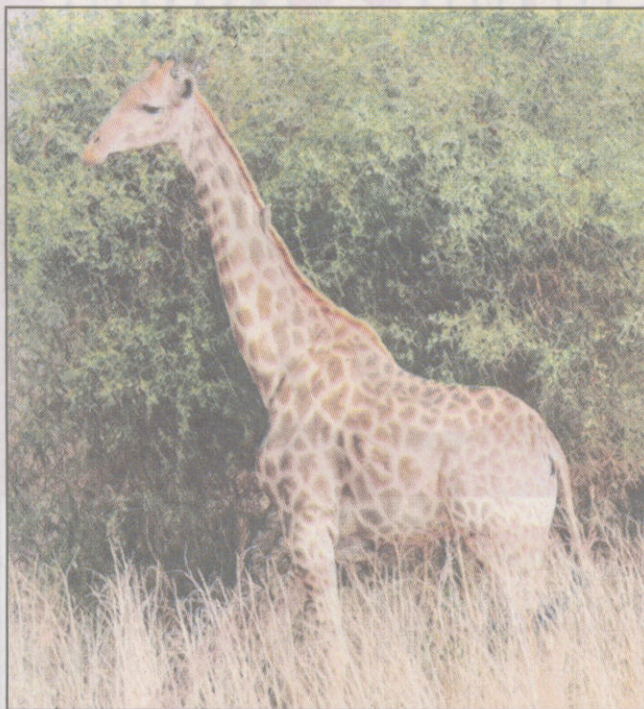


Travel

Senegal has a so much to offer tourists



● An inhabitant of the Bandia Nature Reserve

By Peter Kennedy
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WE had been driving around the Bandia Nature Reserve for an hour or so looking for rhinoceros.

You wouldn't think an animal so big could hide itself so well but on this occasion they were being very elusive.

There were plenty of other beasts to see - giraffes, zebra, buffalo and antelope - but rhinos were definitely the main attraction on the mini-safari.

Our guide, Yella, made several forays into the bush on foot to try to locate some, but without success. Until, that is, he came running towards us, waving his arms excitedly and beckoning our party to jump out of the 4x4 and follow him.

And there, lying in the shade of an acacia tree, we found two rhinos - male and female. We were able to get within a few feet of them without their showing any signs of annoyance at our presence.

Seeing these magnificent animals in their natural habitat - not in a zoo - was one of the highlights of a trip I made to Senegal in West Africa.

Senegal, a former French colony, has an extensive Atlantic coastline and is Africa's most westerly point, lying between Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania, with The Gambia wedged within it.

It has attracted European tourists for

Peter Kennedy was a guest of *The Senegal Experience*, the UK's only specialist tour operator to Senegal, which offers flights to Dakar, via Brussels, with Brussels Airlines from Birmingham, Manchester

Gatwick (no regional flight supplements). Prices start from £699 per person this winter. This price is based on seven nights half board accommodation at Hotel Royam (3 1/2 grade) in Saly and includes return flights, transfers

and taxes, and is valid for departures up to December 11.

Multi-centre holidays within Senegal and/or with The Gambia are available.

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● A little piece of paradise

some years - particularly the French - but relatively few from Britain.

What does Senegal have to offer? Well, the climate is pleasantly tropical, with year-round temperatures between 26 and 30 deg C, and uninterrupted sunshine from November to May. There are some fabulous sandy beaches and, importantly, Senegal is affordable. Prices for accommodation, food and drink compare very favourably with, say, the Cote d'Azur.

The hotels where I stayed were well up to European standards according to their rating.

I thought the French-owned Lamantin Beach Hotel in the resort area of Saly, about 50 miles south of the capital, Dakar, was impressive.

It has 132 rooms in African-style bungalows situated in colourful gardens, three restaurants, a private beach and a marina.

Deep sea fishing is available for visitors and watersports and sailing are popular. There's also an 18-hole international-standard golf course nearby.

And at the Accrobaobab Adventure Park you can play Tarzan and climb, swing and slide on a series of nets and ropes among the baobab trees.

Like the Lamantin, the four-star Espadon Hotel and the five-star Le Royal Lodge enjoy superb beachfront locations. At Le Royal Lodge the suites are very spacious and tastefully fitted out - and even include a jacuzzi.

The French-influenced cuisine in Senegal's hotels has to be a great plus for tourists. I don't think I have dined better abroad.

The opulence of the hotels, though, contrasts sharply with life for the people living in the countryside.

Senegal is described officially as a developing country. That means it's poor.

I visited a typical Senegalese village of huts with thatched roofs next to the land the inhabitants cultivate - ground nuts and sugar beet are the main crops.

The people were living exactly the same lives as their ancestors did hun-

dreds of years ago, I was told. I could well believe it; no mod cons here.

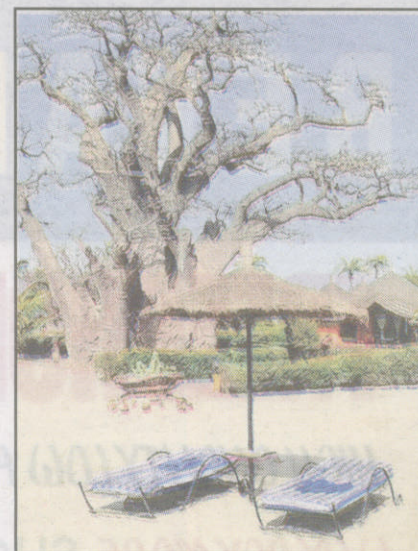
A trip to a weekly market in the bush which sold everything from livestock and clothing to bicycle parts and magic powders was a memorable experience. The sights, sounds and smells...unforgettable.

Close to Le Royal Lodge is the Sine Saloum Delta, a beautiful region of rivers and lagoons, beaches, mangrove swamps and islands rich in wildlife.

It is a birdwatcher's paradise: flamingos, pelicans, herons, gulls, terns and avocets can all be observed.

I didn't see much of the city of Dakar. From its port, though, I took a boat trip to Goree Island. Its colonial-style houses look pretty but behind the genteel facade lies a shameful past.

Goree was once an important staging post in the slave trade and visitors can see the grim quarters where men, women and children were held before being shipped across the Atlantic. A sobering reminder of man's inhumanity to man.



● A typical beach scene

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