

West Gambia Route

Gambia

Duration: 7 days

Itinerary

DAY 1. Kartong and Gunjur. The south coast of Gambia



In the southernmost area of the country, Kartong is located in the district of South Kombo, on the West Coast of Gambia close to the southern frontier with Senegal. This rural, multi-ethnic village is mainly integrated by Mandinka and Jola, or Diola people, together with other minority ethnic groups such as the Karoninka and Balanta.

With a population of approximately 6.000 inhabitants, Kartong is one of the oldest settlements on Gambia's southern coast. The large beaches of white sand, surrounded by palm trees is one of the main attractions of this part of Gambia.

In the Lemonfish gallery in Kartong, inaugurated in 2005, the works of over 25 African artists is displayed. This gallery offers national artists a space to exhibit their work and a means to help them to generate income through the sale of their paintings.

Not far from Kartong, 10 kilometres away, tourists can visit Gunjur, a coastal population in southern Gambia located in a privileged natural setting by the sea, featuring sandy beaches and palm trees.

The Bolong Fenyo Community Wildlife Reserve is a haven for bird watching, home to a wide variety of bird species, both native and migratory. This 320-hectare reserve is protected since 1998, encompassing a mix of habitats featuring forests, mangroves, Guinean savanna and palm groves, a true paradise for bird enthusiasts. The last study performed by the Gunjur Environmental Protection and Development Group identified up to 156 different species of birds. This reserve is also home to a growing population of crocodiles, antelopes, monkeys and snakes.

Between Gunjur and in Kartong there are several perfect eco lodges for visitors to enjoy a pleasant stay at one of the most beautiful areas and with the greatest natural wealth of the Gambian coast.

DAY 2. The sacred forest of Makasutu



Makasutu is a natural reserve located 30 kilometres from Gunjur and 5 kilometres from Bikama, the closest city, in an area of meanders of the Mandina Bolong, a tributary of the river Gambia. With a land area of 405 hectares, the nature in Makasutu offers an excellent example of coastal ecosystems, hard wood forests, palm groves, mangroves and Guinean savannah.

Makasutu can be translated as the “sacred forest”. The ancient Mandinka legends affirm that in the forest swamps, a creature resembling a dragon safeguarded the crown and the garments of a king of the town of Busumbala who was murdered by Kombo Salla, a Muslim king. For this reason, the forest was only used for certain traditional tribal rituals, and was safeguarded from deforestation.

In Makasutu, one can enjoy watching a great variety of bird species that visit the canals and tributaries of the river Gambia, enjoying the fauna and flora of the area while learning about the health and food applications of plants with the help of expert guides during guided excursions, by foot or canoe, through the sacred forest.

The growing interest in ecotourism activities meant that in 2002, an ecological lodge was opened, known as 'Mandina River & Jungle Lodge' which applied different environmental sustainability practices. This project has contributed toward the creation of over 250 jobs in the towns around Makasutu.

In a nearby village, Kubuneh, which can be reached in canoe, travellers can visit the “Wide Open Walls” arts project. The large murals painted by international and national artists in the Ballabu homes are part of an intercultural project aimed at promoting respect, understanding and tolerance as well as revitalising the area with an alternative economic proposal to rural agricultural work.

DAY 3. Tanji, fishing port of Gambia



The Tanji fishing village is located on the Atlantic coast, 25 kilometres from Gunjur and 30 kilometres from Banjul, the capital of Gambia.

Tanji beach is the main area where fishing boats disembark on the coast of Gambia. African canoes of all sizes and colours unload their daily catch on the sands an ever bustling and busy beach. Buckets and boxes of fish are transported by the women to nearby barracks to be smoked and conserved. Fish sellers fill their wheelbarrows with the best catch to take to

neighbouring markets. Curious and carefree, visitors can watch the constant come and go of fishers, carriers and traders. Seagulls, cormorants and pelicans flutter around the beach canoes searching for their meal of the day. The bustle is continuous, especially in the early evening, when the boats which left to sea in the morning return.

The Tanji Village Museum, under private management, is comprised of a group of thatched mud huts. The museum displays a collection of tools and utensils of ethnographic value, with useful descriptions on their uses and applications, together with musical instruments, antique furniture and photographs of the fauna and flora of Gambia. Visitors can interact with some of the artisans of the area who often produce their work within the museum premises.

Yabouy Home Cooking is the recommended place for lunch. This small touristic business is led by the entrepreneur Ida Cham, who offers a complete immersion of the Gambian culture. This experience includes wearing traditional dress, purchasing the necessary ingredients for the day's meal at Tanji market, preparing a gastronomic speciality of Gambia, eating together and after lunch a pleasant conversation in the garden. Benachin is a typical dish, a traditional speciality from the Wolof culture.

Yabouy means "mother", a tribute to Ida's mother, who she considers her inspiration known for her entrepreneur spirit. Through Yabouy Home Cooking, Ida hopes to showcase the cultural values of Gambia. In 2017, Ida Cham received the "African Travel 100 Women Winner" award, an annual recognition for the most outstanding pioneering and innovative entrepreneur women in Africa's tourism industry.

DAY 4. Albreda and Juffureh



According to certain statistics, between the 17th and 19th centuries, one of every six people captured as slaves in West Africa came from the region of Senegambia. At the height of slave-trading in the 17th century, between 5,000 and 6,000 people left every year to Gambia on the so-called "trip with no return".

The small village of Juffureh, located around 30 kilometres from Banjul, on the north bank of the river Gambia, in the district of Niimi, has a population of almost 6,000 inhabitants, most of whom are of Mandinka and Serer ethnicities. By the river, very close to Juffureh, "St James Island" is found, an old fortress which was a holding ground for the trafficking of slaves who came from this part of west Africa. It was here in Juffureh where Kunta Kinte was captured and taken as a slave. Kinte is the main character of the novel "Roots", written by Alex Haley, the North American African American author and, supposedly one of his descendants.

A little over 500 metres away from Juffureh, Albreda is found, a town where one can visit the Museum of Slavery. Inaugurated in 1996, the museum features a small collection of tools: yokes, chains, locks or handles made of iron and bronze, among other tools, commonly used in slave trading, and a brief graphic guide of the history of slavery.

The trip from Juffureh and Albreda can be performed by boat, from Banjul, or by road, crossing the river Gambia on the ferry which joins the north and the south between the cities of Barra and Banjul.

DAY 5. Coast of Gambia



Bordering the Atlantic coast, on the southern bank of the river Gambia, the most touristic areas of Gambia are found. Resorts and hotels are located around the areas close to the beaches of Cape Point, Fajara, Kotu and Kololi, until reaching Brufut and Tanji.

In the last 10 years, Care for Natural has cared for several hectares of ecological forest, protecting the diversity of the autochthonous flora. Using the natural resources collected on these lands, jams, juices, peanut products and natural oils are produced, used in cosmetics, health and food products. Aloe vera is used to prepare drinks and skincare products. Oils and beeswax from beehives are used as the base for elaborating medicinal ointments. The women employed at Care for Natural participate in training programs associated with the processing and conservation of natural products.

On the beach of Kotu, a tourist town located 20 kilometres from Tanji, on the coast of Gambia, next to a handicrafts market, one can enjoy a delicious dish of fruit prepared by the women of the Association of Kotu Beach Fruit Sellers.

Very close to Kotu, visits can be organised to get to know the TRY Women Oyster Harvesters organisation. TRT's mission is to improve the associated women's conditions for the gathering, processing and sale of oysters, improving and adding value to their work and produce, in order to ensure the economic viability of their work and improve the quality of life of the workers. The organisation of Oyster Gatherers has significantly contributed to the progressive empowerment of the associated women and their final recognition as workers with full rights in Gambia.

DAY 6. Banjul, capital of Gambia



Banjul, capital of Gambia, administrative centre and headquarters of the government of the country, is located on Island St. Mary, in the river mouth of the Gambia river, at the south of the river course. The city is named after the Mandinka people, the main ethnic group of Gambia who collected a special type of vegetable fibre on the island, used for the manufacture of ropes. Banjul is derived from the word Bang, which means fibre in the Mandinka language.

The capital of Gambia was founded by the British in 1.816 under the name of Bathurst. In 1.923, the name changed to Banjul. Its main function was to act as the commercial base for the control of slave trafficking once abolition of slavery was declared. The island where Banjul is located was leased by the British colonial government to the old kingdom of Kombo, in Gambia, for an annual payment of 103 iron bars.

In Banjul, travellers can visit the lively and bustling Albert Market, offering a great variety of products in rickety stalls and custom-built shops distributed among a maze of streets and passageways. In the market one can find all types of local products and a specific space for tourists where the goods on offer mainly feature fabric with African designs, batik, masks, wood carvings, leather garments, jewellery and, in general, any type of handicrafts from different areas of west Africa.

The National Museum of Gambia is located in the north of the city, in an area with gardens where tamarinds and palm trees proliferate. Although it is a small museum, in its installations one can find a reduced collection of Yoruba art, some pieces of ceramics from the Neolithic period, traditional stringed musical instruments or masks, as well as tools, handicrafts, photos or maps and other materials of ethnographic or historical interest. The kankurang is particularly striking. This dance is the representation of a powerful embodied spirit covered with baobab bark. The kankurang is a ritual and also a mythical character associated with Mandinka initiatory rites. In 2005, it was proclaimed an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

At the Eburnjan Theatre in Kanifing, it is possible to attend a representation of traditional music and dance. Here a creative and original brief tour is provided on the main ethnic and cultural milestones of the life cycle in Gambia.

DAY 7. Serrekunda and Kanifing. Gambia Women's Initiative



In the morning, we will travel to Serrekunda, the economic and commercial capital of Gambia, stopping at the market and the Batik company, two mandatory stops that you won't want to miss.

In Kanifing, it is possible to visit one of the offices and sales point of handicrafts by the Gambia Women's Initiative. This organization, led by the social entrepreneur Isatou Ceesay, has contributed to the economic empowerment of women of Gambia, training over 2,000 women in the last 17 years in the use of recycled plastic in handicrafts and on the generation of organic fuel based on waste from coconut and peanut shells.

Activities

Yabouy Home Cooking

Brufut (Highway), The Gambia

Tels.: +220 772 72 72 / 990 49 90 / 672 72 73

E-mail: ida@gambianhomecooking.com

<https://www.gambianhomecooking.com/>

Ebunjan Theater

Kanifing (Institutional Area), The Gambia

Tels.: +220 398 12 36 / +220 774 44 30

E-mail: ebunjan@gmail.com

www.ebunjantheatre.gm

Care for Natural

Tel.: +220 446 26 79

E-mail: info@carefornatural.com

<https://www.carefornatural.com/>

Gunjur Environmental Protection and Development Group (GEPADG)

Head office

Kombo Sur (Gunjur), The Gambia

Tels.: +220 345 32 32 / 910 29 69 / 995 50 63 / 448 65 57

E-mail: checgambia@gmail.com

www.gepadg.com

TRY Oyster Women's Association

Tel.: +220 991 11 62

E-mail: tryoysters@gmail.com

<http://try-oysters.com>

Women's Initiative Gambia

Head office

Upper Saloum, División Central River

Njau, Gambia

Tel.: +220 995 90 65

<http://gambiwomensinitiative.org>

Accomodation

Nemasu Eco-lodge

Medina Salam (Gunjur), Gambia

Tel.: +220 368 61 27

<https://nemasuecolodge.com/>

Footsteps Eco-lodge

Kombo Sur (Gunjur), The Gambia

Latitude: 13.19699 | Longitude: -16.77045

Tel.: +220 770 68 30

<https://footstepsinthegambia.com/>

Mama Africa Art Residence

Solifor Layout (Tanji), Gambia

Tel.: +220 717 87 11

E-mail: info@mama-africa-gambia.org

<https://mama-africa-gambia.org/>

The Gunjur Project Lodge

Gunjur, The Gambia

Tel.: +220 314 57 57 / 992 26 74

E-mail: info@thegunjurprojectgambia.net

<https://www.thegunjurprojectgambia.net>

Roc Heights Lodge

Samba Breku Road, Bakau (Banjul), The Gambia

Tel.: +220 449 54 28

E-mail: admin@rocheightslodge.com

E-mail: reservations@rocheightslodge.com

www.rocheightslodge.com

Leybato Hotel

Atlantic Road (Fajara), The Gambia

Tels.: +220 449 71 86 / +220 990 24 08

E-mail: leybato47@hotmail.com

<https://www.leybatobeachhotel.com/>

Useful information

Language

English.

Visas

Visas may be obtained in the border, at the airport.

Currency

Dalasi.

Mandatory vaccines

Yellow fever, for travellers coming from areas of risk, which is particularly relevant if you are travelling from a neighbouring country of the sub region.

Recommended vaccines

Hepatitis A and B, Tetanus, Meningitis AC, antimalarial treatment.

Climate

Subtropical with two distinct seasons. November to May is the dry season, with temperatures that can go as low as 7°C. Between the months of June and October is the rainy season. During this period, the temperatures can soar to over 40°C.