

Casamance



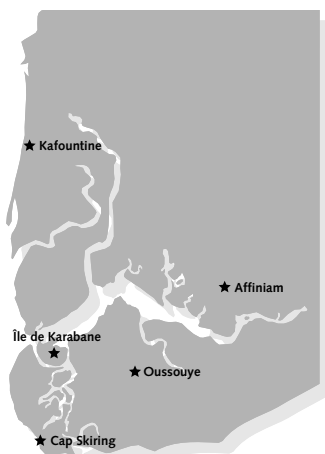
News from Casamance has frequently been of the negative kind, but forget the region's troubles for one minute – there isn't a more beautiful region in the whole of Senegal. Lush tropical landscapes, fertile soils, myriad waterways and the unique culture of the Diola – the largest tribe of the Casamance – give the expansive zone its distinctive flavour.

The mighty Casamance River winds its way through the region in a maze of picturesque creeks and lagoons. Small islands, areas of palm grove, forest, mangrove swamp and abundant estuary vegetation accompany its picturesque course. The pirogue is the ideal means of exploring the waterways, though the surrounding area provides plenty of potential for extensive walking or bicycle tours. On the western coast, Senegal's finest beaches spread in a wide strip of white sand from Cap Skiring towards the 'hip' villages of Kafountine and Abéné, broken by a mangrove-lined delta where the Casamance River spills into the Atlantic. Ziguinchor, the region's gateway, is an atmospheric regional capital where elegant colonial houses and cheap hotels line majestic avenues bordered by flowering trees.

Over the last few decades the region has unfortunately become better known for an ongoing separatist rebellion than for its attractive landscape. At the time of writing, a 2004 peace deal between the Senegalese government and insurgents had calmed things down and tourists were returning. The most exciting sign was the renovation of several *campements villageois*, the rural, village-managed lodgings typical of the Casamance.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Swim by day and party by night at **Cap Skiring** (p242), home to the best beaches in Senegal
- On foot or bicycle, trace the small forest paths and wide shorelines around **Oussouye** (p239)
- Admire original local architecture and get a taste of rural life from the *campement villageois* at **Affiniam** (p246)
- Feel like you've been sent back in time on the peaceful **Île de Karabane** (p240), and admire dozens of bird species on your pirogue trip there
- Drum up a reggae beat and relax in the hammock at **Kafountine** (p247)



■ POPULATION: 1.5 MILLION

HISTORY

The Diola people of Casamance have a long history of resisting the rule of outsiders. It's a sentiment that underlined their outright rejection of slavery (both European and African), their refusal to accept France's colonial administration and the bloody war being waged by those seeking secession from Senegal.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the French colonial authorities controlled their territory through local chiefs. In Casamance, however, the Diola people do not have a hierarchical society and thus had no recognised leaders. The French installed Mandinka chiefs to administer the Diola, but they were resented as much as the Europeans, and Diola resistance against foreign interference remained extremely strong well into the 1930s.

In 1943, the last Diola rebellion against the French was led by a traditional priestess called Aline Siteo Diatta, from Kabrousse. The rebellion was stopped and Aline Siteo

was imprisoned at the remote outpost of Timbuktu in neighbouring Mali, where she eventually died.

The conflict that has plagued the region for the last 20 years originated from a pro-independence demonstration held in Ziguinchor in 1982, after which the leaders of the *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance* (MFDC) were arrested and jailed. Over the next few years the army clamped down with increasing severity, but this only galvanised the local people's anti-Dakar feelings and spurred the movement into taking more action.

In 1990, the MFDC went on the offensive and attacked military posts. The army responded by attacking MFDC bases in southern Casamance and over the border in Guinea-Bissau, which had been giving covert support to the rebels following a coastal territorial dispute with Senegal. As always it was local civilians who came off the worst, with both the Senegalese army and the MFDC accused of committing

TO GO OR NOT TO GO?

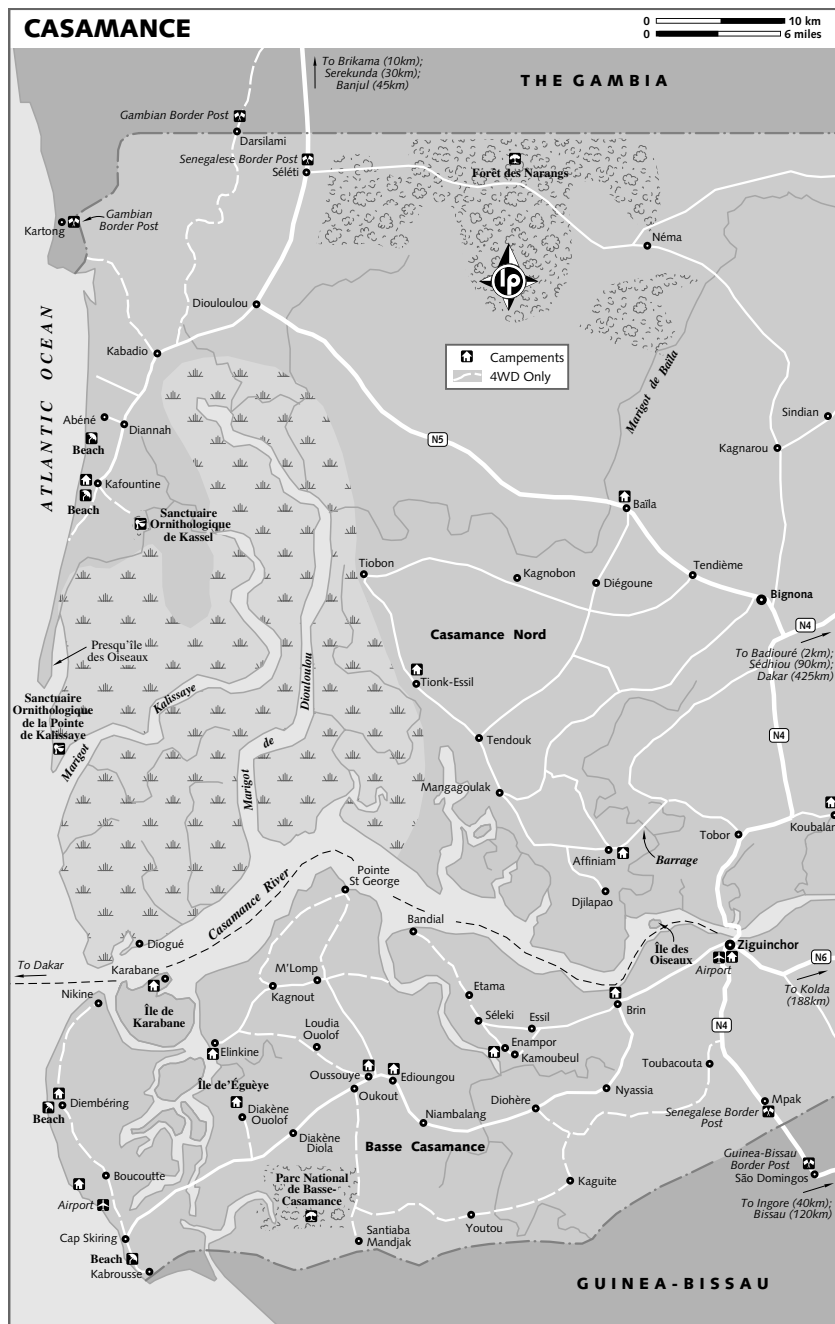
It's the nature of news that you hear more about killing than about living, and in the case of Casamance good news is hard to find. This means that the vast majority of Senegalese know little more than outsiders about the current situation in the Casamance.

Everybody we spoke to in the Casamance assured us that travelling to the area was perfectly safe, but it pays to be extra careful. Don't travel on the roads at night, particularly in the areas near Guinea-Bissau and the route from Ziguinchor to Kafountine via Bignona. There have been occasional car hijackings and ambushes at roadblocks, usually put up by armed bandits rather than separatists defending the rebel cause. Alarm bells rang when, in 2006, the deputy prefect of Diouloulou was assaulted at one of these roadblocks and later lost his life. Attacks are rare, but they do occur, so make sure you give yourself enough time to arrive at your destination before nightfall.

At the time of writing, conflicts between rebel forces and Bissau-Guinean military had just flared up in a small area near the Guinea-Bissau border. This resulted in the temporary suspension of public transport and the closure of the border crossing in São Domingo. These kinds of confrontations have become very rare since 2004, but you always need to check the latest security advice, listen to the locals, and give conflict areas a wide berth. In Ziguinchor you can ask at your hotel, but a more grass-roots picture may be gleaned by talking to bush-taxi drivers: if they are reluctant to go, you should be, too.

During the two weeks we travelled through the Casamance, visiting remote villages as well as major tourist centres, we didn't experience any difficulties whatsoever. By contrast, the hospitality of the people, their eagerness to welcome foreign visitors back into their region and help tourists to travel safely were impressive and moving. Casamance used to be one of Senegal's major tourist destinations, and for most people, the suffering is greater for the lack of tourists and tourist dollars than any direct confrontation with separatist fighters.

The only real permanent no-go zone is the Parc National de Basse-Casamance, which has been closed for years because of suspected land mines. Rest assured that unless you just wander off on your own accord, people will simply not allow you to get too close to trouble.



atrocities against people who were thought to be sympathetic to the opposite side.

As the '90s wore on, ceasefire agreements were signed and broken as periods of peace repeatedly ended in violence. In 1995 four French people touring in Casamance went missing. The Senegalese government blamed the MFDC while Father Diamacoune Senghor, the MFDC's leader, accused the army of trying to turn international opinion against the rebels. Peace talks continued but following the government's refusal to consider independence for Casamance, a group of hardliners broke away from the MFDC and resumed fighting.

Meanwhile Father Diamacoune urged his supporters to continue the search for reconciliation with the government. A new ceasefire was agreed upon in late 1997 but it did little to slow the mounting death toll, and during the following three years about 500 people were reported killed. His authority fading, Father Diamacoune unexpectedly signed a peace deal in March 2001. While the agreement provided for the release of prisoners, the return of refugees and the clearance of landmines, it fell short of the full autonomy many rebels sought. Divisions within the MFDC deepened; a bloody battle was fought between two opposing factions and many in Casamance begun referring to some of the rebels as bandits, or common thieves. Things have since become calmer, and the latest peace deal (agreed in 2004) appears to be effective, though occasional uprisings and street ambushes still occur.

INFORMATION

For information – from the political situation to hotel bookings – try the websites www.casamance.net and www.casamance.info (both run by Philip Chiche from Le Flamboyant hotel in Ziguinchor).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Most tourists visit the Casamance without experiencing any problems, but given the precarious political situation, caution is advisable (see p229).

Along the region's main arteries and near major settlements you will come across military checkpoints manned by government forces. You'll be asked to show identification; as long as all papers are in order, these checks tend to be swift and painless.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

There are airports at Ziguinchor and Cap Skiring. Air Sénégal International flies every day between Ziguinchor and Dakar (one way CFA50,000); from November to May it flies twice a week from Dakar to Ziguinchor (one way CFA59,000).

Boat

At the time we visited, the boat service between Dakar and Ziguinchor was so good, reliable, safe and comfortable that the other options – relatively expensive airfares or a tedious taxi journey via Gambia – somewhat lost their appeal. The boat travels mainly through the night; you can get sleeper seats or a bed in a cabin, and arrive relaxed in the morning (see also p291).

There's a sad background for all this unexpected comfort. In 2005 the current boat *Le Willis* took over the journey previously made by the MS *Joola*, which had tragically capsized in 2002 in the worst catastrophe Senegal had ever experienced. Almost 2000 people perished (only 64 passengers were rescued), caused by dangerous overloading.

This shocking wake-up call has now made the *Joola's* successor one of the safest passenger boats of the region. Passenger numbers are strictly respected, baggage is weighed before getting onboard, and all essential safety measures, including permanent radio contact, life vests and satellite surveillance, are in place. You have to book your place on the overnight trip in advance.

In Dakar the **Somat ticket office** (Map p150; ☎ 889 8009, 889 8060/51) is next to the Gorée ferry pier; in Ziguinchor it's at the port. The boat departs Dakar every Tuesday and Friday at 7pm, returning from Ziguinchor every Sunday and Thursday at 2pm. In Dakar, you need to arrive at least 1½ hours in advance; in Ziguinchor at least one hour. Tickets cost CFA15,500/23,500/28,500 for an armchair/sleeper seat/cabin bed (cabins sleep four people). Residents pay CFA5000 less, children under 12 travel for half price, and children under four are free.

Bush Taxi

The road from Dakar past Kaolack and down the Trans-Gambia Hwy looks relatively short and straight on the map, and is in a good

state, too (with the exception of a few wobbly kilometres in Gambia). But having to cross The Gambia can be a pain, to say the least. Gambian border posts can be hard work to deal with: payments are asked for and visas and vaccination certificates demanded, when in fact none of this is required if you're in transit. Then there's the ferry from Farafenni to Soma, a boat that almost deserves the title 'antique' and is frequently out of service. All of this makes journey times unpredictable. Some drivers claim to do Ziguinchor–Dakar in seven hours, but 10 or more is more likely.

Ziguinchor–Dakar costs CFA7500 by *sept-place* taxi (a seven-seater Peugeot) and CFA5500 by Ndiaga Ndiaye; several cars leave every morning from the *gare routière* (bus and bush-taxi station) in Ziguinchor – it's best to get there early as most drivers like to leave no later than 7am. From Ziguinchor you get connections to all other Casamance destinations. On the Gambian border, you might be asked to pay CFA2500 tax (payable in CFA), sometimes more, and other 'extras' depending on the mood of the Gambian officers. Stay calm and smiling if faced with red-tape tedium.

GETTING AROUND

Casamance can be toured by car, public transport, pirogue, bicycle or on foot. In Ziguinchor and Cap Skiring you can hire

LOCAL GUIDES

If you want to leave the roads and main tracks to explore quieter areas on foot or by bike or pirogue, a local guide is recommended. As well as showing you the way (a maze of paths and trails crosses the region and there are very few signposts), guides can introduce you to aspects of religious practice and culture in the Casamance that you might otherwise miss.

The best way to find a guide is by asking around at your hotel. Some of the best guides of the region are those of the *campement villageois* in Oussouye. The Relais de Santhiaba and Le Flamboyant hotels in Ziguinchor, and Diatta Tour International in Ziguinchor and Cap Skiring are all able to recommend reliable, enthusiastic and knowledgeable guides. Rates start at about CFA5000 per day.

cars, and hiring a taxi with a driver should cost around CFA20,000 for the day.

Cap Skiring, Ziguinchor, Affiniam, Elinkine and Île de Karabane all have pirogues to take travellers on tours, or just from A to B. See individual sections for more details.

For cycling the smaller tracks are often too sandy, even for fat-tired mountain bikes, but there are several good dirt roads in the Casamance that are rideable, such as the route to Enampor, several tracks around Oussouye and Cap Skiring. The main tar roads are also OK on a bike, although you need to keep your eyes and ears open; what little traffic there is tends to go quite fast, and there's no room for error. For specialised hiking and biking tours, contact **Casamance VTT** (☎/fax 993 1004; casavtt@yahoo.fr) in Oussouye.

ZIGUINCHOR

pop 217,000

Ziguinchor (zig-an-shor) is the largest town in southern Senegal, as well as the main access point for travel in the Casamance region. It's hard to imagine a more laid-back town than this regional capital – just don't call it sleepy. Unlike other 'junction towns', Ziguinchor has real atmosphere, couched among the majestic houses, leafy streets and busy markets of this old colonial administrative centre. It's worth spending a couple of days here, just soaking up the calm ambience of the town.

ORIENTATION

Ziguinchor's suburbs sprawl into the surrounding bush, but the central area is quite compact and can easily be covered on foot.

The focal point of the town is the traffic circle Rond-Point Jean-Paul II from which many streets radiate, including Rue Javelier, a bus road with shops, restaurants and a bank. It leads past the covered Marché Escale to the Rue du Commerce, which runs along the southern bank of the Casamance River. This is where you find the ferry terminal.

Leading east from Rond-Point Jean-Paul II is Av Carvalho, which links the centre to the *gare routière*. From a roundabout near the *gare routière*, the wide Rte 54 leads south to Guinea-Bissau and north, via the bridge

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crossing the Casamance River, to Banjul and Dakar.

The road heading southwest from the Rond-Point Jean-Paul II passes the cathedral and becomes Av Lyc e Guignabo (or Route de l'Aviation), passing March  Saint-Maur and the March  Artisanal before reaching the airport, which is 3.5km from the centre.

INFORMATION Bookshops

The best bookshop in town is on the northern end of Rue Javelier, with a good selection of titles on Senegal and Casamance (mostly in French), as well as some English-language magazines.

Cultural Centre

Alliance Franco-S n galaise (☎ 991 2823; Av Lyc e Guignabo; ☎ 9.15am–noon & 3–7.15pm Mon–Sat) This is easily Ziguinchor's most stunning building – a giant *case   impluvium* (large, round traditional house), decorated with blindingly busy South African Ndebele and Casamance patterns, at the southern end of Av Lyc e Guignabo. Inside there are exhibitions, a large concert hall where shows take place at least once a week, and a welcoming restaurant and bar. Tourists are expected to make a donation of CFA750 when visiting the centre, and are given a postcard of the centre in exchange.

Internet Access

There are plenty of Internet caf s, including the two in the following list. Le Flamboyant and H tel Kadiandoumagne are both wi-fi

spaces, and the Alliance Franco-Sénégalaise has a speedy Internet café.

Sud-Informatique (☎ 991 1573; www.sudinfo.sn; Rue Javelier; per hr CFA1000; ☎ 9am-midnight) Has fast machines and good facilities, including satellite TV tuned to European football.

Web City (☎ 991 1044; Rue Javelier; per hr CFA1000; ☎ 10am-midnight) Offers a reasonable service.

Medical Services

Véronique Chiche at Le Flamboyant hotel can recommend reliable doctors in town.

Hospital (☎ 991 1154) Ziguinchor's regional hospital is located next door to the airport. It has an Accident & Emergency department, but it's not well equipped.

Money

The following banks change money, give advances on credit cards and have ATMs taking Visa and MasterCard.

CBAO (Rue de France; ☎ 7.45am-noon & 1.15-2.30pm Mon-Thu, 7.45am-1pm & 2.45-3.45pm Fri)

SGBS (Rue du Général de Gaulle; ☎ 7.45am-noon & 1.15-2.30pm Mon-Thu, 7.45am-1pm & 2.45-3.45pm Fri)

Post

Post office (Av Emile Badiane) South of the Marché Artisanal. Best for parcels.

Post office (Rue du Général de Gaulle)

Telephone

There are plenty of private *télécentres* along Rue Javelier and in the surrounding streets.

Tourist Information

Véronique and Philip at Le Flamboyant hotel on Rue de France will share their knowledge with anybody there for a drink or meal. Véronique speaks English and can help set up excursions or hire local guides.

Fédération des Campements Villageois (fecav; ☎ 991 1268, 558 1421; Marché Artisanal) Mr Sane at the FECAV can help you with the latest information on the *campements villageois*, recent openings, state of repairs and travel.

Travel Agencies

Casamance Voyages Tourisme (☎ 991 4362; casamancevoyagestourisme@yahoo.fr; Rue Javelier) A good option for purchasing tickets and arranging tours.

Diatta Tour International (☎ 991 2781; aessibye@yahoo.fr; Rue du Général de Gaulle) An excellent agency that can arrange air tickets, tours, hotel and *campement* (hotel) reservations and car hire and fishing trips. It also has a subsidiary branch in Cap Skiring. In Ziguinchor, this is also the DHL agent.

SIGHTS

Central Ziguinchor, with its colourful colonial buildings and wide streets overlooked by mighty trees, is well worth exploring for an afternoon. Interesting buildings include the central **post office** on Rue du Général de Gaulle (there are occasional open days, on which you can visit all those parts of the structure you don't normally get to see), the office of **Diatta Tour International** next door, a pink-tinted house with a wide courtyard, the **Governance** (Rue du Général de Gaulle) and, of course, the stunning **cathedral** (Rond-Point Jean-Paul II). Still on the architectural side, the huge *case à impluvium* of the **Alliance Franco-Sénégalaise** (☎ 991 2823; ☎ 9.15am-noon & 3-7.15pm Mon-Sat) offers plenty of interest – from the mosaic floors to the Ndebele patterns painted all across the walls and ceiling. Not far from there, the Marché Artisanal and the Marché Saint-Maur, both on Av Lycée Guignabo, tempt with woodcarvings, fabrics and, more ordinarily, fresh fruit and vegetables.

Any day around town should also take you along **Rue du Commerce**, which runs parallel to the river – not only for the stunning view, but for the impressive sight of dozens of pirogue makers and painters, fishermen and women cleaning mussels. The best place to see them at work is the stretch of coast between the Hôtel Kadiandoumagne and the restaurant Le Erobon.

Heading 5km west out of town, you can walk through the vast greenness of the **Ferme de Djibelo** (☎ 991 1701; admission CFA2000; ☎ 9am-6pm), which has a large, tropical fruit and flower garden to enjoy (and from which to purchase fresh produce). It also has a rather bizarre crocodile farm at the back, where you can get close to Nile crocs in all ages and sizes – from tiny babies to 'granddads', though knowing that they're kept to be one day slaughtered for their meat and skin spoils the fun a little (the crocodile products from the farm can be exported legally, as they're not taken from wild animals).

ACTIVITIES

Pirogue Excursions

The standard day trip from Ziguinchor includes a pirogue trip to Affiniam and Djilapao on the northern side of the Casamance River and a trip to Île des Oiseaux. These three places are set in beautiful surrounding. Affiniam has a stunning *case à impluvium*

(the *campement villageois*), and in Djilapao, you can see some beautiful *cases à étages* (traditional two-storey mud houses). Île des Oiseaux is great for bird-lovers; with very little effort you can see pelicans, flamingos, kingfishers, storks and sunbirds as well as many more species.

Many hotels offer trips to these destinations including Le Flamboyant, the Hôtel Kadiandoumagne and the Relais de Santhiaba. Prices vary slightly but are usually around CFA15,000 per person, with a minimum of four travellers. Alternatively, you can just hire the whole pirogue for CFA50,000 per day. A final option to consider is the public ferry to Affiniam – for more details see p246.

Sports

Ziguinchor is in theory a great base for bicycle excursions, though you'll probably need to bring your own two wheels; all the previously existing bike hire facilities have closed due to the difficult maintenance of bikes forced daily along Ziguinchor's sandy roads.

If a lack of pedal power means you're not getting your legs moving enough, try the **Centre Sportif Aubert** (☎ 938 8020; Rue Diallo; per hr CFA500), opposite of the hotel of the same name, where you can work out on the latest fitness equipment, use the pool or participate in a range of courses from aerobics to weight workouts.

COURSES

Africa Batik (☎ 9911 2689) Near Rond-Point Jean-Paul II, it offers batik-making courses of varying duration. Inquire for rates.

Alliance Franco-Sénégalaise (☎ 991 2823; ☎ 9.15am-noon & 3-7.15pm Mon-Sat) And if you want to learn French, try here.

Sunjata Keita (Av Lycée Guignabo) This small percussion boutique can arrange drumming courses.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The annual **Ziguinchor carnival**, held during carnival season in February, features plenty of local drumming and dancing groups, as well as wrestling matches and impressive parades. Check www.casamance.net and www.casamance.info for dates.

SLEEPING Budget

Hôtel Tourisme (☎ 991 2223; Rue de France; s/d CFA6600/8200) Four simple, clean rooms, in the

heart of town, and above a great restaurant – it's a bargain. It's managed by the owners of Le Flamboyant, and benefits from their good kitchen and vast regional knowledge.

Le Bombolong (☎ 938 8001; r CFA8000) This simple place with a leafy courtyard is best known for its nightclub. Off Rue de Commerce, it is a relaxed place to stay unless you're a light sleeper.

Relais de Santhiaba (☎ 991 1199; s with/without bathroom CFA9000/5000, d with/without bathroom CFA13,000/8000; ☎) This simple place, in a side-street off Ave Cherif Bachir Aidara, is a good pick among the cheapies. Looks drab from the outside, but rooms are surprisingly welcoming and facilities are clean.

Porte Sangamar (☎ 653 9728; r from CFA8000) This place tells a story of mismanagement. It's wonderfully set on the river, and the scrubbed white walls promise simple charm – but rooms are dark and soulless, though well maintained.

Auberge Casafrique (☎ 991 4122; casafrique@yahoo.fr; s with/without bathroom CFA8000/5000, d with/without bathroom CFA10,000/7000; ☎) This basic auberge near Relais de Santhiaba has spartan rooms set in a leafy garden. Several comfy chill-out spaces (including a sofa-TV combination) make it sure to appeal to young travellers, and it was full every time we visited – always a good sign.

Auberge Aw-Bay (☎ 936 8076; r per person CFA3600) This pretty auberge west of town was worryingly empty when we visited – despite its good-value rooms, very clean shared toilets and a mango-tree garden with ready hammocks.

Auberge Le Kadiandou (☎ 991 1071; off Route 54; s/d/tr CFA5000/6000/8000) This small guesthouse near the *gare routière* has performed a steep descent over the last few years. The mere sight inspires bug paranoia.

Midrange & Top End

Le Flamboyant (☎ 991 2223; flamboyant@casamance.net; Rue de France; s/d CFA15,000/17,000; ☎) This classy place is possibly the best value in the country! The tranquil rooms with their red-brick floors and comfy mattresses come with phone, satellite TV, fridge bar and soothing spotlighting, and are set in a quiet garden. The French couple that runs Le Flamboyant is absolutely forthcoming and knowledgeable, and oh yes, the whole place is a wi-fi zone. Bliss.

Le Perroquet (☎ 991 2329; perroquet@sentoo.sn; Rue du Commerce; s/d CFA10,000/12,000) This simple place right on the river and beside the pirogue pier is excellent value. For 1st-floor rooms with balcony you pay an extra CFA1000, a small investment for stunning river views.

Hôtel Kadiandoumagne (☎ 938 8000; www.hotel-kadiandoumagne.com; Rue du Commerce; s/d CFA22,000/25,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Stunningly located right on the river, the top-quality and tongue-twisting Kadiandoumagne (kaj-an-dou-man) has good rooms, wi-fi access in the restaurant, and stunning views from the spacious restaurant terrace. It's also one of the few places in the country that is equipped for wheelchair users, and even has a chair for hire. Ask about the excellent range of pirogue excursions.

Hôtel Aubert (☎ 938 8020; hotelaubert@sentoo.sn; Rue Fargues; d/tr CFA22,000/30,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Part of Ziguinchor's upper class of hotels, this is a tastefully laid-out place, complete with a sports centre and jazz bar. The comfortable rooms have satellite TV and minibar.

Le Nema Kador (☎ 991 1052; controlenema@senegal-hotel.com; Av Lycée Guignabo; s/d CFA18,500/20,000; 🍷 🍷) Part of the Senegal Hôtel chain, this somewhat dated resort hotel has spacious, nicely laid-out rooms, though the dusty bungalow fronts and overgrown garden lend the setting an atmosphere of slight abandon.

Hôtel Tahiti (☎ 991 5949; tahitimotel@sentoo.sn; s/d incl breakfast CFA15,600/18,200; 🍷) It's placed in a strangely unattractive location on the roadside, in front of a military camp. But its well-kept rooms equipped with TV, fridge and phone make this a viable option.

Hôtel N'Daary Kassoum (☎ 991 1472; ndaary@hotmail.com; Rue de France; d CFA12,000; 🍷) This place has more statues than visitors in its gloomy lounge. Rooms don't feel welcoming with dark decor and rattling air-con, but then again, they're fairly cheap, too.

EATING

The best restaurants, and those with the widest range of choices, are the hotel restaurants – Le Flamboyant and Hôtel Aubert are good, and the restaurant of the Kadiandoumagne and Le Perroquet are unbeatable for views.

Le Erobon (☎ 991 2788; Rue du Commerce; meals around CFA2000; 🍷 10am-1am) This humble outdoor eatery is highly recommended. You can come here any time of day for grilled fish,

carefully spiced and served with a sea view. The ambience is wonderfully relaxed.

Hôtel Tourisme (☎ 991 2223; Rue de France; mains around CFA3000; 🍷 noon-2.30pm & 7-10pm) It doesn't look much during the day but after dark the lighting lends this place some style. Great for seafood dishes and *al dente* spaghetti.

Le Palmier (☎ 936 8181; Rue du Commerce; dishes from CFA1000; 🍷 24hr) Not the best address, but this near-port cheapie serves Senegalese, Guinean and Casamance specialities.

Le Mansah (☎ 936 8146; Rue Javelier; dishes around CFA2000; 🍷 8am-midnight) It looks so shady you'd be forgiven if you were too shy to enter. But the food, including prawns grilled on a skewer with hot sauce, is tasty.

Le Kassa (☎ 936 8300; Rond-point Jean-Paul II; meals around CFA1500-2500; 🍷 8am-2am) This is the most inviting of the local-style places – a spacious restaurant-cum-bar with a fairly wide menu and frequent live shows on weekends.

Also recommended:

Salon de Thé Chez Fifi (Rue Javelier; dishes around CFA1500; 🍷 10am-11pm) A great place to sip a cup of milky coffee watching the bustle of Ziguinchor's most animated street.

Le Tamarinier (Av Carvalho; meals around CFA1500-2500; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Good Senegalese meals and standard international cuisine (think chicken and chips).

Self-caterers can buy all the fresh fruit and vegetables they can carry on **Marché Éscale** (Rue Javelier), right in the heart of town. There's also a small **superette** (Rue Lemoine), as well as a good **pâtisserie** (Rue Javelier) opposite the restaurant Le Mansah.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT Bars & Nightclubs

There are plenty of *buvettes* (roughly translated as drinking holes) along Ziguinchor's central streets. Some of the less intimidating options include the following.

Walkunda Bar & Salon de Thé (☎ 991 1845; 🍷 9am-1am) This pretty place near the Rond-point Jean-Paul II serves drinks at very reasonable rates, as well as filling meals.

Bar Malila (near Rond-Point Jean-Paul II) It's tiny, and if it weren't for the smart bar chairs and red-blue lighting it would be like any other drinking spot. It gets going around 2am.

L'Abondance (Rue du Général de Gaulle; 🍷 5pm-2am) This is really a *dibiterie* (grilled-meat place) rather than a bar, but it's also the final stop after a night dancing.

Le Rubis (Rue de Santhiaba; admission CFA1000-2000) Under new owners this was Ziguinchor's most fashionable dance floor when we visited, with salsa on Fridays and a global punch of hip-hop, R&B and *mbalax* (a mixture of Cuban beats and traditional *sabar* drumming) on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Le Bombolung Nightclub (Rue du Commerce; admission CFA1000-2000) Another busy club downtown following the same rules as Le Rubis – 'grown-ups' sway to salsa on Fridays, while Saturday is younger and hipper with heavier bass and faster rhythms.

The youth centre CDEPS near Rue de France is frequently hired for public dance soirees on weekends.

Wrestling

During the dry season (November to May), you stand a good chance of seeing wrestling matches, usually held on late Sunday afternoons at the wrestling arena (really just a dusty field), east of Av Lycée Guignabo.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Air Sénégal International (☎ 991 1081) has an office at the airport. See p231 for details of flights to and from Ziguinchor.

Boat

See p231 for information on the boat service between Dakar and Ziguinchor.

Bush Taxi

Ziguinchor's extremely well organised *gare routière* is 1km east of the centre. If you want to get all the way to Dakar, get there early, around 6am or even earlier, to catch a taxi that'll take you all the way.

Traffic goes via the Trans-Gambia Hwy, crossing the Gambia River on a ferry between Soma and Farafenni.

Sample fares (in CFA) include the following:

Destination	Sept-place taxi	Minibus	N'Diagra N'Diaye
Bissau	5000	-	-
Cap Skiring	1400	1100	1000
Dakar	7500	5500	5000
Elinkine	1300	850	-
Kafointine	2500	1700	1600
Kaolack	5500	3800	-
Kolda	3500	-	-
Séléti	2200	-	-
Soma	2500	-	-
Tambacounda	7500	-	-

CAMPEMENTS VILLAGEOIS

Among Casamance's attractions are its *campements villageois*, traditional-style lodgings, often in remote locations, that are built by local residents, integrated in the village and best of all, benefit the local community. The *campements* have existed since the 1970s, when Adama Goudiaby and Christian Saglio initiated them as a way of counteracting rural exodus and offering perspectives to local youth. Ten were built originally, but during the years of conflict, many were left in ruins. Over the last few years, the Fédération des Campements Villageois (FECVAV) has with financial help from the French and German Cooperations been able to begin an ambitious renovation programme.

At the time this book was researched, the *campements* of Oussouye, Enampor, Baïla, Koubalan and Affiniam had been fully restored, so spectacularly, that some of them exceed any competing private ventures in quality and service. All of them are built in traditional architectural styles (the *case à impluvium* in Enampor and *case à étage* in Oussouye are particularly impressive), and offer insightful excursions into the immediate surroundings led by knowledgeable local guides. Integrated and respectful rural tourism rarely comes more enjoyably.

The prices of all Campements Villageois are standardised, with only small variations:

- bed (with mosquito net) – CFA3000
- breakfast – CFA1500 to CFA1800
- 3-course lunch or dinner – CFA2500 to CFA3500
- beer – CFA800
- soft drink – CFA500

For more information, particularly regarding renovation progress of other *campements*, contact Mr Sane at the **Fédération des Campements Villageois** (FECVAV; ☎ 991 1268, 558 1421).

GETTING AROUND

Car

The setup for hiring cars in Ziguinchor is quite informal, but **Diatta Tour International** (☎ 991 2781; aessibye@yahoo.fr; Rue du Général de Gaulle) and most hotels will be able to help. Cars usually come with a driver, which cuts the hassle with paperwork or deposits. Expect to pay around CFA25,000 per day plus fuel. Another option is to hire a taxi; if you pay for fuel, the daily rate should be around CFA20,000. It's best to get going early, especially if you're taking a long trip – you don't want to be on the road after dark, and neither does your driver if he has to get back to Ziguinchor.

Taxi

The official rate for a taxi around town or to the *gare routière* is CFA400. It's supposed to be the same price between the centre and the airport (3.5km), and even between the *gare routière* and Auberge Aw-Bay on the west side of town (3km), but for these longer rides you'll probably have to pay from CFA500 to CFA750. The main taxi rank is at Rond-Point Jean-Paul II.

BASSE CASAMANCE

It's hardly an overstatement to claim that this region has got it all. Small Diola villages hide among the lush greens, and make great bases for walks and bike rides (preferably with local guidance). At the end of the road that leads west from Ziguinchor lie the stunning beaches of Cap Skiring, and the sparkling nightlife this understated holiday zone proudly calls its own. One of the finest excursions anywhere in Senegal is taking a pirogue from there to the laid-back Île de Karabane, an island seemingly lost in time, then travelling from there to the busy fishing village of Elinkine and back to beautiful Oussouye. This circuit can be done in a few days, though you might be forgiven for wanting to take a couple of weeks. Some visitors have been known to settle in the region, lured by the tranquil scenery, friendly people and unique architecture.

ENAMPOR

Enampor is 19km from Brin, and a bicycle ride (only for the brave) along the deserted

red-dirt road makes you understand the meaning of heading into the middle of nowhere.

But the reward is sweet. The **Campement Villageois** (☎ 441 4484, 936 9160; r per person CFA3000) is a huge *case à impluvium*, one of the most beautiful examples around. All around the *case* there's a photo exhibition on display, showing images of the most recent Diola initiation ceremony held in the region in 2004 (the first one in more than 30 years). The photos aren't that great in quality, but still give an amazing insight into a defining local tradition.

The staff at the *campement* are happy to show you the sights, including a sacred royal site and forest. The surroundings are also great for leisurely walks and pirogue trips.

In theory there are two minibuses per day from Ziguinchor to Enampor and nearby Séleki (CFA500).

Hiring a private taxi will set you back CFA7000 to CFA9000. Other than that, it's a bush taxi to Brin and a long walk or bicycle ride to Enampor (you take the left, or southerly, fork at Essil).

Moving on from Enampor, it's possible to go by hire pirogue from Enampor to Ziguinchor, or just about anywhere else in Casamance – ask around in the village.

CASES À IMPLUVIUM

Across Casamance there has traditionally been at least one *case à impluvium* in most Diola villages. The *impluvium* is in effect a huge, round mud house made using beams of ronian palm and mangrove wood (both of which are impervious to termites), and has a thatched-grass roof.

Historically, during wartime villagers would shut themselves inside the *impluvium* for safety. Rainwater was funnelled into a large tank in the centre of the house through a hole in the roof (which also admits a wonderful diffused light). The largest *impluviums* could hold 40 villagers and their cattle.

With mud and thatch proving useless against modern weapons, there are few *impluviums* left. Two of the better examples are the village *campements* in Enampor and Affiniam, while the fanciest of all is the Alliance Franco-Sénégalaise in Ziguinchor.

OUSSOUYE

Roughly halfway between Ziguinchor and Cap Skiring, Oussouye (oo-soo-yeh) is the main town in the Basse Casamance area. It swings to its own relaxed rhythm, and makes a great base for trips around the region. For the local Diola population this town is of significance, as it's home to an animist king who is often sought for advice.

Oussouye is home to **Casamance VTT** (Chez Benjamin; ☎/fax 993 1004; http://casavtt.free.fr), an inspirational little company that specialises in area tours and organises the annual semimarathon (see right). Benjamin, the English- and Spanish-speaking owner, rents mountain bikes for CFA4000/7500 a half/full day, and organises guided cycling, hiking and pirogue tours from CFA10,500 per day (CFA14,500 with meals). During the dry season (November to May), longer tours can also be arranged at similar per-day rates.

It's worth making some time to visit a humble shop called **Kalaamisso**, a workshop in the centre of the village for disabled people who make and sell beautiful woven hats, baskets and other items. It's usually open all day – just turn up and knock on the door.

Sleeping

Oussouye has some of the prettiest *campements* in the whole of Casamance – another reason for including a couple of days here into your itinerary. In addition to the options below, a new, French-run *campement* (Chez François) was very near completion at the time of research. The organic brick structure promised plenty of character – it's worth checking if the place is open.

Campement Villageois d'Oussouye (☎ 993 0015; http://campement.oussouye.org; s/d CFA4500/6000) This stunning and well-run *campement villageois* is one of the great success stories of the rekindling of the regional tourist industry. Accommodation is in a beautifully restored *case à étages*, built entirely in the stunning, heat-busting mud-architecture once typical of the region. Another big plus: the resident guide Jean Baptiste, a calm force of a tourist guide who has a deep knowledge of the region and is all too happy to share it.

Campement Emanaye (☎ 993 1004; emanaye@yahoo.fr; s/d CFA4500/6000) The striking two-storey mud dwelling that houses good quality en suite rooms gives great views over the local rice fields.

CASAMANCE SEMI-MARATHON

Every December, Oussouye is the proud host of a semi-marathon that takes runners through some of Casamance's most stunning stretches. Organised by Benjamin of Casamance VTT and part-funded by the German Bank for Development, the race is designed to showcase this beautiful but neglected piece of Senegal and is one of the few organised community events in a region where there's not often cause for communal celebration. The Casamance Semi-Marathon is open to all comers and is quickly gaining cult status with participants drawing in from across the country and far, far beyond. For details of the course or to register for the race (spots are limited) go to http://kabekel.free.fr, in French, or call **Casamance VTT** (☎ 933 1004).

Auberge du Routard (☎ 993 1025; r per person CFA3000) This is a jovial place where the ladies of the hut can be found making batiks in the centre of a small *case à impluvium* – an art they will teach you for a small fee. Rooms are basic but clean, and bathrooms are shared.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of little eateries in town. **Le Kassa** (☎ 563 7186; Route Nationale; dishes around CFA1000; ☺ lunch & dinner) This small local eatery is worth a visit, especially if you like the taste of deer, a speciality in the region. The place is as welcoming as a rough hug, and portions are huge.

Le Passager (☎ 512 0243; meals around CFA1500) Restaurants near *gare routières* are usually busy places, waiting rooms for travellers as they are. This one is no exception. It's about as buzzing as it gets in Oussouye, and serves enormous portions of local and international food – with deer as its speciality.

The Télécentre et Buvette du Rond-Point is an ideal place for a quiet drink and any urgent phone calls you may need to make.

Getting There & Away

All bush taxis between Ziguinchor and Cap Skiring pass through Oussouye. Most continue to the Cap, and rates to Oussouye are usually around CFA1000.

EDIOUNGOU

A short bike ride or pleasant walk from Oussouye lies the small village of Ediougou, famous for its pottery (see right). You can watch the local women create their pretty wares, and purchase some during the day, but if you want to spend the night there's the ambitiously sized (and priced) **Campement Les Bolongs** (☎ 993 1041; s/d CFA10,000/13,000). Even if you don't intend to spend the night, you should come here for a meal (around CFA2000 to CFA4000, open from 9am to 10pm) with a view – the spacious restaurant terrace overlooks a particularly beautiful part of the mangroves.

M'LOMP

On what is allegedly a tarred road between Oussouye and Elinkine you'll pass through the village of M'Lomp, the best place to admire the local *cases étages* that are unique to this part of West Africa. The old lady who lives in the largest *case étage* near the main road will show you around her place for a small fee. The tour will undoubtedly include the enormous *fromager* (kapok) tree, at least 400 years old and sacred in the village, that towers above the first *case étage*.

Decent food in a welcoming setting can be found at **Les Six Palmiers** (☎ 569 9058; meals CFA500-1000; ☎ 8am-11pm). To get here, ask for Chéz Brigitte, and any local can give you directions.

POINTE ST GEORGE

To the north of M'Lomp and Oussouye, on a large bend in the Casamance River, lies Pointe St George. If you've got a 4WD, this beautiful spot is well worth a visit. Plans exist for the creation of a maritime reserve in the region, and the reopening of the *campement villageois*. Contact the Océanium (p154) in Dakar and the FECAV (p234) in Ziguinchor for the latest information.

ELINKINE

The busy fishing village Elinkine is the best jumping-off point for Île de Karabane. Hundreds of fishermen and their families have moved to Elinkine from all over West Africa in recent years, adding to the bustle of a beach that's lined with colourfully painted pirogues. This isn't so much a place to laze and sunbathe, but a great destination for those keen to gain a glimpse of day-to-day

POTTERY IN THE MAKING

Ediougou, a small village just east of Oussouye, has been a centre of pottery-making for many years. Until recently, customers were local people from other parts of Casamance, but the women who make the pots have been assisted by a development organisation to sell their wares to tourists.

Items range from spherical bowls and jugs, which have a pleasing purity of design and organic simplicity, to more elaborate cups and candle holders. The work is distinctive because the potters add a mixture of soil and crushed shells to their clay and when fired the pots take on the look of burnished leather. You can buy the pots in Ediougou, Oussouye and at stalls and markets elsewhere in Casamance.

If you don't feel like lugging your precious new pots around for your entire holiday, you can try posting them from the Oussouye post office – though there's no knowing how safe that would be. The DHL in Ziguinchor (p234) is a safer but infinitely more expensive option.

life in a dynamic community of fishermen. The simple but charming **Campement Le Fromager** (☎ 525 6401; s/d CFA3000/6000) has been rebuilt after having been burnt to the ground a few years ago, and now offers good, basic accommodation and a vast range of excursions. Mammadou Ndiaye, the welcoming manager, has spent several decades in the local tourist industry – use your chance to tap into his vast regional knowledge.

There are normally several Ndiaga Ndiayes each day from Ziguinchor to Elinkine via Oussouye for CFA850, or from Oussouye for CFA300. The timetable for transport from Elinkine is less predictable. A seat in one of the occasional *sept-place* taxis that cover this route is CFA1250 to Ziguinchor. Hiring a taxi from Elinkine to Oussouye will cost you between CFA6000 and CFA10,000.

ÎLE DE KARABANE

The perfect address for those determined to pass a few hours or days doing little and not feeling an inch of guilt is Île de Karabane. It's hard to believe that this tranquil island

near the mouth of the Casamance River used to be home to the first French trading stations in the region (1836–1900). The French legacy is now largely ruins, but you can still see the crumbling remains of a tall Breton-style church and a school. Along the beach lies the so-called Catholic Cemetery with the graves of French settlers and sailors including a Capitaine Aristide Protet, who apparently died when he was hit with a poison arrow during a Diola uprising in 1836, and was buried with his dog. The beach is good for swimming, and the mangroves surrounding the island are great for relaxed boat tours. A pirogue trip to the Île des Oiseaux offers effortless viewing of pelicans, herons, cormorants and plenty of other sea birds. Angling, oyster plucking and visits to local fishing villages can all be organised – and there's a pretty realistic chance of spotting dolphins on the way.

There are no landline phones on Karabane and mobile coverage isn't great. Always leave a message if you don't get an answer on any of the numbers given – you will be called back.

Sleeping & Eating

The following places are listed by location from east to west. All serve food.

Campement Le Barracuda (☎ 659 6001; r CFA3000, half board CFA7300) With its pretty en suite rooms, forthcoming management and excellent restaurant, this is probably the most commendable place on the island. It's definitely the best address for bird-watching and angling excursions, whether you're an experienced fisherman or first-time rod-holder.

Hôtel Karabane (☎ 569 0284; hotelkarabane@yahoo.fr; s/d CFA13,000/18,000) This delightful and well-maintained hotel is set in a lush and shady tropical garden. You'll have the honour of staying in what used to be the colonial governance, and enjoying your drink in the former Catholic mission. Plenty of pirogue excursions can be arranged from here.

Chez Helena (☎ 654 1772; s/d CFA4000/6000) If the rooms were as pretty as the gleaming restaurant terrace, this would be a fantastic place to stay. Well they're not, but boisterous manager Helena will try to make you forget the ugly lino floors and curious assembly of furniture by wrapping you up in sparkling conversation.

SHARK'S FIN SOUP

Elinkine is a pretty fishing village, and a great place to watch the whole humdrum surrounding this industry. Yet in the minds of many it's forever associated with the ruthless fishing of sharks. Many fishermen have been drawn to town by the presence of sharks in the surrounding waters, and the willingness of many Asian restaurantgoers to pay stacks of money for the privilege of eating their tasteless cartilage. Shark fishing is carried out almost exclusively by Ghanaians. The local Diola people understand the value of the fins, but apparently find the meat less than appetising, and can't sell it to the Muslim community as they won't eat it. But while the Ghanaians sell thousands of fins a year, they seem to have little idea of their end use. One fisherman asked: 'What do they do with the shark fins?' When told they were eaten in soup he replied in amazement: 'What, they don't even make anything out of them? Just soup?'

Badji Kunda (☎ 556 2856; r per person CFA3000) Littered with small statues and colourful wall paintings, this place has a decidedly carefree and arty ambience. The owner, Malang Badji, is a renowned sculptor and painter; his works are on display and for sale here. If you're staying for a few days and you don't mind paying for materials, you can try your hand at local glass painting or pottery.

Leliba (☎ 544 5108; r per person CFA4000) Furthest along the beach, this busy little *campement* offers workshops in dance, music and crafts, and even houses a small recording studio. It will appeal to those keen to learn about and assimilate some local culture. Basic accommodation is in huts scattered around a large *case à impluvium*.

If you've grown tired of your hotel food, try the **Kaaty** (dishes CFA2500; ☎ 6am-midnight), a laid-back bar-restaurant where seafood and other simple dishes are on offer. Or down a drink at Africando, a cute bar set up by an enterprising mind in the expansive roots of a large *fromager*.

Getting There & Away

Île de Karabane is best reached by motorised pirogue from Elinkine. A fairly regular boat (*navette*) leaves Elinkine daily at 2.30pm

and 5pm, reaching Île de Karabane half an hour later before continuing to the village of Diogé on the north bank of the Casamance River. It returns at 10am the next day. The fare is CFA1000. Alternatively, you can charter a boat for about CFA10,000 each way – just ask at the harbour. If you know where you'll be staying, your *campement* can also arrange to pick you up for a fee. A hired pirogue from Cap Skiring will cost you around CFA30,000 to CFA40,000.

ÎLE D'ÉGUEYÉ

This corner, at about 17km from Oussouye, is still something of a travellers' secret, thanks to its secluded position between two small branches of the Casamance River, which enclose this 'island'. The surroundings of the island are quite simply breathtaking, and that's certainly what the owners of the pretty **Campement de l'île d'Egüeyé** (☎ 544 8080; r ind full board CFA11,000) thought. If you want to hide from the world, this is where you do it. You get here by pirogue from Diakène Oulof, an excursion-worthy village in itself, between Oussouye and Cap Skiring. Phone the *campement* to see if you can get picked up, or talk to Benjamin at Casamance VTT in Oussouye (p239).

CAP SKIRING

Considering the awesome beauty of Cap Skiring's beaches, the tourism industry of the area is still surprisingly low-key. A handful of resort-style hotels attracts European package tourists, but all along the beachfront you also find small *campements* appealing to independent travellers. Off the beaten track this ain't, but if you want a few easy days of sun and sand, with the option of a bit of partying after hours, this is the place.

Orientation

The village of Cap Skiring is 1km north of the junction where the main road from Ziguinchor joins the north-south coast road. It's a busy little place with plenty of shops, restaurants, bars and nightclubs, a market and the *gare routière*. Following the main road through the village, you'll come to a junction, where the *village artisanal* (craft market) lies on your right, and the high walls of the Club Med complex on your left. The airport is another 4km along the road that goes past the Club.

There are some places to stay in the centre itself, but most hotels and *campements* sit on the beach south of Cap Skiring village, 5km along the coast road towards Kabrousse.

Information

Cap Skiring has a small hospital, a post office and several *télécentres* in the centre of the village. The CBAO bank in the village has an ATM that accepts Visa cards.

Diatta Tour International (☎ 991 2781; aessibye@yahoo.fr) Opposite Auberge le Palmier, this busy little touring agency arranges a variety of excursions, including bird-watching and fishing trips around the region. In the absence of a local tourist information office, this is a great place to ask questions and get your planning straight. And, of course, to arrange car and bike hire.

Net's Cap (☎ 993 5371; net-s-cap@sentoo.sn; per hr CFA300; ☎ 9am-10pm) This is one of the fastest and best-equipped Internet cafés in the entire country. Come here to surf the Net with speed, send your emails, print your digital images and do any other Web-related stuff you might have been putting off for weeks.

Sleeping

You'll find accommodation for all budgets in Cap Skiring, most of it overlooking the beach and offering all the associated facilities and activities you'd expect, though with greatly differing quality and price. Half- and full-board deals are available everywhere, and in some of the bigger hotels they are all that's available. Tours and day trips can be arranged at most hotels.

BUDGET

Just south of the junction is a sandy track that stretches along the beach. All the *campements* listed here are situated there.

Campement Chez M'Ballou (☎ 936 9102; r with/without bathroom CFA7500/4000) Possibly the pick of the cheap places on this strip, M'Ballou is a good-value option with a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Palm trees fight for space in this pretty plot of green, and the restaurant gives great views across the beach.

Campement Paradise (☎ 993 5129; r with/without bathroom CFA12,000/6000; ☎) If you're spending your holiday on a beachfront, you're unlikely to spend much time in your room – so who cares that it's basic? The garden around the bungalows invites lounging and accesses the beach. A great budget option.

Auberge Le Palmier (☎ 993 5109; d with bathroom CFA10,000; ☎) Opposite the Club Med, this

long-standing favourite with independent travellers masters the art of tasteful understatement. Rooms are as welcoming as the friendly management, and the restaurant gets good reviews, too. For an extra CFA2000 per night you even get hot water.

Noopalou Coussene (Chez Bruno Diatta; ☎/fax 993 5130; www.casamance-peche.org; half board per person CFA15,000) This is a simple but excellent place, specialising in fishing excursions. Accommodation is in sparkling rooms or self-contained bungalows.

Auberge de la Paix (☎ 993 5145; aubergedelapaix@yahoo.fr; s/d CFA6000/10,000) This is a friendly place with a family feel and a chilled-out restaurant with hammocks to laze a day away.

Le Falafu (☎ 513 3185; falafu@gmx.net; s/d from CFA8000/10,000) This laid-back place calls itself the 'house of friendship and culture', probably for the hairdressing, dancing and batik courses it can arrange. It looks a tad dreary, though, and the potential sea view is unfortunately blocked by a bungalow – for an extra CFA4000 you can book a room in there and watch the sunset.

Le Mussuwam (☎/fax 993 5184; s/d ind half board from CFA11,500/15,500; ☎) What this place has in size, it lacks in inspiration. It's not the prettiest option around, nor the cheapest – but it does have hot water, if that's something to entice you.

Le Buhanor (☎ 993 5270; r per person CFA6000) This is probably the oddest of the lot. Accommodation is in amply decorated, though slightly neglected mudbrick bungalows. It's potentially really nice, but at the time of research, the ambience was marred by extensive building works that could possibly have gone on for a long time. Check the status and let us know.

MIDRANGE

Villa des Pêcheurs (☎ 993 5253; www.villadespecheurs.com; s/d from CFA13,000/15,000; ☎) On the same beachfront strip as the *campements*, this is a wonderful place. Stylish rooms and the renowned restaurant are all done in wooden decor, and overlook a tranquil stretch of beach. Fishing trips including surf casting and angling can be arranged, but nonanglers must not fear – this place appeals also to those that have no interest in casting nets.

Les Paletuviers (☎ 993 5210; www.hotel-kaloo.com; r ind breakfast CFA15,000; ☎) This freshly polished hotel in the centre of Cap Skiring

village offers quite possibly the best value for money in the whole of Cap Skiring. It looks out onto a beautiful stretch of mangroves, and offers all the quality and comfort of a top-end place at a much better rate.

Hôtel Diattakunda (s/d CFA15,000/18,000; ☎) At the time we visited, this place right next to Les Paletuviers was so new, it didn't even have a telephone number yet. It looked impressive though, with impeccable, inviting bungalows spread out around the swimming pool.

Les Bougainvilliers (☎ 993 5129; d CFA20,000; ☎) At the time of research this was still a popular restaurant-bar with eight nearly finished rooms at the back. If the character and quality of the eatery are anything to go by, this will be very nice indeed. Plans were also for a fully equipped studio flat to rent out for a weekly rate.

Hôtel Résidence Kacissa (☎/fax 993 5258; www.kacissa.com; s/d CFA20,000/30,000, villa per week CFA225,000) On a quiet stretch of beach north of Cap Skiring, this place surprises with comfort and a variety of accommodation for most budgets. The fully equipped, two-storey villas are the best pick, and house five to seven people.

TOP END

La Maison Bleue (☎ 993 5161; www.lamaisonbleue.sn; r per person CFA30,8000) As styled as a supermodel strutting down the catwalk, this luxurious place oozes sophisticated chic. Rooms have individual colour schemes, and shades of blue are tastefully dotted around the Moroccan-style lounge, the mosaic-decorated swimming pools and the airy terrace restaurant. Massages and beauty treatments are on offer, too – but much more interesting are the weekend trips to Guinea-Bissau's archipelago. During low season, prices drop by almost 50%.

Hôtel La Paillote (☎ 993 5151; www.paillote.sn; s/d CFA52,000/74,000; ☎) This is the charming grandmother of Cap Skiring's hotels. It's been here the longest, and spoils visitors the best. For a luxurious stay with access to a supreme variety of activities and services – including tailoring, golf, tennis, beauty treatments and, crucially, baby-sitting – alongside the obligatory pirogue excursions and water sports. This is your ideal holiday home.

Les Hibiscus (☎ 993 5136; hibiscus@sentoo.sn; s/d ind breakfast CFA19,900/28,800) Right on the border of

Guinea-Bissau near Kabrousse is this classy hotel in lush gardens on the beach, where comfortable bungalows are decorated with stunning murals and local fabrics.

Résidences Les Alizés (☎ 993 5288; www.residences-les-alizes.com; d per week CFA280,000, villa per week CFA1.6 million; 🚗 🚗) You'll be beautifully wrapped up during your stay here, and yet the tall, three-storey villas don't have the soul of some of the other top-end places. There's a minimum stay of one week, and if your pockets are well lined, you can even buy the villa after your holiday...

Eating

Besides the hotel restaurants, Cap Skiring has a whole range of eateries to choose from. Most of them sit along the main road in the village, and are really hard to miss. The following is only a selection.

Le Kassala (☎ 653 0382; roast meat per kg CFA5000; 🕒 8pm-4am) This lively *dibiterie* is what the Senegalese call a *terminus* (a final halt). Why? It's the almost obligatory 3am food stop for rumpled clubbers before heading home. It's also a fine and friendly place to hang out in the evenings, savour some delicious roast meat and catch up on local gossip.

Le Terazza (Chez Gnima; ☎ 993 5110; pizza around CFA2000-3000) This is where to buy your bread and croissants in the morning and to enjoy the best pizza in town in the evening. Apart from the excellent food, it's energetic Gnima and her mainly female staff who give this place its warm and welcoming character.

Les Bolongs (☎ 936 9104; meals CFA2000-5000; 🕒 9am-2am) Right opposite the CBAO bank, this terrace restaurant is the place to enjoy a simple, solid meal while watching the bustle of the street below.

Le Salima (☎ 936 9127; meals from CFA500; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This unpretentious little eatery in the heart of the village serves generous Senegalese dishes.

Le Carpe Rouge (☎ 993 5250; 🕒 lunch & dinner) You guessed it, red carp is the speciality of this pretty Senegalese restaurant. Right next to Le Salima, this is a little more upmarket and offers a more varied menu.

Le Djembe (Chez Nadine & Patrick; ☎ 533 7692; le-djembe@voila.fr) This colourful place continues the musical theme way beyond the name – you can enjoy live jazz here on Fridays while relishing mouthwatering French and Italian dishes. A great place for family meals.

Drinking & Entertainment

There's certainly no lack of partying options in Cap Skiring – you don't need the privilege of a Club Med membership to have a good time here. All the places listed below sit almost on top of one another along the main street in the village.

Case Bambou (☎ 993 5178; moise_dasyvla@yahoo.fr; admission CFA1000; 🕒 10.30pm-4am) This has held down a solid reputation as Cap Skiring's hottest and most elegant nightclub for years, and still attracts a groomed and trimmed crowd of well-to-do folk and youngsters at weekends.

Les Paletuviers (admission CFA1000; 🕒 9pm-3am) Part of the Paletuviers hotel, this is one of Cap Skiring's most enduring venues. It serves up a reliably good mixture of Senegalese and international grooves.

Savane Café (admission CFA3000; 🕒 9pm-3am) The most expensive place of the lot promises *soirées de classe* and is indeed a waxed-and-shined place for a night out in style. The only drawback – the prices keep all but the most affluent locals out, so it can get quite tourist-heavy.

Kassoumaye (admission CFA500-1000; 🕒 10pm-4am) Those who can't afford Case Bambou tend to shake their leg at Kassoumaye – hence the largely local crowd at this down-to-earth nightclub.

Black & White Bar (🕒 10am-3am) A small place playing reggae music in a mellow atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

AIR

See p231 for details of Air Sénégal International flights to Dakar. **Air CM** (☎ in France 01 53 41 00 50; mail.aircom@wannadoo.fr) has a twice-weekly connection between Paris and the Cap. It also does a lot of special deals including flights and discount accommodation with some of Cap Skiring's top-end hotels.

BOAT

Pirogues from Cap Skiring leave from the beach opposite the Hôtel Katakalousse, some 3km south of Cap Skiring on the main road. Two reliable and experienced *piroguiers* are **Jean Baptiste & Philippe Gomis** (☎ 555 2415). They can accommodate about any boat excursion in the area, including fishing trips (half-/full day CFA13,500/30,500), bird-watching tours to Île des Oiseaux (CFA20,000) and a

highly recommended tour to Île de Karabane (CFA30,000). Staff can arrange a taxi pick-up from Cap Skiring.

BUSH TAXI

Sept-place taxis (CFA1400) and minibuses (CFA1100) run regularly throughout the day between Ziguinchor and Cap Skiring, although there's more traffic in the morning.

Getting Around

It's quite a trek from the main *campement* area to Cap Skiring village. You can hail a taxi for around CFA600. Bicycles are another good option – most hotels, *campements* and Diatta Tour International have them for hire. Day trips by pirogue start at around CFA25,000.

Auto Cap4 (☎ 993 5265; autocap4@sentoo.sn) has an eclectic mix of 4WDs for hire starting at CFA30,000 a day.

BOUCOTTE

This tiny village lies halfway between Cap Skiring and Diembéring, on the escape route from the tourist bustle. The beach at Cap Skiring will seem unremarkable compared with the seemingly endless stretch of white sand and blue waves at Boucotte beach. Augustin Diatta, founder of Diatta Tours, recognised this too and put up the pretty **Oudja Hôtel** (☎ 991 2781, 517 5895; s/d/tr CFA10,000/12,000/15,000) right behind the shoreline. It's a charming *campement* set on a huge terrain with accommodation in spacious bungalows. At the time of writing, a family suite housing four people was under construction.

Also in the making was Diatta's ambitious project of building a **botanical garden** near Boucotte. Plenty of digging and planting had already been done when we visited – it's definitely worth phoning Oudja Hôtel to check whether work has been completed. Once in the village, you absolutely should pay a visit to the **Boucotte Museum** (ask any local to take you there). It's a low-key exhibition of Diola artefacts and objects along the roots of some giant *fromager* (kapok) trees.

Hiring a taxi from Cap Skiring to Boucotte should cost around CFA2000 to CFA3000; if you call before setting out a pick-up can be arranged. A seat in one of the regular but rare (once or twice a day) bush taxis costs

CFA500 – but careful, you'll be dropped off on the main road, from where it's still a long trek down a sand track to Oudja Hôtel. Alternatively, you can walk along the beach, or take the environmentally unfriendly option of driving along the seashore in your 4WD when the sea is low.

DIEMBÉRING

Away from the hustle and bustle of Cap Skiring, Diembéring tempts independent travellers with a taste of village life and a quiet beach.

The place to stay is **Campement Asseb** (☎ 993 3106; r per person CFA3000), a spacious and peaceful *campement* near the big *fromager* tree at the entrance to town. The rooms are a bit rough around the edges, but fair value. On a hill in the centre of the village is another *campement*, **Aten-Elou**, which was completely derelict at the time we visited. Even if you find it closed, the stroll through Diembéring (check the slit drums on the market) and the short climb are worth doing – you get an amazing view across the village and its surroundings from the *campement* site.

The local *groupement de femmes* (womens collective) was looking into renovating the site at the time we visited, and whether they succeeded or not, it's worth checking out the collective. They make cute toys and other souvenirs from colourful African fabrics and sell them at reasonable prices – and who knows, your purchase might buy another brick for the *campement* near the central square of Djembéring.

Diembéring can be reached by bicycle, though the road is sandy and hard work in the heat. Rates for private taxis to/from Cap Skiring vary enormously depending on season and state of the roads. Expect to pay between CFA4000 to CFA6000 each way. The daily minibus from Ziguinchor passes through Cap Skiring around 5pm and returns early next morning; the seat costs CFA600 to CFA700 from Cap Skiring to Djembéring.

PARC NATIONAL DE BASSE-CASAMANCE

This national park has been closed for several years now and, with no-one quite sure whether land mines have been laid in the area or what fauna remains, it looks certain to remain closed for the foreseeable future.

The park measures about 7km by 5km and there are several vegetation zones: tropical

forest and dense undergrowth give way to open grassland, tidal mud flats and mangrove swamps. Before it was closed there were quite a few animals, especially red colobus monkeys and duikers, as well as a herd of forest buffaloes and populations of bushbucks, porcupines, mongooses, crocodiles and leopard. The park had a good network of trails, plus several miradors (lookouts) for viewing birds and animals.

If and when the park reopens, the best option is to stay in Oussouye and visit the park for the day by bike or taxi. Make sure you ask about the latest security situation before setting off.

Getting There & Away

From Oussouye go 2km west on the main road towards Cap Skiring, and turn left (south) at the signpost for the park. The park entrance is 8km down the sandy road towards Santiaba Mandjak. Once you enter the park, keep heading south for half a kilometre, then take the first right to reach the park headquarters.

CASAMANCE NORD

The route northwards from Ziguinchor is best explored with plenty of time available, as several *campements villageois* will tempt you to leave the main road and venture along sandy tracks to tiny settlements.

KOUBALAN

Koubalan is a small village, 22km northeast of Ziguinchor. Its **campement villageois** (☎ 578 2091, téléc centre 936 9473; badienepap@hotmail.com) was created in 1979, and recently restored. Accommodation is in a beautifully decorated, spacious round hut. Ask the staff to take you on excursions; there's plenty to do here: visits to a sacred forest, pirogue trips through the mangroves (some just being reforested) to nearby bird habitats, trips to local artisans' workshops and much more. A tour around Koubalan leads to several other *campements* further east that stay in close contact with Koubalan. Keen walkers can ask to be taken on a guided tour to those villages.

Getting There & Away

You reach Koubalan by bush taxi from Ziguinchor (CFA500, 45 minutes). It's on

a dirt road off the Ziguinchor–Bignona road. You can also get here by pirogue from Ziguinchor, but there's no regular service, so you need to negotiate private hire.

AFFINIAM

A few kilometres north of the river, Affiniam is stunningly located between forest and river, and easily reached from Ziguinchor by boat.

The **campement villageois** (☎ 508 8025, téléc centre 936 9619) is in a beautiful *case à impluvium* (see the boxed text, p238) on the edge of the village, shaded by giant *fromager* trees, and in close distance to the pirogue point. The village itself has an interesting *artisanal* centre, where you can buy locally produced soap, marmalade and juice, and sometimes watch batiks being made. Otherwise, Affiniam is in a good location for pirogue trips to bird habitats and the *case à étage* in Djilapao.

Getting There & Away

The best way of visiting Affiniam is by pirogue. There's a public boat once a day between Affiniam and Ziguinchor (CFA400, departing from Ziguinchor at 3.30pm or from Affiniam at 9.30am, 1½ hours, daily except Thursday and Sunday). Hiring a boat will cost around CFA25,000; hiring a taxi from Ziguinchor costs CFA15,000 (one hour, 30km).

BIGNONA

Bignona is a crossroads town, where the main route to/from Banjul joins the Trans-Gambia Hwy 30km north of Ziguinchor. What looks like a sleepy place full of crumbling colonial buildings was also a core area of the separatist movement. At the time we researched this book, this was the only area where we were advised to be careful, which mainly means not venturing too far off the beaten track and not travelling after nightfall.

A short drive out of town, the **Hôtel Le Palmier** (☎ 994 1258; r CFA7000) has adequate facilities in an old, colonial-style building. In Badiouré 11km from Bignona on the road towards Séléti, you find the **Relais Fleuri** (☎ 994 3002; fax 994 3219; s/d CFA12,000/14,000; 🍷 🍷), which is as pretty as its name, but caters almost exclusively to hunters. Just avoid the main season (January to April).

BAÏLA

On the route from Bignona to Diouloulou, Baïla tempts with another pretty **campement villageois** (☎ 544 8035, téléc centre 936 9516). The large, round hut with its 30 rooms is modelled on the local prefect's house, and the welcoming staff will treat you like a dignitary. The area is great for walks, there are some giant *fromagers* and baobabs to see, and pirogue tours can be organised. It's best to go with a guide, and don't venture out on lonely paths late at night.

Ziguinchor to Baïla takes around 45 minutes along the tarmac main road. A bush taxi costs CFA1500, a hire taxi around CFA20,000.

KAFOUNTINE & ABÉNÉ

Kafountine and Abéné are the hip face of tourism in Senegal. The two villages on the coast just south of Gambia have spawned more than 20 guesthouses, often the sort of places where dreadlocked staff seem happy to drum the day away and everything is 'cool, mon'. The villages are separated from the rest of Casamance Nord by a large branch of the River Casamance called Marigot Diouloulou.

This isolation has meant the area has largely avoided the conflict of the separatist movement, although there was a brief clash here in April 2002. It also means the area looks more to the north than to the south: if you travel here from Gambia, the reggae-vibing tourist scene will seem familiar.

Several Senegalese and European artists have settled here, *djembe* (a short, goat hide-covered drum) clutched between their knees and tie-dye kit in hand, and have tuned the area into the laid-back rhythms of 'baba cool' – a West African version of relaxed reggae culture. You don't have to look far for your introductory drumming, batik or dance workshop.

If this is your scene, come here over Christmas and New Year, when the area buzzes with aspiring and competent drummers who travel here from Europe and around West Africa to participate in the Dutch-run **Abéné Festivalo** (www.alnaniking.co.uk/senegal/festival). This annual event is something of a mini-pilgrimage of *djembe* drummers – from one-rhythm amateurs to fully fledged

TWITCHER TIPS: BIRDING SITES AROUND KAFOUNTINE

The creeks and lagoons around Kafountine are wonderful areas for watching birds, especially waders and shore birds. You can start your excursions right in town, at the small pool near the Campement Sitokoto, or at the bar of the *campement* Esperanto, where you can gaze across the *bolongs* (creeks) while imbibing a soothing sunset drink. Esperanto and several other lodgings organise trips to the famous birding sites further afield, including the Sanctuaire Ornithologique de la Pointe de Kalissaye, a group of sandy islands (usually hidden by the waters), at the mouth of the Marigot Kalissaye, and the highly rated Sanctuaire Ornithologique de Kassel, some 5km southeast of Kafountine. Another place is the Presqu'île des Oiseaux, a narrow spit of land between the ocean and a creek, noted for its huge populations of Caspian terns. It lies south of the Kafountine fishing village – most *campements* organise excursions.

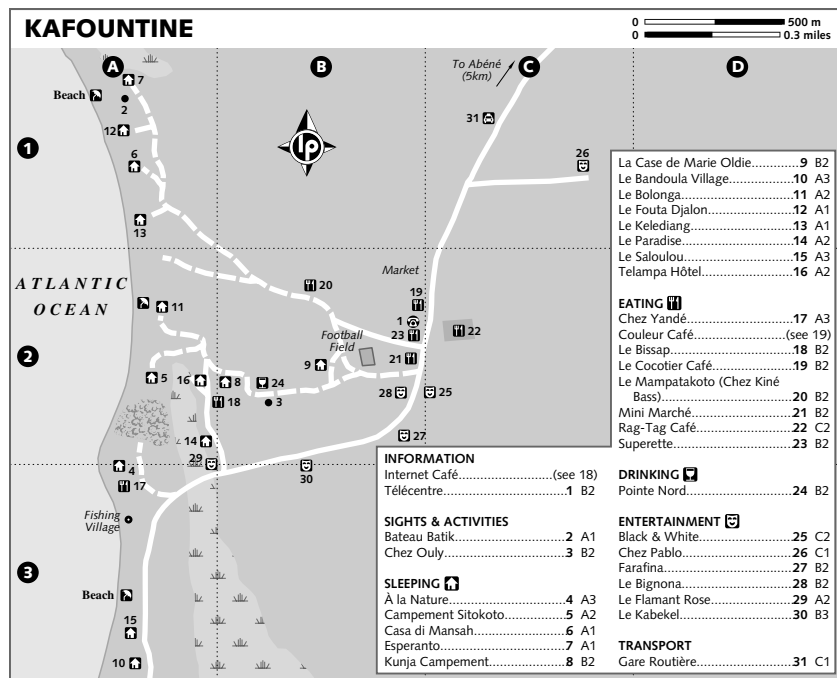
professionals. It's mainly about informal settings and participative drumming rather than mighty stages and big names. For details see the website.

KAFOUNTINE

Kafountine village is spread out near the end of the potholed tarred road leading in from Diouloulou. It's reasonably well equipped, with a **téléc centre** (☎ 9369492; Kafountine Village), a slowish cybercafé, a hospital and a post office but no bank. Most hotels and *campements* are scattered along a wide, sandy beach that divides into two areas: the northern strip, reached by turning right on the sandy road as it leads west from the village, and the southern strip that lies on the main road south of Kafountine village. The beachfront is a taxi- or bicycle-worthy 1km from the village. To reach the southern strip, you pass the fishing village, a busy settlement with lines of shacks where fish is dried and smoked, and a beach from where the boats are launched.

Sights & Activities

The typical Kafountine tourist does as the locals do – very little. A day fills nicely



with relaxing swims, some hammock-lounging and a spell of *djembe* drumming in the evening. But don't get sucked into Kafountinian apathy before trying some of the excellent pirogue tours, and the birding and fishing trips that you can do here. Most hotels offer these; the tours organised by Esperanto are particularly recommended.

At the southern end of town, it's worth checking out the **fishing village** for some real Kafountine life. Fishing times depend on the tide, but try to visit when the boats are being launched or, more spectacular still, when they come back after a long day at sea, surfing in on the rollers. And don't miss a stroll past the area near the hotel À la Nature, where pirogue makers carve and paint the typically colourful boats.

If you're interested in crafts, **Bateau Batik** (☎ 9369520; bateaubatik@hotmail.com) is your place. Near Le Fouta Djalon *campement*, this is a relaxed café and, surprise, a batik workshop. Making your own batiks costs CFA3000 for four- to six-hour sessions, or you can just come and check out the batiks on exhibition while sipping a coffee.

To relax from all the relaxing try Chez Ouly, a recommended massage parlour, all fine-smelling essential oils, opposite Pointe Nord bar.

Sleeping NORTHERN STRIP

Esperanto (Chez Eric & Antonella; ☎ 635 6280; esperanto@arc.sn; d CFA10,000, incl half board CFA16,500) This relaxed place on the river is a real gem – you might be tempted not to leave the hotel at all if you choose to stay here. Bungalows (some family-sized) are large and pretty, but it's the landscaped garden with its palm trees and bamboo bridges, and the location between river and sea (and the bird life this attracts) that hold the greatest appeal. Or is it the tasty Moroccan food served in the restaurant?

Le Kelediang (☎ 542 5385; www.senegambia.net; r per person CFA3200) Enter the forest, and soak up the free-spirited, close-to-nature atmosphere of this relaxed Dutch-run establishment. Accommodation is in deliberately basic but comfy bungalows and the restaurant near the beach serves delicious lunch and dinner.

Ask about pirogue excursions with Fela the Rasta griot.

La Case de Marie Oldie (☎ 936 9710, 539 2379; s/d CFA3000/4500) This red-brick *case à impluvium* construction is a treat in close proximity to Kafountine village. Sunny, clean and friendly – and the rates are unbeatable.

Le Fouta Djalon (☎ 936 9494; www.casamance.net/foutadjalon; s/d CFA12,000/20,000) The hotel's extensive garden begins right behind a small dune that leads to the beach. The red-brick huts are comfortable and the cosy bar invites relaxed evening drinks.

Le Bolonga (☎ 994 8515; s/d CFA7500/10,000) This quality place really is as warm and welcoming as the bar-reception in the wide brick building at the entrance suggests. The young staff goes to great lengths to put you at ease and appease all your excursion or workshop wishes.

Campement Sitokoto (☎ 994 8512; per person incl breakfast CFA4500) Kafountine's *campement villageois* has basic rooms with clean, shared bathrooms right near the river.

Casa di Mansah (☎ 542 5623; r per person CFA3000) This place has been a work in progress for several years now, and still only a couple of the 16 bungalows are completed. No matter, if you want to feel integrated in local family life, and take up some drumming lessons with Momo the young master (per hour CFA2500), this is your kind of place.

Le Paradise (télécentre ☎ 936 9492; r CFA4000) 'Very Jah', is the going description of this phlegmatic little *campement*. Drumming, smoking, hanging about and philosophising – voilà the ambience of this self-declared paradise. The drumming courses here get good reviews.

Telampa Hôtel (☎ 936 9608; telampa@net-up.com; r per person CFA6000) Telampa was another work in progress when we visited, with spacious, half-finished rooms available for rent. If it gets finished, this two-storey hotel overlooking a shady courtyard could be very nice indeed. (As long as it gets rid of the musty carpets in the rooms.)

Kunja Campement (☎ 512 0251; r per person CFA3000) This tired-looking *campement* had new management with great-sounding plans of turning this into an ecofriendly, organic-food place with community involvement. If it works to regular Kafountine-speed its realisation could still take a while, but there's no harm in checking.

SOUTHERN STRIP

À la Nature (☎ 994 8524; alanature@arc.sn; r per person incl breakfast CFA4500) Past the fishing village and pirogue-makers and just above the high-water line, this is Kafountine's famous beachfront venture with a decidedly Rasta feel. Drumming workshops and hammock-lounging are obligatory.

Other options on the southern strip: **Le Saloulou** (☎/fax 994 8514; r per person CFA6000) It might not be fancy, but it's just seconds from the surf and offers fishing trips in the sea or *bolongs* (creeks).

Le Bandoula Village (☎ 994 8511; s/d CFA13,000/15,000) A few steps down from Le Saloulou, this place is slightly more upmarket, as the fair rates suggest. Not a bad option.

Eating & Drinking

Kafountine isn't a gourmet's paradise, and the hotel restaurants are still your safest bet. Esperanto, Fouta Djalon, Le Kelediang and Bandoula Village are among the most reliable. Other good options:

Le Bissap (☎ 994 8512; dishes CFA2000-3000; ☎ 8am-midnight) A cute eatery near Kunja Campement that advertises a unique *cuisine de métissage* (fusion cuisine). Food is tasty, and you can check your emails and buy your own groceries there, too.

Le Mampatakoto (Chez Kiné Basse; ☎ 575 1688) At the time we visited, Le Mampatakoto had just been completed and was still awaiting the big opening ceremony. It looked promising though, and owner and head chef Kiné Basse is something of a local institution, renowned for her love of parties as well as, reassuringly, her cookery skills.

Alternatively, there are a few cheap eateries in the market offering similar local fare for little money; the Rag-Tag Café in town is popular, though the local favourite seems to be Chez Yandé, near À la Nature. **Le Cocotier Café** and **Couleur Café** (☎ 936 9520) both serve simple Senegalese meals (around CFA750 to CFA1500, open 8am to midnight) as well as liquids, and the tiny but popular **Pointe Nord** (☎ 11am-2am) doesn't even bother with the food.

Self-caterers can stock up in the centre of the village. The **Mini Marché** (☎ 9am-11pm) sells a good variety of foodstuffs and is a popular hangout for local youth. A few metres along, the Superette has a good selection of wines, thanks to French management, as well as food.

Entertainment

This is a town full of party-ready inhabitants. The nightclubs are usually packed with dreadlocked youngsters, and often get rowdy as the night wears on. The **Farafina** (admission CFA1500-2000), halfway between Kafountine centre and the Fishing Village, enjoys the reputation of being the most upmarket and most expensive place of the lot. **Black & White** (admission CFA1000) in Kafountine village and **Chez Pablo** (admission CFA500-1000), situated on a side street near the *gare routière* off the road to Abéné, are the cheaper alternatives. Additionally, there's a set of bars that have live bands on rotation. They include Le Kabekel, Le Flamant Rose and Le Bignona. The music can be anything from drumming troupes to local *mbalax* outfits to the occasional visiting group. Entry is usually CFA500, or free with obligatory drinks purchase.

Getting There & Away

From Ziguinchor, *sept-place* taxis (CFA2200) and minibuses (CFA1700) run directly to Kafountine. Alternatively, take any vehicle to Diouloulou, from where local bush taxis take the holed-tarmac road to Kafountine for CFA600.

You can also get bush taxis from Serekunda or Brikama in Gambia, although direct traffic usually goes via the back roads and the sleepy Darsilami border rather than the main crossing at Séléti, so you won't get your passport stamped on the Senegal side (see the boxed text, opposite). Brikama to Kafountine is CFA1300.

A rarely used option is to cross the border just south of Kartong, which involves a river crossing by pirogue (see p121).

Getting Around

It's quite a walk from the hotel-lined beachfront to the village centre, and while you can hope for a ride with a friendly local, you're unlikely to come across a taxi. Ask your hotel to call you a cab; it'll set you back around CFA1000 to CFA2000. If you're headed towards the southern strip, you'll find an occasional taxi shuttling up and down between Kafountine centre and the fishing village.

Bikes aren't a bad option, if you've got the leg muscle to negotiate sandy roads. There's a shop in the market that hires them, as do some of the *campements*. Rates

are standardised at CFA2500 per day, but may be negotiable depending on the quality of the bike.

ABÉNÉ

Abéné, a slightly quieter version of Kafountine, lies 6km north just off the route to Diouloulou. There's a selection of accommodation, either in the village itself or a couple of kilometres away on the shore. From the village it's a 2km-long walk along a sandy track to the beach, past a small craft village near the junction where a track goes off to the upmarket Village-Hôtel Kalissai.

If cycling is more your thing, try the *Campement la Belle Danielle* in the village centre, where bikes can be hired for CFA2000 per day. The friendly owner is full of suggestions for interesting day trips.

Sleeping

Campement La Belle Danielle (☎ 936 9542; r per person CFA2500, half board CFA6000) Contrary to the name this isn't the most beautiful *campement* in town, but the one that offers the deepest insider knowledge. Manager Mammadou Konta is the local representative of the tourist board, and can organise pretty much any pick-up and excursion around Casamance. Besides bicycles, you can also hire 4WDs (around CFA40,000 per full day), and approach Konta with any other worry, idea or suggestion.

Black Sofa (☎ 506 1973; r per person CFA2500) This spacious *campement* looked like either a recently abandoned ship at the time we visited, or it was just dormant waiting for its seasonal occupants. It's a tranquil place close to the beach that is reputed for its dance and drumming courses and musical soirees. Phone to see if it's been dusted and brought to life before you visit.

The following three *campements* are all at the end of the road leading from the village to the beach.

Maison Sunjata (☎ /fax 994 8610; info@senegambia.de; s/d CFA7500/15,000) Set in a well-tended garden, this small German-run place has clean, comfortable rooms with bathroom shared between two bungalows.

Le Kossey (☎ 994 8609; r per person CFA5000) The beach begins where the lush garden with its inviting bungalows stops. This place is particularly famous for its Rasta drumming parties on New Year's Eve.

O'Dunbeye Land École de Danse (Chez Thomas; ☎ 524 9600; www.odunbeyeland.com/fr; r per person CFA2600) There are plenty of drumming and dancing courses going around in Abéné, and this place offers some of the best-quality ones. The ambience is expectedly artistic, accommodation basic and the food delicious.

Le Kalissai (☎ 994 8600; www.kalissai.com; s/d CFA28,000/32,000; ☎ ☎) You won't find anything more polished than this luxury establishment anywhere near. Bungalows and surroundings are as welcoming as you want them to be for the price, and you can even fly here in your privately hired plane (see right). Class.

Eating

Chez Vero (☎ 617 1714; meals around CFA3000; ☎ 10am-10pm-ish) Near the town centre, on the way to the beach, the much-loved auntie of Abéné's restaurant scene. Food has been consistently good for many years now, and lunch and dinner only are served on a semicircle terrace, under the watchful eyes of gaudy Madonnas and griots gazing off the walls.

Seymi (snacks from CFA700) This chilled-out eatery was described by one local as a 'shop with people hanging about', and by another as '*alimentation avec animation*', meaning 'dinner with a show'. The 'shows' are rather spontaneous affairs, depending on the mind-state of the beer-sipping youngsters who populate this joint.

THE DARSILAMI BORDER

Bush taxis from Brikama to Kafountine often go via the remote Darsilami border. The taxi (usually a minibus or Ndiaga Ndiaye) will stop at Darsilami so you can be stamped out of Gambia. However, the area on the Senegal side has long been controlled by antigovernment groups so while armed men may look at your passport, there won't be any stamp. If you arrive in Abéné or Kafountine without a stamp, don't panic. The usual procedure is to head up to Séléti the following day, chat with the border police, perhaps offer them a cigarette, and get the stamp. A simpler alternative is to get your hotel to do this for you. In Abéné, the guys from the *Campement La Belle Danielle* will do it for about CFA2000, no sweat.

The unpretentious **Afad Snackbar** (snacks from CFA700) opposite the Village Artisanal and the nearby **Bistro Café** (☎ 634 3532) both serve reasonable fast food. Bistro Café is the more upmarket of the two, with decent pizzas on the menu (CFA1000 to CFA2000), a well-stocked boutique selling batiks and clothes, and the occasional drumming soiree.

Getting There & Away

All public transport to and from Kafountine stops at the turnoff to Abéné, near a place called Diannah. The village is 2km off the main road and the beach is a further 2km that you'll have to walk. A private taxi will cost CFA2500 to CFA3500. Abéné also has its own aerodrome, with flights to and from Dakar. Hiring a three-seater aircraft will cost around CFA280,000 one way. Plane hire is arranged at Le Kalissai hotel.

HAUTE CASAMANCE

SÉDHIOU

Some 100km east of Ziguinchor, Sédhiou lies just north of the Casamance River. It's the largest town in this part of Casamance, a tranquil place that sleepwalks through an existence that's rarely disturbed by visitors. From 1900 to 1909, this was the main trading post of the French colonial administration, though this moment in the political spotlight has left few marks.

The **Hôtel La Palmeraie** (☎ 995 1102; philippe.bertrand@apicus.net; s/d CFA20,000/28,000; ☎) is the place you should be staying in Sédhiou. It's a large and well-maintained hotel that sits beautifully in an impressive palm garden right on the river. It caters mainly to hunters, and though the manager apologetically shrugged her shoulders, maintaining that there was little else to do in Sédhiou, it's easy to spend a relaxing couple of days exploring the town and its surroundings even if you're not chasing wildebeest.

Budget-bound travellers can head for the **Centre Touristique** (☎ 995 1646; d CFA6500), a no-frills bed-and-roof option.

A short diversion off the smooth tarmac road from Kolda to Carrefour Diaroumé takes you to Sédhiou (bush taxi CFA3500); the turnoff is signposted. There are also bush taxis between Sédhiou and Bounkiling on the Trans-Gambia Hwy (CFA2000).

KOLDA

Kolda's glory lies all in its past, the time when this second-largest city of the Casamance used to be the capital of Fouladou, the historical 19th-century Fula kingdom led by the illustrious kings Alpha Molo and his son Musa Molo. The legacy of this grand past is a large Fula population – whose culture and language predominate in Kolda and its surrounding villages – plenty of proud retellings of classic lore (just mingle with the locals for a while), and an enduring reputation for mystic powers associated with the area.

Today, Kolda is an unspectacular place, where life centres on the three blocks opposite the post office in the centre of town (this is where you'll probably be dropped if you're coming from Ziguinchor). As you cross the bridge the first left is Rue Elhadji Demba Koita, where you find the drab **Hôtel Moya** (☎ 996 1175; fax 996 13 57; s/d from CFA9800/10,800; 📶).

Rooms here are overpriced, and the management is uniquely unforthcoming. If you must stay here, go for the bungalows with fan, they're much better than the pricier air-con rooms. A couple of blocks further down is the impressively sized **Hôtel Hobbe** (☎ 996 1170; www.hobbe-kolda.com; s/d CFA18,100/22,000; 📶 📺 📺), which caters mainly to hunters and often gets booked up during the main hunting season from January to April. Rooms are enormous and come with cable TV and beds that would make an '80s porn star blush. Just out of town on the route to Bignona sits the hotel **Le Firdou** (☎ 996 1780; fax 996 1782; s/d CFA14,100/18,700; 📶 📺 📺), doubtlessly the pick of the lot. Attractive bungalows sit right on the river in a spacious garden, where palm trees fight for space.

Kolda isn't exactly blessed with a thriving restaurant scene or nightlife. Simple meals

can be found at Chez Koumba, Chez Bintou, La Terrasse and Darou Salam (meals are around CFA700 to CFA1500 and all are open for lunch and dinner). The latter is the most upmarket of the lot, which isn't saying much – the town's culinary choices are mainly between your regular Senegalese dishes and *brochettes* (cubes of meat or fish grilled on a stick) with bread. Most places are open until their food stocks are depleted – a hot meal after hours can be tricky to obtain.

For entertainment head for the Moya Nightclub at Hôtel Moya or the Badaala; both get packed with local youth at weekends. If dance floors intimidate you, the Fouladou Bar is a popular drinking hole; it's slightly on the grubby side, though.

Where the town of Kolda threatens to let you down, the surroundings offer ample compensations. During the rainy season, you can enjoy beautiful hikes along the swelling Casamance River, watching pelicans land on small river islands and spotting monkeys. On a Wednesday, a day trip to the gigantic market of Diaobé (38km from Kolda on the route to Vélingara) is a must – traders from all across the Casamance, Gambia and Guinea come here to peddle their wares, transforming the humble village into a bustling hub of activity.

Kolda is well served by public transport. If you head to Ziguinchor, make sure you get into a *sept-place* taxi that takes the route Kolda–Carrefour Diaroumé–Ziguinchor, rather than Kolda–Tanaf–Ziguinchor. The former is a motorist's tarmac dream, the latter a potholed promise of breakdown. The price is the same – CFA3500 – the travelling time about seven hours for the first option, at least three to four hours more for the second. A *sept-place* taxi to Vélingara costs CFA2300, to Tambacounda CFA3000. All bush taxis leave from the *gare routière* about 2km outside town on the road to Sédhiou.