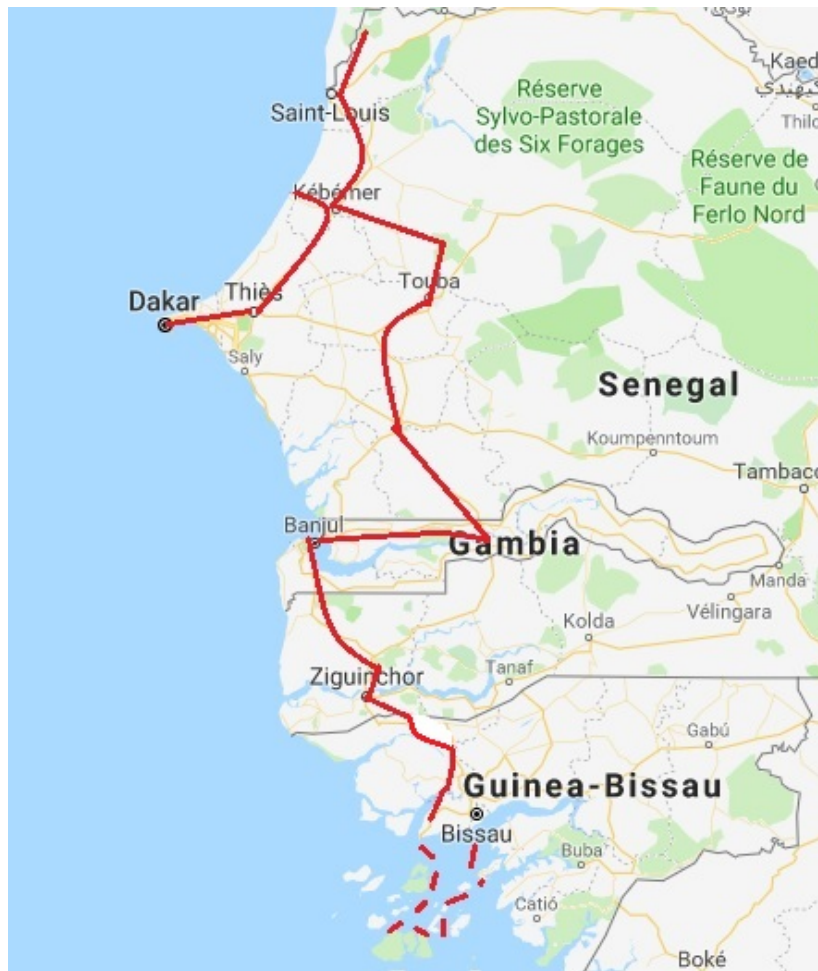

African west coast
Senegal, gambia and guinea bissau
14 days to experience:
nature, rites, tribal and contemporary art, live music
(explorer)

Minimum 2 – maximum 16 participants

Any other date upon request



PRESENTATION

An amazing itinerary crossing three countries “north to south” to experience a continuous change of climatic ecosystems and human environments.

NATURE. Following the “uncertain border” between land and water we move across spectacular variety of natural environments such desert dunes, savanna, estuaries, forest, mangrove swamps, to end with a ocean navigation to discover and enjoy the Bijagos Archipelago. North to south is also the route of migratory birds, a constant presence along the whole journey. Djoudj in Senegal is between the three main migratory birds sanctuary on earth and Gambia is a well-known birding destination, just in the large park of Senegambia hotel is possible to spot 70% of the different bird species of the country.

HISTORY, PREHISTORY & TIME LESS VILLAGES . We will discover historical sites as Goré ancient slave-trade island, Saint Louis – the first colonial capital of “French West Africa” and Bolama the Portuguese Guinea capital to day forgotten in the forest of a remote island. Dakar, contemporary large capital and African intellectual center from the time before independence. We will experience the contact with “Timeless” people as Nomadic herders, and remote villages and discover a prehistoric sites, with thousand mysterious stone craved monoliths.

ART, CULTURE & MUSIC. From In the northern savannah we will be invited at the camp of nomadic herders and we will meet with the largest religious and peaceful brotherhood that practices an African form of Islam that rejects fundamentalism and violence.. In the south, we will be introduced to animistic traditional religions, tribal kings, dancing masks and remote tribes who still worshipping ancestor statues; a unique chance to enjoy **tribal art** in is original contest, the village. In the animistic Casamance region we will witness at the celebrations of Diola mask,

the incarnation of mythical spirits... Masquerade is a unique experience that involves the participation of the entire village in an intense mix of magic, music, and dances. We will focus also on **contemporary art and music**: Dakar metropolis has always been the cultural capital of West Africa, a melting pot for painters and sculptors from the whole continent. Meeting with the vibrant community of the Artist Village. During the week end nights in Gambia and Casamance we will vibe at the rhythm of music in the hot African clubs.

TRANSPORTS VARIETY We will travel in eight different kind of transportation, each chosen to optimize the different geographical and cultural environments and have fun. On the land portion mainly on comfortable air-conditioned minibus and for short rides in 4WD vehicles, traditional calash, donkey chariot, local taxi. On ocean rivers and lagoons : ferry, local boat and modern speedboats.

Each departure date will be special to fit with unique events.

Unique events coinciding with the different departure dates:

Salt water Hippos and Turtle Nesting in the Bijagos archipelago the largest protected animal in Orango National is the rare "saltwater hippo" living in the mangrove and sometimes going for a swim in the ocean! As they move around the island in search of saltwater ponds is not always possible to locate them. Poilao is uninhabited island and the main nesting site for Green Sea Turtle (Chelonia Midas) in West Africa. After dark, in silence on the beach, we await for the magic moment when a female emerges from the ocean to dig a deep hole in the sand and lay an hundred or more eggs. With a bit of luck we will be able to witness the hatching! ... Tiny turtles emerge from the sand to join the ocean and start a long journey that will bring them back to this same island 30 years after, when they will reach sexual maturity.

Vaca Bruto mask dance. In **Bijagos Archipelago** life is still ruled by the "cycle of seasons". 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 with eyes of frosted glass, real horns, leather ears and a rope through the nostril. During the Vaca Bruto Festival 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.

Carnival is the main festivity in **Guinea Bissau**. Carnival goes wild in the afternoon when along the Main Avenue, groups from all the country start hours of parade: sacred traditional masks, warriors dressed in a crocodile skin and armed with arrows, initiated girls wearing only strings of glass beads around their waist and contemporary masks made of papier-mâché. An intense "fiesta popular" combining Portuguese influence with the cheerful African spirit.

DAY BY DAY PROGRAM

DAY 1: Dakar, the capital - [SENEGAL](#)

Arrival in **Dakar** (Senegal) and transfer to the hotel.

Meals Free

Overnight Hotel Djoloff, hotel de *charme* with fine traditional architecture and comfort, or similar (Air conditioned, en-suite rooms)

DAY 2: Dakar contemporary art metropolis- (town drives) [SENEGAL](#)

Dakar became the center of political, artistic and intellectual "*renouveau*" from independence time. Visit of the "Plateau" district, the Governor Palace and some interesting markets as Kermel built in pure colonial style. Lunch in a typical restaurant. Afternoon dedicated to the "Village des Arts" composed by fifty-two artist studios (ateliers). All disciplines of the visual arts are represented (painting, sculpture, ceramics, photography, video, installation, etc.). The Village has a large gallery, which receives exhibitions year round. The Village is "the place" to meet the best artist and young talents of the Senegalese vibrant artistic scene.. Arrival at the port of Dakar to board a ferry and spend a night in Gore Island. Mini night tour of Goré

Meals Lunch and Dinner in a restaurant i.

Overnight Hotel Municipal, "hotel de charme" in a full restored stone building, or similar (air conditioned, en-suite rooms).

DAY 3: Goré, Lac Rose and fisherman villages. (170 Km 4 h) [SENEGAL](#)



Waking up in Goré before the crowd arrives is a pleasure, as strolling in the tiny stone paved alleys of this historical settlement. In Goré slaves used to be crammed and then shipped to the Americas. The town is totally restored to bear witness of those ancient times, however thanks to the nice breeze, the ancient architecture, the many restaurants and boutiques; Goré today has become a very pleasant and trendy location. Ferry to Dakar and drive to **Lac Rose**, a shallow saltwater lake surrounded by dunes, also known as Lac Retba. The water is ten times saltier than in the ocean and thanks to the high concentration the lake often shimmers into pink.

More than 600 workers here collect salt in the traditional way. Along the coast we discover the largest fisherman village in Senegal, more than 4500 wooden painted pirogues came to the shore with the catch of the day... We will live our vehicles for a less intrusive, but fun, donkey chariot to approach the fisherman selling to the local market women, to meet the artisans craving the large pirogues, the painters decorating them with bright colors and if we are lucky the "local saint" for final blessing before sailing...

At the edge of **Lampoul Desert**, some 4WD vehicles will be waiting to cross the dunes and take us at our fix camp.

Meals included in a restaurant and at the camp.

Overnight Permanent tented camp (comfortable tents with beds and en suite)

DAY 4: Saint Louis (150 km – 2 hrs) – [SENEGAL](#)

Saint Louis is a charming old town which was the first capital of West Africa French colonies (AOF). Has been the former base of the "Aeropostale" airmail pioneer operation between Europe, Africa and South America. Saint Exupéry the famous writer author of "The Little Prince" was one of Aeropostale pilotes following this route. The best way to visit the narrow lanes of **Saint Louis** is by calash, just as locals do, and walk in the fisherman quarters. Time to stroll in the tiny avenues and enjoy the unique atmosphere of this old town.

We will spend the night at the historic hotel of the town - built in 1895 and now fully renovated - it was here that all Aeropostale pilots use to stay.

Meals Lunch in a restaurant, dinner a charming restaurant facing Senegal river.

Overnight Hotel de la Poste or similar (Air conditioned, en-suite rooms).

DAY 5: Bird sanctuary & Nomadic tribes (250 km – 5 hrs) - [SENEGAL](#)



Early in the morning departure northwards to discover **Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary** (Parc National des Oiseaux du Djoudj), a natural oasis formed by hundreds of miles of partially flooded lands which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This "humid paradise" - the best habitat and nesting site for over a million of migratory and resident birds - lies on the southeastern bank of the Senegal River and offers a range of wetland habitats that are very popular with migrating birds, many of which get here after crossing the Sahara. Out of over 400 species, pelicans and flamingos are the most common, whereas aquatic warblers are a bit less conspicuous - migrating here from Europe, this park is their

single most important wintering site yet discovered. Apart from birds there is also a wide range of wildlife has warthog and crocodiles. Motor boat excursion led by a local guide-ornithologist

In the afternoon continuation to the **Ferlo Desert** to discover the arid region where nomadic Fulani tribes herds large droves of zebu. The **Fulani** (also called Peul) are the largest tribe roaming West African savannahs, living in a vast area from Senegal to Chad. Their origins are still covered with mystery but they all share a common and aristocratic cult for beauty and elegance. In the afternoon a local guide will join us for a visit to the neighboring villages and shelters. When the herds come back, we might even be invited to witness the milking process.

Meals included in a local restaurant and at the camp restaurant.

Overnight Camp made up of simple grass huts, managed by a local entrepreneur (all rooms with beds, mosquito nets are en-suite).

DAY 6: Tuba Brotherhood (160 km – 4 hrs) - [SENEGAL](#)

The rarely visited the holly town of **Tuba** (Touba) is the right place to appreciate the hospitality of an African brotherhood. Tuba inhabitants follow *Mouridism* and the town itself is a sort of theocratic "state within the state", ruled by a Caliph. The founder of Mouridi brotherhood was a Sufi named Amhadou Bàmba Mbake and still today the Mouridi have a large social and economical impact in Senegal: thanks to their peaceful (and African) vision of Islam, Mouridism has become the bastion that protects Senegal from radical Islam. During the annual festival the town is visited by four million pilgrims. Mouridi welcome any interest for their traditions yet since Tuba is a sacred town, all visitors should show respect for traditional rules, therefore we must apply a considerate dress code, not smoke, not drink alcohol and not listen to music during the visit. If we follow these simple rules, you will be welcomed. *Baye Fall*, a member of a colorful branch of Mouridism, will accompany us during the visit.

Meals included in a local restaurant and at the hotel.

Overnight Le Relais de Kaolack, or similar (Air conditioned, en-suite rooms).



DAY 7: STONE CERCLES – (5 h , 220 Km) [SENEGAL-GAMBIA](#)

Early departure, we will live the main road to discover the unique megalithic site of Sine Ngayene composed by 52 circles of erected stones, including a double circle. With a total of 1102 carved stones this unique site has been recognized by the UNESCO. After Gambia border formalities we will drive to the northern banks of Gambia estuary where we will join a ferry with a colourful crowd to cross this large river. We will shore at Banjul and arrival to Senegambia hotel the first hotel that has open the country to tourism located in a large and lush park where is easy to encounter birds and monkeys that roams freely often also in the reception. It will be Friday evening, lunch in a restaurant before roaming from club to club to enjoy vibrant music and African style of enjoy.

Meals included, lunch picnic, dinner at the hotel restaurant or at a lively town restaurant.

Overnight Senegambia Beach hotel, separate buildings in a tropical forest vegetation, private beach facing the ocean.

DAY 8: GAMBIAN BIRDS– (4h 170 Km) [GAMBIA-SENEGAL](#)

Senegambia gardens are a real African experience, in is large park is possible to spot 70 % of the bird species that can be seen in the whole country. With an ornithological guide providing us binoculars we will discover different species of African birds in their habitat. Join the interesting National museum focused on different aspect of the country: from archaeology to recent history, to art, music and photography. Lunch and afternoon drive to the southern border whit Casamance region of Senegal. Evening arrival to our comfortable hotel on the banks of Casamance River where we will stay two nights.

Meals included in a local restaurants.

Overnight Kadiandoumange Hotel on the banks of the river or similar (air conditioned en suite rooms)

DAY 9: Sacred kings (100 km – 3 hrs) – [SENEGAL](#)

We will live the main road to visit an adobe-fortified building still inhabited by a large patriarchal **Diola** family, a very interesting example of traditional African "sculptural architecture". These large clay and wooden fortified houses, where light comes from a central hole in the roof, are known as "impluvium houses" and had the function to protect its dwellers from outside attacks. We will be received by the **king** of a Diola Kingdom. After the protocol salutations the king, that is also the high priest holding both political and mystical power, will answer our question on the traditional rules in Diola society.



In the afternoon we follow an isolated path to a tiny village and ... **masks** leave the sacred forest (where only initiated are admitted) to dance for an enthusiastic local crowd. Mask are part of the animistic Diola culture and Malinka traditions - people fear and respect masks, consider them spirits who play an important role in solving conflicts between villagers. Evening return to **Ziguinchor**.

Meals included, lunch in a local restaurant and dinner at the hotel.

Overnight Kadiandoumange Hotel on the banks of the river or similar (air conditioned en suite rooms)

DAY 10: Flooded villages (150 km – 4 hrs drive and 3 hours of navigation) – [SENEGAL - GUINEA BISSAU](#)

Early riser departure for a long but interesting day. After crossing the border with Guinea Bissau we will live the main road for a track. We will walk in a unique landscape of streams, salt swamps, flat lands, clay dams and rice farms. In this remote environment, some gigantic and isolated Kapok and Baobab trees give shade to tiny human settlements of **Felupes and Baiotes tribes**. These people live in an isolated

and flooded ecosystem where they farm rice thanks to a complex "tribal technology" to desalinate the soil. People live in adobe huts built in a unique African architectural style: clay "buildings" surrounded by a shady veranda and covered with large and tall thatch roofs with garrets for the aeration. The all building is supported by a complex structure of palm tree poles. Felupes people practice different ceremonies. The initiated groups include a powerful cast of female priestess and rituals are announced by the sound of large sacred drums the "Bombolon". An aluminum speed boat will be at the meeting for a intriguing navigation in a flooded mangrove forest. Thanks to the experience of our local sailor we will be able to find our way through a complicated network of natural canals and bifurcate in hundreds of different streams of salt and fresh water to join the wide **Cacheu River** and discover the white Pelicans (weighing up to 10 Kg each, they are considered among the heaviest birds), the Goliath Herons (the largest herons), Egrets, Hamerkop, Storks and Pink Flamingos. Cacheu town is one of earliest Portuguese settlement in Africa and the first navigators arrived in early 15^o century, interesting the small museum on slave trade. Evening arrival to Quinhamel, late dinner.

Meals included in local restaurant or pic-nick and at the hotel

Overnight

Hotel Mar Azul or similar (en-suite rooms)

DAY 11: The Bijagos Archipelago (4 hrs boat) – [GUINEA BISSAU](#)



In the morning departure by speedboat for a four days navigation across 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 unique fauna and its genuine tribal culture, Bijagos is a "geographical jewel". The colors of **Orango Island** will simply fascinate us: the green vegetation, the white sand beaches, the brown rocks and the blue ocean.

Meals included, pic nic and at the hotel

Overnight Parque Hotel locate in the vegetation in front of the ocean, or similar. (Bungalows en suite, with fan).

DAY 12: Queens island (2h30 hrs boat) – [GUINEA BISSAU](#)

A walk in the island vegetation reach the sacred village of Okinka Pampa, hosting the graves of the Queens - a really fascinating place since this population live in a semi-matriarchal society. We will be received by the Régolo (local King), that will tell us the story of the island.

We will leave Orango to discover villages on remote islands and arrive to Rubane that will be our comfortable base for the last two nights.

Meals included pic nic and at the hotel restaurant.

Overnight Lodge Ponta Anchaca or similar. Large and comfortable ocean front air-conditioned bungalows. Swimming pool, private beach. Gastronomic restaurant on stilts, French and international cuisine, specialized in the catch of the day, different menus available.

DAY 13: Islander life (2 hrs boat) – [GUINEA BISSAU](#)

Day of relax to enjoy the archipelago way of life: relax at the wild beach, swimming pool, or walking to explore villages and luxuriant vegetation.

Optional included: excursion to Soga bay and Bubaque, the largest village in the archipelago and the only one connected to the continent, by an old ferry once a week. In Bubaque we will find unpaved alleys, a tiny colorful market, local bars and traders. Quite interesting the small ethnographic museum dedicated to the Bijagos culture. Return to our comfortable base at Rubane Island for lunch.

Optional not included: game fishing.

Meals included, at a restaurant, at the hotel.

Overnight Lodge Ponta Anchaca or similar. Large and comfortable ocean front air-conditioned bungalows. Swimming pool, private beach. Gastronomic restaurant on stilts, French and international cuisine, specialized in the catch of the day, different menus available.

DAY 14: from the ghost capital to Bissau (5 hrs boat) – [GUINEA BISSAU](#)

Departure to **Bolama Island**, the former capital of Portuguese Guinea from 1871 to 1941, before was moved to Bissau. When the Portuguese left, native people came to squat the town which is now falling apart and is partly invaded by tropical vegetation. The citadel was built following the plans of a «Castrum Romanum» (roman citadel) today we can witness is lethargic avenues, empty squares, dry fountains, bush-like gardens and charming administrative buildings in neo Palladian style. In the large Governor's Palace with a patio and columns in neo Palladian style goats grass peaceful. Bolama, although inhabited, is plunged in the fairy-tale atmosphere of a ghost town.

In the afternoon, we end our speedboat navigation by arriving in **Bissau**. A vehicle will bring us on a brief tour of this tiny and intriguing capital. Day rooms, free dinner.

Transfer to the airport. End of our services.

Recommended Extension:

At the end of this intense journey, we can recommend a few extra days in the Bijagos Archipelago, a natural paradise. On request, we can arrange for some 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 game fishing - Bijagos Archipelago is a known destination for rich game fishing, ask details.

DATA SHEET

- **Due to the limited quantity of available rooms, please book in advance.**
- **VISAS:** Senegal – not required for EU, USA and Canada citizen (ask complete list). Gambia: please, check; Guinea Bissau - single entry visa required and obtainable during the tour (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 - restaurants (tourist menus) or cold picnic; dinner - at the hotel restaurant (complete 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. We are not responsible for any material and physical damage during the tour
- **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 external conditions, and take advantage of opportunities that arise once there.
- Considering the special nature of the journey, some parts may be modified due to unpredictable factors and are based on unarguable decisions of our Tour Leader. Costs originating from such variations will be sole responsibility of the participants. Of course the Leader will do his/her utmost to adhere to the original program.
- There are two border-crossing, flexibility is necessary
- Prices could change in case of major changes in services costs, beyond the organizer's will