

The Ultimate Trans-Sahara & Black Africa Expedition

From Morocco to Guinea Bissau

An incredible journey across unique ever-changing landscapes and eco-systems to encounter the main natural, cultural and religious “milieu” of the African continent. From the desert to the savannah and on to the forest.

CULTURE - from camel herders to fishermen, from legendary Sahrawi nomads to isolated Berber villages, from sacred forests with traditional animistic religions and tribal kings to a cosmopolitan metropolis like Dakar.

HISTORY - encounters with “timeless” people and visits of historical sites such as Marrakesh, Dakhla, Chinguetti, Saint Louis, Dakar, Goré and Bolama.

NATURE - along the “uncertain border” between water and land, we follow the migratory route of birds, visit two of the richest bird sanctuaries of West Africa and admire an astonishing range of plant species .

An adventurous expedition resulting from many years of research on the field.

A journey for “real explorers”

A presentation by S.Saporetti with texts from TransAfrica and photos by B.Zanzottera, C.Zanzottera, S. Saporetti,

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Morocco and its less travelled paths (Days 1 to 12)



Marrakesh, the traditional terminus of caravans from Black Africa is undoubtedly the perfect starting point of our expedition. Right from the start the main road is abandoned in favor of minor tracks, first across the **High Atlas Range, Djebel Sarhro**, the **Dra River** bed and estuary, the **Sahara Desert**, and then along vanishing trails on the **Atlantic Ocean beaches**. Every day is filled with very special visits and encounters: less known Berber villages, beautiful adobe Ksars, modern-day cave dwellers, spectacular mountains and valleys, ancient rock art sites, dry salt lakes, wadi and canyons, high sand dunes and cliffs, lagoons and of course oases. When we reach the ghost military fort on the border with former “Spanish Sahara” we surely think we have just arrived on the set of an old French foreign legion movie!





Free to find our way, we discover remote havens, nomadic tented settlements and some of the most scenic landscapes ...





Naila Lagoon, separated from the ocean by a few chains of sand dunes, is the largest salt lake in Morocco. Protected Area of great natural beauty, it is an important stop-over on the birds' migratory route and in certain periods it can host up to 20.000 birds such as flamingos, cormorants, gulls and herons. Aboard a local fisherman boat we explore this emerald "lake", approximately 100 km away from The Canary Islands



For a few days, led by our Saharawi guide along a very special track, we explore **Western Sahara**, the former Spanish Sahara







The exceptional beauty of the environment makes **the Dakhla Peninsula** a truly special setting. Rio de Oro (Golden River) is a 25-mile long sea loch situated between cliffs and dunes. Different colors “paint” the scenery: the intense blue of the ocean, the bright white of the sand banks, the deep green of the seaweed fields and the powerful yellow of the dunes. The small town of Dakhla, ancient capital of Rio de Oro, was set up by Spanish navigators back in 1502 and was called “Villa Cisneros.”

Mauritania, pure Sahara exploration combined with the visit of historic jewels (Days 13 to 19)



A signboard indicates that we are crossing the **Tropic of Cancer**. A remote route taken only by rare travelers going from Maghreb to Black Africa. Between the two physical borders a “no-man’s land” where some smugglers have created their operating base inside abandoned cars and trucks. A theoretical line dividing “nothing from nothing”. We cut our own unmarked path across **Inchiri**, one of the least known regions - the earth before “the time of man”. Some of the most scenic panoramas in the country.



*Thanks to the experience of our staff and the expertise of our local guide, we start “playing” in our beloved **Sahara**: we get across long ranges of sand dunes, we run along the corridors between linear dunes, we find traces of antique human presence, we encounter rare isolated nomadic settlements ... we breathe the beauty of endless space!*

The **oasis of Chinguetti**, dating back to the XIII century, was a major center on the Trans-Saharan caravan routes and a very prestigious religious seat - five are the notable collections of ancient manuscripts that can still be viewed. The old stone town is partially inhabited, the Ksar is a remarkable example of Arab-Berber architecture and the whole oasis offers a magical atmosphere.





Senegal, from northern savannah to southern sacred forests (Days 20 to 25)



The natural border between Mauritania and Senegal is the Senegal River and we cross it on a mobile bridge. The **Djoudj National Park**, a “humid paradise” on the southeast bank of the river itself, is an isolated region between desert and savannah - the best habitat and nesting site for over one million migratory and sedentary birds. Continuation to **Saint Louis**, the charming former capital of French West Africa. Overnight at the historic hotel (1850) which hosted the pilots of the “Aeropostale” (pioneer airmail service), including Saint Exupéry, the famous author of “The Little Prince”. Spectacular excursion to the **largest fisherman village** in the country where more than 4500 wooden pirogues come to the shore with their catch of the day.







The African metropolis of **Dakar** became a prominent center of political, intellectual and artistic “renouveau” at the time of independence. The “**Village des Arts**” is made up by more than fifty “ateliers” where all the disciplines of the visual arts are represented (painting, sculpture, ceramics, photography, video, installation, etc.). Without a doubt, it is the place to go to for encountering the best artists and the young talents of the Senegalese vibrant artistic scene.





Waking up in **Goré** and strolling in its tiny stone paved alleys before the crowd arrives is a real treat. This historical settlement has been restored to bear witness of those ancient sad times when slaves used to be crammed here then shipped to the Americas. Thanks to the nice breeze, the ancient architecture, the many restaurants and shops, Goré today is a very pleasant location.

We travel across **The Gambia** and arrive in **Casamance**, the southern region of Senegal. Following an isolated path, we reach a tiny village and .. masks leave the sacred forest and come to dance for an enthusiastic local crowd. Masks are part of the animistic **Diola culture**, they are feared and respected, they are spirits who play an important role in solving conflicts between villagers.

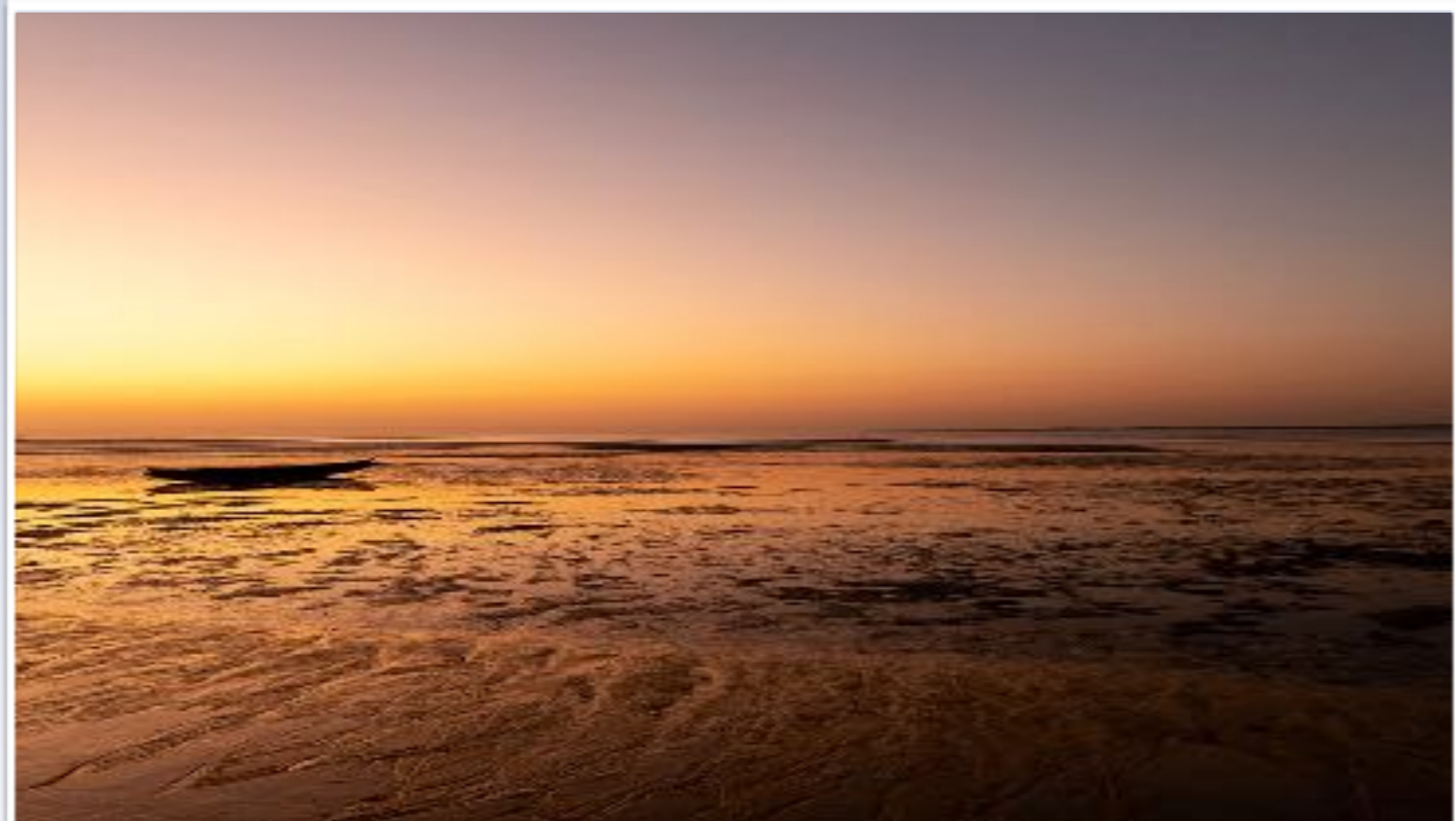




Guinea Bissau and the remote Bijagos Archipelago (Days 26 to 29)



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. Thanks to its wild and pristine landscapes, its unique fauna and its genuine tribal culture, Bijagos is a “geographical jewel”. **Poilao Island** is the main nesting site for Green Sea Turtles in West Africa. **Orango Island** is known for the presence of “saltwater” hippos, they move around the island in search of ponds and often “go for a swim” in the ocean!





In Bijagos, life is still ruled by the “cycle of seasons” and the long dry season is when the main ceremonies take place. The most spectacular mask is called **Vaca Bruto** (wild bull). It stands for a young 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.





Bolama Island was the capital of Portuguese Guinea from 1871 to 1941 before it was moved to Bissau. When the Portuguese left, native people moved in, “occupying” most of the abandoned buildings. Although inhabited, today the historic center is falling apart and is partially invaded by tropical vegetation. Nobody nevertheless can remain indifferent to the unique charm and lethargic atmosphere of this ghost-town built following the plans of a “Castrum Romanum”: wide avenues, empty squares, dried-up fountains, bush-like gardens, open fences leading to once upon a time rich private patios, and administrative buildings with columns in neo Palladian style!



Accommodation & Transportation

We are very much aware that *COMFORT* is an important component of a travel experience, even more so when it is a long and adventurous journey ...

We mainly use modern and comfortable **air-con 4x4 vehicles** (Toyota Land-Cruisers or similar), however we shall also experience special local means of transportation such as a bush taxi, a donkey chariot, local fishing boats and speedboats. Most overnights are in **hotels and comfortable permanent**

tented camps, chosen for their style, good restaurant, friendly service and scenic locations. Four nights out of twenty-nine (while in the Sahara), will be in **mobile tented camps** - “sleeping under the stars” is indeed a must when in the desert

but no worries, we provide it all! The main condition for our tours is safety therefore we wish to emphasize that this expedition is based on our great knowledge and familiarity with the area, a satellite phone is always carried along and one of our best tour managers leads the trip. We regularly monitor the destination and we are in constant touch with our trusted local “connections”.



The Ultimate Trans-Sahara & Black Africa Expedition 2019 & 2020

**From Morocco to the Bijagos Islands via Western Sahara, Mauritania,
Senegal (including Casamance), The Gambia and Guinea Bissau**



DATES 2019:

Nov. 15th, 2019 starting of the tour in Marrakesh -
Dec. 13th, 2019 ending of the tour in Bissau

DATES 2020:

Apr. 4th, 2020 starting of the tour in Bissau -
May 2nd, 2020 ending of the tour in Marrakesh

Nov. 13th, 2020 starting of the tour in Marrakesh
- Dec. 11th, 2020 ending of the tour in Bissau