

## late deals

### UK/IRELAND

**ISLE OF WIGHT:** Wightlink Green Getaways (0870 582 0202) offers three nights' B&B for weekend break at Enchanted Manor, award-winning guesthouse standing in one acre grounds, for £235 per person through Nov (two sharing), incl Wightlink crossings ex-Portsmouth or Lymington.

**SUSSEX & SHOPPING:** Ockendon Manor in Cuckfield (01444 416 111) offers dinner in Michelin-starred restaurant, B&B for £101 per person per night, with Brighton 15 miles away.

**PRE-CHRISTMAS DETOX:** Grayshott Hall (01428 602 020) offers three nights from £499, saving over £150, until Nov 30, incl massage, body scrub, and luxury spa facial. Offer valid Sun-Thursdays.

**YORKSHIRE:** Cottages4u.co.uk (0870 078 2100) offers four nights' self-catering from Dec 30 in 200-year-old Grade II-listed renovated cottage in village of Tollerton for £356.50. Regular buses run to York and Easingwold, or York Park.

### SHORT BREAKS

**LAS VEGAS:** Airline Network (0871 700 8630) offers three nights' room-only at four-star Luxor Resort & Casino, incl return US Airways flights for £399. Offer valid for Oct/Nov depts.

**VENICE:** Voyages Jules Verne (0845 166 7035) offers three nights' full-board from around £400 from Nov 16 to Dec 28. Package incl flights, all transportation, full board on cruise vessel, tour escort and cruise director.

**CHEMICAL BROTHERS IN PARIS:** ShortBreaks (0870 027 6067) offers overnight B&B, return Eurostar and ticket to concert for £189, departing Waterloo Nov 24.

**FAREWELL TO WATERLOO:** ShortBreaks (0870 027 6027) offers two nights' B&B in Marais Bastille Hotel, Paris, and Eurostar return ex-Waterloo from £139, departing Nov 8 in final week before service switches to St Pancras.

**MUSCAT:** BA Holidays (0870 243 3406) offers three nights' B&B at four-star Radisson SAS from £579 from Jan 1 to March 20, incl BA flights, transfers. Book by Nov 13.

**FLORIDA:** BA Holidays (0870 243 3406) offers three nights' room-only at four-star Albion Hotel from £469 for departures Jan 3-31, incl return flights and car hire (rental only). Book by Nov 13.

**CAIRO:** Mosaic (020 8574 4000) offers three nights' B&B at four-star Movenpick Pyramids hotel for £488 (£512 for Fri, Sat, Sun depts), saving £86 through Nov to catch boy king's treasures at Egyptian Museum.

### SHORT-HAUL SUN

**TENERIFE:** Airtours (0871 664 7625) offers seven nights' self-catering at three-star Laguna Park apartments in Playa de las Americas from £209 (four sharing), ex-Manchester Nov 23.

**MOROCCO:** Thomas Cook (0845 070 2530) offers seven nights' B&B at three-star hotel in Agadir from £264, ex-Gatwick Nov 23.

**CAPE VERDE ISLANDS:** Thomson (0870 550 2555) offers seven nights' all-inclusive at four-star Clubhotel in Santa Maria from £561 (two sharing), saving £160, with Thomsonfly flights ex-Manchester Nov 27.

Make the most of your free time

# Smiling Coast will leave you with memory of good times

FROM the terracotta dust of the market streets to the pure prime prints of every local woman's dress, the raw colour in Gambia leaves an image on your memory long after you return.

But there is one colour that is attracting more attention than the others in the country; that colour is green.

And it is not because of the lush fertile green of the mangrove swamps that occupy the land around the mouth of the River Gambia. Or because of the Atlantic ocean that winks greens around the time when the fishermen return home with their nets of African red snapper.

The green hype that is braiding its way through the Gambia tourism industry has been generated by the concept of eco or responsible tourism.

As a visitor to the top end of the tourism industry in Gambia life is luxurious. Sipping champagne on the wooden balcony of your isolated river side lodge, watching your shadow stretch in the setting sun, it is easy to forget where you are.

Actually, the fact that in just six hours you can be transported both literally and metaphorically to another world, without the experience of jet lag, is the main appeal of the Smiling Coast for many tourists.

But just round the corner from your infinity pool and four poster boudoir is a vibrant country that is at last feeling the

## Getting there

- During Winter 2007/08 you can fly to Banjul International airport (via Bristol) from the East Midlands on Tuesdays and Fridays. The airlines are Thomas Cook and Astraeus. An example return flight, leaving on Friday, November 23 and returning a week later costs £439.

- The Gambia Experience offers a range of package holidays to suit all budgets, from last minute deals to luxury five star breaks. For more information visit [www.gambia.co.uk](http://www.gambia.co.uk).

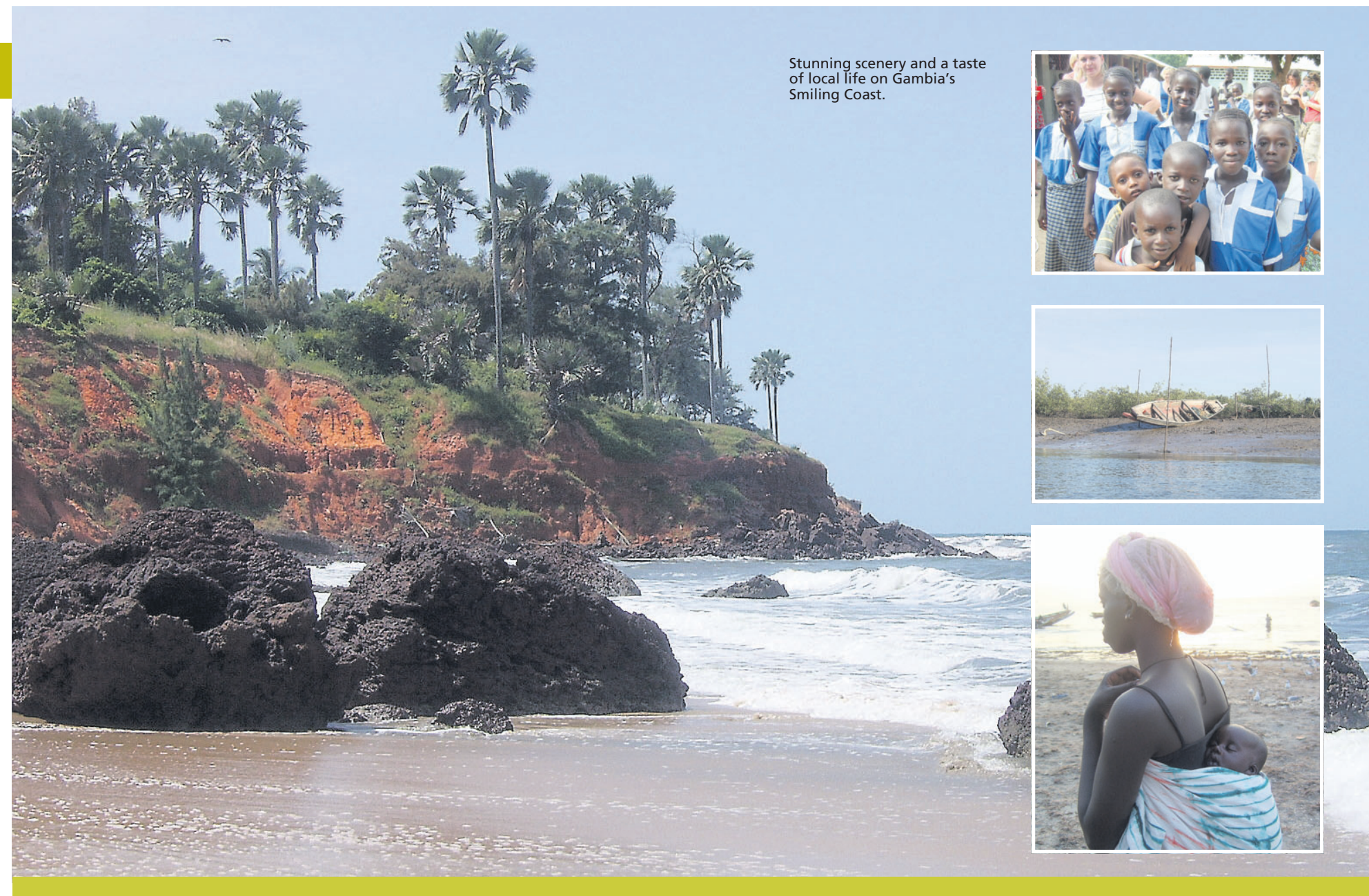
- An example of a seven night stay in the four star Mandina lodges in Makasutu forest, from November 26, costs £1,073.

by Sarah Holt

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impact of tourism.

Firstly, it is important to emphasise that the people of Gambia embrace tourists and are as welcoming as the warm air that envelopes you when you first step off the plane. There are not many people who



Stunning scenery and a taste of local life on Gambia's Smiling Coast.



won't say 'essamadeh' or hello to you. But the fact still remains that the majority of the country's hotels and biggest shops are owned by foreigners. Eighty-five per cent of the people in Gambia make their living in agriculture and cannot get access to the collateral needed to start a commercial operation.

And that is why certain tour operators are trying to work positively to protect the natural environment and culture and protect local communities as much as possible.

The Gambia experience in particular has just been awarded a three star Responsible Tourism award from the Association of Independent Tour Operators for their attempts to preserve the country that fosters them.

They received this award for committing to employing and training local staff, encouraging clients to visit and spend money in the local area and for supporting carbon offset schemes.

So, if you can peel yourself out of your fluffy white robe and away from the comforts of the excellent five star resorts the experiences available are rewarding, to both the visitor and the local community. Makasutu culture forest is probably one

of the most effective adverts for eco tourism in Gambia and also one of the most enjoyable.

Situated on a tributary of the River Gambia, which is muddy and milky coffee coloured in sections, Makasutu is a 1,000 acre area of palm forest. It is owned by Englishmen James English and Lawrence Williams, who preserve the area for the local community, who cannot afford to maintain it.

For the tourist, the experiences available at the forest are multiple. You can take a canoe along the river itself, where you can see cardboard coloured oysters clinging to the river bank plants at low tide. You can trek through the Sacred Forest to have your fortune read by an old native with tea stain coloured eyes. Then you can spend the evening by the campfire watching traditional tribal dancers as the animal calls diffuse from the forest.

Alternatively, a dusty four wheel drive adventure will take you into the heart of the Gambia and through the compounds and fishing villages that serve as its arteries.

If you are really interested in the Eco tourism aspects of Gambia you can choose to stop at one of several community tree

planting projects. These projects vary in their size and purpose. Some have been established to provide resources for local communities who survive from subsistence farming. Others have been set up to offset carbon dioxide. Each tree that is planted offsets the equivalent of 0.5 tonnes of CO2 over a 20 year period.

But if you want a real taste of the Gambia, arrange to stop at a fishing village at the end of the day.

As the setting sun casts golden streaks on the Atlantic ocean, communities gather to unload the catches of the day. The bustle and squabbles of buyers and suppliers rises in the air with the smell of smoking fish and flaked off fish scales rasp underfoot.

At dusk the armoured off-road truck will take you back to your hotel along miles of vacant shoreline, bearded by white sandy beach.



## travelnews

### Christmas gift that will be out of this world

AS glossy brochures packed with Christmas gift ideas drop through your letterbox, the thought might occur that your friends and relatives have nearly everything they possibly need.

In that case, look carefully at the list of travel and leisure gifts which offer an unusual experience or a journey they might remember for the rest of their lives?

Here's a selection of those already on offer:

Shoot mum or dad into space: Elegant Resorts is taking reservations for Virgin Galactic spaceship rides starting some time after test flights planned for 2009. Tickets for a 150-minute flight at 200,000 dollars apiece are getting cheaper as the dollar falls against the pound.

Virgin has five spaceships on order for flights from a base under construction in New Mexico.

Elegant Resorts: 01244 897003. Short-break specialist Cities Direct (01242 536 900) organises packages to about 60 cities. Its gift packages include either holidays or vouchers for recipients to spend on a holiday.

Cities Direct: 01242 536 900 and [www.citiesdirect.co.uk](http://www.citiesdirect.co.uk)

For upmarket UK self-catering, Rural Retreats' £25 and £50 gift vouchers go towards the cost of stays in a portfolio ranging from a Grade II-listed Tudor manor house with Bang & Olufsen multi-room audio (Henry VIII was possibly a fan!) to a 17th century cottage in Co Kilkenny and two wooden vessels which sleep 12 guests on cruises from Holy Loch to Arran. Rural Retreats: 01386 701 177.

Give a visit to a luxury spa: [www.spafinder.co.uk](http://www.spafinder.co.uk), launched in 1986, has grown into the world's largest spa gifting programme.

Available in amounts of £25 and more, SpaFinder Gift vouchers can be cashed in at 125 day and spa salons in the UK and nearly 4,000 worldwide.

Enquiries: online only at [www.spafinder.co.uk](http://www.spafinder.co.uk)

### Shape up for the ski slopes before you go

ENGINEER Jonathan Showan says beginners needn't spend days on the slopes falling over if they train in his simulators before they go.

Realli-Ski, up and running in Canterbury and Watford, might open elsewhere if suitable sites are found.

Mr Showan reckons a 30-minute Realli-Ski lesson is equivalent to seven hours skiing on the slope – and a harness ensures you can't fall over.

Single lessons cost £27 per adult, £24 per child.

A course of 10 beginners lessons cost £228 per adult and £202 per child.

Enquiries: Realli-Ski (0845 838 2811) and [www.realli-ski.com](http://www.realli-ski.com)



By Jeremy Gates

Got a favourite place to stay? Call 01522 804326 or email [sarah.holt@lincolnshireecho.co.uk](mailto:sarah.holt@lincolnshireecho.co.uk)

Meet the writer whose latest biography reveals a local connection or two: See page 12

getaways