

The Gambia

It's easy to miss The Gambia on a map of mighty Africa. This tiny sliver of land is a mere 500km long and 50km wide, and, with the exception of an 80km shoreline, it's entirely enveloped by Senegal. But beach-bound tourists have long known how to trace this oddly shaped country on the map. Its magnificent coast invites visitors to laze and linger, tempting with luxurious beach resorts and bustling fishing villages. But there's more to Africa's smallest country than sun and surf. Stunning nature reserves, such as Abuko and Kiang West, and the historical slaving stations of St James Island and Jufureh offer peaceful pauses from the clamour of the nearby coast. And The Gambia's vibrant culture is always there to be taken in by open-eyed visitors. Traditional wrestling matches regularly take place in Serekunda's arenas, the heaving markets of Banjul and Serekunda have you soaking up the atmosphere and sharpening your negotiation skills, and the striking performances of kora-strumming griots can be experienced during weddings, baptisms or public concerts.

Bird-lovers will easily be seduced by this compact country. On a tour upriver, the cries of over 300 species will follow you as your *pirogue* (traditional canoe) charts a leisurely course through mangrove-lined wetlands and the island of Georgetown. Even if your ornithological skills don't go beyond identifying an inner-city pigeon, you'll be tempted to wield binoculars here, and can rely on an excellent network of trained guides to help you tell a pelican from a flamingo.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 11,295 sq km
- **ATMs** At banks in Banjul, on the Atlantic Coast, in Serekunda and at the airport
- **Borders** Senegal
- **Budget** US\$20 to US\$40 per day
- **Capital** Banjul
- **Languages** English, Mandinka, Wolof, Fula
- **Money** Dalasi; US\$1 = D27
- **Population** 1.6 million
- **Seasons** Dry (November to April), hot (May to June), wet (July to October)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 220; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visa** Cost US\$25 to US\$45, but are not required by citizens of the British Commonwealth, Scandinavian countries, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and Spain



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Serekunda market** (p324) Weave your way through The Gambia's most crammed market to the sound of booming reggae and beeping car horns.
- **Abuko** (p325) Look out for rare birds and giant crocodiles in Africa's smallest nature reserve.
- **Kololi** (p320) Lounge at the beach, then dance till you drop in The Gambia's glitzy tourist resorts.
- **Gunjur** (p325) Beaches aren't for sunbathing only; soak up the busy atmosphere of this traditional fishing village.
- **River Gambia National Park** (p326) Cruise down the Gambia River with an amazing array of birdlife for company.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Most tourists travel to The Gambia during the dry and relatively cool months from November to February (daytime maximums around 24°C). This is also the best time to watch wild-life and birds.

The wet season starts around late June and lasts until late September, when temperatures rise to around 30°C, the rains make some upcountry roads inaccessible, vegetation is lush and the rivers swelling.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Spend a good amount of time at the beaches of the Atlantic Coast (p320), and tie in the occasional day trip to the busy market of Serekunda (p324), sleepy Banjul (p318), the pretty museum and bird reserve of Tanji (p325), the fishing village of Gunjur (p325) and the cute Abuko Nature Reserve (p325).
- **Two Weeks** Follow the one-week itinerary, then go on a *Roots* tour to Jufureh (p325) and take a ride to mangrove-hidden Bintang Bolong (p326). Treat yourself to a river trip up to Georgetown (p326), where you can take *pirogue* excursions to Wassu (p326), River Gambia National Park (p326) and Basse Santa Su (p327).

HISTORY

The Empires of Ghana (5th to 11th centuries) and Mali (13th to 15th centuries) extended their influence over the region that is now The Gambia. By 1456 the first Portuguese navigators landed on James Island and quickly monopolised trade along the West African

HOW MUCH?

- **Soft drink** US\$0.55
- **Newspaper** US\$0.35
- **Sandwich** US\$2
- **French bread** US\$0.30
- **One hour internet** US\$0.60

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.10 (and rising)
- **1L bottled water** US\$1
- **Bottle of Flag/Julbrew** US\$0.60
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$9
- **Shwarma** US\$1.50

coast throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, exchanging salt, iron, pots and pans, firearms and gunpowder for ivory, ebony, beeswax, gold and slaves.

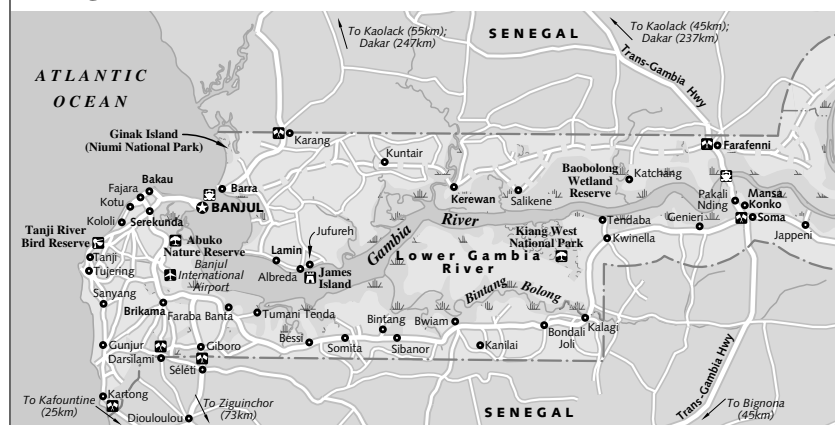
Baltic Germans first built a fort on James Island in 1651, and were displaced in 1661 by the British, who found themselves under constant threat from French ships, pirates and African kings. New forts were built at Barra and Bathurst (now Banjul), at the mouth of the Gambia River, to control the movement of ships. Fort James continued to be an important collection point for slaves until the abolition of slavery in 1807.

The British continued to extend their influence further upstream until the 1820s, when the territory was declared a British protectorate ruled from Sierra Leone. In 1888 Gambia became a crown colony, by which time the surrounding territory of Senegal had fallen into French custody.

Gambia became self-governing in 1963 though it took two more years until real independence was achieved. Gambia became The Gambia, Bathurst became Banjul, and David Jawara, leader of the People's Progressive Party, became Prime Minister Dawda Jawara.

High groundnut prices and the advent of package tourism led to something of a boom in the 1960s. Jawara consolidated his power, and became president when The Gambia became a fully fledged republic in 1970. As groundnut prices fell in the 1980s, and tourism revenues did not trickle down the economic scale, two coups were hatched – but thwarted with

THE GAMBIA



Senegalese assistance. This cooperation led to the 1982 confederation of the two countries under the name of Senegambia, reportedly the first step to unification, but the union collapsed by 1989. Meanwhile, corruption increased, economic decline continued and popular discontent rose. Finally, in July 1994, Jawara was overthrown in a reportedly bloodless coup led by Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh.

The Gambia Today

After a brief flirtation with dictatorship, the 30-year-old Jammeh bowed to international pressure, inaugurated a Second Republic and won the 1996 presidential election comfortably. Human-rights groups and democratic watchdogs were all put at high alert when, in 2004, prominent journalist Deyda Heydara was assassinated after having expressed his opposition to a new controversial media law, and in March 2006, an alleged coup d'état attempt led to the 'cleansing' of governmental ranks. That same year, the country again prepared for elections, this time against a background of increasing autocracy. It now seems unlikely that the future direction of The Gambia will change dramatically, as Yahya Jammeh was sworn in as president for another five years after defeating his main rival Ousainou Daboe.

CULTURE

Holiday brochures like to describe The Gambia as the 'Smiling Coast', a welcoming 'gateway to Africa', where local culture is

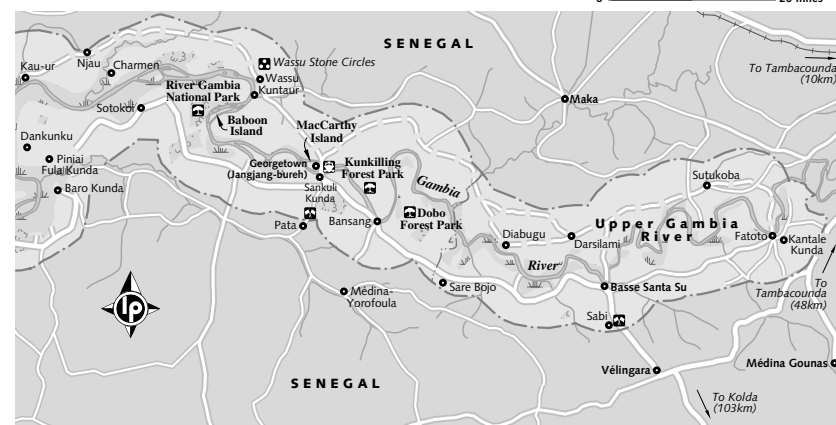
easily accessible. Wiping the gloss off those descriptions, some of the smile still remains, though real hospitality is easier found up-country, away from the coastal resorts where mass tourism has somewhat distorted social relations and the respectful interaction otherwise typical of the country.

Years of authoritarian rule have also resulted in a certain climate of distrust. Conversations are often conducted with care, and few people will express their views on governmental politics openly – you never know who might be listening. Being aware of the troubles that plague the population will help you to understand silences in conversation or the avoidance of topics, and gradually grant you an insight into the real Gambia, the one that lies beyond the polished smiles and tourist hustling.

Modern Gambian life consists of the scramble to make ends meet and get ahead, tempered by the pleasures of family, the obligations of community and a genuine concern for others' welfare. Further upriver, an alternative reality emerges, one that is poorer and more isolated. Opportunities may be thinner on the ground, but the rhythms of river life are calmer and more dignified.

PEOPLE

With around 115 people per sq km, The Gambia has one of the highest population densities in Africa. The strongest concentration of people is around the urbanised zones at the Atlantic Coast, the area many people migrate to from the upcountry towns to try and make a living from



the tourist industry. Forty-five percent of The Gambia's population is under 14 years old.

The main ethnic groups are the Mandinka (comprising around 42%), the Wolof (about 16%) and the Fula (around 18%). Smaller groups include the Serer and Jola.

About 90% of The Gambia's population is Muslim. Christian faith is most widespread among the Jola and to a lesser extent the Serer.

ARTS & CRAFTS

The Gambia is a major centre of the kora (a stringed instrument combining features of the hap and lute), an icon of African music throughout the world whose history is deeply connected to The Gambia. This tiny country became a veritable centre of kora playing when Malinké groups settled in the region after the gradual collapse of the mighty Empire of Mali. Famous kora players include Amadou Bansang Jobarteh, Jali Nyama Suso, Dembo Konte and Malamini Jobarteh.

In the 1960s The Gambia was hugely influential in the development of modern West African music. Groups like the Afro-funky Super Eagles and singer Labah Sosse had a huge impact in The Gambia, Senegal and beyond. Today The Gambia's music scene is mainly dominated by Senegalese artists and Jamaican reggae. Renowned local musicians include the kora-playing brothers Pa Bobo and Tata Dindin Jobarteh, singer Jelibah Kuyateh and reggae artists such as the Dancehall Masters and Rebellion the Recaller.

Banjul's national museum has a few good examples of traditional statues and carved masks on display. Also fascinating is the art of batik making (where fabric is printed using wax to cover areas not to be dyed), which contemporary artists such as Baboucar Fall and Toimbo Laurens push into new creative directions.

ENVIRONMENT

At only 11,295 sq km, The Gambia is the smallest country in Africa (half the size of Wales, or less than twice that of Delaware) and its territory is entirely dominated by the Gambia River. There are few significant variations in altitude (the Gambia River loses less than 10m in elevation over 450km) or vegetation, which consists largely of savannah, gallery forests and saline marshes.

The Gambia has six national parks and reserves, covering 3.7% of the landmass. The four most accessible and interesting – Abuko, Kiang West, Gambia River and Tanji – are mentioned in this chapter.

The most visible environmental problem is beach erosion on the Atlantic Coast, caused by illegal sand mining. The Gambia's fishing villages also face dwindling stocks as a result of overfishing, while deforestation plagues the upcountry regions.

FOOD & DRINK

National dishes include *domodah* (rice with groundnut sauce) and *benechin* (rice cooked in tomato, fish and vegetable sauce).

JulBrew, the local beer, is a refreshing beverage. Local palm wine and various 'firewaters' (made from distilled sugar cane or rice) are also available, especially in the up-country areas. For a nonalcoholic drink, try any of the local juices from *bissap* (made from sorrel), to *bouyi* (made from the fruits of the baobab tree).

BANJUL

pop 50,000

It's hard to imagine a more unlikely, more consistently ignored capital city than the tiny seaport of Banjul. Yet despite the shadow of neglect that haunts its sand-blown streets, Banjul is truly worth a visit. Its colourful markets and hectic harbour show urban Africa at its busy best, while the old museum and fading colonial structures are imbued with a sense of history that The Gambia's plush seaside resorts lack.

ORIENTATION

The July 22 Sq is the centre of town. From here, several main streets run south, including Russell St, which leads past the bustling Albert Market into Liberation St. West of the October 17 Roundabout is the old part of Banjul – a maze of narrow streets and ramshackle houses rarely visited by tourists.

INFORMATION

Banjul Pharmacy (☎ 4227470; ☎ 9am–8.30pm)

Across the road from the hospital.

Gamtel Internet Café (July 22 Dr; per hr US\$1;

☎ 8am–midnight) Internet access.

IBC Bank (☎ 4428145; Liberation St) Changes travellers cheques and has an ATM that accepts Visa cards.

Main post office (Russell St; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Sat) Has telephone facilities next door.

Quantumnet (Nelson Mandela St; per hr US\$1; ☎ 9am–10pm) Internet access.

Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital (☎ 4228223; July 22 Dr) The Gambia's main hospital has an A&E Department, but facilities aren't great.

Standard Chartered Bank (☎ 4222081; Ecowas Ave) Changes travellers cheques and has an ATM that accepts Visa cards.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The Barra ferry is rife with pickpockets, and tourists are easy prey at the ferry terminals and at Albert Market.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Since its creation in the mid-19th century, **Albert Market** (Russell St), an area of frenzied buying, bartering and bargaining, has been Banjul's hub of activity. From shimmering fabrics and false plaits to tourist-tempting souvenirs at the **Craft Market**, you can find almost anything here and then some.

Tucked away in an ancient Portuguese building, the **St Joseph's Adult Education & Skills Centre** (☎ 4228836; stjskills@qanet.com; Ecowas Ave; ☎ 9am–2pm Mon–Thu, to noon Fri) offers tree tours and sells beautiful craftwork at reasonable prices.

Arch 22 (July 22 Dr; admission US\$1.25; ☎ 9am–11pm), a massive, 36m-high gateway built to celebrate the military coup of 22 July 1994, grants excellent views. There's also a cosy café, souvenir shop and a small museum about the coup d'état.

The **National Museum** (July 22 Dr; admission US\$1; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Thu, to 1pm Fri & Sat) has some dog-eared, dated exhibits that are worth a look.

SLEEPING

Ferry Guesthouse (Ami's Guesthouse; ☎ 4222028; 28 Liberation St; s/d/tr US\$12.50/18/22; ☎) This simple guesthouse above a busy shop is great for people-watching and the best budget bet. Single room prices double if you want air-con.

Carlton Hotel (☎ 4228670; fax 4227214; 25 July 22 Dr; s/d US\$18/20, with air-con US\$28/30; ☎) This is a little more upmarket, with luxuries like running water and indoor toilets.

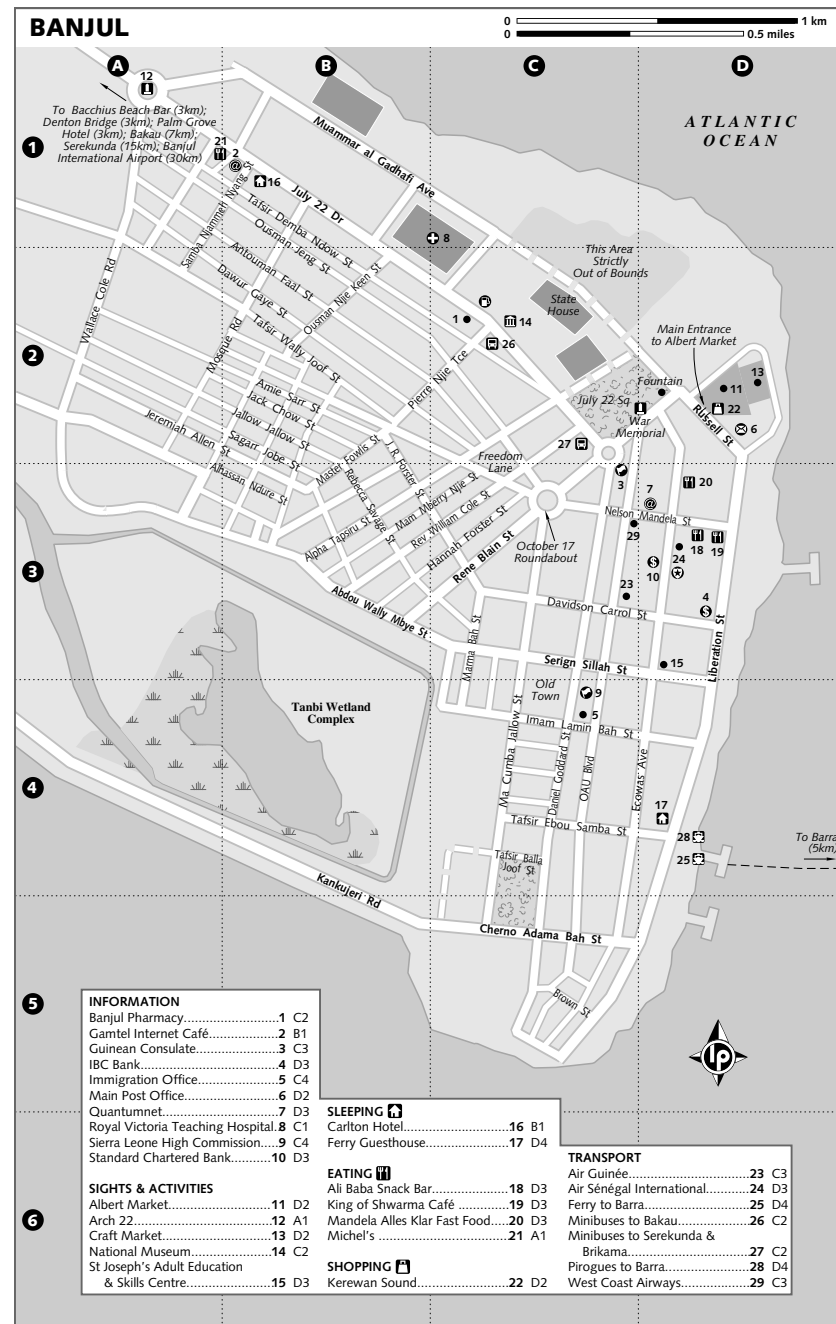
Palm Grove Hotel (☎ 4201620; www.gambia-palm-grovehotel.co.uk; s/d incl breakfast US\$41/66; ☎) About 3km from Banjul towards Serekunda, this upmarket hotel attracts with a personal atmosphere, a decent swimming beach and plenty of activities on offer.

EATING & DRINKING

Banjul is hardly a culinary haven, offering little beyond fast-food joints. Around the north end of Liberation St and Albert Market, you'll find several cheap chop shops and streets stalls where plates of rice and sauce start at about US\$0.80.

Mandela Alles Klar Fast Food (☎ 4223455; Ecowas Ave; snacks from US\$1.50) This is not only The Gambia's snack bar with the prettiest name, it also serves great fish and chips.

Ali Baba Snack Bar (☎ 4224055; Nelson Mandela St; snacks from US\$2, meals US\$5–7; ☎ 9am–5pm) More than just a kebab shop, this place is an institution with a deserved reputation for its *shwarmas* and *felafel*.



Michel's (☎ 4223108; 29 July 22 Dr; meals US\$5-10; ☎ 8am-11pm) A classy place that's excellent from the breakfast menu all the way to after-dinner drinks.

King of Shawarma Café (☎ 4229799; Nelson Mandela St; meals US\$5-10; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) This friendly place serves excellent Lebanese food, and what's even better, large glasses of freshly pressed juice.

Bacchius Beach Bar (☎ 4227948; meals US\$5-15) Next to the Palm Grove Hotel, this busy little beach bar is a great place to sip a drink and dig into a platter of grilled fish.

SHOPPING

In Banjul, the best place to go shopping is Albert Market (p318). Near the main entrance, you'll also find **Kerewan Sound** (Russell St), The Gambia's best place to buy CDs and cassettes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For information on travelling to/from Banjul by air, see p329.

Ferries (☎ 4228205; Liberation St; passengers D10, cars US\$5-7) travel between Banjul and Barra, on the northern bank of the river. They normally run every one to two hours from 7am until 7pm and take one hour, though delays and cancellations are frequent. Small, overcrowded *pirogues* also make the crossing (US\$2 per person or US\$20 if you hire the whole boat).

Minibuses and Mercedes buses to Brikama and upcountry towns, and to places in southern Senegal, all go from Serekunda garage. For details, see p329.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

A green tourist taxi from Banjul International Airport to Banjul costs around US\$10 to US\$15. With yellow taxis, the price you pay depends entirely on your haggling skills; expect to pay US\$5.50 to US\$7 to Banjul. There is no airport bus.

Minibus & Shared Taxi

From Banjul, minibuses to Bakau leave from the stand opposite the Shell station on July 22 Dr. Minibuses to Serekunda and Brikama leave from a roadside corner opposite July 22 Sq. See p329 for more information.

Private Taxi

In a taxi to yourself (known as a 'town trip'), a short ride across Banjul city centre will

cost about US\$1, after bargaining. A private taxi from Banjul to Bakau, Serekunda, Fajara, Kotu or Kololi costs around US\$5.50 to US\$7.

SEREKUNDA & THE ATLANTIC COAST

pop 260,000

Chaotic, splitting-at-the-seams Serekunda is the nation's largest urban centre, and appears to consist of one big, busy market. The nearby Atlantic Coast resorts of Bakau, Fajara, Kotu Strand and Kololi are where the sun'n'sea tourists flock. If you can manage to dodge the persistent ganja peddlers and beach 'bumsters' (touts and hustlers), this is a great place to spend long days on the beach and late nights on the dance floor.

ORIENTATION

Running north-south, Bakau, Fajara, Kotu Strand and Kololi are a string of former fishing villages that have now merged into one big tourist centre. Serekunda, a couple of kilometres inland, is a real city, and Westfield Junction is the hub of its wheel.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Timbooktoo (☎ 4494345; cnr Kairaba Ave & Garba Jahumpa Rd, Fajara; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Fri, 10am-8pm Sat) The best place for international papers.

Cultural Centres

Alliance Franco-Gambienne (☎ 4375418; www.alliancefrance.gm; Kairaba Ave, Serekunda; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Has regular concerts, films and exhibitions, and a good, cheap restaurant (meals from US\$1).

Internet Access

There are now dozens of cybercafés in this area, especially along Kairaba Ave.

Gamtel Kololi (☎ 4377878; Senegambia Strip; ☎ 9am-11pm); Serekunda (Westfield Junction; ☎ 8am-11pm)

Quantumnet (☎ 4494514; Kairaba Ave; ☎ 8.30am-10pm)

Medical Services

Medical Research Council (MRC; ☎ 4495446; Fajara) If you find yourself with a potentially serious illness, head for this British-run clinic, off Atlantic Rd.

Stop Steps Pharmacy (☎ 4371344; Serekunda; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat) One of the best-stocked pharmacy chains around, with branches all along the coast.

Westfield Clinic (☎ 4398448; Serekunda) Another option, at Westfield Junction.

Money

The main banks, Standard Chartered, Trust Bank and IBC have branches with Visa-loving ATMs all across the resort zone (see p327 for standard opening hours). There are also a few exchange bureaus scattered around the busy tourist miles, some part of supermarkets, but you're unlikely to get a better rate. The Gambia Experience Office next to the Senegambia Hotel gives cash advances on Mastercards for a fee.

Standard Chartered Bank Bakau (☎ 4495046); Serekunda (☎ 4396102; Kairaba Ave)

Trust Bank Bakau (☎ 4495486); Kololi (☎ 4465303; Badala Park Way, near Senegambia)

Post & Telephone

The main post office is located about half-way between Fajara and Serekunda, off Kairaba Ave. There are plenty of Gamtel offices and private telecentres in Bakau, Kololi and Serekunda.

Tourist Information

Tropical Tour & Souvenirs (☎ 4460536; tropicaltour@gamtel.gm; Kairaba Hotel, Senegambia) One of the best sources of information in the absence of an official tourist information service.

Travel Agencies

Most travel agencies are on Kairaba Ave.

Gambia River Experience (☎ 4494360; gambiariver@yahoo.com; www.gambiariver.com; off Kairaba Ave, Fajara)

Gambia Tours (☎ 446260; www.gambiatours.gm; off Coastal Rd, south of Kololi) An independent tour operator with a good catalogue of excursions.

Olympic Travel (☎ 497204; Garba Jahumpa Rd) A good place for booking tickets.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime rates in Serekunda are low; however, tourists, and especially women, will have to deal with the constant hustling by 'bumsters'. Be firm but polite when you decline any unwanted offers, and to be safe, rely on the services of the official tourist guides (OTGs) based outside Kairaba Hotel. Women should always avoid going to beaches on their own.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

In Bakau, the **Botanic Gardens** (☎ 7774482; Atlantic Rd, Bakau; adult/child US\$1.80/free; ☎ 8am-4pm) are a peaceful place that offers some shade in calm surroundings, and good bird-spotting chances.

You can get up close and personal with a croc at the **Kachikaly Crocodile Pool** (Bakau village; admission US\$1; ☎ 9am-6pm), a sacred site for the local people and perhaps for tourists, too, judging by their numbers.

Bijilo Forest Park (admission US\$1; ☎ 8am-6pm) is a small nature reserve on the Atlantic Coast at Kololi. The 4.5km nature trail is great for spotting monkeys and birds.

The **Sportsfishing Centre** (☎ 7765765; Denton Bridge) is the best place to arrange fishing and *pirogue* excursions. Various companies are based there, including the **Watersports Centre** (☎ 7765765; Denton Bridge), which can organise your jet-skiing, parasailing, windsurfing or catamaran trips.

The Gambia's beaches suffer badly from erosion. The best ones are in Fajara and Kotu. Note that currents can be very strong.

If drumming appeals more than swimming, try **Batafon Arts** (☎ in UK 01273 605791, in Gambia 4392517; www.batafonarts.co.uk; Kairaba Ave, Serekunda) for excellent African percussion and dance workshops.

SLEEPING Budget

Sukuta Camping (☎ 9917786; www.campingsukuta.de; Sukuta; camping per person US\$3.60, per vehicle US\$0.50, s/d US\$8.50/12.20, d with bathroom US\$16.60; ☎ ☎) This well-organised camping site and hostel southwest of Serekunda is run by experienced overlanders.

Kanifeng YMCA (☎ 4392647; www.ymca.gm; Fajara; B&B US\$6.25) This huge building has just about passable rooms for the budget-bound.

Jabo Guesthouse (☎ 4494906, 7777082; 9 Old Cape Rd, Bakau; d US\$18) This down-to-earth guesthouse has large, clean rooms, some featuring self-catering facilities.

Teranga Suites (☎ 4461961; s/d/ste US\$18/27/36; ☎ ☎) This jewel of a guesthouse off Kololi Rd has airy rooms and large self-catering suites with bright wooden décor.

Bakau Lodge (☎ /fax 4496103; Bakau; d from US\$23; ☎) Located in the heart of the Bakau 'hood, the small Bakau Lodge pleasantly surprises with spotless, two-room bungalows set around a swimming pool.

ATLANTIC COAST RESORTS & SEREKUNDA

	A	B	C	D
INFORMATION				
1 Alliance Franco-Gambienne.....	1	E5		
2 British High Commission.....	2	C3		
3 Gambia Experience Office.....	(see 27)			
4 Gamtel Office.....	3	E5		
5 Gamtel Office.....	4	A6		
6 Guinea-Bissau Embassy.....	(see 13)			
7 IBC Bank Serekunda.....	5	E6		
8 Mauritanian Consulate.....	6	A6		
9 Medical Research Council.....	7	D3		
10 Olympic Travel.....	(see 12)			
11 Post Office.....	8	E5		
12 Quantumtel.....	(see 12)			
13 Senegalese High Commission.....	9	D4		
14 Standard Chartered Bank Bakau.....	10	E2		
15 Standard Chartered Bank Serekunda.....	11	E5		
16 Stop Steps Pharmacy.....	(see 41)			
17 Timbooktoo.....	12	D3		
18 Tropical Tour & Souvenirs.....	(see 27)			
19 Trust Bank Bakau.....	13	E2		
20 Trust Bank Kololi.....	14	A6		
21 US Embassy.....	15	D4		
22 Westfield Clinic.....	16	E5		
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23 Batafon Arts.....	17	D5		
24 Bijilo Forest Park Headquarters.....	18	A6		
25 Botanic Gardens.....	19	E2		
26 Kachikaly Crocodile Pool.....	20	F3		
SLEEPING				
27 Bakau Lodge.....	21	E2		
28 Bakotu Hotel.....	22	C4		
29 Coconut Residence.....	23	A6		
30 Fajara Guesthouse.....	24	C3		
31 Francisco's Hotel.....	25	C3		
32 Jabo Guesthouse.....	26	F2		
33 Kairaba Hotel.....	27	A6		
34 Kanifeng YMCA.....	28	E4		
35 Leybato.....	29	C3		
36 Roc Height's Lodge.....	30	F2		
37 Safari Garden Hotel.....	31	C3		
38 Teranga Suites.....	32	B5		
EATING				
39 Ali Baba's.....	33	A6		
40 Atlantic Bar & Restaurant.....	34	E2		
41 Butcher's Shop.....	35	C3		
42 Chapman's.....	36	E2		
43 Clay Oven.....	37	D3		
44 Come Inn.....	38	D5		
45 Eddie's Bar & Restaurant.....	39	C3		
46 Harry's Supermarket.....	40	D4		
47 Kairaba Supermarket.....	41	D5		
48 Luigi's Italian Restaurant.....	42	A5		
49 Mama's Restaurant.....	43	C3		
50 Pepper's Tropical Restaurant.....	(see 54)			
51 Safe Way Afra King.....	44	D5		
52 Sailor's Beach Bar.....	45	C4		
53 St Mary's Food & Wine.....	46	F2		
54 Solomon's Beach Bar.....	(see 53)			
55 Yok.....	(see 55)			
56 Youth Monument Bar & Restaurant.....	47	E5		
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57 Chapman's.....	(see 36)			
58 Come Inn.....	(see 38)			
59 Weezo's.....	48	C3		
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60 Destiny.....	49	A5		
61 Jazziz.....	50	A5		
62 Jokko.....	51	E6		
63 Lama Lama.....	52	E2		
64 Teranga Beach Club.....	53	A5		
65 Waaw.....	54	A6		
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66 African Living Art Centre.....	55	D3		
67 Bakau Market.....	56	E2		
68 Salam Batik.....	57	D6		
69 Serekunda Market.....	58	D6		
70 Village Gallery & Restaurant.....	59	B5		
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71 AB Rent-A-Car.....	(see 27)			
72 Bellview Airlines.....	60	E5		
73 Boketh Total Station.....	61	D6		
74 Bus & Taxi Stop.....	62	D6		
75 Gambia River Experience.....	63	D3		
76 Green Taxi Rank.....	64	B5		
77 Hertz.....	(see 61)			
78 Minibuses to Banjul.....	65	D6		
79 Minibuses to Banjul.....	66	E5		
80 Minibuses to Banjul & Serekunda.....	67	E2		
81 Shared Taxis to Fajara & Bakau.....	68	E5		
82 Slok Air Airlines.....	69	D4		
83 SN Brussels.....	70	A5		
84 Taxi Stand.....	71	E2		
85 Tippa Garage.....	(see 62)			

Midrange

Leybato (☎ 4497186; www.leybato.abc.gm; Fajara Beach; d US\$30, with kitchen US\$43) This cosy guesthouse has acceptable rooms stunningly located at a calm stretch of beach.

Fajara Guesthouse (☎ 4496122; fax 4494365; Fajara; r incl breakfast US\$23 to US\$34; ♿ ♿) A leafy courtyard and welcoming lounge give it character. Rooms are basic but clean, and some are big enough to house couples with children.

Safari Garden Hotel (☎ 4495887; www.gamsplit.com; Fajara; s/d incl breakfast US\$34/57; ♿ ♿) Pretty rooms, a good restaurant, and exceptionally welcoming management have turned this into a travellers' favourite.

Roc Height's Lodge (☎ 4495428; www.rocheights.lodge.com; Samba Breku Rd, Bakau; s/d US\$36/54; ♿ ♿) This stunning three-storey villa sits in a quiet garden, and has stylish rooms and apartments with fully equipped kitchen.

Bakotu Hotel (☎ 4465555; fax 4465959; Kotu Beach; s/d US\$45/54; ♿ ♿) Compared to its resort neighbours, this is pleasantly understated, and has comfy terrace apartments in a pleasant garden.

Top End

Coconut Residence (☎ 4463377; info@coconutresidence.com; Badala Park Way; ste from US\$190; ♿ ♿) At this classy five-star palace, all amenities and services come wrapped in sophisticated chic, and character flavours the air of the lush tropical gardens and the carefully designed rooms.

Kairaba Hotel (☎ 4462940; www.kairabahotel.com; Senegambia; s/d US\$155/190; ♿ ♿) This government-owned hotel is the kind of vast, labyrinthine, anything-can-be-arranged place you might be tempted not to leave during your whole holiday.

EATING

There are several cheap eateries in Kololi around the market and taxi station entrance, and several others scattered through the streets of Serekunda. For supermarkets in Fajara, head for Kairaba Ave where there's plenty of choice. To buy groceries in Bakau, go to **St Mary's Food & Wine** (Cape Point), Bakau market or any of the small Bakau supermarkets.

Budget

Youth Monument Bar & Restaurant (Westfield Junction, Serekunda; meals around D100; ♿ lunch & dinner) This is a local favourite thanks to cheap food and football matches on screen.

Safe Way Afra King (Mosque Rd, Serekunda; dishes CFA50-150; ☎ 5pm-midnight) Good for *afra* (grill food), *fufu* (a staple along the southern coast of West Africa made with fermented cassava, yams, plantain or manioc which is cooked and puréed) and other African dishes.

Atlantic Bar & Restaurant (☎ 4494083; Atlantic Rd, Bakau; dishes from US\$2; ☎ lunch & dinner) This place serves decent Gambian meals and snacks.

Eddie's Bar & Restaurant (Fajara; dishes US\$2.50; ☎ 8am-2am) This tiny spot serves excellent *afra* and other Gambian dishes.

Mama's Restaurant (cnr Atlantic Rd & Kairaba Ave, Fajara; dishes around US\$3.60; ☎ 11am-10pm Tue-Sun) This vibrant place is as much renowned for its delicious buffet dinners as for the raw charm of Mama the manager.

Come Inn (☎ 4391464; Fajara; meals US\$4-7; ☎ 10am-2am) For a hearty European meal, a good draught beer and a solid dose of local gossip, there's no better place than this German-style beer garden.

Solomon's Beach Bar (☎ 4460716; Palma Rima Rd, Kololi; meals US\$4-8; ☎ 10am-midnight) At the northern end of Kololi beach, this cute round house with a light reggae feel does great grill food.

Midrange & Top End

Sailor's Beach Bar (☎ 4464078; Kotu; meals US\$5; ☎ 9am-midnight) This is one of the best beach bars along the coast, serving excellent grilled barracuda.

Chapman's (☎ 4495252; Atlantic Rd, Bakau Beach; meals around US\$5-US\$9; ☎ 11am-10pm Thu-Tue) This popular pub-cum-restaurant in Bakau has a mixed menu with a focus on European food and cheap beer.

Peppers Tropical Restaurant (☎ 4464792; Senegambia Strip, Kololi; meals around US\$5-10; ☎ 24hr) This tiny place serves good Caribbean and Gambian food to the sounds of live salsa.

Butcher's Shop (☎ 4495069; www.thebutchersshopgambia.com; 130 Kairaba Ave, Fajara; dishes US\$6-10; ☎ 8am-11pm) Everything at this stylish Moroccan restaurant – from the rich local juices to flavour-dripping three-course dinners – is rounded off to tasty perfection. Don't miss Sunday brunch (US\$7) from 10am to 4pm.

Ali Baba's (☎ 4461030; Senegambia Strip, Kololi; meals around US\$7; ☎ 11am-2am) Famous Ali Baba's serves quality snacks and European cuisine. There's occasional live music.

Clay Oven (☎ 4496600; Fajara; dishes US\$7; ☎ 7-11pm) For Indian food, this peaceful, pretty place is one of the best in the whole of West Africa.

Luigi's Italian Restaurant (☎ 4460280; Palma Rima Rd, Kololi; dishes US\$7-10; ☎ lunch & dinner; 🍷) Luigi knows his job: the pasta here is al dente and the pizzas crisp.

Yok (☎ 4495131; African Living Arts Centre, Fajara; meals around US\$9; ☎ lunch & dinner) Enjoy great cocktails and excellent Singaporean, Thai and Chinese fusion-cuisine to the gentle flow of waterfalls and the rustling of palm trees.

DRINKING

All the major hotels have bars and most restaurants turn the lights down and the music up at night.

Chapman's (☎ 4495252; Atlantic Rd, Bakau; ☎ 11am-10pm Thu-Tue) The best beer option.

Weezo's (Atlantic Rd, Fajara; ☎ 11am-3am) The cocktails here taste sweeter with every passing hour.

Come Inn (☎ 4391464; Kairaba Ave; ☎ 10am-2am) A proper, German-style beer house.

ENTERTAINMENT

Teranga Beach Club (☎ 9982669; abdulkabir@hotmail.com; Palma Rima Rd, Kololi; ☎ 10am-2am) This vast place, run by a renowned Gambian musician, holds occasional jazz afternoons and concerts.

Jazziz (☎ 4462175; Palma Rima Rd, Kololi ☎ 10pm-late) A colourful salsa place with a vibrant atmosphere.

Lama Lama (☎ 4494747; Atlantic Rd, Bakau) Bakau's hottest club.

Waaw (☎ 4460668; Senegambia) The Gambia's biggest dancehall DJ mixes at this place in Kololi on a Thursday night.

Jokko (Westfield Junction) This open-air place in Serekunda is a raucous local affair

Destiny (off Badala Park Way, Kololi) A sparkling disco heaven that draws glittering crowds on weekends.

SHOPPING

African Living Art Centre (☎ 4495131; Garba Jahumpa Rd, Fajara) A fairy-tale place, great to rummage for quality artworks and original souvenirs.

Salam Batik (Amadou Jallow ☎ 4395103, Sheikh Tijan Secka ☎ 982 0125; salam_batik_mp_art@yahoo.co.uk; Serekunda Market, Serekunda) The place to get your personalised clothes dyed and tailored.

Village Gallery & Restaurant (☎ 4463646; ☎ 10am-midnight) For quality contemporary paintings.

Serekunda market (cnr Sukuta & Mosque Rds; ☎ 6am-5pm) The African real deal, where you find just about anything you care to imagine. To reach the sky-high stacks of colourful goods, you

have to weave your way through crowds, cars and dodge the ambulant traders. All part of pure urban Gambian fun.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bush taxis and minibuses for most destinations in The Gambia leave from the garage (bus and taxi stop) in Serekunda. Destinations include Brikama (US\$0.50, one hour), Soma (US\$2, four hours) and Sanyang (US\$0.60, 30 minutes). For southern destinations including Gunjur (US\$1, 45 minutes) try also the Tipapa Garage near the Shell Station in Serekunda.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

A green tourist taxi from Banjul International Airport to Serekunda is US\$10, and to any Atlantic Coast resort US\$15. Yellow taxis cost about US\$5, but depend on negotiation.

Taxi

Shared taxis around the Atlantic resorts and Banjul cost US\$0.20. You just hail them.

You can hire yellow taxis for private trips. A 'town trip' – any stretch between Bakau, Fajara, Kololi and Kotu – is usually charged at US\$1. Hiring a taxi for a day around the Atlantic resorts and Banjul should cost around US\$35 to US\$50. The green 'tourist taxis' that are usually parked around the larger hotels usually charge two to three times the rate of yellow taxis.

AROUND BANJUL & SEREKUNDA

ABUKO NATURE RESERVE

Abuko Nature Reserve (☎ 7782633; www.darwingambia.gm; admission US\$1.10; ☎ 8am-7pm) is one of Africa's tiniest wildlife reserves, but boasts an amazing variety of vegetation and animals. It's particularly good for bird-watchers. Around 250 species have been recorded here, and many are easily spotted from well-placed hides.

To get here, take a private yellow taxi (around US\$14) or a minibus headed for Brikama from Banjul or Serekunda (US\$0.35). The reserve is signposted.

TANJI

The village of Tanji is a tranquil spot, perfect for a day trip from the hectic Atlantic Coast resorts.

Tanji River Bird Reserve (☎ 9919219; admission US\$1.10, guided walks US\$7; ☎ 8am-6pm), 3km north of Tanji village, is in an area of lagoons, dunes, dry woodland and coastal scrub that attracts an excellent range of birds. It is also an important breeding area for turtles and Caspian terns.

About 2km south of the village is the **Tanji Village Museum** (☎ 9926618; tanje@dds.nl; adult/child US\$3.50/1; ☎ 9am-5pm), with excellent displays of traditional artefacts, including musical instruments, and an artisans' corner. There's a simple **hostel** (r per person US\$9) and restaurant.

The most attractive hotel is the **Paradise Inn Lodge** (☎ 8800209; www.paradisainngarden.com; r per person incl breakfast US\$24), which is stunningly located amid mangroves and forest, and runs birding excursions and music courses. A little further south in Tujerling, the rootsy **Bendula Lodge** (☎ 7717481; www.bendula.com; s/d US\$18/24) has accommodation in simple huts placed near a lush tropical forest and the beach.

SANYANG & GUNJUR

Twenty kilometres south of Serekunda, Sanyang is a much-loved day-trip destination for Gambians. It's got a pretty beach, where bars, such as the excellent **Rainbow Beach Bar** (☎ 9827790; dishes US\$5-20) tempt with a mouth-watering selection of fresh seafood dishes. The **Kobokoto Lodge** (☎ 9984838; www.salla.se/kk; r per person US\$9) has simple but attractive rooms.

Another 10km along the coast lies the tranquil fishing village of Gunjur, where the holiday hype subsides and 'real life' makes its entrance. This is one of The Gambia's largest fishing centres, so the beach is all *pirogues*, catch and nets. The **African Lodge** (☎ 4486143; fax 4486026; r per person incl breakfast US\$14), in the heart of Gunjur village, is perfect for a feel of 'real life' away from the tourist zones. The **Footsteps Eco Lodge** (☎ 7706830; www.natureswaygambia.com; camp sites US\$9, d US\$63) is one of The Gambia's most fully developed ecolodges, from the compost toilets, solar power, and freshwater pool to the extensive vegetable garden.

LOWER GAMBIA RIVER

JUFUREH & JAMES ISLAND

When Alex Haley, the American author of *Roots*, traced his origins to **Jufureh**, the tiny village quickly turned into a favourite tourist destination. Apart from the Kinteh family, Haley's supposed relatives, there's little

to see, though a *pirogue* trip to **James Island** with its crumbling foundations of its slave fort is worth doing. You can stay in the colourful bungalows of the **Kunta Kinte Roots Camp** (☎ 9905322; baboucarrio@hotmail.com; s/d US\$18/35) and try the renowned African buffet (US\$5 per person, call in advance).

To get to Jufureh from Banjul, take an early ferry to Barra, dodge the touts and find a bush taxi (US\$2), or take an organised tour; see p321 for touring agencies.

BINTANG BOLONG

Tucked away among the maze of shrubs lining the shores of the Bintang River is the intimate and ecofriendly **Bintang Bolong Lodge** (☎ 4488035; www.bintang-bolong.com; r per person US\$14; 🏠). Huts made entirely from local materials sit on stilts in the river; you can leap from your balcony into a *pirogue* for a **boat tour** (per hr US\$30).

Twice a day, there's a bus from Brikama to Bintang (one hour, US\$1). A private taxi costs around US\$65.

KIANG WEST NATIONAL PARK

The mangrove creeks and mud flats, dry woodland and grassland of **Kiang West** (admission US\$1.10, payable at the park headquarters in Dumbuntu), The Gambia's largest national park, are home to an extraordinary variety of species, including bushbabies, baboons, colobus monkeys, warthogs, marsh mongooses and bushbucks. Rarely sighted species include hyenas, dolphins and crocodiles. Birds are also plentiful, with more than 300 species recorded.

Most people stay at nearby **Tendaba Camp** (☎ 4541024; tendaba@qanet.gm; bungalows with/without bathroom US\$8.75/8, luxury r US\$10), a classic on the travellers' scene. Accommodation ranges from small bungalows to 'luxury' rooms, fully equipped with a river-edge veranda and TV.

UPPER GAMBIA RIVER

GEORGETOWN

Georgetown (Jangjang-bureh) is a sleepy, crumbling former colonial administrative centre, and a fine place to relax or venture for day trips into the surrounding area. It is situated on the northern edge of MacCarthy Island, a 10km-long and 2.5km-wide island in the Gambia River, about 300km upstream from Banjul. It has ferry links to both riverbanks, but there is little in terms of infra-

structure – no banks and no hospital. There is, however, plenty to please those with a weak spot for birds and history.

In town, the **Central River Division Forestry Project** (CRDFP; ☎ 5676198; www.crdfp.org), which battles against deforestation, is a great place to visit, mainly for its tours along the ecotrails of various forest parks.

Sleeping & Eating

Jangjang-bureh Camp (☎ /fax 5676182, 9920618; www.gambiariver.com; r per person US\$7) Beautifully located on the north bank, this rustic place has basic bungalows with oil lamps in a mazelike garden. You reach the place by boat from Dream-bird Camp (☎ /fax 5676182).

Baoblong Camp (☎ 5676133; fax 5676120; Owens St; s/d US\$11/14) This leafy camp features well-maintained rooms, friendly staff and the luxury of a generator.

Bird Safari Camp (☎ 5676108; www.bsc.gm; r with half-board per person US\$35; 🏠) In a secluded spot, accommodation is in bungalows or luxury tents. Bird-watching trips are recommended.

There are few places to eat outside the hotels, though the charming **Talamanca Restaurant** (☎ 9921100; Findlay St; meals from US\$1.50; 🍴 lunch & dinner) is worth a visit.

Getting There & Away

MacCarthy Island can be reached by ferry (passenger/car US\$0.20/1.80) from either the southern or northern bank of the river. Most bush taxis turn off the main road between Soma and Basse Santa Su to drop off passengers at the southern ferry ramp; request this when entering the taxi.

RIVER GAMBIA NATIONAL PARK

River Gambia National Park (also known as Baboon Island) consists of five islands in the Gambia River. It's home to a primate protection project that helps once-captured chimpanzees to live in the wild again. Visitors are not allowed to land on the islands, but touring them by boat is pleasant enough. Boat trips can be arranged by all Georgetown hotels (around US\$125 per *pirogue*), or you can go to Kuntaur and hire a *pirogue* (around US\$10 for a four-hour trip).

WASSU STONE CIRCLES

About 25km northwest of Georgetown near the town of Kuntaur are the **Wassu Stone Circles** (admission D30), which archaeologists believe are

burial sites constructed about 1200 years ago. Each stone weighs several tonnes and is between 1m and 2.5m in height.

The hotels in Georgetown have more information and can arrange excursions here (US\$140 for the tour to the national park and the stone circles).

BASSE SANTA SU

Basse Santa Su, commonly called Basse, is The Gambia's most easterly town of any size. Though haunted by neglect, Basse Santa Su is the liveliest upcountry settlement. Trust Bank and Standard Chartered Bank have branches in Basse, and there's an internet café.

The **Basse Guesthouse** (☎ 5668283; r US\$5.30), above a tailor shop, has dingy rooms with shared toilets. The only plus: the 1st-floor balcony with view across the market.

Though slightly run-down since the death of its former manager (his teenage son has now taken over), the **Jem Hotel** (☎ 5668356; s/d US\$10/20) is one of the cleaner Basse options. The restaurant gets good reviews.

The best place to stay and eat is **Fulladu Camp** (☎ 5668743; r per person US\$11), on the north bank of the Gambia River, which has accommodation in comfortable bungalows.

The cultural centre **Traditions** (☎ 5668533; sulaymanjallowtraditions@yahoo.com; 🕒 9am-6pm) exhibits locally made cloth and crafts, has a river-view café and can also dust of a couple of rooms for unexpected visitors (US\$9).

Getting There & Away

There are daily minibuses and bush taxis between Basse and Georgetown (US\$2, one hour) and Soma (US\$5.30, four hours). A bush taxi to Vélingara in Senegal costs US\$1 (40 minutes). From there, you can get frequent connections to Tambacounda via Vélingara in Senegal (see p329). Even further afield, a Peugeot taxi goes more or less daily (passengers depending) to Labé in northern Guinea. The fare is US\$55 and the trip takes 24 hours, or much, much longer.

THE GAMBIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

At the Atlantic Coast resorts of Bakau, Fajara, Kotu Strand and Kololi the choice of accommodation ranges from simple hostels to five-star hotels. Upcountry, your options are normally

limited to basic guesthouses and hotels, with the exception of a few luxury lodges.

ACTIVITIES

Beach-related activities, such as swimming, water sports and fishing are popular around the coast. Upcountry, it's all about bird-watching tours around the national parks and *pirogue* excursions.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are open from 8am to 3pm or 4pm Monday to Thursday, and 8am to 12.30pm Friday. Banks, shops and businesses usually open 8.30am to noon and 2.30pm to 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and 8am to noon Friday and Saturday. Restaurants tend to serve lunch from around 11am to 2.30pm and dinner from 6pm onwards.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Serious crime is still fairly rare in The Gambia. However, muggings and petty theft do occur, particularly around the tourist centres near the coast. Avoid walking around alone after dark, particularly in areas you don't know well. Women in particular should be careful at the beaches, where some readers have reported instances of sexual assault.

Many visitors complain about the beach boys (known as 'bumsters') who wait outside hotels and offer tourists anything from souvenirs to drugs and sex. It's best to ignore these guys completely. They might respond with verbal abuse, but it's all hot air.

PRACTICALITIES

- *Africa Today* (Afro Media) has good political and economic news, plus business, sport and tourism.
- *Focus on Africa* (BBC) has excellent news stories, accessible reports and a concise run down of recent political events.
- *West Africa* (West Africa Publishing) is a long-standing, respected weekly with a focus on political and economic news.
- The electricity supply in The Gambia is 220V. Plugs either have two round pins, as those in continental Europe, or three square pins, as used in Britain.
- The Gambia uses the metric system.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES**The Gambia Embassies & Consulates**

France (☎ 01 42 94 09 30; 117 Rue Saint-Lazare, 75008 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-892 31 21; fax 030 891 14 01; Kurfurstendamm 103, Berlin)

Guinea-Bissau (☎ 0203928; Av de 14 Novembro, Bissau) Located 1km northwest of Mercado de Bandim.

Nigeria (☎ 09-523 8545; Plot 25, Ontario Crescent, 5085 Wuse, Abuja)

Senegal (☎ 821 4476; 11 Rue de Thiong, Dakar)

Sierra Leone (☎ 225191; 6 Wilberforce St, Freetown)

UK (☎ 020-7937 6316; 57 Kensington Court, London W8 5DH)

USA (☎ 0202-785 1399; gamembdc@gambia.com; Suite 1000, 1155 15th St NW, Washington, DC, 20005)

Embassies & Consulates in The Gambia

Guinea (Map p319; ☎ 4226862; 78A Daniel Goddard St, Banjul)

Guinea-Bissau (Map pp322-3; ☎ 4494854; Atlantic Rd, Bakau)

Mauritania (Map pp322-3; ☎ 4461086) Opposite Tafbel Maisonettes, Fajara.

Senegal (Map pp322-3; ☎ 4373752) Off Kairaba Ave.

Sierra Leone (Map p319; ☎ 4228206; 67 Daniel Goddard St, Banjul)

UK (Map pp322-3; ☎ 4495133; 48 Atlantic Rd, Fajara)

US (Map pp322-3; ☎ 4392856; Kairaba Ave, Fajara)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Held every June, the one-week **Roots Homecoming Festival** features concerts by Gambian and Diaspora artists, seminars and lectures. The high point is the weekend in Jufureh, where local dance troupes and bands drown the village in music.

VACCINATION CERTIFICATES

A yellow-fever vaccination certificate is required of travellers coming from an infected area.

HOLIDAYS

As well as the religious holidays listed in the Africa Directory chapter (p1106), these are the public holidays observed in The Gambia:

1 January New Year's Day

18 February Independence Day

1 May Workers' Day

15 August Assumption

INTERNET ACCESS

There are plenty of internet cafés in Banjul and in all of the resorts. Rates are around US\$1 per hour. Upcountry, access is harder to find.

MONEY

The local currency dalasi (D) has for years suffered a dramatic decrease in value, and inflation continues, though it's at 8% less dramatic than in the early noughties.

There are no restrictions on its import or export, but the money's useless outside The Gambia.

It's best to change money at banks or exchange bureaus. Both offer about the same rate. Avoid changing on the black market. A serious government crackdown on illegal moneychangers means that you don't only risk getting ripped off, but might also get into trouble with the police.

If you've come in from Senegal and have no dalasi, CFA francs are widely accepted.

In Banjul and around the coastal resorts you can find several banks with ATMs that accept Visa cards (the withdrawal limit is usually D2000). It's best to change before heading upcountry, where exchange facilities are rare.

TELEPHONE

The telephone system is handled by Gamtel, which has offices and kiosks in Banjul, Bakau, Serekunda and most upcountry towns, where you can dial direct overseas 24 hours a day. The lines are good, and calls to Europe cost about US\$7.50 for three minutes at peak times (7am to 6pm). There are many private telecentres offering better rates. There are no area codes in The Gambia.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism** (ASSET; www.asset-gambia.com) is an umbrella organisation, trying to help small businesses in tourism, and a great source of information for those wanting to travel responsibly.

VISAS

Visas are not needed by nationals of Commonwealth countries, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) or Scandinavian countries for stays of up to 90 days. For those needing one, visas are normally valid for one month and are issued in two to three days for about US\$45; you'll need two photos.

Visa extensions are dealt with swiftly at the **Immigration Office** (Map p319; ☎ 4228611; OAU Blvd, Banjul; ☎ 8am-4pm) in Banjul. They cost US\$9.

Visas for Onward Travel

Most embassies are open from 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm weekdays. You usually need two photos to apply for an onward visa. Contact the relevant embassy (opposite) for more information.

Guinea Three-month, single-entry visas are issued for US\$40 the same day if you come in the morning.

Guinea-Bissau One-month, single-entry visas are issued for US\$10, and two-month visas are US\$12; the process takes a few hours.

Mali The consulate here does not issue tourist visas. For visas, the closest embassy is in Dakar, Senegal.

Mauritania One-month visas are issued for about US\$7 in 24 hours.

Senegal One-month visas take 24 hours to issue and cost US\$14.

VOLUNTEERING

The biodiversity research and education centre **Makasutu Wildlife Trust** (☎ 7782633; www.darwin.gambia.gm), based at Abuko Nature Reserve, takes on volunteers and can provide them with accommodation.

TRANSPORT IN THE GAMBIA**GETTING THERE & AWAY****Air**

SN Brussels Airlines is the only scheduled airline that flies between The Gambia and Europe. Most people get here on cheap charter flights. The leading holiday operator is the British-based **Gambia Experience** (☎ 0845 330 4567; www.gambia.co.uk).

Air Sénégal International has regular flights between Dakar (Senegal) and Banjul (US\$150 one way).

Other regional airlines serving The Gambia include Air Guinée, Bellview, Slok Air and West Coast Airways. Note that these companies don't have good safety standards, and flights are not reliable.

Useful airline offices include:

Air Sénégal International (Map p319; ☎ 4472095; www.air-senegal-international.com; Ecowas Ave)

SN Brussels Airlines (Map pp322-3; ☎ 4496301/2; www.flysn.com; Badala Park Way, Kololi)

Land

Minibuses and bush taxis run regularly between Barra and the border at Karang

(US\$2), where Dakar-bound bush taxis and minibuses (US\$7 to US\$10, six hours) are normally waiting.

If you're heading for southern Senegal, minibuses and bush taxis leave frequently from Serekunda garage. The five-hour trip to Ziguinchor is about US\$8 and you have to change vehicles at the border. Transport also goes from Brikama to Ziguinchor.

At the far-eastern tip of The Gambia, bush taxis run from Basse Santa Su to Vélingara (US\$2, 45 minutes, 27km), and from there bush taxis go to Tambacounda for US\$3 (three hours).

GETTING AROUND Boat

Gambia River Experience (Map pp322-3; ☎ 4494360; www.gambiariver.com), off Kairaba Ave, does trips from Denton Bridge near Banjul to Lamin Lodge and all the way up to Georgetown. Trips are either done by motorised *pirogue* or large boat. One of their offers includes a week-long cruise along the river. **Hidden Gambia** (☎ in UK 01527-576239; www.hiddengambia.com) also has an excellent set of boat excursions, including 'Discover the River' trips that take you all the way from the coast upcountry (seven-day trip around US\$800, 14-day trip US\$1000).

Car & Motorcycle

Reliable car hire companies include:

AB Rent-a-Car (☎ 4460926; abrentacar@gamtel.gm; Kairaba Hotel, Senegambia, Kololi) Has had consistently good reviews for years.

Hertz (☎ 4390041; hertz@gamtel.gm; Boketh Total Station) Slightly more expensive.

Local Transport

Most minibuses and bush taxis upcountry go along the road following the south bank of the Gambia River. This road is in a terrible condition, so prepare for a rough ride and unpredictable delays. If possible, try to get a vehicle that goes along the north bank. Not a dream journey either, but marginally less rough. If you go to Georgetown or Basse, you usually have to change vehicles at Soma. Serekunda-Basse costs US\$11, the 360km trip takes nine to 12 hours. Serekunda-Soma is US\$5.30 (four to six hours). A private taxi from Serekunda to Basse should cost around US\$140 to US\$180. Make sure it's in a good condition.

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