

Bassari Country Route

Senegal

Duration: 8 days

Itinerary

DAY 1. The road to Tambacounda



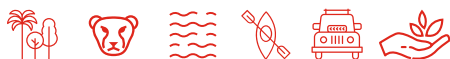
The road to Tambacounda extends from Dakar towards the west of Senegal, passing through Kaolack, Kaffrine, Koumpentoum and Koussanar.

This journey features large extensions of baobabs, the most characteristic tree of Senegal. During the car trip, the visitor becomes immersed in the pleasant rural landscape, travelling through placid villages and markets, and where it is always possible to find whatever is necessary to prepare and enjoy a picnic under the shade of a kapok tree or in a small forest of baobabs.

Tambacounda, the financial capital of southwest Senegal, and a major crossroad in the region, represents a must-see stop in the road trip between Bamako, capital of Mali, and Dakar, in Senegal, located in one of the old transhumance routes for migrating livestock shepherds of the Fula ethnicity and Wolof farmers.

Not far from Tambacounda, in the direction of Kedougou, the first of the entrances to the Niokolo-Koba National Park is found, the most important fauna and flora reserve of Senegal.

DAY 2. Niokolo-Koba



In the Niokolo-Koba National Park, declared a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO, a tropical dry forest is intermixed with large surfaces of Guinean savannah. With an extension of over 9.000 square kilometres, the park is inhabited by almost 80 species of mammals and 350 bird species. Here, some of the most characteristic animals of the African fauna live, including lions, leopards, hippopotamuses, crocodiles, hyenas or jackals and several species of monkeys and antelopes. Inland, the river Gambiadi is located together with two of its tributaries, the river Koulountou and the river Niokolo Koba, after which the park is named.

From here, one can enjoy a car trip through the park and a canoe trip along the Gambia river from Simenti, one of the most favourable places for wildlife tracking due to the availability of water sources throughout the year.

In the afternoon, after lunch, we can continue our journey towards the region of Kedougou, stopping at the solidarity camp of Badian, a beautiful and well cared for camp managed by the Badian community in the framework of an agreement with the Spanish "Solidarity Camps". Association of Active Ecotourism.

Solidarity Camps is a non-profit entity that aims at contributing towards the sustainable development of areas of extreme poverty. For this purpose, ecological-tourist camps are promoted which act as job-creators. These are jointly constructed and managed with the local communities in areas with scarce economic resources and with a high ecological, ethnological and artistic value.

DAY 3. Badian, Mako



Badian is located very close to the city of Mako, by the river Gambia, at the foothills of the Niokolo-Koba National Park, in a location surrounded by the characteristic acacias of western Senegal landscape.

Once in Badian, we recommend that travellers visit some of the local development projects promoted by Solidarity Camps in the Rural Community of Tonboronkoto, mainly related with education, health and the cultural recovery of the Malenke, Bassari and Bedik minority groups.

The village of Sibikilling Bassari is a meeting point and regrouping point of the Bassari community where we can enjoy initial insights regarding some of the typical traditions of this ethnic group in Senegal.

Until the 19th century, the Bassari people were grouped and located in the high mountains to control the territory. The round, thatched huts were grouped around a large central space. At the centre of each village, a larger hut was located where the youth of the community lived together. Currently, the Bassari live preferably in the valleys, close to the fertile fields. The old villages are only used for traditional ceremonies and rites.

DAY 4. Iwol and Ethwar



We now travel from Mako to the most populated city of the Bassari country, Kedougou. Its market, one of the busiest in the region, is a typical place for meetings and commerce between the Senegalese population and travellers coming from Mali or Guinea Conakry.

In the area of Bandafassi, a land of valleys and low mountains located a short distance from Kedougou, we can find up to nine traditional Bedik villages, conformed of dense groups of tilted thatched huts located at the top of the highest mountains.

Iwol is a traditional village of the Bedik ethnicity located at the top of a mountain which one can exclusively reach by foot after a one hour uphill walk. Surrounded by giant baobabs, including the tree which is considered to be the largest of Senegal. Once on the top of the mountain, close to the village, one can enjoy a spectacular panorama of the Bedik territory.

The Bassari and Bedik people are animists, unlike the Fulani or Peúl people, converted to Islam. Their vision of the world is closely related to the natural environment. All living beings, humans, animals or plants are part of an interrelated whole. Nature is embedded with supernatural powers, and thus, for example, certain monumental trees can embody the spirits of the ancestors.

We recommend lunch at Chez Leontine, a simple and pleasant camp managed by a young Bedik entrepreneur, Leontine Keita, who enjoys sharing her experience with travellers as a tourist business woman and a promoter of different projects with the women's associations in her birth town, Bandafassi.

In the afternoon, a walk from the camp to the population of Ethwar is suggested. Upon reaching the high part of the rock massif where the village is located, an exceptional view unfolds of the plains and plateaus of this beautiful region of Senegal.

DAY 5. Dindifelo



Known for its spectacular waterfall of over 100 metres high, in the Dindifelo Natural Reserve, visitors can enjoy a pleasant walk and a refreshing dip in the clean waters of the beautiful waterfall.

Dindifelo means "at the foot of the mountain" in "Peúl" language, referring to the Dande mountain which gives way to the waterfall.

The reserve is one of the refuges of the last chimpanzees of West Africa. The Jane Goodall Institute promotes research and biodiversity conservation programs in the area, especially for chimpanzees, agroforestry sustainability and education programmes, together with training and counselling for local agents to improve the management of natural resources.

The community museum and the batik workshop impelled by the NGO Africa Bassari is found very close to the entrance of the natural reserve.

Once back in Kedougou, the visitor can travel for several kilometres towards Afia or Segou, to get to know the different local development projects triggered by this NGO in the population.

DAY 6. Salemata and Ethiolo



From Kedougou, we travel to Salemata, a locality 30 kilometres from the border of Senegal with Guinea Conakry. From here, we begin our journey towards Ethiolo, one of the most characteristic villages of the Bassari country.

Ethiolo, approximately 20 kilometres from Salemata, is a town that is rich in agriculture and with deep-rooted cultural traditions. In the main square of the village, twice a year, Bassari initiation rituals are performed. These are traditional ceremonies which include the masked dance, which is how youth celebrate their 14th birthday, marking the beginning of adult age. The masks fulfil an important role in the initiation rites of the Bassari.

For the Basra and Bedik people, life is divided into different age groups, associated with stages of greater consciousness and responsibility in the community. Each transition is accompanied by a specific ritual, the most important of which is initiation.

Lunch in Ethiolo, at the Chez Balingho camp, directed by a charismatic Bassari who has constructed a simple and beautiful camp with close attention to detail.

DAY 7. Return to Dakar



After breakfast, we will travel by road back towards Dakar, stopping at Mbour, 80 kilometres at the south of the capital of Senegal.

In Mbour, we recommend visiting the handicrafts market, and going to the beach at sunset to watch the arrival of the fishing boats. A multitude of multicolour canoes, small boats and fishing boats arrive at a beach full of men and women prepared for unloading, selling or transporting the daily catch to other destinations or markets in the country or city.

DAY 8. Dakar and Gorée Island



Dakar, the capital of Senegal, is the meeting point of different cultures, traditions and lifestyles which coexist in Senegal. Its location in the far west of Africa facilitated the development of sea traffic between American and Europe until becoming the greatest seaport of the region and the capital of all the French colonies of West Africa.

We recommend visitors to walk through the streets and markets of the city centre as well as visiting Gorée Island, declared World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1978. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, Dakar was the most important centre of slave trafficking to America. For many men and women captured and enslaved in this area of Africa, The House of Slaves of Gorée was the last stage before beginning the so-called “trip with no return”.

Activities

Jane Goodall Institute in Senegal

Dindéfelo Biological Station
Dindéfelo (Kédougou), Senegal
E-mail: info@janegoodall.es
www.janegoodallsenegal.org

Spanish Association of Active Ecotourism “Solidarity Camps”

C/ Santa Engracia, 17
28010 Madrid, España
Tels.: 91 447 49 32 / 691 758 112
www.campamentos-solidarios.org

Accomodation

Hotel Keur Yakaar

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Tel.: +221 339 57 89 33

E-mail: infos@keuryakaar.com

<http://www.keuryakaar.com>

Campement Hotel de Wassadou

Wassadou (Tambacounda), Senegal

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Badian Solidarity Camp

Badian Village (Tonboronkoto), Senegal

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"le Bedick" Camp - Chez Leontine

Bandafassi (Kédougou), Senegal

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E-mail: chezleontine@hotmail.com

Chez Balingho Camp - "La Vallée Heureuse"

Ethiolo (Tambacounda), Senegal

Tel.: +221 77 146 81 39

Tako-Mayo Camp

Afia Thiabe-Kare (Kédougou), Senegal

Alpha Diallo

Tel.: +221 77 652 64 50

E-mail: Dialloa95@yahoo.fr

Alphaguia.blogspot.com

Useful information

Language

French.

Currency

West African CFA Franc (CFA).

Entry to the country

Passport with over 6 months validity. Spanish citizens with a valid passport, with at least 6 months validity, do not require a visa to enter and stay in Senegal for stays of less than 90 days.

Mandatory vaccines

The yellow fever vaccine is mandatory for travellers over the age of 9 years old, who enter Senegal from a country where the risk of transmission of yellow fever exists as well as for travellers who have travelled through the airport of a country where there is a risk of acquiring yellow fever.

Recommended vaccines

Yellow fever, hepatitis A and B, tetanus and treatment for malaria, which is endemic in Senegal.

Climate

Subtropical with two well marked seasons. From November to May is the dry season, with temperatures that can drop to 7°C. Between the months of June and October is the rainy season. At this time temperatures can exceed 40 °C.