
GUINEA BISSAU & BIJAGOS: THE SACRED ARCHIPELAGO

(Discovery)

9 DAYS / 8 NIGHTS

Scheduled departure dates from Bissau in 2019:

Feb. 8th (Vaca Bruto Mask dances),

Mar 1st (Carnival, special itinerary and special rate),

Apr. 19th (Vaca Bruto Mask dances),

Nov. 1st (Saltwater hippos & turtle nesting)

Dec. 27th (Saltwater hippos & turtle nesting, high season rate).

Be aware : day 1 is considered Feb 8th (arrival night 8th to 9th Feb) - The same for all tours

Each departure date is carefully chosen to coincide with an unique event

Minimum 2 – Maximum 16 participants

Any other date upon request

An amazing journey across an incredible variety of landscapes, colors and experiences:

Guinea Bissau, a still unknown country

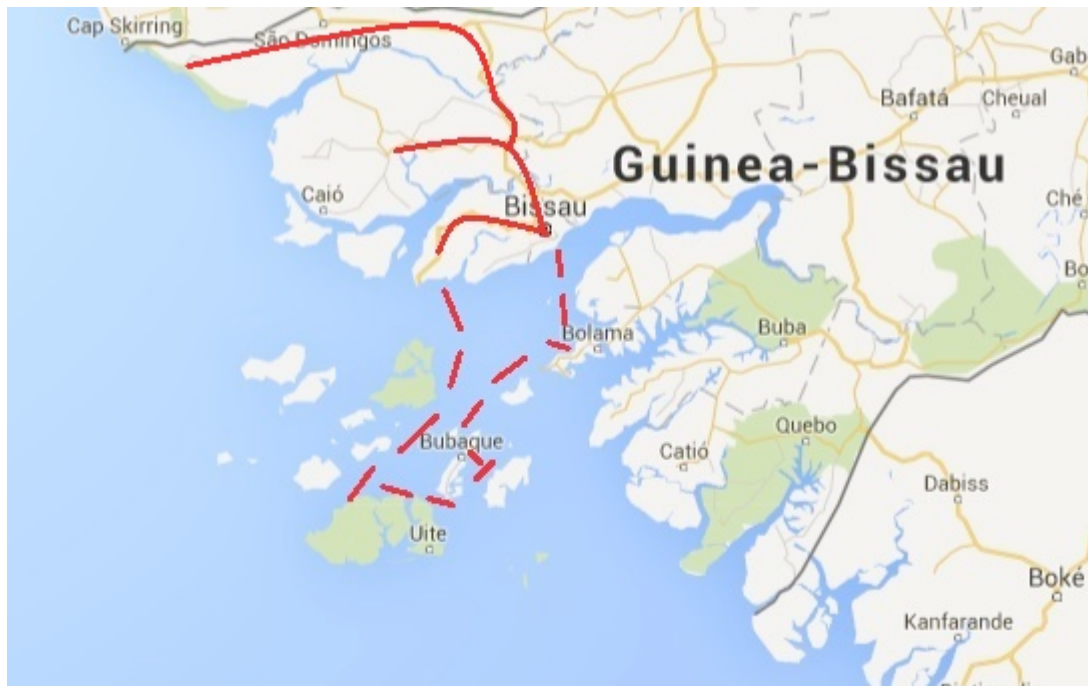
where borders between water and land change with each tide.

*The largest continuous mangrove forest, wild rivers, beaches and estuaries
hiding remote villages and animistic ceremonies.*

*A fantastic adventure taking us to pristine forests,
remote villages and the largest archipelago in Africa.*

*Most of the Bijagos islands have no permanent settlements
and are a real paradise for many bird species and rare fauna.*

*An exciting itinerary perfectly mixing natural
and cultural discoveries and including some relax time to enjoy
the blue ocean and wild beaches where our foot prints are the only tracks.
For travelers who look for something new and very special in Africa!*



Departure dates Nov 1st & Dec 27th coincide with following spectacular event:

Following the "uncertain border" between land and water, we move across spectacular natural environments such as deserts, mangrove swamps, forests, ocean and islands. By traveling from north to south we follow the route of migratory birds, a constant presence along the whole journey. Depending on the departure date, we may discover rare endemic fauna.

Salt Water Hippos - Orango Island (G.B.) is a National Park and among the many protected species there is a unique mammal: the spectacular "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!

Turtle Nesting - Poilao Island (G.B.) is an uninhabited site of great beauty. It is also considered the main nesting ground for the Green Sea Turtle (Chelonia Midas) in West Africa. After dark, on the silent beach, we await for the magic moment when a female emerges from the ocean and digs a deep hole where she then lays her eggs. With a bit of luck we will witness this natural wonder of nature and/or the hatching, when the tiny ones emerge from the sand to join the ocean and begin a long journey that will bring them back to this same beach after 30 years, when they reach sexual maturity.

Departure dates Feb 8th & Apr 19th coincide with following two great natural events:

Thanks to the remoteness of the destination, African tribal culture is still untouched. We will be introduced to animistic traditional religions, tribal kings, dancing masks and tribes who still worship their ancestors' statues.

Vaca bruto ceremonies. In Bijagos Islands life is still ruled by the "cycle of seasons" and during the long dry season, when 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. The mask represents a man in full possession

of his physical strength but with still an immature behavior since he has not yet undergone the final initiations. All the villagers attend this fascinating ceremony.

Departure date March 1st coincides with following spectacular event:

Carnival is the main festivity in **Guinea Bissau**.

Carnival is an incredible mix of African and Portuguese traditions. Carnival goes wild in the afternoon when along the main avenue, colorful masks from different areas and neighborhoods start their parade: sacred masks, fetish priests in traditional costumes, warriors dressed in a crocodile skin and armed with arrows, initiated girls wearing strings of glass beads around their waist and contemporary masks made of papier-mâché. Hours of lively parades turn this carnival into an unforgettable experience, a real "fiesta popular" combining Portuguese influence and tribal African soul.

ITINERARY:

DAY 1: Bissau, the capital – GUINEA BISSAU

Arrival in **Bissau** and transfer to the hotel.

Meals Own arrangements

Overnight Hotel Azalai or similar (all rooms en-suite and with air conditioning)

DAY 2: Cult for the ancestors



Full day dedicated to explore the region inhabited by the **Manjaco**. This ethnic group calls their traditions "Gendiman" and keeps them still very much alive. We visit tiny villages hidden in the forest to discover sculptured wooden poles called "Pecab" representing the spirits of their ancestors; they are kept in sanctuaries known as "Cab Balugun". With the permission of the elders, we will have the opportunity to admire sacred wooden sculptures varying in age and styles. It is indeed a unique opportunity to enjoy tribal art in its original cultural context: the village.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Casa Canchungo, simple eco hotel in Canchungo or Mar Azul in Quinhamel (all rooms en-suite and with fan)

Day 3: Villages of the flooded forest

An aluminum speed boat will take us along the wide **Cacheu River** to discover the abundant bird life: white Pelicans (weighing up to 10 Kg they are considered among the heaviest birds), Goliath herons (the largest ones), egrets, hammerkop, storks and pink flamingos. We then leave the main river to start an intriguing navigation through the flooded mangrove forest where it is only thanks to the experience of our local sailor that we manage to find our way through the complicated network of natural canals. After a few hours we reach some remote villages inhabited by **the Felupes and Baiotes**, both tribes part of the Diola ethnic group. They live in an isolated ecosystem where, thanks to their complex "tribal technology", they manage to desalinate the land and farm rice. We will walk in a unique landscape made up of streams, salt swamps, flat lands, clay dams and rice farms. In this remote environment,

some huge isolated Kapok and Baobab trees provide the shade to the tiny human settlements. Local people live in adobe huts built in a distinctive African architectural style: clay "buildings" supported by a complex structure of palm tree poles, surrounded by a shady veranda and covered with high wide thatched roofs, with garrets for aeration. The Felupes practice different ceremonies and the initiated groups include a powerful cast of female priestesses; rituals are generally announced by large sacred drums called "Bombolon".

In the afternoon we will assist to ritual dances of the **Kumpo** sacred mask; rarely shown to the foreigners, this mask belongs to a secret society and the identity of the dancers is not revealed, it is said that the mask is animated by the spirits. Drums, dances and a colourful crowd will enliven the tiny village in the shade of large kapok trees.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Casa Hélène, simple in Varela (all rooms en-suite)

DAY 4: Magical villages

Visit of a traditional healer specialized in the treatment of bone injuries. He will show us the herbals and traditional medicaments, and explain us his way of proceeding and how he became a "healer".

Visit of an old style local rum distillery (Cana) dating back to the old colonial days and walk across a cashew nuts plantation, the main export product of the country.

Interesting afternoon spent discovering the magical and animistic traditions of the intriguing **Pepel** people. In this region the forest hides a fetish endowed with feared powers: only the initiated young men can carry it on their shoulders...

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Mar Azul or similar (all rooms en-suite and with fan)

DAY 5: The Bijagos Archipelago

In the morning departure by speedboat for a five-day journey in the Bijagos Archipelago to discover remote islands and isolated human settlements.

The Bijagos Archipelago is located approximately 40 miles off-shore 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: 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.

The colors of **Orango Island** will simply fascinate us: the green vegetation, the white sand beaches, the brown rocks and the blue ocean.

The itinerary will be slightly modified in order to participate to the "Vaca Bruto" mask dances. Ask for the specific program.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Orango Parque Hotel or similar (sea front bungalows en-suite and with fan)

Orango Parque Hotel is an eco-lodge managed by the local community and an environmentalist organization; profits are used to support the conservation of the unique environment and the local village.

DAY 6: Secret islands

Day dedicated to the discovery of small islands and untouched villages where the arrival of a foreigner is a rare event. We leave our boat "parked" on the beach and follow paths across the islands vegetation. In Bijagos, villages have always been hidden inside the islands; they were never built near the sea line in order to be protected from tribal wars and slave hunters.

The itinerary will be slightly modified in order to look for the rare salt water hippos and possibly witness turtles nesting. Please ask for the specific program.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Orango Parque Hotel or similar

DAY 7: Matriarcal tribes



In Bijagos tribal culture women have an important role, it is in fact a semi-matriarcal society and often the supreme ruler has been a woman. A 40' walk will take us to the sacred village of **Okinka Pampa**, hosting the graves of the Queens. Return to the hotel for lunch and in the afternoon departure by fast boat to our very comfortable hotel on the beach in **Rubane Island**.

The itinerary will be slightly modified in order to look for the rare salt water hippos and possibly witness turtles nesting. Please ask for the specific program.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Ponta Anchaca or Fishing Club (ocean front comfortable bungalows en-suite and with air conditioning).

DAY 8: Island life

Boat excursion to Bubaque, passing by **Soga Bay**. Visit of **Bubaque**, the largest village in the archipelago and the only one connected to the continent by a ferry once a week: unpaved alleys, a tiny colorful market, local bars and traders; quite interesting also the ethnographic museum dedicated to the Bijagos culture.

Return to our comfortable base in Rubane Island and time to relax on the beach or to discover the lush vegetation and villages of **Rubane Island**. On request fishing can be organized, Bijagos islands are a fisherman's paradise.

Meals B – L - D

Overnight Hotel Ponta Anchaca or Fishing Club

DAY 9: from the ghost capital to Bissau

Departure to **Bolama Island**, the former capital of Portuguese Guinea from 1871 to 1941, before it was moved to Bissau. 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 charming administrative buildings in neo Palladian style. In the Governor's Palace we can still admire columns in the classic style ... where now goats graze! Bolama, although inhabited, is plunged in the fairy-tale atmosphere of a ghost town.

In the afternoon, arrival by speedboat in **Bissau**, the actual capital of the country. Here a vehicle will be waiting for us and take us on a brief tour of this tiny and intriguing capital.

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

Meals B – L

Day-use Rooms in day-use till 18.00 hrs in a comfortable hotel (all rooms en-suite and with air conditioning)

Recommended Extension:



At the end of this intense journey, we can recommend a few extra days in the Bijagos Archipelago. On request, we can arrange for some extra days in Ponta Anchaca Hotel on Rubane Island, in a comfortable ocean-front bungalow enjoying fine French and tropical cuisine. At the hotel you can relax at the pool, go for walks on the wild beach, discover the island lush vegetation or do some sport fishing - all in the natural paradise of The Bijagos Archipelago. **Bijagos Archipelago is known for top game fishing.**

Technical sheet

- **VISAS:** single entry visa required and obtainable upon arrival in Bissau airport (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
- **MEALS:** lunch, picnic or at local restaurants (tourist menus); dinner at the hotel restaurant (tourist menu)
- **LUGGAGE:** max 20 kg and in duffle bags, best if waterproof; when on the speedboat, passengers may get splashed by water or foam, we advise to protect any camera equipment.
- **TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Not included. Mandatory for medical assistance, repatriation, material and physical damages.
- **MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION:** on roads and tracks by Minibus or 4x4, speed boat on Cacheu River and speedboat fitted for ocean crossing to the Bijagos Archipelago.
- **TIDES:** with each departure, visits could be re-scheduled as per the tides; all will be visited but maybe in a different order.
- **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. One hotel we use only has 8 rooms.
- All our trips are designed to be flexible so that we can adapt to weather conditions, focus on the group's interests and take advantage of opportunities that arise once there. Meteorological condition can change or cancel some navigations
- Considering the special nature of the journey, some parts may be modified due to unpredictable factors and are based on unarguable decisions of the local guide. Costs originating from such variations will be sole responsibility of the participants. Of course, the guide 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