

# Guinea-Bissau

Like most sub-Saharan nations, Guinea-Bissau as we know it is an arbitrary, European construct, yet it has two qualities that make this country stand out from its neighbours. First and foremost are the people. They're disarmingly friendly, yet you'll almost never hear the disingenuous '*bonjour, mon ami*' that signals the beginning of an unwelcome sales pitch. If you're arriving from Dakar, you'll be happy to learn that helpful gestures and friendly conversation are almost always just that rather than a means to extract cash.

The country's other big draw? The remarkable Arquipélago dos Bijagós. These delta islands are lined with powdery, white-sand beaches, washed by azure waters, and populated by a fascinating people whose culture, long protected by hidden sandbanks and treacherous tides, is unlike any found in West Africa.

The mainland provides a fine recapitulation of many of West Africa's attractions. There are mangrove-lined rivers, home to crocodiles and shy hippos. The beaches of Varela rival those of Cap Skiring just across the border in Senegal. The tropical rainforests of the south serve as the westernmost habitat of the chimpanzee. And Bissau, the friendly capital and largest city, has a sleepy historic centre of Portuguese colonial buildings shaded by giant mango trees.

Always poor, the country's economy and infrastructure were severely damaged by civil war in the late 1990s. As a result, transport and communications are trying at best and, ironically, hotels and even food – especially in the capital – are no bargain. The good news is that national reconciliation seems to have finally arrived with peaceful elections in 2005, and the people have a cautious optimism about the country's future.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 36,120 sq km
- **Capital** Bissau
- **Country code**  245
- **Famous for** Cashews
- **Languages** Portuguese, Crioulo
- **Money** West African CFA franc; US\$1 = 544.89; €1 = 655.96
- **Population** 1,416,000
- **Visa** All visitors except citizens of Ecowas nations require a visa. They are available upon arrival at Bissau airport. Otherwise, arrange for a visa before arrival.



**WARNING**

The peaceful presidential elections in 2005 and the nonviolent resolution of a serious constitutional crisis that followed have been hailed as signs of movement towards long-term stability. That said, fundamental problems of corruption, poverty and lingering rivalries among the political and military elites could destabilise the current peace. Be sure to check the latest situation before entering Guinea-Bissau. The region around São Domingos and along the Senegalese border is particularly prone to instability, since it is considered by Senegal's Casamance separatists to be part of their natural territory. Violent flare-ups still continue.

Also, beware that there are still land mines in some rural and remote areas, left over from both the 1998–9 civil war and the war of liberation from Portugal. If you plan to travel far off the beaten path, be sure to research your route and consider bringing a trusted guide.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- **João Vieira** (p453) Discover the island's powdery sand beaches and disarmingly friendly people.
- **Orango** (p453) Stalk rare, salt-water hippos after visiting the tombs of Bijagós kings and queens.
- **Bolama** (p451) Witness the crumbling colonial grandeur of the antique Portuguese capital.
- **Sacred forests** (p457) Disappear into the dense jungle around Catió and Jemberem – the westernmost habitat of the African chimpanzee.
- **Bissau** (p445) Sip your way through blackouts at the capital's amiable cafés.

**ITINERARIES**

- **One Week** Most travellers with only a week to spare spend a day or two in the capital **Bissau** (p445), which has few 'sights' but a pleasant, relaxing feel. This could be combined with a few days visiting the country's major attraction, the **Arquipélago dos Bijagós** (p450), southwest of Bissau. The island of **Bubaque** (p452) is the easiest to reach, with good beaches and a range of places to stay.

- **Two Weeks** If you have a second week to spare, consider further explorations of the Bijagós. Head to **Orango** (p453), with its rare, saltwater hippos, and **Bolama** (p451), home to the once-grand Portuguese capital. Then check out one of the small but paradisiacal islands like **Acunda** (p454) or **João Vieira** (p453) for serious decompression.
- **Three Weeks** A third week would give you enough time to explore some of the rich mainland ecosystems in-depth. Consider the mangrove swamps of the **Parque Natural dos Tarrafes do Rio Cacheu** (p454) in the north or the **Cantanhez forest** (p457) in the south, home to chimps and elephants.

**CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO**

The rainy season is from June to October; it rains almost twice as much along the coast as inland. Conditions are especially humid in the months before the rains (April and May), when average maximum daytime temperatures rise to 34°C. Although daily maximums rarely fall below 30°C, this is quite bearable in the months after the rains, especially on islands that catch the sea breeze.

The best time to visit is from late November to February, when conditions are dry and relatively cool. February/early March is also Carnival time in Bissau, although smaller festivals take place in many towns to celebrate the end of the harvest in November and December.

See Climate Charts p813.

**HISTORY**

The great Sahel Empire of Mali, which flourished between the 13th and 15th centuries AD, included parts of present-day

**GUINEA WHO?**

Causing no end of confusion to visitors, people from Guinea-Bissau refer to themselves as *guinenses* and to the country as Guiné, while that southerly neighbour known to the rest of the world as Guinea is here demoted to Guiné-Conakry. You may also hear people from Guinea-Bissau referred to as Bissau-Guinean. In this chapter, we refer to citizens of Guinea-Bissau simply as Guineans.

**HOW MUCH?**

- **Small souvenir mask** CFA2000
- **Shared taxi ride in Bissau** CFA200
- **Nescafé** CFA100
- **Woven indigo cotton cloth (40cm x 80cm)** CFA3000
- **Main course in Western-style restaurant** CFA4000

**LONELY PLANET INDEX**

- **1L of petrol** CFA550
- **1L of bottled water** CFA500
- **Bottle of Portuguese beer** CFA500
- **Souvenir T-shirt** CFA2500
- **Omelette sandwich from street vendor** CFA500

Guinea-Bissau. For more information on the precolonial history of this part of West Africa, see p33.

**European Arrival**

Portuguese navigators began exploring the coast of West Africa in the early 15th century, reaching what's now Guinea-Bissau around 1450. They found the region particularly attractive, with navigable rivers that facilitated trade with the peoples of the interior. Soon, the Portuguese were extracting gold, ivory, pepper and, above all, slaves. For centuries though, the Portuguese presence was limited to coastal trading stations.

In the 17th century, the New World's thirst for slave labour grew astronomically. France and the Netherlands, watching Portuguese merchants grow rich, began to challenge their monopoly on the nefarious trade. Although, Portugal eventually lost control of much of the African coast, it managed to hang onto its valuable Guinean ports.

**Colonial Period**

With the decline and eventual end of the slave trade in the 19th century, the Portuguese had to win control of Guinea-Bissau's interior if they wanted to continue to extract wealth from their possession. To do so, they often allied themselves with Muslim ethnicities, including the Fula and Mandinko,

in order to subdue the territory's animist tribes. Without the means to win hearts and minds with educational or economic incentives, Portuguese Guinea descended into one of the most repressive and exploitative colonial regimes in Africa. When right-wing dictator António Salazar came to power in Portugal in 1926, he imposed punishing tariffs on foreigners in order to re-establish direct Portuguese rule. The rules were simple: peasants planted groundnuts, like it or not.

**War of Liberation**

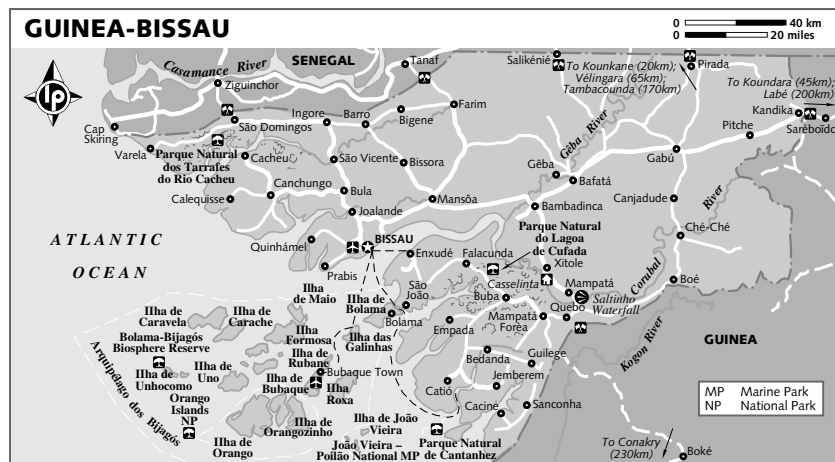
By the early 1960s, African countries were rapidly winning independence from their European colonial rulers. Britain and France made fairly smooth transitions from colonial to neocolonial countries, continuing to profit from trade with their former colonies. But Salazar, fuelled as much by weakness as by his own nationalist rhetoric, refused to relinquish his hold on his African colonies. The result: one of the longest liberation struggles in Africa's history.

The leader of the independence movement was writer and engineer Amílcar Cabral, who in 1956 helped found the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC). In 1961, the PAIGC started arming and mobilising peasants. Though outnumbered, PAIGC troops won control of half the country within five years. Portugal, meanwhile, was becoming increasingly isolated internationally. Foreign politicians and journalists visited the liberated area, and the struggle became front-page news during the early 1970s.

Even though Fula agents assassinated Amílcar Cabral in Conakry, Guinea, in 1973, the momentum for freedom was too strong. The PAIGC organised nationwide elections in the liberated areas and proclaimed independence, with Amílcar Cabral's half-brother, Luiz, as president. Eighty countries quickly recognised the new government, but it took the overthrow of Portugal's dictatorship the following year for Portugal to do the same.

**Independence**

Once in power, the new PAIGC government faced staggering problems. Only one in 20 people could read, life expectancy was 35 years, and 45% of children died before the age of five. During the war of independence,



rice production had fallen by 71% and rice had to be imported for the first time ever.

Politically, the PAIGC wanted a unified Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. However, this idea died in 1980 when President Luis Cabral (Amilcar's half-brother) was overthrown in a coup while he was visiting Cape Verde to negotiate the union. João Vieira took over as president.

Despite the change of leadership, Guinea-Bissau continued to follow a socialist path. The state controlled most major enterprises, Marxist literature was everywhere and political dissent was banned, although behind the dogma, Vieira encouraged pragmatism and political neutrality. The Soviet Union provided arms and advisers while the West provided nonmilitary aid.

Life remained hard for most people. Bissau's shops were almost empty and in rural areas, foreign products were even more scarce. Vieira realised that Guinea-Bissau was making no progress under Marxism, and in 1986, following a serious coup attempt the previous year, the government completely reversed its policies, devalued the currency and began selling off state enterprises.

### The 1990s

Vieira proved to be a shrewd politician, surviving three coup attempts while keeping the PAIGC in power. He won the 1994 presidential elections, although 52% of the vote was hardly a landslide victory. Even though many Guineans questioned the results, op-

position leader Koumba Yala accepted defeat and appealed for national unity.

Economic conditions were gradually improving for most people. Unusually for an African nation, rural inhabitants had been enjoying a slight improvement in standards since the 1970s. Overall, however, Guinea-Bissau's social and economic situation remained dangerously poor. Cracks began to show in 1997 when teachers, health workers and other state employees went on strike to protest, among other things, embezzlement of foreign aid money.

Things suddenly came to a head on 7 June 1998 with an attempted coup led by General Ansumane Mane, former head of the army. Vieira had sacked Mane the day before, accusing him of supplying arms to the *Movimento das Forças Democráticas de la Casamance (MFDC)*, the separatist rebel group in neighbouring Senegal. Mane's coup was backed by a majority of Guinean soldiers and, reportedly, by the MFDC. Senegal and Guinea became involved in the conflict, sending soldiers to help defend Vieira and loyal government troops. As the two sides shelled and bombed each other's positions in and around Bissau, residential districts were caught in the crossfire, and many people were killed. News reports from mid-July told of towns and villages being attacked, with many civilians killed and atrocities committed. By late July, 300,000 people were displaced.

Despite attempts by Portugal and several ECOWAS states to negotiate peace, fighting

continued. In May 1999, the military junta led by General Ansumane Mane at last conquered all of Bissau and personally escorted Vieira to the Portuguese embassy. With the junta's claim that they had no interest in power, the president of the national assembly became interim president.

### Unstable Peace

Transparent presidential and legislative elections were held in November, and a presidential run-off in January 2000 made Koumba Yala the president of the new civilian government. He successfully quashed a coup attempt by General Ansumane Mane, who was eventually killed in a shoot-out at Quinhámel, 40km from the capital.

Yala's problems with the military had been temporarily solved, but it wasn't long before his relations with other sectors of the government, as well as with civic groups and the media, became strained. In 2001 and 2002, Yala seemed to seek out controversy, arresting journalists, defying court rulings, and sacking half the civil service.

In September 2003, a coup headed by General Veríssimo Correia Seabra finally removed the erratic Yala. Legislative elections were held in 2004, with Seabra as caretaker head of state. But, in October 2004, Seabra was killed by a faction of soldiers who, according to some, were protesting unpaid wages. The country held its collective breath until presidential elections in 2005.

### Guinea-Bissau Today

Despite widespread fears of continued factional violence, the 2005 presidential elections were held as planned and have been generally deemed free and fair. The winner?

Deposed president João Vieira, who had returned from exile in Portugal to run a successful campaign based on national reconciliation. People remembered his regime as, if not free of corruption, then at least as a time of stability and a modicum of economic growth.

Still, an obstacle to peace remained. Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior, long Vieira's rival in the PAIGC, refused Vieira's calls to resign. After a tense fall, the stand-off was finally decided in the country's Supreme Court – Gomes had to go. While fundamental problems of corruption and poverty could yet destabilise the current peace, Guineans generally express cautious optimism about their country's future.

## THE CULTURE

### The National Psyche

Despite grinding poverty, a severely damaged infrastructure and wide religious and ethnic differences, Guineans are united by a neighbourly goodwill that is genuinely remarkable. Even in the capital city where blackouts keep streets pitch black most nights, you can walk the streets with only a modicum of care. Violence and even aggressive salesmanship are rare. Visitors of European descent may be peppered with the epithet *branco* (white), especially outside the capital. However, it's almost always an expression of curiosity and surprise rather than a putdown. You will feel welcome just about anywhere you go.

The mainland people share many cultural aspects with similar groups in neighbouring Senegal and Guinea. However, the Bijagós people from the islands of the same name have very distinct customs (see p451).

### REVOLUTION, NOT REVOLT

Three decades after the liberation of Guinea-Bissau, the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC)* is viewed as a model for revolutionary armies in many parts of the world. Realising that society had to be completely reorganised if the people were ever to be genuinely free, party founder Amilcar Cabral insisted on genuine revolution rather than an armed revolt that traded colonialism for home-grown oppression.

As each part of the country was liberated, the PAIGC helped villagers build schools, provided medical services and encouraged widespread political participation. As a result, the PAIGC quickly built popular support in a country of deep ethnic, social and linguistic differences. At the same time, the movement gained wide international support that helped isolate Portugal's right wing dictatorship. The result of the PAIGC's political efforts: they were able to improve the lives of their fellow citizens and at the same time defeat a better armed enemy.

## Daily Life

On paper, Guinea-Bissau is one of the world's poorest countries, though regular rains and relatively fertile land make outright hunger rare. In rural areas, most people scratch out a living from fishing and subsistence farming. Villages consist of mud-brick houses roofed with thatched grasses, and at night families gather around wood fires that are both the stove and, after dark, the only source of light.

Except for a lucky few, life is hardly easier in cities and towns. In a nation with virtually no industry, most people eke out a living as small-time merchants, hawking foodstuffs or cheap imports, mostly from China. The good news is that urban dwellers, while poor, do not face the kinds of threats, from pollution to violence, that wrack many African cities.

## Population

Current estimates put the population at about 1.4 million, divided among some 23 ethnic groups. The two largest are the Balante (30%) in the coastal and southern regions and the Fula (20%) in the north. Other groups include the Manjaco (or Manjak), Papel, and Fulup (closely related to the Diola of Senegal) in the northwest, and the Mandingo (Mandinka) in the interior. The offshore islands are mostly inhabited by the Bijagós people (see p451).

Cities, particularly Bissau, are home to a significant minority of people of mixed European and African ancestry. Largely descendants of Cape Verdean immigrants, they form a kind of urban elite. There are also a number of more recent immigrant groups, including Mauritanian and Lebanese merchants. French entrepreneurs dominate the fledgling tourist industry in the Bijagós. And there is still a scattering of Portuguese colonials who have chosen to stay on after independence, running shops, restaurants and hotels.

For more information on Fula and Mandingo cultures, see p73.

## RELIGION

About 45% of the people (mainly Fula and Mandingo) are Muslims; they are concentrated more upcountry than along the coast. Christians make up less than 10% of the population. Most are Catholic, though

evangelical Christians are making small but significant inroads. Animist beliefs remain strong along the coast, in the south, and on the Bijagós islands. Animism still has a strong influence even on the practices of those who espouse Christianity or Islam.

## ARTS

While mainland Guinea-Bissau is not noted for the use of sculpted figures and masks, the Bijagós people continue to maintain these traditions. Statues representing *irans* (great spirits) are used in connection with agricultural and initiation rituals. The Bijagós also carve initiation masks, the best known being the Dugn'be, a ferocious bull with real horns. One of the best times to see masks is in Bissau at Carnival time (usually February).

On the mainland, traditional dance and music are influenced by the Mandingo and Diola people of neighbouring Gambia and Senegal. The harplike *kora* and the xylophone-like *balafon* are played, while women take turns dancing in front of a circle of onlookers. The traditional Guinean beat is *gumbé*.

Modern music shares the same roots, though the Portuguese colonial legacy has given it a Latin edge, especially among the larger orchestras. On the street and in bush taxis you'll hear little Sahelian-style music and more salsa and Latin sounds. One of Guinea-Bissau's most popular groups is Super Mama Djombo, along with Dulce Maria Neves, N'Kassa Cobra, Patcheco, Justino Delgado, Rui Sangara, and Ramiro Naka. These singers perform occasionally in some of Bissau's nightclubs.

## ENVIRONMENT

### The Land

Guinea-Bissau has an area of just over 36,000 sq km (about the size of Switzerland), making it one of West Africa's smaller countries. The coastal areas are flat, with estuaries, mangrove swamps and patches of forest. Inlets indent the coast and high tides periodically submerge the lowest areas. Inland, the landscape remains flat, with the highest ground, near the Guinean border, just topping 300m above sea level. Off the coast is the Arquipélago dos Bijagós, consisting of 18 main islands and dozens of smaller ones.

## Wildlife

### ANIMALS

Guinea-Bissau's rivers are home to freshwater hippos, while the island of Orango supports a small population of rare, salt-water hippos. The Bijagós are also an important nesting ground for aquatic turtles. The rainforests of the southeast are the most westerly home of Africa's chimpanzee population. There is also a stunning variety of birds, especially along the coastal wetlands, including cranes and peregrine falcons.

### PLANTS

The natural vegetation of the inland areas is lightly wooded savanna, but much of it is under cultivation. You'll see rice fields and plantations of groundnuts, maize and other crops. The coastal zone is very low-lying and indented by many large creeks and estuaries, where mangrove swamps dominate.

### National Parks

Guinea-Bissau has a number of protected areas, including the flagship Bolama-Bijagós Biosphere Reserve, which contains the Orango Islands National Park (p453) and the João Vieira-Poilão National Marine Park (p453). On the mainland, the Parque Natural dos Tarrafes do Rio Cacheu (p454), near the border with Senegal, protects a vast area of mangroves. In the south of the country, near Buba, the Parque Natural de Lagoa de Cafatada (p457) protects a freshwater wetland area. South of here the Parque Natural de Cantanhez (p457) is planned to protect estuarine mangroves and several sacred forests that have cultural significance.

Despite this impressive collection, parks can be difficult to visit because of poor national roads as well as limited park infrastructures. And because of a long history of unpaid salaries, park staff tend to see visitors as potential income sources. That said, a new management structure holds out promise for improved facilities and scheduled rates, though at writing, plans were still being worked out. If you plan to visit any of the parks, check with the friendly people at the Bissau headquarters of IBAP (☎ 207106; Rua São Tomé), the institute that oversees all the parks.

## Environmental Issues

A major environmental issue is the destruction of mangroves – some of the most important in Africa – on the coast, due to the expansion of rice production in seasonally flooded areas. The increase in groundnut production also creates problems – the plants rapidly exhaust soil nutrients and farming methods lead to erosion. Offshore, Guinea-Bissau has rich fishing waters, but overfishing may become an issue if controls are not introduced. The UICN (World Conservation Union) and several other bodies are working to protect Guinea-Bissau's natural environment.

## FOOD & DRINK

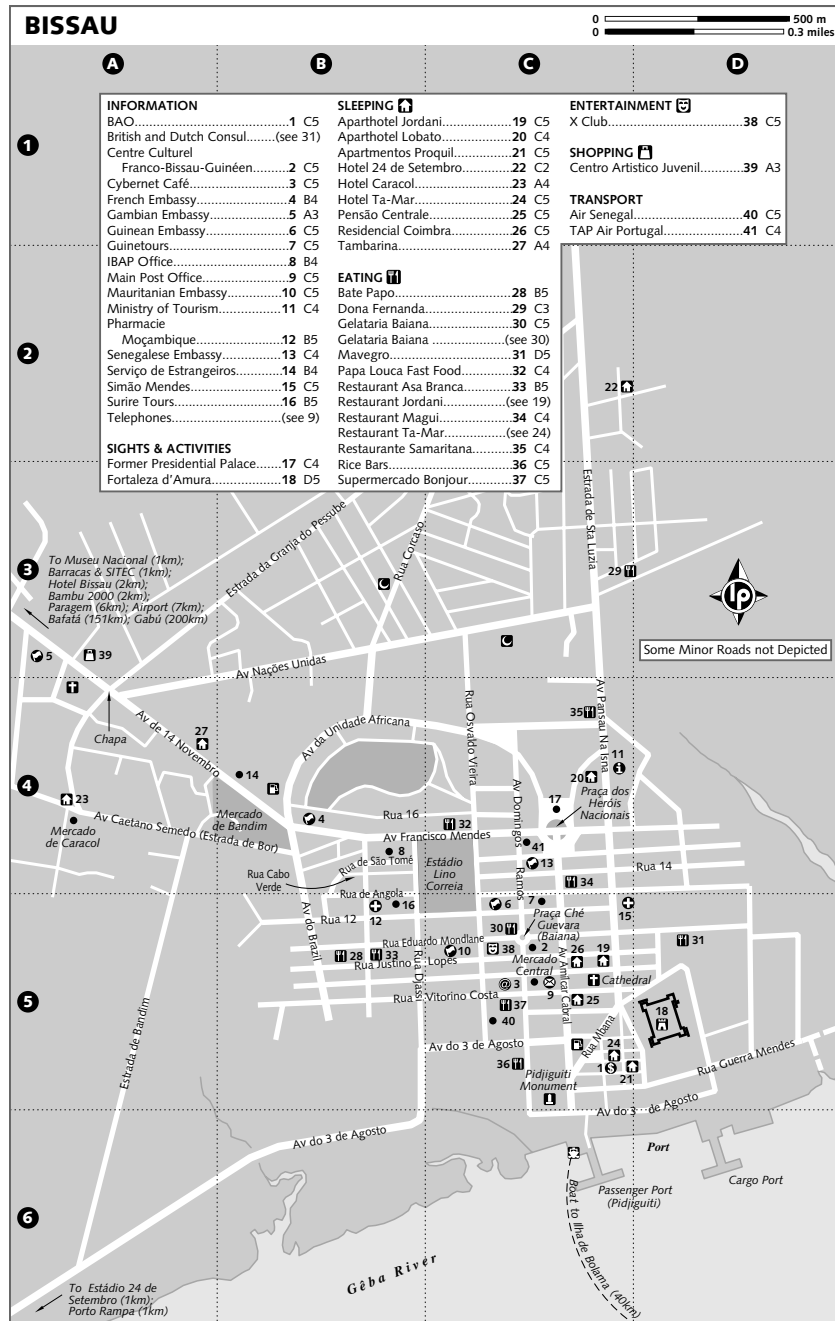
Seafood is the highlight of Guinean cuisine, from oysters and shrimp to the meaty *bica* (sea bream). Fish is generally either grilled or sautéed in a delicious white sauce based on onions and limes. Rice is the ubiquitous staple, sometimes supplemented with other starches like French-fried potatoes, yams, beans and *mandioca* (cassava). Vegetables generally include okra, often served as a puree, carrots and squash. Rich, reddish-orange palm oil, called *chabeu*, is another important staple. In rural areas, meat dishes may be *macaco* (monkey), so ask before ordering if you don't fancy chimp. Vegetarian options are limited indeed, though eggs are plentiful.

Canned soft drinks, bottled water and beer imported from Portugal are widely available. Local brews include palm wine, as in many other West African countries. You may also come across *caña de cajeu* (cashew rum), equally strong and made not from the nuts, but from the fruit of the cashew-nut tree. However, beware that homemade distilled products can have high levels of toxins.

## BISSAU

Despite ruined monuments, cavernous potholes and regular blackouts, Bissau manages to have its charms. The sleepy colonial heart, while largely crumbling, has wide, mango-shaded streets and attractive, pastel-coloured buildings. There are several attractive cafés and restaurants where the country's elite and intelligentsia reliably





gather day after day. Best of all, you'll feel a distinct lack of hustle in the streets that will seem a blessing if you arrive from, for example, Lagos or Dakar.

## ORIENTATION

Bissau's main drag is the wide Av Amílcar Cabral, running between the port and Praça dos Heróis Nacionais. A block west on Av Domingos Ramos is the main market, the Mercado Central, and Praça Ché Guevara (better known as Baiana), which has some bars and restaurants. On the northwest-ern edge of the centre is the Mercado de Bandim. From here, Av de 14 Novembro leads northwest to the main *paragem* (bus and taxi park), the airport and all inland destinations.

## INFORMATION

### Cultural Centres

**Centre Culturel Franco-Bissau-Guinéen** (☎ 206816; Praça Ché Guevara; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat) This newly re-built centre has a library, art gallery, theatre and an interior courtyard with a pleasant café.

### Emergency

**Fire** (☎ 118)

**Police** (☎ 117)

### Internet Access

**Cybernet Café** (Rua Vitorino Costa; per hr CFA1200; ☎ 9am-10pm) Slow but dependable connections, open evenings and Sundays.

**SITEC** (Av de 14 Novembro; per hr CFA1500; ☎ until 10pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) Decent connections in air-con outside the city centre.

### Medical Services

**Pharmacie Moçambique** (☎ 205513) The best pharmacy in town is well-stocked and has a helpful pharmacist. If you need to see a doctor, ask here for Dr Kassem Dahrouge, who speaks French and some English.

**Simão Mendes** (☎ 212861; Av Pansau Na Isna) Bissau's main hospital, but facilities are limited, to say the least.

### Money

At writing, there were no ATM machines in Guinea-Bissau, and credit cards were not accepted anywhere. You must plan to arrive with all the money you need in the form of traveller's cheques or, preferably, cash. BAO near the port is the only bank in the country that reliably exchanges cash. They

strongly prefer euros but will sometimes exchange US dollars.

If you have only traveller's cheques, try the **Supermercado Mavegro** (☎ 201224, 201216; Rua Eduardo Mondlane; ☎ 3.30-6pm Mon, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Tues-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat), though be warned that rates are not good. The store also exchanges cash – including US dollars – at slightly better rates.

There are a number of small money-changers around the Mercado Central, including some who work on the streets themselves. Some may exchange traveller's cheques, though at poor rates. Rates for cash, on the other hand, can be good. Beware, though – there are definitely scammers mixed in amongst the honest brokers.

### Post

**Main post office** (Correio; Av Amílcar Cabral)

### Telephone

For local calls, keep an eye out for signs for a '*posto publico*'; they are located in corner grocery stores and other shops around the city centre. They allow you to make local calls and international long-distance calls, though the latter can be punishingly expensive – between CFA2200 and CFA5000 per minute, depending on the country. There is also a call centre at the main post office.

### Tourist Information

**Ministry of Tourism** (☎ 245643; Av Pansau Na Isna) The people here are friendly enough, but not equipped with much useful information for travellers. For information on hotels and private transport, you're better off at a travel agency or tour operator.

### Travel Agencies

**Guinetours** (☎ 214344; Rua 12) This is the best agency for international or domestic flights, and for information about hotels around the country.

**Surire Tours** (☎ 214166; Rua de Angola) Also recommended.

### DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Walking around at night is safer in Bissau than in just about any other African capital city. Nevertheless, crime is slowly increasing, so take the usual precautions. Where possible, avoid unlit streets and the port area at night.

## SIGHTS

The **former presidential palace** dominates Praça dos Heróis Nacionais at the northern end of Av Amílcar Cabral. With a bombed-out roof and shrapnel in its once graceful, neoclassical façade, it's an ever-present reminder of the country's devastating civil war.

Off the southern end of Av Amílcar Cabral are the narrow streets of the old Portuguese quarter. The quarter houses colourful if often crumbling Mediterranean-style buildings. The old neighbourhood is guarded by the **Fortaleza d'Amura**. Surrounded by imposing stone walls, it's still used by the Guinean military and strictly off-limits to visitors.

On the campus of the national university on the outskirts of town is the **Museu Nacional** (Av de 14 Novembro; admission CFA500; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri). Looted during the war, it is slowly rebuilding a small but interesting collection of tribal art. Don't miss the collection of Carnival floats located in the upstairs gallery.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Guinea-Bissau's main event is **Carnival**, which takes place in Bissau every February/early March. Music, masks, dancing, parades and all-round good times are the order of the day.

## SLEEPING

Accommodations in Bissau are expensive and generally of poor quality, especially given the high prices. Be prepared for power blackouts in budget and even some midrange hotels.

## Budget

**Pensão Centrale** (☎ 213270; Av Amílcar Cabral; r with shared bathroom CFA20,000) Occupying a once-grand building with wide verandas and huge, high-ceilinged rooms, this is the traditional backpacker choice. Beware though: mattresses are thin, rooms are not terribly clean and security can be lax. The hotel is run by Dona Berta, a popular figure in Bissau who may share tales of her city and the various wars she and it have survived.

**Hotel Caracol** (Av Caetano Semedo; r CFA10,000) This seedy place offers small rooms with a bucket of water and a piece of foam on

the cement floor, yet manages to be one of Bissau's 'best' (read 'only') budget options.

## Midrange

**Aparthotel Jordani** (☎ 201719; Av Pansau Na Isna; s/d CFA25,000/35,000; 📶) The Jordani is a friendly hotel and offers digs with running water, TV, small fridge, and a generally dependable power supply. Although, there is only cold water, and rooms are neither very attractive nor particularly clean or well-maintained, yet still manage to be some of the best in Bissau.

**Hotel Ta-Mar** (☎ 206647; r from CFA25,000; 📶) Located in the old Portuguese quarter, this hotel has definitely seen better days – think rickety fixtures and crumbling plaster. That said, it has newish beds and air-conditioning. All rooms have their own shower and sink; in-room toilets cost an extra CFA10,000 per night.

**Hotel 24 de Setembro** (☎ 221033; r from CFA35,000; 📶 📺) This state-run hotel offers pleasant-looking bungalows set on peaceful, leafy grounds a little removed from the town centre. Unfortunately, rooms were looted during the war, and so are neither comfortable nor particularly clean.

**Apartamentos Proquil** (☎ 204980; r with fan/air-con CFA20,000/25,000; 📶) Located near the port, above an export business of the same name, this place has slightly decrepit rooms with furnishings that date to the 1960s. This is as good as it gets for this price range.

**Aparthotel Lobato** (☎ 201719; Av Pansau Na Isna; s/d CFA35,000/45,000; 📶) Rooms are newish and comfortable enough, though stuffy; prices are high.

## Top End

**Residencial Coimbra** (☎ 213467; fax 20 14 90; Av Amílcar Cabral; s/d CFA55,000/78,000; 📶) With tastefully appointed rooms featuring interesting local art, as well as an attractive rooftop garden, the Coimbra is the only genuinely decent hotel in the city – though you'll pay dearly for the privilege of staying here. A high-quality breakfast buffet is included.

**Hotel Bissau** (☎ 251251; fax 255552; Av de 14 Novembro; s/d CFA50,000/60,000; 📶 📺 📺) Taken over by rebels during the recent civil war, this graceless concrete monolith has definitely seen better days. Rooms are large and have balconies, but are definitely frayed. However, the leafy grounds are attractive

enough; the swimming pool is available to nonguests for CFA5000 per day.

## EATING

If your budget is tight, check out the rice bars near the port, where you can expect to pay around CFA500 for a heap of rice mixed with meat or fish. Unfortunately, the street stalls that are so common in West Africa are practically absent from Bissau.

## Restaurants

Unless otherwise indicated, the following restaurants are open for lunch (around noon to 3pm) and dinner (around 7pm to 10pm) daily.

**Restaurant Magui** (Av Amílcar Cabral; meals CFA2500) The charming Magui serves up spot-on Senegalese dishes in her simple eatery above the now-defunct cinema.

**Dona Fernanda** (meals CFA2500-5000; 📺 dinner) Hidden down a dirt road east of Estrada de Santa Luzia, Dona Fernanda serves up excellent Guinean dishes. Her *bica* (sea bream) is considered one of the best in the city.

**Gelataria Baiana** (Praça Ché Guevara) Serving espresso, drinks and baked goods on an outdoor terrace in the city's most attractive *praça* (park or square), Baiana is a favourite of politicians, artists and expats alike.

**Restaurant Samaritana** (off Av Pansau Na Isna; meals CFA2500) Another restaurant serving up simple, fresh and delicious Senegalese food in humble surroundings. Next door, there's also a decent Chinese restaurant with wide-screen TVs playing music videos.

**Papa Louca Fast Food** (Av Francisco Mendes) A decent option for 'fast food' such as shwarmas (CFA1000), hamburgers (CFA1500) and pizza (CFA2000) that is popular with expats.

**Restaurant Ta-Mar** (mains CFA4000) A favourite of the city's movers and shakers, this newly refurbished restaurant in the hotel of the same name has a distinctly European feel. Food is generally decent if pricey. On Friday nights, they close off the street, set up tables outside and often feature live music.

**Bate Papo** (Rua Eduardo Mondlane; meals CFA4000) At night, this upmarket place has the best pizza in town (CFA3500), and in the morning, it has good pastries and coffee.

**Restaurant Jordani** (Av Pansau Na Isna; mains CFA4000-5000) Come here for the festive, red-tiled dining room rather than the food, which is only sometimes good. It's a great

spot on Thursdays when people come to eat, drink and listen to live music by some of the country's leading musicians.

**Restaurant Asa Branca** (Rua Justino Lopes; meals CFA4000-6000) Asa Branca serves traditional Portuguese fare and is particularly noted for its seafood.

## Self-Catering

You can get fresh produce in and around the Mercado Central or at the Mercado Bandim, though be prepared to bargain – the ladies will rob you blind if you don't know your papayas. For imported foodstuffs, head to one of the city's higher-end supermarkets. **Supermercado Mavegro** (Rua Eduardo Mondlane) sells all kinds of imported items, from tents and car tyres to shampoo, plus a decent selection of packaged foods. **Supermercado Bonjour** (Rua Vitorino Costa) near the Air Sénégal office also has a decent selection of packaged food.

## DRINKING

Perhaps the best thing about Bissau is its easy sociability, and there are a number of places to while away an afternoon or evening over beer or coffee.

French speakers may prefer the café in the inner courtyard of the Centre Culturel Franco-Bissau-Guinéen (p447) on the other side of the square.

A number of restaurants also double as bar-cafés, including the Restaurant Jordani and the Restaurant Ta-Mar. On Thursday nights the Jordani hosts some of the best musicians in the country without even charging a cover and on Friday nights, the Ta-Mar closes off the street in front, set up tables outside and often features live music.

## ENTERTAINMENT

**X Club** (Rua Osualdo Vieira) For late-night partying, this club caters to everyone from idealistic UN workers to shady businessmen on the prowl. Décor is Euro-trendy and there are two free snooker tables.

**Bambu 2000** (Av de 14 Novembro) On weekends, this more rustic locale overflows with locals willing to drop a few thousand CFA to dance till dawn.

## SHOPPING

**Centro Artístico Juvenil** (Av de 14 Novembro) Not only a great place to shop (prices are actually marked and there is no pressure to buy!),

this is also a fine introduction to the arts and crafts of the Guinea-Bissau's many ethnicities. Purchases help young trainees learn traditional artisanship.

Check out the beaded jewellery and wood carvings on sale on the sidewalk in front of Pensão Centrale (p448), though here you will have to bargain. Just north of the main post office, vendors sell a variety of textiles (beautiful but mostly machine made). For cheap wares, from hats and sunglasses to used clothing, try Mercado de Bandim.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Bissau is home to the country's only airport with regularly scheduled flights, with services by TACV Cabo Verde Airlines, Air Sénégal International, TAP Air Portugal, and Air Luxor. See p460 for more information.

### Boat

Currently there is no ferry service in Bissau, but there is talk of restarting service to Bubaque in the Bijagós. For information about boat travel to the Bijagós, see opposite.

### Bush Taxi & Minibus

You can get bush taxis and minibuses to just about anywhere in the country, as well as to Senegal, at the outdoor *paragem* (stop), hidden about 500m south of Av de 14 Novembro, about 5km outside town. It's always best to get transport in the morning. For more information about travel by bush taxi and minibus, see p461.

To get to the *paragem*, take a *toca-toca* (minibus) from the Mercado de Bandim (CFA100) or a taxi (about CFA1000) from anywhere in town.

## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport

The airport is about 9km from the town centre. Taxis meet most flights, and it should cost no more than CFA2000 to get into town. To get a minibus (CFA100), walk 200m to the roundabout at the start of Av de 14 Novembro, the main road into the city.

### Taxi

Shared taxis – generally well-worn Mercedes, and always painted blue and white – are plentiful and ply all the main routes. Prices vary according to distance and whim, but never

cost more than CFA300 for trips within the city centre.

### Toca-Toca

These are small minibuses painted blue and yellow that run around the city. Most rides cost CFA100. The most useful route for visitors goes from Mercado de Bandim along Av de 14 Novembro towards the *paragem* and airport.

# ARQUIPÉLAGO DOS BIJAGÓS

At first, the Bijagós – Africa's only archipelago – may seem simply a pleasant escape from the problems of the mainland, with swaying palms, cooling breezes and powdery, white-sand beaches. Stay a little while though, and you'll begin to fall under the islands' singular spell.

Protected by swift tides and treacherous sandbanks, the islands have long been a world apart. They eluded Portuguese control until the 1930s, and the fiercely independent Bijagós people still retain a large degree of autonomy from the federal government.

Most visitors to the islands seem to be either biologists who come to study the unique and rich variety of marine life, or else sports fishermen who come to catch and eat it. When you see the islands' turquoise waters quiver with fish, you can understand what attracts both groups. The entire archipelago has been declared a biosphere reserve, and two island groups have also been declared national parks: the southern Orango group, home to saltwater hippos; and the eastern João Vieira group, breeding ground to a number of endangered sea turtles.

Travellers should note that transportation to and between the islands is difficult. See opposite for more information. Also, low tides often reveal mud flats that reach kilometres out to sea, limiting beach-going to high tide – unless you like to wade thigh-deep in mud. Finally, telephone service on the islands – including mobile service – is very unreliable.

### Dangers & Annoyances

Because of the higher density of tourism, the Bijagós are one of the few places in the country where you will hear a litany of

## QUEENS OF THE BIJAGÓS

Protected by the shallow channels and treacherous tides that wash their islands, the peoples of the Arquipélago dos Bijagós have, over the centuries, developed a largely matriarchal culture that is remarkably distinct from that of mainland Guinea. The islanders are ruled by a king and queen (they're not married) who serve as co-regents – the king managing men's affairs and the queen managing women's affairs. Women often serve as chiefs of individual villages, and they're also the sole homeowners – only fair since they are entirely responsible for homebuilding, from brick-making to actual construction.

Marriage is also a matriarchal affair. On some islands, when a girl reaches puberty, the young men venture forth with as much rice and other goods as they can afford in the hope of buying their way into her favour. She chooses a suitor, but if she's not pregnant within a year, or if someone else makes a better offer, she can ditch her man and choose another. The man usually only stays around until she gives birth, then returns home and becomes eligible for other liaisons. Children take their mother's name and are often unable to identify their father.

The majority of the people remain almost virtually untouched by modern civilisation. They're exceedingly open and friendly, though they'll also ask you to give them anything you might be carrying, up to and including the shirt off your back – literally. But however welcoming they are, remember that their culture's survival depends exactly on its isolation. If you travel to the more remote islands, tread very, very lightly.

requests, mostly by children and always in French, for *cent francs* (CFA100).

### Getting There & Away

Transportation to the islands is, simply put, difficult. There is no longer a ferry service or regularly scheduled flights. That leaves two options. First are *canoas* – large, motorised, occasionally leaky and nearly always overloaded canoes – that leave Bissau from either the port at the foot of Av Amílcar Cabral, or Port Rampa, the fishermen's port near the Estádio 24 de Setembro. Expect to share the boat with farm animals, bags of rice and cement, and quantities of powerful-smelling, not-quite-dried fish. There are several Bissau-Bubaque *canoas* (CFA2500 per person, four to six hours) that follow a regular weekly schedule, though departure times vary according to tides and winds. It's always worth asking around for unscheduled departures, but do check the boat's conditions (and your own instincts) carefully.

At the other extreme, a number of higher-end fishing camps on the islands hire out speedboats to Bubaque or the other islands. However, you can expect to pay more than CFA100,000 for the trip from Bissau to Bubaque. If your hotel doesn't arrange transport, your best bet for fast, safe transport is the **Hotel Marazul** (☎ 6-626277) in Quinhámel. It has a range of boats.

At writing, a small cruise ship called the *African Queen* was expected to return to Bissau, with regular, multiday excursions to the islands. The schedule, prices and details were still to be determined; check with travel agencies in Bissau for current schedules, prices and itineraries.

### Getting Around

Travel between the islands is just as difficult as travel from the mainland. For *canoas*, ask around at the port on each island to find out if anyone is going where you'd like to go. Alternatively, you may be able to hire a boat and driver from one of the top-end hotels, though you should expect to pay about CFA50,000 to CFA100,000 per day plus fuel.

### ILHA DE BOLAMA

Located just off the mainland, about 40km south of Bissau, the island of Bolama was long home to the Portuguese capital. Deprived of its status in 1941, the once-grand town (also called Bolama) has been decaying ever since, with sagging colonnades and papaya trees sprouting from stately living rooms. The effect is one of eerie beauty, though the damage is so advanced in some cases that it causes more regret than reverie.

The island is virtually devoid of a tourist infrastructure, though the NGO Prodepa, an international group devoted to preserving

traditional fishing techniques, rents basic rooms (CFA12,000) and serves food (three meals for around CFA5000 per person). The closest beach is about 4km south of Bolama town, but the best beaches are along the far southwest end of the island, about 20km from town via a poorly maintained road.

Currently there is a regularly scheduled *cano*a that leaves Bissau for Bolama on Saturday (CFA2000, about three hours), returning Sunday. See p451 for more information about boat travel to the Bijagós.

## ILHA DE BUBAQUE

At the centre of the Bijagós, Bubaque is home to the archipelago's largest town, as well its major transport hub. If you can't make it to remoter islands, Bubaque makes a fine place to unwind. There is a range of accommodation in and around the main town and a small beach at the island's northern tip. Or, a better option is Praia Bruce, a wide expanse of powdery white sand at the southern end of the island. It's about 30km from Bubaque town along a paved, if pitted road. Some hotels arrange transport to the

beach (up to CFA10,000 round trip), or you can ask around to hire a bicycle (around CFA5,000 per day). If you make the trip, make sure you're there for high tide.

## Sleeping & Eating

There is a range of good accommodation in Bubaque, all of which also serve meals if you order ahead. Prices are significantly lower – and standards of cleanliness significantly higher – than in Bissau. For cheap eats, head to the port area, where there are several workers' bar-restaurants serving cheap beers and rice plates. Note that the island only has power in the evenings (and this not always).

## BUDGET

All the rooms in this category have shared bathroom with bucket shower.

**Chez Titi** (r CFA5000) Very basic rooms, but they're ideally perched on a small bluff just above the water. Good Senegalese food is served.

**Chez Raoul** (s/d CFA4000/6000) Another good budget option run by a Senegalese couple, with a dining room attached that is con-

sidered the best in town (mains CFA500 to CFA2500).

**Campement Cadjoco** (r CFA7000) This French-run *pensão* (pension) offers good value, with well-maintained rooms at the back of a pleasant garden. The owner also has a good, fast boat and offers fishing trips as well as transport to and from the islands.

**Pousada Bela Vista** (r CFA7500) Located in the heart of town, this Franco-Senegalese run place offers small but clean, newly furnished rooms. Beware, though, that the owners tend to think prices are flexible (upwards, of course) even after you're sure you've settled on a figure, and the food is iffy.

## MIDRANGE

**Chez Dora** (r CFA12,000) Officially called Aparthotel Cano, Chez Dora offers simple, but tasteful, impeccably maintained cottages with private baths and running water ranged around a lush garden. The gracious Dora does all the cooking (meals around CFA3000), which is a delicious amalgam of local ingredients – including her own pigs and papayas – and techniques from her native Portugal. She's also relentlessly clean, so if you're going to eat raw greens anywhere in West Africa, this is the place to do it. Highly recommended.

**Aparthotel Cruz Pontes** (☎ 821135; r CFA10,000) Another good option, with simple but clean cottages with private bathroom and running water. The friendly owner also serves meals (CFA2500 to CFA3000) and is a good person to ask about boat transport.

**Hotel-Restaurant Calypso** (☎ 821131; s/d CFA12,000/15,000; 🍷) This French-run place offers simple but attractive bungalows with private bathrooms, ranged around a little garden and swimming pool.

## TOP END

**Kasa Afrikana** (☎ 821144; [develayg@yahoo.fr](mailto:develayg@yahoo.fr); r CFA50,000; 🍷) The island's newest and cushiest hotel caters to rich fishermen. It's a French-run establishment with tastefully decorated and fully equipped rooms plus attractive grounds with a bar, a pool, and views of the water.

## Entertainment

While the food is iffy, Pousada Bela Vista has a terrace set on the water, making it a popular place for an evening beer. If you're

determined to party, check out **Tatumi** (admission CFA1000-2000), the island's only full-fledged nightclub, catering mostly to locals. Next door is a 'cinema' that plays mostly French-language DVDs on a large screen TV.

## Getting There & Away

There are unscheduled *canoas* to and from Bissau almost every day. In addition, there are regularly scheduled (and generally more reliable) *canoas* that leave Bissau for Bubaque on Tuesday and Friday, returning Wednesday and Sunday (CFA2500 per person, four to six hours). There is also fairly regular service to Orango (CFA2000, two to four hours), and occasional services to other islands. Just head to the port and ask around for times and destinations. See p451 for more information about boat travel to the Bijagós.

If you plan to visit either of the national parks, it's worth checking with the IBAP office (national parks office) in Bubaque to see if you can join the staff on one of the park's boats for the price of fuel (though this can run as high as CFA50,000 return).

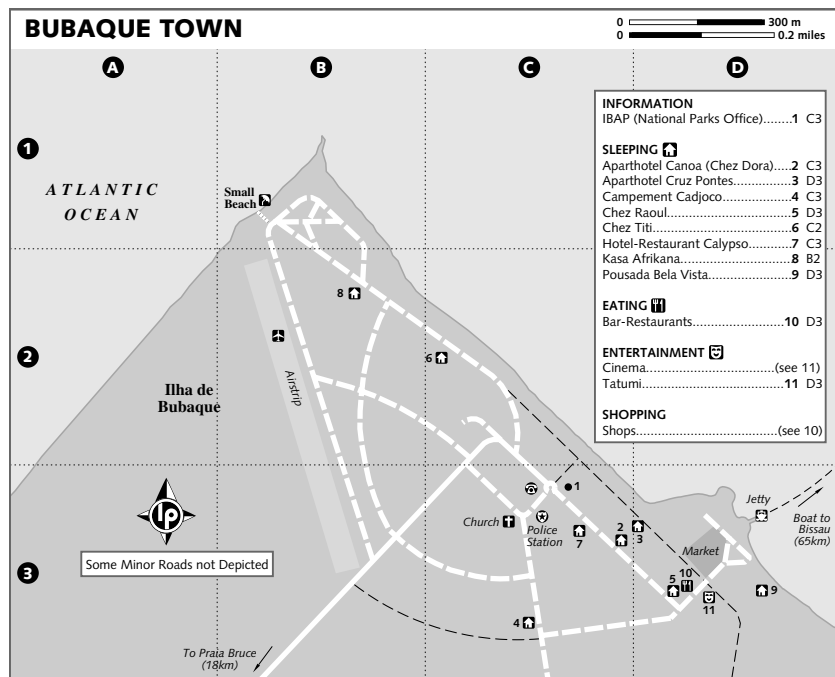
## ORANGO ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Home to rare saltwater species of hippo and crocodile, Ilha de Orango and the surrounding islands together make up the Orango Islands National Park. The island is also the burial site of the Bijagós kings and queens.

The island's only hotel, **Orango Parque Hotel** (☎ satellite phone 00871-761 273221; per person incl 3 meals CFA30,000) has attractive, well-maintained rooms with pretty tile bathrooms, and sits right on the beach. The Italian-Portuguese owners also serve up excellent food. The hotel is a short walk to the royal burial grounds, though you'll have to hire a boat to visit the shy hippos and crocs.

## JOÃO VIEIRA – POILÃO NATIONAL MARINE PARK

At the far, southwest end of the archipelago, the João Vieira – Poilão National Marine Park consists of four islands and surrounding waters that together form a key nesting area for three species of endangered sea turtles. Ilha João Vieira is the only island with accommodations – two adjoining fishing camps run by Frenchmen who have been friends since childhood in Brittany.





Set on a paradisiacal beach, **Chez Claude** (per person per night with full board CFA40,000) offers simple but spotless cabins and Franco-African cuisine that is based on the catch of the day and served up with a hospitality that is at once down-to-earth and distinctly French-inflected. Just up the beach is **Tuburon Club** (per person per night with full board CFA50,000), which caters to higher-end fishing tours.

Between the two lodges is the IBAP office, which has French-language displays illustrating the local ecosystem and at writing was also in the process of building basic rooms for visitors. Check in with park officials before visiting the turtle nesting sites on nearby islands.

### OTHER ISLANDS

Just across from Bubaque is **Ilha de Rubane**, which has a number of high-end, French-owned lodges catering to sports fishermen. At writing, a new eco-hotel promoting low-impact travel was also under construction. Another option is the tiny but paradisiacal **Ilha Acunda**, just off the Unhocomo and Unhocomozinho islands – the most westerly of the Bijagós. The rustic but attractive **Hotel Acunda** (per person per night incl 3 meals CFA25,000) offers cabins just up from a lovely stretch of white sand. To make reservations and arrange transportation, contact the **Hotel Marazul** (☎ 6-626277 in Quinhámel).

## THE NORTHWEST

Northwest Guinea-Bissau offers two distinct experiences for the traveller. Varela, which sits just across the border from Senegal's Cap Skiring, shares its neighbour's gorgeous, wide beaches yet remains almost completely undeveloped. The region is also home to remarkably well-preserved mangrove swamps and the Cacheu river, with its hippos and crocodiles. A word of caution: poor road conditions throughout the region make travel in northwest Guinea-Bissau an exercise in patience.

### QUINHÁMEL

Located about 30km west of Bissau, Quinhámel has a small but lively town centre, and also serves as capital of the Biombo region, which is the traditional home of the Papel people. If you are arriving from

Bissau, you'll see a local collective just before the centre of town on the left that, with support from international groups, is devoted to preserving traditional weaving techniques. There are no formal tours, but it's well worth a stop to see the men and boys at work on the traditional looms. Down a dirt road to the left, past the town, lies the **Hotel Marazul** (☎ 6-626277; s/d CFA30,000/35,000; ♿ ♿). It offers attractive bungalows set amid a pretty grove of palms, plus the country's best-maintained swimming pool. The hotel also rents boats for fishing trips or transfers to the Bijagós islands. Minibuses run regularly to/from Bissau (CFA500).

### CACHEU

The small riverside town of Cacheu (cash-ay-ou) was once a major Portuguese slave-trading centre from which the infamous English pirate Sir Francis Drake was repulsed in 1567. You can visit the reconstructed fort, with cannons and some large bronze statues stacked in a corner and seemingly forgotten. Most visitors, though, come to visit the nearby park. Minibuses run regularly to/from Bissau (CFA2000).

### PARQUE NATURAL DOS TARRAFES DO RIO CACHEU

Established to protect large areas of mangrove, the Parque Natural dos Tarrafes do Rio Cacheu is home to a diverse array of wildlife, including alligators, hippos, monkeys, manatees, panthers, gazelles and hyenas. There are also more than 200 bird species, among them flamingos, Senegal parrots and African giant kingfishers.

The park's infrastructure is limited. However, the park office (on the left before you reach the town of Cacheu if you're coming from Bissau) offers rooms with shared bath with running water, and solar-powered electricity for CFA3000 per person. They'll also prepare meals for guests. At writing, there were no fixed prices for meals – be prepared to bargain. Park officials can organise boat trips on the Cacheu and surrounding swamps, or perhaps arrange for a motorbike. For more information, contact the **IBAP office** (☎ 207106; Rua São Tomé) in Bissau.

A cheap way to view wildlife is to take the *canoa* that plies the river daily between

Cacheu and São Domingos; the trip costs CFA1500 and takes around two hours. Schedules depend on tides.

### SÃO DOMINGOS

While there is not much reason to linger in São Domingos, this town on the Senegalese border is a regional transport hub, sitting on the main route to/from Ziguinchor (Senegal). If you get stuck here (not impossible as the border post is often closed at night), there are food stalls and several hotels around the main square. If you're headed to Varela by public transport, you may be able to find a bush taxi outside the border post. There are plenty of bush taxis to/from Bissau (CFA2700, two to three hours).

### VARELA

With wide sand beaches as beautiful as those of Cap Skiring just across the Senegalese border, Varela is the favourite getaway of Guineans – at least those with four-wheel drives. The road from São Domingos is, at writing, in terrible condition, though there is a lot of talk about repaving. Even with a good vehicle, the 50km drive can take several hours.

Once you arrive, you can pitch a tent along the beach without a problem. Or you can stay at **Chez Helene** (r CFA12,000) which offers simple but well-maintained rooms and excellent meals (CFA2500; at least if the Italian chef decides to stick around). Consider packing food as well, since shops in this isolated town often run out of many items.

There is usually at least one minibus daily that runs to/from São Domingos (two to three hours).

## THE NORTHEAST

Travelling northeast from Bissau, the flat, wet coastal regions give way to drier and hillier land that serves as the transition into the Sahel. There is little to detain the traveller, although the forests and rivers are popular with hunters and fishermen, and the road between the Gabú and the Guinean border winds through pretty hills as high as 300m – the highest point in the country.

### Getting There & Away

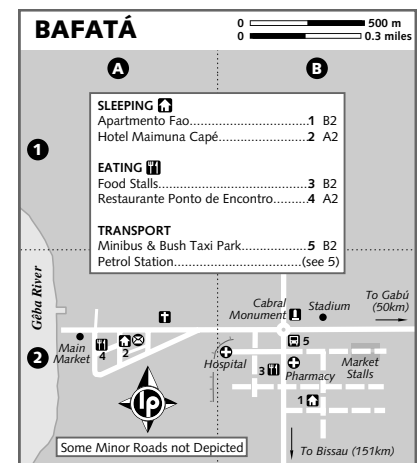
Transport from Bissau to Gabú via Bafatá is plentiful and ranges from bush taxi to toca-tocas. Roads are mostly good as far as Gabú, though annual flooding can change conditions quickly

### BAFATÁ

Bafatá is the birthplace of Amilcar Cabral and the region's largest city. Bafatá retains a small but interesting colonial centre, which is located on a bluff above the Gêba River. Travellers should check out the old public market, with its odd, arabesque façade, and stroll down by the peaceful area around the riverbank.

The nicest place to stay in Bafatá is **Hotel Maimuna Capé** (r with fan/air-con CFA12,000/17,000; ♿ ♿), which offers comfortable, spotless rooms in an attractive building in the old colonial centre. The hotel also offers meals for CFA2800 to CFA5000. Hidden on an unnamed street off the main Bissau–Gabú road is **Apartamento Fao** (r CFA5000), which offers small, basic rooms with shared bathroom with bucket water. The best place to eat is **Restaurante Ponto de Encontro** (dishes around CFA3500). Run by a friendly Portuguese family, it serves simple but hearty Portuguese food made from fresh local ingredients. There are also plenty of food stalls along the main Bissau–Gabú road.

Minibuses to Bissau (CFA1800), Gabú (CFA700) or Buba (CFA1800) depart from the petrol station area.



## GABÚ

It may not be beautiful, but Gabú is definitely lively, especially in the evening as the shops and food stalls along the main road to Bafatá come to life. A range of accommodation makes it a good place to stay if you're travelling to/from Guinea.

If you're determined to get to know this part of the country, you can head to Canjadude, 40km south on the poorly maintained road to Boé. From here, you can hike up several rocky hillocks rising from the plain and get good views of the area.

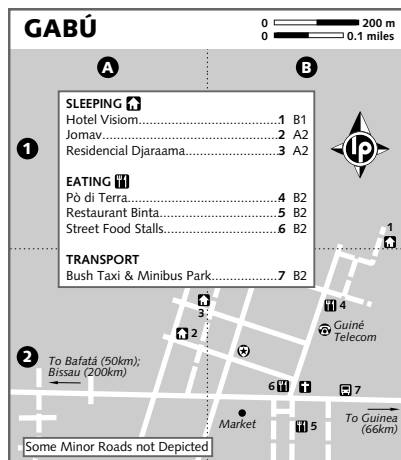
### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Visiom** (☎ 511484; r with fan/air-con CFA8000/15,000; 🚻) Out in a quiet spot north of town, the Visiom is good value, with clean rooms with bathroom, a friendly staff, and a small garden.

**Residencial Djaraama** (☎ 511302; r with shared bathroom CFA12,500) Occupying the 2nd floor of a colonial building and ringed by a wide veranda, this place may be overpriced, but it's the only place with character. Kitschy décor includes a 4m-long snakeskin and an inflatable reindeer.

**Jomav** (r CFA5000) This bar-restaurant-disco offers small but spotless rooms with fan and tiny bathrooms with bucket water. Be aware that you won't get much sleep here when the disco's open.

**Restaurant Binta** (meals from CFA500) Binta is a feisty Dakar lady who makes one hell of a peanut sauce.



**Pó di Terra** (meals CFA1000-2000) The Pó di Terra has outdoor seating in a pleasant garden on the north side of town.

### Getting There & Away

Minibuses go to Bissau regularly (CFA2500, five to six hours). If you're heading for Guinea or Senegal, see p460 for details of transport options from Gabú. You can easily change CFA into Guinean francs at the bush taxi and minibus park.

## THE SOUTH

Moving into southern Guinea-Bissau, you leave the Sahel well behind and enter a beautiful region of tropical forests penetrated by countless waterways. The bird and monkey populations are impressive, and this is the home of Africa's most westerly chimpanzee populations.

### Getting There & Away

Currently, the only way to get to the region is by minibus or with your own vehicle – preferably a very sturdy four-wheel drive. Roads are very poor, so even short distances can be slow. There's a minibus that plies the Bissau–Catió route most days (CFA3000, all day), though you may have to switch vehicles in Buba. You can also get a minibus from Bafatá. Either way, you should ask around the day before to confirm schedules.

At writing there were no longer any regularly scheduled *canoes* or ferries between Bissau and Catió or Enxude.

### Getting Around

Without a very sturdy four-wheel drive vehicle, getting around the region is very difficult. Regular cars can make it to Buba but not to Catió. Minibuses ply most roads, but service can be infrequent and erratic.

## SALTINHO

The main Bissau-Buba road crosses the Corubal River right over the Saltinho waterfalls. The **Pousada do Saltinho** (☎ 202901; s/d CFA20,000/25,000; 🚻) has fine views of the falls, though they're largely obscured by a metal bridge. The hotel is popular with European hunters. Even if you don't stay here, come for a drink or just for a swim in the falls.

## BUBA

Buba is a small junction town on the way to points further south and east. The most pleasant place to stay (and best value) is **Pousada Bela Vista** (☎ 6-647011; r CFA10,000; 🚻), which has spotless, attractively fitted-out bungalows and lovely vistas of the river. To find it, head all the way to the port and turn left along a dirt road for about 500m. Another option is the **Foroya Club** (☎ 611120; r CFA15,000), a hunting and fishing club that offers bungalows with bathroom on a pleasant spot just above the river. There's also a restaurant (meals CFA3000). In town, there are a number of places to get cheap bowls of fish and rice (around CFA500). A minibus from Bissau (CFA2500, all day) leaves most mornings.

About 5km before you reach the town of Buba, you will see signs for **Parque Natural da Lagoa de Cafatada**. While there was no infrastructure for visitors at writing, it is an important habitat for both bird and aquatic life. For more information about arranging a visit, contact the **IBAP office** (☎ 207106; Rua São Tomé) in Bissau.

## CATIÓ

Catió is the most remote area in the south that still has regular transport connections with Bissau. There is not much reason to linger, but it's a necessary stop on the way to Jemberem and the Cantanhez Forest. You can reach Catió by minibus (CFA3000, all day) from Bissau (though you may have to switch vehicles in Buba).

## JEMBEREM & THE CANTANHEZ FOREST

Jemberem is a small village 22km east of Catió, and the centre of a community-based conservation scheme connected with the proposed Parque Natural de Cantanhez, which is a good place to see birds and, with luck, chimpanzees and elephants. The local women's association has set up the small and inexpensive Raça Banana guesthouse. Through them or the local chief you can arrange a guide (essential) to show you through the nearby sacred forest.

There's a daily *kandong* (truck or pickup) in the morning between Catió and Jemberem. You may also check in at the **IBAP office** (☎ 207106; Rua São Tomé) in Bissau for more information about the park, including transport.

# GUINEA-BISSAU DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Bissau is not only expensive but also poor value. The budget doubles are primitive and not very clean but still cost around CFA10,000. Expect to pay upwards of CFA35,000 for a midrange double with running water, electricity and air-conditioning. Outside the capital, the situation is, fortunately, very different. For CFA10,000 to CFA15,000 you can expect a clean, comfortable room with running water, private bath and, at the higher end of the scale, air-conditioning. Budget digs outside Bissau cost around CFA5,000. Specialist hunting and fishing camps are scattered around the country, catering to upmarket visitors flying in from France and Portugal. They generally charge CFA30,000 to CFA50,000 per person for room and full board.

## ACTIVITIES

The Arquipélago dos Bijagós (p450) and especially Varela have great sandy beaches, and the waters around the Bijagós also offer some of the best deep-sea fishing in the world. Cycling is an excellent way to get around Guinea-Bissau, as roads are quiet and generally flat. There are no formal hire outlets, but you can usually arrange something just by asking around. For more serious exploration, consider bringing your own bike (for more information, see p843).

## PRACTICALITIES

- The national radio and TV stations broadcast in Portuguese. Most interesting for travellers is Radio Mavegro FM (100.0MHz), which combines music with hourly news bulletins in English from the BBC.
- Newspapers come and go quickly in Bissau. If you sit at one of the city's cafes or restaurants, a vendor will quickly be offering you the latest offerings.
- Electrical voltage is 220V with European plugs (2 round prongs).
- Guinea-Bissau uses the metric system.

## BOOKS

Patrick Chabal's *Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War* is a fine antidote to current cynicism about African politics, documenting the way the leader of Guinea-Bissau's revolution combined idealism, sharp analytical powers and political acumen.

Walter Hawthorne's *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400–1900* examines the way European slavery radically changed the way of life of the stateless Balanta people of Guinea-Bissau.

Jonina Einarsdottir's *Tired of Weeping: Mother Love, Child Death, and Poverty in Guinea-Bissau* explores the unexpected ways women of Guinea-Bissau's matrilineal Papel tribe cope with high rates of infant mortality.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Opening hours for banks and government offices vary quite a bit, but are usually 8am to noon and 3pm to 6pm Monday to Friday, or from 8am to 2pm Monday to Friday. The post offices are generally open Monday to Friday mornings only, but the main post office in Bissau is open 8am to 6pm Monday to Saturday. Larger shops are generally open from 8am or 9am until 6pm Monday to Friday and 8am until 1pm or 2pm Saturday. Some shops also close for an hour or two in the early afternoon. In most towns there are usually corner grocers that will stay open until 10pm or even later.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### Guinea-Bissau Embassies & Consulates

In West Africa, you can get visas for Guinea-Bissau in The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal. For more details see the relevant country chapter. Outside Africa, Guinea-Bissau has very few embassies or consulates. These are more or less limited to the following:

**Belgium** (☎ 02-647 08 09; 70 Av Franklin-Roosevelt, Brussels 1000)

**France** (☎ 01 45 26 18 51; 94 Rue Saint Lazare, 75009 Paris)

**Portugal** (☎ 21 303 04 40; Rua Alcolena, 17, Lisbon 1400)

**USA** (☎ 301-947 3958; 15929 Yukon Lane, Rockville, MD 20855)

## Embassies & Consulates in Guinea-Bissau

All embassies and consulates are in Bissau, some in the centre, others along the road towards the airport.

**France** (☎ 201312; cnr Av de 14 Novembro & Av do Brazil)

**Gambia** (☎ 203928; Av de 14 Novembro; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Sat–Thu, to 12.30pm Fri) Located 1km northwest of Mercado de Bandim.

**Guinea** (☎ 201231; Rua 12; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Sat–Thu, to 1pm Fri) East of the central stadium.

**Mauritania** (☎ 203696; Rua Eduardo Mondlane) South of the central stadium.

**Senegal** (☎ 212944; off Praça dos Heróis Nacionais; ☎ 8am–5pm)

The consul for the UK and the Netherlands is **Jan van Maanen** (☎ 201224, 211529; fax 201265; Supermercado Mavegro, Rua Eduardo Mondlane, Bissau). Contact the French embassy for information about visas for Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Guinea-Bissau's main event is Carnival, which takes place in Bissau every year in February or early March. Music, masks, dancing, parades and all-around good times are the order of the day. Small festivals are held in other towns around the country at about the same time of year, although you need to ask locally for details as dates are not fixed.

## HOLIDAYS

Public holidays include:

**New Year's Day** 1 January  
**Anniversary of the Death of Amilcar Cabral**

20 January

**Women's Day** 8 March

**Easter** March/April

**Labour Day** 1 May

**Pidjiguiti Day** 3 August

**Independence Day** 24 September

**Christmas Day** 25 December

Islamic feasts such as Eid al-Fitr (at the end of Ramadan) and Tabaski are also celebrated. See p818 for a table of dates of Islamic holidays.

## INTERNET ACCESS

There are several Internet cafés in Bissau. They charge CFA1000 to CFA1500 per hour for slow, dial-up connections. Outside of

the capital, there is virtually no public Internet access.

## LANGUAGE

Portuguese is the official language, but no more than a third of the people speak it. Each group has its own language, but the common tongue is Crioulo – a mix of medieval Portuguese and local words. As Guinea-Bissau is increasingly drawn into the Afro-Francophone world, more and more people understand French. See p861 for some useful phrases.

## MONEY

At writing, there are no ATM machines in Guinea-Bissau, and credit cards are not accepted anywhere. You must plan to arrive with all the money you need in the form of traveller's cheques or, preferably, cash. Euros are the easiest to exchange. US dollars are more difficult, and sometimes impossible outside Bissau.

The unit of currency is the West African CFA franc. The principal bank of Guinea-Bissau is the Banco da Africa Ocidental (BAO), although they don't change travellers cheques. In Bissau you can change cash at BAO or with the moneychangers around the Mercado Central (some may also accept travellers cheques, though at ruinous rates). You can also change cash and travellers cheques at Supermercado Mavegro. Outside Bissau, there are few banks, so most travellers change money in Bissau.

Outside of Bissau you may have luck changing euros, and in rare cases US dollars, just by asking around any public market. However, plan to carry all the local currency you think you might need.

Tippling is optional.

## PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Photo permits are not required, but the usual restrictions apply. For more information see p823.

## POST

The postal service is reliable but slow – you're probably better off posting mail home from Senegal or Gambia. If you decide to make a go of it, airmail letters cost CFA450. Travelers report that the poste restante in Bissau is unhelpful and unreliable.

## TELEPHONE

For local calls, keep an eye out for signs '*posto publico*'; they are located in corner grocery stores and other shops around the country. They allow you to make local calls, and sometimes international long-distance calls, though the latter can be punishingly expensive – between CFA2200 and CFA5000 per minute, depending on the country. There is also a call centre at the **main post office** (Av Amilcar Cabral) in Bissau.

It is relatively easy to buy a mobile phone with a prepaid plan. You can also buy a SIM card and put it in your own mobile phone. The best company is Areeba, which charges about CFA5,000 for a SIM card, about CFA100 per minute for calls within the country and as little as CFA500 for international calls. Service is fairly reliable on the mainland, but not in the Arquipélago dos Bijagós.

There are no city phone codes in Guinea-Bissau. All fixed-line numbers have six digits. Mobile phones have seven digits.

## VISAS

All visitors, except nationals of Ecowas countries, need visas. These are normally valid for one month and are issued for around US\$40 at embassies. They are not issued at land borders, but may be issued at the airport if you come from an African country where visas are not available. To avoid hassles, get one before you arrive.

## Visa Extensions

Extensions are easy to obtain at **Serviço de Estrangeiros** (Av 14 de Novembro, Bissau), behind the main immigration building across from the Mercado Bandim. For virtually all nationalities, 45-day visa extensions cost around CFA4000 and are ready the same day if you apply early.

## Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following neighbouring countries can be obtained at their embassies in Bissau.

**Gambia** Three-month single-entry visas cost CFA15,000 and require one photo; they're ready the same day if you go early.

**Guinea** Two-month multiple-entry visas cost US\$40 plus two photos and take a day or two to issue.

**Senegal** One-month multiple-entry visas cost CFA5000 with four photos and are issued in two days.

## WOMEN TRAVELLERS

The combined legacy of Portuguese assimilation and the role of women fighters in the liberation war, plus limited Islamic influence, means local women enjoy a certain degree of freedom. If you've travelled through Senegal or Mali, the sight of women in trousers, couples holding hands in public, or men and women simply socialising comfortably together, makes a refreshing change. Although the atmosphere is relaxed, in rural areas female visitors may be more comfortable behaving and dressing conservatively. For more information, see p828.

## TRANSPORT IN GUINEA-BISSAU

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Entering Guinea-Bissau

A certificate with proof of a yellow fever vaccination is required of all travellers.

#### Air

Guinea-Bissau's only international airport is on the outskirts of Bissau. The main airlines flying to/from Guinea-Bissau are TAP Air Portugal, TACV Cabo Verde Airlines, Air Sénégal International and budget airline Air Luxor. Departure tax for international flights is US\$20, but this is usually included in the ticket price.

TAP Air Portugal and Air Luxor are the only airlines with direct flights from Europe to Bissau. Between them, Air Sénégal and TACV Cabo Verde Airlines operate seven flights per week between Bissau and Dakar. To fly between Bissau and anywhere else in Africa, you'll have to get a connecting flight in Dakar.

The following airlines service Guinea-Bissau:

**Air Luxor** (LK; ☎ 206422; www.airluxor.com; Av 24 de Setembro) Hub: Lisbon.

**Air Sénégal International** (V7; ☎ 205211; www/air-senegal-international.com; Rua Osualdo Vieira) Hub: Dakar.

#### DEPARTURE TAX

There is a US\$20 airport departure tax, which is usually included in your ticket.

**TACV Cabo Verde Airlines** (VR; ☎ 206087; www.tacv.com; Av Amílcar Cabral) Hub: Praia.

**TAP Air Portugal** (TP; ☎ 201359; www.flytap.com; Praça dos Heróis Nacionais) Hub: Lisbon.

#### Land

The busiest crossing point to/from Senegal is at São Domingos, on the main route between Ingore and Ziguinchor. There are also crossing points between Tanaf and Farim, and near Pirada, north of Gabú on the route to/from Vélingara and Tambacounda.

To/from Guinea, most traffic goes via Kandika and Saréboïdo on the road between Gabú and Koundara. A less-travelled route, open only in the dry season, links southeastern Guinea-Bissau and western Guinea via Quebo and Boké.

#### GUINEA

Bush taxis usually go to the border daily from Gabú and Koundara (CFA2500). It can take all day to cover this 100km stretch, although the winding road through the Fouta Djallon foothills is beautiful. If you have to change transport at Saréboïdo, tying in with the weekly Sunday market will improve your options.

During the dry season you may be able to take a four-wheel drive from Gabú to Boké (CFA8000); from here transport goes on to Conakry.

The adventurous may be able to get a *canoë* from Cacine in the far southeast to Kamsar (about a five-hour trip), from where you can find onward transport to Boké or Conakry.

#### SENEGAL

Most overland travel between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau passes through Ziguinchor, Senegal and the Guinean border town of São Domingos. The recently completed bridge at Joalande means that vehicles rely on only one ferry – the one that crosses Cacheu river. A bush taxi between Bissau and Ziguinchor costs CFA4700 per person, and each passenger must pay another CFA100 for the ferry.

You can also cross the border between Farim and Tanaf by bush taxi. You may also be able to get transport from Gabú to Tambacounda (via Vélingara), though road conditions are poor and journeys long.

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

At writing there were no domestic flights in Guinea-Bissau.

### Boat

*Canoas* connect Bissau with the Bijagós, with regularly scheduled boats to Bubaque and Bolama and occasional boats to other islands. In addition, top-end hotels rent boats, though costs are high. See p451 for more information about travel to the Bijagós.

### Minibus & Bush Taxi

The main roads between Bissau and the towns of Bafatá, Gabú, and São Domingos are all tar and at writing in good condi-

tion, except for some stretches of significant potholes. The roads to Buba, Catió, Cacheu and Varela have long stretches of several potholes, slowing travel to 10km to 20km per hour. Other roads are even slower going, and often become impassable in the rainy season.

Public transport around the country consists mainly of minibuses (almost always painted blue and yellow) and Peugeot 504 bush taxis, often called *sept-places* (seven-seater). *Kandongas* ply the rural routes. Mornings (before 8am) are always the best time to get transport. For an idea of fares across the country, from Bissau to Gabú (around 200km) is CFA2700 by Peugeot 504, CFA2000 by minibus and CFA1500 by *kandonga*.

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