

## **Bradt Guides – Senegal and Guinea-Bissau Itinerary**

Travel through an incredible corner of Africa from the Sahel to the tropics on a remarkable journey, taking you through lands where few western travellers have visited. This trip will be accompanied by Bradt Guides author Sean Connolly, who will be able to add his invaluable insights into the region. Starting in Dakar we have time to explore this most lively of West African cities before heading out for an overnight stay in the desert – a complete contrast from the urban hustle and bustle. In Djoudj National Park we see one of Africa's largest gatherings of birdlife, then head to the charming old colonial town of St Louis with its French style architecture, exploring by traditional horse and carriage. We spend time with the semi-nomadic Fulani before travelling to the holy city of Touba, centre of Senegal's marabout movement and a fascinating place to learn about the spiritual traditions that dominate here. Travelling further south we take a ferry to the Casamance region, where Islam and Christianity never quite managed to dominate; this is the Africa of old, where ancient beliefs and customs are still revered, a world away from the lands we have just crossed. We meet a Dioula monarch and get to grips with the complex belief systems here, then cross to the tiny country of Guinea-Bissau. Here we explore the villages of the Manjaco people, experiencing an Africa that few are lucky enough to see. Finally we sail to the stunning Bijagos Islands, home to turtles, saltwater hippos and some of the most traditional cultures in West Africa. A fantastic journey for the Africa enthusiast, going well off the beaten track to show you the hidden delights of an often forgotten region.

### **Day 1 – Dakar**

Arrive in Dakar and transfer to the hotel. Overnight Hotel Djoloff or similar.

#### **Dakar**

Located on the Cap Vert peninsula and Africa's westernmost city, Dakar is a thriving, colourful, lively city that provides a great experience of urban West Africa on this trip. Brash and often uncompromising, it was once of the major cities of the French Empire and today is home to over a million people. With busy traffic and street vendors everywhere, Dakar is a world away from the rest of Senegal. Nearby is Goree Island, in contrast a peaceful sanctuary with well preserved colonial buildings giving it an almost Mediterranean feel. Goree is best known for its associations with the slave trade, although there is some controversy about how much of a role it actually played.

### **Day 2 – Dakar – Lampoul Desert**

Spend the morning exploring Dakar and its markets, before heading out into the desert later in the afternoon. On the edge of the dunes, 4wd vehicles will be waiting to take us further, and we spend the night at a tented camp. (BLD)

### **Day 3 – Djoudj National Park – Saint Louis**

Travel to Djoudj National Park with its incredible bird life. We discover vast flocks of pelicans, flamingos and more, then continue to the atmospheric town of St Louis, once the capital of French West Africa. We stay tonight at the Hotel de la Poste, built in 1895 and now fully renovated – it was here that the Aeropostale pilots would stay during the colonial era. (BLD)





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### **Djoudj National Park**

Djoudj is a natural oasis formed by hundreds of miles of partially flooded lands, and has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This 'humid paradise' - the best habitat and nesting site for over a million of migratory and resident birds - lies on the southeastern bank of the Senegal River and offers a range of wetland habitats that are very popular with migrating birds, many of which get here after crossing the Sahara. Out of over 400 species, pelicans and flamingos are the most common, whereas aquatic warblers are a bit less conspicuous - migrating here from Europe, this park is their single most important wintering site yet discovered. Apart from birds there is also a wide range of wildlife which could be encountered.

### **Saint Louis**

One of West Africa's nicest towns, Saint Louis was the first French settlement in the region and still retains much of its old colonial architecture, contributing to its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Divided between an island and a peninsula, most of the old European buildings are concentrated on the island with an old governor's palace, museum, and numerous grand old houses.

### **Day 4 – St Louis - Fulani Villages**

Spend the morning visiting Saint Louis, exploring its streets by traditional caleche (horse and carriage). Afterwards we head out into the surrounding Ferlo desert, home to the semi-nomadic Fulani people. We have the opportunity to meet them and learn about their unique culture, centred around livestock and grazing. When the herds return we may be invited to witness the milking process. Overnight in simple huts managed by the local community. (BLD)

### **Day 5 – Touba – Lac Rose**

Drive to Touba, a stronghold of the Mourid Islamic brotherhood and considered to be a sacred town in Senegal. Spend the rest of the day exploring the town and learning about the spiritual traditions of Islam in Senegal – we will be accompanied by Baye Fall, a member of a colourful branch of Mouridism. Later we continue to Lac Rose. A shallow salt lake surrounded by dunes, the high concentration of minerals gives it a pink hue and the water is ten times saltier than the ocean. Around six hundred local people collect salt here. Overnight Le Traza Hotel. (BLD)



### **Touba**

Touba is the centre of the Mourids, a strict Islamic sect that started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Sufi associations, and the town is an important centre of pilgrimage within the region. With that in mind, it's forbidden to bring either alcohol or cigarettes into the town and there are no hotels here, for they are seen somewhat as dens of iniquity. Each year the town plays host to an annual pilgrimage called the Grand Magal, when up to three quarters of a million people descend, raising comparisons with a West African Mecca. The main sight here is Touba's enormous mosque – construction began in the 1930s but was not completed until the 1960s, and it is one of the largest on the continent.

### **Day 6 – Dakar**

This morning explore the area around the lake to discover villages hidden in the dunes. Head back to the lively capital, Dakar, and visit nearby Goree Island, once a centre of the slave trade. Explore its historic sights before boarding a ferry in the later afternoon for an overnight journey to the Casamance region. Overnight on board. (BLD)

### **Day 7 – Cap Skirring**

By morning we enter the Casamance River and sail through a changed landscape of lush vegetation and the culture of tribal Africa. We disembark at Carabane Island, where historic ruins are covered with vegetation, and travel by

local boat to a small island where we see traditional dances of the Dioula women. Arriving back on the mainland we travel by bush taxi to the unspoiled beaches of Cap Skirring. Overnight Hotel La Paillote or similar. (BLD)

### Day 8 – Ziguinchor

Spend the day exploring the culture of the Dioula people. We visit the fortified adobe buildings still inhabited by some large patriarchal Dioula families, an interesting example of West African architecture. These large clay and wooden houses, where light comes from a central hole in the roof, are known as “impluvium houses” - an African variant of the ancient roman house – and had the function to protect its dwellers from outside attacks. We also meet the king of a Dioula kingdom., before continuing to Ziguinchor for the night. Overnight tourist class hotel. (BLD)

### Day 9 – Cacheu

Cross into Guinea-Bissau and start travelling to the small town of Cacheu. From here we visit the villages of the local Manjaco people, known for their ancestor worship. In this region the forest hides a unique fetish endowed with much feared and respected powers; it is the initiated young men only who can carry it on their shoulders. Overnight Hotel Mar Azul or similar. (BLD)

### Day 10 – Bijagos Islands

Sail to the Bijagos Islands, a magical and unique world of authentic tribal traditions and unusual wildlife. Our first stop is Orango Island, a national park and with stunning white sand beaches. Among the many protected species there is a unique mammal: the ‘saltwater hippo’. These rare animals mainly live in the saltwater of the mangrove forests but sometimes even like to go for a swim in the ocean – we will do our best to look for them but they can be elusive. Overnight Parque Hotel or similar. (B)

#### The Bijagos Islands

The Bijagos are the jewel in tiny Guinea-Bissau's crown, an archipelago of more than forty islands that have been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Covered in dense forest and mangroves, the islands are home to some of West Africa's least adulterated cultural traditions, the islands serving to isolate the inhabitants from too much colonial influence. The Bijagos also contain enigmatic wildlife – the rare ‘saltwater’ hippo being the most famous, rather elusive but sometimes found swimming along the shorelines and between the islands. Facilities here are few but our stay here offers us an opportunity to explore some of the region's most pristine natural environments.



### Day 11 – Bijagos Islands

A speedboat ride will take us to the southern islands. Hidden in the remotest part of the archipelago, they recently became the ‘Marine Park of Poilao and Joao Vieira’, a protected area stretching across over 495 square kilometres. We will explore Meio Island with its perfect lagoons and its beautiful forests.

Poilao Island is an uninhabited site of great beauty. It is also considered the main nesting site for the great Green Sea Turtle (Chelonia Midas) in West Africa. After dark, in silence on the beach, we await for the moment when a female emerges from the ocean and digs the deep hole where she then lays her eggs. With a bit of luck there are good chances we will be able to witness this wonder of nature and/or the hatching! ... with the tiny ones coming out of the sand to jump in the ocean and begin a long journey that will take them back to this same island when they reach sexual maturity, 30 years later. Overnight camping. (BLD)



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## **Day 12 – Bijagos Islands**

By speedboat we reach Canhabaque Island (Ilha Roxa) where we will spend part of the day walking to villages hidden in the forest (*5 hours walk on flat sandy track*). Alternatively, one can visit fewer villages and relax on the beach. Canhabaque is the most traditional island of the archipelago and it is considered sacred. Due to the remoteness of the destination, the lack of transportation and the deep attachment to the local traditions, the Bijagos inhabitants have been little influenced by the external world: women still wear the *saiya* - a traditional skirt made of straw - and the rhythm of village life is given by initiations and secret ceremonies – for example young men have to go through a seven-year initiation rite during which they live in a “convent” without any contact with women. Overnight Hotel Ponta Anchaca or similar. (BLD)

## **Day 13 – Bolama – Bissau**

Early morning departure to Bolama Island, the former capital of Portuguese Guinea from 1871 to 1941, before they moved it to Bissau. When the Portuguese left, local people came to live in the town which is now falling apart and is partly invaded by tropical vegetation. The city was built following the plans of a ‘Castrum Romanum’ (roman citadel) so today we can see its large sunny avenues, its empty squares, its dry fountains, its bush-like gardens and its charming administrative buildings in neo Palladian style. In the Governor’s Palace we can still admire columns in the classic style, surrounded by goats! Bolama, although inhabited, has the fairy-tale atmosphere of a ghost town. In the afternoon, we end our speedboat navigation by arriving in Bissau, the actual capital of the country. Here a vehicle will be waiting to take us on a brief tour of this tiny and intriguing capital. Later transfer to the airport for departure. (BL)

**Departure date:** 7 December 2017

**Minimum Group size:** 6

**Maximum Group Size:** 12

**Price:** £3999 per person based on twin share, excluding international flights. Any single supplements required cost £300.

### **What’s included:**

**Airport transfers** – We include arrival and departure transfers regardless of whether you book flights yourself, or we book them for you. If you’re booking them yourself, then please let us know the details so that we can arrange the transfers. Please note though that if you arrive earlier than Day 1 of the tour, and leave after the final day, we may need to make an additional charge for an airport transfer.

**Accommodation** – Accommodation as listed in the dossier. The nature of the destinations that we operate may sometimes mean that we need to change hotels, but we’ll always endeavour to keep the same standards. Please be aware that as we operate in many countries where tourism is in its infancy, hotel standards may not be the same as you’re used to elsewhere.



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**Guides** – You will be hosted by Bradt Guides author Sean Connolly throughout the trip, and will also be accompanied by locally based English speaking guides.

**Meals** – As listed within the itinerary / dossier (B-Breakfast, L-Lunch, D-Dinner). These will vary from trip to trip – in some areas it makes sense to include all meals while in others there is a good choice of restaurants and we feel people might like to 'do their own thing' now and again.

**Entrance fees** – Entrance fees are listed for those sites that we mention within the itinerary. If there are any other sites that you'd like to see, these would be at your own expense.

**What's not included:**

**Visas** – We don't arrange visas for our travellers, but if an invitation letter is necessary then we will arrange this for you. If you need any advice with visas then just give us a call, or alternatively a visa agency such as Travcour ([www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com)) can assist.

**Airport taxes** – If there are any departure taxes to pay that are not included within the cost of your ticket, you'll need to pay these yourself.

**International flights** – Many of our travellers arrive from different destinations and so we don't include international flights in the cost of our tours. If however you would like us to book flights for you, then just give us a call and we'll be happy to discuss your options.

**Travel Insurance** – If you need any assistance with this, then let us know – although we can't arrange it ourselves we can point you in the direction of a reputable provider that can assist.