

**GAMBIA...** Copyright Geof Prigge  
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Most countries with coastal regions throughout the world offer something special. Gambia's smiling coast is no exception. The people are amongst the friendliest in the world. Located on the West African coast, The Gambia is almost entirely surrounded by French speaking Senegal, except for the coastal region. Gambia's official language though is English, the country being a former British colony. The country gained independence on February 18 1965.

Historically The Gambia consisted of many tribes. Tribal people belonging to the Serer, Serahule, Jola, Fula, Mandinka and Wolof language groupings could be found throughout what we now call The Gambia at various periods during pre-colonial times. Some of these language groups had kings who established different states on the north and south banks of the river. Prior to the establishment of a British colony, the various kings were approached by representatives of England for permission to settle. The British merchants provided spices, rum, iron, tobacco, guns, gunpowder, corals, etc. in exchange for elephant tusks, bees wax, hides, timber, bullock horns and gold. It was a mutually beneficial trade, a sort of treaty between the acting Governor and the king of Kantalikunda in which it was understood between the people of England and the people of Kantalikunda that they trade together innocently, justly, kindly and usefully.

This was a subtle stepping stone to eventual colonialism. The year was 1816. By 1823, the next stage was reached. An allotment was granted on MacCarthy Island by the King of Lower Niani, and in 1826 and 1829 further allotments were granted in the Niimi and Fatatenda areas. The Imperial Act of 1843 was established to enable the British monarch to set up a government to govern the settlements. These settlements were to serve as the springboard to take full control of The Gambia.

Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century wars were waged for long periods between various groups and when most of the strong states had been devastated, the administrator of the British settlements established a law in 1894 called **Protectorate Ordinance** to prepare the ground for complete colonial domination. Colonialism was opposed to democracy. It stood for subjugation. Years of such suppression followed, but in 1920, change was on the horizon toward self-determination. The pioneer of this struggle was Edward Francis Small. He realised that organisation and enlightenment are the tools of national liberation. It took ten years of discussions, fights and strikes before bearing fruit, but in 1930, the first representative institution was established called the Bathurst Urban District Council and Board of Health.

During the 1940's, calls for changes to the political system were either dismissed or totally rejected. In the 1950's however, political parties emerged. Between

1951 and 1954 the Democratic Party led by J.C. Faye, The Muslim Congress led by Ibrahima Garba Jahumpa and United Party led by P. S. Njie were formed.

The movement towards independence could not be stopped. The **Protectorate People's Party** was formed in 1959. In 1963 Internal Self Government was introduced. Gambia then had a Prime Minister. The Crown still retained the Sovereign power to determine the external relations of the country. By 1964, a Constitutional Conference was called and in 1965 the independence constitution came into being.

### ***The Gambia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century...***

Today, the country is one of the more peaceful on the continent of Africa. The phrase 'smiling coast' says it all. The total land area of The Gambia is only 11,295 sq km. Within the country, whose coastline incidentally is only 45 kilometres in length are a few tiny gems, little locations with a lot to offer. Some are upriver, but the majority of these highlights are along the coast.

Once you leave the hectic capital of Banjul, your choices are varied. Up river you'll discover hippos, crocodiles, chimpanzees on Baboon Island, and also the fascinating circles of standing stones around Wassau which have been identified as burial grounds more than 1200 years old. Upriver too are areas of beautiful gallery forest along the banks of the river itself. Getting to these more remote regions by road is a bit of an arduous journey, the roads being of poor quality, but going by boat allows you to relax and do the voyage slowly.

If you venture inland to the town of Brikama you'll come into contact with a more legitimate Gambian experience, the highlight of which is the bustling marketplace. The place here to stay is Hotel Nematulie where you'll find twenty small cottages situated in a garden of orange trees. Your host will be the chief of Brikama, Alhadyi Bakari Dembo Santang Bojung, a delightful well travelled man who, together with his family, will really look after you. The hotel's phone number is 9927828 and it's located on Kabba Badjo Road, a five minute walk from the market.

It's the coast though where you'll find the real gems of the country. Away from the 5 star resorts around Bakau and Senegambia, you'll discover partly hidden bays and coves where everything is fresh - the ocean breeze, the pineapple, pawpaw and of course the many varieties of fish.

One such place is Tanji. There are a number of places to stay in the town itself, but the pick of them is the Tanji Museum just outside town. Traditional huts are sprinkled throughout the garden beyond a fascinating museum run by Bayo Abdoulie, the former curator of the National Museum of Gambia where he worked for 19 years before taking an early retirement in 1997 to fulfil his dream of setting up his own museum. Complete with a botanic garden and a museum of

natural history and arts & crafts of The Gambia, he also built a conference centre and six huts to accommodate guests. More are planned for the future. As well there is a restaurant specialising in local Gambian food. From its top floor, there is a view of the ocean. The cooling sea breeze is welcome on a hot day. Museum entrance fees are 100 dalasis per person and if in a group, the price is reduced to 50. Beds are 250 dalasis per person and include a simple breakfast. Tel: 220-371007 or 220-926618.

Nearby Paradise Beach is the closest swimming area, a short twenty minute walk through the fields. At the beach there are several craft shops and small restaurants with shaded beach beds.

Another of the gems of this West African paradise is the fishing village of Gunjur, where the highlight is the regular possibility of body-surfing the small waves. This is the biggest fishing village on the coast and there are 363 registered fishing vessels here.

The place to stay is the spacious and friendly Gunjur Beach Lodge. The restaurant serves exceptional meals inside, outside in the tropical garden or even the few metres distance at the beach. Rooms are large, open and airy...and all have private bathrooms and shaded porches. Tours of the local crocodile farm, snake farm and villages can be arranged through any of the friendly staff. Rooms start at 450 dalasis per night, and this includes a tasty breakfast. Camping under the trees is also possible in this tropical paradise and the cost is 100 dalasis per person, but does not include breakfast.

Tel: 220-448 6065 and email: [gunjur@gambianet.gm](mailto:gunjur@gambianet.gm)

A little further south is the Lemonfish Art Gallery. Wonderful examples of African art are on sale, and the gallery also boasts a guesthouse. It's located in the village of Kartong and the phone number is 220-439 4586, mobile 9922884  
Email: [lemonfish@web.de](mailto:lemonfish@web.de) and their website is [www.lemonfish.gm](http://www.lemonfish.gm)

Wherever you plan to stay though, The Gambia offers a truly rewarding holiday experience, one which will probably have you returning to the country and its smiling coast more than once.