SPECIAL EVENT



SENEGAL GAMBIA AND GUINEA BISSAU THE AFRICAN WEST COAST

14 DAYS/13 NIGHTS

Each departure is unique because concomitant with one of these special events:

Special event: Carnival Parade
Scheduled departure dates from Dakar (day 1):

- Feb 8, 2023 (ask for specific modified itinerary)

Special event: Vaca Bruto masks ceremony
Scheduled departure dates from Dakar: (day 1):
April 7th, 2023

Special event: <u>Turtles' nesting</u>
Scheduled departures dates from Dakar (day 1):
Nov 17th, 2023
Dec 27th, 2023

Minimum 2 – Maximum 16 participants



PRESENTATION

A unique itinerary crossing three countries "north to south" to experience a continuous change of climatic ecosystems and human environments.

NATURE

Following the "uncertain border" between land and water, we move across an incredible variety of natural environments such desert dunes, savannah, estuaries, forest, mangrove swamps, ending with an exciting ocean

navigation to discover and enjoy the Bijagos Archipelago. Birds will be a constant presence throughout the whole journey. **Djoudj National Sanctuary** in Senegal is one of the main migratory bird sanctuaries on earth and Gambia is a well-known birding destination.

HISTORY, PREHISTORY & TIMELESS VILLAGES

We will discover historical sites as:

Dakar, a contemporary metropolis, large capital, and African intellectual center since the time before the independence. Gorée, ancient slave-trade island;

Saint Louis, the first colonial capital of "French West Africa";

Bolama, the Portuguese Guinea capital, forgotten in a remote island;

We will experience the encounter with "timeless" people as herders and remote villages. We will discover the largest monoliths site on earth.

ART, CULTURE & MUSIC

In the northern Savannah, we will be invited to the camp of nomadic herders, and we will meet the largest religious and peaceful brotherhood that practices an African form of Islam that rejects fundamentalism and violence.

In the south, we will be introduced to animistic traditional religions, tribal kings, dancing masks, and remote tribes who still worship ancestor statues: a unique chance to enjoy **tribal art** in its original contest. In the animistic Casamance region, we will witness the celebrations of Diola mask, the incarnation of mythical spirits... Masquerade is a unique experience that involves the participation of the entire village in an intense mix of magic, music, and dances.

TRANSPORTS

We will travel in different kinds of vehicles; each one chosen to optimize the different geographical and cultural environments and have fun. On the land, we will travel mainly on a comfortable air-conditioned minibus and for short rides, we will experience 4WD vehicles, traditional calash, as optional, donkey chariots, and local taxis. On the ocean, to the Bijagos archipelago, we will sail on modern speedboats.

UNIQUE EVENTS

<u>Carnival</u> is the main festivity in <u>Guinea Bissau</u>. Carnival is an incredible mix of African and Portuguese traditions. Carnival goes wild in the afternoon, colorful masks from different areas and neighborhoods start their parade: sacred traditional masks, warriors dressed in a crocodile skin and armed with arrows, modern masks made of papier-mâché, all surrounded by girls wearing only strings of glass beads around their waist. Hours of lively parades turn this carnival into an unforgettable experience, a real "fiesta popular" combining cheerful African spirit with Portuguese and Brazilian influences.

- Carnival coinciding departure: Feb 8, 2023 (ask for specific modified itinerary)

<u>Vaca Bruto mask ceremony</u>. In Bijagos Islands, life is still ruled by the cycle of seasons and during the long dry season, when the harvest is over, the main ceremonies take place. The most spectacular Bijago mask is called Vaca Bruto (wild bull) and is a wooden helmet mask with eyes of frosted glass, real horns, leather ears, and a rope through the nostril. During the Vaca Bruto ceremonies dancers embody the spirit of the mask with great realism: they bow and face the ground, just like a real untamed animal would do.

- Vaca Bruto mask dances coinciding departures April 7th, 2023

<u>Turtles' nesting</u>. Poilao Island in Bijagos Archipelago 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 wait for the magic moment when a female emerges from the ocean and dig 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 natural 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 afterward.

- Turtle nesting - coinciding departures: Nov 17th & Dec 27th, 2023

ITINERARY

<u>DAY 1: Dakar</u>, the capital - <u>SENEGAL</u> Arrival in Dakar and transfer to the hotel.

Meals Free

Overnight Hotel Djoloff, hotel de *charme* with fine traditional architecture and comfort, or similar (air conditioned, en-suite rooms).

<u>DAY 2: Dakar contemporary metropolis & Gorée,</u> from Dakar to Gorée (transfers in town and ferry) - SENEGAL

Dakar, the large and vibrant African metropolis that was the cultural and intellectual capital of French West Africa. Reflecting on that period, the Presidential Palace and the IFAN Museum (*Institut Francais d'Afrique Noire*), hosting an important collection of African art objects. When it opened, the museum was directed by Theodor Monod, a celebrated Africanist and one of the greatest Sahara scholars.

We will visit the *Musée des Civilisations Noirs*. Opened in December 2018, it is the realization of Léopold Sédar Senghor's vision (the first president of independent Senegal, a poet, and Nobel Prize winner). The museum represents the historical and contemporary worldwide cultures, art, and soul of Black people, which he called Negritude.

We will also see the *Cathédrale Notre Dame des Victoires & Place de Souvenirs*. The project to build the Dakar cathedral was initiated in 1910 to pay tribute to African combatants, the Cathedral was finally built in Neo-Sudanese style, a style inspired by the Sahara and Sub-Sahara adobe mosque architecture, and was consecrated on 2 February 1936.

Arrival at Dakar port to board a ferry and spend a night in Gorée, the island where slaves used to be crammed before being shipped to the Americas. Some restored buildings remain to bear witness of those times.

The Portuguese were the first to establish a presence on Gorée in 1450, where they built a small stone chapel. After the decline of the slave trade from Senegal in the 1770s and 1780s, the island became an important port for the shipment of peanuts, Arabic gum, ivory, and other products of legitimate trade. Thanks to the nice breeze, and the many restaurants and shops, Gorée today has become a pleasant and trendy location. In the late afternoon and evening, when the other tourists are gone, we will experience the real feeling of this special island.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Hotel "de charme", the capacity of hotels in Gorée is limited. The group may be split into

different locations, close to each other (air-conditioned, en-suite rooms).

<u>DAY 3: Lac Rose and fisherman villages,</u> from Gorée to Lompoul (ferry and drive 170 km-driving time 6 hrs.) - <u>SENEGAL</u>

Waking up in Gorée before the crowd arrives is a pleasure, as strolling in the tiny stone-paved alleys of this historical settlement.



Ferry to Dakar and drive to Lac Rose, a shallow saltwater lake surrounded by dunes, also known as Lac Retba. The water is ten times saltier than in the ocean and thanks to this high concentration the lake often shimmers into pink. Workers here collect salt in the traditional way.

Miles of exciting drive on the beach by 4x4 will bring us to discover the largest fisherman village in Senegal. More than 4500 wooden painted pirogues come to the shore with the catch of the day... We will leave our vehicles for a less intrusive, but fun, donkey chariot to

approach the fisherman selling to the local market women, to meet the artisans carving the large pirogues, the painters decorating them with bright colors, and if we are lucky the "local saint" for final blessing before sailing...

Drive-by minibus to the north. At the edge of Lompoul Desert, some 4WD vehicles will be waiting to cross the dunes and take us to our fix camp.

The Lompoul orange sand dunes landscape anticipate the neighbouring Sahara.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Permanent tented camp (comfortable tents with beds and en-suite).

DAY 4: Saint Louis, from Lompoul to St. Louis (100 km – driving time 2 hrs.) – SENEGAL

Saint Louis, known to locals as Ndar, is a charming ancient town that was a French territory from 1673 until 1895 and the capital of all French West Africa colonies from 1895 until 1902 when the capital was moved to Dakar. From 1920 to 1957, it also served as the capital of the neighboring colony of Mauritania.

It has been the former base of the "Aeropostale" airmail pioneer operation between Europe, Africa, and South America. Saint Exupéry, the famous writer, author of "The Little Prince", was one of Aeropostale pilots following this route.

Located on two islands between the Senegal river and the ocean at the southern edge of the Sahara, rich in three centuries of history, cultural background, geography, architecture, Saint-Louis is a "bridge" between the savanna and the desert, the ocean, the river, and the inland, between tradition and modernity, Islam and Christianity, Europe and Africa.

Home to a society with a distinctive lifestyle, Saint-Louis has retained its unique identity. "No one comes without falling in love with the city," proudly say its people who consider Saint-Louis as the birthplace of Senegalese Teranga, the Wolof word for hospitability

The best way to visit the narrow lanes of Saint Louis is by calash, just as locals do, and walk in the fisherman quarters. Time to stroll in the tiny avenues and enjoy the unique atmosphere of this old town.

We will spend the night at the historic hotel of the town - built in 1895 and now fully renovated - it was here that all Aeropostale pilots use to stay.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Hotel de la Poste or similar (air-conditioned, en-suite rooms).

<u>DAY 5: Bird sanctuary & Nomadic tribes,</u> from St. Louis to Ferlo desert (150 km – driving time 4 hrs.) – SENEGAL



Early morning departure northwards to discover Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary (*Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj*), a natural oasis formed by hundreds of miles of partially flooded lands which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This "humid paradise" between the Sahara and Ferlo desert, is the best habitat and nesting site for over a million migratory and resident birds - lies on the southeastern bank of the Senegal River and offers a range of wetland habitats that are attended by many migrating birds, some getting here after crossing the Sahara. Out of more than 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 such as warthog and crocodiles. Motorboat excursion led by a local guide-ornithologist.

Depending on the season, considering the time of migrations and level of water, the visit to Djoudj may be replaced by a similar experience in Langue de Barbarie, a thin, sandy peninsula, adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean, located in western Senegal, in the neighborhoods of the city of Saint-Louis. The peninsula separates the ocean from the final section of the Senegal River. The Langue de Barbarie National Park is home to an abundant variety of bird species and three species of turtle, including the critically endangered hawksbill sea turtle.

In the afternoon continuation to the Ferlo Desert to discover the arid region where nomadic Fulani tribes herd large droves of zebu. The Fulani (also called Peul) are the largest nomadic tribe roaming West African Savannahs, living in a vast area from Senegal to Chad. Their origins are still covered with mystery. They all share a common aristocratic cult for beauty and elegance. In the afternoon a local guide will join us for a visit to the neighboring villages and shelters. When the herds come back, we might even be invited to witness the milking process.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Camp made up of simple grass huts, managed by a local entrepreneur (all rooms with beds,

mosquito nets, en-suite).

DAY 6: Tuba Brotherhood, from Ferlo desert to Kabacoto (240 km – driving time 5 hrs.)- SENEGAL

The rarely visited holy town of Tuba (Touba) is the right place to appreciate the hospitality of an African brotherhood. Tuba inhabitants follow Muridism and the town itself is a sort of theocratic "state within the state", ruled by a Caliph. The founder of Mouridi brotherhood was a Sufi named Amhadou Bàmba Mbake.

Amhadou Bàmba founded Touba in 1887. The holy site remained a tiny, isolated place in the wilderness until his death and burial at the site of the Great Mosque, 40 years later. The Great Mosque was finally completed in 1963 and since its inauguration, the city has grown at a rapid pace: from under 5,000 inhabitants in 1964, the population was officially estimated at 529,000 in 2007

The *Mourides* have a large social and economic impact in Senegal: thanks to their peaceful (and African) vision of Islam, Muridism, with other brotherhoods following the cult of Marabouts, has become the bastion that protects Senegal from radical Islam.

During the Grand Magal, the annual pilgrimage, the town is visited by four million pilgrims.



Mourides welcome any interest in their traditions. Yet since Tuba is a sacred town, all visitors should accept traditional rules. Therefore, we must apply a considerate dress code: not smoke, not drink alcohol and not listen to music during the visit. If we follow these rules, we will be welcomed. A *Baye Fall*, a member of a colorful branch of Muridism, will accompany us during the visit.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Kabacoto Safari Hotel or Relais de Kaolak (air-conditioned bungalows, swimming pool).

DAY 7: Stone circles, from Kabacoto to Banjul (240 km – driving time 6 hrs.) – SENEGAL-GAMBIA

Early departure, we will leave the main road to discover the unique megalithic site of Sine Ngayene, as part of the Senegambian stone circles, which lie in The Gambia and in central Senegal.

According to UNESCO, the Senegambian stone circles are "the largest concentration of stone circles seen anywhere in the world." These sites represent an extraordinary concentration of more than 1,100 stone and related tumuli spread over a territory of 100 km wide and 350 km in length, in Gambia River north bank. After The Gambia border formalities, we will drive to the Banjul area.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Atlantic hotel, private beach facing the ocean, (air-conditioned, en-suite rooms).

<u>DAY 8: Gambian birds and sacred masks</u> from Banjul to Ziguinchor (160 km – driving time 4 hrs.) – GAMBIA-SENEGAL



Gambia is renowned as bird watching destinations. With an ornithological guide we will discover different species of African birds in their habitat.

Drive to the southern border whit Casamance region of Senegal.

We will leave the main track to join a remote village. We have lunch in the village, prepared by a local family to enjoy the Senegalese gastronomy and improve local community economy.

In the afternoon masks leave the sacred forest to dance for an enthusiastic local crowd. Masks are part of the animistic Diola culture, people fear and respect masks, consider them spirits who play an important role in solving conflicts between villagers.

Evening arrival to our comfortable hotel on the banks of Casamance River where that will be our base for two days dedicated to discovering Casamance.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Kadiandoumange Hotel on the banks of the river or similar (airconditioned, en-suite rooms).

DAY 9: Sacred kings, Casamance (150 km approx. - driving-time 4 hrs.) - SENEGAL

We will leave the main road to visit an adobe-fortified building still inhabited by a large patriarchal Diola family, an interesting example of traditional African sculptural architecture. These large clay and wooden fortified houses, where light comes from a central hole in the roof, are known as "impluvium houses" and had the function to protect their dwellers from outside attacks.

In a hidden village we will be received by the king of a Diola Kingdom. After the protocol salutations the king, that is



also the high priest holding both political and mystical power, will answer our questions on the traditional rules in Diola society.

Late afternoon, return to Ziguinchor.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Kadiandoumange Hotel on the banks of the river or similar (air-conditioned, en-suite rooms)

<u>DAY 10: Ancestors,</u> from Ziguinchor to Quinhamel (250 km – driving time 7 hrs.)– <u>SENEGAL - GUINEA BISSAU</u>

Early departure for a long but interesting day. Guinea Bissau border crossing.

On the way to Bissau stop at Bula to meet a Manjaco king and learn about the culture of his tribe. Many Manjaco households within the traditional homeland have an ancestor shrine made up of carved wooden posts which are collectivist representations of ancestors in general. When the Manjaco people make offerings, they refer to a single ancestor despite the shrines represent the ancestors collectively. It is important to note the way in which the Manjaco people consider and "treat" their ancestors in comparison with other cultures. Rather than revering and treating them as guides of moral superiority, the Manjaco people tend to subjugate and incorporate them back into society as relative equals. Evening arrival to Quinhamel, late dinner.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Hotel Mar Azul, waterfront or similar (en-suite rooms, simple).

<u>DAY 11: From the ghost capital to the Bijagos Archipelago</u>, from Quinhamel to Rubane (speed boat)-GUINEA BISSAU Aboard a speedboat, we start 4 days of sailing to discover the Bijagos Archipelago with its remote islands and isolated human settlements. The Bijagos Archipelago is located approximately 40 miles offshore and, with its 88 islands (of which only 21 are permanently inhabited), is the largest archipelago in Africa. With its wild and pristine landscapes, its genuine tribal culture, and its unique fauna, Bijagos is a "geographical jewel". 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: during ceremonies women still wear the *saiya* - a traditional skirt made of straw - and the rhythm of life in villages 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.



Our first stop will be Bolama Island, the former capital of Portuguese Guinea from 1871 to 1941 before it was moved to Bissau. This transfer was needed due to the shortage of fresh water in Bolama.

When the Portuguese left, native people came to live in the town which is now falling apart and is partly invaded by tropical vegetation. It was originally built following the plans of a *«Castrum Romanum»* (roman citadel) so today we can witness its large sunny lethargic avenues, its empty squares, its dry fountains, its bush-like gardens, and its large

administrative buildings in neo-Palladian style. In the Governor's Palace, we can still admire columns in the classic style ... where now goats graze! The Bissau-Guinean government is aiming for it to be designated the nation's first World Heritage Site.

Bolama, although inhabited, is plunged into the fairy-tale atmosphere of a still inhabited ghost town.

Arrival to Rubane / Bubaque Islands in a comfortable hotel that will be our base for three days of discovering Bijagos Archipelago.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Hotel Ponta Anchaca or Lodge les Dauphins or similar (oceanfront comfortable bungalows,

en-suite).

DAY 12: Special event (speed boat) – GUINEA BISSAU

Vaca Bruto mask ceremony. If the date of the tour is concomitant to the Vaca Bruta mask, special event: morning relax or walk to visit the inland of Rubane Island and its small village.

After lunch we visit the largest village in the archipelago, Bubaque, the only one connected to the continent by a ferry once a week: unpaved alleys, a tiny colorful market, local bars and traders, and the tiny ethnographic museum dedicated to Bijagos culture. After the visit, we will reach an isolated village to experience the Vaca Bruta initiation mask ceremonies with large participation from the villagers.

Turtle's nesting. If the date of the tour is concomitant to the Turtle's Nesting, special event: visit of the largest village in the archipelago, Bubaque, the only one connected to the continent by a ferry once a week: unpaved alleys, a tiny colorful market, local bars, and traders and the tiny ethnographic museum dedicated to Bijagos culture, sail in the direction of the Southern Island, stop at Meio a pristine uninhabited island where our footprints on the sand will be the only human traces.

Arrival to Poilao uninhabited island, in the night, with high tide the turtles will emerge from the ocean, we must remain silent and don't use a direct flashlight that can scare the turtles....

Late-night return at our comfortable hotel.

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Hotel Ponta Anchaca or Lodge les Dauphins or similar (oceanfront comfortable bungalows,

en-suite).

Day to enjoy the archipelago way of life: relax at the wild beach, a walk to explore villages and luxuriant vegetation, excursion to the neighbor Soga Island.

Optional not included: day excursion to Orango Island to watch hippos (actual seeing the hippos is not quaranteed)

Meals B-L-D

Overnight Hotel Ponta Anchaca or Lodge les Dauphins or similar (oceanfront comfortable bungalows,

en-suite).

DAY 14: to Bissau, from Rubane to Bissau (speed boat) - GUINEA BISSAU

Arrival by speedboat in Bissau, the tiny capital of the country. A vehicle will be waiting for us for a brief tour of this tiny and intriguing capital.

We start walking by Bissau *Vehlo*, the old Portuguese quarter with an atmosphere reminding us of past Portuguese days and where we can experience the mix of African and Portuguese souls. In old wooden cafés, we can taste Portuguese wines and watch Portuguese news. We continue to the Presidential Palace, the Catholic Cathedral, Fortaleza Amura, Independence Monument, and Che Guevara Square to end in an openair bar known for the best mojito in town...

In the evening, transfer to the airport for the flight out.

Meals B – L

Day-use Rooms in day-use (air-conditioning, en-suite rooms).

TECHNICAL SHEET

- VISAS: Senegal not required for EU, USA, and Canada citizens (ask complete list). For other nationalities, a visa can be obtained at Dakar airport. If you apply for a visa upon arrival requires a double entry. Gambia: please, check; for most nationalities not needed or available at the border;
 Guinea Bissau single entry visa is required and obtainable during the tour (please advise if we have to arrange for it).
- **VACCINATIONS:** Yellow fever compulsory; malaria prophylaxis highly recommended; cholera not necessary at the moment but to be checked upon departure; covid vaccination card
- **MEALS:** lunch restaurants (pre-selected menus) or cold picnic; dinner at the hotel restaurant (pre-selected menus).
- **LUGGAGE**: please contain the weight in 20 kg (45 lb.) water-proof duffle bags are suggested, when on the speedboat, passengers may get splashed by water or foam, we advise to protecting any camera equipment. We suggest bringing mosquito repellent.
- **TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Not included. Mandatory for medical assistance, repatriation, material, and physical damages. We are not responsible for any material and physical damage during the tour
- **TRANSPORT:** on roads and tracks by Minibus or 4x4, speedboat fitted for ocean crossing to the Bijagos Archipelago.
- **TIDES and WEATHER:** With each departure, visits could be rescheduled as per the tides; all will be visited but maybe in a different order. Bad weather conditions can oblige to change, cancel, reschedule or delay the itinerary, the organizer cannot behold as responsible for any change and delay.
- ACCOMMODATIONS: Hotels and lodges are always chosen with maximum care, however due to possible lack of
 availability in some hotels, the Tour Leader may have to replace some hotels during the tour itself with others of
 similar standard. In some hotels, single rooms are not always granted.
- All our trips are designed to be flexible so that we can adapt to external conditions and take advantage of opportunities that arise once there.
- Considering the special nature of the journey, some parts may be modified due to unpredictable factors and are based on unarguable decisions of our Tour Leader. Costs originating from such variations will be the sole responsibility of the participants. Of course, the Leader will do his/her utmost to adhere to the original program.
- Prices could change in case of major changes in services costs, beyond the organizer's will.

RATES PER PERSON IN SHARING DOUBLE VALIDITY 2023

Tour is guaranteed from 2 bookings, if two first bookings occur at least 60 days prior departure.

Number of Participants	Published Rate
Based on 6+ guests	4 039 Euro
Based on 2 / 5 guests	4 539 Euro
Single supplement	518 Euro

The scheduled tour is sold by an international pool of tour operators. A departure can also be booked privately by a tour operator

Included:

- Assistance at Dakar airport upon arrival and Bissau airport upon departure.
- Transfers and tour in a great variety of different transports, each fitting the different geographical environment, allowing maximum interaction with the local peoples, comfort, and fun: minibuses /microbuses, 4WD vehicles, local calash (private use), local bush taxi called "taxi brousse" (private use), donkey chariot, speedboat fitted for ocean crossing to the Bijagos Archipelago.
- Tour Leader (languages spoken English, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese as available)
- Tours and visits as per the program.
- Accommodation in standard rooms/bungalows/permanent tents as per itinerary.
- All meals as described, from breakfast of day 2 to lunch of day 14.
- One bottle of Mineral water in the bus/car each day during the visits.
- Entrance fees to parks, concessions, protected areas, cultural sites, festivals, and events as in the program.
- First Aid box.
- All service charges and taxes.

Not included:

- International flights to Dakar and from Bissau
- Visa fees
- Covid tests if required
- Mineral water and drinks at restaurants and hotels
- Portage
- Fees for personal photos and videos
- Personal insurance (compulsory)
- Tips for drivers, guides, and hotel staff
- Any item of personal nature such as phone calls, laundry, etc.
- Whatever is not mentioned as included

PAYMENT POLICY

A deposit of 30% is required at the time of confirmation and the balance is due not less than 60 days before the arrival of guests at the destination.