

taste

# TAKE A WILD RIDE IN...

## GORGEIOUS GAMBIA

The Gambia is on the West coast of Africa, surrounded by Senegal to the north, south and east. The River Gambia flows through the centre of the country, its mouth at the west leading into the Atlantic ocean.  
Currency: Dalasi  
Language: English and tribal  
Population: 1.6million  
Religion: 90 per cent Muslim, 10 per cent other  
Time zone: GMT + 0  
Average temperature: January 31 degrees centigrade, July 30 degrees centigrade.

**ANDREA COLLITT is charmed during a stay in warm and welcoming The Gambia, where she experienced the country's culture – and plenty of its food**

**U**NTIL recently, never had I been anywhere where I went to bed hearing the pounding of African drums beating faintly in the distance and woke up to the sound of waves lapping on the shore.

That all changed when I went to The Gambia.

Prior to my six-hour flight from London I couldn't have told you where exactly the country, the smallest on mainland Africa, was. And I wouldn't be surprised if you're not sure either.

It's not somewhere figuring highly on the tourist map. So I feel privileged so be able to share my experience with you. When the 32-degree centigrade heat hit me as I stepped off the plane all thoughts of chilly November back home vanished.

We stayed at the Kombo Beach Hotel, in Kotu, a 30-minute drive from the airport in Banjul, Gambia's capital.

It's one of a number of hotels with stunning Atlantic views, punctuated against a backdrop of what is, by our standards, a poor community.

To 'get' Gambia I strongly urge you to take advantage of the many excursions on offer.

Expect a bumpy ride on dusty tracks. There are few especially-built roads and alongside them countless market traders flogging mangoes stacked high; just one example of the goods being sold for Gambians to earn a living for their families.

Wildlife fans should certainly head to Makasutu cultural forest, a 1,000-acre conservation area and home to an eco resort in the African bush.

Expect to come within a few feet of baboons, monkeys and maybe a monitor lizard, while a boat trip in a dug-out canoe drifting among the mangroves is likely to earn you sightings of one of the 580 bird species the country boasts.

A cruise along the River Gambia on a pirogue is another must for bird watchers and those seeking tranquillity.

Fishermen can be seen casting huge circular nets and women will be collecting oysters in canoes.

Uniquely, coffee and brandy are offered as the boat departs, with a tasty buffet lunch including fish and salad later.

A four-wheel drive excursion, including a visit to a Gambian school, is another must for those wanting to experience the country's culture.

We experienced a very bumpy but exhilarating ride in an army-style truck before arriving at Mansa-Colley Bojang nursery, the country's only free school.

The sight of mothers gathered in the playground, dressed head to toe in traditional African dresses to greet us, was unforgettable.

These women were delighted to dance and sing for us to make us feel welcome before we met children aged four and five in the two classrooms.

Children are taught English in school and although mesmerised by our presence, were proud to talk to us, show off their workbooks, sing to us and were excited to pose for photographs.

There was the opportunity to leave much-needed pens and books with the school.

A stop-off at Tanji fishing village afterwards is another eye-opener.

The sight of dozens of canoes casting their nets before catches are brought in to excited crowds on the beach certainly gives you a real taste of how trade is central to Gambian life.

Dishes include Chicken Yassa, (chicken cooked with lime, onions and pepper) and Domoda, (meat stew in peanut puree and served with rice).

If entertainment and nightlife are your thing then you may need to look no further than the African drummers found at many of the resorts.



**Holidays at the The Kombo Beach Hotel are from £499 per person for seven nights staying in a standard air conditioned room with bed & breakfast. Price includes flights from Gatwick, with inflight meals, airport taxes, tourism levy and airport transfers (price based on travel from January 2013). [www.gambia.co.uk/kombo](http://www.gambia.co.uk/kombo)**  
**The Gambia Experience is a trade name of Serenity Holidays, established 25 years. It is the UK's only specialist and biggest tour operator to the destination, operating year round from Gatwick.**

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