegal, which is almost 20 times larger – and the country's unique shape makes many good bird-watching sites easily accessible.

The region's proximity to Western Europe further enhances its popularity as a bird-watching holiday destination, and Gambia in particular draws a great number of ornithologists every year.

## BIRD HABITATS

Many birds are wide ranging, but the vast majority have feeding, breeding or other biological requirements that restrict them to one habitat or group of habitats. Following is a brief rundown of bird habitats in Gambia and Senegal.

### Cities, Towns & Villages

Since a city, town or village will be the first stop for nearly all visitors, it is worth mentioning a few birds that will be seen around towns and villages. The grey-headed sparrow is the main representative of this cosmopolitan group; the red-billed firefinch frequents grain stores and village compounds; and swifts, swallows and martins nest under the eaves of buildings. Many travellers have their first introduction to the region's birds in a hotel garden. Look out for the gorgeous little cordon-bleu flitting among the vegetation and for starlings and the brilliant yellow-crowned gonolek feeding on lawns; weavers make their presence felt in noisy colonies. The piapiac, a long-tailed member of the crow family, can also be seen around towns.

### Ocean Shore & Estuaries

The coastlines of the region are rich habitats for creatures such as crustaceans and molluscs, attracting humans and animals alike to feast on them. Birds likely to be seen feeding in these habitats include waders such as oystercatchers and plovers, and the reef egret, which stalks fish and crabs.

The Gambia and Casamance Rivers both have extensive mangrove-lined estuaries. Historically they have been dismissed as 'swamps', but mangroves are now recognised as an important ecological resource. At low tide the fine mud floor is exposed and makes a rich feeding ground for migratory waders such as curlews, sandpipers, stints, godwits and plovers. Small birds such as sunbirds feed in the mangrove canopy, while larger water birds, such as ibises, herons and spoonbills, roost and nest among the larger stands.

While there have as yet been no cases of avian flu in Gambia or Senegal, it has been much discussed, particularly as the region attracts huge numbers of migratory birds. Regular checks are now being conducted in some areas, most notably the Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj.

### Waterways

The major river systems of Gambia and Senegal – and the associated fringing forests, grasslands and swamps – support an astonishing variety of birds. Some hunt along the shoreline or probe the soft mud at the water's edge, whereas long-legged species stride into deeper water to seek prey. Some kingfishers dive from overhanging branches into the water, while warblers and flycatchers hunt insects in riverside vegetation. For the beginner and expert birder alike, freshwater habitats provide some of the best viewing opportunities.

Low-lying areas may flood after the rains to create extensive ephemeral swamps, which are often superb for bird-watching. Egrets, herons and other wading birds stalk the shallows; dainty African jacanas walk across floating vegetation on their bizarre long splayed toes; and rails skulk in reed beds.

### Savannah & Woodland

Large swaths of central and southeastern Senegal, plus adjoining parts of Gambia, are characterised by savannah vegetation dominated by a mixture of small trees. There can be rich pickings for bird-watchers in this habitat, from the perplexing cisticolas to huge birds of prey, plus weavers, finches, starlings, rollers and many more.

The southern part of the region once supported extensive woodland, and though most of this has now been cleared or modified by human activities, patches of it still remain in the Parc National de Basse-Casamance and Abuko Nature Reserve. A number of rare birds, such as the African pied hornbill, the grey-headed bristlebill and the little greenbul, are found only in these protected areas.

### Arid Areas

The northern part of Senegal is sub-Saharan semidesert, a sparsely vegetated landscape that has been shaped by the low rainfall inherent in this area. This habitat is seldom visited by bird-watchers but supports a few interesting species, including wheatears, desert finches and migratory birds stopping on their way to or from the northern hemisphere.

## THE BIRDS

The Senegal parrot is the most famous bird of Senegal. It's known in French as *youyou* and scientifically as *Poicephalus senegalus*.

The following is a group-by-group description of some of the diverse birds visitors will possibly see during a trip to Gambia or Senegal. This is not a comprehensive list – refer to one of the guides (p77) for further information.

Many birds have been left out: for example, a peculiarly African group known as flufftails are so hard to spot as to be virtually invisible.

### Barbets & Tinkerbirds

Barbets are closely related to woodpeckers but, rather than drilling into bark after grubs, they have strong, broad bills adapted to eating fruit and a variety of insect prey. Most of the region's seven species are found in Senegal. Barbets are often brightly coloured and perch in conspicuous locations; tinkerbirds are noisy but tiny and are sometimes difficult to see.

### Bee-Eaters & Rollers

One of the pleasures of bird-watching in Africa is that beautiful and spectacular species aren't always rare. The various bee-eaters are often

brilliant and always watchable; eight members of this colourful family are found in the region. Bee-eaters are commonly seen perched on fences and branches – sometimes in mixed flocks – from which they pursue flying insects, particularly, as their name suggests, bees and wasps. They may congregate in thousands – you won't quickly forget seeing a flock of stunning carmine bee-eaters.

Rollers are closely related to bee-eaters but not as gaudy, decked out usually in blues and mauves; the Abyssinian roller sports two long tail feathers. Most of the five species are common to the region.

### Birds of Prey

Hawks, eagles, vultures and falcons number more than 50 species in the region. Their presence is almost ubiquitous and travellers will soon notice a few species, from soaring flocks of scavenging vultures to the stately bateleur eagle watching for prey. Several have specialised prey or habitat requirements. The osprey and striking African fish-eagle, for instance, feed almost exclusively on fish.

### Cisticolas

These drab little warblers are common and widespread but sometimes difficult to see and even harder to identify. Many are so similar that they are most easily separated by their call, a characteristic that has led to common names such as singing, croaking, siffling and zitting cisticolas. Many of the region's 12 species are typically found in long grass and riverside vegetation.

### Cranes

These graceful birds resemble storks and herons but are typically grassland-dwelling birds. The one species found in the region – the black-crowned crane – is eccentrically adorned with a colourful crest.

### Finches, Weavers & Widows

This large group includes many small but colourful examples. They are readily seen in flocks along Gambian and Senegalese roads and wherever long grass is found in the region. All are seed eaters and while some, such as the various sparrows, are not spectacular, others develop showy courtship plumage and tail plumes of extraordinary size. A finch typical of the region is the crimson-coloured red-billed firefinch.

Weavers are usually yellow with varying amounts of black in the plumage and, as seed eaters, can become voracious pests of agriculture. The village weaver often forms big nesting colonies right in the centre of towns. Widows, like sparrows, typically come in shades of brown and grey while not breeding, but males moult to reveal black plumage with red or yellow highlights when courting. The whydah, a type of weaver, develops striking tail plumes during courtship; the enormous tail of the exclamatory paradise whydah can be more than twice the bird's body length.

### Honeyguides

Displaying some of the most remarkable behaviours of any bird, honeyguides seek out the help of mammals such as the ratel (aka honey badger), or even humans, in order to 'guide' them to a beehive. Once it has attracted the attention of a 'helper', a honeyguide flies a short way ahead then waits to see if it is being followed. In this way it leads the helper to the hive (and its next meal), which the obliging creature breaks open and robs, while the honeyguide feeds on wax and bees' larvae and eggs.

'There can be rich pickings for bird-watchers from the perplexing cisticolas to huge birds of prey'

'The enormous tail of the exclamatory paradise whydah can be more than twice the bird's body length'

### Hornbills

Found in forests and woodland, hornbills are medium-sized birds that sport massive, down-curved bills. The African grey and red-billed hornbills are reasonably common; the rarer black Abyssinian ground hornbill is an extraordinary bird that stands about 1m high. It rarely flies, instead moving about in small groups along the ground.

### Kingfishers

Colourful and active, the nine species of kingfishers found in Gambia and Senegal can be divided into two groups: those that typically dive into water after fish and tadpoles (and as a consequence are found along waterways), and those less dependent on water because they generally prey on lizards and large insects. Of the former, the giant kingfisher reaches 46cm in size while the jewel-like malachite kingfisher is a mere 14cm. Forest-dwelling kingfishers are generally less colourful than their water-diving relatives. The blue-breasted kingfisher, however, is a boldly patterned example.

Mention should also be made of the hoopoe, a black-and-white bird with a salmon-pink head and neck and a prominent crest.

### Nightjars

These small birds are another nocturnal group but are not related to owls, although their plumage is soft and their flight also silent. Nightjars roost on the ground by day, their subtle colouration making a perfect camouflage among the leaves and twigs. At dusk, they take flight and catch insects. Although they are not uncommon, you may be oblivious to their presence until one takes off near your feet. The identification of several species is difficult and often relies on their call, but when spotted during the day nightjars typically perch on a nearby branch, allowing a closer look. The standard-winged nightjar is the region's most spectacular example; with two feathers unadorned except at the ends, the bird seems to be flying flags to herald its flight.

### Owls

These nocturnal birds of prey have soft feathers (which make their flight inaudible) and exceptional hearing, and can turn their heads in a 180-degree arc to locate their prey. Owls have inspired fear and superstition in many cultures, but their elusiveness makes them eagerly sought after by bird-watchers. There are 12 species in the region, ranging from the diminutive scops owl to the massive eagle owl, which measures up to 65cm in length. Their prey varies according to the species, with insects, mice and lizards eaten by the smaller species, and roosting birds and small mammals favoured by others. Pel's fishing owl hunts along rivers and feeds exclusively on fish.

### Pigeons & Doves

Familiar to city and country dwellers alike, members of this family have managed to adapt to virtually every habitat. For example, the various turtledoves and the tiny Namaqua dove feed on the ground while the African green pigeon leads a nomadic life following the seasonal fruiting of trees. Two of the dove species, the cosmopolitan rock dove and the laughing dove, are common inhabitants of gardens and human settlements.

### Sea Birds

Into this broad category can be grouped a number of bird families that hunt over the open sea. They include the various petrels and shearwaters, which

usually live far out to sea and return to land only to breed; beautiful gannets, which plunge into the sea from a great height to feed on fish; and fish-eating cormorants (shags), which also live in brackish and freshwater habitats.

### Starlings

Africa is the stronghold of these gregarious and intelligent birds, and there are 11 species found in Gambia and Senegal. Several species of the so-called glossy starlings, including purple, long-tailed and blue-eared varieties, may be seen in fast-flying, noisy flocks around the region. All are magnificent birds in iridescent blues and purples, although they may prove an identification challenge when they occur in mixed flocks. The yellow-billed oxpecker is another member of this family and can be seen clinging to livestock, from which it prises parasitic ticks and insects.

### Sunbirds

Sunbirds are small, delicate nectar-feeders with sharp down-curved bills. The males of most species are brilliantly iridescent while the females are more drab. Spectacular species include the pygmy sunbird, whose slender tail plumes are almost double its 9cm length, the copper sunbird and the violet-backed sunbird.

### Swifts & Swallows

Although unrelated, these two groups are superficially similar and can be seen chasing flying insects just about anywhere. Both groups have long wings and streamlined bodies adapted to lives in the air; both fly with grace and agility after insects; and both are usually dark in colouration. Swallows, however, differ in one major aspect: they can perch on twigs, fences or even the ground while swifts have weak legs and rarely land except at the nest. In fact, swifts are so adapted to life in the air that some are even known to roost on the wing. There are many examples of the swallow family in Gambia and Senegal; two often seen around towns and villages are the red-rumped and mosque swallows.

### Turacos

These often beautifully coloured, medium-sized forest birds can be difficult to see because they tend to remain hidden in the canopy, but three species (the violet turaco, green turaco and western grey plantain-eater) are common in the region. The violet turaco is a stunning bird, although you may only be lucky enough to catch a tantalising view when it flies across a clearing, showing its deep-violet wing patches.

### Waders

Resident waders include the odd dikkops and the boldly marked lapwings – lanky, nocturnal species with grey spotted wings and weird wailing cries.

### LONG-LEGGED WADERS

Virtually any waterway will have its complement of herons, egrets, storks, spoonbills and ibises. All have long legs and necks, and bills adapted to specific feeding strategies: herons and egrets have daggerlike bills for spearing fish and frogs; spoonbills have peculiar, flattened bills that they swish from side to side in the water to gather small creatures; ibises have long bills, curved down to probe in soft earth and seize insects; and storks have large, powerful beaks to snap up small animals and fish. Members of this group range from the tiny, secretive bittern and the enormous

Few nature films have images of birds in flight as stunning as Jaques Perrin's acclaimed *Winged Migration* (2001). It features a long extract about pelicans and other migratory birds, filmed in Senegal's Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj.

'Swifts are so adapted to life in the air that some are even known to roost on the wing'

goliath heron, which stands 1.4m tall, to the ugly marabou stork, which feeds, along with vultures, on carrion. An unusual member of this group is the little hamerkop (aka hammerhead), which makes an enormous nest of twigs and grass.

### MIGRATORY WADERS

Every year migrating shore birds leave their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere and fly to their wintering grounds south of the Sahara. Generally nondescript in their winter plumage, these migratory 'waders' provide an identification challenge for the keen bird-watcher. They're usually found near waterways, feeding along the shore on small creatures or probing intertidal mud for worms. The migrants include the long-distance champions, sandpipers and plovers.

### Waterfowl

As their collective name suggests, this large group is found almost exclusively around waterways, and includes the familiar ducks and geese. Waterfowl are strong flyers and can move vast distances in response to rainfall. The increased availability of food after the rains means they may be more easily seen at this time. In particular, the large, black-and-white spur-winged goose is often abundant at such times. Despite the significance of water as a habitat in Senegal and Gambia, there are comparatively few species of ducks and geese in the region.

### WHERE TO LOOK

You will encounter birds virtually everywhere in your travels, although weather and temperature can affect bird activity. Both Gambia and Senegal have a number of reserves set up for the protection of wildlife and habitat, and these are good places to concentrate your bird-watching efforts, although some nonprotected areas can also be rewarding. Following is a brief rundown of popular sites; for more details see the relevant destinations in this book.

In Gambia, Abuko Nature Reserve is closest to Banjul and hosts a surprising diversity within its 105 hectares. Many forest species are easier to see here than in other parts of the country and conveniently located observation hides have been set up. Tanji River Bird Reserve, on the coast, protects a patchwork of habitat on the fly way for migrating birds. More than 300 species have been recorded in the park's 612 hectares. Kiang West National Park is one of the country's largest protected areas and a good spot to see a variety of wildlife, including birds. The adjacent Baobolong Wetland Reserve is also very rewarding. Other recommended areas include Niuni National Park, an extension of the Parc National du Delta du Saloum in neighbouring Senegal, and Bijilo Forest Park, which is easy to reach from the Atlantic coast resorts.

Senegal has six national parks, as well as several other areas set aside as reserves to protect wildlife. Near the mouth of the Senegal River in the north of the country are the Parc National de la Langue de Barbarie and Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj – both superb sites famous for flocks of pelicans and flamingos, and Djoudj is a Unesco World Heritage site where some 400 bird species have been recorded. In the southeast, the magnificent Parc National de Niokolo-Koba protects more than 9000 sq km of savannah and associated habitats; about 350 bird species have been recorded and this is also the last stronghold of Senegal's large mammal populations. Near Dakar, the Îles de la Madeleine are an excellent spot for spotting sea birds, while the small reserves of Popenguine and La Somone

For some of the best bird sightings in Gambia, you don't even have to leave your hotel. The Senegambia Hotel in Kotu, the Footsteps Eco Lodge in Gunjur and the Marakissa River Camp in Marakissa are only three lodgings where large varieties of species are regularly spotted.

are interesting to visit. Absolutely worth exploring are the beautiful Siné-Saloum Delta, an accessible area of coastal lagoons, mangroves, sandy islands and dry woodland, and the delta of the Casamance River, which boasts the Sanctuaire Ornithologique de la Pointe de Kalissaye and the highly rated Sanctuaire Ornithologique de Kassel. Both deltas are easily reached from Gambia.

### BIRD-WATCHING TIPS

A pair of binoculars will reveal subtleties of form and plumage not usually detected by the naked eye. Be warned – once you've seen the shimmering iridescence of a glossy starling or the brash hues of a bee-eater through binoculars you may get hooked! Binoculars will also considerably aid identification and help you nut out the subtle differences between species. They are also useful for spotting shy mammals in areas such as the Parc National de Niokolo-Koba.

Basic binoculars can be purchased quite cheaply from duty-free outlets. If you like to keep baggage weight down, there are some very light and compact models available that will still help you get much more from your trip. If you get really serious about bird-watching you may want to invest in better-quality optics; expensive brands such as Leica, Zeiss and Swarovski should last a lifetime and offer unrivalled quality. You might also consider purchasing a spotting scope, which can give you stunning views with a magnification usually at least twice that of binoculars. The drawback is their size and the fact that they must be mounted on a tripod to obtain the best results. On the other hand, some models can be attached to a camera and double as a telephoto lens.

To help you get the most out of bird-watching, bear the following in mind:

- Try to get an early start because most birds are generally active during the cooler hours of the day. This is particularly so in arid regions and during hot weather.
- Many species are quite approachable and will allow observation and photography if you approach slowly and avoid sudden movements or loud noises.
- If you're on foot, try to dress in drab clothing so as not to stand out. Birds are not usually too concerned about people in a vehicle or boat and stunning views can often be obtained from the roadside. Cruises on rivers and through mangroves are rewarding and great fun.
- Water birds and waders respond to tidal movements. As tides go out, more food is available and larger flocks are attracted but the birds are spread out; as the tide comes in the birds may be 'pushed' closer to your observation position.
- Do not disturb birds unnecessarily and never handle eggs or young birds in a nest. Adults will readily desert a nest that has been visited, leaving their young to perish.
- Remember that weather and wind can adversely affect viewing conditions and you should not expect to see everything at your first attempt.

### RESOURCES

#### Books

Gambia's popularity as a bird-watching destination has inspired a number of illustrated books and other publications. *A Field Guide to the Birds of The Gambia & Senegal* by leading ornithologists Clive Barlow and Tim Wacher, with illustrations by award-winning artist Tony Disley, is

'Once you've seen the brash hues of a bee-eater through binoculars you may get hooked!'



undeniably the best. It lists over 660 species (illustrating 570), with colour plates, detailed descriptions and in-depth background information. This 400-page hardback is no featherweight, though, and costs UK£28 in Britain (US\$42 in the US), but it's as essential as a pair of binoculars for any serious bird-watcher. It is also available in Gambia.

More portable is *Birds of The Gambia* by M Gore (UK£22) – an annotated checklist with extra information on habitat, distribution and vegetation, illustrated with photographs; it can be hard to find, though.

Another useful guide is *A Birdwatchers' Guide to The Gambia* by Rod Ward, a finely researched book concentrating on birding sites and likely sightings, rather than detailed species descriptions; it includes 28 maps.

*A Field Guide to the Birds of West Africa* by W Serle and GJ Morel is part of the long-running Collins field-guide series, though with a broader ambit than is usual for this series.

For more detailed information – plus excellent illustrations – on all African birds, refer to the six-volume *The Birds of Africa* by EK Urban, CH Fry and S Keith. The newest option is *Birds of Western Africa* by Nik Borrow and Ron Demey, a UK£55, 784-page monster that was released in 2002.

## Websites

The Internet is a rich resource of information on birds, with databases of birds and their geographic distribution, tour booking sites, trip reports and forums.

**African Bird Club** ([www.africanbirdclub.org](http://www.africanbirdclub.org)) Set up by a charity aimed at the conservation of bird habitats, this site has features on both Gambia and Senegal and regular bulletins and updates.

**Birds of the Gambia** ([www.birdsofthegambia.com](http://www.birdsofthegambia.com)) Home page of ornithologist Clive Barlow, with a virtual birding tour; you can also book trips to Gambia.

**Gambia Birding** ([www.gambiabirding.org](http://www.gambiabirding.org)) This is an excellent site for bird-watchers, with reports on what birds are found where, how to find a guide, and links to birding tours.

## Birding Guides

Gambia has a well-developed network of professional birding guides, as well as tour operators that specialise in bird-watching excursions. It's often recommended that you go with a good, local guide – if they know the region well, they'll be able to help you see many more species than you would on your own. Choose your guide carefully and get recommendations in the country if you can. It's best to do this in one of the nature reserves, in particular the **Abuko Nature Reserve** (☎ 7782633; [www.darwingambia.gm](http://www.darwingambia.gm); admission D31; 🕒 8am-7pm). Less formally, the bridge over Kotu Stream, near the Novotel in the Atlantic coast resort of Kotu, is a good bird-watching site and a traditional place to meet other birders and local guides looking for work. Unfortunately, there is no equivalent setup in Senegal, and visiting bird-watchers are pretty much on their own. Following is a brief list of recommended places offering bird tours and guides.

**Bird Safari Camp** (☎ 676108; [www.bsc.gm/guides.htm](http://www.bsc.gm/guides.htm); Georgetown) This camp has good birding facilities on site, and an informative website that can direct you to a good guide before you start your trip.

**Habitat** (Solomon Jallow ☎ 9907694; [habitatafrica@hotmail.com](mailto:habitatafrica@hotmail.com)) This established network of Gambian guides organises itineraries, transport and accommodation.

**Hidden Gambia** (in UK ☎ 01527 576239; [www.hiddengambia.com](http://www.hiddengambia.com)) This UK-based group organises river trips, with stays at ecofriendly places equipped for birding.

**Wally Faal** (☎ 3372103; [www.geocities.com/birdinggambia](http://www.geocities.com/birdinggambia)) Based in Gambia's Atlantic coast resorts, this local birding guide runs tours that have been highly recommended by travellers over the years.

To look up the names of birds, with translations in several European languages, check [www.bsc-eoc.org/avibase/avibase.jsp](http://www.bsc-eoc.org/avibase/avibase.jsp), a seemingly unlimited resource.

# Food & Drink

By West African standards Gambia and Senegal form a veritable culinary paradise. You could quite easily spend a couple of weeks here testing the myriad flavours of fish, meat and vegetable dishes. Two words summarise the basics of cooking in the region: rice and sauce. Along the coast, fish tends to be the main ingredient, while meat is more common in the inland (for those who can afford it). And those with a taste for delicacies should head directly for Senegal's Petite Côte, where you can suck freshly shucked oysters for breakfast.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Breakfast local-style is a steaming cup of milky instant coffee, accompanied by French bread and butter. If you're from a part of the world where breakfast is a big deal or good coffee is essential to staying alive, Dakar in particular offers plenty choice: just locate your nearest patisserie and you're well on your way to a *café au lait* (coffee with milk) and croissants. Lunch and dinner usually consist of generous rice dishes, and if you're invited to anyone's home you're expected to dig in.

Any discussion of cooked food in the region has to start with the queen of all dishes – the *thiéboudienne* (spelt in myriad different ways, and pronounced chey-bou-jen), in Gambia called *benechin*. *Thiéboudienne* means fish and rice but is so much more than that. A platter of this delicious meal is quite a sight – carefully arranged chunks of fish, often stuffed with a parsley-garlic paste, carrots, cassava and other vegetables, served on a bed of red rice, which owes its colour to the tomato sauce it's cooked in. The festive version of this national dish is *thiébouyaye* (or *riz yollof*), where fish is replaced by meat.

Another favourite is *yassa poulet*, grilled chicken marinated in a thick onion-and-lemon sauce. It features on the menu of every Senegalese restaurant, and after a two-week holiday you'll probably have tasted it often enough to know the subtle differences involved in spicing a *yassa*. Occasionally chicken is replaced by fish or meat, in which case it's called *yassa poisson* (fish) or *yassa bœuf* (beef), but it's just not the same. *Yassa* on its own is understood to mean the original chicken variety.

Rice is the staple food of The Gambia and Senegal. If you really want to thank people for their hospitality, such as inviting you for a meal, purchase a sack of rice at the end of your stay – your kindness won't be forgotten quickly.

## TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

You've been in the region for a while? A simple *thiéboudienne* must by now be far too normal for you. Put your tastebuds to the test with a plate of *soupoukandia* – a slippery stew of okra and vegetables – which is definitely not for the fainthearted. But if the taste gets too much, you can always drown it in homemade chilli sauce, an obligatory addition to every Senegalese meal. If you're ever invited to someone's home, ask the women in charge of the cooking to show you how to make the sorrel sauce *bissap* (not to be confused with the sweet juice of the same name), which is usually offered with a plate of *thiéboudienne*. This humble accompaniment tastes sweet and sour, spicy and fresh at the same time, and once you've learnt the secret of its preparation your home cooking will never taste the same again.

If dairy products are your thing, head for the cooler shelves in your nearest Banjul or Dakar supermarket. They bend with small pots of *chakri* (a sugary millet mix covered with rich, sweet yogurt), and small pots of *lait caillé* (sweetened sour milk), which is eaten on its own or with cereal. For really fresh flavour, visit the Fula regions, where locals prepare the creamiest milk products of all.

The *thiof* is Senegal's best-loved fish, almost something of a national emblem. It's so appreciated that Senegalese women refer to a good-looking (or tasty?) young man or lover as their *thiof* (or super-*thiof*, but only if they're being served really top quality...).

In either country, if you're in the mood for something rich, ask for some *mafé* or *domodah* – you'll be served a platter of rice covered with a thick, smooth groundnut sauce with fried meat and vegetables.

At the house of a Fula or Tukolor family, chances are you'll be served a steaming plate of steamed millet couscous (it's darker than couscous made with semolina), either prepared with a vegetable sauce (*haako*) or meat sauce. Couscous served cold with sour or fresh milk (*lacciri e kosan*) is the delicious speciality of the Fula. The milk is served in a separate bowl or calabash and then poured over the couscous before eating. Show your appreciation for this dish and you'll be welcomed with open arms.

Lunch and dinner in Gambia and Senegal usually consist of a main course – though one heavy enough to quench any desire for dessert.

## DRINKS

### Nonalcoholic Drinks

Gambia and Senegal have a rich array of locally produced juices that are sold in many restaurants and along the beaches of the Gambian coast. Steer clear of the ones sold in plastic bags on the street, as you don't know what conditions they've been prepared under. The most famous drink, *bissap*, is made from hibiscus, sugar and water and is instantly recognisable by its deep purple colour. Ginger beer (*gingembre* in local French) is common, as is *bouyi*, a thick, sweet drink made from the fruits of the baobab tree. Despite the fantastic range of local stuff, the most widely consumed soft drink is Coca-Cola, on sale in even the tiniest, remotest boutique in the bush.

In the hot-drinks department, instant coffee (usually just called Nescafé) rules the game, though real coffee is available at better restaurants in both countries. Worth trying is the Senegalese *café touba*, a spicy brew served in small cups at roadside stalls. For teas, you can either get the tea-bag variety (Lipton is the going name, even if it's another brand), or capture the sweet flavour of home-brewed *kinkiliba*, a herbal tea that is supposed to have a whole host of healthy effects, from boosting energy to clearing skin conditions. And for a real caffeine punch, try a glass

### TEA TIME

You see them everywhere in Senegal, from midafternoon to midnight – groups of boys and men, sometimes joined by women, grouped around a tiny chipped enamel kettle, a steaming stove and a tray holding a few tiny glasses. They're brewing *ataaya*, West Africa's classic pick-me-up. This is a punchy, bittersweet brew made from fistfuls of green tea leaves and a generous amount of sugar. While its high caffeine content does help you to stay awake in the suffocating midday heat, brewing *ataaya* is really about whiling away a hot afternoon people-watching, about meeting old friends and making new ones, about gossip, stories, jokes and football matches.

Brewing *ataaya* is a social ritual that follows a precise set of tiny, immutable laws that are repeated precisely all across the Sahel region. The main rule: making tea shall never be rushed. The leaves are left to infuse with a little water and plenty of sugar for hours. The tea-maker in charge has to watch the kettle and take it off the heat when the lid starts rattling; the first infusion is usually ready after an hour or so. The tea-maker blends the concoction by pouring it into the glasses from an impressive height to create the perfect froth, then back into the kettle and finally back into the glasses, which are now heated and covered in sweet froth.

The first infusion is a pungent wake-up call, usually offered to the men who dare. The second one is strong, sugary perfection; the third is 'sweet as love' (as the locals would have it). You down your hot tea as fast as your throat permits; the tea-maker will be waiting to collect the glass so it can be refilled and passed to the next in line.

### COLLECTING PALM WINE

As you travel along the back roads of Gambia and southern Senegal, you'll almost certainly see men perched precariously on oil-palm trees, collecting the plant's precious sap. Palm wine is a much-loved drink and, once you've grown used to the yeasty flavour, you'll probably agree with the locals.

Watching the collectors climb the trees is an impressive sight. They use a simple loop of handmade rope (called a *kandab* in Diola) that fits like a large belt around the man and the tree, holding him close to the trunk. Just below the point where the palm fronds sprout from the tree, the collector punches a hole through the soft bark until he reaches the sap. The liquid drips slowly through a funnel (traditionally made from leaves, although these days it's usually a piece of plastic) into a container (once a natural gourd, today more likely to be a plastic bottle). At the end of the day, the collector comes back to pick up the bottle, filled with sweet, thick, white sap. At this stage, the alcohol content is still minimal – some say it's nonexistent, others say it's the strength of beer. But leave the palm wine to ferment overnight or a few days and you'll get a pretty strong brew. It's mainly a man's thing, but especially in non-Muslim areas women drink it, too.

of *ataaya* (see opposite), served with the free offer of an afternoon's socialising.

Although tap water is supposed to be safe to drink in some areas (the capital cities in particular), it's strongly advisable to rely on mineral water. This also means avoiding ice cubes in drinks – one of the most frequent sources of stomach aches. Definitely steer clear of the tap in Senegal's Petite Côte and Siné-Saloum areas and along Gambia's Atlantic coast. These regions are renowned for problems with the drinking water, ranging from pollution to a high salt content that destroys teeth at a frighteningly fast rate.

### Alcoholic Drinks

Though Gambia and Senegal are Muslim regions, beer is widely available, and consumed in bars and restaurants. The main Senegalese brands are the watery Gazelle and the more upmarket Flag. In Gambia, Julbrew is the local brew. Buying a good wine can be something of an expensive mission, even in Senegal, despite all its French influence. As for liqueurs, you'll have plenty of choice in the cities and can always get a whisky or gin behind the stained curtains of a village drinking hole. Drinking is strictly a bar activity, and very few people drink at home. Open displays of drunkenness are very much frowned upon in both countries. Remember, you're in a predominantly Muslim region, and though many Muslims do drink, they tend to do it in a discreet fashion – drinking yourself to a stupor is not a way to gain 'cool' points in this part of the world. Palm wine (see above) is a popular home-brew, particularly in Gambia and Casamance, and the sweet-sour liquid is worth a try.

### CELEBRATIONS

Celebrations here, as elsewhere in the world, put the focus firmly on food. Weddings, baptisms and other family celebrations are always on the large side in this region. They are occasions to get the whole extended family together as well as an opportunity to eat really well. At a medium-sized wedding, the eating budget can easily reach US\$1000, and this in countries where basic foodstuffs aren't all that expensive. The meals served are more refined versions of the usual staples – with the addition of extra meat, a more expensive sauce or any other way to make a difference.

Legend has it that the island of Banjul, now the site of Gambia's capital, was purchased by the British from indigenous rulers for two bottles of brandy.

During naming ceremonies in Senegal, *lakh*, a delicious millet porridge served with sweet yogurt, is typically served in large bowls – taste it and you'll understand why people don't miss these parties.

Small fried doughnuts, usually given to guests in small plastic bags, are also obligatory at naming ceremonies and weddings.

For most celebrations, some animal has to give up its life – a sheep in most cases or a cow if the family is really big or immensely wealthy. At Tabaski (see p46), sheep are slaughtered in the homes of all Muslim families. Several days before the event, rams as big as cows line all major roads. On the day of Tabaski, only their droppings on the pavement and suspicious clouds of smoke created by multiple wood fires tell of their former presence.

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Dakar and the urban zones along Gambia's Atlantic coast are blessed with an excellent restaurant scene. Here you'll find refined local and international cuisine, beach restaurants with sunbeds and terraced places with spectacular views, though these plush venues charge for the spoils.

If you're on a budget, hunt out the tiny local eateries, called *chop shops* in Gambia and *gargottes* in Senegal. Many are nameless but can usually be identified by the coloured plastic strips hanging in their doorways. Most of these places have only one dish available at any given time, so just ask what's on offer rather asking for the menu. They are rarely open all day and only serve food during lunch and dinner – when the pots are empty at night, the place simply shuts or serves beers only. Choose your *chop shop* carefully – some have rather dubious standards of hygiene.

Also on the tiny side are the Senegalese *tangana* (literally meaning 'hot stuff'), where you get your *café touba* and perhaps a sandwich with sauce. A *dibiterie* in Senegal or *afra* in Gambia is a grilled-meat stall (open from evening until early morning); it's the place people head to before a night out on the town or when returning home after dancing the night away. Senegal has some fantastic patisseries where you can indulge in cakes and croissants; they're also a good postnightclub alternative to *dibiteries* for those who only leave parties at breakfast time.

## Quick Eats

For food on the go, the trusted hamburger will be a good travel companion, though the more popular alternative is the Lebanese *shwarma*, a kebab-style sandwich made from thin, grilled slices of lamb or chicken wrapped in thin bread. They are sold in small eateries throughout the

For an exhaustive report on Senegalese cuisine, complete with recipes and links to Dakar's restaurants, go to [www.au-senegal.com](http://www.au-senegal.com) (English version), click on 'Noon and Evening' and then on 'Cooking'.

## CULTURAL KOLA NUTS

Any West African market has a stall trading kola nuts – white, pink and purple varieties, about half the size of a golf ball, sold with soil still clinging to them.

The nuts are chewed for their mildly narcotic effects, but their cultural significance goes far beyond their caffeine-type stimulation.

They are often presented as gifts, particularly in situations that demand the highest respect. If family elders ask for the hand of someone's daughter in marriage, they traditionally present their in-laws-to-be with kola nuts.

By extension, the term 'kola' is used to refer to a symbolic sum of money that changes hands at weddings, and is applied to small financial gifts bestowed on someone who has rendered a service.

## LE MENU

In Senegal's smarter restaurants, the *menu du jour* (often shortened to *le menu*) is the meal of the day – usually comprising a starter, a main course and a dessert – at a set price. If you want to see the menu (ie the list of dishes available), ask for *la carte* instead. This may include the *plat du jour* (the dish of the day), usually at a special price too. It is often a good idea to go for *le menu* or *plat du jour* – any other choice may take much longer to prepare.

two countries. Sandwiches tend to be intimidating affairs, with fries, meat, mayonnaise and a few lettuce leaves all squeezed into a stick of French bread.

Selling food on the street is a way for many local women to add to the household income, and you'll see stalls all along busy market streets and near bus and taxi stops. Typically selling *brochettes* (skewered meat or fish), grilled fish, fried plantain – even plates of rice and sauce – they get busy over lunchtime and even more so in the evenings. Leave any nightclub and you'll see a street stall tempting you with something hot and grilled.

If you want to consume your street food sitting down, try an informal coffee stall, where traders, drivers and other working folk stop for milky coffee or *café touba* and bread and butter in the mornings or at lunch.

These roadside places charge only a handful of dalasi or CFA francs and, while eating there can save money, it's also the quickest way of catching a stomach bug. Hygiene in many of these ultrainformal places isn't exactly a primary concern. The interior of a place can tell you a lot – ramshackle doesn't necessarily mean bad quality, but food leftovers that haven't been cleaned up, dirty tablecloths and, well, stray cockroaches definitely do.

## VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

For vegetarians, this region can be a challenge.

If you eat fish, you'll be fine, but prepare for hard times if you follow a strict vegetarian diet. Vegetarian food is hard to find in restaurants and there's little understanding as to why someone who can afford meat won't eat it – vegetables are for the poor. This means that often when you order a dish without meat, you'll still notice a suspicious chicken or fish flavour, just no 'bits'.

The easiest way to get your message across is to say you have an allergy or that your beliefs don't allow you to touch meat. Still, prepare for a rather limited variety of food choices during your stay.

## HABITS & CUSTOMS

If you get invited to share a meal with a local family or group of friends, there are a few customs to observe. You'll probably sit or squat with your hosts on the floor in a circle around the food, which will be served in one or two large bowls – usually one with rice, and the other with a sauce of palm oil, peanuts, vegetables, fish or meat. It is considered polite to take off your shoes, so do this if your hosts do.

The food is eaten with either the hand or a spoon. If you do use your hand, make sure it's the right one – the left is strictly reserved for personal hygiene.

As an honoured guest you might be passed chunks of meat or other choice morsels by the head of the household. It's usually polite to finish eating while there's still food in the bowl to show you have had enough.

There's no end to the commercial ventures of Senegal's superstar musician Youssou N'Dour. In 2004 he coauthored the cookery book *La Cuisine de Ma Mère*, containing recipes for some of Senegal's most popular dishes.



## TOP FIVE RESTAURANTS

- Butcher's Shop (p108; Fajara, Gambia) Has the best steak and local fruit juices in the region.
- Just 4 U (p161; Dakar, Senegal) Spectacular live music and a great ambience every night.
- La Fourchette (p160; Dakar, Senegal) Imaginative, global cuisine in ice-cool surroundings.
- La Linguère (p211; Saint-Louis, Senegal) A little run-down but still serving the best *yassa*.
- Mama's Restaurant (p109; Fajara, Gambia) A bustling local place with scrumptious evening buffets.

The shocked comments of 'You haven't eaten anything, dig in' are more an acceptance of your finishing, rather than an invitation to eat more. The same goes for invitations to eat whenever you pass someone about to take a meal – it's polite to invite, but you're not always expected to take it up.

## EAT YOUR WORDS

For English speakers, dining in Gambia is no problem. However, a few words and phrases in French will come in handy in Senegal.

For tips on pronunciation, see p305.

## Useful Phrases

## Do you know a good restaurant?

ko-nay-say-voò un bon re-sto-ran      *Connaissez-vous un bon restaurant?*

## What time does this restaurant open/close?

a kel-er oo-vrer/fairm ler res-to-ron      *À quelle heure ouvre/ferme le restaurant?*

## I've just eaten.

zher vyen zhoost der mon-zhay      *Je viens juste de manger.*

## Can I have the menu please?

es-ker zher per a-vwa la kart      *Est-ce que je peux avoir la carte?*

## Do you have a menu in English?

es-ker voo-za vay ewn kart on-non-glay      *Est-ce que vous avez une carte en anglais?*

## How much is the meal of the day?

kom-byun koot ler pla dew zhoor      *Combien coute le plat du jour?*

## I'm a vegetarian.

zher swee vay-zhay-ta-ryun/ryen      *Je suis végétarien/végétarienne.*

## I don't eat meat.

zher ner monzh pa de vyond      *Je ne mange pas de viande.*

## I'm allergic to (meat/seafood).

zher swee-za-lair-zheek  
(a la vyond/o frwee der mair)      *Je suis allergique.  
(à la viande/aux fruits de mer)*

## Can I have this dish without meat?

es-ker zher per a-vwa ser pla son vyond      *Est-ce que je peux avoir ce plat sans viande?*

## Do you have any Senegalese dishes?

es-ker voo-za-vay day pla say-nay-ga-lay      *Est-ce que vous avez des plats sénégalais?*

## What's your speciality?

kel ay vo-trer spay-sya-lee-tay      *Quelle est votre spécialité?*

## Is this dish very spicy?

es-ker ser pla e-tray ay-pee-say      *Est-ce que ce plat est très épicé?*

## Do you have any dishes for children?

es-ker voo-za-vay day pla poor lay-zon-fon      *Est-ce que vous avez des plats pour les enfants?*

## A juice without ice cubes, please.

un zhew son gla-son seel voo play      *Un jus sans glaçons, s'il vous plaît.*

## Thank you, I'm full.

mair-see zhay a-say mon-zhay      *Merci, j'ai assez mangé.*

## Excuse me, I ordered quite some time ago.

ek-skew-zay-mwa zhay ko-mon-day ler      *Excusez-moi, j'ai commandé il  
day eel ya long-tom      y a assez de temps.*

## Can I have the bill please?

la-dee-syon seel voo play      *L'addition, s'il vous plaît?*

## Food Glossary

## DAIRY

<i>le beurre</i>	<i>ler ber</i>	butter
<i>le fromage</i>	<i>ler fro-mazh</i>	cheese
<i>le lait</i>	<i>ler lay</i>	milk
<i>le lait caillé</i>	<i>ler lay kay-yay</i>	sour milk
<i>le yaourt</i>	<i>ler ya-oort</i>	yogurt

## FISH &amp; SEAFOOD

<i>le calmar</i>	<i>ler kal-mar</i>	squid
<i>les crevettes</i>	<i>lay krer-vet</i>	prawns
<i>les fruits de mer</i>	<i>lay frwee der mair</i>	seafood
<i>la langouste</i>	<i>ler long-goost</i>	lobster
<i>le poisson</i>	<i>ler pwa-son</i>	fish
<i>le poisson fumé</i>	<i>ler pwa-son few-may</i>	smoked fish

## FRUIT

<i>l'ananas</i>	<i>la-na-nas</i>	pineapple
<i>la banane</i>	<i>la ba-nan</i>	banana
<i>le fruit</i>	<i>ler frwee</i>	fruit
<i>la mangue</i>	<i>la mon-ger</i>	mango
<i>la noix de coco</i>	<i>la nwa de ko-ko</i>	coconut
<i>la papaye</i>	<i>la pa-pa-yer</i>	papaya

## VEGETABLES, NUTS &amp; GRAINS

<i>fufu</i>	<i>foo-foo</i>	mashed cassava
<i>les arachides</i>	<i>layz a-ra-sheed</i>	groundnuts/peanuts
<i>les légumes</i>	<i>lay lay-gewm</i>	vegetables
<i>les pommes de terre</i>	<i>lay pom der tair</i>	potatoes
<i>le riz (thieb in Wolof)</i>	<i>ler ree</i>	rice

## EATERIES

Here are some useful words to know when you're hungry. Terms marked 'G' or 'S' are used only in Gambia or Senegal respectively.

**afra** – grilled-meat stall (G), or grilled meat

**boulangerie** – a bakery that only sells bread (usually French bread)

**chop** – meal, usually local-style (G)

**chop shop** – basic local-style eating house or restaurant (G)

**dibiterie** – grilled-meat stall (S)

**pâtisserie** – a bakery selling bread, croissants and cakes

**salon de thé** – tea shop (S)

**snack** – a place where you can get light meals and sandwiches; it does not refer to the food itself (S)

**tangana** – a roadside café serving hot drinks and snacks

**terminus** – a popular place to eat and mingle after a night out, usually a *dibiterie* or a *pâtisserie*

### OTHER FOOD

<i>les frites</i>	<i>lay freet</i>	fries
<i>le pain</i>	<i>ler pun</i>	bread (usually French bread)
<i>le piment</i>	<i>ler pee-mon</i>	small red pepper
<i>le sel</i>	<i>ler sel</i>	salt
<i>le sucre</i>	<i>ler sew-krer</i>	sugar

### DRINKS

<i>bissap</i>	<i>bis-sap</i>	<i>a purple-coloured drink made of water, sugar and hibiscus leaves</i>
<i>bouyi</i>	<i>boo-yee</i>	<i>sweet, thick juice made from the fruits of the baobab tree</i>
<i>(un) café au lait</i>	<i>(un) ka-fay o lay</i>	<i>(a) coffee with milk/cream</i>
<i>(un) café touba</i>	<i>(un) ka-fay too-ba</i>	<i>(a) spiced, black coffee</i>
<i>corossol</i>	<i>ko-ro-sol</i>	<i>thick, white juice, made from the fruits of the soursop tree</i>
<i>jus de pomme</i>	<i>zhew der pom</i>	<i>apple juice</i>
<i>jus d'orange</i>	<i>zhew do-ronzh</i>	<i>orange juice</i>
<i>kinkiliba</i>	<i>kin-ki-lee-ba</i>	<i>local herbal tea</i>
<i>l'eau minérale</i>	<i>lo-mee-nay-ral</i>	<i>mineral water</i>
<i>(un) petit café</i>	<i>(un) pe-tee ka-fay</i>	<i>(an) espresso</i>
<i>pression</i>	<i>pray-syon</i>	<i>draught beer</i>
<i>(un) thé</i>	<i>(un) tay</i>	<i>(a) tea (usually black)</i>
<i>vin du palme</i>	<i>vin der pal-mer</i>	<i>palm wine</i>