AFRIQUE UNIE · TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Senegal and The Gambia in 12 days: a day-by-day itinerary

The Gambia is a narrow strip of land along a river, entirely surrounded by Senegal: you pass from one to the other in a few minutes, changing official language and currency as you go. This twelve-day loop starts in Dakar, heads south to the Saloum Delta, enters The Gambia at the Karang border post, follows the river upstream to Janjanbureh and returns to Senegal through Farafenni. It stays north of Casamance, where the French authorities advise against travel to some border areas. Read the official travel advice for both countries before you leave.

Day by day

Days 1-2 · Dakar and Gorée Island (night : Dakar)
Blaise Diagne International Airport is about fifty kilometres from Dakar: allow an hour by road, sometimes more at rush hour. On the first day, get your bearings on the Plateau, the historic centre, between Place de l'Indépendance, Kermel market and the Museum of Black Civilisations. The next morning, board the ferry to Gorée, twenty minutes from the port. The car-free island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is explored on foot: ochre houses with wooden balconies, the House of Slaves, Fort d'Estrées and, at the top, the Castel plateau. Back on the mainland, end the day on the western corniche, but return by taxi after dark, as the authorities advise.

Days 3-4 · The creeks of the Saloum Delta (night : Toubacouta)
Head south early in the morning. By motorway, then through Fatick or Kaolack, allow four to five hours to Toubacouta, a village set on the edge of the bolongs, the saltwater creeks lined with mangroves. The Saloum Delta is a UNESCO site, listed both for its mangrove landscapes and for its shell mounds, heaps of shells built up by local people over the centuries and sometimes planted with baobabs. Everything is visited by pirogue: a shell island, the mangrove forest, Serer fishing villages and, at the end of the day, a roost where hundreds of birds come to spend the night. On the second day, add a forest walk or a kayak outing at high tide.

Day 5 · The Karang border and the Banjul ferry (night : Atlantic coast (Bakau, Kotu or Kololi))
The border is only about half an hour south of Toubacouta. At Karang, have your exit from Senegal stamped, then cover the few hundred metres to the Gambian post of Amdallai on foot or by car. From there a tarred road leads to Barra, on the north bank of the river mouth. The ferry to Banjul crosses the river in under an hour, but the wait can be long. UK travel advice warns that this ferry is often overloaded, poorly maintained and lacks life-saving equipment, and suggests considering the Senegambia Bridge near Farafenni instead, at the cost of a long detour inland. If you do take the ferry, get out of your vehicle as soon as it is parked. From Banjul a taxi takes you to the Atlantic coast in half an hour; most accommodation is there. Change a few CFA francs into dalasi as soon as you arrive.

Days 6-7 · Banjul, Abuko Nature Reserve and Tanji harbour (night : Atlantic coast (Bakau, Kotu or Kololi))
Spend a morning in Banjul, one of Africa's smallest capitals, built on an island at the mouth of the river: Albert Market, the National Museum and the monumental arch that towers over Independence Drive. In the afternoon, the beach and gardens of Bakau are made for resting; swim only where there are lifeguards, because the currents are strong. The next day, visit Abuko Nature Reserve as soon as it opens: in this small protected forest, half an hour from the coast, shaded paths lead to hides from which you can watch monkeys, crocodiles and a great many birds. Continue to Tanji in the late afternoon, when the painted pirogues return from fishing and the beach turns into a fish market.

Day 8 · Kunta Kinteh Island, Albreda and Juffureh (night : Atlantic coast (Bakau, Kotu or Kololi))
A day on the river, devoted to the memory of the slave trade. Boat excursions leave Banjul and sail up the estuary to the villages of Albreda and Juffureh, on the north bank, in about two hours. Juffureh is the village that the writer Alex Haley presented as the home of his ancestor Kunta Kinte in the novel Roots; a small museum there traces the history of slavery in the region. A pirogue then takes you to Kunta Kinteh Island, formerly James Island, where the ruins of a fort are slowly being eaten away by erosion. The whole site is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Boats vary in comfort: check that there are life jackets before you board.

Days 9-10 · Janjanbureh and the Wassu stone circles (night : Janjanbureh)
Set off early: the south bank road crosses the country from west to east, and it takes five to six hours to reach Janjanbureh, formerly Georgetown, which sits on an island in the river. This sleepy little town, with its colonial warehouses, is the starting point for boat trips in search of hippos and birds; further downstream you sail past the islands of River Gambia National Park, home to chimpanzees that you watch without landing. The next day, take the ferry across to the north bank to reach Wassu, about twenty kilometres away. Its circles of standing stones, cut from laterite more than a thousand years ago, are part of the Senegambian megaliths listed by UNESCO. A small museum rounds off the visit.

Day 11 · Back to Senegal through Farafenni (night : Kaolack)
Take the north bank road westwards. Farafenni, about a hundred kilometres from Wassu, is the crossroads where this road meets the Trans-Gambia Highway, which links northern Senegal with Casamance over the Senegambia Bridge. You follow it northwards, without crossing the river: the border post is on the edge of town, facing the Senegalese village of Keur Ayip. Have your exit from The Gambia stamped, then your entry into Senegal. Another hundred kilometres or so remain to Kaolack, through Nioro du Rip. Allow five to six hours in all, formalities included. A big groundnut-trading town, Kaolack is above all a practical stopover, with a vast covered market.

Day 12 · From Kaolack to Dakar airport (night : Flight home)
A last morning on the main road across the groundnut basin, between fields, baobabs and Serer villages. Through Fatick and Mbour, then on the motorway, it takes about three hours to reach Blaise Diagne airport, which lies before Dakar, so there is no need to cross the capital again. If your flight leaves in the evening, stop in Fatick or take a break on the Petite Côte, whose beaches stretch between Mbour and La Somone, half an hour from the airport. Keep a comfortable margin: traffic can be heavy around Mbour, and roads are sometimes slowed by demonstrations or, in the rainy season, by violent storms. Return the vehicle or say goodbye to your driver at the terminal.

Getting around

The simplest option is a car with a driver for the whole circuit, provided you check that the vehicle is allowed to enter The Gambia; otherwise you change cars at the border. Senegalese hire cars are generally not allowed to leave the country. Independent travellers use seven-seater shared taxis as far as Karang, then Gambian taxis and minibuses. Avoid driving at night in both countries. The ferry between Barra and Banjul is the weak link: UK

travel advice considers it unsafe and suggests considering the Senegambia Bridge, near Farafenni, which lets you cross the river by road. If you do take the ferry, leave early and expect to wait.

When to go

The dry season, from November to May, is the right time for both countries: clear skies, passable tracks and pleasant temperatures on the coast, especially from December to February. It is also the season for migratory birds in the Saloum Delta and along the River Gambia. From March the heat becomes intense inland, particularly in Janjanbureh and Kaolack. During the rainy season, from June or July to October, storms can flood the roads, some places to stay close and malaria is more widespread.

Practical information

Senegal

Entry	Depends on your passport: visiterafriqueunie.com/en/visa/senegal/
Yellow fever	Certificate required if arriving from a risk country
Malaria	throughout the country
Currency	West African CFA franc (XOF)
Languages	French, Wolof
Plugs	type C, D, E, K · dialling code +221 · UTC0
Emergencies	police 17 · ambulance 15 · fire 18

The Gambia

Entry	Depends on your passport: visiterafriqueunie.com/en/visa/the-gambia/
Yellow fever	Certificate required if arriving from a risk country
Malaria	throughout the country
Currency	Gambian dalasi (GMD)
Languages	English, Mandinka, Wolof
Plugs	type G · dialling code +220 · UTC0
Emergencies	police 17 ou 117 · ambulance 16 ou 116 · fire 18 ou 118

Departure checklist

Documents

☐ Passport valid for at least six months after your return, with blank pages
☐ Visa or e-visa (printed if required)
☐ International vaccination certificate (yellow fever if required)
☐ Travel insurance certificate and assistance number
☐ Paper and digital copies of your passport and bookings
☐ Tickets, bookings and addresses saved offline
☐ International driving permit if you are hiring a vehicle

Health

☐ Travel consultation done and vaccinations up to date
☐ Malaria tablets if your doctor recommends them
☐ First-aid kit: plasters, antiseptic, anti-diarrhoea tablets, rehydration salts
☐ Mosquito repellent suitable for the tropics
☐ Sunscreen, hat and sunglasses
☐ Personal medication and prescriptions

Money and connectivity

☐ Bank told, Visa or Mastercard (and a backup card)
☐ Cash in euros or dollars, recent notes in good condition
☐ eSIM or local SIM card sorted
☐ Plug adapter for the country
☐ Power bank and cables
☐ Offline maps downloaded
☐ Afrique Unie app installed

In the bag

☐ Light clothes that cover up (sun, mosquitoes, places of worship)
☐ A fleece for evenings, dawn safaris and altitude
☐ Walking shoes and sandals
☐ Head torch
☐ Water bottle (ideally with a filter)
☐ Small daypack and waterproof pouches
☐ Luggage padlock

Before you close the door

☐ Your government's travel advice reread
☐ Trip registered with your consular service (if it offers this)
☐ Itinerary and contacts left with someone close
☐ Online check-in done and baggage allowance checked

Notebook made from visiterafriqueunie.com/en/itineraries/senegal-and-the-gambia-in-12-days/ · information checked in November 2026 against official sources. Entry, health and safety rules change: check them again before you leave (your country's official advice, the embassy of the country you visit).