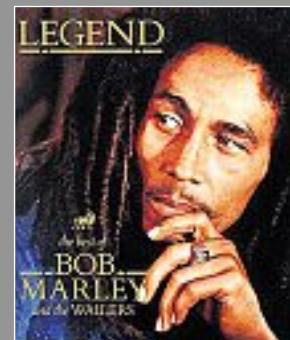


TRAVELLING COMPANIONS

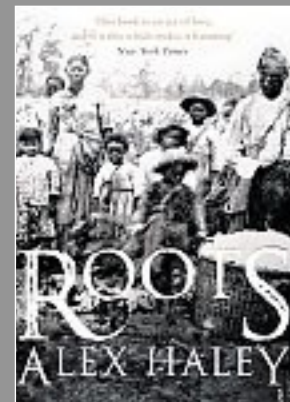
■ **The TUNES**



The Tunes - Legend, by Bob Marley & The Wailers, £9.99, available from Amazon.co.uk

MANY Gambians love Bob Marley. His relaxing, peace-loving music is the perfect soundtrack for a trip to the Smiling Coast.

■ **The WORDS**



Roots, by Alex Haley, £8.99, available from Amazon.co.uk

THE African-American author traced his roots back to the Gambia writing this book. The fishing village Juffereh is now known across the world as it was where Haley's great-great-great-grandfather was abducted into slavery in the 18th century. Brilliant, but deeply disturbing.

■ **Next WEEK**

"With the love of my life, a happy daughter and a full stomach - there is nowhere in the world I would rather be..." **LIZ NICHOLLS** enthusiastically embraces Cornwall's rugged beauty.

■ **Top DEALS**

1 PREMIERSHIP SPORER: Thomas Cook Sport (0844 800 9900) offers B&B at three-star Bewley's Hotel Manchester Airport to see Manchester United v Newcastle United on £125. Package, incl stadium/museum tour, December 26. Thomas Cook also offers tickets for the Arsenal-Newcastle United clash (Dec 29) from £123, incl B&B at three-star Premier Inn London Heathrow Airport.

2 MADRID & CENTRAL SPAIN: Travel Dept (020 7099 9665) offers five nights' half-board from £439 from February 21. Highlights, incl guided city tour of Unesco World Heritage Site of Toledo, full day in Madrid and full day at Unesco World Heritage Site of Avila with return flights ex-Edinburgh to Madrid and five nights' half-board at four-star Hotel Alfonso VI.



■ **HAPPY FACES:** The Gambia lives up to its 'Smiling Coast' tag



■ **KEEP ON TRUCKING:** Tourists pile in to a passenger carrying lorry



■ **GOLDEN DELICIOUS:** A hammock sways on a deserted beach



■ **LEARNING CURVE:** Pupils at Mansa-Colley Bojang Nursery



An African adventure

AS soon as you step out of the aircraft on to Gambian ground and the sweltering air wraps around you like a hot towel, you need to take off your watch and forget about it. Time does not matter here. In fact, GMT equals "Gambian Maybe Time". Watches might as well be missing the second hand.

And it is perhaps because Gambians are so relaxed that their West African country is the ideal place to get away from it all.

Though English-speaking, in the same time zone, and only a five-and-a-half hour flight from the UK, The Gambia is a completely different world to the routine and hectic life most of us lead at home.

And with an average winter temperature above 30C you will not survive long if you do not succumb to the way of life there.

Dosed up on anti-malaria pills and African anticipation, I arrived at the modest country leaving behind the dreary November weather we famously tolerate.

Cut into the side of Senegal, The Gambia is one of the smallest African nations, and our local guide, LT, is quick to point out to us that the country's biggest asset is not the impressive wildlife or picturesque beaches, but the people. The nation of 1.6 million likes to call itself the "Smiling Coast".

It's a rare thing to be able to go to a tourist destination and not to be met with the tired and disdainful eyes of locals who

have the lions and elephants that are synonymous with Africa, there are plenty of other creatures to quench your exotic thirst, including manatees, mongoose, monkeys, hippos, crocodiles and dolphins.

Even those who choose to spend their time welded to a sun bed in a resort could encounter a huge monitor lizard like I did. The Gambia is a place where you may see vultures on the beach or baboons and their babies sitting through someone's rubbish.

For tourists, there is plenty of accommodation on offer - from beachside resorts, to floating lodges hidden in the jungle. Tour operators will pick you up from outside your place of stay and take you on a number of excursions available, including off-road drives through villages and countryside, to boozey riverboat cruises.

On the way to the 1,000-acre tropical nature reserve - the Makasutu forest - we were taken through many villages. It soon became clear that young Gambians get unbelievably excited to see visitors and would run towards our 4x4 truck cheering and waving frantically - making one feel like the Queen.

At the conservation site we were taken down a tranquil river in a dug-out canoe getting up close to oysters, crabs, and birdlife.

We then headed to the unusually decorated village of Kubuneh.

International graffiti artists have made their mark on the tiny settlement, turning it into an attraction villagers are proud to show off.

An undoubted highlight of the trip was a visit to a Gambian primary school. For many of the youngsters, mine was perhaps the first white face they had ever seen. Most of the village came out to meet us and dance



GlobeTROTTER DESTINATIONS FOR YOU TO DISCOVER HOME & ABROAD

■ Staying there

The Gambia Experience
0845 330 2087 gambia.co.uk

- PRICES:** (based on travel from January 2013 for host hotel and properties visited on itinerary)
- Kombo Beach Hotel gambia.co.uk/kombo. Holidays from £499 per person for seven nights staying in a standard air conditioned room on bed & breakfast. Price includes flights (departing from Gatwick).
 - Mandina Lodges at Makasutu gambia.co.uk/mandina. Holidays from £1,199 per person for seven nights staying in a jungle lodge on half board, inclusive of flights (from Gatwick).
 - Coco Ocean gambia.co.uk/CocoOcean. Holidays from £1,099 per person for seven nights staying in a junior suite on bed & breakfast. Price includes flights (departing from Gatwick).
 - Ngala Lodge gambia.co.uk/Ngala. Holidays from £999 per person for seven nights staying in a standard air conditioned suite on bed & breakfast. Price includes flights (departing from Gatwick).

For special offers go to gambia.co.uk/specialoffers

TRAVEL OFFERS

OXFORD MAIL

Newmarket Holidays

5 days from **£189.00**

Blackpool and the Lakes

Departs 18 March & 10 June 2013

There's no better time to visit the lively seaside resort of Blackpool, Britain's undisputed 'capital of entertainment', than during Illuminations time, when over a million bulbs create a stunning light spectacle which will take your breath away. This annual razzle dazzle event has been attracting visitors for over 130 years, with around three million viewers last year alone. It's a spectacle that everyone should see at least once! During the weekend, you'll also enjoy a tour of 'Last of the Summer Wine Country' and visit the delightful spa resort of Buxton. This fantastic value break really does have something for everyone.

Price includes

- Coach travel throughout
- Four nights' dinner, B&B in the Melville Hotel, Blackpool
- Visits to Southport and Lytham St Annes
- A tour of the Southern Lakes taking in Hawkshead and Windermere
- The services of a Tour Manager

2 days from **£115.00**

2 days from **£109.00**

Classical Spectacular

Departs 17 March 2013

Take your seat for Raymond Gubby's Classical Spectacular - a unique evening of music, lights and lasers. Over 200 musicians fill the stage as they perform some of the world's greatest and best-loved classical music. The evening culminates with the 1812 overture complete with cannons, muskets and indoor fireworks finale!

Price includes

- Coach travel throughout
- One night's B&B in a good hotel in London
- A choir seat for Classical Spectacular (Upgrades available)
- A sightseeing tour of London or time to shop and sightsee
- Services of a Tour Manager

Hampton Court Palace Flower Show

Departs 12 July 2013

Held at the height of the summer against the backdrop of one of the great Royal Palaces, the Hampton Court Flower Show, with its fabulous show gardens, floral marquees, gifts and gadgets, is packed with ideas and inspiration and is not to be missed!

Price includes

- Return coach travel
- One night's bed and continental breakfast accommodation in a good quality hotel in the Greater London/Heathrow area
- Entrance to the Hampton Court Flower Show
- A visit to Windsor
- The services of a Tour Manager

For your **FREE** brochures, complete this coupon & send to: Newmarket Promotions Ltd, FREEPOST KT2720, Worcester Park, KT4 8BR (NO STAMP REQUIRED) **OX5**

Tick brochure(s) required: Blackpool & the Lakes - BMO Classical Spectacular - CSP Hampton Court Palace Flower Show - HCF

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Address _____

Postcode _____ Email _____