

AFRICA · BEACHES · WILDLIFE · HISTORY · CULTURE



Gambia

Mainland Africa's smallest country is a thin strip either side of the River Gambia, around six hours' flight from London and on GMT. Most visitors come for Atlantic beaches and birding, with more than 500 species recorded, but the river leads inland to Kunta Kinteh Island's slave-trade history, chimpanzee islands and ancient stone circles.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Gambia and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 7 July 2026.

 CAPITAL Banjul	 CURRENCY Gambian dalasi (GMD) £1 ≈ GMD 99.74	 LANGUAGE English, Mandinka Wolof, Fula	 BEST TIME Nov–May
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£160 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type G 230V · UK plugs fit	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 6h 20m direct ~£350–£700 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+0 standard time

The Gambia follows its river inland for more than 300 kilometres, never more than about 50 kilometres wide and surrounded on three sides by Senegal. That shape decides the trip: most visitors base themselves on the short Atlantic coast between Bakau and Kartong, where hotels, fishing beaches and bird reserves sit close together, then take a trip upriver. Short excursions reach Abuko, Tanji and Makasutu; longer ones head to Kunta Kinteh Island, the old colonial town of Janjanbureh, the stone circles at Wassu and the chimpanzee islands of River Gambia National Park.

Winter sun is the big draw for British visitors: dry, warm days from November to May, a direct flight and no time difference in winter. Package hotels around Kololi and Kotu keep things easy, but independent travel is straightforward and good value, with eco-lodges and simple camps upriver. Birdwatchers arrive with long lists and leave with longer ones. What surprises people is how relaxed the pace is, and how persistent some beach hustlers, known as bumsters, can be; a firm, friendly no usually works.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

HISTORY

Kunta Kinteh Island

A tiny UNESCO-listed island in the river where enslaved Africans were held before shipment across the Atlantic. Combine it with the museum at Albreda and the village of Juffureh, made famous by Alex Haley's 'Roots'.
- 2

WILDLIFE

Abuko Nature Reserve

The country's oldest reserve squeezes gallery forest, a crocodile pool and bird hides into a small area about 20 minutes from the coast, with monkeys, monitor lizards and a good chance of turacos and kingfishers.

3

WILDLIFE

River Gambia National Park

Five river islands near Kuntaur where rehabilitated chimpanzees live free; visitors watch from boats, never landing, alongside hippos and river birds. Most trips stay at lodges around Janjanbureh or Kuntaur.

4

HISTORY

Wassu Stone Circles

Part of the UNESCO-listed Senegambian stone circles, the laterite pillars at Wassu were raised over burials many centuries ago. A small museum on site explains what little is known about the people who built them.

5

CULTURE

Tanji fishing beach

Every afternoon the brightly painted pirogues of Tanji land their catch on the sand, where women haggle, fish is gutted and smoked in long sheds, and the smell carries a long way. Go late afternoon for the busiest scenes.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Serekunda

≈ 380,000 people

The Kanifing urban sprawl of markets and taxi ranks behind the resort strip; Serekunda market is chaotic and fascinating, and the area takes in Bakau's sacred Kachikally crocodile pool.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Brikama

≈ 81,000 people

A busy inland market town known for its woodcarvers' market and kora-playing griot families, easily combined with a visit to nearby Makasutu Culture Forest.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Banjul

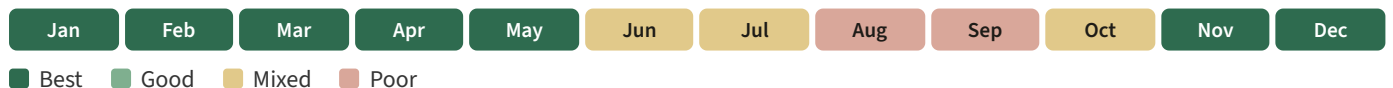
≈ 31,000 people

The small capital on St Mary's Island at the river mouth: Albert Market, the National Museum, Arch 22 and the ferry to Barra make a half-day trip from the coast.

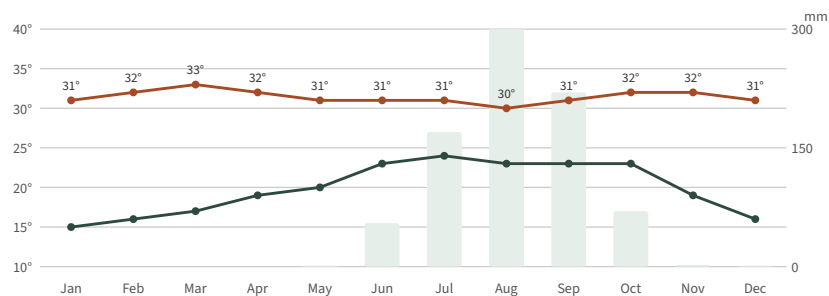
Serekunda's figure is the 2013 census total for Kanifing municipality, which includes Bakau; Brikama and Banjul are 2013 town figures. Sukuta (about 47,000) is larger than Banjul but merges into the Serekunda sprawl.

When to go to Gambia

Best time: **Nov–May**.

**Average climate in Banjul**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb	Kartong Festival A small, friendly festival of music, dance and culture in the southern fishing village of Kartong, with drumming, kora, wrestling and local food, usually held in February; confirm dates before booking.
Mar	Koriteh The end of Ramadan is one of the country's biggest celebrations, with new clothes, family feasts and visits to relatives; many businesses close for a day or two.
May	Tobaski Eid al-Adha, known here as Tobaski, sees families slaughter a ram and dress in their finest clothes; transport is packed in the days beforehand as people head home.

How much does Gambia cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ GMD 2,992 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £75 per person / day ≈ GMD 7,480 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £160 per person / day ≈ GMD 15,958 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Domoda The national dish: a rich groundnut stew with beef, chicken or fish, tomato and vegetables, served over a mound of rice.	Benachin One-pot rice cooked in a spiced tomato sauce with fish or meat and vegetables, a cousin of jollof rice whose name means 'one pot' in Wolof.	Yassa Chicken or fish marinated in lime juice, mustard and plenty of onions, then grilled and simmered into a sharp, sweet sauce.
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Getting around

Green tourist taxis wait outside hotels at fixed, higher fares; yellow-and-green town taxis and shared minibuses (gele-geles) are far cheaper. Upriver, most visitors join an organised trip or hire a car and driver, using the main south-bank road. The Banjul–Barra ferry is slow and crowded, while the Senegambia Bridge at Farafenni is the reliable river crossing. There are no ride-hailing apps worth relying on.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  G 230V — UK plugs fit	EMERGENCY NUMBERS There is no equivalent to the UK’s 999 emergency number in The Gambia. Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +220	TIME ZONE UTC+0 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Leave around 10% in restaurants if service isn't added; tip guides, drivers and boat crews, and carry small notes, as change is often short.

ETIQUETTE

Greetings matter: ask how someone is before getting down to business. Dress modestly away from the beach, use your right hand for eating and giving, and ask before taking photos.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Banjul International Airport (BJL), Banjul

Visas & entry for Gambia

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You do not need a visa to visit The Gambia. You'll get a stamp in your passport that allows you to stay for 28 days when you arrive.

You can get 2 extensions of 28 days from the Immigration Office in Banjul or the tourist police stations in the Tourism Development Area.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus Typhoid Yellow fever

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya Dengue Hepatitis B Measles Meningococcal disease Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK. There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Gambia: antimalarial tablets recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Gambia

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Sat 26 Dec 2026	Boxing Day
Mon 28 Dec 2026	Boxing Day (observed)
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Thu 18 Feb 2027	Independence Day
Sat 6 Mar 2027	Laylat al-Qadr (date may shift)
Mon 8 Mar 2027	Laylat al-Qadr (observed, estimated) (date may shift)
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Mon 3 May 2027	Labour Day (observed)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 25 May 2027	Africa Liberation Day
Tue 15 Jun 2027	Ashura (date may shift)
Thu 22 Jul 2027	July 22 Revolution Day
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Assumption Day
Mon 16 Aug 2027	Assumption Day (observed) · Prophet's Birthday (observed, estimated) (date may shift)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Wolof

ENGLISH	WOLOF	SAY IT
Hello	Salaam aleekum	<i>sa-LAAM a-LAY-koom</i>
Thank you	Jërëjëf	<i>JEH-reh-jef</i>
Please	Su la neexee	<i>soo la NEH-kheh</i>
Excuse me	Baal ma	<i>BAAL ma</i>
How much is this?	Lii ñaata la?	<i>lee NYAA-ta la</i>

Know before you go

Bring sterling or euros in cash as a back-up: ATMs are concentrated on the coast and in larger towns, and Visa cards tend to work more widely than Mastercard.

Bumsters may offer to guide or befriend you on the beach; a polite, firm 'no thank you' is usually enough, and official guides carry ID badges.

Malaria is present year-round, so see a travel clinic about antimalarials, and use repellent and nets, especially during and just after the rainy season.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.