

The Gambia & Senegal Directory

CONTENTS

Accommodation	253
Activities	255
Business Hours	256
Children	257
Climate Charts	258
Customs	259
Dangers & Annoyances	259
Disabled Travellers	262
Embassies & Consulates	262
Festivals & Events	264
Food	264
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	265
Holidays	265
Insurance	265
Internet Access	266
Legal Matters	266
Maps	267
Money	267
Photography & Video	270
Post	271
Shopping	271
Solo Travellers	273
Telephone & Fax	274
Time	275
Toilets	275
Tourist Information	276
Visas	276
Women Travellers	277

ACCOMMODATION

In both Gambia and Senegal, there's a huge discrepancy between tourist facilities available in the coastal areas and cities, and those inland. This is most strongly felt in Gambia, where a highly built-up and developed resort zone at the Atlantic coast contrasts with a near absence of facilities upcountry. There's the occasional upmarket or run-down camp (Georgetown has a good selection) or guest-house in the country, but especially if you travel at the luxury end of the market, your choices will be severely limited. In Senegal, some very well-appointed camps have opened in the remote regions, but most areas, particularly the villages in the north, have only few, lesser-quality choices.

Travellers on tighter budgets are better catered for, although there are not as many backpacker lodges or cheap and cheerful safaris as there are elsewhere on the continent. Generally speaking, the cost of accommodation here is higher than in East or Southern Africa, and noticeably more than most parts of Asia, although it's cheaper than Europe.

Overall, Gambia and Senegal have a wide range of places to stay, from international-type hotels in the capitals, through to comfortable midrange establishments, and down to the most basic lodgings in the rough end of town. Generally, price reflects quality, although Dakar and Gambia's Atlantic coastal resorts are culprits of overpricing.

Top-end hotels have clean, well-appointed rooms with private bathrooms and hot showers, 24-hour electricity and air-conditioning. They are normally equipped with satellite TV and telephone, and many of them have a minibar and safe. Rates frequently include breakfast. Apart from a handful of notable exceptions, service can be pretty lousy, even in the most expensive places.

Rooms in the midrange section have a private bathroom, but not always hot water (not necessarily essential in a tropical climate, but an asset in the winter months, when nights can get quite chilly). They will have fans and most probably even air-con, though you sometimes might have to pay extra for it (in places where electricity depends on generator power, this can push up prices quite dramatically).

Budget places can sometimes be real bargains, with good, clean midrange-type rooms for much better rates. However, they aren't necessarily spotless and may be downright filthy. Bathrooms are often shared, and sometimes in an appalling state. Some budget places will provide a fan, while others won't have any relief from the heat.

Many places, especially those in the top-end and midrange brackets, have high and low-season rates. This book quotes high-season rates throughout, applicable from November to April. During low season (May to October) you can often get rooms

PRACTICALITIES

- The following English-language magazines cover the region and are mostly published monthly. *African Business* (IC Publications) has economic reports, finance and company news. *Africa Today* (Afro Media) has good political and economic news, plus business, sport and tourism. *Focus on Africa* (BBC) has excellent news stories, accessible reports and a concise run down of recent political events. *Focus on Africa* is the easiest to find in Gambia and Senegal. *New African* (IC Publications) has a reputation for accurate and balanced reporting, with a mix of politics, financial and economic analysis. It has features on social and cultural affairs, sport, art, health and recreation. *West Africa* (West Africa Publishing) is a long-standing and respected weekly focusing on political and economic news. In Western countries, some titles are stocked in larger mainstream newspaper shops; others can only be tracked down at specialist suppliers or libraries. There are many more periodicals produced in French. The most widely available are *Jeune Afrique* and *l'Intelligent*, popular monthly magazines covering regional and world events.
- The electricity supply in both Gambia and Senegal is 220V. Plugs in Senegal usually have two round pins, like those in France and continental Europe. This plug type is also used in Gambia, but you'll also find plugs with three square pins, as used in Britain.
- The metric system is used in both Gambia and Senegal. To convert between metric and imperial units refer to the conversion chart on the inside front cover of this book.

about 25% to 50% cheaper. Even hotels that don't offer discounts are usually open to negotiation, most preferring to rent a room for marginal profit than staying empty. Note that some, though few, hotels close entirely during low season. If you travel over Christmas and New Year you can expect price hikes in some hotels, usually the top-end places.

Hotel managers in both Gambia and Senegal tend to be more creative in the labelling of their places, than in raising standards. At time of writing it was fashionable to rename former camps as 'lodges', a title supposed to imply better quality. Ecodge is another favourite, appealing to travellers' sense of environmental consciousness – but beware, some hotels claiming ecofriendliness take the idea no further than using biodegradable washing powder.

In Senegal, you'll find the occasional *auberge* and *gite* – something like a hostel or inn, and varying widely in quality. A *maison d'hôte* is a guesthouse, usually a small, family-like place. A *maison de charme* is similar to a *maison d'hôte*, often with a welcoming decor. An *hotel de passe* is always on the low end of basic, generally implying the availability of rooms by the hour.

The best website is www.ausenegal.com – it lists almost every hotel in the country, with online booking facilities for the most established ones.

Apart from the *campements villageois* (rural village-managed lodgings) in Casamance, all accommodation places in Senegal charge a tourist tax of CFA600 per person per day. Some, usually the more upmarket places, include this in the rate they charge, but most don't, and will add the tax to your final bill. Throughout this book, tourist tax usually isn't included in the rates given.

Campements

Campements are common in Senegal. The name implies a hotel or lodge with accommodation in bungalows or, frequently, round huts. They exist in all price ranges, from very basic to all-dancing luxury versions, though the majority sit in the midrange bracket.

Camping

There are not many camping grounds in Gambia and Senegal, and those that do exist cater mainly for overlanders in their own vehicle. However, some hotels and *campements* allow camping, or provide an area where tents can be pitched. Grassy sites are very rare – you often have to force pegs through hard-packed gravel.

Hotels

Hotels come in all shapes and sizes, from cheap *hotels de passe* to glittering five-star

palaces. Even the top-end versions can double as brothels; the room standard merely reflects the wealth of the clients. Some male tourists travelling to the busy tourist zones of Gambia have reported prostitutes being sent up to their rooms without request. Be wary and complain if this happens to you.

If breakfast is included it's usually on a par with the standard of accommodation: a full buffet in more expensive places, coffee and bread further down the scale.

Some hotels charge by the room, so whether you are alone or with somebody makes no difference to the price, though most places have single and double rates, the rate for two people sharing being cheaper than that of two singles added up.

Resorts

You can spend your entire holiday at resort hotels without venturing out. They are usually large complexes with several restaurants, bars, a nightclub, possibly hair salons, massage parlours, souvenir shops and bike- or car-hire facilities. They also tend to have a wide range of activities on offer. In Senegal, most resort hotels are clustered around Saly, with a few places in Cap Skiring and Dakar. In Gambia, you find them all along the Atlantic coast.

Book Accommodation Online

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

ACTIVITIES

Most tourist activities in Senegal and Gambia tend to be related to the sea, beach tourism being an important slice of the holiday industry. Upcountry it's all about the scenery and wildlife, with bird-watching, tours around the national parks and hiking among favourite pursuits.

Bird-Watching

Senegal and Gambia are among West Africa's best bird-watching destinations. In Gambia, tourists interested in birding benefit from a well-organised network of trained guides, tours and camps. Senegal

LAUNDRY

Throughout Gambia and Senegal, finding someone to wash your clothes is fairly simple. The top-end and midrange hotels charge per item. At cheaper hotels, a staff member will do the job, or find you somebody else who can. The charge at cheap hotels is usually per item, but the price is lower than at the big hotels and often negotiable. If you do hand your washing over, never include your underwear. No-one washes anyone else's briefs and handing your dirty drawers to the laundry lady will cause her embarrassment.

has equally interesting bird-watching sites, but no comparable set-up. While some national parks have ornithological guides, bird-watchers will mainly have to organise their own excursions. See p71 for details on birding sites, species that can be seen, and contact details for birding associations.

Boat Trips

Boat trips are a great way of exploring regions of Senegal and Gambia. Gambia is almost more river than land, and going upcountry by boat is infinitely more rewarding than braving the roads. You can go from the coast all the way to Basse Santa Su in the east, but smaller excursions in the coastal area are also possible. In Senegal, the myriad mangrove-lined waterways of the Siné-Saloum and Casamance are best explored by boat.

Most trips are done by small, brightly painted wooden boats (pirogues) usually equipped with a motor. Motorised pirogues require a lot of petrol to run, the cost of which is carried by the person who hires the boat. This can make pirogue trips expensive. As the amount of petrol needed is the same for one person or a group of 10, you always have to hire the boat, and are hence better off if you're travelling with a group.

On the Senegal River, you also have the possibility to travel by cruise ship, the *Bou El Mogdad*, an old, dignified boat, which has a real historical importance in Senegal. See p209 for more information.

Cycling

Senegal and Gambia are good for the off-road, dirt-track variant of cycling. If you can

bear the heat it can be a great way of exploring the countryside. The best-organised cycling organisation in Senegal is **Casamance VTT** (☎ /fax 993 1004; casavtt@yahoo.fr) in Oussouye, Casamance.

Diving & Other Water Sports

In Senegal, the places for diving and water sports are Dakar, Saint-Louis and the Petite Côte; in Gambia, the Atlantic coastal resorts are your best bet. The large resort hotels usually have water-sports equipment for hire, or make it available at no cost to guests. The most popular activities include kayaking, water skiing, parasailing and jet skiing. Below is a list of other organisers; see individual regional chapters for more details.

THE GAMBIA

Watersports Centre (Map p92; ☎ 7765765; Denton Bridge, Banjul) Between Banjul and Bakau; offers the whole range of water sports, from jet skiing to surfing and parasailing.

SENEGAL

Arcandia (☎ 958 5055; olepepe@sentoos.sn) One of the biggest water-sports centres on Senegal's Petite Côte.

Atlantic Evasion (Map p146; ☎ 820 7675; www.atlantic-evasion.com; N'Gor) Based in Dakar, at Plage de N'Gor, with a wide range of water sports.

Diabar Plongée (☎ 958 5049; www.diabarplongee.com) Diving centre at the Petite Côte.

L'Océanium (Map p148; ☎ 822 2441; www.oceanium.org; Dakar) Dakar-based and ecoconscious. Organises spectacular diving tours to the Île de la Madeleine.

Fishing

Deep-sea sport fishing can be arranged in Dakar and Saly in Senegal and in the hotel resorts at the Atlantic coast in Gambia. More relaxed outings in creeks, rivers and mangroves are possible all along the Petite Côte, Cap Skiring, the Siné-Saloum region in Senegal and on the Gambian coast. Most *campements* organise such trips, either in small, wooden pirogues or motorised boats. Depending on the season, ocean catches include barracuda, tuna, sailfish, blue marlin, swordfish, sea bass and wahoo. See regional chapters for more details, and check www.au-senegal.com.

THE GAMBIA

Several fishing companies are based at the Sportsfishing Centre at **Denton Bridge** (Map

p92), 3km from Banjul. They include the following:

Gambia Fishing (☎ 7721228; www.gambiafishing.com) Small but fantastic little company specialising in lure and anchored-bottom fishing.

Greenies Gamefishing (☎ 9907073; greenies@gambiafishing.freeserve.co.uk) Specialises in blue-water fishing.

SENEGAL

Atlantic Evasion and **L'Océanium** in Dakar, and **Diabar Plongée** and **Arcandia** in Saly organise fishing (see left for details).

Le Marlin-Club de Katakalousse (☎ 993 5282; marlin@sudinfo.sn) Organises fishing excursions around Cap Skiring. You can also bargain with the pirogue owners based opposite the hotel; ask for Jean-Philippe.

L'Espadon (☎ 957 2066; www.espadon-hotel.com) This hotel-based fishing club in Saly gets good reviews.

Ranch de Bango (Map p213; ☎ 961 1981; www.ranchbango.com) One of the major fishing centres near Saint-Louis.

Saly Fishing (☎ 957 2862; www.salyfishingclub.com) A major Saly-based operation.

Hiking

The single most interesting region for hiking is southeastern Senegal, the only area in Senegal and Gambia where you find mountains. Walks lead along small, steep paths, through tiny villages and occasionally through thick forest. It's best to go with a guide, not so much to prevent getting lost, but mainly to find the best spots and ensure a welcoming reception in the villages. See also the boxed text, p227.

Swimming

In the tourist areas of Senegal and Gambia most major hotels have pools that nonguests are able to use for a fee or a small consumption at the hotel restaurant/bar. If you like your swim less chlorine and more saline, you've got a long stretch of coast from where to jump in. Best are the Gambian coast and Senegal's Cap Skiring and Petite Côte; the Grand Côte and Cap Vert Island are too dangerous due to strong undertows. Always seek local advice before swimming in the ocean and respect any warning signs put up.

BUSINESS HOURS

The further you're away from the city, the more flexible opening times seem to get. Note that Friday afternoon is never a good time to try to find people in their offices –

for Muslims, this is the holy day of the week, and many take a longer break for the afternoon prayers, or simply go home.

The Gambia

Government offices are open from 8am to 3pm or 4pm Monday to Thursday, and 8am to 12.30pm Friday. Banks, shops and businesses usually open 8.30am to noon and 2.30pm to 5.30pm Monday to Thursday, and 8am to noon Friday and Saturday. Restaurants tend to serve lunch from around 11am to 2.30pm and dinner from 6pm onwards. Most restaurants in the cities stay open until the last guest leaves, though in smaller towns and villages many close around 10pm, or whenever the food runs out. Bars usually open around 8pm, tend to get going from 11pm onwards, and close around 3am or 4am.

Senegal

In Senegal, businesses and government offices are open from 8am to noon and 2.30pm to 6pm Monday to Friday, and some open from 8am to noon on Saturday. Most banks are open from 8.30am to noon and 2.30pm to 4.30pm Monday to Friday. Some banks also open until 11am on Saturday mornings. The bank at Léopold Sédar Senghor International Airport is open until midnight daily. Shops are usually open from 9am to noon, and from 2.30pm to 7pm Monday to Saturday, and very few open from 9am to noon on Sunday. Some shops are open all day, but they are still in the minority.

The larger restaurants in the urban centres may serve food all day, but it's more common for places to offer lunch (noon to 2.30pm) and dinner (7pm onwards). Most restaurants in Dakar are closed on Sunday. Many places that serve food in the day turn into bars at night, and can stay open (guised in a new ambience) until 3am or 4am. For a night out in Dakar, don't even think of leaving the house before midnight; most places only get going around 1am.

CHILDREN

With an average of five children per mother, you may guess that Senegal and Gambia are places where children are very welcome. No-one will be surprised to see travelling families and people will generally be happy to accommodate children.

However, you need to bring a certain amount of courage and sense of adventure. If you're an easily worried parent, you might not want to brave some journeys upcountry, and even if you are happy to take certain, sensible risks, you should come prepared, having done some reading on the country, investigated facilities and the state of roads.

Practicalities

Travel with older children, from about the age of five, is fairly straightforward. Most hotels and *campements* offer the option of adding an extra bed to a room, usually at a very reasonable rate, and many have family rooms, with a double bed and a single, either in the same, or in a second room. Children under two normally don't pay; in some places this extends to children of five or more years if they share a room with their parents. Most hotels offer at least a discount for under-12-year-olds.

Child-minding facilities are only available in a few hotels, most of them in the upper midrange or top-end bracket, and there's little in the way of professional babysitting agencies.

Other extra provisions for kids, such as high chairs, hire cots and nappy-changing facilities, are generally only found in top-end, and some midrange places. All of the major supermarkets in urban areas, and even some smaller boutiques, stock throw-away nappies, though they're usually even more expensive than in Europe. In smaller places less frequented by tourists or expats, you might not find them so readily, muslin cloths and plastic wraps being the locally used variant. If you're still feeding formula, you're better off taking as much with you as you need; you might not find the same variety, or may have to pay extortionate rates for it. Breastfeeders, by contrast, have it much easier. Most local kids are breastfed way beyond the age of one, and breastfeeding in public isn't frowned upon – though foreign women invariably attract more stares than local women; covering up with a cloth keeps them away.

Safety while travelling is a problem. Most bush taxis don't have seatbelts, let alone child seats. However, if you hire the whole taxi for the trip, or a day (usually by paying for all the seats), you can mount your own child seat, if you've brought it. That's

absolutely recommended – the dangers of road travel in the two countries are very real, and it's a good idea to avoid unnecessary risks, particularly if travelling to remote areas where hospital facilities are limited.

Leave your pram behind! Trying to push a buggy around sandy footpaths, performing a slalom around beggars and parked cars is frustrating to say the least. A baby rucksack is much, much more useful – or you can just learn to strap your little one on your back, local style.

On public transport you'll have to pay for your child if they have their own seat. If they are young enough to sit on your lap, they travel for free. Kids usually love Dakar's battered, though fantastically painted *cars rapides* (a form of bush taxi, often decrepit; cheaper than an Ndiaga Ndiaye).

If you travel with children, a well-stocked first-aid kit is absolutely essential, as is malaria medication, sunscreen, a sun hat and a mosquito net.

Throughout the book, particularly child-friendly features have been highlighted in individual reviews. Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* provides more detailed advice, as well as ideas for games on the bus.

Sights & Activities

While Senegal and Gambia offer little in the way of child-dedicated facilities, such as playgrounds or theme parks, there are plenty of activities that will excite children – you just need a little bit of imagination. Of the urban centres, Dakar is the one with the biggest kids' scene, complete with theme park, kids' theatre shows, workshops and film projections (see p155). In Gambia, many of the resort hotels along the coast cater well for children, with shallow kids' pools, board games and the occasional slide and swing.

Saint-Louis in Senegal is a calm city with fairly safe streets, where pelican- and flamingo-watching tours around the Langue de Barbarie and the Parc de Djoudj lie in close proximity.

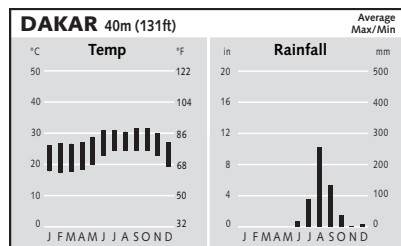
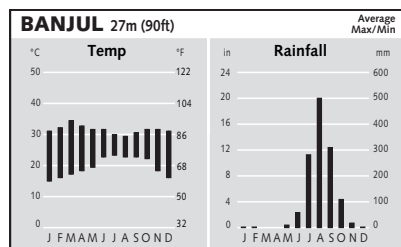
Some of the national parks can be pretty boring for little ones, as animals aren't always easily spotted; Senegal's Reserve de Bandia being a notable exception, with almost guaranteed sightings of buffaloes, monkeys, rhino, crocodiles and other African 'classics' (see p179).

Pirogue tours are usually a hit, as are trips on a horse or donkey cart. The latter are possible in many places, but particularly in Senegal's Siné-Saloum region, Rufisque and the north.

CLIMATE CHARTS

In Gambia, the coolest period is from December to mid-February, with average daytime maximums around 24°C (75°F). In October and November, and from mid-February to April, the average daytime maximums rise to 26°C (79°F), rising further through May and June to sit around 30°C (86°F) from July to September. Senegal has a wider range. In Dakar average daytime maximums are around 24°C (75°F) from January to March, and between 25°C and 27°C (77°F and 81°F) in April, May and December. From June to October they rise to around 30°C (86°F). In southern Senegal, though, temperature patterns are similar to those in Gambia. Temperatures along the coast are generally lower than these averages, while inland they are higher. The northern and eastern parts of Senegal, bordering on Mauritania and Mali, generally have the highest temperatures.

Rainfall is a more significant factor than temperature in the climate of Gambia and Senegal. The wet season is shorter (with lower total rainfall) in the north. The rainy period also gets shorter, and the amount of rainfall



decreases, as you go inland. For example, in the far north of Senegal, the average annual rainfall is just 300mm, while in the far south it can top 1500mm. Dakar, about halfway down the country on the coast, gets around 600mm annually, while inland Tambacounda, at approximately the same latitude, normally gets half of this or less.

CUSTOMS The Gambia

There are no restrictions on the import of local or foreign currencies, or on the export of foreign currency, but you cannot export more than D100. The usual limits apply to alcohol (1L of spirits, 1L of wine) and tobacco (200 cigarettes).

Senegal

There are no limits on the import of foreign currency; CFA200,000 is the maximum amount of local currency foreigners may export. Duty must be paid on some electrical and electronic items, such as computers and VCRs.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

On a world scale Gambia and Senegal are fairly safe places to visit. Outside Dakar violent crime is almost unheard of. Even in Dakar, relatively few people report being robbed, and only a tiny percentage of those suffer any physical harm. Still, be on your guard, especially in downtown Dakar – which doesn't mean treating everyone you meet as a potential assailant.

For specific threats to women, see p277.

Begging

In most of Africa there is no government welfare for the unemployed, sick, disabled, homeless or old. If such people have no family to help, they are forced to beg, and you will undoubtedly encounter this during your trip.

Especially in Dakar, groups of beggars squat near traffic lights or junctions, and will walk up to your car once it's come to a stop. This can be intimidating and annoying, but while you certainly can't help everyone, you don't have to refuse to give completely.

You'll see plenty of locals who are worse off than you digging into their pockets – helping the needy is a fundamental part of

Islam – and even small coins will be appreciated. Just pick the right situation. If there are 20 street kids grouped around your car, don't even start, or you'll cause so much excitement you'll have trouble closing your car window.

Bribery

Throughout Africa bribery is a way of life and you'll probably encounter the problem, especially in Gambia. Put simply, poorly paid officials may use 'rich' tourists to top up their salaries. For example, at an airport or border, a customs official may go through your belongings, find a (possibly fictitious) fault, and start involving you in a lengthy discussion, all intended to extract some money from you.

Travellers have different ways of dealing with this kind of situation. The best method is to feign ignorance, bluff your way through and always, always stay polite – officials love to see people being humble in response to their authority. Some 'bribe-hunters' might go as far as threatening to take you to the police station, deny you access into the country etc, but that's usually a bluff, provided that you're really not breaking any law.

Sometimes you have to play the system. For example if officials are slow in processing a visa request, offering a small *cadeau* (literally 'gift') may be your only option. But tread very carefully; never simply offer to pay. Wait to see whether the official hints for something extra. Ask whether any 'special fee' is required to speed up the process.

Civil Unrest

This mainly concerns the Casamance region in Senegal. Though officially at peace with Dakar since 2004, the area isn't entirely safe, largely due to common robbers profiting from the precarious political situation. You're unlikely to experience any problems if you respect some basic rules.

Don't venture off the beaten track, especially if you're on your own, and don't travel at night. Especially on the road from Ziguinchor to Abéné there have been occasional car hijackings, where tourists have been robbed of their possessions, and kidnappings (of local officials). These have happened after dark; daytime travel is generally safe.

At the time of research, there were frequent violent clashes between the police and Dakar students. Confrontations always took place near the university campus, mainly on the Av Cheikh Anta Diop. Avoid the zone if you hear of such occurrences – you don't want to find yourself in the middle of a stone-throwing, tear gas-spraying exchange.

Gifts

One great annoyance for visitors to Africa is local people (not beggars) asking for gifts. 'Do you have something for me?' (*Donnez-moi un cadeau*) becomes familiar everywhere you go, usually from young children, but also from youths and even adults. Part of this expectation comes from a belief that anyone God has been good to should be willing to spread some wealth around. Because non-African foreigners are thought to be rich (which, relatively speaking, they are), generosity is generally expected. The usual gift asked for is, of course, money, but people may request your hat, shoes, camera or bicycle, all within a couple of minutes of meeting you. In this kind of situation you are not really expected to give anything. It's a 'worth a try' situation, and your polite refusal will rarely offend.

The situation changes when the gift is given in return for service, in which case it becomes more like a tip. There are no hard-and-fast rules when deciding whether to give. Simply pointing out the way to the bus station would not be seen as a significant service, whereas helping you for 10 minutes to find a hotel probably would be. When deciding how much to give, think how much a bottle of Coke or beer costs. Giving your helper enough 'to have a drink' is usually sufficient. If you're not prepared to offer a tip, don't ask for significant favours. In tourist areas you'll encounter locals who make a living by talking to foreigners, then providing 'friendly' services (from information and postcards to hard drugs and sex) for money. Avoid them unless you really need something and do not mind paying. (See also the boxed text, p39.)

Mugging

The danger of robbery is much more prevalent in cities and larger towns than in rural or wilderness areas. The riskiest place is

Dakar, where plenty of pickpockets and street hustlers roam the inner city (see p151 for more details). In the resorts near Banjul attacks are slightly rarer but not unknown; tourists have on occasion been pushed to the ground and had bags or cameras stolen, but they haven't been knifed or otherwise seriously injured (see p103). Gun crime is virtually unheard of.

Police Checks

In Senegal, police checks are usually brief and polite – you're likely to be let off with a smile if your papers are in order. Not so in Gambia. You'll encounter police and military stops all across the country that seem to exist primarily for the purpose of extracting bribes. They'll take their time checking your passport, then probably ask for your vaccination certificate, and if you've provided all that with a smile, they may engineer some other mysterious fault on your part. Keep calm, keep smiling, don't be intimidated and don't offer any money quickly. Most importantly, never ever drive past a stop (some can be hard to spot, watch out for them near larger settlements), as this will always result in you having to pay a bribe, possibly after a slow bag search and some shouting.

Precautions

Taking some simple precautions will hopefully ensure your journey to Senegal or Gambia is trouble-free. Remember that many thousands of travellers enjoy trips without any problems whatsoever, usually because they were careful. Most of the precautions that we have suggested below are particularly relevant to cities, although some of them might apply in towns and other places too.

- Don't make yourself a target. Carry around as little as possible; leave your day-pack, camera, credit card and personal stereo in your hotel room – provided you feel safe about the place. In Senegal, even passports can usually be left behind, though it's a good idea to make a copy of it and keep that with you. An exception is the Casamance, where you'll encounter police checkpoints. In Gambia, you need to keep your passport and vaccination certificate with you at all times.
- Don't display your money and other symbols of wealth. Don't wear jewellery or watches, however cheap they actually are,

REALITY CHECK

Lest you get too paranoid, remember this. Considering the wealth of most tourists and the unimaginable poverty of most locals, the incidence of robbery or theft in most of Gambia and Senegal is incredibly low. Even a shoestring traveller's daily budget of about US\$12 a day is what many Gambians make in a month. When you sit in a bus station sipping a soft drink that costs half a US dollar, look around you. You'll see an old man selling fans carefully woven from palm leaves for about half this price, or a teenage youth trying to earn that amount by offering to clean your shoes. It reminds you with a jolt that the vast majority of local people are decent and hardworking and want from you only respect and the chance to make an honest living.

unless you're prepared to lose them. Use a separate wallet for day-to-day purchases, and keep the bulk of your cash out of sight, hidden in a pouch under loose-fitting clothing.

- Never look as though you're lost (even if you are), and try not to look like a tourist! Remember to walk purposefully and confidently. If you need to keep your bearings, tear out the map you need from this guidebook, or photocopy it, and use that as your reference. If you need to consult the map, step into a shop or some other place where your disorientation is not so obvious. Or just forget about the map and ask someone, it's usually quicker and raises far less suspicion (it's the way locals get around).
- Don't walk in the backstreets, or even on some of the main streets, at night. Take a taxi. A dollar or two for the fare might save you a lot of trouble.
- Take someone you trust with you if you tend to travel to a risky area of town. It's usually not too difficult to find someone – ask at your hotel reception – who wouldn't mind earning a few dollars for the task of guiding you safely around the streets.

Scams

The hustlers of Dakar and Banjul, and some other places frequented by tourists, have perfected a dazzling array of scams and con

tricks. Some are imaginative and amusing; others are serious and cause for concern. Their aim is always to get some (or all) of your money.

A NICE WELCOME

You may be invited to stay in someone's house, in exchange for a meal and drinks, but your new friend's appetite for food and beer may make this deal more expensive than staying at a hotel. More seriously, while you are entertaining, someone will be at the house of your 'friend' going through your bag. This scam is only likely in tourist areas – we heard about it in Saint-Louis – but remember in remote or rural areas you'll come across genuine hospitality.

POLICE & THIEVES

If you buy grass or other drugs from a dealer, don't be surprised if he's in cahoots with the local police who then come to your hotel or stop you in the street and find you 'in possession'. Large bribes will be required to avoid arrest or imprisonment. The solution is very easy – do not buy grass.

REMEMBER ME?

A popular trick in the tourist areas involves local lads approaching you in the street with the words 'Hello, it's me, from the hotel, don't you recognise me?' You're not sure. You don't really remember him, but you don't want to seem like the white person who can't tell the difference between one black man and another. So you stop for a chat. Can he walk with you for a while? Sure. Nice day. A few more pleasantries. Then comes the crunch: how about a visit to his brother's souvenir shop? Or do you want to buy some grass? Need a taxi? A tour? By this time you're hooked, and you probably end up buying or arranging something. A variation involves the con-artist pretending to be a hotel employee or 'son of the owner' out to get supplies for the bar or restaurant. There's been a mix-up in the shop, or he's just out of petrol and needs to get the food stock back. Can you lend him some money? You can take it off the hotel bill later. And there's more. Once you've passed him some bank notes (or even if you haven't), and he's gone, a couple of guys approach you, introducing themselves as tourist guards (with ID cards and all), out to protect visitors to

their country from the low-down con-artists, such as the one you've just fallen for. They explain his trick, will accompany you for a while, and, grateful for their help and understanding, you'll make a small donation to their fund.

The way to avoid the trap is to be polite but firm. Anyone calling you 'my friend', *mon frère*, or just hissing at you without knowing your name is probably a stranger, so just walk on. Tell people confidently you're not staying in any hotel, you've spent years living here; that'll probably put them off, too.

SOCK SELLERS

A youth approaches you in the street with a couple of pairs of socks for sale. Even though you make it clear you don't want them he follows you for several minutes – checking you out. Then his buddy approaches you from the other side and he also tries to persuade you to buy the socks. He bends down and starts playing with your trousers and shoes, supposedly to show you how well the socks would go with what you're wearing. You are irritated and distracted, and while you bend down to fend him off, whoosh, the other guy comes in from the other side and goes straight for the wallet in your pocket.

The solution? Be firm, walk purposefully, stay cool, and don't be distracted. And don't carry your wallet in your back pocket.

THE VISITORS BOOK

In both Gambia and Senegal, the 'visitors book' has become one of the most popular and definitely the most effective means of extracting cash from tourists. There are several variations, but the following scenario is a classic of the genre. You're in the market, carrying your camera, when a man approaches telling you he has a newborn child. Could you please, if it's no problem at all, come to his compound and take a photo of him and the child. It's not far away, it won't take long, and it would mean the world to him and his sick wife. When you get to the compound you meet his sick 'wife' but the baby is nowhere to be seen. Dad explains that his child is also unwell and has been taken back to the hospital, but seeing as you're here would you like a Coke – it's free! 'It is our duty to be hospitable,' he says. 'We have lots of tourists here, and we never

take money for a drink.' As there is no baby around you have had your suspicions for a while – but you feel too rude to walk out as they bombard you with a string of questions about your country. When you get up to leave, the 'visitors book' appears, listing the names of dozens of other Western tourists who've allegedly donated money to the family to help pay for rice – D500 being the average 'donation'. When it gets to this stage few are able to escape. Your only chance is to leave as soon as you see the baby is not there, or better, to say at the outset that you don't want to give money.

Security

To keep your money and other valuables (such as passport and air ticket) safe from pickpockets, the best place is out of sight under a shirt or skirt or inside your trousers. Some travellers use a pouch or money belt that goes around their necks or waists, while others go for invisible pockets and other imaginative devices.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Neither Senegal nor Gambia are easily accessible to disabled travellers. Hotels that make provisions, such as wheelchair access etc, are few and far between. The sandy, and obstacle-ridden pavements can be hard to negotiate for the visually or mobility impaired. However, if you stick to the large, established (and unfortunately expensive) hotels you can expect help, a general awareness, and things such as disabled toilets and wheel-chair access. If you plan to travel upcountry, you're best off travelling with a tour company, and explaining to them your special requirements beforehand.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

For practical purposes, the term 'embassy' in this chapter encompasses consulates and high commissions as well as embassies. In some parts of Africa, countries are represented by an honorary consul (not a full-time diplomat, but usually an expatriate working in a local business or aid project who performs limited diplomatic duties on behalf of citizens).

Gambian Embassies & Consulates

Belgium (☎ 02 640 1049; 126 Ave Franklin-Roosevelt, Brussels 1050)

France (☎ 01 42 94 09 30; 117, Rue Saint-Lazare, 75008 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030 892 31 21; fax 891 14 01; Kurfürstendamm 103, Berlin)

Guinea-Bissau (☎ 0203928; Avenida de 14 Novembro, Bissau) Located 1km northwest of Mercado de Bandim.

Nigeria (☎ 0682 192; 162 Awolowo Rd, Ikoyi, Lagos)

Senegal (☎ 821 44 76; 11 Rue de Thiong, Dakar)

Sierra Leone (☎ 225191; 6 Wilberforce St, Freetown)

UK (☎ 020 7937 6316; 57 Kensington Ct, London W8 5DH)

USA (☎ 0202-785 1399; gamembdc@gambia.com; Suite 1000, 1155 15th St NW, Washington, DC 20005)

Gambia is also represented in Austria, Canada, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland. For a complete list, www.embassy.org is supposed to list every embassy, though last time we checked the site was slightly outdated. It's worth a try though.

Embassies & Consulates in The Gambia

The following list includes embassies of some 'home' countries and of neighbouring countries for which you might have to take a visa. Most are open 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm Monday to Friday. Opening times different from these appear in the list. It's always best to go at the beginning of the morning session, as lunch hours can be very flexible. Note that for every visa application you need to provide between one and four (usually two) passport photos.

Some embassies and consulates are in Banjul, and others are scattered along the Atlantic coast. For details of embassies in Gambia not listed here, check in the phone book (most Gamtel offices have one).

Guinea (Map p92; ☎ 226862, 909964; top fl, 78A Daniel Goddard St, Banjul; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, to 1.30pm & 2.30-4pm Fri)

Guinea-Bissau (Map pp100-1; ☎ 4494854; Atlantic Rd, Bakau; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat)

Mali (Map p92; ☎ 226942; VM Company Ltd, Cherno Adama Bah St, Banjul)

Mauritania (Map pp100-1; ☎ 461086; Badala Park Way, Kololi; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Senegal (Map pp100-1; ☎ 373752; fax 373 750; ☎ 8am-2pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri) Off Kairaba Ave.

Sierra Leone (Map p92; ☎ 228206; 67 Daniel Goddard St, Banjul; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, to 1.30pm Fri)

UK (Map pp100-1; ☎ 495133/4; fax 496134; 48 Atlantic Rd, Fajara; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, to 1pm Fri)

USA (Map pp100-1; ☎ 392856/8, 391971; fax 392475; Kairaba Ave, Fajara)

Several European countries have honorary consuls in Gambia, including Belgium (at the Kairaba Hotel, Kololi); and Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway (above Tina's Grill, Saitmatty Rd, Bakau). These people have limited diplomatic powers, and are mainly there to assist holidaymakers who run into difficulties. If you need either of these consuls, you can get information about them from one of the holiday reps working for the German and Scandinavian tour companies, usually contactable through the larger hotels. French diplomatic affairs are dealt with by the French embassy in Dakar, Senegal.

Senegalese Embassies & Consulates

If you are outside of West Africa, you'll find Senegalese embassies here:

Belgium (☎ 06730097; senegal.ambassade@coditel.net; 196 Av Franklin-Roosevelt, Brussels 1050)

Canada (☎ 0238 6392; www.ambassenecanada.org; 57 Marlborough Ave, Ottawa ON K1N)

France (☎ 01 44 05 38 69; www.ambassenparis.com; 22 Rue Hamelin, 75016 Paris)

Germany (☎ 0228-21 80 08; Argelanderstrasse 3, 53115 Bonn)

Guinea (☎ 224 46 29 30; Corniche Sud, Coléah, Conakry; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri)

Guinea-Bissau (☎ 245 212944; 43 Rue Omar Torrijos, Bissau; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Japan (☎ 0464 8451; fax 464 8452; 1-3-4 Aobadai, Meguro-ku Tokyo 153)

Mali (☎ 223 218273/4; fax 211780; 341 Rue 287 X Av Nelson Mandela, Bamako; ☎ 7.30am-1pm & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri)

Mauritania (☎ 222 525 72 90; Av de l'Ambassade du Sénégal, Nouakchott)

Morocco (☎ 07754171; 17 Cadi Ben Hamadi Benhadj, BP 365 Rabat)

UK (☎ 020 7938 4048; www.senegalembassy.co.uk; 39 Marloes Rd, London W8 6LA)

USA (☎ 02234 0540; 2112 Wyoming Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

In West Africa, Senegal also has embassies in Banjul (see left), Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Lagos (Nigeria), Niamey (Niger) and Praia (Cape Verde).

Embassies & Consulates in Senegal

The following is a list of some embassies, consulates and diplomatic missions in Senegal. You usually need to provide between one and four passport photos when applying for a visa for a neighbouring country.

INTERNATIONAL ROOTS FESTIVAL

On the back of Alex Haley's book *Roots* and its success, the Gambian government initiated the **Roots Homecoming Festival** (www.rootsgambia.gm), a biennial event last held in June 2006, featuring concerts, talks, commemorative walks and workshops across the country. The climax is a big celebration in Jufureh with dance displays and concerts by local troupes and stars from the African diaspora. Registration for the full weeklong programme costs US\$250, though it's perfectly possible to participate only in a few events (some are free, others like the 'Jufureh pilgrimage' cost up to US\$100).

Many embassies are in or near central Dakar, but there is a steady movement of the diplomatic corps towards the Point E and Mermoz areas, about 5km northwest of the centre. If you need to find an embassy that is not listed here, check the phone book, one of the listings magazines, or www.ausenegal.com/pratique_en/ambassad.htm. Most embassies are open from 8am to noon, and in theory from 2.30pm to 5pm, though you're always better off seeking a morning 'appointment.'

Belgium (Map p148; ☎ 822 4720; Route de la Corniche-Est)

Burkina Faso (Map p146; ☎ 827 9509/8; Lot 1, Liberty VI Extension; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Canada (Map p148; ☎ 889 4700; Immeuble Sorano, 4th fl, 45-47 Blvd de la République)

Cape Verde (Map p150; ☎ 821 1873; 3 Blvd el Haji Djily Mbaye; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Côte d'Ivoire (Map p152; ☎ 869 02 70; Allées Seydou Nourou Tall cnr Rue G, Point E; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri)

France (Map p150; ☎ 839 5100; 1 Rue Assane Ndoye)

Gambia (Map p150; ☎ 821 7230; 11 Rue de Thiong; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu & to 1pm Fri)

Germany (Map p148; ☎ 889 4884; 20 Av Pasteur)

Ghana (Map p152; ☎ 869 4053; Rue 6, Point E)

Guinea (Map p152; ☎ 824 8606; Rue 7, Point E;

☎ 9.30am-2pm Mon-Fri) Directly opposite Ker Jaraaf.

Guinea-Bissau (Map p152; ☎ 824 5922; Rue 6, Point E, Dakar; ☎ 8am-12.30pm Mon-Fri); Ziguinchor (☎ 991 1046; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Italy (Map p148; ☎ 822 0076; Rue Seydou Nourou Tall)

Mali (Map p146; ☎ 824 6252; 23 Route de la Corniche Ouest, Fann; ☎ 8am-11am Mon-Fri)

Mauritania (Map p146; ☎ 822 6238; Rue 37, Kolobane;

☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri)

Morocco (Map p152; ☎ 824 6927; Av Cheikh Anta Diop, Mermoz) Near the Total petrol station where all the *cars rapides* wait.

Netherlands (Map p150; ☎ 849 0360; 37 Rue Kléber)

Spain (Map p148; ☎ 842 6408; 18-20 Av Nelson Mandela)

Switzerland (Map p148; ☎ 823 0590; Rue René Mdiayé)

UK (Map p148; ☎ 823 7392; 20 Rue du Dr Guillet) One block north of Hôpital Le Dante.

USA (Map p150; ☎ 823 4296; Av Jean XXIII)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There's always a festival on somewhere in the region: some so small and informal that you'll hardly hear about them; others huge, international events. Here's a selection.

Abéné Festivalo Informal event, mainly featuring drumming troupes of varying standards. Happens every New Year.

Dak'Art Biennale (☎ 823 0918; www.dakart.org)

Fantastic biennial arts festival, held in Dakar.

Festival International du Film de Quartier (www.festivaldufilmdequartier.com) Dakar Film Festival with excellent fringe shows.

International Roots Festival Biennial festival held all across Gambia in June, with a focus on the village of Jufureh, made famous by Alex Haley's book *Roots*. Features mainly traditional music, as well as debates.

Kaay Fecc (☎ 826 4950; www.ausenegal.com/kaayfecc) One of Africa's best dance festivals.

Kartong Festival (☎ 8900411, 7730535; peterborshik@hotmail.com; www.kartongfestival.com) Village festival in Gambia. Features stunning local, largely traditional groups.

Saint-Louis International Jazz Festival (www.saintlouisjazz.com, in French) Renowned international jazz festival in a historical setting.

FOOD

The availability and quality of restaurants differs enormously between the urban and rural areas of the region. The best place by far to go out for a meal is Dakar, home to hundreds of restaurants, serving all kinds of food, from simple rice dishes to several course dinners. Upcountry, your choice is more often between hotel food and that served in the local *gargotte* (eating house), usually found near the taxi ranks or along the market. And if you arrive late in the evening (after 11pm), even the *gargotte* may have run out of food, and you'll be forced to hunt for bread and sardines at the local corner store.

Also note that in smaller towns, restaurants and hotels may only serve food on request, so you have to order in advance.

Prices for meals vary enormously (as does the standard of food). Local rice dishes

are always the cheapest, and you can find them in small eateries from CFA1000 or D25. A classy restaurant will charge around CFA5000 to CFA70000 or D200 to D250 for a dish – but beware, the stylishness of the surroundings doesn't necessarily reflect the quality of food. Hotels, as with pretty much anywhere around the world, tend to overcharge, though some have surprisingly good restaurants (if that's the case, we have tried to highlight this in this guidebook). See also the Food & Drink chapter (p79).

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Most people in both Gambia and Senegal, especially the older generation, are conservative in their attitudes towards gays and lesbians, and gay sexual relationships are both a cultural taboo and (officially) very rare among locals. Strictly speaking, being gay or lesbian is illegal in Senegal. Some parts of the predominantly Muslim community are actively antigay – some villagers have prevented gays being buried in the village cemetery. Most locals, though, have a fairly 'live and let live' attitude. Flirting from Westerners is more often met with embarrassment than with anger.

Among the expat community, which is pretty much confined to the Atlantic coast resorts in Gambia, and Dakar and the resort zones around Saly and Cap Skiring in Senegal, there is a percentage who are gay (as in any Western community), but there are no established regular meeting places or 'scenes', so it is usually quite difficult for visitors to make contact. In most places in Senegal and Gambia, any open displays of affection are generally frowned upon, whatever your orientation.

HOLIDAYS

Senegal and Gambia don't exactly lack in public holidays, and especially in Senegal you'll be forgiven for thinking that the country enjoys a near uninterrupted chain of public celebrations. Both Christian and Islamic events are celebrated. The Muslim holidays, such as Korité, Tabaski, Tamkharit and Maoulid, are determined by the lunar calendar, and occur on different dates each year (for more details, see the boxed text p46). The exact dates of these holidays are only announced just before they occur, as they depend on the sightings of the moon.

And occasionally, experts differ in their readings of the moon, which can result in a two-day celebration.

Governmental departments shut on public holidays, as do many businesses and shops, though there'll always be a boutique open where you can get your bread and coffee. Public transport can be less frequent, and taxis usually increase their prices, sometimes quite drastically.

The Gambia

Holidays include the following:

New Year's Day 1 January

Independence Day 18 February

Good Friday March/April

Easter Monday March/April

Workers' Day 1 May

Anniversary of the Second Republic 22 July

Christmas 25 December

Senegal

Holidays include the following:

New Year's Day 1 January

Independence Day 4 April

Easter Monday March/April

Whit Sunday/Pentecost Seventh Sunday after Easter

Whit Monday Day after Whit Sunday

Ascension 40th day after Easter

Workers Day 1 May

Assumption August 15

Christmas Day 25 December

Other annual festivals include the Grand Magal pilgrimage and celebration, held in Touba 48 days after the Islamic New Year to celebrate the return from exile of the founder of the Mouride Islamic brotherhood; and the Paris–Dakar Rally, which ends at Lac Rose in mid-January.

INSURANCE

An insurance policy covering you for medical expenses and an emergency flight home is essential. Hospitals in Senegal and Gambia are not free, and the good ones are not cheap, particularly for foreigners, who may have to pay up to three times the price charged to locals. Air ambulances and international medical evacuation (medivac) flights are frighteningly expensive, so you need to be fully covered.

Most travel insurance also covers your baggage in case of loss, and cancellation or hijack. (It's important to read the small print,

but some aspects they cover are enough to put you off flying!) It's possible to get medical travel insurance only; however, in our experience there is generally little difference in price for such policies covering Africa.

If your travel agent, insurance broker or credit-card company can't help you with a good policy, try a student travel service. It's preferable to get a policy from an insurance company that will directly pay any costs you incur, rather than reimburse you after you pay your bills.

Worldwide cover to travellers from over 44 countries is available online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

INTERNET ACCESS

Access to the Internet is becoming increasingly easy and cheap in Gambia and Senegal; in Dakar, Senegal, and the tourist areas of the Atlantic coast in Gambia, the service is world-class. See the Information sections in the destination chapters for locations of Internet cafés.

Unless you're planning on staying in expensive hotels there's not much point in bringing your notebook or palmtop computer with you as you'll need to be very lucky indeed to find a phone jack. Even if there is a jack, at the time of writing none of the major ISPs (Internet Service Providers) had local dial-in numbers, meaning connecting to the Net could be both very slow and very expensive. If you do bring a computer, invest in a universal AC adaptor, a plug adaptor for each country you visit, and a reputable 'global' modem. Telephone sockets will probably be different too, so bring at least a US RJ-11 adaptor that works with your modem. Especially in Senegal, wi-fi access is rising fast, and several hotels and restaurants around the country now offer free wi-fi access – perfect for connecting your laptop. See particular reviews for places with wi-fi access.

If your Internet email account is hosted by a smaller ISP or your office or school network, your best option is to rely on cybercafés and other public access points to collect your mail. To do this, you'll need to carry three pieces of information: your incoming (POP or IMAP) mail server name, your account name and your password. Your ISP or network supervisor will be able to give you these. Armed with this information,

you should be able to access your Internet mail account from any Internet-connected machine in the world, provided it runs some kind of email software (Netscape and Internet Explorer both have mail modules).

The Gambia

Internet cafés are common in Banjul and on the Atlantic coast, and there's usually some place to log on in the larger upcountry towns, too. There are three operators whose signs can be seen fairly frequently: CyberWorld, Quantumnet (www.qanet.gm) and Gamtel. All charge about D30 an hour as a base rate. The service is generally reasonably fast, with newish terminals and extras such as microphones and cameras standard. However, frequent power cuts have the potential to ruin your whole day, so it's wise to ask whether the café has a back-up generator, or at the very least a surge protector, before logging on.

Away from the coast and all the cashed-up tourists, Net access is harder to find, slower and more expensive, and the power cuts are more frequent, too.

Senegal

Senegal is the third-best place in Africa for Web services, and you'll have no problem logging on. Cybercafés are plentiful, though not all are equally speedy. All major towns upcountry are connected, and some of the smaller places, too, though the more remote you get, the more you have to pay.

In Dakar, Internet phone and video facilities are common, and you normally pay CFA300 per hour. In Kedougou, this price is a staggering CFA1500, and in most other places you'll pay something in-between.

LEGAL MATTERS

While marijuana is widely available in both Gambia and Senegal, its use is illegal in both countries. If you're caught in possession you could face up to two years in an African jail; a less-than-attractive proposition. However, unless you're caught by an unusually straight cop, or are carrying a particularly large quantity of the drug, it's more likely you'll be 'persuaded' to buy your way out of trouble, which usually results in a very one-sided bargaining session. Either way, you are in deep shit if you get caught.

COPIES

Photocopies of all your important documents, plus airline tickets and credit cards, will help speed up replacement if they are lost or stolen. Keep these records and a list of travellers cheque numbers separate from other valuables, and also leave copies with someone at home so they can be faxed to you in an emergency.

MAPS

Most maps of Senegal also show Gambia, but the level of detail on the smaller country is generally poor.

Macmillan's *Traveller's Map of Gambia* (at a scale of 1:400,000) is by far the best – clear and easy to read, with most roads, tourist sights and places of interest marked – but can be hard to find.

The most widely available map of Gambia is the 1:350,000 effort by Canadian group International Travel Maps. This is not bad, but there are several errors that can be frustrating. For Senegal, the locally produced *Carte du Senegal* (1:912,000) is the best and cheapest available and includes a basic street map of Dakar; this map is hard to find outside Senegal though.

Also good for country coverage is the *Senegal Carte Routière* (1:1,000,000) produced by the Institut Géographique National (IGN). Not as good, but more widely available internationally, is ITMB's *Senegal, Including Gambia* (1:800,000).

If your journey through Gambia and Senegal is part of wider travels in West Africa, the Michelin map *Africa – North & West* (sheet number 953, formerly number 153) is one of the few maps in the world to have achieved something like classic status. The detail is incredible, given the limitations of scale (1:4,000,000), and the map is regularly updated (check the date on the back cover to make sure you buy a recent version). You should expect a few discrepancies between the map and reality, particularly with regard to roads, as old tracks get upgraded and once-smooth highways become potholed disasters. However, no overland driver would be without this map. There's even a **153 Club** (www.manntaylor.com/153.html) for those people who have driven across the Sahara and around West Africa.

MONEY The Gambia

Gambia's unit of currency is the dalasi (da-la-see). This is abbreviated to D or d, and is written before or after the numbers. Throughout this book, we have put it before, eg D200. The dalasi is not fixed and floats against other international currencies, although locals will tell you it's been drowning for years. When this book was written, the dalasi had just become fairly stable; check the situation when you travel, and bear value-decrease in mind when considering prices listed in this book.

The dalasi is divided into 100 bututs, and there are coins for five, 10, 25 and 50 bututs, although apart from the 50 these are rarely seen. Notes in circulation are D5, D10, D25, D50 and D100. There is also a D1 coin.

Gambia's main banks are Standard Chartered, Trust Bank and IBC, all of which have branches in Banjul, Serekunda and the Atlantic coast resorts. Upcountry, only Basse Santa Su and Brikama have bank branches.

Senegal

The currency of Senegal is the West African CFA franc, called the 'franc CFA' in French (pronounced franc seh-eff-ahh). CFA stands for Communauté Financière Africaine, and is also the official currency of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger and Togo.

There are 100 centimes in one CFA franc and they come in 5, 10, 25 and 50 denominations. There are coins for CFA5, CFA10, CFA50, CFA100 and CFA250 and there are notes for CFA500, CFA1000, CFA5000 and CFA10,000.

The value of the CFA is tied to the euro at a fixed rate of 1 euro to 655.957CFA.

The main banks are BICIS (which is affiliated with and accepts cheques from BNP in France), SGBS and CBAO. The first two have the largest number of branches; at least one of them tends to be present in the larger towns.

ATMs

There are ATMs at several banks (notably Standard Chartered) and a couple of petrol stations in Banjul and around the Atlantic coast. Senegal is amazingly well served, with ATMs in all major and some minor towns, and all across Dakar. Still, even in

NEW CURRENCIES

There are plans to unite Gambia, Senegal and 13 other West African countries in a joint monetary zone. In theory, this united currency was supposed to replace all existing ones by 2004, but it hasn't. The hugely ambitious project was launched by the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), which argues that a single currency, combined with common customs laws, common tariff levels and open borders, will help achieve regional economic integration and eventually prosperity in this, the poorest region on earth.

The initial plan was to bring Gambia together with Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone in a currency labelled the West Africa Second Monetary Zone (WAMZ). Then, just as these countries get used to the WAMZ, they'd be expected to go through the whole process again when their new currency merges with the CFA, which is already used in eight West African states.

At the time this book went to press, no news was available about the progress of the project, and locals didn't seem to know anything about it at all. Whether it's been scrapped, thrown into the too hard basket or simply been given more time to mature isn't quite certain. But who knows, perhaps you will be asked to change your dollars into WAMZ by the time you travel. Keep an ear out for the latest news before you head off.

Senegal it's not wise to rely on their presence if you travel upcountry, as a broken or empty teller can leave you stranded.

In theory ATMs accept credit and debit cards from banks with reciprocal agreements. In Senegal SGBS and CBAO ATMs normally take Visa and MasterCard, but BICIS accepts only Visa. In Gambia you're stranded with anything but Visa, and the Cirrus, Maestro and Plus networks displayed at some ATMs aren't generally accepted.

Banks and card companies often use fair exchange rates, which can make drawing money from the wall cheaper than changing travellers cheques.

In Senegal, your typical withdrawal limit is CFA300,000, though some bank branches only allow up to CFA150,000. In Gambia, limits can be ridiculously tight, with some banks only allowing withdrawal of up to D2000.

Black Market

Until a few years ago, Gambia had a thriving black market, where many tourists changed money for slightly better rates, though at hugely higher risks (of theft and of being arrested or fined). These days, as the dalasi has become more stable and the police tougher, the black market is more insignificant. You can still find people changing cash in shady restaurants, near the Barra ferry and in other places, but they will rarely offer you a better rate than the bank (sometimes it's worse), and you run a very real risk of being conned out of your money.

If you travel overland from Senegal, money changers will probably crowd around your taxi as you enter Gambia. Don't feel pressured, many places and most taxis in Gambia also accept CFA, so that you can get by without changing money before you reach Banjul or the coastal resorts.

Cash

In Senegal and Gambia, major international currencies such as euros, US dollars and British pounds can be changed in banks in the capital cities, major towns and tourist areas. In urban areas, you can usually change money at hotel reception desks, although rates are often lousy or commissions high. Another option is to try asking discreetly at a shop selling imported items. Saying something like 'The banks are closed and I have US dollars – do you know anyone who can help me...?' is better than 'Do you change money?'

Try to do all your changing in the cities before heading upcountry. And if you do take foreign currencies into the more remote areas, try to make it euros rather than pounds or dollars or you risk getting stuck.

Because of counterfeiting, old US\$100 notes and some other older notes are not accepted at places that don't have a light machine for checking watermarks.

Credit Cards

The use of credit cards is mainly limited to midrange and top-end hotels and restaurants, car-rental outfits, purchasing air tick-

ets and some tours. Visa is the most widely accepted. You won't usually be able to use them in supermarkets and only in very few shops (such as Senegal's large bookshops).

Certainly don't rely on plastic when travelling upcountry, not even for use in ATMs. Some banks in the interior of Senegal and Gambia can give cash advances on credit cards, though readers have reported this being too much hassle to try.

Your card company will tell you which banks in Gambia and Senegal will accept your card. You'll also need to ask your bank or card company about charges, and arrange a way to pay card bills if you're travelling for more than a month or so. Debit cards can be used to draw cash and because there's no bill to pay off they are good for longer journeys.

International Transfers

Unless you've got a bank account with a major bank in France, it's highly unlikely that your bank will accept international wire transfers. And even if it does, chances are it'll take longer than your holiday and cost you almost as much.

Faster and a lot simpler than banks is Western Union Money Transfer, where all you need to do is phone someone with money, get them to send their cash and tell you the password, and you can pick up the cash at a branch the next day. This doesn't come cheap either, but if you're really stuck for cash in a small village in the sticks of Gambia or Senegal, this might sometimes be your only option. Western Union offices are springing up quicker than potholes in Gambia's tarmac, and even small towns often have a branch.

Moneychangers

All the major bank branches change money, as do exchange bureaus, which are mostly present in the tourist zones. The airports in both countries have bank branches; if they are closed, you can try the bookshop at Dakar airport, or, failing that, change a small amount with the guys lurking around outside for just that purpose – at least to get you into town where you have better options.

In Gambia, moneychanging bureaus tend to give a slightly better rate for cash than banks, and a slightly worse rate for travellers cheques, but as rates and commissions can vary, it might be worth shopping around.

BANK CHARGES & COMMISSIONS

Generally, whenever you change money you have to pay something to the bank – that's how it makes its profit. The charge can be a flat fee (of around US\$2), but sometimes it's a commission quoted as a percentage of the amount you change (usually between 1% and 2%). Sometimes you have to pay a charge in addition to a commission.

Alternatively there may be no charge or commission at all, but this doesn't necessarily mean it's a better deal, as the bank may instead make its money from the lower rate it offers you. For example, Bank A may give you CFA500 to the US dollar, and charge a commission of 2%. Over the street, Bank B may not charge any commission but only give you CFA480 per US dollar. Keep this in mind when looking around.

If you're dealing with CFA francs and euros, much of this is academic. The rate is fixed at 656:1 and all you need to compare between banks is the charge or commission.

Tippling

Tippling in Gambia and Senegal is only expected from the wealthy. This means well-to-do locals and nearly all foreign visitors. Anyone staying in an upmarket hotel is expected to tip porters and other staff, but not a backpacker in a cheap hotel.

At the better restaurants, you're expected to tip around 10%, though many places include this in the bill. At the other end of the scale are the more basic restaurants and eating-houses where no tipping is expected from anyone. There's a grey area between these two classes of restaurants, where tipping is rarely expected from locals, but may be expected of wealthy-looking foreigners.

No-one tips taxi drivers.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques can be a safer alternative to cash – you can get a refund or replacement if they get stolen. But changing them isn't easy in either country. The major city banks accept them grudgingly but charge high commissions, and you'll be stuck with them in the smaller branches upcountry.

Only Amex cheques are considered, and the best currency for travellers cheques (as for cash) is the euro.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Film & Accessories

Film is relatively expensive in Gambia and Senegal because it has to be imported. Outside the major cities only standard print film is available; in Gambia slide film is almost impossible to find. Even if the expiry date has not yet been reached, the film may have been damaged by heat. It's best to bring all you need with you.

The sunlight is frequently strong, so most people find 100 ASA perfectly adequate, with possibly 200 ASA or 400 ASA for long-lens shots. Useful photographic accessories might include a small flash, a cable or remote shutter release, filters and a cleaning kit. Also remember to take spare batteries.

The old X-ray machines at some airports may not be safe for film. Even newer film-safe models can damage high-speed film (1000 ASA plus), especially if the film goes through several checks, so use a protective lead bag. Alternatively, carry film in your pocket and have it checked manually by officials.

The main photo laboratories in the cities of Gambia and Senegal, as well as some clued-up Internet cafés, have facilities for printing digital images, but you're better off waiting until you get home, where it's cheaper.

Photographing Animals

To score excellent wildlife shots, a long lens helps, although you'll need a tripod for anything over 200mm. If your subject is nothing but a speck in the distance, resist wasting film but keep the camera ready.

Photographing People

Taking pictures of strangers is a sensitive issue, especially if a relatively affluent photographer takes pictures of poorer people. What you might consider a great, typical Gambian scene, they may find humiliating, feeling uncomfortable being photographed in a day-to-day situation and poverty. Pictures by locals are usually only taken at ceremonies, parties, in bars and restaurants, when people are dressed their best.

Approach people photography with respect. Some tourists go for discreet shots with long lenses. Others ask permission first. If you get 'no' for an answer, accept it. Some local people may agree to be photographed if you give them a picture for themselves. Take their address and make it clear that

you'll post the photo. Your promise will be taken seriously, so never say you'll send a photo unless you intend to.

Restrictions

In Senegal and Gambia no permit is required for photography. You'll mostly have no problem with a camera (providing, of course, you observe the usual rules of politeness). Note that you should avoid taking photos of military installations, airports, ferries, harbours and government buildings. This is particularly pertinent in Gambia, where there's a good chance you'll have your film and camera confiscated; you might even get arrested. Things are more relaxed in Senegal, though you could still get into trouble. Always ask before taking pictures of places of worship or a natural feature with traditional religious significance.

Technical Tips

CAMERA CARE

Heat and humidity can take a toll on your camera, but the biggest danger is the all-pervading dust that accompanies almost every trip out of town. If you don't take precautions, grit will soon find its way into lenses and camera bodies. Try to find a camera bag that closes with a zip or some other form of seal – the traditional top-opening shoulder bags are hopeless at keeping dust out. Carry snap-lock or zip-lock bags to put lenses into when they're not in use. The worst time of year for dust is during the harmattan (the light winds from the north that carry tiny particles of sand from the desert, causing hazy skies from December to February).

EXPOSURE

When photographing animals or people, take light readings from the subject and not the brilliant African background, or your shots will turn out underexposed.

TIMING

The best times to take photographs on sunny days are the first two hours after sunrise and the last two before sunset. This takes advantage of the colour-enhancing rays cast by a low sun. A polarising filter can help to cut out glare, which is especially useful during hazy periods before the rainy season.

For further tips, check out Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography*.

Video

A properly used video camera can give a fascinating record of your holiday. As well as obvious things – sunsets, spectacular views – remember to record some of the ordinary everyday details of life in the country.

One good rule to follow is to film in long takes, and don't move the camera around too much. Otherwise, your video could well make your viewers seasick! If your camera has a stabiliser, you can use it to obtain good footage while travelling – even on bumpy roads. Video cameras often have sensitive microphones, which can be a problem if there is a lot of ambient noise.

While travelling, you can recharge batteries in hotels as you go along, so take the necessary charger, plugs and transformer.

You should follow the guidelines outlined under Photographing People (opposite) regarding people's sensitivities; many locals find video cameras even more annoying and offensive than still cameras. Always ask permission first. And remember, you're on holiday – don't let the video take over your life.

POST

Senegal has one of the most reliable postal services in the whole of Africa, and Gambia isn't doing too badly either. Telephone networks are good, too, both for mobile phones and landlines. Post is much quicker and more reliable from the main centres.

In both countries the postal services are relatively cheap. For postcards or any sort of stationery or packaging materials, the cheapest places are almost always located outside the post office.

Receiving Mail

If you need to receive mail, you can use the poste restante service, where letters are sent to a post office (usually in a capital city) for you to collect. In Gambia, the best place for poste restante is the main post office in Banjul; mail should be addressed as follows: Your name/Poste Restante/General Post Office/Banjul/The Gambia.

In Senegal, the main postal branch in Dakar is the place for poste restante. You send letters to: Your name/Poste Restante/PTT/Dakar/Senegal. Note that some travellers have reported negative experiences using this service.

Letters usually take about a week to arrive from Europe, and twice as long from North America or Australasia. However, they can take much longer to work through the system once in Senegal or Gambia. If they've arrived in the country, they'll be registered on the computer system, and you can track their whereabouts. (Parcels and large envelopes are usually stuck at customs). To collect your mail, go to the main post office and show your passport; always bring some money with you in case of unexpected customs charges.

It's essential to write your name clearly in capital letters. If you can't find mail you're expecting, check under your other names. Ask people writing to you to use just your family name and initials. If your family name is common, it should be underlined and your given name written in lower case.

Sending Mail

Letters sent from Dakar or Banjul take about a week to reach most parts of Europe, and eight to 15 days to reach North America or Australasia. Don't rely on this – sometimes it can take three times longer for a letter to arrive. If speed is important, you're better off using a DHL service – especially in Senegal, where they have a number of offices.

SHOPPING

Keen shoppers can spend many hours browsing in the shops, stalls and markets of Gambia and Senegal, hunting for that rare souvenir.

Wherever there are tourists, you will find stalls full of wooden carvings of variable quality, the same designs endlessly repeated. It is easy to be disdainful of hastily made 'airport art', but if you look hard you may well find something that catches your eye. Many wooden carvings are stained brown or black, and shoe polish seems to be the dye of choice.

If it's jewellery you're after, the numerous, tiny boutiques of inner-city Dakar or Gambia's coastal area will soon catch your eye. It's best to shop here with someone who knows the difference between a skilled goldsmith selling real items, and one that shifts only mass-produced fakes. Mauritanian silversmiths have a tradition of creating delicate, silver filigree jewellery. You'll find them near Marché Sandaga in Dakar.

FUNKY SOUVENIRS

You're the type of traveller who steers clear of 'tourist trash' but still wants to bring home something special? Try the following:

- a lamp shade or CD shelf made from old cans, craftily welded together by Baba Diawara and sold in his fabulous little workshop opposite Marché Soumbédioune in Dakar
- an Afro-funky jeans outfit made by the young-people's label **Sigil** (☎ 864 7705; www.keur-gui.com; Villa 988, Sicap Rue 10, Dakar)
- a *sous-verre* (glass painting) in the full-colour style of Dakar's *cars rapides*, sold in **Michèle Ka's hair salon** (☎ 824 7033) in Dakar's Point E, near the big swimming pool
- a book by Dakar's leading cartoonist Mohiss, sold in all the big Dakar bookshops. No-one teases the Senegalese better
- a length of cloth printed with the face of Gambia's president, sold in markets all across the country (election time is a good moment to find these)
- an intricately decorated incense burner (the ones made in the Bassari lands are particularly beautiful) together with a bag of *thiouraye* (a mixture of seed and fragrant wood) to burn in it – it'll do wonders for your love life
- a pair of sandals made to fit at the Moroccan workshops in Dakar's Rue Mohammed V
- a wall hanging made from stitched-together lengths of hand-woven indigo fabric – Kedougou market is your best bet
- a batik painting by a leading Gambian artist, try the Lemonfish Gallery in Kartong and the African Heritage Centre in Bakau
- a scrap-material bird made by Dhiedhiou Tall, on sale at the Institut Français in Dakar

Fabrics are another shopper's favourite, and you'll find a wide selection of locally dyed or imported fabrics in every large market. If it's Malian-style *bazins* (dyed fabrics that are beaten to shine with wooden clubs) you're after, it's again advisable to go with someone who knows their stuff – these fabrics range from expensive, rustling, rich *bazin* destined for the affluent classes and first quality (still shimmering) to second quality, usually used for table cloths and bedspreads. You can take your fabrics to a local tailor and have them made into a perfectly fitting outfit. Alternatively, you can buy ready-made clothing. Brightly coloured baggy trousers and shirts are popular. These are cheap and likely to fall apart at a moment's notice, though. The shops selling this type of clothing usually also have a range of batik paintings, which are just as quickly churned out.

For lovers of West African music, there is an enormous supply of locally produced CDs and cassettes, usually sold in markets or by merchants on the street. International artists such as Youssou N'Dour frequently produce albums for the local market that

never reach Europe. You take your chances on quality, with prices around US\$2 per tape and US\$10 for the CD.

Many people come to this region to learn drumming. If you really want to purchase an instrument to play, go with your drumming teacher, they'll have their reliable drum maker. If you are just looking for a souvenir, you can go to any market and haggle. But you might want to consider the fact that the Western love of *djembe* (a short, goat hide-covered drum) has caused such an increase in production that the *dimb* tree they are made from has become almost extinct in some areas, causing all the usual problems associated with deforestation.

Genuine collectors of African art are likely to be more interested in the wooden sculptures, particularly masks, headdresses and stools that have found their way from all over West and Central Africa to the galleries of Dakar, and to a few stalls in the markets of Banjul and Brikama in Gambia. Some of the dusty pieces are genuine, which raises questions about whether travellers should encourage the people of Africa to sell off the best parts of their cultural inheritance,

while others are replicas made specifically for sale.

For contemporary art, it's best to seek out your artist of choice and purchase directly from them. Dakar and Gorée are among the best places for this, details are included in the relevant regional chapters.

At some market stalls you may see ivory for sale. While it's not illegal to buy ivory within Gambia or Senegal, it is illegal to export it in any quantity, so if you carry it home in your luggage you face arrest, fines or imprisonment. By buying ivory, you'll also be supporting the poaching of elephants.

Bargaining

As soon as you flag down your first taxi in Dakar, you'll be introduced to the art of bargaining, an aspect of daily life in this part of the world. Bargaining accompanies almost every purchase, with the exception of supermarkets, some fixed-prices boutiques (usually created to provide relief for haggleshy tourists) and pharmacies. In terms of public transport, taxi prices are always open to negotiation, while bus rates aren't.

Some tourists are put off purchasing altogether by the practice of bargaining, haunted by the fear of being overcharged. You may be, but this shouldn't worry you

PLAYING THE MARKET

The markets in Gambia and Senegal are large, vibrant, colourful and always fascinating, and well worth a visit even if you don't want to buy anything. There are markets with ramshackle stalls, where women sell carefully arranged fruits and vegetables, and those made of lines of boutiques crammed with cheaply imported electrical items, clothes and shoes, endless rolls of gaudy fabrics and pretty much anything else anyone might want. Most larger towns also have crafts markets (*villages artisanales* in Senegal), where carved masks, statues and other items are sold mainly to tourists.

The biggest markets are in large towns such as Banjul, Serekunda, Dakar and Kaolack, but the markets in smaller places are also well worth a visit.

In rural areas, many villages hold a weekly market called *lumo*. It always takes place on a particular day of the week, and it's possible to explore an entire region by travelling from the *lumo* of one village to the next. This is not only a great option because you'll see the villages from their liveliest side, but also because in remote areas, the day of the *lumo* is often the only one you will find relatively frequent bush taxis.

Some *lumos* can be major events, attracting traders and customers from the surrounding area, and from as far away as Mauritania, Mali, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. The market in Diaoubé, near Kolda in northern Casamance, is one of the largest *lumos* in Gambia and Senegal, and absolutely worth a visit.

Most travellers love to visit markets, but dealing with overeager traders requires a particular cool and self-control. The Senegalese are famous for their skill of selling anything to anyone, so you need to be equally clever if you don't want to return home with bags full of unwanted stuff.

The first rule is to feign utter disinterest. Show curiosity, and you'll have a hard time shaking the vendor off. The second is keeping a sense of humour. Getting cross will only decrease your own pleasure, while a witty remark or a calm 'I'm not interested' will get you off without spoiling the fun. If you really want something, casually ask for the price, then put on your best shock-expression and enter the almost compulsory process of negotiation.

Walking around town (especially the inner city of Dakar), you'll often be approached by walking traders, decorated by their wares like Christmas trees. Red traffic lights are another favourite sales spot. Walking past at a fast pace, looking straight ahead is the best way of ridding yourself of the keen salesman. A confident 'bakhna' (meaning 'it's OK') or 'après' (literally, 'later', intended to mean 'I'm pretending to come back later but never will') should shake them off. If that doesn't work, keep looking straight past them, and keep walking on.

In particularly busy spots, such as Dakar's Marché Sandaga, the hassle can verge on danger, as pickpockets work the crowds, and gangs of youths posing as merchants can surround tourists and snatch bags and cameras. For information on precautions to take, see Dangers & Annoyances (p259).

too much. Treat bargaining as a simple aspect of travel in the region, and indulge in the pleasure of rehearsing your own mock-expressions of outrage at a perfectly reasonable price. Simply accepting the first price quoted (even though it may be utterly affordable to you) means setting standards that might subsequently outprice locals or other, poorer travellers.

Confidence in bargaining comes from knowing the going rate. You'll find this out easily if you know locals (who'll probably end up bargaining for you, if they realise you're keen on purchasing), and you'll get a feel for it once you've spent some time in the countries.

There are two hard-and-fast rules to bargaining: theatrical skills are a huge asset and exaggerated seriousness won't get you anywhere. Treat this as a game, and don't be afraid of losing (or be vexed if you do). You show interest in an item, the vendor will name a price (anything from the real rate to twice or more that – hence the importance of local knowledge), you pretend to faint with shock and make your first offer. Now the vendor's jaw drops. He'll probably feign indignation, indicating a clear no. You plead abject poverty, insisting on your first rate for a bit, and he'll come down. Then you go up a little. This carries on until you've found a mutually agreeable price. And that's the crux – mutually agreeable. You hear travellers all the time moaning about how they were 'overcharged' by souvenir sellers. When things have no fixed price, nobody really gets overcharged. If you don't like the price, it's simple – don't pay it.

If sellers won't come down to a price you feel is fair (or that you can afford), it either means that they really aren't making any profit, or that if you don't pay their prices, they know somebody else will. Remember the sellers are no more obliged to sell to you than you are to buy from them. You can go elsewhere or, if you really want the item, accept the price. This is the raw edge of capitalism! And don't forget that prices can change depending on where you buy. For example, a soft drink in a city may be a third of the price you'll pay in a remote rural area, where additional transport costs have to be paid for. Conversely, fruit and vegetables are cheaper in the areas where they're grown.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

It's perfectly possible to explore Senegal and Gambia on your own, but you probably won't spend much time alone anyway, as people start talking to you, take you out for drinks and chat to you in the bush taxi. There's none of the embarrassed staring at the ceiling here that frustrates Westerners on their daily schlep to work – people talk to one another.

Travelling single can get a lot more expensive, though.

Many hotels charge by the room, whether it's inhabited by one or two people (though if that's the case, you should always try negotiating), and on boat trips, you'll be paying for the entire boat, when it can actually hold a dozen others (it's always worth trying to gather an improvised circle of friends for that purpose).

Women travelling alone will have to put up with a lot of unwanted attention from men; see Women Travellers (p277) for details.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Very few Gambian and Senegalese households have their own private line, hence the flourishing scene of public telephone offices, from where you can make local, national and international calls, and sometimes even send faxes.

Even the tiniest towns tend to have at least one telecentre, either run by the national company (Gamtel in Gambia, Sonatel in Senegal), or privately owned.

Connections to and from Europe and America are usually very good, but calling other African countries takes a lot of patience – calls may be relayed through Europe, which means bad reception or possibly none.

Calling abroad from Africa isn't cheap by any means. Calls are charged by the unit, and those add up fast on a call abroad. In Gambia, you're likely to pay around D50 per minute, in Senegal CFA600 to CFA800. In Senegal, a 20% reduction applies between 8pm and 7am, in Gambia you get 33% off between 11pm and 7am.

Making reverse-charge (collect) calls is possible, but it's much easier – and far less expensive for your caller – to get the number of the telecentre you're calling from and then get someone to ring you back.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are booming in both Senegal and Gambia, completely overtaking landlines in importance. In Senegal, Alizé, Sentel and Tigo are the main operators; in Gambia you'll come across the names Gamcel and Africell.

Senegal has almost complete mobile coverage. All major and minor towns are covered, and even in remote villages, there's usually one spot where you get reception. Alizé is the most widely extended network and your best bet travelling upcountry. Gambia is almost equally as well served, Africell seeming to have the widest coverage. Along some border stretches in Gambia, you'll find that Senegalese numbers function better than Gambian ones – but note that this means you're effectively making an international call.

If you stay for a while, it's a good idea to get a mobile. You can buy handsets almost anywhere, from the simplest first-generation phone to the latest camera-video gizmo. If you bring your own phone, make sure you're able to insert any other SIM card (though unlocking contract phones is a flourishing business in Senegal and Gambia), and bear in mind that dust resistance is more important than chic. Connecting is easy. You buy a SIM card (D500 at Gamcel in Gambia, CFA25,000 at Alizé in Senegal), and top up with prepaid cards, which sell in units of D50, D100, D150 and D300 in Gambia and CFA2500, CFA5000 and CFA10,000 in Senegal.

Calls from mobile to mobile are fairly cheap, while mobile-landline costs almost the same as an international call.

Phonecards

In Senegal, the widely available prepaid Nopale phonecard allows you to call from any phone at a loca rate – the cost of the call gets taken off the amount you purchased the card for.

Phone Codes

To phone Senegal or Gambia from another country, you need to dial your country's international access code (for example, ☎ 00 or ☎ 010), then the country code: ☎ 220 for Gambia, or ☎ 221 for Senegal. There are no area codes in Gambia or Senegal; the first three figures of a phone number allow you to identify what region a call comes from.

To phone overseas from either Gambia or Senegal, first dial the international access code (☎ 00 for both Gambia and Senegal), then the code of the country you want to reach, then the city code (omitting the first zero if applicable), and then, finally, the number.

In Gambia, the number for directory assistance is ☎ 151; in Senegal it's ☎ 12.

TIME

Gambia and Senegal are at GMT/UTC, which for most European visitors means there is no or very little time difference. The time is the same all year; neither country has daylight-saving time. When it's noon in Gambia or Senegal, it's 7am in New York, noon in London, 1pm in Paris and 10pm in Sydney.

TOILETS

There are two main types of toilet in Africa: the Western style, with a bowl and seat; and the African one – a hole in the floor, over which you squat. Standards for both vary tremendously, ranging from the pristine to the unusable. Some travellers complain that African toilets are difficult to use, or that you have to remove half your clothing to use them. This is not so, and it only takes a small degree of practice to master a comfortable squatting technique.

In rural areas squat toilets are built over a deep hole in the ground. These are called 'long drops', and the crap just decomposes naturally, as long as the hole isn't filled with too much other rubbish (such as paper or synthetic materials, including tampons, which should be disposed of separately).

In remote wilderness areas, there may be no toilets at all, and you have to find a quiet bush or rock to relieve yourself behind.

Some Western toilets are not plumbed in, but just balanced over a long drop, and sometimes seats are constructed to assist those who can't squat. The lack of running water usually makes such cross-cultural mechanisms a disaster. A noncontact squat loo is better than a filthy box to hover over any day.

A couple of clued-up eco-lodges in Gambia have installed compost toilets – a great, non-smelling, biodegradable solution, especially for areas close to the coast. They just haven't caught on widely yet.

There's little in the way of public toilets, and you've got to muster some courage to enter one of the booths that are occasionally available in Dakar. Restaurants will usually be kind enough to allow you relief, though you might have to purchase a soft drink or something. Long journeys can be problematic. Buses don't have toilets, and there are no comfy service stations on the way. On several-hour trips, drivers will put in a piss-stop, usually near an empty field – easy for men, tough for women (that's where the sarong or wrap-skirt comes in really handy). Some petrol stations have toilets at the back – don't be shy to ask.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Gambia is represented in Britain by the **Gambia National Tourist Office** (☎ 020 7376 0093; www.gambiatourism.info) based at the Gambian high commission. This office has a decent website, responds promptly to calls, faxes and emails and will send a useful colour brochure anywhere in the world. The newly formed Gambia Tourist Authority plans to open information booths in the coastal resorts.

In Gambia the **Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism** (ASSET; www.asset-gambia.com) is a great umbrella organisation that tries to help small businesses, mainly by assisting local entrepreneurs to get a foot in a market that's almost entirely dominated by big tour operators and the government. In Kartong, the local **Kartong Association for Responsible Tourism** (KART; ☎ 4495887; www.safarigarden.com) is good, especially for independent travellers.

Senegal's Syndicat d'Initiative has an office in each of the regions. However, they vary greatly in how active they are. The main branch is in Saint-Louis, a busy office and excellent resource for tourists. The Gorée office is also good, while the ones in Tambacounda, Joal and Sokone are mainly one-man operations that don't even have their own offices (still, try calling them, you just never know).

You'll find Syndicat d'Initiatives in the following locations:

Gorée (☎ 823 9177; methiourseye@hotmail.com)

Lac Rose (☎ 836 5517; kerkanni@tpsnet.sn)

Saint Louis (☎ 961 2455; sltourisme@sentoos.sn)

Saly (☎ 957 2222; bgvsm@yahoo.fr)

Siné-Saloum (☎ 948 3140; www.tourismesinesaloum.sn)

Tambacounda (☎ 981 1250; nijhotel@sentoos.sn)

Ziguinchor (☎ 993 5151; paillote@sentoos.sn)

VISAS

Depending on your nationality, you could need to buy a visa and have it stamped in your passport in order to enter one or both countries. Some information is given below, but it's best to phone your nearest Senegalese or Gambian embassy before travel. Don't forget to ask how long it takes to issue the visa, and whether you need to enter the country within a certain period. Websites such as www.lonelyplanet.com, or the governmental webpages of each country can also be useful.

Multiple-entry visas can be handy if you're flying into Senegal and then visiting Gambia before returning to Senegal for your return flight (or vice versa).

VISAS AT BORDERS & AIRPORTS

Most travellers arriving in Gambia from Senegal just used to get their visa at the border. That's no longer recommended, as border officials have frequently been reported to be difficult, refuse visas or charge extortionate rates. You can ultimately save yourself a lot of hassle and probably money sorting out your visa before you head off.

If you don't need a visa to visit Gambia, you might be asked to get a tourist stamp on arrival, usually from the nearest immigration post. This should be free, so watch out for fictitious charges.

The Gambia

Visas are not needed by nationals of Commonwealth countries, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Ecowas or Scandinavian countries for stays of up to 90 days. For those needing one, visas are normally valid for one month and are issued in two to three days for the equivalent of about US\$45; you'll need to provide two photos. You can find out whether you need a visa by emailing enquiries@gambiatourism.info. An application form can be printed out from www.gambia.com, but if you're applying by snail mail in the USA allow at least two weeks for the process.

Last-minute travellers can sometimes be allowed to enter and obtain a proper visa by submitting their passport to the **Immigration Office** (Map p92; ☎ 4228611; OAU Blvd, Banjul; ☎ 8am-4pm) and making a demand. However, it's obviously much safer to arrive with all your papers in order. The Immigration

Office also handles requests for extensions (D250).

Senegal

Visas are not needed by citizens of the EU, Canada, South Africa, Japan, Israel, USA and several other (mainly African) countries. Tourist visas for one to three months cost about US\$15 to US\$20. Australians, New Zealanders and Norwegians definitely do need a visa. For extensions, you submit a demand to the **Ministère de l'Intérieur** (Map p150; Place de l'Indépendance, Dakar), who'll give you a receipt, which already gives you right to an extended stay until your official prolongation arrives some two weeks later.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

While it's not exactly dangerous to travel on your own as a woman in Gambia and Senegal, you do need to know how to live with a grinding background noise of constant pestering (which can be anything on a sleazy scale from near-stalking to whistling), develop a thick skin and a repertoire of ripostes to offers of marriage and be able to bear occasional disrespect with a grin.

Unwarranted and usually unwanted interest is a pretty steady travel companion of lone female travellers. There are several reasons for this. In this part of the world, it's unusual for women to travel alone, particularly if you leave your husband in another country, or, God beware, don't even have one. Western women are also widely perceived as 'easy prey'. That's partly due to the portrayal of women and sex in Hollywood movies and TV series, and partly because there's a considerable number of female travellers who continue to confirm the stereotype. A third reason is a general flirtatiousness that frequently colours conversations between young people. Guys won't hesitate to approach you, and see how far they can go. It's up to you to set the boundaries.

Dress Code

Dress code can make a difference to how you are regarded to a certain extent. In urban areas, tight jeans and tops are perfectly acceptable – young Senegalese women dress that way and you can too, without causing distress to anyone. In nightclubs, female dress code tends to be staggeringly sexy, though you might choose not to take the

SAI-SAIS

In Senegal, a *sai-sai* is a womaniser, a smooth operator, charming hustler, con-man or a dodgy mixture of all of these. These guys are usually young, often good-looking men, who approach women, sometimes bluntly, sometimes with astonishing verbal skills in towns, nightclubs, bars and particularly on beaches. While some of these guys are fairly harmless (just don't get your heart broken), others can pull some pretty sly jobs, involving sexual advances, tricking you out of money or downright stealing. Women beware. Use the same yardsticks you would at home before getting involved with men. Anyone who approaches you out of the blue claiming undying love a little too quickly isn't serious. Don't fall for their games.

theme as far as some punters unless you really want to get laid. Things are a little different when you travel through rural areas or visit someone's house (especially for the first time). That's when a little more modesty is recommended; go for a below-knee skirt or long trousers, T-Shirts are fine. Miniskirts are only worn by very young women, and then rarely (mainly in bars and nightclubs) – you'll notice that even the most sensual Senegalese dress code typically involves figure-hugging trousers and tops, rather than short skirts.

Sexual Harassment

Especially if walking on your own around inner city Dakar, Banjul or the coastal areas, you are bound to be chatted up, possibly followed and asked for your phone number. The best way of showing disinterest and shaking off hangers-on is to ignore them and keep walking. If that doesn't work, state firmly that you're not interested and make sure you look as though you're heading to meet friends (or better still, your husband).

Avoid getting involved in conversation, but keep it cool – chilly politeness is more effective than anger. Some of the most relentless guys might call you racist if you refuse to answer their advances – don't be intimidated and just keep walking.

Inventing a husband is a pretty good strategy, and can help ward off suitors. On

the same note, it's always better to refer to serious partners as husbands – the fact that you might have a boyfriend usually doesn't deter (and will possibly awaken some sort of male competitive instinct – the last thing you want).

Beaches are prime hassle zones, and the areas where female readers report the most irritating, sometimes downright threatening advances. It's not a good idea for women to take solitary strolls along the beach.

Harassment is a pretty wide term, and while it's certainly annoying to be the object of so much uncalled-for attention, and to have your ears ring with constant smooth talking, it's worth remembering that very few women become the victims of physical harm or rape. And if you follow some common-sense ground rules – don't stroll along deserted beaches or dark city roads

alone, don't hitch-hike or accept rides in cars full of drunken men – you're unlikely to get into serious trouble.

On the upside of this, the more conservative male-female relationships of society also mean that such niceties like getting help carrying a bag, having doors held open, drinks bought, and being asked to dance, still exist.

Tampons

Tampons (usually imported from Europe) are only available at supermarkets and pharmacies in large towns such as Dakar and Banjul, and generally only in the smallest size. They're quite expensive, too, so you might want to take a sufficient supply with you. In Senegal, a tampon is usually called a *tampon hygiénique*. By simply asking for a tampon you'll be requesting a stamp, as in a passport stamp, which just won't suffice.

Transport in The Gambia & Senegal

CONTENTS

Getting There & Away	279
Entering The Gambia & Senegal	279
Air	279
Land & River	283
Sea	286
Getting Around	286
Travelling Between The Gambia & Senegal	286
The Gambia	288
Senegal	291

GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE GAMBIA & SENEGAL Passports

A full passport is essential for entering both Gambia and Senegal. Some officials prefer passports that expire at least three months after your trip ends, so change yours if it's near the end of its life. Senegalese border officials are notably easier to deal with than their Gambian counterparts, and passport checks are usually quick and polite. If you enter The Gambia from Senegal, you might encounter some red-tape tedium at the border, especially if you're travelling on a French or Senegalese passport. It's important that your papers are in complete order, meaning you've got a passport with a valid visa (if you need one) and your vaccination certificate (see p295).

No issues have been reported regarding entry problems due to particular stamps in passports. French and Senegalese travellers might experience slight hassles when entering The Gambia, but as long as all papers are in order, it's highly unlikely that entry will be denied.

AIR

West Africa isn't particularly cheap to reach from other parts of the world, and the best connections still follow the old colonial ties. For cheap flights to Senegal, you're best off checking websites and travel agents in France. For those to Gambia, the UK is a

THINGS CHANGE

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change: prices for international travel are volatile, routes are introduced and cancelled, schedules change, special deals come and go, and rules and visa requirements are amended. Airlines and governments seem to take a perverse pleasure in making price structures and regulations as complicated as possible. You should check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works. In addition, the travel industry is highly competitive and there are many lurks and perks.

The upshot of this is that you should get opinions, quotes and advice from as many airlines and travel agents as possible before you part with your hard-earned cash. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

better address. Charter flights are popular for both countries; contact details of the major operators are given below.

Airports & Airlines

THE GAMBIA

The Gambia's main airport is **Banjul International Airport** (BJL; ☎ 4473117; www.gambia.gm/gcaa) at Yundum, about 20km from the city centre, and about 15km from the Atlantic coast resorts. The most impressive thing about it is its architecture (conceived by a Senegalese architect). It's very small scale, with few facilities. There is no airport bus – see p97.

At the time of research, the former national carrier, Gambia International Airways, wasn't operating; Gambian airspace is mainly used by charter flights.

The closest Gambia had to a national airline at the time of research was **Slok Air** (in Gambia ☎ 4377782), a Nigerian company that had its licence revoked and then moved to The Gambia. It's extremely unreliable, with

flight cancellations, reroutings and delays being frequent.

Air Guinée (☎ in Banjul 412907; www.mirinet.com/airguinee; airline code 2U; hub Conakry Airport, Conakry)

Air Sénégal International (☎ in Banjul 4202117; www.air-senegal-international.com; airline code V7; hub Airport International Léopold Sédar Senghor, Dakar)

Slok Air (☎ in Fajara 4377782; www.slokaire.com; airline code SO; hub Banjul International Airport, Banjul)

SN Brussels (☎ in Kololi 027232323; www.flysn.be; airline code SN; hub Brussels Airport, Brussels)

West Coast Airways (☎ in Banjul 7767666; airline code WCG; hub Accra Airport, Accra)

SENEGAL

Senegal's main airport is the **Aéroport International Léopold Sédar Senghor** (DKR; ☎ 869 5050; 24hr information line ☎ 628 1010; www.aeroportdakar.com) in Yoff, 30 minutes from central Dakar. It's a well-organised airport, with a bank, exchange facilities, car-hire companies and several tour operators.

At the time of research, planning for a new airport, to be created near Thiès, had begun, though its realisation is likely to take some time. The airports of Saint-Louis (☎ 961 1490) and Cap Skiring (☎ 993 5177) also have international connections to France.

The national carrier is **Air Sénégal International** (☎ 804 0404; in France ☎ 0820 202123; www.air-senegal-international.com), which forms part of the Royal Air Maroc group, and is one of the most reliable airlines in Africa. It has an excellent safety record, and serious delays, cancellations or reroutings are infrequent.

Air Algérie (in Dakar ☎ 823 2964; www.airalgerie.dz; airline code AH; hub Algiers Airport, Algeria)

Air France (in Dakar ☎ 823 2964; www.airfrance.fr; airline code AF; hub Airport Charles de Gaulle, Paris)

Air Guinée (in Dakar ☎ 821 4442; www.mirinet.com/airguinee; airline code 2U; hub Conakry Airport, Conakry)

Air Ivoire (in Dakar ☎ 889 0280; www.airivoire.com; airline code VU; hub Abidjan Airport, Abidjan)

Air Mali (in Dakar ☎ 823 2461; airline code XG; hub Bamako Airport, Bamako)

Air Portugal (in Dakar ☎ 821 5460; www.tap.pt; airline code TP; hub Lisbon Airport, Lisbon)

Air Sénégal International (in Dakar ☎ 804 0404; www.air-senegal-international.com; airline code V7; hub Airport International Léopold Sédar Senghor, Dakar)

Alitalia (in Dakar ☎ 823 3129; www.alitalia.it; airline code AZ; hub Rome Airport, Rome)

Iberia (in Dakar ☎ 889 0050; www.iberia.com; airline code IB; hub Madrid Airport, Madrid)

Royal Air Maroc (in Dakar ☎ 849 4747; www.royalairmaroc.com; airline code AT; hub Casablanca Airport, Casablanca)

SN Brussels (in Dakar ☎ 823 0460; www.flysn.be; airline code SN; hub Brussels Airport, Brussels)

South African Airways (in Dakar ☎ 823 0151; www.flysaa.com; airline code SA; hub Johannesburg Airport, Johannesburg)

TACV Cabo Verde Airlines (in Dakar ☎ 821 3968; www.tacv.com; airline code VR; hub Praia Airport, Cape Verde)

Virgin Nigeria (in Lagos ☎ 460 0505; www.virginigeria.com; airline code VK; hub Lagos Airport, Lagos)

There's a couple of airlines who have just started flying to Dakar, but are very important for East–West Africa connections.

Ethiopian Airlines (ET; in Senegal ☎ 821 32 98; www.flyethiopian.com; 16 Av Léopold Sédar Senghor; hub Addis Ababa)

Kenya Airways (KQ; in Nairobi ☎ 020 3274747; www.kenya-airways.com; hub Nairobi Airport, Nairobi) No Dakar office.

Tickets

Regular flights to both Senegal and Gambia tend to be comparatively expensive, and rising petrol prices keep pushing ticket rates up. Furthermore, airport tax can be surprisingly steep; on flights from Paris to Dakar, for instance, airport tax amounts to about €150. But there are occasional good deals, you just need to invest some time in doing your research.

It's worth checking the websites of airlines, though they sometimes don't offer the discounted tickets you might find advertised on 'cheap flight' sites. The website www.lastminute.com and its French equivalent www.lastminute.fr occasionally have good deals. To Senegal, Air Sénégal usually has the cheapest scheduled flights.

Especially in larger towns, it's worth seeking out the help of a travel agent who knows about special deals, has strategies for avoiding layovers and can offer advice on everything from which airline has the best vegetarian food to the best travel insurance to bundle with your ticket. You might find the cheapest flights advertised by obscure 'bucket shops'. Many such firms are honest, but there are a few who will take your money and disappear. If you feel suspicious, only pay a small deposit. Once you have your ticket, ring the airline to confirm you

are booked onto the flight before paying the balance. If the agent insists on cash in advance, go elsewhere.

Several airlines offer 'youth' or 'student' tickets, with discounts for people under 26 (sometimes 23) or in full-time education. If you're eligible, ask the travel agent if any student fares are available – they might 'forget' to tell you. Regulations vary, but you'll need to prove your age or student status.

INTERCONTINENTAL (RTW) TICKETS

The cheapest way of getting to/from Gambia and Senegal is usually on a round-the-world (RTW) ticket, which sells for around A\$3000; you'll probably have to look hard to find one routing through West Africa.

Africa

There are plenty of connections to other West African capitals, though not all airlines are in a particularly good state, and delays, cancellations and reroutings are common.

East and Southern Africa are more difficult to reach. There are some intra-African flights to more far-flung destinations, but these often involve multiple changes, long waiting times and can be very expensive. Most long-haul destinations within Africa are more commonly, and cheaply, reached via Europe. But things are gradually beginning to improve. From Dakar, there are now direct daily flights from Dakar to Johannesburg in South Africa (from CFA494,000 to CFA784,000) and Kenyan Airways was rumoured to be starting a regular route between Dakar and Nairobi.

THE GAMBIA

The best African airline with Gambia flights is Air Sénégal International, flying daily to and from Dakar from where you can connect to other destinations. Return fares are around CFA150,000 – why most people do the Banjul–Dakar journey by bus or taxi. Slokair is the second major operator, theoretically with flights to Dakar, Freetown and Accra, but it isn't reliable, with frequent cancellations and spontaneous reroutings of flights. Air Guinée is another tiny operator (dubbed Air 'Maybe' among West Africans) that has flights between Banjul and Conakry that go via Labé in Futa Jallon. West Coast Airways flies to Lagos, Freetown and Accra, should it still exist by the time you read this. Bellview used to be reputed to

have the safest and most reliable flights between Anglophone West Africa, until one of its planes crashed in Nigeria in October 2005, leaving over 100 passengers dead. It still has twice-weekly flights to Lagos via Freetown (around US\$350 one way). All of these airlines have ticket offices in Banjul (p96) or along the Atlantic Coast.

SENEGAL

Air Sénégal International has excellent connections to Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco and Niger; check the homepage for prices and frequency. Air Mali flies twice a week to Bamako, TACV Cabo Verde Airlines flies three times a week to Praia and Air Guinée goes to Conakry via Labe and Banju. You can reach Banjul by Slokair, if you're brave. Abidjan is reliably reached by Air Ivoire, which often has good deals.

Many travellers fly from Dakar to Casablanca (Morocco) to avoid the difficult overland section through Mauritania and the Western Sahara. Royal Air Maroc has two flights a week.

Most tickets within the West African region are in the range of US\$250 to US\$350, and can be bought at the airline offices in Dakar or via a travel agency. Dakar also has a direct daily connection to South Africa with South Africa Airways.

The young company Virgin Nigeria Airways started regular flights between Dakar and Lagos in March 2006; though the initial flight had to be withdrawn due to technical difficulties, this could be promising.

Asia

Some people travelling from Asia come to Senegal via Dubai, and East Africa. Kenya has better Asia connections – and is linked directly to Senegal by Kenya Airways flights. For Gambia, you have to travel via Europe, and even for travel from Asia to Senegal, this is almost always the quicker and cheaper option.

Australia & New Zealand

There are not many route options from Australia and New Zealand to Gambia and Senegal. Most people fly via Europe or, occasionally, East Africa, using several different airlines. Recommended ticket agencies:

STA Travel Australia (☎ 1300 360 960; www.statravel.com.au)

STA Travel New Zealand (☎ 0800 100 677; www.statravel.co.nz) Usually has the cheapest deals. Phone ☎ 131 776 to find your nearest branch.

Continental Europe

THE GAMBIA

The only airline serving Gambia from Europe is SN Brussels Airlines. Most visitors come on charter flights as these are cheaper and usually direct. The leading charter holiday operator is The Gambia Experience (p102), which has good-value 'no-frills' offers, sometimes from around UK£400. Flights depart from Gatwick, Manchester and Bristol. There's plenty of competition in the tourist season, with Thomson Holidays, Airtours, Cosmos, First Choice, TUI and plenty of other operators organising regular tours and flights.

To check what's on offer in the Netherlands and Germany start with Sunair and Olympia; in Belgium Xeniar Tours and Sunsnacks; and from Scandinavia try Scandinavian Leisure Group (DLG).

SENEGAL

Senegal has good direct connections to European countries including Belgium (SN Air Brussels), Italy (Alitalia), Portugal (Tap Air Portugal), Spain (Iberia Airways) and, of course, France (Air France, Air Sénégal).

To France, there are several daily flights; Air Sénégal tends to be the cheapest, even when booking directly with the airline. Alitalia flies twice or four times a week, depending on the season, between Milan and Dakar (from about €600 return), while Iberia flies from Madrid and TAP Air Portugal has several flights a week from Lisbon (starting at about €600 return). Fares on scheduled flights from London, via Europe, to Dakar start at about UK£550, if you're lucky.

There are plenty of charter flights to Senegal with French and Belgian package-tour companies, all of them a lot cheaper than the scheduled flights. In Senegal, the best agency for charter flights is Nouvelles Frontières (p151) in Dakar.

BELGIUM

Recommended agencies:

Joker Toerisme (☎ 02-502 1937; brussels@joker.be; Blvd Lemonnier 37, 1000 Bruxelles) Is affiliated with the Via Via travellers lodge in Yoff.

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 02-547 4444; www.nouvelles-frontieres.be; Blvd Lemonnier 2, 1000 Bruxelles)

FRANCE

Recommended agencies:

Anyway.com (☎ 0825 84 84 83; www.anyway.com)

Dakar Voyages (☎ 01 72 38 69 65, 0811 03 43 50; www.dakarvoyages.com)

Lastminute (☎ 0892 705 555; www.lastminute.fr)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 08 25 00 08 25, 01-45 68 70 00; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr; 87 blvd de Grenelle, 75015 Paris)

OTU Voyages (☎ 0 820 817 817, 01-44 41 38 50; www.otu.fr; 39 av Georges-Bernanos, 75005 Paris) Offers special deals to students and young people.

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 01-42 86 16 00; www.vdm.com; 55 rue Ste-Anne, 75002 Paris)

GERMANY

Recommended agencies:

Condor (☎ 0180 5 767 757; www.condor.de) Often has cheap flights between October and April.

Lastminute (☎ 01805 284 366; www.lastminute.de)

STA Travel (☎ 030 311 0950; Goethestrasse 73, 10625 Berlin) Has branches in most major cities.

ITALY

Recommended agencies:

CTS Viaggi (☎ 06-462 0431; 16 Via Genova, Rome)

Specialises in youth fares.

Passagi (☎ 06-474 0923; Stazione Termini FS, Galleria di Tesla, Rome)

THE NETHERLANDS

Recommended agencies:

Budget Air (☎ 020-627 1251; www.nbbs.nl; Rokin 34, Amsterdam)

Holland International (☎ 070-307 6307) Has offices in most cities.

SPAIN

Recommended agencies:

Barcelo Viajes (☎ 91-559 1819; Princesa 3, 28008 Madrid) Branches in most major cities.

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 91-547 42 00; www.tuivoyages.com; Plaza de España 18, 28008 Madrid) Has branches in major cities.

UK & Ireland

Advertisements for many travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free magazine *TNT*. There are plenty of cheap charter deals to The Gambia. If you're going to Senegal,

you can save money taking a cheap flight to Paris, and get on a French charter or scheduled flight from there. Other travellers take the charter to Banjul, and go overland to Dakar from there.

Recommended agencies:

Africa Travel Centre (☎ 020-7387 1211; www.africatravel.co.uk; 21 Leigh St, London WC1H 9QX) Often has good deals.

STA Travel (☎ 020-7361 6262, www.statravel.co.uk; 86 Old Brompton Rd, London SW7)

Gambia Experience (☎ 0845 330 4567; www.gambia.co.uk) Offers tours and usually has the cheapest flights.

USA & Canada

No flights are scheduled from the USA to The Gambia, but Senegal is connected by a daily direct flight between Dakar and New York (tickets start at US\$800). All other flights from North America go on European airlines via Europe, so it may be cheaper to fly to London or Paris and buy a discounted ticket onwards from there.

Citizens of Canada will also probably find the best deals travelling via Europe, especially London (although there are some very cheap flights from Montreal to Paris). Contact some of the travel agents listed in the Britain or France sections earlier.

Discount travel agents in the USA and Canada are known as consolidators. San Francisco is the ticket consolidator capital of America, although some good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities. Agencies also tend to advertise in the travel sections of main newspapers, such as those in the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *San Francisco Examiner*.

Recommended agencies:

Council Travel (☎ 800-226 8624; www.counciltravel.com) Has offices throughout the USA.

STA Travel (☎ 800-777 0112; www.statravel.com) Has offices throughout the USA.

Travel CUTS (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com) Canada's national student-travel agency.

LAND & RIVER Car & Motorcycle

Driving your own car or motorbike to Senegal requires plenty of research and planning. See p15 for manuals covering the many issues to be dealt with.

For Senegal, it's important to note that no vehicles older than five years may be im-

ported. If your car is older and you are just trying to cross Senegal to reach The Gambia, you're likely to experience some problems at the border, and might be accompanied by a border official all the way to The Gambia.

If you want to travel around Senegal and Gambia using your own car or motorcycle but don't fancy the Sahara crossing, another option is to ship your vehicle. The usual way of doing this is to load your car or motorcycle on board at a port in Europe and take it off again at either Dakar or Banjul.

Freight costs range from US\$500 to US\$1000 depending on the vehicle size and final destination. However, apart from the cost your biggest problem is likely to be security. Many drivers report theft of items from the inside and outside (such as lights and mirrors) of their car. Vehicles are usually left unlocked during the crossing and when in storage at the destination port – so chain or lock all equipment into fixed boxes inside the vehicle.

Getting a vehicle out of a port is almost always a nightmare, requiring visits to several different offices where stamps must be obtained and mysterious fees paid at every turn. Consider using an official handling agent or an unofficial 'fixer' to take you through this process. In Gambia, Sukuta Camping (www.campingsukuta.de) can help with all sorts of overland information. For Senegal, try the Dakar Rally (www.dakar.com).

For sending motorcycles out of Senegal, we heard of one biker who avoided these pitfalls by sending his bike 'air mail' from Dakar to Paris using **Air France Cargo** (☎ 820 0743) for what seems like a pretty good price. He went to the Air France Cargo office at Léopold Sédar Senghor International Airport, at Yoff; filled out forms with the assistance of a local 'transiter' (recommended by Air France); loaded his bike (about 200kg) onto a bike stand; and took photos of it for security; all in less than a day for just over US\$500. If you are considering this option from the UK to Senegal, **Allied Pickfords** (☎ 020-8219 8000, 0800-289 229; www.allied-pickfords.co.uk) is not the cheapest, but has been recommended.

Train

The only functioning passenger train in the region is the one linking Dakar with Bamako, with several stops on the way. In theory, trains

OVERLAND THROUGH THE WESTERN SAHARA

There are three main routes across the Sahara leading to West Africa: the Route de Hoggar (through Algeria and Niger); the Route de Tanezrouft (through Algeria and Mali); and the Atlantic Route through the Western Sahara (through Morocco and Mauritania).

With the decade-long fundamentalist insurgency in Algeria seemingly finished, regular traffic ran in both directions along the Route de Hoggar in 2001 for the first time since the late 1980s. However, news of the peace and love in Algeria has apparently not reached the smugglers (or bandits, depending who you talk to) who are still taking advantage of whomever they can along the northern Mali section of the once-popular Tanezrouft route.

Therefore, at the time of writing the Atlantic Route is still the most popular for tourists. It's also the most direct overland route to Senegal.

It would be almost criminal negligence to travel through the Sahara without first checking the excellent, up-to-date and entertaining website put together by desert specialist Chris Scott at www.sahara-overland.com.

Other decent websites include that of the 153 Club (named after the old Michelin map of North West Africa) at www.manntaylor.com/153.html; the thorough www.sahara-info.ch (in German); the Dakar Rally site www.dakar.com; and www.sahara.it (in Italian).

The Atlantic Route – Northbound

It is now legal to travel north through Mauritania along this route, but because so much of the southbound traffic is on a one-way journey to the vehicle purgatory that is West Africa, going north without your own transport can be pretty tough. It's probably best to try and arrange your transport before you leave Nouakchott.

From Nouâdhibou northbound transport can be hard to find. Your best bets are the camping grounds.

If you have your own vehicle, head north and have your passport stamped at the small post, then drive on to Fort Guergarrat to complete the border formalities for Morocco. Despite this being far easier than it once was, it's still advisable to wait in Nouâdhibou for other vehicles to form a mini convoy for the trip to Dakhla. It's also worth noting that inexperienced drivers will probably need a guide to get between Nouâdhibou and Nouakchott.

run between Dakar and Bamako twice a week in each direction and the trip takes 35 hours. In practice, this almost never occurs – one train is often out of action; the trip usually takes 40 hours or longer; the train has lots of thieves; and derailments are frequent. If it's adventure you're after, do the journey by all means, but if you just want to get from Dakar to Bamako, the road is a better option.

Tickets are available at all the stations the train passes, during office hours. You're always at an advantage buying your ticket in, and travelling from, Dakar – the train is often full on leaving the capital.

Seats are numbered, although for 2nd class you should get to the train two hours before departure. The 1st-class seats are large and reasonably comfortable, while 2nd class is more crowded. Sleepers (couchettes) are basic but adequate. You can get cheap food at stations along the way, and will find

people reaching into the train with bags of peanuts, fruit, cakes and boiled eggs at every stop. The *Mistral International* (Senegalese) train has a restaurant car, but don't count on it; bring your own provisions.

At each border post you have a short hike to the immigration office. Foreigners sometimes have their passport taken by an immigration inspector on the train, but you still have to collect it yourself by getting off at the border post. Nobody tells you this so if your passport is taken, ask where and when you have to go to get it back.

Theft can be a problem on this train. Keep all valuables with you and be sure to carry a torch; if you leave your seat, especially at night, ask a fellow passenger to watch your gear; and expect to become a target when the lights go out (often in the train and the station) as the train pulls into Kayes and Bamako. Good luck!

The Atlantic Route – Southbound

Travel through Morocco is pretty straightforward (see Lonely Planet's *Morocco* guide). About 500km south of Agadir you enter the disputed territory of Western Sahara, but the road continues along the coast all the way to Dakhla.

Dakhla has some cheap hotels and a decent camping ground (which also has some rooms to rent) where all the overlanders stay, and this is the best place to find other vehicles to team up and travel with.

If you are hitching, drivers taking second-hand cars from Europe (especially from France and Germany) to sell in West Africa may occasionally offer lifts, but you would be expected to share fuel and paperwork costs. Hitchhikers are not allowed in Mauritanian vehicles, and there have been occasional scams where hitchhikers with local drivers are threatened with abandonment in the desert unless they pay a large 'fee'.

For years a twice-weekly convoy headed south from Dakhla, but as of 2002 this is no more. All immigration and customs facilities have moved south to the border at Fort Guergarrat, from where you cross into Mauritania and the last 100km to Nouâdhibou. It's important to take supplies for at least two days on this leg, and for inexperienced or 2WD drivers to go in a group in case someone gets stuck. The route is clearly marked and no matter how bad the road gets, do not stray – twisted wrecks are proof of how near landmines can be.

From Nouâdhibou, most cars go south down the coast to Nouakchott, through the Banc d'Arguin National Park (including a 160km stretch along the beach at low tide, with soft sand on one side and waves breaking over your windscreen on the other). Some cars, and most bikes and hitchhikers, go east on the iron-ore train to Choûm and then take the route via Atar and Akjout to Nouakchott. The train heads east from Nouâdhibou to Choum on Monday and returns on Saturday, and you'll need to be at either end the day before to guarantee a space.

From Nouakchott to Rosso, the southern border is a straightforward run on a good tarred road. Rosso is a hustlers' paradise, but for those with their own vehicle there is a less bothersome way into Senegal. Turn right (west) along a sandy track just as you enter Rosso and follow the Senegal River for 97km to Maka Diama. There are border posts on both sides of the river and crossing will cost you CFA5000/10,000 in winter/summer, landing you just a short drive from the comforts and cold beer of Saint-Louis. Remember to stock a few packets of cigarettes before you set off as they are the best 'bribe' – cheap and usually enough to keep the official happy.

Guinea

Nearly all traffic between Senegal and Guinea goes to/from Labé, a large town in northwestern Guinea.

The busiest route is via Koundara, but some transport also goes via Kedougou (in the far southeast of Senegal) and the small town of Mali (usually called Mali-ville, to distinguish it from the country of the same name).

If you're leaving Senegal, there are several places you can get a frighteningly packed *sept-place* (seven-seater) taxi. Tambacounda has connections almost every day, which go via Medina Gounas and Sambailo (where you may have to change). From Kedougou, your best chance to find transport is on Friday, though at least one car might leave on most other days.

Another popular jumping-off point is Diaoubé near Kolda. Wednesday, the day

of the Diaoubé *lumo* (market) is the best day to get transport here. Fares to Guinea are around CFA15,000 from all these places, and the trip can take up to 48 hours, as routes are bad and Guinean roadblocks tedious to pass.

Guinea-Bissau

Bush taxis run several times daily between Ziguinchor and Bissau (CFA6000, 147km) via São Domingos (the border) and Ingore. The road is in fairly good condition, but the ferries on the stretch between Ingore and Bissau can make the trip take anything from four to eight hours.

Occasionally the São Domingos border closes unexpectedly, apparently on the whim of the guards, but this doesn't usually last too long. Other options are to go from Tanaf to Farim or from Tambacounda via Vélingara to Gabú.

Mali

Travellers have traditionally taken the train from Dakar to Bamako, but train services have deteriorated at the same time that road have improved, so that the bush taxi option is becoming much more attractive. From Dakar to Tambacounda it's a slow slog, while Tambacounda to the border crossing in Kidira (three hours, 184km) is excellent. From Kidira to Kayes in Mali, road quality worsens drastically, making actual travelling times unpredictable. Tamba to Kidira by *sept-place* taxi costs CFA5000. In Kidira, you cross the road bridge to Diboli, from where bush taxis go to Kayes for CFA3000. From Kayes to Bamako, both train and taxi are equally good (or bad) options.

Mauritania

The main border point is at Rosso, where a ferry crosses the Senegal River. It's been announced that a bridge is supposed to replace the boat service within the next few years, but work hadn't started at the time of research.

You can go direct to Rosso from Dakar in a *sept-place* taxi (CFA4500, six hours, 384km), but most travellers stop off at Saint-Louis, from where a *sept-place* to Rosso (two hours, 106km) is CFA2000. Crossing the Senegal River is done on a large ferry (free/CFA2000/3000 for passengers/cars/4WDs, twice daily). You can also cross by pirogue (canoe) for CFA1000. Visas can be obtained at the border. From the Mauritanian immigration post it's 500m to the *gare routièrè* (bus and bush-taxi station), from where bush taxis go to Nouakchott.

Rosso has a reputation for being a bothersome place, and travellers usually return with stories of extortion and frustration, but it's about the only place where you can cross with a vehicle. The only other option is the Maka Diama barrage, 97km southwest of Rosso and just north of Saint-Louis, although the track between the barrage and the main road on the Mauritanian side is soft sand. The crossing here costs CFA5000/10,000 in winter/summer, and there is a theoretical maximum weight for vehicles of 2.8 tonnes. The smaller crossings along the border are pirogue-worthy only.

SEA

The days of working for your passage on commercial boats have long gone, although

a few lucky travellers do manage to hitch rides on private yachts sailing from Spain, Morocco or the Canary Islands to Senegal, Gambia and beyond.

Another nautical option available is taking a cabin on a freighter. Several cargo ships run from European ports, such as London-Tilbury, Bordeaux, Hamburg or Rotterdam, to various West African ports (including Dakar) with comfortable officer-style cabins available to the public.

A typical voyage from Europe to Dakar takes about eight days, and costs vary according to the quality of the ship. Don't take this option if you want to save money – single fares from Europe to Dakar are around US\$1500 to US\$1800 per person in a double cabin.

For more information see *Travel by Cargo Ship*, a handy book written by Hugo Verlomme, or contact a specialist agent.

Associated Oceanic Agencies Ltd (☎ 020-7930 5683; fax 7839 1961; 103 Jermyn St, London SW1Y 6EE UK)
Freighter World Cruises (☎ 626 449 3106, toll-free 1-800 531 7774; fax 449 9573; www.freightworld.com; 180 South Lake Ave, No 335-1, Pasadena, CA 91101 USA) Publishers of Freighter Space Advisory. Excellent website with listings of freighter trips worldwide, including to Dakar and Banjul.

Maris Freighter Cruises (☎ 1-800 996 2747, 203 222 1500; 215 Main St, Westport, CT 06880 USA)

Strand Voyages (☎ 020-7836 6363; fax 7497 0078; voyages@strandtravel.com.au; Charing Cross Shopping Concourse, Strand, London WC2N 4HZ UK)

GETTING AROUND

TRAVELLING BETWEEN THE GAMBIA & SENEGAL

Air
 The main airlines flying between Gambia and Senegal are Slokair (see p279) and Air Sénégal International (see p280). Few travellers fly between Gambia and Senegal, as flights tend to be expensive, and can be so unreliable that they don't save much time.

Boat

There's nothing in the way of scheduled boat services between the two countries. However, if you're very brave, you can take one of the pirogues from various places in the Siné-Saloum region to Banjul. Note that these aren't particularly safe, can often be

overfilled and have to venture out of the shelter of the Siné-Saloum Delta and into the ocean for a bit, meaning that things can get pretty rough. It's an adventure, certainly, but not for the faint-hearted.

The most common departure points are in and around Djifer, you have to ask around when the next boat might be leaving (usually when enough people have registered an interest). A place in an often overcharged pirogue costs CFA5000, and the trip takes around six hours. From Betenti, there's an almost daily pirogue to Banjul (CFA1500, three hours), which leaves around 8am.

Alternatively, you can always hire a pirogue, but that will set you back around CEA150,000 to CFA200,000.

Bush Taxi

TO/FROM DAKAR

Sept-place taxis run frequently between Dakar and Banjul, and in theory, the trip should be fairly quick and painless. In practice, crossings between Senegal and Gambia can be time consuming, as Gambian officials tend to be deeply suspicious of Senegalese vehicles and their passengers, and like to make border crossings as tedious as possible.

The main route from Gambia to Senegal takes you via the Barra ferry (p96) to Karang at the border, then to Kaolack and Dakar. On the Barra side of the Gambia River there's plenty of transport to the border at Karang where you complete border formalities. From there you change into a minibus that goes to the Senegalese border post, and from there into a bush taxi to Dakar or Kaolack.

The road to Dakar is tarred most of the way, the stretch from Sokone to Kaolack being the only really tricky bit. Once you've crossed on the ferry, the drive to Dakar takes a minimum of five hours, possibly a lot longer.

A second option takes you from Banjul to Soma in eastern Gambia, where you cross the Gambia River to Farafenni, then continue along the Trans-Gambia Hwy to Kaolack and Dakar. It's an interesting journey, but you'll have to put up with some terrible roads. The stretch from Brikama to Soma counts among the worst roads of the region.

Most Senegal-bound drivers accept dalasi, but prefer to charge fares in CFA. There's no bank in Barra or Karang, so you should

change dalasi into CFA in Banjul before starting this journey.

If you're coming from Dakar and think you might miss the last ferry across to Banjul (it leaves at 7pm), accommodation in Barra is limited to a couple of sleazy hotels. You'd be far better off staying in Toubaouta and getting the ferry from Barra to Banjul the next morning.

TO/FROM TAMBACOUNDA & KOLDA

From Basse Santa Su bush taxis go through Sabi to Vélingara (CFA1000, 45 minutes, 27km). The bush taxis leave when they fill up, which can mean several hours of waiting, but there's usually one early in the morning. This is one of the few borders where you don't have to change vehicles, making the trip pretty straightforward. Your transport arrives in Vélingara at a small garage on the western side of town. Vehicles for Tambacounda go from another garage on the northern side of Vélingara and *calèches* (horse-drawn taxis) shuttle between the two for CFA250 per person. Vélingara to Tambacounda is CFA1650 by *sept-place* taxi, CFA1400 by minibus.

Another tiny crossing is the one at Pata, from where a smooth dirt road takes you to Kolda. This isn't very frequented, and there isn't always a post at the Senegalese border, but it's the most direct route from Georgetown to Kolda. If you're coming from the Senegalese side and hope to hire a taxi for the brief stretch from Pata to Georgetown, be prepared for some reluctance and inflated pricing on behalf of the Senegalese taxi drivers, who generally aren't keen to face the Gambian police posts.

TO/FROM ZIGUINCHOR & KAFOUNTINE

To get to Ziguinchor you must take a bush taxi from the garage near Serekunda market to the Gambian border at Giboro (D50). From here it's about 3km to the Senegalese border post at Séléti, where a bush taxi to Ziguinchor is CFA2200. You can also get to Giboro from Brikama via bush taxi.

If you're heading for Kafountine, you could get yourself to Diouloulou via Giboro, then change for Kafountine. It's also possible to go from Brikama to Kafountine via the tiny border town of Darsilami. This route isn't frequently used by public transport, but perfectly possible in a hire taxi.

The short hop from Kartong to Kafountine that you see on the map isn't that time-saving if you consider the pirogue crossing of the Allahein River involves a 10km walk on the Senegalese side, as well as the absence of border posts to complete your formalities (see p121). It's possible, but most people tend to take the longer routes via Brikama.

Car & Motorcycle

Taking a rental car across a border in this region is usually forbidden, although the rules about going between Gambia and Senegal are less stringent. Driving from northern to southern Senegal will almost always take you through Gambia anyway, and most Senegalese companies accept this. However, driving with a Senegalese number plate through Gambia can be less than fun – Gambian police points love to check Senegalese cars, so make absolutely sure you've got all your papers in order. For this reason, Senegalese drivers usually don't like going into The Gambia. If you've hired a *sept-place* taxi in Senegal, you're better off letting the driver return, and hire a Gambian car to take you around the country. Senegalese taxi drivers are always looked at with suspicion by the Gambian posts, and the delays can be excruciating.

THE GAMBIA

Air

There are no internal flights in Gambia.

Bicycle

Cycling is a cheap, convenient, healthy, environmentally sound and fun way to travel and gives you a deeper insight into Senegal and Gambia, as you often stay in small towns and villages, interact with the local people and eat African food more frequently. In general, the more remote the areas you visit, the more serious the conditions, but the better the experience.

If you've never cycled in Africa before, Gambia and parts of Senegal provide a good starting point. The landscape is flat and the distances between major points of interest are not so large.

A mountain bike or fat-tyred urban hybrid is most suitable to the dirt-and-sand roads and tracks. However, some tracks are so sandy that no tyre is ever thick enough, and you will have to push. Generally speak-

ing, away from urban areas the main tarred routes are relatively quiet and don't get too much traffic.

When you do encounter traffic, however, drivers are more cause for alarm than any road surface. Cyclists are regarded as second-class citizens in Africa, so make sure you know what's coming behind you and be prepared to take evasive action onto the verge, as locals are often forced to do. A small helmet-mounted rear-view mirror is worth considering.

The best time to bike is the relatively cool period from mid-November to the end of February. Even so, you'll need to carry at least 4L of water and smother yourself with sunscreen. If you get hot, tired, or simply want to cut out the boring bits, bikes can easily be carried on buses and bush taxis for a small luggage fee. If you're camping near settlements in rural areas, ask the village headman each night where you can pitch. Even if you don't have a tent, he'll find you a place to stay.

It's important to carry sufficient spares, and have a good working knowledge of bike repair and maintenance – punctures will be frequent. Take at least four spare inner tubes, some tyre patching material and a spare tyre. Consider the number of tube patches you might need, triple it, and pack those too.

Anyone considering doing some serious cycling in Senegal and Gambia should contact their national cycling association. The following associations also have useful information.

Cyclists' Touring Club (☎ 087-0873 0060; cycling@ctc.org.uk; www.ctc.org.uk) Based in Britain, provides members with route details and information for many parts of the world.

International Bicycle Fund (☎ /fax 206-767 0848; www.ibike.org/bikeafrica) A US-based, low-budget, socially conscious organisation that organises tours, provides information and has an excellent website with information on cycling in West Africa, a huge range of links and a list of cyclist-friendly airlines.

Boat

Seeing that The Gambia consists mainly of a waterway, with a few kilometres of land on each shore, it's surprising how little the river is used as a means of transport. There are no scheduled passenger boats, which is a shame as a picturesque river journey sounds a lot more enticing than a long trip along

potholed tarred road, squeezed into a battered passenger taxi.

Trips upriver are organised by only a handful of private tour operators (see p290). They are absolutely worth checking out, and even spending some money on – the river is only rarely seen from the side of the road, and a leisurely boat trip with occasional stops in small villages and shore-side camps might just be the best thing you'll do on your holiday. Note that some river tours are mainly suited to groups of at least four (which will also bring the price down). If you travel alone, check with the company if it's possible to join a group.

If you want to stay close to the Atlantic coast, you can take part in pirogue day trips around the mangroves between Banjul and Lamin, the best place to book these is Denton Bridge (see p103).

All along the river, there are several ferry crossings connecting the north and south bank. The main ones are the *Barra Ferry* (see p96), a slow beast of a boat that travels between Barra and Banjul, and the one connecting Farafenni and Soma (see p132). Other north-south connections are the pirogues that cross the river at various points, though these can only carry people.

Bus

The Gambia Public Transport Corporation (GPTC) bus network was once the envy of many West African nations. Its fleet comprised several high-standard express buses that regularly connected even the most far-flung destinations. But the state of the roads and the lack of continued funding have taken a heavy toll, so the GPTC buses are no longer a viable option for travellers. We found the main bus stop completely deserted, and were repeatedly told that buses had stopped running. Occasional buses go upcountry, all the way to Basse, but they are not reliable and can take a very long time to arrive. Even bush taxis can sometimes spend up to 12 hours on the 360km – think again if you want to take the bus.

Bush Taxi

There are two main routes though Gambia: the potholed dirt road along the northern bank of the river, and the potholed tarred road along the southern bank. The north side was long considered the last choice, but

LUGGAGE FEES

Wherever you travel by bush taxi there is always an extra fee for luggage, which varies according to the size of the baggage. The baggage charge is partly because bush-taxi fares are fixed by the government and may not reflect true costs. So the only way the driver can earn a bit extra is to charge for luggage. Local people accept this, so travellers should too, unless of course the amount is beyond reason.

The fee for a medium-sized backpack is usually around 10% of the fare, though you'll usually have to bargain hard to get away for less than 20%. Fares tend to rise with the size of the luggage, or if the item is likely to dirty the vehicle.

If you think you're being overcharged, stand your ground politely and the price will soon fall.

as the tarred road deteriorated further in the south, it suddenly gained immensely in appeal – washed-out dirt is still much better to drive on than perforated asphalt.

Roads are fine up to Brikama, and again from Georgetown to Basse, all other stretches are anything from bearable to barely existent. This is supposed to change, however, with road funding programmes in place, so keep an ear out for any updates.

It's becoming increasingly popular to take the ferry to Barra, follow the northern stretch via Kerewan to Farafenni before heading south for the last leg between Soma and Basse. The southern stretch is better served by public transport than the north.

Bush taxis on the southern route go from Serekunda, but usually only as far as Soma (about halfway up the country), where you must change vehicles for onward travel.

Other public transport routes include the fantastically smooth tarmac that parallels the coastline all the way to Kartong, and the good dirt track from Brikama to the southern borders.

Car & Motorcycle

It's possible to hire a car or motorbike in Gambia's resort areas (see p114) and Serekunda, but before doing this read the boxed text on p293. Most hire agencies are small operators, Hertz being the only big name represented.

Cars can often be hired with a driver, though in this case you're likely to be much better off just negotiating a daily rate with a bush-taxi driver. You'll need to have an international driving licence, and be at least 23 years of age (some hire agencies demand a minimum of 24 years) to hire a car. Deposits are required, but vary between agencies. See the Atlantic Coast (p114) and Dakar (p165) chapters for details of hire agencies.

Despite the British heritage, people in Gambia drive on the right, in line with Senegal and most other countries in West Africa.

At the time of writing, petrol prices were CFA500/D30 per litre, and were steadily on the rise.

For minor repair works, there are improvised garages all along major roads, and every village has someone who can weld your oil tank back together. Car parts are harder to find – unless you happen to drive a Peugeot 405...generally: the less fancy your car, the more likely you are to get it repaired.

Local Transport TOWN TAXIS

Town taxis operate in the Atlantic coast resorts, particularly along Kairaba Av linking Serekunda to Fajara. They are painted yellow with green stripes. They operate as shared taxis, with people getting in and out as they like along set routes. Fares are usually just a few dalasis and are not negotiable. Town taxis can also be hired in a more traditional manner (where you are the only passenger/s): this is called a 'town trip'. The cost of a town trip should be D25, but can be more (especially late at night), but it's always cheaper than the same trip in a tourist taxi.

TOURIST TAXIS

Tourist taxis, painted green with a white diamond on the door, are specifically for tourists and can go anywhere in the country, though they mainly operate in the tourist resorts, along the coastal road and are rarely seen further inland than Brikama. Tourist taxis can be found at ranks near large hotels, and drivers offer rides to all the places of interest in Gambia. A list of rates is on display outside most hotels and at the airport. They are considerably more expensive than local cabs, though tariffs are negotiable within reason.

Tours

Nearly all places of interest in Gambia can be reached by public transport, but taking an organised tour can be a good way to get around the country if you want to avoid the hassles of travelling on public transport or if money is not a primary concern.

There are several large companies based in the Atlantic coast resort area that run organised tours. Most cater specifically for groups of tourists at the big hotels, but many of the excursions are open to independent travellers, too.

Gambia River Experience (☎ 4494360; gambiariver@yahoo.com; www.gambiariver.com) An inspired little company with offices in Fajara and at Lamin Lodge does trips from Denton Bridge or Banjul, all the way up to Georgetown. Trips are either done by motorised pirogue or large boat. One of their offers includes a weeklong cruise along the river. Check the website for more details.

Gambia Sport Fishing (☎ 4495683, 908577; www.gambiafishing.com) These guys have a good reputation and offer beach- and river-fishing excursions. Some sample trips include inshore or creek fishing for UK£45 per person; beach fishing for UK£35 per person; or a four-day upriver freshwater-fishing trip for UK£290 per person including accommodation. Costs for all trips are based on a minimum of three anglers per boat and include transport to and from Denton Bridge, bait, tackle, soft drinks, an experienced skipper and fuel, but not lunch.

Gambia Tours (☎ 4462601/2; fax 462603; www.gambiatours.gm) A family enterprise with a good range of tours around the country.

Hidden Gambia (in UK ☎ 01527 576239; www.hidden-gambia.com) This company has an excellent set of excursions, including twice-weekly trips between Bintang and Farafenni, and tours around the Georgetown area (including trips to the River Gambia National Park). It also offers 'Discover the River' trips that take you all the way from the coast to upcountry (seven-/14-day trips £425/575).

Mr Musa Bah (☎ 9914630) He does upcountry tours in his own car, and has been consistently recommended by travellers over the years.

Mr Saiko Demba (☎ 4497186; www.leybato.abc.gm; Leybato, Fajara) The manager of the Leybato guesthouse (p106) has a car and minibus (both with driver) available. He charges per vehicle, so it's cheaper if you get a group together. He can arrange anything from local tours to long excursions around Gambia and into Senegal.

Olympic Travel (olympictravel@gambinet.gm) An efficient operator with a range of tours on offer.

Wally Faal (☎ 3372103; wallyfaal@yahoo.com; www.geocities.com/birdinggambia) This is one of the friendliest, best-informed bird guides around. Highly recommended. See also p71.

SENEGAL Air

Of the several airlines that used to serve Senegal's regional airports, **Air Sénégal International** (☎ 804 0404; www.airsenegalinternational.sn) is the only one still working at press time. It has flights to Saint-Louis, Ziguinchor, Cap Skiring and Tambacounda, though only those to Ziguinchor (once or twice daily, return CFA80,600) operate with regularity. Flights to Cap Skiring (Friday and Sunday, return CFA110,600) and Saint-Louis (Wednesday, return CFA70,000) operate only from November to April, and the two flights that fly from Dakar to Tambacounda every Saturday seem pretty irregular.

Flights are particularly worth considering to Ziguinchor or Cap Skiring, as reaching the Casamance by road involves either tedious border crossings in The Gambia, or a seemingly endless tour via Tambacounda around The Gambia. Saint-Louis is fairly comfortably reached by road. Generally, services tend to be good and reliable, though there can be delays.

If you're in a group, you might consider plane charter. Most charter companies specialise in particular destinations.

Air CM (in France ☎ 01 53 41 00 50; mail.aircom@wannadoo.fr) Have a twice-weekly connection between Paris and the Cap and plenty of good package deals.

Air Saint Louis (☎ 644 8629; www.airsaintlouis.com) Flights from Dakar to Saint-Louis.

Hôtel Kalissai (☎ 994 8600; www.kalissai.com) Arranges flights from the aerodrome in Abéné to Dakar.

Senegalair Avion Taxis (☎ 821 3425) Flies mainly to Simenti in Parc National du Niokolo-Koba, though it can also arrange flights elsewhere.

Bicycle

Please see p288 for information on travelling by bicycle in this region.

Boat

The most important boat service in Senegal is *Le Willis*, which connects Dakar twice weekly to Ziguinchor in the Casamance – possibly the easiest way of reaching southern Senegal (if flying is too expensive). See the Casamance chapter (p231) for more details.

If it's a trip up the Senegal River you're after, you can travel with the *Bou El Mogdad* (p209), a stunning old boat with a long historical connection to the region. This is not a public transport alternative to road

travel though, but a cruise ship that chugs leisurely from Saint-Louis to Podor over several days.

For cruise trips around the Petite Côte, and all the way to Guinea-Bissau, the *Africa Queen* is the most famous option.

Various towns and islands in Senegal can be reached by regular ferry services, including Gorée Island (see p169) and Foundiougne (see p189). Regular pirogues connect Dakar and Île de N'Gor (see p171), Dakar and Île de la Madeleine (see p170), Ndan-gane and Mar Lodj (p188) and various places in the Siné-Saloum region. Note that only the regular, ferry-type pirogues are equipped with life vests; self-hired boats don't necessarily come with the requisite features.

Africa Queen (West Africa Sportsfishing; ☎ 957 7435; Saly)

Bou El Mogdad (☎ 961 5689; www.saheldecouverte.com) One- to four-day trips can be booked through Sahel Découverte Bassari in Saint-Louis (see p205).

Gorée Ferry (☎ 24hr info line 628 1111, 849 7961)

Le Willis (☎ 889 8009, 889 8060/51; tickets from CFA15,500) Departs from Dakar every Tuesday and Friday at 7pm, returns from Ziguinchor every Sunday and Thursday at 2pm.

Bus

Senegal's long-distance bus network stands up fairly well compared to those of other countries in the region. The blue buses (some routes are also served by yellow American school buses) are owned and run by members of the Mouride brotherhood, hence they're known to everyone as *cars mourides*. *Cars mourides* go from Dakar to most major towns in the country. They leave from the Shell station at Av Malick Sy near *gare routière* Sapeurs-Pompiers (usually just referred to as Pompiers), usually in the middle of the night. You have to book your seat in advance. There's no central phone number, and the best thing is to go to the Shell station (every taxi driver knows it), ask for the person responsible for the *cars mourides*, let them know the direction you're going and they should, in theory, book you on the bus.

Even though most *cars mourides* are in good quality, some even have air-con, travelling by bus can be very tedious, and is always time consuming. The advantage of the prebooking system is that buses are fairly punctual. But sharing a vehicle with tens of others and their usually substantial luggage

always means enduring many stops for people to get off on the way, waiting for them to untie their bags from the roof, watching smaller cars pass you by. Punctured tyres take longer to repair, too.

Bush Taxi

Bush taxi is the term for all public transport smaller than a big bus. They leave once they are full; this might take half an hour, or several days if you're out in the sticks.

The best time for catching bush taxis is usually from 6.30am to 8.30am. In remote locations, your best chance for transport are the market days, when people will be heading to the market town (or village) in the early morning and returning in the evening.

Tickets are sold by seat, so if you want extra leg room or want to speed up the process, you can purchase two seats or more. This is also the best way to calculate taxi hire. If you want to hire the whole vehicle, take the cost of a ticket and multiply it by the number of seats to get the amount you should be paying. You might get the driver to reduce that price a little, but shouldn't have to pay much more than that.

Though public transport prices are fixed, they frequently increase in line with rising petrol prices. To give a bit of an idea, *sept-place* bush taxi prices from Dakar include Kaolack (CFA2500, three to four hours), Saint-Louis (CFA3100, four to five hours) and Ziguinchor (CFA6500, nine to 10 hours). Minibuses are typically about 20% to 25% cheaper than *sept-place* taxis, and Ndiaga Ndiayes about 30% to 35% cheaper.

MINIBUS

With a capacity of about 20 people these are smaller versions of the Ndiaga Ndiaye (most of them are Nissan Urvans). They are sometimes also referred to as *petit car*. These mainly operate on rural roads, and cost about the same as the Ndiaga Ndiaye.

NDIAGA NDIAYE

These Mercedes minibuses, named after the first entrepreneur that introduced them to Senegal, are usually the cheapest though slowest form of transport. The ubiquitous 32-seaters, also known as car or grand car, are recognisable by their white colour, and the word *Alhamdoulilahi* (Thanks to God) painted across most vehicles.

They have no timetables, and usually set off when they're full, or when the driver feels like it. They also stop every few hundred metres to drop or collect passengers, which is why they can take almost twice as long for a short journey than a *sept-place* taxi. Or was that because of frequent punctures, engine failures or the occasional accident? It all sounds grim, but in the more remote regions, they'll probably be your only choice of transport, and – the big plus – they're always very social and if you're not in a rush can be a great place to meet the locals.

PICK-UP

Leaving the city and heading for the rather remote regions, you'll occasionally encounter covered pick-up trucks on the street (called *bâchés* in Senegal). These battered vehicles, crammed with people, chickens, sacks of rice and live goats, are sometimes the only type of bush taxi you'll find in the very remote regions.

SEPT-PLACE TAXI

Sept-place taxis (also sometimes referred to as brake or *cinq-cent-quatre*) are Peugeot 504s, used as a slightly more comfortable means of transport.

The quality varies. Some drivers are safe and considerate, others verge on insanity. Some cars are quite new and well maintained with comfortable seats while others are reduced to chassis, body and engine. With three rows of seats, Peugeot taxis are built to take the driver plus seven passengers (hence the name *sept-place*). On the main routes in Gambia and Senegal this limit is observed. But as you get into more remote areas it's often flouted: you might be jammed in with a dozen adults plus children and bags, with more luggage and a couple of extra passengers riding on the roof. These cars do hundreds of thousands of kilometres on some of the worst roads in the world – a credit to the manufacturer and the ingenuity of local mechanics.

Car & Motorcycle

Some general points about driving your own vehicle to and around the region are covered on p283 and opposite. Most car-rental companies are based in Dakar; for rates, conditions, and company addresses see p165.

WARNING

Unless you're very familiar with the state of the streets in Senegal and Gambia, driving around the two countries is not something that should be taken lightly.

Road conditions inland are often terrible. What looks like a promising stretch of racing tarmac on the map, may in reality turn out to be a string of large potholes, vaguely connected by tired asphalt. If you don't want to bust a tyre here, you'll have to perform that careful slalom around the cracks and obstacles you'll see the local taxi drivers perform – and sometimes even leave the route entirely to drive beside it. A straight dirt road can be easier to drive on than perforated asphalt, but you also have to get used to it. Keep the speed down, and watch out in bends, as it's easy to slide off the road.

Other dangers involve cars and animals moving unexpectedly into your path. Cows in particular never give way to a car. If you see a herd approach, take your foot off the gas, and keep moving along slowly, careful not to touch the animals. Don't come to a full stop, they might feel tempted to do the same. Take particular care if driving through Senegal's national park of Niokolo-Koba, especially in the early morning hours. Many wild animals sleep on the warm tarmac at night, and you really don't want to risk hitting a lion.

If you want to hire a car – it's worth considering getting one with a driver (many agencies only rent with drivers for long-distance travel), as he'll be familiar with the territory, and any mechanical problems that arise will be his responsibility, rather than yours. Neither country has automobile associations to assist you in case of an accident.

DRIVING LICENCE

You need an international driving licence to drive or hire a car in Senegal, most hire companies request a minimum age of 23.

HIRE

Car hire is generally expensive. By the time you've added up the cost of the car, the distance travelled, plus insurance and tax, you can easily end up paying over US\$1000 per week.

Hiring 4WDs is even more expensive and hire rates often shoot up if you want to go upcountry, where bad road conditions increase the risk of accidents. Some hire companies can provide a chauffeur at very little extra cost – sometimes it's cheaper because you pay less for insurance.

You will also need a credit card to pay the large deposit. For those still interested, there are car-rental agencies in the capitals and main tourist areas. In Senegal all the international names (Hertz, Avis, Budget etc) are represented, and there are also smaller independent operators.

It usually works out better renting a *sept-place* or other taxi with its driver. To hire a car for a day or longer, negotiate a daily rate (let the driver know where you want to go, as a day around Dakar doesn't go for the same rate as outings over washed-out dirt roads), fill the tank (make sure you've

made clear who pays for petrol) and head off. Even if the daily rate you arrive at is similar to that of a hire car, the great advantage of using a taxi with driver is that all repairs that might need to be undertaken will be his responsibility rather than yours. If you want to hire a taxi with driver for a journey, multiply the number of seats by the fare and you should be paying about the same amount.

Hitching

Hitching in the Western sense (because you don't want to get the bus, or more specifically because you don't want to pay) is also possible, but may take a very long time. Most people with space in their car are likely to want a payment – usually on a par with what a bus costs. The most common vehicles for lifts of this sort are nearly-new white Toyota Land Cruisers driven by locals working for government bodies, international agencies or aid organisations.

Remember though, as in any other part of the world, hitching is never entirely safe, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. If you're planning to travel this way, take advice from other hitchers (locals or travellers) first. Hitching in pairs is obviously safer.

Local Transport

CALÈCHE & CHARETTE

You have herewith left the world of the motorised vehicle. Horse-drawn *charettes* and their 'upmarket' counterpart *calèches* are used as means of public transport in places such as Rufisque, Richard Toll and Dagana. A *charette* is little more than a simple board attached to a wheel and strapped behind a horse, and it's more typically used to transport bags of sand and bricks. The *calèche* actually has seats and a sunroof, and can be a fun means of strolling around town (especially if you've got kids), provided that you're not pressed for time.

CAR RAPIDE

This colourfully decorated, blue-and-yellow Dakar minibus is one of Senegal's symbols; you'll see it on postcards and as souvenirs. While it really is cute to look at, it's not a great way to get around unless random stops, daredevil overtaking manoeuvres and crammed seats are your thing. *Car rapides* only really operate in Dakar and pretty much cover any journey you can imagine, though not always as directly or quickly as you might hope. You pay CFA50 for a short hop, CFA100 for slightly further, and never more than CFA150.

MOBYLETTE

The only place *mobylettes* (mopeds) are used as regular means of public transport is in Kaolack. You pay for the passenger seat, hang on, and be patient while the driver gets you from A to B, either at the speed of a slow motorbike or a battered bicycle, depending on his and your combined bodyweight.

SENBUS

These brand new minibuses are one day supposed to replace *cars rapides* completely,

which would be a shame, seeing that the cars really characterise Dakar. The Senbuses aren't as imaginatively decorated, but they are a great means of getting from A to B, with predetermined stops, one seat per person and other such luxuries. Routes are displayed in front of the vehicle, and rates are the same as *cars rapides*.

Tours

Most places of interest in Senegal can be reached by either public transport or car, but if you're short on time you could get around the country on an organised tour.

A small selection of tour operators based in and around the Dakar area is included here.

M'boup Voyages (☎ 821 8163; mboup@telecomplus.sn; Place de l'Indépendance) One of the most enduring agencies with tours to the major destinations.

Origin Africa (Map p152; ☎ 860 1578; origin@sentoo.sn; Cité Africa, Ouakam) One of the more interesting tour operators in Senegal, with plenty of tours to destinations less frequently covered.

Pain de Singe (Map p150; ☎ 824 2484; paindesinge@arc.sn) Absolutely original, this tiny operation runs excellent, eco-oriented tours, including trips to the marine reserve at Bamboung, to Casamance and plenty of other off-the-beaten-track destinations.

Sahel d'Ecouverte Bassari (Map p150; ☎ 842 8751; bassari@bassarisenegal.com, carresahel@sentoo.sn; 7 rue Masclary) Its tours in northern Senegal are particularly good. It caters well for Spanish speakers.

Senegal Tours (Map p150; ☎ 839 9900; fax 823 2644; 5 Place de l'Indépendance) This is of the largest operators in the country.

TPA (☎ 644 9491; 957 1256; tpa@sentoo.sn; www.jesenegal.info) A tour operator with a difference, TPA is the leading agency for 'bush tourism', with excellent tours around the lesser travelled routes, including trips to its remote *campements* (hotels with accommodation in huts or bungalows) in Lompoul, Simal and Palmarin (Siné-Saloum).

Health

CONTENTS

Before You Go	295
Recommended Vaccinations	295
Internet Resources	295
Further Reading	295
In Transit	296
Jet Lag & Motion Sickness	296
In The Gambia & Senegal	296
Availability & Cost of Health Care	296
Infectious Diseases	297
Traveller's Diarrhoea	301
Environmental Hazards	302
Women's Health	303

Travel health depends on your predeparture preparations, your daily health care while travelling and how you handle any medical problem that does develop. While the potential dangers can seem quite frightening, in reality few travellers experience anything more than an upset stomach.

BEFORE YOU GO

If you wear glasses take a spare pair and your prescription. If you require a particular medication take an adequate supply, as it may not be available locally. Take part of the packaging showing the generic name rather than the brand, which will make getting replacements easier, but be sure to remove or black out the price you paid at home, or you could encounter a sudden dose of hyperinflation. It's a good idea to have a legible prescription or letter from your doctor showing that you legally use the medication.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Plan ahead for getting your vaccinations: Some require more than one injection, while some vaccinations should not be given together. Note that some vaccinations should not be given during pregnancy or to people with allergies – discuss with your doctor.

It is recommended you seek medical advice at least six weeks before travel. Be aware

that there is often a greater risk of disease for children and during pregnancy.

Discuss your requirements with your doctor, but vaccinations you should consider for a trip to Gambia or Senegal are listed here (for more details about the diseases themselves, see the individual disease entries later in this chapter). Carry proof of your vaccinations on an international health certificate, especially for yellow fever, as this is sometimes needed to enter some countries.

In both Senegal and The Gambia you will need a yellow-fever vaccination certificate if you're coming from a yellow fever-infected area.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel-health advice on the Internet. For further information, the Lonely Planet website at www.lonelyplanet.com is a good place to start. The World Health Organization publishes a superb book called *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost at www.who.int/ith. Other websites of general interest are MD Travel Health at www.mdtravelhealth.com, which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov; and Fit for Travel at www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk, which has up-to-date information about outbreaks and is very user-friendly.

It's also a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website, if one is available, before departure:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canada (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/index.html)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel)

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel Africa* is a handy pocket size and packed with useful information on pretrip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. *Travel with Children* from Lonely Planet also includes advice on travel health for younger children.

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

It is essential to have a vaccination certificate to show you've been jabbed for yellow fever.

Diphtheria & Tetanus Vaccinations for these two diseases are usually combined and are recommended for everyone. After an initial course of three injections (usually given in childhood), boosters are necessary every 10 years.

Hepatitis A Vaccine for Hepatitis A (eg Avaxim, Havrix 1440 or VAQTA) provides long-term immunity (possibly more than 10 years) after an initial injection and a booster at six to 12 months. Alternatively an injection of gamma globulin can provide short-term protection against hepatitis A – two to six months, depending on the dose given. It is not a vaccine, but a ready-made antibody collected from blood donations. It is reasonably effective and, unlike the vaccine, it is protective immediately, but because it is a blood product there are concerns about its long-term safety. Hepatitis A vaccine is also available in a combined form, Twinrix, with hepatitis B vaccine. Three injections over a six-month period are required; the first two provide substantial protection against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B Travellers who should consider vaccination against hepatitis B include those visiting countries where there are high levels of hepatitis B infection, where blood transfusions may not be adequately screened or where sexual contact or needle sharing is a possibility. Vaccination involves three injections, with a booster at 12 months. More rapid courses are available if necessary.

Meningococcal Meningitis Vaccination is recommended, especially during the dry season from November to June. A single injection gives good protection against the major epidemic forms of the disease for three years. Protection may be less effective in children under two years.

Polio This is still prevalent in The Gambia and Senegal, so everyone should keep up-to-date with this vaccination, which is normally given in childhood. A booster every 10 years maintains immunity.

Rabies Vaccination should be considered by those who will spend a month or longer in a country where rabies is common, especially if they are cycling, handling animals, caving or travelling to remote areas, and for children (who may not report a bite). Pretravel rabies vaccination involves having three injections over 21 to 28 days. If someone who has been vaccinated is bitten or scratched by an animal, they will require two booster injections of vaccine; those not vaccinated require more.

Tuberculosis The risk of TB to travellers is usually very low, except for those living with or closely associated with local people. Vaccination against TB (BCG) is recommended for children and young adults living in these areas for three months or more.

Typhoid Vaccination against typhoid may be required if you are travelling for more than a couple of weeks. It is available either as an injection or as capsules to be taken orally.

Yellow Fever A yellow-fever vaccine is now the only vaccine that is a legal requirement for entry into Gambia and Senegal, usually only enforced when coming from an infected area. At the time of research, yellow fever was still affecting small numbers in Senegal. For immunisation you may have to go to a special yellow-fever vaccination centre.

For those planning on being away for a while or working abroad (eg as a Peace Corps worker), *Where There Is No Doctor* by David Werner is a very detailed guide ideal for self-diagnosing almost anything.

IN TRANSIT

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Eating lightly before and during a trip will reduce the chances of motion sickness. If you are prone to motion sickness try to find a place that minimises movement – near the wing on aircraft, close to midships on boats, near the centre on buses. Fresh air usually helps; reading and cigarette smoke don't. Commercial motion-sickness preparations, which can cause drowsiness, have to be taken

before the trip commences. Ginger (available in capsule form) and peppermint (including mint-flavoured sweets) are natural preventatives.

IN THE GAMBIA & SENEGAL

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

The Gambia's main government-run hospital is in Banjul, but there is a better selection of private clinics and doctors in the area around the Atlantic coast resorts. If you're upcountry, there are hospitals in Bansang and Farafenni.

In Senegal you'll find the country's main hospitals as well as many private clinics

and doctors in Dakar. Around the country, most large towns have hospitals, doctors and clinics; if you need to find any of these, ask at an upmarket hotel.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Self-diagnosis and treatment can be risky, so you should always attempt to seek medical help. Your embassy or consulate usually has a list of doctors in the area that speak your language, and good hotels should be able to recommend a local doctor or clinic. Although we do give drug dosages in this section, they are for emergency use only. Correct diagnosis is vital. In this section we have used the generic names for medications – check with a pharmacist for brands available locally.

Note that antibiotics should ideally be administered only under medical supervision. Take only the recommended dose at the prescribed intervals and use the whole course, even if the illness seems to be cured earlier. Stop immediately if there are any serious reactions and don't use the antibiotic at all if you are unsure that you have the correct one. Some people are allergic to commonly prescribed antibiotics such as penicillin; carry this information (eg on a bracelet) when travelling.

Cholera

This is the worst of the watery diarrhoeas and medical help should be sought.

Cholera is mostly transmitted via contaminated human excrements. This might sound like a rather unlikely source of infection – but beware, an infected person preparing meals without having washed their hands properly might transmit the disease. Infection is unlikely outside known problem areas, but if you really want to be safe, prepare your own food and choose restaurants with excellent standards of cleanliness.

Note that in Senegal, cholera outbreaks are frequently reported after the annual mass pilgrimage.

Fluid replacement is the most vital treatment – the risk of dehydration is severe as you may lose up to 20L a day. If there is a delay in getting to hospital, then begin taking tetracycline. The adult dose is 250mg four times daily. It is not recommended for children under nine years or for pregnant women. Tetracycline may help shorten the illness, but adequate fluids are required to save lives.

Dengue

This viral disease is transmitted by mosquitoes and is fast becoming one of the top public-health problems in the tropical world. The disease has been reported in small numbers in both Gambia and Senegal. The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which transmits the dengue virus, is most active during the day (unlike the malaria-carrying mosquito), and is found mainly in urban areas, in and around human dwellings. Symptoms of dengue fever include a sudden onset of high fever, headache, joint and muscle pains (hence its old name, break-bone fever) and nausea and vomiting. A rash of small red spots sometimes appears three to four days after the onset of fever. In the early phase of illness, dengue may be mistaken for other infectious diseases including malaria and influenza. Minor bleeding such as nose bleeds may occur in the course of the illness, but this does not necessarily mean that you have progressed to the potentially fatal dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF). This is a severe illness, characterised by heavy bleeding, which is thought to be a result of secondary infection due to a different strain (there are four major strains) and usually affects residents of the country rather than travellers. Recovery even from simple dengue fever may be prolonged, with tiredness lasting for several weeks.

There is no vaccine against and no specific treatment for dengue. Aspirin should be avoided, as it increases the risk of haemorrhaging. The best prevention is to avoid mosquito bites – see p299.

Filariasis

This mosquito-transmitted parasitic infection is found in many parts of Africa, including Gambia and Senegal. Possible symptoms include fever, pain and swelling of the lymph glands; inflammation of lymph drainage areas; swelling of a limb or the scrotum; skin rashes; and blindness. Treatment can eliminate the parasites from the body, but some of the damage caused may not be reversible. Prompt medical advice should be obtained if the infection is suspected.

Fungal Infections

These occur more commonly in hot weather and are usually found on the scalp, between the toes (athlete's foot) or fingers, in the

MEDICAL KIT CHECKLIST

Following is a list of items you should consider including in your medical kit – consult your pharmacist for brands available in your country.

- antibiotics – consider including these if you're travelling well off the beaten track; see your doctor as they must be prescribed, and carry the prescription with you
- antihistamine – for allergies, eg hay fever; to ease the itch from insect bites or stings; and to prevent motion sickness
- antifungal cream or powder – for fungal skin infections and thrush
- antiseptic (such as povidone-iodine) – for cuts and grazes
- aspirin or paracetamol (acetaminophen in the USA) – for pain or fever
- bandages, Band-Aids (plasters) and other wound dressings
- basic set of children's medication – if you're travelling with children
- calamine lotion, sting-relief spray or aloe vera – to ease irritation from sunburn and insect bites or stings
- cold and flu tablets, throat lozenges and nasal decongestant
- insect repellent, sunscreen, lip balm and eye drops
- loperamide or diphenoxylate – known as 'blockers' for diarrhoea
- multivitamins – consider for long trips, when dietary vitamin intake may be inadequate
- prochlorperazine or metaclopramide – for nausea and vomiting
- rehydration mixture – to prevent dehydration, which may occur, for example during bouts of diarrhoea; particularly important when travelling with children
- scissors, tweezers and a thermometer – note that mercury thermometers are prohibited by airlines
- sterile kit – in case you need injections in a country with medical hygiene problems; discuss with your doctor
- water-purification tablets or iodine

groin and on the body (ringworm). You get ringworm (a fungal infection, not a worm) from infected animals or other people. Moisture encourages these infections.

To prevent fungal infections wear loose, comfortable clothes, avoid artificial fibres, wash frequently and dry yourself carefully. If you do get an infection, wash the infected area at least daily with a disinfectant or medicated soap and water, and rinse and dry well. Apply an antifungal cream or powder such as tolnaftate. Try to expose the infected area to air or sunlight as much as possible. Wash all towels and underwear in hot water, change them often and let them dry in the sun.

Hepatitis

This is a general term for inflammation of the liver, a common disease worldwide. Several different viruses cause hepatitis, and differ in the way they are transmitted. Similar symptoms in all forms include fever, chills, headache, fatigue, feelings of weakness and aches and pains, followed by loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, light-coloured faeces, jaundiced (yellow) skin and yellowing of the whites of the eyes. People who have had hepatitis should avoid alcohol for some time afterwards; the liver needs time to recover.

Hepatitis A is transmitted by contaminated food and drinking water. You should seek medical advice, but there is not much you can do apart from resting, drinking lots of fluids, eating lightly and avoiding fatty foods. Hepatitis E is transmitted in the same way as hepatitis A; it can be particularly serious in pregnant women.

There are almost 300 million chronic carriers of hepatitis B in the world. It is spread through contact with infected blood, blood products or body fluids; for example through sexual contact, unsterilised needles and blood transfusions, or through contact with blood via small breaks in the skin. Other risk situations include shaving, tattooing or body piercing with contaminated equipment. The symptoms of hepatitis B may be more severe than those of type A and the disease can lead to long-term problems such as chronic liver damage, liver cancer or a long-term carrier state. Hepatitis C and D are spread in the same way as hepatitis B and can also lead to long-term complications.

There are vaccines against hepatitis A and B, but there are currently no vaccines against the other types of hepatitis.

HIV & AIDS

Infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) may lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), which is a fatal disease. With an HIV prevalence rate of 0.8% (44,000 people) according to a 2003 estimate, Senegal has one of the lowest HIV/AIDS rates in Africa, and the prevalence in The Gambia is also relatively low. Still, that's no reason for taking risks. Any exposure to blood, blood products or body fluids may put the individual at risk. The disease is often transmitted through sexual contact or dirty needles – vaccinations, acupuncture, tattooing and body piercing are potentially as dangerous as intravenous drug use. HIV/AIDS can also be spread through infected blood transfusions; some developing countries cannot afford to screen blood used for transfusions. If you do need an injection, ask to see the syringe unwrapped in front of you, or take a needle and syringe pack with you.

There are two types of HIV, and both are fairly common in West Africa. Unfortunately, many HIV tests do not test for both variations. What this means is that unprotected sex with someone who has tested negative for the virus might not be as safe as it sounds. Fear of HIV infection should never discourage treatment for serious conditions.

Leishmaniasis

This is a group of parasitic diseases transmitted by sandflies, which are found in many parts of the Middle East, Africa, India, Central and South America and the Mediterranean. Cutaneous leishmaniasis affects the skin tissue causing ulceration and disfigurement, and visceral leishmaniasis affects the internal organs. Seek medical advice, as laboratory testing is required for diagnosis and correct treatment. Avoiding sandfly bites is the best precaution. Bites are usually painless, itchy and are yet another reason to cover up and apply repellent.

Malaria

This serious and potentially fatal disease is spread by mosquito bites. Nowhere in Gambia and Senegal is completely free of

malaria so it's extremely important to avoid mosquito bites and to take tablets to ensure a good degree of protection.

Symptoms range from fever, chills and sweating, headache, diarrhoea and abdominal pains to a vague feeling of ill-health. Seek medical help immediately if malaria is suspected. Without treatment the disease can rapidly become more serious and can be fatal.

Antimalarial drugs do not prevent you from being infected, but kill the malaria parasites during an early stage in their development and significantly reduce your risk of becoming very ill or dying. Expert advice on medication should be sought as there are many factors to consider including the area to be visited, the risk of exposure to malaria-carrying mosquitoes, the side effects of medication, your medical history and whether you are a child or an adult or pregnant. Travellers to isolated areas in high-risk countries may like to carry a treatment dose of medication for use if symptoms occur.

If medical care is not available, malaria tablets can be used for treatment. You need to use a malaria tablet different from the one you were taking when you contracted malaria. The standard treatment dose of mefloquine (Larium) is two 250mg tablets and a further two six hours later. For Fansidar, it's a single dose of three tablets. If you were previously taking mefloquine and cannot obtain Fansidar, then other alternatives are Malarone (atovaquone-proguanil; four tablets once daily for three days), halofantrine (three doses of two 250mg tablets every six hours) or quinine sulphate (600mg every six hours). There is a greater risk of side effects with these dosages than in normal use if used with mefloquine, so medical advice is preferable. Be aware also that halofantrine is no longer recommended by the WHO as emergency standby treatment because of side effects, and should only be used if no other drugs are available.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites at all times. The main messages:

- Wear light-coloured clothing.
- Wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts.
- Use mosquito repellents containing the compound DEET on exposed areas (prolonged overuse of DEET may be harmful, especially to children, but using it

is preferable to being bitten by disease-transmitting mosquitoes).

- Avoid perfume and aftershave.
- Use a mosquito net impregnated with mosquito repellent (permethrin) – it may be worth taking your own.
- Impregnating your clothes with permethrin effectively deters mosquitoes and other insects.

In the Gambia you absolutely need to take precautions against malaria.

Malaria is a killer and exists year-round throughout Senegal. It is essential that you take appropriate precautions, especially if you're heading out of Dakar.

Meningococcal Meningitis

This is a serious disease that attacks the brain and can be fatal. There are recurring epidemics in various parts of the world, including the interior regions of Gambia and Senegal.

A fever, severe headache, sensitivity to light and neck stiffness that prevents forward bending of the head are the first symptoms. There may also be purple patches on the skin. Death can occur within a few hours, so urgent medical treatment is required.

Treatment is large doses of penicillin given intravenously, or chloramphenicol injections.

Rabies

This fatal viral infection is found in many countries. Many animals can be infected (such as dogs, cats, bats and monkeys) and their saliva is infectious. Any bite, scratch or even lick from an animal should be cleaned immediately and thoroughly. Scrub with soap and running water, then apply alcohol or iodine solution. Seek medical help promptly to receive a course of injections to prevent the onset of symptoms and death.

Schistosomiasis

Also known as bilharzia, this disease is common in Gambia and Senegal. It is transmitted by minute worms that infect certain varieties of freshwater snails found in rivers, streams, lakes and particularly behind dams. The worms multiply and are eventually discharged into the water.

The worm enters through the skin and attaches itself to your intestines or bladder.

The first symptom may be a general feeling of being unwell, or a tingling and sometimes a light rash around the area where it entered. Weeks later a high fever may develop. Once the disease is established, abdominal pain and blood in the urine are other signs. The infection often causes no symptoms until the disease is well established (several months to years after exposure) and damage to internal organs irreversible.

Avoiding swimming or bathing in fresh water where schistosomiasis is present is the main method of preventing the disease. Even deep water can be infected. If you do get wet, dry off quickly and dry your clothes as well.

A blood test is the best way to diagnose the disease, but the test will not show positive for some weeks after exposure.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B can be transmitted through sexual contact – see the relevant sections earlier for more details. Other STDs include gonorrhoea, herpes and syphilis. Sores, blisters or rashes around the genitals and discharges or pain when urinating are common symptoms. With STDs such as the wart virus or chlamydia (both common in Gambia and Senegal), symptoms may be less marked or not observed at all, especially in women. Chlamydia infection can cause infertility in men and women before any symptoms have been noticed. Syphilis symptoms eventually disappear completely but the disease continues and can cause severe problems in later years. While abstaining from sexual contact is the only 100% effective prevention, using condoms is also effective. Gonorrhoea and syphilis are treated with antibiotics. The different STDs each require specific antibiotics.

Sleeping Sickness

In parts of tropical Africa tsetse flies can carry trypanosomiasis, or sleeping sickness; however it is seldom seen in Gambia and Senegal. The tsetse fly is about twice the size of a housefly and recognisable by the scissor-like way it folds its wings when at rest. Only a small proportion of tsetse flies carry the disease, but it is a serious disease. No protection is available except avoiding the tsetse fly bites. The flies are attracted to large moving objects such as safari buses, to per-

fume and aftershave and particularly to the colours purple and dark blue (avoid dark blue hire cars). Swelling at the site of the bite, five or more days later, is the first sign of infection; this is followed within two to three weeks by fever.

Tetanus

This disease is caused by a germ that lives in soil and in the faeces of horses and other animals. It enters the body via breaks in the skin. The first symptom may be discomfort in swallowing, or stiffening of the jaw and neck; this is followed by painful convulsions of the jaw and whole body. The disease can be fatal. It can be prevented by vaccination.

Tuberculosis (TB)

This bacterial infection is usually transmitted from person to person by coughing but may be transmitted through consumption of unpasteurised milk. Milk that has been boiled is safe to drink, and the souring of milk to make yogurt or cheese also kills the bacilli. TB is quite a problem in parts of Gambia, though travellers are usually not at great risk as close household contact with the infected person is usually required before the disease is passed on.

Typhoid

This is a dangerous gut infection caused by contaminated water and food. While it's seldom seen in Gambia and Senegal, if you suspect you have typhoid seek medical help immediately.

In its early stages sufferers may feel they have a bad cold or flu on the way, with headache, body aches and a fever that rises a little each day until it is around 40°C (104°F) or more. The victim's pulse is often slow relative to the degree of fever present – unlike a normal fever where the pulse increases. There may also be abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea or constipation.

In the second week the high fever and slow pulse continue and a few pink spots may appear on the body; trembling, delirium, weakness, weight loss and dehydration may occur. Complications such as pneumonia, perforated bowel or meningitis may occur.

Typhus

This disease is spread by ticks, mites or lice. It begins with fever, chills, headache and

muscle pains followed a few days later by a body rash. There is often a large painful sore at the site of the bite and nearby lymph nodes are swollen and painful. Typhus can be treated under medical supervision. Seek local advice on areas where ticks pose a danger and always check your skin carefully for ticks after walking in areas that may harbour ticks, such as tropical forests. An insect repellent can help, and walkers in tick-infested areas should consider having their boots and trousers impregnated with benzyl benzoate and dibutylphthalate.

Yellow Fever

This viral disease is endemic in many African and South American countries and is transmitted by mosquitoes. The initial symptoms are fever, headache, abdominal pain and vomiting. Seek medical care urgently and drink lots of fluids.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Simple things such as a change of water, food or climate can all cause a mild bout of diarrhoea, and many people experience a few rushed toilet trips soon after arriving in Africa. If there are no other symptoms then don't worry, this is just your body dealing with the change – it doesn't mean you've got dysentery!

Dehydration is the main danger with any diarrhoea, particularly in children or the elderly as dehydration can occur quite quickly. In all circumstances fluid replacement is the most important thing to remember. Weak black tea with a little sugar, soda water, or flat soft drinks diluted 50% with clean water are all good. With severe diarrhoea, a rehydrating solution is preferable to replace minerals and salts lost. Commercially available oral rehydration salts (ORS) are very useful; add them to boiled or bottled water. In an emergency you can make up a solution of six teaspoons of sugar and half a teaspoon of salt to a litre of boiled or bottled water. You need to drink at least the same volume of fluid that you are losing in bowel movements and vomiting. Urine is the best guide to the adequacy of replacement – if you have small amounts of concentrated urine, you need to drink more. Keep drinking small amounts often. Stick to a bland, fat-free diet as you recover.

Gut-paralysing drugs such as loperamide (Imodium) or diphenoxylate (Lomotil) can

be used to bring relief from the symptoms, although they do not actually cure the problem. Only use these drugs if you do not have access to toilets, eg if you must travel. Note that these drugs are not recommended for children under 12 years.

In certain situations antibiotics may be required: diarrhoea with blood or mucus (dysentery), any diarrhoea with fever, profuse watery diarrhoea, persistent diarrhoea not improving after 48 hours and severe diarrhoea. These suggest a more serious cause of diarrhoea and, in these situations, gut-paralysing drugs should be avoided. A stool test may be necessary to diagnose what bug is causing your diarrhoea, so you should seek medical help urgently.

Where this is not possible the recommended drugs for bacterial diarrhoea (the most likely cause of severe diarrhoea in travellers) are norfloxacin 400mg twice daily for three days or ciprofloxacin 500mg twice daily for five days. These are not recommended for children or pregnant women. The drug of choice for children would be co-trimoxazole with dosage dependent on weight. A five-day course is given. Ampicillin or amoxicillin may be given in pregnancy, but medical care is necessary.

Two other causes of persistent diarrhoea in travellers are giardiasis and amoebic dysentery. You should seek medical advice if you think you have either, but where this is not possible tinidazole (Fasigyn) or metronidazole (Flagyl) are the recommended drugs. Treatment is a 2g single dose of tinidazole or 250mg of metronidazole three times daily for five to 10 days.

Amoebic Dysentery

Caused by the protozoan *Entamoeba histolytica*, amoebic dysentery, is characterised by a gradual onset of low-grade diarrhoea, often with blood and mucus. Cramping abdominal pain and vomiting are less likely than in other types of diarrhoea, and fever may not be present. It will persist until treated and can recur and cause other health problems.

Giardiasis

A common parasite, *Giardia lamblia*, causes giardiasis. Symptoms include stomach cramps, nausea, a bloated stomach, watery, foul-smelling diarrhoea and frequent gas. Giardiasis can appear several weeks after

you have been exposed to the parasite. The symptoms may disappear for a few days, then return; this can go on for several weeks.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Food

There is an old colonial adage that says: 'If you can cook it, boil it or peel it you can eat it...otherwise forget it'. Vegetables and fruit should be washed with purified water or peeled where possible. Beware of ice cream sold on the streets of Banjul or Dakar or anywhere it might have been melted and refrozen. Seafood is generally some of the safest food available in Senegal and Gambia, but shellfish such as mussels, oysters and clams should be treated with caution, while undercooked meat, particularly in the form of mince, should be avoided. If a place looks clean and well run and the vendor also looks clean and healthy, then the food is probably safe. In general, places that are packed with travellers or locals will be fine, while empty restaurants are questionable. The food in busy restaurants is cooked and eaten quite quickly with little standing around, and is probably not reheated.

Heat Exhaustion

Dehydration and salt deficiency can cause heat exhaustion. Take time to acclimatise to high temperatures, drink sufficient liquids and do not do anything too physically demanding.

Salt deficiency is characterised by fatigue, lethargy, headaches, giddiness and muscle cramps; salt tablets may help, but adding extra salt to your food is better.

Anhidrotic heat exhaustion is a rare form of heat exhaustion that is caused by an inability to sweat. It tends to affect people who have been in a hot climate for some time, rather than newcomers. It can progress to heatstroke. Treatment involves removal to a cooler climate.

Heatstroke

This serious, occasionally fatal, condition can occur if the body's heat-regulating mechanism breaks down and the temperature rises to dangerous levels. Long, continuous exposure to high temperatures and insufficient fluids can leave you vulnerable.

The symptoms are feeling unwell, not sweating very much (or at all) and a high

body temperature (39°C to 41°C or 102°F to 106°F). Where sweating has ceased, the skin becomes flushed and red. Severe, throbbing headaches and lack of coordination will also occur, and the sufferer may be confused or aggressive. Eventually the victim will become delirious or convulse. Hospitalisation is essential, but in the interim get victims out of the sun, remove their clothing, cover them with a wet sheet or towel, then fan continually. Give fluids if they are conscious.

Insect Bites & Stings

Filariasis, leishmaniasis, sleeping sickness, typhus and yellow fever are all insect-borne diseases, but they do not pose a great risk to travellers.

Bed bugs are a particular problem in the budget-accommodation places of Gambia and Senegal. These evil little bastards live in various places but are found particularly in dirty mattresses and bedding, and are evidenced by spots of blood on bedclothes or on the wall. Bedbugs leave itchy bites in neat rows, often along a line where your body touched the mattress. They won't kill you but bites often itch for days, making sleep difficult. Calamine lotion or a sting-relief spray may help, but your best bet is to just find another hotel.

Parasites

You should always check all over your body if you have been walking through a potentially tick-infested area as ticks can cause skin infections and other, more serious diseases. If you find a tick attached, press down around its head with tweezers, grab the head and gently pull upwards. Avoid pulling the rear of the body as this may squeeze the tick's gut contents through the attached mouth parts into the skin, increasing the risk of infection and disease. Smearing chemicals on the tick will not make it leg and is not recommended.

Water

The number one rule is be careful of the water and especially of ice. If you don't know for certain that the water is safe, assume the worst. Having said that, we travelled throughout Senegal and Gambia and in most towns the tap water was OK to drink. However, people respond differently, and water that's fine for some might spark a marathon

session on the throne for others – you'll soon know where you stand (or sit).

Bottled water and soft drinks are generally fine and are widely available, although in some places bottles may be refilled with tap water – check the seals. Take care with fruit juice, particularly if water may have been added. Milk should be treated with suspicion as it is often unpasteurised, though boiled milk is fine if it is kept hygienically. Tea or coffee should also be OK, since the water should have been boiled.

The simplest way to purify water is to boil it thoroughly. Alternatively, you could buy a water filter for a long trip. There are two main kinds of filter. Total filters take out all parasites, bacteria and viruses and make water safe to drink. They are often expensive, but they can be more cost effective than buying lots of bottled water. Simple filters (which can even be a nylon mesh bag) take out dirt and larger foreign bodies from the water so that chemical solutions work much more effectively; if water is dirty, chemical solutions may not work at all. It's very important when buying a filter to read the specifications, so that you know exactly what it removes from the water and what it doesn't. Simple filtering will not remove all dangerous organisms, so if you cannot boil water it should be treated chemically. Chlorine tablets will kill many pathogens, but not some parasites such as giardia and amoebic cysts. Iodine is more effective in purifying water and is available in tablet form. Follow the directions carefully and remember that too much iodine can be harmful.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Gynaecological Problems

Antibiotic use, synthetic underwear, sweating and contraceptive pills can lead to fungal vaginal infections, especially when travelling in hot climates. Fungal infections are characterised by a rash, itch and discharge and are usually treated with Nystatin, miconazole or clotrimazole pessaries or vaginal cream. Maintaining good personal hygiene and wearing loose-fitting clothes and cotton underwear may help prevent these infections.

Sexually transmitted diseases are a major cause of gynaecological problems. Symptoms include a smelly discharge, painful intercourse and sometimes a burning sensation when urinating. Medical attention

should be sought and sexual partners must also be treated. For more details see p300. Besides abstinence, the best thing is to practise safe sex.

Both in Gambia and Senegal, tampons and the tiny, discreet and comfortable types of hygienic pads are only available in the supermarkets and service stations of the larger towns – and they tend to be comparatively expensive. Upcountry, it'll all be less-than-sexy towels. Best bring a good supply with you.

Pregnancy

It is not advisable to travel to some places while pregnant as some vaccinations against

serious diseases (eg yellow fever) are not advisable during pregnancy. In addition, some diseases are much more serious for the mother during pregnancy (eg malaria) and may increase the risk of a stillborn child.

Most miscarriages occur during the first three months of pregnancy. Miscarriage is not uncommon and occasionally leads to severe bleeding. The last three months of pregnancy should be spent within reasonable distance of good medical care. A baby born as early as 24 weeks stands a chance of survival, but only in a good modern hospital. Pregnant women should avoid medication, although vaccinations and malarial prophylactics should be taken where needed.