

## The best way to experience The Gambia.

Eco-tourism at its best. Real nature, real people, real culture, real rhythm, real life, real Africa! Non hotel holiday, living in the community like family. Real value trips e.g. 3 days upriver £75

**Price:** GBP £450/person - 5% discount to be applied.

**Discount Price:** **GBP £428/person**

**Tour Operator:** [Drum Doctors](#)

**Customise:** This package can be customised

**Country:** Gambia

**Duration:** 14 days

**Accommodation:** Guest House

**Activities:** Craft Tours, Cultural Tours, Fishing, Historical Tours, River Cruise, Wildlife Viewing, Birdwatching, Cycling, Game Viewing, Wedding Ceremonies

This holiday is about experiencing the reality of life in The Gambia. We live in a regular house, in a real neighbourhood, amongst genuine, gentle people, see photo. We have some western comforts, like solar shower bags, and electric kitchen equipment, but otherwise live just like our neighbours do. We are not in mud huts out in the bush and all rooms and beds have full mosquito net protection, and their own shower. We have the whole place sprayed just before we arrive and take other precautions to the extent that no one on any of these trips has ever got malaria.



### Real People

Having run these trips since 1994, we've had the experience and time to sort the wheat from the chaff. Hangers on and commensals, the usual bane of travel in poor countries, have been identified & are politely kept at a distance. The first people you meet, my friends, are all trustworthy. They're mostly musicians [some world famous] and other artists, because that's where my interests lay. Other friends are optician, masseur, housewives, gardener, builder, cook, councilman, even the head man [Alkalo] of Bakau. Everyone speaks English. It is the people, with their open-hearted generosity of spirit, that make this such a wonderful place.



### Real Africa

Bakau is where we live. Small by USA or European standards it is one of the major towns here. The crime rate is low and I feel safer walking alone here at night than my home town in UK. Everything anyone might need, bank to bazaar, sea to supermarket, is within walking distance.

'Our beach' [see photo] has a cafe where you first walk on to it, 10 mins from your room, then it's nothing but sand bordered by mangrove for miles. It's calm and safe for swimming. Walking around the headland there are rocky coves and eventually the fishing beach. This has a smoke house where you can buy bongafish for 30p [45 cents]. Corner shops are a minute away from our place, stocked with things people need on a daily basis. Like cold drinks [for 15pence 22cents], cigarettes [50p 75cents a pack], sandals, sweets, batteries, even school exercise books. Phone / fax centres and internet cafes are close too, & you can get your photos developed nearby. **Really, everything you might want is within walking distance.**



### Real Nature

We'll do an overnighter to Jinek [Paradise Island] it's on the Senegalese border and in there and The Gambia's largest nature reserves. Locals believe it to be guarded by juju, stopping all in uniform going there. No police, army or customs, so they peacefully enjoy cultivating local herbs and laughing a lot. Hope they never need the fire brigade!

Abukou nature reserve is 20 minutes by taxi. Nearby, Lamin lodge is good for a lunch and to pick up river cruises. Further up river you may see hippos, even manatee near the Chimpanzee sanctuary. A quiet moment in our place and you'll see many birds and lizards. The Botanical gardens has some of the country's best bird watching, 10 mins walk away. In 5 minutes you can be at the crocodile pool, a holy place, around which the town grew. People still come to it for fertility blessings.

### Real Culture

You may be the 'fresh prince' back home, but here you are a long lost cousin. Locals are happy to see you living amongst them rather than in hotels that rip off the community. You'll get invites to homes, ceremonies and celebrations, you'll gain insights hotel dwellers have no chance of experiencing. You'll meet genuine 'griots', the bards / minstrels that hold the tribal histories, and maybe a 'marabout', the shaman, healer or diviner. You could visit the mysterious stone circles. Visit the descendants of Kunte Kinteh, to where Alex Halley traced his roots, just a day trip away.

You can spend time with musicians, story tellers, batik makers, basket weavers, drum makers, wood carvers and other craftsmen. Just tell us who you'd like to meet and we'll arrange it.

### Drumming

Free drum tuition for 2 hours per day creates a structure for our days. The rest of each day is free for individuals to do whatever they like. We're on hand with our local knowledge to help arrange for you getting what you like.

More tuition, and on other instruments like kora [harp] and ballaphon [xylophone] can be arranged with local teachers. Our daily sessions are good for beginners and experienced drummers alike. No matter how experienced, you will enjoy learning some new rhythms. These sessions should help you appreciate this aspect of the culture and deepen your enjoyment of the drums you hear at ceremonies and places of entertainment. Bike can be hired locally. We can arrange weddings.

Drumming is my area of expertise and I realise it is not for everyone, so sessions are run so they do not disturb others. Musician friends of mine often drop round and play for us, or we jam with them. See photo, even the more famous ones!

Usually we have a day in Brikama to visit the musicians of the Jobarteh clan; the most famous griot family in all west Africa. Brikama also has the biggest craft market, especially good for wooden articles. We have a resident wood carver, Haruna our guest house manager.

### Real food

Our kitchen is a separate building, as is the local style, it's fully equipped, including a juicer. It's kept stocked with coffee, teas [+ local herbs] sugar, bread, margarine, jam, jello, marmalade, cereals, salads, marmite, fruit and anything else you may request, to

which you may help yourself any time i.e. cold drinks in the fridge.

Nyima, our chef, arrives about 5pm, cleans the kitchen, makes our dinner then cleans up again. You can hang with her and learn African cuisine, both here and at her place.

We pride ourselves on our excellent vegetarian food; probably the best in the country! We highly recommend this diet while here. When you see the conditions of the meat market, you'll agree it's not worth a stomach upset, just because of a craving for flesh. However, a fisher neighbour usually brings us a fish straight from the sea to our fridge. This is safe to eat and avid carnivores won't suffer withdrawals too much. For those who can not possibly go vegetarian, we can supply you fresh meat and fish dishes, but if you get a stomach upset it's your own responsibility, and we'll nurse you back to health.

Nyima cooks several sauces for each meal that always offer choices of spicy, plain tasty or both.

**Let me know of any dietary needs when booking.** See [www.realafrica.net](http://www.realafrica.net) our official website for more details and photos.

#### Little Details

No inoculations are required to enter The Gambia from USA or Europe. UK & most European citizens do not need visas, others do. [www.traveldocs.com/gm/index.htm](http://www.traveldocs.com/gm/index.htm) You'll have noticed how cheap things are, if you bring about £300 [\$450] cash you can live like royalty. However, bring a credit card as an emergency back up.

Temperatures average 25 - 35c, with 7 -10 hours sunshine most days. **The rainy season is from late June to September.**

We meet you at Banjul airport with a prepaid taxi. You pay the travel agent of your choice for your flight. Ensuring you have all the usual protections afforded by ATOL and ABTA bonded travel agents.

**If you're coming from USA, you might consider travel via UK, where I can help arrange any overnight accommodation you may need. Even provide a drumming workshop for you, if you are really keen. US to UK flights are cheap, you may save money and break an otherwise long journey by not flying direct from USA to Dakar in Senegal which is only a half day drive from our place.** The cost of flights from UK average £300 plus you pay us only £450 for 2 weeks full board, tuition and looking after your welfare, including Gambia airport taxis. You will also need to have to hand £5 'Gambia Tourist Authority' tax on arrival at Banjul airport. Exchange rates vary over time, so we have not quoted a \$ price.

Because different people want different things, the extra tuition and most trips are not included, but are at local, not tourist, prices. For instance a day out in Brikama would cost you about £5. With the pocket money we've suggested you'll be able to do all the trips mentioned and many more. **We can be flexible about lengths of stay, and welcome group enquiries** which would attract discounts. **We are open to enquiries if you would like to use our place to run your own workshops.** You could bring your own group here to do anything you may fancy .....writers, painters photographers, Yogis, bird watchers, fishers, cooks, hang gliders, drummers or dancers of course, anything.....only limited by your imagination. I would suggest having me come with you the first time to make sure all goes smoothly, and make the right introductions.

The next time you could rent the place to run everything by yourself or have locals help with cooking, cleaning and providing local knowledge, invaluable when you want to get something done.

#### Eco-tourism

This is a not for profit endeavor, except a small advertising budget, all the money you pay is spent in The Gambia, with locals providing us with goods or services. We only employ Gambians or other West Africans settled here. We are paying good wages without inflating the economy. We help our neighbours, with donated clothes and shoes and pay some school and college fees, without creating situations of their dependance on us. Wherever we try to help, we also try to maintain and foster people's self respect, values and cultural traditions. See our full website for more on this.

These wonderful people give us a lot, they open their hearts, offering us lifelong friendship, from their natural generosity, not from a need to gain materially. It is a precious gift, worthy of our utmost care and respect. I feel honoured that they continue to so warmly accept me and my guests into their society as part of them.

**NOTE: Due to me being away running trips, there may be some occasional delays responding to your emails. Please be patient, it may only be a week. If not in The Gambia, where everything tends to be, "hey.....manyana...." I usually respond within a day or two.**