

AFRICA · ISLANDS · WILDLIFE · BEACHES · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · CULTURE



Guinea-Bissau

The Bijagós Archipelago, 88 islands and islets inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2025, is why most travellers come: hippos that wade through salt water on Orango, nesting turtles and empty beaches. Closer to the capital, Bissau Velho's crumbling Portuguese streets and the faded colonial capital on Bolama reward anyone happy to travel slowly.



Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Guinea-Bissau and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 10 December 2025.

 CAPITAL Bissau	 CURRENCY West African CFA franc (XOF) £1 ≈ FCFA 781	 LANGUAGE Guinea-Bissau Creole (Kriol), Portuguese Fula, Balanta	 BEST TIME Dec–Apr
 DAILY BUDGET £35–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 11h via Lisbon or Casablanca ~£650–£1,050 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+0 standard time

Guinea-Bissau is one of West Africa's least-visited countries, a small, low-lying land of mangrove creeks, cashew orchards and rice paddies. Almost every trip centres on the Bijagós, an archipelago of 88 islands where matrilineal animist traditions survive and some islands are sacred and off-limits. Bubaque, reached by ferry or speedboat from Bissau, is the usual hub, with lodges on neighbouring Rubane and remote Orango. On the mainland, a week might add Bissau's old quarter, Cacheu's slave-trade fort and mangroves, the beach at Varela and the forests of Cantanhez in the south, home to chimpanzees.

Travel here is slow, unpredictable and rewarding. Roads beyond the main highways are rough, boat transfers depend on tides, and outside Bissau there are few cash machines, so plan with slack built in. Costs are higher than you might expect: island lodges with boat transfers are not cheap, though local guesthouses and food are. You will meet few other tourists apart from sport fishermen, and Portuguese or French goes much further than English. The country suits self-reliant travellers and wildlife enthusiasts; what surprises most is the warmth of the welcome and how intact the islands' culture and ecosystems remain.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

NATURE

Bijagós Archipelago

An archipelago of 88 islands and islets, a UNESCO biosphere reserve since 1996 and a World Heritage Site since 2025, with mangroves, palm-fringed beaches and villages that keep Bijagó traditions. Bubaque is the hub, with simple lodges and boats to other islands.
- 2

WILDLIFE

Orango Islands National Park

Orango's lagoons shelter rare hippos that move through salt water, best seen on guided walks to Anor lagoon from the village of Eticoga. The park also holds the tomb of Bijagó queen Okinka Pampa and some of the archipelago's most traditional villages.

3

ARCHITECTURE

Bolama

Portuguese Guinea's capital until 1941, this island town is a ghostly grid of colonnaded colonial buildings slowly being reclaimed by trees. Boats run from Bissau; wander the empty squares, the old governor's palace and the beaches beyond.

4

HISTORY

Cacheu

One of the earliest Portuguese trading posts in West Africa, Cacheu was a centre of the Atlantic slave trade. Visit the small fort, where toppled colonial statues now stand, and the slavery memorial, then take a boat into the Cacheu River mangroves.

5

WILDLIFE

Cantanhez National Park

Patches of dense forest in the far south shelter western chimpanzees, red colobus monkeys and a wealth of birds. Community guides from villages such as Iemberém lead early-morning tracking walks; sightings are never guaranteed.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Bissau

≈ 500,000 people

The capital's Bissau Velho quarter of faded Portuguese buildings, the sprawling Bandim market and bars playing gumbé music make it worth a day or two before heading to the islands.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Gabú

≈ 50,000 people

The east's main trading town, on the road to Guinea and Senegal, is a largely Fula and Muslim hub of markets and transport — a practical stopover rather than a destination.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Bafatá

≈ 40,000 people

A quiet river town on the Geba with a decaying colonial centre; it was the birthplace of independence leader Amílcar Cabral and makes a pleasant break on the road east.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Guinea-Bissau

Best time: **Dec–Apr**.

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

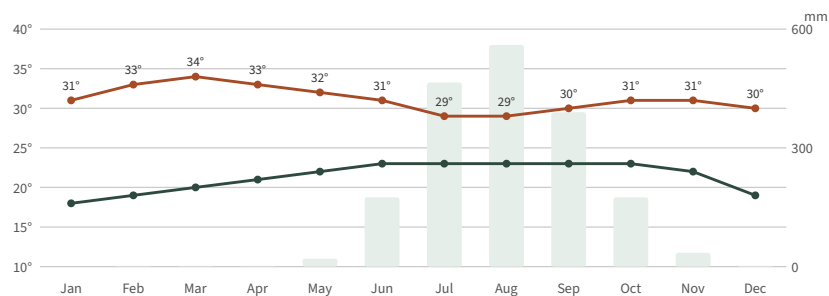
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Bissau

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Carnaval Bissau's pre-Lent carnival is the biggest party of the year, as groups from across the country parade with music, dance and elaborate masks, including the Bijagós' horned bull masks.
Sep	Independence Day On 24 September Bissau marks the 1973 declaration of independence with parades and music; it falls in the rainy season, when many island lodges are closed.

How much does Guinea-Bissau cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ FCFA 27,328 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £80 per person / day ≈ FCFA 62,465 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £170 per person / day ≈ FCFA 132,737 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

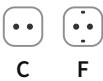
Caldo de chabéu Fish or chicken simmered in a rich orange sauce of palm-nut pulp and served over rice — the country's best-known dish and a celebration favourite.	Caldo de mancarra A thick stew of chicken or fish in ground-peanut sauce, eaten with rice and a staple across the mainland; mancarra is Kriol for peanut.	Cafriela Chicken or fish marinated in lime, onion and chilli, then grilled over charcoal; served with rice or chips in Bissau's restaurants and street grills.
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Getting around

Shared minibuses and bush taxis link Bissau with Bafatá, Gabú, Cacheu and the south, leaving when full; roads deteriorate badly in the rainy season. In Bissau, cheap shared taxis and toca-toca minibuses ply the main roads. For the Bijagós, an infrequent public ferry runs to Bubaque, while lodges arrange faster speedboat transfers. There are no trains or scheduled domestic flights, and no ride-hailing apps.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter

DIALLING CODE

+245

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **1313**

Fire: **1313**

Police: **117**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONE

UTC+0 (standard time)

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Not expected in local eateries; round up taxi fares, and tip guides, boatmen and lodge staff a few thousand CFA francs for good service.

ETIQUETTE

Greetings matter: take time over hellos before getting to business. Ask before photographing people or ceremonies, dress modestly in Muslim areas of the east, and follow guides' advice on sacred Bijagós sites.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Osvaldo Vieira International Airport (OXB), Bissau

Visas & entry for Guinea-Bissau

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to visit Guinea-Bissau.

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 vaccination certificate is required for all travellers (usually over 9 months or 1 year old). 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 Guinea-Bissau: 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 Guinea-Bissau

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
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Wed 20 Jan 2027	National Heroes' Day
Sat 23 Jan 2027	Day of the Beginning of the Armed Struggle

Mon 8 Mar 2027	International Women's Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sun 28 Mar 2027	Easter Sunday
Sat 1 May 2027	Worker's Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 3 Aug 2027	Pidjiguiti Day
Fri 24 Sep 2027	Independence Day

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

Useful phrases in Portuguese

ENGLISH	PORTUGUESE	SAY IT
Hello	Olá	<i>oh-LAH</i>
Thank you	Obrigado	<i>oh-bree-GAH-doo</i>
Please	Por favor	<i>poor fah-VOR</i>
Excuse me	Com licença	<i>kong lee-SEN-sah</i>
How much is this?	Quanto custa?	<i>KWAN-too KOOS-tah?</i>

Know before you go

Bring euros in cash to change into CFA francs. Cash machines in Bissau are few and do not always accept foreign cards, and there are none on most islands.

Boat transfers to the Bijagós depend on tides and weather, so leave a spare day before your flight home, and check the FCDO travel advice before booking.

Malaria is present year-round; take prophylaxis and repellent, and check vaccination requirements, including yellow fever, with a travel clinic well before departure.

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.